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 sea creatures

龍, the Chinese dragon, has bulging eyes, horns, a long scaled body and claws. 龍王 (long wang = dragon~king) is the mythological ruler of oceans. 龍 and 鳳 (feng = phoenix) are feudal symbols for emperor and empress or noble, powerful, handsome people. 龍袍 (long pao = dragon~robe), embroidered with dragons, is the emperor’s attire.

龍 and 虎 (hu = tiger) symbolize heroes. 龍虎鬥 (long hu dou = dragon~tiger~battle) means a fight between equally fierce opponents.

鱒龍 (xun long = sturgeon~dragon) = sturgeon. 變色龍 (bian se long = change~color~dragon) = chameleon. 長龍 (chang long = long~dragon) means a long queueing-up. 追龍 (zui long = chase~dragon) means smoking heroin (putting your pipe to the rising heroin smoke and inhaling it).

Pronunciation: long (Putonghua, 2nd tone), lung (Cantonese 4th tone)
Basic meaning: dragon

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