

The ABCM Model of Conflict Analysis and Zen Buddhism: Transforming Conflict into Peace

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Abstract

To fill the gap of the previous studies, the paper examines the current global conflicts, such as the Ukraine and Iran conflicts, by the mindfulness approach. The classical theories of international relations such as realism, liberalism, and constructivism often are not able to deal with these conflicts, as they do not take into consideration cognitive distortions and ego attachments which influence perceptions of decision-makers and political leaders. In order to fill this gap, the paper integrates the key ideas of the Diamond Sutra to reformulate the ABCM Diamond model of conflict, where this model can be employed to promote internal peace by adding mindfulness (M) as a fourth dimension to the ABC triangle of Galtung. By relying on the "logic of not" of the *Diamond Sutra*, the paper illustrates how decision-makers can turn the subconscious root poisons of greed, anger and ignorance into the clarity of inter-being. This cognitive-ethical change replaces the reactive and egoistic behaviour with the reflective equanimity and unconditional compassion. When the decision-makers can adopt this approach, inner peace can be obtained, leading to external peace to resolve regional and global conflicts.

Keywords: *Diamond Sutra*; ABCM Diamond Model; No-Self; Inter-being; Conflict Transformation; Inner Peace

1. Introduction

The contemporary landscape of world conflict is increasingly becoming marked by an existential crisis which can itself be traced back to a lack of awareness of one's "true nature." This state breeds widespread anxiety and puts individuals and societies stuck on inflexible, individualistic ideas of a pre-determined, separate self. In a world where geopolitical changes are fast and social tension escalating (as evident in the case of the Ukraine conflict and the growing tension with Iran), the old conceptions of international relations have come to the edge of their analytical capabilities. The failure we share is that they could do nothing about the ingrained suspicion, cognitive distortion, and moral blindness that fuel modern warfare.

Since realism finds itself in an endless state of anarchy and competition of power, leaders are compelled to be locked in a security dilemma where their defensive strategies are consistently viewed as offensive defences. The idea of liberalism is based on rational institutional ordering that is often left by the state elites to the politics of insecurity. Constructivism studies identity and discourse but does not explore the very deepest levels of conflict, ego-attachment, cognitive distortion and unprocessed consciousness, which cause political players to frame themselves as morally upright and others as necessarily threatening.

In order to offset these shortcomings, this paper presents a radical synthesis of ancient wisdom and modern structural analysis. In particular, it combines the ontology of no-self of the *Diamond Sutra* and the ABCM Diamond conflict resolution framework to fill in the divide between the external structures and the interior dimension of awareness. Although traditional peace studies, especially the Attitude, Behaviour, Contradiction ABC triangle presented by Johan Galtung, emphasize observable behaviour and incompatible interests, the Mindfulness (M) dimension of the ABCM Diamond model is a critical analytical and transformative parameter. According to this multidisciplinary approach, the escalation of conflict, be it in Eastern Europe or the Middle East, is not solely a matter of military calculations but also of the quality of perception and ego-centric response of political leadership. Based on this, conflict is not initiated when it leads to physical confrontation but at the initial level of hostile interpretation and rigid identity formation.

The main idea of this paper is that the inclusion of the Diamond Sutra in the ABCM model allows the decision-makers to convert the unconscious root delusions (i.e. greed (Taṇhah) anger, and ignorance) into the sustainable inner and outer peace. Mindfulness, in this view, cannot be used in doing political analysis or institutional reform, and instead it is a micro-foundational variable that bridges internal peacebuilding and external peacebuilding. Such an integration offers a strong analytical complement to traditional conflict paradigms and creates an opening to getting beyond the materialist and limited perspectives of identity underlying human-induced spiritual crises.

