



Article

## The Role of the Chef: Exploring Eschatological and Nationalistic Components in Recipes for Change in the Asia-Pacific Region

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### Abstract

*Eschatology is typically considered a branch of theology, i.e., religious understandings the final destiny of humanity and/or the end of history. However, when broadening the scope of the term, we can better facilitate how worldviews and paradigms essentially serve as different, yet often competing, mental operating systems for the planet's nearly eight billion inhabitants. This article explores the nexus of eschatology with nationalism and offers important insight into how co-creating post-pandemic futures might play out in the next 30 years or so in the Asia-Pacific region. It also focuses primarily on the left column of the Integral Futures framework. As a meta-analysis, the article's scope is vast. Climate change, conflict, COVID-19, five major religions, and eight mini country case studies are discussed via the perspective of Theory U and a new three-dimensional futures model. Any "recipe for change" will need to remain cognizant of these deep-seated worldviews, related eschatologies, and intersection with religious nationalism, for they will guide humanity's search for meaning and subsequently preparation for addressing the threats that may jeopardize our collective future.*

### Keywords

Religious Worldviews, Integral Futures, Eschatology, Nationalism, Theory U

### Introduction

The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Asia-Pacific Futures Network conference, held in September 2021, focused on good practices, success stories, new and innovative approaches, and experience-sharing on how to create sustainable post-pandemic futures. "Recipes of Change" was the thematic element used throughout the conference, with panels discussing various topics but through the lens of cooking, culinary practices, sitting at the table, ingredients, spices, menus, etc. If we want to talk about any "recipe of change," we also need to acknowledge the role of a chef—a trained expert on ingredients and their successful combination to serve tastebud-titillating starters, mains, desserts, and such. Good chefs' strategic plans and motivational interests are driven by a mission, purpose, and vision of the future of food, albeit in most cases, relatively short-term in scope. The types of food, the dining ambience, individual tastes, and numbers of customers/diners are all factors in this vision.

Transitioning this analogy from chefs, recipes, ingredients, and hungry consumers to religious leadership, practices, and adherents, this article explores how various views of the future or eschatologies and related nationalisms are potentially positioned to inform how countries in the Asia-Pacific region co-create futures to address challenges in the coming three decades. Why eschatologies and nationalism? Both are components of individual and societal worldviews. The importance of worldviews was recently illustrated in a study of four nations. Survey data revealed that nearly 80% of respondents concurred that humanity would need to transform their worldview to create a better future world, yet almost half felt the future looked too grim and it is better to focus on looking after themselves and close family. Over a third of respondents who self-identify as fundamentalists see a final conflict between good and evil on the horizon (Randle & Eckersley, 2015). These opinions happen to represent a small Western minority, but what are the implications for Asia? How do Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians,

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and other religious adherents understand future threats to humanity and what are their views on societal responses? Should they disengage and protect themselves and their immediate family? Or can religions collectively unite followers to engage with the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) challenges facing the world today? As the Baha'i say, "Religion offers an understanding of human existence and development that lifts the eye from the rocky path to the distant horizon," (2015) but what differences exist between popular religious beliefs (found among all major religions) and the more orthodox and formal theologies informing the religious elite? These are some of the difficult questions addressed in this study.

The article encompasses a broad overview and uses the nexus of eschatology and nationalism to explore all four quadrants of the Integral Futures framework. The scope includes all major religions and the vast populations encompassed in the Asia-Pacific region, which for this article, includes the Central, East, South, and Southeast regions (Western Asia is considered part of the Middle East) and a Pacific region that incorporates additional countries like Russia and the United States (each referenced later in the essay). This vast geography already suggests an ambitious project, but when combining all major religions, half the world's population, and a 30-year timeframe, the article attempts to take a meta-approach to explore various eschatological and nationalistic components in "recipes for change" in the Asia-Pacific region.

The primary aim is to emphasize the importance of religious literacy when discussing the future and any "recipe of change." To do so, two frameworks are utilised—Scharmer's Theory U and a new three-dimensional model that adds a third axis to the common two-by-two matrix used in scenario building exercises. Before discussing these frameworks, I first look at some of the challenges on the horizon for the Asia-Pacific by using climate change, conflict, and global pandemics as examples. This section is followed by a short examination of religious trends for the region through 2050. The nexus of eschatologies and nationalism are explored by looking at the contentious actors (or chefs in keeping with APFN's conference theme) within five major religious groups. The remaining two sections take the preceding insight and overlay it with the two previously mentioned frameworks. My concluding thoughts contribute four suggested areas to consider in the future. As a conversation starter, it is anticipated that future projects will be birthed from this initial thought piece.

### **Integral Futures and Eschatological Worldviews**

The two quadrants of the left column in Figure 1 (individual/interior/intentional and collective/interior/cultural) originate with Slaughter's (2005) Integral Futures framework and provide an excellent paradigm for understanding the power of religion and any vision of the future and strategies for getting there. These two quadrants focus on the interior/internal dimensions of human nature and can offer important insight into how co-creating post-pandemic futures might play out in the next 30 years or so in the Asia/Pacific region. In focusing on the more invisible aspects of the inner world of individual identity/meaning and wider cultural worlds of shared meanings, this article employs a broad understanding of eschatology (Greek origin for the study of the "last") to dive deeper into these two quadrants. Eschatology is typically considered a branch of theology, i.e., religious understandings of the final destiny of humanity and/or the end of history. But when broadening the scope of the term, we can better facilitate how worldviews and paradigms essentially serve as different, yet often competing, mental operating systems for the planet's nearly eight billion inhabitants. Thus, this approach builds on Anthony's argument that Integral Futures needs to bridge the spiritual with the mundane (2006). The article's thematic focus on eschatology starts with ideas and concepts in the left column, but when combining it with forms of religious nationalism, we then see movement into the right column related to the exterior behaviour and social.

