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

養 (radical 食 shi = eat/food) means beget/feed/raise. Women, not men, can 生養 (sheng yang = produce-[baby]-birth = have babies) = 生孩子 (sheng hai zi = give birth to children).


養魚 (yang yu = breed-fish) means fish-farming or keeping an aquarium. Helping/cultivating a potentially dangerous person is 養虎為患 (yang hu wei huan = rear-tiger-become-harm).

Pronunciation: yang (Putonghua, 3rd tone), yeung (Cantonese 5th tone)
Basic meaning: rear, nourish, keep, breed

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