2. Theoretical Review and the ABCM Model of Conflict

Analysis of all the classical schools of international relations: the realism, liberalism, and constructivism, sheds light on the main dimensions of international conflict and the persistence of the dilemma of world peace. Realism views conflict in terms of anarchy, power or politics, survival of states, and national interest. The activities of the defense in this paradigm may often be viewed by opponents as offensive in nature and thus the security dilemma: state leaders get caught in the vicious cycle of fear, mistrust, and worst-case thinking instead of peacefully contemplating (Brown, 2012; Freedman, 2025). In contrast, liberalism focuses on institutions, cooperation, and interdependence, assuming that rational arrangements will help reduce conflict; however, in the reality, state elites still emphasise their concept of sovereignty, strategic benefits, and domestic legitimacy instead of ensuring a common peace, especially in the face of the politics of

insecurity (Eriksson and Giacomello, 2006; Burchill, 2005). Constructivism considers the identity, discourse and social meaning as the main variables affecting conflict, yet it too does not explore deeply the deepest levels of conflict namely, the misunderstanding, cognitive distortion, ego-attachment and the unprocessed consciousness between the political leaders and their societies. Political actors strategically established themselves as defensive and morally right and depict threat to enemies as psycho-aggressive, illegitimate, or threatening and indirectly increase insecurity, fueling conflict. The key issue, though, lies not in the outer framework or structure, the institution, the competing identities per se, but alertness and self-consciousness of the political actors themselves. Realism, liberalism, and constructivism cannot account fully to the persistence of war, nor offer a coherent foundation to sustainable global peace to inadequately tend to the inner causes of fear, delusion and moral blindness in leadership (Brown, 2012; Freedman, 2025).

The conceptual framework of peace by Galtung forms a background that helps to conceptualize a conflict with five dimensions of interrelated understanding. The first category revolves around negative peace which is nothing more than the lack of direct violence when the fighting stops yet in the background, the tension never resolves and such peace is very weak (Galtung, 1969). Second, positive peace refers to the realization of social justice, equality and harmonious social relations which involves the elimination of structural violence entrenched in institutional structures (Galtung, 1969, 1990). Third, Galtung explains the conflict based on the ABC triangle which includes Attitude (A), Behaviour (B) and Contradiction (C) thus revealing the dynamic interplay of perceptions, actions and incompatible interests that perpetuate conflict processes (Galtung, 1969). Fourth, Galtung recognizes three types of strategic approaches to peace: peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding, of which peacebuilding is the most innovative, since it deals with the fundamental causes of peace like inequality, mistrust, and institutional failure (Galtung, 1976). Fifth, he promotes the view of transdisciplinary approach by maintaining that sustainable peace must take into account political, economic, cultural, and psychological aspects as an alternative to the structural or institutional explanations (Galtung, 1985, 2010). At that, peace cannot be viewed as static state but a multi-dimensional process that implies both diminishing the violence and the active setting of conditions helping humans thrive at individual, national, and international levels.

Whereas the attitude, behaviour, and contradiction of the conceptualisation of conflict in the ABC triangle by Galtung is the trio, the ABCM Diamond model presents mindfulness as a fourth analytical and transformative aspect. This extension shows that objective incompatibilities and observable courses of action are not the only causes that contribute to the escalation of conflict, but also the quality of perception, self-construction, and cognitive response according to which structural contradictions are understood. The ABCM Diamond model, as below represented in Figure 1, is based on recent attempts to incorporate mindfulness into conflict analysis, which are further explained by its underlying philosophical basis (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Mindfulness, in the sense of Thich Nhat Hanh and based on the Zen philosophy of Huineng, is a non-judgmental awareness of the present moment, which serves as a cognitive-ethical tool of changing the three poisons of the individual anger, ignorance, and greed. In particular, by using mindful breathing and emotional awareness, mindfulness can convert anger into compassion and thereby minimise negative conflict escalation (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1991, 2016); by applying mindful living and gratitude, can convert ignorance into wisdom and eliminate cognitive distortions and make decisions that are more rational, leading to ethical responsibility and social sustainability (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1998). In this regard, the mindfulness dimension can be seen as a micro-foundational variable between internal transformation (internal peacebuilding) and external peacebuilding, which offers a solid analytical extension to more traditional conflict models (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1991, 2008, 2016).

