

Universal Multiple-Octet Coded Character Set
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In 1957 the People's Republic of China introduced an alphabetical script for the Zhuang language. The alphabet included some uncommon letters for different tones in the language. It was the official writing system for Zhuang language before a reform in 1982 replaced those “tone letters” with Latin letters (**z, j, x, q, h**). Nowadays, the old Zhuang orthography is not used at all, while the new Zhuang script is used very little, either.

In Unicode Latin Extended-B, some letters are introduced for those “tone letters” in the old Zhuang orthography.

- Zhuang tone two is U+01A7/U+01A8 **ʒ/ə** Latin Capital/Small Letter TONE TWO
- Zhuang tone three is U+0417/U+0437 **З/з** Cyrillic Capital/Small Letter ZE
- Zhuang tone four is U+0427/U+0447 **Ч/ч** Cyrillic Capital/Small Letter CHE
- Zhuang tone five is U+01BC/U+01BD **ʒ/s** Latin Capital/Small Letter TONE FIVE
- Zhuang tone six is U+0184/U+0185 **ʒ/b** Latin Capital/Small Letter TONE SIX

However, the shape of **b** (U+0185, LATIN SMALL LETTER TONE SIX) in Unicode is not typical. In the old Zhuang orthography, there are 11 letters which can be the last letter in a syllable to mark the tone. Those are **ʒ, ʒ, ʒ, ʒ, ʒ, p, t, k, b, d**, and **g**. Tone letter **ʒ** is supposed to be as tall as **ʒ, ʒ, ʒ**, and **ʒ** (just like Cyrillic soft sign **ь**), thus not to be confused with taller **b**.

Here are some examples:

- I. *Scheme for the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet* (《僮文方案》). The official standard for the old Zhuang orthography. Published in 1958.

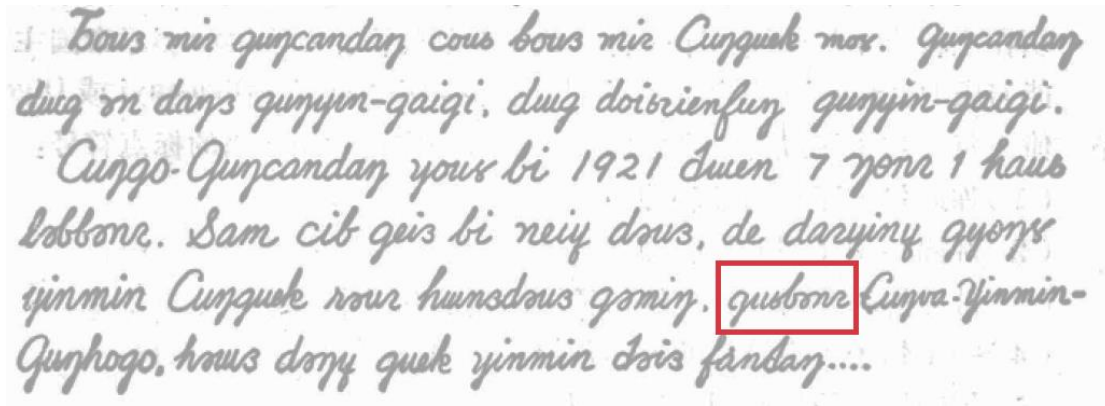
印刷体	大楷	2	3	4	5	b
	小楷	2	3	4	5	b
書写体	大草					
	小草	2	3	4	5	b
字母名称		ha2	na3	ma4	gva5	da b
		第二調	第三調	第四調	第五調	第六調
讀法	标准音調值	低降	高平	中降	高升	中平
	例字	ha2 茅草	na3 臉	ma4 馬	gva5 过	da b 河

The whole tone letter **b** is as tall as letter **a**. Also notice the tiny bar, which makes the letter like Cyrillic hard sign **Ѣ**, only slanting a little bit.

調	类	表示方法	調值	例	字	
舒声韻	第一調	(不标調)	中升	na 厚 dəm 春	go 棵	
	第二調	后加 2	低降	na2 田 dəm2 塘	co2 年青	
	第三調	后加 3	高平	na3 臉 dəm3 織	do3 賭	
	第四調	后加 4	中降	va4 瓦 rəm4 水	to4 知道	
	第五調	后加 5	高升	va5 襪 dəm5 矮	do5 大黃蜂	
	第六調	后加 b	中平	va b 話 hēm b 夜	no b 肉	
塞声韻	高音組	短元音	用 p, t, k 做韻尾	高平	dəp 肝 bət 扫	bək 插
	(第七調)	长元音	(同上)	高升	dap 塔 bat 盆	bak 口
	低音組	短元音	用 b, d, g 做韻尾	中平	həb 咬 məd 蚊	bəg 疲倦
	(第八調)	长元音	(同上)	中平	hab 盒 mad 袜	bag 劈

