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

殖 (radical夕 = rotten grease, bone remnants) means grow/multiply. Living things 生殖 (sheng zhi = give-birth-breed) and 繁殖 (fan zhi = multiply-breed). 生殖器 (sheng zhi qi = birth-breed-instrument) means the male penis.

器官移植 (qi guan yi zhi = instrument-organ-transfer-plant) = organ transplant. Cloning is done through 基因轉殖 (ji yin zhuang zhi = basic-factor-change-plant = genes-transplant) technology.

Settlers 懇殖 (ken zhi = cultivate-plant) on new land. Colonizers 殖民 (zhi min = plant-people): the Dutch in Taiwan (17th century), the Japanese in Taiwan (19th-20th centuries). Colony is 殖民地 (zhi min di = plant-people-land). Decolonization (非殖民地化 fei zhi min di hua = un/de-plant-people-ize) issues are brought to the UN’s Decolonization Committee.

by Diana Yue