In Memoriam: Robert M. Marsh

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Robert M. Marsh passed away on November 15, 2015 in Providence, Rhode Island, at the age of 84. He was an editorial board member of Comparative Sociology since this journal began in 2001, when I was its founding editor. He was unquestionably one of the world’s most renowned comparative sociologists. He was a vivacious person, kind, and a warm friend. A conversation with him was always an enlivening experience because on many occasions he would bring sociological ideas inspired by classical sociologists such as Max Weber into the conversation. His knowledge of the history of sociology and sociologists was enormous. In his later years, he continued to devote his time to sociological research. The article published in this issue of Comparative Sociology was submitted just the day before he took ill.

From his obituary published November 18, 2015 in the Providence Journal, we learn that he was:

A lover of the outdoors, he enjoyed sailing since he was 16 years old in various locations like Lake Winnipesaukee, NH and Narragansett Bay RI. He loved hiking, cross-country skiing, and bicycling. He loved classical music, especially Bach’s works. Robert is survived by his devoted wife of 30 years, Josefina F. Reynes; three children from his previous marriage to Susan H. Marsh Blackburn of Needham, Massachusetts: Eleanor Marsh of Cambridge, Christopher Marsh of Brookline, and Diana Marsh of Somerville; and two grandchildren, Cordelia Sanborn-Marsh and Vivian Breedlove.

The remainder of this notice draws on Robert Marsh’s biography in the Biographical section of the Concise Encyclopedia of Comparative Sociology (Marsh 2014).
[Robert M. Marsh] was born in 1931 and grew up in Chelsea, Massachusetts, just northeast of Boston. His undergraduate education was at Boston University and the University of Chicago, where he studied sociology and anthropology. While a freshman, through the influence of a Unitarian minister, he became interested in Chinese philosophy. By the time he started graduate work in sociology at Columbia University, he had noticed that most sociologists study only or primarily their own society. He did not want to take this path. Instead, he launched himself on a serious commitment to learn to read and speak Chinese and to learn enough about Chinese history so that he could do a dissertation on government officials in the Qing dynasty (1644–1912). This effort provided the basis of his book on *The Mandarins* (1961) which Princeton University Press included in their book re-printing project. When he later decided to do research on Japan, he studied the Japanese language.

In his career as a sociology faculty member in several universities, Marsh had been fortunate in finding settings highly conducive to work in comparative sociology. At the University of Michigan Ann Arbor (1958–1961) he was encouraged to teach not only sociological theory but also Chinese society, and to participate in a large interdisciplinary course on non-Western area studies. At Cornell University (1961–65), he combined formal appointments in Sociology and the China area program. His sociology department chairman during two brief years at Duke University, John C. McKinney, was active in hiring comparative sociologists and providing them with research funds internal to the university in order to supplement external grants from the Social Science Research Council, the Ford Foundation, and other organizations. He was invited to join the Department of Sociology at Brown University in 1967 [where he had been ever since] as part of its effort to broaden sociology in a comparative, international direction. Even more stimulating for his growth as a comparative sociologist were his stints as a visiting professor at Kyoto University and Kwansei Gakuin University, in Japan. In 1987, he was invited to spend a year at the U.S. Naval Academy’s Economics Department in Annapolis where he taught sociological courses to naval cadets, and was very delighted to participate in whatever sailing activities he was allowed to. With the support of former students and colleagues, he did fieldwork in 1991 at Academia Sinica in Taipei while teaching at the National Tsing Hua University in Taiwan.

Marsh undertook the following types of comparative research:

1. **Codification of Cross-societal Analysis**
   In his book, *Comparative Sociology: A Codification of Cross-Societal Analysis* (Marsh 1967), he asked, “What do comparative sociologists do when they conduct a comparative study?” To answer this question, he did a literature review,