THE CHINA HELPER

FREE STARTER BUNDLE

THE ROUTE THROUGH THIS PACK

01 · Before you fly
Documents, copies, packing and the apps to install at home
PART 1 – 2

02 · First 48 hours
Airport, SIM card, police registration, getting to your room
PART 3

03 · Money and phones
WeChat Pay, Alipay, bank account, cash and card fallback
PART 4

04 · First month
Four weeks of tasks, plus the admin nobody warns you about
PART 5 – 6

Free China Starter Pack

Everything you need for the first thirty days, in one file. Documents to pack before you fly, the apps China actually runs on, how to get payments working with a foreign card, a week-by-week plan for month one and the fifteen phrases that carry you through it.

6 PARTS · 16 PAGES · 12 APPS · 15 PHRASES · A 4-WEEK PLAN

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START HERE

How to use this pack

Read it once on a screen, then print the checklist pages you will actually tick. Nothing here has to be finished in order — Part 2 assumes you are standing in an airport, Part 6 assumes you have already slept in the country once.

The six parts and where they live

PART	PAGES	WHAT YOU FINISH IT WITH
Part 1 · Before you fly	Pages 3 – 4	Documents, copies, what to install at home, and the last four weeks before departure
Part 2 · First 48 hours	Page 5	From the aircraft door to your room, in order, with what to have ready at each step
Part 3 · Week one admin	Page 6	SIM card, accommodation registration and campus registration
Part 4 · Money	Pages 7 – 8	Getting WeChat Pay and Alipay working, opening a bank account, and a budget you can fill in
Part 5 · First month	Pages 9 – 12	Four weeks of tasks, the apps table, food and getting around
Part 6 · Chinese and admin	Pages 13 – 16	Fifteen survival phrases, deadlines you cannot miss, an emergency card and the master checklist

Print the last three pages if you print nothing else. The master checklist, the emergency card and the notes page are the ones people come back to in week two.

WHO THIS IS FOR

What the pack assumes about you

- You hold an admission letter from a Chinese university
- You are travelling on a student visa, or collecting one on arrival
- You carry one smartphone you can install apps on
- You have at least one bank or debit card in your own name
- You speak English well and very little Chinese
- Your university has an international office that answers email
- You will live on campus, or close enough to walk
- You can be reached by email while travelling

PART 1 · BEFORE YOU FLY

Paper first: what you cannot board without

The most common arrival failure is a document that exists only on a phone that then runs out of battery, or in an inbox you cannot open without roaming. Pack paper. Paper never asks for a verification code.

Passport and visa

- Passport — original plus two photocopies
- Visa page — photographed and printed
- Admission letter — printed and photographed
- JW201 or JW202 form — original, keep it forever

Money and proofs

- Bank statements or funding proof
- Scholarship award letter, if it applies
- Two spare passport photos, white background
- Emergency contact list printed on paper

Health, insurance and contacts

- Insurance policy number and hotline
- Prescription list in generic drug names
- Vaccination and health check papers if requested
- Accommodation address written down, not just saved in email

The two-copy rule: one copy travels in your hand luggage, one in your checked bag, and every page also lives in a cloud folder you can reach from any browser. If all three fail together, you have had a very bad week.

QUIETLY RUNNING OUT

Documents that expire while you are busy

ITEM	WHAT PEOPLE MISS ABOUT IT
Passport validity	Many offices here want six months of validity beyond your study dates
Insurance policy	Usually annual — note the renewal date the day you arrive
Residence permit	Renewable yearly, and the deadline falls at the same time every year
JW201 or JW202 form	Issued once, used at multiple offices, and not reissued easily

PART 1 · THE COUNTDOWN

The last four weeks, in order

WHEN	DO THIS	WHY IT IS TIMED THIS WAY
Four weeks out	Confirm flight, arrival date and airport with your university	Most universities run a pickup window — outside it you are on your own at midnight
Three weeks out	Install WeChat, Alipay and a maps app; set them up on home internet	Account verification is far easier before you land than on airport Wi-Fi
Two weeks out	Photocopy everything, print photos, sort insurance and prescriptions	Print shops near campus are busy in the first two weeks
Final three days	Charge power banks, pack chargers in hand luggage, save your address offline	Buy a local adapter on day one rather than guessing before departure

