



## *Gawler Oral History Project*

# *Your Memory Our History*

Transcript of a discussion with Jack Butcher in March 2017

Interviewed by Trish Connery

**Trish:** I'm talking with Jack Butcher today who is going to talk to us about his trip to China and what that was like.

**Jack:** China was definitely a very interesting trip. It's very different to Australia and when you first go it's out of your comfort zone a little bit. But when you live there for awhile ... because I lived there for two months ... and you sort of slowly get use to the lifestyle and you actually find that your language skills improve, and things like that occur, and so it's really interesting.

**Trish:** So did you study China?

**Jack:** Yes. I studied Chinese at Trinity College in Gawler and I had a teacher who assisted me with my studies. I was only 16 years old. And at the time I was lacking direction ... and the teacher sort of pushed me in the right direction and said; "this is obviously your talent... this language" . So I picked up the Chinese language quite quickly. It sort of started off as a very difficult process because learning Chinese is ... very difficult. But after awhile you learn how to write the characters and the pronunciation and it just becomes easy after that. Yeh.

**Trish:** How soon after you finished school did you end up going on your trip to China?

**Jack:** The first time I went to China was in 2015. I won a Confucius Institute Scholarship at the University of Adelaide. There is a department at the University which gives out scholarships regularly ... so I applied for one and I got this scholarship ... so I went with all university fees paid for 6 months in China. I lived in a place called Szechuan where the food is very spicy. And Szechuan is very well known for the panda complex as well. So you get to go and see the panda's and everything like that. So yes, it was really interesting.

**Trish:** So after you went overseas through the University you returned again?

**Jack:** Yes I did. I returned briefly for about 8 months.

**Trish:** What got you into doing that. Did you go there for a particular reason? Was there something you wanted to look at? Or you just wanted to immerse yourself in the culture?

**Jack:** I sort of wanted to immerse myself but, I also think I went over there for certain spiritual reasons as well. Because there has always been a very big attraction with me and Chinese culture. But it took me a very very long time to actually realize what it was. I went to China and I found myself in a fairly interesting lifestyle that I had actually never expected. So ... I found there that life is very fast .... the pace of life is quick. There is traffic everywhere. There are people everywhere. There are BBQ stands everywhere. People wanting to buy you stuff. So, as I said, it's very different to Australia. I was fairly accustomed to a lot of Chinese customs and ways, but at the time I thought .... wow! I really am in a different place now.

**Trish:** Where did you stay in China?

**Jack:** So, when I first went to China in 2015 I stayed in Szechuan province in a place called Chengdu. There would be quite a few westerners familiar with the word "Szechuan" ... which is usually done in cooking... and it's the name of the province I lived in. And the province has got roughly 120 million people in it alone which would be the population of Japan almost... just living in a place the size of Victoria. It is very cramped. It is green and it's a very very beautiful place to go to.

**Trish:** Were you staying in a special complex, or were you in a hotel, or in arranged accommodation?

**Jack:** I stayed in a university dormitory for 6 months. So I got to know a lot of students from around the world. Different types of people. Chinese and westerners as well. A few people from Africa, and Europe and other Asian countries. I stayed in this university complex ... the dormitories .. which was quite interesting at first, because there were so many people from different places. It was like a big international community in one place.

**Trish:** So you stayed in a university complex. I just wanted to know what your personal experience was of the Chinese people when you were travelling around China.

**Jack:** I tend to find that the Chinese people are very hospitable, and they are a very hard working people. They will go out of their way to assist you. They will go out of their way to sometimes invite you round to dinner at their house ... and I tend to find travelling around China that they are very proud of their country but they are also very welcoming to foreigners. It was definitely enlightening to know that they can ..... sort of certain perceptions that we have in the West of the Chinese... for me all those perceptions were just gone. So, yeh, basically I found them to be very hospitable and very very kind people.

**Trish:** So, when you were travelling around how did you get around China?

**Jack:** I mostly got around by walking because traffic is a bit of an issue, because there are a lot of cars and everywhere you go there is a car, scooter, or some kind of truck. Traffic becomes clogged. Chinese people don't usually follow any traffic rules. So they will sometimes go through red lights, and when the green light comes on for pedestrians they will just go on through and not pay much attention to it. But apart from that .... also we tend to find as well the Chinese Government is encouraging walking and riding on bicycles and scooters because cars, they believe, contributes to a large portion of their pollution. The Chinese Government are trying to enact policies and are trying to enact clauses where they can actually control this issue of car ownership. They are trying to ensure that this issue of pollution is being solved.

