

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

魂

(radical 手 *gui* = ghost)
Pronunciation: *hun* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *wan* (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: spirit, soul

Humans have 魂: Chinese 魂魄 (*hun po* = spirit~wits), Christian 靈魂 (*ling hun* = spirit~soul), allegedly become 鬼魂 (*gui hun* = ghosts~spirits) after death. Buddhists/medieval theologians believe 靈魂轉世 (*ling hun zhuan shi* = spirit~soul-change/transfer~ life/incarnation = reincarnation/ transmigration of souls).

Elegies mourn/praise 忠魂 (*zhong hun* = patriotic~souls), 英魂 (*ying hun* = heroic/brave~souls), 香魂 (*xiang hun* = fragrant~souls = lovely women). “Requiem” is translated as 安魂曲 (*an hun qu* = pacify~souls~musical/vocal-work).

無主孤魂 (*wu zhu gu hun* = without~master~orphan~spirit = lost soul) describes someone lacking purpose/guidance/group-support. 失魂落魄 (*shi hun luo po* = lost~spirit~dropped~wits) means shocked/ scared out of one’s wits. Absent-minded persons are jokingly called “失魂魚!” (*shi hun yu* = lost~spirit/wits~fish).

by Diana Yue