

# 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 the Cold War**

美

Pronunciation: *mei* (Putonghua, 3<sup>rd</sup> tone), *mei* (Cantonese, 5<sup>th</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: beauty, beautiful,  
transliteration of “me” in  
“America”

Chinese often transcribes sounds “mi”/“me”/“mei” in foreign names as 美. America is 亞美利加 (*Ya Mei Li Jia* = “America”-transliterated), shortened to 美洲 (*Mei Zhou* = 美~continent): 北美 (*Bei Mei* = North~America), 中美 (*Zhong Mei* = Central~America), 南美 (*Nan Mei* = South~America).

The Organization of American States (美洲國家組織, *Mei Zhou guo jia zu zhi* = American~continent~countries~organization) has 34 member-nations, including 美國 (*Mei Guo* = 美~state = the USA).

美金 (*Mei jin* = US~gold/money) is the American greenback. 美式英語 (*Mei shi Ying yu* = American~style~“English”-transliterated~language) = American English. 美諺 (*Mei yan* = American idiom) = Americanism. 美國夢 (*Mei Guo meng* = US~dream) is the American Dream.

by Diana Yue