Book Chapter

From Dukkha to Sukha: Mandalic Thinking in Constructing a Positive Peace

Rosita Dellios

Faculty of Society & Design, Bond University, Gold Coast 4229, Australia

*Corresponding Author: Rosita Dellios, Faculty of Society & Design, Bond University, Gold Coast 4229, Australia

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Abstract

The pursuit of peace in international relations requires an integration of key perspectives—inclusive of the developmental, environmental, political and cultural—through which to transform conflict into a positive dynamic of societal flourishing. By examining the foundational teachings of peace researcher Johan Galtung and subsequent insights and systems investigating global peace, a more comprehensive evaluation is gained. This allows for the representation of an integrated vision of peace through a cosmogram known as *mandala* in Hindu-Buddhist spiritual philosophy. The *mandala*, while grounded developmentally in Indic cosmology, represents a transformation technology that is universal across time and cultures. Buddhist concepts in support of this methodological platform are *dukkha* (suffering), *sukha* (happiness), the doctrine of 'dependent origination' and the associated concept of impermanence. The findings of this exercise are that peace needs to be approached through multiple perspectives, that it has cosmological significance in its own right, as shown through Galtungian and Buddhist thought, and that it is a process that is constantly renewed.

Keywords

Peace; Johan Galtung; Buddhism; Mandala; International Relations

1. Introduction

Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung used the Buddhist analogy of moving "from *dukkha* to *sukha*", meaning from suffering to happiness*,* in the pursuit of his distinctive contribution to peace studies—that of a *positive* peace [1,2]. By the time he died, in 2024, at the age of 93, geopolitical upheaval was characterised by open warfare in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan and elsewhere. A cold war between the United States and China was on the horizon, with potential conflict zones in Taiwan, the South China Sea and the East China Sea, near Japan. The number of conflicts worldwide was reported to be the highest since World War II [3].

The quest for peace, in its various manifestations from the cessation of armed conflict to the building of peaceful societies, remains ever-present. It also beckons a closer examination of the Buddhist contribution to the philosophy and teachings of peace, so well captured in the phrase "from *dukkha* to *sukha*". Beyond it being a memorable turn of phrase, "*dukkha* to *sukha*" represents a transformational process that translates to a positive state of peace for society. It also transcends conflict rather than eliminating it, as Galtung states:

Conflicts can rarely be "resolved" in the sense of making them disappear totally, but they can and must be "transformed", so that they are carried out peacefully, without violence, whether verbal or physical. "Transcending" a conflict means going beyond it, by overcoming the underlying contradiction between clashing goals, so that all parties' needs and aspirations can be fulfilled.

(Galtung [4], para 1)

In recognition that conflict cannot be eliminated but can be transcended and transformed into a positive peace, this article examines the conceptualisation of peace through a Buddhist lens by employing the Buddhist cultural technology of *mandala*. A term common to both the Pali and Sanskrit languages of ancient India1, *mandala* is a circular diagram of relationships within a symmetrical space. It is used here to visualise how a positive peace may be constructed. This exercise entails contextualising peace as a product of 'dependent origination' (Pali: *paticca-samuppada*, Skt: *pratityasamutpada*). Other translations in English include 'codependent origination', 'dependent arising' and the shortened form, 'co-arising'. Rather than resembling a linear cause-and-effect phenomenon, 'dependent origination' comes closer to systems theory in the West (see [5]), as it is multicausal and process-based. It is well represented in the *Bhavacakka* (Pali; *Bhavacakra*: Skt) *mandala*, and the concept of impermanence of all beings—*anicca* (Pali; *anitya*: Skt). Accordingly, while the transition from *dukkha* (Pali; *duḥkha*: Skt) to *sukha* (Pali and Skt) represents a trajectory of progress, the two are connected.

Identifying the obstacles associated with *dukkha* constitutes the enabling condition for the negative-to-positive peace dynamic. It also operates the other way, in that a positive peace makes a negative peace sustainable by having addressed such 'obstacles' (including deep-rooted sources of conflict). This can be appreciated in what does not happen, that is, by diminishing the prospect for a return to violence. Not only are there different directions in the negative–positive conceptualisation of peace but also varying patterns and degrees by which they coexist even within one locality [6].

In his paper "Peace and Buddhism", Galtung [1] discusses several Buddhist concepts. One is *anatta* (Pali; *anatman*: Skt), meaning there is no individual soul or unchanging self but a unity with others, with nature and across time (through karma and rebirth), unlike the *atta* (Pali; atman: Skt) or 'self' of Hinduism (from which Buddhism had broken away in the 5th Century BCE). Thus, *anatta* does not mean an absence of a sense of inner life but rather that it is necessarily connected to the rest of existence. This connectedness leads to an associated doctrine of not harming others. *Ahimsa* (Pali and Skt) is commonly translated as non-violence, and Galtung identifies it most with Mahatma Gandhi's mode of peace-seeking [1]. It is a doctrine familiar to Indic religious philosophy, especially Jainism, where *ahimsa* is elevated as the path to enlightenment. By refraining from violence, *ahimsa* is not simply a passive philosophy of salvation but shows an implicit compassion that fosters "positive relations", and hence a positive peace [1].

Elsewhere, Galtung elaborates on the conceptual distinction between negative peace as the "absence of violence" and positive peace as "social justice" [7]. Social justice is also featured in postmodern peace and conflict studies [8], as it refers to the problem of "structural violence", a concept which was also introduced by Galtung [7] to indicate institutionalised racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. These are based on exploitative and repressive economic and political structures. Moreover, he added "cultural violence" to elaborate on this, defining it as "the symbolic sphere of our existence … that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence", be it

in religion, ideology, language, art, media and education, for example [2,9]. Essentially, there are "economic and political structures of exploitation and repression" [10] to which cultural violence acts as an endorsing norm.

Therefore, not only should peace define a state of affairs that goes beyond the cessation of violence or hostilities but also needs to lead to a just peace. This can entail *fighting* (hence using conflict for positive change in the social–legal structure) for the rights of the marginalised. Indeed, Standish [8] points to upper case *Social Justice* in postmodern Critical Theory to distinguish "narratives that marginalize and 'subjugate' peoples (plural) who hold various group membership" from lower case *social justice* in "an egalitarian and humanizing pursuit of universal human capacity for all people (singular)". She calls the modernists "doves" in seeking to transcend conflict and the postmodernists "hammers" in wanting to dismantle the system in the cause of emancipation. Interestingly, Galtung speaks to both. His integrative tendencies are well attuned to the holistic character of Eastern thought.

This raises the key theme of the peace problématique, which will be examined shortly.

2. Theoretical Framework

The objective of this study is to find a way "from *dukkha* to *sukha*", as Galtung puts it. Such a path is proposed via the *mandala* methodology. Hence, the article's title distinguishes 'mandalic thinking' in the task of 'constructing a positive peace'. This addresses a set of related research questions: How to employ Buddhist thinking in constructing a positive peace? How to incorporate a wider Western perspective that already acknowledges Buddhist thinking in the theory and practice of peace? How can this be of service to international relations and peace scholarship? The resultant theoretical framework is therefore an international relations study that seeks insights into the problem of peace by examining Buddhist and Galtungian ideas for constructing a positive peace in the prevailing international system. Such a construction is performed

through a practical application of an Eastern device—the Buddhist *mandala*—rendered into a template for peacebuilding in the contemporary world. By doing so, this article sharpens existing conceptual tools for advancing peace on the planet and provides a platform to test these concepts in real-world case studies.

