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

Pronunciation: pin (Putonghua, 3rd tone), ban (Cantonese 2nd tone)
Basic meaning: quality, class, taste, assess

品，with three 口 (kou = mouths/openings), means 物品 (wu pin = things-items) and 品级 (pin ji = grade/class). 品種 (pin zhong = class-kind) = species. 品格 (pin ge = quality-personality) is a person’s moral character. Fine paintings/jewelry are 珍品 (zhen pin = valuable-things/items). Witty essays are 妙品 (miao pin = clever/amusing-things/items).

品味 (pin wei = assess-taste) means taste/preference. Tea connoisseurs 品茶 (pin cha = taste/assess-tea), distinguishing 上品 (shang pin = high-grade/quality) from 下品 (xia pin = low-grade/quality). Gourmets 品嘗美食 (pin chang mei shi = assess-taste-lovely-food). Quality control is 品質控制 (pin zhi kong zhi = class-quality-hold-control).

品流複雜 (pin liu fu za = kinds-sources-multiple-complicated/impure) describes hangouts frequented by crooks/hookers/mobsters etc.

by Diana Yue