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 foreign countries

內外 (nei wai = inside~outside) describes physical locales and human relationships. 海外 (hai wai = seas~outside) = 國外 (guo wai = China~beyond) = places abroad. 外國人 (wai guo ren = foreign~countries~persons = foreigners/aliens) hold 外籍護照 (wai ji hu zhao = foreign~nationality~protection~notice) = foreign passports. 外資 (wai zi = foreign~capital/investments) come from 外商 (wai shang = foreign~merchants/businesses).

內憂外患 (nei you wai huan = internal~worries~external~maladies) are a country’s domestic problems and external threats. 排外 (pai wai = dismiss~foreigners) means unfairly rejecting foreigners.

外交部 (wai jiao bu = foreign~friends~communications~department) = ministry of foreign affairs. 弱國無外交 (ruo guo wu wai jiao = weak~country~no~foreign~friends~communications) means a weak country’s diplomatic efforts are useless.

by Diana Yue