

Tough measures are taken as China tries to reopen its economy

Huawei Zheng

GCRF-funded PhD Candidate

School of Politics and International Relations

University of Kent

Amongst the major global economies, China seems to be now in a better position to reopen its economy in a gradual and orderly way. The domestic Coronavirus outbreak has largely become the matter of the past. Since the 2nd of March, the daily new cases remain relatively low, less than 200 per day.¹ The focus has been shifted now towards the imported cases (which accounts for the majority of the new cases now in China), as overseas travellers are coming back from the areas hit by this pandemic.

The measures China takes in order to address the problem of the imported cases are worthy of attention, not only because of its efficiency, but also because, at the end of the day, when Europe and the US survive the Coronavirus outbreak, they would be in a similar position to slowly and gradually reopen their economies. Meanwhile, as the strict border controls will be eased, the problem of imported cases shall be relevant to the rest of the world. Therefore, what is happening in China and how China deals with it present a model that other countries could learn from. In a sense, this serves as one scenario in which we will ‘live with’ the Coronavirus until it is eradicated globally.

Personally, I happen to be one of the overseas travellers who came back to China. This article is partially based on my own experience in quarantine. Let us have a look at what measures China are taking.

In the first place, our flight landed in the city of Shijiazhuang, which intends to ease the burden of the airports in Beijing. All the travellers were asked to fill out a form and report the symptoms they were showing. These involved even the mildest sign of a blocked or running nose. Everyone who reported these symptoms were separated from the asymptomatic travellers on the same flight. Essentially, this is a layered quarantine.

¹ Source: Data are found on the website of the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, available at <http://2019ncov.chinacdc.cn/2019-nCoV/>, accessed 2 April 2020.

The latter went through the normal border control, got tested for Coronavirus, and were sent to a hotel for quarantine. The travellers who showed symptoms (including myself) were hospitalised for two days. During this period they got a CT test, a blood test, and the nucleic acid test twice for Coronavirus. If all the results were negative they would be sent to the hotel and join the asymptomatic travellers.

These travellers need to spend 7 days in Shijiazhuang in quarantine before they can go back to their own home cities. Thereafter, they may be subject to another 14-day quarantine, although the length of the quarantine depends on the policies of the local cities, or even the local communities. It should be acknowledged that these sometimes conflicting policies seem confusing and troublesome to a lot of us indeed.

Tracing, Testing, and Quarantine

So what measures exactly China is taking? They could be summarised into three points.

First, **tracing**. The whereabouts of all the returning overseas travellers are documented from the very beginning. The documentation is shared on a national scale, as this will also help inform the local cities that serve as the destination of these travellers. Each traveller can even obtain a QR code from apps such as WeChat or Ali Pay. These QR codes contain the information about the departure point, the quarantine place, and the testing result of the traveller.

Second, **testing**. In particular, those who reported symptoms would be subject to a more comprehensive testing, involving the CT and blood test beside the nucleic acid test.

Finally, **quarantine**. The quarantine measures are introduced in order to avoid cross infection. This needs to be considered together with the protective measures taken by the staff at border control, hospitals, and the hotels. My personal observation is that all of the staff were equipped with the safe protective gear, including a gown, an N95 face mask, a goggle or face shield, and gloves.

People's Actions: the end of resilience or the beginning of informed collective response?

David Chandler presents a gloomy picture about resilience as an approach to dealing with threats.² His core argument is that people cannot be trusted, do not know better when hit by this pandemic and thus the efforts of empowering them and capacity-building are not fruitful.³ My personal experience presents a counter-argument that people can be empowered and they are able to achieve an effective collective response, as long as they are well-informed. These overseas travellers, the majority of which are Chinese students who studied in the UK, know the Coronavirus well enough. They took measures to protect themselves and others. I saw information-sharing, self-governance, and self-empowerment. By far, the absolute majority of these returning travellers have been tested negative and only two positive cases were found. Perhaps we should believe in the reason and responsibility of the 'human' more than is currently claimed.

The final way out of this Coronavirus pandemic may be the mass production and application of the vaccine. But until then we may have to live with the Coronavirus. If this will be the case, we need to live with the Coronavirus carefully. The tough measures taken by China, although they made the free movement of its population more difficult, seem effective on an individual level. This is not a piece of work on political philosophy. But my personal take on this is that in order to beat such a formidable adversary as the Coronavirus, we need knowledge, information, discipline, determination, and the political will to achieve an informed collective response. In this way we still have a chance to gain our freedom and our normal life back.

² David Chandler, 'Coronavirus and the End of Resilience,' E-International Relations, p. 1, available at <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/03/25/opinion-coronavirus-and-the-end-of-resilience/>, accessed 3 April 2020.

³ Ibid.