The Economic Views of the Religions and Their Limited Cyclicity

An Examination of the Cyclic Perspective for an Integrated Understanding of Religion and Economic Ethics

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Introduction and Purpose of the Study

- ## The Contemporary Significance of Religious Economic Views

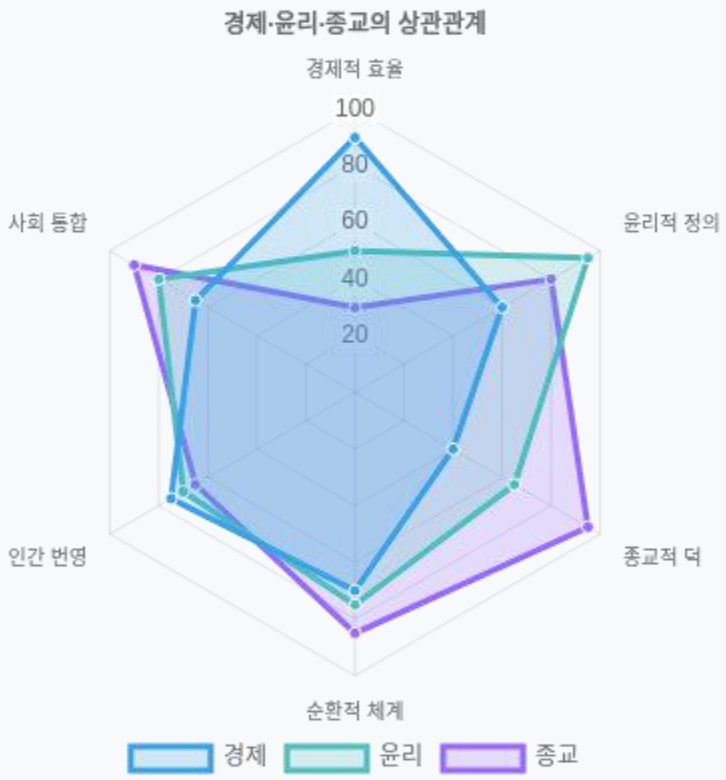
  The economic thought of a religion is a core component that gives concrete expression to abstract religious ideas, serving as an important key to grasping their hidden meaning.

- ## The Correlation between Economy and Ethics

  Economy and ethics stand in a very close relationship, appearing simultaneously yet opposed to each other like Janus, and historically they have exhibited a long-term functional relationship with one another.

- ## The Aim of the Study

  Through an integrated understanding of religion, economics, and ethics, this study reexamines the cyclic worldview needed in modern capitalist society and seeks ways to apply the economic ethics embedded in religious thought to the present day.



The Interrelationship of Economy, Ethics, and Religion

An Introduction to Economic Ethics and Cyclicity

- ## The Oppositional Relationship between Economy and Ethics

  Although modern capitalist economics strenuously denies it, economy and ethics stand in a very close relationship, always opposed yet appearing simultaneously like Janus.

