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 the Cold War

冷 (leng) describes temperature/character/expression/relationships: 冷酷 (leng ku = cold-cruel), 冷笑 (leng xiao = cold/sneering-smile/laugh). Disputing parties have 冷静期 (leng jing qi = cool-down-quiet-period = reflection period).

冷武器 (leng wu qi = cold-military-instrument) = cold weapons, 火器 (huo qi = fire-weapons) = firearms. During 冷戰時期 (leng zhan shi qi = cold-war-time-era = Cold-War Period) 美蘇 (Mei Su = US-Soviet) developed 核武 (he wu = nuclear- weapons): 火箭 (huo zhan = fire-arrow = rockets), 導彈 (dao dan = guide-bullet = guided missiles), 核彈頭 (he dan tou = nuclear-bullet-head = nuclear warheads).

“過冷河” (guo leng he = pass-through-cold-stream = rinsing boiled pasta/noodles in cold water) also means retired/resigned executives’ non-working/cut-off-ties period before next employment.

by Diana Yue