Economic Ethics and the Cyclicity of the Religions

The Cyclic Structure and Interrelationship of Economic Ethics, Religion, Ethics, and Economics

Presenter: [Name]

Affiliation: Department of ○○, ○○

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An Exploration of the Cyclic Correlational Structure of Ethics, Economics, and Religion

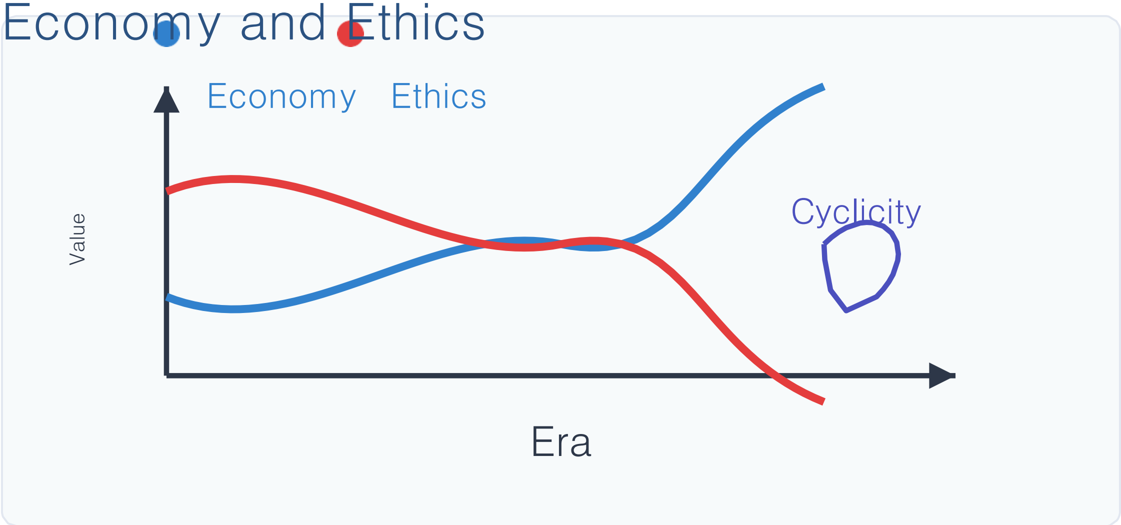
Economic Ethics and the Cyclicity of Religion: Introduction

The economic thought of a religion is a core component that gives concrete expression to abstract religious ideas. It is when a religion is expressed as economic thought that its hidden meaning can be grasped.

> Economy and ethics stand in a close relationship, opposed yet appearing simultaneously like Janus. They stand in so close a relationship that the inverse of economy is ethics and the inverse of ethics is economy. The economic thought of a religion appears chiefly in an ethical form.

The relationship among religion, economics, and ethics can be examined in the following order: first establishing a framework centered on ethics, which is close to everyday life; then illuminating its relationship with economics; and finally relating it to religion.

Figure 2.1: The Historical Trajectory of Economy and Ethics



Historically, economy and ethics have exhibited a long-term functional relationship with one another.

Core Concept

Economy and ethics frequently appear in opposing forms yet stand in a mutually complementary relationship, which becomes even clearer in a religious context.

The Relationship between the System of Ethics and Economics

In chronological order, ethics comprises three traditions:

- **Aristotle's ethics, which emphasizes virtue (excellence)**
- **Kant's deontological ethics, which emphasizes the right (正, justice)**
- **Utilitarian ethics, which emphasizes the good (善, efficiency)**

