

The 6th Asia Future Conference Pre-Conference Report

“International Relations in the Post-COVID Era – Asia Viewed from Taiwan’s Perspective”

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The 5th Asia Future Conference in 2020 was a four-day event held from January 9 to January 13 in the Philippines with 294 registered participants joining from 21 countries. On the afternoon of January 12, just as one of the study tour groups was enjoying Tagaytay, the Taal volcano erupted, with volcanic ash reaching Alabang in the south of Manila where the conference had been held. On the day of departure flights from Manila International Airport were either cancelled or delayed, and over 200 conference participants were unable to return as scheduled. Over 70 participants extended their stay at the conference hotel, and even more had no choice but to wait for long periods of time at the airport terminals or local hotels. At the time we thought that we had just encountered a great disaster, but not long after the novel coronavirus that has since shaken up the whole world led to the city of Wuhan closing its borders on January 23. Thinking about it now, it would be better to say that we were actually very fortunate to have been able to hold an international conference when we did.

The 6th Asia Future Conference was scheduled to take place in August 2021 in the city of Taipei. The selected theme was “Building a Future Asia – Solving Problems, Together,” and this theme as well as the venue were announced during the closing ceremony of the Manila conference by Professor Shing-Ching Shyu, Dean of Chinese Culture University, the co-host institution of AFC 6. On February 24, 2020, the Atsumi Foundation team visited Taiwan and had a look at the conference, accommodation and banquet venues as well as had their first meeting with the Chinese Culture University side. At that time most people were wearing masks and the well-known Taiwan mask sale control system was in place, but no one thought that it would become impossible to travel between Taiwan and Japan and that this situation would last for over a year and a half with no end in sight.

Following that, online meetings were held, with regular communication between Chinese Culture University and the Atsumi Foundation, and faculty from the Chinese Culture University as well as other institutions cooperated to form the Taiwan organizing committee to begin preparations. We had thought that holding a conference for 300 people would not be a problem given Taiwan’s success in preventing the spread of the virus, but it was predicted that it would be difficult for overseas participants to enter Taiwan, and in December the organizing committee decided to postpone the conference by a year, announcing this on our homepage as well as via email to participants. The deadline for the Best Papers as well as scholarships (AFC #6A) had already passed, and as such the schedule for this went ahead as planned, with a second round of applications (AFC #6B) planned for 2021. As such the Best Paper Awards will be awarded twice. The Taiwan organizing committee also established the Special Taiwan Best Paper Awards.

In addition, it was decided that a pre-conference would be held in August 2021. The plan was to hold a keynote symposium with a scale of 500 participants in the morning at the Chinese Culture University, the venue for AFC 6, and to make it a hybrid event with participants from around the world joining in online. In the afternoon, presentations for the Taiwan Best Papers would be held at the venue, and presentations for the Best Papers online. However, in May 2021 there was a sudden spike in cases in Taiwan, with days where there were over 500 new infections. The security level in Taiwan was raised, and the lives of residents in Taiwan changed overnight. It also became difficult to hold events with outside participants at universities in Taiwan during the summer vacation.

Because of this, the pre-conference became a completely online affair. After much consideration, it was decided that the Atsumi Foundation would host the event via Zoom, and the

morning keynote symposium would become a Zoom webinar with simultaneous interpretation. The afternoon Best Paper sessions would be held using the Zoom breakout room function. Since June 2020, the Atsumi Foundation has been holding online as well as hybrid events, and although we have accumulated much experience (as well as some failures), an event like this would be a first for us.

Over a period of four days connection tests were carried out with the people who would be delivering remarks, the five speakers and panelists, the four Chinese-English and Chinese-Japanese simultaneous interpreters from the Chinese Culture University, the 20 Best Paper presenters, and the 5 Taiwan Best Paper presenters. On the day itself, the speakers joined an hour before the event. The biggest relief for us was that there were no technical issues for the 6 and a half hours (10am to 4.30pm) of the event.

