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).
銀珠寶 (jin yin zhu bao = gold-silver-pearls-treasures) means jewelry/valuables collectively.
銀器 (yin qi = silver-vessels/ornaments) = silverware.

銀行 (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 銀樣臘槍頭 (yin yang la qiang tou = silver-looking-wax-spear-head). Hong Kong people's daily goal is “揾銀!” (wen yin = Cantonese “wen ngan” = search-silver/money = “bring in income!”)

by Diana Yue