


Stanley Wong (23 July 1947–30 April 2016): A tribute

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It is not given to many economics scholars to publish an article or a book, let alone both, which are subsequently regarded as classics in their own life time. It is even rarer when the period of training for and then becoming a professional economist is well under 20 years. Yet this was the achievement of Stanley Wong, who was the author of a classic article and a classic book, and who sadly died of lung cancer earlier this year at the age of 68.

Stan's professional life was first as an economist – he was an undergraduate at Simon Fraser University (SFU) and a doctoral student at Cambridge University. He then spent less than 10 years in the Economics Department of Carleton University in Ottawa. Having attained tenure, he retrained as a lawyer at the University of Toronto. He had a successful practice on both the East and the West Coasts of Canada (he grew up in Vancouver) before moving to senior international legal posts overseas. He had an international reputation and was recognised world-wide as a leading expert in competition law and policy.

In his time as an economist, he published a classic article in the *American Economic Review* (*AER*), 'The "F-twist" and the methodology of Paul Samuelson' (Wong, 1973), and a remarkable book which grew out of his PhD dissertation at Cambridge. It was entitled *The Foundations of Paul Samuelson's Revealed Preference Theory: A Study by the Method of Rational Reconstruction*, and was published by Routledge & Kegan Paul (RKP) in 1978. A second edition was published in 2006 with a glowing Foreword by Philip Mirowski and Stan's historical account of the making of the dissertation, the book (and the article), *Reflections: how I came to write "The Foundations ..."*. Stan's first and long-time mentor and close friend was the distinguished methodologist at Simon Fraser, Lawrence (Larry) Boland (who also had a period as supervisor of Stan's dissertation). Roger Sandilands (10 June 2016) advises that Stan 'took a special class from Lauchlin Currie on "basic economic concepts," quite different from any conventional class ... [but] much catering to people like Stan', and with 'Martin Bailey who later became Chairman of Clinton's CEA [Council of Economic Advisors]'.

As well as Boland, Stan was first supervised by Joan Robinson (he was probably her last PhD student); when she 'retired' in 1970, Luigi Pasinetti became his supervisor.

I had met Stan in 1971 when I was on a short visit to Cambridge and then again in 1972–1973 when I was a Visiting Fellow at Clare Hall. We became firm friends. John Hatch (who was on leave in Cambridge from Adelaide) and I read his *AER* paper before it was submitted, and we were present at Joan Robinson's seminar for research students in 1971 when Stan presented the paper. (Ken Arrow, that well-known research student, was also present; he describes the seminar in Arrow, 1999.) When Luigi

decided that he no longer wished to supervise Stan, I took over, warning him that I knew virtually nothing about what he was writing about but would, as a general economist, be happy to read and comment on his drafts. In his historical account he indicates that he found this useful.

Now starts a worrying, thorny set of episodes. He submitted in December 1974. Amartya Sen was the external examiner and David Champenowne, the internal examiner. Sen was very positive and encouraging but Champenowne thought the dissertation should never have been allowed as a PhD topic. The Faculty's Degree Committee asked Martin Hollis, the distinguished University of East Anglia philosopher, who had co-written a book on economics and philosophy (Hollis and Nell, 1975), to adjudicate. Although he thought Stan too uncritical of Karl Popper, Hollis also thought the dissertation certainly deserved the award of a doctorate.

When the book was published, it received most favourable reviews in leading economics journals by outstanding scholars in leading economics journals, for example, *The Economic Journal* (Mark Blaug), *The Canadian Journal of Economics* (David Winch), *Kyklos* (Wade Hands), *Economica* (MW Jones-Lee), *The Manchester School* (Ian Steedman). It was never, though, reviewed in any American journals.

Boland, who early in his career had great difficulty getting his papers published, at last made it to the big time with an important paper in the *Journal of Economic Literature* (Boland, 1979). In it he mentioned Stan's 1973 *AER* article in a footnote. Stan subsequently met Paul Samuelson who was most gracious though, in Stan's view, their minds never met on Stan's arguments in either his article or his book.

Better late than never but not really a pretty story. It reflects badly on the mainstream in the USA, whose ruthless hegemony has been more and more on show for many decades now and has spread world-wide, not least in Australia.

Stan was a many dimensional person. He was a devoted family man (he never married but was close to, and was much loved and respected by, the members of his large immediate family). He was an old-fashioned scholar who was extremely well-read in the literature of economics and philosophy. (His dissertation and book used the philosophical method of rational reconstruction to assess the validity of Samuelson's revealed preference project; he found it wanting.) He was a great tennis player, dancer and a wonderful cook. Stan took over our Clare Hall apartment for a day in order to prepare a banquet of Beijing duck for Joan Robinson and the Harcourt family. He forgot that Joan was a vegetarian but that meant all the more for us. It was delicious. We were friends for many years, and I count it a great privilege to have known him.

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