



***In Memoriam—Professor Giovanni Arrighi (1937-2009)
and Graduate Mentoring***
A Reflection on His Teachings and My Academic Development

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Abstract: In memoriam of the late Professor Giovanni Arrighi (1937-2009), this essay reflects on his contribution to graduate mentoring based on the author's personal experience. The idea that graduate students are the young scholars that collaborate with not-so-young scholars (professors) was the founding philosophy of graduate instruction in the Department of Sociology at SUNY-Binghamton. Professor Arrighi continued this tradition and mentored graduate students by embracing them into the extended Arrighi family. He treated students with respect and involved them into research activities as collaborators and co-authors. He acknowledged that he received academic stimulation from his student, and inspired graduate students through critical yet encouraging comments. With anecdotes from Binghamton days, the essay reports that Professor Arrighi continues to live in the mind, heart, and practice of those who received his mentoring.

I was profoundly saddened by the passing away of Professor Giovanni Arrighi on June 18, 2009. I met him twenty years ago when I was pursuing my second doctoral degree at SUNY-Binghamton. He became my doctoral thesis supervisor and taught me important lessons about sociology and how to pursue an academic career in the field.

Professor Arrighi contributed enormously to the study of global political economy. Among many contributions, he deepened our understanding of hegemony in a world-systems framework, and espe-

cially regarding the nature of hegemonic transition, by historicizing Marx's formula of capital, M-C-M'.¹ He pointed out that in periods of downturn in business cycle, capitalists lift investment from production and channel it into finance. This 'financial re-birth' has been observed in past hegemonic transitions, and it has often been accompanied by a transfer of capital from the declining hegemon to the emerging hegemon.

Professor Arrighi's last book, *Adam*

¹ Arrighi (1994) and (2009a).

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Smith in Beijing (2007), tackled the current stage of capitalist development. Instead of capital leaving the U.S., the declining hegemon, there is an inflow of capital to the U.S. This is partly due to the lack of a clear hegemonic successor and to the measures taken by the U.S. government with its financial sector to provide lucrative opportunities to global investors from all over the world (which, however, came to a sudden end in 2008). In the previous transitions, the hegemonic container has expanded in size from the Dutch, British, to the U.S, and it is not likely that this pattern will continue. What does the rise of China suggest regarding the future of capitalism? Does it foretell the end of capitalism? Professor Arrighi left us important insights and concepts for our continuing engagement with the global political economy.

The objective of this essay, however, is to reflect on Professor Arrighi's contribution to graduate mentoring. My experience as a graduate student at SUNY-Binghamton taught me a lot about how to be a good instructor, and I feel blessed to have Professor Arrighi as the supervisor and Professors T.K. Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein in the supervisory committee of my doctoral program. One of the guiding principles of graduate instruction at Binghamton when these three professors were there was the idea that graduate school is a place where young scholars and not-so-young scholars work together. I remember Professor Arrighi telling us this principle at many occasions. Professor Hopkins established this principle in the graduate program at SUNY-Binghamton, and Professor Arrighi was one of the professors who carried the torch. In the following, I would like to highlight what I learned from Professor Arrighi regarding matters of teaching and instruction.

GRADUATE INSTRUCTION

During my stay in Binghamton in the 1990s, my professors treated graduate stu-

dents with respect. Graduate students had representation at the faculty meeting with voting rights. When Professor Hopkins initiated this system in the 1970s, each student had one vote. Students' voting right was reduced since then, but the graduate students still had five votes at the faculty meeting when I was a student. The graduate students were the stakeholders in department management and they were involved in the decision-making process. With voting privilege came responsibility. Department meeting was a place where individual aspirations were juxtaposed against others' until consensus was reached. Graduate students were often drawn into exploring complex problems regarding departmental management, and we were trained to prepare for our future involvement in administrative affairs as faculty members.

The young scholar and not-so-young scholar principle meant that graduate students are not just "students" and the faculty members are not just "teachers" in the conventional school setting. The young scholars may require mentoring and suggestions from the not-so-young scholars. But the foundational idea is that they are equal in scholarly research activities. Professors respect students' autonomy in selecting research topics, and the students are free to select supervisors and committee members. It was common practice for the graduate students of the Department of Sociology at SUNY-Binghamton to switch supervisors and committee members, and the professors were supposed to help graduate students even if they were "demoted" from the supervisor to a committee member. The graduate students were not treated as intellectual workers hired with meager research assistantships. They were contributors in research endeavors and deserved to be treated with respect, and when the research outcome was published, their contribution needed to be acknowledged as co-authors and collaborators.

