

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 death

死

Pronunciation: *si* (Putonghua, 3rd tone), *sei* (Cantonese, 2nd tone)
Basic meaning: death, dead, stubborn, rigid, dumb, dead-stop

死 = 亡 (*wang*) = die/dead: 死屍 (*si shi* = dead~corpse), 病死 (*bing si* = sick~die = die of illness), 橫死 (*heng si* = intruded~die = unexpectedly/unreasonably killed), 安樂死 (*an le si* = peaceful~happy~die = Euthanasia/mercy-killing). 死諫 (*si jian* = die~advise) means offering unpleasant/offensive advice/suggestions risking death punishment.

Philosophers say: 死生有命 (*si sheng you ming* = death~life~have~fate = fate controls life/death), 死者已矣 (*si zhe yi er* = dead~person~ended/deceased-! = the dead are gone), nobody can 起死回生 (*qi si hui sheng* = raise~the-dead~back-to~life).

Toughly/hopelessly carrying on is 死捱 (*si ai* = dead/rigidly~toil). Studying dumbly is 死讀書 (*si du shu* = dead/stubborn~read~books). “死火!” (*si huo* = dead~fire) means “Car/plans stalled!”

by Diana Yue