



Writing from China ...

This month your correspondent is travelling as a tourist in China. It is impossible not to draw comparisons between how the Chinese organise their society compared to ours.

China is a country as large as Australia but without the vast deserts that we have. One is constantly aware of the pressure that a population of 1.4 billion people brings. (That is over 50 times the population of Australia.) Compare the cities that have been visited so far, on the tour. Beijing with 18m people, Xi'an with a "mere" 10m, Chengdu with 15m and Chongqing with 37m.

Of course, you can say that with a much larger population and bigger economy that comparison is not relevant. Nevertheless, closing our eyes and not learning from others does not allow for advancement nor innovation. After all, our population in the cities is growing constantly and we need to plan well for bigger cities in the future.

Being residents of a relatively large city by Australian standards, one cannot help but to focus on the cities. Take everything you know and multiply by 10. To Australian eyes, the cities are huge. But they are clean and spacious with plenty of green spaces. Buildings have adequate space between them.

There is not much variety in design like in our cities. I find that a bit depressing actually, but the emphasis in China, no doubt, is on efficiency of construction to cater for so many people. At least the developments are clustered into separate smaller communities. There is construction going on everywhere.

The roads in general are magnificent. Beijing has six ring roads around the city helping to move people from one site to the other. The traffic, nevertheless, is congested. However, it seems, not worse than ours in the peak hours. China's traffic seems to work although the road rules appear to be chaotic. Tough for an Australian driver to handle the China traffic, I would think.

The Chinese are working hard to reduce pollution in the cities. In Beijing, I did not notice that the air was particularly polluted but in Xi'an it seemed to be quite bad. All the bicycles, scooters and small



Leafy Street in Xi'an China.

vehicles are electric. You can see quite a large number of electric cars that are distinguished by their green number plates. Electric vehicles will help reduce pollution. Also, China has banned people in cities burning coal in open fireplaces.

Significantly, there are no vagabonds sleeping in the street and no graffiti anywhere. One feels safe walking around the Chinese city. Police presence is evident but not obtrusive. CCTV is all around.



Correspondent on the Great Wall of China.

Your correspondent has been on three the fast trains so far. These are smooth, energy efficient and extremely fast. 305 km/hour. I am currently writing this article on the fast train from Chengdu to Chongqing. Currently the speed is 295km/hr.

One cannot help but wonder why, in Australia we do not have fast trains between Melbourne and Sydney and then onto Brisbane. They are energy efficient being powered by electricity and good for the environment.

Melbourne's CBD has to do better with its cleanliness. And in a country that is supposed to be prosperous, why do we have people sleeping on the streets? It must be such a shock for our overseas visitors to experience the beggars and people lying in the streets during the day without (it appears) purpose in their lives.

As an observer of life in Chinese cities, I see people moving about with apparent purpose. Most that I have seen are well dressed and everyone seems to have a mobile phone. Streets are divided into bike/scooter/small vehicle lanes on the outside, then several lanes in both directions but in many cases there are trees and shrubs running down the centre and/or along the edges of the roadways. Whilst busy and crowded, the streets are spacious along the main routes.

The Chinese have taken care to preserve some areas that are traditional to display their rich culture and characteristic building design. Some poorer areas have not yet caught up with the modern housing developments. These areas are a bit depressing for the outside observer.

The countryside is wonderful. Mountainous and lush. Food is, well, Chinese. Just like we are familiar with in Australia. However, the quality is excellent even when we went out into the countryside and stopped by a local restaurant. However, when you go into a snack shop, it is hard for an Australian to recognise the food on offer and to find something that we are comfortable to eat.

The people that I have met are friendly and helpful, despite the fact that we speak different languages. We do try to use the language translation apps available on the phone but with limited success.



However, you can see that the technology is getting there and such translation services will be handy for travellers in the future.

It is so important as world citizens to allow lots of cultural interchange. China is a great place to visit and even if an Australian cannot absorb all the complexity of the Chinese way of life, at least we can appreciate that in many regards we are the same. Australian lower school children are now having the opportunity to learn Mandarin. In China, all primary school children learn English from grade one with the policy introduced around 2000-2005.

Such policies can only help to bring the people of our world closer together. We need to understand each other better and to appreciate that cultural differences just make our life experience richer.