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 borrowing**

**本**

Pronunciation: **ben** (Putonghua, 1st tone), **boon** (Cantonese 2nd tone)

Basic meaning: original, basis, foundation, capital, principal

本 = basis. 基本 (ji ben = foundation-basis) = fundamental, 本人 (ben ren = original-person) = himself/herself, in person. Capital is 資本 (zi ben = money-foundation), capitalism is 資本主義 (zi ben zhu yi = capital-main-meaning = capital-ideology).

Investors 打本 (da ben = mount/provide-capital) = supply/lend capital to businesses. Bank loans include 本金 (ben jin = basic-gold/money = principal) and 利息 (li xi = gain/earnings-interest = interest). 本錢 (ben qian = basic-money) in negotiations means bargaining power and job-seekers’ personal talent/qualifications. Gamblers often lose 賭本 (du ben = betting-capital) then 翻本 (fan ben = return/turn-around-capital = win back losses).


by Diana Yue