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 maps

界 (jie) Pronunciation: jie (Putonghua, 4th tone), gaai (Cantonese, 3rd tone) 
Basic meaning: limit, border, sector

界 = 界線 (jie xian = limit-line = border): 國界 (guo jie = national-border), 州界 (zhou jie = state-border). However, 世界 (shi jie = world-border) means world/world-wide/global.


赤道 (chi dao = red/hot-route = equator), 回歸線 (hui gui xian = return-back-line = tropics) are 分界線 (fen jie xian = divide-border-lines) dividing 地球 (di qiu = land-ball = globe/Earth) into equatorial/tropical/temperate zones. 無國界醫生 (wu guo jie yi sheng = none-national-border-medicine-sir/doctors) = Médecins Sans Frontières.

by Diana Yue