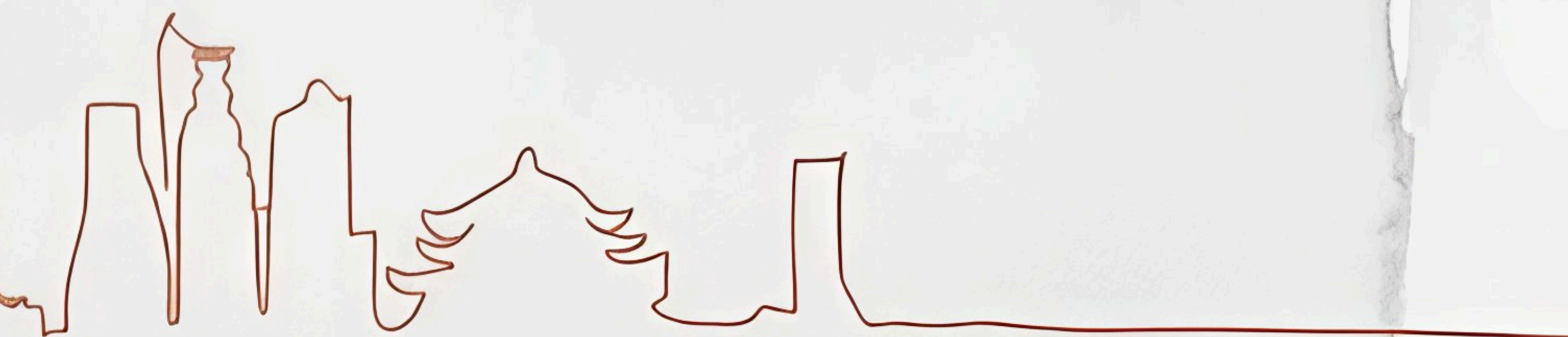


# Living in China

**A Practical Guide to  
Everyday Life, Systems, and Reality**



# **LIVING IN CHINA**

**A Practical Guide to Everyday Life,  
Systems, and Reality**

**By**

Peter Wilcox

**Design & Layout**

Annie Wilcox

**Created for the  
YouTeacher Community**

2026 First Edition

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## **DISCLAIMER**

This guide is based on real-world experience, observation, and research available at the time of writing. Life in China involves systems, regulations, and local practices that may change without notice.

This book does not constitute legal, immigration, financial, medical, or professional advice. Readers are responsible for verifying current requirements with official sources and making their own decisions.

Experiences described in this guide may vary depending on location, timing, and individual circumstances.

First edition, 2026  
Published by YouTeacher

[youteacher.org](https://youteacher.org)

*For the people who showed up anyway,  
without a manual.*

## **About This Guide**

This guide was written to help people function in modern China when familiar systems, apps, and assumptions stop working.

It is not a travel book, a language course, or a collection of tips scraped from forums. It is a practical reference built from lived experience that's intended to be useful when the internet is unreliable and advice is contradictory.

Use it as a starting point, a reference, or a reminder that confusion is normal and solvable.

## **The YouTeacher Community**

This guide was created as part of a wider effort to help teachers and expats navigate life in China with more clarity and less guesswork.

YouTeacher is a growing community focused on sharing practical knowledge, real experiences, and up-to-date information about living and working in China, especially in places where familiar platforms and advice aren't accessible.

If you found this guide useful, you're welcome to continue the conversation and connect with others who are figuring things out too.

### **Website**

[youteacher.org](https://youteacher.org)

### **Community**

Discord: [youteacher.org/discord](https://youteacher.org/discord)

# Welcome to China: Nothing Like I Remembered

My name is Peter Wilcox, and in August 2024, I stepped off a plane in Nanjing and barely recognized the country I used to call home.

I first came to China in 2006. Back then, I was a 27-year-old former computer technician from Australia who'd spent years traveling around doing all kinds of work across Queensland and the Northern Territory. I had no teaching experience, no real plan, and certainly no idea that China would become such a huge part of my life.

But I've always loved adventure. I've always had this itch to explore the world, to just go and see what's out there. A few years before China, I bought an old black 1984 Mazda RX7 in Long Beach, LA - picked it up cheap off a lot because it was sitting there waiting for someone crazy enough to buy it. I drove that car all over the United States for six weeks through 25 states including up to Toronto and down to Tijuana before finally selling it back to the same guy I bought it from in Long Beach.



*Me with the little rotary that could. If you look closely you can see the California plates*

*- JAN 2004 - Toronto, Canada.*

In effect I basically rented it for about \$300. Then I flew to New York City for four days before spending another six weeks touring around Europe. If you're from North America or Europe reading this, I get it - I understand where you're coming from. I've done the backpacking thing, the shoestring budget travel, the "let's just see where this takes me" mentality. That's probably why China appealed to me in the first place.

I got my TESOL certificate, landed a job teaching at an international school in Chongqing, and moved into a little villa on campus with a handful of other foreign teachers. That was August, 2006. I didn't know much about Chongqing. Hell, I didn't know more than two words in Chinese. But I figured it out as I went.



*I was nervous that first day. My very first class I ever taught - Chongqing, September 2006.*

Back then, China was different. You paid for everything in cash. There were no translation apps on your phone because smartphones barely existed. If you wanted to order food, you pointed at menu pictures and hoped for the best. Getting around meant keeping a scrap of paper in my wallet with some names of places a colleague wrote in Chinese. I'd point to the place on my little note to show taxi drivers who would usually just smile, nod, offer me a cigarette and off we went. As for "mobile payments" meant... Well, it didn't mean anything yet.

I taught in Chongqing for a year, then bounced around to other cities between coming home and living elsewhere - Beijing (2007-2008, 2010-2011), Guilin (2013), Dongguan (2015) - when I finally thought I was leaving China indefinitely.



*Beijing 2007. Same country, very different era.*



*Guilin, 2013*

After that, I spent nearly a decade building an e-commerce business (selling silicone rings on Amazon under the brand Swagmat), which took me all over the world. I lived in the Philippines, Vietnam, Georgia, Peru, Indonesia, and back to Australia. I was done with teaching. Or so I thought.

Then COVID hit and wiped out the business. Fortunately, somewhere along the way (while employed as a teacher at times), I'd managed to finish a degree with a major in Information Systems, so I wasn't completely starting from scratch. But it was clear I needed to pivot.

### **Then I came back.**

In August 2024, I returned to China to teach at an international school in Nanjing - my first teaching job in nine years. And the moment I arrived, I realized just how much had changed.

Everything runs off your phone now. Not some things - everything. You can't pay with cash anymore because nobody accepts it. You can't get on the subway without scanning a code. You can't order food, book a taxi, or pay your electricity bill without the right apps set up on your phone. Even buying a movie ticket requires navigating WeChat mini-programs.

It was like I'd traveled to a completely different country. The China I left in 2015 was nothing like the China that greeted me in 2024. I spent my first few weeks fumbling through QR codes, getting locked out of apps, and feeling like a complete beginner all over again - despite having lived here for years... and still don't speak Chinese!

And that's when I realized: if I was struggling after having lived in China before, what must it be like for teachers arriving here for the very first time?

**That's why this guide exists.**

## **The Problem with Teaching Jobs in China**

While I was figuring out how to survive in modern China, I started thinking about something else that hadn't changed much: the way teachers find jobs here.

When I first came to China in 2006, I found my job on Dave's ESL Cafe. You know the site - that ancient, barely-functioning forum that looks like it was built in 1998 (because it basically was). It's still around. Teachers are still using it. And it's still a mess.

Job boards for teaching in China haven't evolved. They're scattered across a dozen different platforms. There's no community, no way to vet employers, no protection against scam jobs. Teachers are handing their resumes to recruiters who might be selling their information. Schools post the same jobs on five different sites with conflicting details. And new teachers have no idea how to navigate the increasingly complex visa process or spot red flags in contracts.

I've watched friends get burned by shady recruiters. I've seen teachers arrive in China only to find out their "international school" job was actually at a training center with zero support. I've heard horror stories about unpaid salaries, illegal work situations, and contracts that weren't worth the paper they were printed on.

**It shouldn't be this hard to find a legitimate teaching job in China.**

## The Problem with Teaching Jobs in China

Here's where this story gets interesting.

Back in 2010-2011, I was teaching Grade 10 students in Beijing. One of those students was a kid named Mojo. Smart kid. Really smart. We stayed in touch over the years - you know how it is with some students, you just click and keep in contact.



*Mojo being Mojo. He was a pretty good rapper actually. 2010, Beijing*

Mojo went on to get his Master's degree in Mathematics and spent about three years working as a programmer and developer between Beijing and Hong Kong. About a year ago, he moved to Toronto to live with his wife. We're now on opposite sides of the planet, working in completely different time zones.

And somehow, we decided to start a business together.



*Me posing with Mojo's grade 10 class, 2011*



*In case you were wondering where Mojo was, that's him at the back with his laptop. Not much changed in that regard.*

Mojo went on to get his Master's degree in Mathematics and spent about three years working as a programmer and developer in Hong Kong. About a year ago, he moved to Toronto to live with his wife. We're now on opposite sides of the planet, working in completely different time zones.

And somehow, we decided to start a business together.

We started talking about the problems with teaching job boards in China. Mojo saw it from the tech side - these platforms are outdated, clunky, and built with zero thought for user experience. I saw it from the teacher side - they're full of scams, lack community, and offer no real support.

So we're building something better.

Introducing [youteacher.org](http://youteacher.org)



**youteacher.org** is our answer to the broken system of finding teaching jobs in China.

Here's what we're creating:

**A centralized job board** that scrapes listings from all the major teaching platforms in China, so you don't have to waste time bouncing between ten different websites. Everything in one place.

**A vetted system** that focuses on protecting teachers from scam jobs and shady recruiters. Our goal is to make sure the schools and recruiters posting on our site are legitimate, so you're not gambling with your resume or your future.

**A real community** - not just a job board.



*When you're not the only foreign teacher at your school, friendships form naturally. Today, many teachers don't have that, which is why community matters more than ever.*  
- Beijing, 2011.

We've launched a Discord server where teachers can discuss jobs, share experiences, warn each other about red flags, ask questions about visas, get advice on contracts, and actually support each other throughout the process. Because teaching in China shouldn't feel like you're navigating it alone.

Right now, we're starting with the basics: aggregating jobs from existing platforms and building the community. Eventually, once we have traffic and trust, schools and recruiters will pay to post directly on our site. But unlike other platforms, we're going to vet them first. Quality over quantity.

The friendships you make as a teacher abroad is life changing.

This isn't some faceless corporate job board. This is two people - a current teacher and his former student - trying to fix a system that's been broken for way too long.

## **Why This Guide Matters**

Before you can get a job in China, you need to survive in China. And before you can survive in China, you need to understand how this country actually works in 2024.

That's what this guide is for.

Over the next 14 chapters, I'm going to walk you through every single app and system you need to function in modern China. Not theory - practical, step-by-step instructions based on what I learned (and struggled with) when I came back after nine years away.

You'll learn:

- How to set up a VPN before you even land
- How to use WeChat for literally everything
- How to pay for things without cash (because cash doesn't work anymore)
- How to order food, call taxis, and navigate cities
- How to handle your banking, pay utilities, and manage your daily life
- How to shop online, book movie tickets, and integrate into Chinese digital life like you've been here for years

This isn't fluff. This isn't "10 tips for living in China" written by someone who visited for two weeks. This is a detailed, practical guide written by someone who's lived it - both in old China and new China - and knows exactly what you're walking into.

By the time you finish this guide, you'll know more about surviving in China than most expats who've been here for months. You'll have the tools to hit the ground running, avoid the mistakes I made, and actually enjoy your time here instead of spending weeks confused and frustrated.

## What Happens Next

This guide is free. The Discord community we're building is free. We're not trying to sell you a course or charge you for access to empowering information.

What we are building is a community of teachers who are living, working, and thriving in China - and a job board that actually serves your needs instead of just collecting your resume to sell to recruiters.

When you're ready, you can:

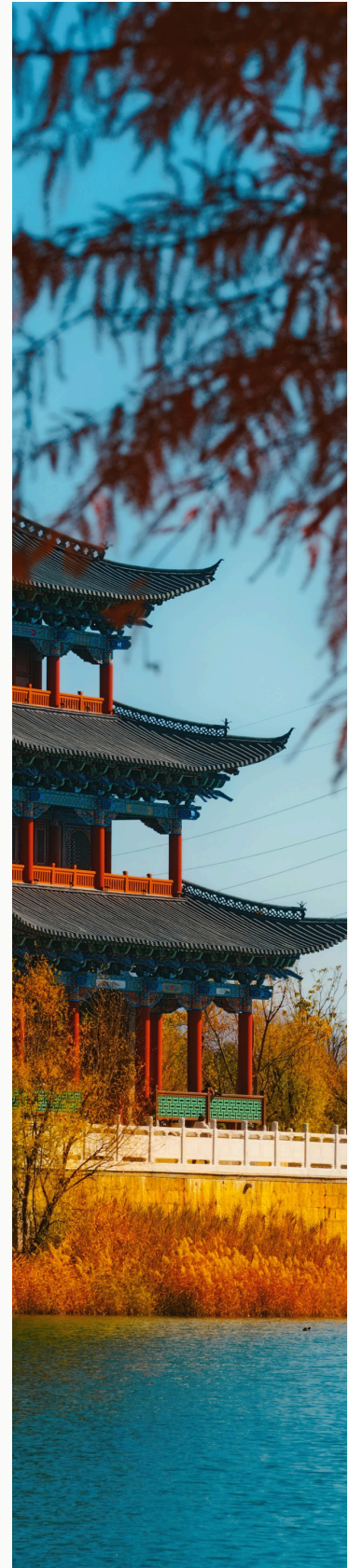
1. **Join our Discord community** (launching in January 2026 as "youteacher") to connect with other teachers, ask questions, and get real-time support
2. **Check out [youteacher.org](https://youteacher.org)** (going live in January 2026) to find vetted teaching jobs across China
3. **Share this guide** with other teachers who are coming to China or struggling to figure things out

But first, let's get you set up to survive - and thrive - in China.

**Welcome to the China Survival Guide. Let's get started.**

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# CHAPTER 1

**VPNs - Set this up BEFORE you land.  
Trust us on this one.**

**Watch the short video for this chapter**

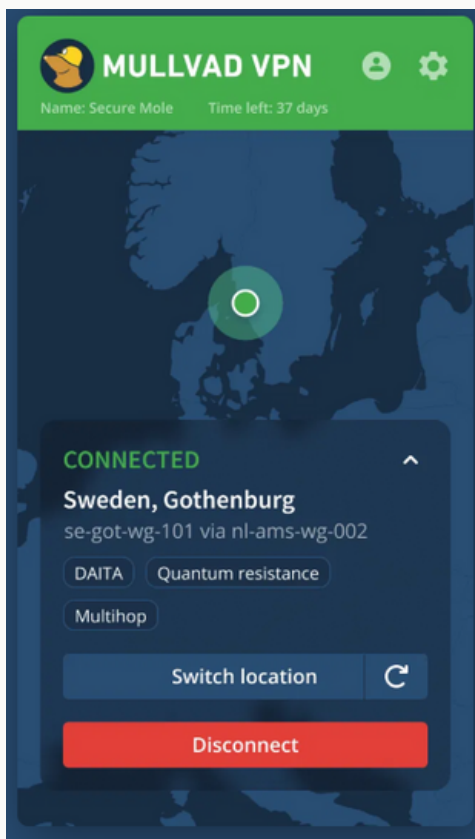
See this step done in real life in under 60 seconds.

Scan the QR code or visit:

[youteacher.org/guide/ch1](https://youteacher.org/guide/ch1)



## First Things First: Get Your VPN Sorted



Welcome to the least sexy but most essential part of your China prep. We're talking VPNs.

If you're reading this from your couch in Manchester, Toronto, or Sydney - **congratulations, you can still access Google**. Enjoy it while it lasts, because the moment you land in China, you're entering the Great Firewall zone.



**No Google.**  
**No Facebook.**  
**No Instagram.**  
**No WhatsApp.**  
**No Netflix (the catalogue you know, anyway).**  
**No a lot of things.**

**But here's the good news:** A VPN is your "get out of firewall free" card. And we're recommending **Mullvad** because it's simple, private, and doesn't try to sell you seventeen different subscription tiers.

👉 **Go to: [mullvad.net](https://mullvad.net)** (right now, while you still can easily!)

The screenshot shows the Mullvad website's pricing page. At the top left is the Mullvad logo and a 'Menu' button. At the top right are 'Log in' and 'Get started' buttons. The main heading is 'A fair pricing model' with a subtext: 'It's not an optical illusion. It's one flat monthly rate for ultimate flexibility. Including VAT.' Below this are three pricing cards, each showing a flat rate of €5 per month for different durations: 1 month, 1 year, and 1 decade.

Duration	Price
1 month	€5 per month
1 year	€5 per month
1 decade	€5 per month

## What'll It Cost You?

€5/month. That's it. About the price of a fancy coffee.

Or roughly:

USD \$5.75

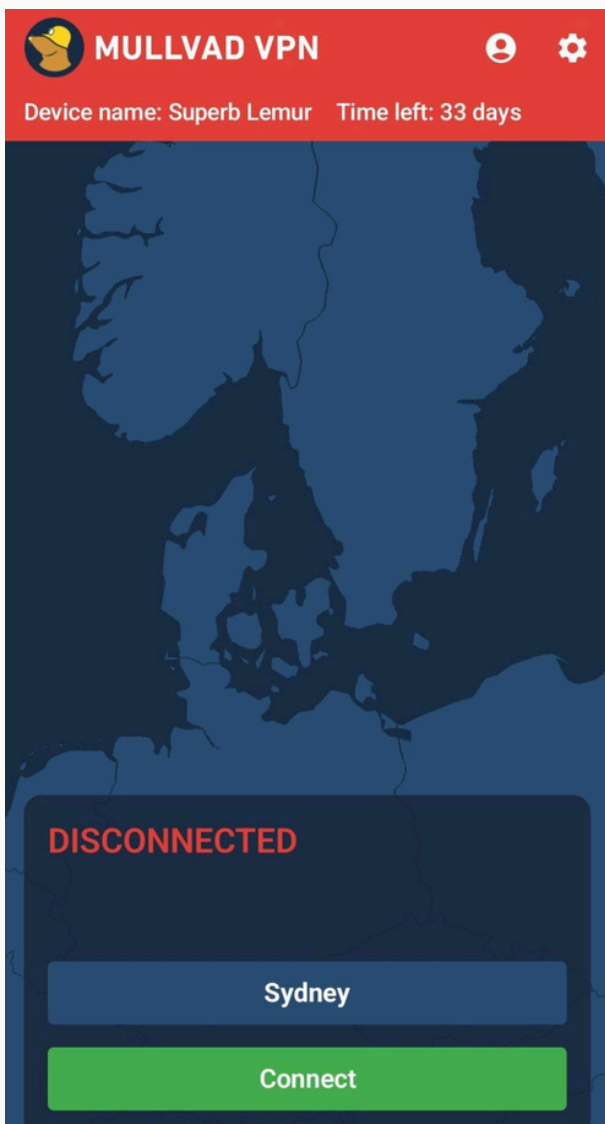
GBP £4.4

CAD \$8

AUD \$9

Here's what makes Mullvad brilliant:

- **5 devices on one account** - your phone, laptop, tablet, whatever.
- **No subscriptions** - just add credit when you need it (like topping up your phone).
- **No email required** - they give you an account number and that's your login. Done.
- **No price tricks** - it's €5 now, it's €5 next year, it's €5 forever.



**Pro move:** Load up 6-12 months before you leave. You'll thank yourself later when you're trying to do this on dodgy airport WiFi.

### The App: Refreshingly Boring

This is what the Mullvad app looks like. Notice anything?

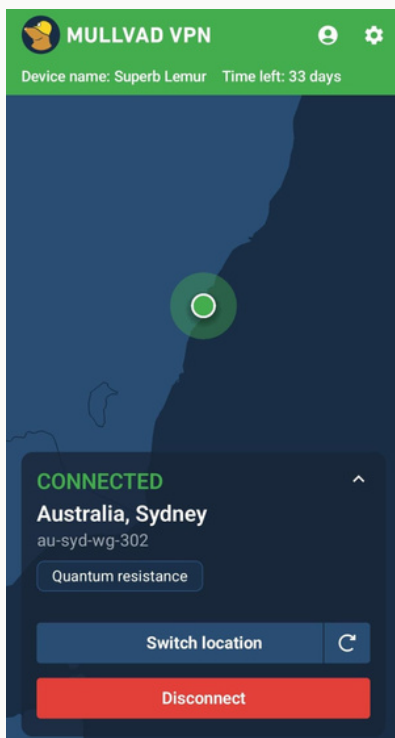
**“It's... simple.  
Almost too simple.  
One big button.  
Pick a country.  
Click connect.  
That's literally it.**



No confusing menus, no "optimization settings," no premium features locked behind paywalls. It's a VPN app that assumes you just want your internet to work like normal, except, you know, private and unrestricted.

After years of bloated apps that try to do everything, this is like a breath of fresh Swedish air (Mullvad's from Sweden, in case you're wondering why we said Swedish).

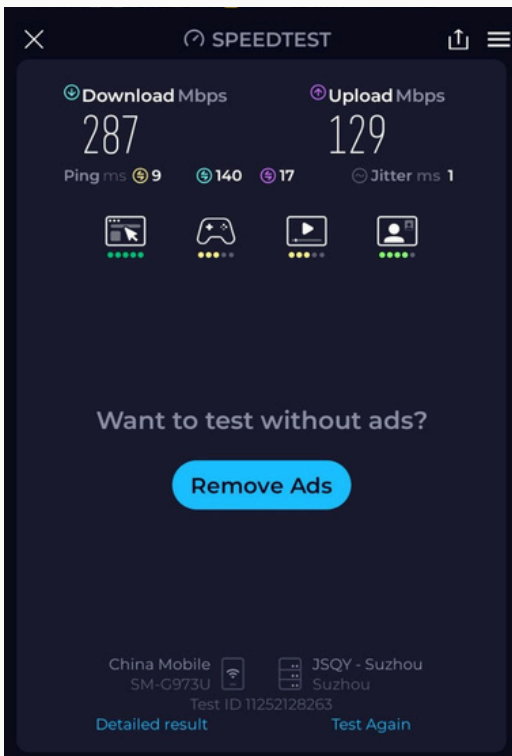
## You're In



When it's working, you'll see this. Green button (or "Secure" status), and your connection is now routing through whatever country you picked.

## Quick tips:

- **For general browsing:** Pick a server close to China (Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong) - better speeds
- **For US content:** Pick a US server (obviously)
- **For UK content:** Pick UK
- You get the idea



The app shows you what server you're on and that you're encrypted. Everything else just... works. Like your internet did before, but now it thinks you're somewhere else.

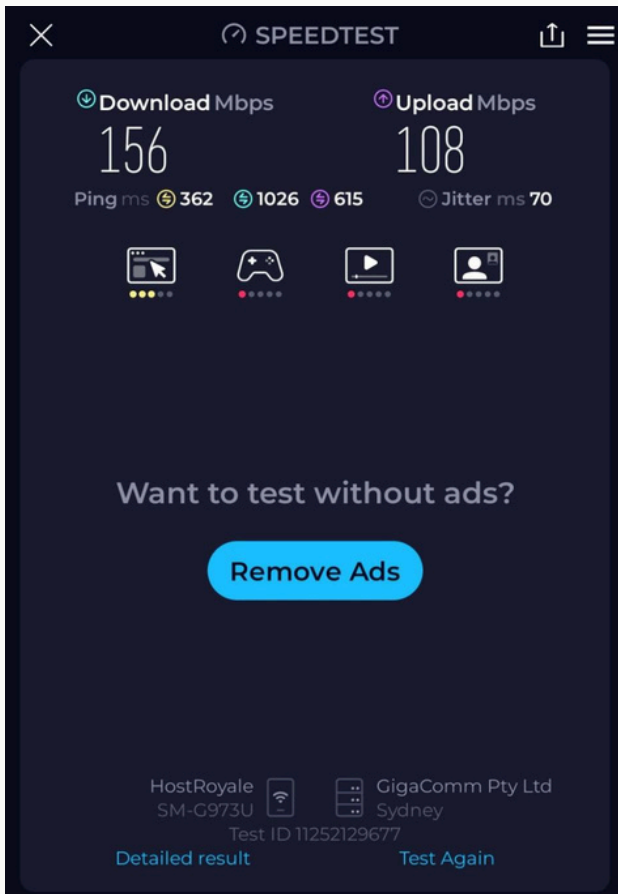
## Reality Check: Let's Talk About Speed

Before you connect to your VPN, head to [speedtest.net](https://speedtest.net) and run a test. Screenshot it. This is your "before" picture.

Why? Because VPNs slow things down a little bit. Not in a "this is unusable" way, more in a "technically your data is traveling further and being encrypted" way.

Anyone who tells you their VPN makes your internet faster is either lying or doesn't understand how the internet works.

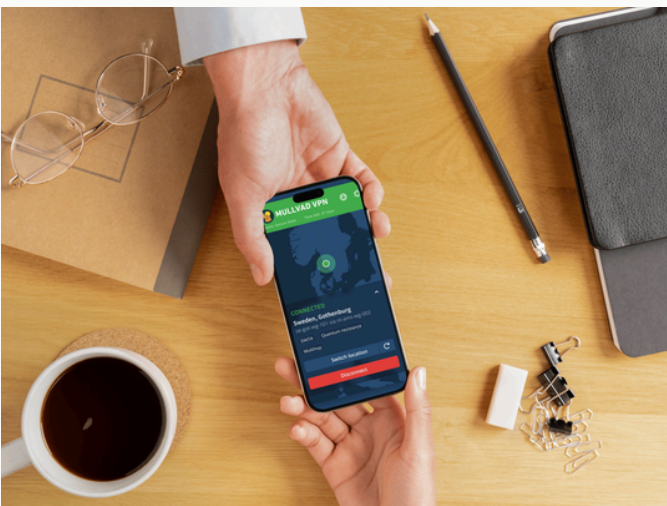
Run this test now while you're still in [wherever you are]. You'll want the comparison later.



## The Actual Impact

Now connect to Mullvad and run the same test.

- Normally Download speed drops about 70-90%. Here it was only 54%
- Upload speed a bit better
- Ping (latency) goes up a bit



**Translation:** You'll barely notice it.

Streaming? Fine. Video calls? Fine. Downloading huge files? Slightly slower but still fine. The only people who'll really notice are gamers, and even then, it's manageable.

The trade-off for accessing the entire internet while in China? **Completely worth it.**



Translated Version with 'Google Lens'



## The Sketchy Alternative (We Don't Recommend This)

⚠️ Read this bit carefully ⚠️


If you search "VPN" in China's app stores (like Tencent), you'll find... stuff. Apps claiming to be VPNs. Some free, some cheap, some very official-looking.

**Here's the deal:** We're showing you this exists, but we're NOT telling you to use it.

LET'S GET YOU STARTED

### QUICK SETUP

Create your account in the app for easy and fast setup with privacy built in.

[DOWNLOAD MULLVAD VPN](#) 

Or

### MANUAL SETUP

For advanced users.

