



ELSEVIER

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

SCIENCE @ DIRECT®

Futures 35 (2003) 1075–1077

FUTURES

www.elsevier.com/locate/futures

Reflections Futures at Tamkang University

Sohail Inayatullah ^{a,b}

^a Graduate Institute for Futures Studies, Tamkang University, Tamsui, Taipei County, Taiwan

^b Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia

To understand Tamkang University's futures program, one must understand the centrality of Clement Chang, the founder. While most futures programs appear to be under the threat of budget cuts, Tamkang remains in a growth mode. This is partly because the Founding president of the University is a futurist and the patron of the futures program at Tamkang.

This is a boon, but as always, boons must be inspected. First, other faculties are naturally jealous. Not only are they suspicious of Futures Studies—they still can't quite understand what it is that the center/institute does but they can't overtly express these concerns since within the Confucian framework loyalty to the chief is paramount. And, Clement Chang is the chief. He is respected, even revered, for creating Tamkang University 50 years ago, and guiding it to become the largest private university in Taiwan.

This does not mean the Graduate Institute for Futures Studies can get what it wants. As with any institution, budgets and power are mediated by the bureaucracy. Chang, while the founding president, is retired, and budgetary decisions are made by the University President, Dr Horng-Jinh Chang.

The question, of course, is when Clement Chang goes onward to futurist heaven, what will happen to the program. Of course, he has thought that through. The first stage was to develop the undergraduate program (the largest in the world, 3000–5000 students a year take a required course in Futures Studies). Second, was the development of the Center for Futures Studies, and then transformation to the Graduate Institute for Futures Studies. As a Graduate institute, its future is secure since its survival is based on enrolment applications. With over 100 applications for 10 places (in the first year), the future does look bright. Along with local strength, third, Chang has cultivated global strength. In 2000, the first International Futures Conference entitled *New Futures* was held at Tamkang University. Luminaries such

E-mail address: sohail@mail.tku.edu.tw (S. Inayatullah).

as Hazel Henderson, Wendell Bell, Richard Slaughter, Graham Molitor and younger futurists such as Ivana Milojevic, Sesh Velamoor, David Wright participated. In 2002 there was another international conference, this time focused on *Teaching Futures Studies*. Jim Dator, David Hicks, Graham May, Chris Jones and others held sessions on the futures of futures pedagogy and I moderated sessions on the steps required to develop Global postgraduate programs in Futures Studies. In May 2004, an international conference on the Global Mind and the Futures of Globalization will be held. And in 2004 the first joint Tamkang University and World Futures Studies Federation course is planned, continuing from the Andorra and Bangkok courses of years ago. Finally, along with the *Journal of Futures Studies*, a series of books on the future will be published by Tamkang University Press. The first is *Questioning the Future*; and future titles include, *East Asian Futures*, *Feminist Futures*, and *The Futures of Schooling*. These activities thus further institutionalize and legitimate futures studies ensuring that having a university founder as the patron saint remains a boon forever.

My role at Tamkang has been to attempt to develop a culture of the future. That is, through lectures, workshops, strategy sessions on the futures of the university, begin the process of seeing futures not as methodology but as capacity building. While joyful, this has not been an easy activity. The Confucian academy remains hierarchy based. The professor knows everything. The Dean even more. And the president is high above, below the sun but above the clouds. Moreover, the university is in a different life-cycle than OECD nations which are beset by budget cuts and low faculty morale. Notions of learning to learn thus challenge traditional modes of learning and doing, especially where there is no crisis to motivate for change. Still, every journey starts with a step.

What is possible in Taiwan is eclecticism. Having been “colonized” by the Chinese and then the Japanese and now by the Americans, Taiwan’s rise has been about determining the crucial components for success and then building on them. The core remains “Taiwanese” but other perspectives are embraced. Thus, there is genuine openness to the future. What the future means is still open. Of course, since the US model of knowledge is paramount, futures studies do have a gee-whiz high tech nature to them as well as a “litany” list of problems approach. That said, social movements that the Faculty is a part of—peace and anti-genetic engineering, for example—use the futures discourse for citizen empowerment.

There is also a social science emphasis in the graduate program, which is directed by a sociologist, Professor Kuo-Hua Chen. Other professors are also from the social sciences. This is a benefit in that the future is approached systematically and with rigor. At the same time, moving from futures studies qua social sciences to futures studies qua critical theory and emancipation has not been easy.

Fortunately professors and students are young, and thus do not identify with traditional Taiwan (Confucian, State-run, economic). There is a natural attempt to go beyond official futures. The *Journal of Futures Studies*, itself, for example is subtitled, Epistemologies, methods, applied and alternative futures.

Graduate students reflect this approach. Their concerns are about the nature of the global and local; about the relevance of Chinese macrohistory to the future; and,

about developing China–Taiwan peaceful futures. Of course, finding jobs is a concern but it is not as paramount as in OECD nations. When I referred to the graduate students as customers, meaning we as professors needed to meet their academic needs and interests (not just teach what we thought relevant), one student rejected this category. She said: “we are your students, and not just your customers.” “We are here to learn all sorts of knowledge not just instrumental knowledge.” This was a surprising breath of fresh air, what I took to be an emerging transmodern perspective—focused on deeper issues but not oblivious to the market.

What is confusing for them is the idiosyncratic nature of Futures Studies. Coming from the social sciences with clear schools of thought, they are surprised that Futures Studies still is defined by individuals and their theories–approaches–methods. They look forward to the development of clear schools, with clear debates among the schools. When I was in graduate school, the main debate was between the WFS and the WFSF; as Taiwan and Tamkang do not have that distinction (between the USA and the world), they are less interested in this argument. Rather, they seek to locate futures studies both in theory, practice and values.

Will these students move onto the global stage? They may or may not. While they certainly have the skills and intellectual capacity, learning remains in Mandarin, and as long as English dominates the world academy, their role will remain marginal. However, as China—in the next 20–50 years—challenges the USA for world hegemony, or at the very least, clearly defines Asia, they will have a much more important role. Already the President’s Office (the nation) seeks advise from Tamkang on developing China–Taiwan scenarios. Moreover, as Taiwan moves from business as primarily a family enterprise where connections are most important to business where planning, policy and strategy are equally crucial, then futures skills will be required. Other issues requiring futures thinking include the Aging of Society in Taiwan and the Changing Nature of Marriage. Of courses, China looms large. However, the state-based strategic international relations perspective has not dominated (there are already dozens of think tanks focused on that); rather, futures studies within Tamkang is slowly but surely defining itself as being critical, trans-disciplinary and policy-based.

What is clear is that Tamkang University is one of the core pillars of an emerging network of future oriented universities or at least programs. This includes Swinburne University in Melbourne, University of Hawaii, University of Houston–Clear Lake, University of Alicante, Sunshine Coast University, and many more. By developing alliances with professional association of futurists a global pedagogy of futures studies can develop. Tamkang University with its multiple cultural heritages can and should play a defining role in this.

Did Clement Chang envision this 50 years ago. I am sure he did! But what will Tamkang look like in 50 years? Come to Tamkang and help create that future.