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 si4, silk/thread) means 系統 (xi4 tong3 = linked-connection = 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