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 confections and sweets

Pronunciation: pang (Putonghua, 4th tone), boon (Cantonese, 6th tone)  
Basic meaning: plump, fat

胖 describes people’s weight/figure: 胖娃娃 (pang wa wa = plump-baby), 胖子 (pang zi = fat-diminutive = fat guy). Girls fear 發胖 (fa pang = develop/grow-fat = get fat), aim at 肥瘦適中 (pang shou shi zhong = fat-thin-appropriate-medium = weighing/looking just right).


“You’re 心廣體胖!” (xin guang ti pang = heart-wide-body-fat = no worries, gets fat) is politely saying “My, you’ve put on weight!”