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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
4<sup>th</sup> 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 burning the linked ships

風 [fung1]
Cantonese pronunciation: fung1
Meanings: wind

風 = wind/breeze: 清風 (qing1 fung1 = fresh/cool wind/breeze), 風暴 (feng1 bao4 = wind-violent = storm), 風向 (feng1 xiang4 = wind’s-direction), 風勢 (feng1 shi4 = wind’s-force), 風險 (feng1 xian3 = wind-danger) = risk.

風平浪靜 (feng1 ping2 lang4 jing4 = wind-calm-waves-quiet) = calm/uneventful situation. 興風作浪 (qing1 fung1 zuo2 lang4 = raise-wind-make-waves) describes trouble-makers/gossipers creating 風波 (feng1 bo1 = wind-wave = disturbance/quarrel) among people.

吳 (Wu2) Kingdom’s general 周瑜 (Zhou1 Yu2) watched 魏 (Wei4) Kingdom’s fleet. 蜀 (Shu2) Kingdom’s prime-minister 諸葛亮 (Zhu1 Ge2 Liang4) 借東風 (jie4 dong1 fung1 = borrow-east-wind): performed magic to make 東風 (dong1 fung1 = east-wind) blow towards Wei’s 連環船 (lian2 huan2 chuan2 = link-ring-ships = chained-together battleships).