



## Where Have I seen you Before?

Two or three times a year I get a phone call from a company involved in producing television programs. The requests are usually exactly the same - they are planning a program that will feature foreigners in Japan studying Japanese culture, and would I be willing to appear? Sometimes these requests come because I myself have sent publicity material to the program producers, and sometimes they just come out of the blue.

If the program in question seems to be a basically sensible one, and not some kind of raucous or frivolous waste of time, then I usually agree to the request. Keeping my work in the public eye is an essential part of making a living the way I do, and even though I myself don't much care for television (I don't own one), going on TV is of course a good way to publicize and promote my work.

I must say though, that TV doesn't have anywhere near as much 'power' as I thought it would have. Back when I was in the early stages of my long *Hyakunin Isshu* print series, and I had my first chances to appear on Japanese TV, I thought that my 'problems' would be over. Surely, appearing on the NHK National News would bring in so many new customers that I would never have to worry about making a living ever again! ... or so I thought.

I was completely wrong. I have now been on Japanese TV programs many many dozens of times, including some of the most popular and widely viewed shows, and I can tell you that it does almost nothing for my business. A good example of this is the time last year when I made an appearance on the very popular program "You Too Can Be Picasso". They showed my work very clearly, and I had a good opportunity to explain what I do, to a national audience of millions of viewers - but how many print orders did I receive from it? One. And that was from one of the other participants in the program, who I had chatted with face-to-face backstage!

It seems that modern TV has become such a jumbled stream of content that the viewers can't really absorb what they are seeing. Something comes on, it shows for a few minutes, then as it leaves the screen something else takes its place and drives the previous scene out of the viewer's mind, and so on, and so on, endlessly. TV is a non-stop flowing river of content, never pausing on anything long enough to allow it to make an impact on the viewer.

That this is true is reinforced by the fact - still surprising to me - that even after appearing on so many popular TV shows, I can walk the streets of Tokyo and never get recognized or stopped by people. And I think I have a pretty distinctive appearance ... surely easy to remember, no?

Actually though, I do very occasionally get recognized in public, perhaps once a year or so. One of these events was very amusing; my brother was in this country for a couple of weeks, visiting us from his home in Germany. He wanted to hear what Japanese jazz was like, so I took him down to a small jazz pub in Tokyo one evening. We settled into our chairs and a young waitress appeared. As she came up to us, she said to me "Oh, I know you ... you're the famous woodblock printmaker!"

We chatted for a minute, and she then left to prepare our order. My brother looked at me with eyes a bit wide. Here we were, in a city of 25 million people, and his brother is so famous that even waitresses in pubs know him?

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Well, what else could I say ... "Sure, nothing special .... happens all the time ..."

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