

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 dressmaking

線

Pronunciation: *xian* (Putonghua, 4th tone), *sin* (Cantonese, 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: thread, line, route

線 has radical 糸 (*xi*, silk/thread). 絲線 (*si xian* = silk~threads) come from 蠶絲 (*chan si* = silkworm~silk). 棉紗 (*mian sha* = cotton~fine-threads) come from 棉莢 (*mian jia* = cotton~bolls). Seamstresses do 針線 (*zhen xian* = needle~thread = sewing/needlework), 刺繡 (*ci xiu* = prick/needle-point-embroidery), 縫補 (*feng bu* = sewing~mending). Knitting woollens is 打毛線 (*da mao xian* = hit~woollen~threads).

Go-betweeners 穿針引線 (*chuan zhen yin xian* = go-through~needle~guide~thread = pull strings for lovers/companies). 線人 (*xian ren* = line/clue-person = informant/stool-pigeon) traces 線索 (*xian suo* = thread-rope = clues).

地平線 (*di ping xian* = land~level~line) = horizon. 一線天 (*yi xian tian* = one~thread~sky) means narrow strip of sky seen through steep crack in rocks.

by Diana Yue