

Whether you're a foreign devil or dignitary, whether you live in China or you're just passing through, you're bound to come in contact with one or more of the 交通工具 jī tōng gōng jù (modes of transportation) described in this week's column. It's a comfort to know that in large cities in China, most 马路 mǎ lù (roads) are well-paved, 红绿灯 hóng lǜ dēng (traffic lights) function, and 驾驶员 jià shǐ yuán (drivers) generally comply with basic traffic laws. But the growing number of 车辆 chē liàng (vehicles), many of which are driven by relatively inexperienced drivers, and the large numbers of 行人 xíng rén (pedestrians) and cyclists who 不怕死 bú pà sǐ (aren't afraid to die), lead to 堵车 dǔ chē (congestion) and 危险 wēi xiǎn (danger) on China's streets.

There are two different kinds of vehicles that can run you down when you least expect it: 机动车 jī dòng chē (motor vehicles) and 非机动车 fēi jī dòng chē (non-motor vehicles).

Motor Vehicles 机动车 jī dòng chē

Cars (汽车 qì chē)

One of the requisite possessions of any genuine 大款 dà kǎn (moneybags) besides a girlfriend half his age is a 私人车 sī rén chē (privately-owned car), also called a 自备车 zì bèi chē (personal car). But the vast majority of Chinese people are too 穷 qióng (poor) to drive. It's not the car they can't afford—it's the hefty bribe to the

department of motor vehicles required to obtain a 牌照 pái zhào (license plate).

出租汽车 chū zū qì chē (taxis) are undoubtedly the most ubiquitous thing on China's streets, besides 垃圾 lǜ jī (litter). The near-extinct 面地 miàn dì (bread-loaf shaped minivans) once ruled the roads of the capital, driven by the dregs of Beijing's 胡同儿 hú tòng er (back alleys) and demobilized tank commanders. Today, fleets of new sedans ramble in their stead.

Other cars include 警车 jǐng chē (police cars) and 救护车 jiù hù chē (ambulances). Then there are various types of 卡车 kǎ chē (trucks), such as 救火车 jiù huǒ chē (fire trucks), 垃圾车 lǜ jī chē (garbage trucks) and 洒水车 sǎ shuǐ chē, which blast loud music and spray the streets with water at night. The music is intended to warn pedestrians to get out of the way lest they get soaked with water. The water is intended not to clean the streets but to cool them down in the hot summer months. However, some trucks spray water laced with insecticide and anti-fungal agent to protect the trees and give cancer to the pedestrians.

Public Transportation Vehicles 公交车 gōng jiāo chē

公共汽车 gōng gòng qì chē (public buses), those smoke-spitting behemoths used to transport the masses, can be found all over China. Beijing is characterized by the 小公共 xiǎo gōng gòng, which are mini public buses that follow the same route as their 笨重 bèn zhòng

(bulky and awkward) big brothers, but charge more because they offer greater comfort and speed. Nowadays buses can also be called by their hip AChinglish@ name 巴士车 br shìchē, or 大巴 dà bā.

Many Chinese cities also make use of 电车 diàn chē (Aelectric buses@, or cable cars). These buses get their electricity from a web of charged wires suspended over the city. The 电车 diàn chē features an appendage that protrudes from the roof of the bus and links to the overhead wire. If you've been in China long enough then you've undoubtedly seen the electric bus stopped with the driver and sometimes passengers trying to get the tentacle connected back up to the wire. That, like a foreigner involved in an argument with a Chinese person, never fails to draw a crowd.

Here are some helpful hints for when you're out during the 高峰时间 gāo fēng shí jiān (rush hour) commute: the term 先下后上 xiān xià hòu shàng@, or Aawait for passengers to get off the bus before getting on@, should be ignored completely. You can file that expression with other useless ones like 禁止吐痰 jìn zhǐ tǔ tǎn (no spitting) and 请排队 qǐng pái duì (please get in line).

When aboard a crowded bus or 地铁 dì tiě, (subway), repeatedly mutter the phrase 怎么那么拥挤? zěn me nà me yǐ (ng jǐ@ (Ahow can it be so crowded?@) under your breath. It's also appropriate to mutter 中国人太多了 Zhōng guó rén tài duō le@ (Athere are too many Chinese people@).

Non-Motor Vehicles 非机动车 fēi jī dòng chē)

Even overpaid foreign correspondents and language pundits know that the number one 非机动车 fēi jī dòng chē in China is none other than the 自行车 zì xíng chē (bicycle, lit. A self-moving vehicle[®]). Bicycles are also known as 脚踏车 jiǎo tà chē and 单车 dān chē.

Whereas in the West everyone owns a car, in China everyone owns a bicycle. Similarly, bicycle theft is as common in China as car theft is in the West. Always buy 二手车 èr shǒu chē (second-hand bicycles), as new bicycles have a tendency to disappear faster than a stray dog in a Cantonese restaurant. And you should always use two 车锁 chē suǒ (bike locks), since Chinese bicycle thieves are as adept at picking locks as Chinese companies are at *侵犯知识产权 qīn fàn zhī shì chǎn quán (committing intellectual property rights infringements).

In China, in any traffic accident involving an automobile and a pedestrian or cyclist, the driver of the automobile is always presumed to be at fault (similarly, if a foreigner is involved in a driving accident with a Chinese person, the foreigner is automatically considered at fault). Armed with that knowledge, Chinese bicyclists and pedestrians are among the bravest people in the world, right up there with 斗牛士 dòu niú shì (matadors). They drift slowly across busy streets, intersections and highways with reckless abandon, giving little or no thought to the definite possibility that this could be their last sortie to the vegetable market. After all, the driver of the vehicle

will certainly swerve first, since an accident will only result in his or her own monetary loss.

If you're going to ride a bicycle in China, there are a few basic vocabulary words (besides the 骂人话 mà rén huà (curse words) you should be familiar with. 车把 chē bǎ (handlebars) are necessary for swerving and holding up a 车篮 chē lán (basket), which is used for carrying groceries, pets or a spare child. The most useful part of your bicycle is undoubtedly the 车铃 chē líng (bell), used to warn other cyclists and pedestrians that you have no intention of slowing down or swerving. The least useful part of your bicycle is the 刹车 shā chē (brakes). And of course no bicycle is complete without a 书包架 shū bāo jià (bookbag frame), purportedly meant to carry books but actually used to transport a second passenger on the back of your bike (an optional third passenger can sit on the bar between the cyclist and the handlebars).

It's summertime and one of the greatest hazards of bicycle riding (even greater than the danger of getting hit by a watermelon truck) is exposure to the darkening rays of the sun. Women should remember to wear 太阳眼睛 tài yáng yǎn jìng (sunglasses, also called 模睛), a 口罩 kǒu zhào (face mask), long white gloves and a huge hat, casting a large, protective shadow. Apply ample amounts of 防晒霜 fáng shài shuāng (sun tan lotion) for extra protection.

In closing, the Comrade would like to recite the following popular limerick: 高高兴兴上班平平安安

回家 Agro gro xìng xìng shàng brn, píng píng rn rn huí
jir@ (Ago merrily to work, and return home safely@). For
the 下岗 xià gǎng (unemployed), here=s wishing you
安全第一 rn quán dì yī(safety first). Drive carefully!