Matthew Melko and the Study of Real Peace

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Matthew Melko (1930-2010), leading civilizationist and peace scientist, left a substantial body of books and articles on the comparative study of actual peace, the condition of not-being-at-war-with-one-another that is in fact (Melko, 1996) the real and historic norm for human societies. Melko’s work will in due course prove foundational for the comparative and scientific study of the character and causes of peace.

Melko’s main work on empirical peace is to be found in four books published between 1973 and 1990: 52 Peaceful Societies (1973a), Peace in the Ancient World (with Weigel, Katary and McKenny, 1981), Peace in the Western World (with John K. Hord, 1984), and Peace in Our Time (1990). The first three books survey human history in order to locate what Melko called “peaces” or “zones of peace,” or what Robert Whealey labeled (disparagingly, 1986: 15) “pockets of peace,” and what I shall more often call “peace domains”—places and periods bounded in space and time, with the periods being a century or more, where violence was notably low. Peace in Our Time examined what Melko elsewhere (1985, 1989) called the “Great Northern Peace,” or “the remission of violence” in the West since the end of the Second World War.

52 Peaceful Societies collected fifty-two peace domains. Peace in the Ancient World and Peace in the Western World replicated and corrected 52 Peaceful Societies for 10 and 12 cases respectively. A replication study summation (Melko, Hord and Weigel, 1983) integrated and slightly modified the collection.

REAL PEACE

Carlyle’s phrase (attributed to Montesquieu) “Happy the people whose annals are blank” (1888: 128) could be seen as governing for Melko’s groundbreaking survey of history. In that survey, absence of evidence of war was taken as evidence of absence of war, i.e., evidence of the presence of peace. Peoples, places and intervals of time whose histories lacked records of dramatic and bloody events were considered to have been at peace, absent evidence to the contrary, on the reasonable assumption that historians find wars interesting and important, and so would have recorded them had they been fought.

Real peace as a domain, pocket or interval that can exist between places and times of war is an old concept. Imperial German general Erich Ludendorff’s concept of peace as “merely” an interval between times of wars was not an original notion. The views of ancient Indian lawgivers were summed up almost identically by Tähtinen: “Peace is the interval between two wars.” (1976: 91) Ambrose Bierce presented the same idea even more cynically: “PEACE, n. In international affairs, a period of cheating between two periods of fighting” (2000, s.v. PEACE).
Some writers both admit the possibility of peace that is real but not durable, as does the nuclear physicist Leo Szilard: “The traditional aim of foreign policy is to prolong the peace, i.e., to lengthen the interval between two wars.” (Szilard preferred measures that would instead establish a “state of permanent peace” 1947: 102.) Others, more idealistic perhaps, reject real peace as unreal, e.g. Orchard: “A peace that is nothing more than an interval between two wars is not a real peace” (2003). Hobbes might concur: “the nature of War, consisteth not in actuall fighting; but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is PEACE.” (Leviathan, ch. 13)

Rather less disparagingly patronizing is John Ogilvie’s Imperial Dictionary, which, at “Interval,” proposes “The space of time between two paroxysms of disease, pain or delirium; remission; as, an interval of ease, of peace, of reason.” (Ogilvie, 1863, s.v. Interval)

Melko’s approach is close to Ogilvie’s, and also to Mao Zedong’s: “Politics is war without bloodshed, while war is politics with bloodshed” (1954: sec. 64). For Melko, “Peace is considered to be an absence of [violent, physical conflict among political entities or among substantial factions within these entities]. It includes situations in which anger or hostility is openly expressed, and in which arms buildups occur, if there is little physical conflict. A situation of mutual war preparation between potential adversaries who nevertheless do not fight would be a period of peace. The term cold war has been used to describe such a period, but it could better be described as a cold peace.” (2010: 22)

Melko’s method of peace-locating work was inverse to A.L. Kroeber’s method for locating cultural creativity. Kroeber (1944) used general sources to find major cultural creators and achievements, and these to map times and places of exceptionally high cultural activity. Melko “looked for periods when nothing was happening” (2001c: 28) and then focused more specifically upon the locations, circumstances and phenomenology of such nothingness.

