

Character Builder 您好嗎？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

This week: Words about borrowing

利

Pronunciation: *li* (Putonghua, 4th tone), *lei* (Cantonese 6th tone)
Basic meaning: sharp, benefit, advantage, gain, interest

利 means sharp/facilitate/benefit: 利刀 (*li dao* = sharp~knife), 利尿 (*li niao* = ease/release~urine), 利害 (*li hai* = advantage~disadvantage = pros and cons), 利益 (*li yi* = gain~benefit).

利潤 (*li run* = gain~nourishment = earnings): gross earnings is 毛利 (*mao li* = hair/surface~gains), net earnings is 純利 (*chun li* = pure~gains). Banks charge 利息 (*li xi* = gain~interest = loan interest) and control 利率 (*li lu* = interest~rate) by 加息 (*jia xi* = raising~interest) or 減息 (*jian xi* = lowering~interest). Loan-sharks lend 高利貸 (*gao li dai* = high~interest~loans).

見利忘義 (*jian li wang yi* = see~advantage~forget~righteousness) is selfish, unprincipled behaviour. 本小利大 (*ben xiao li da* = capital~small~earnings~big) is the small businessman's dream.

by Diana Yue