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 education

師 means teacher/master. 教師 (jiao shi = teach-master) = school teacher. Confucius is honored as 至聖先師 (zhi sheng xian shi = most-holy-pioneer-teacher). 師範大學 (shi fan da xue = teacher-example-big-school) means normal university.

師傅 means skilled workman (修車師傅 xiu che shi fu = repair-car-master/teacher = car mechanic). Apprentices (學徒 xue tu = learn-pupils) have to 學師 (xue shi = learn-(from)-teacher) until 滿師 (man shi = complete apprenticeship).

師法 (shi fa = learn-method) means emulating somebody. 偷師 (tou shi = steal-learning) means learning from another by secret observation. 以俄為師 (yi e wei shi = with-Russia-as-teacher) means copying the Russian example, as China did in the 1950s and 60s.

by Diana Yue