Within this framework, the article proceeds as follows. The first section discusses the peace problématique and introduces Galtung's concepts. The second section moves to the pursuit of peace in international relations (IR) via Galtungian, Buddhist and allied thinking. It does so by addressing the anarchic structure of the international system with its classical geopolitical features, accompanied by a Buddhist interpretation via the *Bhavachakka*, a 'realist' text, to borrow from mainstream 'Realist' IR theory. This leads to the third section, focused on moving "from *dukkha* to *sukha*" through the introduction of the Buddhist *mandala* as a visual means for representing ideas of a positive peace. The fourth section illustrates how these advances in peace research that include Buddhist philosophy can translate to practice. The example used is of a potentially global conflict across various levels, from the domestic to the planetary. It concerns the two superpower rivals, the United States and China. The concluding section considers the overall implication of the research to the broader field of international relations and peace scholarship.

2.1. The Peace Problématique

Peace, with its descriptive divergences and convergences, scales of order (personal to planetary) and orders of meaning (peace in diverse types of world ordering, for example, Pax Romana, the classical Chinese *Tianxia,* meaning 'all under heaven' [see [11,12], through to United Nations ideals of cooperative peace and world problem-solving) qualifies as a "problématique". More than the English word 'problem', the French word problématique has been adopted in the English-speaking academic world to refer to a cluster of problems or inquiries within a particular issue area. It represents a "landscape of attention" that not only raises the problem of peace as both the

"dove" of nonviolence and a "hammer" of emancipation to overcome structural violence in the form of gender, racial and other embedded discriminations [8], but is also definitionally diverse. It is both empirical and normative, or quantitative and qualitative, a phenomenon or a process.

Illustrative of the more empirical view of peace, though with both qualitative and quantitative indicators, is the *Global Peace Index* (GPI). It was established in 2008 by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), headquartered in Sydney, with offices around the world. As "an independent, non-partisan, non-profit think tank dedicated to shifting the world's focus to peace as a positive, achievable, and tangible measure of human well-being and progress", IEP is concerned with "measuring and communicating the economic value of peace" [3]. The GPI uses 23 indicators measuring "the state of peace" across various levels and degrees, these being: societal (safety and security), conflict (domestic and international), militarisation and, as a new separate measure, "global military capability that incorporates military sophistication, technology, and battle readiness" [3].

The negative–positive peace dualism has been criticised as encouraging a sequential view of peace and downplaying the importance of negative peace which, in signifying the end of physical violence, represents a major accomplishment in its own right [6,13]. However, as will be discussed below, the positive and negative, are inextricably linked. Structural violence, too, has received criticism from the viewpoint that it discounts agency while blaming a lack of peace on the "unintended consequences of an ill-defined 'system'" [6], and that it diminishes the importance of personal peace or "peace within" [13]. Critics of Galtung ironically call upon Buddhist teachings to demonstrate these critiques. Thus, Hansen [13] draws attention to Vietnamese Buddhist Thich Nhat Han, who emphasised the cultivation of "peaceful values, and to demonstrate peace through our words and actions" as providing "a necessary foundation for peace work" (215). Sharp [6] uses the Buddhist saying that "concepts are just fingers pointing at the moon" to warn that "there is a risk of taking the finger for the moon" in the case of the "negative-positive polarity" being

mistaken for peace when it is only a concept (125). Finally (but not exhaustively), Galtung's work has been criticised methodologically as being over-reliant on taxonomy "in a world that is essentially continuous" and subject to "randomness in social systems", which further emphasises his dichotomous thinking [14].

While there is validity in these critiques, Galtung—for all his descriptive and analytical detail—paints a multidimensional picture of the notion of peace. In leaving nothing out (as far as that is possible), he instigated peace studies as an academic field2. From there, he advanced the cause of a peace profession as the next stage evolving from peace research. This would have all the attributes of a profession: skills, code of conduct and accountability to clients and others [15]. The peace profession, which may be counted as one of the professions of the future, would be like the health profession. The Hippocratic oath, he says, demands of health professionals "to treat friend, foe and Other alike", and follows that by saying that the field of peace studies is "promoting a value more important than national interests: PEACE" [15]. He adds that the study of conflict is "as basic to peace studies as anatomy, physiology and pathology to health studies" so that the peace professional can work with various levels. These "span the whole spectrum from micro via meso and macro to mega conflicts", from "individual psychology" to global relations [15].

As if to reinforce the earlier observation of Galtung's multidimensional approach, he follows up with the following advice to those who are overly attentive to "transcending state borders" as the main challenge: "There are other fault-lines in the human construction: gender and generation, race and nation, class (political, economic, military, cultural depending on the power involved), environment" [15].

In looking at peace from the viewpoint of the practitioner/peace professional and not only the academic study of peace (like anatomy for the medical profession), Galtung uses the language of medicine as well: to bring about peace it is necessary to arrive at a conflict's diagnosis (analysis), prognosis ("whether the

system is capable of adequate Self-restoration") and therapy ("deliberate efforts by Self or Other to move the system back again toward some well-state") [2]. Then, there is the distinction between a curative therapy for negative peace and a preventive remedy for positive peace [2].

The whole concept of a peace professional and the diagnosis of the conflict 'disease' has much in common with Buddhist ideas. Working as a peace professional would be deemed 'right livelihood' for the laity, while the *Sangha* (Pali and Skt, Buddhist clerical community) would equate it with the professional dedication to the teachings and practice of Buddhism. Additionally, the foundational teaching of Buddhism, the "Four Noble Truths", takes on a medical metaphor by diagnosing the disease and prescribing the treatment. These "Truths" are: (1) *dukkha*, (2) the cause of *dukkha*, (3) the cessation of *dukkha* and (4) the way by which such cessation may be achieved—the "Eightfold Path" of right understanding, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and concentration [16,17].

So, while the peace problématique suggests there is not a single stable definition of peace but a range of perspectives through which to enquire about it, in Galtungian and Buddhist analysis there is a spectrum between negative and positive, from suffering to happiness—that is, peace is a process of transformation "from *dukkha* to *sukha*". This is developed below within the context of the international system.

2.2. The Buddhist Perspective, Galtungian Peace and the International System

Galtung writes in his Introduction to *Peace by Peaceful Means*: Life is capable of suffering (*dukkha*) violence done to the body and to the mind, referred to as physical and mental violence respectively. But life is also capable of experiencing bliss (*sukha*), the pleasure that comes to the body and the mind. Some might reserve the term 'positive peace' for that experience [2]. "*Dukkha* to *sukha*" represents a transformational process that, in recognition of there being no individual 'soul' (*anatta*) but an

interconnectedness of life, translates to a positive state of peace for society. The fact that Buddhism is not just a "religious doctrine" but also a socio-political philosophy, as Galtung points out [1], shows that it has more to offer than personal peace. Moreover, Galtung's thesis of transcending conflict rather than believing that it can be eliminated (Galtung [4], para. 1), is matched by Buddhism's 'wheel' (*chakka*: Pali; *chakra*: Skt) symbolism, in which the diversity of a complex system necessarily carries with it contradictions that would include conflict. "As the wheel rolls through time, new points come up on top and demand more attention", Galtung writes, "as the wheel spins the relationships between points are spun into an ever tighter web of thought and action" [1]. The wheel represents a holistic and dynamic totality [1]. As the 'Wheel of Life' (*Bhavachakka*) *mandala* (elaborated below) the wheel expounds on causal interdependence in pictorial form (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Bhavacakka Mandala [18].