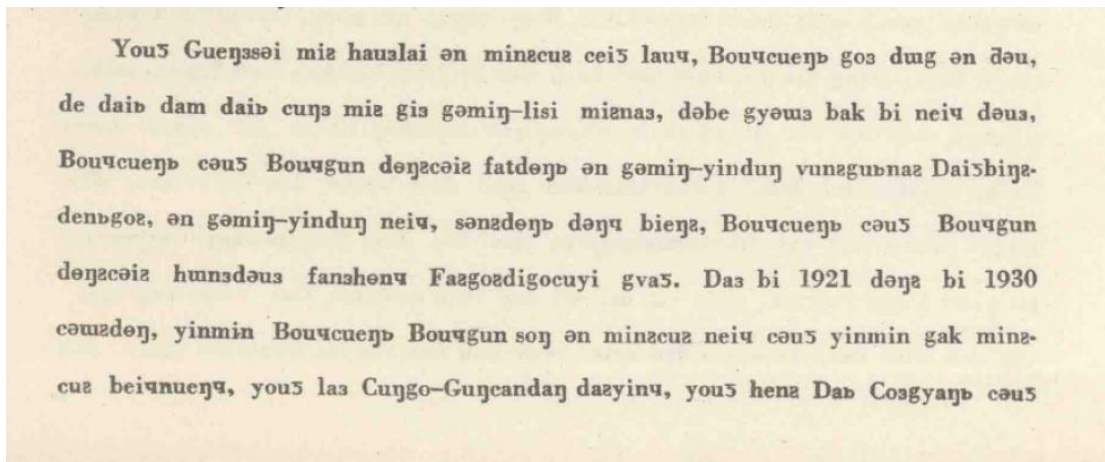
Bous mi2 guŋcandaŋ, cou**b** bous mi2 Cuŋgvek mo3. Guŋcandaŋ dɯg ən daŋ3 guŋyin-gaigi, dɯg doi**b**sienfuŋ guŋyin-gaigi.
 Cuŋgo-Guŋcandaŋ you5 bi 1921 dwen 7 ŋən2 1 hau**b** ləb-bən2. Sam cib geiz bi nei4 dəu3, de dazyin4 gyən5 yinmin Cuŋgvek rəu2 hūn3dəu3 gəmiŋ, **gu**b**bən2** Cuŋva-Yinmin-Guŋhogo, həu3 dəŋ4 gvek yinmin dəiz fandaŋ.....

The tone letter **b** is very different from the consonant letter **b**.



The same paragraph in handwriting.

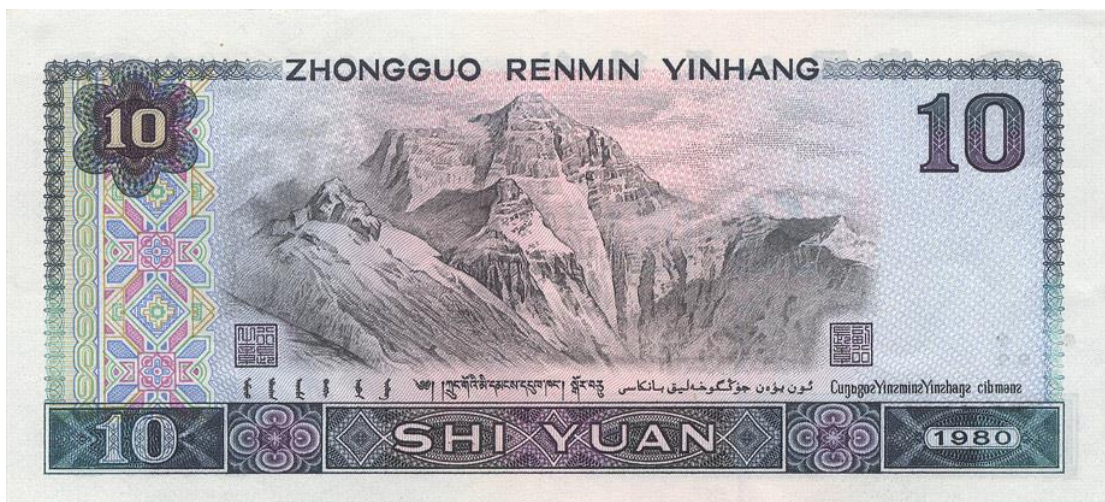
- II. *Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region* (《广西僮族自治区》). A book by the Guangxi government to celebrate Guangxi, formerly a province, becoming an autonomous region in March, 1958. Published in February, 1958.



- III. Renminbi banknotes.

