



## Special Collection: Recipes for Change: Co-Creating Post-Pandemic Futures Today

### Editorial

By Ora-orn Poocharoen

Approximately 300 people convened online between September 16 and 18, 2021, for the 7th Annual Asia-Pacific Futures Network (APFN) Conference titled "*Recipes for Change: Co-Creating Post-Pandemic Futures Today*." (See: <https://www.asiapacificfutures.net/apfn-7>). The conference aimed to promote the co-creation of fair, inclusive, and sustainable futures for the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. It took a three-track approach catering to practitioners, academic researchers, and government leaders. It focused on good practices and success stories, new and innovative approaches, and experience sharing on how to create sustainable post-pandemic future in Asia-Pacific and beyond. Even though we were amid a pandemic, participants were excited to connect and continue conversations about the future. It certainly provided some solace to many of us who struggled with pandemic-related concerns.

The conference kick started with a very special interview with Futures and Foresight MasterChef Professor Emeritus Jim Dator, the former president of World Futures Studies Federation. He laid the foundational work on future studies decades ago and he continues to inspire the futures community globally. After which, we, metaphorically, sampled many dishes from the full menu, ranging from the theoretical evolution of future studies to actual experiences of using the futures approach in tourism, higher education, the Blue Pacific Continent, fake news, climate change, post-normal pandemics, social media, natural disasters, youths, food, citizens, conflict transformation, the Philippines, and more. We presented a variety of strategies and resources for promoting future literacy. Games, applications, quizzes, and well-designed and well-facilitated open discussions are among them. The conference produced a plethora of intriguing new ideas, techniques, and profound insights into the world, our systems, human nature, and where we are headed. We could taste all the above because we all co-produced the menu. We put together all the dishes and recipes. And because we were a mix of academics, policymakers, practitioners, early and veteran learners, and young and not-so-young people from all backgrounds, the dishes were very flavorful, especially when we agreed to disagree and discovered new flavors from the interactions. The conference sessions are available for view at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTb2UzGZncfS7x9ss-XcHMg/videos>.

Like all good meals, we want to document some of the recipes for future use. Thus, this special issue features three distinct articles produced at the conference.

The first article, "The Role of the Chef: Exploring Eschatological and Nationalistic Components in Recipes for Change in the Asia-Pacific Region," by Steven Lichty, provides a strong prism through which we might take a deeper and broader view of the forces shaping our world today. By carefully articulating the nexus of eschatology and nationalism in different dominant organized religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, and Christianity), the author extends Slaughter's (2005) Integral Futures framework and proposes a powerful 3D Futures K.U.B.E model. The new 3D model perfectly reflects the spirit of Otto Scharmer's (2013) Theory U, which proposes two conditions: social pathology/economies of destruction and social emergence/economies of creation. When operating from love and compassion, with an open mind, heart, and will, humans would be in a state of "presencing". This state is crucial for authenticity to oneself and others, as well as for peace. Furthermore, the author contends that religious literacy is necessary for people to understand the complexities and causes or forces of individuals' and particular communities' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Finally, the model incorporates people's level of engagement with VUCA trends. The author refers to this as the K.U.B.E - Knowing Universal Belief Ecosystems 3D model. This new approach can be used to examine decision-makers worldviews and mental operating systems.

It can also lead us to “Transforming systems towards justice, and equity means changing people in the system in fundamentally consciousness-altering ways” (Collective Change Lab, 2022). Lichty’s work offers a “recipe of change” as what the conference had aimed to achieve.

The second article by Ong et al. titled “Who’s cooking our futures? Reframing development policy and programming through imagination,” reports on *Inclusive Imaginaries*, an experimental pilot process conducted by UNDP Asia Pacific that infused imagination as a key process in foresight exercises across multiple countries – Lao PDR, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, Fiji and Samoa. It advocates for bureaucracies to use more ‘generous orthodoxy’ of evidence, including raw and lived experiences of people closest to the issue. The article argues for recognizing the distinction between individual imagination and *shared* imagination. To do so, we should design structures and practices and create relationship patterns that hold the space to transform relationships between people. Shared imaginations can be used in conjunction with more conventional quantitative ways of understanding. This article provides a very good demonstration of how futures work is being adapted to real-world practice in the Asia Pacific. As well as demonstrating the flexibility of how one can ‘imagine’ refining the tools and approaches of foresight to serve new understandings or articulate intangible concepts such as *shared imagination*. In relation to the first article, which discussed the Integral Futures framework, the concept of shared imagination in this second article expands our focus beyond the current collective external to investigate the desirable futures of the collective inner and exterior.

Boonmavichit and Hobbs’s article, titled “The Future of Thailand’s Healthcare Workforce in Light of the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Retrodution Analysis,” carefully crafts a strong case for adopting a critical realism approach to future studies. The study employs the retrodution method to analyze the case of healthcare worker shortage in Thailand during COVID-19 based on structure, culture, and agency elements. It emphasizes the emergence of innovations in crises, putting existing medical protocols and definitions to question. It provides policy recommendations for the Thai government to redefine its healthcare workforce or resources to include informal groups or civil society organizations, as well as the network of volunteer health workers at the local level. The key message of this article is for policymakers to look beyond the empirical evidence of numbers of health personnel and thoroughly investigate the structural elements (such as medical service system, decentralization, investments in medical personnel, HR management, and database, and existing policies), cultural elements (such as attitudes and beliefs, prevention and promotion of healthy lifestyles, social media, volunteerism, collectivism, and hierarchy), and agency elements (such as social health, health literacy, sense of civic-mindedness, and health professionals). In sum, when we carefully observe the interactions between the three elements, we can better see gaps, consider new possibilities, and craft sound policies or solutions. This article brings us to the pragmatic level of utilizing futures and critical realism to analyze a real problem during the pandemic and offer realistic solutions. This article nicely reflects the conference's objective, which is to bridge scholars, futurist practitioners, and government officials. It helps to answer the ‘So what?’ question of future studies.

Overall, the conference was a great success. Organizers and participants demonstrated great agility, perseverance, and grit in ensuring that the annual APFN conferences continued despite the challenges during the pandemic. We hope many will go to the videos to watch the sessions retrospectively.

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