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 housing markets

求 means need/ask. 求婚 (qu hun = beg-marry) = propose. 求職 (qiu zhi = seek-jobs) = look for employment. 求救 (qiu jiu = ask-help) = send SOS. 求生 (qiu sheng = seek-live) means struggling to survive. 求死 (qiu si = seek-die) means committing suicide. Losers 求和 (qiu he = beg-peace = try to equalize). Superstitious emperors 求仙 (qiu xian = seek-fairy = seek immortality/fairyhood).

Recession changes commodities’ 供求规律 (gong qiu gui lu = supply-demand-rule-law = pattern of supply and demand). Cheap goods are 求过剩 (qiu guo yu gong = demand-exceeds-supply), luxury cars are 供過於求 (gong guo yu qiu = supply-exceeds-demand). To implore, say “求求你!” (qiu qiu ni = beg-beg-you!)

by Diana Yue