



# Australia-China Friendship Society

Victorian Branch (Inc).ABN 39 746 574 225

## Newsletter

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## President's Report

It can be expected that there is part of the Western media that is opposed to China's political economy. After all, those who fund the media would be very nervous indeed if local people started getting the idea that perhaps China had something to offer in this regard. As a result, they often want to portray China's economic success in the worst light possible. However, the question from a discerning observer is: "Why are they so bad at it?"

In 2001, Gordon Chang published a book entitled "The Coming Collapse of China", claiming the country would collapse by 2011. The book received widespread acclaim in the "intellectual" press, including Businessweek, The Observer, The New York Times, and more. The NYT review is fascinating:

"Many of its [China's] state industries are virtually bankrupt; its banking system sits on a mountain of unrecognized bad debts; its agriculture is primitive; pollution is out of control; and government interference and corruption are killing off a number of new business ventures..."

Instead of collapsing, China's GDP per capita (PPP) increased from \$1,093 (1991) to \$21,482 (2022), according to the World Bank. The World Bank also notes that, in the same period, life expectancy increased from 68 years to 78 years, surpassing the United States. Around the same time, China debated the implementation of High Speed Rail. In Beijing-Tianjin intercity rail, was opened in August 2008. By 2023 the High Speed Rail (HSR) network in China is the world's longest and most extensively used with a total length of 45,000 kilometres. There has been such a rapid growth of housing, that now China is in the unusual position of having a bit too much. resulting in lower prices and bank loans have shifted to industry, rather than real estate, as a result.

In 2013 The Economist, on its front cover, proclaimed that China was the world's worst polluter. With a



modicum of intelligence one would understand this should be expected as the world's biggest producer of manufactured goods. Yet, in 2024 the very same magazine expressed a panicked fear of "China's EV onslaught". One can imagine their hand-ringing as the world wind report of this month shows that China's wind capacity now more than the US, EU and UK combined. China also installed a massive 155GW of solar in 2023, and China's \$890bn investment in clean-energy sectors is almost as large as total global investments in fossil fuel supplies in 2023. What does CNN have to say about all this? "China's economy had a miserable year. 2024 might be even worse" reads a recent headline. By "miserable", the

article points out much further down, the country had a growth rate in 2023 of 5.4%.

It would be an interesting exercise for the reader to extrapolate China's economic and environmental metrics to the year 2050. One thing is certain, however. Sections of the international media will still be a state of complete denial about the situation. It is almost as if they believe marketing a bad narrative is more effective than reporting the reality of an improving situation. One may suggest they are (as the old proverb says) "guarding a tree stump waiting for rabbits" 守株待兔 (shǒu zhū dài tù).

Closer to home, and in the spirit of "the reality of an improving situation", I am pleased to say that the new committee of the ACFS (Victoria) are moving quite well. Only a few meetings in and we have four events for the year planned, starting with a Tea Tasting and Yum Cha event at Ross House on the 12th May 12.30 to 2pm at Ross House, 4th floor. The tea an excellent new crop (less than two weeks old!) of the famous Bi Luo Chun tea (碧螺春), the first among Chinese green teas. We are also planning a concert in July, a visit to Bendigo in September and our annual dinner in November. An office-clean-up is currently underway, and we're working our way through the membership list to bring old members and interested parties up to financial status.

There are many improvements happening in China and with ACFS (Victoria). We encourage you to become of part of this process.

Lev Lafayette  
President, Australia China Friendship Society (Victorian branch)

## TEA TASTING WITH YUM CHA

*12th May 12.30 to 2pm at Ross House, 4th floor.*

We have a fresh crop (less than two weeks old!) of famous Bi Luo Chun tea (碧螺春) for tasting!

Originating from the Ming Dynasty, Bi Luo Chun ("Green Snail Spring" on account of its shape and colour) is grown in the Dongting mountain region near Lake Tai in Suzhou. Zhen Jun (1857 to 1918), author of the tea encyclopedia Cha Shuo, ranked it first among Chinese green teas.

In addition to the tea, we will be offering a variety of delicious foods to provide a Yum Cha event.

