

From Chinese Zen Thought to Global Peace: Reconstructing the ABCM Model of Conflict through Huineng's Zen Philosophy

White Cloud¹ and Cuong Manh Nguyen^{2,3}

¹ *Renmin University of China, International Academy for Religion and Peace Studies*

² *International Academy for Religion and Peace Studies*

³ *Berlin School of Business and Innovation*

Date: April 18, 2026

Abstract

To fill the gap of the previous studies, the paper combines Huineng Zen philosophy with modern conflict theory. It starts with a constraint of mainstream international relations and peace studies, namely, although realism, liberalism, and constructivism describe significant aspects of power, institutions, identity, and cooperation, they are, nonetheless, inadequately concerned with the inner cognitive and inner ethical processes in which conflict is construed, escalated, and recreated. Though the ABC model of conflict, attitude, behavior, and contradiction by Johan Galtung has psychological aspects, it has not theorized in detail the influence of reactive cognition, ego attachment, and dualistic perception on escalation in circumstances like the security dilemma. To fill this gap, the paper will enhance the ABC framework into an ABCM model by including mindfulness as an analytical and transformational dimension. Relying on the views of Huineng on non-duality, no-thought, non-attachment, and inseparability of ethics, meditation, and wisdom, the paper contends that structural contradictions, strategic rivalry, and the formation of identity and unquestioned perception are some of the forces behind conflict. The study follows a conceptual, interdisciplinary, and qualitative design methodology grounded in the textual and theoretical synthesis and case interpretation. It transfers the framework to the modern geopolitical conflicts, focusing especially on the security dilemma as a process whereby defensive purposes are redefined as offensive threats. The paper will argue that institutional design or power balancing is not enough in case we want to achieve sustainable peace. It needs to be changed in terms of how actors view self, other, threat, and responsibility.

Cuong Manh Nguyen serves as Professor of Development Studies, Provost, and Executive Vice President at the International Academy for Religion and Peace Studies, and is affiliated with the Berlin School of Business and Innovation.

Corresponding Author Email: nguyencuongberlin@gmail.com

Venerable Nghiem Tran, PhD serves as President of the Steering and Strategic Leadership Council at the International Academy for Religion and Peace Studies, and holds a PhD in Religion Studies from Renmin University of China.

The article helps to enrich the peace and conflict literature by suggesting a cognition ethics mindfulness paradigm to connect inner transformation with structural peace-building and provides a fresh foundation of leadership, diplomacy, and conflict resolution in a disintegrated global order.

Keywords: Huineng; Zen philosophy; security dilemma; ABCM model of conflict; mindfulness; conflict transformation; global peace-building

1. Introduction

The modern international conflicts are more complex, multidimensional, and inaccessible to the traditional means of resolving conflicts. Out of the long-standing geopolitical tensions like the Ukrainian crisis to larger crises influenced by energy insecurity, polarization of ideologies, and great-power competition, conflict dynamics in the contemporary world go way beyond material interests and institutional designs. The current paradigms of international relations, in particular, realism, liberalism, and constructivism, offer valuable insights into power, cooperation, and identity, albeit that they are rather externalist. They pay much attention to structures, institutions, and strategic interaction and thus little to the inner cognitive, perceptual, and ethical aspects in which the conflict is interpreted, aggravated, and reproduced.

This deficiency shows a significant gap in the existing research. Though the ABC triangle of conflict, Attitude, Behavior, and Contradiction, created by Johan Galtung, integrates psychological factors into conflict analysis, this theory fails to theorize the underlying mechanisms by which identity, perception, ego attachment, and reactive cognition create and maintain conflict. In the same vein, the burgeoning body of literature on mindfulness has produced useful information on mindfulness as a tool of conflict management and peacebuilding but tends to view mindfulness as a tool, as opposed to a unified philosophical system of comprehending the origins of conflict. Above all, the Chinese Zen philosophy especially the non-dualism of Huineng, has not been systematically incorporated in modern peace and conflict studies. This has a massive gap in terms of theoretical and methodological approaches.

This gap has been addressed in this paper by crafting an interdisciplinary framework that will narrow the ABC model into an ABCM diamond model by adding the dimension of mindfulness as an analysis and transformative core. Based on Huineng's Zen philosophy, the paper will claim that structural contradictions and external behaviors are not the only motivating factors of conflict, but dualistic thinking, strict construction of identity, and lack of reflexive awareness of them. The security dilemma is, in this sense, not only a structural state of international politics but also a cognitive and perceptual process by which actors perceive the defensive action of others in terms of fear, mistrust, and identification with egocentric identities.

This research attempts to deal with two research issues. First, we incorporate the non-dualism philosophy of Huineng to the existing ABC framework of analysis of conflict. Second, mindfulness philosophy can help both individual and leadership awareness to deal with conflict. The paper employs a qualitative, conceptual, and interdisciplinary research design, which involves textual analysis of the teachings of Huineng, theoretical synthesis of the peace and conflict literature, and application of the same to the present-day geopolitical conflicts.

The study has both theoretical and practical implications. In theory, it adds cognition ethics. mindfulness paradigm to the current paradigms in international relations and peace studies. In real practice it implies that the idea of sustainable global peace cannot be achieved just through institutional change and structural adaptation but also through change in consciousness and perception and leadership orientation.

In addition to an introduction, the paper is structured into five sections. Section 2 is concerned with the study methodologies. Section 3 focuses on the literature review, which reviews classical theories, Johan Galtung's peace theory, and mindfulness studies, identifying the cognitive gap. Section 4 deals with redefining the Huineng-inspired ABCM model of conflict, which develops the analytical framework by adding mindfulness to the ABC triangle. In section 5, the Ukraine case study reflects how to apply the model to explain the in-depth issues of this conflict dynamics. Section 6 concludes findings and policy implications.

2. Study Methodologies

The research design of this study is qualitative, conceptual, and interdisciplinary, meaning that the study will focus on theory-building within the context of peace and conflict studies. As the main goal is to deepen the conflict theory by means of the unification of the Chinese Zen philosophy, mindfulness, and modern geopolitical studies, an interpretive and non-positivist approach is the most suitable. Instead of statistically testing causal hypotheses, the research aims at formulating a new analytical framework that is able to explain the way structural contradictions interplay with perception, identity, and consciousness in the growth and metamorphosis of conflict.

