

Character Builder 您好嗎? 呀

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 motherhood

養

Pronunciation: *yang* (Putonghua, 3rd tone), *yeung* (Cantonese 5th tone)
Basic meaning: rear, nourish, keep, breed

養 (radical 食 *shi* = eat/food) means beget/feed/raise. Women, not men, can 生養 (*sheng yang* = produce~[baby]~birth = have babies) = 生孩子 (*sheng hai zi* = give birth to children).

Children 供養父母 (*gong yang fu mu* = support-feed-father-mother). Parents 養育兒女 (*yang yu er nu* = feed~breed/raise~sons~daughters). Bread-winners 養家活口 (*yang jia huo kou* = feed-family~live/sustain-mouths). Children of poor families 天生天養 (*tian sheng tian yang* = heaven~beget-heaven~raise = grow up anyhow). Feudal Chinese families bought 童養媳 (*tong yang xi* = child-keep-daughter-in-law = child-bride cum servant girl).

養魚 (*yang yu* = breed~fish) means fish-farming or keeping an aquarium. Helping/cultivating a potentially dangerous person is 養虎為患 (*yang hu wei huan* = rear-tiger~become~harm).

by Diana Yue