Covid in China in August : « the Town Mouse and the country Mouse »

After 2 major outbreaks in July, 3 large outbreaks in hotspots for Chinese tourism and a dozen more "classic" ones (cold chain, borders...) came to disrupt the summer, with a record number of provinces affected. Paradoxically, and Solidarity Covid – Expats in China will explain why, Tier ½ cities who request normalized screening every 3-5 days have been relatively spared.

In La Fontaine's fable, some noise disturbs the feast of the country mouse hosted by the Town mouse. This summer in China, the mice who stayed in town with regular screening or those who were able to slalom between outbreaks for their holidays managed well, for those who went to visit the country mice, Covid once again ruined everything.

Covid on the island of Sanya, China: "Master Tourist, perched on an island"

Bad luck for those who holidayed in August this summer, and the formerly confined of Shanghai were particularly bitter finding themselves stuck in their hotel room in Sanya with meal trays and then more quarantine in Shanghai on the way back. There was additional bitterness for foreigners who did not attempt the trip out of China.

Nevertheless, the Sanya cluster, hatched 50 km from tourist bays, among fishermen who sailed too close to Vietnamese trawlers, had limited diffusion beyong the island. It

is a mega-outbreak on the scale of the city of Sanya with 15,590 cases (out of a population of 1,031 million inhabitants). It exceeded the maximum daily incidence relative to the population of the Shanghai during the spring outbreak (1014 vs 998 in total for the city, with 7 districts over 1000 at the peak in Shanghai).
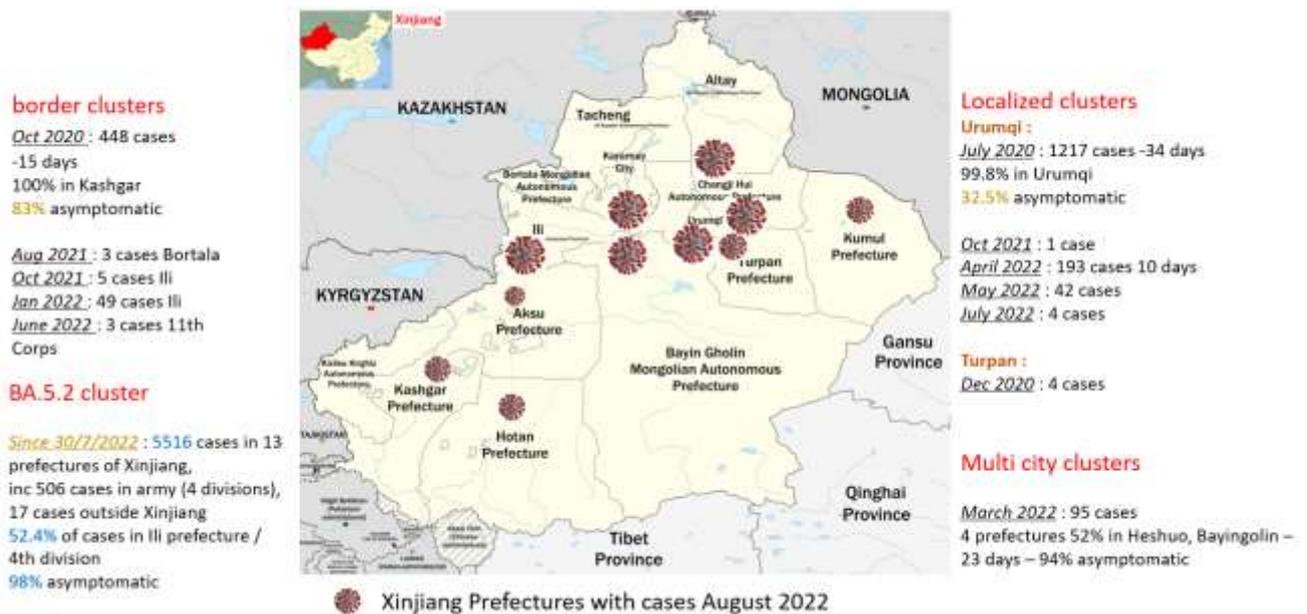
It was discovered late, although fishermen who go to sea are tested regularly, in working-class neighborhoods, and the insular position of Hainan made it possible to quickly confine the outbreak within the island. The capital Haikou which has 3 times more inhabitants than Sanya has been little affected (and therefore lockdown was limited in duration, 70 cases by September 1). As medical teams were expedited onsite, they were able to examine the patients quickly and we obtain consistent metrics : asymptomatic rate of 58% close to the rates observed on imported cases in the main arrival cities (Shanghai 47%, Beijing 31%, Guangdong 42%), severe cases estimated at 42 at the peak, or 0.26% of active cases vs 0.54% at the Shanghai peak. These indicators are a sign that despite the high incidence, hospitals were not saturated, positive cases being taken to makeshift hospitals in gymnasiums set up in a few days, no deaths, very few cases among tourists : there were 4 luxury hotels in high-risk areas for a few days, and for one of them it was the employees' dormitory), and no case among the 132,000 traumatized holidaymakers evacuated by plane as from August 9 (but the wait was long) who were taken to quarantine on arrival.

