

Alibaba (9988 HK/BABA US) In transition

- Taobao/Tmall is currently undergoing business revitalization, while cross-border e-commerce may become a near-term growth driver
- Mixed development in shareholders' return initiatives
- Undemanding valuation after recent share price corrections

E-commerce platforms in transition. We believe Taobao and Tmall is likely to face soft growth in the near term, while the company's revitalization plan to enhance the platform's price competitiveness and user experience will take time. International digital commerce should see higher near-term growth driven by ongoing development in cross-border e-commerce business, though short-term margin will be pressured as the business is still in development stages. We expect overall revenue to grow at 8% CAGR in FY3/24-26E, in which Taobao and Tmall would grow at 4% CAGR during the period.

Mixed development in the shareholders' return initiatives. The company targets to repurchase c. 3% outstanding share per year over the next three years via its upsized share repurchase program. In addition, non-core retail asset disposal is under consideration. Given of the dismal state of the market, the company is not in a rush to pursue IPO or spin-off of its business units. This could, in our opinion, lead to some market disappointments.

A value play. Maintain BUY with SOTP-based TP at HK\$ 110 for Alibaba-SW (9988 HK) and US\$ 113 for Alibaba-ADR (BABA US). After recent share price corrections, the counter is currently trading at an undemanding valuation. In our view, extent and pace for valuation recovery in coming months would depend on 1) overall market sentiment; 2) near-term business outlook; 3) development of shareholders' return initiatives.

Results and Valuation

FY end Mar 31	FY23A	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E
Revenue (RMB mn)	868,687	942,779	1,009,352	1,093,782
Chg (%, YoY)	1.8	8.5	7.1	8.4
Net profit (RMB mn)	72,509	101,316	122,419	130,372
Chg (%, YoY)	17.0	39.7	20.8	6.5
Core net profit (RMB mn)	143,991	161,248	167,462	178,968
Chg (%, YoY)	0.3	12.0	3.9	6.9
Underlying EPS (RMB)	3.5	5.0	6.2	6.8
Chg (%, YoY)	20.3	44.3	24.6	9.8
Core EPS (RMB)*	6.8	7.9	8.4	9.3
Chg (%, YoY)	3.5	15.4	7.1	10.2
Core P/E (x)- ADR*	9.2	8.0	7.5	6.8
Core P/E (x)-SW share*	9.1	7.9	7.4	6.7
ROAE (%)	6.6	8.9	10.4	10.5
ROAA (%)	4.2	5.7	6.6	6.6

¹ ADR = 8 ordinary shares

Source (s): Bloomberg, ABCI Securities estimates

Company Report

Rating (SW-share): BUY TP (SW-share): HK\$ 110 Rating (ADR): BUY TP (ADR): US\$ 113

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Price (ADR/SW-share)	US\$70.7/
	HK\$69.3
Est. share price return	59.6%/58.7%
(ADR/SW-share)	
Est. dividend yield	1.6%/1.6%
(ADR/SW-share)	
Est. total return	61.2%/60.3%
(ADR/SW-share)	
Last Rating &TP	BUY/US\$113
(ADR/SW-share)	BUY/HK\$110
Previous Report Date	Nov 20, 2023

Source(s): Bloomberg, ABCI Securities estimates

Key Data 52Wk H/L (HK\$) (SW-share) 108.5/64.6 52Wk H/L (US\$) (ADR) 109.8/66.6 Issued shares (bn) 20.0 Market cap (HK\$ bn) (all 1,386 share) 3-mth avg daily turnover 3,993 (HK\$ mn) (SW-share) 3-mth avg daily turnover 1,749 (US\$ mn) (ADR) Major shareholder(s) (%): Joseph Tsai 1.4%

Source(s): Bloomberg, HKEx, Company

^{*}Excluding share-based compensation, impairments, fair value changes of investment, etc.



Business revitalization underway

In 4Q23 (3QFY3/24), Alibaba's revenue increased 5.1% YoY to RMB 260bn; core net profit dropped 4.3% YoY to RMB 48bn.

