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, 1st tone), foh (Cantonese, 1st 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 選士 (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