

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

飯

Pronunciation: *fan* (Putonghua, 4th tone), *faan* (Cantonese, 6th tone)
Basic meaning: cooked rice

Housewives 燒飯 (*shao fan* = burn/cook~rice = Cantonese 煮飯 *zhu fan* = boil~rice), 煮粥 (*zhu zhou* = cook~congee/rice-gruel), prepare 餸菜 (*song cai* = accompanying~vegi/meat~dishes). Salary-men buy 飯盒 (*fan he* = rice/lunch~box = bento). 丟飯碗 (*diu fan wan* = lose~rice~bowl) means losing one's job. Beggars 討飯 (*tao fan* = beg-for~rice/food).

請吃便飯 (*qing chi bian fan* = please/treat~eat~casual~rice/meal) means invitation to informal lunch/dinner. 飯店 (*fan dian* = rice/meal~shop) = eatery/restaurant. Chefs make 炒飯 (*chao fan* = stir-fried~rice). Columnists/script-writers 炒冷飯 (*chao leng fan* = stir-fry~cold/leftover~rice = re-use old ideas).

Useless persons are “飯桶!” (*fan tong* = cooked~rice~bucket/container). 生米煮成熟飯 (*sheng mi zhu cheng shou fan* = raw~rice-grains-boil~become-cooked~rice) describes irreversible situations.

by Diana Yue