

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 birthdays

Pronunciation: *shou* (Putonghua, 4th tone), *sau* (Cantonese 6th tone)
Basic meaning: life span, age, birthday, longevity

壽 = 壽命 (*shou ming* = life-span-life) = a person/animal's age. 壽辰 (*shou chen* = birthday-hour) means birthday, 做壽 (*zuo shou* = do-birthday) means hold birthday celebrations. Life insurance is 人壽保險 (*ren shou bao xian* = man-life-protect-risk/danger).

When someone 壽終 (*shou zhong* = life-end = dies in bed), his/her body is dressed in 壽衣 (*shou yi* = longevity-clothes = the deceased's funeral attire).

長壽 (*chang shou* = long-life-span) means enjoying long life. 福 (*fu* = good fortune), 祿 (*lu* = high-ranking official's stipends), 壽 (*shou* = longevity) are three enviable blessings. 壽星公 (*shou xing gong* = longevity-star-grandpa) is the white-bearded smiling longevity fairy. 萬壽無疆 (*wan shou wu jiang* = ten-thousand-life-no-boundary) means "Long live the Emperor!"

by Diana Yue