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

槍 = spear/gun: 長槍 (chang qiang = long-spear/gun/rifle), 手槍 (shou qiang = hand-gun), 獵槍 (lie qiang = hunting-gun), 槍聲 (qiang sheng = gun/gunshot-sound), 槍戰 (qiang zhan = gunfights). 神槍手 (shen qiang shou = god/miraculous-gun-hand) are master-shots.

單槍匹馬 (dan qiang pi ma = single-spear/gun-single-horse) describes cop/cowboy/hero fighting/acting/roaming alone. Traitors 槍口對內 (qiang kou dui nei = gun-mouth-point-to-inside = turn against friend).

Felons are 槍斃 (qiang bi = gun-dead = shot dead). Amid 槍林彈雨 (qiang lin dan yu = gun/gunshots-forest-bullets-rain = fierce shooting), victims get 槍傷 (qiang shang = gun/shot-wounded), 槍殺 (qiang sha = gun/shot-killed). Border confrontation can cause 擦槍走火 (ca qiang zou huo = rub-gun-run/let-loose-fire = unintended escalated fighting).

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