

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 foreign currencies

幣

Putonghua pronunciation: *bi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bai6*

Meanings: currency

銀行 (*yin2 hang2* = silver/money~company = banks) issue 貨幣 (*huo4 bi4* = goods/commodities~currency = currency/money): 紙幣 (*zhi3 bi4* = paper~money = banknotes), 輔幣 (*fu3 bi4* = auxiliary~currency = coins). 貨幣單位 (*huo4 bi4 dan1 wei4* = commodities~currency~single~unit) = currency unit.

外幣 (*wai4 bi4* = foreign~currency) = 外匯 (*wai4 hui4* = foreign~exchange): 美元 (*Mei3 yuan* = American~dollar), 日元 (*Ri4 yuan* = Japanese~yen), 歐羅 (*Ou1 Luo2* = "Euro"-transliterated). 外匯買賣 (*wai4 hui4 mai3 mai4* = foreign~exchange~buy~sell = Forex trading) has risks. Collectors prefer keeping 金幣 (*jin1 bi4* = gold~coins).

China's 人民幣 (*ren2 min2 bi4* = person~people~currency = Renminbi/RMB/CNY) is not 自由浮動 (*zi4 you2 fu2 dong4* = self-permitted~float~move = free-floating), hence non-convertible.