

THEOLOGY, ECOLOGY AND ECONOMICS FROM AN EAST ASIAN CONFUCIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper posits the development of an indigenous East Asian environmental ethics to address the environmental problem in East Asia for sustainable economic growth. It proposes a contextualised environmental ethics based on an integration of theology, ecology, economics and East Asian Confucian tradition. This can be done through three dimensions.

The first dimension is to understand the intricate interdependence and interconnectedness of society, environment and economy in the formulation of a viable environmental ethics. Theological reflection and Herman Daly's concept of steady state economy will form the basis for understanding these relationships.

The second dimension is to establish how the three domains of society, environment and economy are related to each other. To these end the East Asian Confucian concepts of Heaven-Earth-Human, Social Harmony and Intergenerational Equity will be used to establish these relationships.

The third and final dimension is to identify the driving or motivation force that can operationalise this proposed environmental ethics. A transcendent-immanent Eco-Spirituality for effecting change (*metanoia*) in society will be proposed here.

Keywords: Confucianism, environmental ethics, cosmology, eco-spirituality, ecological economics

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1. Introduction

In recent years, there is growing interest and recognition of the East Asian economies and their cultural contexts because of the phenomenal growth of their economies.¹ They are also being sought after as dialogue partners, because their traditions and religious ideas can inform and inspire new ecological theology, environmental ethics and grassroots activism.² East Asian religious cosmologies, with their originations from and relationships to the natural world, provide rich resources for encouraging spiritual and ethical discussion on the issues of God, man and creation.³ Within East Asia's many religious cosmologies, the Confucian tradition is a good dialogue partner for reviewing the role of man in creation.⁴ Confucianism's practical concern with social and ethical orders, can contribute to the construction of a workable environmental ethics, where economic development and growth must be both sustainable ecologically and responsible socially.⁵ Confucianism with its emphases on interconnectedness with nature, intergenerational indebtedness to past generations and obligations to future generations, and communal responsibility towards the common good, provide an ethical framework for developing an environmental ethics that embraces

¹ Lim Hyun-Chin, Globalizing Asia: Towards a New Development Paradigm. *Globality Studies Journal* 9(2007), Electronic document, <http://www.sunysb.edu/globality/Articles/no9.html>, accessed on 4 November 2009. Also Peter L. Berger, *Max Weber is Alive and Well, and Living in Guatemala: The Protestant Ethic Today*. A paper presented at "The Norms, Beliefs, and Institutions of 21st-Century Capitalism: Celebrating Max Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism", 8-9 October 2004 sponsored by Center for the Study of Economy and Society, Cornell University. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report*, East Asia GDP is 17.5% of the world's GDP, compared to USA/Canada at 19.4%.

² J. Baird Callicott, "Conceptual Resources for Environmental Ethics in Asian Traditions of Thought: A Propaedeutic," *Philosophy East and West* 37 (1987):115-130.

³ Masatoshi Doi, "Religion and Nature," in *What Asian Christians are Thinking*, ed. Douglas Elwood (Philippines: New Day Publishers, 1978), 119-130; and Michael G. Barnhart, "Ideas of Nature in an Asian Context," *Philosophy East and West* 47(2006): 417-432.

⁴ Tu Wei Ming, "The Ecological Turn in New Confucian Humanism: Implications for China and the World," *Daedalus* 130(2001):243-264; Mary Evelyn Tucker, "The Philosophy of Ch'i as an Ecological Cosmology," In *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Humans*. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Berthong eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Confucianism and Ecology: Potential and Limits" in *Earth Ethics*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Fall 1998, republished in Forum on Religion and Ecology, Harvard University Center for the Environment (HUCE), MA, USA. Electronic document, <http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/religion/confucianism/index.html>, accessed 20 October 2009.

⁵ Robert P. Weller, and Peter K. Bol, "From Heaven and Earth to Nature: Chinese Concepts of the Environment and their Influence on Policy Implementation," *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Humans*, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Berthong eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

sustainable development and restrained consumption.

This paper proposes an environmental ethic model involving theology, ecology, economics and East Asian Confucian tradition in three parts. The first part will be a theological reflection and critique on the current approach to society, environment and economy. The second part will be an exploration of the Confucian perspectives to society, environment and economy and economics with the view of developing a viable environmental ethics that is relevant to the East Asian context. The final part will be the operationalisation of the proposed environmental ethics through a transcendent-immanent Eco-Spirituality for effecting change (*metanoia*) in human attitudes and actions.

2. Society, Environment and Economy

It hardly needs to be said that governments' unbridled enthusiasm for economic growth is having a disastrous impact on the planet, suggesting a further reason why it is simply not in our interest – let alone the interest of future generations – to persist with it. Adam Smith's eighteenth century capitalist economic assumption that the good life is the life of consumption has led to never ending cycles of artificially generated desire to fuel the capitalist economy pursuit of profit.⁶ John Cobb Jr. calls this new religion "Economism", where its god is endless economic growth, the priests are the economists, the evangelists are the advertisers, and the laity the consumers.⁷ The problem brought about by Economism is the enormous growth of one subsystem of the Earth, namely the economy, relative to the total system, the ecosphere.⁸ Neo-classical economics begins with the unconstrained allocation of resources to competing individuals, on the assumption that if everyone acts in this way, issues of fair distribution and sustainability will eventually work out.⁹ Economics says that the value of all resources is determined by the market price, but in reality the latent value of scarce resources such as land, water, the environment, and biodiversity has been ignored.¹⁰ The ecological crisis that we are experiencing now tells us that if this persists, it will lead to the damage of

⁶ Darby Kathleen Ray, "It's About Time," In *Theology that Matters: Ecology, Economy and God*, Darby Kathleen Ray. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 157.