Consequently, my pedagogical philosophy on graduate instruction is that graduate

students are independent researchers in making. Ask them to think and design their research by themselves so that they grow into independent researchers. If you do not treat them as independent researchers, they will never learn how to do research independently. I have served many students as supervisor and committee member since I became an assistant professor in the University of Alberta in 1998. Their topics covered a wide range, and most of them were out of my research area. I provided suggestions on how to conduct archival research, choose methodology, and develop thesis statement. Students are expected to become the expert in the area, and they guide my understanding on the topic. I follow Professor Hopkins who told me that the students are the experts and the instructor's role is not to decide what the student should study but to provide suggestions from a wider and longer perspective. I see the similarity between this approach and how Professor Arrighi interacted with the social movement activists that he interacted in Italy. In his interview with David Harvey, Professor Arrighi summarized how he and the social movement actors can achieve mutually beneficial interaction:

I'm not going to tell you what to do, because you know your situation much better than I ever will. But I am better placed to understand the wider context in which it develops. So our exchange has to be based on the fact that you tell me what your situation is, and I tell you how it relates to the wider context which you cannot see, or can see only partially, from where you operate. (Arrighi, 2009b, 67)

I remember Professor Arrighi telling us "people do the right thing, but they do not know what they are doing is the right thing. Our role as a researcher is to study and tell them that they are doing the right thing." The relationship between the graduate stu-

dent and the instructor is similar to the relationship between the research partner and the researcher. Students should follow their interests because they should know what is best for them. The advice their instructors could give is to place their topics in a wider and longer context. One requirement in successful graduate supervision is to clearly understand where the students' research would be located in the larger context of the literature, and how their graduate research would serve as the starting point of their prosperous future research career. The researcher and the research participants can create mutually beneficial relationships, and so are the graduate students and their instructors. In case of graduate instruction, however, the students are expected to go beyond 'do the right thing.' They are supposed to accumulate knowledge and experience so that they can become the instructor/researcher in the near future.

Professor Arrighi was among the most popular instructors. I am sure that he remained popular after I left Binghamton and after he moved to Johns Hopkins. I felt that I am part of his extended family, and I am sure that his students felt the same way. He was a serious researcher, and he was a caring person. His seminar was always fun to attend. Students were keen to learn, but they were not tense. One day Professor Arrighi suddenly stopped talking. One of the students was staring at Professor Arrighi's moving hands while he was talking, and he became aware of her stare. He said "I noticed Reiko is staring at my hands, so I put my hands down. But without my hands moving, I cannot speak." We all burst into laughing. Professor Arrighi was in fact speaking not just with his words but also with his hands, body, and soul. Among many faculty members at SUNY-Binghamton, Professor Arrighi was the only professor who played soccer with graduate students. We had pick up games, and Professor Arrighi showed up. He was not as fit as other players, but he was an Italian and he was a professor. He became the coach on the field, telling his teammate

where to pass the ball and how to cover opponents. It was fun. In Edmonton, I played soccer and volleyball with graduate students. Although I do not 'command' as much as Professor Arrighi did, I enjoyed the experience very much.

Professor Arrighi knew how to provide critical comments without hurting my feelings. Or, should I say that even after I was devastated by his critical comments, I did not stop going back to him because I knew he cared about me and expected more from me. Of course we get discouraged when we receive critical comments. I submitted three complete dissertation drafts. The first two were criticized severely and Professor Arrighi suggested major changes. I did modify them and the third one passed the thesis defense. I had already accepted a position in the University of Alberta when I defended the thesis, and wanted to deposit the thesis before leaving Binghamton for Edmonton. In fact there was only one week between the defense and our departure. The day before our departure, I had a lengthy long-distance telephone conversation with Professor Arrighi. He gave me the last editorial suggestions on the revised thesis, and I was surprised by the care and effort he put into editing my thesis. When my thesis was submitted for publication, the editor was happy with the draft and no correction was suggested from the publisher's side. I owe Professor Arrighi enormously for my successful completion of my doctoral program from the stage of topic conception, thesis development, to writing and editing.