- ## An Inverse Relationship

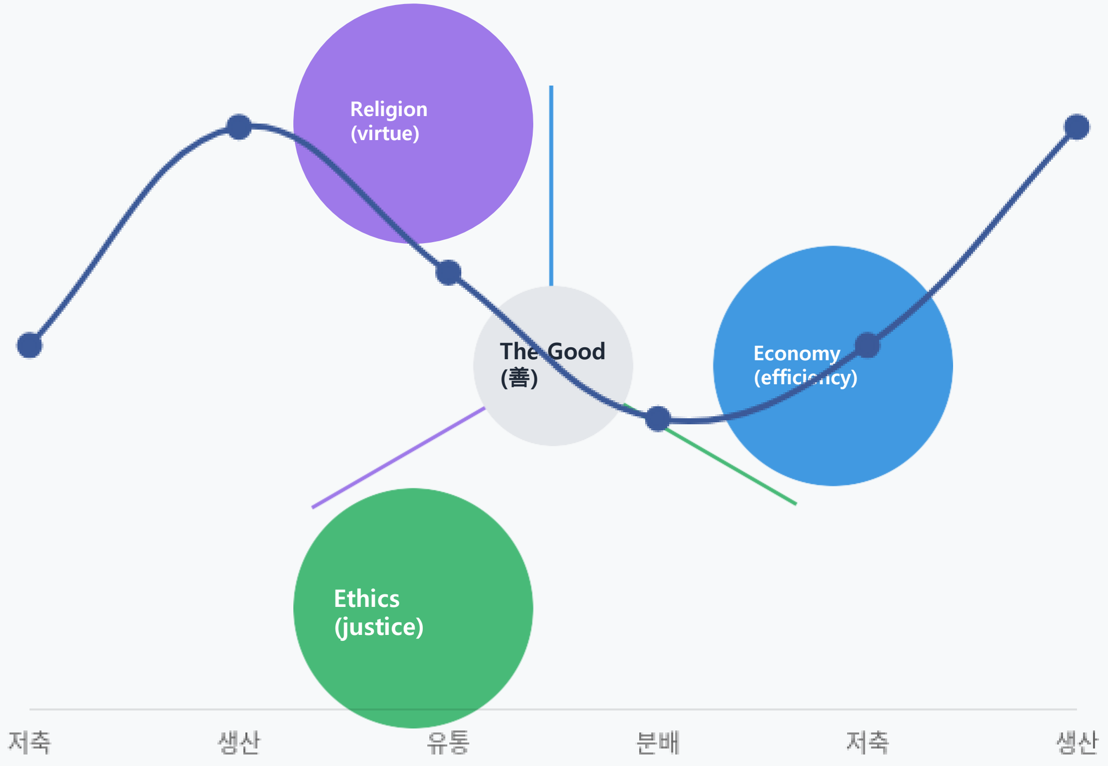
  They stand in so close a relationship that the inverse of economy is ethics and the inverse of ethics is economy; historically, economy and ethics have exhibited a long-term functional relationship with one another.

- ## The Core of Cyclicity

  Economy and ethics are integrated around the good (善) and are mediated through the virtue (德) of politics or religion. Each represents, respectively, action, institution, and being.

- ## The Cycle of Scarcity and Abundance

  Wealth arises from scarce resources, ability arises from deficient virtue, and rights arise from limited rectitude (正). All of these form a cyclic structure integrated into the good.



The Cyclic Structure of Economic Ethics

Economy and ethics pursue efficiency and justice respectively, but ultimately they orient toward the common value of the good (善). This cyclic relationship is deeply reflected in religious thought.

The Relationship between the System of Ethics and Economics

The Threefold Division of Ethics

In chronological order, ethics comprises three traditions: Aristotelian ethics, which emphasizes virtue (excellence); Kant's deontological ethics, which emphasizes the right (正); and utilitarian ethics, which emphasizes the good (善).

Object of Evaluation \ Value Concept	Basic value language	Operational value language	Ultimate end
Action	The Good (善)	Efficiency	Utility
Institution	The Right (正)	Justice	Rights
Being	Virtue (德)	Excellence	Ability

Table 2.1 The System of Ethics

The Point of Contact between Economics and Ethics

Like ethics, economics develops its theories around three tasks: action (the good—the marginal utility school), institution (the right—the institutionalist school), and being (virtue—gift-based economics).

The Integrated Structure of Economy, Ethics, and Politics (Religion)

The Integration of Ethics and Economy

Economy and ethics are integrated around the good (善) and mediated through the virtue (德) of politics or religion. Economy, ethics, and politics (religion) represent, respectively, action, institution, and being.