Apart from the delicious tea and food, this is an opportunity to meet the new committee of the ACFS (Victorian branch). A representative from the Chinese Consulate-General is also expected.

**This event is free for financial members; \$20 for non-members.**

*Tickets are available at the following URL <https://www.trybooking.com/CREOQ>*



# Cultural Notes

by Lia Cross- ACFS committee

Hello everyone and a belated welcome to Cultural Notes for 2024!

During February I was visiting Antarctica so I missed out on reporting about Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations. I'm sure you enjoyed them anyway as they were delightful and varied as usual!

Currently, I hope you are participating in the Melbourne Comedy Festival events which features quite a few Asian Australian presenters. Look for names such as Lyanna Kea, Jenny Tian, Harry Jun, Jason Leong, He Huang, Takashi W Agasaki and Joel Kim Booster amongst others!

These lovely people were present at the Chinese Museum- RMIT University "Screen Presence 24" co-operative event at the Capitol Theatre, and represent the best stage and screen artists. Their presentations "look at what it's really like to be an Asian in contemporary Australia" in a hilarious way. If you can support their performances please do so and have a great laugh at the same time!

On March 15th, I attended the opening of "Dragon Spring Chengdu" exhibition at the Chinese Museum, which was opened by Melbourne Deputy Lord Mayor Nicholas Reece, speakers from the Chinese Consulate and other others representing Chengdu itself.



*Melbourne Deputy Lord Mayor Nicholas Reece and Member of the Standing Committee and Secretary-General of the CPC Chengdu Municipal Committee Mr Haibo DU opening exhibition*

Our city is not only China's largest metropolis but also an exciting cultural hub and home to Chendu Opera, a UNESCO cultural heritage listed cultural activity. You know the one I'm sure, where the performers change masks at lightening speed! The exhibition, which is intended to strengthen already existing relations between Melbourne and Chendu, contains some exquisite artefacts, therefore, I invite you to go and see it while it's still showing.

I sincerely hope you are having a wonderful 2024 so far and looking forward to many cultural activities to come! Meanwhile, please support cultural activities organised by our own wonderful association ACFS, and look out for our next activity, a Yum Cha, which will be coming your way soon!



**ARTIST** Ms Luo Min is an accomplished painter in oils and importantly, watercolours. Her exhibition opened at the Victorian Artists' Society Gallery in East Melbourne and features her work in portraiture, surprisingly vibrant landscapes, and beautifully subtle-toned plants and flowers.

Her work is detailed yet uses the Chinese painting technique of broad strokes with fine tonings within each stroke. There are splashes of vivid colour alongside the delicate tonality of her watercolours, and the far gentler techniques that employs, while her portraits have a grittiness and detail which infuse each work with character and observation.

The exhibition documents three facets of Luo Min's travels: portraits of those she had met in previous travels, plants and people from the North Island of New Zealand and lastly, residence in Mount Dandenong outside of Melbourne, and what she encountered there. This is an encapsulation of flora, fauna and humans over two countries, totally alien to China, the land from which she hails.

The exhibition runs until 9 April at 430 Albert Street, East Melbourne.





## Australia should seek closer ties and not be frightened of China

*By Joe Montero*

Some political figures, those with an ideological bias getting in the way of seeing reality, and major media outlets continue to paint China as the great enemy. China, we are told, threatens us and we must take counter measures. Where does this come from?

The answer is simple. China continues to be the fastest growing economy in the world, in terms of both volume of output and quality. This is a nation undergoing rapid transformation, which has experienced the biggest rise in living standards and quality of life along the way. Not only this, China leads the world in the production and application of new sustainable carbon emission reducing energy, production, and transportation systems.

China has also scored highly on the diplomatic front. One highlight was China brokering peace between Saudi Arabia and Iran. China plays a prominent role in world diplomatic efforts in various other points of conflict, including the present occupation of Gaza.

Through the Belt and Road initiative and other bilateral and multilateral arrangements, China has given assistance to other nations across all continents, to develop their own economies and societies. China is the engine of the growing BRICS alliance that seeks to break nations out of the stranglehold of the old and unequal international financial and trading regime born out of western colonialism and now dominated by the United States. And to a lesser extent western Europe.