DO IT AT HOME, NOT AT THE AIRPORT

Four apps to install before you fly

APP	WHAT CHINA USES IT FOR	SETUP NOTE
WeChat	Messaging that everyone here actually uses	Verify it at home — the check may need an existing user
Alipay	Payments, transport codes, deposits	Bind a foreign card now, switch to a local card later
Amap or Apple Maps	Transit routing with Chinese cities mapped properly	Download the offline map for your city
Pleco	Offline dictionary that reads camera text	Activate the offline pack before you fly

FOR THE VERY LATE READER

If you only have thirty minutes before leaving

BLOCK	DO EXACTLY THIS	WHY
Minute one	Photocopy the passport photo page and the visa page	Two copies, kept in two bags
Minute ten	Screenshot your flight, your arrival address and booking number	Saved offline, not only in email
Minute twenty	Install WeChat and Alipay, verify them on home internet	Account checks are easier before you land
Minute thirty	Put emergency cash somewhere other than your wallet	Cards fail. Cash almost never does

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PART 2 · FIRST 48 HOURS

Wheels down: the first day, in sequence

Nothing about this day is difficult once you know the order things happen in. Read this page on the plane rather than trying to work it out in an arrivals hall.

MOMENT	WHAT HAPPENS	WHAT TO HAVE READY
Off the plane	Follow the arrivals flow, keep your passport in your hand rather than a bag	Health declaration and fingerprint kiosks — staff point you through them
Immigration	Passport, visa, admission letter if asked, fingerprints of both hands	Answer briefly and literally. Purpose of visit: study
Baggage hall	Find a trolley, note the carousel number, look for the university desk	Many universities put a volunteer desk here during arrival weeks
SIM counter	Passport in hand, ask for a data plan, pay in cash or by card	This is the cheapest and easiest place to get connected
Metro, taxi or pickup	Metro is cheapest, taxi is simplest with luggage, pickup needs pre-booking	Show your address written down — English alone will not get you there
Campus gate and dorm	Registration point first, keys second, groceries last	Dorm offices often close around five in the afternoon

GETTING INTO THE CITY

Three ways to reach your room, and when to pick each

Metro

Cheapest by a wide margin

- [ ] Clean, signposted in English
- [ ] Hard work with two large suitcases
- [ ] Runs until around eleven at night

Taxi or ride-hailing

Door to door with luggage

- [ ] Show the address, do not say it
- [ ] Gate guards may block — call your dorm
- [ ] Keep small notes for the old-school taxis

University pickup

Free, and they expect you

- [ ] Usually daytime windows only
- [ ] Book it weeks ahead in writing
- [ ] Have their phone number on paper

IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG

Three common arrivals failures and the fix

SITUATION	FIRST MOVE	SECOND MOVE
Nobody is waiting for you	Go to the official taxi queue inside the terminal	Ignore offers from people inside the hall
Your card does not work	Use cash first, then buy a SIM and sort payments after	Airport ATMs take most international cards
Your dorm office has shut	Ask security for the night registration desk or a hotel	Keep the receipt — it is often reimbursed

PART 3 · WEEK ONE ADMIN

Three things, in this order

1. **SIM card first** — Nothing works without a Chinese number. Every app, every delivery, every bank appointment sends its code to it. Buy the plan at the airport counter if there is one, otherwise at an official store with your passport.
2. **Register where you sleep** — Within twenty-four hours of moving in you must register your address at the local police station, or through your dorm office if the university handles it. This is the deadline people miss, and it is the one that causes the most trouble later.
3. **Register as a student** — Campus registration turns your admission letter into an actual enrolment: tuition paid or deferred, student card issued, dorm contract signed, medical check booked. Ask the international office for the checklist.

