

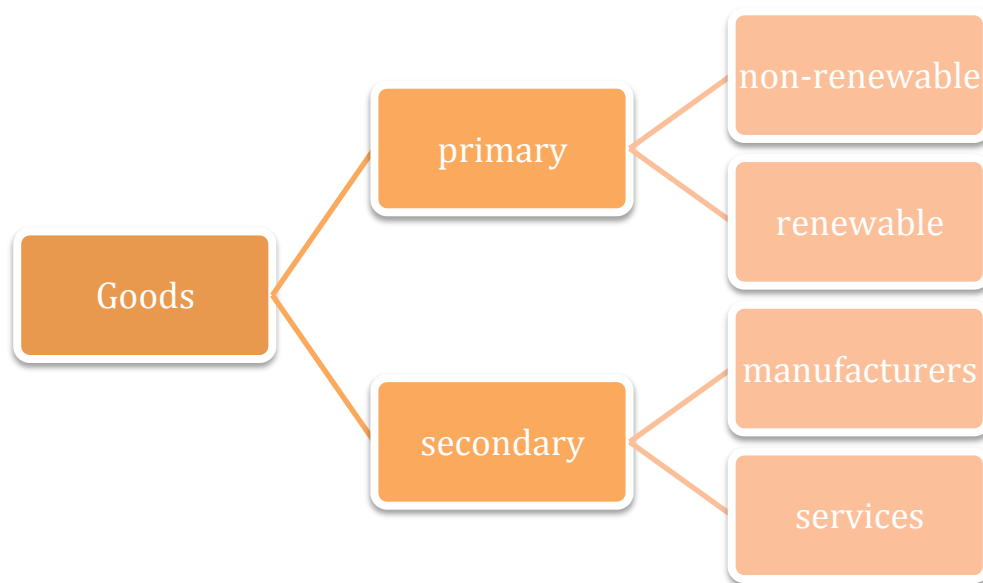
Economic Systems:
An Eastern Lens Through a Buddhist, Christian, and Hindu

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Economics 101: What do we Value?

The Role of Economics

Produce produce produce! In the world of economics, societies care about what is made, since what we make, holds value. Shumacher (2010) describes that one of the main subjects of economics is producing “goods.” To help establish a sense of basics of what goods are, he illustrates a graph (below), which focuses on the core features of primary and secondary sectors. The question of whether something is primary or not is to question whether it is renewable or nonrenewable, or as Schumacher says, “man-made or God-given”. This distinction between humans and God’s creation puts into reality that the essence of consumption is irrelevant if product is not readily available and reproducible. “...for man is not a producer but only a converter, and for every job of conversion he needs primary products.” (52) The demands of a converter require a primary source. In conclusion, without acknowledging God’s gift of resources, people would not be able to produce good. God’s goodness stimulates human ability to produce goodness; one does not function without the other from the human perspective.



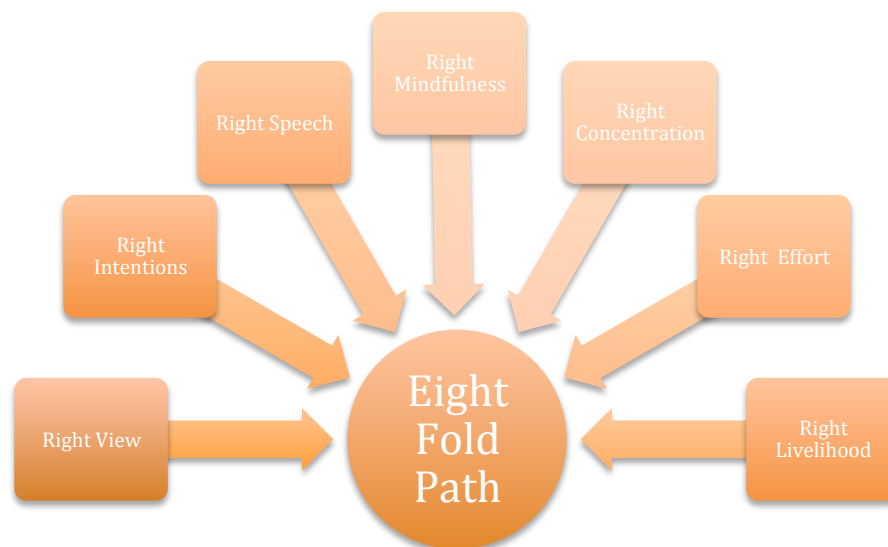
This graph displays Schumacher's (2010) minimum representation of a "Goods" flow chart. (52)

Gaining a perspective on what we value as a society varies throughout different cultures. This affects our actions, choices, and modes of thought in reflection. Shifting focus, we see the lens of economy through different religions, countries, and socioeconomic backgrounds. We will view a Buddhist perspective on the subject of economic activity and what is good, based on our desires. Then we will examine Kagawa’s Christian Cooperative economics, as he puts value into his concept of Brotherhood Economics. Finally, we will look through an Indian’s perspective on the economics of agriculture in a farmland country. Each of these perspectives holds truth and the Christian principles will be drawn out from the Buddhist and Hindu perspectives.