[GENERATE ACCOUNT NUMBER](#)

Already have an account? [LOG IN HERE](#)



### Why not?

1. **You don't know who's behind it** - could be logging everything you do
2. **It might not actually work** - or could stop working tomorrow
3. **Legal grey area** - VPN use in China is... complicated
4. **Security risk** - free VPN apps are often sketchy as hell

Think of it like this: Would you trust a free, unlabeled bottle of medicine you found in a market in a foreign country? Probably not. Same logic applies here.

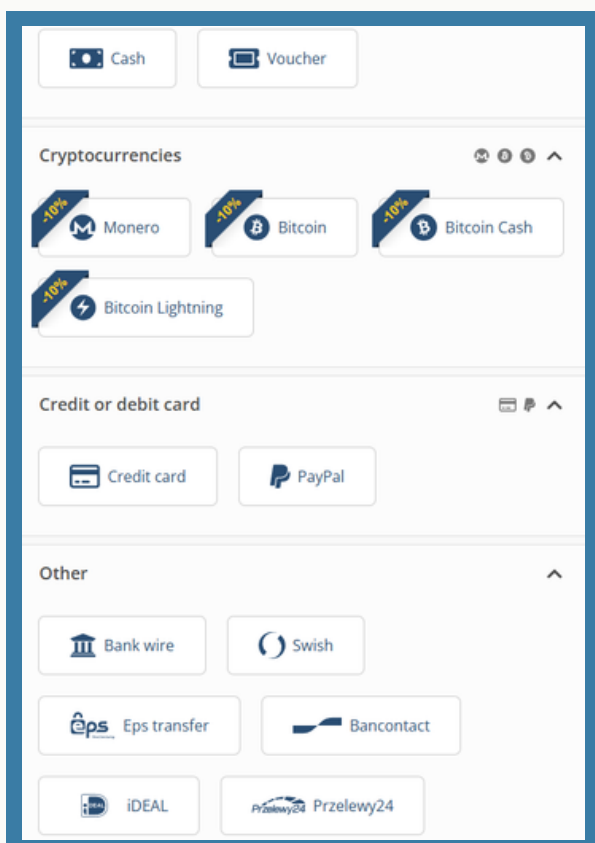
**If you go this route anyway, you're 100% on your own. We warned you.**

### Do This BEFORE You Leave

Seriously, don't wait until you've landed in Beijing to sort this out. Here's your pre-departure checklist:

#### ✓ **RIGHT NOW (while you have unrestricted internet):**

1. Go to **mullvad.net**
2. Generate your account number (write it down somewhere safe).
3. Add credit - we suggest 6 months minimum.
4. Download the app for ALL your devices.
5. Test it. Make sure it works.
6. Maybe download a second backup VPN app just in case (ProtonVPN and Surfshark also work).



Oh, Also...Wondering if your payment method will work?

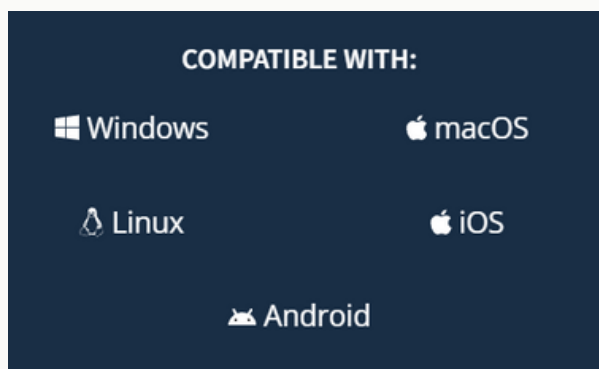
## ✓ BONUS PARANOIA MOVES:

- Email the Mullvad installer to yourself
- Save it to a USB drive
- Save it to cloud storage (Google Drive, Dropbox - while you can still access them easily)

Why the overkill? Because you don't want to be in your new apartment in Shenzhen at 11pm, desperately trying to figure out how to get VPN software when you can't access the website that has it.

**Set it. Forget it. Enjoy unrestricted internet when you arrive.**

**Oh BTW it works on anything too!**



## **IMPORTANT: The Legal Bit**

Look, we need to say this clearly: **VPN use in China exists in a legal grey area.**

The Chinese government technically requires VPNs to be approved, and most foreign VPNs aren't. That said, millions of people (including expats, businesspeople, and yes, foreign teachers) use VPNs daily without issues.

**Our take:** Individual users generally aren't targeted. The focus is on VPN providers, not teachers trying to check their Gmail.

**BUT** - and this is important - **you are responsible for understanding and following local laws.** We're not lawyers. This isn't legal advice. You're an adult making your own choices.

Use common sense. Don't use your VPN to do anything actually illegal. Don't post about VPNs on Chinese social media. Keep a low profile.

**Most importantly:** Get set up before you arrive, use a reputable provider, and you'll be fine

# CHAPTER 2

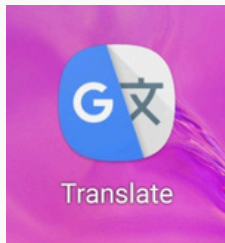
## Google Translate & Lens - Your Superpower Apps

### Watch the short video for this chapter

See this step done in real life in under 60 seconds.

Scan the QR code or visit:

[youteacher.org/guide/ch2](https://youteacher.org/guide/ch2)



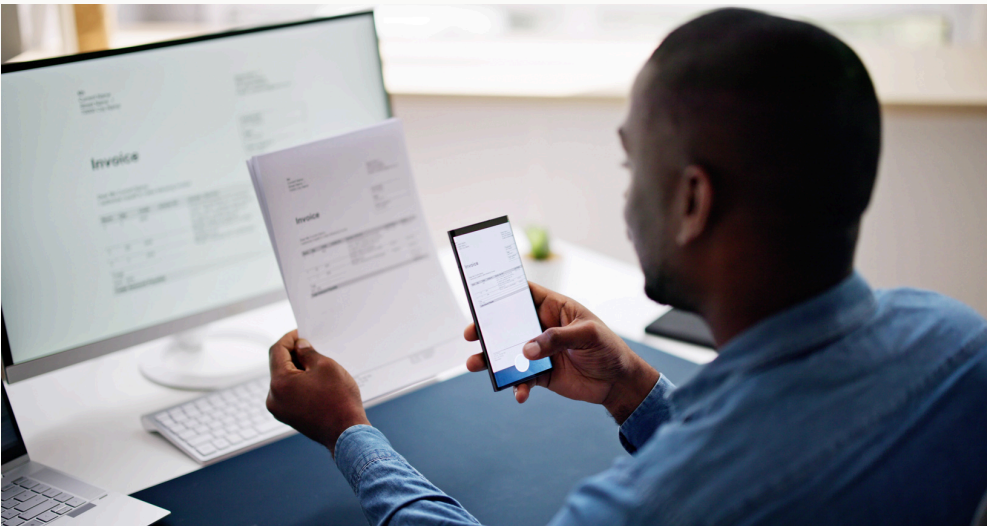
How to read menus, order food, and navigate China without speaking a word of Chinese.

### Watch It In Action First



Before we dive into the details, do try and watch the youtube short attached to this chapter. I filmed it at my local shop, had actual conversations with the owner and his wife using voice translation, walked around translating products on shelves with Google Lens, and showed you the extended screenshot trick on Meituan.

Seriously - watch it. It's 48 seconds and it'll make everything below click instantly.

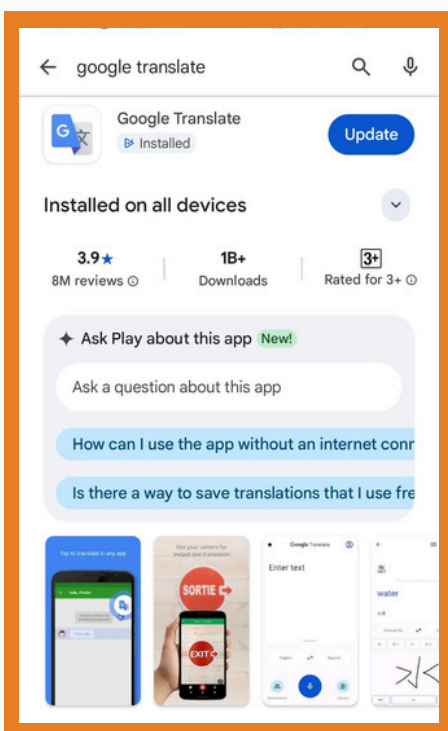


## Why These Two Apps Will Save Your Life

Let's be real: You're probably not going to become fluent in Mandarin before your flight lands. And that's fine.

**Google Translate** and **Google Lens** are your cheat codes. They let you:

- Read restaurant menus.
- Navigate grocery stores.
- Order delivery on apps like Meituan.
- Have actual conversations with locals.
- Avoid accidentally ordering chicken feet when you wanted chicken breast.



**The best part?** They're free, they work offline (with downloaded language packs), and they're stupidly easy to use.

## Download It BEFORE You Leave

This is non-negotiable. Don't wait until you're in China and frustrated because you can't get a sim card or read a menu.

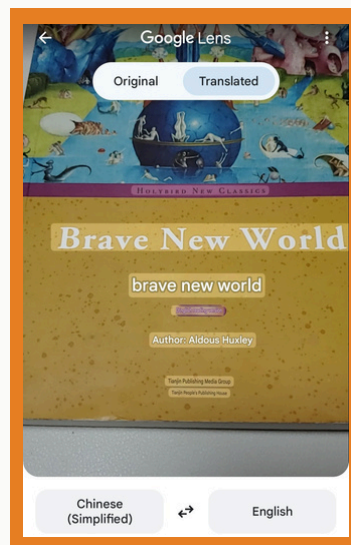
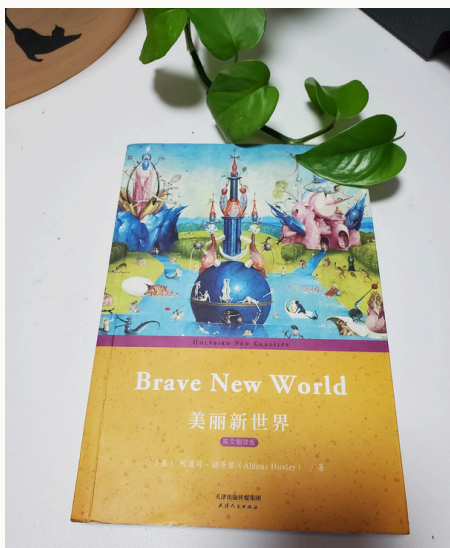
### Right now, while you still have easy access:

1. Open **App Store** or **Google Play Store**
2. Search for "**Google Translate**"
3. Download it (it's free)
4. Open the app and download the **Chinese (Simplified) language** pack for offline use

### How to download the language pack:

- Tap the language name → Download → Chinese (Simplified)
- Now it works even without internet

You can see in the screenshot this app has 1 billion+ downloads and a 3.9-star rating. It's legit. Everyone uses it.



## Real-World Example: Translating a Book Cover

Here's a bilingual copy of "Brave New World" I picked up on Pinduoduo (You'll learn about that later) for a couple of dollars. The cover has both English and Chinese text - perfect for showing you how Google Lens works.

In the next couple of screenshots, you'll see exactly how the app translates this in real-time.

## Google Lens: Point and Translate

Open **Google Lens** (or tap the camera icon in Google Translate), point your phone at Chinese text, and watch the magic happen.

In this screenshot, I'm pointing my phone at the book cover and Google Lens is:

- Detecting the Chinese characters: 美丽新世界 and 英文朗读版
- Showing me the English overlay: "**Brave New World**", "**English reading version**", "**Author: Aldous Huxley**"

The app overlays English translations in **real-time** on your screen. No taking photos. No waiting. Just instant translation.

### This is incredibly useful for:

- Walking around grocery stores and reading product labels
- Understanding signs and notices
- Navigating train/metro stations
- Reading restaurant menus when you're standing outside deciding where to eat

In the video, I did exactly this - walked around my corner store pointing my phone at products on shelves. Instant ingredient lists, instant product names, zero confusion.

## The Conversation Feature (Absolute Game Changer)



This is what I showed in the video at the corner store, and it's hands-down the most useful feature.

Open Google Translate and tap the **microphone icon**, then select **Conversation mode**. Now you can have actual back-and-forth conversations:

**In English, I typed:** "may i have some noodles please?"

**Google translated it to Chinese:** 请给我一些面条好吗? (Qǐng gěi wǒ yīxiē miàntiáo hǎo ma?)

You can either:

- **Show the Chinese text** to the person you're talking to
- **Tap the speaker icon** and have the app speak it out loud in Chinese

**In the video**, the shop owner's wife spoke directly to my phone in Chinese, and I could read her words in English instantly.

“  
**No awkward charades.**  
**No confusion.**  
**Just communication.**

**When to use this:**

- Asking directions
- Explaining what you need at a store
- Talking to your landlord about apartment issues
- Making friends with curious locals
- Ordering food when there's no English menu

## Ordering Food on Chinese Apps



Here's where things get practical. This is a screenshot from **Meituan** - one of China's biggest food delivery apps (think UberEats but way more popular).

**The problem:** Everything is in Chinese. Menu items, descriptions, prices, options - all Chinese characters.

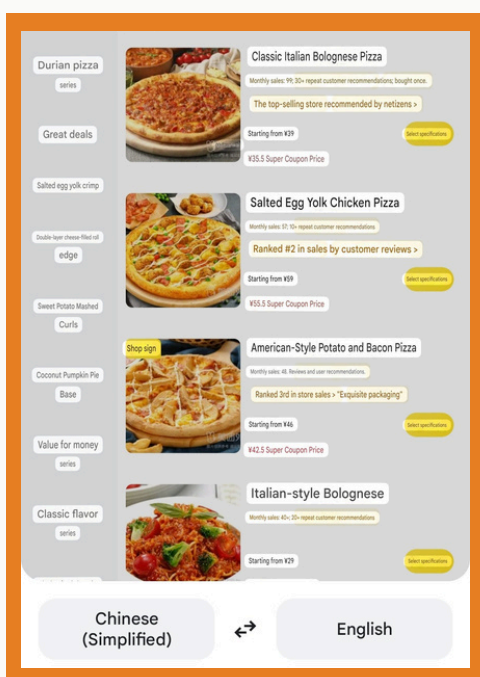
**The solution:** Screenshot it, then use Google Lens to translate it.

In this screenshot, you're looking at a Domino's Pizza menu. I can see:

- 经典意式肉酱比萨 (something pizza)
- 金沙咸蛋黄嫩鸡比萨 (something chicken pizza)
- Prices in Yuan (¥39, ¥59, ¥46...)

But I have **no idea** what I'm actually ordering. Time to translate.

## The Same Menu - Now in English



Here's that exact same Meituan menu, but now run through Google Lens.

Suddenly everything makes sense:

- Classic Italian Bolognese Pizza - ¥39 (¥35.5 with coupon)
- Salted Egg Yolk Chicken Pizza - ¥59 (¥55.5 with coupon)
- American-Style Potato and Bacon Pizza - ¥46 (¥42.5 with coupon)
- Italian-style Bolognese pasta - ¥29 (¥24 with coupon)

Now you know exactly what you're ordering. No surprises. No mystery meat.

### How to do this:

1. Screenshot the menu in the Chinese app
2. Open **Google Photos** or **Google Lens**
3. Select the screenshot
4. Tap the **Lens/Translate icon**
5. Watch it translate the entire image

## The Secret Weapon: Extended Screenshot Capture



Here's the feature most people miss - and the one that'll save you so much time.

See those two little arrows pointing down in the bottom-left corner? That's your golden ticket.

**The Problem:** Chinese apps like Meituan have LONG pages - menus that scroll forever. You don't want to take 10 separate screenshots and translate each one individually.

**The Solution:** After you take your first screenshot and open it in Google Lens, tap those two arrows (↓↓) in the bottom-left.

### What happens:

1. The app **automatically scrolls down** and captures the next section
2. It **stitches it together** with your first screenshot
3. You tap the arrows again to capture more
4. Keep going until you've grabbed the whole menu
5. Now you have ONE long screenshot with everything translated at once

In the screenshot, you can see I'm in the middle of doing exactly this - the little preview on the left shows the extended screenshot being built piece by piece.

### Why this matters:

- **Without this trick:** Screenshot, translate, go back to app, scroll, screenshot again, translate, go back... repeat 8 times. Exhausting.
- **With this trick:** Screenshot once, tap arrows three times, done. Full menu translated in 15 seconds.

**Use this for:**

- Food delivery apps (Meituan, Ele.me, McDonald's, KFC)
- Online shopping product descriptions
- Long social media posts
- Terms and conditions (if you're into that kind of pain)
- Any Chinese app with long scrolling content

**Quick Reality Check**

These apps are amazing, but they're not perfect:

**Translations can be awkward** - Chinese → English sometimes reads like robot poetry. "Salted Egg Yolk Chicken Pizza" is a real thing, but the translation makes it sound weirder than it is.

**Context matters** - "Cold noodles" might be translated literally when it's actually a specific dish name (凉面 - liángmiàn).

**Slang gets weird** - Internet slang, regional dialects, and food nicknames confuse the AI. Don't expect perfection.

**Pro tip:** When in doubt, show the translated text to a local and ask "这个对吗?" (zhègè duì ma? / "Is this correct?"). People appreciate the effort and will help you out.

**Offline Alternatives (Just In Case)**

While your VPN from Chapter 1 should keep Google services accessible, here are backup translator apps that work in China without a VPN:

- **Microsoft Translator** - Similar features to Google, usually accessible, has offline mode
- **Pleco** - Specifically built for Chinese learners, works offline, has handwriting recognition (great for when you see a character but can't type it)
- **Baidu Translate** - Chinese-made, always accessible in China, surprisingly decent for basic stuff

**My advice:** Download at least one backup translator before arriving. Better to have it and not need it than need it and not have it.

## You're Ready

With Google Translate and Lens set up, you've just unlocked 90% of China's navigation challenges.

Can't read the menu? **Lens it.**

Lost and need directions? **Conversation mode.**

Wondering what that mystery snack is at the convenience store? **Point your phone at it.**

Ordering food delivery but everything's in Chinese? **Screenshot, arrows, translate.**

**Now go explore.** You've got this.

# CHAPTER 3

## WeChat - Your Digital Lifeline in China

### Watch the short video for this chapter

See this step done in real life in under 60 seconds.

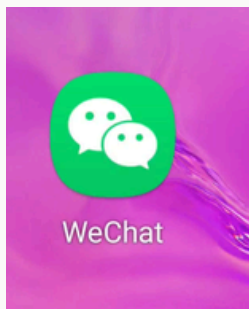
Scan the QR code or visit:

[youteacher.org/guide/ch3](http://youteacher.org/guide/ch3)



### Why WeChat Isn't Optional

Let me be brutally honest with you: **without WeChat, you're not surviving in China, you're just existing, and poorly at that.**



I'm not exaggerating. WeChat (微信 - Wēixìn in Chinese) isn't just a messaging app like WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger. It's the entire operating system of daily life in China. It's your wallet, your ID card, your taxi service, your food delivery app, your utility bill payment system, your movie ticket, your train booking platform, and yes, also your messaging app.

Here's what happens when you don't have WeChat:

- Can't pay for anything (most places don't even accept cash anymore)
- Can't order food delivery
- Can't book a DiDi ride
- Can't pay your utility bills
- Can't buy movie tickets
- Can't even add colleagues or make friends (everyone exchanges WeChat IDs, not phone numbers)

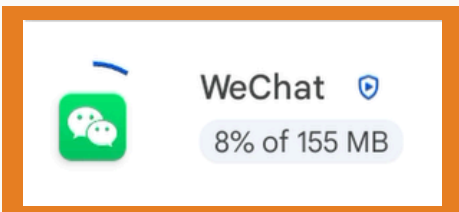
This is the single most important app on your phone for living in China.

## Getting Started: Signup + WeChat Pay Setup



Here's the good news: as of 2025, the signup process has gotten much easier for foreigners. You can sign up with your international phone number AND verify your account by adding an international credit card at the same time. This kills two birds with one stone—you get your account verified AND you get WeChat Pay activated immediately.

### Step 1: Download WeChat



Go to Google Play Store or Apple App Store and search for "WeChat." Make sure you're downloading the international version (it'll be in English). Download and install it.

### Step 2: Sign Up

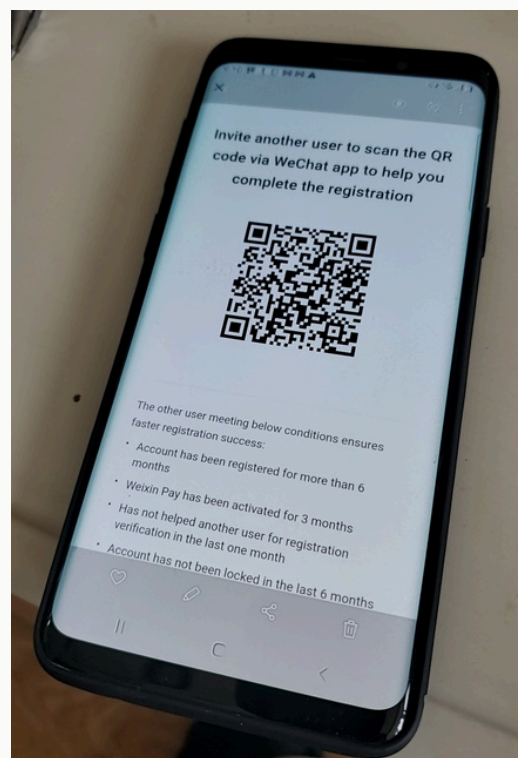
When you open WeChat, you'll see two options: "Log In" and "Sign Up." Hit "Sign Up."

You'll see two signup options:

- **Sign up via Mobile** (RECOMMENDED)
- Sign up via Facebook

Choose "Sign up via Mobile"—it's way simpler and you'll need to provide your phone number anyway.

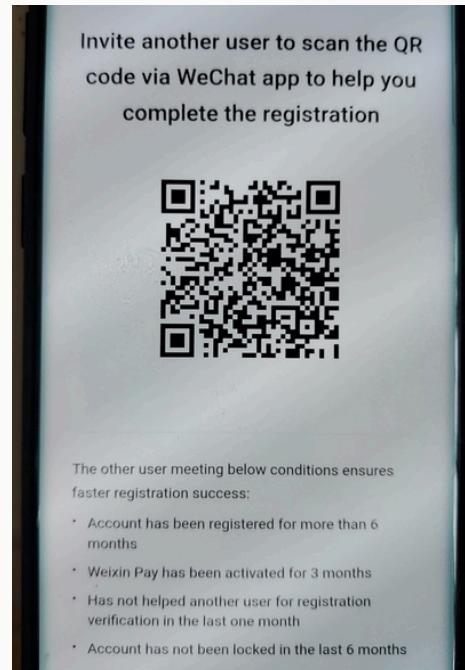
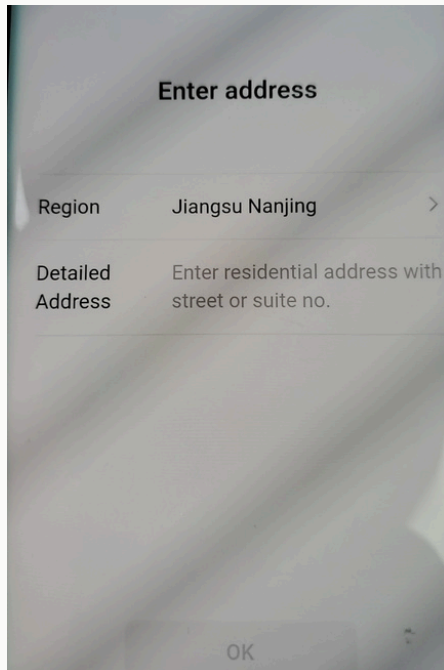
Enter your phone number (your home country number works fine), create a password, and hit "Accept and Continue."



### Step 3: The Verification Challenge

Here's where it used to get tricky, but now it's straightforward. WeChat will ask you to verify your account. You'll see a screen that says something like:

"Invite another user to scan the QR code via WeChat app to help you complete the registration"



Don't panic! You have **multiple verification options now:**

**Option A: Friend Verification** (if you know someone with WeChat) If you have a friend or colleague who already has WeChat, they can scan your QR code. BUT there are requirements:

- Their account must be 6+ months old
- They've activated Weixin Pay for 3+ months
- They haven't helped verify someone else in the last month
- Their account hasn't been locked in 6 months

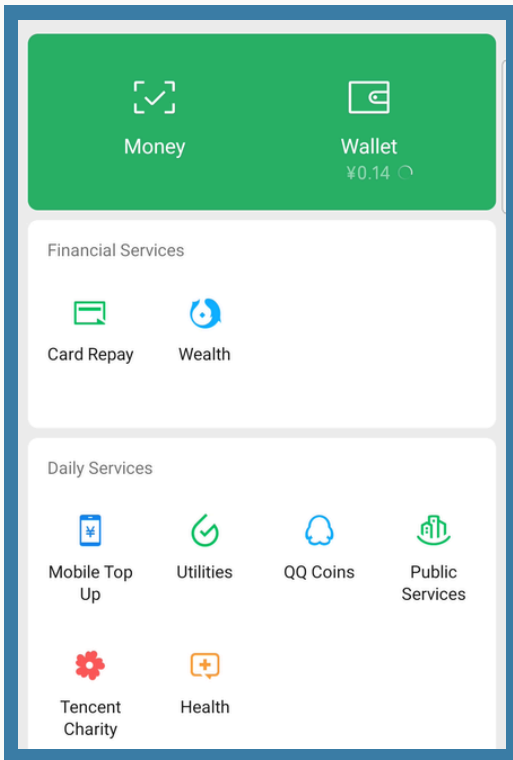
**Option B: Payment Card Verification** (EASIEST for new arrivals) Here's the game-changer: You can verify by adding an international payment card. WeChat will walk you through adding a Visa, Mastercard, Amex, JCB, or Discover card. Once you add it, you're verified AND you've got WeChat Pay activated. Two birds, one stone.

Let's do Option B since it's the most practical for incoming teachers.