> **Everything else can wait until week two.** Shopping, social events and travel plans do not have deadlines attached. These three do.

GETTING CONNECTED

Three places to buy a SIM, honestly compared

WHERE	GOOD POINTS	WATCH OUT
Airport counter	Open before most shops close, staff used to passports	Plans aimed at visitors can cost more than student plans
Official store in the city	Cheapest long-term plans and proper receipts	May ask for Chinese registration first — comes later
Campus stall during arrival week	Student plans, staff who speak English	Queues are long and they run out of SIM stock

WHAT TO CARRY FOR ALL THREE

One kit, three offices

- Passport, original, not a copy
- Visa page photocopy
- Admission letter printout
- Accommodation address written on paper
- Chinese phone number already working
- Passport photos, two minimum
- Cash for the unexpected fee
- A charged power bank
- The name of your contact at the university
- Something to read — queues are long

PART 4 · MONEY

The order that actually gets payments working

1. **Have a working Chinese number first** — Verification codes go there. Without one, almost nothing finishes.
2. **Add your international card to one wallet** — Start with Alipay or WeChat Pay, not both. One working wallet beats two half-set-up ones.
3. **Test it on a small real payment** — Buy water from a machine. Until money actually moves, the setup is not finished.
4. **Keep a second payment method untouched** — A second card, plus cash. Foreign cards fail here often enough to plan for it.
5. **Open a local bank account once you are registered** — It needs your enrolment confirmed, so this comes after campus registration, not before.
6. **Move over once enrolled** — Bind the local card, set a transport code, top up through the wallet instead of the card.

ONCE YOU ARE ENROLLED

Opening a bank account: what they will ask for

Passport and visa

- Enrolment confirmation from your university
- Chinese phone number active for at least a few days
- Proof of address or dorm contract
- Your name exactly as it appears on the passport

Go early, on a weekday. Branches run on queue numbers, the forms are paper, and anything involving a foreign passport takes longer than the queue display suggests.

WHEN IT REFUSES TO WORK

Three failures and their fixes

WHAT YOU SEE	FIRST FIX	WHY IT HAPPENS
Declined at verification	Try the other wallet, then the second card	Issuers block Chinese merchants differently
A code you never received	Restart the app, then ask your bank about international texts	SMS delivery to foreign numbers is uneven
A small shop says cash only	Keep a small amount of cash permanently	Old counters and taxis often have no QR setup

PART 4 · MONTH ONE COSTS

Your first full month, on one page

Month one always runs over, because of deposits. Fill in the planned column before the month starts and the actual column at the end — the gap between them is where your real budget comes from.

CATEGORY	PLANNED (¥)	ACTUAL (¥)	NOTES
Rent or dorm fee			
Utilities, water, heating			
Food: canteen and cooking			
Food: eating out			
Transport: metro, bus, taxi			
Phone and internet			
Study costs: books, printing			
Health: insurance, pharmacy			
Going out and short trips			
Month total			

THE DEPOSIT MONTH

One-off costs that only happen once, and hurt

- Dorm deposit and first month in advance
- Transport card and its first top-up
- Bedding, kettle, basic kitchen things
- Adapter and the charger you only discover you need
- Medical check and any fee a scholarship does not cover
- A bicycle — almost every student ends up buying one

Budget for two months of living costs on arrival. The deposit month is heavier than any month after it, and starting behind is much harder than starting even.

WHERE IT LEAKS

Three places students overspend without noticing

- Eating out every day instead of the canteen
- Delivery fees on top of delivery food
- Taxis home after the metro has closed

PART 5 · WEEK ONE

Week one is logistics. That is all it is.

Almost every international student feels flat in week one, because week one is paperwork, phone form-filling and wrong turns. It is not a verdict on your year.

