

# Here, there: versions of home

## *Movement and perspective, from Australia to Korea*



**Peter Geyer**

International Conference  
for the Integration of  
Science and Technology  
into Society

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**Peter Geyer** (INTP) is a type coach and trainer, and APT International's interest area consultant for theory and research.

[peter@petergeyer.com.au](mailto:peter@petergeyer.com.au)  
[www.petergeyer.com.au](http://www.petergeyer.com.au)

*It's always better to make an adventurous mistake than not get engaged at all.*

Tim Park

### **Sub-prime: A prodigal return**

In many ways life is a juggling act: goals, roles, priorities, possibilities, limitations, realities, and so on, each constraining the other and all problematic. Something apparently resolved can open up new vistas, requiring a different sort of decision, or can return in another guise with a new challenge.

Not all that long ago I decided I had to return to the land of my roots, Melbourne's western suburbs: not to exactly the same place, but to an area familiar through life and experience. I could no longer live in Warrnambool, a place I had come to by accident and stayed in by choice, never intending to leave. But I had arrived at a tipping point with only one viable choice, which was to go 'home', disposing of the vast majority of my much-loved books and abandoning the flowers, fruits and foliage of a garden.

While all this was going on, I received a respectful and enthusiastic email from **Ji-Sup Hwang** inviting me to speak on the MBTI at a conference in Korea, under the banner of 'Neo-Brain Science'. This event at the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology in the regional centre of Daejeong, was organised by students for students. My travel and accommodation expenses were to be covered.

I must admit I was initially wary of this generous invitation, as the Internet is full of deception and false promises. But as time went on things developed further,

and in mid-July, having completed the physical aspects of relocation, I boarded a Korean Air flight to Seoul, curious and interested. I'd also received an invitation to speak at a Summer School conducted in parallel with the conference, and the prospect of a television interview.

### **On the way**

The long flight was pleasant enough. The service was quietly friendly and respectful, with smiling women in teal silk uniforms offering a choice of western or Korean food and presuming I would prefer the former. The cabin was warmish and I discovered there were no adjustable air nozzles available, something I always use to give the impression of a breeze wafting past my face. Perhaps the temperature had to do with colder winters, or the natural humidity of summer, something I was soon to find out. The cabin provided plenty of room and was refreshingly quiet.

At Seoul airport I was met by a student who identified himself with a Western name (many of the students used these in addition to their Korean names), the first of many chaperones. Also waiting was Dr **Margaret Brandman**, a music teacher and author from Sydney, who was also to present at the conference. I'd met her earlier in Melbourne. An extraverted person, she knew something of type and was interested in my work, as I was in hers, notwithstanding being a non-musician.

I hadn't consulted a map and was surprised when told we were to catch a bus and that it would take more than two hours, making our arrival in Daejeong around midnight. The trip turned out to be quite comfortable and pleasant. Bus seemed to be the regular mode for long-distance transport.

Our contact didn't seem to be at the bus stop, so we bundled ourselves into a taxi using broken communication to get to the designated hotel, the Riviera. There I found I had someone else's bag.

I thought it would be easy to just go back to the bus stop, but I reckoned without the different levels of English. The person at the hotel desk was helpful, but I think that the order of words from Margaret and me became confusing. In retrospect, in Korea things seem to have to play out for a while.

The taxi driver wanted to drive a bargain for taking me back. Not being a negotiating person, I just needed to know what he wanted and I would pay it. The main idea was to get to the bus stop.

Eventually that was done and bags were exchanged, but not before a slightly uneasy time in the dark, surrounded by silent buses and a number of men standing silently in a group. They weren't menacing, but they didn't seem happy, and the silence went on for a while after the exchange of the bags, which included my apology.

Some Korean was then spoken, which I indicated I didn't understand. Eventually the person whose bag I had returned asked, in English, 'Why did you take my bag?' This startled me a little, as I saw it as an accident, but his question presumed I had a purpose. I said that it was a mistake, that I'd never done anything like that before and was sorry. This seemed to satisfy everybody and we all went our different ways into the night.

