

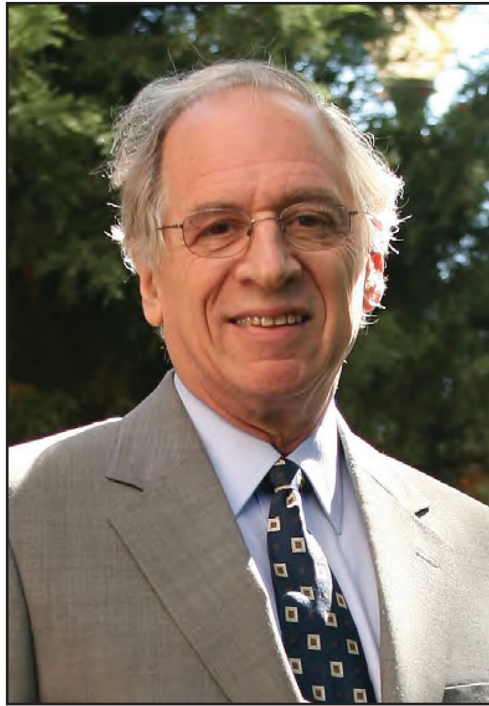
GERALD L. CURTIS

IUC '65

Gerald L. Curtis' interest in Japanese politics began with "a combination of inspiring professors and good luck." Raised in Brooklyn and Far Rockaway, Queens, he majored in music for two years at the State University of New York at Fredonia, but concluded that he had neither enough talent nor passion to make it as a top jazz pianist. He then headed west to Albuquerque and enrolled at the University of New Mexico, earning his keep playing piano in the city's cocktail lounges.

At UNM Curtis encountered "a wonderful professor named Edwin Hoyt," a specialist in international organization who had received his Ph.D. from Columbia. On Hoyt's recommendation, Curtis applied to Columbia and won a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Foundation award. He arrived at Columbia in 1962 expecting to stay for a one year Master's program in international relations. "At that point I thought I might go into journalism or try to get a job in the United Nations or go to law school. The one thought that never crossed my mind was to become an academic and Japan specialist."

But luck intervened. Required to take a seminar on US foreign policy, Curtis signed up for one taught by James Morley and Dorothy Borg. "I had no idea that Morley was a leading Japan specialist and Borg an eminent historian of US relations with East Asia. The two of them changed my life." After reading Curtis' seminar paper, Morley encouraged him to enter the Ph.D. program and study Japanese. A year after entering, Curtis found himself in Tokyo, enrolled for the 1964-65 academic year at the IUC. "Tokyo was a vibrant, exciting city, the Center's teachers, in particular Takagi Kiyoko sensei, Mizutani Osamu sensei, and Mizutani Nobuko sensei, were inspiring, and I made friendships with fellow classmates that endure to this day." It was there, too, that he realized that the study of Japan drew on an



inner passion. "As a music major, I practiced five or six hours a day and realized that my heart was not really in it." By contrast, he was fascinated by the Japanese language and could spend that much time studying kanji without even realizing that hours had gone by. "My experience at the IUC had everything to do with my decision to become a Japan specialist. It gave me a great education in the Japanese language; the dedication of the teachers inspired me; and Japan -- its culture, politics, history -- intrigued me."

Curtis returned to Columbia, but was soon back in Japan with a Fulbright-Hayes fellowship to conduct Ph.D. research, his goal being to study how politics operated at the grassroots. With an introduction from future Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro, Curtis spent a year in Oita prefecture following the election campaign of Satō Bunsai for the lower house of the Diet. His study became an instant classic in both English (*Election Campaigning Japanese Style*) and Japanese (*Daigishi no Tanjō*). Curtis has been a highly sought expert on Japan and Japanese politics ever since.

Curtis received his Ph.D. in Political Science from Columbia in 1969. "James Morley was my mentor and eventually I succeeded him as the Japanese politics specialist in Columbia's Political Science department." Curtis has been teaching at Columbia since 1968 and served as the Director of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute for twelve years between 1974-1990. He has held appointments at academic and research institutions around the globe. He is the recipient of numerous awards and honors including the Chunichi Shimbun Special Achievement Award, the Masayoshi Ohira Memorial Prize, the Japan Foundation Award and the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star, one of the highest honors awarded by the Japanese government.