TWO-SENTENCE THESIS STATEMENT

Regarding dissertation research, Professor Arrighi especially emphasized the need to formulate a two-sentence thesis statement early on. All students were familiar with this "Arrighi" requirement. The thesis statement captures the essence of the thesis, and it is a positive statement. It cannot be a question. It

cannot be a statement of what the thesis is about. It expresses the conclusion/discovery of the thesis, or what the thesis is saying about the topic. He suggested to us to print it out and place it on the wall so that we could look at it all the time while writing the thesis.

I am giving the same suggestion to my students so that they also benefit from Professor Arrighi's wisdom. I tell my students that the thesis is a statement that has never been made before and that was worthy of telling. Being "worthy" is a matter of subjective judgment, and it allows flexibility in thesis selection. If a thesis is worthy of making for the researcher, it should be written. Some thesis may be worthy of making for a list of people. But it is not appropriate for others to say if a thesis is worthy or not based on how many people approve of it since popularity does not guarantee importance particularly in the long-run. Many books and articles that were published prior to the institutionalization of peer review process challenged the existing knowledge in a profound way. If Copernicus was a graduate student and his *On the Revolution of the Celestial Spheres* was a Ph.D. thesis, I doubt the committee would have passed it.

How can we come up with a good thesis? Professor Arrighi told us that he comes up with the thesis worthy of writing dissertations every day while taking morning shower. But the key here is not taking shower per se—I am sure simply taking morning shower would not help graduate students come up with good dissertation theses (though it may help them stay clean, for sure). What actually mattered was that Professor Arrighi did an in-depth reading of books and articles on his research topic accompanied by some careful writing the night before prior to going to bed. Accumulating knowledge alone would not generate new knowledge. It needs to be digested and examined from various angles. It needs to be juxtaposed against other ideas. Going to bed with questions and sleeping over the issues allows for the full mind, conscious and sub-

conscious, to digest the material in the background. By the morning, sparks of new ideas may appear, requiring further cultivation during the day.

Forming the two-sentence thesis statement early on and allowing it to guide and be tested by ongoing research, day and night, is an effective way to train our brain to engage with literature and bring new ideas.

THE “SO WHAT?” TECHNIQUE

While working on this essay, my colleague, Mohammad H. (Behrooz) Tamdgidi, also a past graduate student of sociology at SUNY-Binghamton, reminded me of another important characteristic technique Professor Arrighi used in his teaching. He was known as a tough professor who preferred to, at first, come down rather hard on students from a critical position, than begin by praising them too much. This was reflected in his adding a fifth question to the famous four research questions Binghamton graduate students learned when reading the book, *What Will It Be?: Explorations in Inductive Sociology*, by Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1978), in their research methods course.

Tamdgidi noted that Mukherjee’s proposed inductive methodological procedure involved methodically asking the series of questions in the inductive inquiry: What is it (descriptive inquiry)? Why is it (explanatory inquiry)? How is it (interpretive/methodological inquiry)? And what will it be (constructing the explanatory historical account extending into future predictions)? Professor Arrighi, however, rightly insisted that there is an important fifth question (which he credited the American political sociologist, Barrington Moore, for raising it) that also needed to be asked by any activist scholar committed to social change. And the “Barrington Moore Question” is “So What?” What good is doing any kind of research for if the purpose of the research and the impli-

cations of its central findings for wider research, on the one hand, and for sociopolitical practice, on the other, remained unscrutinized. By confronting the students with the “shocking” question when they were most pleased with their works, Professor Arrighi pushed them to adopt an outsider’s perspective on their findings and research and interrogate what they took for granted. This struck students hard at first, but, even when he did not end up agreeing with their findings and research agenda, it proved invaluable for students and provided them with an opportunity to rethink their research objectives and strategies in favor of more fruitful venues for pursuing the same themes.

MENTORING HOW TO TEACH

I had the opportunity to work as Professor Arrighi’s teaching assistant while I was a graduate student and I was surprised by his commitment to undergraduate instruction and his willingness to share his experience with his teaching assistants.

