

Chongqing: The Cyberpunk Capital of the World 重庆：世界之赛博朋克首都

"There is a cyberpunk quality to Chongqing that enthralled me"

- KM Alexander, novelist



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All photographs taken by the author, May 2018.

Proposal 提议

Chongqing should brand itself as the world's cyberpunk capital, and create and market new tourist products that deliver a unique experience to foreign visitors.

What is cyberpunk? 赛博朋克是什么？

"A science fiction genre focusing on a blurring of distinctions between humans and machines."

- *The Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication* (2016)

"...the interpenetration of human and technological or electronic realms, in androids or in 'virtual' reality, is taken as the basis of fictional speculation."

- *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2015)

"A skyline of densely packed skyscrapers, corporate logos lighting the night sky, proclaiming ownership over the city below. At street level, a haze of neon shines down from the cluster of signs above and shimmers at your feet in the rain that runs down the filthy streets."

- *The Guardian* (2018)

Cyberpunk is one of the most important and popular science fiction styles of the past generation. With its origins in literature, such as William Gibson's *Neuromancer* 神经漫游者 (1984), classic cyberpunk films such as *Blade Runner* 银翼杀手 (1982/2017), *The Matrix* 黑客帝国 (1999), and *Ghost in the Shell* 攻壳机动队 (1995/2017) have made the style world famous.

Cyberpunk is distinctive for its blends of high-technology and gritty elements. It projects a vivid sense of the near future; an accessible and creative way of understanding what is about to come.

Cyberpunk remains a popular visual aesthetic and enthusiasts are constantly looking for cities that capture the cyberpunk atmosphere. Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Tokyo are commonly cited examples but, increasingly, people speak of Chongqing as a cyberpunk hotspot – the city must now capitalise on this golden tourism opportunity.

Why Chongqing? 如何重庆?

After visiting Chongqing for three weeks in May 2018 as part of the Young Sinologists Program 青年汉学家研修计划, I realized that Chongqing is perfectly designed to give tourists the ultimate cyberpunk experience.

Visitors can enjoy a true cyberpunk atmosphere that is normally only available in film or print.

It is a spicy, neon-soaked multi-sensory experience: To enter Chongqing is to enter the future.

Nestled in the mountains at the confluence of two great rivers, and blessed with a subtropical climate, Chongqing's natural elements provide the city with a unique physical environment.

Its recent accelerated development has seen skyscrapers, bridges, and tunnels appear all over the city. The fondness for neon lights, especially on buildings near the river, ensures that Chongqing's cityscape is unparalleled, with layers of skyscrapers cascading up the riverbanks and mountainsides, their bright lights flickering through the thick steamy air.

At the same time—zooming in—Chongqing is home to teeming streetscapes. The smell of hotpot is everywhere. Local people bustle around on the sidewalks, going about everyday life and using emergent technologies in creative ways necessitated by living in one of the world's true megacities.

A relatively new city by Chinese standards, Chongqing's old neighborhoods and new districts all demonstrate a particular magic. The modern and the ancient constantly merge and inform each other, a dialogue that hurtles the city towards a new Sinofuture.

Key Locations 津要

Hongyadong 洪崖洞

Huangjuewan Overpass 黄桷湾立交桥

Liziba Station 李子坝

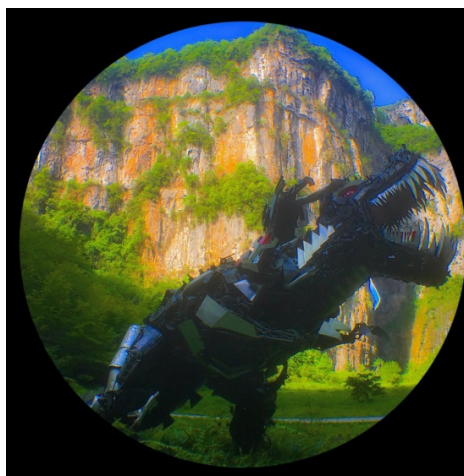
Wu Long 武隆

Yangtze River Cableway 长江索道

Fengdu Ghost City 丰都鬼城

How I saw Chongqing as a cyberpunk city in May 2018

2018 年五月，我眼中重庆的赛博朋克特色



A similar example - Steampunk 类似的蒸汽朋克

Oamaru is a small town in New Zealand with abundant Victorian architecture. This attracted the interest of devotees of steampunk 蒸汽朋克—a subculture that reimagines a future dominated by Victorian culture—and the town now promotes its steampunk credentials through various events. See <https://www.steampunkoamaru.co.nz/> and <https://www.steampunk.org.nz/> for more details.

A similar collaboration between local enthusiasts and business, with the support of the Chongqing Municipal Government, could make Chongqing attractive to cyberpunk enthusiasts (See Appendix A for images of Oamaru's world-famous steampunk culture).

