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

Pronunciation: qin (Putonghua, 1st tone), chan (Cantonese 1st tone)
Basic meaning: parent, relative, close, dear, kiss


Parents feel 親情 (qin qing = family/dear-affection) for 親生子女 (qin sheng zi nu = biologically-close-born-son-daughter = biological offspring). Cousins are 親戚 (qin qi = biologically-close-relatives). Discriminating between close associates and outsiders is 親疏有別 (qin shu you bie = close-distant-has-difference).

親愛的 (qin ai de = dear-love-’s) means dear/darling. 親切 (qin qie = dear-sincere) describes warm/engaging expressions/words. 相親相愛 (xiang qin xiang ai = mutual-dear-mutual-love) = loving and staying close to each other. 親嘴 (qin zui = dear/close-mouth) means kissing, 親一下 (qin yi xia = kiss-one-stroke) means give someone a quick kiss.

by Diana Yue