Table 2.1: The System of Ethics

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

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

Figure 2.2: The Composition of the Tasks

Figure 2.3: The Integration of the World of Economy and the World of Ethics

The Four Streams of Modern Economic-Ethical Thought

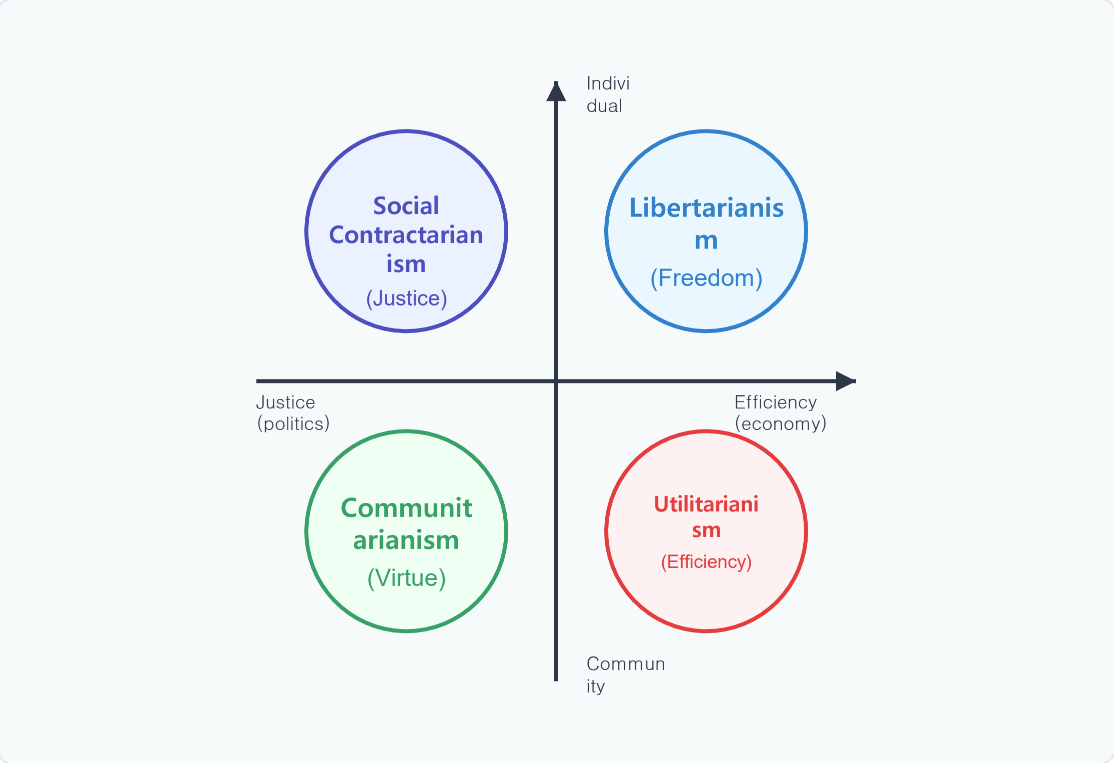
Modern economic–ethical thought can be classified into four principal streams:

- **Utilitarianism: pursues the happiness of the greatest number, emphasizing efficiency.**
- **Social contractarianism: based on Kant's deontology, emphasizing individual rights and justice.**
- **Libertarianism: places individual freedom foremost and pursues minimal government.**
- **Communitarianism: community-centered, emphasizing virtue (德) and practicality.**

Table 2.2: The Standing of Modern Moral Philosophy

Method \ Value	The good (善)—order within institutions	The right (正)—the basic structure of institutions
Individualism	Market equilibrium theory (theoretical economics)	Social contractarianism (justice)
	Libertarianism (freedom)	
Collectivism	Utilitarianism (efficiency)	Communitarianism (virtue)
	Institutional evolutionism (historical–school economics)	

Figure 2.4: The Relationship of the Four Economic Ethics



The Characteristics of the Four Streams of Economic–Ethical Thought

- Libertarianism: individual, efficiency; Utilitarianism: community, efficiency
- Social contractarianism: individual, justice;
- Communitarianism: community, justice

The Cyclic-Logic Structure of Each Religion (the Three Teachings / Western Religion)

The economic ethics of the various religions can be understood through the composition of the cyclic logic within their doctrinal systems. Because the logical frameworks that cyclic logic can express are limited, the religious thought of East and West is condensed into the Three Teachings and Western Religion.

Confucianism (儒教)

X is X, and -X is -X

"The ruler (X) must act as a ruler (X), and the minister (-X) must act as a minister (-X)"
"To say one knows (X) what one knows (X) and does not know (-X) what one does not know (-X)"

Taoism (道教)

X is -X, and -X is X

"If the Dao (X) is called the Dao (X), it is not the Dao (-X)"
"The strongest (X) is the weakest, water (-X)"; "the friend (X) is the foe (-X), and the foe (-X) is the friend (X)"

Buddhism (佛教)

