

Towards a Futures Discourse in Mainland China

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Abstract

There are currently no well-established Futures practitioners working full-time in the People's Republic of China, although certain futurists visit China regularly. This paper addresses the conditions, including political, social and economic, which futurists looking to set up in China are likely to face. It is argued that the time is now right for a range of types of futures practitioners to work permanently in China, or at least have China as a major focus. Conditions are sufficiently permissive, and with an increasing range of major issues and problems facing China in the next decade, the tools and methods of Futures Studies could potentially play an important role in the development of China. Finally, the paper outlines some suggested steps that can be taken to begin to more fully establish a healthy discourse for Futures Studies in China.

Keywords: futures studies, politics, China, development, freedom of information, liberalisation, discourse

Prior to the Tiananmen massacre in 1989, there were approximately five reputable futurists in Beijing, and the World Futures Studies Federation was intending to move its headquarters there. However since that time these futurists have remained silent.¹ As Inayatullah (2007) has recently indicated via a survey of Futures Studies in Asia, the discourse in Asia is relatively more healthy. There are futurists or Futures Studies programs in Taiwan, Japan, Malaysia, India, South Korea, Singapore and several other countries. China is the second biggest economy in the region, and arguably now the most powerful nation in Asia. Sometime within a decade it will probably become the second biggest economy in the world (Hutton, 2007, p. 4).

But China's influence is more than economic. Western bias may lead westerners to forget that China comprises about a fifth of the world's population, and that its historical role in the world has been considerable. Prior to the last two hundred centuries, China was one of the most advanced nations of earth, in terms of both technological and social innovation, and development in general.

Why then are there no permanently established futures practitioners in mainland China? Why is relatively little being written about China by Futurists? More importantly, what scope is there now to initiate such a discourse, or set up a Futures program in a tertiary or public institution? As a futurist who has lived in the greater China region for over seven years, I am particularly interested in what scope there is for a re-ignition of Futures Studies in China. How might futurists *in* China begin to explore the futures of China *now*? What foci should futurists ideally take in the immediate future? Specifically, in this paper I will detail the situation for futurists within mainland China. I will then consider the potential scope for Futures Studies regarding China in the immediate future. I will also highlight the likely roadblocks futurists may encounter if they chose to practice in China in the near future.

Considering the political situation in the People's Republic of China (PRC) after 1989, it is understandable that Futures Studies went quiet. However, more perplexing is the fact that there is relatively little written about mainland China by futurists even outside of China. There are of course a plethora of writers around the world and in China writing about China's meteoric development, and speculating about its future. Yet most of these people are not futurists *per se*, and they typically do not employ the tools and theoretical approaches of Futures Studies (e.g. de Burgh, 2006; Friedman, 2006; Hutton, 2007). It has to be asked, which futurists at present are regularly producing papers and books about the futures of mainland China? The answer is not very many, or at least not as many as there should be, given China's importance in the modern world.

The Current Situation: China Futures in and Out of China

There are many individuals writing and talking about China. A walk into any bookstore in just about any country will reveal that readily enough. Academics are getting in on the scene also. From politics, to economics, to human rights, to innovation and critical thinking and just about any domain of inquiry you care to name, people are talking about China.

In describing the current situation regarding China and Futures Studies, I shall make reference to several categories of futurists. According to Slaughter (2003) there have been approximately four main phases of futures work. The first was the empirical tradition, which was most prominent in the USA. The second was a "culturally based" approach - predominantly European - which eventually led to critical futures studies. Then in the third phase an international and multicultural thrust emerged. Slaughter's fourth phase is post-conventional and Integral Futures Studies. Integral Futures studies has developed from the work of Ken Wilber (amongst others) and the integral tradition (Slaughter, 2003).² In the wake of Slaughter's taxonomy, I shall employ these categories throughout this paper. The working situation in China for each is different, considering their different approaches to knowledge and studying the future.

