

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 Narcissus

俊

Putonghua pronunciation: *jun4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jun3*

Meanings: top talent, handsome, good-looking

俊 (亻 = 人 *ren2*, person + 夂 radical meaning sharp/tip = handsome) is opposite of 醜 (*chou3*, ugly). 俊美 (*jun4 mei3* = handsome~beautiful), 俊俏 (*jun4 qiao4* = handsome~fine-looking), 俊朗 (*jun4 lang3* = handsome~radiant) describe good-looking young men/women.

希臘神話 (*xi1 la4 shen2 hua4* = “Greece”-transliterated~gods-story = Greek mythology) contain stories about 神 (*shen2*, gods/goddesses) and 凡人 (*fan2 ren2* = ordinary~people = mortals). Hunter 納西息斯 (*na4 xi1 xi1 si1* = “Narcissus”-transliterated) was 美少年 (*mei3 shao4 nian2* = beautiful~ young~years = handsome young man) admired by nymph 艾柯 (*ai4 ke1* = “Echo”-transliterated).

俊傑 (*jun4 jie2* = tip~outstanding) = people with outstanding talent/abilities. Society respects 金融才俊 (*jin1 rong2 cai2 jun4* = gold/money~merge~talent~tip = capable/distinguished bankers/ financiers).

by Diana Yue