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

倒 (dao) Pronunciation: dao (Putonghua, 3rd tone), do (Cantonese, 2nd tone)
Basic meaning: downwards, backwards, reverse, fall

倒 means down/back/reverse: 倒水 (dao shui = pour-water), 跌倒 (die dao = slip-fall), 倒下 (dao xia = fall-down), 打倒 (da dao = beat-down = defeat). 時光倒流 (shi guang dao liu = time-light-reverse-flow) means going back in time. 開倒車 (kai dao che = drive-backward-car) describes regressive ideas/policies.

In 經濟倒退 (jing ji dao tui = planning-irrigation-reverse-retreat = economic recession), banks/businesses 倒閉 (dao bi = collapse-close), CEOs 倒台 (dao tai = collapse-stage = fall from power), stockholders 倒霉 (dao mei = fall-mildew/rot = have ill-luck).

Liars 顛倒黑白 (dian dao hei bai= reverse-black-white = distort truths/facts). 不倒翁 (bu dao weng = the toy: “no-topple-old-man”) symbolizes political figures who keep bouncing back into power.

by Diana Yue