## Step 4: Activate WeChat Pay via Payment Card

Once you're past the initial signup screens, go to:

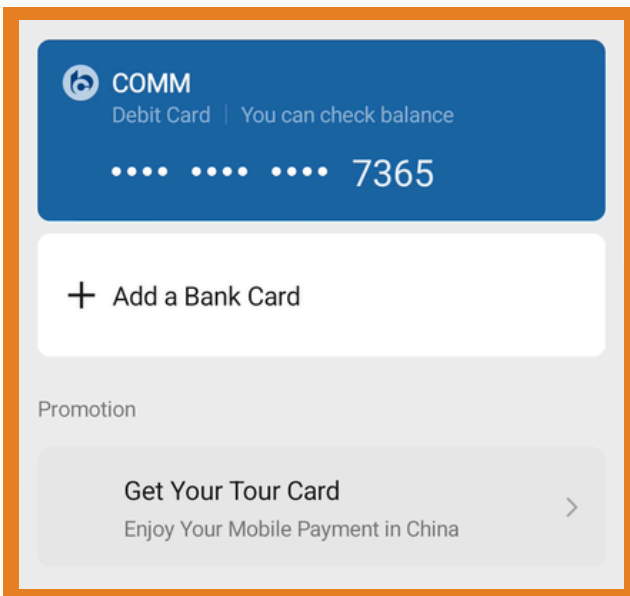
**Me → Pay and Services → Wallet**



If you don't see "Wallet," go to: Me → Settings → General → Features → WeChat Pay → Enable

Now you'll see the option to add a bank card:

**Wallet → Bank Cards → Add a Bank Card**



Enter your 16-digit card number, expiration date, and CVV code. You'll need to:

1. Enter your billing address
2. Add your phone number for SMS verification
3. Complete SMS verification (you'll get a code via text)
4. **Set a 6-digit payment password** (remember this—you'll need it for EVERY payment)

**Note:** WeChat will charge a tiny verification fee (like \$0.05 USD) to confirm your card works.

Congratulations! You now have:  A verified WeChat account  WeChat Pay activated  An international card linked for payments

## Quick Reality Check: Foreign Card Limitations

Your international card works great for most things, but there are some limitations:

- **Can't send Red Envelopes** (红包 - hóngbāo) to friends
- **Can't do peer-to-peer transfers** unless you later link a Chinese bank account
- **Transaction limits:** Single transaction max is ¥6,500 RMB (~\$900 USD), monthly max is ¥50,000 RMB (~\$7,000 USD)
- **3% fee on purchases over ¥200 RMB** (purchases under ¥200 RMB are fee-free)

For daily use—paying at restaurants, stores, taxis, food delivery—your international card works perfectly.

## The WeChat Ecosystem: What You Can Actually Do

Now that you're set up, let me show you why WeChat is called a "super app." This thing does EVERYTHING.

### 1. Payments (The Main Event)

This is what you'll use 50 times a day. There are two ways to pay with WeChat:

#### Method A: You Scan Their QR Code

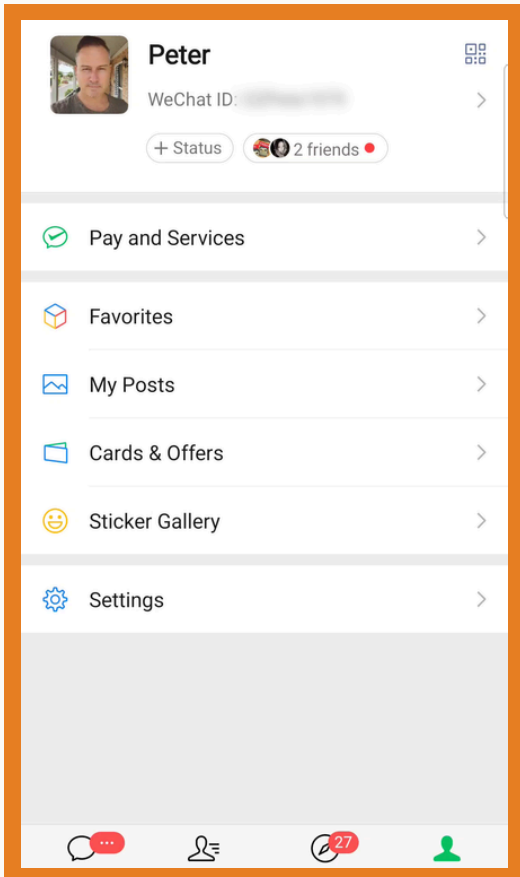
Walk into a store, restaurant, street food stall—anywhere. Look for a green sign that says "微信支付" (Weixin Pay) with a QR code.



Open WeChat, tap the "+" icon at top right, select "Scan," and point your camera at their QR code. Enter the amount, type your 6-digit payment password, and boom—paid. Takes 5 seconds.

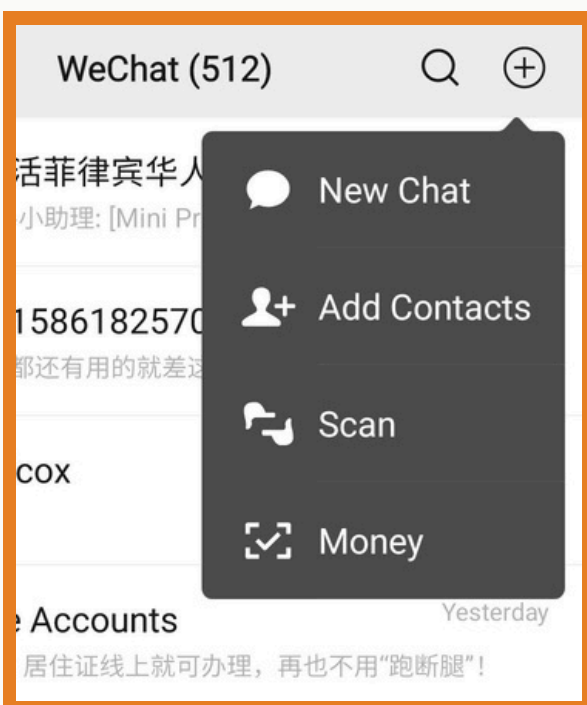
## Method B: They Scan Your QR Code

This is common at restaurants and larger stores. After your meal or shopping, tell them you're paying with WeChat. Open WeChat, go to:



**Me → Pay and Services → Money** (or just tap the big green Money box)

Show them your QR code on the screen.  
They scan it. Done. Walk away.

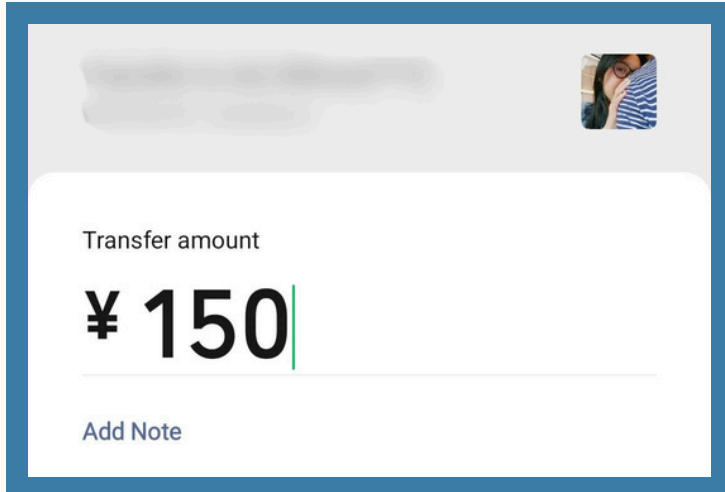


I've paid for everything from ¥2 street food to ¥390 Xinjiang BBQ dinners this way. It's seamless, fast, and you never fumble with cash or credit cards.

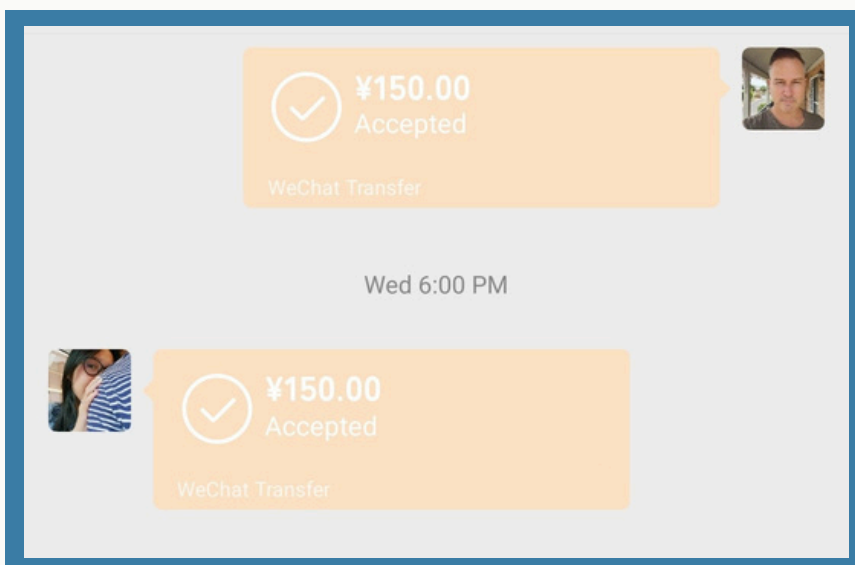
## 2. Transferring Money to Friends

Need to split a dinner bill? Pay back a colleague? WeChat makes it instant.

Open a chat with the person, tap the "+" icon, and select "Transfer."



Enter the amount and hit "Transfer."



They accept it, and the money moves instantly.

**Important:** This ONLY works if you have a Chinese bank account linked. With an international card, you can't do peer-to-peer transfers. But once you get your Chinese bank account set up (which you'll do after arriving), this feature unlocks.

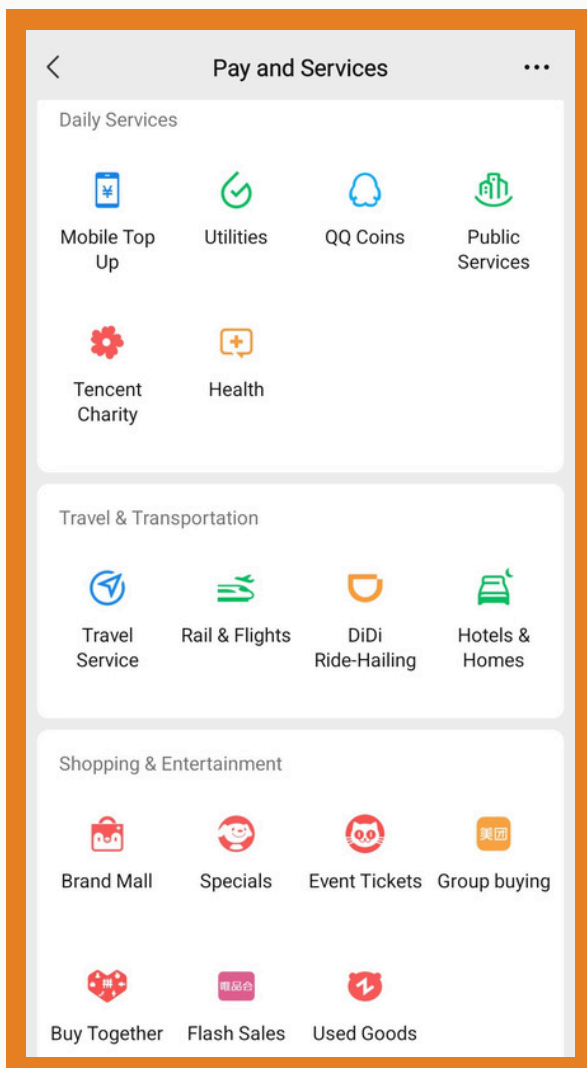
### 3. Mini Programs (小程序 - Xiǎo Chéngxù)

This is where WeChat becomes a full ecosystem. Mini Programs are apps-within-the-app. You don't need to download separate apps for most services—they're all inside WeChat.

Go to: **Discover** → **Mini Programs**

Here's what you'll use constantly:

- **DiDi (滴滴)** - Book taxis and rides (covered in in Chapter 6)
- **Meituan (美团)** - Order food delivery (covered in Chapter 8)
- **Utility bill payments** (covered in Chapter 12)
- **Movie ticket booking** (covered in Chapter 14)
- **Railway 12306** - Book train tickets
- And much more...



You'll see how many of these services we reference throughout this book. That's because WeChat is the gateway to almost everything you do in China.

## 4. Daily Services Hub

Go to: **Me → Pay and Services**

This is mission control for your life in China. You'll find:

- **Mobile Top Up** - Add credit to your phone
- **Utilities** - Pay water, electricity, gas bills
- **Public Services** - Government services and permits
- **Travel & Transportation** - Trains, flights, hotels, DiDi
- **Shopping & Entertainment** - Meituan, event tickets, group buying

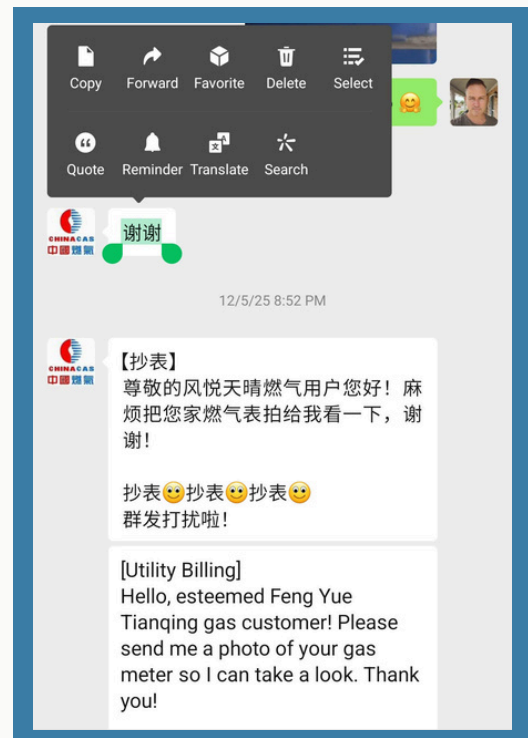
Every time you need to do something in China, your first thought should be: "Can I do this in WeChat?" The answer is usually yes.

## 5. Messaging (Oh Yeah, It Does That Too)

With all this payment and service stuff, it's easy to forget WeChat is also a messaging app. It works exactly like WhatsApp:

- Text messages
- Voice messages (VERY popular in China)
- Video calls
- Group chats
- Voice calls

**Pro tip:** When Chinese people write to you in Chinese, you don't need to screenshot and use a translation tool. Just long press the message and tap 'Translate' and it's translated to your language instantly. You can write to them in your language and they'll do the same for you.



## 6. Moments (朋友圈 - Péngyǒuquān)

This is WeChat's version of Facebook/Instagram feed. Go to Discover → Moments to see what your contacts are posting. You can share photos, updates, and see what everyone else is up to.

### Final Setup Tips

Before you start using WeChat like crazy, do these things:

- 1. Add a Profile Picture** Go to **Me** → **tap your profile picture** → **Set Profile Photo**  
Makes you look less like a bot and more trustworthy when adding contacts.
- 2. Set Your WeChat ID** Go to **Me** → **WeChat ID** Set a clean, professional ID (like your name). You can only change this ONCE, so choose wisely.
- 3. Enable Face ID / Fingerprint for Payments** Go to **Me** → **Pay and Services (three dots)** → **Payment Settings** → **Biometric Payment** This lets you pay with Face ID instead of typing your 6-digit password every time. Huge time saver.
- 4. Turn on Translate Function** WeChat has built-in translation. Long-press any message and select "Translate" to see it in English. This is a lifesaver when chatting with local colleagues or reading Chinese announcements.

### Chapter Summary

WeChat isn't just an app—it's how China works. You've now got:

- A verified WeChat account
- WeChat Pay activated with your international card
- Understanding of how to pay (scan or be scanned)
- Access to the entire mini-program ecosystem
- A digital wallet that works everywhere

Throughout this book, you'll see WeChat referenced constantly—for ordering food, booking rides, paying bills, and more. That's because it's woven into the fabric of daily life here.

Let's keep moving!

# CHAPTER 4

## Getting the Tencent App Store

### Watch the short video for this chapter

See this step done in real life in under 60 seconds.  
Scan the QR code or visit:

[youteacher.org/guide/ch4](https://youteacher.org/guide/ch4)



### Why You Need This App

Here's the reality: Most of the apps you'll need in China aren't available on the Google Play Store. Alipay, Taobao, Didi (China's Uber), food delivery apps—they're all on Chinese app stores. The Tencent App Store (called 应用宝, or "Yingyongbao") is the easiest one to use because it lets you search in English. No Chinese characters required.

This is your gateway to getting set up in China. Once you have this, downloading the apps you need becomes straightforward.

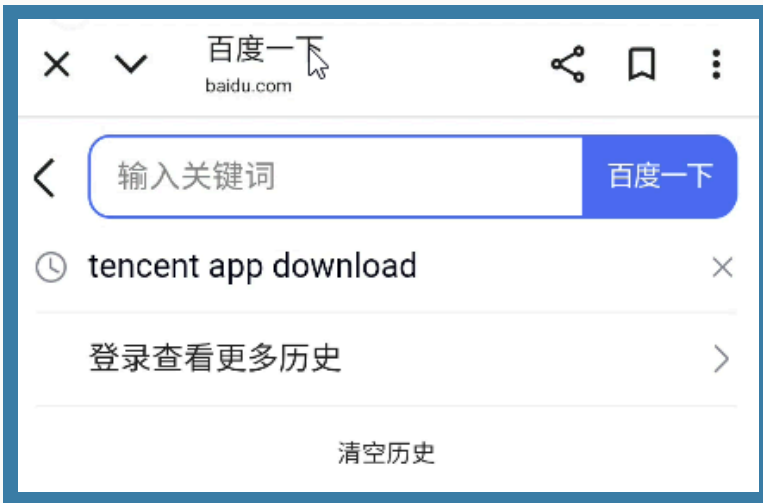
### Step 1: Open Baidu

First, open Baidu.com in your phone's browser. You should see the familiar search page with the Baidu logo.



## Step 2: Search for the Tencent App Store

In the search bar, type: tencent app download  
Yes, in English. Baidu will understand.



## Step 3: Find and Download



The search results will show the Tencent App Store (应用宝) at the top. You'll see its colorful logo—four interlocking shapes in blue, yellow, pink, and green. Look for the download button (usually blue with Chinese characters).

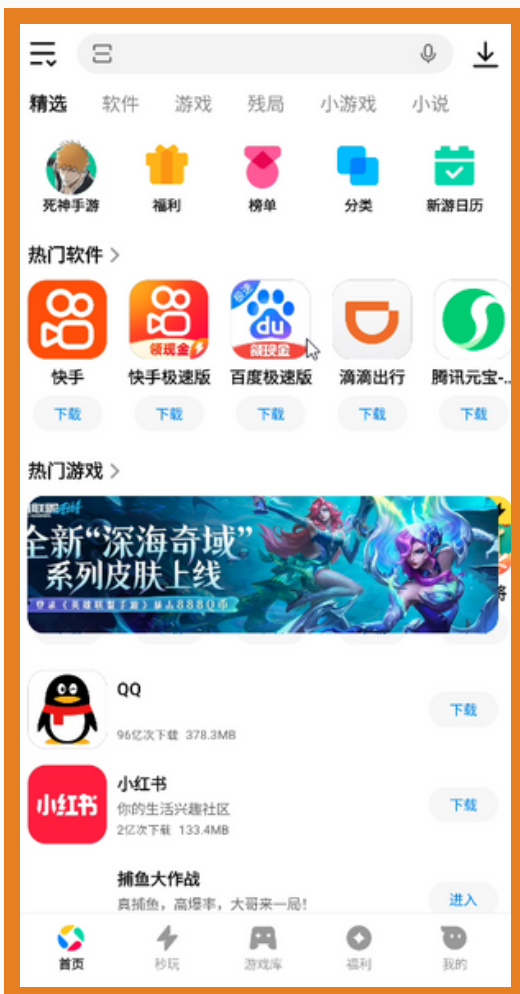
Tap the download button and follow the prompts to install the app. Your phone might ask you to allow installations from unknown sources—that's normal for apps not from the Google Play Store. Just enable it temporarily.

## Step 4: Open the Tencent App Store



Once installed, you'll find the app on your home screen with that distinctive colorful logo.

## Step 5: Explore the Interface

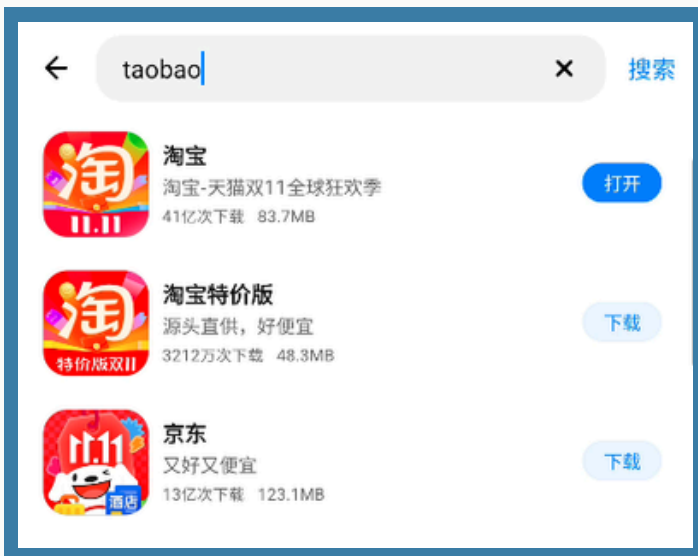


When you open the app, you'll see a home page with featured apps and categories. Don't worry that most of it is in Chinese—you won't need to read it.

## The Key Trick: Searching in English

Here's what makes this app store perfect for foreigners: **you can search using English or pinyin (romanized Chinese).**

For example, if you want to find Taobao (China's Amazon), just type "taobao" in the search bar at the top.



The app will show you results even though you didn't type any Chinese characters. This works for almost every major Chinese app: WeChat (type "weixin"), Alipay (type "zhifubao"), Didi (type "didi"), and so on.

## What's Next

Now that you have the Tencent App Store, you're ready to download all the essential apps you'll need in China. In the coming chapters, we'll walk through getting each of these apps set up: WeChat for communication, Alipay for payments, Taobao for shopping, and more.

Keep this app installed—it's going to be your go-to source for any Chinese app you need.

# CHAPTER 5

## Getting a SIM Card and Phone Setup

### Watch the short video for this chapter

See this step done in real life in under 60 seconds.

Scan the QR code or visit:

[youteacher.org/guide/ch5](https://youteacher.org/guide/ch5)



### The Three Big Carriers

China has three major mobile carriers, and honestly, any of them will work just fine for your needs:

- China Mobile (中国移动) - The biggest, most coverage
- China Unicom (中国联通) - Middle ground, solid network
- China Telecom (中国电信) - Great in cities, excellent English app

Don't overthink this choice. They're all reliable, they all have good data packages, and they all work nationwide. The main difference you'll notice as a foreigner is how English-friendly their apps are (China Telecom wins here), but honestly, with the Chinese language pack you installed in Chapter 3, you can navigate any of them.

### Airport vs. Street Shop: The Trade-Off

You've got two main options for getting your SIM card, each with pros and cons.

#### Airport SIMs: Convenience Over Cost

If you're arriving at a major airport (Beijing Capital, Shanghai Pudong, Guangzhou Baiyun, etc.), you'll find SIM card counters right in the arrivals hall. Look for signs saying "SIM Card" or the carrier logos.

**Pros:**

- Staff usually speak some English
- You can get connected immediately
- Tourist packages are pre-configured
- No wandering around a new city trying to find a shop

**Cons:**

- More expensive (¥100-200 for a month vs ¥50-100 at street shops)
- Less flexibility in package customization
- Tourist packages sometimes have weird limitations

**Pro tip:** Many airports offer specific "tourist SIM" packages. These are designed for short stays and come with hefty data allowances. If you're staying longer than a month, you might want to just grab one to get started, then switch to a better long-term deal once you're settled.

## Street Shops: Better Deals, Less English

Every neighborhood has carrier shops - they're everywhere. You'll recognize them by the massive glowing logos. China Telecom shops are easy to spot - look for the blue and white branding.

**Pros:**

- Significantly cheaper
- More package options
- You can negotiate or ask questions once you have a local helping you
- Real local phone numbers (not tourist temp ones)

**Cons:**

- English proficiency varies wildly
- Can be intimidating if you're fresh off the plane
- Requires some navigation to find one

**The reality:** Most teachers arriving in China go with the airport option first just to have something working, then either keep it or switch later. That's totally fine.

## What You'll Need

Good news - it's surprisingly simple:

### Required:

- Your passport (that's it, really)

### Maybe Required:

- A Chinese address (hotel name works fine if they ask)
- Cash for first payment (though cards usually work at airports)



The signup process: take a queue number, wait for your turn, show your passport.

Most cities don't require proof of address anymore, but occasionally a shop will ask. If they do, literally just give them your hotel name or your school's address if you know it. They're not verifying anything.

## The Signup Process

Walk in, take a queue number (usually from a machine near the entrance), wait for your number to be called, then head to the counter.

The staff will:

1. Ask for your passport
2. Might ask for an address (hotel is fine)
3. Show you package options
4. Ask you to sign some paperwork
5. Pop the SIM in your phone (or give it to you to do)
6. Done

This usually takes 10-20 minutes depending on how busy they are.

**Google Translate reminder:** If you're at a street shop and hitting a language barrier, bust out Google Translate from Chapter 3. The camera function works wonders on their plan comparison posters.

## Choosing a Plan

Plans are dirt cheap compared to Western countries. You're looking at:

- **¥50-100/month** for most people (that's \$7-14 USD)
- Usually includes: unlimited calls/texts + 20-40GB data
- Some plans have tiers: more data = slightly more money

If you're a heavy data user, go for 40GB+. If you're mostly on WiFi at home/school, 20GB is plenty.

**Starting light:** If you're unsure, just get a month of something mid-range. You can always top up more data or change plans next month. Unlike some Western contracts, there's no commitment here - it's all pay-as-you-go.

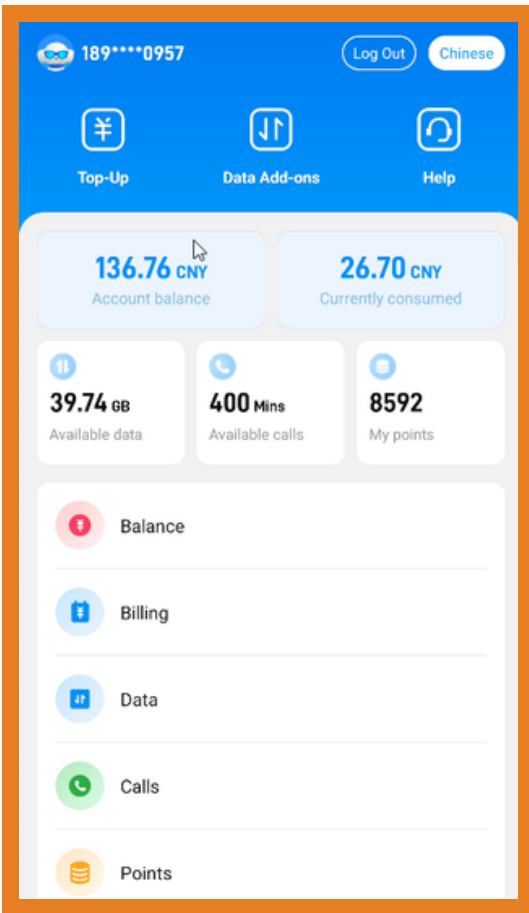
## Payment: Cash First, Digital Later

Here's the chicken-and-egg situation: you need a Chinese phone number to set up Alipay or WeChat Pay, but those are the easiest ways to pay for your phone service.

**Solution:** Pay cash for your first month. Every shop accepts it. Then, once you've set up Alipay or WeChat Pay (covered in upcoming chapters), you can switch to digital payments for your monthly top-ups.

## Using the China Telecom App (Example)

Once you're set up, managing your account is dead simple. I use China Telecom, and their app has excellent English support, so I'll walk you through that as an example. The other carriers' apps work similarly.



The main screen shows everything at a glance: your balance, remaining data, and call minutes.

The home screen gives you:

- Your phone number (top left)
- Account balance (big number, 136.76 CNY in this example)
- How much you've used this month (26.70 CNY)
- Available data (39.74 GB)
- Available call minutes (400)
- Your points (basically useless, ignore them)

## Topping Up Your Account

When you need to add credit, tap "Top-Up" (the ¥ icon at the top). Choose your amount - smaller amounts let you add credit in small increments.



