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 staple foods

稻 = 稻米 (dao mi) = rice-plant grows in 稻田 (dao tian = rice/padi-fields). 插秧 (ca yang = insert-young-shoots) means planting young shoots. 收割 (shou ge = retrieve-cut) means reaping the harvest. 打穀 (da ju = hit-rice-grains) means thrashing grains to remove husks. 稻草 (dao cao = rice-grass) = hay.

糙米 (cao mi = rough-rice) means brown rice. 精米 (jing mi = fine-rice) = 白米 (bai mi = white-rice) = polished rice. 飯 (fan) is cooked rice, congee is 稀飯 (xi fan = diluted-cooked-rice = 粥 zhou).

為稻粱謀 (wei dao liang mou = for-rice-millet-aim/work) is saying humbly “Just earning a living”. 虱米大蟲 (zhu mi da chong = eat-rice-big-worm) means an idle dependent.

Pronunciation: dao (Putonghua, 4th tone), do (Cantonese 6th tone)
Basic meaning: rice plant

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