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\textsuperscript{st} tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2\textsuperscript{nd} tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

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

4\textsuperscript{th} 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: \textit{shen2}
Cantonese pronunciation: \textit{san4}
Meanings: god/goddess

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

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

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

by Diana Yue