

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 MTR

Pronunciation: *ka* (Putonghua, 1st tone), *ka* (Cantonese, 1st tone)
Basic meaning: cart, carriage, card

卡 (*ka* = “cart”-transliterated) in 卡車 (*ka che* = car/vehicle) means truck.

卡 (*ka*) is also transliteration of first syllable of “carriage”: 車卡 (*che ka* = car/vehicle~carriage = train’s compartment), 頭等卡 (*tou deng ka* = head-class~compartment = first-class compartment), 普通卡 (*pu tong ka* = all-common~compartment = ordinary-class compartment).

卡 (*ka*) is also transliteration of “card”. Smart cards are 智能卡 (*zhi neng ka* = wisdom~ability~cards). 刷卡 (*shua ka* = brush~card) = swipe electronic card. 八達通 (*ba da tong* = eight~reach~through = Octopus Card) is a 儲值卡 (*chu zhi ka* = stored~value~card). 信用卡 (*xin yong ka* = trust-use~cards) = credit cards. 欠卡數 (*qian ka shu* = owe~card~amount) means unable to pay credit card charges.

by Diana Yue