⁷ John B. Cobb Jr., "Economics or Planetism: The Coming Choice," *Earth Ethics* 3(1991). Electronic document, http://forestpolicy.typepad.com/ecoecon/2006/03/economism_or_pl.html, accessed on 16 November 2009.

⁸ Ian Coxhead, "Development and the Environment in Asia," *Asian-Pacific Economic Literature* 17(2003):22-54. Coxhead highlights the fact that Asia is also feeling the costs of rapid economic growth.

⁹ John B. Cobb, Jr, *Ecology and Economy*. A lecture delivered in Shanghai, 1 June 2002 and 4 June 2002 in Wuhan. Electronic document, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2221> <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2221>, accessed on 1 November 2009

¹⁰ Dodo J. Thampapillai and Bo Ohlmer, *Environment Stewardship and the Firm: Perspectives from Environmental Economics*. The authors called this 'environmental capital'.

the irreplaceable ecological systems.¹¹ It is unthinkable and irresponsible to let economics dictate the future of man and his environment. The urgency to address the issue of ecology and economics has given birth to ecological economics.

Herman Daly, the father of ecological economics, argues that the Earth as a whole is approximately in a steady state.¹² This means that neither the surface nor the mass of the earth is growing or shrinking; the inflow of radiant energy to the Earth is equal to the outflow; and material imports from space are roughly equal to exports. Therefore the closer the economy approaches the scale of the whole Earth the more it will have to conform to the physical behaviour mode of the Earth.¹³ This behaviour mode is called the steady state, a system that permits qualitative development but not aggregate quantitative growth. At this point, growth is more of the same stuff; development is the qualitative improvement of the same amount. Daly points out that while neo-classical economic growth is all about quantitative expansion; the notionally limitless transformation of natural capital unto man-made capital, sustainable development is about qualitative improvement, permitting increased economic activity only in so far as it does not exceed the capacity of the ecosystem. The world has lived for 200 years in a growth economy. This makes it hard to imagine what a steady-state economy would be like, even though for most of part of recent history developed economies have annual growth rates that are negligible. Daly advocates that the rich should reduce their throughput growth to free up resources and ecological space for use by the poor, while focusing their domestic efforts on development, technical and social improvements.¹⁴ Daly grounds both his socioeconomic liberalism and his environmentalism in the Christian injunctions to love one's neighbors and God's Creation – a pursuit of the common good.¹⁵

The pursuit of the common good must restrain unbridled self-interest promoted by economics. Robert H. Nelson insightfully puts it, “The workings of the market are, I have no doubt, the most powerful instrument of economic advance ever conceived by human beings. As everyone knows, the market is based on the pursuit of self-interest. However, the very success of a market economic system depends on the existence of powerful restraints on self-interest

¹¹ A. Rodney Dobell, *Environmental Degradation and the Religion of the Market*, in *Population, Consumption and the Environment*, Harold Coward, ed. (Albany: State University of New York, 1995), 232.

¹² Herman E. Daly, “Steady-State Economics: A New Paradigm” *New Literary History* 24(1993)811-816.

¹³ Herman E. Daly, *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Herman E. Daly, *Steady-State Economics* (Washington: Island Press, 1991).

¹⁵ John Attarian, “Herman Daly's Ecological Economics - An Introductory Note,” *The Social Contract Journal* Volume 13/3 (2003): 153-154.

as well.”¹⁶ The Old Testament clearly points out that the whole point of economic arrangements is to build up and sustain communities which means that they will incorporate measures to protect the interests of the most vulnerable and marginalized and ensure that they can participate as fully in the community as everybody else. For example, the Sabbatical day and Sabbatical year of rest is an inbuilt limiter of the economy to prevent the exploitation of nature (Leviticus 23:3; 25:1-7). Further, the Jubilee is another inbuilt measures which prevents the rich benefiting permanently from the misfortunes of the poor, or slaves becoming locked into their position (Leviticus 25:8-17). Elsewhere in Old Testament, the prophets confront economic activity that threatens the welfare of the community, with reminders of God’s demands for justice in economic affairs (Amos 2:6-7; 5:11-12; Micah 2:1-2; 6:11-15). Melanie Downer has observed that the Old Testament calls for what has been termed a “pre-care” economic model in which the needs of *all* must be met before profit is made. Such a model does help to stimulate fresh thinking, in the current climate, concerning the overall purpose of economic activity.¹⁷

Traditional economic theory rests squarely on the principle of self-interests.¹⁸ This breeds an economic attitude where people are out for what they can get and will not stop to think about how getting what they want impacts on families, communities, society and environment. The economy must take care of the household of all humanity, making sure that genuine needs are met, while sustaining the well-being of the ecosystem.¹⁹ The vested interests in the economy remaining as it is are huge – which is why the challenge pose is at the root a spiritual battle, one that can only be won by a change of worldview – a transformation of hearts and minds. A model for understanding the interrelationships of society, environment and economy is proposed below.

Figure 1 below illustrates a environment-society-economy worldview through a nested model. This model does not mean that economy is at the core, or the most important. Instead, it shows that economy is nested in society, and society is nested in environment. The interrelationships of economy, society and environment is multi-faceted. This triad

¹⁶ Robert H. Nelson, “What is ‘Economic Theology?’”, *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* New Series 25(2004): 74.