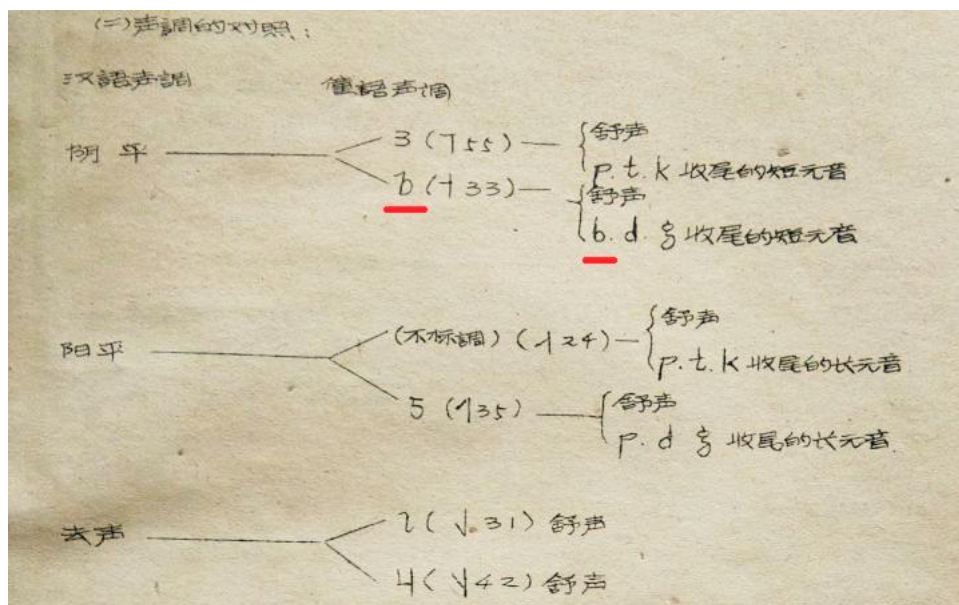


The third series of Renminbi (1965). 10 Yuan. Left-top. “Cun**b**goz Yinminz Yinzhanq cib mənə”. **b** and **b** are not as tall as each other.



The fourth series of Renminbi (1965). 10 Yuan. Right-down. “Cun**b**goz Yinzmimz Yinzhangz cib mənə”. **b** and **b** are not as tall as each other.

IV. *The Pronunciations and Meanings of Toponym in Zhuang Language* (《僮语地名用字的读音和意义》). Handwritten and mimeographed. Published in 1964.

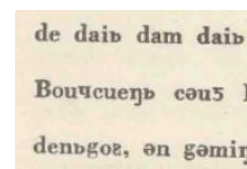


Tone letter **b** was written like Cyrillic hard sign **Ѣ**, to be distinguished from **b**.

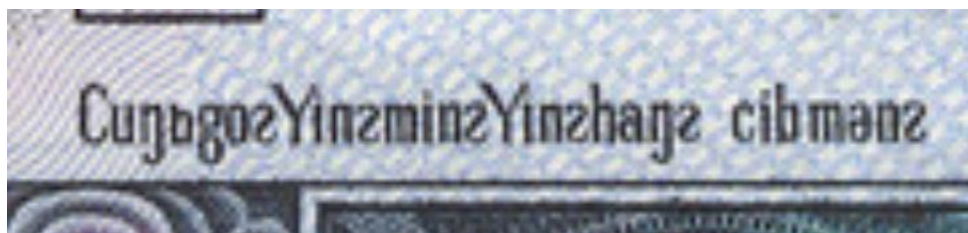
Thus, I suggest that the shape of **b** (U+0185, LATIN SMALL LETTER TONE SIX) in Unicode is not typical and should be corrected.

I have three suggestions of which either has its own reasons.

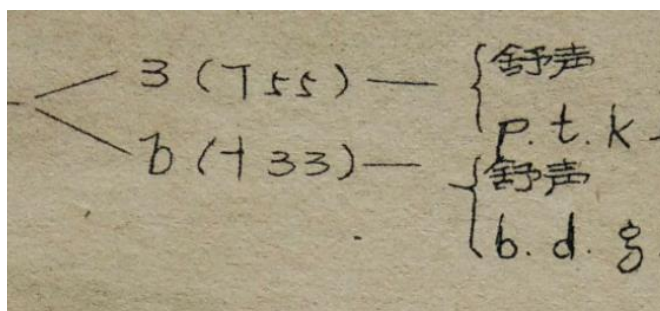
(α) Simply use Cyrillic soft sign **ѣ**, just like the case of using Cyrillic letters **з** and **ч** for Zhuang tone three and four. The printed forms of tone letter **b** in example II seem like this.



(β) Change it into the shape of **b** only with the height of **ɓ** (like small capitals **A**, **B**, **C**, or **D**). The printed forms of tone letter **b** in example III are like this. In the example, tone letter **b**'s “belly” is rounder and taller than the “belly” of Cyrillic soft sign.



(γ) Reshape it like letter **ɓ** or shorter **b**, but with a slant bar. The printed and hand written forms of tone letter **b** in example I and the handwritten forms in example IV are like this.



It should be noticed that U+0184 **ɓ** LATIN CAPITAL LETTER TONE SIX should be adjusted, too, especially in case (α) and (γ).