

# Vol.13 Takeshi Nakasa with leading figures #6



Professor Shoichi Inoue(right)

## Photographer Takeshi Nakasa vs. Professor Shoichi Inoue

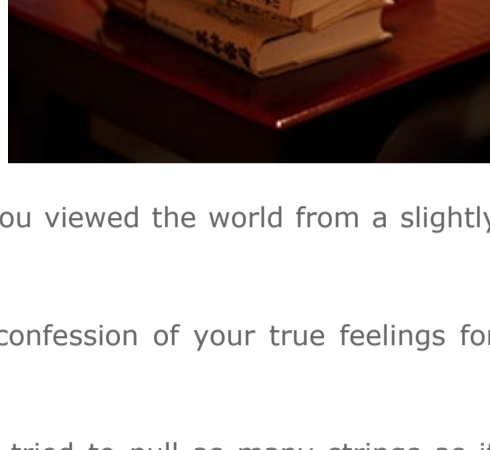
Viewpoints of Our World / Our Viewpoint

Today, Takeshi Nakasa, a man interested in all kinds of things in our world, was finally able to see a person he has long been anxiously hoping to meet. The person he met is the kind of man who, when he talks for thirty minutes, it's not unusual for about 60 topics to come up in the course of the conversation. Akira Inoue brought his unique viewpoints on Japanese culture to a wide range of topics in Japanese culture; more than just architecture, he has written several books on the history of design, and the history and theories of manners and customs. Their minds and their words were sharp enough to cut through the rarified air in which their conversation took place; a swanky Japanese style restaurant tucked away in a quiet corner of the Gion district of Kyoto. As for covering a myriad of different during their talk, the men certainly did not disappoint. (September 2013)

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## 01. Where Photography Meets Voice Lessons

**Nakasa:** It must have been in about the late 1980's when I read your book "Postmodern Greater East Asia", and I thought, "Wow, this guy is so cool..." It was literally love at first sight, or at 'first read' I guess I should say. I could intuitively sense that "I am absolutely positive the he author of this is an interesting person. After that, I read "Did Japan Really Have Antiquity" and I was hooked on the way you viewed the world from a slightly different angle than everyone else.



**Inoue:** Whoa, kicking of the interview with a confession of your true feelings for me. I'm flattered!

**Nakasa:** So, things followed from there, and I tried to pull as many strings as it took until I could get the opportunity to meet you, but I got nowhere until one day ten years ago when I was doing a photography shoot in Kyoto. I saw the car of an architect friend of mine who lived in Kyoto, Hiroyuki Wakabayashi(\*1), and you were sitting in the passenger seat, and the car sped right past me as I was shooting. That image stayed in my head, and I thought, "Ok, so if I go through Wakabayashi-san, I can connect to Akira Inoue." I guessed I could meet you anytime, but the years slipped by and I thought that if there is someone I really wanted to meet, then I should go ahead and meet them. So, this time, I pushed Wakabayashi-san until he introduced you to me.

**Inoue:** Oh, really? Well, I am honored. I don't want to advertise this too loudly, but as a matter of fact, Wakabayashi-san and I went to the same vocal school. If we were in the car together, we were probably on our way to a lesson together.



**Nakasa:** Seriously? You went to voice lessons? Now, that is a surprise.

**Inoue:** Wakabayashi-san and I are both people who have a lot of different interests. He read the old Kyoto office of the Mainichi newspapers with by himself, and now that is his office. Lately, he is doing calligraphy practice, and he reduced the size of his office and made the space into an antique shop. When I see that mix of things, I think that he must idolize Seiichi Shirai(\*2).

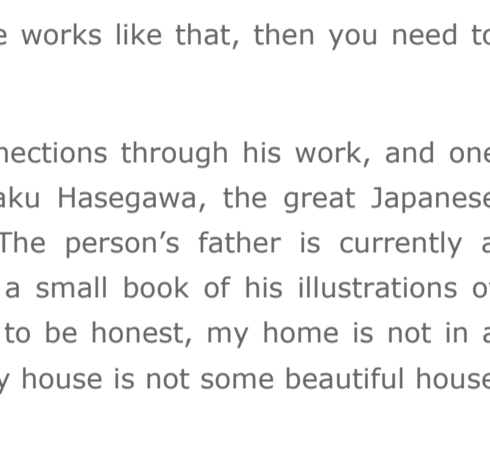
**\*1 Hiroyuki Wakabayashi:**  
Representative of Wakabayashi Hiroyuki Architectural Research Institute. Born in 1949 in Kyoto, he joined Tachikichi Corporation in 1967. After that, he went to Kyoto Design House and worked on product development and planning design for flatware brand Adam & Eve. He went independent in 1972 and ran an office for interior design, during that period, he developed his own style of architectural design. He founded the Wakabayashi Hiroyuki Architectural Research Institute in 1982.

