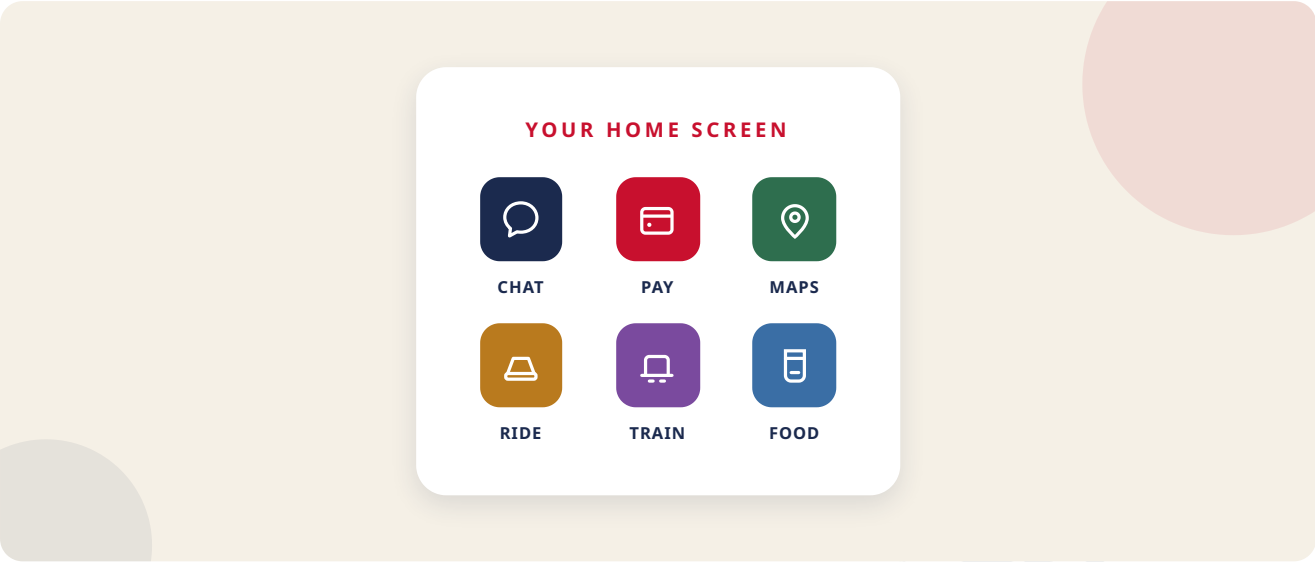
THE CHINA HELPER

FREE STUDENT RESOURCE



Essential China Apps Cheat Sheet

Set up the apps China actually runs on before you land — payments, transport, food delivery and messaging, with setup notes for foreign phone numbers and international cards.

MONEY
Alipay and WeChat Pay, cards and real-name setup

TRANSPORT
Maps, ride-hailing, metro codes and train tickets

DAILY LIFE
Food delivery, shopping and local discovery

TOOLKIT
Messaging, dictionaries and your SIM card notes

MONEY · SET UP FIRST

Alipay and WeChat Pay

Alipay — the digital wallet most students start with

1. Download Alipay and sign up with your phone number
2. Switch the app language to English in settings
3. Complete identity verification with your passport
4. Link an international card, or a Chinese bank card once you have one
5. Pay by scanning the merchant's QR code, or show yours

WeChat Pay — the wallet inside the app everyone uses

1. Create your WeChat account before you fly
2. Complete real-name verification (passport)
3. Add a card under Me, then Services, then Wallet
4. Use it to pay, split bills and pay inside mini programs
5. Keep some RMB cash for the first few days

WHAT YOU NEED	DETAILS
Passport	Real-name verification is mandatory for both wallets — details must match your passport exactly
Phone number	A Chinese number is expected for verification codes; a foreign number works for sign-up but complicates everything after
A card	International Visa/Mastercard usually link to Alipay and WeChat Pay now, with per-transaction and monthly limits that change over time

Expect this: many small shops, street vendors and campus canteens take QR payments only. Mobile payment in China is not a convenience, it is the default — but card rules change often, so check the latest limits before you rely on one card.

MONEY · EVERYDAY FEATURES

What the wallets also do

- [ ] **Transit codes** — ride metro and buses by scanning in the app
- [ ] **Bill payment** — electricity, water, phone top-ups
- [ ] **Train tickets** — book without leaving the app
- [ ] **Mini programs** — food delivery, campus services, city services
- [ ] **Money transfer** — split dinner, pay your landlord, receive refunds

GETTING AROUND

Maps, rides and trains

APP	WHAT IT DOES	WHY YOU NEED IT
Amap / Gaode also Baidu Maps	Navigation, transit routes, live traffic	Google Maps is unreliable in mainland China; local maps know the metro and campus gates
DiDi	Ride-hailing, like Uber	Airport pickups with luggage, late nights, cities without a metro
China Railway 12306	Official train booking	High-speed rail between cities — book on the official app, not resellers
Alipay transit code	Metro and bus entry	No transport card needed — scan your phone at the gate

Boarding a train: your passport is your ticket — enter the station through the manual lane and show it, the e-ticket is tied to your passport number in 12306.

