Mandala-building in international relations as a paradigm for peace

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a mandala conception of security in the international quest for peace. It offers a holistic, universally-applicable, model for transcendence from national security interests to global security aspirations. Moreover, it draws attention to the neglected spiritual condition of international life, a condition which is beginning to be addressed by the ‘greening’ of global politics. Indeed, peace through security is as much a contemplative exercise as a constructional one.

Mandala simply means circle in Sanskrit. In that meaning alone there is much scope for an improved way of thinking about international relations, the area I think about as a Western-trained academic who has a special interest in the classical Chinese problem of ‘How may the world be at peace?’ 1 In turning to Indian heritage and adopting the mandala as a vehicle for comprehension of international relations, I follow the Chinese example almost 2,000 years ago when one great civilisation borrowed from another. I refer, of course, to the introduction of Buddhism, a religion which grew out of Hinduism and spread to China and other parts of eastern Asia.

1 See Rosita Dellios, ”How May the World be at Peace?: Idealism as Realism in Chinese Strategic Culture”, in Valerie M. Hudson (ed.), Culture and Foreign Policy (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, forthcoming).
The aim of Buddhism is to develop compassion for all living beings and to realise that suffering arises from desire. To overcome suffering one must not be too attached to anything. The Chinese, being attached to family and material prosperity, at first found Buddhism to be a difficult philosophy to follow despite acceptance of its atheistic nature (Buddha is not a personal god but a teacher). Yet they did find a place for it in their culture for it 'balanced' the preoccupations of the other two key spiritual traditions of China. In terms of their leanings, Confucianism tends to the ethical, Taoism to the artistic and Buddhism to the religious. Buddhism's interaction with Taoism gave rise to Chan Buddhism (pronounced 'Zen' in Japanese). In this way Buddhism found an indigenous expression in China. An important point to note here is that the three philosophies were not adversarial contenders for adherents, but made for a balanced civilisation. Chinese often regard themselves as followers of all three teachings.

There are lessons here for those who cannot see beyond mechanistic 'power balances' in establishing international stability. Instead of asking, for example - 'Which country or combination of countries will balance the rising power of China?' (China being the current favourite for 'superpower' status) - the question might more profitably be posed: 'Which spiritual tradition or traditions need to be adapted to international relations to make for a more balanced global civilisation?' In the case of China, perhaps Buddhism can serve once more as the 'balancer', not only of the Middle Kingdom's modernising self but also of the world with which it interacts. In practice, this entails a habituation of global politics away from alliance-building, whether actual, such as the 'pactomania' of the fifties or notional, as exemplified by the nineties slogan, 'the West and the Rest'. The introduction of confidence-building security architectures (discussed below) is an attempt to break away from the adversarial mentality. Such confidence-building prepares the ground for the next possible stage: that of *mandala*-building. Because of its culturally universal characteristics - *mandalas* are a cross-cultural phenomenon - *mandala*-building would find greater resonance with the global 'Rest', not just the hitherto paradigmic-dominant 'West'. In view of the Asian Renaissance, as the Asian success story is now being called by Asians themselves, it is also an apt choice of image. *Mandalas*, while universal, are especially Indian, Tibetan, Chinese and Southeast Asian in their use.

**International Relations in Terms of Mandala**

Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism to be precise, is ritually the most developed home for the *mandala*. Its spread to international relations can only be a

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2 The term 'balancer' in the state-centric balance-of-power paradigm is normally reserved for a country. For example, the USA is cast in that role for Asian stability.

welcomed one in this age of uncertain direction. And not only because of the rise of China or the perceived decline of America. An era which is commonly referred to as ‘post-Cold War’ is in need of inspiration. Why does mandala provide the right ‘frame’ or ‘fit’ for the times? A feature which particularly recommends the circle to this post-Cold War age is that it is not an edifice. It does not build monuments to transitory glory, of which the Cold War era is a recent reminder. The now defunct Soviet Union was full of monuments. Appropriately enough, these were to commemorate its dead heroes as well as the lifeless symbols of Leninism. Lest the surviving ‘powers’ congratulate themselves, it should be remembered that they too could succumb to the demise of ‘imperial overstretch’.

