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 meetings

席 (xi) (Putonghua, 2nd tone), jik (Cantonese, 6th tone)
Basic meaning: mattress, table-top, seat, post


主席 (zhu xi = principal~seat) = chairman. 首席執行官 (shou xi ji xing guan = first~seat~handle~execute~official) = top executive. Attending meetings/gatherings is 出席 (chu xi = out/appear~seat), being absent is 缺席 (que xi = void~seat).

Friends turned enemies 割席 (ge xi = slice/cut~mattress = sever relations). Campers spend nights 幕天席地 (mo tian xi di = canopy~sky~mattress~earth = under the stars). 席捲之勢 (xi juan zhi shi = mattress~roll~’s~trend/force) describes landslide victories in elections/takeovers.

by Diana Yue