

Wechat, ICT, and Chinese Nationalism

Alex Liu

Shanghai Disneyland

Lord of the jungle

Disney takes a big gamble with a new theme park in China



[Print edition](#) | [Business](#) >
Jun 16th 2016 | SHANGHAI



A BOLD reimagining of the tale of Tarzan is one of the principal attractions at Shanghai Disneyland, a theme park twice the size of California's original Disneyland, that opened on June 16th. Even more impressive than the acrobatic stunts on display are the gyrations performed behind the scenes by Robert Iger, chairman of the Walt Disney Company, to ensure that his firm's vast investment in China brings equally huge rewards.

The Bike-Share Oversupply in China: Huge Piles of Abandoned and Broken Bicycles

ALAN TAYLOR | MAR 22, 2018 | 30 PHOTOS | IN FOCUS

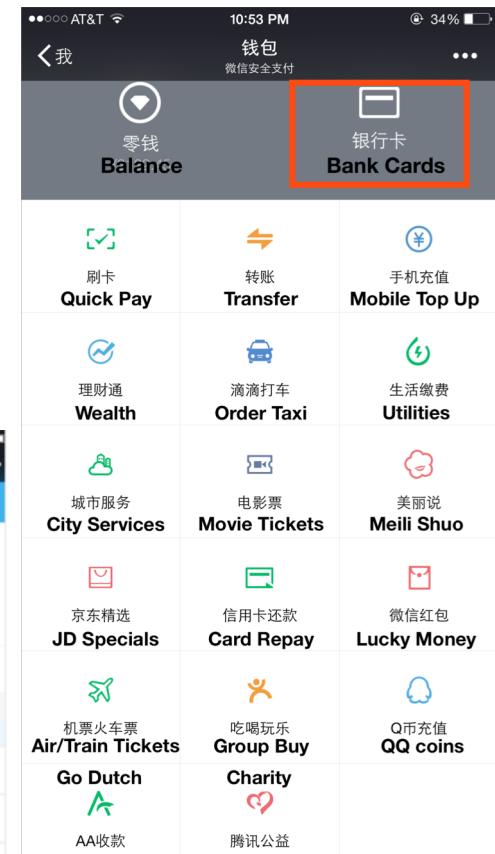


22. Shared bicycles block a pathway in Jiuxianqiao, Chaoyang district, Beijing, on July 14, 2017. #

Zhanglin.net / Shutterstock

What is Wechat? Credit to a16z

- The app-within-an-app model – changes everything we think we know about ‘web vs. mobile’
- Payments as a portal to a brave new mobile world



- <https://a16z.com/2015/08/06/wechat-china-mobile-first/>



THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.



A quick-response code enables shoppers to buy vegetables with their smartphones at MC Box Po Tat Market in Hong Kong. ANTHONY KWAN/BLOOMBERG NEWS

By [Alyssa Abkowitz](#)

January 4, 2018

134 COMMENTS



Zhao Shenji has a WeChat code to encourage people in Beijing to give him handouts. PHOTO: ALYSSA ABKOWITZ/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Using WeChat or Alipay in China to Pay | Expat Guide

Prior to the emergence of mobile payment apps in China, the country was primarily a cash-based society. From meals, clothing, rent, bills, taxis, and almost everything else, paying cash was the norm. However today, apps like **Alipay** and **WeChat** are transforming China into a cashless society where transactions are commonly carried out via the phone in your pocket.



Whether you are currently living in China, plan on moving, or traveling there, this guide covers ways that expats can pay for things in China with payment apps and old fashioned methods like cash and debit / credit cards.

Below is a quick summary of this article followed by a more in-depth analysis below.

