

# 化為烏有

*hua4 wei4 wu1 you3*

A rocket that was to carry a satellite into orbit for Facebook blew up just before launch at Cape Canaveral space center. There were two explosions taking place within 20 minutes of each other.

When millions of liters of rocket fuel catch fire and explode, you can be sure nothing will be left.

So, the social media giant's project costing HK\$1.56 billion has “化為烏有” (*hua4 wei4 wu1 you3*).

“化” (*hua4*) is “to change,” “to transform,” “to melt,” “為” (*wei4*) “to become,” and “烏有” (*wu1 you3*) means “naught,” “nothing,” “nothingness,” “zero.” “化為烏有” (*hua4 wei4 wu1 you3*) is, literally, “transforms into nothingness.”

“化為烏有” (*hua4 wei4 wu1 you3*) describes destruction of the utmost degree, complete destruction, resulting from processes like “vaporizing,” which is what happens when an object turns practically into air, or “pulverizing,” meaning being reduced to fine particles.

The idiom means “to disappear completely,” “to

## Idiom by Lon Yan

come to naught,” “to vanish,” “to go up in smoke,” “to crumble to dust.”

When a building collapses in an earthquake, big chunks of concrete are left behind, so it is not exactly “化為烏有” (*hua4 wei4 wu1 you3*) literally. But a nuclear bomb will make everything “化為烏有” (*hua4 wei4 wu1 you3*).

The idiom can also be applied to non-physical things, like money people put in Lehman Brothers bonds, or time and effort put into a project that ends in utter failure.

The rocket that blew up was a reusable Falcon 6. But reusing this one is obviously out of the question because it has already “化為烏有” (*hua4 wei4 wu1 you3*).

### Terms containing the character “化” (*hua4*) include:

化妝 (*hua4 zhuang1*) – to apply cosmetics

化學 (*hua4 xue2*) – chemistry

感化 (*gan3 hua4*) – to influence and reform

同化 (*tong2 hua4*) – to assimilate; assimilation