

# CHINA & CARS: A LOVE STORY

## TEACHER'S NOTES



### WARMER

China has a growing problem with cars in the main cities causing congestion and pollution. On average 2000 cars are added to the streets of Beijing a day. Tell the students that they are on the Transport Committee in Beijing, they are going to be having a meeting where they need to brainstorm as many proposals as possible to deal with this problem, and then decide on a solution.

### PRE-TEACH VOCABULARY

Cut out the following table of words and their definitions, and get the students to match them up again.

to acquire	to buy or obtain for oneself
loiter	to stand or wait around without an apparent purpose
glimpse	to see something briefly or partially
soar	to climb swiftly
striking	attracting attention, impressive
get out of hand	to not be in control anymore
eligible	qualified to be chosen (especially for marriage)
impecunious	to have little or no money, penniless

### READING

Get the students to read through the text and answer the following questions:

1. How does car ownership in China compare with the rest of the world? *It is very low (44 cars per 1000 people), well below the rest of the world (135 cars per 1000 people)*
2. Would the Chinese government like to see the motor industry in China grow or not? *They would like it to grow because it provides jobs and tax revenue, although they are concerned about being dependent on imported oil.*
3. Is police data about road fatalities in China accurate? *No, there were more registered deaths in car crashes than on the police records.*
4. What proposals have been implemented and which ideas have been put forward in Beijing to reduce traffic congestion? *Implemented - motorists are banned from driving one day a week. Proposals – licence plates will be odd or even number, and restrict drivers to times and locations*
5. What are the main reasons for people in China wanting a car? *Status, to be acceptable for marriage, to get business contracts*

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### COLLOCATIONS

Get the students to match the collocations without looking back at the text:

*to acquire a bicycle, to loiter on street corners, to glimpse imported Soviet Ladas, to soar 20-fold, striking ring roads, impecunious suitor*

### QUESTION TAGS

Answers:

*NOTE: If we want to express surprise, doubt or annoyance, we can use a positive question tag with a positive sentence.*

1. He was loitering outside the cinema, was he? He wouldn't be there now, would he?
2. He acquired a new Porsche, did he? He couldn't have got the money legally, could he?
3. You caught a glimpse of her wedding dress, did you? It's beautiful, isn't it!
4. The prices have soared, have they? That's outrageous, isn't it?
5. That's a striking hat, isn't it! It must have cost a fortune, mustn't it!
6. He's impecunious, is he? He doesn't look it, does he?
7. You aren't eligible for the prize, are you? You're too old, aren't you?
8. His behavior is getting out of hand, is it? Well, do something about it!

### GRAMMAR & VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Give each of the students a blank piece of paper. Each student needs to write their own sentences on the paper with the new vocabulary with some surprising information. They then need to pass their page to the student to their left, who has to add questions tags showing surprise. Get them to read out their sentences, with the question tags and showing their surprise.

### IDIOMS

Answers:

1c, 2e, 3a, 4b, 5d

1. She's not really interested in protesting against the government, She is just **climbing on the bandwagon** because all her friends are doing it.
2. They really **went to town** for their wedding. It must have cost a fortune!
3. I'm not going to worry about that now, it might never happen! I'll **cross that road/bridge when I come to it**.
4. We're really **at a crossroads** at the moment. We could stay here or move to another country.
5. If you want your business to succeed, you need **to go full throttle**.

### IDIOMS PRACTICE

Write the idioms onto flashcards and place them face down on the table. The students need to take turns drawing an idiom, so that the others can guess it, and then ask each other questions with that idiom.

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### HOMEWORK

Get the students to go through the text and underline all the phrasal verbs. Then they need to find a synonym or a definition for that phrasal verb in the context that it is used in the text:

Answers:

made up for (line 11)	to do something more quickly or more often because something prevented you from making progress before
shore up (22)	to support, to prop up
reliant on (29)	Dependent
point out (36)	to notice and comment
drop off (39)	to deliver
loom out (52)	to appear (in a large way)
account for (53)	to be the reason or explanation for
pick up (62)	to collect
sum up (64)	a brief statement that presents the main points in a concise form
roll up (67)	to arrive by car

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### CHINA AND CARS: A LOVE STORY

It is half a century since Zhang Jing's father impressed the neighbours with a mark of his family's rising fortunes. He was the first in the village **to acquire** a bicycle; like Ford's Model T, the Forever came in any colour you liked, as long as it was black. Though America was deep in the golden age of the automobile, those days lay so far ahead for China that small boys would **loiter** on street corners in Beijing, waiting until a car drove by and the exotic tang of petrol fumes filled their nostrils. Even by the early 1980s, **glimpses** of imported Soviet Ladas or stately Chinese Red Flag saloons were rare outside the capital.