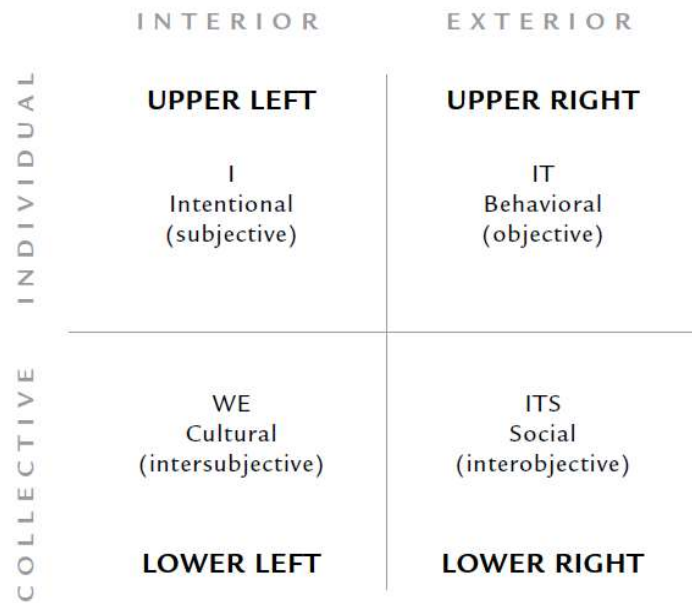


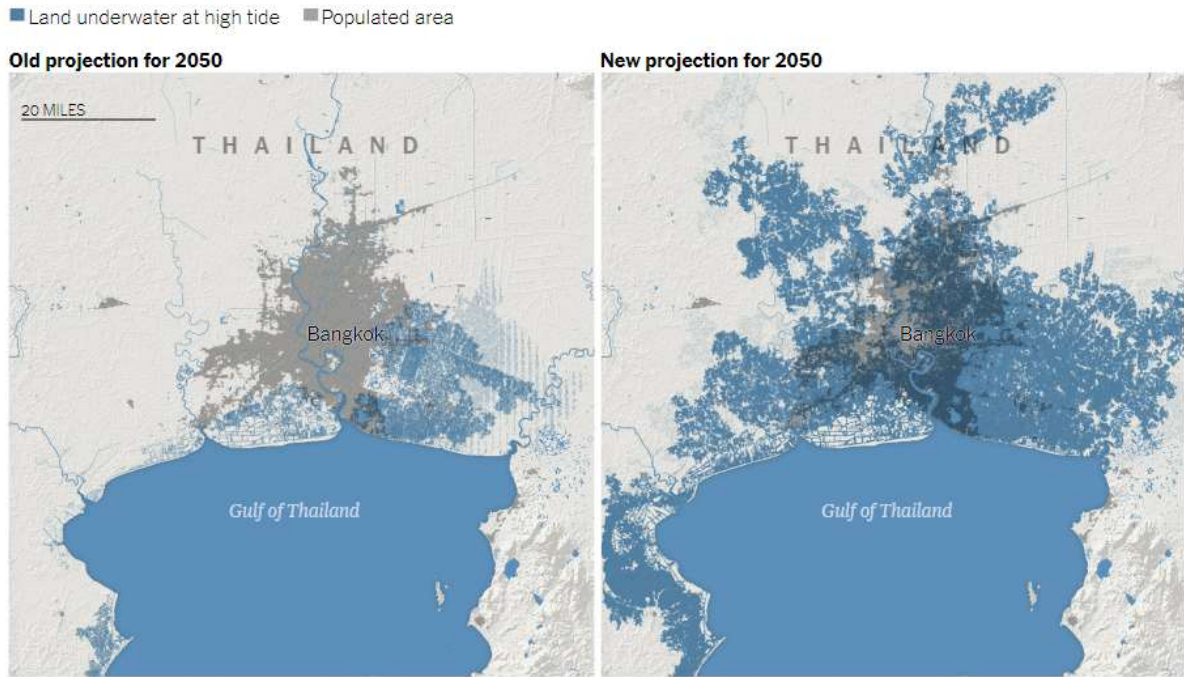
Fig. 1: Integral Futures Framework (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2009)

**Challenges on the Horizon: Climate Change, Conflict, and COVID-19**

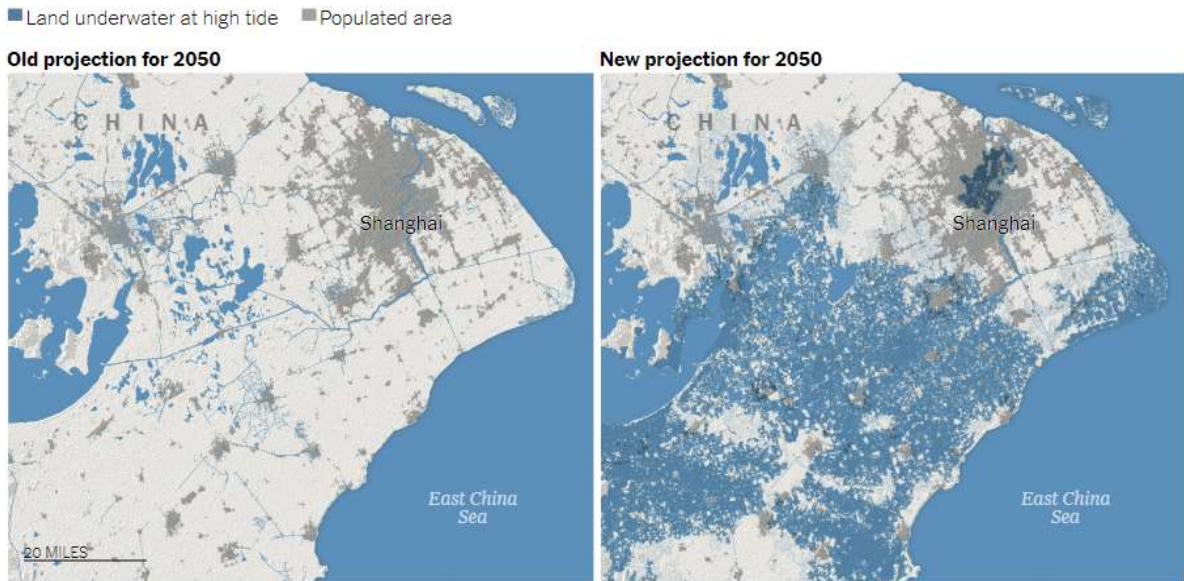
Before exploring eschatological components, it is important to briefly highlight three challenges and potential crises on the horizon in the Asia/Pacific Region—climate change, conflict, and COVID-19. These three represent some of the core challenges related to the Triple Nexus—the interlinkages between the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors.

**Climate change**

A range of climate change challenges are facing countries in the Asia and Pacific region. Drought, flooding, increases in tropical storms and other unexpected violent storms are on the horizon. If we look only at displaced populations due to rises in sea levels, Asia may confront precarious scenarios. Recent research using more accurate calculations suggests that three times more people than previously thought could be affected by high tides in 2050 (Kulp & Strauss, 2019). The top six countries with the largest populations below the elevation of an average annual flood in 2050 are in Asia—China will potentially have an affected population of 93 million, Bangladesh (42m), India (36m), Vietnam (31m), Indonesia (23m), and 12 million in Thailand. Among Asian cities, Bangkok (Fig. 2), Shanghai (Fig. 3), and Mumbai (Fig. 4) do not fare well.



