

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

饑^{also} **飢** Pronunciation: *ji* (Putonghua, 1st tone), *gei* (Cantonese 1st tone). Basic meaning: hunger, famine

饑 = 餓 (*e*) means hungry, 饑餓 (*ji e*) means hunger. During 饑荒 (*ji huang* = hunger~bad-harvest = famine), 饑民 (*ji min* = hungry~people = famine victims) 餓死 (*e si* = hungry~die = die of hunger).

When feeling 饑腸轆轆 (*ji chang lu lu* = hungry~intestines~wheel-grinding-sound), we 饑不擇食 (*ji bu ze shi* = hungry~no~choose~food = eat whatever is available). 餓肚子 (*e du zi* = hungry~belly) means going without food. 絕食 (*jue shi* = end~eat) means going on hunger strike.

During a famine, an ignorant emperor said “天下饑，何不食肉糜？” (*tian xia ji, he bu shi rou mi?* = sky~under~famine, why~not~eat~meat~gruel? = Why don't our famished people eat meat porridge?)

by Diana Yue