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 beaches

潮 (radical氵=水shui = water)
Pronunciation: chao (Putonghua, 2nd tone), chiu (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: tide, surge, humid
潮 means tide: 潮水 (chao shui = tidal-water), 潮汐 (chao xi = morning-tide-evening-tide), 海潮 (hai chao = sea/ocean-tides). 漲潮落潮 (zhang chao luo chao = swell-tide-fall-tide) = high and low tides. 潮流 (chao liu = tidal-stream) = mode/trend. 潮濕 (chao shi = tide-wet) means humid.
潮 = spate/period: movie’s 高潮 (gao chao = high-tide = climax), career’s 低潮 (di chao = low-tide = depressed period), stock-market’s 狂潮 (kuang chao = mad-tide = surge). 新潮 (xin chao = new-tide/wave) means unconventionally chic. 落潮 (luo chao = fall-tide) means waning of mode/movement’s popularity.

罷工浪潮 (ba gong lang chao = stop-work-waves-tides) = surging strikes. 心事如潮 (xin shi ru chao = heart-things-resemble-tides) means surging/restless thoughts/emotions.

by Diana Yue