**Fig. 2:** Bangkok Projections (Lu & Flavelle, 2019)



**Fig 3:** Shanghai Projections (Lu & Flavelle, 2019)

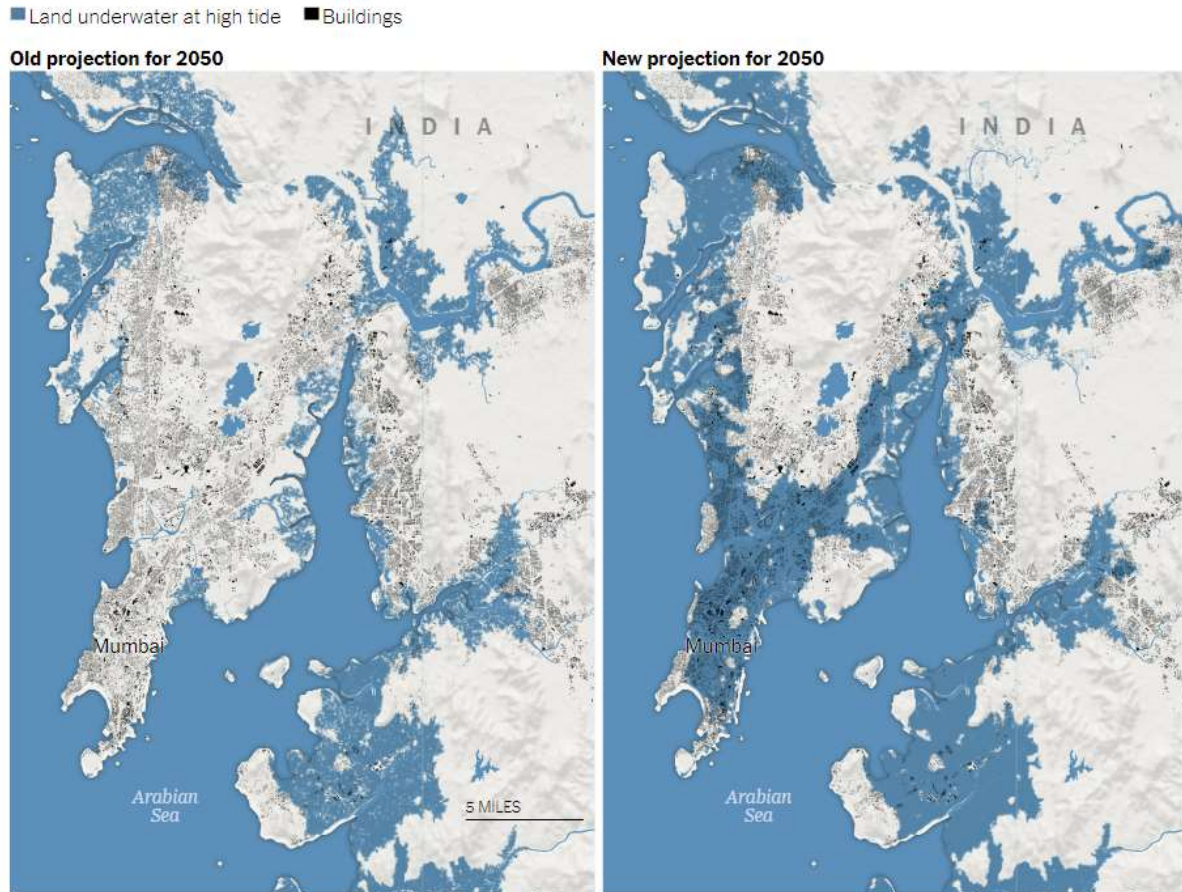


Fig. 4: Mumbai Projections (Lu & Flavelle, 2019)

**Conflict**

Asia hosts numerous conflict zones. The coup in Myanmar, ongoing tension between China and Taiwan, and territorial disputes in the South China Sea dominate recent headlines, but past conflicts, like Thailand’s return to a de facto military leadership, conflict in Aceh and Timor-Leste, clashes in Kashmir between Pakistan and India, border disputes between China and India, increased refugee movements arising from Afghanistan and Rohingya crises, possible genocide of Uighurs in China, terrorism in the Philippines, show the recurring challenges of conflict in Asia-Pacific. Putin’s invasion of Ukraine and subsequent nuclear saber-rattling has only shaken the region further. The Asia Foundation’s State of Conflict and Violence in Asia (2017) highlights the following emerging trends:

- Conflict and violence affect every country in Asia, not just those often thought of as conflict-ridden.
- Asian countries have been relatively successful at managing national contestation, but often at the price of significant subnational and local violence.
- The politicization of ethnic and religious identities has frequently led to violence and creates major risks for the future.
- Development and urbanization will likely increase rather than decrease violence in the coming decade.
- Gender-based violence is widespread in Asia, and its impacts are greater than previously understood.

Their most recent report shows the hotspots for state-based violence in South and Southeast Asia.

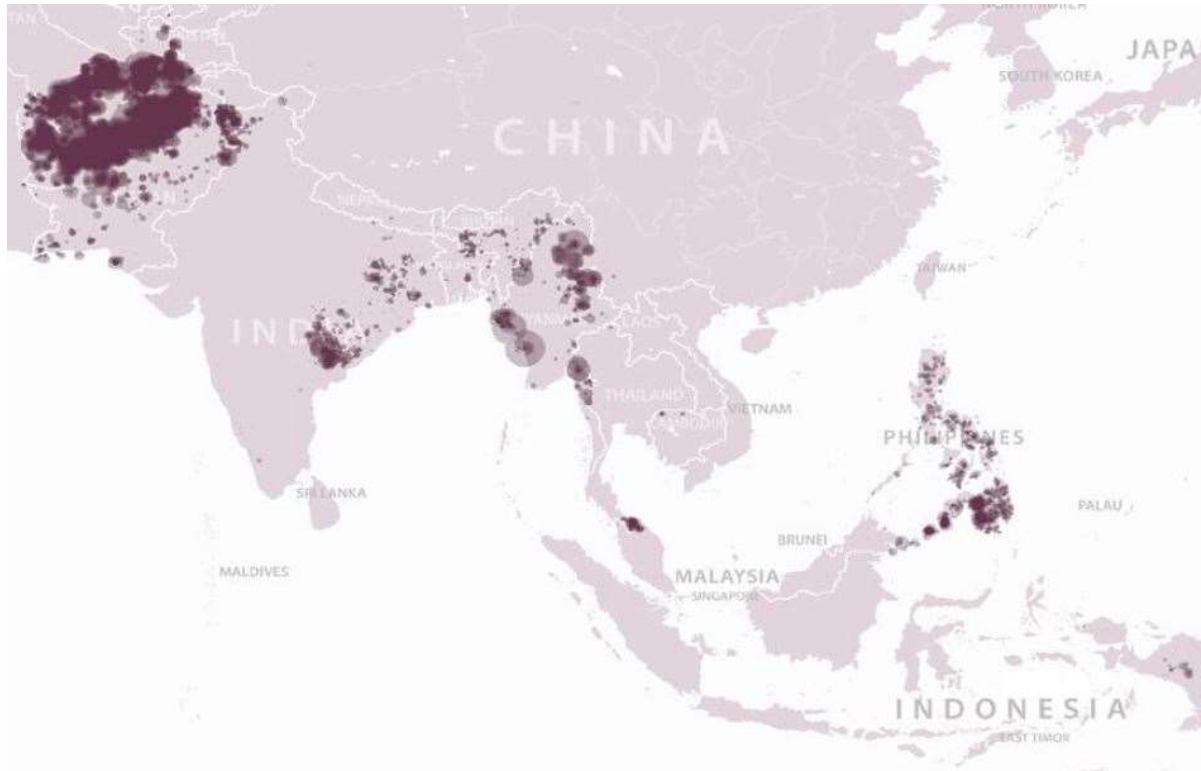


Fig. 5: Asian State-Sponsored Violence Hotspots (The Asia Foundation, 2021)

**COVID-19**

Future pandemics that could be similar to or even worse than COVID-19 are a real possibility in the coming decades (Wright, 2022). Unfortunately, religious groups were not at the forefront of providing assistance during the pandemic. In fact, in some corners, religious nationalist aggravated the situation. For example, in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hindu nationalists jumped on the opportunity to link the virus to Muslims, inventing the conspiracy theory of “coronajihad.” Muslims were beaten and denied hospital beds and Muslim health care workers were ostracized (Viswanatha, 2021).