## Daejeong

Later in the morning I went out to see something of Daejeong, to walk its streets. The conference didn't start until the next day, so it was an opportunity to acclimatise. It was humid and the sky could not be seen. I had a map of the city which gave a broad idea, with some artistic licence, and headed for one of the indicators of water, a river with wetlands and a running/cycling track alongside. Goods were placed outside some shops in colourful arrangements.

The hotel didn't seem to be in the central shopping area; there were a number of small businesses and a bit of construction

work. At one site workers were having a break and eating soup, with several dozen eggs close by in a neat pile.

I like these sort of walks, as you get to see something approaching the normal life of the people and the architecture surrounding that life. Some things were relatively new, others were well used, still others were crumbling.

Daejeong itself was advertised as a 'City of Creativity' and you could see some of that development. I found out later that its population of 1 million or so isn't significant as far as Asian cities go. The streets were busy in a way, but not packed, with provision for bicycle parking and motor scooters and cycles, all very agreeable.

After a while I ran out of energy and went back to my room, a pleasant place with a modern bathroom where everything worked in the opposite direction to what I expected. The main room was comfortable, but did not have any chairs, just a low-lying table with cushions in the local style. It was quite elegant, but of no help to me, as I've never mastered the art of sitting on the floor, and anyway, I haven't physically been able to do that for a number of years.

I went out again, briefly. The zoom lens on my camera failed, which I thought was a battery problem. I sought directions from one or two very genial people in a variant of sign language, with mixed results, but ultimate success, with the battery at least. The zoom no longer operated, which was a pity, although manageable.

## KAIST

The KAIST campus was located across a river, a few minutes from the hotel by bus. These turned up at a prearranged time and delegates boarded, giving an appearance of order.

The campus was modern and still in development: aluminium grey on the outside, with an interesting water feature, a landscaped pool with fountains. Topiary was used widely around the campus. I found the bookshop on the last day and discovered many things of interest. There was a coffee shop close by: in general, Korean coffee was quite agreeable.



The KAIST campus was modern and still in development

Meals were in a dining room where you queued to select from a variety of foods, some Korean, some not. The soup seemed to be an expected selection. At the end of one meal, the senior (male) at the table appeared to make the decision to leave, after which everyone stood and departed. Another queue led to the kitchen window, where trays and plates were returned and napkins were available for cleaning hands. This was done quietly and semi-formally.

Conference breaks were in an entrance hall to the Creative Learning building. Biscuits, water and cans of caffeine drinks were the staples. I've never had those drinks, and I haven't been in an environment where they were so readily available. For some reason I found that mildly disturbing. Some robot building kits were also on display.

## ICISTS

The conference was called the International Conference for the Integration of Science and Technology into Society (ICISTS). The students were international: the core from Korea, others from China and Japan in particular. The presenters came from Europe, the USA and Asia, including Australia, of course.

There were three workshops at the conference:

- Robotics:  
Human-Robot Symbiotic Society
- Neo-Brain Science:  
Consilience of Brain and Society
- Traffimatics:  
Integration of Traffic and Information

There were parallel sessions in each. The students were allocated to a workshop and had a project to complete, in groups of six.

Dr **Kim Myung Ja**, a government minister and former professor at KAIST, opened the conference, speaking about the growth of the Korean economy and the importance of new technology and ideas. The conference was government-funded, including flights and accommodation. Dr Kim described a directly interventionist government, rather than one driven by magical market forces.

Parallel sessions began with **Yoon Hyo Woon** on the technology of brain imaging, which was informative and technical.

After lunch **Jeong Jae-Seung** presented entertainingly on neuroscience and arts. As a humanities person, this was interesting to me. I'd seen similar sessions and wondered why art selections were made from modernist and similar genres, particularly as that sort of art arouses much controversy, even with art lovers.

Jeong, a genial man and a media star, was very popular with the students, who lined up *en masse* for a group photo with him.

**Jim Dator**, a futurist from the University of Hawaii at Manoa, gave the plenary address. Dressed curiously in a roll-neck retro style, he led us through an entertaining, if surprisingly low-tech, presentation.

Droll and gently challenging in the American way, he stated that futurists don't predict the future, but forecast alternative futures. (Obviously this is a dilemma for those who only want to get involved in climate change issues, for instance, when they know the answer.)