Conflict is handled by addressing Buddhism's equivalent of negative peace (apprehending and working through *dukkha*) that builds towards and sustains a positive peace (*sukha*). This underlines the importance of grasping the meaning of *dukkha* or suffering and not being defined by it. Here is where *dukkha* is accompanied by *anatta* ('non-self', 'no soul') and *anicca* (impermanence). By not identifying with or being attached to the delusion of the self and permanence, it is possible to gain understanding that leads to a form of higher consciousness or higher-order 'Self'-realisation. This is where one identifies with the unity of being—the wheel of dynamic possibilities. By recognising the emptiness of appearances, a

person becomes 'self-less' as attachments and cravings fall away [11,19]. To Galtung, this represents "a state of constant sukha" and "would be highly compatible with the idea of peace" [1].

Joanna Macy [5] concurs when she points out that Buddhism "provides a structure of transformation, whereby it is held that suffering can be transcended and consciousness opened to that which is of irreducible value" (20). Thus, a Buddhist peace is not simply the triumph of good over evil in acts of battle or a retreat into solitude from its illusions and turbulence. Rather, in *World as Lover, World as Self*, Macy [20] moves from the time-honoured themes of regarding the world as a *battleground* and as a *trap* to two other images, also enduring, those of *lover* (or "life-giving partner") and even as an extension of the *self* [20]. Chinese philosophy also recognises this greater partnership of life and the "anthropocosmic" dimensions of self, as Tu Weiming has expressed it [21]; see also [22]. The ancient Chinese classic, the *Doctrine of the Mean* (section 22, trans. Robert Eno), places the human in "a triad with heaven and earth" [23]. Realising one's wider interconnectedness, inclusive of the planet, is what it is to become fully human, bestowing an "ethic of responsibility" [21] and promoting peace.

The difference with Buddhist teaching becomes evident when considering the *dukkha* end of the spectrum. Here, the focus is on Death via Mara, the Lord of Impermanence. To return to the medical metaphor so well favoured in Galtungian and Buddhist discourse, one needs to diagnose the disease. The diagnostic lens for this may be found in the *Bhavacakka mandala* (Figure 1). In this instance, the world as *battleground* becomes a battle against one's ego and escaping the *trap* of the ego's attachments. When thinking about peace, this necessarily applies to the world, which is also *self*.

The International System under the Lord of Impermanence
While *battleground* is represented in ideological adversarial terms, it can be extended to geopolitical battles over resources and seemingly non-ideological national-interest ventures. This is where structural violence creeps in as it demarcates the deserving (self-interested actor) from the non-deserving (weaker,

poorer or politically different) other. This *orientalising* effect on the differences also bestows moral dimensions to the Western world order through its narratives of power, as the sub-field of critical geopolitics has argued (see [24].

The world as *battleground* from this wider perspective informs international relations and its institutions, including the United Nations (UN), which was established in the aftermath of World War II. The Realist narrative sees states vying for power to survive and thrive in an 'anarchic' international system—that is, one without a central authority and in which sovereignty rests with the territorial state. Out of such a competitive security landscape arises the demand for peace and stability. This occurred after the First World War, when the League of Nations (1920–1946) was formed "to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security" [25]. Having failed to avert WWII, a successor organisation took over this role. The United Nations, with a strengthened capacity (including peacekeeping forces) and larger membership, has sought:

To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace [26].

The UN Charter goes on to address ways in which "to strengthen universal peace" through "respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples" (art. 1.2), as well as "encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion" (art. 1.3), and, pointedly from a mandalic world ordering perspective: "To be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends" (art. 1.4). The UN is part of a wider system to promote peace that includes third party negotiations such as faith-based diplomacy—a form

of Track II (unofficial) diplomacy when the traditional structures of diplomacy, Track I, are inadequate.

The title of a seminal work on international relations by Hans Morgenthau reflects the relationality of preparing for war while promoting peace: *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* [27]. The book was published in 1948, after the 20th Century's two world wars, which had seen unprecedented levels of destruction, including the use of the atomic bomb to end the war in the Pacific theatre of WWII. *Politics Among Nations* has remained a classic in the discipline of International Relations, as it describes the world as a *battlefield*, including during the Cold War. It remains relevant in the case of the US–China rivalry of recent times, as well as regional wars or 'flashpoints' around the globe. The fact that peace is a 'struggle' in today's world can be seen statistically in the annual *Global Peace Index*. Ranking countries according to their level of peacefulness using a variety of indicators, it found that there were 56 conflicts underway in 2023 and 97 countries had deteriorated in peacefulness in that year [3].

Conflict in its various manifestations may be fruitfully viewed through the Buddhist principle of 'dependent origination'. As noted above, the interdependent existence of all phenomena means that they are empty of their own existence and, therefore, contingent. Following Dellios' [28] lead in projecting traditional mandala technologies onto contemporary political phenomena, Maggie Grey conceptualised the international system in terms of the Buddhist *Bhavacakka* (the *Wheel of Life*), which dates to the 6th Century BCE in what is today northeastern India. She has written:

The *Wheel of Life* … provides a violent global spectacle: monstrous death tyrannizing life, causing pain, conditioning terror. A realist paradigm in Oriental silks, this ancient cartoon of the human condition implies not only the death of individuals but of states and empires, worlds and world-views [29].

The Wheel is embraced by *Mara*, Lord of Impermanence. Beyond the Wheel, the figure pointing at the moon signifies the

possibility of overcoming the conditions of the Wheel, which in international relations or the socio-political dimension of

Buddhist teachings, would equate to peace.

- Grey explains:

Death, the [visual] text proclaims, is the only superpower; Death dominates the global community and all its productions: human bodies, ideologies, foreign policies and realms of power. The doctrine of Codependent Origination stresses the fact that no political event: not a weapons sale, not a foreign policy determination, not an act producing terror, occurs for its own sake: all political phenomena are dependent in their origination and within that dependency, the primary stimuli are ignorance, greed and aggression [29].

Also termed delusion, desire and aggression, the 'three poisons' or 'three fallibilities' are symbolically drawn at the nave of the *Bhavachakka*, with delusion represented by the pig, desire (in the form of greed) by the rooster and aggression by the snake. Delusion in international relations would represent a failure to apprehend the reality of global interdependence, the contingent nature of all security, be it traditional or non-traditional (such as climate change and pandemics). All of these are in a process of mutual conditioning, so that an attempt to solve one problem will not work as effectively as would a combined approach. This is evidenced in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015. It led to the promulgation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), consisting of three pillars (environmental, social and economic sustainability), 17 goals (the SDGs) and 169 targets associated with the goals. The SDGs are not only concerned with quantifying targets but represent a qualitative change in how development is conceived (in all its complexity) and pursued (including through a change in social and individual behaviours). Socio-economic goals such as Quality Education (no. 4), Gender Equality (no. 5), Reduced Inequalities (no 10), Sustainable Cities and Communities (no. 11), Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (no. 16) and Partnerships for the Goals (no. 17) all contribute to

transformative change. Without this understanding, sustainability would operate under the *delusion* of permanence.

