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 One Belt One Road

带 带
Putonghua pronunciation: dai4
Cantonese pronunciation: daai3
Meaning: lead, take, bring, carry, line, belt

Verb (radical 中 jin1, scarf/kerchief) means 带领 (dai4 ling3 = lead-collar = lead), 带有 (dai4 you3 = contain-has). 带笑 (dai4 xiao4 = carry-smile) = smilingly. 带孩子 (dai4 hai2 zi0 = carry-child-diminutive) = child-care. 带菌者 (dai4 jün1 zhe3 = carry-germ-person) = germ-carrier.

Noun 带 means line/belt: 腰带 (yao1 dai4 = waist-belt), 鞋带 (xie2 dai4 = shoe-lace), 热带 (ri4 dai4 = hot/tropical-belt). 裙带 (qün2 dai4) = skirt-rim/edge) means nepotism.

China launches 一带一路 (yi1 dai4 yi1 lu4 = One-Belt-One-Road) strategy, 带头 (dai4 tou2 = lead-head = takes the lead) to develop 中亚地带 (zhong1 Ya3 di4 dai4 = middle-A-sia-land-belt = Central Asian regions), 带动 (dai4 dong4 = lead-move = initiates/generates) economic development.