Character Builder 您好嗎？火

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 Flaming Mountains

焰 Putonghua pronunciation: yan4
Cantonese pronunciation: yim6
Meanings: flame, brightness, passion, burn, shine, violent power

焰 (radical 火 huo3, fire) means 火焰 (huo3 yan4 = fiery-flames), 火舌 (huo3 she2 = fire-tongue= tongues of fire). Nouveau-riche has 氣焰 (qi4 yan4 = air/gas-flame = arrogant airs).

Novel 《西遊記》(Xi1 You2 Ji4 = west-travel-record = Journey to the West) describes 唐僧 (Tang2 seng1 = Tang-Dynasty-monk = Xuanzang/Tripitaka)'s journey to obtain Buddhist sutras in India, escorted by disciples Monkey (monkey-demon 孫悟空 Sun1 Wu4 Kong1 = surname-Sun-understand-emptiness), Pigsy (pig-demon 朱八戒 Zhu1 Bai2 Jie4 = surname-Zhu-eight-abstinences), Sandy (sandy-rapids-demon 沙僧 Sha1 seng1 = surname-Sha-monk).

At 吐魯番 (Tu4 Lu3 Fan1 = Turfan) in 新疆 (Xin1 Jiang1 = new-territories/land = Xinjiang), 火焰山 (huo3 yan4 Shan1 = fire-flame-mountain-range = the Flaming Mountains) blocked their way.

by Diana Yue