



Tai Chi early in the morning in Nanjing  
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# Changing formats, weights and cultures

**With the advent of digital photography, not only has the notion of film gone out the window (camera), but so has the monopoly of formats dependent on 35 mm or 120 mm film. No longer is the width of film imposing on camera manufacturers what the proportions of any images should be. We are starting to see transformations that would have not been possible earlier in the analog era. Of course lenses are now also being designed so that such variables can be increased together with the chips that capture the images.**



Baker and his wife in Pingyao.  
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Forbidden City Beijing.  
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One such example is with the new Panasonic DCM- LX2 camera, that not only offers one but three size options.... 4:3 ratio, 3:2 ratio and the 16:9 ratio so identified with Wide Screen Cinematography or the new HI Definition Video. Such a wide screen ratios, was something you could do previously with the dedicated Hasselblad Xspan 35 mm camera, 24 mm high x 65 mm wide, however, I found the Panasonic format of 16:9 slightly easier on the composition side and the camera, including a Leica Vario-Elmarit lens, the camera costs only about \$500 US (for a 10.2 megapixel file) a lot less than the Hasselblad option, isn't it?



These sort of transformations, with less costs and greater variables, together with increased file size are the dream come true for creative individuals willing to explore all that there is to offer in this digital era. I wrote last month of the CASIO, 10 megapixel camera. I now have to add to our arsenal of light cameras to travel with, this new LUMIX from Panasonic that is just as nice to handle as the CASIO and offers very different and new alternatives as well.

One of the problems of being on the forefront of such new options is that it doesn't all work as one would like it. For instance, the Lumix, although it offers a 10.2 megapixel RAW file, it does so only for the 16:9 ratio and does not open yet with any of the known applications for digital images. One is not able, as I write this, to use it with Photoshop, for instance. Panasonic offers you a software application to open up their

RAW files that leaves a lot to be desired, especially if you work with a Macintosh. In short, the option of using RAW format files is not yet available in a practical way so we are missing the key ingredient of a RAW plug-in that works. Yet, these things also change very quickly and one simply has to remain alert to when the solution has been added to your preferred software package.



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However, you can work using JPEG compression. So, while we work out how to use the Panasonic LX-2 RAW files, we will be using a JPEG option. The images are sharp and feel very well exposed and above all, offer new creative alternatives that are very attractive. I have been alternating between taking pictures with a Nikon 200 and a wide angle and the LX-2 and in some instances I am getting better results with the LX-2. By the way, the new Nikon 80, which is also a wonderful new addition to the arsenal of digital cameras, has a new RAW format that equally to the LX-2 has yet to be made compatible with all the usual imaging software we are using.

**As you might know Sony acquired the line of Minolta-Konica cameras and combined them into the new ALPHA series, altogether with their own technologies, so we have a very successful new line of cameras, which produce very high quality images, and yet do this with an interchangeable lens camera, that is very light weight.** I still do not understand why the Canon semi professional and professional cameras are made to weigh more than any other cameras. It would seem their design department, would be put through a terrific test if they were given the limit in weight of let us say a Sony Alpha camera. Nikon is increasingly doing just that.



We are told that the number of cameras used world wide -standalone and embedded (as in a telephone)- has increased 600% in just the past four years, and it will double again over the next five years.

The total number of cameras sold worldwide, of all kinds, in 2000 was 85 million units. For 2008 the projected sales are ONE BILLION cameras.

**There is no question that the increase in the number of cameras has also increased the number of images recorded. The internet has become the most rapidly expanding form of making those images available to everyone, so let us then ask, how is photography going to be transformed by all these changes that are presently underway? How is in fact, is culture being transformed by the phenomenal growth of photography?**

I give you of many examples. I was visiting the tombs of the Ming Dynasty near Beijing, and found myself photographing a group of people from Manchuria, in their costumes and special attire that looked to me quite interesting. They were at that moment, tourists just as I was, when all of a sudden a very friendly man with very powerful hands and arms, pulls me over without saying a word, and me not knowing what was going on, was very hesitant at first to follow his lead. But I soon realized that he had good intentions, as with a broad smile he told me in a very broken english: "picture". I imagined that he just wanted me to take a picture of him, but no, that was not how it was going to be, he wanted to be photographed together with me, by one of his people who happened to pull out a digital camera from underneath the folds of her dress. We had become empowered by the digital camera, to photograph each other as equals, as surely I was as exotic to them, as they would be to me. No longer was the power of the photographer what it used to be (just because we had the instrument, and they did not, with which to make the images). We both were now on equal footing.



Tourists from Manchuria I.  
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Tourists from Manchuria II.  
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One last thing, the boy in this picture was making his homework by the roadside, next to his mother who was selling some candy, in Pingyao. The kid would continue doing his home work of learning and writing Chinese characters, only when a car or motor-bike would come by and shine the lights of the vehicle in his direction, otherwise it was too dark to see. I believe the dedication and commitment this little boy had to make his homework, no matter what the conditions were, can be a humbling example for all of us who work with new technologies, I know it was for me.



Boy doing his homework. Pingyao.  
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