Katsuichi Kita-sensei – The Human Encyclopedia and Professor Par Excellence

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It has been our great fortune and privilege to be associated with Kita-sensei as a co-worker and we take this opportunity to, first of all, express my deepest gratitude to him for being our friend, philosopher and guide over the years.

Our association with Prof. Kita started in 1996 when Onishi and Raghavan joined the Media Center at Osaka City University. In 1996, the newly open Media Center started out as a state-of-the-art center combining functionality of Library, Computer Center and modern educational facility for Information Technology. Prof. Kita was heading the Library Science Division and Onishi and Raghavan were placed at the Networking and Database and Multimedia Division respectively. The research staff at the Media Center consisted of a multi-disciplinary group encompassing arts, science and technology backgrounds. At that stage of our research career, our main experience was that of in algorithms (Onishi) and computer oriented geologist (Raghavan) and it took us a while to get into the grove and equip ourselves with necessary skills and knowledge to work with a research team of such diversity. Prof. Kita went out of his way to make young researchers like us feel comfortable and advised us to think beyond our narrow fields of specialization. The initial conversations would take place over the hot cups of coffee prepared by Kita-sensei. We recall that his single worded “Coffee” e-mail which used to arrive around 11:00am daily. Towards the end of most of these coffee sessions, Kita-sensei would pull out a book from the vast collection lining his bookshelf and advise us to read in order to broaden my knowledge horizon. Soon the coffee sessions were inadequate to conclude our conversation and discussions would continue after office hours on almost any topic that one could imagine. Prof. Kita, not only amazed us with the broad spectrum of his knowledge but we were flabbergasted by his ability to instantly grasp new topics and analyze them threadbare. His conversation would be dotted with anecdotes and quotations for books and spiced with sharp wit that we have seen in very few. We used to find myself frantically taking notes, lest we miss the opportunity of learning from his immense wisdom and deep knowledge.

It was Kita-sensei who taught us that value of knowledge comes from sharing it and that open innovation was all about communication and collaborations. Our collaboration with Kita-sensei helped to strengthen our commitment to Open Source, Open Standard and Open Contents. In 2003, Raghavan co-authored a paper on Open Spatial Data Infrastructure [1] with focus on GRASS GIS and how community led

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innovation coupled with a not-for-profit business model could make the difference.

The next phase of even closer collaborations started with the establishment of the Graduate School of Creative Cities in April 2003. The new school was mainly for working professionals and Kita and Raghavan were both placed at the Information Media Environment Division. We recall expressing our apprehension of being able to change our style of teaching and research to suit part-time rather than full-time students. Kita-sensei boosted our confidence by explaining that “a undergraduate student need to learn what to study, graduate student must be guided how to study and doctoral student should think deeply on why to study, so if your experience can help students to know how and why to study, you can be a good teacher”.

Another initiative that got started under Kita-sensei’s stewardship was the publication of electronic journals. Kita-sensei always wanted to provide opportunities and forums to enhance their career and publish their works in an openly accessible form, “the web is the best peer review system” he said. So, we started out with the “Journal of Informatics” published since 2003 and it is fitting that this special issue to commemorate his retirement from Osaka City University is also published in tenth anniversary of this Journal.

“Knowledge is nurtured when intelligence is awakened”, Kita-sensei would say. He also explained to us that intelligence is intrinsic to life and the process of learning follows three basic steps a) integrate thoughts b) innovate and c) imagine new possibilities. “Knowledge is less about innovation and more about imagination” is how he summed it up. 2006 saw the restructuring of Urban Informatics Division at the Graduate School of Creative Cities. Kita-sensei, Onishi and myself were placed together in the newly formed Knowledge Information Infrastructure (KII) Division. Yonezawa later joined the team in April 2011. Kita-sensei visualized KII as a three layered model with hardware infrastructure at the base, IT applications in the middle and digital contents at the top. While the basic layers remain the same, the emerging technologies such as Cloud Computing, SOA (Service Oriented Architectures), Crowd Sourcing, Sensor Network etc. will continue to evolve and provide a new Information and Knowledge Ecosystem vastly superior to what we are presently have.

During his tenure at Osaka City University, Kita-sensei guided numerous excellent master students and produced several PhD scholars. Many of them have since entered the academic profession and are continuing the rich tradition established by Prof. Kita. His contributions to Library Science and Information Technology are too numerous to be listed here. Apart for his mentorship for our academic pursuits, we are immensely fortunate to share a deep personal bond with Kita-sensei and will always cherish the kindness and generosity that he bestowed upon us and our families. While Kita-sensei will be completing his tenure as a full-time Professor at Osaka City University in March 2013, we look forward to his future
contribution in the capacity of Emeritus Professor to continue to sharing his knowledge and vision with us in the years to come.

Kita-sensei, thank you for everything. Especially in stimulating our growth and guiding us to seek new challenges in research and education.

Reference: