



Employees are allowed to work remotely at home, cafes and bookstores with advanced technology support. — Ti Gong

# Home or office?

## Traditional workplace undergoes transition

**Zhu Shenshen**

**A** working mother who wants to be identified only as Ah Pan is more chipper about her job nowadays. She works for the Trip.com Group, China's biggest online travel service, which is rolling out a policy that allows its employees to work remotely up to two days a week.

This hybrid work schedule is "something I really value," Ah Pan said.

Small wonder. For two days a week, she won't have to spend up to three hours a day commuting from her home on the east side of the Huangpu River to the company office near Hongqiao airport on the west side.

For those two days, she sets up her "office" in a coffee shop or bookstore

near her home, also affording her the opportunity to have lunch with family members.

Shanghai-based Trip.com, formerly known as Ctrip, conducted trials of the hybrid work model in 2020 and 2021 at a time when COVID-19 was forcing people to work from home. On March 1, the company will roll out hybrid work on a continuing basis, the first top technology company in China to do so.

The practice may start to redefine the Chinese work environment - enhancing the work-life balance and breaking from the so-called "996" culture of working 12 hours a day, six days a week that has dominated the Chinese tech industry.

Many people wonder how veering from daily face-to-face contact will impact the entrenched Chinese concept of

*guanxi* (connection).

That refers to building personal trust and a strong relationship with someone, and can involve moral obligations and the exchange of favors. The concept is sometimes incorrectly perceived in Western business as dubious "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" behavior, but it is a core part of doing business in China.

"The promotion of hybrid working is a multifaceted win for companies, employees and society," said James Liang, chairman of Trip.com.

He said employee satisfaction rises, rush-hour traffic congestion is reduced and women with children can still maintain careers.

With the nation's digital transformation and epidemic prevention

rules, an estimated 45 percent of Chinese companies are initiating remote work opportunities, higher than the average level of 41 percent in the Asia-Pacific region. About 70 percent employees welcome the system in China, according to the professional site LinkedIn.

Trip.com's move follows the adoption of the hybrid work model by overseas tech giants like Amazon, Apple, Google, Facebook and Microsoft.

When the hybrid work model covers 20 percent or more employees, it will bring clear social benefits and improvements in traffic, environment, gender equality, education and house-price stability, said researchers at Ireland-based multinational consulting company Accenture.