In other words, major global challenges to peace cannot be achieved just by setting national SDG targets and using incentives and penalties to change corporate behaviour, for example. Rather, a deeper perception and understanding of the shared impact of routine human actions is needed to widen the motivation of individuals to embrace the needs of other people, vulnerable communities and of nature itself. Otherwise, the appearance of change via rules and goals substitutes for the substance of change through interconnectedness and behaviour.

The second fallibility, desire as greed, may be transposed to international relations in the form of hegemonic ambition as well as an economic system that has neglected the planet, most of its people (especially in the Global South) and human-centred values. These conditions explain the urgent need for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The third fallibility, aggression, primarily denotes militarism but also dogma and social injustice. Galtung's concepts of direct, structural and cultural violence come to mind, as does the medical metaphor of diagnosing the 'disease' in preparation for a prescription which, via the *Bhavachakka*, would entail:

political action that acknowledges the interdependence of the global community (thus confounding ignorance), political action that focuses national interests on needs rather than desires (thus confounding greed), and political action that eschews violence including structural violence (thus confounding aggression), is political action that will generate international peace and human security [29].

2.3. From Dukkha to Sukha: Exploring the Mandala

This calls for consideration of a different kind of *mandala*. 'Deity' and 'palace' *mandalas*, unlike the *Bhavacakka's* centre featuring the three poisons/fallibilities, are representations of a therapeutic journey inwards towards *sukha*. The shift is one from a 'realist' core in the *Bhavaccaka* to an 'idealist' spiritual condition (deity) and sovereign (palace) design (see Figure 2). They equate with Macy's [5] world as *lover*, world as *self*.

Figure 2: The Avalokiteshwara Mandala [30].

But first, what is a *mandala*? Simply, it is a diagram of relationships. It represents an inter-relational whole, a cosmogram composed of concentric forms. Commonly depicting Hindu and Buddhist cosmologies, *mandala* can refer to a political system made up of a circle of states (see the Arthasastra,

trans. [31])or a meditational diagram with the deity representing a Buddhist quality, such as compassion, in the centre [11,19]. There may also be a political reading of a spiritual mandala in terms of a 'spiritual' state. Besides reflecting "relations between royalty and the sacred world ever since the dawn of Indian civilization" [32], more precisely it suggests a legitimation of engaging in worldly affairs of power and governance. This is understandable, as direct and structural violence has a long legacy.

Warfare and an exploitative feudal system prevailed during the Buddha's time. Living under such a system, it was a case of "emulating its form while subverting its goals. Thus the mandala represents a 'spiritual' state" and may be viewed as "both a mystical condition and a political reality" [33]. Indeed, according to tradition, the *Bhavachakka mandala* served a diplomatic purpose. This occurred in the kingdom of Magadha (in modern Bihar), where the historical Buddha, Gautama Siddhartha, lived and attained enlightenment. The courtly texts of Magadha and Buddhist chronicles tell the story of Magadha's King Bimbisara (c. 543–c. 491 BCE) requesting the Buddha for a diplomatic gift to reciprocate an allied king's gift of an "invincible armour" [29,34]. The Buddha's response was to have a *mandala* constructed that taught the doctrine of 'dependent origination'. This was the *Bhavachakka*, "the first Buddhist example of the mandala model" with "an explicitly political history" [29]. The political context was not only one between states but within the state. It showed how the *Sangha* were able to maintain relations with the political ruling class from a spiritual standpoint. It also demonstrated the subversion of the state's goals by replying with a spiritual gift of conquest (of the 'three poisons') to the material one promising invincibility in battle.

This conjoining of the temple of meditation and the palace of power, so to speak, is well reflected in the *deity* and *palace mandalas* referred to earlier. The chief deity (some mandalas have many surrounding deities) sits at the throne of spiritual power towards which the devotee approaches through different realms and guarded gateways. As one moves from the outer

sectors of the mandala inward, one assumes possession of the demons3 (obstacles presented by delusion, desire and aggression at the gateways)—thereby owning the problems—and then moves "by degrees to transfigure them" [32]. In Galtungian terms, this would parallel the process of transcending and transforming the sources of conflict.

Examples of *mandalas* that perform the function of the deity at the centre are the specialised qualities of the *boddhisattvas*. According to the Mahayana ('Greater Vehicle') school of Buddhism practised in Tibet and Eastern Asia, these are beings who defer release from rebirth in order to return to save others from suffering. A popular deity in the palace design is the *bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara* (Embodiment of Compassion), known in Chinese as *Guanyin* (see Figure 2).

Avalokiteshvara (compassion) is often venerated together with *Manjushri* (wisdom) and *Vajrapani* (power) to overcome the 'three poisons' of delusion, desire and aggression:

Manjushri, who cuts through ignorance and personifies correct knowledge; Avalokiteshvara, a compassionate protector of the devout that helps reveal the true nature of reality; and Vajrapani as the embodiment of the energy of enlightenment. Focusing on dramatic images, a worshipper could first evoke the subtle knowledge that Manjushri personifies, then with Avalokiteshvara's aid, it is possible to proceed in a way free from self-imposed delusions, while Vajrapani's transcendent power aids in destroying jealousy and hatred that stand in the way of enlightenment [35]

Three-dimensional forms of *mandala* may be found in temple architecture throughout the Indic sphere of spiritual influence, including Borobudur in Central Java, built during the 8th and 9th Centuries, and the later (12th Century) Angkor Wat temple complex in Cambodia. Both are United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage sites. They display the mandalic design of a sacred centre within a symmetrical geometry. *Mandalas* are more commonly known in their two-dimensional pictorial form emanating from Tibet.

Impermanent sand mandalas are created for ritual purposes, such as healing and the promotion of peace, by Tibetan monks. Upon completion, the sand is swept up to show the impermanence of existence (*anicca*), then poured into running water, normally a river, symbolically dispersing the energies represented by the *mandala* into the world [36].

More lasting painted *mandalas*, known as *thangkas*, are used by devotees as a visual aid for contemplation associated with the qualities of the deity depicted or selected spiritual teachings (see examples below). The properties of a *mandala* are a centre, symmetry, 'gateways' from one layer to the next, a nested design, dynamic interaction across sectors, and the cardinal points of North–South and East–West. The importance of quadrants is notable, as is the number four as pertaining to the square, while the circle both contains the *mandala* and represents infinity. The "squaring of the circle" is acknowledged as an archetypal motif of wholeness [37].

Mandalas are recognised universally in their holistic symbolism, as integrative and inter-relational representations, irrespective of what they are called (though *mandala* has entered the English language) or their cultural origin. Indigenous *mandalas*, for example, may be found among Native American tribes and Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. They are also evident in visual representations among the world's religions. They have found a role in psychology and the modern wellness movement. Preeminent *mandala* therapist, the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, employed the *mandala* as a therapy for his patients, who created their own, in integrating the self [37]. This represents yet another extension of the medical metaphor, so that one may speak of a Buddhist, Galtungian and Jungian therapy in the treatment of conflict through a transformational process. Using the term "mandala principle", Rhie and Thurman [38] note that "mandalas are blueprints for transformed living", explaining that they apply to all levels—"transforming others as well as self, community as well as individual, world as well as living being" (429). The above represent the abundance of materials—from cultural technologies to articulations of the

'mandala principle'—from which it is possible to conceive a mandala of peace in the 21st century.

