

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 king planning revenge

薪

Putonghua pronunciation: *xin1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *san1*

Meanings: firewood, salary

薪 (radical 艹 = 草, *cao3*, grass) means firewood. 薪金 (*xin1 jin1* = firewood~gold/money) = 薪水 (*xin1 shui3* = firewood~water) = salary. Employees get 月薪 (*yue4 xzin1* = monthly~salary), want 加薪 (*jia1 xin1* = add~wages/salary = raise).

吳 (*Wu2*, today's 浙江 *Zhe2 Jiang1* Province), 越 (*Yue4*, today's 江蘇 *Jiang1 Su1* Province) developed 文明 (*wen2 ming2* = language~bright/enlightenment = culture) which 薪火相傳 (*xin1 huo3 xiang1 chuan2* = firewood~fire/torch~mutual-transfer = was passed down the ages).

Wu invaded Yue, 滅 (*mie4*, extinguished/wiped out) Yue. Yue's king became 亡國奴 (*wang2 guo2 nu2* = die~country~slave = enslaved/oppressed subject of conquered state), 臥薪嘗膽 (*wo4 xin1 chang2 dan3* = slept-on~firewood~tasted~gall-bladder = used self-torture to shame himself, stimulate will to revenge).

by Diana Yue