

## Reflections on Economics Education in China and Suggestions for Its Reform\*

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### Abstract

Although the current economics education system in universities in China differs from developed Western countries, China has been deliberately emulating the economics education system in the West over the past two decades, a system that has been repeatedly criticized by international movements such as the “post-autistic economics movement” and the “International Student Initiative for Pluralism in Economics.” This article argues that the dominant position of mainstream Western economics in Chinese higher education contradicts the scientific principles of pluralism and does not align with China’s national conditions and the necessity for the development of a philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics. Based on the proposals put forward by faculty and students involved in the international movement for the reform of economics education over the past twenty-two years, this article recommends reforms to address the major weaknesses of economics education in China. The reforms address ten areas for improvement, including the overall goals of pluralism in economics education, curriculum design, teaching methods, an independent academic evaluation system, faculty development, and the evaluation of academic disciplines. The purpose of these reforms is to destabilize the dominant position of mainstream Western economics in higher education in China and gradually

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establish a new economics education system with a curriculum based on a plurality of approaches, a variety of critical pedagogies, and a methodology of problem-based learning.

### **Keywords**

Pluralism in economics; international movement for the reform of economics education; reform of economics education in China; philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics

### **The Formation of the Current Economics Education System in China and Reflections on It**

The formation of the current economics education system in China occurred during the second wave of “learning from the West” after the reform and opening up period. Before reflecting on and proposing reforms to the system, it is necessary to understand how it was influenced by economics education in developed capitalist countries in the West, educational systems whose own formation can be traced back to the Cold War.

In the early 1950s, during an intense moment in the confrontation between the capitalist and socialist camps, McCarthyism emerged in the United States. McCarthyism marginalized Marxist economists and led to the suppression of non-Marxist, heterodox economists who criticized the flaws in the capitalist system. The authority of state institutions, the power of business associations, and the consensus of elites in higher education all effectively worked to suppress heterodox economic thinking. As a result, liberalism and mainstream Western economic thinking came to dominate the discipline of economics in higher education in developed capitalist countries. It was not until the 1970s that Western capitalist states became less concerned with suppressing heterodox economics. At the same time, however, mainstream

economics, leveraging its dominant position, continued to marginalize heterodox economics by employing tools and mechanisms such as faculty performance evaluations and journal ranking systems. In the United States, the ranking of economic journals and academic institutions became the primary mechanisms for excluding heterodox economics and restricting the teaching of economics to mainstream ideas, thereby reinforcing the dominant position of mainstream economics. Some Western scholars even argue that the level of pluralism in economics teaching today is not as high as it was before the 1970s, as exemplified by the case of the United Kingdom (Dow, 2011).

After the end of the Cold War, Western economic theorists began to reflect on the damage caused by the monopolistic dominance of mainstream neoclassical economics. The International Confederation of Associations for Pluralism in Economics (ICAPE), established in 1993, pointed out that due to the dominant influence of mainstream neoclassical economics, in the United States,

it is difficult to identify more than a handful of graduate programs that do not follow the orthodox canon. Virtually all departments have become controlled by advocates of a single view of what economics is about and how it should be practiced. The involuted extension of the theory of markets, frequently by applying abstruse mathematical techniques, has become the sine qua non of the profession. Arcane proof receives louder applause than social purpose.

Trends established in the profession in the United States are spreading, with some lag, to Europe and Japan, threatening to reduce the rich variety of traditions of economic thought on the global stage. This is in part due to the fact that many economists are trained in the United States and then return to home universities and research centers,

carrying with them the neoclassical ethos they have imbibed. Following the American model, standards for recruitment, promotion, salaries, and grants are shifting in favor of neoclassical, quantitative, and theoretical criteria. Although still not fully completed, the parallel processes of homogenization and methodological uniformity are steadily advancing in Europe and Asia. (ICAPE, n.d.)

After entering the new century, serious questions came to be asked about the dominant position of Western mainstream economics. French students were the first to call for reforms to economics education. In July 2000, they published an open letter on the internet entitled “The French Students’ Petition: Open Letter from Economic Students to Professors and Others Responsible for the Teaching of This Discipline” to challenge the dominant position of mainstream economics in higher education and expressed themselves “generally dissatisfied with the teaching that we receive.” They criticized the lack of any semblance of reality in economics education, the excessive use of mathematics as an end in itself, the overwhelming dominance of neoclassical theory (referring to Western mainstream economics) in the economics curriculum, and the use of teaching methods that discouraged critical and reflective thinking. The French economics students proclaimed their desire to break free from the fictional world of neoclassical economics, opposed the fetishization of mathematics, and demanded methodological pluralism in their courses. They urged their teachers to wake up because “We no longer want to have this Autistic science imposed on us” (Fullbrook, 2003: 13-14).

This petition by the French students marked the beginning of the economics education reform movement, which has had a significant impact in countries such as France, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The petition received support from economics

professors and some economic research institutions, who also initiated their own petitions. In November 2000, British economist Edward Fullbrook created the post-autistic economist movement website at <http://paecon.net>. Through this website, the *post-autistic economics newsletter* became the platform for public discussions of economics education. In March 2008, starting from its 45<sup>th</sup> issue, the newsletter was renamed the *real-world economics review*. As of March 2023, the review had reached its 103<sup>rd</sup> issue.

After the outbreak of the global financial crisis, the “international movement for the reform of economics education” surged once again. In 2009, billionaire George Soros, recognizing that the economics courses taught in higher education in developed countries no longer met the needs of contemporary economic development, funded the establishment of the Institute for New Economic Thinking. One of the institute’s primary goals was to reform the curriculum of economics programs and develop new economics textbooks. In 2012, German students launched a new round of petitions for economics education reform. This movement quickly spread worldwide, leading to the emergence of numerous student organizations such as the “Post-Crash Economics Association” and the “Rethinking Economics Network.” On May 5, 2014, 42 student groups from 19 countries established the “International Student Initiative for Pluralism in Economics.” Within a year, this organization had expanded to include 82 student groups from 31 countries.

This new activity in the “international movement for the reform of economics education” once again targeted the dominant position of Western mainstream economics instruction in university education. For instance, the “Post-Crash Economics Association” at the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom highlighted in their research report, “Economics, Education and Unlearning: Economics Education at the University of Manchester,” that the university made

neoclassical economics the sole focus of their studies. Other economic schools of thought, such as institutionalism, evolutionary economics, the Austrian School, post-Keynesianism, Marxism, feminism, and ecological economics, they argued, were largely absent from the economics curriculum. This state of affairs, they claimed, suppressed, undermined, and stifled the crucial innovation, creativity, and constructive criticism essential for understanding economics, which contradicted the educational guidelines set forth by the University of Manchester itself (Post-Crash Economics Society, 2014). Students thought this state of affairs was abnormal in a democratic society. They wrote,

It is not only the world economy that is in crisis. The teaching of economics is in crisis too, and this crisis has consequences far beyond the university walls. What is taught shapes the minds of the next generation of policymakers, and therefore shapes the societies we live in. . . . Ultimately, pluralism in economics education is essential for healthy public debate. It is a matter of democracy. (International Student Initiative for Pluralism in Economics, 2014)

The students called for action, stating: “United across borders, we call for a change of course” (International Student Initiative for Pluralism in Economics, 2014).