GETTING AROUND · DAY ONE

Set this up in your first week

- [ ] Install Amap and save your campus address in English and Chinese
- [ ] Register DiDi and add a payment method
- [ ] Enable the transit code inside Alipay for your city
- [ ] Register a 12306 account with your passport details
- [ ] Ask which metro line serves your campus and save the route

DiDi in English: enable English in settings, and show the driver the pinned map location instead of saying the address.

IF IT GOES WRONG

Common snags and quick fixes

SNAG	QUICK FIX
No verification SMS	Turn off roaming, make sure the Chinese SIM is active, retry on Wi-Fi
Foreign card declined	Check the wallet's limit notices, try a smaller amount, or add a second card
Driver cannot find you	Pin the pickup point; use a landmark gate, not the address

DAILY LIFE

Food, shopping and discovery

APP	WHAT IT DOES	WHY YOU NEED IT
WeChat the one must-have	Messaging, groups, calls, files, payments, mini programs	Classmates, professors and the university itself will ask for your WeChat ID, not your number
Meituan / Ele.me	Food delivery, groceries, local services	Campus evenings, rain days, and anything a delivery rider can bring to your dorm
Taobao / JD	Online shopping, everything from bedding to electronics	Dorm setup and far cheaper prices than import stores
Xiaohongshu	Local discovery and recommendations	Real reviews of restaurants, travel spots and student life tips
Pleco + a translate app	Chinese dictionary and camera/speech translation	Menus, labels, signs and pharmacy runs without Chinese

THE PHONE NUMBER BEHIND THEM ALL

Your SIM card is step zero

Why it matters

- [ ] App verification sends SMS codes — WeChat, Alipay and banking all want a Chinese number
- [ ] Public Wi-Fi logins usually ask for one too
- [ ] The university and your landlord need to reach you on it

Where to get one

- [ ] Airport kiosks on landing — convenient, slightly pricier
- [ ] Carrier stores (China Mobile, Unicom, Telecom) — cheapest, bring your passport
- [ ] Typical plans: about ¥30–50/month for 10–30 GB

Avoid street vendors offering "no documents needed" SIMs — they can be scams or recycled numbers. Real-name registration with your passport is mandatory for every SIM in China.

INSTALL ORDER

When to install what

1. **Before you fly:** WeChat and Alipay accounts created, passport details ready
2. **First 48 hours:** local SIM, then finish wallet verification
3. **First week:** Amap, DiDi, transit code, 12306, Meituan
4. **After you settle:** Taobao, JD, Xiaohongshu, Pleco

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MASTER CHECKLIST

Every app, at a glance

- [ ] WeChat — account created and verified
- [ ] Alipay — verified, card linked, payment tested
- [ ] WeChat Pay — card added
- [ ] Chinese SIM active, SMS codes arriving
- [ ] Amap — campus saved, transit routes working
- [ ] DiDi — registered, payment method added
- [ ] Transit code enabled for your city's metro
- [ ] 12306 — passport registered, e-ticket booked
- [ ] Meituan or Ele.me — first delivery done
- [ ] Taobao or JD — dorm shopping started
- [ ] Pleco and a translate app installed
- [ ] Cash backup in your wallet

Continue your China journey

Scan for the full library of free China downloads — arrival checklists, budget templates, planners and study tools.

The Essential Apps in China — *the full walkthrough behind this sheet*

How to Set Up WeChat Pay as a Foreigner — *step by step*

How to Use Alipay in China — *verification, cards, features*

Online Shopping in China — *Taobao, JD and parcel pickup*

KEEP THIS HANDY

Quick reference

Numbers and habits

- [ ] **Police 110 · Ambulance 120 · Fire 119**
- [ ] Keep your passport photo page saved offline
- [ ] Carry ¥100–200 cash for the rare cash-only moment

Protect the accounts

- [ ] Never let your Chinese number lapse — every app resets through it
- [ ] Avoid banking on public Wi-Fi; use mobile data
- [ ] Screenshot each app's verification status once working

Notes — account IDs, card limits, questions for your international office

About these apps: app features, English-language support, card limits and availability change frequently. Check each app's official listing or in-app help centre for the current position before you rely on a feature.

Disclaimer: this cheat sheet is general guidance, not legal or financial advice. Prices and rules vary by city and change over time.

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