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

藍 = blue: 藍天 (lan tian = blue-sky), 湛藍 (zhan lan = deep-blue), 藍圖 (lan tu = blue-picture/print = blueprint = 藍本 lan ben = blue-original = master copy), 藍鯨 (lan jing = blue-whale), 藍牙 (lan ya = blue-tooth). Indigenous indigo prints are 藍印花布 (lan yin hua bu = blue/indigo-dye/print-flower/pattern-cloth).

Students surpassing teachers’ achievements are 青出於藍而勝於藍 (qing chu yu lan er sheng yu lan = green-issues-from-blue-and-wins-over-blue), shortened to 青出於藍.

Taiwan’s 藍綠對決 (lan lu dui jue = blue-green-face-to-face-final-battle) means election fight between blue-party 國民黨 (guo min dang = Chinese Nationalist Party = Kuomintang/KMT) and green-party 民進黨 (ming jin dang = Democratic Progressive Party/DPP).