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 elections

票

Pronunciation: piao (Putonghua, 4th tone), piu (Cantonese 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: ticket, stamp, vote

Some 票 are sold: 郵票 (you piao = postal-stamps), 戲票 (xi piao = movie-tickets), 船票 (chuan piao = boat-tickets). Parking tickets (違例泊車告票 wei li bo che gao piao = violate-rule-park-car-prosecute-tickets) demand fines.

投票 (tou piao) = cast votes. 投票箱 (tou piao xiang = cast-vote-box) = ballot box. 出口點票 (chu kou dian piao = exit-mouth-count-votes) = exit polls. 公投 (gong tou = common/all-vote) = referendum. 鐵票 (tie piao = iron-votes) means a candidate’s sure-win votes.

糧票 (liang piao = grain-ticket/stamps/coupons = grain coupons) were used in the PRC under the ration system. 長期飯票 (chang qi fan piao = long-term-rice-ticket) means financial support given to a kept mistress.