Covid in Xinjiang: "Drawn be the Mechoui smell"

In Xinjiang, bordered by 5 Central Asian countries, India, Mongolia and a short border with Russia, the outbreak started in the border area of Kazakhstan, in the city of Yining, which hosts military garrisons. It is the 7th cluster of border origin in the province, the 3rd in Ili Prefecture, the 6th to hit Urumqi, but the largest and most diffuse inside Xinjiang. The fault lies in the Omicron BA.5.2 effect in a region at a time of high tourist activity. It nevertheless took about ten days to spread outside the city of Ili and

therefore few tourists were blocked, and very little spillover outside the province. On Day 13 the peak was reached at 453 cases, and the decline has been well underway since August 14, but it is several weeks of the tourist season that, as in Sanya, are wasted.

border clusters

Oct 2020 : 448 cases
-15 days
100% in Kashgar
83% asymptomatic

Aug 2021 : 3 cases Bortala
Oct 2021 : 5 cases Ili
Jan 2022 : 49 cases Ili
June 2022 : 3 cases 11th
Corps

BA.5.2 cluster

Since 30/7/2022 : 5516 cases in 13
prefectures of Xinjiang,
inc 506 cases in army (4 divisions),
17 cases outside Xinjiang
52.4% of cases in Ili prefecture /
4th division
98% asymptomatic

Localized clusters

Urumqi :
July 2020 : 1217 cases -34 days
99.8% in Urumqi
32.5% asymptomatic

Oct 2021 : 1 case
April 2022 : 193 cases 10 days
May 2022 : 42 cases
July 2022 : 4 cases

Turpan :
Dec 2020 : 4 cases

Multi city clusters

March 2022 : 95 cases
4 prefectures 52% in Heshuo, Bayingolin –
23 days – 94% asymptomatic

Xinjiang Prefectures with cases August 2022

Since October 2020 outbreaks in Xinjiang have delivered a very large majority of so-called "asymptomatic" cases, which are in fact mild cases that have not been the subject of a thorough clinical examination. For this outbreak, these "asymptomatic" are therefore positive cases that are put in isolation in the "Fangcang", facilities dreaded by all, that appeared with the Shanghai outbreak and replicated since then to each new large outbreak.

Covid in Tibet : « We often meet our destiny by the paths we take to avoid it »

We thought Tibet was protected from Covid outbreaks: natural barrier of the Himalayas, and the drastic conditions for getting there. Tibet, which had only had one case since 2020, requires visitors to come only from "non-starred" cities (no medium risk area within the prefecture). before and after the adjustments announced at the end of June. And for foreign tourists coming from China, you have to wait until you are "unstarred" to apply for a permit, which takes about 10 days to be delivered and which would be suspended if the star (even virtual since the "star" was officially removed from the app on June 29) reappeared before departure. There was no Chance then the Expats from Shanghai could make it to Tibet, and the window was very short for Chinese residents of Shanghai because we were stuck with new cases and new risk areas until July 30.

On rencontre sa destinée souvent par les chemins qu'on prend pour l'éviter.

(Jean de La Fontaine)

Other vacation goers from northern China, relatively spared in recent months, have taken the place of these Town mice for the Tibet destination. There is also the altitude effect. There is a risk of discomfort from landing at an altitude of more than 4000 meters coming from the plains, and therefore tourists often choose to fly to one of the gateways to Tibet: Sichuan, Qinghai, Yunnan and then a train that will take its time to Lhasa so that we can acclimatize to the altitude. Others will take their car for a long trip. How did this BA.2.76 variant, which we have seen little in the world (except in India), manage to cross the Himalayas and these peaks at 8000 meters? The outbreak area is close to the Indian border, the hypothesis of birds coming from North Korea has been suggested on the successive outbreaks of Dandong, Liaoning in April / May (residents had been asked to close their windows …).

One can imagine that birds coming from India were able to cross passes and drop the virus on the Tibetan side. Unlike Sanya, which hatched far from the tourist sectors, the outbreak started with tourists who crisscrossed all of Tibet, enabling a wide dissemination in the province and beyond. In Sanya, hotel capacities are plenty but in Tibet, where everything is calculated for an annual quota of tourists, it is necessary to isolate close contacts (about 60,000 have been taken to the hotel), and what to do with tourists who risk to develop altitude sickness ? So they let them go back more easily than in Sanya, 2 negative tests in 48 hours and it's ok to go back in your own car, or take trains that will make multiple stops in neighboring provinces and beyond, and the same for the flights which are rarely direct, stopping in Chengdu, Chongqing, Xi'an, Kunming before continuing. This is the explanation for this record spread of the outbreak of Tibet and the number of provinces and prefectures affected.

