"MEGATRENDS?" — "PERFECT!"

He coined the terms "megatrend" and "globalization": **JOHN NAISBITT** and his wife and co-author, **DORIS NAISBITT,** on their greatest invention.

By Simon Brunner (interview) and David Payr (photos)

Mr. and Mrs. Naisbitt, you developed the field of future studies. How do you explain to a child what a trend is?

`DORIS NAISBITT` We tell our granddaughters Leonie and Cosi ma that trends are the direction in which things are moving. For example, not too long ago everybody used text messages to communicate. Text messages were trendy. Then they were replaced by new message services like Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, WeChat, Snapchat and Instagram. And you can add emojis to these messages to show how you feel. In short, text messages have fallen out of fashion and been replaced by a new trend.

And when does a trend become a megatrend?

`DN` When the trend involves, to take this example further, not just the individual apps, but instead involves something bigger: a change in information technology. The internet enables us to use smart phones and new message services. You can stay in touch with multiple friends at the same time, no matter where you are or where they are. Trends come and go, but megatrends are developments that change our environment and stay with us for a long time.

How did you come up with this concept?

`JOHN NAISBITT` At the end of the 1960s, I was working for President Lyndon B. Johnson as a special assistant. Although I supported his Civil Rights Act, which provided legal equality to AfricanAmericans, I was against the Vietnam War. I quit and started looking at what interested me – the future of America.

How did you go about doing this?

`JN` Those were difficult times for America – with mass violence, riots and looting on a daily basis. To get a picture

of where my country was headed I founded the Urban Research Corporation. We analyzed around 100 local and national newspapers: Reading those newspapers was like looking at the pieces of a puzzle, and we were trying to put the pieces together correctly.

What did you find?

JN That America was in a restructuring process. The conventional was obsolete and the new had not yet fully evolved. There was no vocabulary for the transitional phase and, more importantly, the new world. I ended up with ten major pillars – the "megatrends" of the transformation.

These included the shift from an industrial to an information society, and you also coined the term globalization. How did you come up with the groundbreaking title of your book?

JN We were nearing the publication deadline, but we still didn't have a title. My editor called me and said just one word: "Megatrends?" And I said: "Perfect!"

You additionally popularized the field of future studies. How has it developed since then?

JN First, future studies has expanded in an inflationary manner, with the basic idea now diluted. Megatrends, or "broad outlines," can only be anticipated by studying the present global situation and putting together the small pieces to form the bigger picture. Megatrends by nature do not appear every year, as consumer trends do.

And second?

DN In the 1980s, outside in views dominated. People focused on the changing context, then they looked for a personal connection and developed business opportunities from this. Now it is the exact opposite. People are focused on themselves with an inside out view. The context is only relevant if it has short term benefits. And megatrends will be neglected if they do not match up with preconceived notions, the desired thinking or mainstream ideas.

John Naisbitt, 89, published his book "Mega trends" in 1982. It was published in more than 57 countries, with 14 million copies sold. Naisbitt, a US citizen, popularized future research and the concept of globalization. Prior to that, he worked for US Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. **Doris Naisbitt,** 66, is an author (of seven books written together with her husband, John) and teaches at various Chinese universities. The couple lives in Austria and China.