



Accidents are common for many reasons. Aside from the fact that China's population is so large, most have to do with the fact that China is so new to the business of driving cars. In 2013 it added more cars to its roads than were driving in the whole country in 1999. In China, the number of vehicles has been increasing by 15m cars every single year for a decade. The number of licence-holders has risen even faster; one in five Chinese now has a licence. In the rich world, by contrast, the number of licence-holders is flat or falling.

Speed of development plays a large part. There had been a gradual increase in the number of drivers in rich countries. In China, as in nations such as Indonesia, car ownership has risen so fast that a large portion of those on the road are new drivers with limited experience. In every country insurance premiums for new drivers are high for a reason: people who have only just passed their test are more likely to be involved in an accident than those who have driven for years.

China certainly has some safety regulations in place. Drivers and passengers must wear seatbelts, for example, and mobile phones can only be used hands-free when driving. Unfortunately these laws are entirely ignored. Most taxis value keeping their seats clean over keeping their customers safe, so they cover the back seat and thus block the use of seat belts.

There has been some improvement. Speed limits are more rigorously enforced than they used to be, not least because speed cameras and speeding fines are an important source of revenue for local governments in China, as they are elsewhere in the world. Some regions have stepped up fines for overloaded lorries. The incidence of drink driving has been vastly reduced by increasing penalties and enforcing the law.

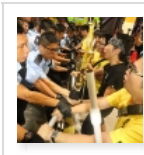
The high number of accidents is not just about the drivers. China has extraordinarily diverse terrain and weather conditions. However fast the country builds roads, it cannot keep up with its own development. Many are in poor condition after only a few years, because of shoddy workmanship, poor materials, little maintenance, bad weather or all a combination of these.

Despite the high number of accidents, the incidence of deadly collisions has been falling even as the number of cars has increased. According to official statistics, the number of road traffic deaths has fallen from 9 per 100,000 of the population in 2002 to 5 per 100,000 now, compared with 3 per 100,000 in Britain, for example.

The official statistics look extremely positive, even miraculous. Since new road-safety laws were introduced in 2003, the number of accidents has fallen by 70%, according to the government. The question is whether the data are correct. An article in the *Lancet* in 2011 questioned the verity of those numbers: it reported that the number of fatalities the traffic police counted was less than half that derived from death certificates at the ministry of health. The incentives may be wrong for traffic cops too: they are penalised if a large number of accidents happen on their turf, so may underreport.

Even if the official numbers are over-hopeful, the trend looks to be in the right direction. Every 30 seconds, someone, somewhere in the world dies in a road crash and ten others are seriously injured. It is encouraging if China's contribution to that awful toll is falling. But it may still be advisable to pay close attention when crossing the road.

(Picture credit: AFP)




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


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**JimBowen0306** Sep 3rd 2014, 10:35

As someone who lives in China, you forgot two things. First, it's pedestrians who just seem to step out, without a care in the world (or any semblance of fear that that big boxy thing can hurt you). Second, it's the fact that rules are often more than just disregarded. Drivers, and passengers, positively ignore common sense sometimes. I've seen motorised tricycles drive the wrong way down the fast lane of a dual carriageway (with bundles on cardboard on his back), coaches reverse on motorways to make the junction they missed, and mothers breastfeed their children in the rain on the back of mopeds, while holding an umbrella, but not a helmet (which the child wasn't wearing either).

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**TS2912** Sep 3rd 2014, 20:25

China is really weird in one aspect...

No, it is not the terrible driving. As someone else pointed out, many countries share that trait.

It is the complete lack of aggression one encounters. Drivers break rules continually and NO ONE GETS MAD.

You drive in Britain, make the slightest mistake and can be assured of getting a honk, an obscene gesture (or both) from an irate local.

(Unlike the US, the average Brit barely drives but seems to think he/she's heading to war once behind a wheel)



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**carl65** Sep 4th 2014, 00:07

I first drove in China in 1981, albeit in the remote desert province of Qinghai. Though I am now visiting the country, I stick to the buses. One thing I found after 100,000km of driving here is that it is so much more pleasant sitting and looking out the window while someone else does the driving - provided it is a bus. The taxis have become a lot better, with speed limits more respected (in Zhuhai anyway) and there being a functioning seat belt in the front at least. I even saw some vehicles stop for pedestrians at a zebra crossing a few days ago, a miraculous new development which I hope becomes more common. Don't bet your life on it though.

The core years of my driving experience here were 2002 - 2006 in Sichuan province. Most of the drivers were out of their minds and I gave up using the word "accident". The often-fatal consequences of the deranged driving were better described as "crashes". I became a driver in Sichuan because I wanted a steel box around me on the road, and that steel box to be driven by me, not a lunatic who drove at 100km per hour on unlit streets with his headlights turned off. Riding a bicycle or walking on such streets was suicide, especially after dark.

At one stage in 2002 I was detained in a remote rural town for three weeks after a crash. A teenage cyclist rode across my path without looking (and without brakes or helmet), the inevitable happened and he ended up in hospital with head injuries. When I suggested to the local traffic superintendent that some education was required after highways were built through villages, he laughed and said: "But this is China!"

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**Connect The Dots** Sep 3rd 2014, 17:20

PROPOSAL to reduce motor vehicle caused pedestrian death and injury:

Make a 'smart automobile hood' with integrated proximity and acceleration sensors.

