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

葬  Pronunciation: zang (Putonghua, 4th tone), jong (Cantonese, 3rd tone)  
Basic meaning: bury the dead

Mourning rituals include 祭奠 (ji dian = offer sacrifices/wine to the deceased), 喪經 (nian jing = recite-sutras: Diamond Sutra/Bible), 殭葬 (lian zang = put in coffin, bury). 葬禮 (zang li = burial-ceremonies) include 土葬 (tu zang = earth-burial = interment), 火葬 (huo zang = fire-burial = cremation), 海葬 (hai zang = sea-burial).

Ancients used 墓俑 (mu yong = funerary-figurines) to 陪葬 (pei zang = accompany-burial, serve decedents in after-life). 陪葬 also means dragged down by another person’s destruction.

Fire victims 葬身火海 (zang shen huo hai = buried-body-fire-sea = are consumed by fire).
Heart-broken people 埋葬 (mai zang = cover-bury) bad memories. Acting recklessly, people 葬送 (zang song = bury-give-away/forfeit = destroy) their promising futures/prospects.

by Diana Yue