Amidst a number of interesting points, Jim identified the following components of the future over the next 30 to 50 years.

### Continuation:

Things that have always existed in the past and present—and so, in the future.

### Cycles:

Not in the present, but in the past, and so in future; *or*

Big in the present, but not the past, and so in the future.

### Novelties:

Never before experienced by humans—not in the present or past, but in the future.

Jim asked us to rate the importance of each, now and in the future. He gave his opinion of now as 80% continuation, 15% cycles, and 5% novelties; and, the reverse in the future: 5% continuation, 15% cycles, and 80% novelties. He then identified Korea as one of the places where the technological revolution was more likely to happen: the wave of the future.



A respectful invitation:  
**MinJi Sung and JiSup Hwang**

I didn't get the results he presented, backward or forward. I have a bias to history and culture as influencing things, because of my knowledge and interest in that area (the recent conflict in Georgia comes to mind). And I thought he discounted too much of what I'd seen in the influence and importance of Korean culture in the lives and behaviour of the students and others I'd encountered.

On the other hand, I was impressed by the government support and general interest at KAIST.

Still, who knows? I doubt the future is simply technology oriented, but I enjoyed this presentation and liked its clarity and explanation.



Daylight confirmed the large number of apartment blocks

### Seoul, television, panel

The next day was busy: first to Seoul for the television interview, then a return to KAIST to present in a panel. I went with **Michael Pollitt**, a presenter in the robotics workshop, and two chaperones.

I'd met Michael earlier. Originally from Melbourne and now resident in London, he is a genial man of 30 or so with a sharp mind and interesting views. For instance, he observed that 'saving the planet' is not the point, because the Earth will still be there after humans have gone; the current issues are about human survival.

He thought that people had not thought much about a society with robots, and it was ingenuous to think that they would always be subordinate to what humans want, particularly given the tasks they might be developed to perform. They would be more likely to be supremely logical—much different from human society.

Michael was interested in what I was doing and we had a chat about type. (I thought he preferred ENFJ.) He is also a musician, interested in jazz in particular.

The bus ride enabled a casual observation of this part of Korea in the light of day. The darkness of the previous bus journey displayed the shadows of apartment and other buildings and an inordinate number of Christian crosses, overwhelmingly red.

Daylight confirmed the large numbers of apartment blocks, clustered together, and the variety of church designs. There were many hills and valleys, and many trees, none of which seemed particularly old.

The road was full of traffic, several lanes each way, mostly medium-sized cars. The usual Korean taxis are quite small, and the trucks were also small to medium in size: no B-doubles or anything approaching that. Everything seemed to go on pleasantly, if slowly at times.

Korean drivers seemed a bit random, as far as distance between cars and from pedestrians was concerned. On a walk back to the hotel with colleagues I was cheerfully warned about this tendency to keep going in narrow spaces, regardless of potential collision. I didn't see anyone run over, though.

Eventually we arrived at the TV station, Arirang, a cable and Internet company. They'd selected Michael and me from a number of presenters, so it was nice to think we were considered interesting. We had been provided with a script, which we had looked at and made some suggestions. Mine were mostly about factual accuracy, as I was to be talking about the MBTI.

The daily talk show we were to appear on, *Heart to Heart*, has had an impressive list of guests, including George Soros, Jackie Chan, Anita Roddick, various business persons, artists and other famous figures. We were met by the producer and others, including a writer and a make-up person. (Apparently I look younger with makeup on, although I suppose that wouldn't be difficult.)

In the chat before going on camera, I was asked my thoughts of Korean culture, as far as type went. I thought it is introverted and organised, perhaps feeling and sensing as well. Interestingly, the writer suggested that Korean culture is more flexible than what appears on the surface, particularly regarding time, meetings and so on. There might be ways to behave, but decisions are more likely to be made at the last moment. After I had asked a few questions around this proposition, it did seem to me that the culture is P, ISFP perhaps. That's how I experienced it, at any rate.

