

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.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

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

4th 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 Prometheus

Putonghua pronunciation: *huo3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *foh2*

Meanings: fire

火 = fire/passion. 火炬 (*huo3 ju4* = fire~hold-up = burning torch) radiates 熱 (*re4*, heat), 光 (*guang1*, light). 火山 (*huo3 shan1* = fire~mountain) = volcano. 火箭 (*huo3 jian4* = fire~arrow) = rocket.

Chinese myth says 燧人氏 (*sui4 ren2 shi4* = ignite~person~sire = Fire Discoverer) 鑽木取火 (*zuan1 mu4 qu2 huo3* = screwed/scrubbed~wood~kindle~fire). Revolutionaries believe 星星之火, 可以燎原 (*xing1 xing1 zhi1 huo3, ke2 yi3 liao2 yuan2* = star~star~'s ~fire, can~thus~burn~plain), i.e. 火花 (*huo3 hua1* = fire~flower = sparks) becoming 火舌 (*huo3 she2* = fire~tongue = flames) can inflame the world.

Prometheus stole 火種 (*huo3 zhong3* = fire~seed = kindling), made gods 怒火中燒 (*nu4 huo3 zhong1 shao1* = anger~fire~inside~burn = furious with rage).