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 slavery

奴 (nú) = slave

Pronunciation: nu (Putonghua, 2nd tone), no (Cantonese, 4th tone)

Basic meaning: slave

奴 (nú) = slave
奴隶 (nu li = slave-lowly-laborer = slaves) were purchased through 奴隸販子 (nu li fan zi = slaves-hawk--er = slave-traders). 妹仔 (mei zai = Cantonese “mui-tsaí” = sister/girl-diminutive = bought maids) are 家奴 (jia nu = domestic-slaves). Tibet/Tsarist Russia had 農奴 (nong nu = farmer-slaves = serfs). Europeans/Americans had 黑奴 (hei nu = black-slaves). 奴隸制度 (nu li zhi du = slave-servant-institution = slavery system) is now abolished.

Chinese people who kow-tow to westerners show 奴性 (nu xing = slave-nature), are derisively called “洋奴” (yang nu = over-the-ocean/foreigner’s-slaves).

In WWII Japanese soldiers used women captives as 慰安婦 (wei an fu = comfort-ease-women = “comfort women”), i.e., 性奴 (xing nu = sex-slaves).