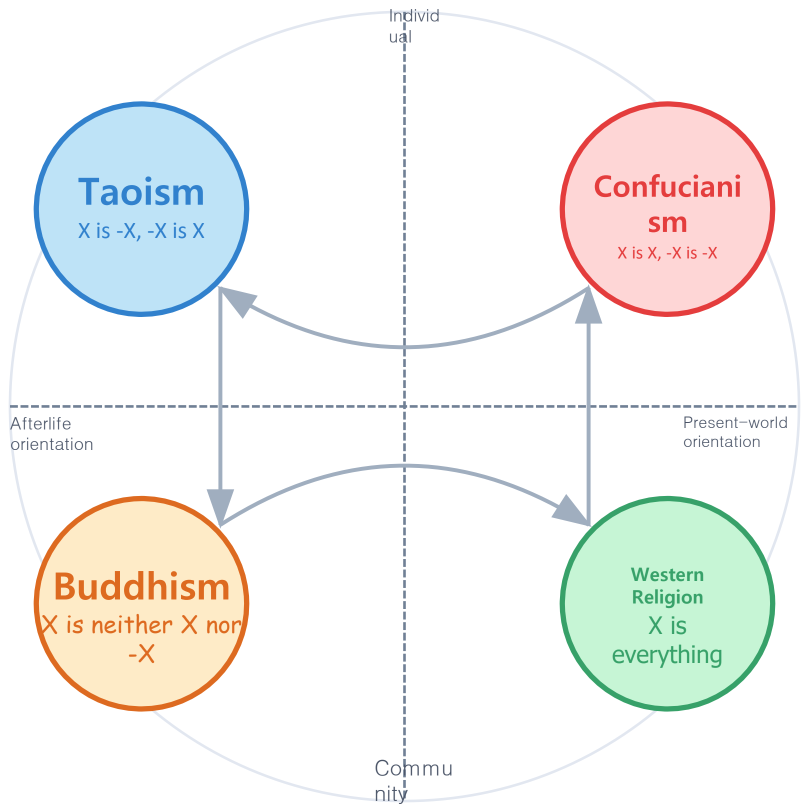
X is neither X nor -X

"With 'neither friend (X) nor foe (-X),' all things are empty (空)"; "there is no distinction between matter and spirit, and no distinction between self and other"

Western Religion (西教)

X is everything

Figure 2.5: The Correlation of the Religions



The logical structure of each religion forms a complementary (相補的) relationship, constituting a cyclic structure.

Views of Eternal Life and Economic Views across Religions

The various religions can be divided into four types according to the form of eternal life they orient toward and their individual/community and afterlife/present-world orientations.

Confucianism: regeneration through the summoning of the soul (招魂再生)

Pursues regeneration through circulation within human relations—father and son, ruler and subject.

The logic that matter is matter and spirit is spirit—oriented toward the present world over the afterlife, and toward community over the individual.

Taoism: bodily immortality (肉身永生)

Pursues bodily immortality through the circulation of non-action and nature that conforms to the principle of nature.

The logic that spirit is body and body is spirit—present-world-oriented individualism.

Buddhism: rebirth through transmigration (輪回轉生)

Pursues rebirth through transmigration via the circulation of all things in the Wheel of Dharma according to dependent origination.

The logic in which the distinction between body and spirit disappears—afterlife-oriented

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

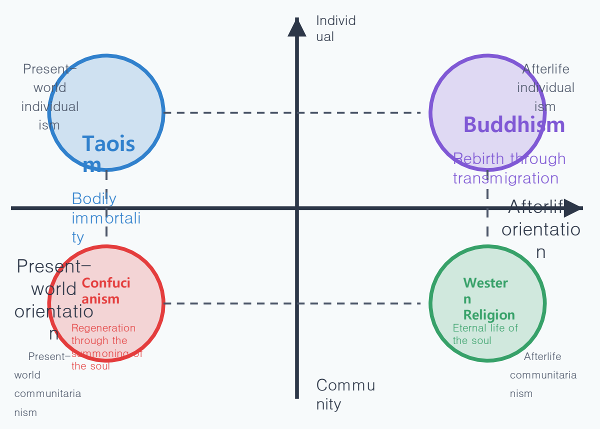
Pursues eternal life through covenantal circulation based on the Ten Commandments between God and the human community.

Pursues community over the individual and spirit over matter—afterlife-oriented communitarianism.

Linkage with Economic Views

Each religion's view of eternal life connects to an economic view (view of wealth, view of labor, view of goods, view of distribution), which in turn connects to the respective economic-ethical thought.

