

From Micro-Lessons to Meta-Narratives at the Tamkang Futurama!

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Futurists frequently employ images, geometric shapes, graphs, equations, or metaphors to better communicate their ideas and meaning. My image of the International Asia-Pacific Course in Futures Studies and Policymaking held at Tamkang University from August 23rd–August 27th, 2004, is the violent symmetry of a typhoon.

After a very interesting but somewhat routine opening day, the conference was dealt a major wild card before day-two began. Typhoon Aere struck northern Taiwan causing major damage and less importantly wiping out or delaying conference events scheduled for day-two and day-three. In noble futurist response to this discontinuity, a number of the conference attendees on campus were able to reorganize into ad-hoc meeting groups to discuss futures issues. These issues ranged from international futures education, to the categories of futures marketing, to futures in the Asia-Pacific region. Around a residence hall coffee table, we exchanged personal and professional stories about being futurists, revealed motivations, set-backs, and learning experiences, and asked serious questions about the good, bad, and ugly parts of futures studies. The typhoon caused a transformation of the conference and from this edge of chaos many spontaneous, creative, and enlightening interactions were made possible. The casual atmosphere and spontaneity of the discussions allowed revelations and lessons to follow fuzzy, unpredictable, but ultimately rewarding paths.

I doubt any of us who attended will forget the collective natural and intellectual energy that was generat-

ed at Tamkang this August. We assembled in Taiwan, blew new ideas around in our heads, and now must assess the results. In the spirit of the conference and the non-linear twists and turns it took us, I'd like to present 49 observations, ruminations, experiences, lessons, questions, and statements that I gathered during the week. I present these as grouped bits organized into a form representing the swirling forces of academic traditions, participants' interests, and outside events. These sets, or waves, follow a similar pattern, each containing statements about futures studies theory and practice, statements about particular topics presented, and certain idiosyncrasies from the week.

Waves

1. Futures studies has never been as theoretically and methodologically robust as it is now.
2. Futures depth: empirical, experiential, personal, cultural, mythological.
3. NGOs and other change agents need futures studies techniques, and futures studies needs to get more involved with NGOs.
4. Women in Australia still are at a disadvantage in the workplace and for retirement benefits.
5. Typhoons look flat from above and vertical from below.

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1. Futures Studies= Critique of power + constructive engagement.
 2. Futures studies as social marketing: category

responsibility, fused categories, layered categories.

3. Beware of public policy by slogan!
4. Worldwide communication speed and availability have exponentially increased, but it is still hard for most citizens of this planet to have a conversation – even standing face-to-face.
5. The students at Tamkang cleaned their own campus after the Typhoon.

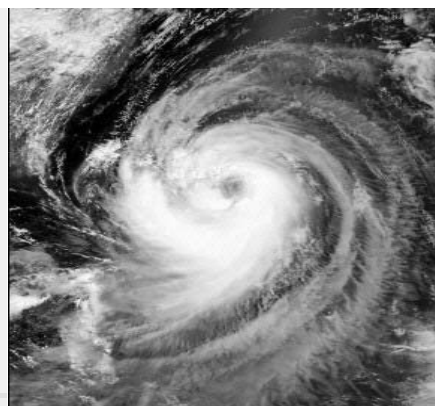
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1. Futurists must not be beholden to any one model, perspective, viewpoint; we must be agnostic about our epistemologies.
 2. Futures Studies: scholarly work bent toward action.
 3. There is a bias against negative futures - often answers are offered that please the customer.
 4. Conditions effecting pubic policy: size of the group, complexity of the issue, time frames.
 5. Is there a future in it?

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1. Futures studies: challenges assumptions and notions of time.
 2. Consulting futurists: Be transparent!
 3. We are the unlikely result of many chance events and must respect future generations.
 4. People are buying used futures.
 5. A Chinese leader is traditionally judged by how much land has been gained or lost.

1. What are the advantages/disadvantages of problem solving vs. capacity building?
2. Models obscure some worlds and open others.
3. Democratic governance is increasing worldwide and offers hope for peace.
4. Spiral Dynamics looks at systems *in* people-not types *of* people
5. Knowledge is like a birthday cake, everyone should get a piece.

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1. How do we grow the futures category? i.e. we are not selling a brand (a particular future), but a way of thinking about futures.
 2. Let's look at non-local, memetic, microvita inspired public policy.
 3. Three Vs- values, voices, visions.
 4. Three kinds of relationships: humans to humans, humans to nature, humans to spirit.
 5. There are 500 Chinese missiles aimed at Taiwan.

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1. Futurists need to talk about where we go wrong, when we go wrong in an evaluation feedback loop.
 2. Middle management has potential for futurists.
 3. International futures Masters Degree? We need core institutions supplemented by local nodes and a network.
 4. Find the 10% of people in a group who can infect others with change.



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5. The world's citizens should have a vote in American elections.

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1. Futurists roles: *both enabling and disruptive*.
 2. Futures studies market? Mid career professionals.
 3. We are authors of the social world!
 4. Do we have failed states because we have failed selves?
 5. Stick beats tiger, chicken eats worm.

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1. Futures have non-linear emergence.
 2. Can we build symbiotic cities?
 3. The brain's architecture is a political issue.
 4. Asian images of robots are generally more diverse and integrated into society than western images.
 5. Chinese and Taiwanese scholars stood together and enacted the overcoming of barriers to peace.

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1. Ideas need systematic ways to be delivered to change agents.
 2. Stakeholders need ownership of images of the futures.
 3. The income gap is widening in China but may be slowed or reversed by central government policy, economic trends, and social change.
 4. In Mandarin, the words for "university" and "flood" only slightly differ in inflection.
 5. ___ (always leave some black space)___

Conclusion

I hope these notes convey some of the breadth and the many layers of engagement that I experienced during the week-long course. The varied methods and approaches to futures studies each had its own advocates and contexts, but as Richard Slaughter and Sohail Inayatullah indicated in the introductory session, any or all of these methods should be viewed as potential parts of the futurists' toolkit. Even though some methods surely seemed to

me to have better theoretical foundations and wider applicability than others, the context and culture of the conference allowed for critical assessment of these diverse methodologies without creating an atmosphere of competition for ultimate methodological superiority.

The workshop sessions were also edifying in their diversity and enthusiasm. All of the workshop groups were very good, but two were highlights for me. First was a group that used men to role-play as Taiwanese women in "typical" social situations. Second was the presentation by a group that discussed Taiwan and Chinese peace. This group included Taiwanese and mainland Chinese scholars who used the T-cycle and Futures' triangle methods to address barriers to peace in the region. They then acted out the overcoming of barriers to peace in a rousing and moving presentation.

The ability for a diverse group of futurists and students to come together and share their knowledge and perspectives in spite of communicative difficulties, outside disruptions, and ideological differences was both educational and inspirational. The intelligence and passion of the participants was combined with a sense of spontaneity and good-will to create a truly remarkable conference experience.

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