The edifices built by past empires are easy to criticise. But what of the present? Should we not take care that our ‘regional architectures’, be they primarily security ones or economic ones, are not locking us into a particular outlook; a room with a contrived view? What of the slum-dwellers? While ‘regional architectures’ have mandala potential in their confidence-building role, they can also promote a certain ‘mindset’. Economic regionalism is a case in point. It could degenerate into the tyranny of the consumer mega-regions. Amid the heavy publicity in favour of economic regionalism that most of us are exposed to, it is sobering to reflect on the message in a report produced this year by an American think-tank, the Institute for Policy Studies. It found the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), after two years in operation, to be a model which “glorifies” the marketplace and “views human beings and civil society as little more than customers in a continental shopping mall”. NAFTA was blamed for the Mexican currency crisis of 1994, environmental degradation along the US-Mexican border, increased unemployment due to NAFTA-facilitated company mergers, and a lowering of labour conditions in industries within the bloc. Clearly there is scope for more than a consumerist economic view to happiness. For this reason ‘regional architectures’ need to exhibit a balance in values.

Surprisingly, it is the security architectures which hold greater promise to do so than their economic counterparts. I say that it is surprising because ‘security’ has long been equated with ‘military’, a perspective renowned for its rigidity

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4 A possible exception is the mandala-based temple (like Borobudur in Java), which is not so much an edifice but a symbolic structure which leads the individual to worship at the sacred heart.


7 Ibid.

8 See New Internationalist, No. 278, April 1996, whose issue theme is Green Economics.
(the mentality which says: 'If you are not with us you are against us'). Old-style security architectures were nothing but military alliances, such as NATO, the Warsaw Pact, and SEATO. Present ones attempt to be more inclusive - not only of allies but potential enemies - in a process termed 'comprehensive engagement'. This approaches the idea of circle and, within it, the constituent relationships typically found in mandalas. For example, Australia's contribution to "developing a new regional security system" was described in terms of "laying four cornerstones". While the language is architectural, it also alludes to the mandala's feature of cardinal points. The difference between the architectural and the mandala approach lies in content. Australia's proposed cornerstones were excavated from the Western political order, much like economic architectures were welded together by faith in the primacy of the market. The 'cornerstones' were identified in 1991 as:

first, support for the United Nations as the supreme international guarantor of peace and security; secondly, support for the continued engagement of the United States in the security affairs of the western Pacific; third, support for the development of regional co-operation and dialogue on security matters; and fourthly, continued development of Australia's defence both as the final guarantor of our own security and also as a contributor - through FPDA [Five-Power Defence Arrangement] and other co-operative programs - to the security of the region as a whole.9

Given Asian nations' fears of 'internationalising' anything to do with their personal concerns - from the Spratly Islands to control of the Java Sea10 - the UN may not be such an appropriate cornerstone. Moreover, for all its high-mindedness as a global institution, it remains a statist structure. Its presence has not transformed the essentially self-interested morality of the society of states. The United Nations as it stands cannot be expected to shoulder

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10 Problems would have to be overpowering (as Cambodia was) before the UN or the US could be permitted to intervene. Asian nations are cautious lest international pressure be applied over human rights performance or their claims to territorial sovereignty. China would never allow the UN to take over the Spratly Islands dispute, nor could it condone US interference in cross-Strait relations with Taiwan. As for Indonesia, it recently reserved the right to police the Java Sea and other maritime thoroughfares in its archipelago (Patrick Walters, "Indonesia Defends Union of Land and Water", The Australian, 29 March 1996, p. 7). East Timor is probably the best illustration for Asian leaders of what happens when an issue becomes internationalised. After 20 years, East Timor is still living out its life of contestation in the UN, and it has a wide NGO following.
responsibility for the world's environmental or ethical condition. Such responsibility rests with the domestic and foreign policies of the member states. In practice, these issues are often driven by the NGO (Non-Government Organisation) movement. Unlike IGOs (International Government Organisations), of which the UN is the primary construct, NGOs are, by definition and conviction, non-statist. They are also opposed to the big-project mentality of the 'official development world'.

