

OBITUARY

Mark Blaug (1927–2011)

Naoki Haraya

Mark Blaug, a prominent scholar in the fields of economic history, cultural economics, history of economic thought, economic methodology, and economics of education, passed away on November 18, 2011, at 84 years of age. Blaug was born in the Hague, the Netherlands, in 1927, but his family left there before the Nazi invasion, and he took a higher education in the United States. He got a Ph.D. under the supervision of George Stigler in 1955 at Columbia University and started his career at Yale University, then moved to the Institute of Education at the University of London. Afterward, he also worked at the London School of Economics, the University of Buckingham, the University of Amsterdam, and Erasmus University Rotterdam. He published numerous books, articles, essays, and book reviews in various fields of economics.

Blaug is well known in Japan, especially as a specialist in the history of economics and economic methodology. His several books in those fields have been translated into Japanese and widely read by Japanese intellectuals. His first book, *Ricardian Economics* (1958), was translated by Shoken Mawatari and Hiroyasu Shima in 1981. *Economic Theory in Retrospect* (1962), his magnum opus in the field of the history of economics, was translated in three parts by Yoshikazu Kubo, Kazuo Mazane, Shiro Sugihara, Saiichi Miyazaki, Tsuneyoshi Seki, and Eiichi Asano in 1966–1968. This team of scholars also translated the 3rd edition (1979), in four parts, in 1982–1986. *The Cambridge Revolution* (1974) was translated by Masao Fukuoka and Tamotsu Matsuura in 1977.

Toshihiro Nakaya, who stayed at the University of London as a visiting scholar from 1986 to 1988 and who became a friendly associate of Blaug's, attempted to spread awareness of his work to a wider readership among Japanese economists. He translated three of Blaug's books: *Great Economists since Keynes* (1985) in 1994, *Great Economists before Keynes* (1986) in 1989, and *John Maynard Keynes* (1990) in 1991.

Not only Blaug's books but also several of his articles were translated and

had a major impact on Japanese academia. “Education and the Employment Problem in Developing Countries” (1973) was translated by Yoshihiro Mizuno in *The Japanese Journal of Labour Studies*, 16 (5), in 1974. “The Entrepreneur in Marx and Schumpeter” (1986) was translated by Kensuke Sasaki with a comment by Shoken Mawatari in *Keizai Hyoron*, 34 (9), in 1985. In addition, B. Snowdon and H. R. Vane (1999), *Conversations with Leading Economists: Interpreting Modern Macroeconomics*, which contains an interview with Blaug, was translated by Katsuji Okachi in 2001.

Unfortunately, Blaug’s most important work in the field of methodology, *The Methodology of Economics, or How Economists Explain* (1980) has no Japanese version. However, his methodological stance in this work, in which he applied Popper’s falsificationism and Lakatos’s methodology of scientific research programmes into economics, was introduced by Mawatari and other Japanese scholars, and have therefore become well known and acquired a certain following in Japanese academia. Mawatari examined Blaug’s argument especially thoroughly in his book *The Methodology of Economics from Adam Smith to Milton Friedman* (1990) (in Japanese).

Mawatari introduced not only Blaug’s ideas but also Blaug himself to Japan, inviting him on scholarly visits in 1984 and 1999. In November 1984, Blaug attended the 48th Annual Conference of the Japanese Society for the History of Economic Thought at Tohoku University in Sendai, where he gave a special lecture titled “What Ricardo Said and What Ricardo Meant.” Then, returning from May to June 1999, he conducted seminars at Senshu University in Tokyo, at Tohoku University, and at Kwansei Gakuin University in Nishinomiya. Blaug presented a paper titled “Ugly Currents in Modern Economics” at Senshu and Kwansei Gakuin, and one called “Recent University Reform in Britain: As an Economist Sees It” at Tohoku. All the seminars enjoyed considerable attendances and lively discussions. In addition, after the seminar at Tohoku University, Blaug and a group of Japanese historians of economics took a short trip to Akiu Onsen, a hot spring resort in the region, and enjoyed a rest there.

The Japanese Society for the History of Economic Thought also maintained a close relationship with Blaug for years. He was a member of the International Advisory Board for the society’s journal, *The History of Economic Thought*, beginning in 2001.

Let me now recount some personal memories of Mark Blaug. When I was a graduate student at the Erasmus Institute for Philosophy and Economics at Erasmus University Rotterdam in 2004–2005, I had an opportunity to take his class on the “History of Economics,” based on his famous textbook, *Economic Theory in Retrospect* (5th edition). His style of teaching was a classical one, so we students first listened to him lecture on the content of the book, and then

asked various questions about his text and his lecture. He gently answered all our queries, completely dispelling all our concerns. One day, I found a small mistake in the textbook and hesitantly pointed it out to him; to my surprise, he welcomed my input and promised me that it would be corrected in the next edition. He said that it is impossible to eradicate all errors from one's work, but that nevertheless, we have to continue revising it and trying to progressively improve it. I have always felt that he actually conducted his research this way, in accordance with his own methodology and principles.

(Naoki Haraya: Faculty of International Communication,
Gunma Prefectural Women's University)