**\*2 Seiichi Shirai:**  
Born in Tokyo in 1905, his real name was originally written with different characters. He graduated from what is now Kyoto Institute of Technology with a degree in design in 1928. That same year, he received a recommendation from scholar of aesthetics Yasukazu Fukada and studied philosophy at the University of Heidelberg. His brother-in-law Koichiro Kondo was in France, and he used that opportunity to interact with Parisian intelligentsia. He began his path as an architect after returning to Japan in 1932. He also left behind many great books he designed. He died in 1983 at the age of 78.

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## 02. The Relationship between Homes and Antiques

**Nakasa:** Speaking of antiques, that reminds me of when I was shooting in Kyoto, I had the chance to stay at a certain person's house. As I went through the hallway, I came upon all of these wonderful antiques. I thought "Who are you, Rosanjin(\*3)?" All of the pieces were so refined and elegant, it looked like he was doing business with some high-prices antique shop. I just kept staring, and then a voice from inside the house called out "You want to take something home?" I couldn't help but wonder how many antiques must be sleeping somewhere inside the house.



**Inoue:** if you are going to display fine antique works like that, then you need to have a good setting for them in your home.

**Nakasa:** You are right about that. He had connections through his work, and one such connection was in the family line of Tohaku Hasegawa, the great Japanese painter and founder of the Hasegawa Style. The person's father is currently a modern style Japanese artist, and I was given a small book of his illustrations of Japanese cherry blossoms. I took it home, and to be honest, my home is not in a modern style, so I have no place to display it. My house is not some beautiful house in Gion.

**Inoue:** Now that you mention it, Wakabayashi-san's house is wonderful. The balance between the antiques and the home itself is just perfect. However, I think, in turn, that he is sacrificing his own normal daily living situation. The way modern architecture decays, the way buildings are forgotten in time, it's just dreadful. On the other hand, looking at old buildings, they have a different kind of longevity. Take, for instance, the giant, jet-black front gate at the entrance to the temple grounds of Zen temple Nanzenji, it has a kind of awe-inspiring presence.

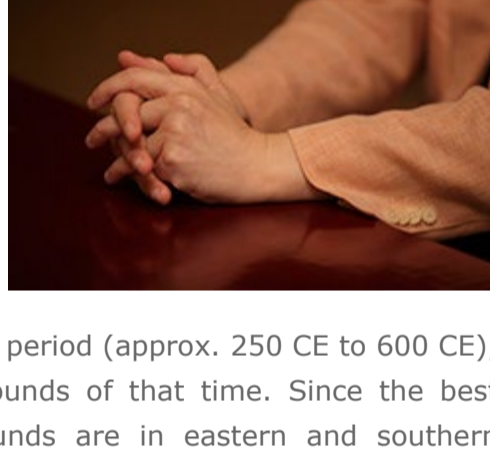
**\*3 Rosanjin:**  
Kitaōji Rosanjin was born in Kyoto in 1883. A famous artist and calligrapher, and writer in mid-20th century Japan. His real name was Fusajirō Kitaōji, but he is best known by his artistic name, Rosanjin. He died in 1959.

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## 03. Why Don't We Ever Get an 'Osaka Period'?

**Nakasa:** In that way, I think Kansai region (south-western half of Japan, including Osaka) has greater depth than anywhere else in Japan.

**Inoue:** Yes, that's right, although I can't help but feel that, within the framework of history, Osaka always gets the shaft. For example, look at the official names of Japanese historical periods. There was the Yayoi period (approx. 300 BCE to 250 CE). It was named that because a scholar found ancient pottery in a place called Kaizuka, in the town of Yayoi. Then after that we have what is called the Kofun period (approx. 250 CE to 600 CE), named for the giant keyhole-shaped burial mounds of that time. Since the best examples of those keyhole-shaped burial mounds are in eastern and southern Osaka, I think we could just as easily call that period the "Osaka period." So, much later we had the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1573 to 1603). Azuchi was the home castle of Oda Nobunaga (the great samurai general/warlord who nearly consolidated power over Japan). Momoyama was the home castle, named Fushimi Castle, of his successor Toyotomi Hideyoshi (who completed the process of gaining control over the whole of Japan), which is located in southern Kyoto on the edge of Kyoto, next to Osaka. But of course when you think of Hideyoshi, Osaka comes to mind more than Kyoto. This period should be called the "Azuchi-Osaka period," but over the course of time, we have settled on the names we have today.



**Nakasa:** I get it...

**Inoue:** And then we also have the masterpiece "Breakfast at Tiffany's".

**Nakasa:** Ah, the Audrey Hepburn movie.

**Inoue:** That's right. In the first scene, Holly Golightly, Audrey Hepburn's character, is having a party on the roof of her apartment building with her friends. The Japanese man who lives in the same building comes out to complain about the noise. The Japanese character is going on and on in fluent English, but the Japanese language subtitles for his lines are in Osaka dialect. Don't you think that's a bit much?

**Nakasa:** That feels like it is done very much on purpose... I bet the characteristic Japanese accents on the TV show Ama-chan are translated into some other kind of accent in English.

**Inoue:** Yeah, probably so.

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## 04. Architecture and Location

**Nakasa:** When you compare East Japan and West Japan, the West has more interesting architectural movements. There are many fabulous building on the slanted ground along the Seto Inland Sea (an arm of the Pacific Ocean in southern Japan). When you build a great building within a beautiful landscape, the greatness of the building increases many times over.

