

Trade, Development, and the Broken Promise of Interdependence: A Buddhist Reflection on the Possibility of Post-Market Economics

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The profound promise implied in expanding and deepening community is often invoked and celebrated in discussions of increasing global interdependence. Growing interdependence implies ever-widening circles of concern. It also implies at least tacitly questioning the acceptance of independence for some and dependence for (many) others. Such implications, I think, are entirely laudable.

From a Buddhist perspective, as well as from that of much of contemporary science, interdependence can be affirmed as the deep nature of all things. Yet, there are Buddhist teachings that the cycles of conditions leading to suffering or trouble (*samsara*) are without beginning, as well as teachings that all beings have Buddha-nature or the capacity for enlightenment (*nirvana*). Affirming that all things arise interdependently is not to affirm that they do so in a necessarily liberating way. Interdependence, we can say, has no essential self-nature. It can mean increasing wealth, skillful means, and happiness. It can also mean deepening poverty, trouble, and suffering. Realizing the promise of expanded and deepened community in the context of increasing economic, social, political, and cultural globalization pivots on keenly discerning existing and emerging patterns of interdependence and orienting them in a liberating (nirvanic) rather than a troubling (samsaric) direction. Ultimately, the promises of community and of deepening interdependence turn on karma—that is, on the specific experiential force of intentions and values.

It is the good fortune—the good karma—of Bhutan that it is positioned to exercise a unique degree of self-awareness and discernment in exploring strategies for sustainably and equitably integrating into global developmental processes. Bhutan's stated intention of keeping the value of happiness central to the development process is, I believe, a suitable counter to the values and karma that prevail in most development strategies and ideals. Given present day realities of unprecedented, accelerating changes and paradigmatic shifts in economic, political, and social practices, any successful strategy for integration into global development processes must be creative in nature. It must, in other words, consist of an ongoing improvisation that is at once virtuosic and virtuous and that brings both greater resolution and resolve into the development process.

Here, I want to contribute to this effort by considering the broad landscape of development and trade concepts and practices and their implications for the trajectory of innovations needed to insure that

development processes and greater economic interdependence are, indeed, liberating. I will begin by reflecting on the context of present day patterns of development, raising some issues related to history and scale in assessing the effects of increasing global interdependence. In brief, I will be suggesting that present day patterns and scales of globalization have both generated and been generated by the extremely rapid and practically irreversible commodification of subsistence needs—a commodification that (paraphrasing Ivan Illich) has the effect of institutionalizing entirely new classes of the poor. Beyond a critical threshold and unless redirected—that is, informed by radically different values—present day patterns of interdependence will continue bringing about the conversion of communities that have been faring well into aggregates of individuals in need of welfare. Unchecked, the promise of globally extended, deep community will be broken.

This account turns on the insight that present day patterns of economic interdependence and global trade are systematically translating diversity—understood in terms of the Buddhist concept of emptiness—into mere variety. In particular, they are bringing about a stunning collapse of locally focused ecologies of production and trade. This has the effect of affording remarkable ranges of consumer choice through reliable, efficient, and institutionally secured market operations. But these market operations also significantly isolate producers and consumers and replace local-to-local *exchanges* with globally mediated *transfers*. In effect, global interdependence is presently inflected in such a way as to erode both personal and communal resources for direct mutual contribution—depleting the very resources needed to differ in ways that meaningfully make a difference. Development of this sort is finally impoverishing.

Given such a global context, I will offer some tentative inferences about how Bhutan might approach clearly and consistently framing its efforts to operationalize the development goal of heightened Gross National Happiness.

Gift Exchange, Contribution and Trade: The Roots of Economic Interdependence

As an initial move toward fleshing out these insights, I want to think through some of the continuities among gift giving, contribution, and trade. Although this will involve appealing to an admittedly vague and almost mythological past, it will be useful in setting a context for investigating how economic interdependence has come to be directed in the way that it has.

Gift giving has had a long and honored place in anthropological studies of social practices. Most such studies have concentrated on relatively explicit levels of exchange and offering, but there is a sense in which gift giving can be considered the original and abiding nexus of all human sociality.

Perhaps the most apparent expression of the centrality of gift exchange to human sociality is its persistent association with intimate partnership. Even in today's postmodern societies where brides and grooms are themselves no longer thought of as gifts exchanged between families, and where formal dowries no longer factor into finalizing marital arrangements, marriages remain among the most extravagant occasions for gift giving. More generally, it is customarily assumed that formally initiating a lasting intimate or romantic bond will include some offering or exchange of gifts. Such practices and rituals can, of course, be seen cynically, particularly where gift-giving and gift-receiving practices exhibit gender asymmetry or are apparently and heavily influenced by consumer advertising. What eludes cynical or politically correct bracketing, however, is the fact that the most meaningful of human relationships are customarily christened through the exchange of gifts.

Of course, human sociality is not limited to intimate unions, and the exchange of gifts is by no means always intensely personal. Traditional hospitality customs worldwide involve hosts and guests in paired offerings. Especially in Asia, initial business meetings are formally structured around gift exchange. Worldwide, heads of state ritually exchange symbolic gifts upon meeting. Neither are human sociality and the giving of gifts restricted to human-to-human encounters. Particularly among indigenous or first peoples, human-to-nature connections are customarily mediated through the offering of gifts, and religious rituals (for example, initiation rites or ancestral worship) establishing human-to-divine connections often center on making offerings. In sum, gift exchange is associated with establishing and affirming community—the realization of lasting and meaningful relationships that are both rich in content and enriching.

The functional meaning of gift exchange as the enriching nexus of human sociality is nicely captured in the etymology of the English word contribution and its links to such associated terms as attribute, tributary, tribute, and tribe. The root noun to which all these can be traced is the Latin *tribus*, which literally means a place-centered grouping of people. The verbal root is the Latin *tribuere*, meaning giving or distributing. Keeping both the noun and verb roots in mind, contribution can be understood as a process of bringing together and fusing the horizons of place-centered groups of people through gift giving.

Intuitions of this process arguably underlie (and, because of infelicitous metaphysical assumptions, languish within) much of modern Western social theory. For example, in Hobbes' theory of societal origins, the giving of gifts is read and represented in highly schematized fashion as a contractual relationship rooted in rational self-interest and directed toward establishing regulated or customary institutions for mutual benefit. Societies are taken to consist of aggregates of competing and fundamentally self-interested individuals who pool their various strengths with the belief that

through combined numbers, each one's own interests will be met as surely and readily as possible. For Hobbes—and as affirmed in much of contemporary international relations theory—should the returns on cooperation and community diminish sufficiently, a reversion to directly self-interested competition naturally results. Thus, although partially occluded by his (empirically groundless) presupposition that individuals pre-exist the (social, natural, and cosmic) relationships in which they are embedded from birth, Hobbes correctly saw that social life is founded upon consistently practiced (and often ritually enhanced) give and take. Far from being accidental or forced associations, communities arise as a function of mutually sustained contributory processes.

