

Character Builder 您好嗎？

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

Pronunciation: *qiong* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *kung* (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: exhaust, poor, poverty

窮 = 貧 (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