## Religious Trends in 2050

**Table 1:** Religious Projections for Asia-Pacific, 2010-2050 (Pew Research Center, 2015)

	2010 ESTIMATED POPULATION	% IN 2010	2050 PROJECTED POPULATION	% IN 2050	POPULATION GROWTH 2010-2050	% INCREASE 2010-2050	COMPOUND ANNUAL GROWTH RATE (%)
Hindus	1,024,630,000	25.3%	1,369,600,000	27.7%	344,970,000	33.7%	0.7%
Muslims	986,420,000	24.3	1,457,720,000	29.5	471,290,000	47.8	1.0
Unaffiliated	858,490,000	21.2	837,790,000	17.0	-20,700,000	-2.4	0.1
Buddhists	481,480,000	11.9	475,840,000	9.6	-5,640,000	-1.2	0.0
Folk Religions	364,690,000	9.0	366,860,000	7.4	2,170,000	0.6	0.0
Christians	287,100,000	7.1	381,200,000	7.7	94,100,000	32.8	0.7
Other Religions	51,920,000	1.3	48,650,000	1.0	-3,280,000	-6.3	0.2
Jews	200,000	< 0.1	240,000	< 0.1	40,000	21.2	0.5
<b>Regional total</b>	<b>4,054,940,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4,937,900,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>882,960,000</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>0.5</b>

In 1966, the cover of *Time* magazine enquired if God was dead. In the millennial issue of *The Economist*, God's obituary was written (only to be retracted seven years later!). Any talk of God being "dead" and the demise of religion remains premature. The Pew Research Center, in their new report (2015), show that major religions will continue to grow (Table 1) in the next 30 years. Pew also found that in regions with the most population growth, respondents stated ongoing religious practice remains important, possibly in response to existential threats related to COVID-19, conflict, and natural disasters.

### Contentious Chefs: the Nexus of Eschatologies and Nationalism

Moving back to the kitchen, faith systems and theologies dictates the menu option for billions of religious adherents, e.g., pork, beef, seafood, edible roots, etc. Like the various ethnic dishes and delicacies from around the world and associated acquired tastes, religious belief systems are generally obtained at birth and reinforced during childhood. This section dives into understanding some of the eschatologies of the world's main religions and then how these influence and interact with nationalism across the Asia-Pacific. Again, this is a meta-review of these eschatologies and related nationalisms and is meant to provide a sample of the complexity, richness, power, and purpose of religious worldviews—all to illustrate the value of the left column of Integral Futures.

#### Hindu eschatologies and nationalism

Hinduism represents the most complex eschatology of any major religious group. A cyclical view of time, belief in transmigration and rebirth/liberation based on human action (karma), recognition of class/caste social hierarchies, acknowledgement of ancestors, personal versus cosmic versions of eschatology, etc., add numerous layers of understanding of time, heaven, and hell. Hindu scholars argue how a final consummation of history is understood. Cycles of rising and falling, creation and destruction characterise Hindu eschatological tradition, with the current age (*Kali yuga*) being the last of the four ages of the *yugas*. From here, a coming new age (*Krita yuga*) will arise where righteousness and peace dominate this golden era, yet this is part of a larger cycle related to Brahma where universal destruction is followed by chaos and then another rebirth and creation of new cycles of birth and death (Knipe, 2008).

India's constitution enshrines secularism, but in the last few decades, Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) is increasingly asserting a stronger political hold across the nation. Prime Minister Modi is in his approaching eight

years in office and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) continues to maintain a tight grip across the country. Modi has long been associated with stoking Hindu-Muslim social conflagrations. Modi's government scrapped the special status of Kashmir and recently implemented a religious test for citizens (Muslims being excluded). More nationalist elements in India go so far as to suggest that India's borders should include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and Pakistan, with these extended borders being the centre of a campaign to revise Indian textbooks (Malji, 2018). During the early phases of COVID-19, nationalists attempted to link the virus to Muslims, claiming a "coronajihad" was in place. Muslims were ostracized, beaten, and denied health care. While Hindus are taught to see the divine in all aspects of life, Hindutva is wreaking havoc in social spaces across the country (Viswanatha, 2021).

### **Buddhist eschatology and nationalism**

Like Hinduism, Buddhism views time as circular. With unending cycles of birth and death, Buddhism has many phases of manifestation and non-manifestations of the cosmos. Buddhist scriptures even predict the dissolution of the current religion, and a new Buddha arriving in the future and thus repeating the manifestation of previous Buddhas. It is at the individual level that Buddhism provides a self-cultivating process for repentantly escaping *samsāra* (endless cycle of birth and rebirth). The end goal is a state of divine awakening to reality and a place of nirvana (Nattier, 2008).

Buddhism is often associated with non-violence and peacebuilding. The work of Thich Nhat Hanh, a prominent Buddhist monk, peace advocate, writer, poet, and teacher, was globally recognised and celebrated. However, small bands of Buddhists have condoned violence in some regions of Asia. If we look at Myanmar and Sri Lanka, we see nationalistic trends driving the majority religion. Myanmar's military coup in February 2021 toppled the democratically elected government ruled by the National League for Democracy (NLD). Long-time NLD leader and recognised peace advocate, Aung San Suu Kyi, was placed under house arrest, as were other prominent political figures. The world was caught by surprise by this coup and the citizens of Myanmar immediately began protesting, despite a violent response from the police and security forces. Gravers (2015) posits that this xenophobic nationalism represents a combination of two fears—a doctrinal decline marked by a dark future of moral chaos and fear that Christianity and Islam are attempting to eliminate Buddhism. The Buda Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force) movement operates a brutal campaign to support anti-Christian and anti-Muslim activities, including rioting and burning of mosques and churches. A powerful symbiotic relationship is entrenched in Myanmar, whereby nationalistic Buddhist groups provide cultural and religious support for the military and in return, they offer protection against the perceived Muslim threat (Brenna & Rowand, 2021).