Freedom as a Common Value Norm

The Cyclic Logic of Each Religion

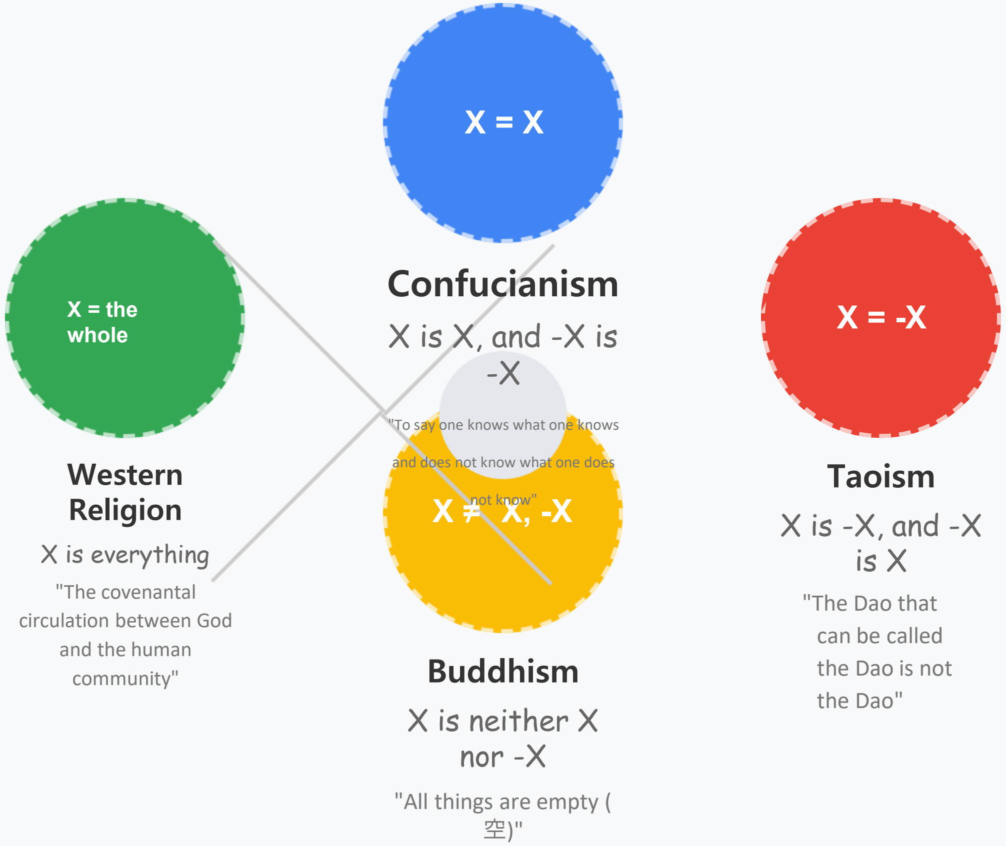
Comparing the logical systems of Eastern and Western religions according to a cyclic framework of logical thought reveals the following features:

- ## Confucianism (X is X, and –X is –X)
  It emphasizes clear distinctions and duties: the ruler must act as a ruler, and the minister as a minister. It pursues clarity, saying that one knows what one knows and does not know what one does not know.

- ## Taoism (X is –X, and –X is X)
  A paradoxical approach in which the Dao that can be called the Dao is not the Dao. It holds a mutually transformative worldview in which the strongest is the weakest, water; the friend is the foe, and the foe is the friend.

- ## Buddhism (X is neither X nor –X)
  A middle-way worldview in which all things are empty (空). A dependent-origination system of thought that emphasizes that all things are without substance, with neither friend nor foe.

- ## Western Religion (X is everything)
  It emphasizes the covenantal circulation between God and the human community. A comprehensive worldview centered on universal love (博愛), pursuing community over the individual and spirit over matter.



The Correlation between Views of Eternal Life and Economic Views across Religions

Each religion's view of eternal life represents the core of the cyclic relationship with that religion's economic thought. The economic view is formed according to the method and perspective by which eternal life is pursued.

Western Religion — eternal life of the soul (靈魂永生)

"X is everything" — the covenantal circulation between God and the human community

Community-centered & oriented toward the afterlife

Buddhism — rebirth through transmigration (輪廻轉生)

"X is neither X nor -X" — dependent origination and the circulation of all things through the Wheel of Dharma

Social-contractarian & ethical distribution

Community-centered & present-world production

— regeneration through the summoning of the soul (招魂再生)

"X is X, and -X is -X" — circulation within human relations and orientation toward the present world.

Taoism — bodily immortality (肉身永生)

"X is -X, and -X is X" — the circulation of non-action and nature, centered on the individual

The Linking Structure of Views of Eternal Life and Economic Views across Religions

The Correlation between Economic Views and Views of Eternal Life

- Western Religion (eternal life of the soul) → a circulation-centered economic view (symbolic value, gift); Buddhism (rebirth through transmigration) → a distribution-centered economic view (exchange

The Four Theories of Economic Ethics and Their Religious Correspondences

The theories of economic ethics form a fractal structure similar to the cyclic logic of the religions, matching as follows:

道 Taoism ↔ libertarianism

Taoism, holding that 'X is -X, and -X is X,' is linked with libertarianism, which emphasizes individual freedom. It orients toward free economic activity that follows the Dao of non-action and nature.