Professor Arrighi remembered the names of all students. By the third or fourth week, he could put the name to the face of each student. I recall that one class had about fifty students. Professor Arrighi took attendance and registered the face and the name in his brain. I try to do the same in my undergraduate courses although it is always a challenge. Professor Arrighi chose the latest books for the textbooks. This meant that his lectures were always updated with latest data and debates. I follow his example by adopting latest books in my courses. A student of mine commented on this point last semester saying that he appreciated the fact that all of the textbooks used in my course were published within last two years including one that was published in 2009.

Professor Arrighi integrated his research and undergraduate teaching by introducing the latest information to the students and by testing his understanding

with his students. In undergraduate courses, evaluation is one of the most tedious and time-consuming tasks. Professor Arrighi insisted that the evaluation had to be based on essays. The use of multiple-choice examination is an easy way out of this task, but it would not help developing students' capacity in critical thinking and writing. I now use written reports for evaluation following Professor Arrighi's practice.

Professor Arrighi also enjoyed interacting with undergraduate students. He extended his care just like he did to the graduate students. Although the relationship with most undergraduate students may last only for one semester, Professor Arrighi cared about the students and treated them with respect and affection. He entertained students with bold statements and challenging questions. I am hoping to emulate his undergraduate pedagogy to the best of my ability.

INVOLVING GRADUATE STUDENTS IN RESEARCH

Sociology at SUNY-Binghamton was a place where graduate students also participated in the professors' own research work. We were treated as fellow researchers and were invited to take part in Research Working Groups (RWGs) at the Fernand Braudel Center directed then by Professor Wallerstein. The door was open to any faculty member and graduate student and some came from other departments. I was fortunate to get involved in several RWGs. Professor Joan Smith initiated a RWG on Gender, Race, and Ethnicity and I began participating in it in my first year as a Ph.D. student. When Professors Wallerstein, Arrighi, and Hopkins initiated the hegemonies research working group, I participated in the Trajectories RWG headed by Professors Hopkins and Wallerstein. Professor Arrighi headed the Comparative Hegemony RWG. In these RWGs, graduate students proposed the research topics that fit to the overall re-

search theme. We had regular meetings where we reported our research results and exchanged critical advices. The two hegemonies RWGs generated two books that incorporated graduate student essays.² For those who stuck with the project, they were rewarded with publications.

Aside from the Comparative Hegemony RWG, Professor Arrighi started a project on the "Rise of East Asia" and invited Alex Irwan and me. We participated in a conference in Hawaii and the article was later published in a book. Professor Arrighi significantly contributed to our career development by involving us in conference presentation and publication. I have to confess that my first conference presentation was not easy since we had a big audience with all those big name academics who were the expert on East Asia. Having Professor Arrighi as co-presenter made it easy for me to have my first presentation. The paper became a co-authored article, and it became my first academic publication. Going through peer review process can be tenuous. But having my first experience with Professor Arrighi made it easy. He showed me how to nurture students into the authors of academic publications.

At the University of Alberta, I participated in a research working group on environmental sociology composed of several professors and graduate students. After one and half years of regular meetings to discuss interesting articles, we wrote a book chapter and a textbook on environmental sociology. I had two chapters in this book that were co-authored with a graduate student. After moving to Montreal and taking a Canada Research Chair position at Concordia University, I started a RWG on social economy. I am financially supporting several graduate students (though the amount is modest), and working on joint papers. I plan to continue Professor Arrighi's practice of working with graduate students.

² Hopkins and Wallerstein (1996) and Arrighi et al. (1999), respectively.

LEARNING FROM GRADUATE STUDENTS

Working together with graduate students guided by the principle of “young and not-so-young scholars” means that there is an exchange of ideas, instead of a one-way flow of ideas from the instructor to the students. I was surprised and felt honored when Professor Arrighi told me that I am one of his thesis committee members (or advisors to his research). Together with Alex Irwan and P.K. Hui, my fellow graduate students, I became the source of information and inspiration for Professor Arrighi’s research on East Asia. After listening to Professor Takeshi Hamashita who gave a lecture at Fernand Braudel Center in the early 1990s, research interest on East Asia rose among the students and faculty members. Alex Irwan was from Indonesia and P.K. Hui was from Hong Kong. With my background in Japan, we became the collaborators in Professor Arrighi’s research on the rise of East Asia. He was open about the role his graduate students played in his research, and this is one of the most important lessons I learned from Professor Arrighi. I felt honored when I read the acknowledgment in *Adam Smith in Beijing* where Professor Arrighi mentioned our names. When I interact with my graduate students, I seek them as my committee members. When I read student papers and theses, I look for suggestions for my research. I found that Professor Arrighi’s approach makes students feel involved, needed, and encouraged.