The research is based mostly on secondary and conceptual materials. First, it relies on primary philosophical sources, in particular, the teachings of Huineng in The Platform Sutra, which have the ontological and epistemological basis of the analysis. These writings are applied to determine the fundamental ideas, which include non-duality, non-thought, non-attachment, and the inseparability of ethics, meditation, and wisdom. Second, the paper involves the scholarly literature on conflict theory (and especially the ABC model by Johan Galtung) and the recent research on peacebuilding, mindfulness, and Buddhist perspectives on transforming conflicts. Third, it uses policy reports, international analyses, and modern geopolitical interpretations as supplementary resources to the discussion of conflict cases and how the model is relevant in general.

The analysis will follow three broad methodology steps. To begin with, a textual analysis would be employed to explain some important ideas within the Zen philosophy of Huineng and render them into analytical classifications within the studies of peace and conflicts. In this way, philosophical concepts like non-dual awareness and ego transcendence can be re-formulated in the language that directly addresses conflict processes, such as identity development, reactive cognition, and threat perception. Second, the theoretical synthesis is used to combine the knowledge of the conflict theory, mindfulness research, and Zen philosophy into a logical analytical approach. In this way, the paper narrows down the ABC framework by Galtung to an ABCM diamond model by locating mindfulness as an explanatory and transformative aspect in the crisis of the conflict analysis. Third, the interpretive case-based analysis is used to demonstrate how the structural contradictions interplay with attitudes, behaviors, and consciousness in the modern geopolitical conflicts with particular reference to the conditions that are related to the security dilemma.

The methodological framework is more appropriate to theory-building, as it can integrate various knowledge traditions at the same time without narrowing them down to a single disciplinary prism. It is also able to help the paper go past the purely structural concept of conflict because cognition, ethics, and perception are all included in the analysis. Simultaneously, the research is conscious of its shortcomings. Being a conceptual and interpretive process, it is not intended to offer statistical generalization and causal measurement. Rather, it has contributed to creating a solid interdisciplinary framework that can be utilized in future empirical studies of mindfulness, leadership, escalation of conflicts, and peacebuilding.

3. Literature Review

The review of classical schools of international relations, namely realism, liberalism, and constructivism, provides key aspects of international conflict and the need to achieve global peace. The realism focuses on conflict by analyzing the anarchy, competition of power, survival, and national interest. In this context, defensive actions are often viewed by other groups as offensive, thus creating the security dilemma. In this situation, state leaders are trapped in the cycle of fear, mistrust, and worst-case thinking instead of peaceful thinking (Brown, 2012; Freedman, 2025). Liberalism, in its turn, is more focused on institutions, cooperation, and interdependence, although it tends to believe that rational arrangements and institutions can alleviate conflict. But in practice, though, state elites still put sovereignty, strategic benefit, and domestic legitimacy ahead of common peace, especially at times when the politics of insecurity comes into play. The only way to resolve the deep-rooted suspicion and self-defense in competition is therefore by institutions only (Eriksson and Giacomello, 2006; Burchill, 2005). Constructivism considers identity, discourse, and social meaning as the key solutions for global peace, but even this approach fails to investigate deep enough into the innermost dimension of conflict, such as misunderstanding, cognitive distortion, ego attachment, and the unprocessed consciousness of the political leaders and societies. Political actors tend to position themselves as defensive and morally right and others as aggressive, illegitimate, or threatening, thereby intensifying each other insecurity and

further spiraling conflict. The main issue of conflict, however, is not so much in the external structures, institutions, or competing identities but rather in the awareness of political actors themselves. Realism, liberalism, and constructivism fail to fully explain the continuation of war and offer a viable basis of sustainable global peace without considering the inner causes of fear, delusion, and moral blindness in leadership (Brown, 2012; Freedman, 2025).

The mainstream peace theories are structurally strong, but cognitively deficient in these aspects. In contrast, Johan Galtung's more recent research has focused on direct, structural, and cultural violence, as well as the difference between negative (the absence of violence) and positive peace (harmony, social justice, and rule-of-law societies). Institutions and governance are set up to deal with the inner cognitive and ethical processes that escalate conflict. Ragandang (2024) reinstates the central place of Galtung in peace studies, and Steinmetz (2025) demonstrates that the Western approaches are inclined to accentuate the role of state structures and institutional regulation, whereas the non-Western approaches emphasize more the relational harmony, spirituality, and moral balance. This difference is important in that it implies that mainstream theories prove useful in elucidating external conflict patterns but are less helpful in explaining the perceptual and psychological processes that enable hostility to be perpetuated.

Simultaneously, the recent academic community is to acknowledge mindfulness as a valuable analytical and practical variable in conflict transformation. The closest one is that of Nguyen et al. (2024) who add the mindfulness aspect to the triangle of the ABC triangle in the analysis of the conflict in Ukraine to make it an ABCM diamond model of conflict. They argue that realism, liberalism, and constructivism do not provide a complete explanation of conflict escalation since they do not consider compassion, empathy, a non-judgmental awareness of cognitions, and reactive cognition. Similarly, Volodin (2023) demonstrates that mindfulness-based nonviolence, which relies on the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, can disrupt the cycle of hatred and revenge and, therefore, can help to establish long-term peace, both at the individual and global levels. The focus of these studies is especially useful since it brings peace research beyond external diplomacy and institutional bargaining to a much more profound understanding of the role of consciousness itself in conflict dynamics.

Buddhist ways of conflict also make this question even more profound as they underline the inner causes of violence. According to Sunandabodhi (2024), Buddhist mindfulness techniques are applicable to conflict resolution specifically due to the fact that they deal with greed, hatred, and delusion as the origins of conflict. Tiwary and Sharma (2024) also emphasize the applicability of the Buddhist doctrines of nonviolence, compassion, interdependence, and moral discipline to modern conflict resolution. Burmansah et al. (2024) bring in an applied leadership aspect and demonstrate that mindfulness and Buddhist principles of governance can enhance conflict management and leadership ability. Combined, these research papers show that the Buddhist traditions provide not only moral ideals but also a set of practical strategies of de-escalation, mediation, and ethical leadership.

An additional theoretical contribution that Buddhist thought makes is challenging the strict identity building and dualistic perception (Zalta, 2016). The perpetual presence of conflict is made possible through the building of a hard self and defensive clinging to identities, perceptions, and oppositional categories. In this light, conflict is not only a competition of material interests but also a cognitive process that is the result of a misperception, ego-attachment, and reactive consciousness. This observation is very practical to the current geopolitical struggles, where collective identities, moral absolutism, and self-other dichotomies tend to heighten confrontation.

