



# future news

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## Extreme futures: global conflict? or global soul?

The best future is the created future, says Clement Chang, founder of Tamkang University in Taipei. It's easy to see his point, in a country that is currently located at a dramatic point between the future and the past.

Speaking at an international futures conference held to mark the university's 55th birthday, he noted that Taiwan had transformed itself from an impoverished nation to a developed nation in just a few decades. Now, he says, the next task lies ahead. "As the world moves to the knowledge economy we must learn how to transform ourselves from a manufacturing economy to a more high end information and knowledge economy.

"But our challenge is deeper than that. We have a neighbour across the Taiwan Straits - only 100 miles away - which is always putting pressure on our very existence here. So for us futures thinking is not a luxury but a necessity.

"We think for the future we can prepare for alternatives, something that is not materialistic, something that can not be quantified, but is invaluable. That is why we chose the topic of the conference: *Global Soul, Global Mind, Global Action.*"

Referring to his discussion with Pico Iyer, author of the bestselling book, *Global Soul*, Dr Chang agreed that a sense of global mind or global soul was already being created - sometimes by choice, sometimes because circumstances forced the shift.

"Global soul is not just an issue of personal

identity but an issue of collective identity," he said.

"I wonder if in our evolution - technological, cultural, even spiritual - we are creating a new dimension of what it means to be human. Our trajectories are taking us to a point where humanity is collectively reflecting on its purpose and thus creating a global sense of identity at our conscious and unconscious levels."

**This conference was a small but important step in the process of imagining a world soul, conceptualising and creating a shared global soul, mind and action.**

"Indeed, this process is central to the core purpose of Tamkang University - future oriented education, information oriented education and globalisation.

"These are the three main ideas on which the university is built."

At 55, Tamkang University is the oldest private university in Taipei and the largest, according to president Dr Flora Chia-I Chang. She emphasised that for all 7000 freshmen, futures oriented study is a core part of their studies.

As part of its focus on the future, and on globalisation, the university has agreements with 82 other universities in 24 countries, creating another version of an emerging global mind.

The November 2005 conference was the fourth international futures conference that the university has hosted in the past five years.



Tamkang University, Taipei, Taiwan

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# POTENT MIX FOR TAMKANG CONFERENCE

*Pico Iyer, Author, "Global Soul"*

*"For many years now, globalism has been seen only in the context of markets and technologies, data and goods flying around the world with unprecedented speed. But people are being propelled around the globe as never before, too, and more and more of them have parts of themselves in many different cultures. How does a new kind of global imagination arise out of the 21st century lifestyle, and what new forms of relationship and affiliation and community and self are coming into being? How do we consciously construct a new kind of global dreaming and, more fundamentally, a planetary conscience?"*

*"Globalism is creating a new kind of being, one who is in a position to choose his or her sense of tradition, of loyalty, of religion and of home as never before. But with these new choices come new kinds of challenges. How can the so-called global soul turn the unfamiliar, but fundamental, conditions of life to advantage, and alchemise out of our newly linked world a new and revolutionary kind of life?"*

*Pico Iyer describes himself as a "global village on two legs... a multinational soul on a multinational globe on which more and more countries are as polyglot and restless as airports."*

*Take some of the world's leading scientists, including a co-founder of string theory, and an originator of systems philosophy and general evolution theory. Add a famous Indian political psychologist and a leading Australian conservation scientist. Blend with a tantric monk who holds a Ph.D. in business and applied economics; add a handful of well-known futurists from Australia and the US, and some Chinese, European and Taiwanese professors.... and what have you got? Another exciting futures conference at Tamkang University in Taipei. Designed to explore the notion of "Global Soul, Global Mind, Global Action -- futuring from survival to thrive!" the conference was an ambitious early step toward reconceptualising the self-image of humanity on earth. It was coordinated by Professor Sohail Inayatullah and his colleagues at Tamkang. Papers ranged from Michio Kaku's "four stages of civilisation" and Ervin Laszlo's concept of the multi-verse... parallel universes popping in and out of a cosmic soup like bubbles... to spirituality and psi consciousness. Copies are expected to be available at Tamkang's website, [www.tku.edu.tw](http://www.tku.edu.tw), and our own, shortly. Meanwhile, the first few sessions are reported in this issue. Poetry and music had their place in the proceedings, too, as part of its emphasis on challenging the narrowing of knowledge in academic specialties. In the picture above, students play for conference participants at a dinner party in a Chinese palace style classroom, set in the university's beautiful gardens.*