Figure 2.6: The Correlation of the Religions' Views of Eternal Life



The Connection between Religion and Economic Views

Taoism → libertarianism
Economic circulation based on the view of wealth; the pursuit of individual freedom

Confucianism → utilitarianism
Production-centered; the pursuit of the greatest happiness of the greatest number

Buddhism → social contractarianism; equitable distribution, deontological ethics

Western Religion → communitarianism
Circulation and gift-giving; the spirit of universal love (博愛)

Fractal Structure and Correlation

A fractal (相同性) refers to a structure that resembles itself, characterized by self-similarity in which the whole and its parts have similar patterns. Such a fractal structure is also found in the relationship among religion, economy, and ethics.

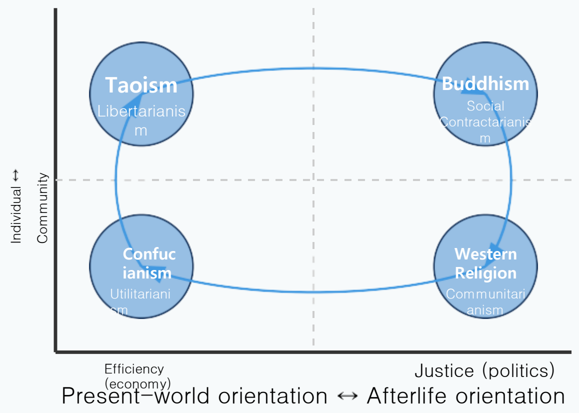
All things exhibit similar relationships to one another like fractals, and this is especially so for economy and ethics as they relate to religion.

- In modern science as well, the smallest atom and the largest galaxy have similar structures. In circulation theory, all things circulate, and structures that exhibit complementary opposition to one another are similar.

An Emergentist Approach

Unlike the reductionist method that breaks all things apart to find the ultimate particle, the correlation between economic ethics and religion can be understood through an emergentist and holistic (全一) method that finds laws within the relationships among all things.

Figure 2.7: The Correlation between Religion and Economic Ethics



The correlation between economic ethics and religious thought shows patterns similar to one another, like a fractal structure.

[Figure 2.4] The Relationship of the Four Economic Ethics and [Figure 2.5] The Correlation of the Religions share common axes (individual-community, efficiency-justice/present world-afterlife), forming similar fractal structures.

