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 colours

色 (se)

Pronunciation: se (Putonghua, 1st tone), sik (Cantonese 1st tone)
Basic meaning: colour

顏色 = (yan se = couterance-colour): 膚色 (fu se = skin-colour), 音色 (yin se = musical-note-colour = timbre), 色盲 (se mang = colour-blind). Unique people have 特色 (te se = special-colour = special character). 神色 (shen se = spirit-colour) = expression. 拋眼色 (pao yan se = throw-eye-expression) means passing someone a knowing glance.


Buddhists preach 色即是空 (se zhi shi kong = colour/appearance-equal-is-empty): All existence is emptiness.