



Heaven and Earth are without pity; To them the ten thousand things are but straw dogs.
Lao Tse, sixth century B.C. (from Ten Thousand Things: all life forms)

I still don't know for certain how Mr. B.H. Jiang found me, or why he decided to put his faith in a total stranger. It is one of those things that happens nowadays on the Internet. And, because it happens so casually, so innocently, it takes a while for us to realize that it is altogether marvelous.

It was several months ago that it began. Late one night, as I made a routine check of my e-mail, a new message appeared with the subject "photographer," and it brought with it a rather hefty attachment of files. The address indicated that the message had come from a "jbh" in Guangzhou, China. As it happens I have a friend with those same initials, and as it happens he is a photographer who went off several years ago to work in Asia. The message read simply: "Mr. beardsley How are you." That "Mr. beardsley" was particularly puzzling because it occurred to me that my old friend would never have been so formal, not even long ago when he was my

student.



Soon enough, however, it was clear that my old student remains lost in Asia and that I have a new friend in the person of Mr. B.H. Jiang (or, as it is written in Chinese, Jiang Bao Heng -- jbh -- with the last name coming first). Mr. Jiang, it turns out, is a man in his thirties who supports himself and his photography by working as a computer salesman in Guangzhou. Guangzhou is a city of over six million people, one of those burgeoning new industrial giants that dot the Pearl River Delta in southeastern China.



It is the capital of Guangdong Province that takes in the cities of Hong Kong (since July 1, 1997), Huizhou, Shenzhen, Dongguan, Foshan, Jiangmen, Zhongshan, and Zuhai. The "registered" population of the delta is said to be about 25 million persons. The "unregistered" population, which includes migrant laborers who come from the interior of China hoping to share in the growing prosperity of these new "special economic zones".



Rediffusion Photo Library, Hong Kong, China, 1986. Photo of a young child, possibly a child of a soldier, in a rural setting, smiling.











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