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


騙子 (pian zi = swindle-person = swindlers/con-men) 吹牛 (cui niu = blow-bull = bluff), 拍馬屁 (pai ma pi = pat-horse-fart/ass = are sycophants), organize 騙局 (pian ju = swindle-game/set-up). 天仙局 (tian xian ju = sky/heavenly-fairy-set-ups) use pretty girls as bait.

Everyone knows 十賭九騙 (shi du jiu pian = ten-gamble-nine-swindle = nine out of ten gamblers cheat), but 旁觀者清, 當局者迷 (pang guan zhe qing, dang ju zhe mi = aside-watch-er-clear, involve-game-er-engrossed/drugged/unclear = outsiders see clearly, those involved don’t).

by Diana Yue