PEACE DOMAINS

Table 1 lists 46 peace domains, and reflects Melko’s 1975 summation (1975b: 550-551) as modified by the 1983 partial replication by Melko, Hord and Weigel. I have partitioned the list of domains among the civilizations (as bounded in Wilkinson, 1987, 1992, 1993) within which they were space-time “pockets” of peace.

In choosing the cases, Melko faced ontological issues and resolved them in ways that could have been reversed. An interrupted peace was treated as continuous; peace in domains as small as a city-state was not negated by the size of the unit; peace in contiguous areas was treated as being in a single domain; regions at peace within a state undergoing war were not treated as peace domains, except for one long hinterland peace (Hispano-Roman) that was treated as separate from its “parent” Pax Romana; interruptions judged “minor” were discounted; and war outside a peace domain did not negate the peace within (Melko, Weigel et al., 1981: 10-11; Melko and Hord, 1984:2-3).
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<th>LOCATION</th>
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<td>Arakanese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Javanese</td>
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<tr>
<td>T’ai</td>
<td>1802</td>
<td>Menam Valley</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 1
Melko Peace Domains
PEACE DOMAIN | DURATION | LOCATION
--- | --- | ---
*East Asian Civilization (5):*
Han | 202 BC-AD 184 | China, Annam
T’ang | 626-868 | China, Annam, Manchuria, Korea, Tibet, Taklamakan Desert
Sung | 1004-1235 | China
Ming | 1403-1629 | China, Korea
Manchu | 1682-1852 | China, Manchuria, Korea, Taiwan
*Japanese Civilization (2):*
Fujiwara | 600-900 | Honshu, Kyushu, Shikoku
Kamakura | 1185-1331 | Honshu, Kyushu, Shikoku

**STUDENTS OF PEACE**

Other scholars have examined actual non-war relations from various approaches. Lewis F. Richardson summarized the views of several philosophers and other writers who puzzled over “The fewness of wars among Chinese”; Richardson concluded that the most likely explanation had been cultural-educational, i.e. Confucian instruction (1960: 240-242). Karl Deutsch (1977), Adler and Barnett (1998) and others have examined “security communities” of persons who share the belief that their mutual problems must be addressed by nonviolent means. With roots in the writings of Immanuel Kant, Thomas Paine and Alexis de Tocqueville, there has developed a massive body of work pro and con the “democratic peace theory” that democracies are to some degree inhibited from making war upon one another by their institutions and/or their sense of kinship. (Wikipedia, s.v. “Democratic Peace Theory.”)

Somewhat closer to Melko’s line of work is a school inspired by Kenneth Boulding’s concept of “stable peace” (“a situation in which the probability of war is so small that it does not really enter into the calculations of any of the people involved”: 1978, 13). Alexander George (2000, 12-13) contrasts stable peace with “precarious” peace teetering upon the brink of violence, and “conditional” peace based upon the calculative rationality of deterrence. Stable-peace research as most recently represented by Arie Kacowicz and Charles Kupchan (Kacowicz, 1998; Kacowicz et al, 2000; Kupchan, 2010) tends to confine itself to international peace. Thus Kacowicz conceives of a “zone of peace” as “a discrete geographical region of the world in which a group of states have maintained peaceful relations among themselves for a period of at least thirty years—generations span—though civil wars, domestic unrest, and violence might still occur within their borders, as well as international conflicts and crises between them” (1998: 9).

Kacowicz identified (1998: 15) the following “zones of peace” since 1815:
- Europe, 1815-1848
- Europe, 1871-1914
- Western Europe, since 1945
- Eastern Europe, 1945-1989
North America, 1917 to the present
South America, 1883 to the present
West Africa, 1987 to the present (again, K wrote in 1998)
East Asia, since 1953
Australasia, since 1945
The ASEAN countries of Southeast Asia, since 1967.

