

Character Builder 您好嗎? 呀

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 feeding of the five thousand

餅

Putonghua pronunciation: *bing3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *beng2*

Meanings: cake, biscuit, bread

餅 has radical 食 (*shi2*, eat/food). Baker kneads 麥粉 (*mai4 fen3* = wheat-flour) into 麵團 (*mian4 tuan2* = wetted-flour-lump = dough), adds 餅餡 (*bing3 xian4* = cake-fillings/stuffings), bakes 餡餅 (*xian4 bing3* = fillings-cake = pies).

餅店 (*bing3 dian4* = cake/pastry-shop) sells 結婚餅 (*jie2 hun1 bing3* = tie-marry-cake = wedding cakes), 嫁女餅 (*jia4 nü3 bing3* = marry-daughter-cake = bride's Chinese-style dowry cakes), 西餅 (*xi1 bing3* = west-cake = western-style fancy cakes), 燒餅 (*shao1 bing3* = burn/roast-cake = sesame-seed griddle cake), 油條 (*you2 tiao2* = oil-strip = fried dough), 豆漿 (*dou4 jiang1* = bean-soup = soybean milk) make regular Chinese breakfast. 畫餅充饑 (*hua4 bing3 chong1 ji1* = draw-cake-fill-hunger) = promising/presenting empty solution for real problem.

by Diana Yue