

# 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 staple foods

麥

Pronunciation: *mai* (Putonghua, 4<sup>th</sup> tone), *mak* (Cantonese 6<sup>th</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: wheat

麥 = wheat/barley: 小麥 (*xiao mai* = small~wheat = wheat), 大麥 (*da mai* = big~wheat = barley), 麥穗 (*mai shui* = wheat~ears). 麥田 (*mai tian* = wheat~fields) look beautiful with 麥浪 (*mai lang* = wheat~waves = billowing of wheat heads). 打麥 (*da mai* = hit~wheat) means thrashing wheat. 麥稈 (*mai gan* = wheat~stem) = straws.

麵粉 (*mian fen* = noodles~powder = wheat~flour) is made into 麵條 (*mian tiao* = noodle~strings), 饅頭 (*man tou* = bun~head = buns), 糕點 (*gao dian* = cakes~dumplings). 麥片 (*mai pian* = wheat~piece = oatmeal) and 麥草 (*mai cao* = wheat~grass) are health foods.

麥當奴 (*mai dang lao* = “McDonald’s”-transliterated = wheat~should~labour) is the Chinese name of Big Mac.

by Diana Yue