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

泉

Pronunciation: quan (Putonghua, 2nd tone), chuen (Cantonese 4th tone)
Basic meaning: spring

Tea connoisseurs泡茶 (pao cha = brew-tea) with 泉水 (quan shui = spring-water), 雨水 (yu shui = rain-water), 雪水 (xue shui = snow-water), 井水 (jing shui = well-water). Poets praise 清泉 (qing quan = clear/unpolluted springs), 碧泉 (bi quan = brilliant-green-springs), 甘泉 (gan quan = sweet-springs = springs yielding tasty/flavoursome water).

泉眼 (quan yan = spring-eye) means spots where spring-water oozes from the ground. 礦泉水 (kuang quan shui = minerals-spring-water) = mineral water. 溫泉 (wen quan = warm-spring) = hot springs.

血如泉涌 (xue ru quan yong = blood-like-spring-ooze) describes wounds oozing blood. For many artists, love is 靈感的泉源 (ling gan de quan yuan = soul-feeling’s-spring-source = source of inspiration).

by Diana Yue