Of the real-peace researchers Kacowicz is probably closest to Melko in spirit, none of their approaches is identical to, subsumes, or builds upon Melko’s research line. Some confine themselves to international peace, as Melko does not. Others are theory-driven or practice-driven. Like L.F. Richardson’s study of wars, Melko’s study of “peaces” is first of all a data-collection exercise, driven by the need for more comprehensive data-bases for the various uses of reflection, theory and practice. It is an undertaking deserving to be continued much in its own terms.

MOVING FORWARD

How might the study of real peace along the lines defined by Melko go forward? I would suggest the following program.

1. Replications.
   (a) The history-search should be replicated by area historians, to reduce the frequency of false negatives (genuine peaces erroneously rejected or overlooked). Melko, Hord and Weigel (1983) mention as candidates for a possible false negative- status an Egyptian Old Kingdom peace 2650-2350 BC, a Mesopotamian peace 1540-1220 BC, a Bohemian peace 1197-1394, a North Italian peace 1538-1701, a Dutch peace 1794-1940, and West Indian peace (in the Guianas as well as the West Indies) 1815. That 1983 replication also added a Roman Republican peace, a Spanish Imperial peace, and a Brazilian peace to the collection. It removed the United states post 1866 from a previous “North American” peace, but with doubts that should be addressed (Melko, Hord and Weigel 1983: 42).

   (b) The existing list of peaces should be scrutinized by area historians to reduce the frequency of false positives (unpeaces misclassified as peaces). The 1983 replication moved the 6 candidate peaces cited above from the prior list to a “not validated” list, and withdrew a previously listed “Habsburg” peace 1711-1848, and a Sassanian peace AD 363-590. The Middle Kingdom and new Kingdom peace carried the note “interrupted”; the interruptions will need attention.

   (c) Time-boundaries of peace domains should be scrutinized closely. The 1983 replication made minor changes in the time boundaries of the Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom, Phoenician, Achaemenid, Ptolemaic, Hungarian, Brandenburger, and Swiss peaces.
(d) Spatial boundaries of peace domains should also be reviewed. The 1983 replication shrunk a North America peace (1866-) to a Canadian peace (1885-) because of uncertainty regarding the scale of racial violence in the United States, while expanding the boundaries of a former Australian peace to take in Tonga and Hawaii as well as Australia and New Zealand.

The first round of replication was not done (Melko, Hord and Weigel, 1983: 39) for the South Asian, Southeast Asian/Indonesian, East Asian and Japanese civilizations. These should accordingly receive priority in any future replication study.

2. Ontology.

Complex issues arise in war-analysis when different areas enter and leave violence at different times. Did World War II begin in 1937 in China or in 1939 in Poland? America and Russia entered in 1941, but were they in the same war in 1941, or was one in a European war and the other in a Pacific war?

Peaces offer similar ontological challenges. Melko, Weigel and Hord combine the formerly separate Icelandic (1262-) and Scandinavian (1721) into a single Scandinavian peace, and must then note five different dates for the five participant societies: Iceland (1262-), Norway (1371-1940), Denmark (1660-1801), Sweden (1721-), and Finland (1809-1918). The peace of the British Isles was shorter in Ireland (1690-1919) and Scotland (1746-1940) than in England and Wales. The Pacific peace began for Australia in 1788, for Hawaii in 1824, for Tonga in 1845, and for New Zealand in 1872. The Spanish Imperial peace of 1492-1808 lasted in New Spain only from 1590 to 1780.

The most controversial ontological choice made by Melko was to accept that the government of a peace domain might be fighting elsewhere, even fighting continuously, and yet the external war was not treated as negating the peace that held within the domain. Leitenberg (1975) and Whealey (1986) took particular exception to the British Isles peace domain 1485-1940. The matter must be considered, but if Melko’s criteria are chosen that peace must be recognized.

