

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.

This week: Words about money

銀

(radical 金 *jin* = gold)
Pronunciation: *yin* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *ngan* (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: silver, money, cash

銀行 (*yin hang* = silver~hongs/firms = banks) print 銀紙 (*yin zhi* = silver/money~paper = banknotes). 金銀珠寶 (*jin yin zhu bao* = gold~silver~pearls~treasures) means jewelry/valuables collectively. 銀器 (*yin qi* = silver~vessels/ornaments) = silverware. 銀兩 (*yin liang* = silver~taels = variously-shaped silver pieces) = silver currency in old China. Someone saying “此地無銀三百兩!” (*ci di wu yin san bai liang* = this~place~has~no~silver~three~hundred~taels = “No such money here!”) is denying and lying about his/her obvious involvement/interest in a matter.

Impressive-looking but useless people are 銀樣蠟槍頭 (*yin yang la qiang tou* = silver~looking~wax~spear~head). Hong Kong people’s daily goal is “搵銀!” (*wen yin* = Cantonese “wen ngan” = search~silver/money = “bring in income!”)

by Diana Yue