Even though existing studies on mindfulness, Buddhist ethics, and non-Western peace theory are becoming more and more useful, they hardly relate the teachings of Huineng on Zen to peacebuilding or conflict transformation. However, the focus of non-attachment and direct insight, criticism of fixation on concepts, and change of mind as provides a unique contribution to peace theory. The philosophy of Huineng is not only religious or metaphysical as proposed by recent works like Che (2025) but also epistemological as it questions the adherence to language, to fixed categories, and dualistic thinking. Combining the Zen philosophy of Huineng with the ABC concept of Galtung, recent mindfulness-based peacebuilding research, and the latest example of geopolitics, this study has provided a new cognition-ethics-mindfulness lens in world peacebuilding. In this regard, the ABCM model of Huineng fills the existing gap in the peace studies, where sustainable peace cannot be achieved just through structural change and institutional adaptation but also through the change of consciousness, ego-centered identity, and reactive perceptions.

Che (2025) and Song (2023) also demonstrate that the teaching of Huineng is practical, doctrinal, rhetorical, and transformative. Peacebuilding cannot be based on external institutions or political negotiations only but also on the transformation of consciousness, perception, and communication. These concepts are directly related to the ABCM concept since mindfulness, non-duality, and decreased ego-attachment can be used to understand how conflict intensifies in the inner before it develops into external violence.

The management of conflict is, therefore, best managed through a holistic system that deals with inner feelings, objective problems, outer behavior, and consciousness in this multifaceted system.

4. Redefining the Huineng-Inspired ABCM Model for Global Peace

4.1 From the ABC Triangle to the ABCM Diamond Model of Conflict

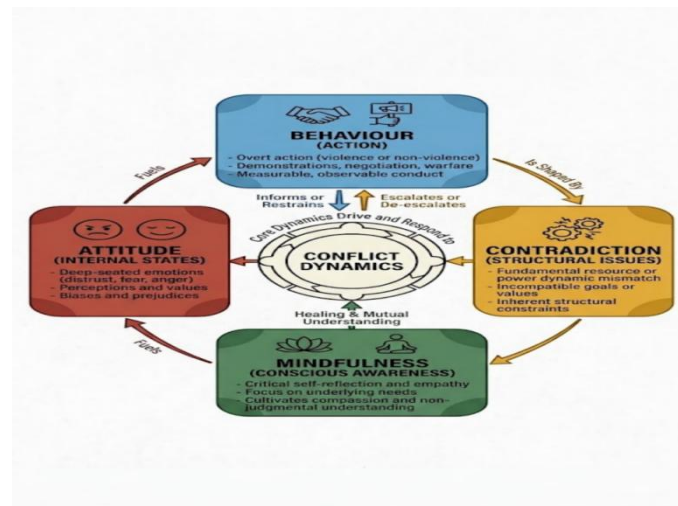
Galtung's peace conceptual framework can offer a foundational framework for understanding conflict based on five interrelated dimensions. First, **negative peace** reflects the mere absence of direct violence, where war or violence happens, but underlying tensions could not be resolved, making peace fragile and challenging (Galtung, 1969). Second, **positive peace** is also critical for societies, which indicates the presence of social justice, equality, and harmonious social relations, requiring the

removal of structural violence embedded in institutional structures of each society (Galtung, 1969, 1990). Third, Galtung describes conflict through the **ABC triangle**, consisting of attitude (A), behavior (B), and contradiction (C), clarifying the dynamic interaction between perceptions, actions, and incompatible interests in sustaining conflict processes (Galtung, 1969). Fourth, three strategic approaches to peace—**peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding—are mentioned, where** peacebuilding is considered as the most transformative, addressing root causes such as inequality, mistrust, and institutional failure (Galtung, 1976). Fifth, Galtung focused on a **transdisciplinary perspective on peace**, arguing that sustainable peace requests integrating political, economic, cultural, and psychological dimensions, moving beyond purely structural or institutional explanations (Galtung, 1985, 2010). However, peace is not a static status but a multidimensional process involving both the reduction of violence and the creation of conditions for human flourishing at individual levels as well as national and international levels. This framework is particularly important for contemporary conflict analysis, as it compensates for the constraints of traditional international relations theories and incorporates deeper cognitive, ethical, and cultural transformations into peacebuilding strategies.

While the ABC triangle of Galtung describes conflict as the combination of attitude, behavior, and contradiction, the new model introduces a new dimension of mindfulness as an analytical and transformative level. This extension further develops them by demonstrating that it is not only the objective incompatibilities and observable actions that fuel the escalation of conflict, but also the quality of the perception, self-construction, and cognitive reaction wherein the latter contradictions are perceived. In diagram 1, the ABCM diamond model of conflict is based on the recent attempts to introduce the concept of mindfulness to conflict analysis along with the further elaboration of the philosophical basis of the given step (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Mindfulness, as conceptualized by Thich Nhat Hanh and grounded in the Zen philosophy of Huineng, reflects non-judgmental awareness of the present moment as a cognitive-ethical mechanism for transforming the three poisons of each individual—anger, ignorance, and greed. Mindfulness can turn **anger into compassion** through mindful breathing and emotional recognition, reducing negative conflict escalation (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1991; 2016). Second, it can transform **ignorance into wisdom** by cultivating insightful thoughts on impermanence and non-self, thereby removing cognitive distortions and making more rational decision-making (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2008). Third, it reforms **greed into contentment** via mindful living and gratitude, promoting ethical responsibility and social sustainability and peace (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1998). Consequently, the mindfulness approach is a micro-foundational variable connecting internal transformation (internal peacebuilding) to external peacebuilding, providing a robust analytical extension to conventional conflict models (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1991; 2008; 2016).

Diagram 1. ABCM Model of Conflict



Source: Nguyen et al., 2024.

The concepts of contradictions, attitudes, and behaviors are the incompatibility of goals, interests, or structural positions; fear, mistrust, resentment, and hostility in perception; and actual actions, including coercion and exclusion, as well as violence and war. The model thus shows that conflict does not commence at the point when there is an actual confrontation. It tends to emerge at an earlier stage, with antagonistic interpretations, fixed identities, and unresolved structural tensions. This understanding is especially applicable in the modern geopolitical contexts where the security dilemma transforms positional defensive measures into perceived threats, and thus escalation increases aggression, and other cycles of escalation are strengthened.

Through the addition of **mindfulness**, the model provides a cognitive-ethical aspect that can be used to explain how structural contradiction is not known to generate conflict in a mechanistic way, but rather in a reactive manner and through ego-based attachment. The concept of mindfulness is not regarded as just a therapeutic method or emotional support. It is theorized as a way of consciousness where actors can see perceptions, intentions, and reactions without necessarily identifying or causing escalation. This extended concept aligns with the studies that demonstrate that Mindfulness can empower empathy, emotional control, perspective-taking, and conflict resolution in the context of peacebuilding (Waelde et al., 2019).