Who is, and is not, a futurist is debatable. For the sake of simplicity I define a futurist as a person studying any aspect of the future, and employing tools and methods typically used in Futures Studies or Foresight work. There are certainly people

talking about the development of China in depth who do not fall into this category (de Burgh, 2006; Hoffmann & Enright, 2008; Hutton, 2007; Navarro, 2007). I consider their work to be both relevant and important in regard to Chinese Futures Studies. These writers are knowledgeable - but not necessarily about the field of Futures Studies itself. Further, I have largely restricted my survey of the literature to researchers and thinkers who write or have contributed material to significant journals in the field of Futures Studies. These include *Futures*, *Futures Research Quarterly*, *The Futurist*, *Foresight*, and *The Journal of Futures Studies*. The latter is based in Taiwan and would seemingly be an ideal location for significant discussion of the development of China. Finally, I have restricted my research predominantly to research conducted and published since the year 2000, as this reflects the most recent output of the discourse.

Chinese Futures Studies by Futurists Outside of China

There *are* futurists discussing China at present. But the surprising fact is that the discourse is relatively undeveloped. Of the major Futures journals, *The Futurist* is the only one producing a significant number of papers about mainland China, covering topics such as a potential collapse of China (Johnson, 2002), Chinese branding and advertising (Tucker, 2006), domination of the global economy (Anderson, 2006), economic barriers (Wagner, 2007), sustainable development (Dong, 2006), and eugenics (Swedin, 2006). There are only a scattering of papers about China in the other Futures journals. Even Taiwan's *Journal of Futures Studies*, surprisingly up till the recent publication of one of my own articles (Anthony, 2007a), contained not a single paper specifically based on mainland China. Futures Studies is thus lagging behind the world in its assessment of and focus upon China. To put it with a twist, in terms of China, is Futures Studies stuck in the past?

Futures Studies by Futurists Inside of China

Inayatullah (2007) is essentially correct to point out that Futures discourse within China is very limited. There is at present no Chinese journal specifically devoted to Futures Studies or Foresight. However, Inayatullah fails to mention that there are several futurists beginning to enter China to initiate a discourse.

Johan Galtung has conducted some work within China, most notably at Sichuan University where is an "Honorary professor." Galtung's work is most commonly devoted to Peace Studies, but often with reference to the Futures field. His work sometimes pushes the boundaries of the permissible. For example, Galtung and Fischer (1996) argue that the driving force of the One China Policy is the Han mentality of seeing themselves as "the undisputed rulers" of the greater land mass of "China," a model in existence since 221 BC when China became a unitary state. They propose a Chinese confederation as the preferable future, rather than a monolithic centralised state (Galtung & Fischer, 1996). Yet it seems unlikely that Galtung would raise this point at length within China itself, as this argument would certainly invoke the ire of both official policy makers, and public sentiment.

Recently another futurist, John Naisbitt, has been engaging in work at Nanjing University in China (Naisbitt, 2006). He has also given public lectures in China as recently as 2007.

The cases of Galtung and Naisbitt, though they are not permanently based in China, indicate clearly that the way is open for foreign futurists to make a contribution to the development of China. But what kind of futurists will be welcome in modern China? Naisbitt is a trends analyst, whose work is akin to Slaughter's first stage of Futures Studies, and the degree of self-censorship he needs to employ is much less than for critical and post-conventional futurists. He is also a sinophile of unbounded optimism. In his recent book *Mind Set* (2007), he writes a chapter devoted to China, where he praises China's path to development and sweeps aside criticisms about its rise. In telling contrast, his view of India is completely pessimistic, and he writes not a single positive point about Indian development.

The golden rule for any academic or public commentator working in China, whether Chinese or foreign, is not to criticise government at any level, or question any of their key policies. Criticism of top CCP officials remains a complete taboo. There are other sensitive areas that are off limits. The obvious ones are the "3-Ts" – Taiwan, Tibet and Tiananmen. All discussion of these issues is still forbidden, beyond echoing of government propaganda. Human rights and democracy are other domains that are likely to create trouble. It can be seen that Naisbitt's values, methods, and his focus, are perfectly compatible with the values of the Communist Party. His analyses are mostly centered upon economic trends, and there is little exploration of deeper social and political facets.

It is therefore unlikely that Naisbitt will have any problems in expressing his opinions in modern China. His case indicates that experts who stick to economic and empirical discourse (effectively the litany, in Inayatullah's (2002) Causal Layered Analysis, or CLA) are tolerated, especially if their ideas and forecasts focus on the positive.