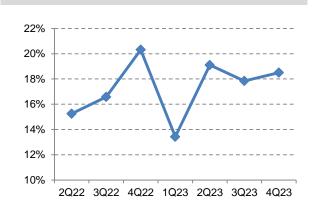
Among its major business segment, Taobao and Tmall experienced a 2% YoY revenue growth during the quarter; GMV growth was offset by the lower take rate as GMV mix was shifting towards Taobao merchants. The company is currently revitalizing its platform to enhance price competitiveness and user experience with a new management team but a revamp will take time. International digital commerce remained strong with a 44% YoY revenue growth driven by retail platforms, especially the AliExpress Choice business. Local service revenue grew 13% YoY thanks to the over 20% order growth YoY, while Cainiao reported a 24% YoY revenue growth. Cloud intelligence's revenue growth remained slight at 3% YoY due to continuous business adjustment of project-based cloud services.

In terms of segment profitability, Taobao/ Tmall's adjusted EBITA margin was 46.4% in 4Q23, which can be attributed to increased promotions in our view. In addition, international digital commerce saw widening losses due to ongoing investment in cross-border e-commerce businesses. The negative impacts were partially offset by improved profitability of other businesses such as Local service, Cainiao, and Cloud intelligence. Overall, core net margin was 18.5% in 4Q23.

Exhibit 1: Revenue growth trend



Exhibit 2: Core net margin trend



Source(s): Company, ABCI Securities

Source(s): Company, ABCI Securities

Financial Outlook

We expect revenue to grow at 8% CAGR in FY3/24E-26E.

Taobao and Tmall revenue would expand at 4% CAGR in FY3/24E-26E. In our view, near-term challenges include take rate pressure as GMV shifts towards Taobao merchants amid moderating consumer sentiment; competition from Pinduoduo and other live-streaming e-commerce platforms can also affect revenue. The company is revitalizing its platform to enhance price competitiveness and user experience with a new management team, but we believe a revamp will take time.

We expect Cloud intelligence's revenue to grow at 5% CAGR in FY3/24E-26E due to continuous business adjustment and rivalry from telco cloud operators. In our view, more focus will be on propping up profitability instead of driving revenue growth for this segment in the near term.

For other businesses, we expect International Digital Commerce to grow at 23% CAGR in FY3/24E-26E, driven by expansion of cross-border e-commerce initiatives such as AliExpress Choice. In addition, we expect Cainiao and Local consumer services to expand at 16% and 12% CAGRs in FY3/24E-26E amid ongoing business expansion. For DME (Digital Media and Entertainment), we expect it to grow at 8% CAGRs in FY3/24E-26E driven by offline entertainment business.



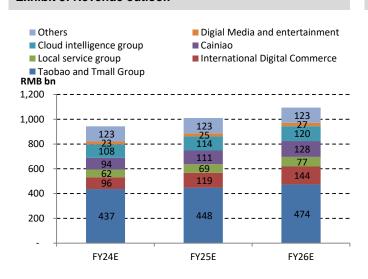
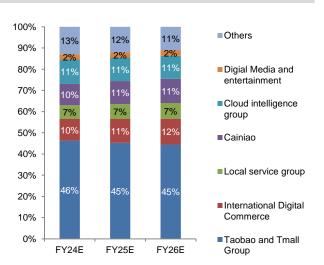


Exhibit 4: Revenue mix outlook



Source(s): Company, ABCI Securities estimates

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In terms of segment profitability, we estimate adjusted EBITA margin of Taobao and Tmall to moderate to 43.6% in FY26E due to increased customer incentives and promotions to boost sales. Adjusted EBITA margin of other businesses (International commerce/Local service/Cainiao/Cloud/DME) would remain largely stable, in which International commerce is likely to see some margin pressure amid ongoing business expansion, while Cloud margins would continue to improve.

We expect core net margin (excl. impacts of share-based compensation and other non-operating items) to be 16.4% for FY26E.