Unburdened by the assumption that individual existence precedes relationality, Buddhist social narratives allow that while societies may be constituted historically as mere aggregates of individuals, this is so only when interdependence has been severely deflected in keeping with the prevalence of self-interest and exclusive claims to truth. When not so deflected—as during the reign of a “wheel turning king”—societies obtain as qualitatively distinctive patterns of relationship directed explicitly toward liberating, mutual contribution. As a dynamic process, sociality can be directed well or ill, truly or errantly, toward liberation (*nirvana*) or toward further suffering and trouble (*samsara*). Truly liberating sociality means realizing consciously sustained and enriching interdependence. It is not competition, but contribution that choreographs the emergence of community.

Perhaps the most pointed statement of the cardinal role of contribution in liberating sociality is the Chan Buddhist affirmation that, “awakening is just the perfection of offering.” In Chan, as in much of (at least pre-modern) Chinese Buddhism, psychological events or experiences associated with awakening or enlightenment were effectively displaced by considerations of the relational meaning of buddha-nature, emptiness, and skillful means. Focusing on the *liberating relationships* realized by the historical Buddha and other bodhisattvas, Chinese Buddhists—and particularly the lineage of Chan Buddhist masters from Huineng through Mazu, Baizhang, Huangbo and Linji—came to understand enlightenment in terms of attentive and relational mastery. Enlightenment means always and everywhere realizing consummate appreciative and contributory virtuosity.

The Chan tradition insisted that this understanding of awakening could be traced in an unbroken lineage back to the Buddha himself. And, in fact, there are many precedents for a relational understanding of awakening to be found in even the earliest strata of the Pali Canon—those texts generally regarded as historically primary. Indeed, for the purposes of shedding light on the linkages among sociality, gift exchanges, trade, and the karma of now predominating patterns of globalization, many of these early texts are particularly useful. Consider, for example, the Buddha's

somewhat lyrical description of his first insight into the interdependence of all things as like coming upon a city long forgotten and overgrown by dense jungle.

For those familiar with the history of Buddhism and its early valorization of forest dwelling reclusion, there is a certain incongruity in this striking image. The Buddha's enlightenment occurred in a rural setting as he sat in meditation under a banyan tree. There, he realized the interdependence or irreducibly relational nature of all things. It was this realization that the Buddha later described as a city lost and forgotten. His qualification of the city—that is, the content of his insight—as “lost and forgotten” can reasonably be explained as an expression of humility. It made clear that the Buddha's enlightening realization was neither original nor independently arisen, but rather a recovered, shared heritage. But why use a city as a metaphor for interdependence?

We have no direct answer to this from the Buddha himself. However, the metaphor is rich with possibilities. To begin with, in a truly vibrant city, no one lives long (if at all) under the illusion of being wholly independent. Urban life is a continuous reminder of the extent to which we are not self-sufficient. We rely constantly on the contributions of others, just as they rely on ours. Moreover, cities both make possible and are made possible by degrees of specialization, education, and cultural refinement far exceeding—especially in 6th century BCE India—anything possible in traditional rural or village life. Cities have from earliest times been attractors and amplifiers of excellence, and have practically commanded reflection on the extent to which our lives emerge out of ongoing patterns of mutual contributions and shared negotiations of meaning. Whether this holds true at all scales of urbanization, under all modes of production, and without severe ironic effects is, of course, open to critical debate.

Significantly, in the *Sutta Nipata* and other very early collections of the Buddha's teachings, those who have fared long and well on the Middle Way are not described as aloof from community life. On the contrary, they are described as leading lives of public wisdom, enjoying harmonious and calm relationships, joyful, purified of negative qualities of thought, speech and action, and clear of purpose. Equally interesting, early Buddhist teachings and their popular translations did not represent the ideal Buddhist world as an Arcadian paradise or as a sensuously austere domain. It is a world teeming with people, animals, and plants of every sort—a world that is explicitly *worldly*, with all manner of good food, music, architecture, and activity. In later Mahayana traditions, narratives about Buddha-realms in which all things do the work of enlightenment feature lush descriptions of both natural and human structures that are practically psychedelic in detail and sensuous presence. It is as if the “lost and forgotten city” representing the culminating insight of the Buddha's six-year quest had been restored to its former vibrancy and brilliance.

Of course, interdependence is not necessarily enlightening or liberating. Cities are not always ideal places. They can and, all too often, do go wrong. In the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta*, the Buddha relates a story chronicling how, over eight “generations,” an ideal and highly urbanized society slides into intensifying trouble and suffering and finally dissolves into a social miasma in which generational strife is rampant, social customs and rituals are ridiculed, violence has escalated to a point that killing sprees become horrifically common and random, and in which crude addictions and abusive relationships are almost universally celebrated.

The turn toward social collapse takes place when a new ruler of the kingdom elects to exercise his authority based on his own understanding of affairs, neglecting precedents for regularly and thoroughly consulting with his ministers and advisors. As a consequence, he does not properly respond to mounting evidence of poverty in the capital city and, for the first time in dozens of generations, a theft is committed. In a series of well-intended follies, his attempts to control the behavior of the people only drive matters spiraling ever further out of control. This movement is reversed only when a few people retreat into the countryside, refusing to adopt prevailing behavioral norms, and eventually band together in shared practices aimed at coursing freely on the four immeasurable relational headings (*brahma-vihāra*) of loving-kindness, compassion, joy in the good fortune of others, and equanimity.

The account given by the Buddha of the conditions leading to poverty is both remarkably simple and profound. Poverty arises when people are not able to work in and contribute to their community in a meaningful way. Far from being a function of few possessions or not having the means to get what is wanted or needed, poverty is a function of having too little to offer that is of value to others. It occurs when either a person or an entire population is effectively blocked from contributing directly to the welfare of others. As expressed in the narrative climax, the ultimate antidote to poverty (and the kinds of social malaise for which it is a crucial condition) cannot consist of either state welfare or legal and technological controls. These eventually only exacerbate the root conditions of poverty. Instead, poverty alleviation entails fostering increased capacities for giving appropriately to others. Ending poverty is a process of realizing appreciative and contributory virtuosity.

Several forceful insights are embedded in this account and its framing narrative. Poverty is a function of contributory impasse and implies a failure to appreciate—that is, to sympathetically understand and add value to—our ongoing patterns of interdependence. Both felt community and its objective expression in abiding social institutions are compromised when interdependence devolves into patterns of dependence and independence, and they disintegrate with the breakdown of robust patterns of mutual contribution. Resisting or

reversing such devolution and disintegration cannot hinge on simply meeting individual (or even collective) needs or wants; success finally hinges on how these are addressed—that is, on the values underlying our strategies for redressing the erosion of relational capacity and effective offering. Successfully alleviating poverty is a function of realizing and sustaining patterns of interdependence that enhance the capabilities of both individuals and communities for freely contributing to one another's welfare. True poverty alleviation at once results from and results in bodhisattva action.

Together, these insights suggest at least superficial compatibility between Buddhist understandings of awakening and social prosperity, and currently predominant growth-oriented, free-market models of development. There is, for example, substantial resonance between the Buddhist focus on alleviating poverty by enhancing contributory virtuosity and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen's definition of "development as freedom" or increased relational capacity. The basis for this resonance, I would argue, is the crucial role played by trade in poverty alleviation and development. At the same time, however, trade—as it has come to be practiced at global scale—works against the expanded and enhanced diversity that is at the root of a fully Buddhist approach to poverty alleviation.