[Figure 1. ABCM Model of Conflict — Insert Here]

Source: Nguyen et al. (2024).

The fundamental constructs of the model, namely, contradiction, attitude and behaviour, relate to the incompatibility of goals, interests or structural positions, to mistrust, resentment and hostility in perception, to actual actions such as coercion, exclusion, violence and war. The model therefore shows that conflict does not start at the beginning of physical confrontation but starts earlier in the form of the antagonistic interpretations, identities as well as the unaddressed structural tensions. This observation can be especially applied in the modern geopolitical situation where security dilemma turns defensive actions into the perceived threats, which subsequently enhance aggression and perpetuate the escalation process.

The model has a cognitive-ethical layer, which, through the use of mindfulness, explains the structural contradiction as a reactive source of conflict, mediated through the ego-based attachment. Mindfulness is not theorised as a therapeutic method or emotional support tool per se, it is theorised as a state of consciousness whereby actors are able to monitor their perceptions, intentions, and responses without necessarily identifying with them or letting them escalate. This prolonged conceptualisation is consistent with the findings that show mindfulness can promote empathy, emotional regulation, perspective-taking, and conflict resolution in peacebuilding situations (Waelde et al., 2019).

Mindfulness plays a triple role of analysis in the ABCM model. Diagnostically, it reveals the nature of fear, projection, and unbending identity to form attitudes. Regulatively, it breaks the automaticity of the hostile attitudes turning into aggressive behaviour. It allows actors in a transformatively way to re-examine contradictions in less absolutist and less antagonistic ways. In this regard, the ABCM Diamond model does not refute the presence of material conflict, power asymmetry and strategic rivalry, instead, it claims that the escalation of these contradictions can be partly explained by the lack of reflective consciousness. In the absence or under-development of mindfulness, the contradictions are processed by ego-bound positions, behaviours are reactive and

conflict is self-governing. On the other hand, mindfulness training results in actors being more restrained, empathetic, and possessing a non-dual perception, which increases the negotiation and de-escalation distance.

The ABCM model should, however, not be understood in an idealist manner. Mindfulness cannot pierce geopolitical rivalry, material asymmetry or institutional inertia. Structural contradictions exist and most conflicts are perpetuated by interests, capabilities and power calculations that cannot be corrected by cognitive means only. Mindfulness is not alternative to political analysis. It offers a micro-foundational explanation of how actors to conflict perceive conflict, respond to it, and may change the responses. So in this respect the Huineng-inspired ABCM model would add something to peace studies by developing a more holistic understanding of conflict as a cognitively and ethically mediated process which is geared towards a more wholesome model of peacebuilding.

The aspect of mental state is theorised in terms of three functions (related to one another). The first one is that it re-interprets moral dilemmas by being mindful and uninvolved because individuals are not merely observing their thoughts and feelings like greed, anger and ignorance but also not judging them in a responsive manner and this results to its escalation either because of fear or the ego-centered approach. Second, it integrates compassion and wisdom in daily decision making striking a balance between humanistic and ethical issues. Third, it is a sign that conflict is thoroughly rooted in cognition, in particular, individual perception, will and mental conditioning in such a way that, a transformation in inner processes will result in the change in behaviour pattern to reflective and produce inner peace. This connection of ethics to consciousness implements the ABCM model into mindfulness as a critical vantage and variable that allows a peaceful change in conflict, which can be sustained (Nguyen et al., 2025).

