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


Go-betweens 穿針引線 (chuan zhen yin xian = go-through-needle-guide-thread = pull strings for lovers/companies). 線人 (xian ren = line/clue-person = informant/stool-pigeon) traces 線索 (xian suo = thread-rope = clues).

地平線 (di ping xian = land-level-line) = horizon. 一线天 (yi xian tian = one-thread-sky) means narrow strip of sky seen through steep crack in rocks.

by Diana Yue