Tourism opportunities 观光业的机会

There are several easy ways that the Chongqing Municipal Government can leverage the city's cyberpunk elements to attract more visitors. All of these respect and interpret Chongqing's local cultures, mountainous scenery, and the magnificent Three Gorges to create a unique global brand.

Film and Television 电影和电视

Chinese sci-fi is growing in popularity, no more evident than the recent successful film adaptation of *The Wandering Earth* 流浪地球 (2019). The Chongqing region should attract filmmakers to make use of its gritty yet pretty urban environment, as seen in *Still Life* 三峡好人 (2008), *I Belonged to You* 从你的全世界路过 (2016), and *Chongqing Hotpot* 火锅英雄 (2016). The animated series *Last Hope* 重神机潘多拉 (2018) offers an example of how the urban landscape can be reimagined in a cyberpunk context (See Appendix B). Using the city as a set for films and TV series will enhance its appeal to visitors, thereby integrating tourism with the cultural industry.

Chongqing's exotic blend of accelerated modernity, subtropical grit, and mountainous landscapes make it a fresh location for an international film or TV series. A Hollywood-China co-production for a sci-fi movie will sell the wonders of Chongqing to an even broader audience and increase the potential for tourism. A good example of this was *Transformers 4* 变形金刚4 (2014), set in Wu Long 武隆景区. This movie created a new legacy for Wu Long and serves as a template for future international film collaboration and tourism development.

Augmented/virtual reality 扩增实境/虚拟现实

Essential to cyberpunk is the integration of technology into human life. Augmented reality or virtual reality technologies have the potential to render Chongqing into an even more amazing destination, such as that demonstrated in *Last Hope* 重神机潘多拉. Chongqing has a growing high-tech industry, for example local companies such as Haiyun Shuju 海云数据, and these could work with tourism stakeholders to develop augmented reality technologies that recreate the city in a cyberpunk/sci-fi manner. This type of technology will allow visitors to experience Chongqing in a new reality and radically enhance their tourist experience.

Art and Social Media 艺术和社会化媒体

The Chongqing Municipal Government can invite cyberpunk artists (video, music, visual) to the city. These artists can work in the city and countryside of Chongqing to create art that captures the cyberpunk spirit of the region. The artworks can then be circulated on social media to generate buzz amongst cyberpunk fans worldwide.

Performance 表演

The Chongqing Municipal Government could consider funding a large scale performance in the metropolitan area that tells Chongqing's history in a cyberpunk style. A similar local event is Beacon of the Three Kingdoms 烽烟三国, and Wang Chaoge 王潮歌 has created these types of historical spectacles all over China. Such a performance would fuse Chongqing's rich history (Bayu culture, Three Gorges Culture, War of Resistance Culture) with its impressive modernity, while suggesting a high-tech future that is in harmony with the goals of President Xi Jinping's New Era 中国特色社会主义进入了新时代.

Tours 旅游

Cyberpunk-themed tours of Chongqing would allow participants to visit relevant sites but could also include elements of local culture, such as spicy food/hot pot, hot springs, and the Three Gorges. Local entrepreneurs could build restaurants/cafes/tea houses that reinterpret local elements with a cyberpunk style and the government could install cyberpunk sculptures or other art works in public places so as to enhance the environment and create new spaces for public interactions and spontaneity.

Outcome 成果

Marketing itself as the world's cyberpunk capital poses many possibilities for Chongqing. This is a multi-level strategy: it involves developing local infrastructure (tours, performances, art, augmented/virtual reality) and utilizing media (film, television, social media) to enhance and promote the region's intrinsic qualities.

Chongqing has one of the world's most amazing sets of cyberpunk qualities – it typifies how China's decades of accelerated modernization have created a new Sinofuture. These architectural and human resources can be combined with other preexisting features (Three Gorges, mountains, local cuisine, migration culture, and so on) to develop a new brand for the city that will attract the interest of a global audience that is hungry for new destinations and fresh experiences.

Cyberpunk culture and visual aesthetics are recognized around the world and are integral to science fiction. If Chongqing can leverage its abundant resources, it has every chance of enhancing its unique status as a true megacity by interpreting its past, present, and future through the creative possibilities inherent in cyberpunk culture.

Appendix A

Oamaru (New Zealand), the world's steampunk capital.



Images (from top):

<https://www.odt.co.nz/regions/north-otago/make-my-day-steampunk>

<https://www.eventfinda.co.nz/2018/steampunk-nz-festival-parade/oamaru>

<https://www.odt.co.nz/regions/north-otago/steampunk-fans-take-over-town>

Appendix B

Chongqing imagined as a cyberpunk city of the future, from *Last Hope* 重神机潘多拉 (2018)

