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 myths and legends

邪

Pronunciation: xie (Putonghua, 2nd tone), che (Cantonese, 4th tone)  
Basic meaning: unorthodox, sinister, evil

正 (zheng) = correct orientation, orthodox/righteous. 正派 (zheng pai = correct-school) describes orthodox/decent approach/behaviour. 邪 is 正’s opposite: 邪惡 (xie e = unrighteous-evil), 邪念 (xie nian = evil/bad-thoughts). 邪教 (xie jiao = unorthodox/heretic-teaching/religion = cults) worship 邪神 (xie shen = evil-gods/spirits), practice 淫邪 (yin xie = lascivious-evil) rituals.

Buildings having bad 風水 (feng shui = wind-water = Chinese geomancy) install 辟邪物 (pi xie wu = expel-evil-beings-objects = talismans) to dispel 邪氣 (xie qi = evil-atmosphere/mystic-force).

Church authorities denounce/ban 邪魔外道 (xie mo wai dao = evil-demons-alien-ways/teachings = evil heresies). However, 道高一尺, 魔高一丈 (dao gao yi chi, mo gao yi zhang = orthodox-way-rises-one-foot, demon-rises-one-yard = evil-doers always out-smart law-enforcers).

by Diana Yue