

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: *fa2*
Cantonese pronunciation: *fat6*
Meanings: punish

罰 = 處罰 (*chu3 fa2* = treat~punish = punish). Sinners/criminals/offenders 犯罪 (*fan4 zui4* = commit~sin), 犯法 (*fan4 fa3* = offend/ violate~law), 犯規 (*fan4 gui1* = offend/violate~rule), 被罰 (*bei4 fa2* = are~punished).

Judge 判罰 (*pan4 fa2* = judge/assess~punish = metes out punishment). Offenders get 刑罰 (*xing2 fa2* = sentence~punishment): 入獄 (*ru4 yu4* = enter~prison = imprisonment), 罰錢 (*fa2 qian2* = penalty~fine), 罰跪 (*fa2 gui4* = punish~kneel = punitive kneeling session). 《罪與罰》 (*zui4 yu3 fa2*) is Chinese title of Dostoyevsky's novel Crime and Punishment.

Prometheus was 重罰 (*zhong4 fa2* = heavily/severely~punished) by 宙斯 (*Zhou4 Si1* = "Zeus"-transliterated), king of the gods, for stealing fire and giving it to 人類 (*ren2 lei4* = human~species = mankind).