

Today's global economy is heavily influenced by neo-liberalistic doctrines, which developed during the 1970s and became increasingly prominent during the 1980s. Neoliberalists criticise government interventions in the economy and claim that the net gains of global free markets and capitalism will outweigh their costs in almost all cases. Unquestionably, global free trade and globalization has grown over the last decades, but as Kofi Annan pointed out in his Millennium Report, the benefits and opportunities of globalization remain highly concentrated among a relatively small number of countries, and that globalization can bring on economic instability and social dislocation at lightning speed. In this essay I will try to highlight a Buddhist's stance towards globalization in the following three spheres: global production, global consumption and global lifestyles.

Global Production: Multinational corporations no longer choose their venues to serve local markets alone, but move their bases to locations from which the global market can be served best. In the end, the decision often becomes a race to the bottom for prospective production sites, as costs have to be minimized and labour flexibility maximised. The products themselves have to bring satisfaction to the global consumer, not a satisfaction at having enhanced the quality of the consumer's life. From a Buddhist point of view, everything about this line of thought is wrong and uneconomic. The working conditions of the workforce are almost criminal, as a sharp line between work and leisure will be drawn for those working as mechanical slaves in the factories. Machines replace tools, and for the worker the chance to utilize and develop his abilities at work are destroyed. There is no common task among the workers, and if there is, it is at best artificial. Production for a global market is highly uneconomic, as self-sufficient local communities are worth thriving for. The fact that Metro New World sells three imported German beers at horrendous prices might result in a wide choice for the consumer, but allows choices lacking any kind of ethical reflection and loaded with bad karma. The aim of global production, wealth, is justifiable. But wealth should not be too important or hoarded and has to be used for constructive purposes.

Global Consumption: Material comfort can create happiness, but is of a secondary nature to the development of human potential. Right Livelihood, as one factor on the Noble Eightfold Path, consists of food, clothing, shelter and medicine. Various degrees of material dependence exist among humans, and as long as one's livelihood does not exploit others, wealth is not condemned. Global production does just this, and also contradicts simplicity and non-violence. Patterns of consumption continuously deteriorate, the more global consumption and overconsumption become commonplace. Also, consumption in neoliberalistic markets is not aimed at personal well-being, but merely at satisfaction, thus wrong. The concept of moderation is also missing from the open-ended economic activity of globalization, and the right amount of consumption is disregarded as most decisions of consumption lack reflection of their true purpose.

Global Lifestyles: The spread of neoliberalistic doctrines coincides with a spread of uneconomic lifestyles. Humans, especially mothers of young children, have to work as they crave for the enjoyment of pleasurable things, and cannot liberate themselves and proceed on their path to salvation. A modest use of resources is discarded and work is separated from satisfaction and merely the path to consumption. The natural consequences of all actions and work become secondary to artificial consequences, such as money. The attitude towards work is filled with apathy, laziness and poor workmanship, as work is no longer a complementary part of a living process involving work and leisure. Personal well-being is widely ignored or even violated through unreflected consumption or overconsumption, and the absurd craving for material possessions can contradict the aim of non-violence as criminal activity can result.

Conclusion: Based on an analysis of global production, consumption and lifestyles it is obvious that today's economical world affairs would look different if Buddhism had been the world's major religion centuries ago, when Calvinist traditions led to the rise and development of today's economic world affairs. Nevertheless, Buddhists can try to aim at a middle way and incorporate many of the concepts or technologies of globalization into their societies. The result could be a more locally oriented capitalism based on moderation, simplicity and non-violence, which could greatly enhance the well-being of its society.