

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 ceramics

陶

Pronunciation: tao (Putonghua, 2nd tone), to (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: clay, pottery

陶人 (*tao ren* = pottery~person = potters) make 陶器 (*tao qi* = clay~containers = pottery/earthenware), using 陶土 (*tao tu* = pottery~earth/clay).

Museums display ancient 陶片 (*tao pian* = pottery~pieces = shards) of 杯 (*bei* = cups), 碗 (*wan* = bowls), 陶瓶 (*tao ping* = bottles) etc. 黑陶 (*hei tao* = black~pottery), 白陶 (*bai tao* = white~pottery), 繩紋 (*sheng wen* = rope~patterns), 魚紋 (*yu wen* = fish~patterns) reflect different civilizations. 陶俑 (*tao yong* = clay~figurines) accompany the dead in their tombs.

Literature/art can 陶冶性情 (*tao ye xing qing* = mould~smelt~nature~sentiments = nurture/refine sentiments), make us 陶醉 (*tao zui* = moulded~drunken = feel carried away). 薰陶 (*xun tao* = smoked/infused~moulded = influenced/nurtured) by culture, barbarians become civilized.

by Diana Yue