Contrary to the international trend toward economics education reform, the economics academic community in China has been accelerating the adoption of the Western mainstream economics education system over the past two decades. This has led to the rise and dominance of Western mainstream economic dogmatism in China. According to this dogmatism, economic principles are singular and uniform and economics does not differ across countries. In other words, there is only one true economics, Western mainstream economics, which is sometimes known as “modern economics.” Under the banner of economic modernization and international

integration, a dogmatism emerged in the Chinese economic academic community that “economic modernization means Americanization, Americanization means neoclassicalization, and neoclassicalization means mathematization.” The essence of this dogmatism lies in considering Western mainstream economics as the only scientific economics and demanding that this paradigm’s academic propositions and practices be established as the disciplinary standards and academic norms that the Chinese economics community must follow. This includes integrating them into the curriculum system, textbook development, research evaluation, faculty recruiting, and graduate entrance examinations.

As early as 2003, I strongly questioned these trends and introduced the “post-autistic economics movement” to the Chinese academic community (Jia, 2003). In that article, I argued, the rise of the “post-autistic economics movement” marked the most severe crisis encountered by “modern economics” since the Great Depression. The movement was a critique of the current state of economics teaching and research in Western countries and should serve as a wake-up call against the trend of Westernization in the development of economics in China. The direction of economics education in China, I contended, needed to be reconsidered because the true spirit of science is pluralism. Western mainstream economics undoubtedly played an important role in modern economics and should not be completely abandoned. However, many serious flaws and the questionable “scientific” nature of Western mainstream economics had not been adequately discussed and its hegemonic position posed a significant threat to academic freedom. This, I believed, provided an important lesson from the development of post-war economics in the United States and Europe; China should not go down the same disastrous road. Instead, China should carefully study the issues raised by this international movement, abandon neoclassicalization and mathematization in the development of Chinese economics, and adopt a

progressive and trial-and-error approach, embracing a path of economics education and economic development with Chinese characteristics (Jia, 2003).

The development of any phenomenon follows its own inherent laws, especially when it comes to the blind pursuit of Western mainstream economics in the Chinese academic community. This blind pursuit has deep social, political, economic, philosophical, and cultural roots. I was under no misapprehension in 2003 that my harshly critical article would reverse the trends in economics education in China. On the contrary, it can be observed that this trend intensified after 2005 and reached its peak when the Academic Degree and Graduate Education Development Center of the Ministry of Education issued its Document No. 42 on academic discipline evaluation 学科评估 in April 2016 (Jia, 2016). In response to the issuance of this document, I naturally wanted to express my long-standing opposition and wrote a blog post entitled “Fundamental Errors in the Guiding Ideology behind the Fourth Round of Discipline Evaluation in Economics” during the evening of April 29, 2016, to criticize the thinking behind the establishment of the “List of Class A Journals” (Jia, 2016). First, the list elevated the academic norms of Western mainstream economics—already at an impasse—and went against the tide of the “international movement for the reform of economics education.” Second, it further marginalized Marxist economics in universities, thus contradicting the guiding ideology of General Secretary Xi Jinping’s construction of a socialist political economy with Chinese characteristics. Third, it suppressed scholarly debate through administrative fiat, violating the spirit of academic freedom that advocates “letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend.” Last, the people working in the field of theoretical economics would find their specialty absorbed into “Western mainstream economics” while the sub-disciplines of theoretical economics, such as the history of economic thought, economic history,

and political economy, would all face their own demise. I proposed that the Ministry of Education suspend the fourth round of discipline evaluation in economics, gather together relevant experts to conduct a thorough investigation into and study of the current state of economics both domestically and internationally, and develop methods of discipline evaluation in economics that align with the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

My arguments in “Fundamental Errors in the Guiding Ideology behind the Fourth Round of Discipline Evaluation in Economics” represented the concerns of many economists and had a tremendous influence on the field of economics and even the entire philosophy and social science community. With the support of numerous social science researchers, these questions and concerns soon came to impact policy decisions. Ultimately, the Ministry of Education decided to “continue using the evaluation method from the previous round and not add the ‘List of Class A Journals’” to the fourth round of discipline evaluation. Although the “List of Class A Journals” was canceled, the underlying principles and other significant issues have not been resolved. Here, I will illustrate two of the main problems as they pertain to economics.

First of all, the “List of Class A Journals” reflects the lack of autonomy in the academic evaluation system. Although the “Invitation Letter for the Fourth Round of National Discipline Evaluation” and its appendix, the “Indicator System and Related Explanations for the Fourth Round of Discipline Evaluation,” claim that the goal of setting the list of Class A journals was to “establish a more scientific threshold for ‘highly cited papers in the Essential Science Indicators,’ create an independent ‘Class A Journal’ evaluation system for the humanities and social sciences in China, and establish the international status of Chinese article evaluations,” there were only 8 domestic economics journals in the list of Class A journals (40% of the total) while there were twelve foreign-language journals (60% of the total), with the latter all being in English. If the

majority of the journals are in a foreign language, how can the Ministry achieve its own stated goal to “create an independent ‘Class A Journal’ evaluation system for the humanities and social sciences in China”? I am afraid it is far more likely that this would lead to “establishing an international evaluation system of Chinese articles by the Anglo-American academic community.” As Wu Wenxin has pointed out,

The extensive adoption of Anglo-American academic standards in fields with distinct political and value orientations [such as the humanities and social sciences] is not only a form of self-colonization within academic disciplines, but it also goes against the statements on the value of scholarship issued by the Party Central Committee and the Ministry of Education in recent years. They have emphasized the need to use Chinese modes, styles, and manners 中国方式、中国风格、中国气派 to research Chinese issues and to construct the guiding thought of the Chinese academic discourse system. (Wu, 2016)

Second, the “List of Class A Journals” only reveals the tip of the iceberg regarding the serious problems in the Chinese economics education system. According to the “Indicator System and Related Explanations for the Fourth Round of Discipline Evaluation,” this “List of Class A Journals” was generated by the “Academic Degree Center requesting Thomson Reuters, Elsevier, CNKI, CSSCI, and CSCD to preliminarily select the list based on bibliometrics and other methods, and then inviting national doctoral supervisors to vote online, followed by recommendations from the Discipline Evaluation Group for Theoretical and Applied Economics of the Academic Degree Committee of the State Council.” This explanation reveals that although some scholars questioned and opposed the “List of Class A Journals” at the previous “Workshop

on Indicator Systems in Discipline Evaluation,” it actually obtained the approval of the majority of doctoral supervisors and members of the discipline evaluation group. This truthfully reflects the dominance of “worshipping and obsessing about all things foreign.” It also reflects the dominance of Western mainstream economics in higher education institutions in China and highlights how the Chinese economics education system has, to some extent, been reduced to a replica of the economics education system in developed capitalist countries, despite significant differences between the two.