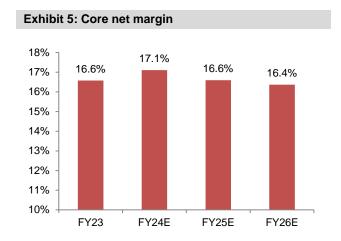
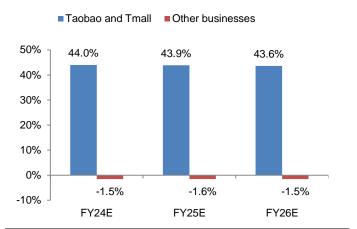


Exhibit 6: Segment adjusted EBITA margin



Source(s): Company, ABCI Securities estimates Source(s): Company, ABCI Securities estimates

Exhibit 7: Forecast changes for FY3/24E

(RMB mn)	Old	New	Diff.	Comment
Revenue	942,779	942,779	0.0%	
Core profit	161,760	161,248	-0.3%	

Source(s): ABCI Securities estimates

Exhibit 8: Forecast changes for FY3/25E

(RMB mn)	Old	New	Diff.	Comment
Revenue	1,052,097	1,009,352	-4%	Weak consumer demand
Core profit	174,724	167,462	-4%	

Source(s): ABCI Securities estimates

Recommendation

We maintain our SOTP-based TPs to HK\$ 110 for Alibaba-SW (9988 HK) and US\$ 113 for Alibaba-ADR (BABA US). Our TP for Alibaba-SW (9988 HK) implies 10.8x FY3/25E core P/E.

In terms of shareholders' return initiatives, the company targets to repurchase c. 3% outstanding share per year over the next three years via its upsized US\$ 35.3bn share repurchase program till Mar 2027. In addition, the company is considering non-core retail asset disposals.

Given the dismal state of the market at present, the company is not in a rush to pursue IPO or spin-off for its business units, which may lead to some market disappointments.

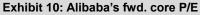
The counter is currently trading at an undemanding valuation of about 7.5x FY3/25E core P/E. While near-term volatility might still persist, we believe current valuation implies recovery potential in the medium term. In our view, the extent and pace for valuation recovery in coming months would depend on 1) overall market sentiment; 2) near-term business outlook; 3) development of shareholders' return enhancement initiatives.

Exhibit 9: SOTP-based TP for Alibaba-SW (9988 HK)

	HKD per share	% of total	Remarks
Taobao and Tmall	55	49.7%	6.5x FY3/25E P/E
Other businesses (International Digital Commerce/Cainiao/Local service/Cloud/DME)	19	17.1%	0.8x FY3/25E P/S
Investments	16	14.3%	Latest book value with a 40% discount
Net cash	21	18.9%	Latest book value
Total	110		

Source(s): ABCI Securities estimates

Note: Refer to Exhibit 3 and 6 for segment financial forecasts.





Source(s): Bloomberg, ABCI Securities



Business

- After recent strategic restructuring, Alibaba now consists of six major business groups (Cloud intelligence, Taobao/Tmall, Local Consumer Service, Cainiao, International Digital Commerce, and Digital media and Entertainment), each with independent management teams and public listing potentials (except for Taobao/Tmall which will remain wholly owned).
- Taobao/Tmall: Largest ecommerce platform in China with estimated market share at the mid-40s level; we believe its market share has been dropping in recent years due to rising competition from emerging players such as Pinduoduo (PDD US) and short-video platforms. Estimated annual active buyers amounted to RMB ~1bn in China, while estimated GMV per buyer was around RMB 9K in 2022, vs. about RMB 3.3K for Pinduoduo and about RMB 6K for another e-commerce platform.
- International Digital Commerce: Lazada, AliExpress, and Trendyol, etc.
- Local Consumer Services: "To-Home" business of Ele.me and the "To-Destination" business of Amap. Revenue size about one-third of Meituan's (3690 HK) local service business.
- Cainiao: External customers account for about 70% of revenue
- Cloud Intelligence: Largest public cloud platform in China with about 33% market share
- Digital Media and Entertainment: Youku (YOKU US), Damai, and Alibaba Pictures (1060 HK)
- Other business include Sun Art (6808 HK), Freshippo, Alibaba Health (241 HK), Lingxi Games, Intime, Fliggy, etc.
- In 3Q23, Ant Group repurchased approximately 7% equity interest from its existing shareholders and the shares
 repurchased were allocated to the employee incentive plans of Ant Group. Alibaba's equity interest in Ant Group
 on a fully diluted basis remains unchanged at 33%.