In contemporary, idiomatic English, trade tends to be most strongly associated with exchanges of goods, services, or ideas for the purpose of economic gain. But we also speak of "trading places" (taking each other's positions), "trading security for adventure" (changing the global, narrative character of our situation), and considering "trade-offs" (collateral effects of a present course of action on future possibilities). These broader connotations reflect the origins of the English word "trade" as a derivative of "tread" or "treading," the Middle English and Middle German roots of which referred to the making of a track, path, or course.

Footpaths and tracks are neither natural features nor the results of random wandering. Rather, they develop as a function of steady traffic along preferred routes connecting separate localities that have been drawn into some kind of meaningful relationship. The localities might be two villages or family compounds, or they might be a human settlement and a particularly productive hunting or foraging ground. Though the furious pace of contemporary construction and real estate speculation tends to obscure the fact, tracks, paths, and roadways at once arise through and facilitate meaningful interchange. Thus, as evidenced in its linguistic roots, trade is inseparable from trade routes and most broadly originates in activities that expand and deepen community—activities that overlap, if they are not continuous with, contribution and gift exchange.

To the extent that this is so, there are Buddhist precedents for affirming the positive, even liberating, possibilities of trade. But given the teachings of emptiness and the absence of fixed or essential natures, it would be

incorrect—just as it is with regard to interdependence—to affirm that trade is always and inevitably “good.” Indeed, these teachings enjoin careful and diligent awareness of the great variability in what trade means. As an outcome of what processes has trade come to be configured and practiced as it is now? What genealogy of intentions and values underlies this configuration and these practices? What opportunities do they open? To what relational heading(s) do they commit us? In a word, what karma is associated with (especially global) trade, as it has come to be?

The Commodity Explosion and Eroding Productive Diversity: The Current Karma of Trade

It is part of a Buddhist understanding of trade that it not only promotes more extensive patterns of interdependence, but also directs or orients these patterns in keeping with particular, sustained intentions and values. Trade is karmically significant. Because of this, snapshot understandings of trade are potentially (if not necessarily) misleading. Short term perspectives afford insufficient insight into the axes of intention and value on which trade practices have turned in coming to be, precisely *as* they have come to be. Reasonably deep historical perspectives are thus indispensable in assessing trade’s karmic implications, especially the kinds of trade now taking place at truly global scale.

In keeping with the teaching of karma, we might begin (at least partially) evaluating the kind of trade now being carried out by especially developed nations and multinational corporations through considering the dramatic implications of their root motive: increasing wealth through expanding market share and accelerating profit. Given relatively free reign, to what kinds of situational dynamics—what patterns of relational tension and release—do market-domination and profit-seeking lead? Patterns of relationship aimed at amassing wealth—rather than, for instance, alleviating poverty—are not likely conducive to equitably enhancing relational or contributory capacity. On the contrary, they will tend to institutionalize slopes of advantage inclined as steeply as possible in the direction of corporate profit. Moreover, market-domination—a primary means to this end—is similarly likely to streamline and concentrate production practices in such a way as to promote both efficiency and a breakdown of self-sustaining, local production regimes.

As demonstrated, for example, in the era of European colonial expansion and in the early 20th century emergence of massive industrial monopolies in the U.S., the natural outcome of this process of controlling the topography of advantage (and trade) is a remarkable concentration of power in very few hands. And this is by no means a now defunct historical trend. Globally, the kind of economic interdependence characteristic of the waves of market integration taking place over the past quarter century has likewise led to a widening gap between rich and poor, with roughly 80% of

global resources and wealth being controlled by and benefiting less than 20% of the world's population. At least at the levels of national, regional, and global economies for which there is significant comparative data, currently prevailing patterns of trade promote developmental inequality.

There has been a tendency to view the rise of developmental inequality as a function of already developed nations taking too little responsibility for ratcheting up the developmental cycle elsewhere and, perhaps, even taking severe advantage of less developed economies. In other words, the tendency has been to call into question the intentions of the developed world and of the multinational corporations to whom disproportionate profit flows through rapidly integrated markets and global patterns of trade. Indeed, there may be cases where such major players in steering the process of growing global interdependence can rightly be charged with unduly selfish strategies and even morally deficient motives. But because of the wide array of such players and the complexity of national or corporate intentionality, this provides very little critical leverage, despite its rhetorical appeal. An intentional analysis also, for quite apparent reasons, is not readily conducive to generating deep and critical historical perspective. The intentions of even close associates are difficult to ascertain at time, much less those of actors greatly distant in time or temperament. Moreover, charges of deficient motives can be dismissed as an inversion of the "ad hominem" argument: they indict those presently benefiting most greatly from prevalent patterns of globalization, rather than the system of values informing and orienting such patterns.

To rephrase this in Buddhist conceptual terms, the karma of presently prevailing patterns of global trade may be deflected in accordance with self-centered or equity-denying intentions held by major economic players: the most highly developed nations and increasingly powerful multinational corporations. But karma is—as stated earlier—always a function of both intentions and values. Focusing exclusively on the former can produce a critical blindspot—a range of potentially crucial phenomena left entirely out of consideration, especially when the karma in question is not individual, but collective or systemic.

I have argued with respect to technology that such a critical blindspot arises through a confusion of technologies with the tools to which they give rise, and an inappropriate tendency to evaluate technologies in terms of how well these tools serve us as individuals.¹ In consequence, technologies are effectively exempted from critical attention—that is, the values that technologies embody and render ambient throughout societies deploying them are critically occluded by the individual uses to which tools are put. And because these tools are designed and redesigned with the overarching mandate of increasing utility and user-friendliness, this leads to blindly

¹ Peter D. Hershock, *Reinventing the Wheel: A Buddhist Response to the Information Age*, State University of New York Press: Albany, NY 1999.

endorsing continued technological development and deployment in a particularly vicious form of critical circularity. The effects of technology on the character and direction of relationships (personal, communal, national, international, and global) are functionally ignored.

Similarly, it is particularly dangerous to fail in assessing the values underlying global patterns of trade through assuming their “value-neutrality” and focusing instead on how trade patterns are used by various actors. Indeed, while many economists ostensibly view trade as a technology, they actually treat it as a tool used by individual entrepreneurs, corporations, countries, or regional associations (the EU or ASEAN, for example). Trade is thus assumed to be properly and adequately assessed in terms of how well it meets the individual needs and interests of those engaging in trade. Many economists then stress the fact that although global trade does tend to bring about increased inequality, it also makes *both* the rich *and* the poor richer. From this, they conclude that while the benefits may be greater for some than others, current patterns of global trade are good for each and every one of the world’s people. What they cannot conclude, at the risk of committing the fallacy of composition, is that what is good for each and every one of us, must be good for *all* of us. The effects on a whole may be something entirely other than the sum of effects on all its parts.