The second 'cornerstone' promotes American strategic leadership (what else has American 'engagement' ever been?) and camouflages, indeed westernises, East Asia by calling it the western Pacific. Small wonder the EAEC (East Asian Economic Caucus, which excludes Australia, New Zealand, the US and Canada) startled APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation). When Asia refuses to hyphenate with the Pacific, where does that leave America and Australia? Certainly not in EAEC. As to American strategic leadership, how well will this sit with the continental, and increasingly maritime, power of China? Who in the region (besides Australia) vocalised support for the US when it sent an armada to the Taiwan Strait in March? Even the Philippines were reluctant to join US exercises in the region at that time.

The third 'cornerstone' of regional security dialogue has already been put in place. ARF - the ASEAN Regional Forum - was set up in 1993 as a 'preventive diplomacy' forum. It is an 18-member group made up of the seven ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) states; plus ASEAN's seven dialogue partners (Australia, Canada, European Union, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and the US); the consultative partners of Russia and China; plus Laos and PNG as observers. It met for the first time in July 1994. While a much larger group is involved, it is being held under the auspices of ASEAN. Therefore ASEAN has become a facilitator of a multilateral security regime in the region. In terms of security architecture in the 1990s, the western Pacific has an ASEAN face.

In view of Australia not being a member of ASEAN, it is just as well that the fourth 'cornerstone' of Australia's regional security blueprint should be "continued development of Australia's defence both as the final guarantor of our own security and also as a contributor . . . to the security of the region . . .". For a topic dealing with regional security it is curious that an individual nation's security (plus the worth of its contribution to the region's security) should be allocated a whole 'cornerstone' to itself. Is Australia's defence of itself on a par with the UN or the US or ARF in forming a regional security cornerstone? Is Australia's contribution to the region more worthy of being a cornerstone than China's or Japan's, for instance? This is not just a matter of political grandstanding on the part of politicians who wish to show how much they have done to advance their country's standing in their neighbourhood. It is symptomatic of the state-centric attitudes which still pervade international relations. Even the phrase, "our own security", is a giveaway when employed for a topic ostensibly about 'us' as a region, not 'us' as a nation-state.
A circle, by comparison, is inclusive; furthermore, the cardinal points within a mandala design typically describe qualities or processes ('forces' and 'aspects' are also terms used) rather than actors or institutions. An example may be found in the foundational principles of a security mandala, adapted from the Neo-Confucianist Yen Yüan's cosmological diagram. There is a square within a circle, and a number of intersecting lines (Fig. 1). According to Yen Yüan: "The large circle represents the Way of Heaven in its entirety. . . . The operations of the yin and yang result in the creation of the four powers: yüan (originating growth), heng (prosperous development), li (advantageous gain), and cheng (correct firmness)." The four powers may be translated into international relations as the four cycles of (1) identification of a suitable global security mandala (originating growth); (2) the introduction of enabling ideas, such as a regionalism based on cultural and ethical values and not only economic ones (prosperous development); (3) empowerment as a result of enrichment, so that programs of poverty alleviation or environmental revival (advantageous gain) are implemented because they accord with the now established norms; and as a result of this (4) metapower as pervasive, indirect influence which represents the attributes of a post-'power politics' system (correct firmness). The Way of Heaven which Yen Yüan's large circle represents means the moral universe, or - in international relations' terms - the spirit of a global security mandala. The principle of interdependence is acknowledged in Yen Yüan's cosmology: "Thus there is nothing that does not interpenetrate everything else." In this respect, a redeeming feature of the 'cornerstone' proposal discussed above is that it is prefaced by an explanation about what the final 'structure' should look like - "a complex web of relationships extending across the whole range of government-to-government and people-to-people activity".

