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 dressmaking

針 (radical 金 jin = gold/metal)
Pronunciation: zhen (Putonghua, 1st tone), jam (Cantonese, 1st tone)
Basic meaning: needle, pin


Opposing speakers 針鋒相對 (zhen feng xiang dui = needle-point-mutual-confront = challenge each other’s points), 針對 (zhen dui = needle-confront = focus sharply on) opponent’s weakness. 一針見血 (yi zhen jian xue = one-needle-see-blood) describes comments which hit the nail on the head.


by Diana Yue