Mindfulness has a threefold role of analysis. To start with, it works diagnostically, uncovering how fear, projection, and rigid identity construct attitudes. Second, it works regulatively by breaking the automaticity of hostile attitudes to aggressive behavior. Third, it works in a **transformatory** manner as it allows actors to re-evaluate contradiction itself in less absolutist, less antagonistic ways. In this respect, the ABCM The diamond model of conflict does not refute material conflict, a power asymmetry, and strategic rivalry. Instead, it claims that the intensification of these contradictions is partly due to the lack of reflective consciousness. In the weak or empty state of mindfulness, contradictions are explained by attached ego stances, behaviors are reactive, and conflict is self-perpetuating. Actors also have more ability to be restrained, empathetic, and non-dual, which is created when mindfulness is cultivated, thereby creating a wider negotiation and de-escalation space.

Meanwhile, the ABCM model cannot be perceived in an idealist manner. Mindfulness in itself will not unfreeze the geopolitical rivalry, material asymmetry, or institutional inertia. The structural contradictions do exist, and most of the conflicts are perpetuated by interests, capabilities, and power calculations, which cannot be changed by cognitive means alone. Mindfulness is not a substitute for political analysis but is complementary to it. It provides a micro-foundational explanation of the perceptions of actors towards conflict, their reactions to it, and the possible changes they might bring about. In this regard, the Huineng-inspired model of the ABCM can be added to the peace studies by shifting to a more wholesome reading of conflict as based on a more cognitive-ethical model of peacebuilding. The mindfulness approach is conceptualized by three dimensions. First, it needs to reframe moral dilemmas through mindful awareness and non-attachment, enabling individuals to observe thoughts and emotions (greed, anger, and ignorance) without immediate reactive judgment, thereby reducing escalation driven by fear or ego-centric behaviors. Second, it integrates compassion and wisdom into daily decision-making, which balances human needs with ethical responsibility toward each other. Third, conflict is derived from cognition—particularly individual perception, intention, and mental conditioning—reflecting that transforming these inner processes can transform behavior from reactive to reflective: internal peace. By connecting ethics with consciousness, this approach considers mindfulness as both an analytical lens and a practical pathway for sustainable, non-violent conflict transformation (Nguyen et al., 2025).

4.2 Huineng's Zen Philosophy for Refined ABCM Model of Conflict

The philosophy of **Dajian Huineng** (638-713), the Sixth Patriarch of Chinese Chan (Zen) Buddhism, becomes the basis for the refinement of the ABCM model of conflict in this paper. Huineng is strategically positioned as a source of East Asian Zen philosophy since he expressed a view of awakening, which focuses on immediate realization as opposed to a progressive one. His teachings focus on sudden enlightenment, realization of inherent nature, and inseparability of ethics, meditation, and wisdom. The main aspects

of his thinking are the **no-thought**, **no-form**, and **non-abiding**, which are a combination of non-dual attitudes toward mind and reality. These concepts are not only the religious concepts but also give an elaborate explanation of cognition, attachment, and liberation, which can be taken to discussion with modern peace and conflict theory. From this perspective, misery and unrest ensue when the mind is hooked on the differences and fixation on ideas. The mind forms oppositions between self and other, gain and loss, and victory and defeat and then sticks to those and makes them absolute. Out of this process, desire, aversion, defensiveness, and confusion are generated. According to conflict, this implies that hostility is not produced solely by the external contradiction, but it is reinforced by the dualistic cognition that actors make sense of themselves and others. This understanding is paramount to the ABCM model of conflict. The attitudes are not mere preferences or emotions but are influenced by deeper habits of seeing and building identities. Huineng thus allows the model to give an explanation regarding why conflict usually starts in the inside before it is then transferred to external violence. The second significant contribution of Huineng is his redefinition of ethical cultivation. Instead of ethics, concentration, and wisdom being individual and sequential, he introduces ethics, concentration, and wisdom as concurrent manifestations of awakened awareness. When attachment goes away, ethics then becomes an automatic way of not harming. However, concentration is not a strict mental control but an awareness without fixation. Wisdom is firsthand experience of emptiness, interdependence, and non-substantiality of self. This holistic perspective has firsthand consequences on conflict transformation. It implies that peace cannot be constructed only by the outside inhibition or official obedience. True peace demands a state of consciousness whereby response ceases to be due to ego-centered attachment. This aids the role of mindfulness in the ABCM model of the conflict as a factor that does not only moderate behavior but also the very formation of attitude. This interpretation aligns with the Buddhist methods of transforming conflicts that associate mindfulness with dismantling the fixed sense of self and the self-protective state of existence (Zalta, 2016).

Peace is not merely the lack of out-and-out aggression, nor merely a political order brought down on the populace by a top-down approach. It is an ontological and cognitive state that arises when the mind ceases to reproduce misperception, attachment, and division. Here, peace is discovered as opposed to being created. This assertion has to be treated with care when conducting an academic analysis, as it tends to be misconstrued as being passive or apathetic towards injustice. When understood correctly, though, the insistence of Huineng on non-abiding does not preclude conflict, morality, and responsibility. Instead, it helps actors to avoid being ensnared in reactive absolutism. Peace does not imply the inability to see evil; it is an ability not to repeat the egoistic reasoning that helps the conflict to get worse.

Another Huineng's refinement of significance is that of merit and true virtue. **Merit** in Buddhist terms is the positive effects produced by external activities that are ethically

positive, like generosity, help, or social responsibilities. In the framework of the ABCM model, these actions can have a positive effect on **behavior** and can even alleviate certain types of **contradiction** through alleviation of material or relational tension. But Huineng proposes that the essence of virtue goes beyond what is beneficent in outward looks. It comes about due to internal awakening, the breakdown of ego-centered attachment, and the development of wisdom and compassion, leading to both negative and positive peace for personal life transformation. Apparently ethical acts can be motivated by fear, self-interest, or ideological superiority. Even coercive or violent actions can be justified in terms of peace, order, or moral defense in geopolitical terms. Such distortion in the ABCM model is when **behavior** is not rooted in transformed **attitude** and true **mindfulness**. The difference between Huineng thus indicates that ethical appearance is not enough, but the question is whether acting is because of awakened consciousness or because of blind attachment.

This can be generalized to the understanding of enlightenment as change by Huineng. Enlightenment in this meaning does not consist of some mystical escape from reality but rather a training of greed, anger, ignorance, pride, doubt, and wrong view into compassion, wisdom, and clarity. This transformation is psychologically applicable since it restructures the mind towards self-centeredness of reactivity and non-self-centeredness of awareness. It is also politically applicable, as it is offering a model of peace that cannot be curbed into domination, oppression, or delayed gratification. The notion of the Pure Land as something that can be realized here and now with the help of mind purification by Huineng directly contradicts any idea of peace that can be established by using force and power over others. A peace that is based on domination is opposite to the consciousness needed to build a peace. In the terms of the ABCM model, this implies that sustainable peace cannot be born in the context of the contradiction being resolved by force and the attitudes being dictated by fear and attachment to ego only.