Regarding the dominant influence of neoliberalism and Western mainstream economics in Chinese universities, the well-known Chinese-American scholar Philip C. C. Huang wrote with grave concern:

Within the trend of complying with “international standards,” neoliberalism has deeply penetrated into the textbooks and core journals of economics and has also established a hegemonic position in the selection of graduate students, appointment of faculty, and evaluation processes. A concrete example is the institution where I have been working in recent years. Despite being under the leadership of a capable dean who identifies with “alternative” scholarship and has inclinations toward the New Left, in reality, in critical areas such as admissions, hiring, and evaluations, “mainstream” economics is still in the hegemonic position. The selection of required readings, design of examination questions, and requirements for publishing papers are all dictated by the standards of “mainstream” economics, which has completely subordinated the discipline to the neoliberal knowledge system. Therefore, in practice, neoliberalism will control the future of the discipline.

(Huang, 2012: 63)

Many scholars consider the current problems in economics education in China to be a result of “Westernization.” Qiu Haiping has published a relevant article that has attracted widespread attention and debate (Qiu, 2014). Qiu criticized this phenomenon from the perspective of Marxist economics. By contrast, the articles I have published since 2003 on this topic have criticized the hegemonic position of Western mainstream economics in the Chinese economics community from the perspective of the history of economic thought, the scientific principle of pluralism, the scientific and philosophical foundations of economics and the direction of its future development, and the academic ecosystem. In developed Western countries, the majority of the members of the International Confederation of Associations for Pluralism in Economics and scholars involved in the “international movement for the reform of economics education” belong to non-Marxist, heterodox schools of thought within Western economics; few of them are Marxists. The serious problems in the economics education system in China do not simply stem from an “ideological” problem, as some people understand it. My own area of research is not Marxist political economy nor do I want to discuss the problems in economics education in China from the perspective of Marxist economics or “ideology.” Instead, I will continue to adhere to my own long-standing research approach and present the following suggestions for reform of the economics education system.

## **An Overall Approach and Specific Suggestions for the Reform of Economics Education in China**

### *Pluralistic Reforms*

China and Western countries differ in their economics education systems, particularly in the presence of a tradition of Marxist political economy in many Chinese universities. The degree of

pluralism in the economics education system in China, from this perspective, appears higher than that of universities in developed Western countries. In these universities in China, however, faculty working in the traditions of Marxist political economy are usually concentrated in Marxist institutes, while only a handful of them teach in universities specializing in finance and economics. In contrast, some second- and third-tier universities in Western countries offer courses on non-Marxist heterodox economics or “Western political economy,” which is different from the mainstream non-Marxist economics taught in China (Jia, 2017). From this particular perspective, the economics education system in China is less pluralistic than in developed Western countries. But, overall, while the economics education system in China is slightly more pluralistic than in developed Western countries, Western mainstream economics not only dominates the curriculum in Chinese universities, but it also has a dominant position in the evaluation of academic research, faculty recruitment and development, research incentives, graduate entrance examinations, and discipline evaluations. Therefore, the entire system needs to be reformed to embrace pluralism.

Over the past thirty years, there has been a significant amount of scholarly literature in developed Western countries that is critical of mainstream economics, but there has been little research on this topic in China. I conducted an in-depth study on this subject around 2004-05, but found that there was an overwhelming amount of literature in the West. If one gets too immersed in it, it is possible to spend a lifetime on it and become a critic of Western mainstream economics, like Tony Lawson at the University of Cambridge, and leave yourself little time to study specific economic problems. Therefore, after 2007, I have rarely read literature in this area. One of the main findings of these works is that Western mainstream economics has serious flaws in its philosophical foundations, research methods, and the relevance of its theories to reality.

Some economists, such as Bernard Guerrien, even argue that Western mainstream economics is irrelevant to reality. Therefore, he has raised doubts about whether mainstream economics courses should be retained in a reformed economics education system.

The majority of participants in the “international movement for the reform of economics education” agree that analyzing and understanding a complex and uncertain world requires a pluralistic approach. Therefore, pluralism in economics has become the core agenda of the movement. According to Uskali Mäki, pluralism in economics means “one world and many theories”: although the objective world is singular, it is composed of countless entities, complex evolutionary processes, and uncertain futures. To the different perspectives of observers, the world appears in various forms, and interpretations of it become diverse, fallible, and incomplete (Mäki, 2002). In other words, no paradigm in economics can provide a comprehensive and definitive answer to real-world problems, but they can offer different lenses through which to comprehend different economic realities, providing knowledge about economic phenomena from various angles; they are alternative means to understand reality. This approach means that it is absolutely necessary to retain Western mainstream economics courses because they offer valuable choices within the study of economics.

In the academic competition ecosystem, keeping Western mainstream economics is an important and necessary condition to prevent other economic paradigms from becoming dogmatic. Therefore, whether from a philosophical position or from the perspective of academic competition, the “international movement for the reform of economics education” opposes replacing old mainstream economics dogmas with new dogmas. It advocates the formation of a competitive pattern of pluralism in economics education, making pluralism an integral part of the foundational culture of economists. This allows for mutual tolerance among various economic

paradigms and promotes competition on an equal basis. Pluralistic economics education has now become a specialized field in economics research. The publication of the *International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Education* has been quarterly since 2011. Contrary to the scientific spirit of pluralism in economics, however, there has been a powerful trend of “only one economics” in China. Under the influence of this trend, the economics education system, modeled after developed Western countries, has resulted in the dominance of Western mainstream economics. Pluralist reforms are thus necessary, reforms that encompass theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary aspects. We will explore each of these issues in turn in the following discussion.

#### *A Pluralistic Curricular System*

Introductory courses on non-Marxist, heterodox economics should be taught in universities to create a pluralistic curricular system. In teaching basic economic theory, a pluralistic curricular system can be formed by offering Western economics, political economy (Marxist political economy), and “Western political economy” (i.e., non-Marxist, heterodox economics).

