

# ***Globalization and Buddhism***

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The issue of globalization is an important topic affecting all our lives. It is important for Buddhism because Buddhism is a global, world faith. Further Buddhism stresses the principle of interdependence which is also employed by proponents of globalization to advance their economic interests.

Unfortunately, economic globalization is opposed by many people, because the effects of the globalization of business and trade are often disastrous for underdeveloped nations. These nations provide the raw materials and cheap labor which are necessary to make globalization prosperous for the more developed nations. Though there are successes in the process of globalization, there is much unrest among peoples today. Unrest occurs mainly among poor and underdeveloped nations which are deep in debt and suffer internal conflict, poverty, droughts and famines.

Globalization also leads to the globalization of culture, the homogenization of culture. It can undermine local cultures and disrupt traditional relationships in a society with the assumption that free trade will also lead to a more democratic society.

The underlying principle and argument for globalization, as we have indicated, is the interdependence of all peoples in this age of worldwide travel and communications. The world is interconnected instantaneously through electronic means such as television and the Internet. There is immediate knowledge of disasters and tragedies. The glint and glitter of the developed nations are flashed to the underdeveloped nations, arousing desires for a better life among people whose political, educational, social and economic conditions prevent quick fulfillment of those desires.

You may ask what has this to do with Buddhism? Buddhism and its role in the modern world is affected by the way people understand the nature of their lives. As a spiritual perspective, the principle of interdependence is a positive teaching aimed at curbing our deep-rooted egoism. It teaches that we cannot live simply for ourselves or without regard to others who make our lives possible.

When this concept is transferred to the contemporary world of politics and economics, it can turn into an onerous reality where the dominant nations control the conditions within the dependent nations who need their financial and economic support. Such dependence leads to enormous debt for the underdeveloped nations and severe political inequalities. Underdeveloped nations are often despotic and characterized by a high degree of corruption. Interdependence which enables dependence increases the tendency to nationalism and ethnic divisions as people look for scapegoats for their problems.

We hear much about free trade as an important aspect of the principle of globalization. However, when free trade causes economic dislocation in developed nations, it turns quickly into protectionism for national industries. Free trade comes to mean trading freely in underdeveloped nations to sell products while protecting business in the developed societies.

As a consequence, there is strong, negative reaction to the idea of globalization and interdependence. Riots and violence at meetings of governmental, international organizations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund attest to this problem.

If Buddhism promotes the principle of interdependence which is a fundamental truth of life, it must also promote the principle of equality and justice, together with the rule of law for all participants in this process. It must work to transform not only the nationalism of the dependent nations, but the nationalism of the dominant nations.

Buddhists must be clearer in articulating the meaning of interdependence. It is not simply the interdependence between people. It is the interdependence of causation. The original teaching of interdependence or *pratitya-samutpada*, was proclaimed in Sakyamuni Buddha's first sermon as a central teaching. It refers to the twelve link chain of causation which describes the conditions that give rise to sentient being in the process of rebirth. It is also the basis for understanding the way to attain nirvana and spiritual emancipation. The forward movement of these links indicates the way that our passions and ignorance produce the sufferings of life, noted in the first truth that all life is suffering. The reverse movement of the chain suggests that the removal of the various causes in the series is the way to escape rebirth and attain nirvana.

Ignorance is the root of the series of links, though the totality forms a circle as the wheel of births and deaths. This circle continues to revolve as long as each element is produced and nurtured. Ignorance produces mental functions; then in order consciousness, name and form, the six sense organs, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, becoming, birth, old age and death. The cycle begins again as ignorance arises and produces the links of the chain. Each factor in the chain relates to aspects of our experience and nature as a human being. However, the system as a whole indicates that life and reality is subject to the law of cause and effect.

In the context of the issue of globalization, beyond the actual interdependence among peoples that human life requires, it also means that whatever principles, policies and actions that are promoted have their resulting effects. When something happens in our world, it must be seen in context of the interactions of the various parties in the situation.

Contemporary issues, whether Afghanistan, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, or even the sovereignty issue in Hawaii have a history of interacting causations which must be understood to arrive at a just solution for all. The Buddhist principle of interdependent causation means that we cannot simply decide issues as black and white, seeking to pin blame on one party or another. Nothing happens in a vacuum.

We Buddhists must recognize the complexity of contemporary issues and call on our compatriots to resist simplistic and emotional responses to events and situations. It means we must call on our leaders to consider issues in their full context and not seek politically expedient solutions.

The Buddhist principle of non-discrimination and equality is related to this understanding. When we recognize the complexity of causation that produces conflicts and suffering, we must treat each party to the problem equally and fairly. We must clarify the issues that will lead to reconciliation and the solution to the problem. Buddhists must make clear the superficiality of contemporary notions of globalism and interdependence and work to rectify injustices created by this process. We must promote equality and support the aspirations for a full life for all people, beyond economic and political power.