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 Taiwan

省 (verb) = 節省 (jie sheng = squeeze~skip) = economize. 省錢省力 (sheng qian sheng li = save~money~save~strength) describes something low-priced and simple to upkeep.

省 (noun) means a province in China, e.g. 福建 (Fujian), 臺灣 (Taiwan). 省會 (sheng hui = province~metropolis) = a province’s capital, e.g. 廣東省 (Guangdong Province)’s 廣州 (Guangzhou = Canton). 省長 (sheng zhang = province~leader) = provincial governor.

A Chinese person’s 籍貫 (ji guan = nationality/province~link = place of origin) means his ancestors’ native 省 (sheng = province), 縣 (xian = county), 市 (shi = town) which he also identifies with. 外省人 (wai sheng ren = outside~province~person) means someone from another province with cultural and linguistic roots unlike our own.

by Diana Yue