

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

Putonghua pronunciation: *ge2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gaak3*

Meanings: leather, hide, remove, change

Pictogram 革 shows hide skinned from animal. 皮革 (*pi2 ge2* = skin~hide) = leather. Verb 革 originally means removing/tanning animal skin to make leather, hence 革 means remove/change. 革職 (*ge2 zhi1* = remove~post) = sacked from post. 洗心革面 (*xi3 xin1 ge2 mian4* = wash~heart~change~face) describes penitent villain turning over a new leaf.

Japan's 明治維新 (*Ming2 Zhi4 wei2 xin1* = “Meiji”-reign-period-maintain~new = Meiji Restoration, 19th century) triggered social 變革 (*bian4 ge2* = transform~change = changes).

20th century China's 革新派 (*ge2 xin1 pai4* = change-new~sect = reformists) opposed 守舊派 (*shou3 jiu4 pai4* = guard-old~sect = conservatives), advocated 政治改革 (*zheng4 zhi4 gai3 ge2* = political-rule~alter~change = political reforms), 革命 (*ge2 ming4* = change~fate = revolution).

by Diana Yue