

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: *zai* (Putonghua, 1st tone), *joi* (Cantonese 1st tone)
Basic meaning: disaster

災 (氵 = water + 火 *huo* = fire) contains disaster-inflicting elements. 水災 (*shui zai* = water-disaster = floods), 火災 (*huo zai* = fire-disaster = fires) cause 災難 (*zai nan* = disaster-sufferings = catastrophes).

Earthquakes are 自然災害 (*zi ran zai hai* = self/automatic-so-disaster-harm) = natural disasters. 抗災 (*kang zai* = resist-disaster) means rescue work in 災區 (*zai qu* = disaster-region = areas affected) to help 災民 (*zai min* = disaster-people = victims).

天災人禍 (*tian zai ren huo* = heaven/natural-disaster-people-calamity) laments natural disasters (unavoidable) and calamities caused by human errors/folly (deplorable). 破財擋災 (*po cai dang zai* = break-money-resist-disaster) consoles someone who has paid/lost money and escaped 災劫 (*zai jie* = disaster-Sanskrit-“kalpa” = injury/destruction).

by Diana Yue