2.3.1. Constructing a Mandala of Positive Peace

When considering constructing a *mandala* for positive peace, it is worth looking back to tradition and adapting from it. According to Tucci [32], "the choice of mandala may be suggested by the intrinsic qualities of the persons who are to be guided by it" (81). If the intrinsic qualities of a positive peace in the prevailing world are considered, then there are numerous possibilities. Given that the *mandala* is a cosmogram of a constructed vision rather than a replica of an observed phenomenon, it is possible to be selective about the domains used to build it. Among those already available are the *Global Peace Index's* focus on societal security, domestic and international conflict, militarisation and global military capability [3]. Galtung's "dimensions" for developing peace policies also feature a *military* category. He offers further analysis along negative and positive peace lines: defensive defence, delegitimising arms and non-military defence exemplifying the former, while the latter may be advanced by peacekeeping forces, non-military skills and international peace brigades [2].

Galtung's other categories are *political, economic* and *cultural*. The *political* entails democratising (but not necessarily Westernising) states to counter structural violence, and democratising the UN and removing the "big-power vote", that is, reforming the Security Council (3–4). The advancement of democratic values is well known as a force for peace, as shown by a conference in Reykjavík, Iceland, in 2024, which explored ways to renew democracy for the 21st century [39]. Galtung's *economic* dimension seeks greater self-reliance to avoid exploitation and a higher attention to the side-effects of the economic system such as ecological and human degradation (5–6). On self-reliance there are similarities with Thailand's philosophy of a sufficiency economy, introduced by the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, advocating moderation, sustainable farming and social resilience [40]; see also [41]. Finally,

Galtung's *cultural* dimension recognises culture as "that great legitimizer of violence, but also of peace" (6). It requires action at the religious and ideological levels, while culture in the form of a "global civilization" features partnership with nature, equality, justice and "life enhancement" (7). Moreover, it would be a "world where each place is a center and no place a periphery" (7). This would suggest an atypical *mandala*: many centres, no periphery. It could be conceived as a circular space interspersed with mutually linking nodes and no outer ring. It would appear galactic. While unorthodox, such a *mandala* would conform to Buddhism's doctrine of 'dependent origination'. It is also reminiscent of Galtung's borrowed wheel analogy "where the relationships between points are spun into an ever tighter web of thought and action" [1].

This raises the question of the *mandala* design or structure. If there are four categories, as in the above example, then these would lend themselves to the *mandala* as a quaternity, composed of quadrants defined by the North–South and East–West axes. The square of the palace *mandala* would rest in the circle of its universe—the contextual and conditioning environment surrounding the sectors. Other numerical divisions of the *mandala* can be used, in accordance with the number of selected sectors. Instead of a palace design, there may be a wheel, such as the *Bavvacakka* (the *Wheel of Life*), or simply concentric circles as used for the World Peace Sand Mandala (Figure 3). Created in 2019 at Drikung Dharma Surya Center by Tibetan Buddhist monks in India, it was originally made for Saint Paul Catholic Center's Interfaith Peace Ceremony and blessed by the Dalai Lama [42]. The outer ring of colours represents the elements of earth, water, fire and air, which "protect the mandala". Ring 3 displays the eight "auspicious symbols of Tibetan Buddhism". Ring 2 is made up of the symbols representing different religions, and the centre shows the "Four Perfect Friends"—the elephant, monkey, rabbit and bird—who worked and lived in a spirit of cooperation, using their different talents to enjoy the fruits of their labour. The description on the explanatory diagram of World Peace Sand Mandala reflects the interfaith theme: "We each have different talents and can live harmoniously" [42]. The "Four Perfect

Friends" represent a positive peace idea compared to the 'three poisons' or fallibilities of the *Bhavachakka* (Figure 1) of delusion/ignorance (pig), desire/greed (rooster) and aggression (snake).
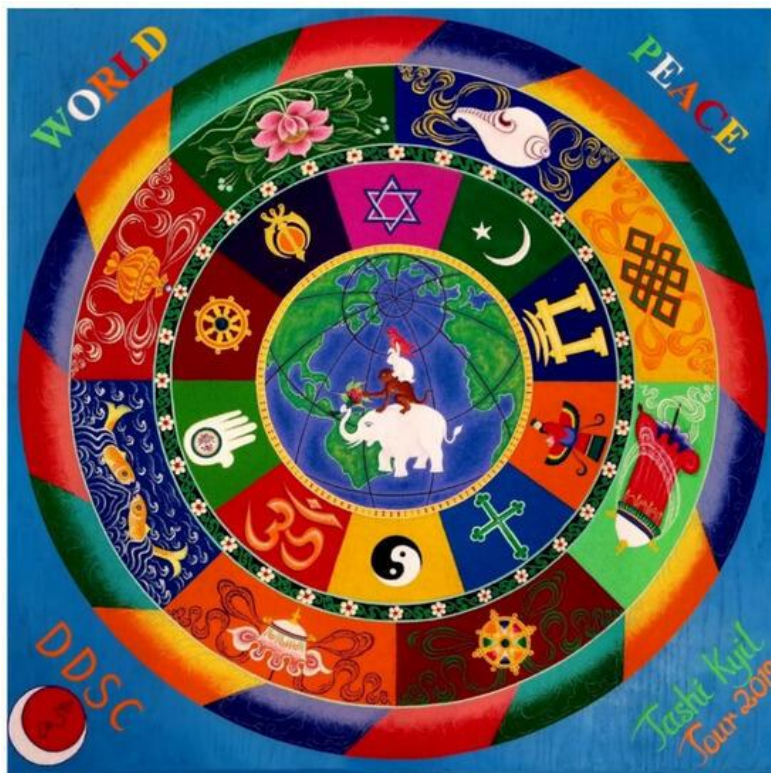

Figure 3: World Peace Sand Mandala [42].

Unlike the design of a palace with gateways, whereby the centre is approached from the outside, the centre of a *mandala* may radiate outwards its realist or idealist messages. Furthermore, it can be absorbed as a whole: inwards, outwards, from above (zenith) and through visualising the nadir below (on dimensions and directions of Tibetan designs, see [43]. Ultimately, much depends on the purpose of a given *mandala*. The World Peace Sand Mandala, unlike those whose sands are dispersed after completion, is a permanent fixture at the DDSC temple. Its

"purpose is dedicated to interfaith harmony and world unity, displaying holy symbols from the world's major religions, for visitors to look at, to venerate and to reflect" [42].

A schema of positive peace would suggest a deity or palace *mandala* or a combination of both. A palace *mandala* would entail attention to the obstacles to peace, hence a recognition of the *dukkha–sukha* inter-relationship. Based on the investigations of this study, one sector that stands out is *development*, which is identified by Galtung as a condition of peace within his comprehensive approach to peace [47]; see also [2]. It also encompasses the *economic* dimension noted above [2] but is larger in scope. It includes spiritual development, with its transformative effects, and 'sustainable development', in which there is full cognizance of the importance of the environment as a partner in codependent nurturing. So important is the environment in 21st century peace perceptions that it deserves a place within the *mandala* in mutual regard with development, especially if their related constraints are to be overcome. Thus, development, as an 'economic animal' [45], may seek to devour the environment, as has occurred under the industrialisation phase of much of the world that has been called 'development'. This accords with Galtung's observation mentioned above of an economic system that creates ecological and human degradation [2]. Policies that have moderated this problem and efforts to decarbonise the economy may come under the *politics* dimension, also noted by Galtung [2]. The UN's SDGs have had an enabling effect, as have member nations' efforts to implement them. China's legally enshrined commitment to becoming an *ecological civilisation* [46]; see [47], in which Chinese philosophical approaches to the unity of humanity and nature (recalling the anthropocosmic view, above) are combined with contemporary ecological approaches, shows a cultural perspective on the environment.

