

YongMin Wang



An engineer who made Chinese characters commonly available on personal computers.

Background:

In August, 1984, the 23rd Olympic Games was held in Los Angeles. In a Chinese newspaper *Reference News*, here was an article wrote like this :

"The Xinhua News Agency sent 22 reporters, 4 photographer and 4 technicians. In the 7,000 reporters who are working for the Olympic Games, only Chinese are using their hands to write down their reports."

In 1986, Wang commented on this article:

"Chinese! Only Chinese, one hand held the gold medal, but the other hand held a pen. How incongruous are heroic giants and backward equipment!"

These directly shows the problem that Chinese people faced in 1980s. When

Personal computers were commonly used all over the world, Chinese people were hardly to interact with those “magic boxes” from western world. That’s because here was no efficient way to input Chinese into a computer. On the *North American Daily*, someone wrote in 1984, “Chinese characters are the stumbling block of modernization”. And someone in China even said, “if we don’t discard Chinese characters, China will never enter the information society.”

Wang commented on this:

“If we can’t find a way to keep our culture and catch up with the development of the world at the same time, we would be the sinner of history.”

How to solve the problem:

Wang believed that using “Pin Yin”¹ is not the best way to solve the problem. For a reason, using Pin Yin could let people forget the shapes of Chinese characters (actually this is really become a problem nowadays), for another good reason, the memory size and the power of processor those days were limited. So, the Pin Yin inputting software were very hard to use. For example, if you type “Jl” to the computer, then you need to choose from a table of 110 characters and select the only one you want. And if you want to type “I’m a student”, you need to do these selections 7 times.

¹Pinyin is the Romanization of the Chinese characters based on their pronunciation. In Mandarin Chinese, the phrase “Pin Yin” literally translates into “spell sound.” In other words, spelling out Chinese phrases with letters from the English alphabet.

Therefore, Wang began to research on how to disassemble Chinese characters by shapes, and assemble characters back again. He began his research in 1978. He finally disassembled 21,003 Chinese characters into 130 "character root", and mapped them to the English keyboard and for each character, just need to type at most 4 "character root". So life became much easier, press 4 buttons on the keyboard and it could give you the right character even it has 30 strokes, if you know the mapping rules. In 1984, the first version of his inputting software *Wubi* came out, and the most popular inputting software *WangCode86* came out in 1986. From then on, personal computers really became useful tools in Chinese daily life.

Big moments in Wang's life:

- YongMin Wang was born in 1943, in NanYang, Henan province, China.
- In 1968 he graduated from USTC , but soon after that he was sentenced to farm labour during the Chinese Cultural revolution.
- In 1978 he undertook research on a system for decomposing Chinese characters into their constituent parts with minimal ambiguity.
- The first PC version of Wubi appeared in 1984.
- In 1988 he received the title of National Model Worker
- In 1989 Wang Yongmin established his own company Wangma (lit. Wang Code).
- In April 1992 Wang Yongmin brought a lawsuit against Dongnan, and won in 1993.

-- In 1997, Beijing High Court made a second trial decision, this time he lost the lawsuit.

Intellectual property dispute:

From 1985 to 1988, computers became common in China, but computers still can't directly edit Chinese. People need to buy an external device to include Chinese library and Wubi software. Those days, many companies were selling their own devices, without any payment to Wang's Company. After 1988, external devices were no longer needed. But many Chinese computer manufacturers installed Wubi on their new computers, still paid nothing to Wang. In 1992, Yongmin Wang brought a lawsuit against Dongnan company and finally won. Hundreds of companies were very panic and they formed a "club", which name was "against Wang club". Wang was a clever and powerful man, but he couldn't fight with nearly the whole industry in the nation. He lost the lawsuit for the second trial decision in 1997, Beijing High Court finally decided to treat Wubi as "public knowledge".

His lost term was also a loss to his company, a loss to himself, a loss to Chinese software industry and a loss to Chinese Intellectual property law.