Ever since the reform and opening up period, China’s biggest mistake in introducing Western economic theories has been blindly following the trend of Western mainstream economics while neglecting the study of non-Marxist, heterodox economics, which only a few scholars have been studying. The main reasons for this situation are as follows: after “non-Marxist, heterodox economics” was marginalized and removed from prestigious universities in the West through suppression and exclusion, China started importing Western economic theories and all that people in China could see was “Western economics,” with the exception of a small handful of scholars. Francis Fukuyama’s argument about the “end of history” also played a

contributory role in China's adoption of Western economic theories. During the Cold War, the confrontation between the East and West led to extremism and dogmatism in both Soviet-style political economy and Western mainstream economics. The end of the Cold War marked the demise of the former and the apparent victory of the latter. In the absence of awareness or knowledge about Western non-Marxist, heterodox economics, almost all Chinese economists regarded Western mainstream economics as the "sole" form of economic theory in developed Western countries (Jia, 2017).

Non-Marxist, heterodox economics has a long history in the intellectual traditions of economic thought—numerous schools represent these traditions—and they provide a more accurate and profound description and analysis of the functioning mechanisms and patterns of market economies compared to "Western economics" (i.e., Western mainstream economics). As Michael Jacobs and Mariana Mazzucato have argued in their introduction to *Rethinking Capitalism*:

None of the key problems which Western capitalism has experienced over recent decades—weak growth and financial instability, declining investment and financialisation, the stagnation of living standards and rising inequality, dangerous environmental risk—are explained by [the idealized theories of the orthodox model]. . . .

Fortunately, there are plenty of resources within economics with which to do this. For these characteristics of capitalist economies are hardly revelatory. They have been analysed in theory and documented in practice for more than a hundred years of economic scholarship. They underlie the work of some of the greatest economists of the past century—such as Karl Polanyi, Joseph Schumpeter and John Maynard Keynes—and of the more recent schools of evolutionary, institutional and post-Keynesian economics.

As the separate chapters in this book show, analysis based on these foundations can generate searching critiques of current policy, and powerful alternative perspectives. (Jacobs and Mazzucato, 2016: 17-18)

Non-Marxist, heterodox economics in the West includes various schools of thought, including old institutional economics, post-Keynesian economics (including modern monetary theory), new Schumpeterian economics, feminist economics, socio-political economics, “The Other Canon” of economics (<http://othercanon.org>), and even ecological economics. One prominent figure in post-Keynesian economics, especially after the outbreak of the international financial crisis, is Hyman Minsky. In Chinese universities, however, the teaching of “Western economics” predominantly focuses on Western mainstream economics. Therefore, I suggest that reforms be made to the undergraduate economics curriculum in China’s finance and economics programs. This should involve reducing the class hours on “Western economics” and adding a course on Western non-Marxist, heterodox economics under the name of “Western political economy,” which should become one of the core courses in economics programs (Jia, 2017).

The current constraints on teaching hours in undergraduate economics education mean that adjustments can only be made by reducing the excessive emphasis on Western economics. In many economics departments, intermediate and even advanced courses in microeconomics, macroeconomics, and econometrics are offered at the undergraduate level. The design of these courses, however, does not consider the practical needs of students, as many undergraduates in finance and economics do not pursue theoretical research in economics after graduation and thus do not require in-depth knowledge in these areas. Therefore, these intermediate and advanced undergraduate courses should be eliminated. One-third of the time saved from these courses

should be allocated to “Western political economy,” while the remaining two-thirds should focus on economic methodologies, strengthening the teaching of the history of economics, the history of economic thought, and other relevant courses. In this way, a pluralistic curricular system can be introduced at the undergraduate level by teaching Western economics (mainstream economics), political economy (Marxist economics), and Western political economy (non-Marxist, heterodox economics) (Jia, 2017).

### *The Creative Development of Marxist Economics*

The creative development of Marxist economics entails opposing dogmatism and advocating mutual tolerance and openness within the field. It encourages the creation of new schools of thought and the writing of different styles of textbooks. This is an important way to solidify the position of Marxist economics in higher education. We can learn from the experiences and lessons of innovative Marxist economists in developed Western countries. The creative development of Marxist economics is not without principles, but involves innovating while adhering to its basic principles. The notion of “rational choice Marxism,” for example, is not Marxist economics, but rather neoclassical economics in a different guise. The regulation school and social accumulation school are examples of innovations that adhere to Marxist principles while incorporating foundations from Western heterodox economics. The reason for this difference lies in the fact that Marxist economics shares a common philosophical and methodological foundation with the latter, but not the former. For instance, critical realism in social science philosophy constitutes a common foundation for all schools of Western heterodox economics, which developed out of Marx’s pioneering ideas. There has been an ongoing debate

in the Western academic community about whether these developments represent the evolution of Marxist scientific philosophy over the past three decades.

There are few Chinese Marxist economists who have studied the relationship between Marxist economics, critical realism in social science philosophy, and Western heterodox economics, let alone innovations like the regulation school and social accumulation school. The reasons for this situation are many. Most Marxist economists in China have shown a strong preference for the mathematical and econometric models of Western mainstream economics while overlooking the historical methods employed by Western heterodox economics. They may even consider Western heterodox economics as a “tangent” and only associate Western economics with mainstream economics. In this context, Marxist economics not only loses a crucial ally in Western heterodox economics, but also rejects the theoretical innovations that can be learned from such economic theories. This reflects a certain degree of dogmatism and resistance to change within the Chinese Marxist economics community. There are also other significant reasons for the marginalization of Marxist economics in Chinese higher education in recent decades.

I am emphasizing the importance of the creative development of Marxist economics because it needs to consolidate its position in Chinese higher education. To do so, it should not be confined to the discipline of political economy, nor should the teaching of Marxist political economy be limited to specialized Marxist research institutes. Instead, its influence should be expanded in other theoretical and applied economics sub-fields. The most important approach to the creative development of Marxist economics is to build on the foundation of political economy and draw from and critically incorporate the research achievements of Western heterodox economics. At present, the textbooks used in university courses on public finance,

monetary and banking studies, and international economics are almost all based on Western mainstream economics. However, as far as I know, Western heterodox economics has made significant contributions in these three fields. Marxist economists can fully utilize their critical insights, draw inspiration from their work, and incorporate it into the development of textbooks that are more engaging and appealing to students than those based solely on Western mainstream economics.

### *Teaching Centered on Debate and Critical Thinking*

Pluralistic economics education requires debate and critical thinking. The theories and methods of mainstream Western economics, Marxist political economy, and Western heterodox economics should all be questioned. They should all be subject to critical debate to determine their strengths and weaknesses. Pluralistic teaching is not about simply listing different theories and methods together; it involves providing equal opportunities for each theory. By focusing on important economic issues, various economic theories (even conflicting ones) can be debated, highlighting their conflicting viewpoints. Through comparison, students can engage in critical learning, sophisticated understanding, and the appropriate use of theory. This approach to teaching is designed to disrupt traditional views of science; it is fundamentally different from the traditional teaching method of promoting a single, consensus-based ideology. It also means changing the binary mode of thinking (that something is either true or false) among students. It will help them recognize that scientific knowledge is subject to ongoing debates, that scientific understanding can be fallible, and that scientific conclusions are often temporary, which is true even with extensive data collection and rigorous quantitative analysis.