This, in turn, suggests a fourth category of consideration, that of *culture*, rather than adopting Galtung's and the GPI's inclusion of a *military/militarisation* domain. Like the *economy*, the *military* can be subsumed within a larger category. *Politics* provides a natural 'home' for *military*, as it

may be viewed as a subset of security (and indeed *society*, noted as a category in GPI). But *military* also has relevance for the processes of *development* illustrated by transformations into non-military defence and international peace brigades [2]. The *military* component has *cultural* relevance too. Linked to strategic culture, *military* takes on the character of its classical teachings, ranging from Clausewitzian force to Chinese strategies of deception [48] and the Maoist doctrine of *people's war* [49]. This returns the cycle to *politics*. While more categories could be added, these four interrelated developmental, environmental, political and cultural perspectives provide a platform through which to trace the transformation of conflict into a positive dynamic of societal flourishing, or *dukkha* to *sukha*. Like the World Peace Sand Mandala's four concentric rings, a palace mandala would also have four sectors but laid out as quadrants. These are represented in Figure 4.
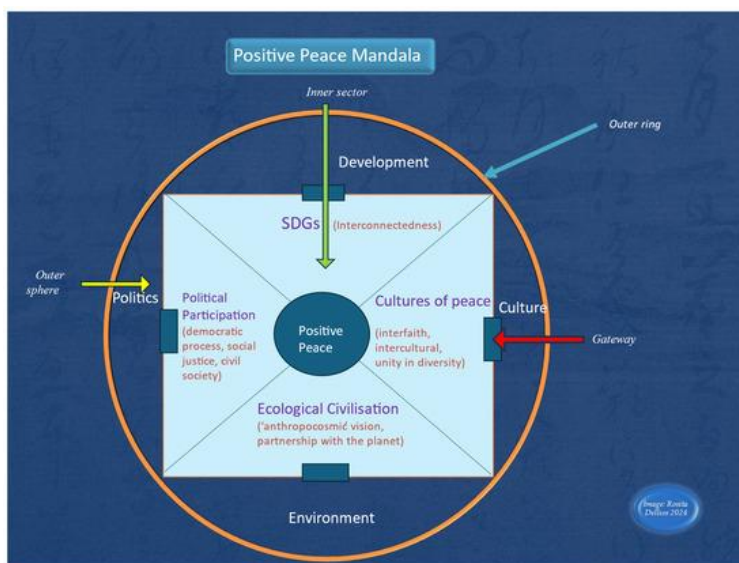

Figure 4: Mandala of Positive Peace. Rosita Dellios.

The palace of peace mandala design in Figure 4 is centred on the goal (or deity) of positive peace. The outer ring represents the universe of peace potentialities. The four general outer spheres that lead to specific inner sectors and their intervening

impediments (demons that are wrathful forms of the deity guarding the gateways) can be summarised as follows.

The Sphere of Development

The idea of the world as *self* [5] suggests that development, like peace, can be experienced at all levels, that through the doctrine of 'dependent origination' there is a vast interconnectedness in which the self develops beyond its ego. The personal is at the same time the planetary, connecting with the *environmental* sphere of anthropocosmic vision, the *political* in advancing the governance required for conceptualising and implementing the SDGs and other governance measures to assist humanity and the *cultural* in bringing a rich and complex tapestry of ideas about what it is to develop as a human, how to cultivate the conditions of peace.

To cross into the more desirable sector of *development*, a prominent hurdle to overcome is the narrow economic definition of development. It is based on the carbon economy and high growth rates at the national level, with artificial needs created for the human-as-consumer. Here, *delusion* (ignorance) of the nature of development and *desire* (greed) to increase material wealth often entail *aggression* in exploiting human and natural resources. Hence, the 'three poisons' (fallibilities) infect the macro political economy that has seen division between the wealthy North countries and the developing South, as well as the microcosm of households shaped by consumerism. The realisation of 'dependent origination'—of developmental co-arising—would open one door to approaching the positive peace of *sukha* (happiness). However, much work needs to be performed to overcome the causes of *dukkha* (suffering).

The Sphere of Environment

The environmental costs of 'delusionary' development in the industrialised world have been high. The world as *lover* or "life-giving partner" [5], on the other hand, shifts the focus to an anthropocosmic vision [21] of one's greater self. The accompanying action would be seen as a behavioural change in

relations with the environment. To cross the threshold into "ecological renewal" [5], from the title of her book), it would be necessary to confront the impediment posed by the modernist anthropocentric worldview. Indeed, the way Earth has been changed through human activity has merited the naming of a new geological age: the Anthropocene (the age where geology is shaped by human activities). Yet, as argued above, humans cannot be fully human unless they realise their interconnected selves, that any global civilisation (currently simply known as globalisation) becomes an ecologically grounded one. Buddhism's concern for all sentient beings is reflected in the *bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara's* virtue of compassion. This would translate in ecological parlance to protecting the biosphere, in coordination with the associated problems of climate change and land degradation.

For example, restoring degraded ecosystems such as forests can bring back biodiversity (including pollinators), while improving soil fertility, supporting the production of clean water, storing carbon and protecting communities from devastating droughts and floods. The well-planned deployment of renewable energies is crucial to preserving native vegetation, together with its biodiversity, climate and livelihood benefits.

(Schomaker et al. [50], para. 8)

Here, the UN and other multilateral frameworks have been active in developing legal structures that are leading to what has been termed "planetary politics", and will require "strengthening existing and creating new multilateral institutions and treaties to address the crisis of the biosphere—and backing these commitments with adequate resources" [51].

The Sphere of Politics

Environmental governance turns to the sphere of *politics*. This is a potent sphere, as it includes both direct and structural violence, it sets the rules for how the military arm of government is used, and it provides a ready remedy to dissatisfaction (*sukkha*) with the way in which power is used: that of political

participation. Galtung [2] described democracy as "a nonviolent arbiter between parts of the population vying with each other for power and privilege" (4). But given the anarchic structure of the international system, democracy ends at the state border: "The democracy has to be global," Galtung concluded, "in the inter-state system, in the world system" (4). While the Westphalian international system of sovereign states is no Kantian "federation of free states" for a "perpetual peace" [52], the possibility of moving in this direction remains. This is especially true under the *development* sphere's interconnectedness and the *environmental* sphere's planetary politics. When accompanied by social justice and civil society, at both domestic and international levels, the wrathful face of multilevel violence may be transformed at this threshold era in 21st century politics. The *bodhisattva* of power, *Vajrapani*, would represent a fitting symbol for overcoming the 'three poisons', especially *aggression*. Meanwhile, *Manjushri*, as the personification of wisdom, would serve as a suitable patron deity for the sphere of *culture*.

