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 auto-racing

標 (radical 木 mu = wood/pole) = 標誌 (biao zhi = mark/symbol): 路標 (lu biao = road-sign), 商標 (shang biao = trademark), 標點 (biao dian = mark-dots = punctuation), 標題 (biao ti = mark-title = title). Phoneticians use 音標 (yin biao = sound-mark = phonetic symbols) to indicate 標準 (biao zhun = mark-exact = criteria/standard) pronunciation.

Auto-racers join 錦標賽 (jin biao sai = brocade-symbol-contest = championship race). 冠軍 (guan jun = crown/first-in-army = winner) passes 標杆 (biao gan = sign-post), 奪標 (duo biao = snatch-championship = comes first), gets 獎杯 (jiang bei = prize-cup), 獎金 (jiang jin = prize-gold/money).

標奇立異 (biao qi li yi = show/advertise-strange-establish-odd = shock/break norms) characterizes punk culture.