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

合 = join. Groups 集合 (ji he = assemble-together) for event. Choristers 合唱 (he chang = join-sing). Partners 合作 (he zuo = join-work = co-operate), sign 合約 (he yue = joint-agreement = contract). Go-betweenes 撮合 (cuo he = hand-pick-join = bring together) marriageable couples.

Small units/factions 合併 (he bing = join-combine = combine/merge). Allies 聯合 (lian he = link-join = join forces). United Nations is 聯合國 (lian he guo = link-join-states).

In multi-ethnic regions, different races 混合 (hun he = mix-together), 融合 (rong he = melt-join = merge). History shows ethnically-close states 合久必分, 分久必合 (he jiu bi fen, fen jiu bi he = merged-long-will-split, split-long-will-merge = are periodically united, periodically divided).

Pronunciation: he (Putonghua, 2nd tone), hap (Cantonese, 6th tone) Basic meaning: combine, unite, merge

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