

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 the myth of Prometheus



Putonghua pronunciation: *tou1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tou1*

Meanings: steal

偷 = 盜 (*dao4*, rob/steal). 小偷 (*xiao3 tou1* = petty-thief) 偷錢 (*tou1 qian2* = steals-money). 偷懶 (*tou1 lan3* = steal-lazy) = lazing around, ignoring work rule/target. Love-hotels are for 偷情 (*tou1 qing2* = steal-love = secret lovers' rendez-vous).

Adverb 偷偷 (*tou1 tou1* = steal-steal) = stealthily/without permission: 偷服 (*tou1 chui1* = steal-intake = secretly take) banned drugs, 偷襲 (*tou1 xi2* = steal-attack = ambush). 偷聽器 (*tou1 ting4 qi4* = steal-listen~instrument) = bugging device. 偷渡客 (*tou1 du4 ke4* = steal-cross-guest) = illegal immigrant.

希臘神話 (*Xi1 La4 shen2 hua4* = "Greece"-transliterated-god-talk = Greek myth) tells how 普羅米修士 (*Pu3 Luo2 Mi3 Xiu1 Shi4* = "Prometheus"-transliterated) 偷火 (*tou1 huo3* = stole-fire) from the gods.