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 tea

茶 (cha) Pronunciation: cha (Putonghua, 2nd tone), cha (Cantonese 4th tone) Basic meaning: tea


茶園 (cha yuan = tea gardens/plantations) grow 茶樹 (cha shu = tea-trees/shrubs). Girls 採茶 (cai cha = pick-tea) = pick 茶葉 (cha ye = tea-leaves). 青茶 (qing cha = green-tea), e.g. 龍井 (long jing = Longjing tea), is un-roasted. 紅茶 (hong cha = red-tea), e.g. 普洱 (pu er = Pu-er tea), is roasted.

茶客 (cha ke = tea-guests) enjoy 清茶 (qing cha = plain-tea), 茶點 (cha dian = tea-snacks), chess-games, story-telling, singing performances in 茶館 (cha guan = tea-houses).