Admin

SIM card bought and working
- Address registered at the police station
- Campus registration started
- Tuition sorted or payment plan agreed
- Student card collected

Digital life

WeChat working with at least one contact
- Alipay or WeChat Pay doing real payments
- Campus group joined
- Transport card or metro code working
- Offline map of your city downloaded
- Cloud backup running on your photos

Body and basics

Sleep pattern nudged towards local time
- One canteen you can order from confidently
- Nearest supermarket and pharmacy found
- Cash withdrawn from an ATM on the right network
- Laundry sorted — where, how, and when it closes

Set one deadline for yourself and meet it: everything that asks for your passport should be finished inside seven days. Everything else has slack.

DAY BY DAY

A first week that fits in six days

DAY	WHAT BELONGS TO THAT DAY	NOTE
Day one	SIM, dorm check-in, food, sleep	Jet lag makes decisions worse — do nothing optional
Day two	Police and campus registration	The two that carry real deadlines
Day three	Canteen, supermarket, ATM, pharmacy	Walk it once without a phone map
Day four	Bank visit, or book the appointment	Go early, take everything, expect to queue
Day five	First class, first campus group message	Join everything offered in the first fortnight
Day six	Clean the room, wash clothes, rest	The first quiet day is usually needed

PART 5 · WEEKS TWO TO FOUR

Three weeks that decide your semester

By the end of week four the logistics stop dominating and something resembling a life starts. These are the things that get it there.

Week two

Timetable confirmed, first classes attended

- Library and study room located and card working
- Printing account set up — you will need it weekly
- Two canteens tried, one delivery app used
- Bank appointment booked or done
- Walking route to campus timed, bus backup noted
- Named at least one person in each class

Week three

A routine that includes food, sleep and washing

- One club, society or language exchange joined
- Sports card or gym sorted if you want one
- Residence permit paperwork started
- Home contact set up across both apps and email
- A weekend plan beyond the campus gate
- Found one place off campus you like

Week four

Month-one budget filled in and compared

- Anything still broken reported again, in writing
- One short trip outside the city or a museum day
- People you would call friends, not just classmates
- A regular time to study Chinese as well as attend it
- Month-two plan written down before it starts
- Everything with a deadline entered into one calendar

WHAT USUALLY GOES WRONG

The two predictable problems, and the answer

PROBLEM	WHAT IT USUALLY MEANS	MOVE THAT HELPS
Week-two flatness	Nothing is wrong; campus novelty has worn off	Book something specific for the weekend
A deadline you misread	Offices often work from different calendars	Ask in writing, then screenshot the answer

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PART 5 · REFERENCE

Twelve things China runs on

You do not need every app on day one. You need the first four on day one, and the rest as the need appears.

APP	WHAT IT IS REALLY FOR	SETUP NOTE
WeChat	Messaging, official accounts, mini-programs, most campus groups	Set up at home; verification may need an existing user
Alipay	Payments, transport code, deposits, bills, deliveries	Works with a foreign card; easier once you have a local card
WeChat Pay	Payments inside WeChat, splitting bills, group red packets	The second wallet to set up, once Alipay is stable
Amap / Apple Maps	Transit routing, walking routes, real-time bus arrival	Chinese cities are mapped far better here than elsewhere
Didi	Ride-hailing, available inside WeChat and Alipay too	Needs a local number; English interface exists but is thin
Meituan / Ele.me	Food delivery, supermarket runs, group-buy deals	Copy an address, paste it; never retype it
12306	Train tickets — the official national rail app	Passport-linked; buy seats long before holidays
Taobao / JD	Everything physical, from kettles to winter coats	Check the campus parcel pickup point before ordering
Pleco	Offline dictionary, camera lookup, flashcards	The offline pack is the part worth having
Your bank's own app	Transfers, balance, blocking a lost card	Install it in-branch — setup usually needs staff
University portal or app	Grades, timetable, campus card top-up, leave requests	Usually only reachable after enrolment is confirmed
Your access tool or VPN	Reaching services blocked inside China	Arrange and test it before departure, not after

IN THIS ORDER

Installing them without the usual tangle

1. **WeChat first** — It is how the university, your classmates and almost every office will contact you.
2. **Alipay second** — Payments are the thing you cannot do without, and it accepts foreign cards most reliably.
3. **Maps third** — Download your city for offline use before you leave home Wi-Fi.
4. **Delivery and trains last** — Neither works until you have an address, a number and a payment method.

