

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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: *ming4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ming6*

Meanings: life, fate

命 = 生命 (*sheng1 ming4* = alive~life) = life/life-span: 長命 (*chang2 ming4* = long~life), 短命 (*duan3 ming4* = short-lived).

命運 (*ming4 yün4* = life~cycle/luck) = fate: people are 注定 (*zhu4 ding4* = cast~fixed = predestined) to be 好命 (*hao3 ming4* = good~fated = fortunate) or 苦命 (*ku3 ming4* = bitter~fated = misfortunate). 算命 (*suan4 ming4* = calculate~fate = fortune-telling) tries to explain 命理 (*ming4 li3* = fate's~patterns = how fate/predestination dominates us).

革命 (*ge2 ming4* = change~fate = revolution) literally means overturning nation's fate. Russia's 十月革命 (*shi2 yue4 ge2 ming4* = tenth~month~revolution = October Revolution, 1917) overthrew the Czars' regime. China's 辛亥革命 (*xin1 hai4 ge2 ming4* = Xin~Hai-year~Revolution, 1911) overthrew the Qing Dynasty.

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