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 motherhood

Pronunciation: ying (Putonghua, 1st tone), ying (Cantonese 1st tone)
Basic meaning: baby

婦產科 (fu chan ke = women-birth/delivery-unit/department) = gynaecology-obstetrics. When 孕婦 (yun fu = pregnant-woman) safely gives birth to 胎兒 (tai er = womb-child = baby), nurses cry: “母子平安!” (mu zi ping an = mother-son-calm-safe! = mother baby both fine!)

Baby (嬰兒 ying er = baby-child) is 哺乳 (bu ru = feed-breast/milk = breast-fed) by Mom or 乳娘 (ru niang = milk-mother = wet-nurse), uses 尿片 (niao pian = urine-pieces/pads = diapers/nappies). Baby’s one-month-old celebration dinner is 滿月酒 (man yue jiu = full/complete-moon/month-wine/banquet).

聖母 (sheng mu = holy-mother) = Mary, 聖嬰 (sheng ying = holy-baby) = baby Jesus. El Nino effect is 聖嬰效應 (sheng ying xiao ying = holy-baby-effect).

by Diana Yue