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 Tibet

Pronunciation: zang (Putonghua, 4th tone), jong (Cantonese 6th tone)
Basic meaning: Tibet, Tibetan

Centuries ago 西藏 (Xi Zang = West-Zang = Tibet) was called 吐蕃 (Tu Bo = “Tibet”-transliterated).
西藏 is abbreviated to 藏: 藏族 (Zang zu = Tibetan-race), 藏語 (Zang yu = Tibetan-language), 藏羚羊 (Zang ling yang = Tibetan antelopes), 青藏鐵路 (Qing Zang tie lu = Qinghai-Tibet-iron-road/Railway).

Tibet was under 神權統治 (shen quan tong zhi = god-authority-overall-rule = theocratic rule) before Liberation. Noble families, 喇嘛 (la ma = lamas) and landlords exploited 農奴 (nong nu = farmer-slaves = serfs). Serfdom (農奴制度 nong nu zhi du = serfs-system) was abolished when the 西藏自治區 (Xi Zang zhi zhi qu = Tibet-self-govern-region = Xizang Autonomous Region) was established in 1959.

by Diana Yue