儒 Confucianism ↔ utilitarianism

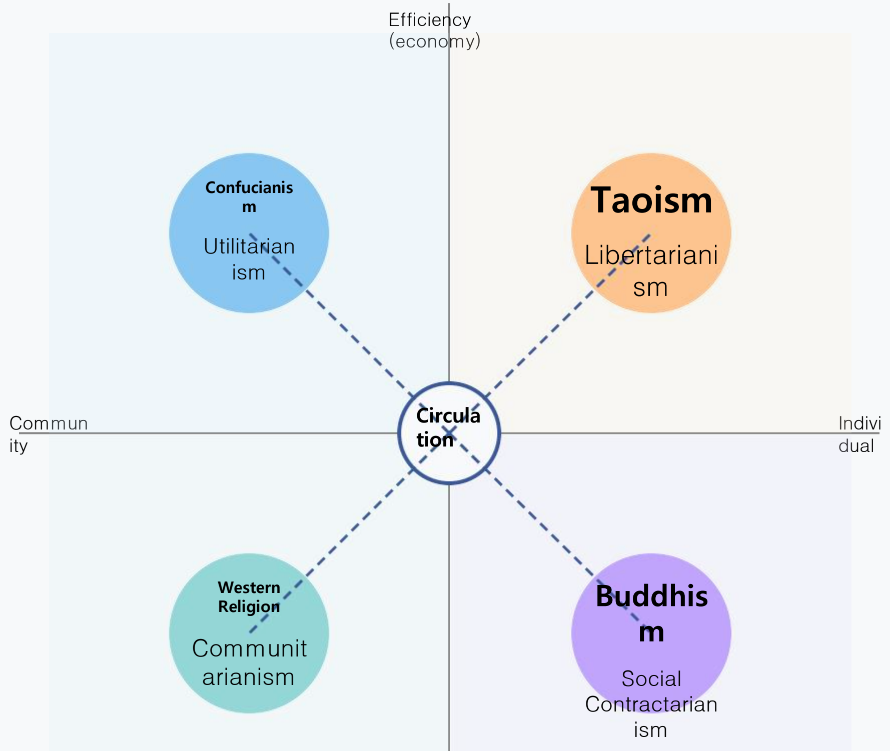
Confucianism, holding that 'X is X, and -X is -X,' is linked with utilitarianism, which pursues the greatest happiness of the greatest number. It emphasizes public interest and order.

佛 Buddhism ↔ social contractarianism

Buddhism, holding that 'X is neither X nor -X,' is linked with social contractarianism, which emphasizes duties and rights. It orients toward fair distribution that respects individual rights.

+ Western Religion ↔ communitarianism

Western Religion, holding that 'X is everything,' is linked with communitarianism, which emphasizes universal love (博愛). It emphasizes the values of community and sharing.



The Characteristics of Economic Ethics and Religion (Politics) with Respect to Justice

Emphasis on individual/efficiency (present world/body) Emphasis on community/efficiency (present world/summoned soul)

Emphasis on community/justice (afterlife/soul) Emphasis on individual/justice (afterlife/transmigration)

The Economic Cycle Process and the Role of Each Religion

The Four Stages of the Economic Cycle and the Role of Religion

Saving — Taoism

"X is -X, and -X is X" — Taoism concentrates on economic circulation through a view of wealth (財富論) that prepares the present to provide for the future. It exhibits a libertarian tendency and emphasizes the individual's accumulation of wealth.

