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

僑 (qiao) (Putonghua, 2nd tone), kiu (Cantonese 4th tone)
Basic meaning: foreign residents, diaspora

僑 = 僑民 (qiao min = foreign-resident-people). 外僑 (wai qiao = outside-foreign-residents) = foreigners living outside their own countries. 美僑 (mei qiao = America-transliterated-foreign-resident) = Americans living abroad. 撤僑 (che qiao = withdraw-foreign-resident) means deporting foreign residents, usually before outbreak of war.

華僑 (hua qiao = Chinese-foreign-residents) = overseas Chinese = the Chinese diaspora. 同胞 (tong bao = same-afterbirth/cell) = kin/companiots, so 僑胞 (qiao bao = foreign-resident-kin/companiots) = “overseas compatriots”. 僑匯 (qiao hui = foreign-resident- transfer) means money sent home by overseas Chinese.

Many 第二代 (di er dai = the-two/second-generation = Japanese “nisei” 二世 er shì) foreign residents 归化 (gui hua = return-transform) = 入籍 (ru ji = enter-nationality) = become naturalized citizens of their resident country.

by Diana Yue