

Collaborative Teaching Pathways between Marxist Political Economy and Western Economics from an Interdisciplinary Perspective

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Abstract

In the context of China's turn toward high-quality development and the expanding digital economy, university economics education faces a dual challenge: to consolidate Marxist political economy as the fundamental guiding framework while drawing effectively on Western economics as a core analytical toolkit. In practice, however, these two theoretical traditions are often taught in parallel and in isolation, resulting in fragmented knowledge structures, weak connections between theory and practice, and a limited ability of students to interpret complex socio-economic issues from multiple perspectives. This study responds by proposing an interdisciplinary model of collaborative teaching between Marxist political economy and Western economics. Using literature review, comparative analysis and illustrative teaching cases, it clarifies the distinct yet complementary teaching objectives and core categories of the two theories, and constructs a rationale grounded in constructivist learning theory, dialectical materialist epistemology and interdisciplinary education theory. On this basis, the study develops a three-dimensional pathway of "theoretical mutual learning, methodological integration and practice bridging." Concretely, it suggests restructuring course content around shared themes such as value, distribution, digital economy and common prosperity; designing dual-theory case teaching, blended learning and cross-course project-based learning; and building collaborative education platforms that connect classroom teaching with university-industry cooperation, academic exchange and field-based social investigation. The paper argues that, supported by cross-disciplinary teacher development, multi-dimensional assessment and integrated teaching resources, this collaborative model can transform the prevailing parallel pattern into a synergistic one and significantly enhance the quality and integrity of economics education in Chinese universities.

Keywords

Marxist political economy; Western economics; Interdisciplinary teaching; Teaching collaboration; Curriculum ideological and political education.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and significance

Since the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, documents such as the Several Opinions on Deepening the Reform and Innovation of Ideological and Political Theory Courses in Schools in the New Era have explicitly required universities to promote the integration of ideological-political education with professional courses and to cultivate "all-round" socialist builders and successors[1]. In economics disciplines, this requirement has translated into a dual task: to maintain the foundational role of Marxist political economy as the

guiding theoretical paradigm, and to fully absorb and critically utilize the analytical tools and methods of contemporary Western economics. At the same time, the global movement to rethink economics education—represented by initiatives such as the Economy Studies project—has continuously criticized the narrowness and formalism of mainstream curricula and called for pluralist, real-world, and value-conscious economics programs[2]. These trends highlight an international consensus: economics education must go beyond a single theoretical paradigm and isolated discipline boundaries to help students understand complex socio-economic realities and address contemporary challenges such as financial crises, climate change, and inequality. In China, however, Marxist political economy is typically offered as a theoretical or ideological-political course, while Western economics is delivered as a professional core curriculum in economics and related majors. This structural division leads to several problems: students often perceive the two theories as mutually exclusive systems; overlaps and gaps coexist at the level of core concepts; and teaching objectives and evaluation standards lack coherence. As a result, universities find it difficult to cultivate graduates who are both theoretically grounded in Marxism and skillful in modern economic analysis. Therefore, constructing collaborative teaching pathways between Marxist political economy and Western economics, based on an interdisciplinary vision, is of considerable importance for:

- a. Responding to the demand for interdisciplinary training under the new round of scientific-technological revolution and industrial transformation (e.g., digital economy, green transition).
- b. Enhancing the quality and effectiveness of economics education, by overcoming the fragmentation of theory, method, and practice.
- c. Strengthening curriculum-based ideological and political education, enabling value education to be internalized within disciplinary knowledge and problem-solving processes[3].

2. Literature review

2.1. Teaching reform in Marxist political economy

Recent years have witnessed active exploration of innovative pedagogy in Marxist political economy. Zheng, Chen, and Ye, for example, integrate experimental economics methods into teaching surplus value theory, designing behavioral experiments to help students “see” the production process of absolute, relative, and super surplus value and thus deepen their intuitive understanding of Marx’s core concepts[4]. This line of research emphasizes modernizing the teaching of Marxist political economy through tools such as experimental economics, simulations, and digital platforms, while retaining its theoretical depth and critical spirit.

