

# 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 race

祖

Pronunciation: *zu* (Putonghua, 3<sup>rd</sup> tone), *jo* (Cantonese, 2<sup>nd</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: ancestor

祖 = 祖宗 (*zu zong* = ancestral~origin/head). Legendarily, 黃帝 (*Huang Di* = Yellow Emperor) is Chinese people's 始祖 (*shi zu* = beginning~founder/ancestor). 祖國 (*zu guo* = ancestor~country) = motherland. 祖籍 (*zu ji* = ancestor~native-identity) = native place/province/region. 祖父母 (*zu fu mu* = ancestor~father~mother) = grandparents.

Traditionally, Chinese clans/families 拜祖先 (*bai zu xian* = worship~ancestors~predecessors), visit ancestral tombs/shrines/temples to 祭祖 (*ji zu* = offer-sacrifices-to~ancestors), keep 祖先靈位 (*zu xian ling wei* = ancestors~spirit-seat/place = plaque representing ancestors~presence) at home.

Successful people “光宗耀祖!” (*guang zong rao zu* = bright~origin~glorious~ancestors = “enhance family's fame/honor!”) Bad/failed offsprings are “不肖子孫!” (*bu xiao zi sun* = not~resemble~sons~grandchildren = “no comparison to ancestors!”).