



Special feature: economics education and evolutionary economics

Kiichiro Yagi^{1,2} 

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Abstract

This preface introduces five items that constitute this special feature and suggests the future task with which evolutionary economists and other heterodox economists have to tackle in the area of economics education.

Keywords Economics education · Evolutionary economics · Pluralism in economics education · Reference standard for economics education

JEL Classification A2 · B5

1 Preface

Pluralism in economics education Reference standard for economics education.

In the Fall of 2022, *Evolutionary and Institutional Economics Review* announced the call for papers on the special feature, Economics Education and Evolutionary Economics, as follows:

The global financial crisis in 2008 and the still-continuing economic contraction caused by the COVID-19 pandemic raised a serious distrust of the prevailing neo-classical economics. We remember that in Japan in 2013/14, a draft of reference standard for bachelor-level economics education by the Science Council of Japan (SCJ)¹ caused a hot discussion that included academic econo-

¹ Details of the discussion were described in the introduction of Yagi, Aruka, Osaka, Onishi, Yoshida eds. (2015), which is an anthology of reflections on this matter, including the text of the finally adopted SCJ's

✉ Kiichiro Yagi
yagi@econ.setsunan.ac.jp

¹ Setsunan University, Neyagawa City, Osaka, Japan

² Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan

mists and interested citizens. The recognition of the plurality in economics and the significance of the cooperation of economists and citizens colored this discussion. Now, how is the present situation in economics education? Economists in the evolutionary and institutional direction must have their say in this area, too. We welcome contributions that range from theoretical consideration and practical reports to the discussion on the renovation of economics education for this special feature.

We could not publish all the manuscripts we received officially via the Editorial Manager and unofficially. Though we could not publish some of them in this special issue, we would appreciate their authors for their wholeheartedness in the mission of economics education.

The coordinating editor's article describes the debate's international background of the 2013/14 debate in Japan and its outcome after a decade. It suggests the discrepancy between the debate of the neo-classical mainstream vs. its critics and the concerns of practitioners and pedagogues facing international divergences in the area of economics education. The latter would focus their attention on students' outcomes from their study in economics. Such a focus is important when we reflect on heated discussions of economists of different theoretical directions in the area of economics education once more.

This article discusses the position of "pluralism" that is often taken as the counterpole of various theoretical perspectives of economics.² On this matter, too, the discussion covered both areas of theoretical directions and approaches in education. In the former area, Samuel Bowles and Wendy Carlin, two leaders of the CORE that provided an open online textbook, *The Economy*³, distinguished "pluralism by juxtaposition" with "pluralism by integration" and declared to choose the latter.⁴ However, they could not convince many pluralists. In the latter area, many teaching, learning, and studying methods are practiced. Even the newest Subject Benchmark Statement Economics of QAA in the UK (2023) shows some concessions to pluralistic projects in education.

How does evolutionary economics take its position in this respect? Of the five papers in this special issue, the authors of two Discussions, Henning Schwardt and Takashi Seo, clearly declare their position in evolutionary economics. The former understands evolutionary economics as "a broad umbrella," by whose construction "the varying perspectives that rest on the integration of economic activity as an ongoing process in endogenously changing system" are analyzed. In his case, evolutionary economics is not in conflict with pluralism. It is rather the name of a wider economics view that covers various patterns of economic actions and of the

Reference Standard for Economics Education and its explanation by the chief of the SCJ's subcommittee concerned. The final adopted version is available from SCJ's site (<https://www.scj.go.jp/ja/member/iinkai/daigakuhoosyo/daigakuhoosyo.html>).

² See the article Pluralism in Economics in WIKIPEDIA (2024).

³ The CORE Team (2017). See <https://www.core-econ.org>. From Spring 2024, *The Economy 2.0* is available.

⁴ Bowles and Carlin (2020).

economic development embedded in the physical and social environment. As it is so, it helps students not only to recognize economic phenomena from a broader perspective than the education confined in the standard can give them but also offers a base suited to collaboration with other disciplines.

In Seo's discussion, evolutionary economics is given from the beginning as the theme of his course lecture for undergraduate students. This course seems to have been not a regular course, but it was an experimental one that Seo tried. Though evolutionary economics has a quarter-century history in Japan, the number of courses that cover "evolutionary economics" remains a few. Thus, this discussion is a precious and frank report of his teaching trial of evolutionary economics in Japan. Seo's choice of topics and materials are probably also interesting.

Tokumaru offers a detailed report of her course lecture in which she used CORE's *The Economy* in English for non-native speakers at a Japanese university. This is novel in economics teaching at Japanese universities in both respects of using a heterodoxy text and of performing it all in English class for non-native speakers (Japanese and foreign students). Under a well-planned schedule, she measured the students' progress by practicing the TEL (Walstad et al. 2013) before and after the course. Grounded on the change in the pre-test and post-test of TEL and the result of students' submission of mini-reports, she concludes the effectiveness of CORE's text. Apart from the debate about whether CORE's *The Economy* represents an alternative text to the present mainstream economics, this is an encouraging report.

Yoshihara's article stressed the need for an "overarching economic theory" in economics education in the critical age of the capitalist economy. He focuses his attention on capital theory, whose difference divides neo-classical economics from the Classical-Marxian economics. He argues that in the age when even conservative politicians talk about the crisis of capitalism, teaching a smooth substitution of productive factors with the market mechanism is totally inappropriateness. However, about the model Yoshihara proposes in this article, a reviewer is not in accord with him. The editor of this special feature accepted Yoshihara's article with some modifications of the original manuscripts related to the criticism. He must add further that Yoshihara's view is grounded on his teaching experience at universities in Japan and the United States.

The five papers in this special issue represent today's situation of the challenge of non-orthodox economists around economics education in Japan and the US. However, as our reviewers suggested, the discussion tends to stand on the teacher's side and fails to consider the position of the learner easily. Not only contents, but methods and approaches, further reflections on education itself are needed. Thus, we are still in the early stages of our progress. The editors of this journal wait for further contributions in this research area.

Declarations

Conflict of interest There is no conflict of interest.

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