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 recessions

花 Pronunciation: hua (Putonghua, 1st tone), fa (Cantonese, 1st tone) Basic meaning: spend


花 = 費 (fei) = spend. 消費 (xiao fei = vanish-spend) = consume/consumption. 消費品 (xiao fei pin = vanish-spend-things) = consumer goods. 消費者 (xiao fei zhe = vanish-spend-persons = consumers) support 消費主義 (xiao fei zhu yi = vanish-spend-principal-ideology = consumerism). Big cars消耗 (xiao hao = vanish-waste = consumes/exhausts) petrol.

Recession reduces people’s 消費能力 (xiao fei neng li = consumption-power-strength = spending power). However, 由儉入奢易 (you jian ru she yi = from-frugality-into-extravagance-easy), 由奢入儉難 (you she ru jian nan = from-extravagance-into-frugality-difficult).

by Diana Yue