

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 Revolution of 1911

統

Putonghua pronunciation: *tong3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tung2*

Meanings: system, chief, orthodox, unite, united

統 (radical 系 = 絲 *si1*, silk/thread) means 系統 (*xi4 tong3* = linked-interconnection = system). 總統 (*zhong3 tong3* = overall-chief = president) 統治 (*tong3 zhi4* = overall-rules) country. Manager 統籌 (*tong3 chou2* = overall-plans/leads) projects. Accountant 統計 (*tong3 ji4* = overall-count = computes) statistics.

China has long tradition of 天下一統 (*tian1 xia4 yi1 tong3* = heaven-under-one-united = political unity), honors Confucianism as 道統 (*dao4 tong3* = way/teaching-chief = orthodox teaching), stresses 體統 (*ti3 tong3* = body-unity = propriety of moral behavior).

In WWII, ROC and PRC formed 統一戰線 (*tong3 yi1 zhan4 xian4* = united-one-battle-line = united front) against Japanese invaders. Abbreviated term 統戰 (*tong3 zhan4* = united-battle) now means befriending opponents to win them over.

by Diana Yue