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 guerrilla warfare

Pronunciation: mao (Putonghua, 2nd tone), mo (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: hair, surname (Mao Zedong’s surname)

毛澤東 (Mao Zedong) led 中國工農紅軍 (Zhong Guo gong nong hong jun = Middle Kingdom-workers-peasants-red-army = the Chinese Red Army), proved “槍桿子裡出政權” (qiang gan zi li chu zheng quan = gun-barrel-diminutive-inside-produce-rule-power = military force produces political power).

This inspired 切格瓦拉 (qie ge wa la = “Che Guevara”-transliterated) and others to 打遊擊 (da you ji = fight-move-attack = fight guerrilla wars), 幹革命 (gan ge ming = act/work-revolution = achieve the revolution), penetrating 平原 (ping yuan = flat-plains), 森林 (sen lin = forests-woods), 山區 (shan qu = hilly/mountainous-regions).

尼共 (毛派) (Ni gong (Mao pai) = Nepal’s Communist Party (Maoists)) now dominates the Nepalese parliament.

by Diana Yue