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On August 26th, 2021 (Thursday), at 10am Taiwan time, the 6th Asia Future Conference Pre-conference began as scheduled, with the MC, Meng-Jung Lin from the Chinese Culture University, kicking off the event. Thanks to the promotion that the Taiwan organizing committee had done for the event there were 669 registered participants from 15 countries signed up for the Zoom webinar, half of them being residents of Taiwan. The event started with opening remarks from Mr. Yasushi Akashi, chair of the Asia Future Conference committee.

The riveting keynote speech by Yu-Shan Wu of Academia Sinica, entitled “Where is Asia Heading? When Disease Control is Entangled with Politics” was very timely. Dr. Wu’s analysis was as follows: Although controlling an epidemic should stimulate international cooperation, in the coronavirus pandemic we have instead seen a string of international conflicts such as disputes over the origins of the virus, vaccine nationalism and vaccine diplomacy. This phenomenon of restrained cooperation is related to the new Cold War in the international system that has existed from prior to the pandemic. The new Cold War has its roots in international power shifts between nations and the financial crises that have led to right wing populism. This dynamic is deeply rooted, and the virus response has been caught up in its maelstrom.

He also gave the following warning: How can we prevent this aspect from worsening? First, epidemic response must be set apart from international political disputes and not allowed to feed a new Cold War; secondly, there should be agreement and political reconciliation in sectors such as epidemic control in which cooperation is possible; thirdly, there should be a fundamental system in place to prevent the worsening of a new Cold War. If this does not go well things will only get worse.

In the second part of the symposium Shing-Ching Shyu, dean of Chinese Culture University served as moderator, and comments were given by Yasuhiro Matsuda (Professor, University of Tokyo), Ming Lee (Professor, National Cheng-Chi University), Dr. Kevin Villaneuva (Professor, University of the Philippines) and Kristy Tsun-Tzu Hsu (Director, the Taiwan ASEAN Studies Center). Issues such as the difficulties of vaccine passports, the unique position of Taiwan in its success in controlling the spread of the virus, the necessity of an ASEAN-centric strategy, and how developing nations were losing out were brought up. The abstract for the speech as well as presentation materials are available in the proceedings, which can be accessed from the link below:

<http://www.aisf.or.jp/AFC/2021/wp-content/themes/afc2021/AFC6Pre-ConferenceProceedingsLite.pdf>

After lunch, the third part of the pre-conference – the Best Paper Awards Ceremony and presentations - started at 1pm. Dr Sonja Dale, former Atsumi scholar, was the Master of Ceremonies

for the awards ceremony. There was no interpretation for this event and it was held only in English, but participants were encouraged to use the chat function, leading to a more relaxed atmosphere than the morning session. Mr. Akashi, the AFC Chair, offered congratulations to the award recipients, and Professor Hitoshi Hirakawa, Chair of the AFC Academic Committee, explained the procedure and criteria for selecting the Best Papers.

Following the ceremony, 6 sessions were held in three separate meeting rooms (breakout rooms), and the presentations for the 20 Best Papers and 5 Taiwan Best Papers commenced. Each session had two chairs presiding and 4 presenters (5 presenters for the Taiwan Best Papers session). The AFC aims for an international and interdisciplinary approach, and panels were based around themes such as “environment,” “innovation,” “peace” and “education,” leading to more diverse and lively discussions than one would find at other academic conferences. Each session had around 20 to 30 participants joining in, with over 100 participants in total leading to a very lively event.