The Zen philosophy of Huineng thus fortifies the role of mindfulness as the driving force of transformation for inner peace in the ABCM model of conflict. With mindfulness, it is possible to observe, dismantle, and go beyond the reactivity patterns of the mind and thereby change the dynamics of conflict to a power-seeking, antagonistic response to ethical clarity, compassionate interaction, and more judicious judgment. Overall, the Zen philosophy of Huineng can enable the ABCM model to go beyond a very limited approach to conflict management to a more theoretical approach of conflict transformation.

5. Case Study: The Ukraine Conflict

5.1 Ukraine Conflict as a Security Dilemma and Humanitarian Crisis

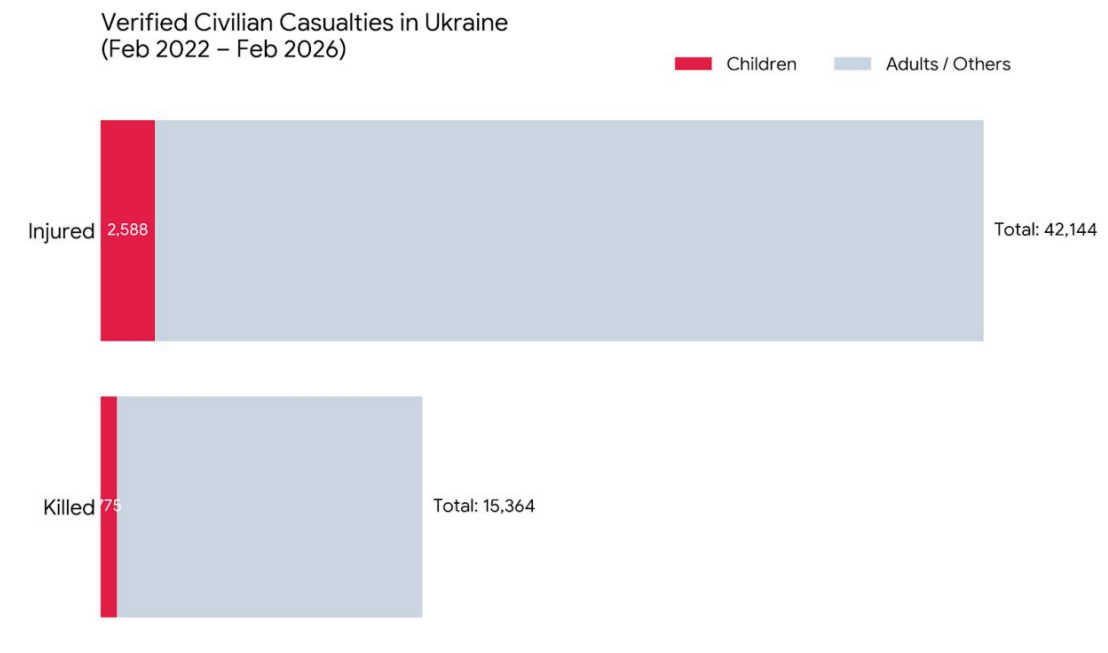
The conflict in Ukraine is a great failure in regional and international stability, which is based on a security dilemma where defensive actions of one actor are viewed as

existential threats by another. Its context is the unresolved post-Soviet security order that left Ukraine in between its desire to integrate more closely with Europe and the demands of Russia that it maintain a strategic sphere of influence. These tensions escalated when the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the conflict in eastern Ukraine, and the inability of diplomatic efforts to reach a stable settlement all led to the mass invasion in 2022. The conflict is thus not merely a military battle but a breakdown of reassurance between each other in the European security system.

The reasons behind the war may be explained by three drivers that are related to one another. To begin with, the Western political and military frameworks were seen by Russia as a threat to its security environment despite the fact that NATO and the European Union included their functions as defensive and institutional as opposed to offensive. Second, the claim of sovereign choice by Ukraine and its increased orientation towards Western standards was a direct threat to the long-standing inclination of Moscow to a buffer zone in its near abroad. Third, the diplomatic order of the post-Cold War era was unable to balance these conflicting concepts of security, and a vortex of distrust, broken agreements, and a diplomatic arms race began. In this regard, the Ukraine conflict can be discussed as a classic example of a security dilemma where one cannot improve the security of his or her nation without increasing the insecurity of the opponent (Smith and Dawson, 2022; Palinchak et al., 2025).

The conflict has had disastrous effects on the humanitarian level. The statistical evidence indicates that in early 2026, there has been a colossal civilian loss and injury toll, including grave child effects and strain on the long-term health system, social cohesion, and demographic recovery strain. Displacement has also been of enormous proportions, with millions of refugees being registered in Europe and out of Europe, which has resulted in a long-term regional and international burden. Besides the human cost, the economic devastation has been great, and it has been experienced in the spheres of commerce, industry, agriculture, energy infrastructure, housing, and rehabilitation capacity. The war in Ukraine is not a military crisis but also a humanitarian, developmental, and systemic shock that has long-term consequences on Europe and the whole international system (UNHCR, 2026; Kyiv School of Economics, 2026). As reflected in graph 1, a devastating human cost includes two main outcomes: massive civilian trauma and a significant effect on the younger generation. The conflict has led to 57,508 total confirmed casualties, with 42,144 injury cases exceeding 15,364 deaths, showing a huge, long-term strain on medical facilities and a physical and psychological disability legacy on the population. Second, the confirmed loss of 775 children and the damage of 2,588 others highlight a terrible failure of humanitarian safeguards, which is a loss of generations that will complicate recovery in demographic and social life in the coming decades. These statistics, which were confirmed by the OHCHR and the United Nations, are a minimum estimate of the overall magnitude of the humanitarian crisis.

