

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

鎮

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhen4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jan3*

Meanings: heavy weight, suppress, anchor, base, town

鎮 (radical 金 *jin1*, gold/metal) means weight, base, suppression: 紙鎮 (*zhi3 zhen4* = paper~weight), 冰鎮 (*bing1 zhen4* = ice~weigh) = chill with ice-cubes, 小鎮 (*xiao3 zhen4* = small~town), 重鎮 (*zhong4 zhen4* = heavy~town/base = military/professionally important town/unit/person).

Army鎮壓 (*zhen4 ya1* = suppresses~crushes) uprising, 鎮守 (*zhen4 shou3* = militarily-holds~guards) frontiers. Buddhist abbot 法顯 (*Fa3 Xian3*) tells 許仙 (*Xü3 Xian1*): 鎮定 (*zhen4 ding4* = weigh~not-move = Be calm!) I can 鎮妖 (*zhen4 yao1* = suppress~demons), 鎮邪 (*zhen4 xie2* = suppress~evil-spirits/forces!)

Legend ends: Madame White used magic to 水漫金山 (*shui3 man4 Jin1 Shan1* = water~flood~Gold~Hill = flood Gold Hill Monastery), but was 永鎮雷峰塔 (*yong3 zhen4 Lei2 Feng1 Ta3* = eternally~suppressed/imprisoned-under~Thunder~Peak~Pagoda) in Hangzhou.

by Diana Yue