

Imagine Taiwan in the Year 2500

By Dan Bloom

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Two recent articles about climate change (“How much more proof is needed for people to act?” and “Ignoring the future — the psychology of denial,” Dec. 4, page 9) emphasized the importance of facing major issues that will have an impact on the future of the human species. Climate change is indeed an issue that is on everyone’s mind, and while Taiwan seems to be **far removed from** the experts who recently made their way to Copenhagen to try to **hammer out blueprints** to prevent global warming from having a **Doomsday impact** on humankind, Taiwan is also **on the front lines of** these issues.

Despite most observers’ belief that solutions lie in **mitigation**, there are a growing number of **climatologists** and scientists who believe that the A-word — adaptation — must be **confronted head-on**, too. The fact is — despite the **head-in-the-sand protestations** of **denialists** like Marc Morano and Sarah Palin in the US — that we cannot stop climate change or global warming. The Earth’s atmosphere has already passed **the tipping point**, and in the next 500 years, temperatures and sea levels will rise considerably and millions, even billions, of people from the tropical and **temperate zones** will be forced to **migrate** in search of food, fuel and **shelter**. This includes the people of Taiwan.

By the year 2500, Taiwan will be largely **uninhabited**, except for a few **stragglers eking out** a **subsistence** life in the heights of the Central Mountain Range. The rest of the population will have migrated north to Russia’s northern coast or northern parts of Alaska and Canada to find **safe harbor** from the **devastating** impact of global warming.

A researcher at Academia Sinica, Wang Chung-ho (王中和), told a reporter for the Liberty Times (the Taipei Times’ sister newspaper) earlier this year that there was a good chance Taipei would be flooded by the end of this century, adding that the the capital might have to be **relocated** to higher ground in less than 100 years. Wang said the entire **Taipei basin** would likely be **engulfed** by rising seas by 2100, **triggered**, of course, by global warming. Wang said his research showed that most of the west coast of Taiwan would be **submerged** by rising sea levels by that time, as well.

Wang’s report, which was presented at a public **forum** sponsored by Academia Sinica, **theorized** that sea levels would rise by at least 1m, **gobbling up** all low-lying areas of Taiwan, from Kaohsiung to Taipei. “Taiwan must be prepared for the **worst-case scenario**,” Wang said, according to the Liberty Times.

If Wang is correct, and Taipei is faced with major flooding in 90 years, then what will life be like in Taiwan in 490 years? Most likely, Taiwan’s population will have left the country for **faraway** northern regions to find shelter in UN-funded climate **refuges** in places such as Russia, Canada and Alaska. Taiwanese climate refugees will join millions of others from India, Vietnam, Thailand, Japan and the Philippines. It won’t be **a pretty picture**.

When a reporter asked Wang if this was a possible future scenario for Taiwan some 500 years from now, he said it was very possible, and that these issues needed to be addressed now, if only as a thought exercise, and even if it all sounded like a science fiction movie script. When the same reporter asked acclaimed British scientist James Lovelock if such a scenario for Taiwan were likely, he said in an e-mail: “It may very well happen, yes.”

We humans cannot **engineer** our way out of global warming, although scientists who believe in **geo-engineering** have offered theories on how to do it. There are no easy fixes. Humankind has pumped too many greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, the result of the industrial revolution that gave us trains, planes, automobiles and much more, enabling us to live comfortable and **trendy** lives — and now there is so much carbon dioxide in the atmosphere that the Earth cannot recover.

Forget using your reusable steel chopsticks at Taipei **eateries**, forget planting more trees around the island, forget cleaning up the polluted rivers of Taiwan, forget trying to be more “green” in your daily life. Taiwan, like the rest of the world, is **doomed** to a **bleak** future full of billions of climate refugees seeking shelter in the far north, and in places like New Zealand, Tasmania and Antarctica in the far south.

Meetings in Copenhagen and Rio de Janeiro and at **the UN** in Manhattan will not stop global warming.

What we need to focus on now is preparing future generations for what our world will become in the next 500 years and how best to survive it.

For the next 100 years or so, life will go on as normal in Taiwan. There is nothing to worry about now. For the next 100 years **posh** department stores will **hawk** their trendy items, computer firms will launch their latest **gadgets** and airline companies will continue to offer passengers quick passage here and there, to the Maldives and to Manhattan, for business and for pleasure.

But in the next 500 years, according to Wang and other scientists who are not afraid **to think outside the box** and **push the envelope**, things are going to get bad. **Unspeakably** bad.

Those of us who are alive today won't suffer, and the next few generations will be fine, too. The big trouble will probably start around 2200 — Wang says 2100 for Taipei — and last for some 300 years or so.

By 2500, Taiwan **will be history**, as will the nations of Africa, Asia, North America and Europe.

We are entering **uncharted waters**, and as the waters rise and the temperatures go up, future generations will have some important choices to make: where to live, how to live, how to grow food, how to power their climate refugee **settlements**, how to plan and how to pray.

In a recent **op-ed** on this page (“Taiwan remains oblivious to climate,” Dec. 14) Chen Meei-shia (陳美霞), a professor of public health at National Cheng Kung University, said “the lives of most Taiwanese are based on the **aspiration** to and an **obsession** with **consuming** large amounts of products.” **One** can therefore conclude that most people in Taiwan are not interested in thinking about the future impact of climate change on their country.

This attitude does not **bode well** for the future of *Isla Formosa, the “beautiful island.”

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*The name given to Taiwan by early Dutch settlers