In the event of a pedestrian falling on the hood, a large airbag automatically inflates like a giant catcher's mitt to cushion the impact of collision of the pedestrian on the hood and windshield. And prevent the passenger from being launched into the sky and landing somewhere on the pavement or other vehicle.

It reduces injury and death of an otherwise vulnerable pedestrian.

The technology would be similar to common automobile interior airbags already widely used and proven.

===

It can also work on automobile-deer collisions, moose collisions, or live stock collisions.

This can be retrofitted on old cars.

It prevents damage to the vehicle from the collision.

It is idiot proof.

And most importantly can save lives.

Call it Pedestrian Anti-Collision Air Bag.(PACAB)

Recommend 13 Report Permalink

**APenNameAndThatA** in reply to guest-soweils Sep 4th 2014, 00:56

Calm down. Less than twice as bad as Britain is pretty good given China's state of development.

Recommend 11 Report Permalink

**guest-soweils** Sep 4th 2014, 00:50

The passage is not objective.

I don't understand why China need to compare to the rich world like Britain. China is not a rich country, it will become one but not now. The comparison is not fair. I can see China is making progress, that's good enough for us.

"The number of licence-holders has risen even faster; one in five Chinese now has a licence. In the rich world, by contrast, the number of licence-holders is flat or falling."  
What's that mean? Sounds like it's not our fault to have a licence.

I think comparison would be more fair if compare the China to the average of the world.

Recommend 11 Report Permalink

**guest-soolwns** Sep 8th 2014, 08:06

I live in Vancouver, where there is a disproportionate amount of Asians (especially mainland Chinese). They are exactly how this article explained.

At first, when you move to the city, you are incredulous at how unaware, space-cadets they are in every thing they do. Then after a while, you just realize it's just part of their culture. They seem to barely function driving vehicles, walking down sidewalks, crossing the street, getting off and on transit, and even shopping. It is not uncommon to see groups of them blocking streets, pathways, and other major thoroughways, just seemingly unaware at how they arrived to that spot or why they are even there.

When driving, they do not react to people honking at them, yelling at them, or blatantly and angrily driving around them when they are simply parked in a major intersection. Unfortunately, it's not entirely funny because there are many scams pulled by them because we have such good car insurance in Vancouver. Everyone you ask here knows at least one person who has been hit on purpose, blamed, sued, and lost their case against these scammers. And that's not counting the many, many cases of accidents from just oblivious and inattentive driving.

Recommend 10 Report Permalink

**Der Springer** in reply to guest-soweils Sep 5th 2014, 04:19

The comparison gives readers a concrete understanding of the extent of road traffic accidents. The Economist is a British magazine; many readers are familiar with the road situation in the UK, so it is a natural reference point. Comparing to the global average would help us understand how well China is doing relative to other countries, but it wouldn't give readers a concrete understanding of how dangerous Chinese roads are.

Second, the comment on the number of licence-holders helps us see the difference between the developed and developing world. There's no negative connotation.

If you can't understand the precise meaning of some sentences, you'd best keep quiet, rather than jump to conclusions based on misunderstandings.

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**Anjin-San** Sep 4th 2014, 01:48

"Bike jams were a common site"  
Surely, a commong "sight"??

Recommend 10 Report Permalink

**carl65** in reply to TS2912 Sep 4th 2014, 00:21

I recently drove a few thousand kilometres in the UK in a LHD vehicle under the guidance of a GPS.



Often I found myself in the wrong lane or at the wrong exit of a roundabout and had to correct my mistake at short notice. This doubtless distressed some following drivers but they were quite restrained about it. Only once was I honked - I won't go into the details.

Maybe the flag attached to the rear of the vehicle and accompanying note explaining that I was lost and bewildered caused following drivers to smile rather than give me the finger. I saw no other Spanish-registered cars and indeed very few from the Continent while in the UK. Maybe I was so exotic that anything was forgiven.

Recommend 10 Report Permalink

**SSeven7** Sep 10th 2014, 09:09

Morality is everything!

Recommend 8 Report Permalink

**PebbleCanon** in reply to guest-soweils Sep 4th 2014, 01:30

I agree with you totally!

Car accident is existing when it was invented!!

Recommend 8 Report Permalink

**carl65** in reply to Connect The Dots Sep 4th 2014, 00:26

In Australia, it is very common to fit bars to the front of vehicles, to prevent panel damage if an animal is hit. Of course, any pedestrian clobbered by such a vehicle will be mangled or even killed. I have long thought that an assembly similar to a Zodiac inflatable boat might make such vehicles less unpleasant for the hapless animal or pedestrian that gets in the way.

Recommend 8 Report Permalink

**Eusebius Pamphili** in reply to TS2912 Sep 9th 2014, 18:05

Uuuhhhh.... I was on a bus once and the driver was racing with another bus and they were screaming and shouting obscenities at each other prompting a man on our bus to pull out his knife and chase the driver from the bus... It was pretty wild!

Recommend 7 Report Permalink

**Sachi Mohanty** Sep 8th 2014, 09:49

It cannot be worse in China than it is in India.

Speaking as an Indian ...

:-)

Recommend 7 Report Permalink

**Swiss Reader** Sep 4th 2014, 01:57

Send the legions of internet police to look after traffic instead.

Recommend7

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APenNameAndThatA in reply to Connect The Dots Sep 4th 2014, 01:01

Already thought of.

Recommend6

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459179387@qq.com in reply to JimBowen0306 Sep 4th 2014, 01:01

Safty awareness is ungodly lack.

Recommend5

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