

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 Jesus' crucifixion

刑

Putonghua pronunciation: *xing2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ying4*

Meanings: punishment, penalty, torture

Character 刑 shows 井 (*jing3*, water-well) guarded by 卩 (= 刀 *dao1*, knife), implying torture/punishment for invader. Imperial China's 刑部 (*xing2 bu4* = punishment-bureau = Ministry of Punishments) implemented 刑法 (*xing2 fa3* = penal-law/code), imposed 刑罰 (*xing2 fa3* = punishments-penalties).

刑警 (*xing2 jing3* = criminal-offence-investigations~police) = police. Judge 判刑 (*pan4 xing2* = decides-on~punishment-sentence), announces 刑期 (*xing2 qi1* = prison-term). Convict 服刑 (*fu2 xing2* = serves~sentence). 三K黨 (*san1 kei1 dang3* = three-Ks~party = the Ku Klux Klan) used 刑具 (*xing2 ju4* = torture-instruments) to conduct 私刑 (*si1 xing2* = private/illegal-torture/execution = lynching).

Jesus was taken to Golgotha for 行刑 (*xing2 xing2* = performing/execution of sentence). 極刑 (*ji2 xing2* = ultimate/capital~punishment) means 死刑 (*si3 xing2* = death~sentence).

by Diana Yue