To tell one's emotions from reading facial expressions

Face reading is not only an important part of inter-personal relationship, but also the key to find out one's inner psychological state.   Researchers worldwide used to test patients' reactions by using a set of standard slides of facial expressions created by the United States in 1988.   It was believed that human facial expressions are universal across ethnic groups.   But a research conducted in the US, Japan, China and Hong Kong by the Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, the University of Hong Kong showed that they were not. Asians and Caucastians read some basic human facial expressions in different ways, while Hong Kong people showed moderate ability in recognizing facial expressions when compared with the Asians and Caucasians.

In order to improve the testing method for psychiatric research, the department is now trying to develop a computer programme for testing.   Instead of a set of still slides, the software will generate continuous changes in facial expressions to let subjects grasp a more accurate feeling of how the emotions evolve and develop.   It is expected that the new programme would be completed by April 2005.   Meanwhile, the department is also studying the brain mechanism of patients, in order to identify the unusual brain activities during the process of recognizing different facial expressions.   The study commenced in September 2004 and would be completed by 2006.