At the same time, various studies discuss how to embed Marxist political economy more deeply into ideological and political theory courses, linking the labor theory of value, surplus value theory, and distribution theory with contemporary issues like income inequality and common prosperity. Yet, many of these explorations remain intra-disciplinary; they seldom systematically connect Marxist political economy teaching with Western economics curricula at the course or program level.

2.2. Teaching innovation in Western economics

In the international literature on economics education, works such as *Economy Studies: A Guide to Rethinking Economics Education* argue for pluralism in theory, contextual understanding of economic systems, and strong connections to real-world problems. They propose curriculum building blocks including economic history, political-economic systems, and economic theories, and advocate pragmatic pluralism and curriculum review to redesign economics programs[5].

In China, research on the ideological and political construction of Western economics courses has expanded rapidly. Liu and He use bibliometric and knowledge mapping techniques to show that “curriculum ideological and political education” has become a key theme in higher education, with economics courses as important testing grounds[2]. Jiang further explores macroeconomics teaching under an OBE framework, illustrating how learning outcomes can simultaneously target economic theory competence and value formation, and how ideological and political education can be organically integrated into macroeconomic content[6].

These studies demonstrate that Western economics teaching in China is undergoing both pedagogical and ideological-political reforms. Nonetheless, their discussions often focus on how to handle Western economics “within itself” (e.g., adding ideological-political elements or enhancing case-based teaching), rather than on its structural integration with Marxist political economy.

2.3. Research gaps on collaborative teaching of the two theories

Research explicitly addressing collaborative teaching of Marxist political economy and Western economics remains limited. Internationally, Privalov and Privalova analyze 28 years of interaction between mainstream economics and political economy textbooks, arguing for new textbook models that link modern economics with classical political economy within a pluralist and systemic framework[2]. Fine similarly discusses the complicated relationship between economics and interdisciplinarity, indicating that political economy has often migrated to other social sciences rather than being integrated within economics curricula[7].

In the Chinese context, many studies compare Marxist political economy with Western economics at the level of theoretical content or ideological standpoint, but do not propose concrete course structures, teaching models, and evaluation systems for collaborative teaching. There is a lack of structured discussion on:

- 1) How to design shared modules and “concept pairs” across the two theories
- 2) How to organize teaching activities that require students to use both frameworks to analyze real problems
- 3) How to build assessment systems that measure collaborative thinking rather than single-theory mastery

3. Research design and innovations

To address these gaps, this paper adopts a multi-method approach:

Literature research: Systematic review of domestic and international literature on teaching Marxist political economy, Western economics, curriculum-based ideological and political education, and interdisciplinary teaching.

Comparative analysis: Comparison of theoretical categories, teaching objectives, and curriculum structures of the two theories, as well as their pedagogical innovations.

Case analysis: Extraction of typical reform cases such as experimental teaching in Marxist political economy, OBE-based macroeconomics courses, and cross-curricular ideological-political initiatives[4].

Based on the above, the article constructs a conceptual framework for teaching collaboration and proposes a three-dimensional pathway encompassing “theoretical mutual learning–methodological integration–practice bridging,” supported by institutional safeguards in teacher development, evaluation reform, and resource construction.

Relative to existing studies, the innovations of this paper lie in:

1. **An interdisciplinary definition of collaborative teaching** that connects Marxist political economy and Western economics not only at the level of content but also at the levels of epistemology, methodology, and practice.
2. **A three-dimensional collaborative path model** that concretizes “theoretical mutual learning, methodological integration, and practice bridging” into actionable curriculum designs and teaching strategies.
3. **Integration of domestic policy context and international reform trends**, linking China’s curriculum ideological and political construction with global rethinking of economics education.
4. **An implementation-oriented perspective**, highlighting teacher training, assessment reform, and teaching resource integration as necessary safeguards for sustainable collaborative teaching.