3. The Diamond Sutra as the Philosophical Foundation for Mindfulness

The Diamond Sutra (Vajracchedkā Prajñāpāramitā Sutra) is a cornerstone of Mahayana Buddhism, a wisdom of diamond-cutting sharpness that is meant to cut the existential crises that arise due to the clinging to a fixed and isolated self. Applied to the conflict resolution in the modern context, this sūtra offers a more significant ontological decomposition that alters the classical model of conflict (ABC) consisting of Attitudes, Behaviours, and Contradictions into a ABCM Diamond framework. A combination of Mindfulness (M) with the logic of emptiness in this structural analysis make it a possibility to target the subconscious root delusions of greed, ego and unbending perspectives that are the root causes of grievances between the individual and the world geopolitics of struggle. This transformational process has been called the articulation of three significant dimensions that interface the tradition of Zen with new peacebuilding.

First, the Diamond Sutra is the main philosophical basis of the Zen (Chan) tradition, namely, via the practice of non-abiding. By using the sutra, practitioners are then able to create a mind set that never lands, nor sticks to a certain thought, notion or appearance; therefore creating a state of fluidity of the mind which is easily fundamental in the de-escalation of tension. This tradition views enlightenment as neither a passive realisation nor something passive but an embodiment and is termed practising meditation and developing merit and is a combination of intensive meditative practice and ethical life and philanthropic social action. The recitation of the sutra in contemplation is also used as a way to develop a sense of awareness that enables the ego-based self to fade away, allowing a more inclusive, relational identity to appear.

Second, the Diamond Sutra adds the much needed Logic of Not to the idea of mindfulness, transforming it into an instrument of deconstructing the perceived reality. This reasoning is summed up in the equation A not A therefore is called A which allows one to admit a classic conflict provoking situation, like a stop over a piece of land or an insult that is perceived, without being absorbed by the seeming permanence of it. By understanding that these activating events are transient, conditioned phenomena, similar to a bubble, a shadow, or a dream the practitioner will be able to approach conflict without the ego-focused reactive grasping which usually results in escalation. This reasoning breaks the rigidity of concepts, and it allows what can be called a Diamond Disputation where irrational, ego-defending ideologies are confronted by the awareness of empty space.

Third, the sutra redefines mindfulness by dismantling the Four Notions (Saṃjñā): the misconceptions of a separate Self, a Person, a Living Being and a Life Span. It is by breaking up these discriminative illusions that mindfulness turns into the revelation of Interbeing, the realisation that the self is entirely made up of non-self elements, such as natural, cultural, ancestral dimensions. This identity change has immediate structural implications on the ABCM Diamond model as it alters the Attitudes (A) and the Contradictions (C) of the involved parties. As soon as decision-makers start to understand the other is a continuation of their own interbeing, the incentive to aggression collapses into an unconditional compassion. Such integration ultimately facilitates equanimity, which is inner peace that cannot be disturbed by external factors, as the preconditions required to achieve lasting harmony in the world.

4. Mindfulness Practice of Decision-Makers: Transforming Conflict into Peace

The use of mindfulness in political decision making consists of three practices which are interrelated and which make the philosophical knowledge of the Diamond Sutra operational in peacebuilding.

The initial practice is related to the dismantling of the activating event. Instead of interpreting conflict triggers as potentially permanent endangers to the self or to national identity, mindfulness-trained decision-makers can learn to regard such experiences as temporary, conditioned experiences--bubbles, dreams, or shadows. This

re-framing bypasses the cognitive automaticity whereby perceived threats give rise to reactive decisions about policies, pushing it through a critical space of reflective thought.

The second practice is one that deals with the connection between internal conflict and geopolitical behaviour. The mindset of individual decision-makers is not an issue of individual concern and it is a driver of conflict or cooperation on the state level. In cases where leaders act out of a hubristic attachment, panic, and hard-line self-identification, their policies are reactive and escalatory. On the other hand, a leader who practices mindfulness allows a more judicious, caring approach towards the opponents so that the likelihood of a miscalculation and inadvertent escalation is low.

The third practice sets non-attachment and forgiveness as the pre-conditions of the true harmony not as some moral platitudes but as cognitive disciplines that facilitate the ability to seek justice without nurturing the cycles of vengeance. Non-attachment is not a passivity, a lack of concern about unfairness; it is the ability to take action without being controlled by the emotional impulse or the need to embarrass the opponents. This orientation coincides with the rational of restorative justice and has been consistent with the tradition of transformative peacebuilding, in which the point is not to defeat the other but to restore the circumstances of coexistence once again.

