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 Victory Harbour

岸
Pronunciation: an (Putonghua, 4th tone), ngon (Cantonese 6th tone)
Basic meaning: shore

海岸 (hai an) = sea coast/shore. 天星小輪 (tian xing xiao lun) = sky-star-little-wheel/machine-boat = the Star Ferry) sails between 維港兩岸 (wei gang liang an = Victoria-Parcel-Island-Two-shores). When it 浮岸 (bo an = park-shore), passengers 上岸 (shang an = up-shore = go onshore).

兩岸關係 (liang an guan xi = two-shores/sides-relationship) = relationship/tension between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. 兩頭不到岸 (liang tou bu dao an = two-heads/ends-no-reach-shore/land) describes something that is neither here nor there.

Buddhists preach enlightenment/repentence: “苦海無邊, 回頭是岸” (ku hai wu bian, hui tou shi an = bitterness/sufferings-sea-no-border/end, turn-head-is-shore/land) = human existence is endless suffering; turn back and you will find transcedence.

by Diana Yue