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 education

教, with radical 文 (wen = letters), is inseparable from writing, hence teaching is 教書 (jiao shu = teach-books). Teachers are 教師 (jiao shi = teach-masters) or 老師 (lao shi = old/venerated-masters).

Education is 教育 (jiao yu = teaching-breeding). 數化 (jiao hua = teach-transform) is education and acculturation. 數養 (you jiao yang = has-teaching-breeding) describes a well-bred person. 有教無類 (you jiao wu lei = has-teach-no-categories) means willingness to teach all students, talented or untalented.

Religion is 宗教 (zong jiao = sect-teaching). 傳教士 (chuan jiao shi = spread-reglion-scholars = missionaries) preach to 教徒 (jiao tu = religion-disciples = converts). 教訓 (jiao xun = teach-lecture) means tenets or teaching someone a lesson by scolding/beating him.

Pronunciation: jiao (Putonghua, 4th tone), gaau (Cantonese 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: teach, teaching, religion

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