¹⁷ Quoted by Andrew Bradstock, *Profits without Honour? Economics, Spirituality and the Current Global Recession* at University of Auckland School of Theology Public Lecture, 5 August 2009.

¹⁸ Robert Frank, *Microeconomics and Behaviour* (New York: Irwin McGraw Hill, 2002).

¹⁹ Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine and God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 2.

relationship takes the form of: environment-society, society-economy and economy-environment. At one level, society where humans belong to is nested in his environment. He has a connectedness to and dependence on his environment. While he needs to cultivate his environment for survival, he also has to take care of it, because the destruction of his environment is to his own peril. Man must tap the resources of his environment, but he must also be a responsible steward. At another level, the economy is nested in society. The economy serves the needs of the society. It is a means to the common good, it is not an end in itself, and definitely not the master. The economy exists to serve man and not man the economy. At the third level, the economy must never expand beyond its environment. When this happens, the whole ecosystem will collapse, and with it the economy and ultimately society. As one nests into another, and one is interrelated and interconnected to another, what then is the element that holds them together? This is where East Asian Confucian concepts of Heaven-Earth-Human (天人合一), Social Harmony (和谐社会) and Intergenerational Equity (代际公平) can provide the answer.

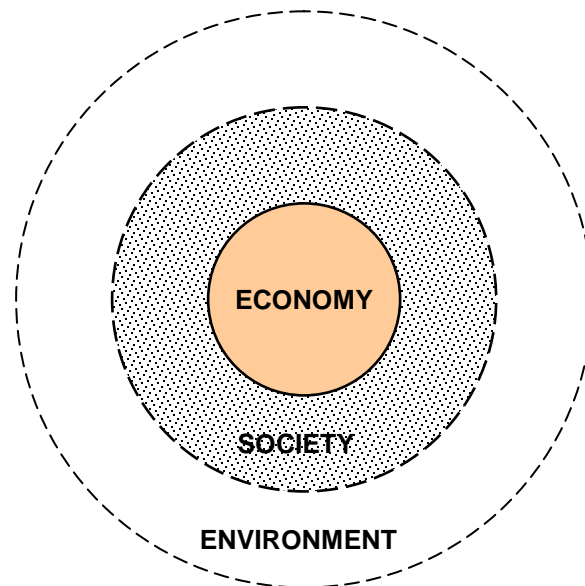


Figure 1:
Interdependence and Interconnectedness of the Environment-Society-Economy

3. Confucian Perspectives to Society, Environment and Economy

To address the ecological crisis, there is the need for a new ethical dimension which seriously considers humanity's relationship with the natural world.²⁰ East Asia is facing a stark reality. The western-consumerist economic model has largely depended on the industrializing countries colonising the resources of the under-developed or developing countries. This has led not only to the depletion of natural resources, it has also left the resource-supplying countries with the environmental problems. Against this background, we will review Chinese Confucian traditions in our attempt to create an ecological culture. The Confucian worldview derived from this tradition is based on the ideals of harmony, human perfectibility and systemic fit within natural systems and processes. However, it also contains strong worldly and utilitarian elements at the popular level. Chinese traditions offer conceptual resources for ecological thinking by placing economics within a wider socio-ecological fabric, emphasising soft technologies, challenging meta-economic assumptions, and encouraging systemic wisdom. The Chinese realize that the ecological crisis is also a crisis of culture and of the human spirit. This is the moment for reconceptualising the role of the human in nature. In the following discussion we will consider three areas where Confucianism can contribute to the construction of a viable ecological economic model. The proposed model will tie the above Confucian concepts to the economy, society and environment to create three domains of environmental ethic, namely environment-society, society-economy, economy-environment.

3.1 Confucianism on Unity of Heaven, Earth and Human

Confucianism is a philosophy which contains profound environmental ethics through its inclusiveness of Heaven, Earth and the Human order (天人合一).²¹ This triad forms the traditional Chinese trinity which configure the ultimate harmony. Relations between people and the natural world are therefore of intrinsic interest to those who profess Confucian ethics. Confucians maintain the oneness of humankind and nature, the harmony and unity between the two. The *Doctrine of the Mean* says: "Attaining equilibrium, heaven and earth will be in their right places and all things will come into being."²² In handling relations between the human and natural worlds, people need to observe the principle of 'equilibrium', so that the vitality and harmony of nature, the ecological balance of the natural environment, can be

²⁰ T.N. Jenkins, Chinese traditional thought and practice: - lessons for an ecological economics worldview, *Ecological Economics* 40 (2002):39-52.

²¹ Li Tianchen, "Confucian Ethics and the Environment", *The Cultural Mandala* Vol 6(2003). Electronic document, <http://epublications.bond.edu.au/cm>, accessed on 16 November 2009.

²² *Doctrine of Means*, 1

maintained properly. This view is further intensified by the Confucian conception of nature, human, and society. In fact, Confucianism perceives that nature and human constitutes the organic unity; and considers the individual, family, society and the state as the one organic body. In the Confucian worldview, cultivating oneself is a precondition to achieving this equilibrium of harmonizing one's own family, which is a precondition to good governance in the state, which in turn is a precondition to bringing peace to the world.²³

Taking this Confucian view, the current ecological crisis actually stems from a spiritual crisis in human beings. Society in its unquenchable thirst for economic goods, has disregarded the need to maintain the fundamental equilibrium in nature. The society must cultivate their moral sensibility if they want to protect the environment, and bear the responsibility and obligation toward nature. Confucius identified this type of person as *junzi* (君子), the morally noble person. The goal of the economy is to meet physical needs, yet bearing in mind that we should not destroy the larger natural economy - nature. The aim is to do so in ways that encourage other human values, especially those associated with human community and a sense of belonging to the larger world. Another underlying assumption is that human beings are fundamentally communal. That is, their relations to one another are extremely important, more important than consumption of goods beyond a quite minimal level. So, our consumption must not lead to the destruction of other communities. The ideal is to produce the goods people need with as little disruption to nature and society as possible. Further, the solution to the ecological problem is not just better economics or technology, but a proper ethical and moral worldview.

