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 Buddhism

佛 (fo, short for 佛陀 fo tuo) = Buddha. “佛陀” and “Buddha” are transliterations from the same Sanskrit (= 梵文 fan wen = Sanskrit-language) name.

Sakyamuni (= 释迦牟尼 xi jia mou ni), founder of Buddhism, was born in 5th century B.C. At age-thirty he 成佛 (cheng fo = become-Buddha = attained Buddhahood). Upon death he entered Nirvana (= 涅槃 nie pan).

Buddhism preaches 慈悲 (ci bei = kindness-compassion/pity = mercy) and 覺 (jue = awakening = enlightenment). 佛教徒 (fo jiao tu = Buddha-religion-disciples = Buddhists) study 佛經 (fo jing = Buddhist scriptures/sutras) and 佛法 (fo fa = Buddhism-laws = Buddha’s teachings). 12 May 2008 is Buddha’s birthday (佛誕 fo dan = Buddha-birth).

by Diana Yue