The Sphere of Culture

The wisdom traditions across cultures and religions have much to offer in the development of a culture of peace that knits together a global society. Otherwise, there will be less 'unity in diversity' and more division. This calls for interfaith cooperation (as shown in the World Peace Sand Mandala's central symbol of the "Four Perfect Friends"), and intercultural dialogue "to close the gap between the idea of peace and the reality of tension and conflict" [74].

The agency within the UN most aligned with the *cultural* sphere in promoting world peace is UNESCO. The Preamble to its Constitution declares that "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed" [26]. UNESCO's 2005 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* sees cultural diversity as "indispensable for peace and security at the local, national and international levels", but for this to occur, it needs to "flourish within a framework of

democracy, tolerance, social justice and mutual respect between peoples and cultures" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 1945, preamble). This integrative approach befits mandalic thinking, so well captured by the phrase 'unity in diversity'—a concept of ancient lineage, both in the East and West. It describes not merely tolerance (a negative peace that is still worthy) but harmony (positive peace), which is dynamic and creative. It is not an artificial 'harmonising' through enforced conformity, just as peace (as in pacification) becomes a euphemism for control when imposed coercively. Cultural violence, as discussed earlier, remains the (supposedly) legitimating force for both direct and structural violence [2,9]. These are the demons at the gate of the *cultural* sphere. The gate provides entry into a genuine unity in diversity, one which expands and responds to global needs through 'co-arising'. A *bodhisattva* well suited to facilitating this activity is the aforementioned representative of wisdom—*Manjushri*.

The components identified here of the *mandala* of positive peace are not meant to be exhaustive, but representational. This conforms with how the cultural technology of *mandala* works and, indeed, how mandalic thinking directs attention to the relational whole, as distinct from cataloguing the details or accounting for data sets of conflicts. To return to the health metaphor, this would represent the next stage in applying the remedy to 'patient' needs. Galtung has ably demonstrated such direction with his shift from peace studies to the peace practitioner as professional, whilst still maintaining advances in peace research to support its practice. The next section takes a step in the direction of the peace professional, schooled in theoretical discourse and equipped with 'tools' of the trade.

2.4. Case Study: The United States and China

When Galtung died in 2024, he may have found 'perpetual peace', to borrow from Kant [52], but the world had not. He did, however, leave a valuable legacy of lessons for arriving at the *sukha* end of the spectrum in which peace is a process of transformation from suffering (*dukkha*) to happiness (*sukha*).

Galtung spoke of various levels too: "from micro via meso and macro to mega conflicts", from the individual to the global [15]. Applying insights gained from Galtung, mandalic thinking, and other ideas examined above, a case study is in order.

The chosen case is of a potentially global conflict across various levels, from the domestic to the planetary. It concerns the United States of America and the People's Republic of China. The conflict here is one of strategic competition between the two superpower rivals. In Western Realist logic, the two have opposing interests that make conflict inevitable. This is often referred to as the 'Thucydides Trap' [53] named after the 5th Century BCE Greek historian and politician whose History of the Peloponnesian War showed that a rising power (Athens, but today China) will come into conflict with an already dominant power (Sparta, today the United States). Should this come about, the world would be witnessing a mega conflict, fought across all domains, be they physical, virtual, technological, economic, societal or psychological. In other words, it would be a case of 'unrestricted warfare', to employ a term used as the title of a book—also translated as 'comprehensive warfare'—written by two Chinese military officers [54].

The next world war could well be triggered by domestic upheaval or fragmentation that leads to a nationally unifying policy through the expedience of a diversion, that of military deployment abroad. This could be incorporated into the banner of *making America great again*—MAGA—or PRC's President Xi Jinping's equivalent slogan of the *great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation*. Irrespective of domestic instigators, regional conflicts exhibit an inter-relational dynamic of their own (see [55]. These could range from the annexation of independent polities (for example, Taiwan or Panama), posturing in contested waters and overlapping territorial claims (South China Sea, East China Sea or the Arctic), across borders where alliances, strategic partnerships or interests are invoked (US vs China–Russia or US–Russia vs China as a repeat of the Sino–Soviet split, China–India whereby it is in US interests for India to succeed and China–Japan—the primary USA ally in Asia).

Turning this around in the direction of a positive peace entails the employment of various strategic tools. Among these is a change in narrative and metaphor (see further [56]; [57]; and [58], as well as showing greater awareness of differences in worldview. This would lead to a more sustainably peaceful condition of 'competitive coexistence' and away from "increasing levels of confrontation and mutual deterrence" [59]. At a 2023 US–China leadership summit in Woodside, California—which was held on the sidelines of a multilateral inclusive organisation, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting—it was agreed that both countries would act responsibly in managing the competitive facets of the relationship [60,61].

Can a relationship be simultaneously a rivalry and a partnership? It can if the parties partake of wider circles of engagement such as the multilateral system to which the above-mentioned APEC belongs. Besides multilateral engagement, there are also the advantages of better bilateral communication. The potentially dire consequences of misperception (well established by [62]) mean that communication should be taken as seriously as procuring armaments for protection. It can also be obtained at a lower cost. Communication creates a positive relationship between the other two 'Cs', competition and cooperation, better articulating the relational sphere:

While doing everything within their power to out-compete the other, they are also maintaining open channels for regular, candid, private communication about the most delicate and dangerous issues. These include not only conversations between the two presidents and their trusted national security advisers but also analogs in meetings between cabinet officers and military leaders. They are also cooperating on issues such as Taiwan, climate, fentanyl, trade, and others in ways that serve each nation's interests [63].

A year after the Woodside Summit, the two presidents met again, this time in Lima, Peru, reinforcing their earlier commitments and taking a common stance on maintaining human control over artificial intelligence (AI):

Building on a candid and constructive dialogue on AI and co-sponsorship of each other's resolutions on AI at the United Nations General Assembly, the two leaders affirmed the need to address the risks of AI systems, improve AI safety and international cooperation, and promote AI for good for all. The two leaders affirmed the need to maintain human control over the decision to use nuclear weapons. The two leaders also stressed the need to consider carefully the potential risks and develop AI technology in the military field in a prudent and responsible manner [64].

AI is a mega-issue in the future of peace and war, in the difference between civilisational suffering (*dukkha*) and societal flourishing (*sukha*). AI can be both an enhancer of peace (see, for example, [65] and a threat to peace. As the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned, its misuse could lead to "horrific levels of death and destruction", and its malfunction in the nuclear arena would amount to a clear existential threat [66] see also [67].

Ultimately, in view of the Buddhist principle of 'dependent origination' and the practicalities of globalisation, 'competitive interdependence' would be the outcome, as distinct from 'competitive coexistence', which would be more in line with the détente phase of the US–Soviet Cold War. 'Competitive interdependence' represents a realisation more than a coping mechanism, as long as national strategies are cooperative rather than entrenched in adversarial postures.

Here is where the 'trust deficit' needs to be addressed and the peace practitioner would rise to the task, employing the tools at their disposal. Among these would be a change in the afore-mentioned metaphorical language. As Min [68] notes: "Metaphors help disputants and observers understand and communicate to others about things that are occurring, framing events in a way that gives meaning in their own worldview" (para 1). Min goes on to say that there are both negative and positive metaphors. Macy's world as *a battlefield*, noted above, exemplifies a negative metaphor of struggle, while the world as *lover* provides a positive frame.