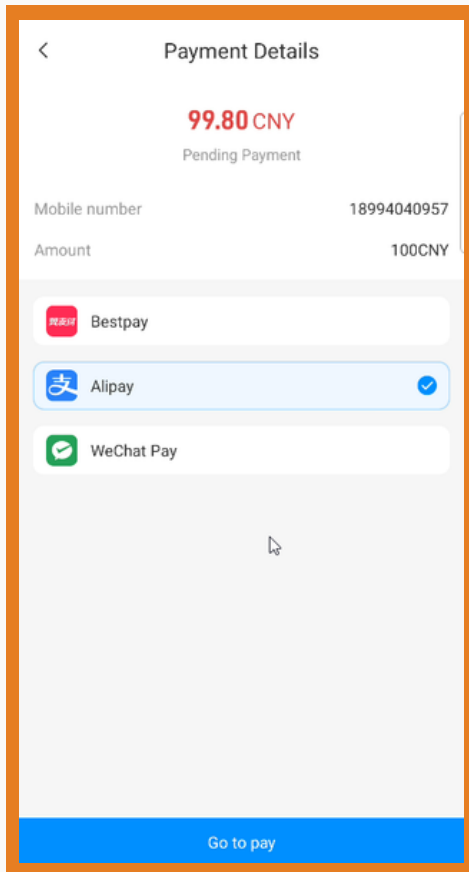
You'll see preset amounts. The pricing is a bit weird because of processing fees, so:

- ¥9.98 gets you ¥10 credit
- ¥49.90 gets you ¥50 credit
- ¥99.80 gets you ¥100 credit

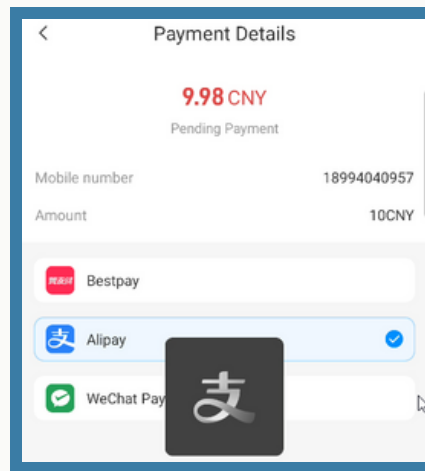
Just pick whatever amount you need. For most people, ¥50-100 every month or two is plenty.

## Paying with Alipay (or WeChat Pay)

Once you've set up your digital payment apps (Alipay coming in a later chapter), topping up is instant.



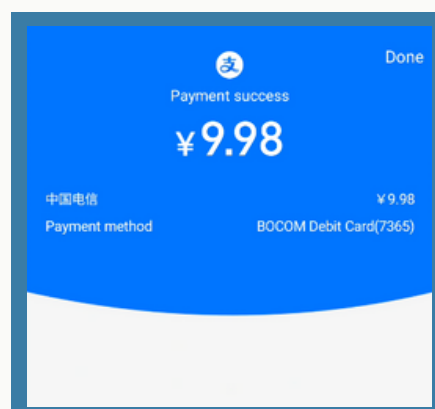
Choose your payment method - Alipay and WeChat Pay are the most common. Select your payment method (Alipay in this example), and you'll be redirected to complete the payment.

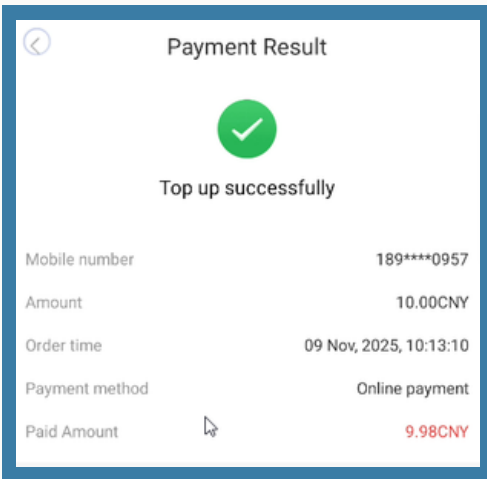


Alipay takes over to handle the secure payment.

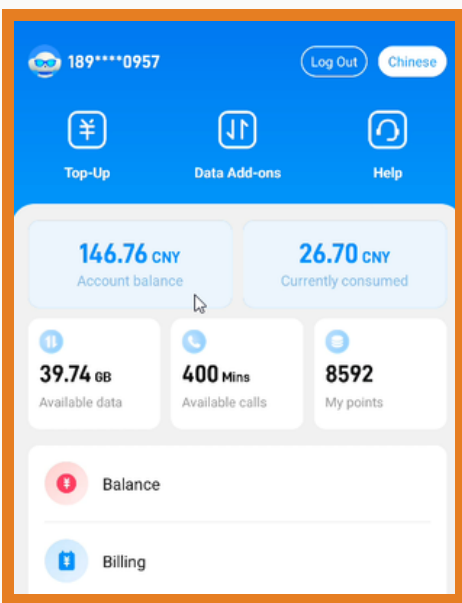


Enter your payment PIN to confirm the transaction. The payment goes through in seconds. Payment confirmed - Alipay immediately shows success.





The telecom app confirms receipt of your payment.



And your new balance shows up instantly in your account.

Your account balance updates immediately - went from 136.76 to 146.76 CNY.

The whole process takes maybe 30 seconds once you're set up. No websites to log into, no waiting for processing - just tap, pay, done.

## Important: Think Before You Switch Carriers

Here's something that catches people out: if you switch carriers, you get a **new phone number**.

China does technically have number portability (携号转网), but it's bureaucratic and requires:

- You've had the number for several months
- No outstanding contract obligations
- A bunch of paperwork at a physical store
- Potentially waiting periods

Not realistic for new arrivals.

**What this means:** If you think you'll want to keep your number long-term (for work contacts, setting up accounts, etc.), choose your carrier somewhat carefully at the start. That said, if you're just testing the waters with an airport tourist SIM, switching later is totally fine - you just need to update your contacts.

## Troubleshooting & Tips

### "The shop is packed and I'm exhausted from my flight"

Airport WiFi acting up? Here's a trick: find the information desk or any airport staff member and politely ask if they can hotspot you their connection for a minute. Chinese service staff are incredibly helpful to confused foreigners, and I've seen this work countless times (all over Asia). You just need enough internet to pull up translation or maps potentially.

### "How do I know if I'm running out of data?"

The app shows you in real-time. You'll also get SMS warnings in Chinese when you're at 80% and 90% usage. If you see a text message with percentages and data amounts, that's your warning. Just open the app and top up.

### "Can I use my SIM in a different city?"

Yes! All three carriers work nationwide. You might see the network name change (China Mobile becomes "CHN-Mobile" or something in different regions), but it all just works. No roaming charges between provinces.

### "What about Hong Kong or Macau?"

Different systems entirely. Your mainland SIM will roam there (and it's expensive). Either:

- Get a separate HK/Macau SIM if you're going frequently
- Use WiFi and just accept being disconnected for a day
- Pay the roaming fees (not worth it for most people)

### "International calls?"

Expensive. Use WeChat voice/video calls over WiFi instead - that's what everyone does anyway.

## The Bottom Line

Getting a SIM card is one of the easier admin tasks you'll handle in China. Whether you go to the airport or street shop, you'll be up and running within an hour of deciding to do it.

My recommendation: If you're arriving at a major airport and just want to get it done, grab a tourist SIM in arrivals. If you're already settled somewhere or want to save money, find a China Telecom shop (they've got the best English app) and sign up for a proper plan.

Either way, you'll be scrolling TikTok on Chinese 5G soon enough.

# CHAPTER 6

## Getting Around with DiDi – China's Rideshare That'll Ruin You for Uber Prices

### Watch the short video for this chapter

See this step done in real life in under 60 seconds.

Scan the QR code or visit:

[youteacher.org/guide/ch6](http://youteacher.org/guide/ch6)



### Why DiDi Changes Everything

Let's talk about DiDi for a second. If you've used Uber or Lyft back home, you know what to expect: Pull out your phone, book a ride, pay too much, repeat. DiDi works basically the same way, except for one massive difference – **the price**. We're talking 8-9 CNY (about \$1.20-1.30 USD) for rides that would cost you \$15-20 back in Australia or the US. Yeah, you read that right. Once you get used to DiDi pricing, going back home is going to hurt your wallet.

The other great news? You don't even need to download a separate app. DiDi lives right inside WeChat as a mini-app, so if you've already got WeChat set up (which you do, because you read Chapter 3, right?), you're basically ready to roll.

This chapter walks you through the entire process from opening DiDi to paying for your ride, with some pro tips to make it even smoother.

### Step 1: Opening DiDi Through WeChat

DiDi is a WeChat mini-app, which means you don't need to download the Didi app to use it. You can access it directly through WeChat.

### Here's how to find it:

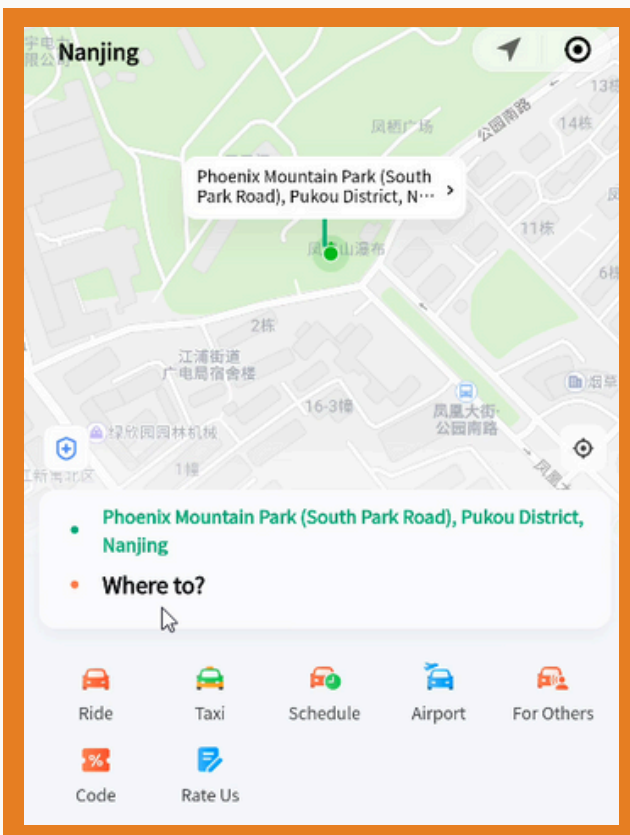
1. Open WeChat
2. Go to **Me** (bottom right menu)
3. Tap **Pay and Services**
4. Scroll down until you see **'Didi Ride-Hailing'** in the 'Travel & Transportation' section.
5. Tap to open

**Pro tip:** The first time you open DiDi, it'll ask for permission to access your location. Say yes – it needs this to figure out where you are and where you're going.

**Another pro tip:** DiDi works better with your VPN turned off. The location services can get confused when your phone thinks it's in another country, so flip that VPN switch off before booking your ride. You can turn it back on once you're in the car.

## Step 2: Setting Your Pickup and Destination

When you open DiDi, you'll see a map with your current location already locked in.



The app automatically detects where you are (that's the green pin on the map). You'll see:

- Your current location at the top (in this example: "Phoenix Mountain Park")
- A field that says **"Where to?"** – this is where you enter your destination
- Different ride options at the bottom (Ride, Taxi, Schedule, Airport, For Others, Code, Rate Us)

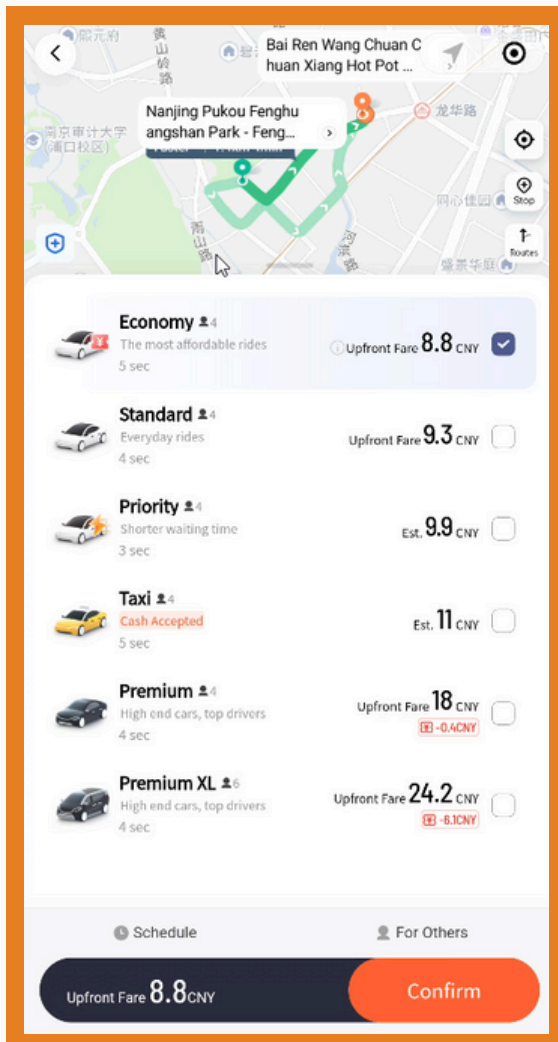
### What to do:

- Tap the **"Where to?"** field
- Type your destination in English or Chinese (the app handles both pretty well)
- Select the correct destination from the dropdown suggestion

The app will then show you the route and calculate the estimated fare.

### Step 3: Choosing Your Ride Type

After you set your destination, DiDi shows you different car options. This is where you'll see just how cheap rides are in China.



You'll see several ride types with different prices:

- **Economy** – The cheapest option (usually 8-9 CNY for short trips)
- **Standard** – Slightly more comfortable, still incredibly cheap
- **Priority** – Shorter wait time
- **Taxi** – Regular metered taxi (cash accepted)
- **Premium** – Nicer cars, top-rated drivers
- **Premium XL** – Bigger, fancier cars for when you want to feel like royalty

**The prices are shown upfront**, which is amazing. No surge pricing surprises, no guessing – you know exactly what you'll pay before you book. In the example screenshot, an Economy ride is 8.8 CNY upfront fare. That's about \$1.20 USD. For a ride across town. Let that sink in.

### What to do:

1. Pick the ride type that fits your budget and timeline (Economy is almost always fine)
2. Check the estimated wait time (usually just a few seconds)
3. Tap Confirm at the bottom

## Step 4: Tracking Your Driver

Once you confirm your ride, DiDi assigns a driver and you can track them in real-time as they head to your pickup location.



You'll see:

- The driver's name, rating, and number of trips
- The car model and color (in this example: white GAC Trumpchi)
- **The license plate number** (苏ADJ6231 in this example) – **this is important**
- A live map showing the car icon moving toward you
- Estimated arrival time
- Distance and time remaining

At the bottom you'll see options to:

- **Call** the driver if needed
- **Message** them through the app
- **Cancel** if plans change (but there's usually a cancellation fee if you wait too long)
- **Share** your ride details with someone for safety

## Step 5: Confirming It's Your Ride

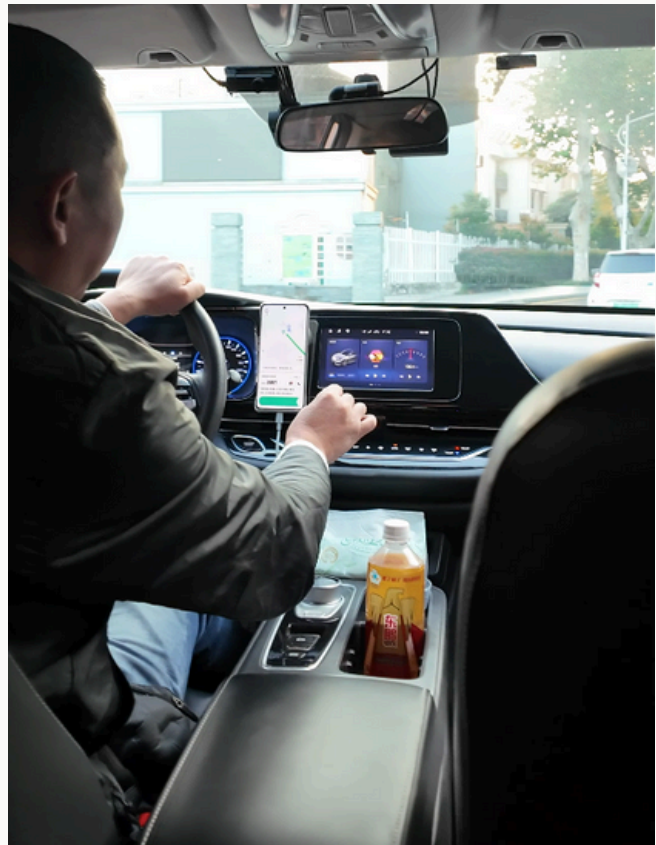
When your ride pulls up, you want to make sure the license plate number matches before you hop in. It sounds obvious but really, I jumped in the wrong car once. The difference being just one character on the license plate and my actual car was waiting behind the one I jumped in. What were the odds of that happening I wonder.



### What to do:

1. Check the license plate number against what's shown in the app
2. Give a friendly wave to the driver (they're looking for you too)
3. Walk up to the car

As you're getting in, the driver might say something to you in Chinese. Don't panic – **they're just confirming the last 4 digits of your phone number** to make sure they've got the right passenger. This is standard practice.

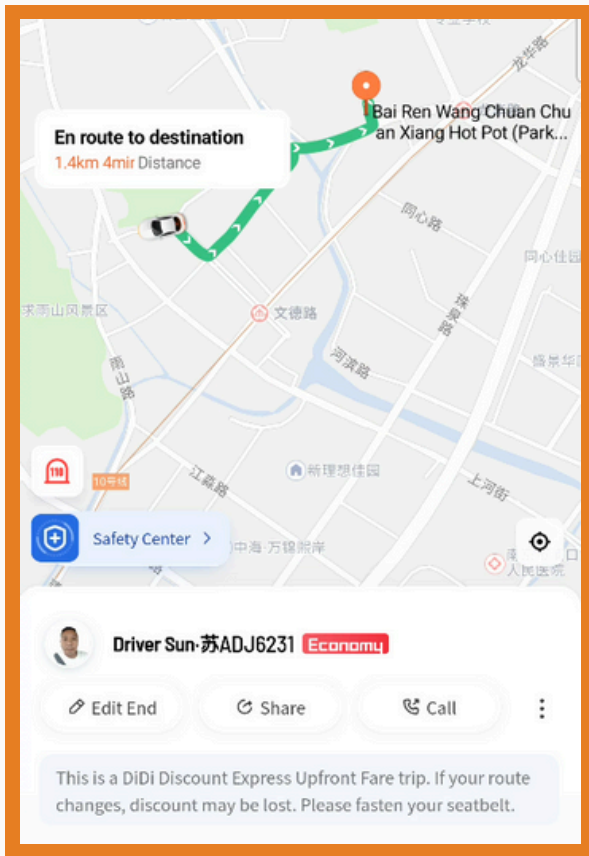


### Here's what to do:

While you're on the plane if you haven't beforehand, learn how to count to from 0-9 in Chinese. That way when you get your phone number, learning how to say the last 4 digits of your phone number in Mandarin is easy. Just those 4 numbers. That's it. The driver will say them, and if you can say 'Dui' (sounds a bit like doo-way) which just means **'Correct'**, and you're good. If you can say the numbers back, even better. It takes 5 minutes to learn and makes this interaction smooth as butter.

## Step 6: During the Ride

Once you're in the car and buckled up, the ride starts automatically. The driver follows the route on their app, and you can follow along on yours.

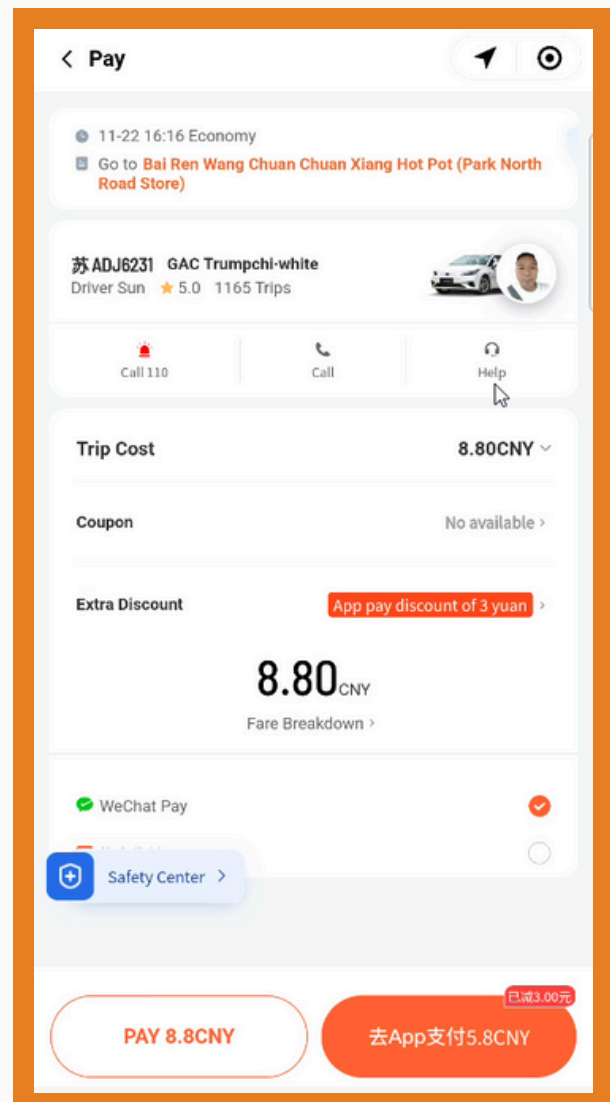


Most DiDi drivers in China don't speak much English, and that's totally fine. The app does all the heavy lifting. Some drivers might try to make small talk, and if you know a bit of Chinese, great! If not, a smile and a nod work just fine. They're not offended – they're just focused on getting you where you need to go safely.

You'll see:

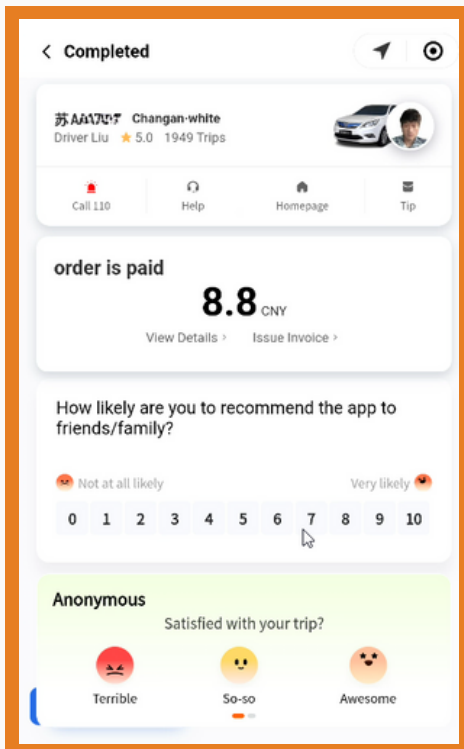
- The route on the map
- Current distance and estimated time to destination
- The fare tracker
- Options to edit your destination, share your trip, or call the driver

Then just sit back, relax, look out the window, and enjoy the ride.



## Step 7: Paying for Your Ride

When you arrive at your destination, payment happens automatically if you've linked WeChat Pay or Alipay to your DiDi account.



After the ride ends, you'll see:

- **"order is paid"** confirmation
- The final fare (8.8 CNY in this example)
- Driver details and rating
- Option to view details or request an invoice
- A prompt asking "How likely are you to recommend the app to friends/family?" (you can skip this)
- Emoji options to rate your trip (Terrible / So-so / Awesome)

**If payment doesn't go through automatically**, you'll see a bill waiting for you. You won't be able to book another ride until you settle it, so just open DiDi again and pay it through the app using WeChat Pay or Alipay.

### What to do:

- Check the fare matches what you expected (it almost always does)
- Rate your driver if you want (optional but appreciated)
- Get out and go about your day

That's it. Done. You just got across town for the price of a coffee back home.

## Common Questions and Troubleshooting

### "The app can't find my location"

Turn off your VPN and make sure location services are enabled for WeChat. DiDi needs to know where you actually are in China, not where your VPN makes it look like you are.

### "I don't have WeChat Pay or Alipay set up yet"

You'll need one of these to use DiDi. If you haven't set them up yet, go back to the chapter on setting up WeChat Pay and get that sorted first. You can't pay cash for DiDi rides.

### "The driver called me and I have no idea what they're saying"

They're probably asking for clarification on your pickup location or destination. If you can't understand them, you can:

- Use the message feature in the app and send your location pin
- Try Google Translate's voice feature (though it's hit or miss)
- Use Google Translate to write a text message and tell them you're a foreigner and can't understand Chinese and you'd prefer to chat by text so you can use a translator
- Just hang up politely and walk to a clear, visible spot – they'll find you

### "Can I book a ride for later?"

Yes! Use the Schedule option at the bottom of the main DiDi screen. You can book rides up to 2 days in advance.

### "Can I book a ride for someone else (like a friend or colleague)?"

Yes! Use the For Others option and enter their phone number and destination. The ride will be charged to your account.

### "Do I need to tip?"

Nope. Tipping isn't expected or required in China for DiDi rides. The fare is the fare.

**"What if I leave something in the car?"**

Check your ride history in DiDi, find the specific trip, and there should be an option to contact the driver about lost items. If it's something valuable, act fast.

**"Are DiDi rides safe?"**

Generally, yes. DiDi has safety features built in (you can share your trip details with friends, call for help through the app, etc.). The drivers are tracked and rated. As with any rideshare anywhere in the world, use common sense: check the license plate, share your trip with someone, sit in the back seat.

**Final Thoughts**

DiDi is one of those things that'll spoil you for life. Getting around Chinese cities becomes absurdly easy and cheap once you've got this down. Within a week, you'll be booking rides without thinking about it.

And honestly? When you get back to your home country and see Uber wants \$25 for a ride that would've cost you \$1.50 in China, you're going to feel personally attacked. Welcome to the club.

Next up, we'll cover ordering food at a restaurant, because there's still more ground to cover before you're fully set up for life in China.

# CHAPTER 7

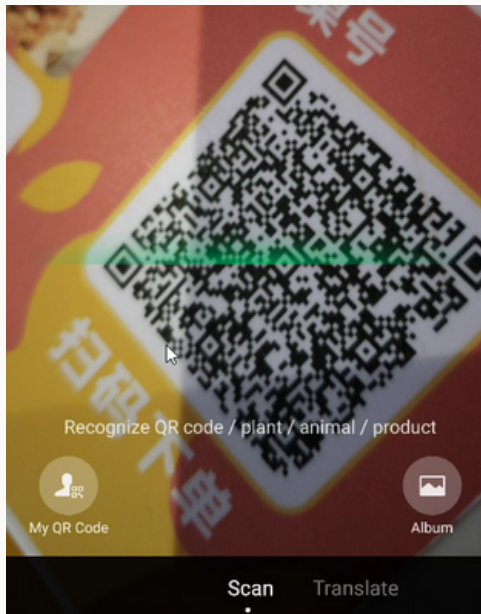
## Ordering Food at Restaurants with QR Codes (AKA How to Eat Like a King for Pocket Change)

**Watch the short video for this chapter**

See this step done in real life in under 60 seconds.