Yet Galtung's case also promotes optimism. Despite having moved into an historical and systems analysis (Galtung & Fischer, 2006) which points out the limitations of a very central policy of the Chinese authorities (One China), he has not been identified as being a problem, at least publicly. This might indicate that the way is open for carefully worded critiques of social and political systems in China. However, it would be naïve in the extreme for visiting futurists to believe that they can now come to China and launch in-depth critiques of power structures in the country, in the same way that they can in democratic nations. Chinese futurists in particular would place themselves at risk by doing this, as indicated by recent cases of imprisonment or violent killings of activists like Xu Ting, Wei Wenhua and Hu Jia, who, in different cases, all tried to publicise sensitive information or criticise government policies (Ng, 2008; Associated 2008).

The Political Situation in China and Futures Studies

It would appear extremely unlikely that a futurist who is respectful to China, its traditions and its political situation would meet any life-threatening repercussions for

writing in books, journals, newspapers and publications outside of China. The Chinese authorities have restricted very few people from entering China, and I am not personally aware of any foreigners who have been excluded from China for writing or speaking out from locations abroad. Even Jung Chang, the author of the banned books *Wild Swans* and *Mao: The Untold Story*, is allowed to freely enter and leave China at will (Chang, 2003; Chang & Halliday, 2005). It is apparent that as long as researchers and commentators do not directly challenge the power of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), they will be left alone. China is now intricately interwoven into the world economy and world culture. The authorities have acknowledged this, and most likely understand that this situation will only continue to develop more as time goes on.

Freedom of Information and Futurists

The potential development of democracy in China will affect the development of Futures Studies. The reason is obvious. In the effective one-party state that is The PRC, there is little room for the expression of political views that challenge the status quo. Previously (Anthony, 2007a), I argued that the development of democracy and freedom of expression in China remain uncertain at this point in time. The Beijing authorities often refer to China's "democratic" future, and it is one of the foundations of the Party concept of the "harmonious society" ("Building harmonious", 2005). However the actual character of this democracy remains undefined, and there are concerns that Beijing may be merely paying lip service to the concept (Anthony, 2007a).

It appears that local government is becoming more accountable, policies are being discussed more widely, and officials are being allowed the opportunity to be more professional and responsive to the public (de Burgh, 2006). There is also no question that China is far more politically tolerant than it was during the Mao era (1949-1976). For example in July 2007 a leading party periodical, *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, launched possibly the most severe criticism of China's development that has been seen in recent times, citing corruption and the one-party state as being incompatible with a sustainable development of China ("Liberals slam", 2007). Nonetheless it remains to be seen just how far the CCP will go in permitting the system to develop into a more wide-ranging democracy at the higher levels of power.

Of great concern for futurists working in China is that there are ongoing reports of government crackdowns on dissidents and political rivals. For example in 2006 Chen Guangcheng, a blind self-taught lawyer and critic of the abuses surrounding forced abortions (allegedly in regard to the one child policy), was arrested and jailed for four years for "disrupting traffic." He had done little more than report cases of such abuses ("Chinese Court", 2006). However the negative publicity which this case brought forward in the Western media was such that the activist's sentence has been reduced. The other major concern for futurists is the tight media control in the PRC. Reporters Without Borders ranks China 163rd in the world in terms of press freedom – only ahead of a few other nations. At least 32 journalists are now imprisoned in China (the highest number in the world), as well as fifty cyber-dissidents (Ching, 2007). China's newspapers remain under a general blanket of restriction from Beijing.

There are often contradictory policies put forward by the CCP in regard to the media, with some cases suggesting liberalisation, and others a tightening of controls. On January 1st 2007 the Beijing authorities announced that they were lifting certain restrictions on foreign journalists in China, in the lead-up to the Beijing Olympics in 2008. However the new laws are only effective till October 2008, when the Olympics are over. Further, just two weeks after announcing these changes, the authorities announced a new round of media restrictions to clamp down on newspapers which had been boldly giving publicity to politically sensitive topics (Huang, 2007).

The internet is a potentially important medium for futurists in China, as elsewhere. The internet has boomed in China, and 400 million Chinese people now have online access, and there are about 600 000 bloggers (de Burgh 2006, p. 140). Yet the net is also heavily controlled, with about 30 000 internet police employed by the CCP (de Burgh 2006). Search engines and servers are structured so that sites with certain key words fail to show up, even though they are not blocked. This includes Microsoft servers (MacKinnon, 2006). Recently, in January 2008, internet restrictions were tightened even more, with all blogs and online forums which contained video capacities being effectively blocked from public viewing ("China tightens", 2008).

