

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 Qin Dynasty

統

Putonghua pronunciation: *tong3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tung2*

Meanings: lead, unite, overall, standardize, unify, uniform, interconnected system

統 (radical系 *xi4*, silk/hang) means統領 (*tong3 ling3* = unite~lead). 統帥 (*tong3 shuai4* = leading~general) = top commander. 統治者 (*tong3 zhi4 zhe3* = overall~rule~person) = ruler. Budgets need 統籌 (*tong3 chou2* = overall~planning), 統計 (*tong3 ji4* = overall~estimates/accounting/statistics).

統一 (*tong3 yi1* = lead~one) = uniform/unify/standardize. 統一戰線 (*tong3 yi1 zhan4 xian4* = unify~one~war~line) = allies' unified front. During Chinese Nationalist-Communist civil war (1946-1949), 統戰 (*tong3 zhan4* = unify~war) means befriending/persuading/luring political opponents to win them over.

秦 (Qin2) 統一天下 (*tong3 yi1 tian1 xia4* = unite-into~one~heaven-under = unified world/China), implemented reforms: 書同文 (*shu1 tong2 wen2* = writing~same~script = standardized writing script), 車同軌 (*che1 tong2 zhe2* = carts~same~axle = standardized carts' axle lengths).

by Diana Yue