3.2 Confucianism on Social Harmony

In Confucianism, priority is attached to creating harmony in human society (和谐社会).²⁴ Harmony is essential in relationships among humans, among nations and the relationships between humanity and nature. In Confucian societies, considerable attention is paid to the effects of and the need for harmony. For the Confucian entrepreneurs and business executives, organizational harmony is a primary goal to pursue. The idea of tension between the enterprise manager and the worker is abhorred. Business is likewise expected to maintain harmony with the society at large. Confucianism views economy as an essential element of

²³ *The Great Learning, The Text* 4-5.

²⁴ Chan Wing-Tsit, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), 98.

politics and insists that economy should be harmonized with ethics. “Virtue is the root, while wealth is the branch.”²⁵ It also regards economy as a necessary condition for morality. They believe that sufficient provision of the basic needs of the people is the basis of a good society. This would mean that economic policy must be geared to realizing economic equality, which, in turn, would necessitate regulation of economic activity. In their view, “If there is equal distribution, there will be no poverty.”²⁶

The Confucian concept of intra-generational equity, or income and wealth distribution, has received little attention within the field of ecological economics. Herman Daly has been one of the rare exceptions to the general pattern. Daly called for the radical idea of both a lower and an upper limit on income. According to Daly, we must stop aggregate growth because it is uneconomic, the issue of poverty can be dealt with through redistribution—by limits to the range of permissible inequality, by a minimum income and a maximum income.²⁷

3.3 Confucianism on Intergenerational Equity

Confucianism presents the family as the model for the entire society, stressing moral obligations of family life as the basic building block of society. It emphasizes that if the family is well ordered, the local community will be well ordered, and if the local community is well ordered, the whole nation will be well ordered. Filial piety (孝) was taught as the highest value, surpassing even the loyalty to the ruler. In traditional Confucian societies an intense familism took precedence over all other social relations. Here an individual seldom thought of himself as an isolated entity. He was a concrete individual person who moved, lived and had his being in the natural milieu of the family. The family (家) extends to lineages and larger kinship groups; the local community and the nation are seen as a kind of family of families that unite all its members into a single social entity. Communitarianism has thus developed in Confucian societies, functioning as an informal system of social security, as well. Traditional Confucianism emphasizes the community over the individual, and responsibility over rights.

²⁵ *The Great Learning*, 10:7

²⁶ *The Analects*, 16:1.

²⁷ Herman E. Daly, *A Steady-State Economy*, speech before the Sustainable Development Commission, UK, April 24, 2008. The speech is reproduced at <http://www.theoil drum.com/node/3941#more>, accessed on 16 November 2009.

Confucianism stresses intergenerational indebtedness to past generations and obligations to future generations. This communal responsibility towards the common good, provide moral framework for considering the relationship between economy and environment. Many ecological economists have considered the issue of intergenerational equity.²⁸ They have proposed policies that would lead to a sustainable production of value from resources over hundreds or thousands of years. The basic moral principle involved is that the use of resources to sustain affluence in the present should not diminish the affluence of future generations by depriving them of equivalent value from that stock of resources. The economy must not expand at a rate faster than the growth of the earth's natural resources, thus leading to depletion for future generation. Neither should the environmental problems brought about by unbridled economic expansion by the present generation be passed on as a liability to future generations.

Figure 2 is a diagrammatic representation of the interrelationships of the three domains.

