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

瓷 (radical 瓦 wa = clay roof tile) = 瓷器 (ci qi = porcelain-containers = porcelainware/ chinaware). Ceramics is collectively called 陶瓷 (tao ci = pottery-porcelain). 日用瓷 (ri yong ci = day-use-porcelain) = everyday china. 瓷磚 (ci zhuàn = porcelain-bricks/tiles) line kitchen/bathroom walls.

宋瓷 (Song ci = Song-Dynasty-porcelainware), characteristically 青瓷 (qing ci = light-green/blue-porcelain), 白瓷 (bai ci = white-porcelain), represent classical refinement. The Ming and Qing Dynasties produced glamorous 彩瓷 (cai ci = multi-colored-porcelainware).

For centuries China sold 外销瓷 (wai xiao ci = foreign-sell-porcelain = porcelainware designed/ manufactured for foreign consumption) to Europe, mainly 青花 (qing hua = blue-flower/pattern = blue-and-white porcelain) from the 瓷窯 (ci yao = porcelain-kilns) in 景德鎮 (Jingde Zhen, in Jiangxi Province).

Pronunciation: ci (Putonghua, 2nd tone), chi (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: porcelain, china

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