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 colours


彩 also means luck/splendour/honour/decoration. 彩票 (cai piao = luck-ticket) means lottery. Shouting applause is 喝彩 (he cai = shout-splendid), booing is 喝倒彩 (he dao cai = shout-reverse-splendid). 掛彩 (gua cai = dangle-honour) means carrying a bandaged wound from battle.

Cantonese “好彩!” (ho choi = good-luck) means “Luckily!” 多姿多彩 (duo zi duo cai = many-gestures/poses-many-colours) describes a colourful life.

by Diana Yue