Like technologies, presently prevailing patterns of global trade are not value neutral and cannot be accurately or adequately assessed by measuring (even in statistical aggregates) their impact on individuals as such. Neither can their ill effect of fostering developmental inequality be traced solely back to unjust motives in how they are used. Rather, contemporary patterns of trade can only be critically evaluated by seeing how the constellation of values structuring global trade affect how we relate, as individuals, as countries, and as members of expanding global communities. At the center of this constellation, I would argue, are the related values of control and choice that structure the operation of markets.

Global trade presently apportions unequal benefits to the already developed and advantaged and disproportionately exports the costs of economic growth to those least able to bear these costs.² On one hand, this means that the present system of trade fosters a growing “capacity gap” that results in the vast majority of the world’s population being in a relatively poorer and poorer position both to contribute to others and to be contributed to by them. Although they may be better off over time in absolute terms, in *relative* terms they will always be worse off. On the other hand, by bearing the cost burden—for example, in terms of environmental degradation—of benefits they do not receive, it is practically assured that

² See, for example: *Alternatives to Economic Globalization, A Report of the International Forum on Globalization*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers: San Francisco, 2002; David C. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*, Kumarian Press: Bloomfield, CT, 2002.

their capability for responding to the challenges of their own situation will prove increasingly inadequate. As it is currently configured, global trade will never bring about true poverty alleviation because poverty is its primary by-product.

This admittedly iconoclastic claim is not in any way a claim about the intentions of those who have initiated and sustained the kinds of global trade we now experience in everyday ways. Neither is it a claim—like that central to Marxist critiques of global capital—that rests upon an assumed historical necessity or developmental teleology. Rather, it is simply a claim about the history of how things have come to be, as they have come to be. It is a claim about how large-scale patterns of relationship are systematically oriented toward the demise of productive diversity through growing trade focused on increasing wealth through market domination and accelerating profit, making use of technologies biased toward the strategic value of control to promote market freedoms centered on choice. Like the efforts of the hapless king in the *Cakkavatti Sihanda Sutta* who tries to restore social order and prosperity through the increasing exercise of control, the intentions of those promoting more extensive global trade may be quite positive. But the values embedded in their strategies for poverty alleviation—contrary to their explicit intentions—are sending things spiraling further and further away from their ostensive goal.

A Brief Narrative History of Global Trade and the Demise of Productive Diversity

Present global scales of trading activities and the technologies of exchange that are associated with them are exerting historically unprecedented influence on the quality and direction of relationships realized through trade. Prior to the emergence of comprehensive monetary economies, trade pivoted on bartering activity. That is, it turned on directly negotiating comparative values for the goods or services being traded. Trades could be completed only if and when all parties involved felt that fair values—often highly contextual rather than standardized or absolute—had been placed upon the goods or services involved. Within and among small-scale, subsistence economies, trade is an activity—heavily conditioned by local circumstances—through which distinct communities meaningfully and with considerable immediacy contribute to one another's welfare. In such contexts, trade promotes both productive specialization and diversity.

Trade begins undergoing important transformations as technological, bureaucratic, and political institutions make possible and come to depend upon large-scale accumulations and transfers of goods. Relatively amorphous local-to-local patterns of trade linking small-scale subsistence economies give way to geographically extensive patterns of periphery-to-center trade. Here, the economic terrain is more or less steeply sloped from subsistence dominant village economies toward rapidly growing urban

centers with large populations engaged in highly specialized activities. Already at this stage, the face-to-face trade of subsistence goods (especially foodstuffs) begins being replaced by something akin to the modern system of commodity marketing. As money enters the trade process, a level of abstraction is added to the process of negotiation. Currency values come to be established for commonly traded goods and services, which then no longer need be directly compared and evaluated. Qualitative modes of evaluation give way to essentially quantitative modes, and vernacular patterns of goods exchange begin giving way to serial transfers.

The interdependence of urban and rural communities and of individuals within them begins already at this stage to be markedly occluded. Indeed, the roots of modern economic interdependence can be traced historically to state-building processes emerging out of periphery-to-center trade dating at least into the first millennium BCE. But for the most part, local-to-local exchanges of goods and services based on face-to-face negotiation remain dominant and continue as such well into modern times. As long as the vast majority of the world's population remained rural—until the late 19th or early 20th century in all but the most highly developed industrial nations—subsistence needs continued to be met almost entirely locally. Production ecologies—porously bounded domains of interlocked producers contributing to one another's welfare in a sustainable fashion—remained small in scope.

With the increasing sophistication of transportation technologies and infrastructure, lines of transmission for more durable goods quite early became long even by contemporary standards. For example, as early as the second century BCE, the tributary system fueling the imperial Chinese economy covered an area of perhaps 2,000 miles in diameter. By the 4th century CE, well-traveled land and sea trade routes linked African, European, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and East Asian societies. Still, because of the low capacities and speeds at which transportation took place, trade at great distances tended to be in durable material goods of high unit value like salt, spices, cooking oils, gems, precious metals, and silk, but also included what would now be termed intellectual property (e.g., maps, books, musical forms, and religious teachings). Thus, until at least the mid-19th century, most of the meat, dairy products and vegetables required by the population of cities like Paris were produced within surrounding suburban areas, if not within the city itself. The urban "footprint" remained rather small, with specific dimensions effectively set by the quality of a city's local "metabolic" support system—the quality of its nearby environment. In effect, cities were bioregionally defined.³

³ An interesting discussion of the relationship between bioregional urbanization processes and capital flows can be found in David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, Blackwell: Oxford, 1996 (p.410ff.).

This changes from the 16th to 19th centuries through the steady convergence, particularly in the European West and the Americas, of cumulative technological innovations enabling much greater speed and control in transportation, industrial and agricultural production, and communication. The 19th century invention of the clipper ship can be seen as a key turning point in this process, after which transoceanic trade and the global colonization of subsistence economies and markets shifted into apparently irreversible high gear.⁴

The history of global capitalism and competitive market-driven production is, from the late 19th century onward, a history of rapidly growing production monocultures that effectively disrupt local ecologies of production and consumption. Dominance shifts from local-to-local exchanges rooted in meaningful negotiations of value and need to local-global-local transfer currents, the velocity of which come to be subject to relatively overt control through price manipulation rather than as a naturally variable function of subsistence needs and values.

In the present era of global markets, trade is only incidentally a vernacular activity that directly links members of nearby communities through local-to-local exchanges for meeting basic needs. The benefits of this are very well advertised—both literally and figuratively. Especially in the most developed countries, supermarkets carry fresh fruits and vegetables grown all over the planet. In even the least developed countries under WTO governance, readily available grains and other staples are no longer likely to have been locally produced. Agriculture has given way to agribusiness. And the same is true for virtually every other consumer need from clothing, shelter, and entertainment to health care and education.

The contemporary shopping mall—virtually identical across most of the planet—is at the center of the new “global village.” It is a curiously structured village in which producers and consumers are not neighbors and never see one another face-to-face. Yet, it is a village in which niche manufacturing and marketing are able to provide a practically flawless semblance of direct and sustained attention to personal needs and desires. It is a village in which markets guarantee that the choices available to consumers are practically unlimited, with a remarkably similar range of goods and services (albeit at remarkably disparate prices and qualities) available both to the very wealthy and the very poor. Although there are clearly many inequalities in the village, the overall degree of security it affords with respect to basic needs is, in absolute terms, quite high. The new global village may not be perfect, but to a degree that is often amazing, it works.