## A VISION OF THE FUTURE

Opening comments from Flora Chia-I Chang, President, Tamkang University

What is unique about our time is three-fold. First, dramatic developments in technology are driving from genetics to artificial intelligence to breakthroughs in the body-mind arena. Second is the process of globalization, not just at the economic level but more deeply in the capacity of humanity to reflect upon itself, to question its direction. This is different from the question 'why?': it is the question of 'where to next?'. What do we want the world to be like? Third is the notion of 'we' - who is asking this question? Is the 'we' that is exploring the future our individual selves, or is there a collective 'we'? If so, what is the appropriate language to describe this 'we'? Do we use the eloquent work of Pico Iyer, who talks about the new emerging global self? Or do we use the language of Willis Harman, who wrote about the global mind? Or H.G. Wells and the global brain? I leave this crucial distinction to you, learned scholars.

But as a university president, my concern is not just research and inquiry but global action. What do we do with our new knowledge, our new technologies and our collective consciousness?

And this becomes the crucial question. Can we make the shift from survival - the jungle - to the vision of thrive, of working together to create a new future for the planet? Using our collective wisdom to make different types of decisions: decisions that do not jeopardize future generations, that reduce environmental pollution, that do not create a divided world - a world in conflict with itself - and ultimately, a world that while keeping the dignity of the individual understands that our soul, our mind and our actions are, and indeed must be, global in scope.

# PREDICTING THE WORLD OF 2020 AND BEYOND

Michio Kaku, Professor of Theoretical Physics, City University of New York, at the Tamkang conference

No-one can predict the future, but perhaps the most authoritative and authentic description of the future comes from interviews with the world's leading scientists. I have interviewed the 150 top scientists who are inventing the future, in three areas: life, the mind, and matter, which are the three pillars of science.

## The next 20 years

Moore's Law says computer power should double every 18 months for the next 15 years. In 2020 computer chips will cost about a penny [and] will be everywhere and nowhere, hidden by the billions in the environment, our clothes, the walls, the furniture, even our bodies. The destiny of the computer is to become invisible. Even the word will gradually disappear from the English language. Computation will be quiet, seamless and invisible, the internet following us unnoticeably as we move from house, to car, to office and back.

The future will resemble a fairy tale. The internet will become the Magic Mirror in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. A friendly face will emerge from our walls, wristwatches, mirrors, glasses, rings, to answer all our questions. As in Pinocchio, our toys will become animate, with chips placed inside, so we can communicate with them. As in Pocahontas, we will talk to the trees and plants and they will talk back to us. As in Peter Pan, advances in biotech will enable us to slow down the aging process.

In biotechnology, we will be able to establish a 'human body shop' capable of replacing livers, hearts, skin, bone, etc. as they wear out, created by proliferating stem cells in a test tube. We will also gradually unlock the secret of the aging process at the genetic and cellular level. Already scientists can grow skin, ears, noses, cartilage, bladders and bone in the laboratory, but not much more. Soon, they will be able to grow livers and other simple organs, thereby curing many ancient diseases of the body caused by failing organs.

Artificial intelligence, however, will probably hit a stumbling block. Our current robots have the intelligence of a retarded cockroach. Perhaps in 2020 they will have the intelligence of a mouse. But after 2020 Moore's Law collapses. This means that humans will

not be replaced any time soon by robots. We will not wind up as zoo animals behind bars, with our robot creations throwing us peanuts and making us dance.

## Collapse of Moore's Law

The laptop on your desk contains a Pentium chip with a layer 20 atoms across. By 2020, it will be five atoms across and the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle takes over, and the chip short circuits.... Silicon becomes unsuitable at the molecular level. The Age of Silicon will come to a close, and there could be large economic disruptions caused by this collapse.

