

## Using Your Electric Brain



The word FOR "computer" IN CHINESE literally means "electric brain" (电脑 - diàn nǎo). It is one of many Chinese words that are formed by logically combining two Chinese characters to convey a literal meaning. For example, the word 电话 diàn huà (telephone) literally means "electric words." 电影 diàn yǐng (movie) means "electric shadow." And the word 电椅 diàn yǐ means "electric chair."

When the Comrade was a boy we were so poor that we couldn't even afford to pay attention, much less buy a computer. We did all our computing on our trusty 算盘 suàn pán (abacus). Now Chinese kids in Beijing and other big cities in China all have access to computers, and many have them in their own homes. Hence the emergence of the term 电脑发烧友 diàn nǎo fā shāo yǒu (lit. "computer fever friend", or simply "computer geek").

There are several 前提 qián tí (prerequisites) required before you can use a 电脑 diàn nǎo (computer) in China. First of all, you need to have 电 diàn (electricity). Assuming that you don't live in a poor mountain village, you probably have access to at least sporadic electricity. You'll also need a desk and a sufficient amount of 钞票 chāo piào (cash).

If you are in the market for a computer, head down to 中关村 Zhōng guān cūn in the university 海淀 Hǎi diàn

District. There you can get one custom-made. You'll need a 键盘 jiàn pán (keyboard), 显示器 xiǎn shì qì (monitor), 鼠标 shǔ biāo (mouse), and of course a 主机 zhǔ jī (CPU) which contains the 奔騰 Bēn téng (Pentium) processor and 硬盘 yìng pán (hard drive or "C" drive). Optional 硬件 yìng jiàn (hardware) include a 声卡 shēng kǎ (sound card) 打印机 dǎ yìn jī (printer) and 调制解调器 tiáo zhì jī, tiáo qì (modem).

Once you've got your new computer set up you can start playing 电子游戏 diàn zǐ yóu xì (video games). 软件 ruǎn jiàn (software) is available on 软盘 ruǎn pán (disk) and on 光碟 guāng dié or guāng pán 光盘 (CD). Buyer beware: there have been unofficial reports of the alleged sale of 盗版 dào bǎn (pirated) software in some areas of China. If you accidentally purchase this allegedly illegally pirated software, you could be contributing to reduction in profits of some multi-billion dollar computer companies.

No computer in China should be without Chinese language software such as 中文之星 Zhōng wén zhī xīng (Chinese Star). 老外 lǎo wài (foreigners) will be happy to learn that you don't even have to know how to write Chinese characters to use Chinese language software, although a certain level of recognition is required. Simply type in the 拼音 pīn yīn (romanized spelling) of the Chinese word and several of the possible Chinese characters will appear on the screen. You then choose the correct character by typing the corresponding number.

Stick with earlier versions of Chinese language programs. Newer versions are made to be more "user-friendly" for 同胞 *tóng bro* (compatriots) from Hong Kong and Taiwan who can't fully 掌握 *zhǎng wò* (grasp) 拼音 *pīn yīn*. When you type "n" instead of "ng" or "s" instead of "sh", the "intelligent" program assumes you made a mistake and displays all sorts of Chinese characters with related romanized spellings.

After you've stocked up on software, it's time to get yourself a 电子邮箱 *diàn zǐ yóu jiàn xìn xīng* (email box; email account), also known as a 电子邮件地址 *diàn zǐ yóu jiàn dì zhǐ* (email address). You'll also need a telephone line and an Internet Provider, such as the Post Office, to send and receive 电子邮件 *diàn zǐ yóu jiàn* (email). Email is better than regular "snail mail" in China because your neighbors can't read it (though your local wired constable can and probably does).

Now you can begin to 搜索 *sǎo su* ("surf") the 英特网 *yīng tè wǎng* (Internet). The first step is to 入网 *rù wǎng* (log on). Enter your 用户名 *yòng hù míng* (account or user name) and 密码 *mì mǎ* (password). Then, simply enter the name of the 网页 *wǎng yè* (Web site) you want to visit and, *voilà!* In the blink of an almond eye you can be staring at pictures of throngs of angry protesters and damaged property, uh, I mean detailed bilingual ball bearing production statistics.

Whether used to search the 全球互联网 *quán qiú hù lián wǎng* (World Wide Web), play video games, or even do

work, computers are among the most sought-after gift items of Chinese boys and young men today (their popularity is exacerbated by a dearth of Chinese girls and young women). The popularity of computers in China has led to the emergence of the 网吧 wǎng bā or Internet Bar - computer rooms where you can go to use a computer and surf the Net for a minimal hourly charge.

Finally, in this day and age, no computer system is 完成 wán chéng (complete) without a 病毒 bìng dú (virus) protection program. There is a myriad of viruses out there that can potentially harm your computer. Of course, none of these computer 病毒 bìng dú (virus) originate in China. They all come from decadent Western countries, just like AIDS and other 性病 xìng bìng (sexually transmitted diseases).

With the approach of the new millenium, the most talked-about virus is none other than the 千年虫 qiān nián chóng (Y2K virus or Millennium Bug). The Y2K virus name derives from the way that early computer programmers used only the last two digits of the four-digit year number in an effort to save memory. In this sense, computers may mistake the year 2000 as 1900 and disorders will occur.

Zhang Qi, Chairman of the China Computer Industry Association, warns that the Y2K virus "will even go so far as to bring incredibly major loss to human society, giving rise to complete confusion." Sounds worse than

the (1959-61) 大跃进 Dà yuè jìn (Great Leap Forward) and (1966-76) 文化大革命 Wén huà dà gé mìng (Cultural Revolution)! Zhang points out that industries such as telecommunications, transport, insurance and banking, including Mainland stock markets and some government departments will get hit hard. "China hasn't seriously considered the year 2000 glitch, and many sectors are slow in taking efforts to make their electronics products ready for the 2000 change."

Other comrades are less concerned. Qu Weizhi, Vice Minister of Information Industry says that because China began to use computers relatively late, the national-level networks of mainframe computers and of databases are relatively small. The entire society's degree of dependence on computers is not as extensive as in 发达国家 fā dá guó jiā (developed nations). The impact, therefore, of the year 2000 problem will not be as great.

The Comrade would like to add that the year 2000 is the year of the dragon, so China should certainly have extra good luck in combating the Y2K virus (recent dragon years have included such auspicious events as the Tangshan earthquake and the death of bevvies of Long March leaders).