Scan the QR code or visit:

[youteacher.org/guide/ch7](https://youteacher.org/guide/ch7)



Alright, let's talk about one of the most brilliant things about eating out in China: QR code ordering. No waiting for a server to notice you. No awkward hand-waving. No language barrier anxiety. Just scan, tap, eat.

The first time I walked into a restaurant in China since I left in 2015, I'll admit I was a bit apprehensive.

I couldn't read Chinese, couldn't speak it very well, and I was staring at a table with nothing but a QR code sticker. But here's the thing – once you do it once, you'll never want to go back to the old way of ordering.

For this chapter, we're using one of our favorite hotpot chains as an example: **The King** (you'll see that red cat mascot everywhere – that's your guy). This is a "串串" (chuàn chuàn) style hotpot, which means you're ordering food on individual wooden skewers (even the Chinese characters look like food on a skewer). It's pay-per-stick, and trust me, the math is about to blow your mind.

## Step 1: Scan the QR Code



See that QR code on your table? Pull out WeChat and hit the scan function. The restaurant's ordering app will pop right up in WeChat. No download needed. No account creation. Just straight to ordering.

**Pro tip:** If you're still getting comfortable with the Chinese interface, keep Google Translate open on another device or in split-screen. Most restaurant apps have pretty simple layouts once you know what to look for, but Translate can be your safety net if staff don't speak English (which is common outside major expat areas).

## Step 2: Select Number of People



The first screen usually asks how many people are dining. In this case, we're a party of two, so we select "2" (the big red button in the middle makes it obvious).



### Step 3: Choose Your Soup Base



Now here's where hotpot gets fun. You need to pick your soup base – this is what everything cooks in. For The King, we're looking at the "中型锅底 (1-3人)" section, which means "medium pot base for 1-3 people."

You'll see options like:

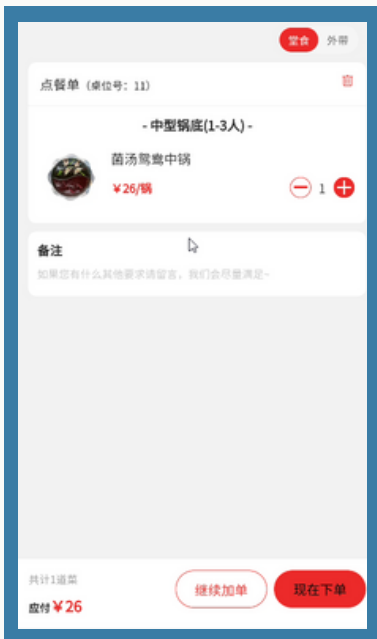
- 菌汤鸳鸯中锅 (Mushroom and spicy split pot)
- 三鲜鸳鸯中锅 (Three-fresh and spicy split pot)
- 番茄鸳鸯中锅 (Tomato and spicy split pot)
- 酸汤鸳鸯中锅 (Sour broth and spicy split pot)

Most bases are around ¥26-28 (that's about **\$3.60-3.90 USD**). Yeah, you read that right. The entire base that you'll be cooking food in for the next hour costs less than a Starbucks coffee back home.

**Important note:** When we first started going to The King, we ordered the large pot thinking two people needed it. Wrong. The ¥26 medium pot is perfect for two people. Save your money – stick with the medium size unless you're in a group of 4+.

**Navigation tip:** See those two red buttons at the bottom of the screen?

- **Left button (继续加单):** "Continue adding items" – this keeps you in the menu to add more stuff
- **Right button (现在下单):** "Place order now" – this sends your order to the kitchen



Make sure you know which is which! You don't want to accidentally leave the app in limbo while it thinks you want to add some sides or drinks. When you just want to submit your order and get your dips and your skewers while you wait for your broth to come out.

## Step 4: Browse and Select Your Skewers



Here's where The King's system is genius. You don't actually order individual food items through the app beyond the soup base. Once your order goes through (usually takes 3-5 minutes), your soup pot arrives at your table. The electric hotplate underneath will be turned on and soon your broth is bubbling away. If you haven't already, you get up and head to the skewer refrigerator.

Grab a tray and start loading up. Almost every item – meat, vegetables, seafood, tofu, noodles – is on a bamboo skewer. Each skewer costs **¥0.80** (that's 0.8 yuan, or about **\$0.11 USD**).

Let me repeat that: **eleven cents per skewer.**

A skewer of beef? \$0.11. A skewer of mushrooms? \$0.11. A skewer of prawns? \$0.11. Everything is the same price. Load up your tray with 20-30 skewers and you're still looking at \$2-3 worth of food.

## Step 5: Get Your Dips and Seasonings



Before you sit down, swing by the sauce station. This is where you build your dipping sauce – and it's unlimited, so go wild. Traditional Chongqing style is sesame oil with minced garlic, but you can mix and match however you like.

Options usually include at least:

- Sesame oil (麻油)
- Minced garlic (蒜蓉)
- Chopped spring onion (葱花)
- Fresh coriander (香菜)
- Tahini-style paste
- Fermented bean paste
- Various oils
- Vinegar (醋)
- Soy sauce (酱油)
- Chili oil (辣椒油)
- Powdered spices
- Sesame seeds

**Pro tip:** Don't overthink it. Grab a bowl and experiment. Your first combination might be weird, but that's half the fun. And since it's unlimited, you can always make another bowl.

## Step 6: Cook and Enjoy

By the time you're back at your table with your tray and sauces, your soup base should be bubbling. Drop your skewers into the pot, wait a few minutes depending on what you're cooking (meat takes 3-5 minutes, vegetables 1-2 minutes), and pull them out.

Dip. Eat. Repeat.



The bamboo sticks that are used, you just pop it in a little cylindrical hole embedded at the side of the table as you go. Don't throw them away – the staff needs them for counting.

## Step 7: Payment



When you're done eating, signal the staff. They'll come over and count your sticks. However many sticks you have  $\times$  ¥0.80 + your soup base = your total bill.

For us? We usually demolish about 60-80 skewers between the two of us. Let's do the math:

- 85 skewers  $\times$  ¥0.80 = ¥64
- Soup base = ¥26
- Total = ¥90 (about \$13 USD)

Thirteen dollars. For two people. To stuff ourselves silly with unlimited dipping sauces and a full hotpot experience and takes about an hour to get through. Oh right and free water and tea.

Back in Australia or the US? You'd easily drop \$50-80 for a comparable hotpot meal. Here? It's less than the cost of a movie ticket.

**Payment Methods:** WeChat Pay or Alipay is standard. We've never tried using a foreign card at places like this, so make sure you have one of those payment apps set up. Cash usually works too, but digital is king in China.

## Common Questions:

**Q: What if I can't read the menu at all?** A: Keep Google Translate handy for the first few times. Point your phone camera at the menu through Translate's camera function and it'll show you what things are. After a couple visits, you'll start recognizing the common items.

**Q: How do I know when the food is cooked?** A: Meat should be fully cooked through (3-5 minutes in boiling broth). Vegetables are fast (1-2 minutes). Seafood is usually 2-3 minutes. When in doubt, give it an extra minute – you can't really overcook most items in hotpot.

**Q: What if I order too much?** A: It happens! Most places will let you take leftovers, though with skewer places like The King, the sticks make it a bit awkward. Start with 10-15 skewers per person and see how you feel. You can always grab more.

**Q: Do I tip?** **A: No.** Tipping is not a thing in China. The price you see is the price you pay. It's awesome.



**Q: What if I want something else to drink?**

A: No problem. Just scan the app again and find a coke or whatever you like and submit the order as you did last time. A can of coke runs at about ¥6 (**about \$0.85 USD**) and a robot, yep a robot will roll out to give it to you. Take it off the tray, tap the button on its face and it will say 'Thanks mate' in Chinese and go back to its dock.

## The Bottom Line:

QR code ordering at restaurants is one of those things that seems intimidating until you do it once. Then you'll wonder why the rest of the world hasn't caught up yet. No waiting for servers. No miscommunication. No surprise charges. Just scan, order, eat, and pay exactly what the bill says.

And at places like The King where you're paying eleven cents per skewer? You'll eat like royalty for the price of a sandwich back home. This is the kind of thing that spoils you for life.

Trust me, after a few months of \$13 hotpot dinners, the idea of paying \$60-80 for the same experience back home will feel absolutely criminal.

Welcome to eating out in China. Your wallet is about to get very, very happy. Then again as I write this, I don't actually remember where I put mine. I haven't seen it since 2024!

# CHAPTER 8

## Meituan - Food Delivery That'll Spoil You Forever

### Watch the short video for this chapter

See this step done in real life in under 60 seconds.  
Scan the QR code or visit:

[youteacher.org/guide/ch8](http://youteacher.org/guide/ch8)



Alright, let's talk about one of my favorite things about living in China: Meituan food delivery. This app is going to absolutely ruin you for food delivery in the West. I'm talking restaurant-quality meals delivered to your door in 15-30 minutes for \$3-5 USD. Yeah, you read that right.

Once you experience ordering a healthy chicken salad for \$3.80, waiting 18 minutes, and having it arrive fresh and delicious, you're going to have a really hard time paying \$25 for a cold burger back home. Actually, I ordered a Whopper from Burger King for lunch yesterday for ¥29 (\$4.13 USD) in total. Burger King is only around 300 meters from where I live so it was at my door in about 12 minutes. So, consider this your warning.

### What You'll Need Before You Start

Before you dive into Meituan, make sure you've got:

- Your Chinese address saved in both Chinese characters and pinyin on your phone (if you're at a hotel temporarily, the front desk can help you with this)
- Your Chinese phone number
- WeChat Pay or Alipay (we covered Weixin/Wechat Pay in an earlier chapter, Alipay is next)

The app itself has a lot of Chinese text, but don't let that intimidate you. Between your favorite AI assistant (ChatGPT, Claude, whatever you prefer) and Google Translate, you'll figure out the initial setup no problem. The beauty is that once it's configured, ordering becomes stupidly easy.

## Step 1: Finding Food Delivery in Meituan

Open up the Meituan app and look for the little kangaroo icon. No joke - that's their food delivery mascot.



Tap that little kangaroo to access food delivery.

Tap on "外卖" (wàimài - which means "takeout/delivery") or just look for the kangaroo. You'll know you're in the right place when you see a bunch of restaurant options pop up.

## Step 2: Browse Restaurants and Use Google Translate

This is where it gets fun. You'll see tons of restaurants with photos of their dishes. The app will show you:

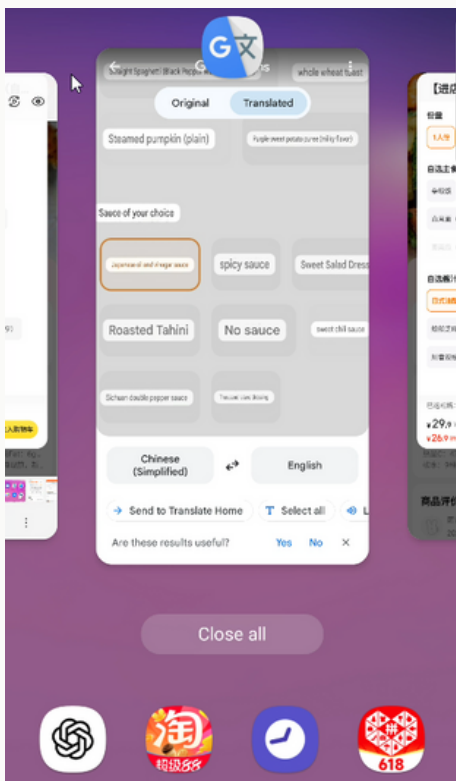
- Delivery time estimates
- Ratings and reviews
- Distance from your location
- Special deals (and trust me, there are always deals)



Don't stress about the Chinese text. Because...

### Step 3: Google Translate Is Your Best Friend

Here's where Google Translate becomes absolutely essential. When you find something that looks good, screenshot it.



Google Translate showing me the salad ingredients - purple sweet potato, roasted tahini, steamed pumpkin, sauce options, etc.

In my case, I wanted a healthy chicken salad for lunch. Google Translate showed me all the ingredients and customization options. I could see:

- "Steamed pumpkin"
- "Sauce of your choice" with options like "cucumber gourd" or "spicy sauce"
- "Roasted Tahini"
- "No sauce"
- Other ingredient options

This let me make an informed decision about exactly what I wanted. No guessing games.

## Step 4: Customize Your Order

Once you know what you're ordering, tap on the dish and you'll usually get customization options.



Most restaurants let you choose:

- Portion size
- Main protein or base
- Sauce preferences
- Add-ons or substitutions

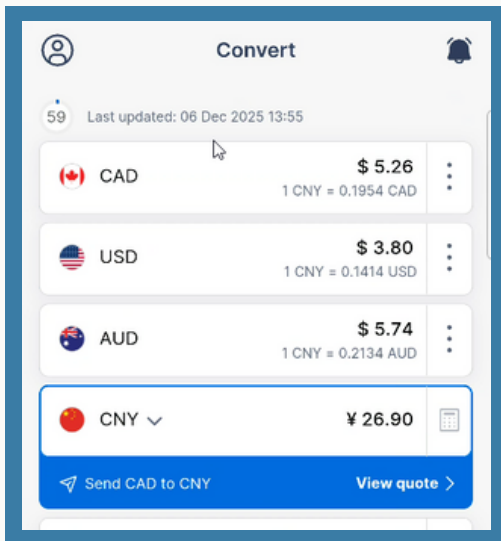
Thanks to Google Translate, I knew exactly what I was selecting. I went with the signature pan-fried chicken breast salad with purple sweet potato (炫彩饱), roasted sesame sauce, and all the good stuff.



The chicken salad I ordered - 29.9 yuan with a discount.

## Step 5: Check Out the Price (Prepare to Be Amazed)

Here's where your mind is going to be blown. Let's look at what I paid for this meal:



26.90 CNY = \$5.26 CAD, \$3.80 USD, \$5.74 AUD.

That's right. **\$3.80 USD** for a fresh, restaurant-quality chicken salad with vegetables, purple sweet potato, and quality ingredients.

In Australia or the US, you'd be paying \$15-20 minimum for the same thing. And that's before delivery fees and tip.

## Step 6: Look for Discounts (They're Everywhere)

One of the best parts about Meituan? The discounts are constant and legit.



Got a 5 yuan discount plus free delivery - this happens all the time.

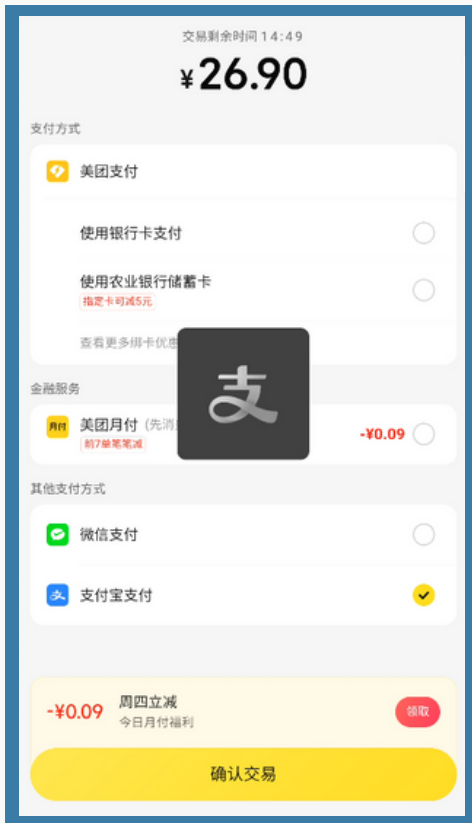
On this order, I got:

- 5 yuan off the food
- Free delivery (saved another 2.85 yuan)
- Total savings: about \$1 USD

These aren't rare promotions. They happen constantly. The app is always throwing deals at you - first-time user discounts, restaurant promotions, free delivery, group buy discounts, you name it. It's like the app wants you to save money.

My final total went from 29.9 yuan down to 26.9 yuan. That's already cheap, and then they made it even cheaper.

## Step 7: Choose Your Payment Method



When you're ready to check out, you'll select your payment method. The main options are:

- Alipay (支付宝支付) - marked with a blue icon
- WeChat Pay (微信支付) - marked with a green icon
- Bank card options

I usually use Alipay for Meituan and Wechat pay for everything else. But for no particular reason. They're basically the same thing. Just tap your preferred payment method - it'll be highlighted with a checkmark.

## Step 8: Confirm Payment



After you tap to complete the order, the app will redirect you to your payment platform for confirmation.

Alipay opens for secure payment confirmation.

You'll see the total amount (26.90 yuan in my case), and you just tap "Instant Pay" or confirm with your fingerprint/face ID. Done. The whole checkout process takes about 10 seconds.

## Step 9: Track Your Delivery

Once your order is confirmed, you can watch your food being prepared and delivered in real-time.



The app shows you:

- "商家正在备餐" (The restaurant is preparing your order)
- "骑手正在赶往商家" (The driver is heading to the restaurant)
- A map with the delivery driver's location
- Estimated delivery time

In my case, the entire process took 18 minutes from clicking "order" to having food in my hands. That's faster than most Western food delivery services, and it cost \$3.80.

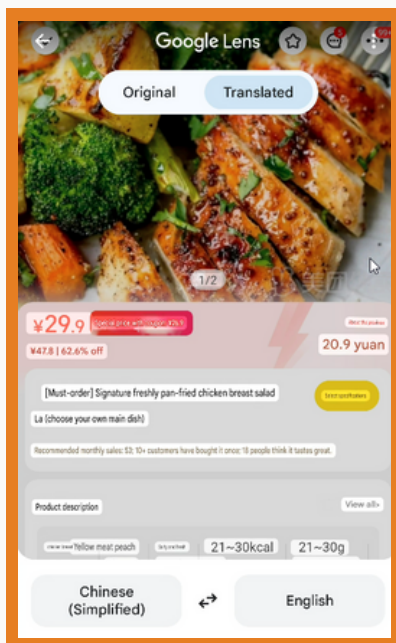
## Step 10: Enjoy Your Ridiculously Cheap Meal

When your food arrives, you're going to be impressed by the quality.



Look at that - fresh grilled chicken, colorful vegetables, purple sweet potato, all properly packaged and still warm. For less than four bucks.

And if you want to double-check what you got, just use Google Lens on the packaging or the food itself.



Using Google Lens to translate the dish description.

Google Lens told me this was a "[Must-order] Signature freshly pan-fried chicken breast salad" with all the nutritional info and ingredient details. Perfect.

## Common Questions and Tips

**"What if I mess up my order?"** Don't worry too much. Use Google Translate liberally, and remember that pictures are your friend. Most dishes have photos, so you can usually tell what you're getting. Check out other customers' reviews, they often leave photos. Worst case? You discover a new food you didn't expect. That's part of the adventure.

**"How do I find restaurants with English menus or foreign food?"** Use Google Translate on the search bar and type in what you want - "pizza," "burger," "salad," etc. The app will show you relevant options. Major chains and expat-friendly restaurants often have some English.

**"What about dietary restrictions?"** Google Translate the customization options. You can usually deselect ingredients or add notes. For serious allergies, it's worth having a Chinese speaker help you create a standard message you can send to restaurants.

**"Should I tip?"** No! Tipping isn't expected in China. The price you see is the price you pay. This is another reason why it's so cheap.

**"Can I save my favorite restaurants?"** Yes! Just tap the star or heart icon on restaurants you like. This makes reordering super easy.

## Why This Will Ruin You

Here's the thing about Meituan: it's not just cheap. It's cheap, fast, with a massive selection, constant discounts, and legitimate quality food.

When you're paying \$3.80 for a healthy lunch that arrives in 18 minutes, and you're doing this every day, it fundamentally changes your expectations. You'll find yourself thinking, "Why would I ever cook?" or "Why would I go out to eat when this is so convenient?"

And then when you go back to the West and see \$15 delivery fees, \$25 minimum orders, \$20 burgers, and 60-minute wait times, you'll understand what I mean when I say Meituan spoils you forever.

But honestly? It's worth being spoiled. Embrace it while you're here.

**Next up:** Chapter 9 will cover Alipay. But seriously, when you get here, go order some food on Meituan. Enjoy the adventure on the cheap.

# CHAPTER 9

## Alipay for Public Transport - Your Ticket to Riding Like a Local

### Watch the short video for this chapter

See this step done in real life in under 60 seconds.

Scan the QR code or visit:

[youteacher.org/guide/ch9](http://youteacher.org/guide/ch9)



Remember when I told you China would spoil you for life with those \$1.20 DiDi rides? Well, buckle up, because we're about to add another layer to your "I can never go back to my old life" experience. We're talking about using Alipay for public transport - metros and buses - all without ever pulling out a wallet, transport card, or fumbling with coins.



In China, your phone isn't just a communication device. It's your wallet, your transport card, your everything. And once you experience the seamless convenience of tapping your phone to ride the metro or bus, going back to physical cards or cash is going to feel like using a rotary phone.

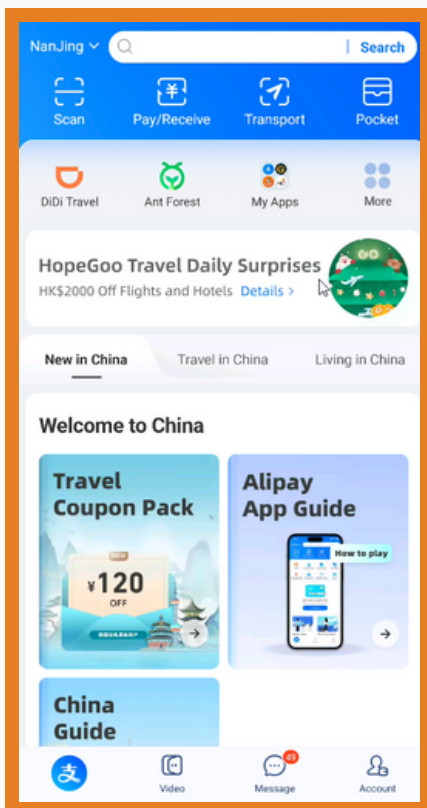
### What Is Alipay and Why Do You Need It?

Alipay (支付宝) is one of China's two payment giants (WeChat Pay being the other). While you've already set up WeChat Pay in Chapter 3, Alipay has some features that make it particularly excellent for public transport. Think of WeChat as your Swiss Army knife and Alipay as your specialized transport tool - both essential, both serving slightly different purposes.

The beauty of Alipay's transport feature? It's specifically designed for getting you on metros and buses with zero friction. No buying tickets, no reloading transport cards, no keeping track of balances. Just open, scan, done.

## Setting Up Alipay (The Quick Version)

If you followed along with Chapter 3 on WeChat Pay, you're already 90% of the way there. The setup process for Alipay is nearly identical:



1. Download Alipay from the Tencent app store that we covered earlier.
2. Create an account with your phone number
3. Link your international bank card
4. Verify your identity

The app will walk you through these steps, and just like WeChat, the English version is perfectly functional. Once you're set up, you're ready to become a public transport ninja.

## Activating Transport Mode - Your Digital Metro Card

Here's where Alipay really shines. Look at the top menu bar in the app, and you'll see a clearly labeled "Transport" button.

### Step-by-step:

1. Open Alipay
2. Tap "Transport" at the top menu (it's in English, can't miss it)
3. The app will either auto-detect your city or ask you to select it
4. Choose whether you're riding metro or bus
5. A QR code instantly appears

That's it. No loading money onto a card. No calculating fares. No keeping track of expiration dates. The system automatically charges your linked payment method based on where you enter and exit.

## The City-Switching Magic

Here's something brilliant: Alipay knows where you are. When I was living in Nanjing and took a trip to Shanghai for the weekend, the app automatically switched from "Nanjing Metro" to "Shanghai Metro" when I opened it in Shanghai. It just... works. Nationwide. No fiddling with settings, no downloading new apps, no buying new cards for each city.

This is one of those "future is here" moments that you'll want to video and send to friends back home.

## Using It On The Subway/Metro



Metro stations in China have dedicated QR code scanning areas at both entry and exit gates. Here's your routine:

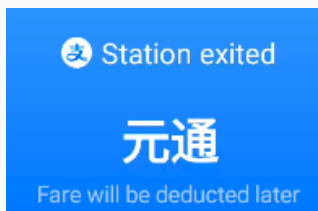
### Entering:

1. Open Alipay
2. Tap "Transport"
3. Select "Metro"
4. Hold your phone's QR code up to the scanner
5. Gates open - walk through



### Exiting:

1. Pull up your QR code again (yes, you need to scan twice)
2. Hold it to the exit scanner
3. The system calculates your fare based on distance traveled
4. Money is automatically deducted



You'll see a notification showing "Station exited" and "Fare will be deducted later." The charge typically appears in your transaction history within minutes, and we're talking pocket change here - most metro rides in Chinese cities run between ¥2-6 (\$0.30-0.90 USD).

## Using It On Buses

Buses work slightly differently, and this varies by city, so I'll tell you how it works in Nanjing:

**Nanjing buses:** Flat fee system. You tap your QR code when boarding, and that's it - no exit scan needed. The fare is fixed (usually ¥2, about \$0.30) regardless of how far you ride. Jump on, pay your 30 cents, ride across the city, hop off whenever you feel like it.

**Other cities:** Some cities require you to scan both when boarding and exiting buses, similar to metros. The app will adapt to whatever system your city uses, and locals will give you the "what are you doing?" look if you try to scan unnecessarily - that's how you'll know you're in a flat-fee city.

## The "I Don't Need My Wallet Anymore" Revelation

Let me paint you a picture of my daily life in China: I wake up, grab my phone, and leave my apartment. No wallet. No cash. No cards. No transport card. No keys (ok I have a key but some door locks here are often phone-enabled too, but that's another story).

I use Alipay to:

- Scan onto the metro
- Buy breakfast from a street vendor
- Pay for lunch on meituan
- Grab a coffee
- Scan onto a bus
- Order dinner delivery
- Pay utilities

This isn't some futuristic fantasy - this is everyday China. And once you experience it, going back to carrying a physical wallet is going to feel as outdated as carrying a paper map. I kinda wish post-cards would make a comeback though 😊.

## Troubleshooting & Common Issues

### "The scanner won't read my QR code"

- Make sure your screen brightness is turned up
- Clean your screen if it's smudged or dirty
- Hold the phone steady about 6 inches from the scanner
- If it's really bright outside, cup your hand around the screen to reduce glare

### "My code disappeared"

- The QR code refreshes every 60 seconds for security
- Just tap "Transport" again and it regenerates instantly

**"The app is asking me to verify something"** For security reasons, Alipay occasionally requires authentication (fingerprint, face ID, or PIN) before generating your transport code. This is especially common if you haven't used the app in a while. Just verify and you're good to go.

**"I couldn't screen record the QR code"** Don't worry, that's by design. Alipay blocks screen recording when the QR code is displayed for security reasons. You don't need to screen record anyway - the code generates instantly whenever you need it. That's why I couldn't show you in the videos attached to this guide.

