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 colours

青

Pronunciation: qing (Putonghua, 1st tone), ching (Cantonese 1st tone)
Basic meaning: blue/green

青’s traditional meaning covers 藍 (lan = blue) and 綠 (lu = green): 青天 (qing tian = blue-sky), 青菜 (qing cai = green-leafy-vegetables), 青山 (qing shan = green-hills), 綠水 (lu shui = blue-water), 綠燈 (lu deng = green-light) = green/go signal, 綠色運動 (lu se yun dong = green-colour-rotate-move = the green movement).

青 symbolizes youth: 青苗 (qing miao = green-young-shoots), 青年 (qing nian = green-years = youths/youthful years), 青春 (qing chun = green-spring = youth/splendour of youth).

青花瓷 (qing hua ci = blue-flower-pattern-porcelain) is the popular blue-on-white china. 雨過天青 (yu guo tian qing = rain-passeed-sky-blue) means (1) quarrel’s over, no hard feelings, (2) a light milky blue glaze in Chinese ceramics.

by Diana Yue