⁴ For an extended discussion of this process, see: James Beniger, *The Control Revolution, Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Age*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1986.

Such are the familiar benefits of global markets and unrestricted trade liberalization. As an economic system, it is remarkably well suited to meeting individual needs and wants, benefiting some more than others, but clearly benefiting all.

From Personal Contributions within Shared Patterns of Welfare to Individually-Biased Patterns of Consumption under Mass-Production Regimes

As the idiom goes, however, we don't get anything for nothing. The system has its costs. The technologically triggered efficiencies that made possible the remarkable geographic expansion of markets from especially the 18th century onward also had a powerful effect on the content of those markets. Global trade ceased being limited to highly durable goods, typically of high unit cost. Trade in luxuries—for example, in silks, spices, and precious metals and stones—continued to be important. But the overall ambit of global trade spread to include ever-greater kinds and quantities of non-luxury goods. The economic logic is not particularly complicated. Expanding markets require expanding consumer bases—an expansion that can be driven only so far by falling prices associated with efficiencies in production and transportation. Sustained market growth is only possible if the range of goods traded undergoes similar growth. Trade expansion can only be stably realized through increasing trade density.

As the range of goods transferred into a local economy nears the point of natural saturation, it is possible to sustain market growth through advertising that systematically extends the spectrum of goods perceived as necessary and/or desirable, and through the emergence of industries that commodify an increasingly broad array of services. The global corporate outlay for advertising now exceeds by a considerable margin that expended worldwide on all levels of public education. Tellingly, the greatest increases in advertising expenditures appear in so-called developing markets. In the decade ending in 1996, for example, advertising expenditures in China grew by more than 1,000%; in Indonesia by 600%; in Malaysia and Thailand by 300%; and in India, the Republic of Korea and the Philippines by more than 200% (UNDP, 1998). Such expenditures are not based on wishful thinking, but on results: the realization of maximally broad and dense markets wherever and as profitably as possible. The power of advertising to extend market reach and density is perhaps nowhere so evident as in such poor countries as Ethiopia and Nepal where populations living on less than \$1/day, over just a 5 year period from 1993-1998, were induced to increase spending on such imported consumer goods as cosmetics, cameras, and soft drinks by 400-500%.

Recommending such expanded and dense markets are reliability, standardized products and product compatibility, convenience, and heightened possibilities for exercising freedom of choice. But increasingly

dense, globally mediated provision of goods and services can have an effect on local economies that is not unlike what happens when virulent alien species are introduced into a sensitive ecosystem: indigenous species—that is, local modes of production and patterns of exchange—are eventually choked out or granted limited continued existence in specialized preserves or cottage industries. Importantly, this does not mean local populations become indigent. The monetary medium of global transfers of goods and services guarantees that wage-earning employment invariably is fostered by expanding markets. In fact, the transition from barter to cash is crucial to marketization processes.⁵ In advanced market economies, employment tends to be high and relatively inclusive, at first available and then necessary not only for adult men, but also for women and previously marginalized minority populations.

The picture just sketched is often tinted in fairly rosy hues. Greater employment opportunities for all, but especially women and minorities, and greater access to the goods and services offered by the market—these are typically celebrated as signs of successful development. Futures that traditionally have been somewhat narrow in prospect are manifestly widened. Choices multiply. And there is certainly no reasonable argument against this in principle: the professional opportunities now open to women and minorities, for example, mark a real, significant, and entirely welcome enhancement of their possibilities for social contribution. But focusing on the positive effects on individual members of communities or individual classes is, again, to dangerously restrict our ability to evaluate how such changes affect qualities of relationship more broadly. If the poor are invariably worse off in relative terms, it follows that they are in some significant degree *relationally* disadvantaged by present patterns of global trade.

The range of relationships that might be considered in this regard is practically unlimited. For present purposes, however, consider the relationships centered on employment or labor. Focusing on the upper end of the scale of opportunities opened by global trade tends to gloss over the phenomenological realities of average employment in the service of greatly expanded, efficient, and dense markets. Most jobs in such markets no longer afford workers the opportunity to carry through with a complete production process or service. The rationalization of industries and workplaces to the end of maximum efficiency practically guarantees that workers will not participate in or consider themselves responsible for the full production (or service) cycle. Quite literally, they do piece-work. As anyone who has done it well understands, piece-work does not promote worker pride unless it is related to overall quantity of work accomplished. More work equals more pay. But more is not necessarily better. Indeed,

⁵ A wonderfully concise and powerful fictional account of this process and its motivations are given in the early chapters of John Nichols' novel, *The Magic Journey*, Ballantine Books: New York, 1983.

under most circumstances, piece-work is not conducive to workers actively increasing product quality, but at best to maintaining a minimum level of quality while maximizing output quantity.

This is quite different from what prevails in subsistence economies, where one person or family may be involved in and responsible for the entire set of processes required to build a dwelling or provide regular meals and clothing, and where trade involves face-to-face negotiations of the value of goods to be traded. Specialization greatly reduces inefficiencies, especially those that result from productive redundancy. Indeed, mainstream economists from Adam Smith (18th century) to the present day have been adamant in praising the transition from craft to commodity. But by translating the entire production cycle into discrete units, the synoptic perspective needed to envision paradigmatic revisions of the entire process is typically restricted to just one or a handful of workers who are particularly suited to and hired for such work. This can yield very high quality results. But it does not promote creative development on the part of those workers whose responsibilities and imaginations are confined to the narrowest possible scope compatible with overall production efficiency.

For workers who remain in a given company or industry for an extended period, there is some opportunity for personal growth and contributory maturation. But personal growth and maturation in the work world, as elsewhere, rest on shared commitments. And unfortunately, the market drive toward greater efficiencies and lower costs tends to work against such commitment—a phenomenon now painfully evident in the post-bubble economy of Japan. There is a striking and significant trend in the more advanced economies for workers to undergo several major career changes over the course of their working life, and for the work histories of the majority of workers in lower-wage jobs to reflect an increasingly random approach to employment. Far from supporting a coherent narrative of professional development and personal maturation, scanning average work histories is much like randomly channel surfing a cable-supported television. For most workers, jobs are strictly a means to an end—most often: access to a greater range of choices for personal consumption.

As market economies have matured, some significant counter trends have emerged based on a recognition of the profitable nature of distributed creativity and responsibility, with many leading analysts now touting the importance of “flexible specialization” and “network accountability.” But these efforts to fine-tune the system do not restore the “old growth” or indigenous patterns of production in which work concretely and meaningfully results in goods or services directly exchanged in face-to-face realizations of shared welfare. In spite of the economic imperative for innovation in terms of both product design and marketing and work unit size and organization, global trade remains a composite of what are individually almost meaningless moments or links in a chain of production

and marketing. It is not just that “old growth” production ecologies are replaced by more efficient systems. Their replacement signifies a loss of overall local productive diversity and the depletion of the personal and community resources required for responding to changing circumstances and meaningfully meeting local needs. People lose the positions from which they were able to contribute directly to their own and others’ welfare—a loss of capacities for innovation, for shared improvisation, for on-site learning, and for appreciating (literally adding value to) their situation.