In Sri Lanka, tensions may have subsided since a 30-year civil war ended in 2009. The predominantly Buddhist Sinhalese account for 70% of Sri Lanka's population, yet they feared the Tamil population (mostly Hindu) representing 10% of the island's people—Muslims represent nearly 10% as well, but were not perceived to be the threat as they were in Myanmar. After a devastating war that killed approximately 40,000 people over, there were hopes that it could return to its previous state of ethnic and social harmony, but today, pockets of ethnonationalistic ideologies remain that can still stir social rupture and ethnic tensions, including the infamous anti-Muslim riots in 2014 (Imtiyaz & Mohamed-Saleem, 2015; Morrison, 2020; and Sarjoon et al., 2016).

### **Confucian eschatology and nationalism**

Confucianism has a long, complex history in China, but in contemporary times assumed relegated to a private cultural belief and practice. Confucianism, in general, holds to a cyclical view of time and focuses on the present world versus the hereafter, with Buddhism being the only religion that played a role in Chinese eschatology (Crisp, 1993). However, when examining some of the sects within Confucianism, there are elements of a pathway to heaven and ideologies for ultimately transforming humanity. Here two poles in a Confucian continuum represent personal salvation through self-cultivation and a world redemption in the end (Taylor, 1990; Jin, 2014). An exemplary thinker was Kang Youwei, known as the Martin Luther of Confucianism. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries he attempted to modernize Confucianism and envisioned a utopian world where a world government replaced nation-states, public institutions replaced the family, women have equality with men, and the world was free of poverty



(Tay, 2010). The doctrine of the Three Suns was held by more salvationist sects, which divide the end times into three stages, each led by a different Buddha (Seiwert, 2003).

In the last two decades, mainland China has seen a revival of Confucian nationalism, which is viewed as a core component of national identity distinguished from Marxism and other foreign traditions like secular liberalism. Mao Zedong, China's first president, was fervently anti-Confucian and it was nearly 30 years later after his death in 1976 that President Hu Jintao revealed his "harmonious society" slogan in 2005 (but without mentioning Confucius by name). It was only in 2014 that Xi Jinping unveiled official policies supporting Confucian nationalism. Through the Confucius Institute, China has embarked on the world's largest public diplomacy project, with over 1,000 institutes and classrooms in more than 120 countries. As China's regional and even global ambitions become more apparent, it seems that a Confucius-informed nationalism will be paramount for Chinese domestic and foreign policy, and even possibly an alternative to Western liberalism (Babones, 2017; Bell, 2014; Wang, 2012).

### **Islamic eschatologies and nationalism**

According to Chittick (2008), the Koran, related Hadiths, and Islamic traditions speak of death, the end of the world, and resurrection more than any other major religion. The "last day" and "day of resurrection" see God descending and interrogating humanity, asking not what they did, but why. The Koran is incredibly graphic in describing both heaven and hell, painting vivid pictures of paradise for the worthy and perpetual fiery damnation for the wicked. The Koran's focus on the afterlife and the end of the world is so paramount that most ethical teachings found throughout Islam must be read from this perspective. For example, significant portions of Islamic thought emphasise the coming of the Dajjāl or antichrist and how to read the signs of the times (Bijlefeld, 2004).

If we look at Islam in two of the largest Muslim nations in Asia—Indonesia and Pakistan—we see some of the variations of the nexus between eschatologies and nationalism. In Indonesia, Islam has historically played a key role in defining politics, culture, and ideology, but has met resistance with the official state policy of Pancasila<sup>i</sup>, developed by President Sukarno shortly after the end of Japanese occupation in 1945. Indonesia pursued democratic reforms immediately following Suharto, the threat of Islamic populism was always an undercurrent in society. Former President Yudhoyono gave Islamists greater power in the early 2000s, which has caused current President Widodo to attempt to revive Pancasila as an alternative to conservative Islam to confront this threat (Abdullah, 2016; Souisa & Wulandari, 2017; Bouchier, 2019; and Arizona, 2019).

Pakistan has faced numerous problems with building a stable nation with a coherent national identity. Pakistan did attempt a modernist Muslim project between the late 1940s into the early 1970s, but as a relatively young state, Pakistan's birth is marked by a contentious religious nationalism. Providing a homeland for Muslims in India was the initial rationale for dividing Pakistan from India, but this identity was never enough to bring stability to the country, nor was developing a hostility directed at India. In short, Pakistanis are divided not only by different Islamic sects, but also by differences related to language, culture, class, and ethnicity (Jaffrelot, 2002; Paracha, 2018).

### **Christian eschatologies and nationalism**

Christianity's eschatology views time from a linear perspective, beginning with the creation of the universe and concluding with an internal life for the "saved". Christianity, like theistic Islam, contains powerful images of heaven and hell. For those who have accepted salvation through faith in Christ will be saved and those that reject him are damned to hell. This is a common eschatological understanding of most sects within Christianity. However, since there is only a small minority of Christians in Asia (using Pew's geography), let me focus on an influential Christian sub-culture in the United States with a disproportionate level of power that potentially influences the rest of Asia-Pacific. These groups believe in Dominionism or Christian Reconstructionism, a form of theocracy calling for control over political and social institutions and are enamoured with the "end times" and actively devote themselves to understanding the signs of the times. These followers have consistently been duped by numerous end times prophecy stating the end was near and God's judgment was at hand. Hurricanes, tornados, floods and other natural disasters are commonly attributed to some "sinful" elements of society—whether the gay community, secular liberalism, ban on prayer in school, Muslims, immigrants—some scapegoat is identified (Clarkson, 2016; McVicar, 2013).

This version of Christian eschatology has adherents throughout all branches of the United States government, including Senator Ted Cruz; former governors Sarah Palin, Mike Huckabee, and Rick Perry; presidential candidate Michele Bachman, former secretary of state, Mike Pompeo to name a few. There is also an entire economy based on the end times—movies, book series, magazines, media platforms, conferences, and websites provide eschatological and religious nationalism information to this mass base across the country (Davidson & Harris, 2006). The recent move of the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was due in part to the lobbying efforts of evangelicals and Christian theocrats, who see this relocation as aligning closely with perceived predictions and signs of Christ's return. While Israelis and evangelicals celebrated, Palestinians and the rest of the Arab world added one more element of distrust toward U.S. foreign policy (Burton, 2017).

Russia is also not immune to some form of Christian Dominion theology. Putin's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has caused fury across the world for the atrocities committed by Russian forces. Putin appears to be guided by some form of religious nationalism and a strategy to take the world back to a cold war era by making Russia great again. Scholars are trying to piece together Putin's end goal, but during his recent patriotic concert, Putin invoked Fedor Ushakov, a Russian admiral from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, now turned Orthodox saint, to speak of glorifying Russia (Ignatius, 2022). In 2013 when visiting Kyiv, Putin declared that God wanted to bring Russia and Ukraine together. Earlier in 2012 in an address to the Russian Parliament, Putin claimed he was fulfilling the goals initially started by Vladimir the Great, the 10<sup>th</sup>-century ruler of Rus (present-day Ukraine). Tikhon Shevkunov, a Russian Orthodox Bishop pronounced, "He who loves Russia and wishes it well can only pray for Vladimir, placed at the head of Russia by God's will." Shevkunov hopes to inspire a connection here between the two Vladimirs (Snyder, 2022).