4. Theoretical Foundations for Collaborative Teaching

4.1. Conceptual clarification

4.1.1. The connotation of interdisciplinary teaching collaboration

Interdisciplinary teaching collaboration refers to a teaching mode in which two or more disciplines (or theoretical paradigms within a discipline) jointly design learning objectives, coordinate content, co-organize teaching activities, and co-develop evaluation systems to help students form integrated knowledge structures and problem-solving capabilities. Recent research on interdisciplinary teaching readiness emphasizes that collaboration requires not only knowledge integration but also teaching skills and attitudes that support cross-boundary learning[8]. In the context of this paper, “collaborative teaching between Marxist political economy and Western economics” means:

Content level: identifying overlapping and complementary concepts, and forming shared modules and “concept pairs”;

Methodological level: using teaching designs that require students to mobilize both theoretical frameworks;

Practice level: linking classroom learning to social practice, policy analysis, and enterprise cases using dual theoretical perspectives.

4.1.2. Core categories and teaching goals of the two theoretical systems

Marxist political economy focuses on the social relations of production and the historically specific capitalist mode of production. Its core categories include value, surplus value, capital, class, reproduction, and crises. Teaching goals typically include:

- Cultivating students' ability to analyze socio-economic phenomena from the perspective of historical materialism;
- Understanding the inner laws and contradictions of capitalist development;
- Strengthening value orientations towards social justice and common prosperity.

Western economics, in its mainstream form, emphasizes individual rational choice and market allocation mechanisms. Microeconomics centers on utility maximization, profit maximization, and market equilibrium; macroeconomics deals with aggregate variables such as output, employment, inflation, and growth. Its teaching goals focus on:

- Equipping students with rigorous analytical tools (e.g., optimization, equilibrium, comparative statics);
- Training them to interpret and predict economic phenomena using models and data;
- Enhancing their capacity to participate in policy analysis and economic decision-making.

From a collaborative perspective, Marxist political economy offers a critical and historical lens and a value framework, while Western economics offers formal analytical tools and micro-macro modeling techniques. Effective teaching collaboration should allow students to move between structural-critical and model-based modes of thinking, rather than simply juxtaposing two separate "theory blocks[2].

4.2. Theoretical rationale for teaching collaboration

4.2.1. Constructivist learning theory

Constructivist learning theory holds that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with new information, existing cognitive structures, and social contexts. When students are exposed to multiple theoretical frameworks for interpreting the same phenomenon, they are prompted to compare, reflect, and re-organize their mental models, thereby achieving deeper understanding.

Collaborative teaching between Marxist political economy and Western economics, if designed around authentic problems (e.g., platform economy regulation, real estate cycles, income distribution), can guide students to construct multi-layered problem representations: from micro incentives to macro structures, from model-based predictions to critical evaluation of assumptions. This aligns closely with constructivist principles.

4.2.2. Dialectical materialist epistemology

Dialectical materialism emphasizes the unity of opposites, the interpenetration of contradictions, and the historical and practical nature of cognition. From this standpoint, Marxist political economy and Western economics can be seen as different theoretical responses to the same evolving capitalist reality. Their collaborative teaching should not aim to mechanically "merge" them, but rather to guide students to recognize their different premises,

analytical focuses, and value orientations, and to grasp the dialectical relationship between critique and utilization.

Using experimental economics methods to teach surplus value theory, for example, not only inherits Marxist methodology but also leverages a research tool originally developed within mainstream economics[4]. This hybrid design itself embodies dialectical thinking in teaching.

4.2.3. Interdisciplinary education theory

Interdisciplinary education research suggests that high-quality interdisciplinary teaching requires a clear framework of competencies, including knowledge integration, instructional design, and reflective attitudes[8]. For economics education, interdisciplinary collaboration between Marxist political economy and Western economics can:

- Prevent “single paradigm dominance” and enhance theoretical pluralism;
- Improve students’ ability to link economic models with institutional, historical, and political contexts;
- Support the development of curriculum ideological and political education by embedding value reflection into economic analysis[3].

5. Status Quo and Challenges of Teaching the Two Theories

5.1. Current teaching situation

5.1.1. Curriculum structure: Parallel and isolated courses

In most universities, Marxist political economy is located within ideological–political theory course sequences, while Western economics comprises core courses in economics and related majors. The two are usually offered by different schools or departments, with limited coordination in syllabus design, teaching schedules, or assessment. This institutional arrangement easily leads to:

- Content overlap in basic concepts (e.g., value, price, competition, distribution) without explicit mapping or comparison;
- Gaps regarding new issues such as digital platforms, financialization, or environmental sustainability, which are sometimes neglected by both courses.

