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 zis together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

This week: Words about ceramics

淘 (pinyin: táo) 读作 (Putonghua, 2nd tone), 读作 (Cantonese, 4th tone)
基本意义: clay, pottery

淘人 (tao ren = pottery-person = potters) make 淘器 (tao qi = clay-containers = pottery/earthenware), using 淘土 (tao tu = pottery-earth/clay).

Museums display ancient 淘片 (tao pian = pottery-pieces = shards) of 杯 (bei = cups), 碗 (wan = bowls), 淘瓶 (tao ping = bottles) etc. 黒陶 (hei tao = black-pottery), 白陶 (bai tao = white-pottery), 绳纹 (sheng wen = rope-patterns), 魚纹 (yu wen = fish-patterns) reflect different civilizations. 淘俑 (tao yong = clay-figurines) accompany the dead in their tombs.

Literature/art can 淘冶性情 (tao ye xing qing = mould-smelt-nature-sentiments = nurture/refine sentiments), make us 淘醉 (tao zui = moulded-drunken = feel carried away). 薰陶 (xun tao = smoked/infused-moulded = influenced/nurtured) by culture, barbarians become civilized.

by Diana Yue