These achievements have raised the ire of those who wish to maintain the old order. Using the tags of a dictatorship, undemocratic, aggressive, and a suppressor of national minorities, are used as a cover to justify intervention in the internal affairs of the country, plus hostility and beating the drums of war in the international arena.

China can be called a new imperialist power out to take over the world by those who can't imagine behaviour other than that of those who control their own nations. They can't contemplate a rising large economy behaving in any other way. These people believe that China must be stopped at all costs.

They are wrong. The anti-China crusade harms us as well. We are Australia, geographically existing within the Asian orbit. This is a multicultural society with a major Chinese population. China is by far our biggest trading partner. Australia's economy is in trouble, with declining growth, opportunities, and a rising cost of living crisis. On top of this, we remain hitched economically, and politically, to a declining power. There is no future in this.

Progress depends on building good ties with China and not them. After all, we are stuck with each other. A mutually beneficial relationship suits both parties. And progressing on this foundation, will do a lot to build closer ties across Asia. This would build better trading and investment environment for Australia.

The benefits are not only economic. Contributing to improving the international climate is conducive to peace, and this in turn, will help to meet the many challenges we face together, like climate change and building a global order that is far more focussed on breaking the barriers, building equality, and working towards mutually beneficial relationships between all nations.

## **The Difference between Chinese and Western Society (part 1)** (中西比较西方社会)

### Introduction

Britannica suggests, "there are several ideas implicit in the notion of social structure. Social relationships are regular and continuous in nature. Our social life is not random, it is in fact divided into groups with positions and institutions that can be both interdependent and or interrelated. Individual choices are shaped by the environment in which we live and as a result all but governed by society." It is further suggested that social structures are forced upon the majority by the imbalance of power between conflicting group interests.

### Ancient Chinese Social Structure

Social structure hierarchies were prevalent in most parts of the world. China also practiced a social hierarchical structure in its societies that were divided into classes and can be classified into four major categories: Shi, Nong, Gong and Shang.

The Shi held the highest status in the Chinese social hierarchy, they

- Wore silk robes as an identification of their status.
- Had the right to ride in chariots, carry weapons and command battles.
- Were educated to serve in various job roles such as advisors, clerks, overseers and scribes.
- Also served in various administrative services and performed various civil functions.
- People of this group sat examinations to enter various government positions.
- Entered governments of various levels such as district, provincial and federal levels.

Nong played a vital role in the rise of the China's civilisation

- The food and labours produced sustained the whole society.
- Therefore, they were considered as valuable members of society.
- They held the second highest rank in the Chinese social hierarchy.
- They also provided services to the nobles.
- Most importantly the Nongs provided revenue to the country.

#### The Gong class consisted of Artisans and Craftsman

- They were higher in position than the merchants.
- They worked in either the government sectors or private sectors.
- Many artisans also worked on their independent businesses.
- They were involved in various types of jobs.
- They produced textiles, potteries and worked in various architectural works. They were valued because of their skills.

#### Shang or Merchants

- This was the lowest in the Chinese social hierarchy because they didn't produce any thing and gained profit from others.
- They were comprised of shopkeepers, bankers and traders.
- They lived in towns and provided goods and services to the landowners.
- They were not allowed to carry weapons.
- The superior members of the Chinese hierarchy believed that the government officials must not be concerned with money. They didn't allow the merchant class to do government jobs.

### Ancient Western Social Structure

In a previous article I noted western culture dates back as far as ancient Greece and ancient Rome. From here cultures moved apart but not so much that the basic social structures differed. Most cultures had a structure that consisted of a ruler or similar at the very apex of society, followed by the priests or government officials, then traders and merchants, artisans and craftsmen, then the peasants and finally the slaves. Certain characteristics emerged from this ancient social stratification. E.G., the hereditary nature of occupations and status. As well as tradition in Roman times, social structure was enshrined in law.

#### Agricultural Workers aka Serfs

- The basic agricultural work unit in the ancient world was the family.
- In some regions where the state owned the land, farms were allocated by family.
- When large farming estates were formed during the roman empire the structure of rural society was not affected, as the owners left cultivation to peasants who were their tenants.
- Work within the family farm unit often was divided along sexual lines: the men commonly bore chief responsibility for such seasonal tasks as plowing, sowing, tilling and harvesting the women cared for children, prepared food and made clothing.

