

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

Pronunciation: *guan* (Putonghua, 3rd tone), *goon* (Cantonese, 2nd tone)
Basic meaning: pipe, manage, control

Noun 管 means pipe/reed-instrument.

Verb 管 means manage/control/regulate. Homes need 管家 (*guan jia* = manage-home = housekeepers). Children need 管教 (*guan jiao* = control-teach = discipline-guidance). Cities need 管治 (*guan zhi* = manage/rule = administration). 工商管理 (*gong shang guan li* = industry-commerce-control~manage) = business administration. 金融管理局 (*Jin Rong Guan Li Ju* = gold~merge-control~manage~bureau = financial-management bureau) = Monetary Authority. Free enterprises 不怕官-1st-tone, 只怕管-3rd-tone (*bu pa guan, zhi pa guan* = no~fear~official-only~fear~control).

“Mr X has 氣管炎 (*qi guan yan* = air~tube~affection = bronchitis)” may mean the man’s 妻管嚴 (*qi guan yan* = wife~control~strict = hen-pecked)”, with puns on 氣-4th-tone&妻-1st-tone, 管&管-3rd-tone, 炎&嚴-2nd-tone.

by Diana Yue