

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

瓶

Pronunciation: *ping* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *ping* (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: bottle, jar, jug, vase, urn

瓶 are containers: 水瓶 (*shui ping* = water~bottle), 酒瓶 (*jiu ping* = wine/liquor~bottle), 香水瓶 (*xiang shui ping* = fragrant~water~bottle = perfume bottle). 花瓶 (*hua ping* = flower~vase) also means persons hired for adornment. 拖油瓶 (*tuo you ping* = drag~oil~ flask) describes a woman taking her son to marry another man. 守口如瓶 (*shou kou ru ping* = guard~mouth~like~bottle) means tight-lipped/uncommunicative.

梅瓶 (*mei ping* = plum~jars) display twigs of plum-blossoms. Water sprayed from 觀音 (Goddess Guanyin)'s 淨瓶 (*jing ping* = pure-water~bottle) can heal/bless worshippers.

In 2002 Sotheby's sold a Qing-Dynasty 粉彩蝠桃紋橄欖瓷瓶 (*fen cai fu tao wen gan lan ci ping* = pastel-colored~bat~peach~patterns~olive-shaped~porcelain~jar) at 天價 (*tian jia* = sky/astronomical~price) of HKD41,500,000.

by Diana Yue