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 banquets

宴 = 宴會 (yan hui = banquet-meeting) = banquet.
国宴 (guo yan) = state banquet. 家宴 (jia yan) = family banquet. 設宴 (she yan = arrange-banquet) means playing host and throwing a dinner party.

婚宴 (hun yan) = wedding banquet. 公宴 (gong yan = colleagues/office-banquet) means a company dinner, not a private dinner. Winning teams hold 慶功宴 (qing gong yan = celebrate-success-banquets). Buddhist followers hold 齋宴 (zhai yan = vegetarian-banquets = dinners without meat dishes). 羅漢請觀音 (luo han qing guan yin = Lohans-treat-Guanyin) means friends jointly invite a single guest to dinner.

鴻門宴 (hong men yan = Hong-Gate-banquet) is a banquet given in honor of a guest with a conspiracy to arrest/kill him.

by Diana Yue