

# Princeton University

Honors Faculty Members  
Receiving Emeritus Status



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The biographical sketches were written by colleagues in the departments of those honored, except where noted.

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# Contents



## *Faculty Members Receiving Emeritus Status*

Leonard Harvey Babby	1
Mark Robert Cohen	4
Martin C. Collcutt	6
John Horton Conway	10
Edward Charles Cox	14
Frederick Lewis Dryer	16
Thomas Jeffrey Espenshade	19
Jacques Robert Fresco	22
Charles Gordon Gross	24
András Peter Hámori	28
Marie-Hélène Huet	30
Morton Daniel Kostin	32
Heath W. Lowry	34
Richard Bryant Miles	36
Chiara Rosanna Nappi	39

Susan Naquin	42
Edward Nelson	44
John Abel Pinto	47
Albert Jordy Raboteau	49
François P. Rigolot	54
Daniel T. Rodgers	57
Gilbert Friedell Rozman	61
Peter Schäfer	64
José A. Scheinkman	68
Anne-Marie Slaughter	71
Robert Harry Socolow	74
Zoltán G. Soos	78
Eric Hector Vanmarcke	81
Maurizio Viroli	83
Frank Niels von Hippel	85
Andrew John Wiles	87
Michael George Wood	89

# Martin C. Collcutt



Martin Collcutt, born in London, England, in 1939, was schooled in London and Plymouth in Devonshire. At Fitzwilliam College, University of Cambridge, he studied British and European History and graduated with honors. Eager to see the world, he took a course at London University in the teaching of English as a second language. Martin considered various possibilities and decided that Japan, by then recovering from defeat in war and atomic destruction in 1945 and preparing to host the 1964 Olympic Games, would be an interesting country to visit for a few years. He did not realize that this would become a lifelong involvement.

In 1963, Martin found a position teaching English language and literature at Yokohama National University. Befriended by faculty and students in Yokohama, enjoying his life in Japan, and thinking that he might stay more than two years, after a few months Martin began to study spoken and written Japanese in Tokyo and working with a private tutor. Around this time, Martin was introduced to a Zen Buddhist meditation group whose members met at one of the old Buddhist temples in the city of Kamakura. Curious about Zen, he joined the weekly meditation sessions.

After three years of teaching in Yokohama, Martin moved to the University of Tokyo, where he taught English literature and European history for three more years, continuing his study of Japanese and Zen Buddhism. While teaching in Tokyo, he made the acquaintance of his future wife, Akiko Morinaga. They were married in 1967 at the Daishuin Zen temple in Kyoto. Akiko's uncle and adoptive father, Morinaga Soko Roshi, was the abbot of Daishuin. In their frequent visits to Kyoto, they would stay at Daishuin and join in the meditation practice there. Morinaga Soko was quite well known outside Japan and was invited to give annual retreats at summer schools organized

by the London Buddhist Society. Martin began to accompany him to these summer sessions as his interpreter.

While teaching at the University of Tokyo, Martin also served as tutor in English to the then-crown prince of Japan, now the emperor, Akihito. Weekly, at the convenience of the crown prince, Martin visited the detached palace. The crown prince, then in his early thirties, was deeply interested in marine biology and ichthyology—a branch of zoology dealing with fish—especially the study of small river fish belonging to the Goby family. In their meetings, they discussed the crown prince’s various official activities, read newspaper articles on world events, and sometimes discussed essays the crown prince had written for publication in English-language ichthyology journals, as well as articles on contemporary science and Francis Bacon’s essays. If the crown prince happened to be planning travel to some foreign venue, or to be entertaining English-speaking visitors to the palace, they would discuss the comments he was considering. Martin was impressed by the crown prince’s commitment to his scientific research and to his public responsibilities, as well as to his seriousness in his study of English and his acceptance of, and commitment to, his likely future role as the emperor of Japan.

Pursuing his interest in Japanese culture, especially earlier history and religion, Martin was accepted into the graduate program in East Asian studies at Harvard University in 1969, where he completed his Ph.D. in 1975 with a study of Zen Buddhist monasticism in medieval Japan. Interested in the history of Zen Buddhism and influenced by David Knowles’ pathbreaking study of *The Monastic Order in England*, Martin decided to look at Zen in medieval Japan from the angles of how Zen monastic life developed in Japan, when and how meditation was practiced, how monks and monasteries were regulated, the rules for monastery cooks, how monasteries managed their economies and their sometimes extensive landholdings, and what ties they had with lay patrons, including nobles, warriors, townspeople, and farmers. This research culminated in his book, *Five Mountains: The Rinzai Zen Monastic Institution in Medieval Japan* (Harvard East Asian Monographs, 1981).

Appointed as an assistant professor in the departments of East Asian studies and history at Princeton in 1975, Martin was subsequently promoted to associate professor and professor. From 1984 to 1987, he served as chair of the East Asian studies department, and from 1984 to 2005, except while on leave, as director of the East Asian studies program. Reflecting strong faculty opinion within East Asian studies, he worked to strengthen the focus on the intensive study of spoken and written Chinese and Japanese for undergraduates and graduate students. Working with professors C.P. Chou and E. Perry Link, he supported the early development of the Princeton in Beijing summer language program and its counterpart in Japan, the Princeton in Ishikawa program. Martin would have liked to add Korean studies to the department and program curriculum, but that would come later.

Martin's teaching focused on earlier Japanese history and culture, including the aristocratic and warrior culture of the Heian and Kamakura periods, and Zen Buddhism and the arts in medieval Japan. His research has focused on Zen Buddhism, including "Zen and the Gozan" in the *Cambridge History of Japan, Vol. 3: Medieval Japan* (1990). He has also written about pre-1600 Japanese society and religions more generally, as in his "'Nun Shogun': Politics and Religion in the Life of Hôjô Masako (1157-1225)," in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Pre-modern Japan* (2002). Martin has not restricted himself to the early and medieval history of Japan. Working with Marius B. Jansen and Isao Kumakura, he published the generously illustrated *Cultural Atlas of Japan* (1988). Becoming interested in the writings of the Japanese historian Kume Kunitake, he helped translate Kume's detailed record of the round-the-world journey of the Iwakura Embassy, which was sent to re-negotiate unequal treaties and to learn from the West from 1871 to 1873. Martin translated the first volume of the five-volume record that gives Kume's detailed account of the embassy's experiences in the United States between January and September 1872. They were welcomed as distinguished visitors from a Japan that was opening to the world.

Martin has held visiting professorships at a number of Japanese universities including Kyoto University (1982), International Christian University, Tokyo (1988-89), the International Research Center for Japanese Studies, Kyoto (1992-93), University of Tokyo (1996), Kansai University (1997), the National Museum of Japanese History, Chiba (1999), the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka (2001), and Keio University (2006). In 2008, he was awarded an honorary doctoral degree by Kansai University in Osaka.

Contemplating retirement, Martin and Akiko will continue to enjoy rural life and gardening in Hopewell, but they also hope to spend more time with family and friends in Japan. In a leisurely way, they are visiting the eighty-eight Buddhist temples on the pilgrimage circuit around the small island of Shikoku in southwestern Japan and hope to complete the pilgrimage in a few more years. Martin has several research projects in mind. One is a detailed, day-by-day study of the reception of the Iwakura Embassy in 1872, and the reactions of those Americans from San Francisco to Washington, New York, and Boston who welcomed and entertained the embassy. Another topic for research is the Zen monk and artist Sengai Gibbon, whose humorous ink-paintings and verses have intrigued Martin since he first saw them in a Tokyo gallery many years ago.