"We never dreamed we would have a chance to have our own car... and not only one," Zhang's husband, Wang Junfang, says.

China's love affair with cars began late, but it has more than made up for the delay. In 2000 there were 4m cars for the 1.3bn population and experts predicted that the number would be six times higher by the end of the decade. Instead, it **soared** 20-fold. Two years ago, the country became the world's largest new car market. This year, it should see about 18m sales, against 14.5m in the US. The kingdom of bicycles is now the land of the car. But at 220,000 to 400,000 yuan – £22,000 to £40,000 – the cars are a hefty investment in a city (Beijing) where last year the average (annual) income was about 33,000 yuan. Wang and Zhang are teachers, but still live with his parents and have had a little help from relatives. Being a two-car couple seems natural to them.

Some believe that the US – the land of Route 66, T-Birds and American Graffiti – has reached "peak car"; the number of miles driven per person has fallen in recent years. But no one doubts that plenty of room remains in the world's second largest economy, even as its GDP growth cools. In the US, there are around 600 cars per 1,000 people, against a global average of 135, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit. In China? Just 44.

Meanwhile, officials have used infrastructure construction to shore up GDP figures and promote development across the country. If Beijing's six ring roads are **striking**, the national network's expansion is more so. In 2000, there were 16,000km (11,000 miles) of expressway, according to state media; by 2009 that had reached 65,000 and by 2020 there will be 100,000km, roughly similar to the US.

But, Dunne notes, there is now "a bit of a political dilemma" for the government. "It really likes the fact that 95% of cars on the road are built here, thanks to very high tariffs on imported cars. It means investment in factories, jobs, tax revenues. On the other hand, [it is] suddenly confronted with the potential risks to national security in that it is more than ever reliant on imported oil. How do you feed this monster? And the environment is incredibly important, especially to younger Chinese. The government is saying it will tolerate the problems because it wants the motor industry. But it's not an open-and-shut case. They are saying: we have to manage this, because it's big and it could **get out of hand**."

China is roughly the same size as the US, but its population is four times bigger, and the downsides of car growth are already obvious. In 2011 alone, 62,387 people were killed on the roads, according to the police. Although those figures show the toll declining from a peak in 2002, other researchers question the data and the downwards trend. In 2007, they point out, police recorded 81,649 deaths on the roads, whereas death registrations suggested that crashes killed 221,135.

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Even two-car households often spurn the western one-vehicle-one-user model on practical grounds, as Zhang explains. "The traffic is so bad, we drive one car and he will drop me off halfway so I can get the subway," she says. "It's more efficient than taking two cars to work."

The problems are becoming so bad that Beijing has banned motorists from driving one day a week and limited new car registrations through a lottery system. In 2010, some 790,000 cars were added to the capital's roads – more than 2,000 a day. But officials say only 173,000 were added last year – the first slowdown in growth since 1984. Even that, they think, is not enough of a reduction. In October they said they would consider ordering odd- and even-numbered licence plates to drive at alternate times in specific areas. Shanghai has also taken action and Guangzhou hopes that similar measures will halve the number of new vehicles. Chongqing, a south-western metropolis, has discussed introducing a congestion charge.

Arthur Wang of McKinsey says 15 or 20 cities are likely to reach the congestion levels that prompt such policy changes over the next five years. But most car growth is in small cities and newly urbanising areas, and he sees little prospect of national controls.

On a cold late autumn afternoon, shoppers wander the rows of the Huaxiang secondhand car market in south-western Beijing. The city's air is thick with fumes. Buildings loom out of the haze and the sun glows an apocalyptic red. According to local officials, motor vehicles account for about half the capital's air pollution. Clusters of men play Chinese chess and puff on cigarettes under the pearl-coloured sky. Women stamp their feet to keep warm as they swipe at cars with miniature mops; even a boxy, retro-looking Chang'an estate shines as if fresh from the production line.

