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Robin Li

By BILL POWELL Thursday, Apr. 29, 2010



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In 1999, Robin Yanhong Li was a shy computer-science geek with a recent master's from the State University of New York at Buffalo, who was toiling away for a financial-database company then owned by Dow Jones. But he had two big things going for him. First, he was, much earlier than most, very interested in — "obsessed with, actually," he has said — the computer field that would soon be the next big thing: search. And second? He is a native of a small town in Shanxi province, a poor region in China, and 10 years ago, he thought to himself that it might be a good idea to return to his home country.

What do you get when you combine the explosion in the field of search with the economic growth that China has experienced over the past decade? You get Baidu, the company Li founded in 2000. Even before Google created a furor by refusing to censor its search engine, Baidu

had been whipping it handily in China. Now Baidu is increasing its search dominance there with the most Internet users on the planet. Li, 41, is worth about \$3.5 billion on paper, and his company has a market cap of \$22.4 billion. Not bad for a decade's work.

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Christine Lu

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