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 dieting

餓 = become/feel hungry: 饥了 (e le = hungry-already), 饥餓 (ji e = famished-hungry), 饥渴 (ji he = hungry-and-thirsty).

In 饥荒 (ji huang = famished-bad-harvest = famine), 饥民 (ji min = famine-people/victims) 饥死 (e si = hungry-die = starve to death). However, “餓死了!” e si le = starved-dead-already) after working the whole morning just means “I've got to eat!”

Girls on diet 餓瘦 (e shou = starve-themselves-skinny), 餓壞 (e huai = starve-themselves-bad/broken = famish), develop 厌食症 (yan shi zheng = tired-of-eating-illness = anorexia). Lascivious/horny men are 色中餓鬼 (se zhong e gui = women/sex-amid-hungry-ghost = hungry for women/sex). 饥狗抢屎 (e gou qiang shi = hungry-dog-snatch-faeces) means inelegantly pouncing on food/target/spoils.

Pronunciation: e (Putonghua, 4th tone), ngoh (Cantonese, 6th tone) Basic meaning: hungry

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