Beside not being exclusionary (infinity, rather than the adversarial 'other', lies beyond the circle), a circle is not a linear progression. A security mandala would not abide by the 19th century European ideology of 'progress' or the 20th century's equivalent of (economic) 'development'. In speaking of historical evolutionism, Gong-Way Lee has written:

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11 This I discuss at greater length in Dellios, "How May the World be at Peace?: Idealism as Realism in Chinese Strategic Culture".


13 The 'enrichment-empowerment' terminology is employed in Chalmers Johnson, "The Empowerment of Asia", Discussion Paper, Australian Centre for American Studies (ACAS), Sydney University, Sydney, December 1994.


15 Evans and Grant, Australia's Foreign Relations, p. 110.
From the viewpoint of modern history, particularly since the Industrial Revolution, we have discovered the importance and development potential of science and technology. This can be considered as a progressive step in human civilization. On the other hand, however, the moral and spiritual standards of our societies are gradually being corrupted. This is a situation even more dangerous than that of material scarcity. Thus, to say "history is progressive" is not totally correct: in fact, history is only progressive in its development of material culture; as for spiritual culture, however, history diverges into two directions - forward and backward at the same time. Efforts must be made so that spiritual culture and material culture advance hand-in-hand. 16

Neither exclusionary, nor linear, a circle is also not open-ended. The global security mandala does not take "political pleasure in fragmentation, indeterminacy, multiplicity".17 It should not be confused with the currently popular philosophy of postmodernism which "consigns the world to a state of nihilism, with the hope that it will feel happy about its fate".18 The postmodern scheme is cosmologically incomplete. It has established that there are no absolute truths in a "non-absolute world", but has not enquired as to "what' lies beyond the non-absolutes".19 Its task is unfinished.

Unlike a postmodern construct, the mandala creates harmony from the polarities, order from chaos. As cosmic diagram, it orients human awareness. In this role of facilitator to contemplation, the mandala becomes in both Hindu and Buddhist tradition a yantra. Can it become the yantra of international relations as we enter a new millennium?

Millennial Expectations and Preparations
A new millennium is a potent intersection in socio-political expectation. Unorthodox religious and reform movements are spawned; charismatic heroes emerge; problems inspire prophesies for good or ill. From Naisbitt-style trend-watching to the politically vocal Indonesian mystics,20 messages about the

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17 The description of a postmodernist in Paul James, "A Postmodern Republic", Arena, No. 4, 1994-95, (pp. 69-89), p. 72.
19 Ibid.
20 As a futurologist, John Naisbitt has acquired celebrity status, primarily from his book, Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives (2nd edn, New York: Warner Books, 1984), which sold eight million copies. This year he is in the public gaze once again with
future are conveyed in ever-increasing pitch when new eras are known to be
dawning. Even postmodernists appear millenarian in their rebellion against
hegemonic modernity. Ritualistic in their use of language, which is
impenetrable but to the initiated, and charismatic in their subversion, their
philosophy may be viewed as a millenarian candidate for our times.

In the past, millenarian movements like the Boxer revolution in China or new
religions like Cao Dai in Vietnam would attempt to heal the dislocations
brought on by remote ruling elites, foreign or local. The millenarian
movements sought divine intervention to right a wronged world, while the
new religions strove for integration in an alienating socio-political
environment.

Are these social phenomena a case of revivalistic neurosis or are they a healthy
sign - however dangerous the manifestation - of the cycles of hope? Irrespective
of the significance one ascribes to the millennial moment, its attendant social
recognition clearly offers a 'window of opportunity' for therapeutic change.
Today's environmental movement has all the hallmarks of integrative healing.
It calls upon its followers to think globally and act locally. It 'transcends'
national boundaries. It does not simply 'cross' them as acid rain or damaged
rivers do. In a sense, the ground has already been prepared for the cultivation
of a global security *mandala*. Both expectancy and preparation are present.

**Psychological Integration**

The integrative function of the *mandala* has been recognised by the pioneering
Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, who found it to occur spontaneously in
dreams or the artistic creations of people across many cultures. He explains the
psychological significance of the *mandala* thus:

> As a rule a mandala occurs in conditions of psychic dissociation or
disorientation . . . or again in schizophrenics whose view of the world has
become confused . . . In such cases it is easy to see how the severe pattern
imposed by a circular image of this kind compensates the disorder and
confusion of the psychic state - namely, through the construction of a central
point to which everything is related, or by a concentric arrangement of the
disordered multiplicity and of contradictory and irreconcilable elements.