Media giants such as Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation have had their rejections, and internet corporations including Google, Yahoo and Microsoft have submitted to censorship (Spencer, 2006). Concerns have been raised regarding these internet giants "selling out" for profits. In one notorious case, Yahoo handed over to the Beijing authorities information contained within a dissident's email account, which led to his arrest. In 2006 Reporters Without Borders denounced Yahoo's involvement in the arrest and prosecution of at least three Chinese dissidents. Yahoo's collaboration with the Chinese police and judicial authorities has been proven in these cases ("Cyber-dissident", 2006). Obviously under these conditions, futurists wishing to express divergent opinions and significant analyses of China's futures face uncomfortable conditions.

From a long-term perspective, something which may have a significant effect on the ongoing development of the media and internet in China is the arrival of the era of "cyberdemocracy" (Marien, 1996). This era enhances individualism, creativity, democracy and capitalism. Chang (2000) also sees the benefits of new technologies – computer, genetic and quantum – in enhancing economic integration between China and Taiwan, and with the entire world. Democracy, empowered by the expansion of knowledge economies, is an ongoing trend of recent world history (Wang, 2007). Beijing may find it difficult to resist this trend. China's economy is now intimately interwoven with the world's. China is now too dependent upon its economic relationships with other nations to insist upon an isolationist and restrictive policy towards the media, democracy and human rights (Huang, 1997).

A more dystopian future may occur if an increasingly powerful China fails to democratise, and then begins to "export" its authoritarianism offshore. We can see this already with China selling its internet control technologies to other nations, especially in South-East Asia (Gomez, 2004).

Still, the significance of all this for futurists is that it is likely that Chinese society, politics and the media will continue to open up in the long term. It is the degree of this

opening that remains uncertain. Nonetheless, it remains true that even today there is great scope for futurists to operate in China. The prospects are looking increasingly optimistic.

Dissent in the New China

Critical, postconventional and Integral Futures Studies tend to be dissenting, by nature (Slaughter, 2006). They ask big questions, and seek to move beyond the limitations of established power structures, both overt and covert. They tend to challenge the status quo. By definition, such Futures will come up against barriers in the mainland of China, where local, provincial and the central governments are intolerant criticism. The media and the publishing industries are also severely restricted because of this.

The spiritual components of postconventional and Integral Futures may also be an issue. Yet this will most likely only be the case if authorities perceive that they involve some threatening ideology which challenges Communist Party control, or encourages a cult-like mentality. Notably, Ken Wilber's works are freely available in China. Therefore at present his often metaphysical stance is not perceived as a problem by the authorities. However, there have been some criticisms that Wilber's followers tend to exhibit cult-like attitudes (Bauwens, n.d). Therefore a little discretion is advised on behalf of any Integral futurists who plan to operate in China.

The greater danger is that being critical in nature, Futures Studies faces the possibility of a blanket ban if any one or more futurists become too aggressive in critiquing government or its policies. As the futures discourse develops in China, theorists will have to tread a fine line. It must also be noted that there is no guarantee that any hard work, research or development which Futurists put into China will be rewarded. Our work within China's borders could be silenced at any time, in part or in total.

John Naisbitt appears to have understood something about China that some foreign commentators have failed to grasp. The Chinese respond far more positively to praise, even flattery, than to criticism. This is an entrenched reality of Chinese culture, where public criticism results in loss of face (and often protracted personal conflict), and flattery and praise are common forms of social discourse. As a general rule, commentators wishing to have their work read by Chinese people should remember the old Dale Carnegie rule: praise before you criticise. And for every measure of criticism of anything Chinese, there should be two measures of praise. Though this may appear outrageous to an individual brought up in the often severe intellectual climate of western education and academia, it is nonetheless vital for any personal or business transactions in China. Futurists who fail to understand this do so at their own peril. To be labeled a "China hater" could well spell the end of any opportunities for an individual futurist to have a greater impact in China.