#### Craftsmen

- Economic growth, sophistication of taste and enlarged markets ultimately brought a sort of mass production, here large workshops were dedicated to the production of a single item.

- These workshops however, never achieved the size of a small modern factory; a building in which a dozen persons worked was considered a large factory.

### Medieval farming and Craft Work

- Social divisions, or class structure, in the medieval world reflected a division of labour.
- The noble class essentially contributed to the organisation of work.
- They controlled the land, basic to production in this agrarian society.
- They alone possessed the wealth to purchase the products of artisans, buy goods brought from a distance, acquire the weapons and armour made by metallurgists and construct castles and fortresses.
- The Lords (Nobles) also decided in accordance with prevailing custom how the farm work should be organised.

### The Craft Guilds

- In contrast to the land-bound serfs townspeople were free.
- Some engaged in commerce and formed groups known as merchant guilds.
- The majority were small merchant-craftsmen, organised in craft guilds as masters (of highest accomplishment and status), journeymen (at a middle level), and apprentices.
- The master was typically many things at once: a skilled workman himself, a foreman, supervising journeymen and apprentices, an employer, a buyer of raw or semi-finished materials and a seller of finished products.

### The new world order

- In both China and Western countries we now have systems of government rather than rulers
- Social structure has changed in both environments.
- It is possible that only a few European cities—Paris and the Italian commercial cities of Venice, Genoa and Naples—had as many as 100,000 people at the beginning of the modern era
- London may have had only about half that number. By the end of the 17th century London probably had 500,000 inhabitants
- The sheer number of townspeople change social structures for ever
- To attached another name, it is called 'Industrialisation'.

Modern Chinese and Western Societies are becoming less and less polarised. In recent decades China migrated millions of people from rural areas to build the cities and infrastructure, thus we see many similarities between the two societies. A large proportion of the population are 'floating', that is without local household registration, this limits access to many of the things that urban population enjoy.

Part two next month will look at a modern society in more depth.

*Ian Parker*

- [www.hierarchystructure.com/chinese-social-hierarchy/](http://www.hierarchystructure.com/chinese-social-hierarchy/), viewed 19/4/2024
- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-work-organization-648000/Social-classes>, viewed 18/4/2024
- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/modernization/The-nature-of-modern-society>, viewed 18/4/2024

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

Family Name (Mr /Mrs/Ms/Other) .....

Given Names .....

Address .....

..... P/code.....

Phone .....

Email .....

### VICTORIAN MEMBERSHIP RATES

Family \$40.00 Single \$30.00 Concession \$15.00

Corporate on Application

I/We support the Society's aims: .....Signature/s

I/We enclose the sum of \$.....for my/our membership subscription.

Pay directly into the ACFS Victoria Branch Account,

Commonwealth Bank

BSB: 063-019, Account number: 10040625

Please put your name in the subject line & email REFERENCE to

[secretary@acfs-vic.org](mailto:secretary@acfs-vic.org)

You may send cheques to the Treasurer at the ACFS office address

YOUR DONATION WOULD BE GRATEFULLY RECEIVED

Promoting Friendship and Understanding  
Between the Australian and Chinese People

# **THE AUSTRALIA-CHINA FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY'S AIMS**

Cultivate friendly relations with the people of China by fostering the study of China's history, language, culture, social and political structure.

Promote mutual understanding through friendly exchanges between the people of China and Australia. Strengthening ties with travel, the exchange of ideas, information and trade between the two countries.

To seek to clarify misunderstandings between the peoples of China and Australia, which may arise from the misrepresentation of information.

## **The ACFS Victorian Branch**

PRESIDENT: Lev Lafayette  
VICE PRESIDENT: Tower Liu  
SECRETARY: Edith Wilson  
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COMMITTEE: Lia Cross, Joe Montero, James Doery.

We are always looking for interesting stories and articles to share with our members. Any members who have great stories to tell please contact ACFS office or e-mail to [secretary@acfs-vic.org](mailto:secretary@acfs-vic.org)