

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, 1st tone), *goon* (Cantonese, 1st tone)
Basic meaning: official, bureaucrat, government authorities

In feudal China 做大官 (*zuo da guan* = be~big~officials = occupying high-ranking government posts) meant power/wealth. 官員 (*guan yuan* = officials) represented 官方 (*guan fang* = official~side = government authorities), commanded 官兵 (*guan bing* = government~soldiers/army), ruled 老百姓 (*lao bai xing* = old~hundred~surnames = commoners).

In 官場 (*guan chang* = officials~field/arena = bureaucratic world), even 芝麻小官 (*zhi ma xiao guan* = sesame~small~official = low-ranking officials) took bribes.

官字兩個口 (*guan zi liang ge kou* = “官”~word~two~unit~mouths) = officials have the largest say. 官官相護 (*guan guan xiang hu* = official~official~mutual~protect) = officials cover each other. Thus, 官逼民反 (*guan bi min fan* = officials~force~people~revolt = unpopular rule provoked rebellion).

by Diana Yue