

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.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about wheat-planting

麵

Putonghua pronunciation: *mian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *min6*

Meanings: wheat-flour, wheat-flour dough, wheat-flour noodle

麵 = 麥 (*mai4*, wheat) + 面 (*mian4*, face). Wheat grains are ground into 麵粉 (*mian4 fen3* = wheat-flour~powder). Baker 擀麵 (*gan3 mian4* = kneads~wheat-flour-dough), makes 麵包 (*mian4 bao1* = wheat-flour-pouch = bread).

麵條 (*mian4 tiao2* = wheat-flour~string) = noodle: 生麵 (*sheng1 mian4* = raw~noodle = freshly-made noodles), 乾麵 (*gan1 mian4* = dried~noodles). 意大利麵 (*Yi4 Da4 Li4 mian4* = "Italy"-transliterated~noodle) = Italian pasta. Japanese soba is 蕎麥麵 (*qiao2 mai4 mian4* = buck~wheat~noodle). Japanese ramen comes from Chinese 拉麵 (*la1 mian4* = pulled~noodle, made by pulling/stretching dough into strings).

方便麵 (*fang1 bian4 mian4* = instant~easy~noodle) = 即食麵 (*ji2 shi2 mian4* = immediate~eat~noodle = instant noodles) symbolize today's mass culture which hastily/unthinkingly swallows/adopts foreign trends.

by Diana Yue