**"What if my phone dies?"** Honestly? You're stuck. This is the one downside of the all-digital lifestyle. I recommend carrying a small portable battery pack, or at the very least, keeping your phone charged above 20%. Alternatively, you can always load a small amount of cash onto a physical transport card as a backup, but I'll be honest - I never bothered, and I never got caught short. There is another thing that hasn't been mentioned yet. There are 'powerbank'... 'banks' all over the city. You can basically rent a power-bank from a sort of powerbank vending machine. I might include this as another 'honourable mention' at the end of the guide.

## Pro Tips From Someone Who's Been There

**Keep some cash as a backup:** Yes, I just spent several paragraphs telling you how you'll never need your wallet, but keep ¥100 (\$15) somewhere in your bag or apartment for true emergencies. Better safe than sorry.

**Screenshot your transaction history:** If you're tracking expenses or need to justify costs for reimbursement, Alipay keeps detailed records. Just screenshot them periodically.

**Watch the locals:** If you're unsure whether to scan on exit (bus systems vary by city), just watch what locals do. They're your best guide, and they'll usually help if they see you looking confused.

## The Bottom Line

Setting up Alipay for public transport takes about 5 minutes. Using it daily will fundamentally change how you think about payments and convenience. You'll find yourself at metro gates laughing at your former self who used to fumble with cash and cards while locals smoothly glided through.

And here's the kicker - you're not just making your life easier. You're integrating into daily Chinese life in a way that tourists never do. When you confidently pull up your QR code and scan through without breaking stride, you're not a foreigner struggling with the system anymore. You're just another person going about their day.

That's the real goal here. Not just surviving in China, but thriving. And thriving starts with mastering the tools that make daily life seamless.

Next up in Chapter 10, we'll talk about Pinduoduo - your gateway to the cheapest online shopping in the known universe.

Welcome to the future. Your wallet is officially retired.

# CHAPTER 10

## Pinduoduo - Where Even "Cheap" Gets Cheaper

### Watch the short video for this chapter

See this step done in real life in under 60 seconds.

Scan the QR code or visit:

[youteacher.org/guide/ch10](https://youteacher.org/guide/ch10)



You think AliExpress is cheap? Temu has good deals? Let me introduce you to Pinduoduo (拼多多) - the app that'll make you question everything you thought you knew about online shopping prices.

Here's a reality check: A 5-pack of Indomie instant noodles costs \$4 AUD in an Australian supermarket. Not delivered - that's just walking into the store and buying it off the shelf. On Pinduoduo? ¥12.5 which is about \$2.68 AUD... **delivered to a pickup point near your apartment.**



And we're talking about imported Indonesian noodles here. Chinese-made products? Even cheaper. This is the app that'll spoil you so badly, you'll have a minor crisis every time you buy groceries back home.

### What Exactly Is Pinduoduo?

Pinduoduo is China's group-buying e-commerce platform that's become massive by focusing on one thing: rock-bottom prices. While Taobao is like eBay and JD.com is like Amazon, Pinduoduo is like... well, imagine if Costco had a baby with an online marketplace and that baby was obsessed with making things as cheap as humanly possible.

The platform originally got big by offering group deals (hence the "pinduo" meaning "together more"), but now it's just known as the place where everything costs less. Sometimes significantly less.

## What Should You Buy on Pinduoduo?

### YES - Buy These:

- Packaged foods (instant noodles, snacks, drinks)
- Household items (cleaning supplies, toiletries)
- Clothing basics
- Phone accessories
- Kitchen gadgets
- Stationery and office supplies

### NO - Avoid These:

- Electronics (especially TVs, laptops, phones)
- Meat products or jerky
- Non-packaged food items
- Anything where quality really matters

I learned this the hard way. Pinduoduo's reputation for some categories isn't great. Trust me - save electronics and sketchy food items for Taobao (we'll cover that in Chapter 11). But for packaged goods and basic household stuff? Pinduoduo is unbeatable.

## Let Me Show You How Easy This Is

My Indonesian wife wanted some instant noodles. Let me walk you through exactly how I bought them, from opening the app to eating my purchase.

### Step 1: Opening the App and Browsing

When you open Pinduoduo, you'll see a feed of random products. It's like TikTok but for shopping - designed to suck you in with deals.



But we're not here to browse mindlessly (tempting as it is). Let's search for something specific.

## Step 2: Searching for Products

I wanted Indomie noodles, so I searched "indomie noodles" in English. Pro tip: For foreign brand names, English often works fine. The app is smart enough to figure out what you want.



For Chinese products, I usually ask ChatGPT or use Google Translate to get the Chinese search terms. Something like: "What's the Chinese term for 'laundry detergent'?" Then copy-paste that into Pinduoduo's search bar.

Don't be intimidated - it takes maybe 30 seconds of experimentation and you'll get the hang of it. ChatGPT and Google Translate are your friends here.

## Step 3: Choosing Your Product

I found a good deal on a 5-pack of Indomie. The original price was ¥12.5, on sale for ¥23.5 (wait, that math doesn't make sense... Chinese pricing promotions can be weird, but the final price is what matters).



Look for products with lots of sales and good ratings. This particular listing showed over 531,000 packs sold - that's a good sign people aren't getting scammed.

## Step 4: Selecting and Paying

I selected the flavor my wife wanted (they had both Japanese-style chicken and regular options), chose my quantity, and hit pay.



Payment goes through Alipay or WeChat Pay (remember, you set those up in Chapter 5). The whole process took maybe 90 seconds. Final price: ¥12.5, which is about \$2.68 AUD (\$1.78) delivered.

## The Genius of Cainiao Stations

Here's where China's delivery system gets really cool. Instead of having packages left on your doorstep (hello, package theft), most deliveries go to a **Cainiao station** (菜鸟驿站) - basically a neighborhood pickup point.

### Why This System Is Brilliant:

1. **No theft risk** - Packages are held securely inside the station
2. **No missed deliveries** - You don't need to be home when it arrives
3. **Super convenient** - Stations are everywhere (mine is 2 minutes walk from my apartment)
4. **Simple pickup** - Show your pickup code, get it scanned, grab your stuff, leave

About 20 hours after I ordered, I got this notification:



The app shows you exactly which Cainiao station has your package and gives you a pickup code. The map shows you how to get there (though after the first visit, you'll know where it is).

## Step 5: Picking Up Your Package

I walked 2 minutes to my local Cainiao station. These places are usually small shops or garage-style spaces filled with shelves of packages.



You walk in, show the worker your pickup code (either on your phone or you can tell them the number), they scan it, hand you your package, and you're done. No ID check, no signing, no hassle. The whole interaction takes about 15 seconds.

Also if you have multiple packages they will know based on your phone number. If you have 8 packages delivered. You only need to give them one of the tracking codes you have and they'll find all 8 packages you have there.

## Step 6: Unboxing at Home

Got home, opened my package, and there they were - my Indomie noodles, perfectly packaged and exactly what I ordered.



From clicking "buy" to eating noodles: less than 24 hours. For USD \$1.78. Delivered.

## Getting Pinduoduo on Your Phone

You can't download Pinduoduo from the Apple App Store or Google Play if you're using a foreign account. Remember Chapter 4 where we set up the Tencent App Store? That's where you'll get Pinduoduo.

Quick reminder:

1. Open Tencent App Store (应用宝)
2. Search for "拼多多" (Pinduoduo)
3. Download and install
4. Open the app and sign in with your WeChat account. Or use Google Translate to create an account by entering your address and phone number that you copied and pasted from a note on your phone.

It's that simple.

## Tips for Shopping on Pinduoduo

Start with familiar foreign brands - Your first purchase should be something you recognize, like Oreos or something. This builds confidence in the platform without the language barrier stress.

**Check the sales numbers** - Listings showing 10,000+ sales are generally safer bets than listings with only 50 sales.

**Use the translation features** - If product descriptions are confusing, screenshot them and run them through Google Translate or ask ChatGPT "What is this product?"

**Don't overthink it** - Yes, there's a learning curve, but you'll figure it out faster than you think. Your first order might take 10 minutes of fumbling around. Your tenth order will take 90 seconds.

**Save the big purchases for Taobao** - Anything over ¥200 or anything where quality matters (electronics, better clothing, specialty items), save for Taobao. We'll cover that in Chapter 11.

## Why This Matters

Living in China on a teacher's salary combined with cost of living is the supercharged way to save money. When you can cut your grocery and household spending by 30-50% just by using the right app, that adds up to serious money over a year.

And it's not just about saving money - it's about convenience. Having cleaning supplies, snacks, toiletries, and basic necessities delivered to a pickup point 2 minutes from your apartment, often cheaper than supermarket prices? That's life-changing.

Once you start using Pinduoduo, you'll wonder how you ever lived without it. And more importantly, you'll dread going back to Western prices when you eventually leave China.

Fair warning: This app will absolutely spoil you for life. Don't say I didn't warn you.

**Next up in Chapter 11:** Taobao - where you can find literally anything (and I mean anything) and why it's the better choice for items Pinduoduo can't handle.

# CHAPTER 11

## Online Shopping Part 2 - Taobao & Returns

### Watch the short video for this chapter

See this step done in real life in under 60 seconds.

Scan the QR code or visit:

[youteacher.org/guide/ch11](http://youteacher.org/guide/ch11)



### Why Taobao When You've Got Pinduoduo?

In the last chapter, we covered Pinduoduo - your go-to for dirt-cheap everyday essentials and random nick-nacks you didn't even know existed. But China's e-commerce ecosystem isn't one-size-fits-all, and that's where **Taobao** comes in.

Think of it this way:

- **Pinduoduo**: Your local discount warehouse. Great for bulk buys, household items, and when you want the absolute cheapest price.
- **Taobao**: More like Amazon or eBay. Better for branded items, more variety, better quality control, and - crucially - a smoother returns process.

You'll want Taobao when you're buying:

- Clothing and shoes (where sizing matters)
- Branded electronics
- Items where quality and authenticity are important
- Anything you might need to return

And speaking of returns... that's exactly what happened to me with a shirt order, which makes for the perfect real-world tutorial.

## My Taobao Return Story: The 5XL Shirt That Was Still Too Big

I ordered a plaid shirt from Jeanswest on Taobao - size 5XL, because sizing in China runs smaller than Western sizing. It arrived, I tried it on, and... it was too big. Time for a return.



The Jeanswest shirt with its tag still attached. When returning items in China, always keep the tags on.

Here's the thing that blew my mind: **the entire return process took about 10 minutes, was completely free, and my refund was virtually instant.** Not 7-10 business days. Not "processing your refund." Instant.

Let me show you exactly how it works.

### Step 1: Access Your Taobao Orders



When you log into Taobao, you'll see your account dashboard. Look for these key sections:

- **待付款** (Pending Payment): Orders you haven't paid for yet
- **待发货** (Pending Shipment): Orders paid but not shipped
- **待收货** (Pending Receipt): Orders on their way to you
- **待评价** (Pending Review): Orders delivered and waiting for your review
- **退款/售后** (Refund/After-Sales): This is where we're heading

Tap on **退款/售后** to see your return and refund options.

## Step 2: Find Your Order



This is what my shirt listing looked like - ¥59 (about \$8 USD). I actually got it for ¥56; a little discount. Notice the seller is 天猫 (Tmall), which is Taobao's premium marketplace for verified brands and official stores. Tmall listings generally have better return policies than regular Taobao sellers.

Find the order you want to return in your "已收货" (Received) or "待评价" (Pending Review) section.

## Step 3: Initiate the Return



Once you start the return process, Taobao generates a **return code** for you.

Mine was **3-5-3526**.

This code is crucial - it's how the pickup point or courier will identify your return package. You'll see it displayed prominently along with:

- The pickup location details
- The return tracking information
- A phone number if you need to call

The system has already assigned you a pickup location based on your address.

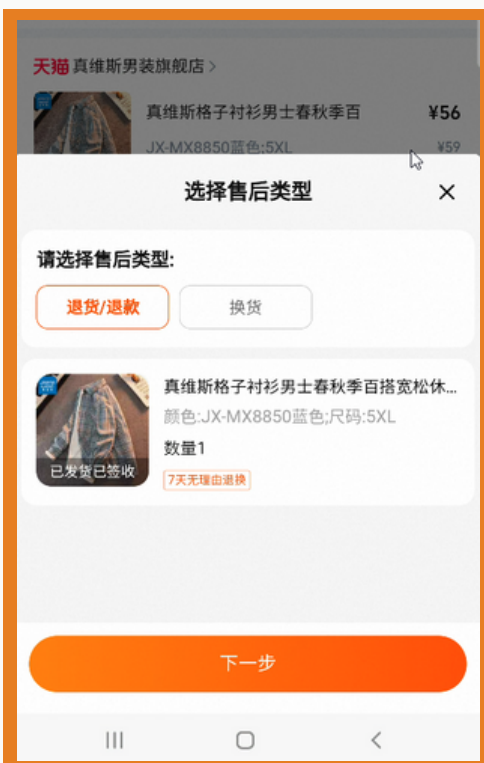


Here's the detailed view showing:

- Your return code: E.g. **3-5-3526**
- Pickup location address
- Contact phone number.
- The actual item you're returning

**Pro Tip:** Screenshot this page! You'll need the return code when you drop off the package.

## Step 4: Choose Your Return Type



Taobao gives you two options:

- **退货/退款** (Return & Refund): Send the item back and get your money
- **换货** (Exchange): Swap for a different size/color/version

Since my shirt was too big and I wasn't sure what size would fit, I chose **退货/退款** (Return & Refund). Tap the orange button **下一步** (Next Step) to continue.

## Step 5: Select Your Return Reason



Now Taobao wants to know why you're returning. The options include:

- **买贵了/少用优惠** (Bought expensive/didn't use discount)
- **不要了** (Don't want it) - with "7天无理由退换" (7-day no-questions-asked return) tag
- **协商一致退款** (Agreed refund with seller)
- **材质与描述不符** (Material doesn't match description)
- **尺码没选对** (Wrong size selected)



Scroll down to see more options:

- **做工问题** (Workmanship issues - defects/poor quality)
- **缩水/褪色** (Shrinkage/color fading)
- **少件** (Missing items/accessories)



Since my issue was sizing, I selected **尺码没选对** (Wrong size). The system then asks whether it's:

- **尺码偏小** (Size too small)
- **尺码偏大** (Size too big)

I tapped **尺码偏大** (Size too big) because, well, it was too big. Tap **下一步** (Next Step) once you've made your selection.

**AI Assistant Pro Tip:** If you're unsure which reason to select or what the Chinese text says, take a screenshot and ask ChatGPT: "I'm trying to return an item on Taobao. Can you translate these return reason options and tell me which one I should select if [explain your situation]?" Works like a charm.

## Step 6: Confirm Return Details



This is your return confirmation screen. Here's what it shows:

- **退款原因** (Return Reason): 尺码没选对 (Wrong size)
- **退款金额** (Refund Amount): ¥56
- **退回微信** (Refund to WeChat): ¥56
- **退货方式** (Return Method): 上门取件 (Door pickup) - this is the default
- **我的地址** (My Address): Shows your registered address

Notice the orange button at the bottom: **提交申请** (Submit Application).

## Step 7: Choose Your Return Method



This is where Taobao really shines. You get multiple return method options:

### 1. 上门取件 (Door Pickup) - Recommended by Taobao

- They come to your address
- Free service
- But you need to wait for them to arrive at their scheduled time

### 2. 寄件点自寄 (Self-Send from Service Point) - Free pickup point drop-off

- Drop off at a nearby pickup location
- No waiting required
- Still completely free

### 3. 快递柜寄件 (Express Locker)

- Drop at a parcel locker
- Convenient for some locations

### 4. 自行寄回 (Send Back Yourself)

- You arrange your own shipping
- You pay shipping costs
- Only use this if other options aren't available



I selected **自行寄回** (Self-drop-off) because the pickup point is literally a 2-minute walk from my apartment - it's the same place where I pick up my regular deliveries. Why wait around for someone to pick it up when I can drop it off on my own schedule?

Notice the screen now shows:

- **退货方式:** 自行寄回 (Self-drop-off)
- **我的服务:** 7天无理由退换 (7-day no-questions-asked return policy)
- **退回微信** ¥56.00 (Refund to WeChat: ¥56.00)

Tap the orange **提交申请** (Submit Application) button to finalize.

## Step 8: Drop Off Your Package



After submitting your return request, you'll see the drop-off location details:

**Location:**

**Address:**

**Hours:** 09:30-21:00

**Distance:** 38m away (Yes, really - it's that close for me!)

**Estimated Shipping Cost:** ¥9.03 (but remember, this is FREE when using the official return process)

Now here's what you actually do:

1. **Pack the item** with all original tags and packaging (if you still have it)
2. **Write your return code** (mine was 3-5-3526) clearly on the package, or show it on your phone to the staff
3. **Walk to the pickup point** during their operating hours
4. **Hand it to the staff** - they'll scan your return code
5. **Done!** Walk away and wait for your refund

That's it. No paperwork. No printing labels. No waiting for email confirmations.

## The Refund: Virtually Instant

Here's what blew my mind coming from Western e-commerce: my refund hit my WeChat account **within about 10 minutes** of dropping off the package. Not days. Not "5-7 business days pending inspection." Just... instant.

The pickup point staff scans your return, it registers in the system, and Taobao processes the refund immediately. You'll get a notification on your phone, check WeChat Pay, and the ¥56 is already back in your account.

Compare this to:

- **Amazon in the US:** 5-10 business days after they receive the return
- **Australian retailers:** Often 7-14 business days
- **Many European platforms:** Up to 14 days

China's instant refund system is something you'll get spoiled by. Returning to slower Western systems will feel painfully archaic after this.

## Pro Tips for Taobao Returns

### 1. Always Keep the Tags On

Until you're 100% sure you're keeping an item, don't remove tags. Many sellers require original tags for returns, and Tmall's 7-day return policy requires them.

### 2. Use the Pickup Points

Unless you're home all day, the self-drop-off option is superior to door pickup. You control the timing, it's usually very close by, and you don't have to wait around for a courier.

### 3. Screenshot Your Return Code

The return code is your golden ticket. Screenshot it, save it, and show it to the pickup point staff. Some locations might ask for it on your phone rather than written on the package.

### 4. Take Photos Before Returning

Snap a few photos of the item you're returning, especially if there's a quality issue. This protects you if there's any dispute. Taobao's system heavily favors buyers, but documentation never hurts.

### 5. Use AI for Translation

If you get stuck on any of the Chinese return screens, just screenshot it and paste it into ChatGPT or Claude with a prompt like: "I'm trying to return an item on Taobao. What does this screen say and what should I click?" Honestly, this is a game-changer for navigating Chinese apps.

### 6. Check the Return Policy Before Buying

Look for the **7天无理由退换** (7-day no-questions-asked return) badge on listings. Tmall sellers usually have this, but some smaller Taobao sellers might have stricter policies.

### 7. Time Your Drop-Off

Pickup points can get busy during peak hours (lunch time, early evening). If you want to avoid queues, drop off your return mid-morning or mid-afternoon.

## Troubleshooting Common Return Issues

### "The app is asking me to provide photos"

Some returns (especially for quality issues) require you to upload photos of the defect. Use your phone camera, take clear photos, and upload directly in the return process. Google Lens can help you understand what the app is asking for.

### "My return request was rejected"

This is rare but can happen if you removed tags, damaged the item, or are outside the return window. Contact the seller through Taobao's chat function (there's a 客服/customer service button on every listing). Use Google Translate or AI to communicate.

### "I can't find the return option on my order"

The return option typically appears after you've confirmed receipt ("确认收货"). If you confirmed receipt more than 7 days ago, you might be outside the return window for some sellers. Check the seller's specific return policy.

### "My refund didn't arrive instantly"

While most refunds are instant, some sellers (especially smaller non-Tmall stores) might require manual review. Give it 24 hours. If still nothing, contact Taobao customer service through the app.

### "The app is entirely in Chinese and I'm lost"

Open Google Lens or Google Translate's camera function and point it at your screen. It'll translate the text in real-time. Alternatively, screenshot each step and ask ChatGPT or Claude to walk you through it. Trust me, thousands of foreigners navigate Taobao daily without knowing Chinese - you've got this!

## Taobao vs. Pinduoduo: When to Use Which

Now that you've seen both platforms in action, here's my guide for choosing between them:

### Use Pinduoduo for:

- Groceries and fresh food
- Household essentials (toilet paper, cleaning supplies)
- Everyday items you buy repeatedly

- When you want the absolute cheapest price
- Group buying deals with friends or family

#### **Use Taobao for:**

- Clothing and shoes (better return process)
- Branded items and electronics
- Items where quality matters more than price
- Anything you might need to return or exchange
- When you want more product variety and seller ratings

#### **Use Both:**

- Compare prices! The same item can vary significantly between platforms
- Pinduoduo for your weekly groceries, Taobao for everything else
- Check both for big purchases - you might find better deals on one over the other

## **Final Thoughts: Returns Made Easy**

Coming from Western e-commerce, China's return system feels almost too good to be true. Free returns, instant refunds, convenient pickup points open until 9 PM - it's the kind of customer service that spoils you for life.

The key takeaway? **Don't be afraid to order online in China.** Even if something doesn't work out, you can return it in 10 minutes with zero hassle. No more anxiety about "What if it doesn't fit?" or "What if I don't like it?" Just order it, try it, and if it's wrong, return it.

Between Pinduoduo's rock-bottom prices and Taobao's hassle-free returns, you've now got China's e-commerce ecosystem figured out. Your wallet is about to get very happy, and your apartment is about to get very full of cheap, convenient deliveries.

I ended up getting a 4XL and it was still too big. I returned again, 3rd time worked like a charm with 3XL. I'm actually wearing the shirt in some of the videos for this guide.

Now go forth and shop with confidence! 🛒

# CHAPTER 12

## Paying Utility Bills Through WeChat

### Watch the short video for this chapter

See this step done in real life in under 60 seconds.

Scan the QR code or visit:

[youteacher.org/guide/ch12](http://youteacher.org/guide/ch12)



Remember those days of writing checks, mailing payments, or standing in line at utility offices? Yeah, forget all that. In China, you'll pay your electricity, water, and gas bills right from your phone through WeChat. No envelopes, no stamps, no waiting on hold with customer service. The entire process takes about 30 seconds once you know where to look.

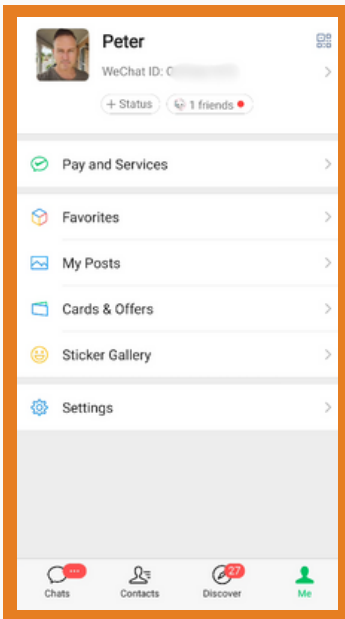
Most apartments in China use prepaid utility systems, which means you top up your accounts before you use the services — kind of like adding credit to a phone plan. When your balance runs low, you'll get a notification from your landlord or property management, and you simply add more funds through WeChat's "Pay and Services" section. Your landlord typically handles the account setup and relationship with utility companies, so you're just making payments rather than managing accounts directly.

The beauty of this system is its simplicity. You won't be dealing with monthly statements, due dates, or late fees. You top up when needed, use your utilities, and top up again. The entire infrastructure is built into WeChat, so there's no separate app to download, no account to create, and no Chinese language barriers to overcome. Everything you need is already in the palm of your hand.

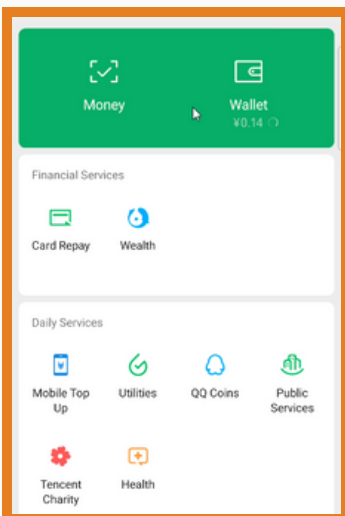
Let's walk through exactly how to pay each type of utility bill so you'll never be caught without power or hot water.

## Finding the Utilities Mini App

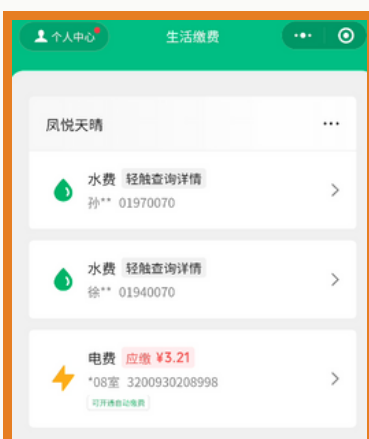
All utility payments happen through the same WeChat mini-app, so let's start by finding it:



1. Open WeChat and tap the **"Me"** tab in the bottom right corner
2. Tap **"Pay and Services"** (it's the option with the green circle icon)



3. Scroll down to the **"Daily Services"** section
4. Tap **"Utilities"** (the icon looks like a water droplet with a circular arrow)



This opens the Utilities mini-app where you can manage all your utility payments. You'll see three main sections at the top for your existing accounts (if you have them set up), and six options at the bottom for adding new services: Electricity (电费), Water (水费), Gas (燃气费), Phone (固话费), Internet (宽带费), and Cable TV (有线电视).

## Paying Your Electricity Bill

Electricity is typically the most straightforward utility to pay. Most landlords will have already set up your electricity account and linked it to your apartment, so you just need to top it up when the balance gets low.

Your landlord will usually message you when it's time to add more funds — mine just screenshots the message they get, — and you simply open the Utilities mini-app to pay.

### Here's the complete process:

1. Open WeChat → Me → Pay and Services → Utilities
2. Your electricity account should already be visible at the top of the screen with your current balance



3. Tap your electricity account
4. Choose your top-up amount (common options are 50元, 100元, or 150元)
5. Confirm the payment through Weixin Pay

The funds are added instantly to your account, and you'll receive a confirmation message. Your electricity meter will automatically draw from this balance as you use power, so there's no manual calculation or reading required on your end.

### How much should you top up?

150 yuan (about \$21 USD) typically lasts 1-2 months for a single person in a standard apartment with regular AC use. If you're running AC heavily during summer or winter, you might need to top up more frequently. I usually add 150 yuan at a time and only need to do this every 6-8 weeks.

When your balance drops below a certain threshold (usually around 20-30 yuan), you'll get a notification from your landlord or property management reminding you to top up. Don't wait until it hits zero — you don't want to be stuck without power on a hot summer evening.

## Paying Your Water Bill

Water payments work identically to electricity — same mini-app, same process:

1. Open the Utilities mini-app (Me → Pay and Services → Utilities)
2. Tap your water account (水费) if it's already set up
3. Choose your top-up amount
4. Confirm payment

Water is incredibly cheap in China. I typically add 100 yuan at a time and it lasts me several months. Your landlord will let you know when it's running low and needs a top-up.

