

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 slavery

奴

Pronunciation: *nu* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *no* (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: slave

奴 (= 奴隸 *nu li* = slave~lowly-laborer = slaves) were purchased through 奴隸販子 (*nu li fan zi* = slaves~hawk--er = slave-traders). 妹仔 (*mei zai* = Cantonese “*mui-tsai*” = sister/girl-diminutive = bought maids) are 家奴 (*jia nu* = domestic~slaves). Tibet/Tsarist Russia had 農奴 (*nong nu* = farmer~slaves = serfs). Europeans/Americans had 黑奴 (*hei nu* = black~slaves). 奴隸制度 (*nu li zhi du* = slave~servant~institution = slavery system) is now abolished.

Chinese people who kow-tow to westerners show 奴性 (*nu xing* = slave~nature), are derisively called “洋奴” (*yang nu* = over-the-ocean/foreigner’s~slaves).

In WWII Japanese soldiers used women captives as 慰安婦 (*wei an fu* = comfort~ease~women = “comfort women”), i.e., 性奴 (*xing nu* = sex~slaves).

by Diana Yue