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

升 = 上升 (shang sheng = up-rise = rise/rising). 升降机 (sheng jiang ji = rise-fall-machine) = elevators. 升旗 (sheng qi = raise/fly-flag). 升学 (sheng xue = rise-study) = pursue higher/tertiary education. 升值 (sheng zhi = rise-worth) means appreciate in value.


Smart bureaucrats 升官 (sheng guan = get higher government posting) like 坐直升机 (zuo zhi sheng ji = sit-straight-rise-machine = take helicopter = ascend government ranks swiftly). Wishing somebody 升级 (sheng ji = rise-level/tier = get promoted), we say “步步高升!” (bu bu gao sheng = “Step-step-high-rise!”)

by Diana Yue