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his latest book, *Megatrends Asia* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 1995). The popularity of
Indonesian mystics for their political commentary has been reported periodically over the past
year or so.

21 See Charles F. Keyes, Helen Hardacre, and Laurel Kendall, "Introduction: Contested Visions
of Community in East and Southeast Asia", in Charles F. Keyes, Laurel Kendall and Helen
Hardacre (eds), *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and
This is evidently an attempt at self-healing on the part of Nature, which does not spring from conscious reflection but from an instinctive impulse.  

A mandala - in whichever capacity, personal or communal - is a centring device. It lays out the order of one’s universe and the flow of energies relevant to one’s existence. It unifies disparate elements into a coherent complexity, organised around a central self or divinity. This centre may be called Heaven (the Chinese Tien) and have the sense of above as well as centre. The way of Heaven (tien-tao), as Yen Yüan’s mandala suggests, forms the circle itself.

Jung himself freely traversed from the personal to the collective, and from one ethnic domain to another, without ceasing to speak the language of mandala. An example of crossing from one culture to another may be found in descriptions of various mandalas shown in his book, Mandala Symbolism:

When the perfect union of all energies in the four aspects of wholeness is attained, there arises a static state subject to no more change. In Chinese alchemy this state is called the "Diamond Body," corresponding to the corpus incorruptibile of medieval alchemy, which is identical with the corpus glorificationis of Christian tradition, the incorruptible body of resurrection. This mandala [a Tibetan design] shows, then, the union of all opposites, and is embodied between yang and yin, heaven and earth; the state of everlasting balance and immutable duration.

He also compares Chinese cosmological design to the Indian system, concluding with the ancient Greek:

Round this masculine power centre (Tien or heaven) lies the earth with its formed elements. It is the same conception as the Shiva-Shakti union in kundalini yoga, but here represented as the earth receiving into itself the creative power of heaven. The union of heaven with kun [earth], the feminine and receptive, produces the tetraktys, which, as in Pythagorus, underlies all existence.

Because of its ordered comprehensiveness, a mandala may be understood as a 'totality picture'. But because not everything can be described in the totality, for logistical and spiritual reasons (the Tao that can be described is not the Tao), symbolism is necessary. There is no standard meaning for the various symbols; sometimes a typical meaning presides; and usually there are many levels of meanings.

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23 Ibid., p. 74.
24 Ibid., p. 75.
25 A term used by Jung, ibid., p. 78.
**Kautilyan Mandalas**

Where Jung lays the groundwork for understanding *mandalas* at the psychological level, ancient Indian statecraft had already done so from a political perspective. The classical Indian strategist, Kautilya (4th century BC), through the *Arthasastra* (Book of the State), developed a complex system of international relations based on relationships of power. Kautilya's *Raj-mandala* system or circle of kingdoms, which contracts and expands in accordance with shifting loyalties, depended on a spiritually powerful centre (the ruler) for domestic resilience, and a mastery of the meaning of relationships for external protection. Here the sacred and secular combined in the efficacy of the conduct of *mandala* politics internally and externally. These features are not only true of the ancient Indian system and the polities of Southeast Asia it influenced, but also of the Chinese mandala (through the Confucian-administered tributary system) which was distinguished by a longevity unparalleled in world history. With regard to the sacred aspect of power, the Javanese experience from the 9th to the 13th centuries AD, provides an interesting case study in which influence was acquired without the backing of economic or military power. As to the more secular mastery of relationships, the Thai kingdom of Ayudhya (14th to 18th centuries AD) provides a fascinating account in which the Thai king, Naresvara, offered in 1592 to attack the Japanese islands in order to assist China where Hideyoshi's invasion forces were heading. China, as it turned out, did not accept the offer, and Hideyoshi died before he could harm the Celestial Empire. But first to Java.

