

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 confections and sweets

餅

Pronunciation: *bing* (Putonghua, 3rd tone), *beng* (Cantonese, 2nd tone)
Basic meaning: cake

餅 (radical 食 *shi* = eat/food) include 餡餅 (*xian bing* = stuffing~crusty-cake = pies), 蛋糕 (*dan gao* = egg~fluffy-cake = cakes), 餅乾 (*bing gan* = cake~dry = biscuits). In Hong Kong afternoon tea is typically 西餅 (*xi bing* = western-style-cake), 奶茶 (*nai cha* = milk~tea = tea with milk).

Chinese people eat fried soft dough pieces called 燒餅 (*shao bing* = fired~cake), 油條 (*you tiao* = oil~strip) with 粥 (*zhou* = rice-gruel = congee). The Mid-Autumn Festival is celebrated with 月餅 (*yue bing* = moon~cakes).

畫餅充饑 (*hua bing chong ji* = draw~cake~fill~hunger) means comforting oneself with unrealizable plans. Cantonese idiom 阿茂整餅 (*a mou zheng bing* = guy-named-Mou~makes~cakes) means making unnecessary things/moves to boost one's image/reputation.

by Diana Yue