



Column

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Rituals, corona quarantine – and news from the wandering herd of elephants

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About celebration and rituals

At the end of my last report in June I mentioned the 100th birthday of the party, which was celebrated with great pomp throughout the country at the end of June. In front of the entrance to our office in Nanjing, which is located within the city's exhibition halls, the city's propaganda department had built a large entrance area out of wood and cardboard to the official exhibition on the history of the party in Jiangsu. All party cadres and the employees of state-owned companies and authorities were supposed to visit this exhibition in the weeks and months that followed, busses were on the move for weeks and large groups of people stood in line before they were shown through the exhibition.

I myself was invited by a provincial organization that had awarded me a friendship price last year to take part, together with other foreigners, in a celebration in the city of Yancheng, on the coast east of Nanjing. The event took place in an old temple building which had served as the headquarters of the People's Liberation Army in the 1940s. The mayor of the city and other important people from the party and administration attended. We were nicely lined up, speeches were given and the local press took beautiful pictures. A professor from the local party university gave us a two-hour lecture on the history of the party, especially about the period from its founding in 1921 to the takeover of power in 1949; the time after that up to Mao's death was shortly touched, but the achievements since the beginning of the opening policy 1978 to today – the new era under Xi Jinping – was given ample consideration.

Three representatives of the foreigners were asked to speak as well, I was also one of them, speeches had to be submitted a week in advance. After being in China for so long

and having also studied the culture of the country, such ritual processes no longer seems very strange to me, but I did wonder how such an occasion would be celebrated in most European countries. During the day in Yancheng, I also had a few interesting conversations with representatives of the city. Yancheng is one of the centers of the wind energy industry in Jiangsu, and holds an international conference and exhibition on that subject every year.

About Corona and quarantine

The ongoing propaganda event on our doorstep in Nanjing came to an abrupt end on July 20, when the city government reported new corona cases in the city – staff at the city's airport had tested positive. China so far still adheres to a policy of zero cases, so every new case is of course a major problem. Since I and my son had been on vacation in southern China the week before and had come through Nanjing Airport twice, we were among the lucky ones whose health code in our mobile phones changed from green to yellow. In addition, in the evening of that day we received a text message informing us that we belonged to the group of suspected cases and that we had to submit to central quarantine. We then packed our suitcases ... But the message changed overnight – we only had to do home quarantine for two weeks and have ourselves tested several times during that time.

The entire city population – 9 million people – were tested three times in two weeks, with a total of just over 200 cases found to date. It is the Delta variant, brought in via a Chinese flight from Moscow. Newly found cases are now rapidly declining, but the city is still divided into different risk areas. The residential areas in which individual cases were found are put under lock-down. Many companies, like our office, had switched to home office for a while, but production in most factories continued. However, many companies are complaining about delays in their supply chain, because the transport into Nanjing can take longer now and because all finished products are only allowed to leave the city after disinfection and official release.

We expect that a certain restriction will remain in place for a few more weeks, until then one cannot simply leave the city, as most other areas of China do not allow anyone from Nanjing to enter. Life actually went on fairly normally within the city, but in public, face masks must be worn and shops and public buildings can be entered only after showing the green health code on one's mobile phone.

Unfortunately, the virus has now spilled over to Yangzhou, a neighboring city on the northern bank of the Yangzi – or rather it was carried there by an elderly lady from Nanjing. Since this person attended some events and also played Majiang in a popular Majiang club, a lot of people – especially elderly people – have been infected there. I hope that Yangzhou will also be able to get the virus under control quickly.

In the meantime, there is also a discussion in China about how long the strict zero-cases policy can be adhered to. Although entry from abroad is only possible to a very limited extent and all those entering have to spend two weeks in a state-monitored quarantine hotel, some new cases pop up in different areas. China is not an island – the land borders are not completely impassable everywhere, accordingly there have been corona cases in the south of the province of Yunnan on the border with Vietnam for some time.

About the herd of elephants

The herd of elephants which I had mentioned the last time also comes from Yunnan. They have left their reservation in the beginning of the year walking to the north and had reached the capital, Kunming, some weeks ago. Every now and then I check the media to see where they are now. Yesterday they were in Yuxi, a beautiful town about ninety kilometers south of Yunnan's provincial capital Kunming. They stayed in a wooded area not far from the city area and were peaceful. In the evening they crossed a river, and it is assumed that they are now moving back to their reservation ...

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