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 outer space

探 means meet/feel/probe. 探熱 (tan re = measure-heat) = take body temperature. 探望 (tan wang = visit-see) = pay cordial visit. 探病 (tan bing = visit-illness) = visit sick people.


Man’s 探索 (tan suo = probe-search = quest) into space began with 月球 (yue qiu = moon-sphere = the moon). 太空船 (tai kong chuan = ultimate-space-ship = space-ships) took astronauts to 探月 (tan yue = visit-moon) — 探測 (tan ce = probe-check) conditions on the moon’s surface.

Pronunciation: tan (Putonghua, 4th tone), taam (Cantonese 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: feel, probe, visit, investigate

by Diana Yue