



Column

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## **Cars, family and wandering elephants**

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### **About Cars**

A few weeks ago, I visited the big annual "Shanghai International Car Show". The media have already reported on this in detail, so I only want to give my personal impressions here.

The Chinese car market developed relatively quickly after the country opened in 1978. In the 1980s it was inconceivable for many Chinese people to own a car, and today owning a car has become very important for the Chinese middle class. The Chinese auto industry was decisively shaped by foreign brands in the first decades, if these companies were only allowed to establish minority stakes in China with Chinese companies, it was a profitable business for most of them. Our German car manufacturers **VW, Mercedes Benz, Porsche** and **BMW** in particular are very successful in the Chinese market to this day. Until a few years ago, the streetscape was mainly dominated by foreign car brands, but in the meantime, there are more and more cars from Chinese companies on the streets, and since the Chinese government has forced the switch to electric vehicles, you can see more and more interesting Chinese e-cars in addition to **Tesla** brands like **NIO, BYD, Xpeng, Li Auto** etc. on the streets. In the cities, entire taxi fleets are only electric. Accordingly, this year's auto show was also characterized by electric vehicles. It is assumed that a total of 2 million e-cars will be sold in China this year, with a total volume of around 28 million Cars.

I do not understand much about cars, but have to say that the new Chinese brands with their chic cars impressed me the most. So far, larger vehicles have tended to be popular in China, cars are still status symbols and are often bought larger so that, in case of need, one can take for a drive three generations of a family in one car. So it is now surprising that the most sold e-car since the beginning of this year is not from Tesla, NIO or **Geely**, but it is the so-called **Hongkuang MiniEV** from **SAIC-GM Wuling**, which is manufactured in Liuzhou in Guanxi Province in southern China. 128,000 of these cars were sold this year by the end of May, the next best-selling model from Tesla came to almost 40,000.

Personally, I liked this MiniEV very much, I would like to buy something like that too. It is a vehicle the size of a Fiat 500, in a slightly more angular shape with three doors, the rear seats can be folded back and create decent storage space. The car is available in different colors for less than the equivalent of 5.000 euros, there are also "Hello Kitty"- or "Military"-versions for an extra charge ... This year a series called **Macaron** came out, in the pastel colors of the fillings found in the popular macaroons in China. In the country's e-commerce markets one can find a large selection of accessories for the MiniEV, the vehicle has developed into a cult car for young people and is the first affordable car for the rural population. A Chinese Volks-Wagen? In any case, this will open up customer groups for e-vehicles who have only been on the move with a two-wheeler ...

### **About family ...**

Small cars would of course not make much sense in the context of the expansion of Chinese family planning legislation, which now allows up to three children per family. This admission of a failed population policy will certainly be just as unsuccessful as the increase to two children a few years ago, the birth rate simply continued to fall afterwards. The fact that there ever was a state-regulated restriction to one child per family at the beginning of the 1980s goes back to the situation at the time: In the 1950s and 1960s, Mao encouraged the population to multiply as quickly as possible and rewarded families with many children, an explosion of the population was the result, to which the development of the food supply from could not follow, all important food was rationed, living space in the cities scarce and the living situation in the whole country extremely poor. In order to prevent a further jump in the population, if the baby boomers of the first wave also had two or more children, the one-child rule was then enforced with great brutality. The result is an unbalanced population pyramid. Millions of men more than women are the result of targeted abortions and infanticides to meet traditional ideas about the importance of carrying on the family name through a son.

Since the burden of elder care rests largely on the shoulders of the children, a future working couple will have to care for two elderly couples. In a society where both spouses usually work and where sending children to school is expensive and time-consuming, the new three-child policy will not be of much use either. All of my acquaintances whom I asked about it just laughed ...

### **About wandering elephants ...**

On the other hand, the excursion of a herd of 16-17 elephants, which marched from the large Chinese elephant reserve between Burma and Laos in the south of the province of Yunnan in April and recently reached the capital of the province, Kunming, has been followed with joy in China in the past few weeks. A special police operation ensures the safety of the elephants and the affected settlements through which the herd passes. Drones document the movement of the group and an attempt is made to encourage them to return to the reserve, especially by laying out food and building up obstacles. The elephants eat their way through whole fields and plantations, sometimes like to look through a house with their trunks for something to eat when passing by and have learned how to turn on a tap to get water. A calf was born on the journey, and two elephants from the original group returned earlier. Even specialists are puzzling over the reason for this enormous journey. The herd seems to be led by an inexperienced leader, and a lack of food in the reserve could also be a reason. The reserve is the size of the island of Ireland,

when it was established in the 80s, around 150 elephants lived there, now there are more than 300. For me, the interest in the welfare of the herd by a large part of the Chinese people is a sign that a lot has changed in attitudes towards animals ... Let's hope that the group comes home safely. May sneaky guess: They just wanted to be in the provincial capital in time for the big 100th anniversary of the Communist Party of China on July 1st ...

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