

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 tea

Pronunciation: *qi* (Putonghua, 4th tone), *hei* (Cantonese 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: utensil, instrument, container, ware

器, with four 口 (*kou* = mouths/openings), means 具 (*ju* = utensils) and 皿 (*ming* = containers). Eyes/lungs are 器官 (*qi guan* = utensil-commander = body organs). Weapons are 兵器 (*bing qi* = soldier/army-instruments).

Museums display ancient 青銅器 (*qing tong qi* = green-bronze-utensil/container, e.g. 鼎 *ding* = three-legged bronze cooking vessels), 瓷器 (*ci qi* = porcelain-ware). 茶壺 (*cha hu* = tea-pot), 茶杯 (*cha bei* = tea-cup) are 茶器 (*cha qi* = tea-utensils). Ancient tombs contain 冥器 (*ming qi* = netherworld-utensils).

器重 (*qi zhong* = utensil-important) means giving someone great regard/responsibility. 不成器 (*bu cheng qi* = no-accomplish-utensil) describes a failed person. 大器晚成 (*da qi wan cheng* = big-utensil-night/late-accomplish) means achieving success later than others.