

## **Looking Back from Abroad on the Accomplishments of Professor Zentaro Kitagawa**

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For the numerous foreign students and guest researchers from all parts of the world who remember Professor Zentaro Kitagawa as a most kind, helpful, encouraging and efficient host at the justly renowned Kyoto University Law Faculty, his name will for ever be a synonym for “doing research in Japan”. His willingness to welcome so many different young scholars over the decades was based on a wide-ranging interest in comparative law, spanning not only the legal orders of the civil law tradition (namely the German and French), but also those of the common law world (including the US and Anglo-Commonwealth legal regimes). To cite but one fruit of his broad interests, Professor Kitagawa was a path breaker among private law scholars in exploring deeply and early not only the German and French laws of contract but also US contract law. But his interest did not stop there. He was equally engaged as a builder of bridges to various Asian legal systems, from the very beginning – long before engagement with “Asian law” became fashionable.

This broader worldview and intellectual curiosity also led Professor Kitagawa to write and teach inspiringly about important transnational topics and legal instruments, including the UN Sales Convention and strict product liability regimes. We vividly recall the international nature of Professor Kitagawa’s seminars, where we not only met each other – eventually resulting in a close cooperation that has spanned different continents and lasted already for nearly a quarter of century. Those seminars also gave us the chance to meet the future elite among Japanese academics as well as an excellent mix of foreign researchers with in interest in Japan’s from China, the US or any other country one can think of. Again, lasting cooperations grew out of these early contacts.

Professor Kitagawa once famously complained that comparative law had become “a one way street” between Japan and most western legal orders for over a century after Japan reopened to the world in 1868. If one looks today at the enduring and deep interest that Japanese law finds in the US, Australia, the UK, Germany or France – to name but a few “western” countries – this critique is obviously no longer true. One important cause for this positive change was his own highly successful engagement in actively promoting two-way legal exchanges with Japan, including through encouraging and welcoming so many young and mid-career legal comparativists.

Professor Kitagawa was particularly well suited for this task, as his academic interest was not restricted to contract law or other aspects of civil law in a narrow sense, but included various neighbouring fields of law and disciplines – ranging from intellectual

property to legal sociology. He had the ability to encourage and stimulate his guests to explore these venues, as well as the generosity to assist those of his guests with interests in fields he did not completely cover, by finding additional guidance from other colleagues. Being a true teacher he did not mind what his “deshi” did with their lives, only that they excelled in whatever they did – in academia, legal practice or elsewhere. Of the many contacts we have had in our academic lives, the formative contact with Professor Zentaro Kitagawa is one that will always stand out.