

Professor Yoshimasa Shirai

Field of Specialization: Theoretical Economics International Economics

(Interviewer: 関川 亮)

Interview with Professor of the Seminar Committee, Faculty of Economics

"Specializes in the construction and analysis of economic dynamic models that take into account labor market movements"

Q. Please tell us about the research that you specialize in.

My current work at the institute is narrowly focused on constructing and analyzing economic dynamic models that take into account labor market movements in macroeconomics, but my interests are wide-ranging.

"The Various Studies and Broadened Interests Undertaken in International Trade."

Q. Please tell us how you came to decide to do such research.

I was very interested in international trade at first because it was the specialty of the professor of my seminar. In the 1980s, economies of scale were introduced into international trade theory and analysis was advanced. Research dealing with issues such as bargaining among firms, which is called market structure analysis, was very active, and I had to work on industrial organization theory in order to conduct international trade. I had to study game theory as an analytical tool used in industrial organization theory, so I began studying industrial organization theory and game theory during my undergraduate and graduate years. My master's thesis was a mixture of industrial organization theory and international trade. My master's thesis was on the theory of international competition in research and development, which was a mixture of industrial organization theory and international trade. After that, I studied at Northwestern University in the U.S., gradually became interested in dynamic models of economic growth and game theory issues over time, and ended up doing my doctoral thesis on constructing models of economic growth and endogenous economic fluctuations. As an extension of that, I am very interested in analyzing general equilibrium models that take into account the labor market dynamics I mentioned earlier.

"An International Economy Inseparable from the Domestic Economy"

Q. What is the significance of studying international economics?

I am sure you are all familiar with the term "globalization," but when you understand the domestic economy, you have no choice but to consider the economic activities of other countries. When you start a business in Japan, for example, you are not only dealing with your domestic competitors, but also with other competitors outside of Japan, similar services, how new technologies progress outside of Japan, and even if you create something unique to Japan, it can

be sold all over the world these days. Even if you create something unique to Japan, it can be sold all over the world these days. In short, even if we think about domestic issues, we have to consider the international economy. I think international economics is indispensable. My student years were dominated by clubs in the first and second years and seminars in the third and fourth years.

Q. Tell us about your student days.

When I was a student, I was involved in clubs. I was a member of a music circle, the Jazz Society, and I was active in performing in music circles. I was also involved in seminars. I studied in the seminars, and those two things were important. In the first and second years of college, the circle played a major role, and in the third and fourth years, seminar activities were by far the most important part of student life.

If Only I Could Create an Opportunity to Arouse the Students' Motivation."

Q. Please tell us about Professor Shirai's educational philosophy.

What I think is important when I teach seminar students is the motivation for students to study and do things. I believe that as long as there is motivation, everyone will study on their own, search for things, and read deeply. I hope that I can provide materials that will arouse such motivation. It is more interesting to look at things with curiosity, so I would like to explain how I myself became interested in things and thought about them. I am also looking for ways to create opportunities for students to think more deeply about what they are interested in and to continue their studies, including their way of thinking.

Joint Research in the Third Year Centered on the Writing of a Thesis, and a Graduation Thesis in the Fourth Year.

Q. What kind of activities do you do in your seminar?

I think the goal of every seminar is the same: to write a graduation thesis. Writing a thesis is the very activity of a scholar, and I think it is the best thing a university professor can teach. Many people want to learn about actual business, but university professors, including myself, are not good at that. What university professors are best at is writing thesis papers.

But in fact, this work has a great deal in common with business. The most important thing for a university professor is to discover and solve problems that people are not yet aware of, and to make them widely known to the public. In order to have the significance of one's research recognized, marketing must be done, issues must be explained logically, and discoveries must be made scientifically. Scholars are always thinking about how to communicate to readers in a clear and appealing manner, so I think it would be good to learn those things from university professors who are scholars.

The best model for writing that paper is a paper published by a professional researcher. There are actually a lot of useful things in these papers, and I would like students to learn about them in the seminar. Next, we have them form a joint group to actually write the paper, and in the third year, they work together to write the paper, which is the content part of the paper. At the end of their third year, they will have a seminar on international economics at other universities and present the results of their research. This is the main activity of the third year students, and the fourth year students write their thesis. The fourth year students do their thesis, and then repeat the process on an individual basis.

“I Want Students to be Curious, to Look, and to Think.”

Q. What are you looking for in second-year students who want to join the Shirai Seminar?

Curiosity, that's all I ask for. I want them to be curious about anything they see, and to think about it. I don't think it's a good attitude to say, "Please tell me about this. I don't want them to be like, "Please tell me about this. I think it would be best if the seminar activities were approached with that kind of attitude.

“Make the most of the university's resources in your student life!

Q. Finally, do you have a message for second-year students?

Why don't you use the university's resources to the fullest? There are three main resources. The first is teachers. There are a lot of excellent people here, so don't worry about the fact that they are not your seminar professors or the professors who took your classes, but just talk to the professors who are involved in the things you are interested in. I think it is very important to use the class in such a way. You should not just listen to the class, but actively go and ask the teacher with a purpose, and communicate with the teacher to the extent that you do not become a nuisance by saying, "I will tell you this properly. The second is to use databases and other library resources, such as magazines and books, which have already been digitized. Keio has spent a lot of money on electronic databases, so if you use them to the best of your ability, I think you can easily recover your tuition fees (laughs). So you should definitely use them. I am sure that you will realize how much it costs after you go out into the world, so I suggest that you use the resources while you still have them so that they do not become a treasured possession. The third is friends. I think that is one of the human resources. I think it is important to have fun just to relax, but I also think it is important to share your thoughts with your friends and see their reactions, or to try activities together. I am sure there are many people who are doing very good things, such as engaging in various social activities together. In fact, it is possible to do all three things I just mentioned at the same time. You could go to the teacher's office with your friends and use these electronic resources to do more and more activities. I think it would be good to use schools in this way.

Editor's Postscript

Since the seminar to which I belong often deals with domestic systems, I found it refreshing to hear about the topic of international economics in contrast to domestic systems.

In the interview, he talked not only about himself and the activities of his seminar, but also about how universities are used. While there has been a lot of discussion about the state of universities in recent years, I think that what he said was very informative and provided me with an opportunity to deepen my own thinking. I hope this interview will be helpful to all readers, including second-year students who are about to enter the seminar.

Finally, I would like to thank Professor Shirai for taking time out of his busy schedule to talk with us. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation. Thank you very much.