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 housing markets

Pronunciation: fang (Putonghua, 2nd tone), fong (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: house, room

房屋 (fang wu = house/room) = 房子 (fang zi = house-diminutive) = house(s); 兵房 (bing fang = soldiers-houses/quarters), 屠房 (tu fang = slaughter-house).

房間 (fang jian = room-partitions) = rooms: 睡房 (shui fang = sleep-room = bedroom), 廚房 (chu fang = cooking-room = kitchen). 一套房 (yi tao fang = one-set-rooms) means an apartment. Polygamous marriages have 長房 (zhang fang = first-room = number-one wife-and-offsprings), 二房 (er fang = second-room = number-two wife-and-offsprings) etc.

City-planners formulate 房屋政策 (fang wu zheng ce = houses-rule-strategy = housing policies), 建房 (jian fang = build-houses). People 租房 (zu fang = rent-houses), 買房 (mai fang = buy-houses). 鬧房荒 (nang fang huang = shout/complain/plagued-by-houses-desolation/famine) means housing shortage.

by Diana Yue