- To use mobile payment apps, *you must have a Chinese bank account*, which means that this may not be a good option for travelers to China. **UPDATE SEPT 2018:** WeChat supposedly allows foreign credit cards to be used on their platform, but as I'll talk more about below, this doesn't seem to work well.
- If you're moving to China, [opening a Chinese bank account](#) and setting up Alipay and WeChat pay are a MUST.
- Mobile payment apps allow you to pay for utilities, use [China's bike share programs](#), buy groceries... pretty much anything you need, all over China.

Finally in 2018...

You can now tie foreign credit cards to your WeChat Pay account!

Just so long as you downloaded WeChat in mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, or Taiwan



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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN
NATIONALISM GOES
DIGITAL?

Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) and Nationalism

1995

Nicholas Negroponte, a World Wide Web (WWW) founder at the MIT Media lab, declared:

“the role of the nation-state will change dramatically and there will be no more room of nationalism than there is for smallpox.”

2018

MAGA



Questions Raised

- There are, of course, good reasons to be critical of the way that the PRC government treats its own recent history, but stories of ‘brainwashing’ are nonetheless unhelpful. **While they no doubt resonate with problematic American and European threat-perceptions of China as a quasi-totalitarian Communist state, they obscure how politics, media, and psychology are connected.** (Schneider, 5)
- Classic theories of nationalism, whether modernist or ethnosymbolist, emphasise the role of elites and spread of a common imagined community from centre to periphery. **Recent work across a range of disciplines challenges this account by stressing the role of horizontal, peer-to-peer, dynamics alongside top-down flows.** (Kaufmann, 6)

Nationalism and Communications/Media Studies

- Marco Adria places Gellner within a long tradition of ‘medium theorists’ who joined media into the broader category of technology
 - Innis (1951), Marshall McLuhan (1964), and, more recently, Ronald Deibert (1997).” (Aria, 8)
- Ernest Gellner: “**The most important and persistent message is generated by the medium itself**, by the role which such media have acquired in modern life. **That core message is that the language and style of the transmissions is important**, that only he who can understand them, or can acquire such comprehension, is included in a moral and economic community, and that he who does not and cannot is excluded.” (Gellner, 127)
- Anderson aimed to “..combine a kind of historical materialism with what later on came to called discourse analysis...” (Anderson, 227)
- Anderson, pg. 6: “All communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps in even these) are imagined. **Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.**”

Possible Answers: Nationalism as Technology

- First, I believe we need to **treat political concepts like the nation and its state as technologies in their own right**. They are designed by people, in specific socio- historical contexts, to solve perceived problems of their time, **for instance how to assure large-scale economic production and political organization**. (Schenider, 6)
- To Mumford, **innovations like the stone axe, the plough, the airplane, or the computer are not the most notable human technologies...** Instead of viewing toolmaking alone as the pinnacle of human development, Mumford argues, we should connect this activity to the conceptual meaning-making capacities of human beings. **Creating tools and devices is truly innovative because these creations are ‘modified by linguistic symbols, aesthetic designs, and socially transmitted knowledge’** (Mumford 1966: 5).
- What is important here is that the factors that shape technologies and their uses also apply to what Mumford calls conceptual ‘technics’ like social and political innovations. **How technologies work is the outcome of design choices, socio-political and economic conditions, and psychological processes, and, in this sense, a knife is no different from, for instance, nations and their states.** (Schneider, 31)

Possible Answers: Nations as Networks

- *Complexity and Nationalism*, Eric Kaufmann
- Complexity theory, which has recently been applied to the social sciences, expands our understanding of horizontal national dynamics.
- It stresses that order may emerge from chaos; hence, ‘national’ behaviour may appear without an imagined community.
- Treating nations like complex systems whose form emerges from below should focus research on **four central aspects of complexity: emergence, feedback loops, tipping points and distributed knowledge, or ‘the wisdom of crowds’**.
- This illuminates how national identity can be reproduced by popular activities rather than the state; why nationalist ideas may gestate in small circles for long periods, then suddenly spread; why secession is often contagious; and why wide local variation in the content of national identity strengthens rather than weakens the nation's power to mobilise.