Eventually I went on to the set, a red and white design with a comfortable couch for me, and a chair for presenter **Anh Jung-hyun**. The introduction showed selections from my web site, as well as MBTI Complete and other aspects of CPP's product. I found it fairly relaxing, notwithstanding that none of the questions asked had been in the draft script. (Not sure why, but the same thing happened with Michael.)

A genial discussion ensued. I was fascinated to see Anh reading her question cards in Korean, then speaking directly to me in flawless English. Towards the end, a light exploded at the back of the stage, which brought things to a halt for a while. Anh seemed a bit rattled and I was asked a few times if I was OK, but I was indifferent, perhaps because I'd seen the light explode.

Anyway, we got back on track and completed the session.

A search for lunch was next. Our chaperones provided us with choices, something I didn't really want, just wanting to be directed. We ended up in a restaurant on the 10th floor of a department store, with a clientele almost entirely female. The food was presented in a hot stoneware bowl: you added the ingredients and stirred away as it cooked. It was most enjoyable.

The panel session involved responding to audience questions. It was interesting to be with Margaret on a panel with neuroscientists, all significant researchers with some quite different perspectives. Neuroscience presumes something different from type, possibly because its research methods are empirical and designed to be measurable.

It struck me that the neuroscientists didn't really have a workable understanding of the psyche, simply physiological response to which a label is attached, which eliminates nuance a bit. The definition of intuition, for instance, would be recognised as an understanding of sensation in Jungian terms. A questioner was surprised when I said that, in Jungian terms, intuition had to do with novelty. Maybe some good research subjects can be generated that can be of some insight and use.

A speakers' dinner ended the day. There was a mixture of organising students and

presenters, and some interesting conversation. I couldn't meet the expectation of sitting on the floor, so another room was made available where the table was in a small pit that some of us sat around, as if on chairs.

The traditional Korean food was delivered in regular streams. Rice was a staple, with fresh vegetables, fish and meat. Tomatoes were regularly presented, but in all of my Korean meals I never saw potatoes. Some things, like jellyfish, were too exotic for me, but as a whole I enjoyed the food. The beer was local, around room temperature and nice to drink. Like the other beverages, it was consumed in small glasses.

## Speaking

The next day was my speaking day: at the conference in the morning and the summer school in the afternoon. In many ways my paper was technical: I'd been asked to talk on the MBTI and I thought it important to say something about Jung, consciousness, etc; what sort of questionnaire the MBTI is; and the theory it indicates to.

I thought it might be a little dry and perhaps too much depth of information for the students, who might have been more enthusiastic about something else about type—relationships and learning styles, perhaps—but it was well received. I had students come up to me in the next couple of days asking to complete the MBTI, and I was more than happy to do that.

**Margaret Brandman** performed after my presentation, displaying a great knowledge of various styles of music. As well as a keyboard, she played a length of plastic pipe in a similar manner to an Aboriginal bullroarer, which grabbed a lot of attention. A few students tried it out afterwards.

**Jeong Jae-Seung** was the organiser of the summer school. I presented much the same in the afternoon session. The audience of mostly graduate students listened politely, with a couple of questions. I would have liked to have conducted a tutorial of sorts on personality and neuroscience, but was not prepared for that. I'm looking at collaborating with a couple of people I met through this experience.



It was interesting to be on a panel with Margaret Brandman

After my presentation I thought of calling it a day, but I managed to get some energy back and listen to a presentation in Korean by **Kim Hack Jin**, whom I'd met earlier and had some good discussions with. The language background went interestingly with the slides, in English. Although there are neuro-scientific terms in the Korean language, apparently the subject is usually taught in English.

That night I attended the Summer School speakers' dinner, mixed in with the students. It was a relatively quiet though enjoyable affair, with western seating, which helped me. Most of the noise was made by an academic who attended Kim's session and argued throughout—at least, it looked like that, although I was informed that he simply asked a lot of questions. His manner and tone seemed brusque and aggressive, and it seemed that the students were pleased to see him go. My comment that he probably wasn't all that sensitive was met with general laughter and smiles, anyway.

### Team presentations

The last day of the conference was given over to the team project presentations. Work had been going on throughout the conference, and earlier I'd spent some evening time wandering through the teams that comprised our particular workshop—an interesting time, as it enabled casual chat with the students. They were to base their presentations on the themes of the particular workshop they were in.

