

Silicon Valley's culture, not its companies, dominates in China

Mountain View, Dec 5

THE majesty of the Golden Gate, the windy cliff of Alcatraz, the tourist hubbub of Pier 39—Zhao Haoyu's itinerary for San Francisco had it all.

Yet when Zhao, a Chinese tourist, arrived with his wife in September, they spent their first day wandering the humdrum suburban office parks that Facebook and Google call home.

Joining a guided tour with a dozen other Chinese visitors, the two became part of the steady flow of Chinese tourists to Silicon Valley that represents—despite pervasive censorship and outright hostility from the Chinese government—the tremendous influence Silicon Valley has in China.

"You hear so much about these companies in China," said Mr. Zhao, a native of the southern Chinese city of Kunming who is in his 30s. "We just wanted to experience it."

China in recent years has given rise to a vibrant and innovative tech industry that in some ways surpasses what Americans can do. But it has done so despite a culture dictated by Confucian conformity and, more recently, strictist rules of the Chinese Communist Party.

"Neither prizes rebellion or disruption, so China's young entrepreneurs and investors have looked for guidance and inspiration in a place that does: Silicon Valley.

China's tech world has copied the valley's innovative-meet-investor network of incubators, accelerators and venture capitalists. Start-up employees and leaders actively seek to question authority and think outside the box—two attributes widely discouraged in corporate China.

Many of those copying the model have never worked in Silicon Valley, so their understanding comes secondhand. Yan Shuai, a 30-year-old entrepreneur, is one of many whose "The Pirates of Silicon Valley," a 1999 made-for-TV movie



about Bill Gates of Microsoft and Steve Jobs of Apple, as a guiding force. (In some instances, reflecting an era before Apple's resurgence, it is translated into Chinese as "The Heroes of Microsoft.") "It was having difficulty finding a partner who specializes in the technology side," said Yao, who estimated that he watched the movie more than 10 times in 2013 and 2014. "I started to wonder how people in 'The Pirates of Silicon Valley' found their partners. So I watched the film over and over, and learned a lot from it."

Silicon Valley's soft power in China is unlikely to help Facebook go back into China. But it demonstrates the sort of influence China seeks for itself. Despite its innovations, China's online renaissance has taken place largely within its own borders, and the country's ambitions to create companies with global influence so far have been largely unsuccessful. It also provides a model for a new type of Chinese business guru, political and thought leader. In the vein of Elon Musk and Peter Thiel, already the Chinese tech world has created figures like Jack Ma, the founder of the e-commerce giant the Alibaba Group, and Jia Yueting, founder of the budget smartphone maker Xiaomi, who derive their influence from channels outside the Chinese Communist Party. The party in turn courts them even as it seeks to contain them, often holding up as examples of Chinese innovation.

Baidu, one of China's largest tech companies and often called the Google of China, owes a heavy debt to the valley. One founder, Eric Xu, made a documentary about Silicon Valley in the late 1990s and helped model the company around an unstructured, meritocratic—and thoroughly non-Chinese—organisation style its founders admired.

Employees receive copies of a book called "Baidu Analects," said Kaiser Kuo, a former spokesman for Baidu and the host of the China podcast Sinica. "It's anecdote after anecdote of those borderline humblebride employees who stuck to their ideas in spite of pushback, and the enlightened manager who let them do it, and ultimately they triumph," Kuosaid.

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BMW sees battery costs causing years of 'tears' on e-cars

Munich: BMW sees no quick way to boost profit from electric cars, with battery capacity and cost set to weigh on the technology for the foreseeable future.

"We simply have to walk through the valley of tears" to figure out how to save more money by producing battery-powered cars, Stefan Jurascek, vice president of electric-powertrain development, told reporters at a briefing at a BMW testing facility in Munich.

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