Progress in artificial intelligence may come to a gradual halt around 2020. The two problems facing AI are pattern recognition and common sense. This means that the jobs market of the future will be dominated by jobs involving common sense (e.g. leadership, judgement, entertainment, art, analysis, creativity) and pattern recognition (e.g. vision and non-repetitive jobs). Jobs like brokers, tellers, agents, low level accountants and jobs involving inventory and repetition will be eliminated.

## "Nations investing in intellectual capitalism will be wealthy."

The world economy will change, from commodity-based capitalism to intellectual capitalism. Nations relying solely on commodities will find their economies slowly shrinking: commodity prices on average have dropped continuously for the past 150 years. Nations investing in intellectual capitalism (e.g. common sense and pattern recognition) will be wealthy. But by 2050 and beyond, advances in biotechnology may create an ethical crisis. By 2100 we may even be debating the merits of immortality, which is full of ethical and practical problems.

## Four stages of technologies

All technologies move in four stages. Paper, for example, began as papyrus in the Nile communities around 2000 BC. In 1450 Gutenberg invented movable type and printing. The first mass production of paper around 1930 led to personal libraries. Today, at

around one cent per sheet, paper is just a source of waste in any modern society.

Water distribution has followed the same steps. A single well would serve a community of 100 people. At stage two we have a faucet, a tap for each person. Stage three sees many taps available to each person, while at stage four water is free, anywhere and everywhere. It has become invisible. (*Other participants challenged a worldview which could produce such a statement. - Ed.*)

Finally we see the four stages in computing, where in the 1950s, with mainframe computing, up to 100 scientists would share one computer. By 1985, with the arrival of the personal computer, one human would use one computer. Around 2000 one human had access to one million computers. By 2020, with 1c chips, computers will "disappear", becoming embedded in our environments.

## Four types of civilisation: Beyond 2100 - Type 1

To analyse civilisations beyond 2100 we may have to use the Kardashev classification of civilisations in space. Each Type is separated from the next by a factor of 10 billion in terms of energy consumption.

A Type I civilisation harnesses the power of an entire planet. They can use 100 per cent of the light which reaches them from the sun. In principle, they would be able to modify the weather, alter the course of hurricanes. All planetary forces might gradually be under their control.

A Type II civilisation harnesses the power of an entire star. They control 100 per cent of the output of their mother sun.

A Type III civilization harnesses the power of an entire galaxy, consisting of 10 to 100 billion stars.

By comparison, we use the power of dead plants (oil and coal) and qualify for a Type 0 civilisation. (More precisely, we are a Type .7 civilisation). But we can calculate that we are about 100 to 200 years away from attaining Type I status. We are privileged to be alive to witness the greatest transition in human history, the transition from Type 0 to Type 1.

# SELF AND DISSENTING FUTURES

Ashis Nandy, Professor, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi, at Tamkang

Alternative visions and interpretations of the global soul/mind are crucial if we wish to engage in global action that does not reproduce yet another nightmare.

Most pressing is moving away from the discourse of universalism, as the dominant strand of universalism is grounded in a European worldview that accepts as absolute the superiority of the human, the masculine, the adult, the historical, and the modern/progressive over the non-human/sub-human, the feminine, the child, the ahistorical and the traditional/savage. Thus in present times, the dream of 'one world' has become a nightmare and a threat to the survival of non-modern/western cultures. It portends a homogenised, hierarchised world that is sharply categorised - into the modern and the primitive, the secular and the non-secular, the scientific and the unscientific, the normal and the abnormal, the developed and the underdeveloped, the vanguard and the led, the liberated and the salvable.

At the 1900 Paris Exhibition, the world's leading scientists were asked to make predictions for the

*"We should set limits to our innovation, our ingenuity and our technological expertise... it is the responsibility of future studies to find out what these limits should be"*

20th century. What will be the highest speed human beings will achieve? Two hundred and fifty miles an hour, they said. Asked whether radio or the electric bulb would become household fixtures, the consensus was that they would not become normal household fixtures. Asked about rockets, these scientists said they would be in the sphere of science fiction in the 20th century. The lesson of the survey is that specialist knowledge does not ensure an adequate break with the past to predict satisfactorily.