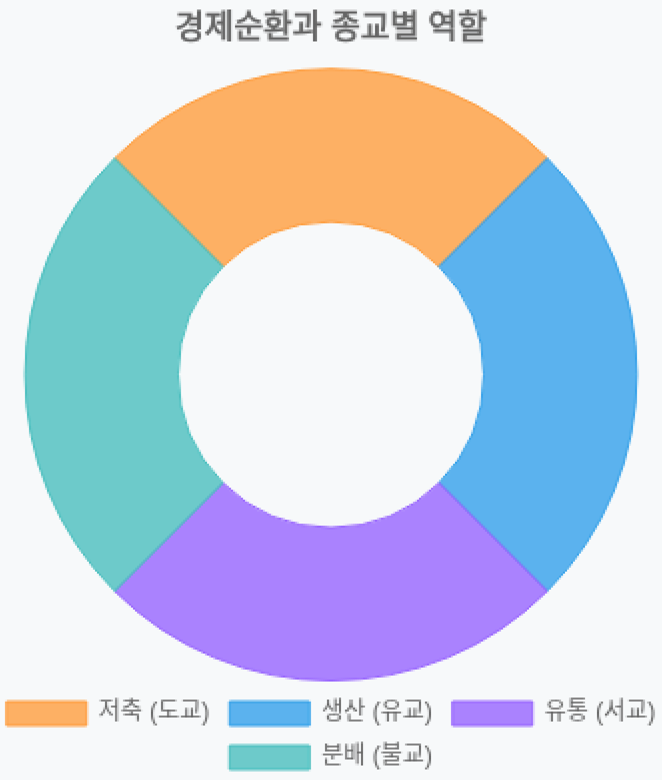
Production — Confucianism

"X is X, and -X is -X" — Confucianism organizes people and society with accumulated wealth to engage in production. Through a utilitarian approach, it emphasizes the efficient production of society as a whole.

Circulation — Western Religion

"X is everything" — the universal love of Western Religion serves to broadly give and circulate produced goods. Through a communitarian approach, it emphasizes the sharing and giving of society as a whole.

Distribution — Buddhism



The Economic Cyclic Structure and the Role of Each Religion

The Characteristics of the Cyclic Economic View

A Comparison of Economic Schools and Religious Thought

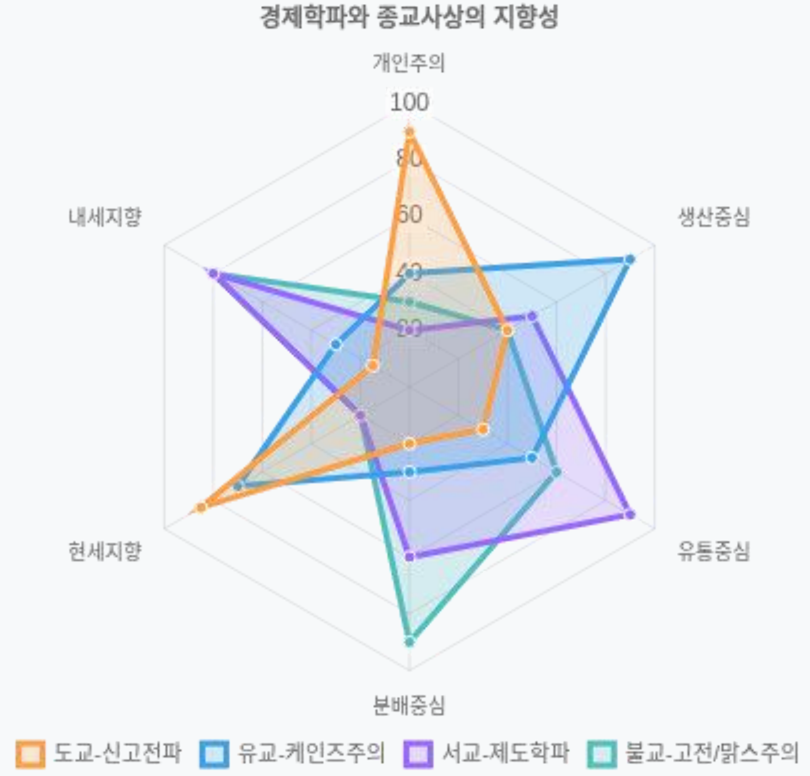
The Correspondence between Economic Schools and Religious Thought

The economic thought of the various religions has an essentially similar structure to the major economic schools. The economic views of the religions and the value theories of the schools resemble one another like a fractal structure, and this is an answer to the fundamental questions shared by economy and religion.

Religion	Economic Ethics	Economic view	Economic school	Theory of value
Taoism	Libertarianism	View of Wealth	Neoclassical school	Use value
Confucianism	Utilitarianism	View of Labor	Keynesianism	Sign value
Western Religion	Communitarianism	View of Goods	Institutionalist school	Symbolic value
Buddhism	Social Contractarianism	View of Distribution	Classical school / Marxism	Exchange value

The Economic–Cyclic Perspective of Religion

Each religion performs a different role in the economic cycle of saving–production–circulation–distribution, and this coincides with the principal research domains of the economic schools.