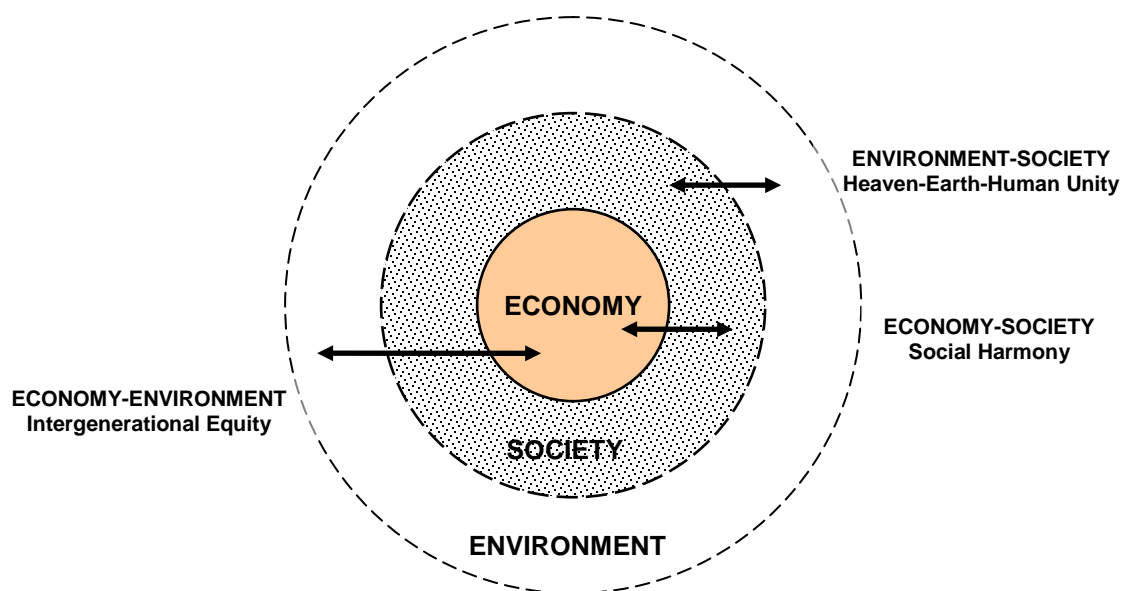


Figure 2:
Environment-Society-Economy worldview for sustainable development

²⁸ Richard B. Howarth, "An Overlapping Generations Model of Climate-Economy Interactions." *Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 100(1998):575–591. Richard B. Howarth and Richard B. Norgaard, "Intergenerational Choices under Global Environmental Change." In *Handbook of Environmental Economics*, ed. D. W. Bromley. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995). Emilio Padilla, "Intergenerational equity and sustainability" *Ecological Economics*. Volume 41(2002): 69-83. Robert C. Lind, "Intergenerational equity, discounting, and the role of cost-benefit analysis in evaluating global climate policy." *Energy Policy*, Volume 23(1995): 379-389.

4. A Contextualized Eco-Spirituality from a Confucian Perspective

The next challenge is getting society to embrace this Confucian ecological-economic-environmental worldview. How then do we move people from a selfish to an altruistic disposition towards environment and economy? To do this, we need another critical element as a driving force. Daly and Cobb give us a clue here,

“[T]he changes that are now needed in society are at a level that stirs religious passions. The debate will be a religious one whether that is made explicit or not. The whole understanding of reality and the orientation to it are at stake.... [The solutions will be created] by those who can draw forth these deepest energies of the centered self and give them shape and direction. Getting there, if it happens at all, will be a religious event.”²⁹

In other words, a workable environmental ethics must be one that takes into consideration the psyche and worldview of the population. It must be something close to their hearts. To this end, a contextualised environmental ethics integrating theology, ecology and economy set in the context of Confucianism is proposed here. There are three dimensions to this model. The first dimension involves the application of theology to the integration of economy, society and environment to create three domains of environmental ethic, namely environment-society, society-economy, economy-environment (Figure 1). The second dimension involves establishing the interrelationships through the Confucian concepts of Heaven-Earth-Human Unity, Social Harmony and Intergenerational Equity (Figure 2). The third and final dimension is the motivation for effecting a change (*metanoia*) that will cause one to embrace this environmental ethics. The answer is a theistic transcendent-immanent eco-spirituality that will effect a new worldview. The model is illustrated in Figure 3.

²⁹ Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

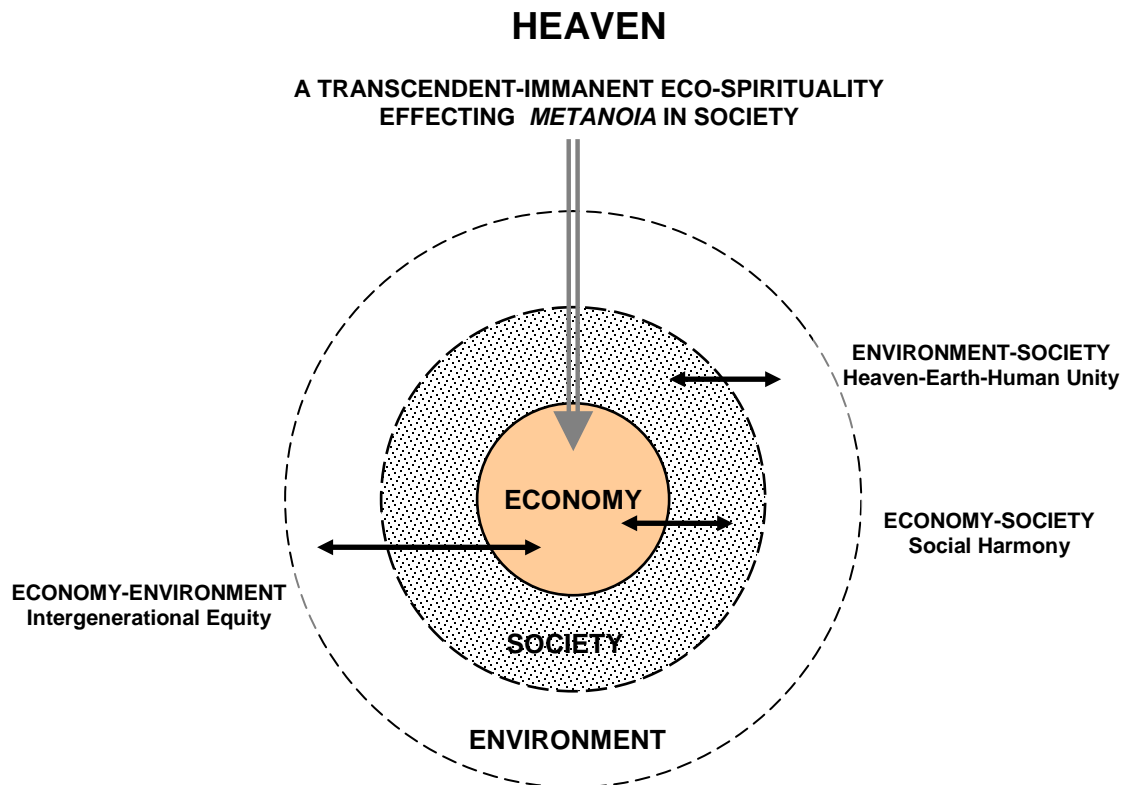


Figure 3:
Eco-Spirituality of Environment-Society-Economy worldview for sustainable development

