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 music

楽

Pronunciation: yue (Putonghua, 4th tone), ngok (Cantonese 6th tone)
Basic meaning: music

In ancient China, 礼 (li = rites) and 樂 (yue = music) were part of a 君子 (jun zi = honorable = gentleman)’s education.

Later, 器樂 (qi yue = instrumental music), 舞樂 (wu yue = dance music) and 戲曲 (xi qu = drama-songs = opera) all became 藝術 (yi shu = art-method = art).

Today 西樂 (xi yue = western music) is big business, whether 古典 (gu dian = ancient-classics = classical) or 流行 (liu xing = flow-current = pop). 樂迷 (yue mi = music-infatuated = music fans) love 交響樂 (jiao xiang yue = cross-echo-music = symphonies), 爵士樂 (jue shi yue = “jazz” transliterated), 樂與怒 (luo yu nu = bliss-and-anger = “rock’n’oll” transliterated).

by Diana Yue