There are some related "concessions" required under the political conditions in modern China. One should avoid volatile language and references to "unmoderated" facts. For example, to describe China's political makeup, I typically use the term "centralised government," and sometimes "authoritarian government." I avoid the volatile term "totalitarian government." Such concessions may grate at Western ideals of free speech, and "tell it like it is," but they are a reality of working in China.

One thing that is clear is that foreign critics and commentators are in little personal danger in writing about China, within or beyond its borders. There are currently no foreign dissidents in Chinese custody.

The same cannot be said for Chinese futurists and dissidents. There are dangers for Chinese citizens, even those writing in offshore sites and publications. Recently, for example, activist Zhang Jianhong was jailed for six years for defaming the central government. He was accused of posting more than sixty anti-government articles on foreign websites ("Activist jailed", 2007). The line between critical futurist and dissident is one that is potentially blurry. The precise location of the "line" between these is beyond the futurist's immediate control, and often beyond her exact knowledge. Therefore any Chinese person entering this field at present should err on the side of caution, as far as his/her critiques of China go.

The Potential Roles of Futurists in China in the Immediate Future

The work of Naisbitt and Galtung suggests that the way is now open for more foreign and local Futures work in the mainland. There is no reason why futurists in China cannot work within the bounds of accepted protocol, considering the limitations of political and social conditions. A problem may occur when official opinion shifts. What is considered an acceptable domain for discussion at one time, may be off limits at another. In such cases futurists may suddenly find themselves a target for official "sanctions". These would most likely be banning of specific books and journals, and in severe cases a general blanket ban on publishing by that author, or in the worst case scenario, an entire subject area. However, unless a foreign futurist oversteps the mark via a direct confrontation with authorities, it seems highly unlikely that penalties would move beyond this. Severe penalties like detainment and imprisonment are generally reserved for individuals of Chinese citizenship whom the authorities deem to be persistent troublemakers.

What then, can futurists bring to the vibrant wider discourse on the development of modern China? The greatest benefit will be the futurists tool bag – the unique methods that futurists have at their disposal, and the powerful insights and analyses which these can bring to discussions about modern China. Table 1, below, indicates that key Futures tools can be used to analyze significant issues in China's development.

Table 1: *Key Issues in China's Development, & Futures Tools and Methods*³

	Busine ss	Enviro nment	Popul ation	Trans port	Energy	Gender Imbalance	China vs West
CLA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Trends/ empirical	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Integral Analysis	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Visioning	X	X		X	X	X	X
Scenarios	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Harmonic Circles	X						X

Table 1 indicates some potential applications for key futures tools, for working in Chinese business or analyzing China's development. I will discuss just some of these here.

There is now room in China for Futurists of all persuasions. Empirical futurists and trends analysts can develop predictive models, and discuss scenarios. Though the concept is largely untried in China, business and governments at all levels may find their services attractive. This contains little danger for such futurists. At least one foresight company is now exploring business opportunities in China: Shaping Tomorrow (www.shapingtomorrow.com). This is a company which tracks data from the web and "sells" foresight: assisting businesses and corporations to perceive the near future, and make sound business and investment decisions.⁴ There is no reason why other foresight ventures and practitioners could not be involved in similar projects.

Other kinds of futurists may face greater obstacles. Critical futurists and discourse analysts may face more obstacles due to the obvious government reluctance for criticism. Further, China's current social and cultural focus is upon making money and entertainment, so much so that often there seems to be little else of importance in everyday life, as I argued previously (Anthony, 2007a). However, as China faces more and greater problems with its development, and the economic boom slows, focus is likely to turn to a broader range of issues (such as outlined in Table 1, above). I predict that Chinese people, companies and authorities will soon start to ask more questions regarding a greater range of issues. Broadfoot and Enright (2008), Navarro (2007) and Hutton (2008) agree that more challenging times probably lie ahead for China in the next decade. This may open more doors for critical futurists.

Post-conventional and Integral Futurists may have a more flexible role. Practitioners in these fields tend to be less confrontational. Being heavily influenced by Eastern and spiritual discourse, they have an approach which is generally more gentle. For example, Wilber's Four Quadrant model and Integral analysis could be used to examine any of the issues listed in Table 1, above.

One great limitation may lie in getting Chinese business people, institutions and leaders to understand Wilber's Integral Operating System. On the positive side, the Chinese authorities might be surprised to find out that Wilber and many Integral futurists actually have a lot in empathy for China and the East in general, sometimes drawing inspiration from China's history and Chinese thought.

