

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:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

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

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

4th 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 Madame White Snake

戀

Putonghua pronunciation: *lian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *luen5*

Meanings: love

戀 (radical 心 *xin1*, heart) means love. 戀人 (*lian4 ren2* = love-person) = lover. 談戀愛 (*tan2 lian4 ai4* = talk-love-love) = lovers seeing each other. 熱戀 (*re4 lian4* = hot-love) = deeply in love. 失戀 (*shi1 lian4* = lose-love) = dumped by lover. 戀母狂 (*lian4 mu3 kuang2* = love-mother-mania) = Oedipus complex.

Young scholar 許仙 (*Xü3 Xian1*) met 白娘娘 (*Bai2 Niang2 Niang2* = White-lady-lady = Madame White) and her maid 小青 (*Xiao3 Qing1* = little-green) in beautiful 杭州 (*Hang2 Zhou1* = Hangzhou).

Xü Xian迷戀 (*mi2 lian4* = obsess-love = crazily loved) Madame White, not knowing they were 白蛇精 (*bai2 she2 jing1* = white-snake-demon) and 青蛇精 (*qing1 she2 jing1* = bluish-green-snake-demon).