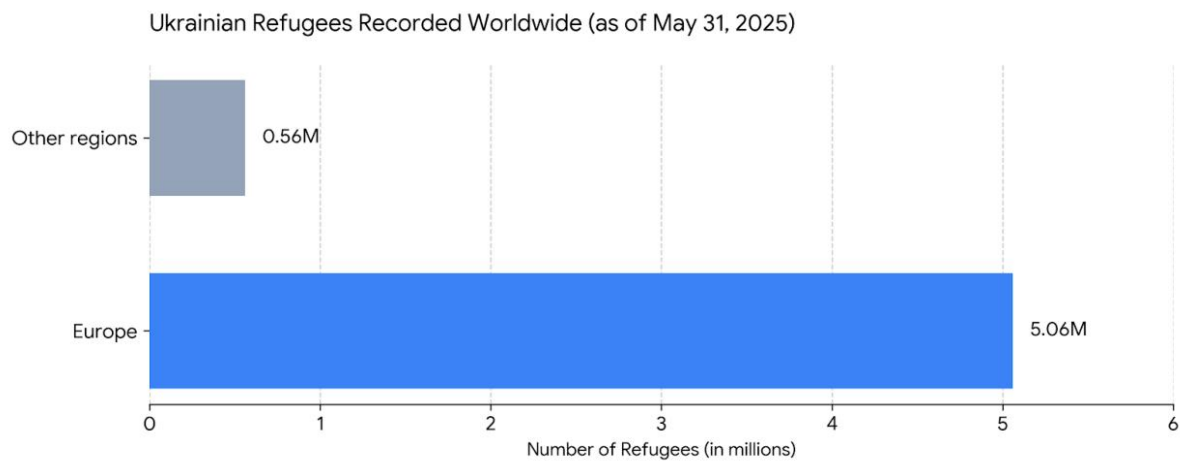
Graph 1. The Human Toll: Verified Civilian Deaths and Injuries in Ukraine



Sources: OHCHR, United Nations, 2026

Further, as shown In graph 2, the 5.62 million-refugee global displacement by May 2025 has posed a regional problem, with about 90 percent of the refugees escaping staying in Europe, and it needs an unprecedented international collaboration and resource mobilization on the part of host countries. Combined, these factors represent a conservative baseline of the war's verified consequences as of 2026.

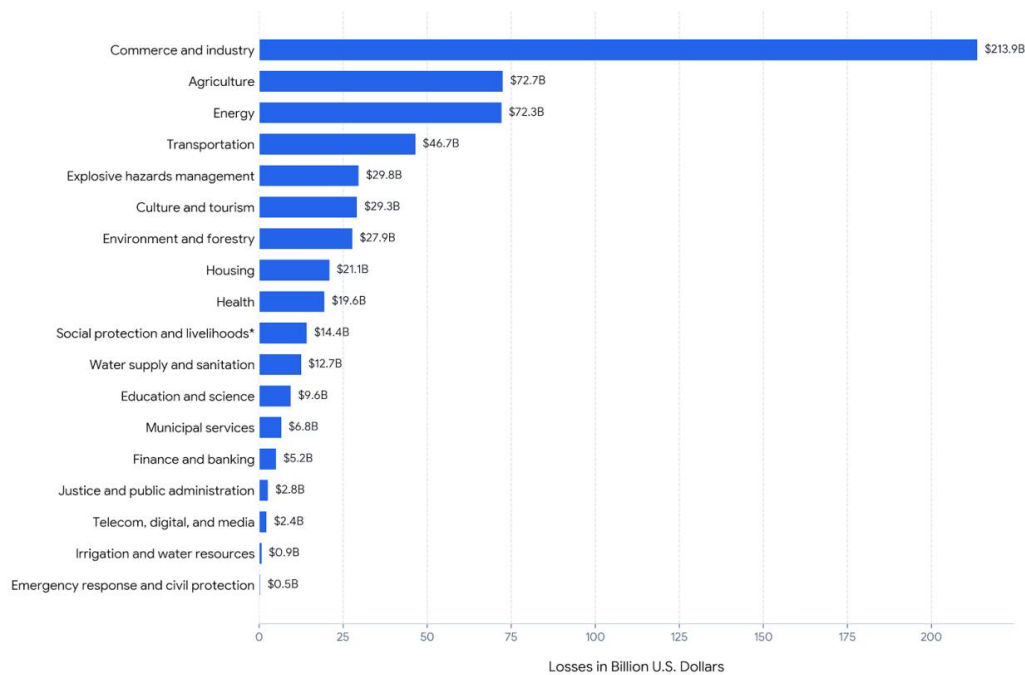
Graph 2. Estimated Ukrainian Refugee Distribution Recorded Worldwide as of May 31, 2025



Source: **UNHCR. (2026).**

Ukraine suffered from the devastating effects of the conflict on the economy in the long run (Graph 3). The loss of a little over 211.9 billion dollars in trade and industry emphasizes the almost complete disruption of the productive capacity of the country, which is causing the shrinkage of the economy. It also faces virtually similar disastrous harm to agriculture (72.7 billion USD) and energy (72.3 billion USD), which jeopardizes national food security and the very infrastructure of utility required by civilians to survive and industry to recover. This data represents systemic economic drainage, which will demand serious multi-decade investment on an international scale to be fully neutralized and sovereign growth initiatives in all those social and institutional sectors that have been affected.

Graph 3. Estimated Monetary War Losses in Ukraine by Sector (2022–2026)



Source: Kyiv School of Economics. (2026).

The conflict in Ukraine is not merely a military crisis but a humanitarian shock, a developmental shock, and a systemic shock that will have lasting effects on Europe and the international system on the whole (UNHCR, 2026; Kyiv School of Economics, 2026).

5.2 Interpreting the Ukraine Conflict through the ABCM Model of Conflict

The conflict in Ukraine evidences that the reasons for modern war are not entirely material or strategic. They are also related to perception, identity, and cognition. In the framework of the ABCM, **Contradiction (C)** is based on incompatible geopolitical aims, particularly the conflict between Russian security concerns, which the expansion of NATO threatens, and Ukrainian sovereignty, territorial integrity, and integration into the Western institutions. But structural contradiction will not necessarily lead to war. The extent to which it is escalated is determined by the way it is perceived by political actors.

It is here that **Attitude (A)** comes into play. Attitudes in the Ukraine case have been influenced by historical grievances, collective memory, rival events of legitimacy, and distrust of each other. Both parties have been inclined to view their actions as self-defense and rightful and those of the other as offensive or disruptive. Dualistic types of thinking, particularly self versus other, security versus threat, and legitimacy versus illegitimacy, enhance such attitudes. Such interpretive patterns narrow down the room to compromise and transform political conflict into existential conflict. In this regard, the conflict in Ukraine is a conflict of identities and meaning, as well as a conflict of interests.

These mental and attitude processes are converted into **behavior (B)** by the means of military escalation, sanctions, alliance consolidation, proxy support, and retaliation.

Attitudes are in turn maintained by behavior, and the cycle of self-reinforcement is created. This is exactly the dynamic that the ABCM model attempts to describe: it is the contradictions that construct attitudes, attitudes that construct behaviors, and behaviors that construct contradictions. The conflict system is more rigid and escalatory without a moderating mechanism. Recent contributions to the ABCM model have already noted that mindfulness can be used to shed light on these feedback processes in the conflict in Ukraine by emphasizing attention towards compassion, empathy, non-judgmental awareness, and reactive cognition (Nguyen et al., 2024).