The Eastern View: An Asian Lens

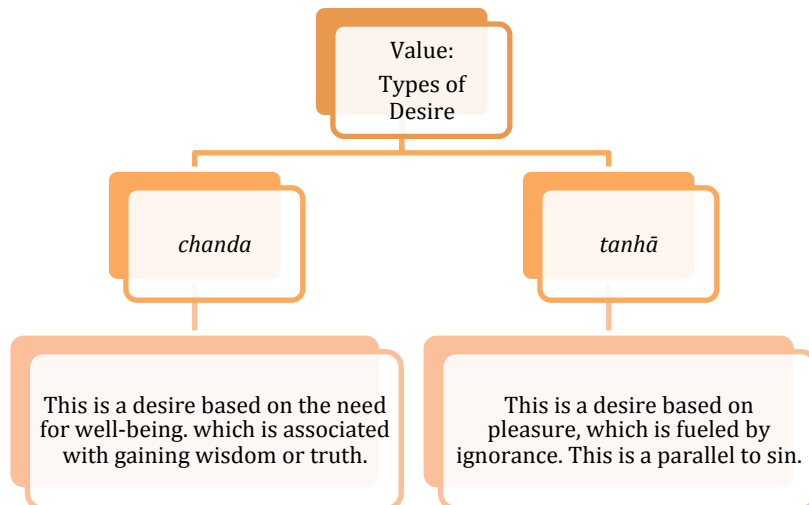
Buddhist Perspective: The Uplift and Downfall of Desire

According to Payutto (1998), a large part of Buddhism is the constant struggle of trying to control one's desires. There are desires in life that produce good and those that produce evil. This breaks the good and bad desires into two categories; one focused on feeling from seeking and one focused on benefit through intelligence. Feeling from seeking can be paralleled to Christianity's context of sin. In Buddhism, attaining an utmost well being is the ultimate goal, but in the end, mostly harmful desires still result. The solution to sin is knowledge, which is referred to as *paññā*. This form of wisdom is the ultimate goal of *dhammachanda* – to gain well being through what is right, what is true.



Your ability to self evaluate allows you to see truth or what is right. Buddha's eightfold path unanimously focuses on what is *right* throughout his entire path. From the Buddhist's point of view on economic activity, there should be a focus to serve others in order to be well as an individual, so that you may reflect good within a society. This should reflect a life of well being. Your body should be accurately nourished and balanced in its maintenance. This means your habits and consumption should promote healthy practices that nourish the body. This is believed to bring truth.

Buddha did acknowledge that one could acquire wealth. But before we make the assumption of what wealth looks like here is the direct purpose of wealth, "to facilitate the highest human potential." (36) The ultimate Buddhist perspective is to enhance life. The way people spend their time, money, and resources, should be devoted toward an overall well being. Circulating back to the concept of goods, we adopt value to these good for various reasons. This is acknowledged as a modern perspective when we relate these values purely from materialism, a concept disassociated with Buddhism. Later, we will examine how India's Hindu culture promotes a sense of self-value through pleasure; a concept in which Buddhists strive to stay away from.



To gain understanding of the Buddhist perspective on economics, we must learn the concept of value. (Payutto, 1998)

Part of our value system contributes into our work ethic. Schumacher (2010) describes Buddhist economics in the form of cooperation. There are three functions to the process of work: the opportunity to work in one’s particular skill and develop, working with others in a shared task in order to end ego-centered practices, and lastly, to produce goods and services required to maintain a sufficient state of being. It is then from the Buddhist perspective that materialism is seen as a hindrance and the true ethic in work comes from a pure character. Schumacher states, “...work, properly conducted in conditions of human dignity and freedom, blesses those who do it and equally their products.” (59) The Christian parallel comes from the creation story in the biblical theme of work and rest (Grigg, 2010). Buddhist perspective acknowledges that when work is properly done, conditions provide freedom for individuals. Freedom is blessed to those who model this expectation and produce work in its same caliber. This requires equality in distribution across different people who produce different work. When we create a balance in work and rest, as God designed, we are able to work at our optimum level of productivity.

Brotherhood Economics: Joining Hands Through Cooperation



a finger or thumb is useless by itself, but with cooperation of more than one part, there comes to fruition a task at hand.

From a Japanese perspective, Kagawa (1936) offers a challenge to capitalism and provides insight to the value of cooperation. Kagawa argues that, “Unless we have a cooperative system each individual cannot have freedom.” (121) From a Christian perspective, Kagawa draws on interdependence and the necessity for human love and worth. Kagawa argues that liberty is not granted through individual means, but instead through others. Using the analogy of a hand, Kagawa provides the simple comparison of the insignificance of one’s freedom, if not all are free. A thumb cannot pick anything up without the help of a finger. A table cannot be lifted without the use of an entire hand. We see that

Kagawa states, "... I firmly believe that the development of Christian brotherhood is basic to the development of ideal economic society." (80) His efforts to refute capitalists' notions is based on their leech-like behaviors, which feed off of cash flow and as a result immobilizes the economic system as a whole. An economic revolution sees the face of a society with no class association and merges members together as a whole. Kagawa continues to emphasize on this theme of *brotherhood love* through the use of scripture. The story of the Agape illustrates not only examples of providing food and drink for those in need, but demonstrates the priority of providing relief to the poor. Grigg's (2010) biblical principle of cooperation is the obvious effort in daily practice, but rooted in that is providing constant human worth & love, and wishing to attain redistribution for equality. Looking to empower the poor and distribute wealth requires the practice of *brotherhood love*; coming together to provide Christ's love as God saw fit.

