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 birthdays


生機 (sheng ji = life-chance) means vitality or chance of survival. 生理需要 (sheng li xu yao = life-reason-want-need) means physical (e.g. sexual) need. 生物學 (sheng wu xue = living-things-studies) = biology.

Buddhists 放生 (fang sheng = free-lives = free animals back into the wild) for good karma. 生辰 (sheng chen = birth-hour) means hour of birth. “Happy birthday!” is “生日快樂!” (sheng ri kuai le = birth-day-cheer-happy).

by Diana Yue

Pronunciation: sheng (Putonghua, 1st tone), saang (Cantonese 1st tone)
Basic meaning: beget, birth, live