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 death

死

Pronunciation: si (Putonghua, 3rd tone), sei (Cantonese, 2nd tone)  
Basic meaning: death, dead, stubborn, rigid, dumb, dead-stop

死 = 亡 (wang) = die/dead; 死屍 (si shi = dead-corpse), 病死 (bing si = sick-die = die of illness), 横死 (heng si = intruded-die = unexpectedly/unreasonably killed), 安樂死 (an le si = peaceful-happy-die = Euthanasia/mercy-killing). 死諫 (si jian = die-advise) means offering unpleasant/offensive advice/suggestions risking death punishment.

Philosophers say: 死生有命 (si sheng you ming = death-life-have-fate = fate controls life/death), 死者已矣 (si zhe yi er = dead-person-ended/deceased-! = the dead are gone), nobody can 起死回生 (qi si hui sheng = raise-the-dead-back-to-life).

Toughly/hopelessly carrying on is 死捱 (si ai = dead/rigidly-toil). Studying dumbly is 死讀書 (si du shu = dead/stubborn-read-books). “死火!” (si huo = dead-fire) means “Car/plans stalled!”

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