Teaching centered on debates and critical thinking poses a challenge to the epistemological structure of faculty. In theoretical economics, Western mainstream economics, Marxist political economy, and Western non-Marxist, heterodox economics constitute the three fundamental research paradigms or theoretical traditions. However, the majority of scholars returning from overseas institutions who currently work in Chinese higher education have predominantly received education in Western mainstream economics without systematic training in Marxist economics. Both domestically and internationally trained teachers are largely unfamiliar with Western heterodox economics, which presents a “knowledge gap” for faculty. If faculty are only knowledgeable in one or two of these three economic research paradigms, how can they effectively engage in teaching centered on debate and critical thinking? For instance, Western heterodox economics offers extensive critiques of Western mainstream economics and its textbooks, but the vast majority of Western economics textbooks in China do not comment on the limitations and deficiencies of mainstream theory, let alone engage in debate. One of the main reasons for this is that the majority of Western economics faculty are simply unaware of the existence of such literature.

Pluralistic economics education and critical teaching should be implemented in both theoretical and applied economics. Faculty involved in foundation courses should be trained and equipped to teach Western economics, political economy, and potential future courses on Western political economy. To ensure the effective implementation and improvement of critical teaching, each faculty member should have at least three years of teaching experience in one of the other two courses before engaging in long-term teaching of any of these three courses. The three fundamental paradigms or theoretical traditions in economics research exist not only within the field of theoretical economics, but also within the field of applied economics. In these fields,

measures that fundamentally ensure a pluralistic economics education and a critical teaching approach involve the development and use of textbooks that reflect and facilitate comparative analysis of the three fundamental economic paradigms.

### *Guided by Real-World Problems*

A fundamental requirement of pedagogical methods focused on vigorous debate and critical thinking is engagement with real-world problems. In the critical teaching of different theoretical paradigms, the focus should always be on the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches in explaining and addressing real-world problems. Debate-centered teaching can only revolve around the interpretations of different theoretical paradigms and their advantages and disadvantages in solving real-world problems.

In both domestic and international economics education, however, teaching is centered on tools such as mathematics and econometric models. This is referred to as “mathematical formalism,” where the choice of economic realities to be considered is based on the research tools being used. As a result, real-world economic realities are often excluded from both teaching and research. Many mathematical and econometric models taught and applied in economics are not directly relevant to real-world problems. This type of economics education and analysis revolves around a fictional world (Syll, 2023). In response to this situation, French economics students have passionately petitioned for change in their “post-autistic economics movement,” urging their professors to abandon this fictional world and stop excessively using mathematics.

The faculty and students in the “international movement for the reform of economics education” believe that a truly scientific methodology should first and foremost maintain an appropriately abstract relationship between models and reality, which is not necessarily tied to

the use of mathematics. Only by breaking free of this scientific standpoint, establishing a real scientific perspective, adopting a truly scientific attitude, and decoupling the scientific status, research methods, and scholarly agenda of economics from the dominance of the Western mainstream paradigm, including mathematical formalization, can we pave the way for economics to be redirected towards explaining and solving real-world problems. This will also facilitate the formation of a pluralistic intellectual landscape and allow space for various research methods other than mathematical formalization.

The “international movement for the reform of economics education” advocates overturning the relationship between analytical tools in Western mainstream economics and economic realities. They propose a problem-centered approach that rejects the constraints of dogma and selects or develops analytical tools based on the economic reality being studied. The use of certain tools or models is not the objective; only tools relevant to the analysis of the problem have inherent value. This problem-centered approach demands that economics education and research be guided by significant and urgent present-day economic issues such as technological innovation, income distribution, poverty, unemployment, an aging population, social exclusion, the ecological crisis, the energy crisis, and the international financial system. The focus should be on real-world relevance, prioritizing theoretical substance over technique, content over form, and reality over fiction. This approach aims to restore and strengthen the empirical foundation of economics and bring the field back to reality. Since mathematical formalism has become institutionalized in the economics education system in developed Western countries, making it like a deep-rooted weed that is almost impossible to eradicate, economics education in China should learn from this lesson. It should rectify the current excessive tool-

centric teaching methods, reform the economics education system, and eliminate the dominance of mathematical formalism in economics education and research.

### *Methodological Diversification and Interdisciplinary Approaches*

To achieve methodological diversification and adopt interdisciplinary approaches, it is important to offer compulsory courses on the methodologies of economics and elective courses in other social science disciplines in the undergraduate curriculum. Addressing the proliferation of mathematics (including econometrics) in economics education and research activities, Jacques Sapir wrote, “Still, I believe that if we could cut the time devoted to math in the curriculum by a half and dedicate a similar amount of time to methodology and epistemology, everybody would be better off” (Fullbrook, 2003: 61). Understanding the appropriate use of mathematics (including econometrics) in economics involves questions related to the methodologies of economics or, more broadly, the philosophy of science. However, in both domestic and international economics education, few economics departments offer courses on the methodologies of economics or the philosophy of science. This institutional condition provides the basis for the dominance of Western mainstream economics, especially mathematical formalism. As Bart Nooteboom has argued,

Science is not itself an institution but is institutionalized to the extent that it is subject to durable regulation, standards of legitimacy and excellence, procedures of evaluation. . . .

Methodology, on the other hand, is an institution, if we see methodology as regulative and constitutive of science, since it consists of a set of rules on how to conduct and legitimize science. (Nooteboom, 2001: 46)

The purpose of requiring students to take a mandatory course on the methodologies of economics is to emancipate their minds and break free of the dominance that the worldview and scientific perspective of Western mainstream economics has over economics education and research. It can also provide a theoretical foundation for pluralism in economics theory, an expansion of methods, and interdisciplinary development. In contrast to Western mainstream economics that analogizes economics to mathematics and physics, Marxist and heterodox economics in the West both consider economics to be a social science, rather than a natural science like mathematics or engineering. These two different perspectives have generated distinct ideas and actions in economics education. Western mainstream economics has drifted away from other social science disciplines, only acknowledging mathematical formalism as the sole scientific method of economics. As the renowned philosopher of science and post-Keynesian economist Tony Lawson has argued, in the Western economics community, “For a contribution even to be counted as economics (or to gain an audience) in mainstream circles, it is requisite that the author takes a mathematical approach and ultimately produces a formal model” (Lawson, 2003: 4). In other words, economic theory has become synonymous with “mathematical modeling.”

