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 (jun4)
Cantonese pronunciation: jun3
Meanings: top talent, handsome, good-looking

俊 (jun4 jie2 = tip-outstanding) = people with outstanding talent/abilities. Society respects 俊 (jin1 rong2 cai2 jun4 = gold/money-merge-talent-tip = capable/distinguished bankers/ financiers).

Hunter 納西塞斯 (na4 xi1 xi1 si1 = “Narcissus”-transliterated) was 美少年 (mei3 shao4 nian2 = beautiful-young-years = handsome-young man) admired by nympha艾柯 (ai4 ke1 = “Echo”-transliterated).

俊傑 (jun4 jie2 = tip-outstanding) = people with outstanding talent/abilities. Society respects 俊 (jin1 rong2 cai2 jun4 = gold/money-merge-talent-tip = capable/distinguished bankers/ financiers).