I include these examples from the United States and Russia for three reasons. First, both countries technically border the Pacific. Second, they both have high engagement with other Asia countries. Finally, they both represent the power of underlying eschatologies and religious nationalism that when enacted via foreign policy or war, the repercussions are felt across all of Asia and beyond.

### **The Bad, the Good, and the Ugly**

Religious nationalism may represent the shadow side of global faith communities and represent philosophical or ideological worldviews and paradigms that align closely with particular eschatologies arising from various orthodoxies, i.e., accepted norms and beliefs within religious creeds. But faith entails more than just orthodoxy (right beliefs). There is also orthopraxy (right action and prescribed religious practices) and orthopathy (having the right affections). A more colloquial version is belief, behaviour, and belonging or attitudes, actions, and affections. A more informal and corporeal perspective entails the head, hands, and heart (Lichty, 2016). The aggregation of religious heads, hands, and hearts can ultimately lead to the good, the bad, or the ugly.

The previous discussion on religious nationalism contained embedded components of all three of these parts of religion. A helpful framework for better understanding this holistic connection of the head, heart, and hands is Theory U, a macro-level concept of two dichotomous conditions that humanity can operate from. Developed by Otto Scharmer (2013) and his team at the Presencing Institute, Theory U refers to these conditions as a social pathology/economies of destruction and social emergence/economies of creation, e.g., the bad and the good. More recently he defines these conditions as social grammars of either destruction or co-creation (2022a/b). Figure 7 shows the upper pathway characterised by the closing and freezing of mind, heart, and will, leading to ignorance, hate, and fear, or what he references as "six debilitating social and cognitive practices:

- Deceiving: not telling the truth (disinformation and lies)
- De-sensing: not feeling others (stuck inside one's own echo chamber)
- Absencing: disconnecting from purpose (depression, a disconnect from one's highest future)
- Blaming others: an inability to recognize one's own role through the eyes of others
- Violence: direct, structural, and attentional violence

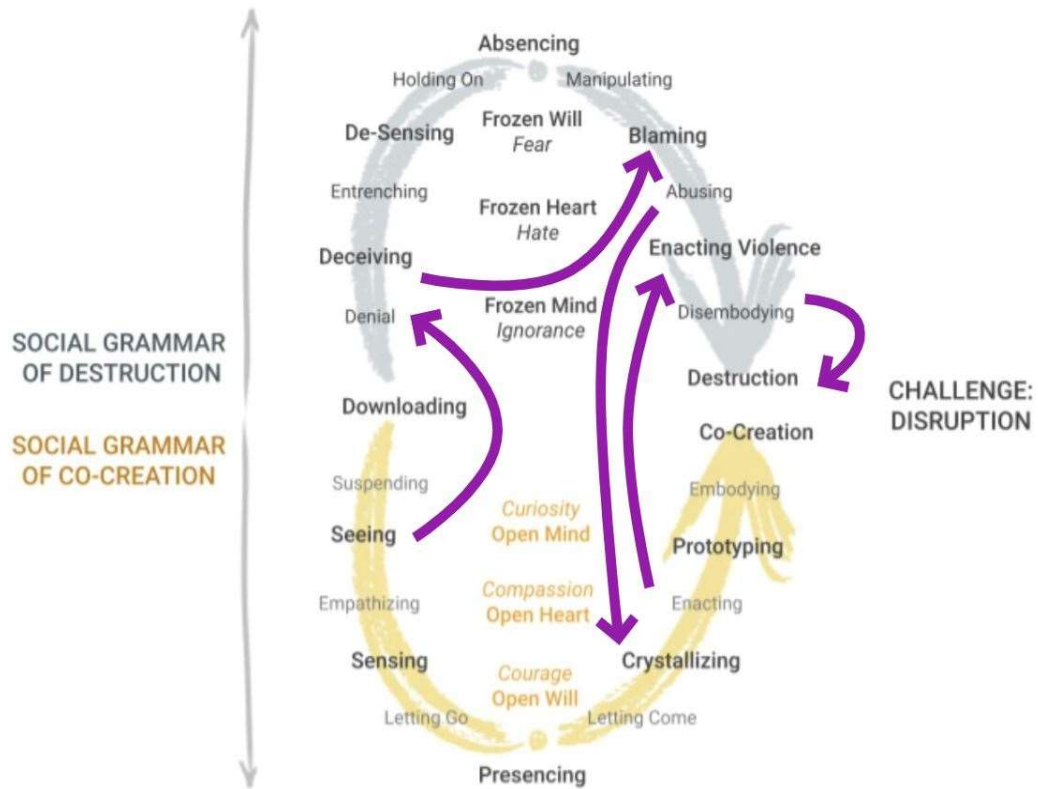


Fig. 7: Theory U (Scharmer, 2022a)

Destruction: of planet, of people, of Self” (Scharmer, 2022a)

The journey represented in the bottom half of the visual is one based on openness, courage, compassion, and curiosity, and contains six life-affirming practices:

- Seeing: suspending judgment (seeing with an open mind, heart, and will)
- Sensing: active sensing (widening perception from objects to source)
- Presencing: letting go of the old (allowing the future to emerge)
- Crystallizing: creation of intentional energy (envisioning from the future, not ego)
- Prototyping: implementing and learning by doing (facing the resistance)
- Performing: convening the right set of stakeholders for co-creating

Notice that both conditions start from a position of downloading, which refers to the continuation and adoption of old mental habits and reproducing patterns of the past. A crucial juncture occurs when societies determine if they want to continue downloading a journey of absencing and using a social grammar of destruction or pivot and embark on the inverse journey of presencing and co-creation. Climate change, conflict, and Covid-19 all represent these contemporary pivotal junctures.

However, Scharmer clarifies that in reality, we personally live in tension between the two conditions—sometimes living from our highest personal and collective potentialities (presencing), but sometimes getting stuck in old habits of downloading from the past (absencing) (2013). This last admission by Scharmer finally brings in the “ugly” or what could be defined as the collective movement between the good/presencing and the bad/absencing. The purple arrows capture this weaving between the upper and lower social grammars and represent a hypothetical scenario for religious elite and their adherents where:

- Seeing proves too painful and/or difficult so it is easier to deny reality
- If you are a leader, you can move to deceive yourself and then others

- Blaming others for problems in society is now viewed as an option
- Abuse then follows but even becomes crystalised (but not in the positive sense)
- With a worldview set on the superiority of your sect, violence can follow
- Violence then begets destruction

It is in this messy space that many religious adherents find themselves; and while a certain eschatology might attempt to guide believers, the reality is that humanity mixes their devil side with their angelic side. The purple pathway also underscores the interconnection and progression from the head (seeing, deceiving, worldview superiority), to the heart (blaming others, hate), and eventually to the hands (abuse, violence, destruction).