4.1 Conceptualised Eco-Spirituality of Environment-Society from Confucian Perspective

Our model shows that society cannot ignore its symbiotic relationship with the environment, for there can be no life without it and society cannot expect to escape the negative fallout of a damaged environment. It is therefore in society's interest and it is within its capacity to care for the environment. The key to the construction of an environmental ethic correlating environment and society is the Confucian concept of Heaven. The concept of Heaven in Confucianism has various meanings such as Abode, Personal Lord, and Immanent Way of the Universe.³⁰ Heaven can be said to be that which is encompassing and which transcends the horizons of the world and man. Heaven can also be the source of everything finite. After the doctrine of Yin and Yang became popular in the Chinese thought in the 4th century B.C., Heaven was conceived of as the Ultimate Principle of the universe which produces and reconciles the yin and yang forces in the universe. This ultimate principle is called Tai Chi (太极), or Great Ultimate as in the Book of Changes, which was later incorporated into

³⁰ Ha Ta Kim, "Transcendence without and within: The Concept of Tien in Confucianism". *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 3(1972)146-160.

neo-Confucian cosmology.

As far back as two milleniums B.C., during the Xia and Shang dynasties, the Chinese developed the concept of Heaven (天) or the Lord (帝), a sort of monotheistic belief without the weakening polytheistic tendency associated with nature worship. The pattern of development of religious ideas in China is similar to that of other religions of the world. The development is from polytheism to transcendent monotheism and then to immanent monism. The concept of Heaven or Lord signifies the monotheistic transcendent source of human beings and things, which sustains all existing things and controls human destiny. But at this stage of transcendent monotheism, a definite form of belief is manifested in ancient Chinese religion. The Chinese recognized an anthropomorphic deity in the name of Lord, who sent blessings or calamities, gave protection in battles, sanctioned under-takings, and passed on the appointment or dismissal of officials. In the period of Chou, this anthropomorphic deity is replaced by the concept of Heaven as the supreme spiritual reality.³¹ However, we must not be confused into thinking that Heaven and Lord are two separate deities. Perhaps it can be said that Heaven is a more general, universal term whereas Lord is Heaven personalized as the Lord.³² Both Heaven and Lord are transcendent in that they are regarded as the source of all existence and also as controlling all events in the world. In Confucius' time, the Heaven is believed to be the Way of Nature, which includes human nature. Here, we see the transition from transcendent monotheism to immanent monism, which is often characterized as the humanistic emphasis of Confucianism. The point we are trying to make here is Confucianism is not purely humanistic, it is inherently theistic.³³ Despite the impression we have of Confucius as agnostic and sceptical towards religious matters, he was actually highly spiritualistic and keen on the concept of the transcendent Heaven and its immanent influence on Nature, and mans role is to mediate between the divine and the natural.³⁴

Developing on this transcendent-immanent concept, Confucianist scholar Tu Wei Ming proposes that the concept of Heaven make an “anthropocosmic” turn away from the anthropomorphic view of classical Confucianism and naturalistic view of Heaven in Song-

³¹ Kelly James Clark, “The gods of Abraham, Isaiah, and Confucius,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 5(2005): 109-136. Also Chen DeRong, “Di 帝 and Tian 天 in Ancient Chinese Thought: A Critical Analysis of Hegel's Views,” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 8(2009): 13-27.

³² Ha, “Transcendence without and within”, 149-150.

³³ Julia Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study* (Japan: Kodansha International, 1977), 118.

³⁴ Yong Huang, “Confucian Theology: Three Models, *Religion Compass* 1(2007): 455-478.

Ming Neo-Confucianism.³⁵ Tu's notion of Heaven stands in between classical Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism, where humanity is situated somewhat between the divine and the natural.³⁶ Tu's anthropocosmic approach emphasises man's (society's) participation in the Heaven-Earth nexus:

*"Human beings are ... an integral part of the 'chain of beings', encompassing Heaven, Earth and the myriad of things. However, the uniqueness of being human is the intrinsic capacity of the mind to 'embody' the cosmos in its conscience and consciousness. Through this embodying, the mind realizes its own sensitivity, manifests true humanity and assists in the cosmic transformation of Heaven and Earth."*³⁷

This approach has exerted a tremendous influence in the articulation of the Confucian stance on the role of human beings in global ethics and environmental philosophy.

Modernity, rising out of the Enlightenment legacy, is de-natured and de-spirited. Confucianism, on the other hand, seeks harmony with nature and mutuality with Heaven. It is neither secular nor anthropocentric. As Tu Wei Ming puts it, "It regards the secular as sacred by infusing spiritual values to earth, body, family, and community; it urges humans to realize and rediscover the ultimate meaning and the deepest source of life in the Heaven-endowed nature."³⁸ Human beings are not merely creatures but partners of the cosmic process. Through active participation in the great transformation, they are co-creators and thus responsible for the well-being of not only the human community but of "Heaven, Earth and the myriad things" (天地万物). This anthropocosmic insight serves as a corrective to the secular humanism informed by the western enlightenment mentality. Confucianism's worldview of a harmonious relationships of Heaven, Human and Earth, provides a broad ethical basis in the quest for sustainable development.

