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 fruit

甜 = 舌 (she, tongue) + 甘 (gan, good-tasting). 紅豆沙 (hong dou sha = red-bean-paste/thick-soup), 湯圓 (tang yuan = soup-round-ball-dumplings) are 甜品 (tian pin = sweet-opus/dish = desserts).
Ports/sherries are 甜酒 (tian jiu = sweet-wines).
甜美 (tian mei = sweet-pretty) describes looks/voices/girls. Endearing kids make parents 心甜 (xin tian = heart-sweet = feel sweet/pleased/comforted). Lovers call each other “甜心!” (tian xin = sweet-heart = sweetheart/honey/darling), share 甜蜜回憶 (tian mi hui yi = sweet-honey-return-remember = sweet memories).
Cheats use 甜言蜜語 (tian yan mi yu = sweet-words-honey-speech = sweet-language) to get 甜頭 (tian tou = sweet-tip/head = advantages). 甜酸苦辣 (tian suan ku la = sweet-sour-bitter-hot-tasting) describes the tastes of life’s experiences.

by Diana Yue