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

幣

Pronunciation: bi (Putonghua, 4th tone), bai (Cantonese, 6th tone)
Basic meaning: currency

貨幣 (huo bi = commodity-currency) = currency/money: 人民幣 (ren min bi = person-people-currency = PRC's RMB), 港幣 (Gang bi = Hong Kong-currency), 澳幣 (Ao bi = Macau-currency = pataca/MOP). Tourists travelling abroad spend 外幣 (wai bi = foreign-currency/money).

In old China people used 銀兩 (yin liang = silver-taels), 銅錢 (tong qian = copper-coins). Today, for現金 (xian jin = immediate-gold/money = cash) we use 紙幣 (zhi bi = paper-currency = 鈔票 chao piao = paper-money-ticket = banknotes/bills), 輔幣 (fu bi = supplementary-currency = coins).


by Diana Yue