### **Ways Forward: Utilising the 3D Futures K.U.B.E.**

In this final section, I present the 3D Futures K.U.B.E (Knowing Universal Belief Ecosystems), a three-dimensional model to further explore the nexus of eschatologies and nationalism in the Asia-Pacific region (and beyond). The acronym is to convey the importance of religious literacy (or what I term “knowing universal belief ecosystems”) in conjunction with futures literacy. The three-dimensional aspect enables a broadening of scenario exploration. As Jane McGonigal (2022) argues in her new book *Imaginable*, mapping out and exploring looming potential scenarios not only helps adapt and prepare us for change, but also equip us to see the hidden curveballs embedded in the future. The K.U.B.E. adds another tool in support of McGonigal’s argument by offering three axes to consider how religious eschatologies and nationalism will engage with future challenges.<sup>ii</sup> It also contributes to the Integral Futures framework by showing how movement throughout the K.U.B.E.s’ eight quadrants also represents transition through the framework’s four quadrants.<sup>iii</sup>

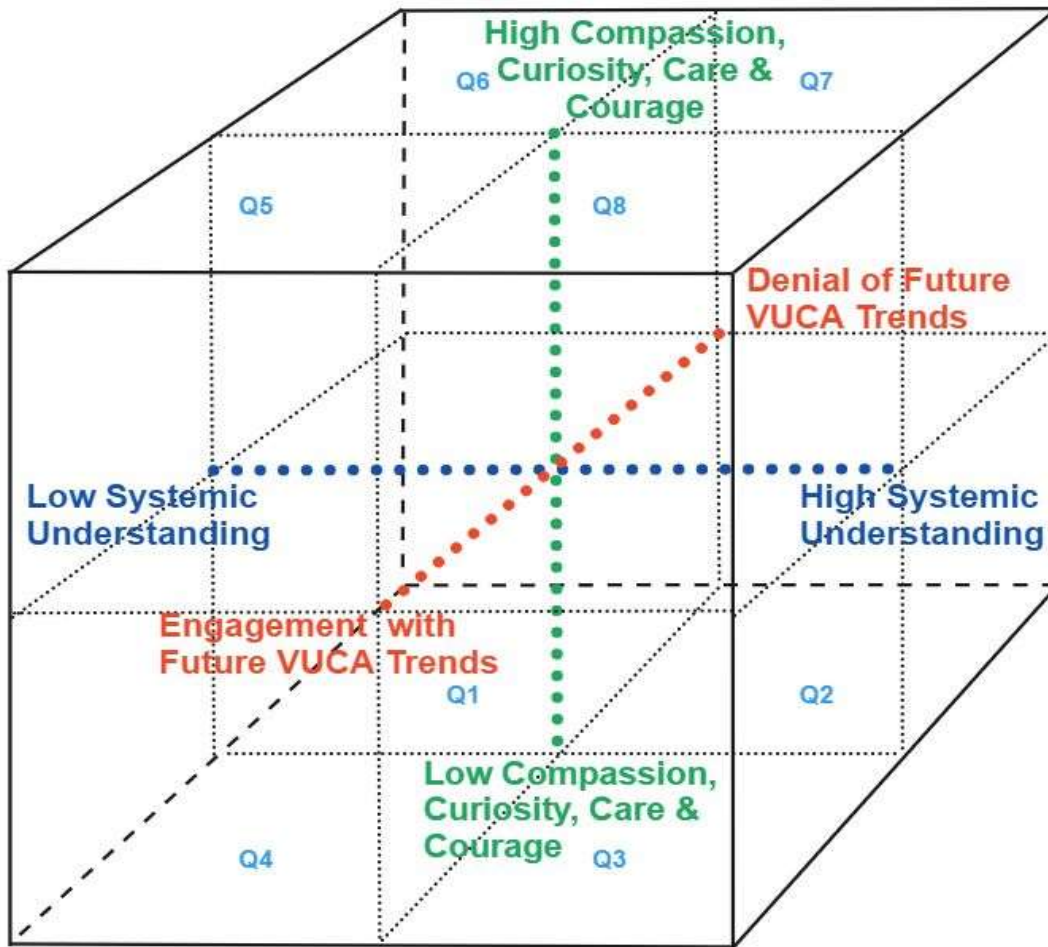


Fig. 8: 3D Futures K.U.B.E (author’s own)

The x-axis (blue) represents a continuum of systemic understanding (systems thinking, complexity/chaos theory, understanding “wicked” problems, etc.). The y-axis (green) captures a continuum related to actual religious practices (think of the heart and hands analogy), where the top portion represents high compassion, curiosity, care, and courage and the bottom signifies the opposite. Finally, the z-axis (orange) adds a third dimension and denotes engagement with future trends characterised as VUCA, e.g., climate change and views on COVID-19 vaccination represent two examples where different faith communities have practised denial and non-engagement. The eight resulting quadrants are labelled for easier reference, e.g., the bottom four quadrants are labelled Q1-Q4 starting from the back left, coming around clockwise; and the top four are Q5-Q8, starting from the front, top left, continuing clockwise. Thus, Q1 and Q8 demonstrate opposite spaces in the 3D model.

The continuum for the x and z axes is relatively straightforward, but more explanation of the y-axis may be helpful. The continuum is related to the “perennial tradition” i.e. the idea that all religions have common and recurring themes related to love, union with the divine, care, kindness, compassion for one another, humility, etc.— or what Aldous Huxley called “the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical to, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being; the thing is immemorial and universal” (1945, vii). In short, this tradition best captures the continuum reflecting various levels of union with a higher power, with other humans, and with reality in general (Holland, 2020; Rohr et al., 2014).<sup>iv</sup>

### Comparative Analysis of Opposite Quadrants

It is beyond the scope of this study for a complete comparative analysis of all eight quadrants, but a short analytical summary comparing quadrants one and two (Q1/Q2) with quadrant eight (Q8) can demonstrate the utility of the 3D Futures K.U.B.E. Scharmer's Theory U captures some of the dichotomies between Q1 and Q8. Q1 would compare to Absencing and represents little care for humanity, non-engagement (even denial) with the existential challenges facing society, and limited systemic understanding of both the problem and solutions. Q8 exemplifies Presencing and the final destination after journeying from low systemic understanding to high, from denial of VUCA elements of the future to engagement, and from limited compassion and care to an open heart, wise head, and serving hands.