In terms of postconventional analysis, Inayatullah's (2002) Causal Layered Analysis could be used to deconstruct the idea of the development of China in general. Inayatullah's method has litany, system/social, worldview and myth/metaphor levels. At the litany level we could look at trends and data in terms of population, migration, car usage, energy consumption and so on, and see what is happening at an empirical level. At the systems level problems for the futurist might occur with the role of local authorities, as the pervading political system is the unquestionable power of the CCP. Nonetheless, there are other systems and social issues that can be analyzed. The growing individualism of China's young could be examined. Worldview considerations might come into play when the differences between Eastern and Western concepts of the development are considered. The myth/ metaphor level might be used to examine some of the deeper causes of problems in China's cities. Again, caution would be

required. A pervasive "story" is that of the emperor having unaccountable power over the people. This may be an unwise story to discuss, for obvious reasons. A more acceptable "story" to discuss would be the myth of the "harmonious society" ("Building harmonious", 2005), a long held conception in eastern societies, and a foundation of President Hu Jintao's ideal of an Harmonious Society.

Perhaps the most pervasive story of modern China is that of being the victim of foreign aggression, here the *guilao* or "foreign devil" is explicitly a threat to be repelled or destroyed. Here my Futures tool Harmonic Circles (Anthony, 2007) could potentially come into play, as I have written in an upcoming article (Anthony, 2008). Harmonic Circles has the potential to shift perspectives of both parties within a conflict, and return attention to mutual commonalities. From this there emerges space for a new story to replace the old. A new story might see the West as less "other," and more as a friend in the global community. Harmonic Circles could also be used in business, where conflict occurs within and between companies, with individuals and groups.

Scenarios and visioning processes potentially have precisely the same functions in China as they do elsewhere. They allow stakeholders to assess different potential paths into the future, and anticipate the pros and cons of each. For example, Broadfoot and Enright (2008) use a "scenario tree," a tool which looks much like the draw of a tennis competition. They identify sixteen possible scenarios based on good and bad outcomes regarding four key "uncertainties": economic performance, internal cohesion, relations with Taiwan, and Great Powers relations.

Visioning potentially serves an even more powerful function. Visions empower the imagination and passion of individuals and populations, and have a unifying capacity (Inayatullah, 2002). A problem will arise where projected visions conflict with those of the authorities. China's greater developmental model of "scientific development" is not open to dispute. Visions which involve esoteric or spiritual components are also likely to arouse suspicion, judging by current restrictions of religious activities in China. These are just a few issues and tools that might potentially be addressed and used by futurists working in China.

In conclusion, the most positive approach futurists can now take to China Futures is to work within the system, acknowledge limitations, exercise discretion, and trust that developments will move forward in the future. Whether they will or not, only time will tell.

Sites for Publication within China

While sites for publication of China Futures material offshore are the same as for all Futures work, in China there are obvious limitations. There is no accredited Futures journal in China, and Taiwan's *Journal of Futures Studies* has the limitation of being in the English medium, and is published offshore. Where then, can futurists writing about China hope to publish and discuss their ideas within China? Here we have to keep in mind the caveats previously mentioned – that political discussions have to be carefully self-censored.