**Trish:** Did you go on any train trips in China?

**Jack:** I went on train trips quite often. They have got high speed rail and they have normal trains ... sort of the slow trains as well. High speed rail is interesting because they are fairly modern and you tend to find a lot of Chinese with money take the high speed rail. But I travelled on the regular train once. The regular train is interesting because you come across people from all kinds of different backgrounds. People who bring on a big plastic bag they drape over their shoulder, and they carry it on the train, and all of a sudden they open this bag and there is all this stuff in there ... it could be clothes and in other bags there would be wheat or stuff that they have sort of picked up from their crops. So yeh, you come across all kinds of different people in Chinese society.

**Trish:** And so on these daily trips where was some of the places that you went to?

**Jack:** I visited the Great Wall when I was in Beijing. And I visited the Temple of Heaven. Usually we took guided tours in vans .. so it was an interesting experience being on a Chinese freeway because certain people drive a lot quicker than the speed limits (laughter).. and also experiencing the different variety of vehicles that they have. So you tend to find there are a lot of BMW's on the road, Mercedes, a lot of luxury vehicles, but you also tend to find there are a lot of scooters. People use scooters to get around if they need to sort of go to places that they want to go and see. When I was in ????? it was another one in the van too. Sometimes I would take a bus. There'd be other times I would ride a bike around or I'd just walk to places. So yeh! different types of transport were very enlightening to know.

**Trish:** And what did you think of the Temple that you went to?

**Jack:** The Temple of Heaven. Yes, it was interesting because the day we went there it was 5 degrees below zero. They were doing an old cultural performance where they welcomed the emperor with all the gongs and the different types of musical instruments that they sort of used. It was interesting to see because this Temple of Heaven ... back a fairly long time ago... roughly about 2000 years... they use to perform sacrifices in the temple. And in this place .... the history ... to look at something which is broadcasted so much on tourist sites and on web sites, and web pages and the .... sort of the icons of China .... and to actually be there and see them is an amazing experience.

**Trish:** And what's another place that you went to that you really liked?

**Jack:** I liked the Terracotta Warriors. I thought they were interesting, they were lifelike and they come out on their own. It was interesting because they are 1.8 metres tall, they are standing in straight lines, their appearance is all different. Every warrior has a different appearance and you can sort of see by the different type of their hair styles what rank they had. So you could see the generals, the commanders, some of the lieutenants, and then you could see the general infantry as well.

**Trish:** Do you know how they were found?

**Jack:** The Chin emperor quite a long time ago .. he established his own empire, so he believed he had the mandate from heaven to go and conquer all the different territories around China. He believed God had given him this inborn ability. He ended up conquering China and for many years before his death he had ordered slaves .. people gathered from many country sides .. to build his tomb. And in this tomb complex .... people nowadays don't actually know what his tomb inside is like because they can't drill into it .. because they are worried about it losing its ... sort of .... if oxygen comes into contact with some of the paints they used .... and so it's sort of shaped like a pyramid .. in some ways ... the mound that he is buried at ... and he had a very strong fear of death ... it was his largest phobia. So he sent all these different people around China to gather all kinds of elixirs from natural sources. One day a person, whether he had this intent or not, he found mercury ... gave it to the emperor... which ended up killing him. And he had all his concubines buried alive with him in the tomb. So it was really interesting to see, as I said the terracotta warriors and their role, because they stood in front, actually guarding the emperor in a long line of infantry. And the emperor believed that if the time came for him to be reborn or reawaken again these warriors would also awaken with him.

**Trish:** And, can you tell me any other places that you went to that you were very impressed with.

**Jack:** I was very impressed with the state of the Panda Research Centre. I believe their processes for panda reproduction is amazing because now panda's aren't considered, as much as they were 8 years ago, to be in danger. There are a lot of pandas in the complex and one day they are hopefully going to release these pandas into the wild. And they can go ack to their original habitats. But still, there are certain issues facing these programs because of pollution, of course, and poaching. And a lot of people feel that it is not safe for the pandas to go out there. But the Chinese Government have placed restrictions on poaching and also are trying to limit the pollution. So people feel confident that that project will go ahead.

**Trish:** And meeting Chinese people on a daily basis, what did you feel they felt about their government and the way they are governed?