The Social Economy Research Working Group I am currently engaging in is composed of seven graduate students and two undergraduate students. I have several colleagues at Concordia University who are giving me various suggestions on our research. These students did not follow my suggestion to study social economy. They had their own research agenda that involved social economy. They drew my at-

tention to social economy, and I found my thesis committee among them. We are launching on an exciting research project involving video shooting of those who are practicing social economies. This is part of my exploration into what are emerging alternatives to dysfunctional corporate economy. Professor Arrighi turned to East Asia for the world-systemic processes that may lead to the end of capitalism. I am turning into micro practices. I hope to bridge in the future the studies on the large-scale world-systemic processes and that on the micro-level struggles and counter-movements.

MENTORING BEYOND GRADUATE SCHOOL

The relationship between professors and graduate students continue beyond graduate school. I continued to ask Professors Arrighi and Wallerstein for reference letters. I am grateful that they wrote good letters for my successful job applications. They also suggested who would be good candidates as referees for my tenure application. I follow the example shown by Professors Arrighi and Wallerstein and write letters of recommendation with heart. After many years of engaging in graduate study, getting a job is the next stage for the graduate students. The instructors could play an enormous role in the success of job applications, although it is obviously the candidate and the potential employer in the end that decide the outcome. I am grateful to Professor Arrighi for showing me how to be a good mentor and a supporter beyond graduate school.

REMEMBERING PROFESSOR ARRIGHI

I had an opportunity to have Professor Arrighi in Montreal in December last year at the Karl Polanyi Conference held at Concordia University. As a member of the confer-

ence organizing committee, I very much looked forward to having Professor Arrighi as one of the keynote speakers. Due to his illness, however, this plan did not materialize. Instead, his wife Professor Beverly Silver (also at Johns Hopkins University) kindly prepared a video clip, and Professor Arrighi spoke at the Conference. He was on the projector panels in the conference halls, and we all enjoyed his presentation and the warmth he sent out to the conference participants. The China issue he raised remained in the mind of conference participants until the very last panel.

Since we missed the chance to see Professor Arrighi in person at the Conference, I decided to drive to Baltimore in the week following the Conference. The trip was marred by bad weather, but we managed to go and come back safely. With Professor P.K. Hui we spent two days with Professors Arrighi and Silver. He looked great and we enjoyed great conversation while having good food. I asked Professor Arrighi what are the projects he was currently working on. He listed many projects including the new postscript to *The Long Twentieth Century*. But I was surprised that he had a score of projects he was conducting with his graduate students. He was continuing his mentoring through research with students. I also asked him if he thought that the current crisis was the terminal crisis of capitalism. His answer was yes.

It is nearly twenty years since I started my sociology Ph.D. at Binghamton. The Binghamton sociologists were already talking in the 1980s about the end of the capitalist world-system. But the world that Professor Arrighi left with us is the one that is in definite transition. The potential paths are several as Professor Arrighi pointed out in *Adam Smith in Beijing*. What would be the better alternatives? I am sure that those who are taught by Professor Arrighi will continue studying for better futures by carrying his legacy in political economy studies and graduate mentoring.

It has been some years since I joined the

rank of not-so-young scholars. By reflecting back on the life of Professor Arrighi, I have to say that he was always young at heart. He never stopped pushing his research forward. He is still teaching me how to live the academic life. I feel I am still in his embrace. The only way I could return favor is to continue what I learned from Professor Arrighi while mentoring my graduate students. I am sure Professor Arrighi would agree with me by saying "that is the right thing to do as an academic."

Professor Giovanni Arrighi continues to live in the mind, heart, and practice of those who he mentored.

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