Financials

- Taobao/Tmall contributes most of Alibaba's operating profit, while other businesses are either loss-making or has
 minimal profit contribution. Nonetheless, profitability of these business units has been improving recently.
- Profit contribution from Ant Group at low-teens level.
- Core net margin dropped from high-20s years ago to high-teens level currently due to industry competition and ongoing investments in new business initiatives.
- Strong balance sheet with about RMB 389bn in net cash and RMB 488bn in equity investment in Dec 2023.
- The company has set up a capital management committee to undertake a comprehensive capital management plan to enhance shareholder value, such as capital market transactions, shareholder return initiatives, subsidiary equity incentive plans, fundraisings, IPOs, and spin-offs.
- Full spin-off of Cloud was cancelled due to business uncertainties arising from recent expansion of US restrictions
 on export of advanced computing chips. IPO of Freshippo has been put on hold due to market conditions.

Management and shareholder

- **Softbank** (9984 JP) has monetized its stakes in Alibaba via forward contracts. There are no shareholders with a stake higher than 5%.
- Alibaba's partnership structure limits the ability of its shareholders to influence corporate matters, such as the
 nomination and election of directors. For example, its Articles of Association allow the Alibaba Partnership to nominate
 or, in limited situations, appoint a simple majority of board of directors. There are 28 partners in total and election of
 new partners requires the approval of at least 75% of all of the partners.
- Jack Ma stepped down as Chairman in 2019. He will also give up its voting control on Ant Group after Ant's

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restructuring.

A series of management changes occur due to the strategic reorganization. In June 2023 ,Daniel Zhang, who succeeded Jack's Chairman role since 2019, resigned as Group Chairman and took up the role of Chairman and CEO of Cloud Intelligence Group. Joseph Tsai succeeded Zhang as the new Group Chairman. Yet, only after three months, Daniel Zhang has stepped down from his role of Chairman and CEO of Cloud Intelligence Group in Sep 2023, which surprised the market.

Shareholders' return

- Declare an annual cash dividend of US\$ 1 per ADS for FY3/2023 of US\$ 1 per ADS.
- The company has been ramping up its share repurchase program in recent years. The company has boosted its share repurchase program by US\$ 25bn through the end of March 2027. Following the increase, it currently has US\$ 35.3bn available for share repurchase. The company targets to repurchase c. 3% outstanding share per year over the next three years
- Organization restructuring including spin-off, asset disposal, IPOs, etc might increase shareholders' return.
- The company will form a new asset management company to manage its non-core assets to improve return on capital and enhance shareholders' value
- Potential increase in shareholders return constrained by availability of offshore cash

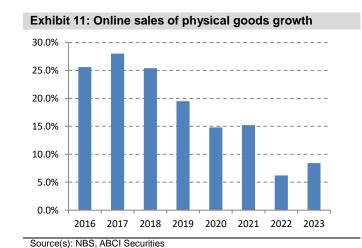
Corporate governance/information disclosure

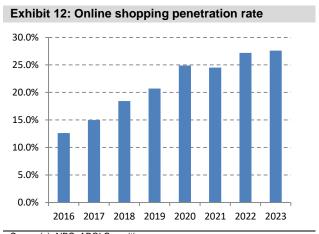
- RMB18.2bn in Antitrust fine in 2021
- Ant Group: Listing suspended in 2020 and RMB 7.07bn in regulatory fine in 2023.
- Increase information disclosure as a result of strategic reorganization
- Various ESG initiatives in recent years