Zhang Penghao is in search of his first car, without a great deal of enthusiasm. Despite his friendly smile, his eyes are gloomy behind his heavy glasses. "Actually, it's not worth it. There are too many cars and limited roads," the 24-year-old complains. Driving to his job at a hotel would take longer than using the subway; he will reserve the car for visiting friends in the suburbs and, more importantly, for dates. "In China, if you don't have a house or car, you can't get a wife. There's a lot of pressure." His only reason for buying a vehicle is to improve his **eligibility**. "If a girl can see you didn't drive to pick her up, she won't bother coming out. I don't understand why it's so important, either. It's women, or really the women's parents, who care."

It is no coincidence that the soundbite that has come to sum up modern Chinese materialism centres on a car. When a dating show contestant rebuffed an **impecunious** suitor with the words, "I would rather cry in the back of a BMW than laugh on the back of a bicycle", they instantly became part of popular lore.

Chinese motorists know they must impress, whether they are seeking partners for romance or business. Roll up in an Audi and you ensure a basic degree of respect. Arrive in a domestic Chery QQ hatchback and you are doomed before you get through a client's door. "People don't really think about whether they need a car, but feel they have to have one to show their status," Zhang's friend Zhao Cihang tells me at the Mini showroom. Until recently he edited a car website and, although he is a year younger than Zhang, already owns two BMWs, an Audi and a Honda. But, he adds, "I still think about new ones. I'd like an SUV – the biggest kind."

This text is an extract from an article printed in the Guardian by Tania Branigan:  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/14/china-worlds-biggest-new-car-market>

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### READING

Read through the text and answer the following questions:

1. How does car ownership in China compare with the rest of the world?
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3. Is police data about road fatalities in China accurate?
4. What proposals have been implemented and which ideas have been put forward in Beijing to reduce traffic congestion?
5. What are the main reasons for people in China wanting a car?

### COLLOCATIONS

Match the collocations without looking back at the text, and then suggest your own collocations:

ring roads	imported Soviet Ladas	suitor
on street corners	a bicylce	20-fold

to acquire

to loiter

to glimpse

to soar

striking

impecunious

Your own suggestions:

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### QUESTION TAGS

We often use question tags to show surprise and disbelief:

*NOTE: If we want to express surprise or annoyance, we can use a positive question tag with a positive sentence.*

***You didn't really go there, did you? It's an awful place, isn't it?  
It's snowing, is it? We'd better dress warmly, hadn't we!***

Add question tags to either both or one of the following sentences, and then practice saying them with the correct intonation:

1. He was loitering outside the cinema. He wouldn't be there now.
2. He acquired a new Porsche. He couldn't have got the money legally.
3. You caught a glimpse of her wedding dress. It's beautiful.
4. The prices have soared. That's outrageous.
5. That's a striking hat. It must have cost a fortune.
6. He's impecunious. He doesn't look it.
7. You aren't eligible for the prize. You're too old.
8. His behavior is getting out of hand. Well, do something about it!

### IDIOMS

Match the idiom with the definition, and then fill the missing idiom in the sentences below:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. at a crossroads                             | 1. to do something with as much speed and energy as you can  |
| 2. climb on the bandwagon                      | 2. to do something enthusiastically and as completely as possible, especially if this involves spending a lot of money |
| 3. to go full throttle                         | 3. you are at a point where an important decision or choice has to be made   |
| 4. to go to town                               | 4. to do something just when it happens, not in advance  |
| 5. to cross that road/bridge when I come to it | 5. to do something because it is popular and everyone else is doing it   |

1. She's not really interested in protesting against the government. She is just \_\_\_\_\_ because all her friends are doing it.
2. They really \_\_\_\_\_ for their wedding. It must have cost a fortune!
3. I'm not going to worry about that now, it might never happen! I'll \_\_\_\_\_.
4. We're really \_\_\_\_\_ at the moment. We could stay here or move to another country.
5. If you want your business to succeed, you need \_\_\_\_\_.