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 sleep

睡 (radical 目 mu = eyes)
Pronunciation: shuí (Putonghua, 4th tone), sui (Cantonese, 6th tone)
Basic meaning: sleep

睡 = 睡覺 (shuí jiào = sleep-sleeping-round = sleep). Overcome by 睡意 (shuí yì = sleepy-feeling), we 睡著 (shuí zhào = sleep-become = fall asleep), 熟睡 (shóu shuí = mature/ripe-sleep) = sleep soundly. 睡美人 (shuí měi rén = sleep-beauty-person = Sleeping Beauty) was drugged into 沉睡 (chéng shuí = heavy/deep-sleep).

We love 小睡 (xiǎo shuí = small-sleep = naps), 午睡 (wǔ shuí = noon/afternoon-sleep = siestas), 打瞌睡 (dá ké shuí = hit-doze-sleep = dozing off) but hate 打鼻鼾 (dá bí hān = blow-nose-snore = snoring).

睡 = 眠 (mián = sleep). Bears 冬眠 (dōng mián = winter-sleep = hibernate). The dead 長眠地下 (cháng mián di xìa = long-sleep-ground-under = have eternal sleep/rest).

by Diana Yue