

## LAURISTON SHARP

(1907–1993)

Lauriston Sharp, Goldwin Smith Professor of Anthropology and Asian Studies Emeritus at Cornell University, died at the age of 86 at his Ithaca, New York, home on December 31, 1993. He was born in 1907 in Madison, where his father was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin. While majoring in philosophy at Wisconsin, Sharp went on several summer treks to archaeological sites in Arizona and Utah, and these encounters led him to prefer the concrete, culturally informed anthropologist's view of human nature to the more abstract, universalizing view of the philosopher.

After receiving his B.A. in philosophy from the University of Wisconsin in 1929, Sharp chose anthropology and Southeast Asian Studies as career goals. He encountered Berber culture while on a 1930 Beloit-Logan Museum archaeological expedition to Algeria. He then studied Southeast Asian Ethnology in Vienna with Robert Heine-Geldern, receiving the Certificate in Anthropology from the University of Vienna in 1931. He entered the doctoral program at Harvard University in 1932 and received his Ph.D. in 1937, after two years of fieldwork among Australian aborigines.

Professor Sharp began teaching at Cornell in 1936 as that university's first appointment in anthropology. Devoted to Cornell, he taught at, and remained connected with the university for fifty-six years. He remained active as the Goldwin Smith Professor Emeritus, even after his retirement in 1973.

During an interlude at the State Department in 1945 and 1946, Sharp served as Assistant Division Chief for Southeast Asian Affairs. On returning to Cornell, he guided the expansion of anthropology, making it a leading center for graduate training and research. This reflected Sharp's vision of anthropology, stressing an applied orientation and an area studies focus, including research centers in South and Southeast Asia and North and South America.

In 1947, Professor Sharp began the Cornell-Thailand Project, a pioneering effort to gather baseline data in a comprehensive study of a farming village (Bang Chan) near Bangkok. Sharp was also founder and first director (1950–60) of Cornell's Southeast Asia Program, assembling a multidisciplinary faculty, developing a strong language program and laying the foundations for unparalleled library resources on the region. He was also concerned that academics from the areas studied receive training in these programs, in addition to hundreds of Western scholars. He later chaired the Cornell Faculty Committee, which in 1961 ushered in the University's Center for International Studies.

The Thailand Project not only realized Sharp's longtime dream of Southeast Asian research but also initiated a productive collaboration with Lucien and Jane Hanks. This was continued in the Bennington-Cornell Project, begun in 1963, involving a broad regional survey of the upland and lowland peoples of northern Thailand. Ruth Burdick Sharp, Lauriston's wife, contributed her acquired expertise in anthropology and ceramics to this project as well. While health problems made field research difficult after his retirement, Sharp remained active at Cornell and abroad, working with his research materials on Thailand as well as his fieldnotes on Australian aborigines.

Sharp's professional career was multifaceted. As a scholar-researcher, he had first-hand exposure to indigenous cultures on four continents. Several of his publications become classics, e.g., "Steel Axes for Stone-Age Australians" (1952), "People Without Politics" (1958), and "Cultural Continuities and Discontinuities in Southeast Asia" (1962). A number of his coauthored works also reflect his pioneering, multidisciplinary research and interest in culture change, such as *Siamese Rice Village* (1953) and *Bang Chan: Social History of A Rural Community in Thailand* (1978). As a teacher, he shared his ideas, experience, and example with generations of undergraduate and graduate students, and he took special pride in training students from the areas where he had done research.

Professor Sharp was president of the Association for Asian Studies in 1961–62. He was also a founding member of the Society for Applied Anthropology and a founding trustee of the Asia Society, and served on the governing boards of the American Anthropological Association and the Siam Society. He received many awards, including the Bronislaw Malinowski Award of the Society of Applied Anthropology for his lifetime contributions to the field, and Guggenheim, Fulbright, and National Endowment for the Humanities fellowships. On his retirement, he was presented with a two-volume festschrift, one celebrating his contributions to studies of cultural change and applied anthropology (Smith, Robert J., ed., *Social Organization and the Application of Anthropology: Essays in Honor of Lauriston Sharp*, Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), the other recognizing his contributions to Thai studies (Skinner, G. William, and A. Thomas Kirsch, eds., *Change and Persistence in Thai Society: Essays in Honor of Lauriston Sharp*, Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1975).

For those who were privileged to know and work with Lauriston Sharp, his wisdom, balance, kindness, and gentility will be an enduring legacy. He was a person all too rare in our world, a truly *gentle man* in the best senses of the term.

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