

# 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.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about the myth of mending the sky

神

Putonghua pronunciation: *shen2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *san4*

Meanings: god/goddess

中國神話 (*Zhong1 Guo2 shen2 hua4* = Middle-Kingdom-god-talk = Chinese mythology) reflects 泛神 (*fan4 shen2* = overflow-god = pantheistic) worldview. 盤古初開 (*Pan2 Gu3 chu1 kai1* = god Pan-Gu-first-open/create) means birth of the cosmos or institution's infancy.

God 伏羲 (*Fu2 Xi1* = Fu-xi) and goddess 女媧 (*Nu3 Wa1* = Nu-wa) had 人首蛇身 (*ren2 shou3 she2 shen1* = human-heads-snake-bodies), were 兄妹 (*xiong1 mei4* = elder-brother-younger-sister), 夫妻 (*fu1 qi1* = husband~wife).

Nu-wa shaped 泥土 (*ni2 tu3* = mud-earth = earth) into 人形 (*ren2 xing2* = human-forms/figures), 施法 (*shi1 fa3* = performed-magical-power), created 人類 (*ren2 lei4* = human-kind = mankind), made 男女 (*nan2 nu3* = men~women), initiated 婚配 (*hun1 pei4* = marry~match = marriage).

by Diana Yue