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 drugs

癮 (radical 疾 = 病 bing = illness) is unhealthy: 上癮 (shang yin = up/on-addiction = becoming addicted), 大癮 (da yin = big-addiction = heavily addicted). Gamblers having 賭癮 (du yin = gamble-addiction), 麻雀癮 (ma que yin = “mahjong”-addiction) 戒賭 (jie du = give-up-gambling) by 斬手指 (zhan shou zhi = chop-off-hand’s-finger).

酒癮 (jiu yin = liquor-addiction) = alcoholism. 痴君子 (yin jun zi = addicted-gentlemen) means drug addicts. 香煙 (xiang yan = fragrant-smoke = cigarette) smokers have 煙癮 (yan yin = smoking-urges/cravings). Opium-smokers get spasms/tremors/attacks if 吊癮 (diao yin = suspend-craving = cravings not satisfied).


by Diana Yue