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 banquets

東 (dong fang = east-side) = the East/Orient. 東洋 (dong yang = east-ocean) means Japan. 東南亞 (dong nan ya = east-south-asia) = southeast Asia.

Traditionally, the host family occupied the east wing of the family residence, and guests occupied the west wing. Thus, 東家 (dong jia = east-family) means employer. 做東 (zuo dong = act-east) means playing host, paying for the expenses.

東方紅 (dong fang hong) = The East is Red, a songs-and-dances-performance glorifying China.

西風東漸 (xi feng dong jian = west-wind-east-gradual) means western practices are coming to the East. Mao’s statement 東風壓倒西風 (dong feng ya dao xi feng = east-wind-press-fall-west-wind) means the East will eventually overtake the West in progress.

by Diana Yue