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 hiking

志
Pronunciation: zhi (Putonghua, 4th tone), ji (Cantonese, 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: will, determination

意志 (yi zhi = idea-determination) = will. 志向 (zhi xiang = will-direction) = aim. Athletes need 意志力 (yi zhi li = idea-determination-power = will-power).

Aspiring youths 立志 (li zhi = erect/establish-aim = decide/vow) to fulfill 志願 (zhi yuan = aim-wish = resolution) of becoming soldier/athlete/artist etc., believe 有志者事竟成 (you zhi zhe shi jing cheng = has-will-person-acts-eventually-succeed = when there’s a will there’s a way). 少年得志 (shao nian de zhi = young-years-obtain-aim) describes young people already enjoying fame/success.


by Diana Yue