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 children

幼 = 稚 (zhì) = young; 幼兒 (you ér = young-child = baby/toddler), 幼樹 (you shù = young-tree), 幼蟲 (you chóng = young-insect = larva). Baby carrots taste 幼嫩 (you nuàn = young-tender). 幼稚園 (you zhì yuán = young-small-garden) = kindergarten. 幼稚 (you zhì = young-small/immature) means childish/foolish.

粗幼 (cu you = wide-slim) = width. Angel’s hair is 幼麟 (you mian = thin/slim-noodles), not 粗麪 (cu mian = fat/chunky-noodles).

Beverages/sports/reading suitable for all are 老幼咸宜 (lǎo you xián yí = old-young-all-suitable). The maxim 幼吾幼以及人之幼 (you wù you = care-for-our-young, yì jí rén zhì you = and-extend-to-others-people’s-young) encourages us to support/protect/love our own children and all children of the world.

by Diana Yue