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

醒 (xìng)  (Putonghua, 3rd tone), sing (Cantonese, 2nd tone)
Basic meaning: wake up, awake, sober

醒 = 醒来 (xícái = wake-come = wake up) = 醒著 (xíngzháo = awake-continuous = awake).
In spring, 萬物甦醒 (wànwùsūxíng = ten-thousand-things-revive-wake = the world awakes).
Hot tea/towels help drunks 酒醒 (jiùxíng = wine/liquor-wake = clear effects of wine/liquor).
清醒 (qíngxíng = clear-awake = sober) drivers can avoid road accidents.

False hopes shattered, we 覺醒 (juéxíng = sense-wake = become disillusioned), lament “好夢由來最易醒!” (hào mèng yóu lái zuì yí xíng = good-dreams-since-ever-most-easy-wake = “Good dreams don’t last!”)

Prophets/cynics boast “眾人皆醉我獨醒!” (zhòng rén jiē zuì wǒ dú xíng = many-people-all-drunken-I-only-sober = “I’m the only clear-headed guy!”)

by Diana Yue