

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 Chinese cuisine

Pronunciation: *chao* (Putonghua, 3rd tone), *chaau* (Cantonese, 2nd tone)
Basic meaning: stir-fry

炒 (radical 火 *huo* = fire) means using spatula to stir/turn meat/vegetables in 鍋 (*guo* = pan = 鑊 *huo*, Cantonese wok = wok) over 武火 (*wu huo* = martial-fire = strong flames), sometimes adding 芡 (*qian* = thickened sauce). Freshly done dishes have 鑊氣 (*huo qi* = wok-air = hot frying smell).

Speculators 炒賣 (*chao mai* = stir-fry/speculate~sell) commodities. Paparazzi 炒作 (*chao zuo* = stir-fry~manipulate = fabricate, blow-up) news-stories. Careless chefs 炒燬 (*chao nong* = stir-fry~burn/char) ingredients. Over-bullish investors 炒燬 (*chao nong* = speculate~burn/char) stocks/commodities: short-term buy/sell, lose out to tricky market.

炒魷魚 (*chao you yu* = stir-fry~squid~fish) = 炒人 (*chao ren* = stir-fry people) = sack employees: stir-fried squid curls up; sacked employees leave with their rolled-up bedding.

by Diana Yue