Covid outbreaks in Tibet: « A stitch in time saves nine »

Is this record spreading, with a significant number of sub-outbreaks originating from travelers who were not placed in solitary confinement in time, due to the withdrawal of the star ? This is unlikely, because after a few days of strong circulation, we go into "city-wide lockdown" and therefore anyone arriving from Tibet, regardless of the city, will be taken to quarantine. This does not prevent having new substantial sub-clusters in all cases, 19 cities with more than 30 cases linked to Tibet. We have a flagrant

counter-example on 30/8 in Shanghai with a young man who arrived for a professional meeting from Sichuan, green code, test before departure, test on arrival, but no isolation, because Chengdu (756 cases in August 2022 linked to Tibet) was not (yet) considered a high-spread region.

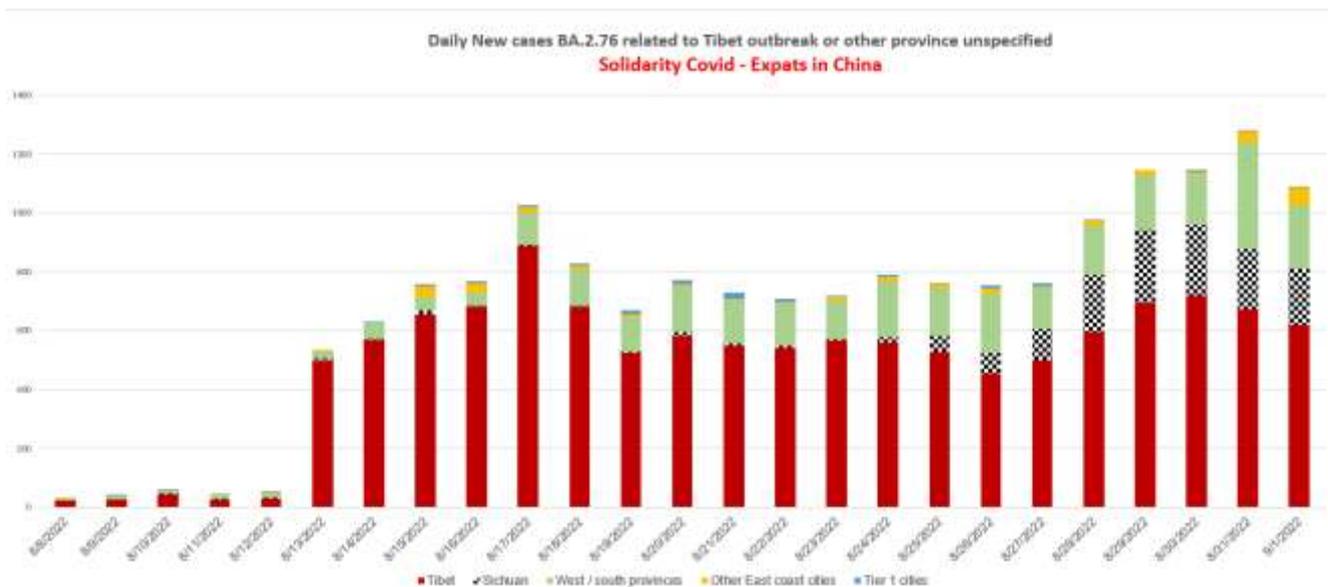| Spillover of main touristic clusters and Shanghai mega cluster 2021-2022			
Solidarity Covid - Expats in China	Nanjing Lukou airport	Shanghai Spring 2022 mega-cluster*	Tibet cluster*
total nb of cases in mainland China **	1,141	639,409	16,308
duration of cluster	38 days from July 20 2021	172 days from Feb 28 2022	25 days as of Aug 30 2022
variant	Delta	Omicron BA.2.1-BA.2.2	Omicron BA.2.76
nb provinces / prefectures	13/37	28/248	25/133
nb sub-cluster cities / prefectures > 30	6	57	18
% cases outside of province of outbreak	28%	2.2%	31%
prevalence in main location of outbreak	0.03% of Yangzhou, Jiangsu population	2.5% of Shanghai population	0.33% of Tibet population
Patients condition			
% asymptomatic	6.7%	90.5%	86.9%
est % of severe cases @ peak of severe cases	5.50%	0.87%	unspecified

* for 2022 clusters, include cases coming from other province unspecified at the time of the cluster

** sporadic cases reported in Macao and Hong Kong for Nanjing Lukou and Shanghai clusters, not reported here   9/2/2022 15:39

Computed from our exclusive database of clusters, where each line of cases/day/prefecture is assigned to a cluster, we get that the 2 tourist outbreaks studied delivered the same proportion of cases in the province of origin as outside, around 30%. With the Omicron effect added to the "means of transport adapted to the altitude" effect, the distribution in a number of cities and provinces is much wider for Tibet, which nevertheless does not reach the spread of the mega cluster in Shanghai.

