

# 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 zoos



Pronunciation: *niao* (Putonghua, 3<sup>rd</sup> tone), *niu* (Cantonese, 5<sup>th</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: bird

鳥 = 雀 (*que*) = 禽 (*qin*): 麻雀 (*ma que* = freckled-bird = sparrow), 家禽 (*jia qin* = domestic~fowls). 天鵝 (*tian e* = heavenly~goose = swans), 企鵝 (*qi e* = standing~goose = penguins) are 水鳥 (*shui qin* = water~fowls), 雁 (*yan* = wild-geese) are 候鳥 (*hou niao* = seasonal/migratory~birds). Soaring 鵬 (*peng* = mythological roc) commands 鳥瞰 (*niao kan* = bird's-eye~view).

羽翼未豐 (*yu yi wei feng* = feathers~wings~not~yet~full) describes 雛鳥 (*chu niao* = baby~bird = fledglings) or not-yet-powerful would-be leaders.

鷹 (*ying* = eagle) symbolizes majesty, 鴿 (*ge*, dove) peace, 鴛鴦 (*yuan yang* = mandarin ducks) marital bliss. Chinese literature 以鳥鳴春 (*yi niao ming chun* = with~birds~sound~spring = uses birdsong to represent springtime).

by Diana Yue