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 earthquakes

救

Pronunciation:  jiu (Putonghua, 4th tone), gau (Cantonese 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: save

救 means help/save: 救命 (jiu ming = save-life = save someone’s life), 救援 (jiu yuan = save-aid = physical/material/military aid), 救濟 (jiu ji = save-irrigate = economic support), 救傷車 (jiu xiang che = save-injure-car = ambulance).

求救訊號 (qiu jiu xun hao = beg/seek-save-message-sign) = SOS. 獲救 (huo jiu = receive-save) means is rescued. 見死不救 (jian se bu jiu = see-dead/death-no-save) means heartlessly ignoring someone’s desperate plea. 救國救民 (jiu guo jiu min = save-country-save-people) describes the deeds of a national hero.

Christianity preaches 救贖 (jiu shu = save-redeem = redemption) by the 救世主 (jiu shi zhu = save-world-lord = saviour). 救星 (jiu xing = save-star) means someone coming to timely rescue.

by Diana Yue