5.1.2. Teaching methods: Lecture-centered and low interaction

Although various reforms—such as case teaching, flipped classrooms, and problem-based learning—have been piloted, many classrooms still rely heavily on one-way lecturing and textbook-based explanations. Ideological–political elements may be added in the form of “moral stories” or “policy exemplars” that remain loosely connected to economic analysis, while model derivations in Western economics may be decontextualized from social realities[6].

5.1.3. Teaching staff: Single disciplinary background and limited collaboration

Teachers of ideological–political courses are often trained in Marxist theory, philosophy, or political science, whereas Western economics is mostly taught by faculty with training in economics or finance. Joint course design, co-teaching, and team-based instruction remain

relatively rare. In addition, many teachers report limited readiness and confidence for interdisciplinary teaching[8].

5.2. Core challenges in collaborative teaching

5.2.1. Theoretical cognition: Partial and polarized understandings

Some students (and even some teachers) tend to see Marxist political economy and Western economics as mutually exclusive: the former as a purely “ideological” discipline, the latter as “scientific and neutral.” Conversely, some see mainstream Western economics as inherently “bourgeois” and thus unworthy of serious engagement. Such polarized views hinder meaningful comparative analysis and theoretical mutual learning.

5.2.2. Teaching practice: Coexistence of duplication and disconnection

At the content level, certain topics (e.g., value, capital accumulation, distribution) are addressed by both courses, but without explicit mapping, leading to duplication. At the same time, emerging issues—such as digital platform monopoly, global value chains, and carbon neutrality—are often treated either predominantly through mainstream models or exclusively through critical discourse, resulting in disconnected knowledge fragments.

5.2.3. Evaluation: Single-dimensional assessment and neglect of collaborative outcomes

Assessment in Marxist political economy often focuses on conceptual memory and political stance, while Western economics assessment prioritizes problem-solving and model application. There are few evaluation indicators targeting students' abilities to:

- Compare theoretical frameworks;
- Synthesize insights from both paradigms;

6. Constructing Collaborative Teaching Pathways from an Interdisciplinary Perspective

6.1. Theoretical mutual learning: Reconstructing course content systems

6.1.1. Integrative modules around core theories

One pathway is to develop cross-listed modules organized around key economic categories and problems, for example:

- **Value and price:**
 - Marxist perspective: labor theory of value, surplus value, and exploitation;
 - Mainstream perspective: marginal utility, cost, and equilibrium price formation;
 - Collaborative teaching: students compare the explanatory power of each theory in contexts such as digital goods, data as a factor of production, and platform pricing.
- **Distribution and inequality:**
 - Marxist perspective: distribution of surplus value, class relations, capital accumulation;
 - Mainstream perspective: factor markets, marginal productivity, human capital;
 - Collaborative teaching: students analyze issues like wealth gaps, regional disparity, and common prosperity by mobilizing both frameworks.

Through such modules, students no longer receive two separate theoretical narratives, but instead learn to juxtapose and critically evaluate them in analyzing the same issues.

6.1.2. Cross-theoretical interpretation of contemporary issues

Collaborative teaching should focus on major contemporary issues, such as:

- Digital platform economies and data capitalism;
- Common prosperity and social security systems;
- Green transformation and carbon neutrality.

For each topic, teachers can design dual-theory reading lists: classical chapters from *Capital* and contemporary Marxist analyses on one side, and mainstream micro/macro models and empirical studies on the other. Classroom discussion can then be structured around questions such as:

- What assumptions does each theory make about agents, institutions, and technology?
- Which dimensions of reality are illuminated or obscured by each framework?
- How can they complement each other in guiding policy design?

This approach aligns with international calls for pluralism and real-world orientation in economics education[5].

6.2. Methodological integration: Innovating teaching implementation models

6.2.1. Dual-theory case teaching

Case teaching provides a natural platform for methodological integration. Typical cases could include:

- Price regulation in platform economies;
- Housing market cycles and macro-prudential policy;
- Labor dispatch, gig work, and labor rights.

