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 Taiwan

Also written as 臺
Pronunciation: tai (Putonghua, 2nd tone), toi (Cantonese 4th tone)
Basic meaning: Terrace, stage, platform, short for Taiwan

戲台 (xi tai = opera-stage) = 舞台 (wu tai = dance-stage) = acting stage. 台柱 (tai zhu = stage-pillar) = person(s) upholding an institution’s performance/reputation. Politicians/CEOs 上台 (shang tai = ascend/enter-stage = assume office), 下台 (xia tai = descend/exit-stage = leave office).

電台 (dian tai = electric-platform) = radio station/channel. 電視台 (dian shi tai = electric-watch-platform) = television station/channel.

台 is short for 台灣 (Taiwan), capital city 台北 (Tai Bei = Taiwan-north = Taipei). 台灣海峽 (Taiwan hai xia = Taiwan-sea-strait) = Taiwan Strait. 台灣人 (Taiwan ren = Taiwan-people) speak 閩南話 (Min nan hua = Fujian-south-speech) = southern Fujian dialect. 台商 (Tai shang = Taiwanese-merchants/businessmen) have huge investments in China.

by Diana Yue