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 animal symbolism

蛇 are 爬虫類動物 (pa chong lei dong wu = crawl-worm-type-animal = reptiles). Being 涼血 (liang xue = cool-blood = cold-blooded), they 冬眠 (dong mian = winter-sleep = hibernate). 眼鏡蛇 (yan jing she = eye-mirror-[spectacles]-snake) = cobras.

蛇羹 (she geng = snake-soup/broth) and 蛇宴 (she yan = snake-banquet = dinners using snake meat as ingredient) are autumn specialties in southern China.

蛇 symbolizes 魔鬼 (mo gui = evil-devil-ghost = the Devil) or evil/cruel/sly people. 蛇蠍心腸 (she xie xin chang = snake-scorpion-heart-intestines) describes evil-hearted people. 蛇蠍美人 (she xie mei ren = snake-scorpion-beautiful-person) are attractive women with evil motives/plans. 蛇鼠一窩 (she shu yi wo = snake-rat-one-nest) describes bad people teaming/colluding together.

Pronunciation: she (Putonghua, 2nd tone), se (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: snake

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