**Jack:** They feel the government supplies them with what they need and also, nowadays, they feel that the government is definitely giving them opportunities to realize their potential. Chinese people feel that the government has their best interests at heart. Which in a lot of ways is true. Contrary to a lot of Western media reporting, Chinese people actually feel liberated, they actually can speak against, and they can voice their own opinion, and at

---

times are allowed to speak against the government in certain areas they feel aren't right. And a big example is the education reform that is currently the topic that is going around China. A lot of people are lobbying for changes to education because they believe it's fairly tough for the students to enter university. They believe it's too difficult. So they have criticised certain government policies and the government are hopefully in the process of responding to that. They have got a lot of responses back. Also on a level, Chinese people are eligible to vote. Even though they don't have elections like we have here in Australia with different parties, members of the communist party are allowed to vote for their local candidates and vote them in to the politburo. So there are quite a lot of people who join the communist party to express their different type of ideas. Usually it's to village elections, people will gather together, listen to what one candidate has to say and another candidate has to say. They all claim allegiance to the communist party but there are certain people who want more reform and democratisation. There are other people who prefer the status quo. So they are able to voice an opinion .. but yes.. they are not allowed to run independently.

**Trish:** And do you think there is a difference in attitude from people who live in the country and the city?

**Jack:** I think overall the people feel that the Chinese government is looking after their needs. So in the city they feel that ok they're provided with opportunities. People do go out and work. Also the government does supply the people with jobs. So, if say for instance .. this is an example .. being my father in law, he used to work in a museum and the Chinese government believed that he wasn't .. ie the local provincial government, believed that he wasn't earning enough .. so they actually gave him another opportunity. They had said to him .. “well you can work in Beijing doing advertising”. So he went up to Beijing to do advertising and now earns quite a lot of money. So when certain situations arise they definitely do act.

**Trish:** What were the certain things you liked to do with the students? Were they all students?

**Jack:** There were people there who were mostly students. There were a couple of lecturers as well that were living in dormitories. Mostly we would go out and have food, or go out and have a look at different places. When I was at Chengdu and living there,. we would go to all these different shopping complexes. We would go and have a look at the cinemas.. we'd go to certain tourist sites .. and sort of experience the local culture and that sort of stuff that we enjoyed. In China food is central to their life ....so having food with a Chinese person it furthers your relationships.

**Trish:** And what was it about Chinese food that you liked? What would be your favourite?

**Jack:** My favourite dish in China was, not exactly a dish, but it was the Chinese Huoguo, which is the hotpot. The hotpot of course is a traditional Szechuanese dish and it's put in a pot of water under an open fire and has a lot of spice added to it, a lot of chillies, and you can put all different type of ingredients in there. So you've got meat, vegetables, fish, any kind of things you can put in there.

**Trish:** did you get to know some of the people in the complex, some of their views about their government, and the way they lived, and their culture and ..

**Jack:** Yeh. I got to know quite a lot of people. Westerners and Chinese people. The Chinese mostly believe that the government is providing for them, so they feel that there are not really a lot of issues that they have to talk about. The only issue they would talk about .. two issues mostly .. would be economic inequality and issues with education. There is a push for education reform. They believe that for their country.. they are quite proud of their history.. and they feel that their country is very great because of all the achievements they have had over the years. For them this is the most important part of being Chinese. They are rather proud of their government and very proud of their system and their ideology. However they openly talk about issues they do have. For the westerners in there however it is fairly divided. Some of the westerners go with what the Chinese believe. So why need to come to China and cause any kinds of issues for the local people. But there are a group of westerners in the university that were protesting .. and sort of liked to question every little bit about what the Chinese government is doing.. and were there to criticize. We can't be political all the time. We have to understand that with life we eat, we socialise, we do the best we can. These type of westerners found that there were a lot of issues for them to integrate .. and interact with chinese people. It is really a positive feeling I have noticed from most people.

**Trish:** What do you think the Chinese people are proud of?

**Jack:** They are very proud of their culture and their ideology. And they are very very proud of their economic development and economic achievements. For the Chinese they believe, that coming from what they were in the past, ..... being looked down upon by a lot of western powers, having a lot of issues, famines and droughts, and a lot of hardships .... to now having a comfortable life. Chinese people feel that their life is fairly comfortable and they don't have to worry too much about tomorrow. They don't have to live for today. They can plan for the future. They feel comfortable in their lifestyle. However, you do now and again have people express a lot of concerns .. and they do.. and these are fairly warranted.

