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

炸 (radical 火 huo = fire) means explode: 炸藥 (zha yao = explode-medicine = explosives), 炸彈 (zha dan = explode-ball = bomb).

炸 uses more oil than 煎 (jian = shallow-fry). Ingredients coated with 炸漿 (zha jiang = deep-frying-batter) are plunged into 油麪 (you huo = oil-filled-wok). 炸油條 (zha you tiao = deep-fried-oil-strips = Cantonese 油炸鬼 you zha gui = oil-deep-fried-ghosts) are deep-fried dough-strips eaten with congee. 炸薯條 (zha shu tiao = deep-fried-potato-chips) = French fries. 天婦羅 (tian fu luo) is kanji for Japanese “tempura”.

In WWII Chinese restaurants served “轟炸東京” (hong zha Dong Jing = “bang”-explode-East-Capital = bombing Tokyo): hot soup/prawns/bamboo-shoots are poured over deep-fried rice biscuits, making a sizzling sound.

by Diana Yue