For many, this statement will seem overstated, if not simply false. Even if it is allowed that most people are employed in jobs that they do not like, performing tasks that have neither intrinsic nor perceived value and meaning, and would avidly look forward to a future that would not include work at all were such a future practically conceivable, many of us will still be inclined to insist on the creative possibilities our lives include that were not open to our parents or grandparents. But such a reading rests, I think, on an insufficiently robust understanding of creativity and on inadequately distinguishing between freedoms of choice and contributing freely. The kind of trade now dominant in the world functionally pivots on acts of consumption. Although workers engaged at any given point of the production and marketing process can intellectually or in abstract terms see their efforts as important, the signal and culminating event economically is the act of consumption. Inescapably, the most basic, concrete meaning of trade—in spite of its roots in the realization of extended community through gift exchange—now reduces to a transfer of possession.

This is not primarily a function of deficiencies on the part of workers or consumers, but rather a dynamic necessity of present-day markets. Because of the demands for expanded and increasingly dense markets, global scale trade compresses the utility of consumed goods or services to the smallest unit measure possible. Through the advertised inculcation of desire and through the constriction of the popular imagination, conditions are realized such that individual acts of consumption only fleetingly answer needs. The classic example of this is, of course, the institution of fashion (the history of which long predates the contemporary market, but at vastly restricted scales), which sets strict temporal, spatial, and cultural limits on product usefulness. But the phenomenon is quite general, and it is finally such compressions of utility that “open” the space required for multiplying choices. As a consequence of this, most goods, once acquired, are used very briefly, if at all. Even goods used frequently are seldom used to the point of being functionally worn out. Obsolescence—real or perceived—is crucial to growing markets. As markets become increasingly extensive and dense, consumers begin to function as producers of waste. Or, more graphically stated, they begin to serve as organs of elimination by means of which the residue of profit-making—whether material or experiential—is summarily disposed.

As long as there are more (and better) goods on the market, and as long as employment remains sufficiently high to support their continued consumption, there is a general tendency to turn away from the implications of practically collapsing consumption and waste. There are those who would convince the general public that there are, for example, simple environmental limits to growth. Planetary resources will one day run out or become scarce enough to throw a wrench in the works of the market. The cumulative environmental ramifications of waste will render the planet inhospitable if not uninhabitable. But such proclamations are, for most, unpersuasive. The broad public expects technological advances to afford new capacities for exercising control over the production and waste management processes—control intense and extensive enough to insure opportunities for unlimited growth.

But when the exercise of control (technologically mediated or otherwise) crosses the threshold of its own utility, it begins reproducing the conditions of its own necessity. In short, it brings about conditions in which there are not only increasing capacities for exercising control, but increasing need to do so as well.⁶ The experienced consequences of this are dire: living in a maximally controlled environment—a euphemism, finally, for prison. Technologies biased toward control and economies biased toward the proliferation of wants go quite well together. But karmically, the continued interdependent growth of control-biased technologies and global markets does not lead, as might be assumed, to finally solving thorny problems of supply and demand, resource allocation, and poverty alleviation. Rather, it rests on the continuous production of new wants and new problems. As made evident in the classic representation of *samsara* as a wheel, *karma* plays out in a cyclic (or at least spiral) manner.

The intentions and values associated with “getting what we want” are karmically linked to finding ourselves “left wanting.” When trade is predominantly carried out as a local-global-local transfer of goods that undermines local ecologies of production and that compromises both personal and communal resources for contributory virtuosity, trouble and suffering both sustain and are sustained by “good business.” The more we rely upon the market to bring us what we want or lack, the more we will find ourselves wanting or lacking. In other words, the more we will find ourselves incapable of meeting our own needs, of seeing to our own welfare, and acting in our own fullest interests. As local ecologies of production are translated into marketplaces for the practically infinite array of goods and services made available through geographically fluid production monocultures and fully liberalized global trade, capacities for relating freely are converted into ironic compulsions to exercise ever-expanding freedoms of choice.

⁶ For more on the ironic effects of technologies biased toward the value of control, see Peter D. Herschok, *Reinventing the Wheel: A Buddhist Response to the Information Age*, SUNY Press, 1999.

Such translation and conversion processes are especially powerful in the attention economy that began consolidating over the past quarter century in post-industrial societies and that is now a global phenomenon. In this still emergent economy, it is no longer material goods, services, or information/knowledge that are the most basic resource commodities, but attention itself. Lasting goods and services are no longer the focus of production, but rather the production of inherently fleeting meanings. In such an economy, “value-added” signifies attention captured. As attention is systematically exported from local contexts (family and community, for example), primarily through intensive mass media consumption, it is no longer available for appreciating and contributing to one’s immediate situation. And, in much the same way that the conversion of capital to money allows its maximally fluid distribution, the attention economy effectively converts awareness from a qualitatively complex relationship to a minimally structured—that is, minimally committed—energy source. As the attention economy grows, personal and community capabilities for sustained appreciative and contributory virtuosity diminish.⁷ World Health Organization projections of an epidemic increase of depression in developed and developing economies (already rated as the most important factor of morbidity and lowered life quality of women in the developed world) is a particularly chilling commentary on the correlation of prevailing development processes, their social ramifications, and the erosion of meaning-making capability.

Again, however, it is important to note that such effects are not a matter of historical necessity. They are the experienced consequences of intentions and (especially) values that have shaped and continue shaping currently prevailing patterns of economic growth and interdependence. Crucially, the key conditions for these karmic consequences coming to fruition as they have pivot on issues of scale and what has been termed “downward causation.”—the tendency of higher order systems for which history makes a difference to affect the nature of sub-systems comprised within them.⁸ These conditions are, in short, both karmic consequences and opportunities. And as I will try drawing out in the following two sections, they constitute the signal factors by means of which the liberating promise of the Buddhist teaching of impermanence might be operationalized: no situation, no matter how complex or conflicted, is intractable.

⁷ See *Part Three of Reinventing the Wheel* for a sustained discussion of the transformations of awareness that attend the conversion to an attention economy through the global, technology mediated colonization of consciousness. For a concise treatment of the role of media, see Peter D. Hershock, “Media, Attention, and the Colonization of Consciousness: A Buddhist Perspective,” in *Reason and Insight*, edited by Robin Wang and Timothy Shanahan, Wadsworth/Thomson Publishing: Belmont, CA, 2003.

⁸ For a wide range of papers exploring the concept of downward causation, see *Downward Causation: Minds, Bodies, and Matter*, edited by P.B. Andersen et. al., Aarhus University Press, 2000.

