

Member Spotlight: Kenji Kuroda

Through adversity, a star lawyer is born.



Kenji Kuroda is an attorney at law admitted in Japan and New York and registered with the Taipei Bar Association.

He is also registered as a patent attorney in Japan, and focuses on intellectual property litigation including Japanese and foreign patents. In addition, he handles international business matters such as direct investment and finance projects, and mergers and acquisitions both domestic and abroad.

He was educated at the Waseda University Faculty of Law, the Beijing Language School, Duke University School of Law in North Carolina, USA, and Fudan University Faculty of Law in Shanghai, China.

Real estate fraud was the driving force that enabled Kenji Kuroda to become the youngest person ever to pass the Japanese bar exam at the age of just 20.

As a boy, Kenji was set to follow his grandfather into an engineering career, until he watched his parents fall victim to real estate fraud and saw how powerless they were against the developer's lawyers.

His grandfather studied in Berlin before World War II, and eventually became one of the first civil engineers to build a highway in Japan. This was Kenji's career path, until his father, a high school principal, was defrauded while buying an apartment in Tokyo. The family was forced to abandon their case against the developer when the legal dispute became too complex for their resources.

It was this experience that fuelled Kenji's desire to become a lawyer.

He recalls: "I studied what the developer's lawyer was doing, then started to study law on my own after school, determined to help other victims of

fraud in the future. Normally in Japan, people go to university and study law for four years after graduation, so the average age to pass the bar exam was 28."

"I dropped out of university as a freshman and studied law in my own time, passing the bar exam at the age of 20. I was featured in the national newspapers and on TV because it was so unusual. The pass rate at the time was 1.5 percent."

After passing the bar exam in 1983, Kenji undertook the obligatory two-year training course at the Institute of Legal Training and Research, governed by the Supreme Court of Japan, but he was still only 23 years old when his legal career began, giving him some difficulty in choosing what to do next.

Kenji decided he wanted to push himself further, study more and gain some international experience, and after assessing that the number of lawyers in Japan with experience in Chinese law was almost negligible, he went to China to study Chinese language and law before applying to US law schools.

He says: "It was 1984 and I had identified five areas of law that I thought would experience high growth in the future, namely Chinese law, software law, biochemical law and environmental protection law. At that time there were almost no laws in China, including no civil code or patent law."

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"After spending time in China, I applied to US law schools. I had no undergraduate degree, so only four out of 25 law schools accepted me. For my applications, instead of a degree certificate, I enclosed clippings of newspaper articles about me, with English translations. I eventually attended Duke University School of Law and subsequently passed the New York Bar Exam."

Kenji completed his training with some time in Denmark studying EU law and a stint in a Hong Kong law firm, before turning his attention back to Japan and eventually establishing his own firm. Kuroda Law Offices is now a mid-sized firm in Japan, with nearly 20 attorneys and Kenji as Managing Partner.

The firm has offices in Taiwan and China and also has experience employing lawyers in other developing Asian nations including the Philippines and Indonesia. They specialise in technology and intellectual property (IP) and work hard to represent their Japanese clients in these jurisdictions.

One of the major areas of work for Kenji is litigation against counterfeit and piracy, since China is the source of the majority of the counterfeited goods imported into developed nations such as the US, Europe and Japan.

One of his proudest achievements to date is the work he did representing an international sports organisation in 2002, when it held an international tournament in Asia (including Japan).

He says: "When the event was held in Europe in 1998, there were more than 200 litigation cases brought by the organisation against counterfeit goods. When the next event was held in Asia, I was asked to organise the litigation teams in Japan to cope with the huge number of litigation cases expected. I employed a novel strategy, choosing to work inside China instead, and implemented a plan to shut down the counterfeit factories before they could export to Japan.

"As a result of my work, the number of litigation cases during the event in Asia 2002 was reduced from over 200 in 1998 to just one."

We also built a very good relationship with the Japanese Customs Authority to deal with those counterfeit goods that did find their way to Japan. We won customs officers the autonomy to act independently when suspect goods were uncovered, which was the first time such a strategy had been employed. As a result of my work, the number of

litigation cases during the event in Asia 2002 was reduced from over 200 in 1998 to just one."

This type of creative legal work in highly specialised areas of law is key to Kenji's success and he is constantly assessing new technologies for opportunities. These include FinTech, LED technology, semiconductors and most recently, self-driving cars. Kuroda Law Offices is the only Japanese firm to have opened three offices in China (presently Beijing and Shanghai) and one office in Taiwan, helping them to remain at the frontier of new technology law.

Kenji has a firm focus on growing his partnership by increasing his network of international contacts and developing new expertise to help his Japanese and international clients. His commitment to this goal is so great, he often finds that even his hobbies lead to new business opportunities.

He concludes: "I love hi-tech gadgets and new products. I recently bought a new type of juicer made by a foreign company and began studying it to see what IP was applied. That company became our client."

Kenji lives close to his office in Tokyo and exercises daily, believing a healthy body helps to keep his mind sharp. He loves to travel and leaves Japan once or twice a month for business meetings, usually managing to combine a healthy amount of sightseeing and relaxation with the legal work that first became his passion as a young boy, almost fifty years ago.



Kuroda Law Offices

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Kuroda Law Offices is a full-service law firm, founded in 1995. Our focus is intellectual property litigation including Japanese and foreign patents, international business matters such as direct investment and finance projects, and mergers and acquisitions both domestic and abroad. We also have ample experience with areas such as investing in developing nations and growing markets, Internet businesses using digital contents, and sports marketing.