The only person who came close to predicting the future was the novelist, Jules Verne. That says something about human imagination.

I propose therefore that one task of futures studies is to make such imaginative leaps, not because you will be right, but because ...that might give you better access to human futures.

A UNESCO publication in 1980 discussed the growth of science and technology in the next 35 years. The predictions were very optimistic.... For example, their data showed that if the rate of science and technology continued, the total weight of all scientific and technological papers and books would overtake the total weight of the earth. Also if the growth rates were projected into the future, total expenditure would overtake the total budget of all the countries of the globe put together. Finally, if the growth rate continued, the total number of scientists and technologists in

the world would overtake the total number of human beings on earth.

All three are absurd and none of them happened of course, but it shows that linear projections can take us only some distance....

Futures studies begin with two negations.

1. Negation of the primary assumption of the person who set the tone of the economic world in which we live, John Maynard Keynes. He said, more or less, that in the long run we are all dead. Futures studies is the negation of this presumption. It presumes that we live, that something of ourselves is passed on to coming generations. That matter of trust in the future, that belief we can do something for it, matters.

2. Negation No.2 is the famous saying of W.C. Fields, who was once asked in the context of the environmental crisis, 'what do you think of the future?'. He replied: 'Why should I think of the future? What has the future done for me?'

Futures studies is a negation of this, too, because it invites you to do something for the future, not because the future has done something for you but for the sake of doing something...that will make things better for the 95 per cent of humankind who have never moved out of the village where they were born, or the 30 per cent who live below the line of \$1 per day, or the 21 per cent who walk on average two and a half miles per day to get their drinking water. That also is part of the responsibility of students of the future.

The projections and predictions of science need to be balanced by other ways of knowing.

We should set limits to our innovation, our ingenuity and our technological expertise. I think it is the responsibility of future studies to find out what these limits should be.

Continued at [www.futuresfoundation.org.au](http://www.futuresfoundation.org.au).

“ the European worldview must be challenged if the dream of 'one world' is not to become a nightmare...”

“ Predictions of science need to be balanced by other ways of knowing...”

“ History is being frozen...we have become captives of history, the domain of history has expanded. It is freezing the past...”

“ In many civilisations, Utopias are not in the future but in the past... ”

# What is the future of religion?

*News commentary continues on what seems to be a symbolic fight to the death between science and religion, albeit with inadequate explanation of the issues at stake (if you'll forgive the allusion). Should we teach intelligent design in our schools? Are science and religion inevitable enemies? Or can we reframe our thinking as a wider view, with room for both? What is the future of religion anyway? Are we pre-wired for it? Or is it something we choose? Then there's that other, tragically real battle, between Muslim jihadists and the west. But what about the rest of the Muslim community? In the past few weeks there has been growing recognition in the west of the rise of the so-called "warriors of love", popular-culture Muslims taking a stand against fundamentalists and terrorists. Who are they, and what do they stand for? And what is the strength of the "virtual caliphate" now emerging on the internet and satellite TV, in books and through major international conferences and research centres? We explore these ideas in the next few pages.*

The coming century is shaping as one in which religion will continue to play a central role, both in its interaction with the secular world, and in the way relationships among particular religions shape events, according to Peter Stuart, an Anglican priest and theologian in New Zealand.

"At the heart of what is called 'secularisation' in the west is the separation of Church and State. In the ensuing 'secular states' religion may decline, but it may also be enabled to flourish more freely. The extent of secularisation is thus distinct from the question of whether or not religion is declining, anywhere. Globally, the scene is complex, with some fall-off from particular religions in some places, growth in others. It certainly looks as though religion will continue to shape the lives of individuals and societies."

Noting that particular religions come and go, he points out that the major religions show no sign of disappearing, though their geographical distribution is changing (e.g. the strong growth of Christianity in Africa and China). Westerners, he says, are often unaware of these trends.

