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**

縫 (radical 纖 si = silk)
Pronunciation: feng (Putonghua, 2nd tone), fung (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: gap, fault, sew

縫 means sewing, 縫工 (feng gong = sew~work) means needlework. 裁縫 (cai feng = make-pattern~sew) means tailor, someone who cuts fabrics and sews/makes clothes. Factory girls use 縫紉機 (feng ren ji = sew-thread-needle-machine = sewing machines) to 車衣 (che yi = Cantonese “che yi” = machine-make~clothes), 釘鈕 (ding niu = Cantonese “deng nau” = nail/sew-on-buttons), 縫製 (feng zhi = sew-produce) garments.

縫 also means gap/crack on surfaces. Surgeons 縫合 (feng he = sew~close) wounds/cuts. Quarrels cause 裂縫 (lie feng = crack-gap = break) in friendships.

見縫插針 (jian feng cha zhen = see-crack-insert-needle) means using every available chance to plant/expand connections/influence. 天衣無縫 (tian yi wu feng = heaven-made-garment~has-no-seam/fault) describes perfect cooperation or faultless performances/plans/theories.

by Diana Yue