

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.

This week: Words about martial arts

Pronunciation: *jian* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *gim* (Cantonese 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: sword

The term 刀 (*dao*) includes knives, choppers, razors etc. 劍 (with radical 丷 = 刀) only means swords. 西洋劍 (*xi yang jian* = west~ocean~sword) = epee.

In Chinese swordsmen stories, assassins send out 飛劍 (*fei jian* = flying swords) to kill the enemy. 劍招 (*jian zhao* = designed sword-movements) have visually-prompting names, e.g. 天女散花 (*tian nu shan hua* = heavenly~girl~disperses~flowers). 劍氣如虹 (*jian qi ru gong* = sword~energy/force~resemble~rainbow) describes the eye-dazzling flashing of a sword. In Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the 青冥劍 (*qing ming jian* = blue~depth~sword, translated as "Green Destiny") symbolizes ultimate enlightenment in swordsmanship.

劍拔怒張 (*jian ba nu zhang* = sword~pulled~bow~arched) describes tension on the brink of opening fire.

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