## What is religion?

The terms 'religion', 'religions' and 'spirituality' have distinct meanings. 'Religion' is that dimension of human life in which systems of belief, practice and ethical norms provide frameworks of ultimate meaning. 'Religion' is a universal phenomenon.

'Spirituality' is a difficult word, sometimes used so vaguely as to be devoid of content. Yet it points to the experiential depth of authentic human existence. It is both corporate and intensely individual, linked with particular religions but often transcending them. It too is universal.

Religion has many social roles, but two stand out:

## *"the search is on for agreement around a global ethic and instruments of inter-religious cooperation"*

- religion as a 'sacred canopy', sanctifying a particular socio-political status quo, and
- religion as 'utopian', subverting a status quo in favour of a 'better' future.

Violence can be used by both forms of religion, and will continue to be a feature of politics until all religions renounce violence. As not all religions have done so yet, 'sacred violence' will continue.

Nevertheless, he reminds us that there are major resources within most religions for the restraint of human violence.

## Religion and identity

"Global religious pluralism is a feature of our interconnected world. In addition, a consequence of globalisation is increasing urbanisation, which increases local pluralism of every sort, including religious.

"Balancing this is the growing reassertion of particular cultural identity in the face of globalisation, and with it a reclaiming of a religion as part of that identity. How global and local religious pluralism is handled will shape much of the coming century."

## Religion and human rights

Many states, whether secular or not, are authoritarian. The UN Declaration of Human Rights and similar UN Declarations are not observed in many parts of the world, and human rights abuse is widespread. One of those rights is freedom of religion, which is often seriously restricted or non-existent, and will

continue to be, for a variety of reasons. This threat sometimes stems from government fear of religious calls for socio-political change. Sometimes it stems from the intolerant nature of particular religions, not all of which have embraced the principle of religious freedom or of universal human rights generally. Yet freedom of religion could be seen as the root of all human rights, from which all others follow: the notion of the ultimacy of the human conscience and the inherent dignity of human beings.

"The growth of international law and global respect for human rights will be inseparably linked with the struggle for full religious freedom around the world," says Peter Stuart. "Religion is both part of the problem and part of the solution.

"Expect to see great debate within and among the religions around this issue. There will be pragmatic and principled pressure on the religions to adopt the practice of religious pluralism within a secular state, but the path will not be easy."

## Religion and ecology

In responding to the great challenge to humanity's only habitat, religion will play an ambiguous role, he says. Both among and within particular religions are attitudes of stewardship and reverence for the natural world, and also of disregard and exploitation of it, rationalised or justified by particular views of what constitutes ultimate reality. Religion is thus again part of the problem and part of the solution.

"So the search is on for agreement around a global ethic and instruments of inter-religious cooperation," he concludes. "The trend towards inter-religious dialogue among world religious leaders which began last century is likely to continue, both in frequency and in significance for the world."

# Religion: why it's here to stay, and what to do about it

“Ever since logic, reason and scientific enquiry emerged from the Enlightenment scientific reasoning has been accepted as a system of gathering knowledge that, while imperfect, is more reliable than religion in describing and predicting the behaviour of the world. We have had Nietzsche's famous proclamation that 'God is dead' and watched the existentialist philosophers grapple with choices in a universe devoid of meaning and purpose, writes Mark Braidwood. "Expectations have arisen that religion might fade into history.

"Yet despite these challenges from science, it is clear religious belief has not become irrelevant at all, and in fact there is evidence of a resurgence in religious fanaticism. Witness also the discussions about placing 'intelligent design' on the school curriculum, and the upsurge of Islamic fundamentalism.

"Why then, despite centuries of enlightened scientific reasoning, and apparent weaknesses in the religious narrative thus revealed, is religious faith not fading away? Recent research suggests we need look no further than within ourselves. Insights in brain biology and anthropology have provided an understanding of where religious belief might originate in the brain, and why it is so persistent."

The key is the way the brain is structured to perform its various, highly complex tasks. The human brain is modular in design, made up of lots of speciality modules that perform different tasks. A number of these inference systems are implicated in religious belief.

