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

窮 (pin) = poverty: 窮人 (qiong ren = poor-people), 窮鄉僻壤 (qiong xiang pi rang = poor-village-remote-land = underdeveloped, out-of-the-way places), 貧窮線 (pin qiong xian = poverty-line), 窮國 (qiong guo = poor-countries).

In recessions, everyone 喊窮 (han qionag = yell-poor = declares/emphasizes he/she is poor), financiers 技窮 (ji qiong = skills-exhaust = at their wits’ end), 國內生產總值 (guo nei sheng chan zong zhi = state-inside-yield-produce-total-worth = Gross Domestic Product = GDP) tumbles.

Pessimists say capitalism is 日暮途窮 (ri mu tu qiong = sun/day-evening-path-end = reaches dead-end). Gurus say 窮則變, 變則通 (qiong ze bian, bian ze tong = dead-end-then-change, change-then-through-way = change/adapt, and you’ll find new solutions).

by Diana Yue