5.3 Huineng's Zen Philosophy and its Analytical Contribution to Understanding the Ukraine Conflict

According to the Zen philosophy of Huineng, the conflict in Ukraine has also been shown to have a second aspect to causation. It cannot be reduced to structural contradiction or strategic rivalry and its escalation. It is also perpetuated by dualistic thinking, ego attachment, and strict identity formation. The philosophy of Huineng focuses on the fact that a conflict occurs when the consciousness is attached to rigid differences and when it sees the reality in terms of attachment, fear, and fixation of ideas. In its application in the situation in Ukraine, it implies that the geopolitical contradiction is particularly destructive when the actors are unable to deescalate their self-righteous narratives and threat-subjugated perceptions.

It is at this point that **mindfulness (M)** comes in. The mindfulness in the Huineng-inspired ABCM model is not just emotional coolness or politeness. It is a state of consciousness that can break the reactive thought process and decrease the fixation on the fixed self and other differences. This in practice does not drive out the fact of structural contradiction. Instead, it alters the perception and response to contradiction. Mindfulness will help leaders and institutions to re-evaluate assumptions, see the boundaries of their own accounts, and prevent escalation through projection and fear. It also opens up the potential of dialogue by undermining the process of automatic transfer of insecurity to hostile behavior.

In this perspective, the conflict in Ukraine exemplifies the main thesis of this paper: it is not only external arrangements that are important to achieve sustainable peace but also the change of consciousness. The processes of negotiations, ceasefires, institutional guarantees, and reconstruction are inevitable. Structural agreements, however, might be weak unless there is a change in perception and leadership orientation. The philosophy of Huineng makes the ABCM model more solid as it reveals why conflict continues despite the obviousness of the cost of war: actors are stuck in the dualistic interpretation and reactive identity patterns. To achieve a lasting peace, structural settlement and cognitive-ethical change are thus necessary.

The conflict in Ukraine has three wider implications for peacebuilding. First, any sufficient strategy towards peace must take care of the security architecture as well as perceptual dynamics. Structural contradiction is important; fear, identity, and strategic interpretation are also important. Second, peacebuilding cannot be seen as a

one-sided process of interstate diplomacy, and it is also needed to promote dialogue, social trust, historical reconciliation, and leadership practices that can mitigate reactive escalation. Third, the Huineng-based model of ABCM provides a more holistic model of the reasons behind the inability of conflict to end even after the terrible human and economic price it costs. It offers a deeper explanation of both the escalation and de-escalation through a combination of structural analysis and mindfulness and non-dual awareness.

In this respect, the case of Ukraine is not just another example of conflict under the conditions of a security dilemma. It is also an indication of the reason why global peacebuilding needs a wider paradigm, one that incorporates contradiction, behavior, attitude, and mindfulness into one conflict transformation framework. This kind of a framework does not substitute realism, diplomacy, and institutional design. It demonstrates that peace is related to the distribution of power and the perception of reality.

6. Conclusion and Implications for Global Peacebuilding

The paper has come up with an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates the conflict theory and Chinese philosophy of Zen to add more insights into elucidating and resolving the increasing complexity of the global conflicts today. Based on the shortcomings of the current paradigms, the research has further developed the ABC triangle of Johan Galtung into an ABCM diamond model of conflict with **mindfulness** as the main dimension of analysis and transformation. Based on the non-dualism teachings of Huineng, the paper has progressed a cognition, ethics, and mindfulness paradigm of internal transformation and structure conflict dynamics. By so doing, it contends that no useful understanding of conflict can be achieved solely in terms of external structures since the growth and inertia of conflict are also conditioned by perception, identity, and reactive consciousness.

There are a number of conclusions. To begin with, the reasons for the modern conflict are multidimensional. They are not only a result of structural contradictions, including power asymmetry, geopolitical rivalry, territorial insecurity, and resource rivalry, but also a result of cognitive and perceptual processes and fear, misperception, identity creation, and moral absolutism. The methodologies that are only concerned with external structures are thus incomplete, as they do not provide the entire picture as to why conflict escalation is even increased when the cost of escalating conflict is apparent.

Second, although the ABC model is still a useful starting point to understanding conflict in **attitude, behavior, and contradiction**, there is a lack of explanation of the internal processes by which these dimensions are constituted, reproduced, and changed. The ABCM model has been presented to accommodate this limitation by introducing the concept of **mindfulness** to the model to offer a micro-foundational view of explaining the connection between awareness, perception, and decision-making to conflict dynamics. In this regard, the model provides a more unified perspective of how the structural contradiction is converted into escalation by way of reactive cognition.

Third, the integration of the Zen philosophy of Huineng is an important theoretical contribution. Identifying the origins of conflict in dualistic thinking, attachment to the ego, and reactive consciousness, the thinking of Huineng enriches the discussion of the ways that the hostility is generated and maintained. Non-duality, no-thought, and non-abiding are not used in this context as the mere abstractions of spirituality; they actually provide a guide to the way that actors get caught in fixed self-other dichotomies and how these dichotomies fuel enmity. The view contributes to an understanding of the need for not only behavioral restraint and institutional settlement but also a change in the perception of conflict as a means of promoting peace.

Fourth, empirical interpretation of the conflict in Ukraine and the discussion of contemporary war on the whole demonstrate the interplay of structural contradictions and attitudes and behaviors being influenced by fear, identity, and interpretation of strategy. These instances demonstrate that in the face of lack of mindfulness, conflict is likely to escalate in the form of misrecognition cycles, reactive decisions, and mutually sustaining insecurity. The ABCM model thus offers a better perspective into the interdependent and dynamic nature of global conflict.

Fifth, the research demonstrates that it is impossible to achieve sustainable peace only by balancing power, designing institutions, or making formal agreements. These are still required, as they are not adequate. A lasting peace involves also a change of consciousness that would allow actors to go beyond the fixed identities, reactive judgments, and egoistic definitions of threat. This does not imply that we should stop being realistic in regard to power and structure. Instead, it is the addition of structural analysis with the more in-depth description of cognition, morals, and consciousness.

