Character Builder

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.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each zi is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
4th tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest

To pronounce each zi below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about BRIC

(radical 石 shi 2 = stone)
Putonghua pronunciation: zhuān 1
Cantonese pronunciation: juen 1
Meanings: brick

砲 (zhuān yào 12 = brick-kilns/factories) manufacture 矮.
砖牆 (zhuān qiáng 12 = brick-walls) are made of 矮頭 (zhuān tou 12 = brick-head = bricks). Archaeologists excavate 秦磚漢瓦 (Qín zhūān Han wá 2143 = Qin-dynasty-bricks~Han-dynasty-roof-tiles = ancient architectural remains). 瓷磚 (cí zhūān 21 = porcelain/ceramic-tiles) are used in kitchens/bathrooms.

Acronym “BRIC” and “brick” 同音 (tóng yīn 21 = same-sound = are homonyms), thus "BRIC" is translated complimentarily as “金磚四國” (jīn zhūān sì guó 1142 = gold-brick-four-states).

大國崛起 (dà guó jué qǐ 4223 = big-state-rise-up = rise of big state) requires 現代化 (xiàn dài huà 444 = now-generation-transform = modernization), 工業化 (gōng yè huà 144 = industry-enterprise-transform = industrialization).

by Diana Yue