A survey of religions and superstitions around the world has revealed that religious beliefs have certain elements in common. At their core are ideas that violate an ontological category, which is a template that our brains use for understanding the world. For example, rather than memorise every animal you see, your brain processes each new encounter with an animal as a specialisation of the animal template. My first encounter with a giraffe tells me it is an animal with a long neck and four legs. However, I don't waste time remembering that a giraffe also eats and breathes, because this is part of the animal template and I know this implicitly.

What is a violation of an ontological category, or template? If you are told that a woman in the next village had thirty children, this does not constitute a violation (although it is extremely unlikely, it is possible). If you are told that a woman in the next village conceived without sexual intercourse, then this is a violation of your brain's ontological person category, because it departs so radically from how your brain understands the person template. A similar example is that of the Haitian zombie, a dead person believed to be able to walk around and observe the living.

So whether it is a tree that can eavesdrop (Sudan), a mountain that eats and digests things (Aymara people of the Andes), or a virgin birth, religious

ideas share this violation. The reason is that such violations resonate very strongly in this particular inference system. In fact, research has shown that people remember stories involving a violation more readily than those without. This of course also aids in retention and transmission of the idea within the group.

Research from another discipline is also helping us better understand religion, not in how beliefs are formulated, but rather in how they persist. Death clearly looms large in the minds of human beings.

Continued at [www.futuresfoundation.org.au](http://www.futuresfoundation.org.au)

## What is "intelligent design" exactly?

There have been few explanations of what "intelligent design" really means, in spite of generous mass media coverage of the symbolic battle between science and religion that this term apparently represents. Futurists familiar with talk of post-Darwinian evolution may find it particularly difficult to separate, for example, the Gaia hypothesis and ideas of global consciousness from related ideas of design and intelligence. Luckily the *New Scientist* comes to our aid once more, in a recent feature on fundamentalism.

"Their aim is to destroy science. They seek 'nothing less than the overthrow of materialism and its cultural legacies'. Who are they? The words come from a think tank called the Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture in Seattle. But they reflect the ideology of a much wider network of funding foundations and lobby groups dedicated to overthrowing 'scientific materialism,'" says the *New Scientist*.

"One of the fruits of a faith-based approach to science will be a dismissal of [*what they call*] 'the chimeras of popular science': ideas such as global warming, pollution problems and ozone depletion. And that, unsurprisingly, has political ramifications, including climate-change denial and the pursuit of ruthless free-market economics." The journal says it is possible to trace some of the funding sources of the Centre, and its parent, the Discovery Institute, through watchdog websites such as [www.mediatransparency.org](http://www.mediatransparency.org) and [www.sourcewatch.org](http://www.sourcewatch.org).

Describing the visions and strategies of this powerful group and its supporters, the *NewScientist* feature paints an ominous picture of growing power in influential places, in a spreading network that includes curious links like the one to Korean cult leader, Syung Moon.

"Sometime in the past few years, those who question the findings of mainstream science ceased to be laughable luddites and, to a significant number of people, became an accepted voice in public debate about science," said the journal.... "As veteran liberal broadcaster Bill Moyers said when accepting the Global Environmental Citizen Award at Harvard Medical School: 'The delusional is no longer marginal. It has come in from the fringe, to sit in the seat of power in the Oval Office and in Congress.'"

New Scientist 8 October 2005

## WARRIORS OF LOVE

Some dismiss him as a fundamentalist showman, but Amr Khaled has been styled as Islam's antidote to Osama bin Laden, reports David Hardaker.

The 37-year-old former accountant has become a modern phenomenon by fashioning himself into the anti-bin Laden. Rick Little, a US adviser to the United Nations, says he doesn't know another single individual who is having the impact that Amr is having, altering the daily habits and beliefs of millions of Muslims around the world. Yet, while the west focuses on al-Qaeda and its turbaned warriors, writes Hardaker, the parallel power of Amr has gone unnoticed.

