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 thunderstorms

雷, a weather word, shares its radical 雨 (yu = rain) with 電 (dian = lightning/electricity), 雲 (yun = cloud), 霧 (wu = mist/fog), 雪 (xue = snow). 雷電 (lei dian) = thunder and lightning. 雷公 (lei gong = thunder-grandpa) is the Thunder God.

When the sky 打雷 (da lei = hit-thunder = thunders), we hear 雷聲隆隆 (lei sheng long long = thunder-sound-rumble-rumble). 雷暴警告 (lei bao jing gao = thunderstorm-alert-announce) = thunderstorm warning, where 暴 stands for 暴風雨 (bao feng yu = violent-wind-rain = storm/tempest).

地雷 (di lei = land-thunders) = land mines. 雷聲大雨點小 (lei sheng da yu dian xiao = thunder-sound-big-rain-drops-small) means a lot of talk but little action.

Pronunciation: lei (Putonghua, 2nd tone), lui (Cantonese 4th tone)
Basic meaning: thunder

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