Late sub-clusters related to Tibet (specifically Chengdu and some sporadic cases on the East coast) appeared several weeks after Tibet was put under lockdown and traveler subject to quarantine. Rather, we talk about these cases of erroneous declarations, telephones put in airplane mode, and when you arrive by car it's easier to hide where you come from... so we will certainly have laconic announcements in the coming weeks on criminal proceedings against these persons.

Daily New cases BA.2.76 related to Tibet outbreak or other province unspecified
Solidarity Covid - Expats in China

We are not yet done with the cluster in Tibet which has been on the increase again at its epicenter for 4 days and which is adding significant sub-clusters in several cities

The beginning is also suspicious, with a takeoff at day 5. Tibet is a very vast plateau, it takes time to transport the equipment and the mass screening teams to the various sites.

« Gone the calves, cows, pigs" Covid has a significant impact on tourism in China

How many disappointed tourists have been forced to interrupt their holidays in the 3 tourist clusters ? A huge loss for tourism professionals in many regions... Hundreds of thousands of other City Rats had to cancel planned stays in Hainan, Tibet, Xinjiang (but also Qinghai, Gansu, Shanxi, Sichuan, Chongqing) and fall back on other preserved places: South-West China (Guangxi and Yunnan, Hunan) had a record crowd this summer. Upon return, you get tests and 7 days of presence required in Beijing for parents and children before the long-awaited return to school on September 1st.

« The reed bends but does not break »

With this Brownian movement imposed to offer a few days of vacation to the Town Mice, we are led to considering that since we're going to be in quarantine anyway, we might as well take advantage of the relaxing adjustments for international arrivals to go abroad... The adjustments were made several times before and after the announcement of the slashing of quarantine on arrival to 7+3. This frees up places in quarantine hotels, and thereby accommodates more passengers : addition of flights (in dribs and drabs) and then on August 7, several circuit breaker criteria are cut in half: duration of suspensions, trigger thresholds linked to the proportion of contaminated passengers, which makes it possible to better envisage the return of large carriers and

lower airfares. Of course, the tests are still requested, the circuit breaker is not completely abandoned, but the latter is heavily altered.

« The ant is selfish »

The Mice of Tier 1 Very Large Cities (Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou) have been preserved : star effect for Shanghai, too far to get there by car / train, so a mandatory plane stopover, and also the effect of standardized screening, i.e the obligation to test oneself every few days to access public places / transport / schools. It is outrageously expensive to make it smooth and well accepted by the population, but it limits the contagion to a few days and all the disastrous inconveniences that go with it. Xi'an did not have it after the closure of the museum outbreak in July (48 cases), Chengdu did not put it in place after the closure of the Jianjiang outbreak (417 cases between 7/15 and 10/8), and now we are at more than 150 cases per day with a clearly traced origin to Tibet and a full lockdown (from September 1).

 The big cities are shifting to it with resilience : like Shenzhen, which is very exposed by its border with Hong Kong, Wuhan since March 2022, there is an ongoing outbreak which appears not to exceed 25 cases / day for 3 days), Hangzhou since April, Tianjin as from next week, with variable frequency depending on the city. But what can one do for the smallest towns condemned to find themselves confined for several weeks at every new outbreak ?

RECEIPT 48-HOUR COVID TESTING
CUSTOMER 317.5 MILLION PEOPLE

ONE-TIME COSTS

84,661	NEWLY-BUILT TEST SITES @ 25,000 YUAN / SITE	
	TOTAL	2,116,530,000 YUAN

RECURRING COSTS

705,529	TEMPORARY TESTING WORKERS @ 200 YUAN / HOUR	
	TOTAL	141,100,000 YUAN/DAY
15,875,000	UNITS OF REAGENTS @ 5.7 YUAN / UNIT	
	TOTAL	90,480,000 YUAN/DAY

TOTAL	231,580,000 YUAN/DAY
TOTAL	86,643,230,000 YUAN/YEAR (INCLUDING TEST SITES)

SIXTH TONE

Source Sixth tone article What does it cost to test China for Covid-19 ? 9 juin 2022

 Zero Covid, it's also blatant social injustice between the Town mouse and the country mouse…

Our volunteer research project is an initiative from Union des Français de l'Etranger – Shanghai, it requests daily work that is exponential with the epidemic pressure. Wherever you are you can help us on data curation tasks even you cannot commit on daily delivery. Please reach out to carole.gabay@solidaritecovid.com

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