As Jan Wisseeman Christie points out, Javanese political arrangements of the past have a reputation for having achieved a high degree of stability and integration despite an absence of concentrated centres of population or the organisational ability of a Chinese-style bureaucracy. There was no reliance on military force, nor was there political or economic dependence on the centre. Rather, the cohesive force was spiritual - the king's spiritual assets were

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reputed to be greater than any other concentrations in the kingdom and knowledge of this was spread through the effective 'propaganda' system of cultural performances, particularly the Ramayana epic told in the wayang kulit (shadow puppet) performances - needless to say, with the king modelled on the Ramayana hero, Rama, an ideal king who fulfilled the formula of a selfless and highly spiritual king. Indeed, the role of a Javanese king was to mediate between 'Heaven' and 'Earth', as the Chinese might put it. More specifically in Javanese understanding, his "function [was one] of mirroring the divine world." As Christie concludes, "The unity of the state seems to have depended . . . on the mystique of royal power", and: "Lacking a monopoly of violence within his territory, the ruler appears to have attempted to lay claim to, if not a monopoly, at least the greater share of the spiritual power within the realm." The importance of 'legitimacy' for a government's survival is appreciated in our own world, whatever the political system. Still, the extent to which the 'exemplary centre' centre mattered in the past is not readily replicated today.

The other example, of astute diplomacy on the part of Ayudhya, is well told by an authority on Kautilyan mandalas in Southeast Asia, O. W. Wolters:

The king of Ayudhya had undoubtedly identified the components of a very extensive mandala. His immediate and "assailable" enemies [defined by Kautilya, and footnoted by Wolters, as "a neighbouring foe of considerable power" who is "involved in calamities or has taken himself to evil ways"] were weak Cambodia and weakened Burma. Japan was seen as a powerful "rearward" enemy [a Kautilyan geopolitical expression], likely to become an immediate and dangerous one unless Hideyoshi were humbled. In these circumstances China was Naresvara's "rearward" friend. A less nimble-minded man might have told himself that, when Japan struck China in its Korean rear, he had no self-evident reason to intervene; but not so, apparently, Naresvara. Japanese ambitions merely created a new problem of priorities, which were assessed in a manner worthy of Kautilya. Japan, though stronger than Cambodia or Burma, was committing its armies to the massive campaign against Korea and China, its frontal enemies, thus making itself vulnerable to an attack in the rear by the [powerful] "black raven" ships of Ayudhya.

Ways of curtailing the ambitions of avaricious states are detailed in the Arthasastra for the reason that the Kautilya project was essentially one of uniting India, as the Mauryan Empire, against foreign invasions. Kautilya was not an advocate of territorial conquest of foreign lands (a condition he sought

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29 Ibid., p. 33.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., p. 35.
to prevent against his state), nor unconcerned with what the Chinese call *de*, a word that means both power and virtue. He insists on the moral rectitude of the king and of good governance at home. This is the foundation of security, and the basis upon which to judge the trustworthiness of other states. Intentions were more meaningful in his international order than capabilities - "a king of unrighteous character and of vicious habits will, though he is an emperor, fall prey either to the fury of his own subjects or to that of his enemies" (Ch. 1, 259).

Conclusion
Thus *mandala* is not new to the language of international relations, even if this paper's particular application may appear novel. Any return of *mandala* as a security conception of international relations would occur at a time when the philosophy of what it means to hold power on behalf of a designated population within the borders of a physical, including natural, environment has not gone beyond the essentially instrumental. No nation today has an active foreign policy of advancing the cause of the global interest. If 'the national interest' may be understood as equivalent to 'ego', we can begin to understand the importance of the task which lays ahead. Unless nation-states are induced to exchange the pursuit of their national interest for Shiva or Buddha (to paraphrase Jung), or to redefine national interest as global interest, then security cannot be achieved in any practical sense. Mandala-building, far from being the esoteric notion it might seem, returns international relations to a more realistic perspective.
Figure 1: Simplified form of Yen Yüan’s Mandala