China's Didi launches Silicon Valley research hub

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Chinese ridesharing leader Didi Chuxing has opened a Silicon Valley research hub, where it will join the race with other tech companies for autonomous driving.

The Didi Labs center in Mountain View—which is also the home of Google—will focus on "intelligent driving technologies," according to a statement Wednesday.

Building on rich data and fast-evolving AI (artificial intelligence) analytics, we will be working with cities and towns to build intelligent transportation ecosystems for the future," said Didi founder and chairman Cheng Wei.

One of the engineers hired for the lab is Charlie Miller, who gained famed two years ago for hacking into a Jeep to show how automobiles can be taken over remotely.

"My job is to make sure the assisted driving and autonomous systems developed and used by Didi are resistant to external attacks and threat," Miller, who has been working at Uber, said in a tweet.

According a report in the tech news website Re/code, Didi has hired engineers away from Google's rebranded self-driving unit Waymo.

Didi Labs will be led by Fengmin Gong, who is vice president of the Didi Research Institute.

The Didi statement said that "dozens of leading data scientists and researchers have joined the team," and that it will focus on "cloud-based security, deep learning, human-machine interaction, computer vision and imaging, as well as intelligent driving technologies."

The research center also hopes to help cities develop smart transportation infrastructure.

Didi, which claims almost 90 percent of China's ride-hailing market, announced a tie-up with Uber last year to end a ferocious battle in the surging Chinese market.

Didi is the latest Chinese tech giant to open a research center in California, after Baidu's launch last year.