In the US–China case, it would be more productive to move away from the transactional business model or the 'art of the deal', which has returned with the Trump presidency, or the 'card game' (who is 'holding the cards') which President Donald Trump used in his televised verbal attack on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in February 2025 [69]. A more positive metaphor, which contrasts with an impersonal or low-context transaction, would have been dance. This invokes interdependence and cooperation. Dance also alludes to creating "something beautiful, graceful, and inspiring that depends on each person's skill, training, and individual expression" [70], in [68]. It also implies taking care not to step on the other's toes, or even taking the lead. If Washington and Beijing were to be dancing partners, "It would be a dance where no one takes the lead, as in the dance of giants it is better to avoid being too close in case there is a collision" [49].

China itself is adept at using metaphors. For instance, on the topic of climate change cooperation, Foreign Minister Wang Yi employed an oasis-and-desert metaphor: "The U.S. side wants the climate change cooperation to be an 'oasis' of China-U.S. relations. However, if the oasis is all surrounded by deserts, then sooner or later, the 'oasis' will be desertified. China-U.S. cooperation on climate change cannot be divorced from the overall situation of China-U.S. relations" [71].

Cooperation on the environment links in with developmental, political and cultural facets of the relationship. If there is a trust deficit, these are more likely to become mutually obstructive than enabling. In this sense, the oasis-and-desert metaphor has some validity but it is not necessarily helpful, even if it is instructive. Perhaps, a better Chinese metaphor is the *yinyang* symbol of two encircled hemispheres in which the seeds of one may be found in the other. This captures the idea of 'competitive interdependence'. It also suggests a more creative interdependence in solving—or at least managing—mutually conditioned global problems. The wheel of dynamic possibilities comes to mind, as it represents a holistic and dynamic totality [1]. A US–China *mandala* would therefore exhibit similar properties to the Positive Peace Mandala (Figure 4) but would

distinguish itself with a *yinyang* centre of mutuality and balance for the global peace outcomes.

3. Conclusions

To conclude, it is possible to transcend and therefore transform conflict in international relations, bringing it within reach of a positive peace. In contemplating the composition of a global *mandala* for such peace, this article has drawn lessons from the prolific work of the 'father of peace studies', Johan Galtung, Buddhism's "*dukkha* to *sukha*", [29] *Bhavacakka mandala*), Macy's [5,20] Buddhist ecological insights, as well as many others.

Prior to constructing a mandala of positive peace, the properties of a *mandala* were examined. The mandala included considerations of thematic sectors, structure and scale. The four quadrants of the 'palace' mandala chosen were development, the environment, politics and culture. They were selected on the basis of being broad enough to contain subtypes, scales (from the universal to targeted sectors) and stages (desirable directions) of peace that include their impediments, but selectively limited to fulfil the storytelling or scenario properties of mandalic construction. The four quadrants of development, the environment, politics and culture exhibited the relational and inter-reflective design of the *mandala*. By facing opposite from each other in a North–South and East–West direction, as well as being adjacent in the circle of relations, the selected domains tell a story of the processes of transformation to a positive peace. *Development* and the *environment* face one another as fundamental forces for human survival. *Politics* and *culture* shape its civilisational character, but not without the integration of the other two. The cross-influences of all four tell of strengthened propensities for a positive peace while apprehending the impediments along the way that require remediation.

The findings of this exercise in thinking about peace in a mandalic manner are that peace needs to be approached through multiple perspectives, that it has cosmological significance in its

own right, as shown through Galtungian and Buddhist thought, and that it is a process that is constantly renewed.

The overall implication of this research to the broader field of international relations and peace scholarship is that it answers certain questions posed from the outset. To the question of the possibility of employing Buddhist thinking in constructing a positive peace, it was found that the interrelated ideas of being or existence in a Buddhist world lend themselves to thinking about peace. Thus, positive peace needs to be anchored in non-violence. This is accompanied by the realisation that there is no individual soul but an inter-relational self—in turn, explaining and reinforcing the condition of mutual 'co-arising', with the implication that nothing is permanent but exists in a constant state of change. These concepts may be used in planning for peace through the spiritual technology of *mandala*, which is native to the Indic Buddhist tradition and has represented the methodological vehicle of this study.

How to incorporate a wider Western perspective that already acknowledges Buddhist thinking in the theory and practice of peace was a question that found a rich field of association with Johan Galtun's body of work, as well as other instances including Macy's application of Western systems theory to Buddhist concepts. Through Galtung's inspiration, the Buddhist view of peace has been highlighted. It can be differentiated from the modernist idea of social progress where peace becomes an evidence-based science and war a governance problem [72]. For Buddhism, peace pertains to an ontological condition of co-arising and impermanence. Galtung has straddled both the Buddhist and modernist persuasions. Borrowing from Western scientific epistemology and framing his ideas through Buddhist concepts, Johan Galtung created a vocabulary of peace that resonates to this day. His 'mantra' of "*dukkha* to *sukha*" matches the *mandalas* used here to represent the process. Thus, the *Bhavacakka mandala* provides a platform for 'dependent origination' to be translated from *dukkha* (suffering) to *sukha* (happiness). This is performed via contemporary governance structures that are built upon integrative bodies such as the UN and illustrated by the specialised qualities of

the *boddhisattva mandalas*. This conceptualisation, which can be of service to international relations and peace scholarship, has been further elaborated through the case of global rivalry between the United States and China. There is no inevitability in Sino–American rivalry turning to conflict and ultimately war. Understanding the parameters of cooperation even with lively competition allows for a transformation of two power systems into a global governance force that lends its weight to the supranational system of UN governance. A fundamental change of perception, narratives and metaphors assists in the process of turning the trust deficit in Sino–US relations to one of credit. These changes, in turn, foster the mutually-constructive relationship of key perspectives—developmental, environmental, political and cultural—through which to transform conflict into a positive dynamic of societal flourishing.

Finally, a recommendation for future research is the application of mandalic thinking to individual cases, as a means to map a positive peace and act as a source for policy recommendations. In a world that has remained mired in conflict despite extraordinary advances in material civilisation, such a step may help facilitate the aspiration of moving from *dukkha* to *sukha*.

Notes

1. Henceforth, terms in this article are given in Pali and Sanskrit (Skt), though it should be noted that Tibetan terms are also commonly employed in the literature on Buddhism. Other Central or East Asian languages, such as Chinese, have their own terms. When it comes to the names of particular *bodhisattvas*, discussed below, these are rendered in the form most commonly used in English.
2. He authored 156 books and some 1600 articles and book chapters. He founded the world's first peace studies institute—The International Peace Research Institute—in Oslo in 1959, The Transcend International Foundation in 1993 and the first online peace studies university—Transcend Peace University—in 2000. Moreover, he engaged in mediation in over 150 conflicts around the world and exhibited an interdisciplinary aptitude in having

researched "human rights, sustainable development strategies, basic human needs, macrohistory, history of civilization, globalization, sociology, ecology, and the future" [73]. These fed into his overarching concern with peace studies and its professional development.

3. While presenting impediments, these 'demons' are also overcoming them through the transformation they make possible in the spiritual traveller. Thus, the demon is also a deity but with a wrathful face. These 'custodians of the gates', as they are traditionally called, have *Mara*/Death, Lord of Impermanence, as their supreme ruler [32].

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