"His image is more western banker than Islamic preacher -- no beard and flowing robes; instead, he wears a hand-tailored cream suit, open-necked sky-blue shirt and Bulgari watch. His dream is one of harmony between civilisations.... but if the west thinks it is getting an Islamic Uncle Tom it should think again. The preacher might be hip, but he is deeply conservative."

For example, he is a fierce proponent of the headscarf for women: "Who respects the woman more? Islam or the ones who cannot even sell a box of matches without painting a half-naked woman on it? Are they the ones who have respected women or ill-treated them? Has not Islam respected women, covered them and liberated them from such exploitation?"

Meanwhile, in Indonesia a young musician called Ahmad Dhani, leader of the popular rock band Dewa, is using music to influence millions of fans to resist the tide of religious extremism that has produced religious war and suicide bombings.

"The latest suicide bombings in Bali appear to have been carried out by young Indonesian Muslims indoctrinated in an ideology of hatred," wrote former president Abdurrahman Wahid in an article in the *Washington Post*. "Once again the cult of death has proved its ability to recruit misguided fanatics and incite them to violate Islam's most sacred teachings in the very name of God."

To discredit the appeal of fundamentalist ideology, Ahmad Dhani composed the best-selling album *Laskar Cinta (Warriors of Love)*.

"Released last year, it quickly rose to the top of the charts as millions of young Indonesians embraced its message of love, peace and tolerance.... In response, radical Muslim groups hauled Dhani into court on charges of defaming Islam, seeking to ban his use of rock music to promote a spiritual and progressive interpretation of Islam that threatens the appeal of their own extremism. Rather than be intimidated, Dhani has announced another 'ideological smart bomb' - a song that uses the revelatory tone of the Koran to declare: '*Truth dwells in the hearts of those who love and are free of hatred; the hearts of those who hate... are possessed by Satan.*'"

Sydney Morning Herald 18 November 2005

## Towards a virtual caliphate

"While Al Qaeda is often held up as the de-territorialized 'brand name' seeking to rally the masses of the umma - the world community of Muslims - around militant religious radicalism, it is not the only game in town, writes Peter Mandaville, director of the Center for Global Studies in the United States.

He points to an emerging infrastructure - on the internet and satellite TV, in books and through major international conferences and research centres - of a countervailing effort by mainstream Islamic scholars to challenge Al Qaeda's global rhetoric.

"In Islam's Sunni tradition, to which some 90 per cent of the world's Muslims adhere, there is no centralized structure of religious authority. Instead, a variety of local religious scholars and legal specialists compete with regional and - increasingly - global voices of religious authority.

"Until 1924, however, there was in the Sunni tradition a nominal global figurehead in the person and office of the caliphate. The caliph, not in any sense a cleric, was understood to be the world guardian of a divine moral order. His office - whose theoretical jurisdiction extended to all lands under Muslim rule - is better understood as fulfilling the executive branch function of implementing and preserving the law.

"The caliphate issue provides a space in which to explore the question of contemporary globalization and religious authority. This is not only because a number of Islamic political movements, Al Qaeda among them, aim to re-establish caliphate institutions, but also because wider debates on the waning influence of the nation-state may render such models of transnational religious polity more attractive.

"Perhaps most interesting, however, is a diverse body of 'superstar' religious scholars whose efforts might serve as a more metaphorical embodiment of the caliphate. For them, the caliphate is not so much a political institution attached to sovereign territory, but rather an ideal of Pan-Islamic ecumenicism -- a moderate and relatively inclusive form of lowest-common-denominator orthodoxy. In their minds, this community of shared knowledge and religious interpretation is explicitly designed as an antidote to the radical jihadis."

According to Peter Mandaville, the figure at the forefront of this movement is Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a Qatar-based Egyptian religious scholar who trained at Al Azhar in Cairo, "the Oxford of the Islamic religious sciences". Although he personally reaches wide audiences, articulating a more cosmopolitan understanding of Islam, his greatest contribution lies not in his ideas, but rather in the many institutions he has created and the transnational collaborations he has fostered among Islamic scholars. He refers frequently to the Koranic injunction against extremism and the emphasis on Muslims as a moderate community of the middle.