5. Mindfulness Pathways to Inner Peace

The mindfulness and cognitive training of the resolution of global conflict need a radical change in perspectives on the traditional view of security dilemma in international relations and an approach to the cognitive-ethical model of peacebuilding that will deal with the internal sources of aggression. This is a metamorphic process whose three essential pathways the Diamond Sutra wisdom is intertwined with to provide a realistic blueprint of both personal and planetary equanimity.

The first route is concerning meditation and mind training. Through their use of samadhi (concentration) and vipassanà (insight), the practitioners learn how to be able to abandon the optical delusion of separate ego state of mind, which is the traditional source of fear and power politics as theorised by realism. Samadhi brings the mind to a state of balance and vipassanai is having the ability of the individuals to look into their lives experiences in a deeper sense and realise that the self is not a fixed entity, but rather a dependent flow of five aggregates. This understanding can help destroy the limited, individualistic identity that makes the other one a threat, allowing leaders to transcend the root delusions of pride and defensiveness that so often fuel contemporary geopolitical conflicts.

The second channel is non-violence. This strategy uses mindfulness-based non-violence to break the cycles of hatred and retaliation that are self-perpetuating and usually follow an open military conflict. Being a cognitive-ethical process, it changes the three poisons: greed, anger, and ignorance which are the major sources of conflict. In particular, mindfulness turns anger into compassion by recognizing emotions, turns ignorance into wisdom by developing an insight into non-self and impermanence, and

turns greed into contentment by mindful living and gratitude. With such mindful awareness, moral dilemmas are reframed, thereby limiting the escalation of negative conflicts and increasing the non-dual negotiation space, even in deep-rooted situations like the Ukraine or Iran conflicts.

The third direction is experimentation on a daily basis - going beyond theoretical philosophy in order to implement the understanding of emptiness of the self to work crises and relationship problems. This method involves the decision-makers to use the Logic of Not of the Diamond Sutra, which acknowledges that a conflict is not a conflict, thus it is called a conflict, and will deprive activating events of their ego-charged meaning and view them as transient, conditioned events. As decision-makers start integrating these insights into their everyday lives, they will start to realize the truth of Interbeing, the fact that their actions have a karmic signature on an interrelated reality where benefiting the other is essentially benefiting the self. This rigorous combination of meditation, active non-violence and deep experimentation can lead to the discovery of the inner self, and materialistic and ego-centric concepts of self-definition can be transformed into the state of unconditional compassion and world citizenship.

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued that in the case of sustainable conflict transformation, it is necessary to consider the inner cognitive and ethical aspects of political agency that the mainstream theoretical traditions of international relations systematically overlook. The combination of the ontology of no-self of the Diamond Sutra and external peacebuilding and conflict through the ABCM Diamond model, the study presents a micro-foundation model, linking internal peacebuilding to external peacebuilding.

This analysis gives rise to three conclusions. To begin with, the shift of self-interest perspective to a cosmic identity founded on interdependence is not a spiritual longing, but a cognitive-ethical precondition of policy behaviour that fails to increase structural contradictions to a violent clash. Second, external peace requires inner peace; that is, equanimity that is not disturbed by external circumstances; without political actors being freed by the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance, sustainable international harmony will be unattainable. Third, the wisdom of the Diamond Sutra presents a more strictly philosophical tool- not an ambiguous spiritual add-on- to the analytic dismantling of the fixed identities and ego-attachments that maintain conflict. Once decision-makers disengage themselves with their stories and ideas, they open up to a freedom where new forms of political action can emerge.

Future studies need to consider the practical applications of the ABCM Diamond model based on the case studies of track-two diplomacy, leadership training programme and post-conflict reconciliation process. The synthesis provided in this paper (theoretical) is meant to support that larger research agenda.

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