**Inoue:** Long ago, I visited the chapel of Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, designed by Le Corbusier. Maybe because it's so far out in the middle of nowhere—with only three trains per day going there, so if you mistake the weekday train schedule and the weekend train schedule and miss your train home, you have to spend the night on a station bench until the next train comes the next day—the relationship between the location and the architecture is overwhelming. Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater is the same. Thanks to such a powerful location, the greatness of the architecture is enhanced.

**Nakasa:** The Akasaka imperial villa in Tokyo is also quite interesting.

**Inoue:** I think that building is an expression of the zeitgeist of Japan at that time it was built. For example, the skyscrapers bunched together in the Pudong district of Shanghai or Dubai are postmodern symbols; I guess they show how China and the United Arab Emirates have overtaken American globalization. When you mention the Akasaka imperial villa, I think of Tokyo being sucked into Paris. Or conversely, that architecture could also be something like an expression of not wanting to be inferior, a declaration of "We can build that, too, you know!"



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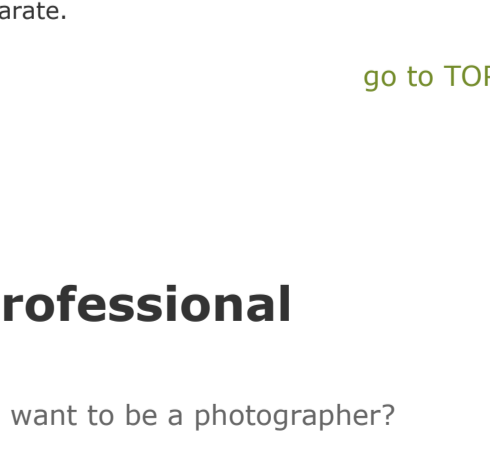
## 05. Anti-Japanese Sentiment and Reality

**Nakasa:** Do you often go to China?

**Inoue:** I went last year, in October of 2012, to Shanghai. Right when the anti-Japanese feeling was the most intense.

**Nakasa:** I was also in Shanghai during that same time. I went to shoot the reception party for a friend's shop. The only real inconvenience we had was when we got a phone call from the designer for our shoot saying he was going to be a little late because he had been riding a taxi but after the driver realized he was Japanese he suddenly became upset and made him get out of the cab.

**Inoue:** That reminds me, there was a catch phrase going around the Internet at that time in regard to the Senkaku Island dispute between Japan and China that was causing much of the anti-Japanese feeling. It was "Senkaku Islands belong China, Sola Aoi(\*4) belongs to the world!" This phrase came from Chinese fans at a soccer game between the J-League club Kashiwa Reysol, and the Guangzhou Evergrande, and I think it is quite interesting. It seems to follow the same pattern of how Japan, the loser of the war, fell in love with Marilyn Monroe, and actress from the country that was formerly our enemy. Being a sex symbol transcends time periods. Speaking of sexuality, this is a bit of a different story, but you know how they have those TV shows where a female reporter travels around Japan and introduces different hot spring resorts?(\*5) The female reporter covers up her body by wrapping a towel around herself and then gets into the hot spring bath. Under usual circumstances, people would be angry if you did that. I think, instead of trying to show something that you normally can't see on the TV screen in such a strange way, it's probably more natural to just have some middle-aged male reporter covered up by the water instead of a young woman.



**Nakasa:** I wonder how much the TV ratings spike during just that short scene with in the bath, I can't help but laugh about it.

**\*4 Sola Aoi:**  
Born in 1983 in Tokyo. A Japanese adult film star and celebrity. Recently she is gaining popularity in China and has over 14 million followers on Weibo, China's version of twitter.

**\*5 In Japanese hot springs one always enters the communal bath completely naked, although in modern times, men's and women's baths are usually separate.**

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## 06. Getting to Work as a Professional

**Inoue:** By the way, Nakasa-san, did you always want to be a photographer?

**Nakasa:** I actually wanted to go to art university. In high school, I studied as drawing and design and such hard as I could, and in the end, I became a photographer.

**Inoue:** Oh, I see. With such professional types of jobs, like an architect, you have to start preparing in high school so you can get into an architecture program in college. But if you want to be a professional baseball player you have to start younger, or to become a professional pianist you have to begin as a small child and train at music conservatories. While of course it depends on your family's economic situation, but becoming a baseball player or pianist requires a huge amount of time training, and then you have to win out in an extremely competitive field. It takes a different dimension of self-awareness than becoming an architect or a photographer.

**Nakasa:** From time to time, young people ask me, with a serious look on their faces, "What should I do if I want to be a photographer?" They really have stars in their eyes! My answer is always the same. "First, make yourself a business card and label your occupation as 'Photographer.' Then you can be a photographer right away." The starting point, the entrance I mean, is wide open, what happens from there is what it's all about.



Thanks to: Gion Yata

Text: Hiroki Yanagisawa

Edit: Nobuko Ohara

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