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 jewelry

Chinese men/women wear 玉珮 (yu pei = jade-pendants) because jade symbolizes moral purity/perfection. Jade has lustre: 白玉 (bai yu = white-jade), 紅玉 (hong yu = red-jade), 黃玉 (huang yu = yellow-jade). 溫潤如玉 (wen run ru yu = warm-moisture-enriched-like-jade) describes kind/gentlemanly personality.

翡翠 (fei cui = red-jade-green-jade = brilliant-deep-green jadeite) jewelry e.g. 玉镯 (yu zhuo = jade-bracelets) can cost millions. 翠玉白菜 (cui yu bai cai = green-jade-white-cabbage) is a jadeite sculpture in the Palace Museum, Taipei.

玉女 (yu nu = jade-woman) means pure sweet-looking girl. 玉樹臨風 (yu shu lin feng = jade-tree-facing-wind) describes tall handsome men. 守身如玉 (shou shen ru yu = keep/defend-body-like-jade) describes man/woman who resists temptation and keeps integrity/virginity.

by Diana Yue