- **Newspapers.** China has numerous newspapers, and each tends to be located within a single city. Leading papers include Beijing's *Wan Bao* and *Mingpiao*. These are in the Chinese medium. English language newspapers such as *China Daily* and *The People's Daily* are government mouthpieces. They are also available on the web (www.chinadaily.com.cn, english.peopledaily.com.cn). However their audience is limited to the small numbers of Chinese who can read English. Nonetheless, short articles written for a lay audience, and which have a positive spin on China's futures, have a good chance of publication.
- **Books.** China is now witnessing a flood of books written by foreigners and translated into Chinese. It must be said that the majority of these are books directly or indirectly related to doing business, or how to get rich. However, there are also plenty of books on personal development, communications skills, popular science, education, and biographies of famous foreigners. This is a booming industry, and futurists seriously considering working within China should investigate this avenue of publication.
- **Academic journals.** These tend to be of dubious quality. There are regular accusations of heavy plagiarism within academia, a problem which is poorly monitored ("Plagiarism in Chinese", 2008). As journal writing reaches a limited audience, it is unlikely to have a great impact on the development of China. It may, of course, grant credibility and create connections, leading to other opportunities in universities and business. In the absence of a specific Futures journal, futurists will have to go through journals in other fields. The most prestigious journals are those associated with China's premier universities, Beijing University and Tsinghua University, both in Beijing.
- **Radio and television.** The most obvious problem here is that of language. There are relatively few Chinese people who can speak or understand English at a level that could make media and public appearances worthwhile. The exception would be venues where English is the preferred medium. China has an English language TV station – the government mouthpiece, CCTV9 – which sometimes features interviews and documentaries with foreign thinkers and experts in various fields. However it is likely that the audience for this station is largely expats living in China. Radio is even more limited, with Radio National China being one of the few English language stations. In fact, while attending a talk about the Olympics at Beijing's Bookworm bookstore in July 2007, I was interviewed briefly by China Radio International's reporter/editor, Liu Dan. I managed to get in a few words about my being a futurist, in between making flattering comments on the Olympics!
- **Public lectures.** The major cities in China now feature a few small English language libraries and bookstores. The aforementioned "The Bookworm" in Beijing has experienced phenomenal growth in the past five years since it opened. It now serves as a venue for talks by both local and international speakers. John Naisbitt spoke there in August 2007. However these sites are relatively new developments, and audiences are likely to be small (restricted to a few dozen people, and up to a hundred or so). The other problem is publicity, and convincing Chinese people to attend talks, lectures or workshops. The idea of

"fame" is even more important in China than in most western countries, and the general populace tends to be reluctant to attend public presentations by people with "no name." Further, in English-language arenas, foreign speakers should be aware that the audience will consist of a significant number of non-native English speakers and listeners, so they should be careful to speak a little more slowly and carefully than usual, while using repetition and example wherever possible to clarify points.

Hong Kong and Taiwan

There is much less censorship in Hong Kong than on the mainland. Beijing has generally upheld its promise to Hong Kong to maintain a free media. There are however increasing signs of self-censorship, especially in regard to sensitive issues such as the Tiananmen massacre. There is a sizable body of pro-Beijing thinkers in Hong Kong who tend to back the political, historical and ideological propositions of the CCP. Nonetheless, there are perhaps even more who openly criticise the policies of the CCP. A general taboo, even in Hong Kong, is personal attacks upon any of China's senior Politburo Standing committee members, especially President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao. Those who repeatedly criticise Beijing may be refused permission to enter the mainland, as happened to Hong Kong politician "Long-haired" Leung in 2007.

The reality is that Hong Kong media has limited penetration into the mainland. Hong Kong newspapers sent to the PRC are regularly checked for content, and television signals are jammed by the authorities in neighboring mainland areas. For greatest voice in the mainland, mainland media and publications have to be used. While there are no established Futures Studies practitioners in Hong Kong, there are those working indirectly on the futures of China, such as Broadfoot and Enright (2008).

Taiwan remains effectively free of mainland control, having a separate and democratically elected government. In theory there is no reason why Futurists cannot write freely about China within Taiwan. However, the obvious problem is that publications have to be approved by PRC authorities before they are published in the mainland of China, and Taiwanese TV and radio are strictly controlled, reaching a very limited mainland audience.

Leadership required

I believe that the time is right for Futures Studies to play a greater role in the development of modern China. Now is an ideal time for the initiation of a more in depth, sustained and enthusiastic discourse. Political restrictions are no longer an adequate excuse for lack of (ironically) foresight, on behalf of the Futures Studies community. What is lacking is leadership, and people with the commitment to do the groundwork. There is a need for somebody to take that initiative. This will require people that understand China, its political and social systems, its people, education systems, and business culture. Ideally they should have at least some connections in the country. Needed also are individuals who are willing to do the hard work to learn

these skills, and make these connections. An investment in time, energy and probably money is required. There are likely to be obstacles, and the political situation in China means that the situation could change at any time. In short, there is no guarantee of success. This is pioneering work, and only the adventurous need apply.

I propose a number of steps that can be taken in the immediate future to re-ignite Futures work in China.

