

Futures Studies as a Global Activity

For the panel on East Asia and Futures Studies

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Futures studies began in the 1960s and early 70s as a global activity. People from all over the world contributed to its origins from the very beginning. It did not begin in one part of the Earth and spread outward (as did the scientific-industrial revolution in Europe, for example). It was global from the beginning.

True, the first meeting of what became the World Futures Studies Federation was held in Oslo, Norway in 1966, but there were participants there from Asia and elsewhere also. Moreover, the next meeting of the WFSF was in Kyoto, followed quickly by Cairo, and shortly thereafter Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Alishabana (Indonesia), Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire), Rabat (Morocco), Brisbane (Australia), San Jose (Costa Rica), Nagoya, Bacolod City (Philippines), Islamabad (Pakistan), Taipei, Nairobi (Kenya), Penang (Malaysia)... Very significantly, no meeting of the World Futures Studies Federation has ever been held in North America, though one was held in Hawaii.

The WFSF did not meet in fancy hotels in the garden spots of the world as most organizations do. To the contrary, members of the WFSF in the countries named invited us to the dormitories of their universities and homes of their communities so that, on the one hand, we could experience the realities of the present of their cultures and learn their images of the future, and, on the other hand, so that by our presence and activities we could inspire more people locally to come to understand and embrace futures studies.

The WFSF was in part created to counterbalance the divisive effects of the Cold War. It desired to bring "East" and "West" (that is, "Communist" and "Capitalist") people together to imagine and build a better future for everyone. Thus, early meetings of the WFSF were also held in Poland, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, and Beijing, as well as in France, Italy, Sweden, West Germany, Spain, and Finland.

The unofficial journal of the World Futures Studies Federation—called *Futures*—started with British editors, but soon was taken over by Zia Sardar, from Pakistan, specifically to engage and enhance the voices of people who had images of the futures different from those dominant at the time.

Futurists from South Korea were among the early founders of futures studies. There were four attendees from Korea at the foundational Kyoto meeting of the WFSF: LEE Hahn Been, CHOE Chungho, CHOI Hyung Sup, and SOHN Jung Mok. Lee was the Dean of the Graduate School of Public Administration, Seoul National University and founder of the Korean Society for Future Studies; Choe was a journalist with the *Hankook Ilbo*; Sohn was a professor at the Central Officials Training Institute, Seoul; Choi was the president of the Korea Institute of Science and Technology. At the Kyoto conference, Choi explained that KIST had been created by US President Johnson and Korean President Park in 1965 to engage in futures oriented research into science and technology useful for the development of Korea.

Lee was very active during the Kyoto Conference. He gave a description of the Korean Society for Future Studies, saying that it had thirty-five members in the humanities, social and natural sciences, as well as government, business and the press. The purpose of the society was "to prevent a surprise attack from the future. Future research in a country such as Korea must be seen as part of the general development thinking which has evolved more and more strongly in the 25 years since the liberation. There is strong emphasis on social changes, and value orientation is added."

That is an important statement because while it revealed that futures was to be linked to national development goals, futurists were especially concerned with understanding the social and ethical implications of development.

Lee moderated two Sections at the 1970 Kyoto conference on "The role of futures and future research". He distinguished between "passive and positive futuristics, where only the latter could yield progress on a nation-wide scale."

In the final session of the conference, when there was a heated discussion about what kind of a global futures organization should be created, Lee said that while he hoped future meetings would abandon the formality of "United Nations type procedural debate...., we should avoid behaving like some apostolic pioneers in a new religion of the future, mainly because this is not a future movement--this is a study of the future and we are researchers about the future."

Lee and other Korean futurists had been highly impressed by *The Year 2000* project that Herman Kahn developed shortly after founding the American futures think tank, the Hudson Institute, in 1961. Kahn inspired "year 2000" projects all over the world. One of the best known was in Japan. Less well-known, but perhaps even more influential, was Kahn's *The Year 2000 in Korea* work in 1968. This project was continued as an official Korean government project, *Korea in the Year 2000*, in 1971. On the basis of a "developmental", "continued growth" image of the future that Kahn championed, *Korea in the Year 2000* aimed at forecasting changes that might take place by the year 2000 in Korean population, economy, science, technology, social environment, and ethics. Koreans were provided an image of a very desirable future in which people live in an economically prosperous, urbanized, internationally opened, and peace-loving country. Lee eventually became Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister. He was

thus in a position to see that his research on the future could be reflected in governmental policy.

In 1987 Dr. Chun Tuk Chu of Soongsil University was invited to be a visiting professor in the Department of Political Science of the University of Hawaii. I met with him several times, and he became interested in reigniting futures studies in South Korea. Chun became a member of the WFSF in 1987. He created the Korean Association for Futures Studies which became an Institutional Member of the WFSF in 1989. Seven persons from KAFS attended the WFSF Conference held in Beijing in September 1988..