For Marxist economics, however, particularly heterodox economics in the West, mathematics and econometric models are just two of their many research methods. They do not oppose the use of mathematics or econometric models, but consider them as supplementary research methods. Their primary research methods are historical, comparative, interest analysis, statistical, and hermeneutic. Since Marxist economics and Western heterodox economics view their discipline as a social and historical science, they see economic phenomena as part of the broader social context, which includes politics, law, society, culture, and the geographical

environment. As a result, they place greater emphasis on drawing insights from the development of other social science disciplines. Compared with the research methods of mathematics and econometric models, they prioritize theoretical analysis, case studies, and research reports, focusing on absorbing new ideas and adopting new research methods from the development of other social science disciplines.

According to this scientific outlook, the research methods in economics should be pluralistic and economics education should offer elective courses from other social science disciplines. This would enable methodological diversification and interdisciplinary development. This scientific perspective should serve as a guiding principle in the current reforms in economics education in China. In addition to offering economic methodologies as a mandatory course, along with some elective courses from other social science disciplines, it will also be important to introduce some qualitative research methods from sociology such as grounded theory.

### *Teaching the History of Economics (or Social History of Economics) and History of Economic Thought*

Political economy is fundamentally a historical science. In the education systems of developed capitalist countries, fields such as the history of economics and history of economic thought were once taught as mandatory courses within economics departments. At present, however, the field of the history of economic thought faces an existential crisis in China and abroad. Two landmark events over the past decade have highlighted the crisis faced by the field of the history of economics and history of economic thought. In 2007, the Australian Bureau of Statistics proposed incorporating these two fields under “History, Archaeology, Religion, and Philosophy.” Strong opposition from historians of economic thought, however, forced the bureau

to shelve its plans. Nonetheless, the European Research Council classified these fields under “Studies on the Human Past: Archaeology, History, and Memory.” In 2011, thanks to the efforts of historians of economic thought, these fields were reinstated within the discipline of economics (Kates, 2013).

In the past two decades, due to the dominant influence of Western mainstream economics in China, the development of the history of economics and history of economic thought lags far behind that of Western countries. The field of the history of foreign economic thought, in particular, is gradually disappearing from universities in China despite being an institutionalized field of study. Among the five universities in China that were granted doctoral programs in the history of foreign economic thought in the reform and opening up period, except for Renmin University of China (from which I am about to retire), Fudan University, Wuhan University, and Liaoning University all stopped enrolling students between 2021 and 2023 (Jia, 2023). Beijing University will also cease recruiting doctoral students in this field in 2024.

In China, the teaching of economic history (or socio-economic history) and the history of economic thought also faces challenges in implementing the principles of pluralistic economics education. In economic history, over the past decade, some young returning Chinese economists have vigorously promoted cliometrics at domestic universities. Many young scholars have been drawn to it, believing it to be the only scientific method for historical research, unaware of its serious shortcomings, which have been criticized in the Western literature for many years. Cliometrics is essentially the application of the neoclassical economic paradigm to the study of history, which is ahistorical. In other words, it involves studying history using non-historical methods, which is a paradox in itself.

Prior to the “cliometrics” revolution in the late 1950s, research traditions emphasizing the importance of technology, institutions, economic structure, and their specific historical context held the mainstream position in the history of economics in Western countries. This included Marxist economic history, economic history in Germany and England from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s, and research on economic history by theorists such as Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, the American institutionalist school, and the French Annales school as well as the economic historical work of Karl Polanyi, which emerged in the 1940s. These traditions of economic history, however, have almost all disappeared from economics programs in Chinese universities. For three consecutive years during doctoral admissions interviews, I asked the same question to candidates specializing in economic history (around 2-3 candidates each year): besides cliometrics, do you know any other methods for studying economic history? Even with my prompting, not a single candidate could provide a satisfactory answer. The exclusive and dominant influence of cliometrics in the field of Chinese economic history undoubtedly serves to further consolidate the hegemony of Western mainstream and neoliberal economics.

#### *Publishing Overseas and Establishing Independent and Autonomous Academic Norms*

Above, I criticized the “List of Class A Journals” for economics, a list that was temporarily canceled during the fourth round of discipline evaluation at universities in China in 2016. Now, I would like to further discuss the issues reflected by this decision. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the trend of “aligning economics with international standards” swept through the Chinese economics community and many universities responded by requiring faculty to publish in overseas scholarly journals for tenure and promotion. Currently, the majority of universities in China still consider the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) as the highest

standard for evaluating faculty publications in philosophy and the social sciences. In economics in Chinese higher education institutions, publishing overseas is not treated equally. Instead, a tiered classification system for foreign journals (primarily in English) has been established.

The most representative and widely recognized journal classification system in China is the journal ranking system used by Shanghai University of Finance and Economics. It categorizes English-language economics journals into four tiers: Top Tier (referred to as the “Top 5”), Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 (Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, 2008). In the fourth round of discipline evaluation in economics, the “List of Class A Journals” included 12 foreign-language journals, 11 of which were from the Top Tier (5) and Tier 1 (6) journals in the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics ranking system. This reflects how important the journal list of the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics has been in faculty evaluations at Chinese institutions of higher learning.

What are the problems with the “List of Academic Journals for Tenure-Track Faculty at Shanghai University of Finance and Economics”? By examining the list, several characteristics become obvious. First, among the over 300 SSCI journals included in the list, there is not a single journal dedicated to the study of Marxist economics. Second, the list fails to consider the differences between economic fields. For instance, there is no journal included for the field of the history of economic thought. Third, the list is dominated by the singular paradigm and research methods of mathematical formalism. While there are several journals related to the history of economics in the list, unlike the field of the history of economic thought, they were included because of the predominant use of cliometrics in their pages. Fourth, among the Top Tier, Tier 1, and Tier 2 journals in the list, there is not a single academic journal representing the various schools of Western heterodox economics. Only the *Cambridge Journal of Economics* is

included in the list, and even then only in Tier 3, the lowest level. Fifth, the journal list for tenure-track and tenured faculty at Shanghai University of Finance and Economics does not include a single domestic Chinese economics journal. In other words, faculty evaluations are based solely on publishing in overseas, foreign-language journals. Although different Chinese universities have different tiered classification systems for foreign-language journals, these classification systems generally exhibit similar characteristics.

In reality, the journal classification system of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics is essentially a replica of the evaluation system for Western mainstream economics in China. In developed Western countries, the purpose of journal classification and ranking is quite clear. They aim to exclude and eliminate Marxist economics and non-Marxist heterodox economics, and even fields like the history of economic thought, from universities. These journal classification systems serve as a tool to undermine the survival of Marxist economics, non-Marxist heterodox economics, and researchers in the field of the history of economics who adopt non-quantitative approaches in their work. In developed Western countries, these scholars and their disciplines have faced a fatal blow, as their research findings are hardly publishable in the top three tiers of journals according to the classification system. Consequently, faculty evaluations in universities and departments that have these fields are inevitably low. Under this system, universities are compelled to adopt discriminatory institutional policies and measures against these economic schools and fields in order to improve faculty performance. In recruitment, promotion, research strategies, and other decision-making processes, these universities are forced to discriminate against these economic schools, and may even go as far as to deny tenure to researchers who are not aligned with the mainstream economics paradigm. This trend has become evident in China as well.