The Best Papers were selected by the Academic Committee before the conference. Papers, for which abstracts were uploaded to the AFC online system by September 20, 2020, were eligible provided that a full paper was uploaded by March 30, 2021. 112 papers were divided into 12 groups and evaluated by 55 reviewers, and papers in each group were reviewed by five reviewers who judged them based on seven evaluation criteria. Papers that did not abide by submission guidelines received negative points. The criteria were as follows: 1) the theme of the paper is in accordance with theme of “Building a Future Asia: Solving Problems, Together”; 2) the paper is clearly structured; 3) the argument is clear and persuasive; 4) originality; 5) international scope; 6) interdisciplinary; 7) overall recommendation. Reviewers recommended 2 papers from each group of 9 to 10 papers, and after tallying the scores the top 20 Best Papers were selected. The list of the Best Papers for AFC #6A can be viewed at the link below:

<http://www.aisf.or.jp/AFC/2021/files/2021/06/AFC6A-Best-Paper.pdf>

The Taiwan organizing committee followed the same procedure in selecting the Taiwan Best Papers. The list of Taiwan Best Papers can be accessed below.

<http://www.aisf.or.jp/AFC/2021/files/2021/06/AFC6A-Taiwan-Best-Paper.pdf>

The closing ceremony started at 4.20 PM Taiwan time. The AFC Organizing Committee Chair Junko Imanishi provided a brief report of the event, and Dr. Chen Tzuching (Assistant Professor, Kainan University) served as the representative for the Taiwan Raccoons (an organization for Atsumi fellows) and gave an introduction of the Atsumi Foundation and the Asia Future Conference. Following this, an invitation was extended to all participants to join us in Taipei city from August 26 to August 30, 2022, for the 6th AFC. Unfortunately, it was not possible to have a closing party for an online conference, but, with the sincere hope to meet all of the participants in Taipei next year, the first online 6th Asia Future Conference Pre-conference successfully came to an end.

The 6th Asia Future Conference Pre-Conference “International Relations in the Post-COVID Era – Asia Viewed from Taiwan’s Perspective” was organized by the Atsumi International Foundation Sekiguchi Global Research Association (SGRA), co-organized by the Chinese Culture University, and supported by the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association, a grant from the Takahashi Industrial and Economic Research Foundation, in collaboration with the Center for Japanese Studies, the National Taiwan University, and the Center for Japanese Studies, College of Language, National Taichung University of Science and Technology, and sponsored by the Chemical Grouting Co., Ltd.

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Former Atsumi Foundation scholars from Taiwan formed the core of the AFC organizing committee for this event, and former Atsumi Foundation scholars and members from SGRA Philippines were a part of the academic committee. Together with the Taiwan organizing committee all aspects of the conference such as the planning, running of the event, selection of award winners and photography were covered. The Taiwan organizing committee was in-charge of the morning keynote lecture and symposium, and the AFC organizing committee was in charge of the afternoon Best Paper presentation sessions and the closing ceremony.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to the over 500 participants who joined us, as well as to those who supported this event and all of the volunteers who provided assistance in many ways and helped lead to the success of the AFC6 pre-conference.

The Asia Future Conference is interdisciplinary at its core and encourages diverse approaches to global issues that are both mindful of the advancement of science, technology, and business, and also take into consideration issues pertaining to the environment, politics, education, the arts, and culture. This conference is organized together with likeminded institutions to provide a venue for the exchange of knowledge, information, ideas and culture. It is not only for SGRA members, but also for former international students of Japan from educational institutions around the world and their students and collaborators as well as for anyone interested in Japan.

The 6th Asia Future Conference will be held from August 26 (Friday) to August 30 (Tuesday) 2022 at the Chinese Culture University in Taipei, Taiwan. We would like to ask for your continued support and cooperation, and especially your participation,

Photo highlights from AFC 6:

<http://www.aisf.or.jp/sgra/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/AFC6PreConferencePhotos.pdf>

Survey results from AFC 6:

<http://www.aisf.or.jp/sgra/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/AFC6PreConferenceFeedback.pdf>

Flyer for AFC6 Pre-conference:

http://www.aisf.or.jp/AFC/2021/files/2021/07/6thAFC_PreConference_Poster_light.png