The Correlation between Economic Schools and Religious Thought

A Comparison of Principal Features

- **Neoclassical school: emphasis on individual utility and freedom**
- **Taoism: emphasis on the harmony of the individual and nature**

Theories of Value and the Contemporary Issue of Distribution

Each economic school views the value inherent in commodities differently, and this has a direct effect on distribution and consumption.

Use Value

Neoclassical economics: based on the utility of using goods.

Effect on distribution: efficiency-centered, prioritizing individual preferences.

Exchange Value — Classical school / Marxism: value determined by the labor invested. Effect on distribution: emphasis on the fair distribution of labor value.

Sign Value

Keynesianism: value based on social innovation and effective demand.

Effect on distribution: promotes imitative consumption and conspicuous consumption.

Symbolic Value — Institutionalist school: based on gift-giving and cultural value. Effect on distribution: emphasis on community-centered sharing and circulation.

A Comparison of Distribution and Consumption Characteristics by Theory of Value

The Integration of Baudrillard's Theory of Value

"Every object has four economic values. For example, an apple held in the hand becomes use value when eaten, exchange value when exchanged, sign value when used as a sign, and symbolic value when given to another person."

Conclusion and Implications

Summary of Research Findings

Each religion has its own cyclic system of logic, and it has been confirmed that the Three Teachings and Western Religion are closely linked with the economic cycle of saving–production–circulation–distribution.

The Integration of Economic Ethics and Religion

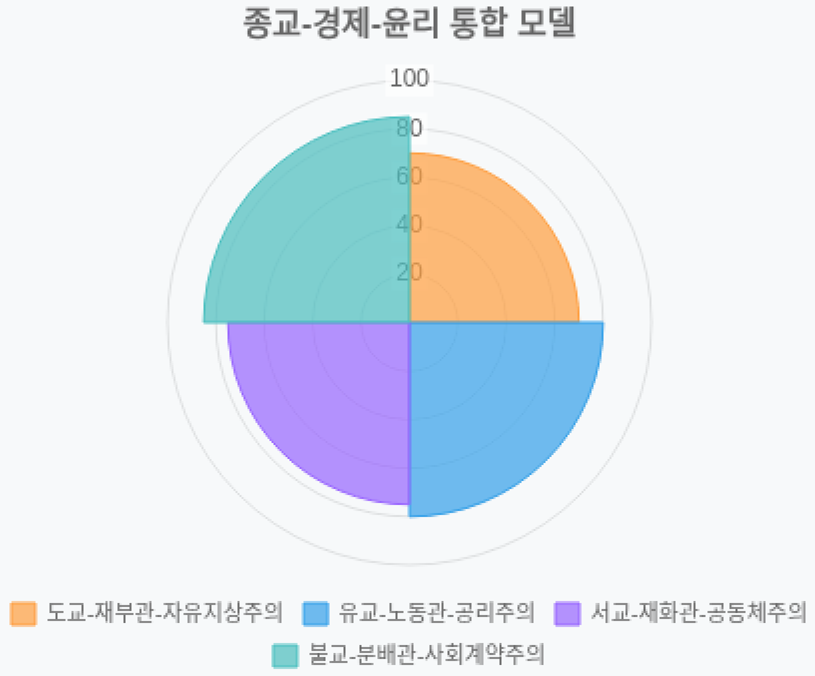
Economic ethics (libertarianism, utilitarianism, social contractarianism, communitarianism) and religious thought (Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Western Religion) share similar patterns in a fractal structure.

Contemporary Implications

A cyclic religious–economic view offers an alternative paradigm capable of filling the sustainability crisis and ethical vacuum of modern capitalism. In particular, it can provide the theoretical basis for a transition from the myth of 'infinite growth' to 'sustainable circulation.'

Future Tasks

Practical research is needed to seek ways to apply religious economic thought to the present day, to verify it across diverse cultural spheres, and to integrate it into a sustainable economic model.



An Integrated Model of Religion, Economy, and Ethics

The Principal Implications of the Cyclic Religious–Economic View

- The economy is a cyclic system that embodies ethical value. A balance of the four values (use, exchange, symbolic, sign) is needed.