The faculty evaluation system represented by the journal classification system in the list of academic journals for tenure-track and tenured faculty at Shanghai University of Finance and Economics has had a destructive impact on the academic ecosystem of Chinese higher education in which a hundred flowers are supposed to bloom and a hundred schools of thought are supposed to contend. Under its influence, many important economics journals published by Chinese research institutions are increasingly aligned with the Western mainstream economics paradigm. This has resulted in significant negative effects on the rankings of institutions of higher education, the direction of academic development, the hiring of faculty, and ideological considerations in universities in China. If this situation remains unchanged, developed Western countries will inevitably dominate the problematics and discourses of Chinese scholars. This is why I argue that, although the fourth round of discipline evaluation in Chinese higher education canceled the “List of Class A Journals” under pressure, no one has addressed the underlying issues and crucial concerns in terms of guiding principles.

#### *Faculty Development and Entrance Examination Questions for Graduate Students*

The significant influx of “returnees” 海归 into the faculty of universities in China began around the time of a seminar on the “Review of Economics Education in China over the Past Ten Years” at Renmin University of China in June 2005. During the seminar, a well-known professor from Fudan University proposed that China should reduce the training of domestic economics doctoral students and instead focus on sending outstanding students to Western universities. Surprisingly, this proposal received wide support from the majority of participants. At that time, I criticized this trend and argued that senior economics faculty should primarily be cultivated domestically (Jia, 2006). Over the past decade, universities in China, especially economics departments, have

witnessed a continuous surge in the recruitment of highly-paid graduates from prestigious doctoral programs in developed Western countries, particularly the United States. Another trend has been the hiring of foreign economics deans. Consequently, the proportion of “returnees” in the faculty, an indicator of faculty development in the discipline evaluation, has been constantly on the increase.

Given that “returnees” in the field of economics are primarily trained within the monolithic education system of Western mainstream economics, particularly in the United States, I would like to propose the following recommendations. First, the proportion of “returnees” in the recruitment of economics faculty in universities in China should not exceed one-third of the total number of faculty members. The development of economics faculty should primarily rely on a domestic, pluralistic economics education system. Second, we should learn from the experiences and lessons of the “National Economics Talent Training Base” program implemented at universities in China more than two decades ago to provide faculty reserves for economics teaching. Since the talent pool in Western mainstream economics can be provided by “returnees,” I suggest that the “national economics talent training bases” should focus on nurturing students and faculty in research paradigms that lay outside Western mainstream economics.

It is also necessary to improve the subjects and content of the entrance examinations for master’s and doctoral programs. In the admission examinations for most finance and economics master’s programs at universities in China, the relevant subjects include mathematics and “Western economics” (microeconomics, macroeconomics, and econometrics). In the admission examinations for doctoral programs, most universities only test students on “Western economics” as the major subject. I have previously pointed out that the 2002 regulations issued

by the Ministry of Education, which stipulate that in the entrance examination for master's programs in economics mathematics is to weigh as heavily as economics, undoubtedly exacerbate the mathematization of economics (Jia, 2003). The excessive emphasis on mathematics and "Western economics" in graduate programs in China is a product of imitating the dominant Western mainstream economics education system in developed Western countries; it is a system that needs to be reformed.

*Reforming the Methods of Discipline Evaluation and Encouraging Pluralistic Competition in Economics Education*

In May 2016, I made the following suggestions about the methods used in the fourth round of national discipline evaluation: the field of economics should restore the previous practice of assessing (key) disciplines based on their sub-fields rather than conducting a comprehensive evaluation at the level of theoretical or applied economics. I made this suggestion because different sub-fields have distinct characteristics. For example, within the field of theoretical economics, there are six sub-fields: political economy, Western economics, the history of economics, the history of economic thought, the world economy, and population, resource, and environmental economics. These sub-fields vary in popularity and there are different evaluation criteria for each sub-field. Therefore, it is inappropriate to apply the exact same evaluation standards to these diverse sub-fields.

Over the past decade, conducting evaluations at the level of major disciplines has caused a serious imbalance in the development of sub-fields. In the field of theoretical economics, for example, the lack of direct evaluation of its sub-fields and the dominance of Western mainstream economics has led to the severe decline of economic history and the history of economic thought, which are sub-fields of equal importance to "Western economics." This has resulted in a

significant squeeze on the fields of political economy and the history of economic thought, to the extent that these sub-fields have disappeared from many universities, including Beijing Normal University, Sun Yatsen University, and Shandong University. Considering these factors, I suggest restoring the practice of evaluating key disciplines based on their sub-fields. This approach will serve two purposes: first, it will avoid the decline of other sub-fields in theoretical economics caused by the dominance of Western mainstream economics; second, it will help prevent the serious homogenization of economics in Chinese universities. Overall, it will encourage universities to develop their unique competitive advantages in their disciplines and facilitate a balanced distribution of talent among the universities, especially those in central and western China.

## **Conclusion**

So far, I have provided a comprehensive overview of the major weaknesses in the economics education system in China and put forward ten specific proposals for reform. From 2014 to 2018, I submitted most of these reform proposals to internal publications, but my proposals were not adopted. During this period, I also wrote letters to relevant departments in the Ministry of Education, but received no response, which has been discouraging. Since 2018, however, there have been significant changes in both the domestic and international environments that are favorable for the reform of the economics education system in China. The “once-in-a-century changes” 百年未有之大变局 mentioned by the country’s leader poses serious challenges to the dominance of Western mainstream economics in higher education in China. On the one hand, the actions of the Trump and Biden administrations to suppress Chinese companies—thus completely abandoning the dogma of free competition and free trade—as well as their attempts to “decouple” from the Chinese economy, have been a “slap” in the face for Chinese neoliberals.

The latter are unable to explain to their students why their “revered teachers” are “rebellious” against neoliberalism, which has caused a crisis for neoliberalism in Chinese universities. On the other hand, China currently faces severe challenges in addressing important economic issues such as widening income inequality, the rise of the “lying flat” 躺平 movement, the “996” work culture, increasing unemployment, declining birth rates, an aging society, and the possibility of long-term economic stagnation. It is evident that economists who fiddle with mathematics and econometric models within the “ivory tower” cannot provide valuable solutions to the enormous challenges facing the Chinese economy. Unless the Chinese government is willing to tolerate the fact that many of its economics and management professors receive high salaries for publishing papers abroad that have little value in addressing China’s actual economic problems, that “ivory tower” economics is a waste of intellectual resources, and that economics education in Chinese universities has lost its function of serving society, reforms of the Chinese economics education system will inevitably become a priority.

