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 Easter

墓 (radical 土 tu = earth)
Pronunciation: mu (Putonghua, 4th tone), mo (Cantonese, 6th tone)
Basic meaning: tomb

墓 = 墳墓 (fen mu = grave-tomb) = graves. After crucifixion Jesus’ 遺體 (yi ti = remain-body = dead body) was put in 墳室 (mu shi = tomb-chamber).

Ancient Chinese liked 厚葬 (hou zang = thick-bury = extravagant funerals/burials). 皇陵 (huang ling = emperor 擬-tomb/mausoleum), 古墓 (gu mu = ancient-tombs) were robbed by 盜墓賊 (dao mu zei = steal-grave-thieves = grave-robbers).

During 清明節 (Qing Ming jie = Qing Ming Festival in April) descendants visit 墳園 (mu yuan = tomb-garden = graveyards) to 掃墓 (sao mu = brush-graves = clean ancestral graves’ surroundings). 墓木 已拱 (mu mu yi gong = grave-wood/tree-already-bent = trees have formed arbors over their graves) describes pensively people whose lives/influence have long ended.

by Diana Yue