India's Farmer: Agricultural Economics

Bhagat (2012) illustrates that India's government system does not show interest or take priority in caring for today's farmer. Government provides the means for living, but do not provide the sustainability for life to improve in the agricultural world. Bhagat argues that this does not produce any type of change or progress for the farmer or India as a whole. We must acknowledge what the farmer looks like, in respect to agriculturally dominant land. "We must nourish the nourisher to ensure he will still be around, for us and for generations to come." (31) Bhagat comes from a Hindu background. This concept of valuing others spoken by a Hindu presents a major paradigm shift. Allow me to paint a picture of the Hindu context to bring better understanding of this shift.



An Indian farm full of acres of sugar cane.

The Hindu culture promotes inward spirituality; to please the God that is within. This leads to great discrepancy and spiritual oppression due to the caste system. The higher caste projects purity and greatness, while the lowest caste holds no human worth at all (the untouchables, the outcastes "without caste"). How can we have a prosperous economy, if the nation does not acknowledge their whole population as people, but identify those without caste as speaking animals? This is where expectations set out by leaders of a nation strongly sway the productivity and the excellency of work provided. How can we expect positive work and productivity from a system, which is not humanely acknowledged? This state of hopelessness pulls the rug from under the outcastes and backwards castes' feet. They are constantly going to fall because it is their destiny. I would argue that India has used the caste system as propaganda to keep people in a survival-working mode. The structure of the caste system builds an economy to keep the elite, rich and the deprived, poor. Hence, we see how the caste system greatly skews the economic downfall. The farmers remain at the lowest caste level; hence, their level of worth is low to nothing.



The farmer's water well, which was low on reserve.

Bhagat's challenge grants a new perspective of putting value into helping others. Here we see a perspective that draws on the value to invest in others. This speaks to the Buddhist's concept of *chanda* – building a good society, of good character. We see Grigg's (2010) Christian principle of love & human worth. We see the desire and need for people to love their neighbor, in order to help shift economic burdens and downfalls. We see there needs to be the concept of human value spoken into the Indian culture. People who value truth, seek truth in all corners.

Bhagat points out the farmers' problems become more about the method of how to tend the land. The farmer is dependent on rain for financial success. India depends on rainfall for a means of irrigation. To help bring research to practice, I will speak life into a farmer's story in Southern India. My colleague, Sean, and I spoke with an elder of Poyyapakkam, a village in Southern India in Tamil Nadu. The farmer explained that he grew sugar cane to sell to factories. He said the stalks each took one year to grow. This gave me perspective to the importance of time and depending on a successful harvest for profit. He asked if we could pray for him and his land. He wished for a successful harvest, and that meant he needed the rain. He had told us the rain level was very low this year and that this threatened the livelihood of his crops and affected the success of his family. Without rain, success of the crops had a slim chance of giving the family profit. So, as a result, he leaned on God in times of struggle. He asked for God to provide him rain for his crops and for his land to bring out fruitfulness. He had given permission for the pastors of the community to build a church on his land. He strived for multiplication and discipleship. He was being a good steward of the land by allowing a church to be built on his property. He sacrificed space for his own means of production in order to obedient to what he felt his land should be used for. Then he asked if we wanted to see his well. He took us through the sugar cane fields and revealed a large, water well. This hidden gem was tucked away from the main road and revealed a source of life for villagers. I stood with my toes at the edge of the well. I could see fish and turtles swimming around in the clear, blue water. He said family members would occasionally go down into the well and skim out any debris that might have fallen in. He said they also go fishing and are provided food by the fish in the water. This amazing source provides water, food, and allows people to store clean drinking water, yet its lack of availability threatens the nourishment of the farmer, drawing back to Bhatan's call of responsibility. "Agriculture can be India's competitive strength globally if we become serious about it". What Bhatan urges is for us to take focus on India's farmers. India must speak into equality and reevaluate its understanding of human worth beneath the shadows of the caste system.

Conclusion: Truth Shaped Into Daily Living

When we ask ourselves what does society value, the answer will vary greatly based on many different distinctions. With that great diversity, it is important to see the common thread that aligns with differences among humankind. We see Grigg's (2010) biblical principles throughout different examples of eastern thought. Across the different countries of historical and religious influence, there was a value found in love & human worth, productivity, cooperation, work & rest, and distribution for equality. Truth is intricately laced in all of God's creation. Throughout different beliefs, statuses, and upbringings, we see people gain a thirst, a longing for God. People associate with what is good as how God intentionally created the heavens and the earth. Because after each day, *it was good*.

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