³⁵ Tu Wei Ming, "The Continuity of Being: Chinese Versions of Nature," *In Confucian Thought: Selfhood and as Creative Transformation*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 51-66. Tu Wei Ming borrows this term "anthropocosmic" from Mircea Eliade to describe the interacting triad of heaven, earth and human beings.

³⁶ Tu Wei Ming, *Looking Forward to Confucianism in Ten Years* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press), 45

³⁷ Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 132

³⁸ Tu Wei Ming, *Confucian Humanism as a Spiritual Resource for Global Ethics*. Tasaan Lecture #4, Korea, November 2001. Electronic document, <http://tuweiming.com/lecture.8.html><http://tuweiming.com/lecture.8.html>, accessed on 23 November 2009.

Laura Westra, an environment ethicist and policy practitioner argues that belief systems such as East-Asian Confucianism which supports reciprocity of respect for society and environment can steer ethical action beyond the self-interest of preserving the economic status quo.³⁹ Confucianism can help do so by recovering the cosmological principle of unity between environment and society. Confucianism rooted in the environment-society nexus reminds society of its responsibility and commitment to preservation of the environment. We have also seen that Confucianism is inherently theistic, and the belief in God, whom Confucius called the Lord of Heaven, is the key to the spirituality that will give authority to the Heavenly Mandate to care for the environment and define society's obligation to fulfilment of this mandate. Confucianism is often declared a humanism with Judeo-Christian traditions being considered religions that are more other-worldly. But both traditions maintain their respective high deity's deep and abiding commitment to human welfare. Tu asserts of the Chinese is equally true of the ancient Hebrews:

*"Heaven is intimately related to the story of the earth. The earth, as the habitat of all known creatures, is the proper home for us. Even if we can imagine a spiritual sanctuary radically different from the world on this earth, such as the Kingdom of God or the other shore, the earth is a lived reality that defines our daily existence here and now."*⁴⁰

The relationships of the biophysical-human-spiritual "household," both among humans and between us and the rest of creation, that lies at the heart of environmental ethics. This concept resonates with the Judeo-Christian worldview and ethics because of its core teaching about the transcendent worth of God's creation. Respect for the God-given dignity of all and for the unity of all in the One Living God is central to the Christian understanding of theology, ecology and economy.

4.2 Conceptualised Eco-Spirituality of Society-Economy from Confucian Perspective

Our model has shown that the economy must grow in a sustainable manner to serve the common good of the society. When the economy expands out of control, it will eventually

³⁹ Laura Westra, The Earth Charter: from Global Ethics to International Law Instrument, in Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application, ed. LP Pojman (Toronto: Wadsworth, 2005), 590-596.

⁴⁰ Tu Wei Ming, "Creativity in Christianity and Confucianism," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 6(2007): 115-124.

destroy the society. Economic and environmental ethics within the market mechanism is necessary to keep up the transparency and health of an economic system based on the just management of the market system and the environment. Confucianism rooted in its concern for the society at large, beyond and single personal interest, compels that the common concerns of the global community are listened to and economic ethics such as concerning the global ecology are properly attended upon. Confucian teaching on social harmony is a plain reminder to growing an economy in a responsible manner vis-a-vis the society and environment. There must be limits to human consumption and the expansion of the economy. The key to responsible and controlled economic growth and consumption is self-cultivation. As Tucker succinctly puts it, "To the Confucians, cultivation implies evoking and establishing resonances between the human and the natural worlds. To be fully human means to locate oneself in patterned relationships to the changes in the cosmos."⁴¹ This is the key to not only self-cultivation but also self-limitation with respect the environment and consumption.

On self cultivation, Tu emphasizes the interaction in Confucian thought of individual moral development and the community. He conceives "the person as a center of relationships, the more one penetrates into one's inner self, the more one will be capable of realizing the true nature of one's human relatedness."⁴² In response to the charge of Weber against Confucianism in hindering the growth of the Chinese economy, Tu tries to show how Confucian ethic may contribute to the fast growth of some East-Asian countries - specifically Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong, where Confucian teachings have much influence. While the cultivation of a work ethic is seen in Protestantism by Weber, Tu sees the Confucian calling "to establish others for the sake of establishing oneself, to enlarge others for the sake of enlarging oneself", as the philosophical basis for organic group solidarity which serves to minimize conflicts in an organization.⁴³ Tu thinks that the Confucian emphasis on mutuality and harmony in society are an integral part of their political mission to transform the world. However, the moral problems of social redistribution in a growing economy have never been dealt with properly, perhaps because of the dominant Confucian view on goodness

⁴¹ Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Religious Dimensions of Confucianism: Cosmology and Cultivation," *Philosophy East and West* 48(1998):19.

⁴² Tu Wei-ming, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 27.

⁴³ Tu Wei-ming, 'A Confucian Perspective on the Rise of Industrial East Asia', in Silke Krieger and Rolf Trauzettel (ed.), *Confucianism and the Modernization of China* (Mainz: Hase and Koehler Verlag, Mainz, 1991), 29-41.

of human nature.⁴⁴ There is a strong belief that self-cultivation would enable a person to identify with a good conscience, or the principle of heaven. However, the failed experience of idealistic socialism in the Soviet Union and China, it should be evident that the moral strength of persons in a society without an external source of moral strength as found in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is often not strong enough to prevent moral failure. Without a more refined spirituality that takes into consideration the moral weakness of humans, the incentive needed responsible economic growth and sustainable development will be impeded. The answer to this gap is the source and motivation behind this spirituality. Developing on the same argument of the Mandate of Heaven, and Heaven can be synonymously identified as Lord, than it makes good sense to see the importance of a theistic presence as the external source of moral strength that can penetrate into the psyche of human beings and hence remodel his worldview. Where Confucianism has identified self-cultivation as the means to a harmony of economic growth and societal common good, a transcendent-immanent spirituality built on theism is necessary as motivation for this self-cultivation.