Source(s):Company, ABCI Securities

E-commerce industry profile

- China's online sales growth has turned steadier after years of development. According to NBS, online sales of physical goods grew 8.4% YoY in 2023. In particular, the 8.4% growth in 2023 was lower than the 10.8% growth in 1H23, indicating a slowdown in 2H23.
- By product category, online sales of food products, groceries, and apparel rose 11.2%, 7.1%, and 10.8% in 2023.
- Online shopping penetration rate has been trending up in recent months, indicating an ongoing consumption shift from offline to online.
- Live-streaming e-commerce has been growing fast in recent years. In 9M23, live-streaming e-commerce sales rose
 by 60.6% YoY and accounted for 18.3% of total online sales, according to Ministry of Commerce. Short video platforms
 such as Douyin and Kuaishou (1024 HK) are major players in this emerging segment, posing threat to traditional
 e-commerce platforms. In response, Alibaba has been actively developing its live-streaming business to defend its
 market position.
- Major e-commerce platforms are increasing their sales and marketing effort by raising user incentives and price subsidies. In our view, online shoppers have turned more price-sensitive in past years due to the pandemic and moderating economic development, prompting e-commerce platforms to enhance price competitiveness.
- In terms of market share, we estimate that Alibaba is still the largest e-commerce platform with mid-40s market share, vs. Pinduoduo (mid-20s), Platform A (low-20s), Douyin (high-single-digit), and Kuaishou (mid-single-digit).
- Over the past few years, Pinduoduo and short-video platforms (Douyin and Kuaishou) are gaining market shares. Common features of these platforms include 1) Product offers with low prices; 2) More interactive features (social e-commerce, live streaming, etc.) than traditional search-based e-commerce format.
- A number of platforms, such as Pinduoduo and Shein, are actively developing **cross-border e-commerce** and gained traction in overseas markets.





Source(s): NBS, ABCI Securities

Financial Forecast

Consolidated income statement (FY23A-FY26E)

FY Ended Mar 31 (RMB mn)	FY23A	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E
Total revenue	868,687	942,779	1,009,352	1,093,782
Cost of sales	(549,695)	(583,301)	(630,472)	(688,678)
Gross profit	318,992	359,478	378,880	405,104
Product development expenses	(56,744)	(53,518)	(59,510)	(64,487)
Selling & marketing expenses	(103,496)	(110,689)	(124,159)	(134,544)
General & admin expenses	(42,183)	(37,827)	(40,781)	(44,193)
Amortization/Impairment	(16,218)	(33,627)	(11,103)	(12,032)
Operating Profits	100,351	123,817	143,328	149,848
Interest and investment income	(11,071)	1,000	1,500	2,000
Interest expenses	(5,918)	(7,500)	(7,400)	(7,200)
Other income	5,823	5,500	5,500	5,500
Share of results of equity investees	(8,063)	(2,000)	(1,000)	1,000
Profit before tax	81,122	120,817	141,928	151,148
Tax	(15,549)	(24,163)	(28,386)	(30,230)
Profit after tax	65,573	96,654	113,542	120,919
Minority interests	7,210	4,833	9,083	9,673
Accretion of mezzanine equity	(274)	(171)	(207)	(220)
Profits attributable to ordinary shareholders	72,509	101,316	122,419	130,372
Share-based compensation	30,831	18,856	25,234	27,345
Amortization and impairment	37,855	39,906	21,103	22,032
Gains on disposals/revaluation of investments	13,857	1,000	(1,500)	(1,000)
Other non-core items	(11,061)	171	207	220
Non-GAAP profits attributable to ordinary				
shareholders (Core net profit)	143,991	161,248	167,462	178,968
Growth				
Total revenue (%)	1.8	8.5	7.1	8.4
Gross Profits (%)	1.7	12.7	5.4	6.9
Operating Profits (%)	44.1	23.4	15.8	4.5
Net profit (%)	17.0	39.7	20.8	6.5
Core net profit (%)	0.3	12.0	3.9	6.9
Operating performance				
Operating margin (%)	11.6	13.1	14.2	13.7
Net margin (%)	8.3	10.7	12.1	11.9
Core net margin (%)	16.6	17.1	16.6	16.4

Note. Individual items may not sum to total due to rounding differences

Source(s): Company, ABCI Securities estimates

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Consolidated balance sheet (FY23A-FY26E)

