

# 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 bureaucrats

科

Pronunciation: *ke* (Putonghua, 1<sup>st</sup> tone), *foh* (Cantonese, 1<sup>st</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: study subject, examination to select scholar-officials

Feudal China used 科舉制度 (*ke ju zhi du* = study-subject-raise/select-system = official examination system) to 取士 (*qu shi* = take-scholar = select scholar-officials).

考生 (*kao sheng* = examination~students/candidates) competed by composing poetry and 八股文 (*ba gu wen* = eight~part~writing = eight-legged essays). 鄉試 (*xiang shi* = village~examinations) selected 秀才 (*xiu cai* = outstanding~talent = first-round qualifiers). 縣試 (*xian shi* = county~examinations) selected 舉人 (*ju ren* = raise~person = second-round qualifiers). 京試 (*jing shi* = capital-city~examinations) selected 進士 (*jin shi* = promote~scholars = third-round winners) and 狀元 (*zhuang yuan* = top scholar) who would fill ministerial posts.

科舉 was abolished in 1911 because it was 落伍 (*luo wu* = drop-behind~army-line = behind the times).

by Diana Yue