Since May 2016, there have also been some changes in Chinese academia that are conducive to the reform of the economics education system. Here are two examples. First, party and state leaders have delivered speeches addressing certain issues within the social sciences and scientific community that have prompted scholars to reflect on the major weaknesses in the economics education system in China. On May 17, 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping delivered an important speech in Beijing at a symposium on philosophy and the social sciences. In the speech, Xi called on

all philosophy and social science workers with ideals and aspirations to stand at the forefront of the times, understand the changes throughout history, and lead in ideological thinking. They should actively contribute their research, insights, and policy suggestions

to the Party and the people, shouldering the glorious mission bestowed upon them by history. . . and strive to construct a philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics, fully reflecting Chinese modes, styles, and manners in guiding ideology and in their disciplinary, academic, and discursive systems. (Xi, 2016a)

On May 30, 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping also gave an important speech at the National Conference on Science and Technology Innovation, the Academician Conferences of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering, and the 9<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Chinese Association for Science and Technology, in which he emphasized: “The vast majority of science and technology workers should write papers on the land of our motherland and apply their scientific and technological achievements to the great cause of modernization (Xi, 2016b). Since then, the notion of “writing papers on the land of our motherland” 把论文写在祖国的大地上 has stirred the hearts of many knowledge workers, much like a gentle breeze blowing across the land. It is evident that the current Chinese economics education system is not in line with the spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping’s speeches and requires reform. At the same time, it also indicates that the calls I have made since 2003 for “forging a path of economics education and development with Chinese characteristics” and “innovation in economics on China’s own initiative” (Jia and Huang, 2006) have finally received a response at the national level.

Second, the “top journals” in China’s economics community, *Economics Research* 经济研究 and *Management World* 管理世界, have both issued statements that strongly oppose the negative academic practices of “mathematization,” “modelization,” and the tendency to prioritize foreign over domestic research in Chinese economics and management. This is the first time that such a stance has been taken by Chinese academic institutions. On March 24, 2020, the website

of the National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences of the State Council republished an article entitled “Against ‘Mathematization’ and ‘Modelization’ in Academic Research and Writing” by Li Zhijun, the president, and Shang Zengjian, editor-in-chief, of *Management World* (Li and Shang, 2020), which was subsequently published in *Management World* as an editorial. Some commentators pointed out that the National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences, as a permanent institution of the National Leading Group for Philosophy and Social Sciences, had clear intentions when they reprinted the article on their official website. After the publication of the article, many journal editors and professionals in the field shared it on their social media, mostly expressing positive affirmations and support. On the following day, March 26, the editorial department of *Economic Research* published an article entitled “Efforts to Overcome ‘Quantitative Bias’ and Construct an Economics with Chinese Characteristics: Clarifications on the Manuscript Requirements for *Economic Research*” on its website (Editorial Board, 2020). Considering that *Economic Research* has been a flagship journal in China that strongly promoted Western mainstream economics, the significance of these “statements” by these two top journals cannot be underestimated. It not only suggests the impact that the intervention by the Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee has had on *Economic Research* in recent years, but also reveals the journal’s own reflections on the problems of the dominance of Western mainstream economics and mathematical formalism.

The “statements” by *Economic Research* and *Management World*, however, only represent a sporadic and localized questioning by Chinese academic institutions of the dominant influence of Western mainstream economics in the Chinese economics community. Recently, I conducted telephone interviews with four senior, mid-career, and junior scholars who are engaged in teaching and studying political economy, economic history, and the history of

economic thought. They unanimously agreed that the dominance of Western mainstream economics in universities in China has not only failed to decline, but has become even more prominent than before 2016. One interviewee pointed out that at the national level, although the central government has recognized and attached importance to the problems existing in economics education, there is a lack of effective measures. At the institutional level, in the leadership positions of universities and economics departments across the country, those in power are predominantly individuals who have built their careers on Western mainstream economics or the neoliberal paradigm. They harbor significant resistance to reforms of the economics education system and their resistance is strong. At the junior faculty level, there is no movement for reform, as the dominance of the Western mainstream economics paradigm as a “belief” is absolute within the teaching faculty. There is almost no “mass” support for pluralistic reforms of economics education. The problems in the economics education system in China have almost reached the point of “no return.” It is easy to see that the frozen ground cannot be thawed in a single day. The reform of the Chinese economics education system is not something that can be solved simply by the speeches of national leaders; it will be a long and laborious process.

This situation places significant constraints on the central leadership and the relevant national departments in their long-standing emphasis on constructing disciplinary, academic, and discursive systems with Chinese modes, styles, and manners. Nor is the situation conducive to the survival and sustainable development of scholars and institutions that advocate for “Chinese subjectivity” and pursue independent academic innovation, as well as those engaged in “independent innovation in Chinese economics” (Huang, 2012, 2009). On April 24, 2022, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out during an inspection at Renmin University of China: “Accelerating the construction of a philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics

ultimately involves constructing an independent knowledge system in China” (Xi, 2022). The core task of “constructing an independent knowledge system in China” naturally requires extracting new theories from Chinese experiences and practices. As the famous philosopher of science Norwood Russell Hanson has said, observation is theory-laden. “Constructing an independent knowledge system in China” requires relying on existing ideas and theories and engaging in dialogue through the comparative interaction of empirical reality and various competing theoretical frameworks. Only through such a process can Chinese scholars gradually form an independent knowledge tradition by challenging existing theories and proposing new ones. This is why pluralism in economics education is so important and why the field of economic history, which serves as the “gene pool” for economic theories, is indispensable. With the dominance of Western mainstream economics in economics education, how can we make sense of General Secretary Xi Jinping’s statement at the symposium on philosophy and the social sciences that “the positive achievements made in philosophy and the social sciences in all countries can serve as nourishment for a philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics”? How can we possibly “construct an independent knowledge system in China” through the clash of different theories in dialogue with reality?

General Secretary Xi Jinping has issued a call to China’s vast community of knowledge workers to “write papers on the land of our motherland” and “construct an independent knowledge system in China.” This call reinforces my belief in the necessity and urgency of reforming the economics education system in China. Although the dominance of Western mainstream economics in China’s economics education may persist for a considerable period, “the green mountains cannot hinder the waters that must flow eastwards” after all. The severe challenges China faces, both domestically and internationally, will ultimately compel the reform

of the economics education system in China, creating the necessary conditions for more Chinese scholars to engage in independent theoretical innovation rooted in China's reality. This is an inherent requirement for a philosophy and social sciences with Chinese characteristics and for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. As Francis Bacon wrote in the preface to his *The Great Instauration* (1620), a work on restoring the arts and sciences, I also hope to “entreat men to believe that it is not an opinion to be held, but a work to be done; and to be well assured that I am laboring to lay the foundation, not of any sect or doctrine, but of human utility and power” (Bacon, 1999: 75).

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