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PART 5 · DAILY LIFE

Eating and getting around without drama

Food

- Pointing at a dish is completely normal in a canteen
- Two words get you a plate without chilli
- Canteen meals are the cheapest food you will ever eat
- Delivery apps save your address — paste it, do not retype
- Hot water dispensers are usually free and everywhere
- Payment is by QR code far more often than cash

Getting around

- Metro closes around eleven — check the last train
- Buses are numbered, cheap and slow; metro is faster
- Taxis and Didi both need your destination written down
- Bikes and scooters fill the gap between blocks
- Long-distance trains book out days before holidays
- Your student card sometimes halves entry and ticket prices

Save your address three ways: your dorm name and room number saved in your phone notes, the nearest landmark in English, and the map pin dropped once and saved as a favourite.

YOUR FIRST CANTEEN ORDER

Five steps that always work

1. **Look up at the menu boards** — Dishes are numbered or shown with a picture; prices sit beside them.
2. **Point, and hold up fingers for quantity** — Nods, pointing and fingers work better than words at this stage.
3. **Say ní hǎo, then thank them** — Two words, badly pronounced, and the whole exchange goes better.
4. **Tap or scan to pay, then take a tray** — Hold the phone over the QR pad, confirm the amount, find a seat.

CHEAP INSURANCE

Four habits that quietly prevent problems

- Carry a small amount of cash at all times
- Keep passport photos in your bag, not your room
- Ask the international office — their answers are free
- Do one thing badly in public every day
- Say thank you in Chinese even if it comes out wrong
- Read the sign before you reach for the translator

PART 6 · SURVIVAL CHINESE

Fifteen phrases that carry the whole month

Tones matter, but being understood matters more. Say these slowly and badly and you will nearly always be understood. The full fifty-phrase list is a free download too.

WHAT YOU MEAN	SAY IT LIKE THIS	WHEN YOU WILL ACTUALLY USE IT
Hello	Nǐ hǎo	Greeting anyone, anywhere, including the security desk
Thank you	Xièxie	Every shop, every delivery, every held door
Sorry, excuse me	Duìbuqǐ	Getting past someone, or apologising for the small things
How much is this?	Zhège duōshao qián?	Markets and shops without price labels
Too expensive	Tài guì le	Starting a negotiation politely, said with a smile
I don't understand	Wǒ tīng bù dǒng	Buys you patience before someone switches to gestures
Do you speak English?	Nǐ huì shuō Yīngyǔ ma?	Ask near universities, banks and tourist areas
No chilli, please	Bú yào là	The most useful food sentence you will learn
Where is the toilet?	Cèsuǒ zài nǎr?	Malls, stations, campuses — always worth knowing
This one, please	Wǒ yào zhège	Pointing works too; this makes it polite
I need help	Wǒ xūyào bāngzhù	Say it first, then show the address on your phone
Is there Wi-Fi?	Yǒu Wi-Fi ma?	Cafés, hotels, waiting rooms
Where is the metro?	Dìtiě zhàn zài nǎr?	Ask it pointing at your phone map, not at the sky
I am a student	Wǒ shì xuésheng	Discounts, canteen counters, ticket windows
I live here	Wǒ zhù zài zhèr	Say it while showing your address — drivers recognise it instantly

Two study habits that work. Learn three phrases a day from this table and use them the same day — after a week you will be ordering food without looking at the page. Reading the list without saying it aloud changes nothing.