Such issues must be discussed in terms of definitional criteria for the concept being applied, and in terms of historical evidence of connectedness between the various parts of the phenomenon. When statistics are to be employed, it will be prudent to determine the maximum expected error by analyzing the disputable data twice (at least), once with any variable defined with maximum strictness, once with maximum leniency.

3. Reflection and conjecture

As the list of peace domains becomes better attested and its problems and probabilities become better known, a reflective, insight-generating, discursive phase will be in order. Essays and conferences in which dueling specialists propose, for those peace periods they jointly accept, their alternative historical explanations for their inception, continuance and termination. Especially urgent would be the contemplation of long
intervals of peace between great and general wars (in which Melko will also proved a forerunner—cf. Melko, 1997, 1999, 2001a, 2001b). Melko’s own explanations should be a part of, and can be seeds for, the discussion.

4. Comparison and hypothesis
With a fair number of cases in hand, it becomes appropriate to compare cases, educe a typology (like George’s stable vs. precarious vs. conditional peaces) and conjecture causality. Melko will be a companion here as well: see especially the Recapitulations chapters in 52 Peaceful Societies, Peace in the Ancient World and Peace in the Western World, his major analytical articles (1973d, 1975c, 1985, 1992, 2010), and the entirety of Peace in Our Time. Within these, his theories of peace termination via institutionalization and via saltations in the evolution of military technology demand special consideration.

5. Hypothesis testing.
The human social sciences are the truly “hard” sciences when what is at stake is the researcher’s ability to test hypotheses. The subjects of hard-science study can render it harder by financing and biasing, appropriating and abusing, or resisting and preventing it. The ethics and governance of any real-world hard-science experimental testing of peace theories, were that feasible, would be doubtful at best. Substitutes, however unsatisfactory, must be sought.

Partitioning sets of historical peaces, deriving hypothetical generalizations from one half, and trying them against the other, may offer a route to an approximation of an inductive historical science of peace. Games of various sorts, and an enormous variety exists, would seem the best agenda for an observational science of real peace.

6. Practice
Aeronauts rose to their heights (and flew, or fell), while aeronautical theory was nourished by their successes and their disasters. Practice rarely awaits science; unsatisfactorily tested theories are nonetheless constantly being tried out upon unforgiving reality. Real peace is no different. Consider the diplomatic efforts surrounding (in 2015) the Libyan, Ukrainian, Syrian, ISIS, Iranian nuclear, Afghan, and South China Sea crises and wars. These and all such crisis diplomacies are inescapably grounded upon incomplete information and inadequately verified or partly-baked theory.

Crisis diplomacy concerns itself with the short term: peace now. Matthew Melko’s work is concerned with the longue durée of peace, peace at the century scale. Melko (1989, 1990, 1992) observed that the powers of the West (or the North) had entered after World War II into a period of “remission of violence,” a point with which the security-community, stable-peace and democratic-peace schools of real-peace theory would not at all disagree. But Melko’s view was that this remission should be perceived, as Leo Szilard would have perceived it and despaired of it, as a shaky and wasting asset, an
Indian Summertime destined to fade, as social instruments once functioning for a general good—e.g. states, corporations--ossified into institutions for the benefit of their owners. Melko’s theories offer a starting point for a practice of long-peace prolongation and extension at least as well-founded as the short-term pacifying efforts of the crisis diplomats.

If we were to concur with Melko’s assessment of the key variables in the termination of durable peaces, we would want to proceed on the one hand with a Quigleyan economics of reform or circumvention (Quigley, 1961: 78; Melko, 1972a: 601-603), and on the other with the selective advancement of military technologies designed to frustrate and obstruct major power shifts based on the rapid exploitation of new technique.

Other schools of real peace propose other priorities, which merit discussion. But Melko’s line of work satisfies the criteria needed for civilizationists to move ahead through the worlds of discourse of history, science and practice (Oakeshott, 1933) in a lively and durable direction for the historical, scientific and practical study of peace

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