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 Buddhism

廈 (radical 广 = building), means buildings for worshipping deities: 希臘神廈 (xi la shen miao = Greece-god-temple, e.g. the Parthenon). The Chinese erect 宗廈 (zong miao = ancestor-temples), 孔廈 (kong miao = temple of Confucius), 天后廈 (tian hou miao = Heavenly-Queen/Goddess-Temple = temple for the goddess of the sea).

Buddhist monasteries are 佛寺 (fo si). 出家人 (chu jia ren = exit-home-people) means 僧尼 (seng ni = monks-nuns) 剃度 (ti du = shaved-delivered = tonsured) and severed from worldly ties.

Buddhist temples worship 彌勒佛 (mi le fo = Maitreya Buddha), 觀音菩薩 (guan yin pu sa = Avalokitesvara/ Guanyin-Bodhisattva). 香火不絕 (xiang huo bu jue = incense-fire-no-terminate) describes a temple enjoying continuous prosperity.

Pronunciation: miao (Putonghua, 4th tone), miu (Cantonese 6th tone)
Basic meaning: temple

by Diana Yue