In each case, students are required to conduct:

- **Mainstream analysis:** Model construction (e.g., supply–demand, game theory, macro models), parameter interpretation, and scenario simulation.
- **Marxist analysis:** Examination of class relations, value transfer, accumulation dynamics, and structural contradictions.
- **Synthesis:** Consolidation of insights, identification of complementarities, and reflection on policy proposals.

Zheng et al.'s surplus value experiment provides a methodological template, demonstrating how experimental tools can be mobilized to make abstract Marxist categories more accessible and to cultivate students' critical thinking about capitalist production relations[4].

6.2.2. Blended learning with cross-disciplinary resource sharing

Blended learning combines online resources with offline seminars. At the online layer, a shared platform can be built to host:

- Video lectures on both theories' core concepts
- Massive open online courses (MOOCs) related to political economy, economic history, and public policy
- Digital libraries linking readings from *Economy Studies* and pluralist economics projects[5].

Offline, joint seminars can bring together teachers and students from Marxist theory and economics departments to discuss common readings and cases, facilitating dialogic knowledge construction.

6.2.3. Cross-course project-based learning

Project-based learning (PBL) can better reflect interdisciplinary collaboration. University programs can design “collaborative projects” running across Marxist political economy and Western economics courses, such as:

- Regional economic development diagnosis;
- Firm digital transformation analysis;
- Local governance of platform economies.

Student teams would be asked to:

- Collect data and policy documents;
- Build mainstream economic models to simulate impacts;
- Use Marxist political economy to analyze structural contradictions and distributional consequences;
- Propose policy recommendations integrating efficiency and equity.

Such projects resonate with OBE principles by aligning learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessments around integrated competencies[6].

6.3. Practice bridging: Building collaborative education platforms

6.3.1. University-industry collaboration for real-world learning

Universities can work with enterprises, financial institutions, and government agencies to co-design teaching practice programs. Examples include:

- Joint internships where students analyze enterprise strategies using both cost-benefit models and political-economic perspectives
- Applied research projects on industrial upgrading, labor relations, or digital governance that require dual-theory interpretation
- Through such collaborations, students encounter “live” economic contradictions and are encouraged to use both analytical frameworks in explaining and addressing them.

6.3.2. Academic and teaching exchanges platforms

Interdisciplinary teaching collaborations also require regular academic and teaching exchanges. Institutions can:

- Host seminars and forums on collaborative teaching between Marxist political economy and Western economics;

- Invite scholars in political economy, heterodox economics, and curriculum ideological and political education to share experiences;
- Encourage cross-departmental teaching observation and peer feedback.

These platforms help build a community of practice around interdisciplinary economics education[7].

6.3.3. Social investigation and fieldwork guided by dual theories

Field-based social investigation—such as surveys of rural revitalization, urban community governance, or employment in platform firms—offers fertile ground for practice bridging. Students can be guided to:

- Use mainstream methods (questionnaires, regression analysis) to quantify relationships and outcomes;
- Use Marxist categories to interpret production relations, power structures, and ideological narratives;
- Reflect on value conflicts and institutional reforms.

Such practice helps internalize theoretical mutual learning and methodological integration into students' value orientations and professional identities.

7. Implementation Safeguards for Collaborative Teaching Pathways

7.1. Teacher development and team building

7.1.1. Interdisciplinary teacher training

Universities should establish systematic training programs to improve teachers' dual-theory literacy and interdisciplinary teaching competencies, including:

- Short courses on Marxist political economy for economics faculty and on mainstream economics for Marxist theory faculty
- Workshops on pluralist economics education and interdisciplinary didactics[5]
- Opportunities for joint research projects engaging both theoretical frameworks.

7.1.2. Cross-professional teaching teams

Given the complexity of collaborative teaching, it is difficult for single teachers to master all required knowledge and skills. Hence, cross-professional teaching teams should be formed, combining expertise in Marxist political economy, mainstream economics, educational theory, and data analysis. These teams can jointly design syllabi, share teaching responsibilities, and coordinate assessment.

