

# 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 outer space

探

Pronunciation: *tan* (Putonghua, 4<sup>th</sup> tone), *taam* (Cantonese 3<sup>rd</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: feel, probe, visit, investigate

探 means meet/feel/probe. 探熱 (*tan re* = measure-heat) = take body temperature. 探望 (*tan wang* = visit~see) = pay cordial visit. 探病 (*tan bing* = visit~illness) = visit sick people.

偵探 (*zhen tan* = investigate~probe = detectives) tail suspects. Spies 刺探 (*ci tan* = prick~probe = spy on) enemies. Adventurers 探險 (*tan xian* = probe~danger = join dangerous expeditions). Geologists 探油 (*tan you* = probe~oil = drill for oil).

Man's 探索 (*tan suo* = probe~search = quest) into space began with 月球 (*yue qiu* = moon~sphere = the moon). 太空船 (*tai kong chuan* = ultimate~space~ship = space-ships) took astronauts to 探月 (*tan yue* = visit~moon) — 探測 (*tan ce* = probe~check) conditions on the moon's surface.

by Diana Yue