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 autumn


熟睡 (shou shui = ripe/mature-sleep) means sound asleep. 生面人 (sheng mian ren = unfamiliar-face-persons) means stranger, 熟人 (shou ren = familiar-person) means acquaintance/friend. 熟練 (shou lian = thoroughly-practiced) technicians do their jobs properly. 熟能生巧 (shou neng sheng qiao = thorough-practice-can-produce-skill) = practice makes perfect.

Farmers harvest 熟稻 (shou dao = ripened-padi/rice-crop). 一年兩熟 (yi nian liang shou = one-year-two-ripe/harvests) means yielding two crops a year. Girls are more 早熟 (zao shou = early-mature = precocious) than boys. People/plans/intellects 成熟 (cheng shou = form/complete-ripe = mature) with time.

Pronunciation: shou (Putonghua, 2nd tone), suk (Cantonese, 6th tone)
Basic meaning: cooked, ripe, mature, thoroughly familiar

by Diana Yue