Character Builder

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 health and healing

藥

Pronunciation: yaoi (Putonghua, 4th tone), yeuk (Cantonese, 6th tone)
Basic meaning: medicine, drug

Chinese 藥 (radical 叉 cao = grass) is mostly 草藥 (cao yao = grass/herbal-medicine). Doctors write 藥方 (yao fang = medicine-prescriptions). 人參 (ren shen = ginseng), 冬蟲夏草 (dong cong xia cao = winter-worm-summer-grass = caterpillar-fungus = cordyceps sinensis), 牛黃 (niu huang = cow’s-gallstones) are special ingredients.


靈丹妙藥 (ling dan miao yao = miraculous-pill-wonderful-drug) means all-curing medicine or effective problem-solving plan. 無可救藥 (wu ke jiu yao = nothing-can-save-medicine) describes someone’s incurable illness, behaviour, situation.

by Diana Yue