There was a bit of formality behind the casual friendliness. I was respectfully called 'Doctor' or 'Professor' (mostly because of my great age, compared to them), even though I'd indicated I didn't hold either. Like the other presenters, I was seen as a mentor of sorts.

The students were also more formally dressed than one might expect: this was apparently a requirement of the conference. The men were in conventional dark suits and the women in various formal attire, predominantly in black and white, with a faint 1950s style to their dresses. Many of the students had travelled widely and most of the English was spoken with an American accent.

Margaret and I were the judges for our section. We were given criteria to rate the performances (which they really were) and discussed each separately, together, and finally with the student committee, where we had general agreement. The presentations used multiple media (with occasional technical glitches), and acting of various quality, some excellent. Interestingly, the music was much older than the students, and mostly black (e.g. Bobby McFerrin, Stevie Wonder). The focus was romance, which wasn't surprising, really.

There were awards for the presentations. In my workshop, most were made in an Academy Awards format, dragged out with glee and cliché. The two best presentations were named, with the winners and runners-up for all of the workshops to be announced at the gala dinner that evening.

### Gala dinner

This event was held at the hotel in typical style and format, although awards were made before the meal, due I think to the Chinese students having to catch a flight. Not all of the presenters attended, as flights and other commitments had limited their stays. The native English-speaking presenters sat at a table at the front of the room and we had a genial conversation, hoping, naturally, to keep in contact afterwards.

There was also a talent contest in which a couple of presenters participated. Michael Pollitt had been a favourite of the students, possibly because of his youth and engaging personality, and he sang a couple of songs, accompanying himself on acoustic guitar in a more than creditable performance.

Student performances varied interestingly, from piano pieces to a stunning operatic performance by a young woman. The organising committee presented something from *Grease*, dressed appropriately and performed energetically and competently.

In closing the evening, ICISTS president **Sangsu Lee**, a young man who knows the value of short but pertinent speeches, added that he was to report for duty in the armed forces two days later. Apparently every Korean male must serve some time between their late teens and late twenties.



A students' favourite:  
A KAIST delegate with  
Michael Pollitt

## Koreans on Korea

I discovered to my pleasure that I was able to maintain my practice of observing a place through its newspapers. *The Korea Times*, an English language daily, was available at the hotel.

Predominantly, its foreign affairs focus was on North Korea (a South Korean tourist had just been shot at the border) and Japan (territorial issues). Investment and development were also key issues, as was education—a supplement, *The Learning Times*, was provided each day in Korean and English.



In a personal explanation of the North–South conflict and the misery of a war in which perhaps 10% of the population was killed, Yun Chung reported that in September 1950 ‘Seoul burned for three days and nights’ (2008).

Kim Heung-Sook (2008) wryly complimented Japan’s prime minister Fukuda for claiming the Dokdo Islands, and so presenting Koreans ‘with what we have needed most—one voice’. She went on to say that

... by nature we Koreans are born to be diplomatic failures. We are not great pretenders or negotiators. We don’t like to wrangle or provoke. We despise boasting. We believe in and tell what we have and know. We are learning the ways of the advanced world, but it should take time.

## To home

The next day it was time to go home. I was met at the hotel by Ji, who had made the initial contact with me for the conference. He had looked after me well, and I’d been made welcome and felt at home in a land where I couldn’t speak the language or read the signs. We stood at the bus stop for a while in intermittent rain, and then it was time to go, exchanging waves as the bus departed for the airport.

Incheon Airport is on an island, reached via a causeway that displays an attractive, if enigmatic, coastline. As I waited, and on the flight itself, I reflected on the various meanings of home and on being welcome.

I concluded that no matter where it was, I would seek to be where I felt welcome, where what I had to offer was appreciated, and that that would be like home—as had been my Korean experience. ❖

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This article is available at [www.petergeyer.com.au](http://www.petergeyer.com.au).

Photos: Peter Geyer; ICISTS.

**In the next issue of the *Review*, Peter continues his theme of ‘home’ with a report on his research, teaching and cultural experiences in Switzerland.**



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