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 museums

考 = scrutinizing. 考證 (kao zheng = test-prove) means methodological checking/ascertaining. In 考試 (kao shi = examine-test = exams), 考官 (kao guan = examination-officials) examine 考生 (kao sheng = examined-students).

In 田野考古 (tian ye kao gu = field-wild-examine-ancient = field archeology), 考古學家 (kao gu xue jia = examine-ancient-studies-master = archaeologists) examine 出土文物 (chu tu wen wu = out-earth-civilization-objects = unearthed cultural relics), e.g. 瓷器 (ci qi = porcelain-ware = china).

炭十四測年法 (tan shi si ce nian fa = carbon-ten-four-check-year-method = carbon-14 dating) differentiates 真品 (zhen pin = true/authentic-objects) from 僞品 (yan pin = false-objects = fakes). 不可考 (bu ke kao = no-can-check) means dates/origins are “untraceable”.

by Diana Yue