The Linkage between Economic Schools and Religious Thought

Table 2.3: A Comparative Table of Religion–Economic Ethics–Economic Theory

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

Figure 2.9: The Correlation between Religion and Economic Views

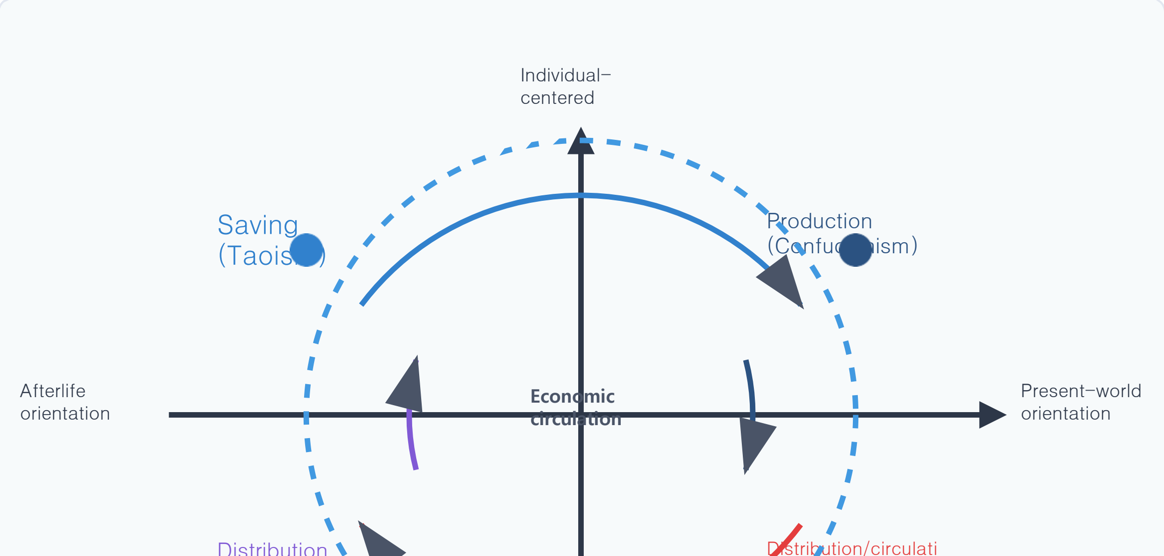
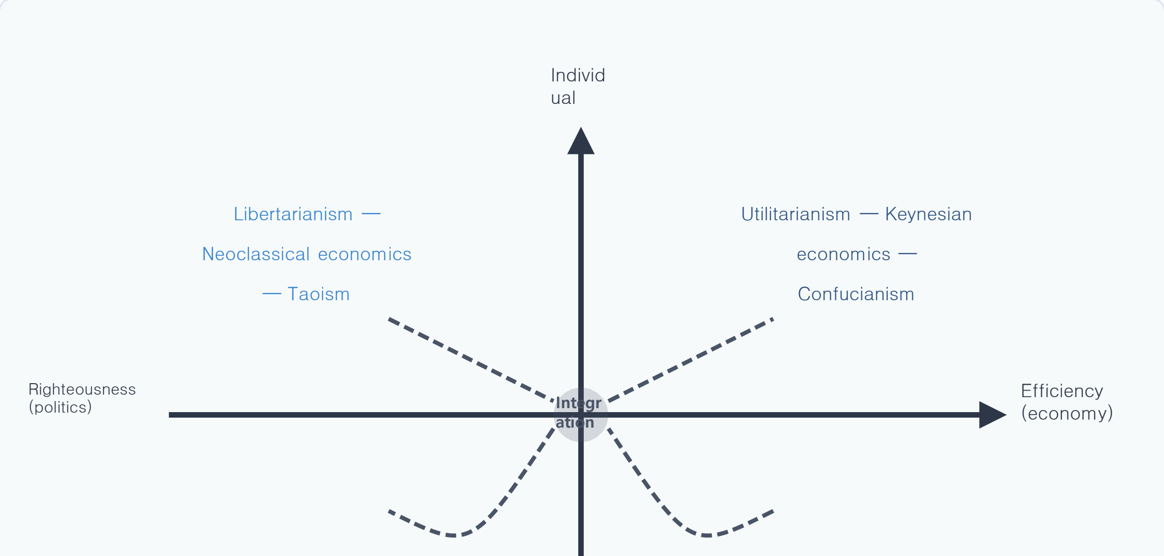


Figure 2.11: Correlation among religion, economic ethics, and economics



Summary and conclusion: the cyclicity of Eastern and Western economic ethics and religion

Examining the economic history and religious cyclicity of East and West, we confirmed that each religion and economic thought stands in a close relationship of mutual influence.

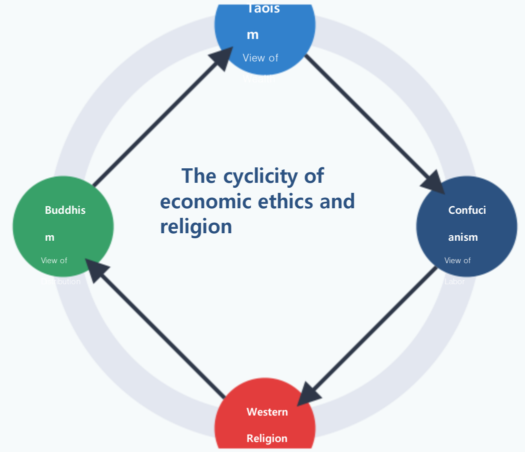
- Western capitalism began with Calvin's Protestant view of wealth, which resembles the Taoist view of wealth.
- Western capitalism developed under the Confucian doctrine of enriching the nation and strengthening its military, which came from China.
- The policy of national wealth and military strength destroyed Eastern cyclicity, and it also destroyed the Western-religious cyclicity of goods as God's promise of salvation.

> The modern era has transformed into materialism and casino capitalism, and cyclic religious thought and economic ethics are needed to redeem it.

The cyclicity of economic ethics and religion is not merely a theoretical structure; it can become a source of practical wisdom for a sustainable human society.

** This study offers a foundation for interdisciplinary research on the interconnection of religion, economic ethics, and economic theory.*

Synthesis: the cyclic structure of religion and economics



Comprehensive analysis

Economic ethics and religion each exhibit their distinctive traits within the economic cycle of saving (Taoism), production (Confucianism), distribution (Buddhism), and circulation (Western Religion); their harmonious integration can serve as an alternative for the sustainability of modern society.

Reference: Table 2.3 Comparison of religion, economic ethics, and economic theory