Memorial to Sho Sato

Ira Michael Heyman*

Recently I was privileged to say a few words to the participants in the Symposium on Japan, the United States and Pacific Ocean Resources at Boalt. We have not spent as much time as is warranted on global issues of conservation and exploitation of resources. In deepening our perceptions, however, we are building on the heritage of the professor to whom this volume is dedicated: Sho Sato.

Sho was a young but seasoned law teacher when I joined the faculty in 1959. Dean Prosser assigned Real Property to me, thus relieving Sho from a chore from which he wished to escape to devote himself more fully to his deep interests in Water Law, Oil and Gas Law, and State and Local Law. Nonetheless, Sho was my mentor and teacher in Real Property that year. (As a Yale Law School graduate of that era, I, of course, knew nothing of estates or other conventional property doctrines.) I used the casebook Sho had used. He gave me copies of his class notes to help me prepare. And he freely gave me his time that year in helping to explore areas I found difficult to comprehend. Sho’s lucidity, directness, and precision helped me to learn both substance and approaches to teaching. I shall always be grateful for his empathetic assistance.

Our friendship broadened over those early years. We were competitive in tennis and cooperative in work. My interests tended towards land use planning, regulation, and environmental law. These dovetailed with Sho’s expertise in municipal law (he coauthored a leading book on the subject) and resource law. We only became partially intellectually divorced when he turned some of his attention to income tax, a subject that still terrifies me. By this time, however, our relationship was strong enough to withstand even this deep tremor and I continued to visit his office each time I had another outrageous idea that needed mature review and wise tempering. Sho always found time to visit with me despite his deep and successful drive to be productive, exhaustive, and wise in his research undertakings.

Ethnicity was less noted in Sho’s years than now, or at least less spoken about. It is nevertheless notable that Sho was one of very few law teachers of Japanese (or for that matter, Asian) ancestry. There was little in his behavior at school reflecting ethnic origin. We did not discuss,
for instance, the resentment he had to feel for the forced relocation of his family during World War II. Sho in these regards was a very private person. He eschewed ethnic politics, yet he gave time to social and political causes important to him.

It is fitting that the Ecology Law Quarterly pay tribute to Sho Sato. He published an important two-part article in the Quarterly on property rights and geothermal development. He was deeply interested in the wise use and conservation of resources, and in the structuring of the legal system to attain those objectives. He was a prodigious scholar in these realms and left us with ideas, information, and analysis to continue the quest. And he was a very fine person.