

**FUTURISTICS AND NATION-BUILDING
FOR MALAYSIA 2020**

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*We cannot humanize the future until we draw it into our consciousness
and probe it with all the intelligence and imagination at our command.
This is what we are now beginning to do.*

*Alvin Toffler
The Futurists*

INTRODUCTION

We have shifted paradigms. No longer at a historical juncture nor standing at the banks watching the rapids of technological progress run its course, we have been systematically plunged into an epoch of changing times - for better or for worse.

The "Information Age" - much heralded by those who hold on strong to faith in technological progress - is here. Prewarned of its advent by futurists such as Alvin Toffler, John Naisbitt, Arthur C. Clark, Herman Kahn and Peter Drucker, the age of "change, chaos and complexity", of "future shock" of "power shift", of "managing in turbulent times" and of "becoming an electronically-wired society" signify the highest stage of post-industrial, post-capitalist and post-modern society.

Malaysia moved gracefully first into the industrial stage, then into the post industrial era and culminating into a new rhetoric of nation-building sloganized by the word "Vision 2020". Across the board, the dimensions of change to be taken are systematically engineered by the political economic elites to steer the nation through the tides of turbulent times. Radical changes are demanded, education is to be democratized, intellectualism mobilized, infrastructure corporatized, politics electronically centralized - those nuances are laced with the strengthening of our country's super structure : information technology. Another phase of Malaysia's "creative synthesis" has begun. In the most advanced sectors of society, Vision 2020 is already a reality.

Whilst, all those megatransformations are taking place in the periphery nation called Malaysia, in United States two important events campaigning for excellence in thinking were concluded, sometime in the middle of 1994.

One is an international conference on critical thinking in Sonoma, California, the other is a gathering of intellectual giants of the World Future Society in Washing D.C. Whilst the former calls upon America to urgently cultivate the skills of thinking critically in order to survive in the sea of intellectual mediocrity, the later envisions a global millennium of a positive and sustainable future. And meanwhile, the Malaysia news media continue to monitor the turbulent changes in society, politics, education, economics, military, international relations and in

virtually all aspects of the national base and superstructure in its effort to invent and reinvent a "reality" which is sometimes difficult for us to comprehend.

If there is a term to describe the development stated above, it is that of "change, complexity, competition, and chaos": the 4C's. Like the 4C's of the framework for a story-crisis, conflict, climax and conclusion - they permeate the consciousness of the mind of the Malaysian. At times, the promises of technological progress bring us hope for a better future and at times we are like spirits lost in the gamut of technological jargons and ideological confusion. At times we seem to understand what Vision 2020 means but at times we seem to be like deranged minds bombarded by unending Pepsi and Diet-Coke commercials.

How do we make sense of all these changes and consciously be part of the national agenda having asked to systematically coaxed towards a collective agreement of what Vision 2020 is? What model of thinking should we adopt for us to be intellectually prepared against the constant bombardment of ideologies sacred and profane and ultimately to choose the ones closer to our heart's desire? What brand of thinking should we adopt in order to select amongst the many currently marketed? Which one would best synchronize with our desire to build a sustainable future?

WORLDS OF THINKING

Choices abound in the field of thinking. Our mind is asked to perform the tedious process of selecting the range of diverse styles of thinking and to pay allegiance to an equally diverse range of thinkers. We are told of packaged thinking skills such as Edward de Bono's "lateral thinking", Tony Buzan's "radiant thinking", or those inspired by readings of Sun Tzu's Art of War, Steven Covey's The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People and other brands such as "synectics", "divergent thinking", "critical thinking", and the list goes on.

Whilst those are the ones, which are of nature technologically transferred, there are those which, has been with us since the time we are taught the lessons on Universal Truth, be it Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity or Islam. How do we capture the essence of this creative synthesis and continue to look beyond the border or conflicts and crisis brought about by the clash of paradigms?

FUTURISTICS AS A DISCIPLINE

I propose we look at the discipline called "futuristics" as a dimension of creative thinking which can offer the necessary tools for the creation of a sustainable future. "Futuristics", which developed from the 1950s out of the work of thinkers concerned with moving beyond the age crisis and conflicts. In the world of futurist Edward Cornish of the World Future Society.

Futurists take historical fact and scientific knowledge and adds human values and imagination to create images of what may happen in the future it is science standing on tiptoes; it is history seeking to look forward instead of back.

It is the blend of systematic and creative thinking and human value which makes this this new discipline of social analysis worthy of serious consideration.

The writings of futurists have, for the last few decades, become valuable sources for one to analyze the multitude of changes brought about by the Computer Revolution. Among those prominent one come names such as Alvin Toffler, John Naisbitt, Arthur C. Clark, Peter Drucker, Margaret Mead, Marshall McLuhan, Kenneth Boulding and Joel Arthur Barker.

Futuristics consist of thinking and social analysis tools such as time-lines, scenario buildings, Delphi methods, cross impact matrices, tree diagrams and future problem solving skills which proposes to create alternative futures.

Futuristics-natured writings have been used by governments and corporations as sources of reference for high-level decision makings. They analyze issue of change in a multi-disciplinary manner and propose integrative channels of alternative solutions. Amongst the topics, for example, analyzed at a supersession of the World Future Society Conference include:

- *Meeting Basic Human and Organizational Needs in the 21st Century.*
- *Governance and Participation in the 21st Century.*
- *Cultural and Spiritual Values in the 21st Century.*
- *Health and Environment in the 21st Century.*

These topics are characteristic of the futurists' concern for the possible action to be taken to manage change and complexity in the 21st century.

FUTURISTICS AND MALAYSIA CIRCA 2020

If there is a dimension of creative thinking that can be experimented with, consistent with the Malaysian "Vision 2020", it is the dimension of futuristics.

If we are to create a citizenry equipped with critical and creative thinking skills and strengthened with a strong moral foundation and a concern for a peaceful and a sustainable future, we must introduce "the study of the future".

An intelligent society is one which has the skills of anticipating and designing the future, not one which is forever drowning in the sea of "false consciousness" and not one which is "one dimensional" in its thinking, nor one which allows Fate to dictate its history.

Can we create such a society which can visualize and strategically plan itself in areas such as personal visioning, education, politics, social engineering and humane use of technology?

How can we train the minds of today to build scenarios twenty-five, fifty, and one hundred years from now so that the "end in mind" can be visualized and the necessary course of action to be taken will be visible, although haze may cloud that vision?

In my three years of teaching an introductory course in thinking at the Universiti Utara Malaysia, I have experimented with some of the major components of the futuristics such as "scenario building", "time-lines" and "Delphi method" which I juxtaposed with techniques in teaching Creative, Critical Thinking and Philosophy.

One of the products of this experiment is the project called "Malaysia 31 August 2020 : A Scenario" in which students work in groups (think-tanks) and envision changes which has happened come 2020. Their writings are grounded in existing realities and the imaginative aspects of its comes in their description of a nation fully developed characteristic of a civil and moral technologized society as chartered by the signposts of developmentalism sloganized in Vision 2020.

CONCLUSION

The art of visioning needs the proper tools and techniques for analyzing the future. It demands a dimension of creative thinking and an intellectual desire to be in the future filled with hope. The past, present and the future are a state of mind. I am thus inclined to submit to the believe that "there is no past, there is no future ... all that exist is an ever changing present."

Futuristics is a discipline which can become an attractive intellectual exercise in creativity. It is a dimension of creativity suited for an age of "change, complexity, and chaos".

And whilst we are reminded by many a philosopher that "Man proposes, God disposes", the Islamic daily call for prayer, enjoins us to grasp the future with nothing less than towards Victory.