Some General Implications

The Buddha's metaphorical representation of insight into the interdependence of all things as a "lost and forgotten city" suggests that urbanization, specialization, institutional growth and development can be seen as processes capable of dissolving commitments to narrow self-sufficiency and independent existence. Indeed they can be seen as conducive to establishing patterns of mutually enriching relationships, infusing daily life with ready opportunities for increasingly refined practices of (what would ideally be mindfully) shared welfare. Yet this is not a necessary result of urbanization and development, or of the transformation of practices for meeting subsistence needs that they entail and institutionalize. As evidenced in the cautionary tale embedded in the *Cakkavatti Sihanda Sutta*, these processes can be inflected in profoundly troubling ways, with socially disastrous results. In the simplest Buddhist terms, whether these processes are finally constraining and coercive or expansive and liberating depends on whether they are directed in alignment with ignorance, habit formations, and craving desires, or they are directed in alignment with wisdom, attentive mastery, and moral clarity. Development, in the broadest, Buddhist sense, should consist of movement toward realizing patterns of relationship that serve to bring increased productive diversity—that is, patterns of mutual contribution that appreciate or add value to an irreducibly shared situation. Trade is then consonant with and is deepened through cultivating wisdom, attentive mastery, and moral clarity.

Present-day patterns of trade and development do not meet this requirement. On the contrary, they work against the constellation of conditions that might sponsor a concerted turn in that direction, systematically converting local resources for contributory virtuosity and relating freely into increasingly dense arrays of consumption-fueled freedoms of choice. Beyond a certain threshold, markets can only grow by problematizing present circumstances and delivering appropriate consumer product solutions. Granted the scale of contemporary trade and development regimes, but also the unprecedented rapidity with which these regimes and their technological infrastructures undergo significant change, it is hard to imagine what it would mean to turn the prevailing tide and begin restoring local ecologies of production. At the very least, the global institutions that now mediate the meeting of basic subsistence needs cannot be changed fundamentally overnight. Indeed, we could not reasonably hope that they would: any cataclysmic changes in these institutions could occur only at the cost of tremendous suffering to the billions now dependent upon them.

Yet, a key entailment of seeing all things as impermanent, troubled, and without any abiding, essential self is that no situation can be seen as intractable. There is always opportunity for meaningful response and—in

keeping with the teaching of karma—a change in the direction of our situation and the relationships constituting it. What can and should be done, then, to alter our karma with respect to trade and development to realize their liberating potential?

Three initial observations can be made, I think.

First, there is no generic, one-size-fits-all solution, no universal way to resolve the predicaments in which we find ourselves. Appropriate resolutions must be improvised, in context, in real-time. Secondly, the scale and complexity of our situation, as it has come to be, make evident the need for a paradigm shift from focusing on factual problems that can be solved finally, at least within objectively determinate parameters, to realizing our immersion in predicaments that can only be resolved by grappling with contending goods, norms, and meanings, through establishing harmonizing and yet open-ended commitments to appropriate values and associated courses of action. Finally, resolving key trade and development predicaments—key conflicts with respect to both ordinal and strategic values—cannot be carried out alone. Both the aim and measure of this work lie in relational quality—in enhanced and mutually enriching diversity.

These observations can be seen as consonant with the traditional Buddhist attribution of limitless resources for relational attunement (*upaya*) to fully realized bodhisattvas. As such, they suggest that the path of liberating trade and development is a particular manifestation of the path of realizing the emptiness of all things—that is, realizing the potential of all beings for mutual relevance or meaningful difference. It is a path that can be taken up anywhere and traveled without end. Truly liberating trade and development will promote opening ourselves *to* one another in that utterly proximate way needed to truly make a difference *for* one another. Only in this way is it possible for each and every one of us to realize that the very place in which we find ourselves is a place of immeasurable meanings and value—the ultimate alleviation of poverty.

But What About Bhutan?

At some risk, let me attempt linking these general (and, admittedly, hyperbolic) reflections to the task of operationalizing Gross National Happiness.

GNH has been described as built on four interlinked processes: the preservation and promotion of culture; environmental conservation; good governance; and socio-economic development. These very processes, however, have been claimed (or could easily be claimed) as foundational by many developed and developing countries, as well as by many multinational corporations and such intergovernmental organizations as the World Trade Organization or World Bank—for all of which the ultimate (and purely quantitative) measures of development remain rooted in rising GDP, per capita income, and levels of consumption. And although appeals

are increasingly made to such “alternatives” as the Human Development Index, these alternative measures generally only supplement rather than supplant or even set proper limits to traditional quantitative models for assessing economic development.

If measuring national development in terms of GNH is to be truly distinctive, happiness must factor significantly – and not merely incidentally or consequentially – into the development equation. That is, happiness cannot be simply an unplanned collateral benefit or even a focal outcome of economic processes – a pleasant, but entirely contingent by-product of existing economic imperatives, values, and practices. Instead, happiness must factor crucially and critically into resolving the sorts of predicaments and suffering sponsored by prevailing scales and directions of global interdependence. It must, that is, have sufficient traction to uniquely effect and orient development, exerting appropriate “downward causation” on relevant economic and social processes. Short of this, Gross National Happiness degenerates into what Stefan Priesner has described as “mere magniloquence.”

The early Buddhist tradition is unparalleled for the thoroughness and clarity with which it lays bare the constellation of conditions sponsoring unhappiness, trouble, and suffering (*dukkha*), as well as the means of dissolving that constellation and thus realizing *nibbana* (nirvana). The tradition is, however, notably muted when it comes to discussing happiness. When happiness (*sukkhā*) is explicitly invoked, it is almost invariably in the context of rehearsing what might be termed a conceptual genealogy of awakening or liberation. In the *Majjhima Nikaya*, for example, it is said that: “with mindfulness comes wisdom; with wisdom comes tireless energy; with tireless energy comes joy; with joy comes a tranquil body; with a tranquil body comes happiness (*sukkhā*); with happiness comes attentive mastery (*samadhi*); with attentive mastery comes equanimity,” as well as the other immeasurable relational headings (*brahmavihāra* or *appamaññā*) of compassion, appreciative joy, and loving-kindness (MN 118.29ff). These interactive vectors are not considered to be subjective feelings – emotions as now commonly understood – but rather as relational qualities that “suffuse” the entire world. Happiness marks a phase or modality of relational enhancement and refinement that is inseparable from public, social transformation oriented toward enlightened and enlightening liberation. In particular, it emerges in the context of sustaining bodily tranquility and establishing attentive mastery (*samadhi*).

Granted this characterization, happiness will have demonstrated effective economic traction when trade and development reduce overall stress and bring about enhanced capacities for concentrated and yet flexible awareness, in the context of realizing the kinds of mature emotional capabilities associated with sustaining meaningfully enriched and liberating relationships. In terms of the analysis given earlier, such trade and

development practices and institutions would serve to counter the commodification of attention and the contraction of awareness that lie at the roots of the global colonization of consciousness. They would challenge the predominance of choice and control as values structuring the operation of markets and practically mitigate both the erosion of productive diversity and the inequitable patterns of economic growth to which they lead. Finally, they would conserve and enhance local resources for meaning-making, working against the consumption of commodified meaning, particularly as institutionalized in global mass media news and entertainment. If appropriately sustained, they would lead to the emergence of post-market economies rooted in a paradigmatic value shift from individual freedoms of choice to relating freely and from consumption-driven to contribution-enhancing patterns of growth.⁹

What might this mean concretely for Bhutan? Let me briefly address just four, representative and interconnected issue areas: meeting subsistence needs; technology transfer; cultural conservation; and the role of governance.