1. The setting up of a **Futures program** or course within a Chinese university or educational institution, preferably in one of the major cities of China. Such a program might initially exist within another faculty – such as language, social science, business or even science. The program will have to meet the needs of the given institution and faculty. This will require a teacher/facilitator versed in the methods of Futures Studies and/or foresight. I am in the process of developing such a China Futures Program, and will report upon it at some later date in JFS. (see www.mindfutures.com for details).
2. **A faculty of Foresight or Futures Studies** can eventually be established, similar to the one at Tamkang University in Taiwan. This will probably require cooperation with offshore universities which currently have Futures programs.
3. **Bringing visiting professors in Futures to China**, to give lectures, set up educational programs, or make media appearances.
4. **The setting up of masters and doctoral programs** in Futures, to train Chinese students in Futures Studies and foresight methods and practices. Graduates might then be able to create their own programs in other universities across China, or enter the corporate sector, thus expanding the field.
5. **Ongoing appearances and publications within the Chinese popular media and publishing industry.** These would ideally be in the Chinese language to reach the intended audience. Appearances by futurists on Chinese television and radio would be helpful. The obvious candidates for such appearances would be faculty from Taiwan's Tamkang University's Institute of Futures Studies, who all speak Mandarin Chinese. There are other futurists who also speak Chinese and have Chinese experience, such as Spain-based Scotsman Chris Thomson and myself.

Conclusion

Futures Studies purports to examine the futures of humanity, world, and (in the case of post-conventional and Integral futures) the cosmos itself. It includes big picture thinking. In this sense the effective exclusion of China from our discussions, our maps and our predictions and scenarios, along with an absence of discourse within China itself, is not only strange, it is a self-contradiction. Many analysts have realised that China is an important part of the Future – why have futurists largely ignored it?

It has been lamented by some long-standing futurists that Futures Studies has failed to gain the status and popularity that it has long sought. The rise of China is not only a great chance for China to reclaim its power, and for lots of people to get rich quick. It is also a chance for Futures Studies and futurists to become more truly global. As futurists, we have numerous Futures tools and methods at our disposal. The rise

of China avails us an opportunity to put them to good use in the nation that has developed faster in the last thirty years, and on a greater scale than any other nation in the history of the planet. Business and career opportunities are now numerous in China. Trade, discussion and travel to China have exploded. There are great opportunities here for those with genuine foresight, and just a little bit of courage.

That futurists have generally failed to grasp the opportunity at hand is perplexing. This may reflect the demographics of futurists. The leading futurists in the world tend to be middle aged, and they developed their worldviews at a time when China was not such a major player on the world stage.

This paper has been exactly what its title suggests – a further step towards the re-ignition of a vitally important discourse. Futurists potentially have a central voice in the re-emergence of China as a superpower. Futurists outside of China and foreign futurists working in China are in the best position to speak and write freely about this. Futures Studies itself will benefit greatly. The rise of China may reflect back on Futures Studies, returning the energy that we expend on it. It is an exciting time in China. There is a tangible energy, a sense of optimism, growth and progress.⁵ There is a tremendous opportunity here for Futurists, too. Are we going to take it?⁶

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Notes

1. Personal email correspondence with Professor Linda Groff, 04.01.07.
2. Integral Futures can be used to analyze and situate problems according to Wilber's Four Quadrant Model, which can examine social, cultural, mental and empirical aspects of any given issue. See Slaughter (2003) for more information.
3. "Business" refers to working directly within the business community in China. "Environment" includes the degradation of the environment, air and water pollution. "Population" centers upon the One Child Policy and problems associated with it, such as an aging population. "Transport" involves urban planning and the use of public transport, increasing use of cars, and the building of transport alternatives. "Energy" involves issues related to fueling China's development. The problem of "gender imbalance" refers to the fact that there are now far more boys being born in China than girls, a side-effect of the One Child Policy. "China vs West" refers to potential civilizational clashes.
4. I am the representative for Shaping Tomorrow in the Greater China Region.

5. I do not wish to disregard the suffering of the many people in China who may not share this expectation. There are numerous problems which are causing suffering for ordinary people everyday. Just a few of these include the growing gap between poor and rich, the exploitation of migrant workers, and the land grabs by greedy local officials (de Burgh 2006).
6. Any individuals who are interested in developing Futures Studies in China, or getting involved in the China Futures Program, can contact Marcus Anthony, marcus.a@mindfutures.com, or go to www.mindfutures.com.

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