

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 earthquakes

Pronunciation: dao (Putonghua, 3rd tone), do (Cantonese snd tone)
Basic meaning: island

孤島 (*gu dao* = alone/lonely-island) = single island, 群島 (*qun dao* = group-islands) = archipelago. Islanders are 島民 (*dao min* = island-people). The 蓬萊仙島 (*Peng Lai xian dao* = Penglai-fairy-island) in Chinese mythology is where immortals live.

Dutch colonizers called Taiwan “Formosa” (transliterated as “福摩薩” *fu mo sa*, meaning “美麗島” *mei li dao* = beautiful-island). The Chinese call Taiwan “寶島” (*bao dao* = treasure-island).

Hongkong’s outlying islands are 離島 (*li dao* = separate-islands). The Britain Isles is 英倫三島 (*ying lun san dao* = England-transliterated-three-islands). New York’s Long Island is 長島 (*chang dao* = long-island). Pedestrian islands are 安全島 (*an quan dao* = safe-intact-islands = safety-islands).