

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 hiking

Pronunciation: *xie* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *haai* (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: shoe

鞋子 (*xie zi* = shoe~diminutive) have 鞋帶 (*xie dai* = shoe~laces), 鞋掌 (*xie zhang* = shoe~palms = soles).

Ferragamo sells 皮鞋 (*pi xie* = leather~shoes), 靴子 (*xue zi* = boots~diminutive), 涼鞋 (*liang xie* = cool~shoes = sandals). Chinese make 繡花鞋 (*xiu hua xie* = embroidered~flowers/patterns~shoes).

Ballerinas wear 舞鞋 (*wu xie* = dance~shoes).

Cinderella wore 玻璃拖鞋 (*bo li tuo xie* = glass~drag-shoes = glass slippers).

Feudal Chinese praised women's 三寸金蓮 (*san cun jin lian* = three~inch~golden~lotus), painful result of 纏足 (*chan zu* = binding~feet). Now girls abandon 高跟鞋 (*gao gen xie* = high~heel~shoes) for 運動鞋 (*yun dong xie* = action/sports~shoes), 懶佬鞋 (*lan lao xie* = lazy~chap~shoes = loafers).

by Diana Yue