International Herald Tribune 12-13 November 2005

## Signals in the noise....

### Bin Laden without the filters

Osama bin Laden wants the US to convert to Islam, ditch its constitution, abolish banks, jail and homosexuals, bar women from appearing in the press and sign the Kyoto climate change treaty. The first complete collection of the Saudi's statements has been published by Verso, portraying a world in which Islam's enemies will take the first steps toward salvation by embracing the 'religion of all the prophets':

*The Telegraph, London*

17 November 2005

### The future of values

UNESCO's 21st Century Talks series brings together 50 notable scholars to address broad issues in values, ethics and morals facing humankind, writes Jose Ramos. In a useful critique he notes that while contributions are written with great care and thoughtfulness by respected minds, this is not a coherent statement on the 'future of man' or 'a new globalism'. Rather it is eclectic and muddled in academic prose, and fails to speak to the great majority of humanity.

*World Futures Studies Federation Bulletin*

October 2005

### Critical spirituality as a resource

Increasing complexities and increasing uncertainty are creating a space that begs to be filled, writes Ivana Milojevic. This is where competing visions for transformation start vying for dominance, and fertile ground for conflict is created. She explores three main visions: (1) bringing back the old/religious fundamentalism; (2) continuing Enlightenment paradigm/secular progressivism (whether modern or post-modern); (3) Eupsychia (perfection and liberation of self) + conscious human evolution/critical spirituality. The direction chosen from these three to be the new guiding narrative will determine the quality of lives of many future generations to come. We desperately need the third story, and beyond.

*Journal of Futures Studies*

February 2005

### Culture, not technology, holds back collaboration

Scientific communities worldwide are not up to the task of huge cultural change, say two British researchers. Cautionary tales surrounding obstacles to trust, security, standards, training and collaboration jolted delegates out of their afternoon torpor in the closing sessions of an advanced computing conference on the Gold Coast.

*Sydney Morning Herald*

11 October 2005

### Global Technological Change: from hard to soft

In emerging knowledge societies, the "soft" technologies are drivers of physical "hardware" technologies. They include management, organizational design, education for creativity and entrepreneurship, good governance, prudent regulation, as well as systems thinking, ecological and cultural balance. This new book from Professor Zhouying Jin in Beijing is "a powerful reconceptualization of technological options and innovation management," according to Hazel Henderson.

*Intellect Books*

October 2005

### Rosa Parkes of this century

Mukhtaran Bibi is a peasant living in a remote Pakistani village who doesn't know her own age. But she is being called the Rosa Parkes of 21c for failing to be beaten by injustice. Gang-raped on the order of a local council, she prosecuted her attackers and became an effective women's rights leader in Pakistan. She used her compensation money to start schools in her village, and has raised more to "endow" them with cows to generate income to pay expenses.

*New York Times*

8 November 2005

### Africa rising

The east African nation of Zanzibar is one of the continent's success stories, writes Jonathan Power, though sensationalist reporting of its recent election may have suggested otherwise. President Benjamin Mkapa attacked the media coverage: "Derision, cynicism, prejudice, stereotyping and hunger for stories of failure rather than of success will be the undoing of democratic progress on the continent". Nonetheless, a lot of good things have been happening in many African countries.

*International Herald Tribune*

12-13 November 2005

### Obsolete G7 should give way to G20

Australia, with 20m people and a US\$618 billion economy, is rarely thought of as a global power. Yet the leaders of a country whose economy ranks 13th in size may just shake up the world order by reducing the influence of the G7 nations. It would be replaced with a more inclusive regime for managing global economic affairs. "As the world economy has changed, so too, these institutions must change," Treasurer Peter Costello said last month in China.

*Taiwan News*

10 November 2005

### Correlation of Christian ethics, social ills

The belief that a moral society depends on holy guidance has been contradicted by a study published in a US academic journal. It found an inverse relationship between religiosity and public health and social stability. "In general, higher rates of belief in and worship of a creator correlate with higher rates of homicide, juvenile and early adult mortality, STD infection rates, teen pregnancy and abortion in the prosperous democracies," wrote the author, Gregory Paul.

*New York Times*

8 November 2005