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 policemen

警 (radical 言 yan = words)
Pronunciation: jing (Putonghua, 3rd tone), ging (Cantonese, 2nd tone)
Basic meaning: alert, alarm, warn, police, cop

警 = alert/warn: 警告 (jing gao = warn-tell) = warn, 警報 (jing bao = alarm-inform) = alarm/sirens. Mice are 警覺 (jing jue = alert-feel = alert) about cats.

警察 (jing cha = alert/warn-watch/detect) = police: 警員 (jing yuan = police-member = constable), 警車 (jing che = police-car), 交通警察 (jiao tong jing cha = cross-through-police = traffic police).

巡警 (xun jing = patrol-policemen) stop-search 可疑人物 (ke yi ren wu = can-suspect-person-thing = suspicious-looking persons). 便衣警探 (bian yi jing tan = convenient/informal-clothes-police-investigate = plainclothes policemen) contact 線人 (xian ren = thread-person = stool-pigeons). 臥底 (e di = lie-at-bottom = undercover) policemen penetrate 黑社會 (hei she hui = black-society-club = triad/criminal organizations).

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