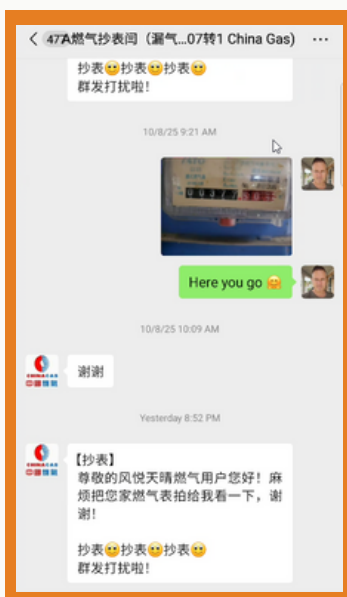
## Paying Your Gas Bill (Slightly Different Process)

Gas billing works differently than electricity and water because it often requires manual meter readings. Instead of paying directly through the mini-app, you'll typically interact with your building's gas company through a WeChat group chat.

**Here's how the gas billing process typically works:**



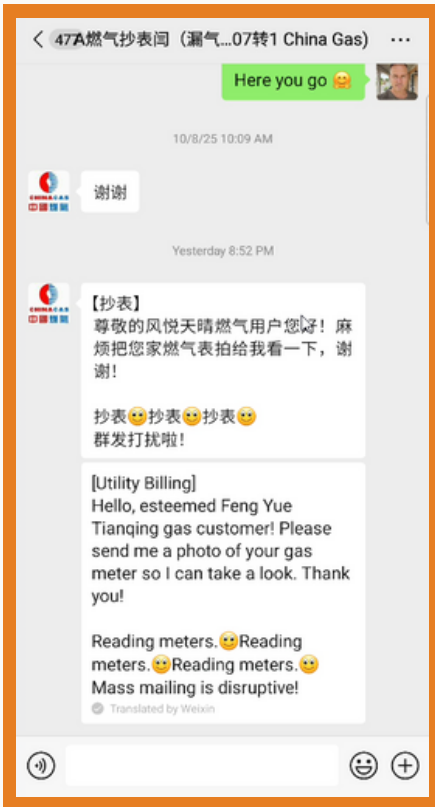
1. Your building's gas company will post a message in your building WeChat group (or contact your landlord)
2. They'll request that residents take photos of their gas meters and send them to the chat



The message will look something like this after translation:

"Hello, esteemed gas customer! Please send me a photo of your gas meter so I can take a look. Thank you!"

Remember you can just long press on Chinese text and select translate and it will appear in English for you.



3. Use Google Translate to translate their message if needed
4. Find your gas meter (usually in a cabinet under the kitchen sink or on the kitchen wall)



5. Take a clear photo of the meter display showing the numbers
6. Send the photo to the group chat or directly to the gas company



7. Reply with a simple acknowledgment like "Sure. Here you go"

The gas company calculates your usage based on the meter reading and sends the bill to your landlord. Your landlord will then message you with the amount owed (usually something like "Gas bill: 50 yuan"), and you simply transfer that amount to your landlord through WeChat Pay.

### **Why doesn't gas use the mini-app like electricity?**

Many Chinese apartments still use older gas billing systems that require physical meter readings rather than automated digital systems. While electricity and water meters can transmit usage data automatically, gas companies often need to manually collect readings from photos. It's a bit more old-school, but still much easier than traditional Western utility billing.

## **Typical Utility Costs (For Budgeting)**

Here's what you can expect to pay monthly in a standard one-bedroom apartment:

- **Electricity:** 75-150 yuan (\$10-21 USD) in mild weather; 200-300 yuan (\$28-42 USD) with heavy AC use
- **Water:** 30-50 yuan (\$4-7 USD)
- **Gas:** 30-60 yuan (\$4-8 USD)
- **Total monthly utilities:** Approximately 135-260 yuan (\$19-36 USD) depending on usage and season

Compare that to Western countries where utility bills can easily hit \$150-300+ per month, and you'll see why China's cost of living is so much lower. You're looking at spending less per month than a single dinner out in a Western city.

## **What You Just Learned**

You now know how to pay every utility bill you'll encounter in China without leaving your apartment:

The entire process takes 30 seconds once you know where to look. No paperwork, no checks, no office visits, no phone calls in Chinese. Everything happens through WeChat on your phone, and your landlord handles the complex account management stuff behind the scenes.

# CHAPTER 13

## Sending Money Home - International Bank Transfers

### Watch the short video for this chapter

See this step done in real life in under 60 seconds.

Scan the QR code or visit:

[youteacher.org/guide/ch13](https://youteacher.org/guide/ch13)



Alright, let's talk about something every foreign teacher in China eventually needs to do: **getting your hard-earned money back home.**

Here's the thing that catches everyone off guard: **you can't do international transfers through the bank app.** I know, I know - it's 2026 and you can order dumplings delivered to your door in 15 minutes through your phone, but sending money overseas? That requires an actual visit to the bank. Every. Single. Time.

NOTE: But there is a better way than going through the bank. Keep reading.

### Why This Chapter Matters

Your employer will walk you through opening your bank account when you start - that's usually a 1- 2 hour process where you'll just need your passport and they'll handle the rest. But when it comes to international transfers? You might find yourself navigating this alone with limited English-speaking support, which is exactly why I'm giving you this complete walkthrough.

The good news: once you know the process and have your documents organized, it becomes routine. The bank needs to verify your income is legal, taxed, and earned inside China (totally reasonable), and there's a specific way to do this that works smoothly once you understand the system.

## The Old Way: Bank Visits That Ate Your Entire Afternoon

Let me paint you a picture of how this used to work.



Every month, if you wanted to send money home, you'd need to visit a specialized branch – not just any Bank of Communications location, but one specifically set up to handle international transactions. In Nanjing, that's the branch near Yuantong Station.



## What You Had to Bring (Every Single Time)



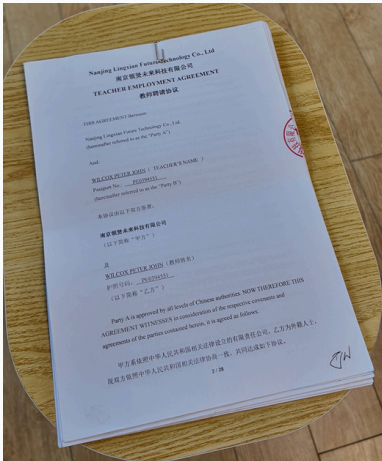
### 1. Your Passport

They need to verify your identity and visa status.



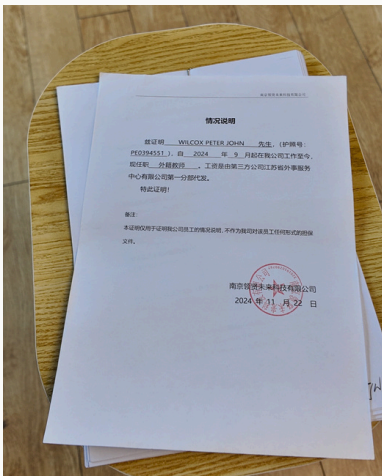
## 2. Your Bank Card

The account you're transferring from.



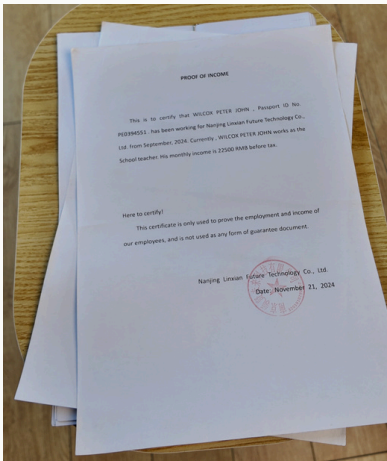
## 3. Employment Contract

Proves you're legally employed in China.



## 4. Proof of Employment Letter

Current letter from your employer (usually in Chinese with English translation).



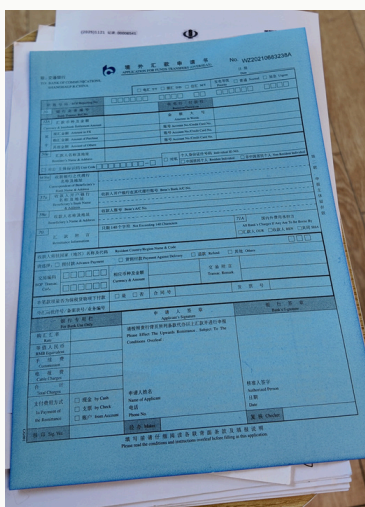
## 5. Proof of Income Certificate

Shows your salary and that it's being properly reported.



## 6. Tax Records (Individual Income Tax Certificate)

THE critical document showing your income is legally taxed. This comes from the Chinese tax app (个人所得税).



## 7. The Transfer Application Form

A mostly-Chinese form you'd fill out at the bank.

## The Process That Made You Want to Cry

Picture this: You'd arrive at the bank, take a queue number, and wait. Then you'd spend 10 minutes working through that form:

You'd need to fill in:

- Your Chinese bank account number
- Amount to transfer (in RMB)
- Amount in destination currency
- Beneficiary name (exactly as on account)
- Beneficiary bank name
- Beneficiary account number / IBAN
- SWIFT/BIC code
- Beneficiary address

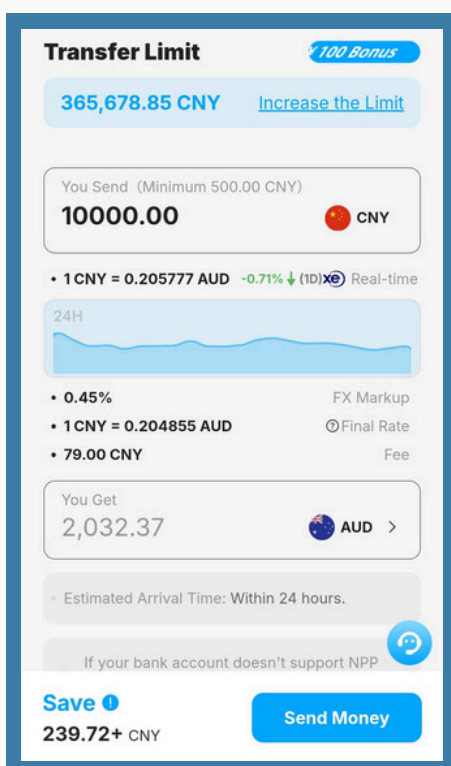
Most teachers used Google Translate or Baidu Translate at the counter. The staff were patient, but it's slower than doing it in Chinese, and you'd often need to clarify details multiple times.

**Then came the waiting game.** The bank would convert your RMB to your desired foreign currency, process the international transfer, and charge you between **300-500 RMB in fees** per transfer, plus exchange rates that weren't as favorable as mid-market rates.

The whole process? **90+ minutes, every single month. Not including the travel time on the subway!**

## The Game-Changer: SkyRemit

About a week ago, I discovered something that completely changed how I send money home: **SkyRemit**.



SkyRemit is a mobile app designed specifically for expats working in China. It's officially approved by the People's Bank of China and designed to make international money transfers as simple as ordering takeout.

Here's what makes it different:

### Cost

- **Old way:** 300-500 RMB per transfer + poor exchange rates
- **SkyRemit:** 79 RMB flat fee, no matter how much you send

### Time

- **Old way:** 90+ minutes at the bank
- **SkyRemit:** Under 5 minutes from your phone

### Convenience

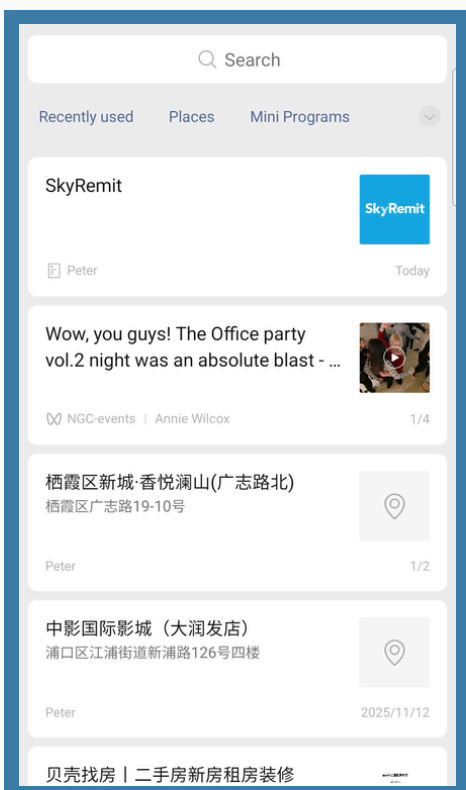
- **Old way:** Bank branch visit during business hours (9am-5pm, closed 12-2pm for lunch)
- **SkyRemit:** 24/7 from anywhere with your phone

### Speed

- **Old way:** 2-5 business days
- **SkyRemit:** Usually 24-48 hours (sometimes as fast as 5 minutes!)

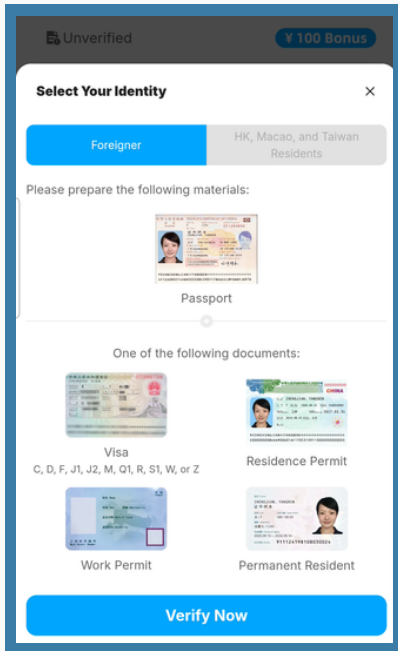
## How to Set Up SkyRemit

### Step 1: Find SkyRemit on WeChat



Open WeChat and search for "SkyRemit" in the Mini Programs section. It'll show up as a verified mini program.

## Step 2: Sign Up and Choose Your Identity



When you first open SkyRemit, you'll need to verify your identity. Select "Foreigner" and prepare these documents:

- **Passport** (to verify identity and visa status)
- **One of:** Visa, Residence Permit, Work Permit, or Permanent Resident card

You'll upload photos of these documents directly in the app.

## Step 3: Upload Your Tax Records



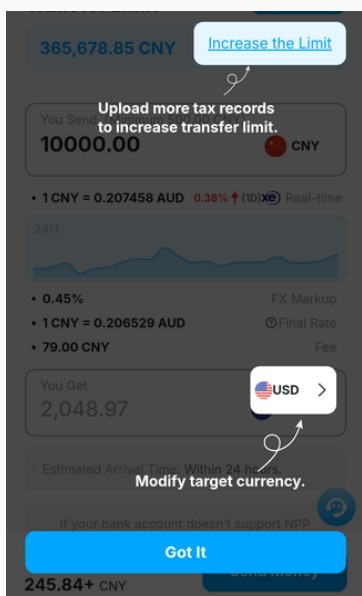
This is the same requirement as the bank - SkyRemit needs to verify your income is legal and taxed. Download your tax certificate from the Individual Income Tax app (个人所得税). *Hint: Search that on Tencent App Store. Otherwise Skyremit will instruct you on how to get and navigate that with very detailed easy to follow instructions in their app. There is an English version of the tax app now too.*



The app shows all your salary payments and tax deductions for verification. Upload the PDF directly to SkyRemit.

**First-Time Setup:** For your first transfer, the bank will verify your tax records through the official tax system. Your employer coordinates this, so don't stress.

### Step 4: Wait for Verification

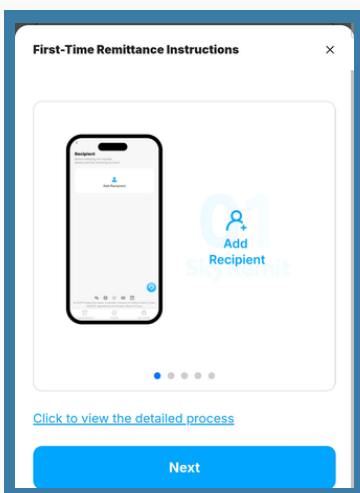


SkyRemit will verify your documents (usually takes 1-2 business days). Once approved, you're ready to send money!

**Your Transfer Limit:** After verification, you'll see your annual transfer limit. Mine is 365,678.85 CNY based on my tax records.

## Making Your First Transfer

### Step 1: Add Your Overseas Bank Details

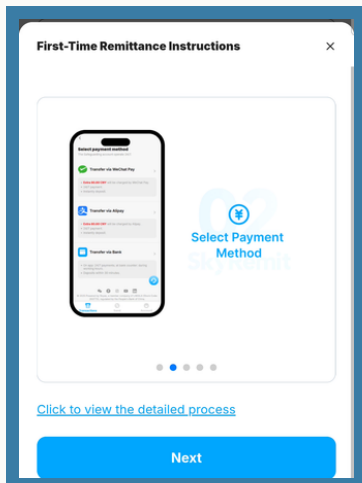


Add your recipient account - this is your overseas bank where you want money to arrive. You'll need:

- Full name (exactly as on account)
- Bank name and address
- Account number / IBAN
- SWIFT/BIC code
- Your overseas address

Save all this information in your phone notes in English beforehand - it makes setup much faster.

## Step 2: Choose Your Payment Method



SkyRemit offers three options:

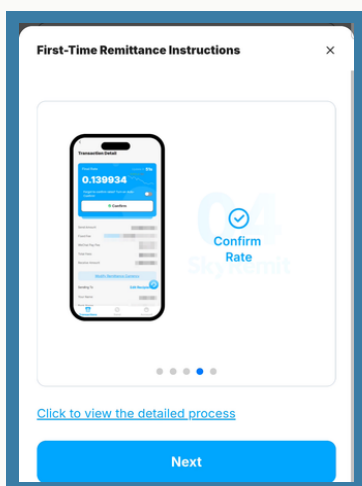
- **WeChat Pay** (extra 80 CNY fee)
- **Alipay** (extra 80 CNY fee)
- **Bank Transfer** (recommended - no extra fees)

I always use bank transfer to keep fees at the flat 79 CNY

## Step 3: Enter the Amount

Enter how much RMB you want to send. Minimum is 500 RMB (*With the exception of your initial 100 CNY bonus on signing up where you only need to send 1 yuan*).

## Step 4: Check the Exchange Rate

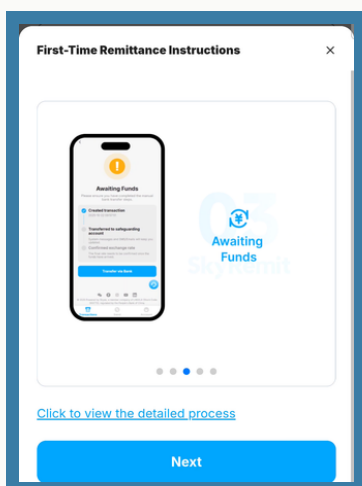


SkyRemit shows you:

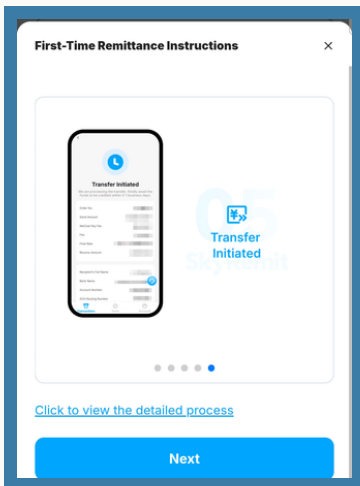
- Real-time exchange rate
- FX markup (their margin)
- Final rate you'll get
- The 79 CNY fee
- Exact amount that will arrive

Exchange rates update throughout the day based on forex markets. You can check rates in the app before committing.

## Step 5: Confirm and Send



If you chose bank transfer, you'll see an "Awaiting Funds" screen. Transfer the money from your Chinese bank to SkyRemit's safeguarding account (they'll provide the details).



Once they confirm receipt, they'll process your transfer. You'll get a confirmation showing:

- Order number
- Send amount
- Fee
- Final rate
- Receive amount
- Recipient details

**How Long Until It Arrives?** Usually 24-48 hours. Transfers to major countries (Australia, US, UK, Canada) are typically faster. I've heard of transfers arriving in as little as 5 minutes, though that's not guaranteed.

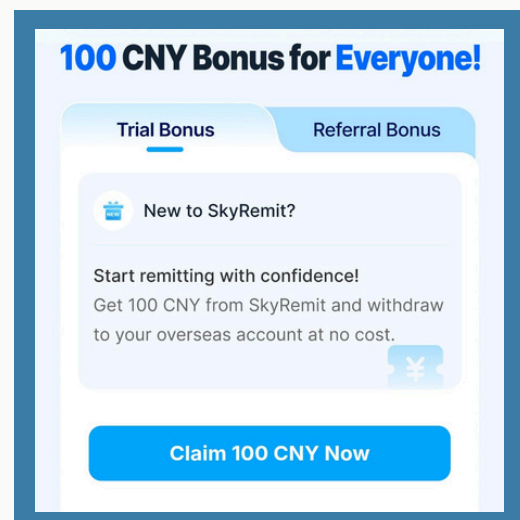
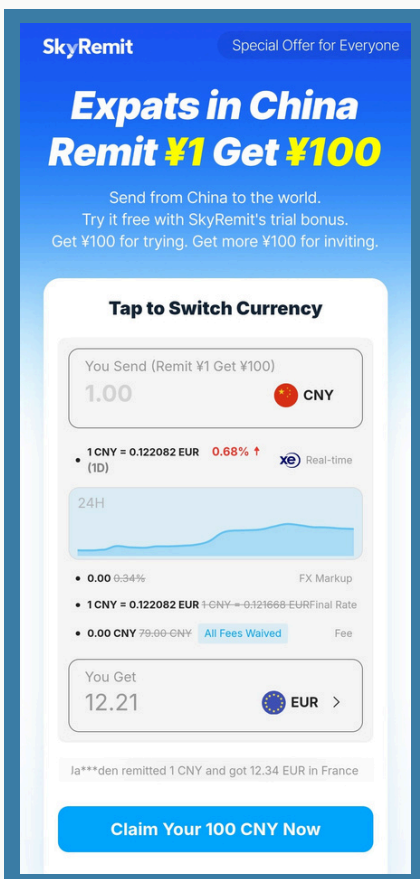
## The Referral Bonus (And Being Transparent About It)

Here's where I need to be completely upfront with you: SkyRemit has a referral program, and yes, I'm sharing my referral link.

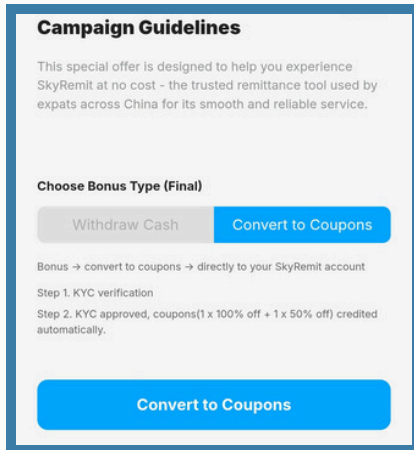
### How It Works:

Both you and I get a **100 CNY** bonus when you:

1. Sign up using my referral link or code
2. Complete your first transfer (even just 1 yuan counts!)



## The Two Bonus Options:



When you claim your bonus, you can choose:

- **Withdraw Cash:** Bonus converts to foreign currency and goes directly to your overseas account (no fee)
- **Convert to Coupons:** Get discount coupons for future transfers (1 × 100% off fee + 1 × 50% off fee)

## My Referral Details:

Invitation Code: R05037

Scan this QR code in WeChat:



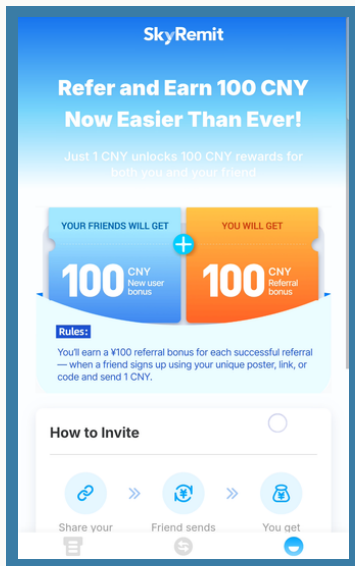
Or visit: [youteacher.org/discord](https://youteacher.org/discord) (you'll find the link there along with my free China Survival Guide)

## Transparency Note:

**⚠ REFERRAL DISCLOSURE:** *This is a referral link. When you sign up and complete the 1 yuan activation transfer, both you and I receive a 100 CNY bonus at no extra cost to you. I only recommend services I personally use and genuinely believe will help you. All opinions in this chapter are my own based on my actual experience using SkyRemit.*

This is exactly how I will be sending money home every month from here on. The 100 CNY bonus is a nice perk for both of us, but I'd recommend SkyRemit even without it - the time savings and lower fees make it a no-brainer compared to monthly bank visits.

## Once You Get Your Own Referral Code



After your first transfer, you'll get your own referral code. Share it with other foreign worker friends you know or meet - you'll both get 100 CNY for each person who signs up and sends their first transfer.

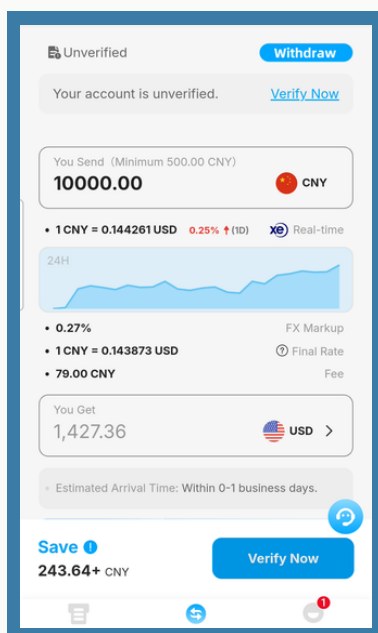
## Important Things to Know

### Eligibility

You must be legally working in China with proper documentation (work visa/permit, residence permit, and tax records showing Chinese income). SkyRemit is specifically designed for expats with legal employment.

### Transfer Limits

Your annual limit depends on your tax records. Most teachers can transfer up to 50,000 USD equivalent per year. If you need to transfer more, you'll need special approval and additional documentation.

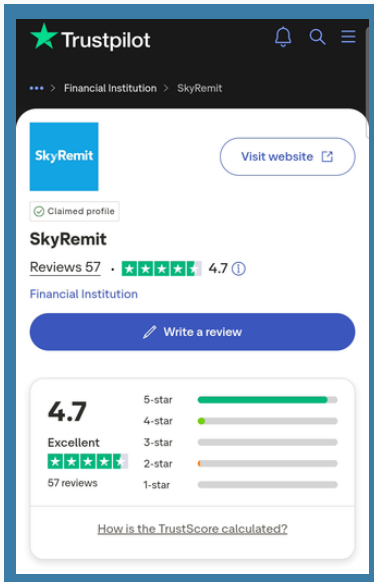


To increase your limit, upload more tax records showing higher income. The button is in your account dashboard.

## Is It Safe?

Yes. SkyRemit is:

- Officially approved and regulated by the People's Bank of China (PBOC)
- A licensed financial institution
- Recommended by the Shanghai government for expat remittances
- Backed by Skye (Lakala member, stock code: 300773)



They have excellent reviews on Trustpilot (4.7 stars, 57+ reviews) with users praising the smooth process and fast transfers.

## Supported Countries

SkyRemit sends to 43 currencies and 218 countries/regions. Major destinations include Australia, USA, UK, Canada, most of Europe, and many Asian countries.

