

Character Builder 您好嗎？

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 recessions

衰

Pronunciation: *shuai* (Putonghua, 1st tone), *sui* (Cantonese, 1st tone)
Basic meaning: decline

衰 is opposite of 盛 (*sheng* = prosperous). Empires 由盛而衰 (*you sheng er shuai* = from~prosperous~then~decline). Philosophers say everything 盛極必衰 (*sheng ji bi shuai* = prosper~peak~surely~decline).

Illnesses make bodies 衰弱 (*shuai ruo* = deteriorate~weak). As bodies'/organs' 衰老 (*shuai lao* = deteriorating~with~age), physical/mental abilities 衰退 (*shuai tui* = decline~recede = deteriorate).

經濟 (*jing ji* = planning~irrigation) = the economy. During 經濟衰退 (*jing ji shuai tui* = economic~decline/recede = recession), 百業蕭條 (*bai ye xiao tiao* = hundred~trades/businesses~cold/neglected = all businesses are depressed). 大蕭條 (*da xiao tiao* = big~cold/depressed) = the 1929 Great Depression.

Cantonese call someone “衰鬼!” (*sui gwai* = Putonghua *shuai gui* = bad ghost) for non-serious cheeky rebuke.

by Diana Yue