7.2. Optimization of evaluation systems

7.2.1. Multi-dimensional evaluation indicators

Evaluation systems should move beyond single-dimensional knowledge tests and incorporate indicators for:

- Conceptual mastery in both theoretical systems;

- Ability to compare frameworks and articulate their assumptions;
- Capacity to apply both to analyze real economic issues;
- Development of critical thinking, value reflection, and collaborative problem-solving.

Rubrics can be developed for essays, project reports, and presentations that explicitly reward integrative analysis and cross-framework reasoning.

7.2.2. Process–outcome combined assessment

In line with OBE and curriculum ideological and political education principles, assessment should combine formative and summative elements, including:

- Participation in joint seminars and PBL activities;
- Reflection journals documenting students' evolving views on the relationship between the two theories;
- Final essays or projects demonstrating comprehensive use of both frameworks[6]

This approach allows evaluation to capture not only knowledge outcomes but also the development of interdisciplinary competence and value orientations.

7.3. Integration of teaching resources

7.3.1. Development of interdisciplinary teaching materials and case collections

To sustain collaborative teaching, universities should organize faculty to compile:

- Textbook modules that pair chapters in Marxist political economy and Western economics around shared topics;
- Case collections on issues such as digital platforms, industrial policy, and common prosperity, each with dual-theory teaching notes;
- Reading guides that connect classic Marxist texts, mainstream economics literature, and pluralist economics resources[5]

7.3.2. Online resource platforms

Digital platforms can be used to store and share:

- Recorded lectures, micro-videos, and discussion clips from collaborative teaching sessions;
- Syllabi, course designs, and assessment rubrics;
- Data sets and code for empirical projects.

8. Conclusion

From an interdisciplinary perspective, this study shows that collaborative teaching between Marxist political economy and Western economics is both necessary and feasible under current economics education reforms. The two theoretical systems have distinct yet complementary strengths: Marxist political economy offers a historical–structural and value-critical lens for understanding capitalism, distribution and social transformation, while Western economics provides rigorous modeling and empirical tools for analyzing resource allocation, incentives and policy effects. When integrated in a deliberate way, they help students move beyond single-paradigm thinking, enabling them to interpret complex economic phenomena through both

structural critique and quantitative analysis, and to better connect theoretical understanding with real-world policy challenges.

However, existing teaching practice is still dominated by parallel, fragmented and weakly coordinated arrangements. The two courses are usually taught separately, with limited alignment in objectives, syllabi, pedagogy and assessment, which results in content overlap and gaps, fragmented knowledge structures and single-dimensional, exam-oriented evaluation. To address these problems, this paper proposes a three-dimensional collaborative pathway of “theoretical mutual learning, methodological integration and practice bridging,” operationalized through content restructuring around shared categories and contemporary issues, dual-theory case teaching, blended learning and project-based learning, and the construction of practice platforms linking universities, industry and society. For this transformation to be sustainable rather than experimental or short-lived, it must be supported by robust safeguards: cross-disciplinary teacher development, multi-dimensional and process-oriented evaluation mechanisms, and integrated teaching resource systems that institutionalize collaborative teaching as a stable feature of high-quality economics education.

9. Limitations and Prospects

This study is primarily conceptual and normative, and does not yet offer systematic empirical evidence from large-scale teaching practice. Future research should therefore conduct empirical evaluations of collaborative teaching between Marxist political economy and Western economics, using quasi-experimental designs, learning analytics, and qualitative interviews to assess its impact on students’ knowledge structures, value orientations, and problem-solving abilities. It will also be important to explore differentiated collaborative pathways for different types of institutions—such as research universities, local universities, and vocational colleges—taking into account differences in student background, faculty capacity, and institutional missions, so that collaboration models are realistically tailored rather than uniformly imposed. In addition, further work should deepen integration with related disciplines, including sociology, political science, environmental science, and data science, to construct broader interdisciplinary platforms for economics education.

By advancing both theoretical refinement and empirical experimentation, universities can gradually develop localized yet internationally connected models of economics education, in which Marxist political economy and Western economics are not opposed but jointly embedded in curriculum design, teaching practice, and quality assurance. Such models can help cultivate high-level talents who are able to combine historical-structural analysis with formal modeling and empirical methods, and who can thus better understand, assess, and shape the evolving dynamics of the contemporary economy.

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