

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 the myth of mending the sky

煉

Putonghua pronunciation: *lain4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lin6*

Meanings: smelt, extract, refine

煉 (radical 火 *huo3*, fire) means make/refine by burning/heating: 提煉 (*ti2 lian4* = take~extract) mineral/perfume from ores/flowers, 煉鋼 (*lian4 gang1* = smelt~steel = steel-smelting), 煉油 (*lian4 you2* = extract/refine~oil), 鍛煉 (*duan4 lian4* = smelt~refine = rigorously strengthen) body/spirit.

Daoist priests 煉丹 (*lian4 dan1* = extract~pill = concoct medicinal/immortality pills), 煉金 (*lian4 jin1* = extract~gold = make gold by alchemy). 煉獄 (*lian4 yu4* = burning~hell) = purgatory.

When 天塌一角 (*tian1 ta4 yi1 jiao3* = sky~collapsed~one~corner = one corner of the sky collapsed), 天河 (*tian1 he2* = Heavenly~River)'s water flooded the world. Goddess 女媧 (*Nu3 Wa1* = Nu-wa) 煉石 (*lian4 shi2* = burnt/refined~rocks/stones), made them 色彩斑斕 (*se1 cai3 ban1 lan4* = colors~hues~medley~brilliant = brilliant, multi-colored).

by Diana Yue