

“Tokyo Sky Tree” & the Nezu Family

By Noboru HATAKEYAMA

Last March, a digital broadcasting tower called “Tokyo Sky Tree” was completed in Sumida-ku in Tokyo. This tower is now the tallest TV tower in the world at a height of 634 meters.

Although Tokyo Sky Tree happens to be No. 1 in height, it was not intended to be that high from the outset but this was necessitated because many newly constructed high-rise buildings in Tokyo tended to prevent TV signals from reaching their destination. Six TV broadcasting companies in Tokyo found that Tokyo Tower in the Shiba area was too low (at 333 meters) and formed a group to promote construction of a new TV signal tower in the 600-meter class in 2003. There was severe competition over where to construct the new tower. The site was decided in 2006 as Sumida-ku, and actually the name of this TV tower was determined as Tokyo Sky Tree in 2008. Tobu Railway Co. formed a special company to engage in designing and constructing this new tower in 2006. This company's stocks are 100% held by Tobu Railway Co.

Tobu Railway Co. was established in 1897. Kaichiro Nezu the First (hereafter the First) was asked to join Tobu Railway Co. as president in 1905. During his presidency, he succeeded in rebuilding the company which had been suffering from a business slump. One of his strokes of magic in rebuilding the company was to establish a “Nikko” line to carry increasing numbers of tourists from Tokyo directly to Nikko, a popular sightseeing area. He joined a business mission to the US led by Eiichi Shibusawa in 1909 which was formally called the “Honorary Commercial Commissioners of Japan to the United States of America.” Koichi Nezu, the first son of Kaichiro Nezu the Second (son of the First, and hereafter the Second), told me that according to what the Second frequently told his son, the First was greatly impressed by the fact that rich American people donated money to society. Therefore, the First believed that money earned from society must be returned to society. In this respect, he contributed at least two things to our society. The first was that he established in 1922 an excellent middle school and high school, which are united. These schools are called Musashi Middle School and High School (hereafter the High School). “Musashi” was the old name of the entire area where the High School was, and still is, located (in addition, Musashi University was established in 1949 in the same place it is now). The other was the establishment of the Nezu Museum in Aoyama. This art museum was built in accordance with the provisions of his will shortly after his demise back in 1941.

The post of president of Tobu Railway Co. was taken over by the Second.

The High School was famous even before World War II as a school that allowed great freedom with excellent academic achievements. This atmosphere attracted many of the best and brightest boys (girls were not allowed) from all over Japan. Among the graduates of the High School were the late honorable Kiichi Miyazawa, former prime minister of Japan, honorable Akito Arima, former Education Minister of Japan, former President of Tokyo University and the incumbent Chancellor of Nezu Educational Foundation and Shoichi Saba and Taizo Nishimuro, both former presidents and CEOs of Toshiba Corporation, to name a few. As a matter of fact, Koichi Nezu, the first son of the Second, is the incumbent president of Tobu Department Store as well as chairman of the board of Nezu Educational Foundation which oversees the High School. On the other hand, Yoshizumi Nezu, the second son of the Second, is the incumbent chairman of the board of Tobu Railway Co. I don't know whether the First thought that managing public transportation was returning money to our society or earning money from it.

The decision by the Tobu Group to embark on digital broadcasting through Tokyo Sky Tree was made after the demise of the Second. In this regard this decision cannot be attributed to any achievement of the First or the Second though this project may be an undertaking to return money to society.

I said the height of Tokyo Sky Tree is 634 meters. Although the following story is a little bit difficult for non-native Japanese speakers to understand, 6 is often pronounced as *muttsu*, abbreviated to *mu*, while 3 is *san*, abbreviated to *sa*, and 4 is *shi* – so altogether 634 sounds like “Musashi”. The wide area where Tokyo Sky Tree stands now was called *Musashi no kuni* (country). That is one possibility why the two young Nezu brothers decided on the height, but I speculate that they may have decided its height as 634 meters not necessarily because of the old name of the area but because it is identical to the name of the High School established exactly 90 years ago of which both of them are graduates. I very much hope my speculation is right because I am also a graduate of the High School. **JS**

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