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 ceramics

瓶 (ping (Putonghua, 2nd tone), ping (Cantonese, 4th tone))
Basic meaning: bottle, jar, jug, vase, urn

瓶 are containers: 水瓶 (shui ping = water-bottle), 酒瓶 (jiu ping = wine/liquor-bottle), 香水瓶 (xiang shui ping = fragrant-water-bottle = perfume bottle). 花瓶 (hua ping = flower-vase) also means persons hired for adornment. 拖油瓶 (tuo you ping = drag-oil~ flask) describes a woman taking her son to marry another man. 守口如瓶 (shou kou ru ping = guard-mouth-like-bottle) means tight-lipped/uncommunicative.

梅瓶 (mei ping = plum-jars) display twigs of plum-blossoms. Water sprayed from 觀音 (Goddess Guanyin)’s 淨瓶 (jing ping = pure-water-bottle) can heal/bless worshippers.

In 2002 Sotheby's sold a Qing-Dynasty 粉彩蝠桃紋橄欖瓷瓶 (fen cai fu tao wen gan lan ci ping = pastel-colored-bat-peach-patterns-olive-shaped-porcelain-jar) at 天價 (tian jia = sky/astronomical~price) of HKD41,500,000.

by Diana Yue