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 Tibet

山 (shan), the radical in 峰 (feng = summit), 坡 (po = slope), 峻 (jun = steep) etc., indicates mountainous terrain.

喜馬拉雅山脈 (Xi ma la ya shan mai = Himalayas/transliterated=mountain-vein/range) = the Himalayas. 珠穆朗瑪峰 (Zhu mu lang ma feng = Qomolangma Peak) = Mount Everest. Western China also boasts of the 嵩崑 (Kun lun = Kunlun) and 天山 (Tian shan = heaven-mountain = Tianshan) ranges.

青藏高原 (Qing Zang gao yuan = Qinghai-Tibet-high-plain/plateau) has 雪山 (xue shan = snow mountains) and 冰川 (bing chuan = ice-rivers = glaciers). 一山還有一山高 (yi shan hai you yi shan gao = one-mountain-still-has-one-mountain-tall) issues caution: “There may be someone even smarter than you.”

by Diana Yue