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 swindlers

Pronunciation: tou (Putonghua, 1st tone), tau (Cantonese, 1st tone)
Basic meaning: steal

偷 = steal. 偷偷地 (tou tou di = steal-steal-ly) = stealthily/secretly; 偷看 (tou kan = stealthily/ secretly-watch/read); 偷聽 (tou ting = stealthily/ secretly-listen to); 偷吃 (tou chi = steal-eat = take/steal and eat something without permission).

Lazybones 偷懶 (tou lan = steal-lazy = skip work).

小偷 (xiao tou = small/petty-thieves) commit 偷竊 (tou qie = steal-steal = theft). Cantonese expression 偷呃拐騙 (tou e guai pian = steal-cheat-kidnap-con) summarizes swindler's bag of tricks.

by Diana Yue