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PART 6 · DEADLINES

The six dates you cannot argue with

THING	WHEN IT IS DUE	WHAT IT ASKS FOR	NOTE
Police registration	Within twenty-four hours of moving in	Passport, accommodation proof, sometimes the landlord	Dorm offices often handle it — ask first
Campus registration	In the window printed on your admission letter	Admission letter, JW201 or JW202, passport, photos	Missed windows can cost a whole semester
Medical check	Usually arranged by the university in week one	Passport, photos, fee paid at the clinic	Book the slot the day registration finishes
Insurance activation	Before the first clinic visit, not after	Policy number, passport, student card	Keep the hotline number in your phone, not in email
Residence permit	Within thirty days of arrival on a single-entry X1 visa	Everything above, plus the university's letter of introduction	Genuinely unforgiving — treat it as a hard deadline
Annual re-registration	Once a year, usually at the start of the semester	Student card, timetable confirmation	Ask your office when yours falls — it varies

Write these six onto one page and keep it with your passport. Almost every bad outcome international students run into traces back to one of these being late, not missing — just late.

KEEPING ALL SIX STRAIGHT

One system instead of six worries

- Put all six dates into one calendar with reminders a week early
- Photograph every receipt and every stamped form
- Keep one folder, physical or digital, for everything border-related
- Ask for deadlines in writing, then screenshot the answer
- Check whether your dorm office handles police registration for you
- Note who signed what, and when
- Re-check one week before each deadline, not the day before
- Take someone from your university along if you are unsure
- Go in the morning — afternoon queues spill past closing
- Ask what happens next at every counter before you leave
- If you are offered a receipt, take it every time

PART 6 · KEEP THIS ONE

The card you actually want in your pocket

110	120	119	12345
POLICE	AMBULANCE	FIRE	CITY HOTLINE

Fill this in before you need it. Paper works when a phone does not — flat battery, no signal, or panic.

MY DETAILS — NAME, NATIONALITY, BLOOD TYPE

MY ADDRESS, WRITTEN OUT IN FULL

UNIVERSITY CONTACT TO CALL FIRST

NEAREST HOSPITAL OR CAMPUS CLINIC

WORST CASE

Lost passport: do these five things, in order

1. **Tell your university international office** — They issue the letter every later step depends on
2. **Report the loss to the local police station** — Ask for the written report — you will need it twice
3. **Contact your embassy or consulate** — They handle the emergency travel document
4. **Reapply at the exit and entry administration** — Your new document needs a new permit attached to it
5. **Keep every receipt and stamped paper** — Each office asks for the previous office's paper

IN THE MOMENT

Three things to say when something is wrong

Wǒ xūyào bāngzhù — I need help. Say it first.

- Nǐ huì shuō Yīngyǔ ma? — Do you speak English? Ask second.
- Then show this page, not your face.

Keep someone on the phone with you. Call whoever you trust most, put it on speaker and let them hear it. You will need a witness later more often than you expect.

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ONE PAGE, THREE MOMENTS

The master checklist

At home

- Documents packed, with two printed copies
- WeChat and Alipay set up before flying
- Passport photos and cash in hand luggage
- Address saved offline, and written on paper
- University told about your flight

Week one

- SIM card working
- Police registration done inside twenty-four hours
- Campus registration started
- One payment method tested on a real purchase
- Canteen, supermarket and pharmacy located

Month one

- Bank account opened once enrolled
- Residence permit applied for inside thirty days
- Budget table filled in twice
- One club, society or language exchange joined
- All six deadlines into one calendar

NOTES — DATES THAT APPLY TO YOU, NAMES OF PEOPLE WHO HELPED, THINGS TO CHASE

Everything else we publish

Scan for the full library of printable checklists, templates and phrase guides — all free.

Airport Arrival in China: Your First 24 Hours — *if this is still ahead of you*

Essential Apps Every International Student Needs — *the setup, step by step*

How to Get a Chinese SIM Card — *the step everything else depends on*

Police Registration: The 24-Hour Rule — *the deadline people miss most*

Opening a Bank Account as a Foreigner — *what to bring and what they ask*

Your First Month in China Checklist — *the thirty-day version, week by week*

50 Essential Chinese Phrases — *the full list, with pinyin and usage*

Disclaimer: this pack is general guidance for international students, not legal, immigration or financial advice. Rules change by city, by university and by year, and the offices applying them interpret them differently. Confirm current requirements with your university's international office, the exit and entry administration handling your permit, or the Chinese embassy or consulate covering your country.
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