No economy can be considered healthy if it fails to provide basic subsistence needs in an equitable and just manner. These needs include, at the very least, food, clothing, shelter, health care, and education. As Bhutan opens itself to global economic forces, it may not remain feasible to address all of these needs through traditional local-to-local patterns of trade, or in ways that conserve and promote robust, associated local production ecologies. For example, it may not prove feasible to significantly improve health care provision without importing medicines and treatment techniques and technologies. A reasonable aim, however, is to target key subsistence needs as foci for strenuously conserving and developing local resources and production ecologies. Education is arguably the central candidate for such treatment. For instance, education practices in Bhutan might be revised in such a way as to foster improvisational ability, emotional maturity and refinement, stress reduction, and attentive mastery—all necessary to offset the predominant effects of prevailing patterns of global interdependence. These might be more or less explicitly Buddhist in nature, but should clearly reflect indigenous, Bhutanese values and practices. Improvisational ability, in particular, will be crucial in the adaptive work needed to truly conserve—and not merely preserve—Bhutanese culture and Bhutan's overall capability for contributing effectively to global social, economic, and political processes.

⁹ There is a significant body of Buddhist literature that addresses the problematic ontological commitments underlying the act of choosing, most notably perhaps, the Chan works associated with the lineage from Huineng through Mazu, Baizhang, Huangbo, and Linji. Here, the tendency toward "picking and choosing" is forcefully depicted as rooted in a denial of the emptiness of all things and a failure to practically realize the meaning of non-duality. To be bereft of possibilities for enhancing our way of life is, indeed, a horrific prospect. But being in a position to choose is not equivalent to being positioned to contribute to and enrich our irreducibly shared situation.

As a very small country, with a comparably small national economy, it is sheer folly to believe that Bhutan could ever develop or sustain competitive advantage in manufacturing or other industrial modes of production. If, indeed, there is a commitment to conserving local production ecologies, technology transfer must be carefully orchestrated to insure that imported technologies (and the strategic values they embody) are appropriate complements to existing Bhutanese production practices and values. For instance, there is a wealth of new building materials and technologies flooding onto the global market. In most cases, the transfer of these materials and technologies has been accompanied by practically wholesale conversion to imported building design protocols—often with both aesthetically and practically disastrous results. Care should be taken to introduce only those materials and technologies that can contribute to the evolution of already existing Bhutanese design sensibilities—that is, to extend the values and practices that already obtain in Bhutan and have historically proven their appropriateness to the Bhutanese setting.¹⁰ Moreover, the pace of technology transfer should, to whatever degree possible, be indexed to the availability of relevant Bhutanese expertise. Excessive reliance on foreign experts practically guarantees eventual dissonance between imported means and indigenous aims.

Of particular importance will be policies related to communications and information technologies, and their role in effecting the export of attention from local concerns. The recent, official introduction of television to Bhutan marks a decisive move—understandable, and yet not without marked risks for the erosion of Bhutanese cultural and contributory resources. The case for developing Bhutanese competitive advantage in media production is no better than that in relation to manufacturing and industrial production. Neither can it be assumed possible to stem what is likely to be a flood of global media products into Bhutan. It is, however, possible to establish policies restricting direct advertising—a key component in the generation of desires for consumer choice in market-oriented economies. It is also possible, with broadcast media, to establish policies requiring, for instance, that a certain percentage of daily airtime be devoted to locally relevant program content. As a counterbalance to the potentially overwhelming extent and density of cultural products arriving through global media, policies might be established to fund the creative advancement of Bhutanese artists, performers, writers, and commentators, making use of taxes pegged to audience size for imported program content. Unavoidably, many new artists will engage in creative hybridization. What is crucial is that this process enhances and extends Bhutanese culture. The aim is not to *preserve* Bhutanese culture (in effect rendering it incapable of

¹⁰ The work of Susan Murcott and her Institute for Sustainable Living can be referenced as exemplars in technological transfers and innovations oriented toward enhancing local contributory resources.

natural reproduction), but rather to *conserve* it—a process that implies creative adaptation as well as sustained continuity.

Related to these three issue areas is a broader policy implication regarding the institutional structure of integrating global and Bhutanese economies. Although large nation states can reasonably anticipate some advantages, for example, to membership in the World Trade Organization, Bhutan would appear to have much more to lose than to gain in such arrangements. Much more is promised by Bhutan remaining in a position to levy appropriate tariffs and import taxes than by adopting an “open-market” approach to development. Indeed, the flood of consumer products and its attendant ideology of freedom through choice would very quickly erode what real possibilities remain for Bhutan to leapfrog the phase of post-modern market economics in achieving truly equitable and just trade and development.

These last remarks suggest an importance role for governance in both orienting and driving the operationalization of GNH. Much of the development literature in the West—particularly that originating in the US—asserts a strong correlation between development and democratization. And, as customarily defined, both processes indeed embody shared and strong commitments the preeminence of choice as both an ordinal and strategic value. Some commentators, however, have identified reasons to qualify the implied causal relationship. Amy Chua, for example, has discussed the ironic consequences of importing democratic patterns of governance into countries with market-favored minorities.¹¹ Others have noted that authoritarian states have been successful in generating rapid development—Singapore, for instance—and that many democratic states have undergone developmental regression. Yet others have claimed that the only clear correlation is between overall development and the degree to which leadership and governance practices are committed to securing basic human welfare. In short, the meaning of any substantial correlation between democratization and development is open to contest.

What can be recommended in the case of Bhutan, I think, is careful and responsive adaptation to changing circumstances, as they come to be—not, in other words, any *prescriptive* shift in governance practices. At present, an appropriate balance seems to obtain between a democratization of the processes by means of which problems and predicaments associated with development are identified and understood, and a sustained and substantial role for the king in establishing appropriate national values, commitments and resolves. Although perspectives will differ, it is my own conviction that the loyalties, trust, and consideration that obtain between the Bhutanese people and the Bhutanese royalty—so aptly epitomized in the commitment

¹¹ In Amy Chua, *World On Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability*, Doubleday: New York, 2003.

to granting highest priority to Gross National Happiness—demonstrates a unique and deeply shared virtue.

By way of conclusion, allow me to invoke the frame narrative of the *Cakkavatti Sihanda Sutta*. In this narrative, the Buddha instructs a gathering of students to practice mindfulness in all aspects of the present as it has come to be, keeping close to their own preserves, to the ranges of their ancestors. In this way, he affirms, illusory thoughts and desires will find no foothold. He then adds that it is only by cultivating wholesome states that this virtue will deepen and develop. In operationalizing happiness as a key value for effecting and orienting socio-economic development, Bhutan can ultimately do no better than to heed this injunction: mindfully discerning the present, global situation, as it has come to be, responding through and in endless cultivation of wisdom, attentive mastery, and moral clarity.