## When You Might Still Need the Bank

- If SkyRemit doesn't support your destination country
- If you need to send more than your annual limit
- If you're sending to a business (not a personal account)
- For specialized transfers (property purchase deposits, etc.)

## My Honest Take

Look, I'll be completely straight with you: having to physically go to the bank every single month to send money home felt archaic in 2024. The process made sense from a regulatory standpoint (preventing money laundering, tax evasion, etc.), and the documentation requirements actually protect you as a foreign worker by ensuring everything's above board.

But spending 90+ minutes at the bank every month? Brutal.

**Pros of SkyRemit:**

- Saves massive amounts of time
- Much cheaper (79 RMB vs 300-500 RMB)
- Better exchange rates
- Convenient (24/7 from your phone)
- Fast (usually 24-48 hours)
- Legitimate and regulated

**Cons:**

- First-time setup still requires document verification
- Not all destination countries supported
- Annual transfer limits (though adequate for most teachers)
- Requires smartphone and WeChat

**The Verdict:** If you're teaching in China and need to send money home regularly, SkyRemit is hands-down the better option. Set it up once, and every subsequent transfer takes under 5 minutes.

**Setting Yourself Up for Success**

Before you need to send money:

1. **Download the Chinese tax app** (个人所得税) and familiarize yourself with downloading your tax certificate
2. **Save your overseas bank details in your phone notes** (full name, bank name, account number, SWIFT code, address)
3. **Take clear photos** of your passport, residence permit, and employment documents
4. **Set up SkyRemit early** so you're verified and ready when payday comes

After your first transfer, you'll wonder why you ever went to the bank in the first place.

**And hey - at least you're getting paid in a currency you can actually transfer home.** Not every country makes this as straightforward as China does for legal foreign workers.

Now you know exactly how to get your money where it needs to go. Go teach/work, get paid, and send that cash back to your home country without stress.

**Need help? Join our Discord community:** [youteacher.org/discord](https://youteacher.org/discord)

See you in the next chapter!

# CHAPTER 14

## Going to the Movies in China (Because You've Earned a Break)

### Watch the short video for this chapter

See this step done in real life in under 60 seconds.

Scan the QR code or visit:

[youteacher.org/guide/ch14](http://youteacher.org/guide/ch14)



Alright, we've covered the essentials – VPNs, payments, food delivery, getting around. You can officially survive in China now. But here's the thing: you didn't move halfway around the world just to survive. You moved here to actually live.

So let's talk about something fun: going to the movies.

Now, I know what you're thinking – "Pete, I can barely order noodles without Google Translate, how am I supposed to navigate a Chinese cinema?" I get it. When I first arrived, I'd stand outside theaters trying to photograph the LCD screens showing movie times, then frantically run them through translation apps. It was frustrating.

But here's the secret nobody tells you: **you don't need to talk to anyone, you don't need to understand the LCD screens, and you definitely don't need to speak Chinese.** Everything happens through one little app icon hidden in WeChat.

### Why Chinese Cinemas Are Incredible (Seriously)

Before we get into the how-to, let me just say – Chinese cinemas are going to spoil you. Here's what we're talking about:

- **Tickets cost ¥35-40** (around \$5-6 USD). Not some limited-time deal. Just... regular prices.

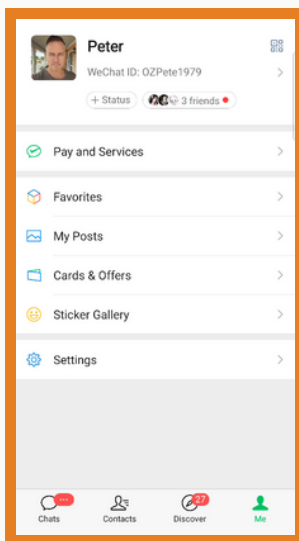
- **The theaters are often empty.** Western movies aren't as popular, so you might have the whole cinema to yourself.
- **The chairs massage you.** Yes, really. Random intervals, free massage.
- **You can bring ANY food from outside.** Fried chicken? Sure. Whole meal from a restaurant? Go for it. Staff don't check, don't care.

My wife and I have literally had private screenings of Hollywood blockbusters multiple times. It's awesome.

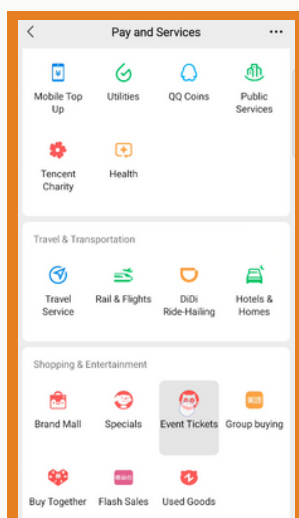
## Finding the Cinema App in WeChat

The app you need is called Maoyan (猫眼), which literally means "Cat Eye." It's a mini-app inside WeChat, which means you don't need to download anything new.

Here's how to find it:



1. Open WeChat
2. Tap "Me" at the bottom right
3. Tap "Services" (or "Pay and Services")
4. Scroll down to the "Shopping & Entertainment" section



5. Look for "Event Tickets" – tap on that



6. At the bottom of the screen, you'll see a row of icons. Tap the film reel icon (second from the left) – that's Maoyan

## Booking Your Tickets

Once you're in the Maoyan app, everything becomes ridiculously simple.



### Step 1: Choose Your Cinema

The app will show you nearby cinemas. You can search by location or just pick one from the list. The names will be in Chinese, but you can tap on them to see the address and use Google Maps (or Amap will be more accurate) to figure out which one is closest.



## Step 2: Pick Your Movie

Side-scroll through the movie posters. Most foreign films will have their English titles visible, even if there's Chinese text too. If you're not sure, tap on the poster – the movie details page often includes the English title.



## Step 3: Select Your Showtime

You'll see available showtimes with prices. The format is 24-hour time (so 19:00 is 7pm). Different times might have different prices – later shows are sometimes cheaper.



## Step 4: Choose Your Seats

This is my favorite part. The seat selection interface is visual and color-coded:

- White/Yellow seats = Available
- Blue seats = Your selection
- Gray seats = Already taken

Pick your seats, then tap the big red button at the bottom to proceed.

## Step 5: Skip the Concessions

The app will try to sell you overpriced popcorn and drinks. Just scroll past all that and tap the payment button at the bottom. Remember: you're bringing your own snacks and drinks from outside.



Pay with WeChat Pay, and boom – you immediately get a QR code. Screenshot this if you want, but it's saved in the app too.





## The Cinema Experience



Now for the fun part. Chinese cinemas are different from Western ones in the best possible ways.

### Bring Your Own Food

Staff don't care what you bring in. We've walked in with:

- Fried chicken from a nearby restaurant
- Bubble tea
- Entire McDonald's meals
- Snacks from the supermarket



Nobody blinks an eye. There's no bag check. The concession stand exists purely as an option, not a requirement.

We routinely hit up snack shops and kiosks before the movie and bring in whatever we want. It's pretty cool.

## The Massage Chairs



This still blows my mind. Most Chinese cinemas have electric massage recliners as standard seats (no extra charge). They'll randomly activate during the movie and give you a few minutes of massage.

## Real Example: My Last Cinema Trip

Let me give you the full breakdown from our most recent movie:

- **Movie:** 一战再战 ("One Battle After Another")
- **Time:** 7:00 PM showing on a Tuesday
- **Cost:** ¥79.80 total for two tickets (about \$11 USD)
- **Seats:** Row 6, seats E and F (middle section, perfect view)
- **Food:** ¥15 fried chicken from outside + ¥8 mango dessert thing from the supermarket = ¥23 (\$3.20 USD)
- **Total experience:** ¥102.80 (\$14.20 USD) for two people

The theater was completely empty except for us. We had free massage chairs. We ate fried chicken while watching explosions on a massive screen.

For context: in Australia, two movie tickets alone would cost me around \$40-50 AUD (\$26-33 USD). No massage chairs. No private screening. No outside food allowed.

China wins.

## Pro Tips

### Book in Advance for Popular Times

Chinese movies (especially big local releases) can fill up quickly. If you're seeing a Chinese film on opening weekend, book a day or two ahead.

### Seat Selection Strategy

- Middle of the theater, about 60-70% back
- If the theater is empty, you can always move during the movie

### Check Subtitle Availability

Most Western movies have Chinese subtitles, but not English ones. If your Chinese isn't there yet, stick to movies you can follow visually or that you've seen before.

### Save Your Ticket Code

Take a screenshot of your QR code or save it to your photos. WeChat can be finicky sometimes, and you don't want to be fumbling through the app at the ticket machine.

## Common Questions

### Q: Do I need to show ID?

Sometimes for age-restricted films, but it's rare. Your passport works fine if they ask.

### Q: Can I get a refund if plans change?

Usually yes, but there's a deadline (often 30 minutes before showtime). Check the refund policy before booking.

### Q: What if the movie I want isn't showing?

Chinese cinemas rotate films quickly. If something just left theaters, it's probably already on streaming platforms anyway. The selection is actually pretty good for both Chinese and Western films.

### Q: Are 3D/IMAX tickets more expensive?

Yes, but still absurdly cheap compared to Western prices. IMAX is usually around ¥60-80 (\$8-11 USD).

## Troubleshooting

### "The QR code won't scan at the kiosk"

Make sure your screen brightness is turned up. If it still won't work, there's usually a manual input option – tap the screen and enter your booking number.

### "I can't find my cinema on the app"

Try searching by the cinema chain name (e.g., "万达" Wanda, "星光" Starlight). If you're still stuck, search for the cinema name in Chinese on Baidu and copy-paste it into Maoyan.

### "The seats I want are grayed out"

They're taken. Chinese apps update in real-time, so what you see is what's actually available.

## Why This Matters

Look, going to the movies isn't essential for surviving in China. But it's one of those small quality-of-life things that makes living here feel normal, comfortable, and frankly, pretty damn good.

Plus, it's a social activity that doesn't require language fluency. You can invite colleagues, make friends, or just enjoy a quiet date night without stress. And when you're paying \$5 for a ticket instead of \$20, you'll actually go to the movies more often.

You've made it through the essentials. You can order food, get around, and pay for things. Now go enjoy a movie in a massage chair while eating fried chicken you brought from outside.

You've earned it.

# CHAPTER 15

## Notable Mentions: Essential Apps We Didn't Cover

### Watch the long-form companion video

In this 30-minute walk-and-talk, I show what a normal workday in China actually looks like and explain how these apps fit into real life, not just theory.



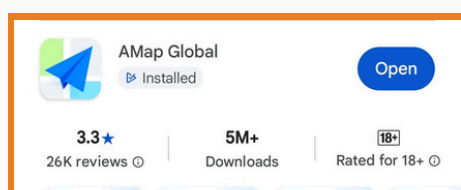
Scan the QR code or visit:

[youteacher.org/guide/outro](https://youteacher.org/guide/outro)

While the 14 chapters above cover the absolute must-haves for daily life in China, there are several other apps that can make your experience even smoother. Here are the apps worth knowing about:

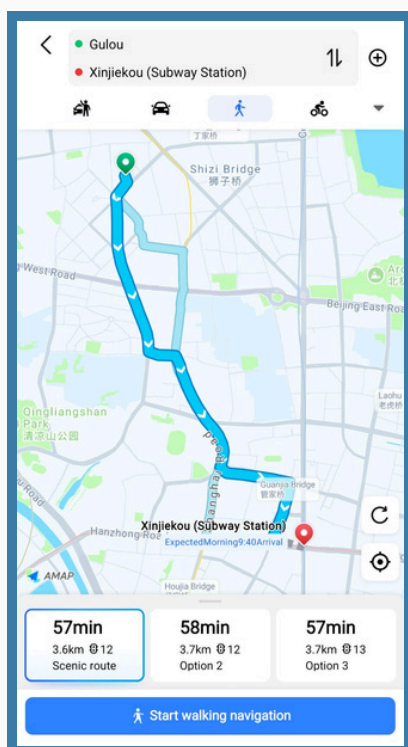
### Amap / AutoNavi (高德地图) - Navigation

**Why you need it:** Google Maps doesn't work properly in China - the data is outdated and GPS positioning is off. Amap is THE navigation app that actually works.



#### What's great about it:

- English version launched in January 2025, with 14 additional languages added in July 2025
- Real-time traffic updates and accurate public transit directions
- Shows subway exit numbers (crucial in China's massive subway systems)
- Works for driving, cycling, walking, and public transportation
- Can book taxis directly through the app



**How to use it:** Download before you arrive in China. You can search in English for major landmarks and addresses. The app shows live traffic conditions with color-coded roads (red = congested). For teachers living in China long-term, this becomes your daily companion for getting anywhere.

**Download:** Search "Amap Global" in your app store.

## Xianyu (闲鱼) - Second-Hand Marketplace

**Why you need it:** When you're settling into a new apartment or leaving China, Xianyu is where you buy and sell second-hand everything - furniture, electronics, appliances, clothes, you name it.



**What's great about it:**

- Prices are 50-80% off retail
- Owned by Alibaba, so it uses Alipay's secure payment system
- Great for finding used appliances when you first move in
- Perfect for selling your stuff when you leave China
- Can negotiate prices directly with sellers

**How to use it:** You'll need a verified Alipay account (covered in Chapter 9). Search for what you need, chat with sellers through the app, and arrange pickup or delivery. Always ask sellers for real photos of the actual item, not stock photos. Check seller ratings - aim for 4.8+ stars.



**Tips for safety:** Use Alipay's escrow system - never pay directly via WeChat. Meet in public places for big-ticket items. Take photos/videos when you pick up items.

**Download:** Search for 应用宝 in the Tencent app store (应用宝) (See Chapter 4 if you don't have this yet).

The Xianyu app should appear in the results.

## Huolala (货拉拉) - Moving Service

**Why you need it:** Changing apartments? Need to move furniture? Huolala is like Didi for moving your stuff. No more haggling with random van drivers.



**What's great about it:**

- Book vans or trucks of different sizes based on your stuff
- Choose just a driver + van, or add movers for an extra fee
- Transparent pricing (no surprise charges)
- Track your driver in real-time
- First-time user discounts

**How to use it:** Open the app, select your vehicle size (they show 3D models so you can gauge what fits), enter pickup and drop-off locations, and add your floor number (affects price). You can specify if you need help carrying things up/down stairs. The app calculates the price upfront. Book at least 3 hours before you need the service.



**Teacher tip:** Some teachers in China move during their contract if they stay more than a year. Save this app for when you need it - it's a lifesaver and much cheaper than moving companies back home.

**Download:** Search for 货拉拉 in the Tencent app store. That's the Chinese name for Huolala.

The app is for moving/delivery services - the icon is usually orange or has truck/moving imagery.

## HelloTalk - Language Exchange

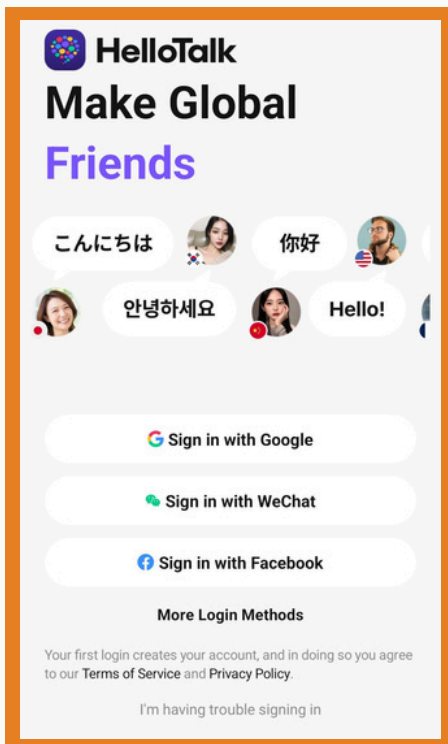
**Why you need it:** Want to practice your Chinese with real people? HelloTalk connects you with native Chinese speakers who want to learn English. It's like a pen-pal app for language learners.



**What's great about it:**

- Over 30 million users in 260+ languages
- Built-in translation tools for when you get stuck
- Voice messages, video calls, text chat
- Correction feature - they fix your Chinese, you fix their English
- "Moments" feed to see posts from Chinese learners
- Free to use (premium available)

**How to use it:** Set your native language (English) and learning language (Chinese/Mandarin). The app matches you with Chinese speakers learning English. You chat back and forth, helping each other learn. It's part language practice, part cultural exchange, part making friends in China.



**Teacher tip:** This is gold for improving your Chinese and making local friends. Many expat teachers have met long-term friends through HelloTalk. Just be aware it's not a dating app - keep conversations focused on language and culture.

**Download:** Search for **HelloTalk** (just type it in English) in the Tencent app store.

HelloTalk actually uses its English name even in China - it doesn't have a separate Chinese name. Just type HelloTalk directly in the Tencent app store search bar and it should appear.

The icon typically has a speech bubble or chat design with multiple colors.

## NetEase Cloud Music (网易云音乐) - Music Streaming

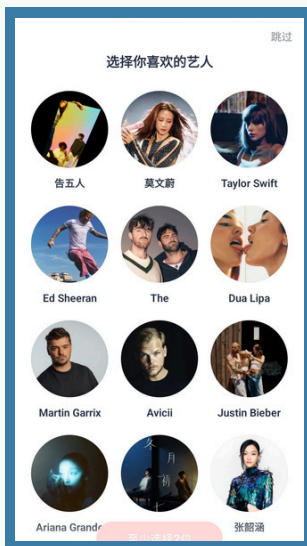
**Why you need it:** Spotify doesn't work in China without a VPN (which can be unreliable). NetEase is China's answer to Spotify, and it's actually really good.

**What's great about it:**

- Huge library of both Chinese and international music
- Free tier available (with ads)
- Social features - see what others are listening to, read comments on songs
- Premium is cheaper than Spotify
- Works perfectly without VPN
- Curated playlists and music discovery



**How to use it:** Download the app, create an account, and start exploring. The interface is in Chinese, but once you get used to it, navigation is intuitive. You can search in English for international artists. The algorithm for music recommendations is excellent.



**Note:** The app is primarily in Chinese, so you might need Google Translate for the first few uses until you learn where everything is.

**Download:** Search for 网易云音乐 in the Tencent app store.

That's the Chinese name for NetEase Cloud Music. The icon is usually red/white with a music note design.

## Beike (贝壳找房) - Apartment Hunting



**Why you need it:** When you're looking for an apartment in China (or upgrading to a better place), Beike is one of the major platforms with professional management and reliable listings.

## What's great about it:

- Virtual Reality (VR) apartment tours - see places without physically visiting
- Detailed property information and real photos
- Professional property management
- Focus on higher-end, quality rentals
- Good for major cities



**How to use it:** Browse listings by location, price, and amenities. You can filter by distance to subway stations, which is crucial in Chinese cities. The VR tour feature lets you "walk through" apartments on your phone. When you find something interesting, contact the agent through the app to schedule a real viewing.



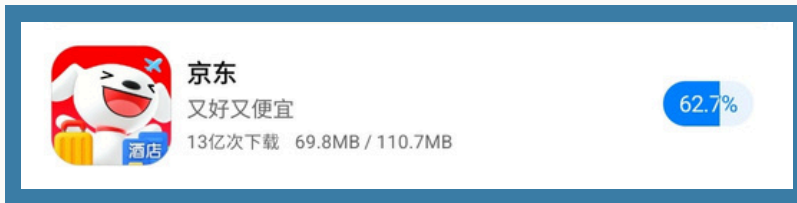
**Teacher tip:** Combine this with other rental platforms like Lianjia and 58.com for maximum options. Always visit apartments in person before signing - photos can be deceiving. Agent fees typically run 35-50% of one month's rent.

**Download:** Search for 贝壳找房 in the Tencent app store.

That's the Chinese name for Beike (the apartment hunting app). The icon typically has a shell design (贝壳 means "shell" in Chinese).

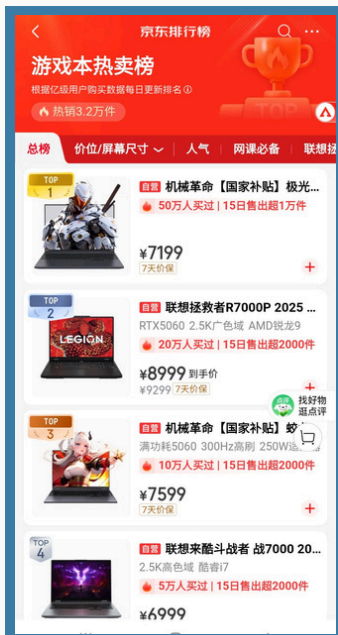
## JD.com (京东) - E-Commerce for Electronics

**Why you might want it:** While Taobao/Pinduoduo are great for bargains, JD.com is where you go for electronics, appliances, and branded goods you want to be 100% authentic.



### What's great about it:

- Known for genuine products (less counterfeit risk than Taobao)
- Incredibly fast delivery - often same-day or next-day
- Own logistics network (like Amazon)
- Best for: laptops, phones, cameras, appliances, supplements
- Better customer service than Taobao
- Easy returns



**How to use it:** Similar to Taobao but with a focus on branded products. Search for what you need, add to cart, pay with Alipay/WeChat Pay. JD's own delivery service is fantastic - you can often get electronics delivered within hours in major cities.

**When to use JD vs Taobao:** Use JD when buying anything expensive or tech-related where authenticity matters. Use Taobao for cheap everyday items, clothes, accessories, random stuff where authenticity is less critical.

**Download:** Search for 京东 in the Tencent app store

That's the Chinese name for JD.com. The icon is typically red with the JD logo or a dog mascot (JD's mascot is a metal dog).

## And many, many more...

Browse around Meituan and Wechat's mini apps for even more from doctors, to vets to massages; it pretty much never ends.

## Conclusion: You're Ready for China

### What You've Learned

From setting up your VPN on day one to booking movie tickets on Maoyan, you've covered every essential app and service you need for daily life in China. You can:

- Stay connected to the outside world
- Communicate with locals and translate on the go
- Pay for everything from subway rides to utility bills
- Order food, shop online, and get anything delivered
- Navigate cities, call taxis, and move apartments
- Handle your banking and international transfers
- Integrate into Chinese digital life like a local

This isn't just a list of apps - it's your ticket to independence in China. While other new arrivals will be fumbling with cash and getting lost, you'll be scanning QR codes, ordering hotpot, and hopping on the subway like you've lived here for years.

### The Real Secret

Here's what we haven't talked about enough: **China runs on apps**. Not sometimes. Not as an option. China's entire society operates through these digital platforms. Your phone isn't just a convenience here - it's your wallet, your ID, your transportation card, your social life, and your gateway to everything.

The teachers who struggle in China are the ones who resist this reality. They try to use cash when everyone scans codes. They avoid WeChat when it's how everyone communicates. They stick to what's familiar instead of adapting to how things actually work here.

The teachers who love China? They're the ones who embrace these tools, learn the systems, and plug into Chinese digital life. Within months, they're living more conveniently than they ever did back home.

### **What Happens Next**

You're standing at the threshold of an incredible adventure. China will challenge you, surprise you, frustrate you, and amaze you - sometimes all in the same day. But with these tools in your pocket, you're equipped to handle whatever comes.

Your first weeks will be a whirlwind of new apps, QR codes, and Chinese characters. You'll make mistakes. You'll accidentally order something bizarre on Meituan. You'll take a Didi to the wrong location. You'll probably lock yourself out of Alipay at least once.

### **That's normal. That's part of the process.**

Every expat who thrives in China has those stories. The difference is they kept going, kept learning, and eventually hit that magic moment when everything just clicks. When using Alipay feels natural. When ordering food in Chinese becomes routine. When you stop translating every character and just know what buttons to press.

That moment is coming for you.

## **Join Our Community**

Living and teaching in China is better when you're connected to others doing the same thing. That's why we created a community of teachers navigating this journey together.

### **Ready to take the next step?**

👉 **Join our Discord community** if you haven't already, connect with other teachers in China, and get real-time answers to your questions.

This is where you'll find:

- Teachers currently living in China who can answer your questions

- Job postings and opportunities across China - we're building a job board specifically for positions in China at [youteacher.org](https://youteacher.org)
- Major focus on avoiding dodgy recruiters/employers
- City-specific advice and recommendations
- Troubleshooting help when apps don't work the way they should
- Updates on new apps, features, and policy changes
- A community of people who get what you're going through

The Discord is free. The guide is free. The community is waiting for you.

**Here's the link:** [youteacher.org/discord](https://youteacher.org/discord)

Don't try to figure out China alone. The teachers who succeed here are the ones who tap into community knowledge, ask questions, and learn from others' experiences. We've built this space specifically for you.

## One Final Thought

China is unlike anywhere else in the world. It's the future and the past colliding in real-time. It's 5G speeds and QR code payments sitting alongside thousand-year-old temples. It's a place where your phone can do absolutely everything - except access Instagram without a VPN.

This contradiction is what makes China fascinating, frustrating, and ultimately unforgettable.

You're about to join millions of foreigners who chose to live, work, and build lives in China. Some will stay for a year. Some will stay for decades. All of them will tell you that China changed them.

This guide is your foundation. The community is your support system. The rest? That's up to you.

Welcome to China. Your adventure starts now.

*P.S. - Bookmark this guide. Screenshot the important sections. Download all the apps before your flight. And most importantly, participate in Discord so you have people to turn to when you need help. See you in China.*

## About This Guide

This China Survival Guide was created specifically for teachers coming to live and work in China. Whether you're arriving next month or just starting to research the move, this guide gives you the practical, boots-on-the-ground knowledge you need to hit the ground running.

Questions? Updates? Success stories? Share them in our Discord community. We're all in this together.

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was written to help people navigate everyday life in China more easily and with less frustration.

It focuses on practical systems, habits, and setups that are rarely explained but quickly become essential. Many of the challenges people face are not cultural misunderstandings, but missing information. This guide aims to close that gap.

The information here is based on real experience living in China across different periods, rather than theory, online debate, or idealised portrayals. It prioritises clarity over completeness and usefulness over opinion.

This guide is not intended to replace official advice, legal guidance, or professional services. Policies, platforms, and procedures change, sometimes without notice. Readers are encouraged to verify details when necessary and use this book as a practical starting point rather than a definitive authority.

# THE YOUTEACHER COMMUNITY

Living in China is easier when you have access to current information and people who understand the systems you are dealing with.

The YouTeacher community is a space for teachers and long-term residents to share practical knowledge, updates, and experience based advice. It is focused on real situations, not social media takes or recycled forum posts.

If you found this guide useful and want ongoing context, discussion, or clarification, you are welcome to join.

YouTeacher

[youteacher.org](https://youteacher.org)

[youteacher.org/discord](https://youteacher.org/discord)

This guide will continue to evolve, but the community is where the most up to date conversations happen.



**Living in China** is a practical guide for people trying to make sense of everyday life in a country that rarely explains itself.

Modern China runs on systems, apps, and processes that most newcomers are never properly introduced to. Cash often does not work. Familiar websites are blocked. Simple tasks like paying bills, ordering food, or getting around a city can feel far more difficult than they should.

This guide focuses on what actually matters. It explains the tools, habits, and setups you need to function day to day, based on real experience rather than forums, guesswork, or outdated advice.

Whether you are arriving for the first time or returning after years away, this book is designed to help you get oriented quickly, avoid common mistakes, and feel capable sooner.

No fluff. No filler. Just the things that matter.