I said before that one of the missions of the WFSF was to serve as a neutral meeting place for people from communist and capitalist nations to discuss better futures during the Cold War. The WFSF came very close to playing a role in bringing north and south Korea together:

Members of both the KAFS in South Korea and KASS (Korea Association of Social Studies, led by Hwang Jang-Yop) in North Korea attended the World Conferences of the WFSF in Budapest in 1990 and Barcelona in 1991. At the 1990 conference, Koreans from both organizations, along with Prof. Glenn Paige and myself, met and signed a document pledging to arrange a regional conference of the WFSF on the Korean peninsula, perhaps meeting first in Pyongyang and then traveling to Seoul. Most of my last days as President of the WFSF were spent trying to arrange such a meeting. The last word we received from Hwang was a fax he sent proposing a meeting in Pyongyang to be co-sponsored by WFSF and KASS in July or August 1996. That meeting never happened, much to my regret. Developments in North Korea prevented any further communication between us.

Dr. KIM Tae-Chang attended the 1988 Beijing Conference as part of the KAFSdelegation also. He also attended the WFSF Conferences in Budapest in 1990 and Barcelona in 1991. Dr. Kim was the director of the Institute for the Integrated Study of Future Generations and the Future Generations Alliance that was conceived by the Japanese entrepreneur, Katsuhiko Yazaki. From 1994 through 1999, the Institute held numerous conferences all over the world about the responsibilities of current generations towards future generations. Kim and I edited and contributed to two of the many volumes of essays by world-renowned scholars on future generations, *Creating a new history for future generations* (1995), and *Co-creating a public philosophy for future generations* (1999).

However, Dr. Kim's interest turned to making Confucianism more relevant and prominent in the modern world, since he believed that East Asian nations, influenced by Confucian thought, were likely to gain global dominance over the 21st century and beyond. Dr. Kim and I conducted a workshop on "Confucianism and Futures Studies" at the WFSF Conference in Brisbane, Australia in 1997. We argued that Confucianism should grow beyond its association with East Asia only and become a global perspective, as both Christianity and Islam have done. Dr. Kim held many more such meetings in Korea, China, and Japan.

So you should be convinced from this evidence (and more I do not have time to present) that futures studies began and developed as a global activity.

Nonetheless, in spite of its global reach, from the very beginning, all of these international meetings were held in English. All of the people from the countries I mentioned were westernized people, often educated in English and in the UK or the United States. A few international meetings were held in French or Spanish, and all local meetings were conducted in the languages of the localities, but clearly futures studies for the most part began using English language concepts and European cultural myths and metaphors.

Futures studies, thus began as a very western activity, very much impacted by western religious and secular images of the futures, especially by the idea that history has a direction and (more recently) that that direction is a positive advance from an earlier, inferior past to a progressively, continuously, better, and richer future. This image of the future came to be called “progress” or “development” or “continued economic growth”. It overwhelmed all other images of the futures from the late 19th C onward.

But at the same time, there was a general understanding among most members of the WFSF that there is no single inevitable future; that the future is inventible, something humans actively create that the consequences of “progress” were far from being all good; that “primitive” times had much to recommend them compared to modern times; and that the World Futures Studies Federation should specifically encourage the many images of the future around the world that differed from continued economic growth to be encouraged and more widely shared. That was a mission of the journal *Futures* from the beginning, but especially during the editorial leadership of Zia Sardar.

As one example, a team of researchers from Japan, at the Kyoto conference in 1970, gave a series of presentations on aspects of what they called “The Multi-Channel Society” of the future—a Japan that did not blindly pursue only “continued growth”, but that allowed and nourished many different images of the future and the differing behaviors resulting from them. Very different from the policies and practices of Japan at the time!

Moreover, there was never any serious objection that I know of to the “s” in “futures” when the Federation was created in Paris in 1973; nor to the title of the journal, *Futures*, when Vol. One, No. One was published in 1968; nor to the name of the Hawaii Research Center for Futures Studies (a name given by the Hawaii Legislature that created the Center in 1971, and not by me).

Futures were understood from the beginning to be plural, alternative, possible, in the French word, “*futuribles*”. Not **The Future** (singular, inevitable, progressive in a specific meaning of that word), but **Futures** (multiple, alternative, possible, inventible—forever).

That concept—of Futures and not The Future--though a bit awkward and unfamiliar, can easily be expressed in English and most other western languages. But it is very difficult to express and grasp easily in languages that do not require nouns to have number, such as Chinese, Korean and Japanese.

In addition, in English, we typically say, “The future lies ahead”. But there are some cultures that find that ludicrous. The future lies behind, they believe. We face the past, and so can “see” it and learn from it. On the other hand, the future creeps up in back of us and often surprises us.

“So turn around and face the future,” a westerner might say. To which a Hawaiian, for example, would reply, “Why don’t YOU turn around and start learning from the past? Then your world might not be in the mess it is now.”

This panel today is organized with the intention of problematizing and examining some of the facts I just reviewed, and more. We will explore the consequences of the fact that futures studies has been colonized by English and by various western conventions—even if that colonization was innocent and unintended—and whether an East Asian futures studies, based on the languages and cultural experiences of people in East Asia, can contribute to the improvement and better globalization of futures studies beyond its well-meaning, but restricted origins.

To help us in that discussion our panelists are:

Dr. Sohail INAYATULLAH

Dr. CHEN Kuo-Hua

Dr. KIM Tae-Chang

Dr. PARK Seongwon

Discussant of their papers is

Prof Ivana MILOJEVIC