As of Mar 31 (RMB mn)	FY23A	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E
Fixed assets	176,031	178,031	179,531	181,031
Investments	453,117	456,117	460,117	466,117
Other non-current assets	425,930	413,303	417,200	420,169
Total non-current assets	1,055,078	1,047,451	1,056,848	1,067,317
Cash & equivalents	193,086	222,461	276,925	351,762
Restricted cash and escrow receivables	36,424	38,245	40,157	40,157
Short-term investments and investment securities	331,384	351,384	371,384	396,384
Prepayments, deposits & other assets	137,072	150,779	165,857	165,857
Total current assets	697,966	762,869	854,324	954,161
Total assets	1,753,044	1,810,320	1,911,172	2,021,477
Accrued expenses, accounts payable and other				
liabilities	275,950	271,210	290,362	314,650
Other payables & accruals	12,543	13,170	13,829	13,829
Borrowings and notes	12,266	20,266	28,266	34,266
Deferred revenue	71,295	75,422	80,748	87,503
Merchants deposits	13,297	13,962	14,660	14,660
Total current liabilities	385,351	394,031	427,864	464,907
Borrowings and notes	149,088	154,088	159,088	164,088
Other non-current liabilities	95,684	98,771	102,013	102,013
Total non-current liabilities	244,772	252,859	261,101	266,101
Total liabilities	630,123	646,890	688,965	731,008
Net current assets	312,615	368,838	426,459	489,254
Mezzanine equity	9,858	10,029	10,236	10,456
Equity attributable to shareholders	989,657	1,034,828	1,102,481	1,180,198
Non-controlling interests	123,406	118,573	109,490	99,816
Total equity	1,113,063	1,153,401	1,211,971	1,280,014

Note. Individual items may not sum to total due to rounding differences

Individual items may varies from reported figures due to rounding differences/definition differences

Source(s): Company, ABCI Securities estimates

Consolidated cash flows statement (FY23A-FY26E)

As of Mar 31 (RMB mn)	FY23A	FY24E	FY25E	FY26E
Net income	65,573	96,654	113,542	120,919
Depreciation and amortization	46,938	50,627	39,603	40,532
Other non-cash adjustments	123,759	20,856	26,234	26,345
Change in working capital	(36,518)	(11,761)	12,085	31,042
Operating cash flow	199,752	156,375	191,464	218,837
Investing cash flow	(135,506)	(65,000)	(70,000)	(75,000)
Financing cash flow	(65,619)	(62,000)	(67,000)	(69,000)
Net cash flows	(1,373)	29.375	54.464	74.837

Note. Individual items may not sum to total due to rounding differences

Individual items may varies from reported figures due to rounding differences/definition differences

Source(s): Company, ABCI Securities estimates



Risk factors

Market competition

The e-commerce industry is highly competitive, with companies contending on commission rate, promotion discount, brand advertising, technological investment, and more.

Slowdown in ecommerce consumption

As the industry is dependent on consumer spending, any significant slowdown in consumption in China would hamper the Group's performance. In the long term, we believe consumption growth in domestic market would converge with income growth, which is usually in line with GDP growth.

Loss making segments

Some business segments such as International Digital Commerce, Local Consumer Service, and Digital Media and Entertainment recorded loss from operations. If their losses enlarge, overall business performance will be adversely affected.

Non-GAAP financials

Ecommerce platforms generally disclosed the non-GAAP financial metrics, such as the non-GAAP net profit, to supplement its GAAP financial measures. Historically, there were differences between its GAAP net profit and non-GAAP net profit due to inclusion of items such as share-based compensation and other non-core items in the former.

Among these items, share-based compensation expense is related to various factors including price movement of ordinary shares, expected volatility, risk-free interest rate, etc.

While investors tend to exclude these items when performing analysis given their non-cash nature, we believe these non-GAAP financial measures should only be taken as references.



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Rating	Definition
Buy	Stock return rate ≥ Market return rate (~7%)
Hold	- Market return rate (-~7%) ≤ Stock return rate < Market return rate (+~7%)
Sell	Stock return < - Market return (-~7%)

Notes: Stock return rate: expected percentage change of share price plus gross dividend yield over the next 12 months Market return rate: average market return rate since 2005 (HSI total return index 2005-23 averaged at 7.4%)

Time horizon of share price target: 12-month

Stock rating, however, may vary from the stated framework due to factors including but not limited to: corporate governance, market capitalization, historical price volatility relative to corresponding benchmark index, average daily turnover of the stock relative to market capitalization of the stock, competitive advantages in corresponding industry, etc.

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