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 drugs

販

Pronunciation: fan (Putonghua, 3rd tone), faan (Cantonese, 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: hawk, sell, traffic

小販 (xiao fan = small-seller) = hawkers, 報販 (bao fan = report/newspaper-seller) = newspaper vendors. 販夫走卒 (fan fu zou zu = sell-man-run-pawn) means lower-classes hawkers/workhands. 戰爭販子 (zhan zheng fan zi = fight-dispute-sell-ers) = warmongers.

黑社會 (hei she hui = black-societies = mafias) control 黃 (huang, literally “yellow” = prostitution), 賭 (du = gambling), 毒 (du = dangerous drugs). 毒販 (du fan = drug-traffickers/dealers) 走私 (zou si = run-private/illegal = smuggle) narcotics from 金三角 (jin san jiao = gold-three-corner = the Golden Triangle).

蛇頭 (she tou = snake-heads) help escapees 屈蛇 (qu she = crouch-like-snake = get smuggled) across borders, 販賣人口 (fan mai ren kou = traffick-sell-people-mouths = operate white slavery).

by Diana Yue