However, the challenges we face in the future are going to be compounded by groups of people residing in Q1 and cunning, shrewd, and charismatic leaders found in Q2. In the previous discussion of eschatologies and nationalism, I examined how religious imaginaries combined with nationalistic politics can morph into xenophobic, fundamentalist pathways that download "used futures" to trap religious followers into thinking some historical golden era can be rebuilt, albeit with strong autocratic strategies. Maheshvarananda illustrates this well when he states a formula for political success is to "preach to the poor and unemployed that the cause of their suffering is the exploitation done by followers of another religion who are better off" (1999). Another example is the "Rapture Anxious Crowd" within white, evangelical circles in the United States, who in their enthusiasm to hasten the return of Christ, their eschatological belief ecosystem foresees and could almost require nuclear war, environmental destruction, and general global chaos (or anything symbolic of Armageddon). Yet conveniently, in some evangelical eschatologies contain an escape system for the "saved," which is the rapture from the earth before all hell breaks loose. Religious subscribers to this view of impending doom (not just end of the world scenarios, but any manufactured danger to one's religion and/or identity via rapid changes occurring in society) are easily exploited by religious and nationalist hucksters and often lead the religious version of what Cherian George calls "hate spin" i.e., the "manufactured vilification or indignation, used as a political strategy that exploits group identities to mobilize supporters and coerce opponents" (2016, p. 4).

As demonstrated earlier, all religions face these phenomena. Wikipedia's informal list of predicted apocalyptic events contains over 170 claims beginning in the first millennium CE (2022). What is frustrating is that these forms of escapism result in apathy and/or disengagement with the VUCA challenges in our midst and are unfortunately perpetuated by religious "prophets" claiming to know some date for an apocalyptic end to the world. As humanity engages with an increasingly VUCA world, more people, including youth, may return in mass to the world religions, where they think they can find solace and peace of mind (Chen, 1999). However, these religions are generally ill-equipped to deal with the present injustices. They are more preoccupied with either fantasy-filled salvation scenarios and/or want to reestablish some "Golden Era" of the faith.

What is needed is a greater movement, a nudge, a new critical mass to Q8 and embarking on the Presencing pathway. But the journey to this quadrant is not easy. Thich Nhat Hanh and the team at the Collective Change Lab capture this challenge succinctly:

People identify completely with one side, one ideology. To understand the suffering and the fear of a citizen of another country, we have to become one with him. To do so is dangerous—we will be suspected by both sides. But if we don't do it, if we align ourselves with one side or the other, we will lose our chance to work for peace. Reconciliation is to understand both sides, to go to one side and describe the suffering being endured by the other side, and then to go to the other side and describe the suffering being endured by the first side. Doing only that will be a great help for peace (Hanh, 1987, p. 73).

Transforming systems towards justice and equity means changing people in the system in fundamentally consciousness-altering ways. Unless and until then, a system's structures will continue to produce the same outcomes. Systems, after all, are made up of people. Once we recognise that simple truth, it becomes obvious that we will never catalyze the profound and necessary shifts in people's beliefs, and behaviors, and relationships while remaining solely in the realm of the rational and the analytical (Collective Change Lab, 2022).

## Concluding Thoughts

Any recipe for change needs to remain cognizant of these deep-seated worldviews and related eschatologies and any subsequently informed nationalisms, for they will guide humanity's search for meaning and preparation for addressing the threats that may jeopardize our collective future. This article aims to contribute tools and approaches to understanding the worldviews and mental operating systems that drive the global elite and any enraptured followers they can dupe. Where do we go from here? I have four suggestions to guide future action.

First, the current youth population in Asia-Pacific will be driving the agenda in 20 years. According to the UN, a decade ago, 60% of the global youth population (750m) resided in the Asia-Pacific (2012). Will this youth population continue practicing the religious traditions they inherit at birth? Will technology and the internet/digital era facilitate greater journeys of self-discovery and increased agency in choosing an identity? How will these generations engage with climate change, conflict, and future pandemics? Will social media continue to build digital bubbles for this group? Or will these youth collectively rise to face VUCA trends in new and innovative ways that combine digital and analogue approaches? How will their religious beliefs help or hinder the development of a more sustainable and equitable future?

Second, we need to continue to emphasize the importance of the Integral Futures framework, specifically in the interior world represented in the left column. I see much of the foresight and futures sector focused on the right column, where this exterior objective/interobjective world is perceived to be easier to understand and measure. But it is the left column, consisting of the worldviews, paradigms, eschatologies, and mental operating systems that are driving the signals, drivers, and trends that impact the exterior found in the right column. The 3D Futures K.U.B.E. can assist futurists with understanding where vast portions of the world population reside (possibly most in Q5, Q1, and Q3). The wily religious and political leadership (Q2) trying to spook followers into their personal psychopathologies might be the biggest threat to Q8.

Third, this article presents a large ecosystem representing an Asia-Pacific terrain inhabited by numerous systems. But if we want to transform these systems (social, ecological, political, economic, religious, etc.), how and where do we even begin? The great system theorist, Donella Meadows (1999), posited 12 leverage points or places to intervene in a system, which she listed in order of increasing effectiveness.<sup>v</sup> Unfortunately, a lot of contemporary systems change efforts focus on her first five leverage points, which are easy to implement, but not truly effective at bringing sustainable change. Her last five (5-rules of the system; 4-power to add, change, evolve, or self-organize system structures; 3-goals of the system; 2-mindset or paradigms in which the system arises; and 1-the power to transcend paradigms) are where true systems transformation occurs, but goals, paradigms, and the power to transcend are all core features of worldviews and the subjective/intersubjective left column of Integral Futures. If we want to see leverage in these five places, we need to be more deliberate in incorporating these two quadrants into our foresight practices.

Finally, as we build futures literacy around the world, we also need to make sure it not only addresses all quadrants of the Integral Futures framework, but it also should include a religious literacy component that dives deep into the spiritual "operating systems" that drive attitudes, affections, and actions across the Asia-Pacific region. Becoming conversant with the various religious beliefs and practices—truly understanding the head, heart, and hands of the billions who practice some form of faith—will facilitate the journey proposed by Scharmer, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Collective Change Lab.

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## Notes

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- i- Pancasila consists of the Five Principles: Indonesian nationalism; humanism; democracy; social prosperity; and belief in one God.
- ii- The basis of this model is from a two-dimension Cartesian graph developed by Doran (2022), who used an x-axis for levels of systemic understanding and the y-axis for levels of care.
- iii- The model's three axes can also be used to represent other continuums related to scenario building.
- iv- Some scholars, such as Stephen Prothero (2008, 2011), argue there is too much variance in world religions to find any common theme.
- v- Her places to intervene in a system, listed in this increasing order of effectiveness, include: 12) Constants, parameters numbers; 11) the sizes of buffers and other stabilizing stocks; 10) the structure of material stocks and flows; 9) the lengths of delays, relative to the rate of system change; 8) the strength of negative feedback loops, relative to the impacts they are trying to correct against; 7) the gain around driving positive feedback loops; 6) the structure of information flows; 5) the rules of the system; 4) the power to add, change, evolve, or self-organize system structures; 3) the goals of the system; 2) the mindset or paradigm out of which the system—its goals, structure, rules, delays, parameters—arises; 1) the power to transcend paradigms (Meadows, 1999).