Based on these results, the paper provides three recommendations towards world peacebuilding. The initial one is theoretical. Research in conflict and peace studies needs to shift to a more integrative paradigm that integrates structural analysis with cognitive and moral transformation in which mindfulness is central as an analytical variable as opposed to a marginal moral adjunct. The second is the policy-oriented one. Mindfulness-informed strategies ought to be included in leadership education, negotiation, and peacebuilding practices by policymakers, diplomats, and international institutions to enhance empathy, reflective reasoning, and long-term thinking. The third one is functional. Individually, in organizations, and in society, mindfulness and moral consciousness can be cultivated to decrease reactive behavior and enhance the management of conflicts, as well as assist in more sustainable and non-violent approaches to interaction. **Mindfulness is considered a foundational factor from which** global peace must be derived from individual peace; when national leaders and citizens of each country learn how to cultivate inner awareness and peace so that they should not be driven by fear, ego, and reactive biases, they thereby de-escalate the risk of wars. Further, drawing on the Zen philosophy of Huineng, it is relevant that all individuals, including national leaders, can practice the mindfulness **transformation of anger, ignorance, and greed into compassion, wisdom, and contentment**, improving ethical and rational decision-making. Therefore, integrating mindfulness into the ABCM diamond model of conflict helps mitigate the **security dilemma**, as self-

aware leaders are more capable in dealing with national threats and pursuing cooperative strategies for national and global peace while recognizing that conflict escalation leads to no mutual benefits and instead to collective losses and long-term instability.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization and methodology, M.-C.N.; Buddhist mindfulness philosophy and Huineng Zen philosophy, T.N. supervision, M.-C.N. Nguyen Manh Cuong served as the first and corresponding author. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Data are contained within the article.

Acknowledgments: The authors acknowledge the support of BSBI.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Reference

- 1) Brown, C. (2012). *Realism: Rational or reasonable?* International Affairs, 88(4), 857–867. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2012.01105.x>
- 2) Burmansah, B., Sutawan, K., Suryanadi, J., Ardianto, H., & Kundana, D. (2024). *A study of mindful leader and educator on conflict management: The effect of mindfulness, ten principles of Buddhist governance, and transformational leadership toward conflict management*. Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture. <https://doi.org/10.70082/esiculture.vi.701>
- 3) Burchill, S. (2005). *The national interest in international relations theory*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780230005778>
- 4) Che, X. (2025). “Words falter in encapsulating the Dao” (言語道斷): The philosophy of language of Zen Buddhism in The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch. Religions. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16080974>
- 5) Eriksson, J., & Giacomello, G. (2006). *The information revolution, security, and international relations: Relevant theory?* International Political Science Review, 27(3), 221–244. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512106064462>
- 6) Freedman, L. (2025). *Robert Jervis, realism, and misperceptions*. Oxford Scholarship Online. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197814659.003.0020>
- 7) Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301>

- 8) Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 27(3), 291–305.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343390027003005>
- 9) Galtung, J. (1976). Three approaches to peace: Peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding. *Journal of Peace Research*, 13(4), 297–298.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/002234337601300207>
- 10) Galtung, J. (1985). Twenty-five years of peace research: Ten challenges and some responses. *Journal of Peace Research*, 22(2), 141–158.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/002234338502200205>
- 11) Galtung, J. (2010). Peace studies and conflict resolution: The need for transdisciplinarity. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 47(1), 20–32.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461510362041>
- 12) Kyiv School of Economics. (2026). *Total monetary losses from the war in Ukraine by category* [Graph]. Statista.
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1465040/ukraine-war-monetary-losses/>
- 13) Nguyen, M., Chelabi, K., Anjum, S., Kumari, S., Samoylenko, S., Silwizya, K., & Tran, N. (2024). *Mindfulness approach and the redefined analysis model of conflict: The case study of the Ukraine conflict*. *Social Sciences*, 13(11), 564.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13110564>
- 14) Nguyen, M. C., Chelabi, K., & Anjum, S. (2025). *Mindfulness approach and the moral dilemma between killing sentient beings and human survival*. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 2(3), 733–740.
- 15) Palinchak, M., Ostapets, Y., & Toca, C. V. (2025). *The Russian-Ukrainian war: Causes, essential characteristics, and consequences for Ukraine and the globalised world*. *Baltic Journal of Economic Studies*, 11(2), 242–250.
<https://doi.org/10.30525/2256-0742/2025-11-2-242-250>
- 16) Ragandang, P. C., III. (2024). *In honor of Johan Galtung, the father of peace studies*. *Peace Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2024.2360472>
- 17) Smith, N. R., & Dawson, G. (2022). *Mearsheimer, realism, and the Ukraine war*. *Analyse & Kritik*, 44(2), 175–200. <https://doi.org/10.1515/auk-2022-2023>
- 18) Song, M. (2023). *A study on Huineng's The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch in rhetoric: Focusing on rhetorical questions and figures of speech*. *Korean Journal of Rhetoric*.
- 19) Steinmetz, C. H. D. (2025). *Non-Western and Western theories of peace*. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 12(8).
<https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1208.19180>

- 20) Sunandabodhi, B. (2024). *Buddhist mindfulness practices in conflict resolution*. International Journal of Governance and Public Policy Analysis, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.31357/ijgppa.v6i1.7656>
- 21) Tiwary, K. N., & Sharma, N. (2024). *Buddhism and non-violence: Exploring the relationship between Buddhist teachings and conflict resolution*. ShodhKosh Journal of Visual and Performing Arts, 5(6). <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.2332>
- 22) Thich Nhat Hanh (1991) *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*. New York: Bantam Books. Available at: <https://books.google.de/books?id=cLNRLq-1jV0C>
- 23) Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*. New York: Broadway Books.
- 24) Thich Nhat Hanh (2008) *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*. Boston: Beacon Press. Available at: <https://books.google.de/books?id=FiRpAPjgoLsC>
- 25) Thich Nhat Hanh (2016) *The Art of Living: Peace and Freedom in the Here and Now*. New York: HarperOne. Available at: <https://books.google.de/books?id=2NkiDQAAQBAJ>
- 26) UNHCR. (2026). *Number of Ukrainian refugees recorded worldwide* [Graph]. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1413699/ukrainian-refugees-worldwide/>
- 27) Volodin, A. V. (2023). *Mindfulness-based nonviolence and engaged Buddhism: Thich Nhat Hanh's contributions to sustainable peace*. In World Sustainability Series. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-7295-9_12
- 28) Waelde, L. C., Panting, A., & Heise, A. G. (2019). *Mindfulness in the peacebuilding process*. In *New directions in peacebuilding evaluation* (pp. 21–36). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-14943-7_2
- 29) Zalta, A. (2016). *Contribution of Buddhist mindfulness to the transformation of conflicts: Dependent origination (paticca-samuppāda) and deconstruction of identity*. Asian Studies, 4(2), 139–151. <https://doi.org/10.4312/AS.2016.4.2.139-151>