Concern for the common good is more in keeping with the communitarian traditions of Judeo-Christian ethics than are western notions of private property. From the more of the Scripture, God's gift of creation belongs to God and is to be shared by all. The individual is accountable to the community and ultimately to God for the use of this divine gift. Private rights in property are, according to Scripture and the teachings of the Church, encumbered by social responsibilities to the community.

4.3 Conceptualised Eco-Spirituality of Economy-Environment from Confucian Perspective

Market economy makes no distinction between genuine needs and the most questionable manufactured desires. This has become an ethical crisis because such relentlessly pursuit of economic goods is damaging global ecology of the future generations. In a nutshell, Confucian East-Asia needs a wake-up call, having long followed a neo-classical economic worldview rooted in scientific rationality, materialism and social utilitarianism in the interest of progress. Economies must work on the principle of intergenerational equity which reminds us of the rights of future generations. It is a notion that is implicit in ecological sustainability. Intergenerational equity is a notion that views the human community as a partnership among

⁴⁴ Lam Kit-Chun Joanna, Confucian Business Ethics and the Economy Confucian Business Ethics and the Economy Journal of Business Ethics, Vol. 43(2003):153-162

all generations. Each generation has the right to inherit the same diversity in natural and cultural resources enjoyed by previous generations and to equitable access to the use and benefits of these resources. At the same time, the present generation is a custodian of the planet for future generations, obliged to conserve this legacy so that future generations may also enjoy these same rights. In this way, intergenerational equity extends the scope of social justice into the future. Confucianism rooted in intergenerational obligations must compel the global community to take responsibility for what we are creating and leaving behind for future generations. Confucianism reminds us that it is immoral and unethical to spend, or worse squander, the inheritance of future generations.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, God gave the earth to his people and their offspring as an everlasting possession, to be cared for and passed on to each generation. Man may only appropriate as much and leaves enough for others. He has an obligation not to take more fruits of nature than he can use, so that they do not spoil and become unavailable to someone else for use - i.e., an obligation not to waste the fruit of nature.

4.4 A Transcendent-Immanent Eco-Spirituality effecting *Metanoia* in Society

Society needs to realize that her economic obsession is symptomatic of a spiritual need that is not met. As we have consciously or unconsciously turned away from a spiritual understanding of ourselves, we have come to pursue this-worldly goals with a misplaced zeal. The solution to the environmental catastrophe that has already begun, and to the social deterioration we are already suffering from, will occur when we redirect this repressed spiritual urge back into its true path. For the time being, that path includes struggling against the false religions of our age. In the Book of Rituals, it is mentioned “The noble person is content to follow the Way; the petty person is content to obtain the things he desires.” According to Ekken’s reflection on Neo-Confucianism, the capacity for joyful contentment is implanted by the workings of heaven in the human heart and thus we possess it originally.⁴⁵ However, the cravings of the senses will cause us to have evil desires. While Neo-Confucianism surfaces the personal crisis, it is not quite able to answer the question at the spiritual level. What Confucianism has left unanswered is the issue of man’s deepest contentment, which must be cannot be answered without embracing a theistic spirituality.

⁴⁵ Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Moral and spiritual cultivation in Japanese neo-Confucianism: the life and thought of Kaibara Ekken* (Albany: State University of New York, 1989), 214-215.

From our model, society stands as a buffer between economy and environment, which means that with the right spiritual orientation, society will be able to balance economic development with environment protection. On the one hand, society is able to moderate the scale of the economy; on the other hand, society is able to protect the environment. The key to the re-orientation of the human heart and of society at large, is the concept of theistic transcendent-immanent spirituality, which is actually inherently present in Confucianism. An integration of Biblical Theology and Confucianism has shown that we can construct an environmental ethic that fits into the worldview of East Asians. The final element that is needed is a spirituality that drives the change (*metanoia*) in the society. A theistic eco-spirituality is necessary for society to understand that true contentment and satisfaction is not in relentless hoarding and consumption of goods.

Conclusion

The goal of the economy is to sustainably improve human well-being and quality of life. We have to remember that material consumption and GDP are merely means to that end, not ends in themselves. We have to recognize, as both ancient wisdom and new psychological research tell us, that material consumption beyond real need can actually reduce well-being. We have to better understand what can really contribute to sustainable human well-being, and recognize the substantial contributions of natural and social capital, which are now the limiting factors in many countries. We must acknowledge the importance of ecological sustainability. Ecological sustainability implies recognizing that natural and social capital are not infinitely substitutable, and that real biophysical limits exist to the expansion of the market economy. The long term solution to the ecological crisis is therefore to move beyond the growth at all costs economic model to a model that recognizes the real costs and benefits of growth. We need to break the addiction to over-consumption, and create a more sustainable economic model that focuses on quality of life rather than merely quantity of consumption. It will not be easy; it will require a new vision, new measures, and new institutions. It will require a redesign of society's worldview. Clearly, environmental ethic is about changing hearts and not merely better economic theory or improved technological. As such, we need to look at economy and ecology from a spiritual *metanoia* perspective, that is a transformation of hearts and minds. In this regard, our study of East Asian Confucianism shows that its inherent transcendent-immanent spirituality provides an inroad for this *metanoia* to take place. The next challenge is to construct a framework and formulate the approaches to bring about this transformation. This will be the subject of further studies.

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