**Trish:** You were saying early about the terracotta warriors. Can you tell me about the other things in China that the people are very proud of.

**Jack:** As I said, they are proud of their history. As well they believe, .. that being one of the first civilizations to be established around the world, and actually the first country to have an organised empire.. they believe that they are an enlightened people even though in modern history in certain terms they have had issues and have lagged behind. They have caught up ... and they have caught up very quickly. So they look at the economic development and they believe that that is what they are mostly proud of .... their economic development. They are proud of their position in the world. And in the international community the Chinese people feel that they are decision makers in the world... instead of being looked down upon by Western powers. So they see that, and they say, "well we've come from very humble beginnings but now we can make decisions and influence the world".

**Trish:** In the western media you see stories about the difference between the very rich in China and the very poor. On a day to day basis what do you think the people there actually feel about those differences?

**Jack:** Well they feel that there are definitely injustices. And they do feel that the gap between the rich and the poor is an issue. The government has tried a lot. Despite a lot of criticism their efforts have in some ways been fairly successful. However there are a few people, especially in the countryside, who are lagging behind. And that is being recognised. Also they feel that the most important part of being in society is expressing concerns. And the government usually does listen. Local provincial governments will try their hardest to ensure that people are satisfied. Nowadays you can see a lot of old country houses are being knocked down .. and put in their place are huge high rise buildings. And these people don't have to sell their houses to the government when they get knocked down. The govt just build it for them and let them move in for free. For them life is fairly secure... no matter if you are a farmer or with little income, or if you are really rich .. they still feel that nowadays in the 21st century that their life is fairly secure.

**Trish:** And what do you think about the relationship between China and Australia?

**Jack:** I think the relationship between China and Australia economically is developing very fast and there are a lot of important parts and reliance economically for Australia. China is a strong industrial nation and they supply a lot of our imports. And the Australian economy relies on the Chinese economy fairly heavily. Australian people feel that all these imports from China .. some people feel it's a good thing, others believe it's a bad thing .. but economically China has provided Australia with a lot of economic stability over the last 15 years when certain countries were going into recessions, and there was the global financial crisis in 2008. I think certain parts could be improved. I believe cultural interactions between the two countries and political interactions can be improved dramatically. I believe that it's important for Chinese and Australian people to connect and understand we are part of an international community. Australians can understand Chinese culture and some Chinese can understand Australian culture despite their large population. At least if some Australians understand China and Chinese understand Australia we can bridge closer relations and have more ties in that area.

**Trish:** So do you see that that relationship is a positive one and that it will grow in the future?

**Jack:** I believe it's a very positive relationship for Australia. There are a lot of benefits for the Australians and Chinese in the relationship .... especially with trade and business opportunities. People feel now that the Chinese have established themselves on the global stage. So Australian businesses can go to China and earn a lot of money .. and Chinese can come to Australia and earn money. Even though there has been a lot of concern about Chinese people buying up investment properties and large amounts of farmland in Australia, Chinese investment in Australia will continue to provide benefits for Australian people and benefits for Chinese people in the future.

**Trish:** And after your trip to China have you started studying now, or what is your future plan?

**Jack:** I'm currently studying at the University of Adelaide, A Bachelor of International Studies. I won in the past a Confucius Institute Scholarship to go to China and study, which is a department at the University of Adelaide. I have just won the Westpac Bicentennial

---

Foundation Scholarship for 2017 which ensures I will go to Tsinghua University, which is China's top university, to study for 6 months as an exchange student. With the Westpac scholarship I'll be put into a leadership program and I'll also be part of a scholars network where I will be able to interact with people who have won the scholarship before. So, job opportunities will be easier to get because I have won this scholarship. I believe that the future holds ... well the Australia China relationship is fairly important to me and I would love to become a diplomat in the Department of Foreign Affairs .... maybe represent Australia's interests in China ... and also hopefully one day become an ambassador of some kind ... or even go into the political scene here in Australia for the Australian Labor Party. So, I have got quite a few and certain ambitions. It's good to aim high and I will definitely try my best to achieve my goals.

**Trish:** Thank you very much for having a talk with me today:

**Jack:** No worries. I appreciate it.

**Trish:** And I wish you all the best for the future.

**Jack:** Thank you