

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 foreign countries

洋

Pronunciation: *yang* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *yeung* (Cantonese 4th tone)
Basic meaning: ocean, foreign, western

洋 = ocean, 洋人 (*yang ren* = ocean~person) = foreigners from overseas. 東洋人 (*dong yang ren* = east~ocean~people) = Japanese, 西洋人 (*xi yang ren* = west~ocean~people) = westerners. 洋鬼子 (*yang gui zi* = foreign~devil) is a derogatory term. 洋化 (*yang hua* = foreign~transformed) describes westernized ways/thinking. 十里洋場 (*shi li yang chang* = ten~miles~foreign~arena) means city thriving with western establishments/entertainment.

洋's opposite is 土 (*tu* = earth/native/indigenous). In 洋土之爭 (*yang tu zhi zheng* = foreign~indigenous~'s ~debate, 19th — 20th century), Chinese intellectuals debated whether China should westernize or keep her age-old traditions.

崇洋 (*chong yang* = worship~foreigners) means pro-western in everything. 出洋相 (*chu yang xiang* = reveal~(to)~foreigners~look) means behaving foolishly (as judged by foreigners).

by Diana Yue