

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 foreign countries

外

Pronunciation: *wai* (Putonghua, 4th tone), *ngoi* (Cantonese 6th tone)
Basic meaning: external, outside, beyond, foreign

內外 (*nei wai* = inside~outside) describes physical locales and human relationships. 海外 (*hai wai* = seas~outside) = 國外 (*guo wai* = China~beyond) = places abroad. 外國人 (*wai guo ren* = foreign~countries~persons = foreigners/aliens) hold 外籍護照 (*wai ji hu zhao* = foreign~nationality~protection~notice) = foreign passports. 外資 (*wai zi* = foreign~capital/investments) come from 外商 (*wai shang* = foreign~merchants/businesses).

內憂外患 (*nei you wai huan* = internal~worries~external~maladies) are a country's domestic problems and external threats. 排外 (*pai wai* = dismiss~foreigners) means unfairly rejecting foreigners.

外交部 (*wai jiao bu* = foreign~friends/communications~department) = ministry of foreign affairs. 弱國無外交 (*ruo guo wu wai jiao* = weak~country~no~foreign~friends/communications) means a weak country's diplomatic efforts are useless.

by Diana Yue