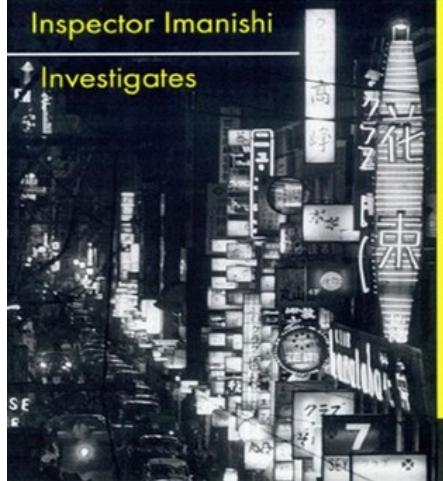




“Tantalizing...  
A superb thriller.”  
—LOS ANGELES TIMES

Seichō Matsumoto



## Inspector Imanishi Investigates

*Seicho Matsumoto, Beth Cary (Translator)*

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# Inspector Imanishi Investigates

*Seicho Matsumoto , Beth Cary (Translator)*

## **Inspector Imanishi Investigates** Seicho Matsumoto , Beth Cary (Translator)

In the wee hours of a 1960s Tokyo morning, a dead body is found under the rails of a train, and the victim's face is so badly damaged that police have a hard time figuring out the victim's identity. Only two clues surface: an old man, overheard talking in a distinctive accent to a young man, and the word "kameda." Inspector Imanishi leaves his beloved bonsai and his haiku and goes off to investigate—and runs up against a blank wall. Months pass in fruitless questioning, in following up leads, until the case is closed, unsolved.

But Imanishi is dissatisfied, and a series of coincidences lead him back to the case. Why did a young woman scatter pieces of white paper out of the window of a train? Why did a bar girl leave for home right after Imanishi spoke to her? Why did an actor, on the verge of telling Imanishi something important, drop dead of a heart attack? What can a group of nouveau young artists possibly have to do with the murder of a quiet and "saintly" provincial old ex-policemen? Inspector Imanishi investigates.

## **Inspector Imanishi Investigates Details**

Date : Published July 1st 2003 by Soho Crime (first published 1961)

ISBN : 9781569470190

Author : Seicho Matsumoto , Beth Cary (Translator)

Format : Paperback 352 pages

Genre : Mystery, Cultural, Japan, Fiction, Asian Literature, Japanese Literature, Crime, Thriller, Mystery Thriller

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## From Reader Review Inspector Imanishi Investigates for online ebook

**Nancy Oakes says**

Inspector Imanishi Investigates is a serious crime novel which starts out with a murdered victim discovered under the tracks of a train in a station. The victim has not been killed by the train; his face was bashed in and he was strangled. The only clues the police have are that he spoke with a northern dialect, and the word "Kameda" was overheard in a conversation between the murderer and his victim in a bar. So from these two clues as a starting point, Inspector Imanishi of Tokyo must track down a killer. While he is searching for clues, a woman commits suicide and there are two other murders. Are they all related? And if so, how? This is the task of the Inspector.

I absolutely loved this story. It had layers and layers of clues, red herrings, dead ends, multiple suspects & no gratuitous sex. It was written in 1961, but except for some of the technology, you'd never know it.

I highly recommend this as a mystery novel to be read by lovers of serious mystery stories.

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### **Patrick Sheriff says**

After having really enjoyed Matsumoto's *A Quiet Place* (my review is here:

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>) I was ready to have my mind blown by this... but it wasn't.

Possibly that's because the book was written a good 10 years earlier, I'm not sure. And while I enjoyed Imanishi's dogged pursuit of clues around 1960s Japan, complete with intentional and unintentional glimpses of Japan's work ethic, sense of personal responsibility and non-existent home-life, something about the mystery rankled.

I think coincidences are like exclamation points; you are allowed one per novel, any more than that and you risk jolting the reader awake from the fictive dream. Well, I was nudged out of that happy place by several: a murder victim happened to live round the corner from our hero, and then another victim happened to have moved into his sister's apartment; a key clue happened to be written on a scrap of paper discovered a few days later on a street by a bus stop, then our hero happened to read a fictional story in the paper which happened to be about one of the murder victims. All very suspicious coincidences if they had happened in a little village, but in megapolis Tokyo? C'mon...

Download my starter library for free here - <http://eepurl.com/bFkt0X> - and receive my monthly newsletter with book recommendations galore for the Japanophile, crime-fiction-loving English teacher in all of us.

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### **Ensiform says**

This was written in 1961. Plotwise, it's very complicated and tightly-woven, replete with subtle clues and red herrings. But stylistically, it's plodding. Probably due to the translation, the writing is choppy and repetitive. And perhaps because of the culture, perhaps because of the period, the process of investigation is laughable at times. Examples: the overheard word "Kameda" is instantly assumed - for no apparent reason - to be a person, and the police proceed to look for such a person, assuming he's in Japan; when Imanishi talks to a very guilty-acting suspect, he allows the man to tell the police what he knows the next day, instead of taking him into custody then and there. In short, some of the investigating is carried out as if a mentally challenged and exceptionally naive five-year-old is at the helm. But overall, it comes through with an intricate murder scheme and some subtle police work. And it's also intriguing as a diary of Japanese thought and cultural activity of the time.

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### **AC says**

Excellent, smart, intricately constructed, seamlessly translated, police procedural, by the dean of postwar Japanese mystery writers.

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### **Elaine says**

This book was picked up because I didn't have a book to read and it ended up sucking me in completely. From the depth of the characters, the twists and turns of the plot, and the stunning descriptions of Japanese landscapes and culture made this book a joy to read. Intriguing to the last, if you like noir type murder mysteries with a fantastic cast of characters, then READ IT. It opened my eyes to Japanese crime novels and I fear I may be hooked.

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### **Jeanette says**

Finally finished this one. Not a book I could read straight off! In fact, I think I paused after each 3 or 4 chapters and left it for awhile. It's hard work. Not only the surnames and groupings, but also within the context of Japanese mores and myriads of locations during the latest years of the 1950's. Quite a different Japan from today completely across the boards, and one that has a rather unique detective/ Homicide Dept approach, as well.

If given a chance to give a star rating at the 1/2 way point, I would be hard pressed to mount a 3.

But the last quarter of the book made up for it. It was especially good in approximation of the details to how all the history had gone down, and also sublime to the mood of Imanishi as he finally turned the corner to some correct answers after all the months and months of inquiry and travel. This is his "one that got away" case and the one in which he and his district group were self-deemed "failure".

At points I thought it supremely simplistic and childishly naive to how a coroner declared the cause of death and other medical and scientific issues. But it turns out, I was wrong about that aspect and didn't even see the weapon.

Women have their completely traditional gender "roles" here. Even those bar hostesses and clerks with jobs. And the address and formal parts of interchange are those of past Japan, although still with remnants of WWII voids in domicile records and citizens' documented proofs. And there is a strange, strange pattern too of so many deaths of those under 40 or just past it. As if 30 different people, with not a one getting to 60 is "norm".

But this takes a bunch of patience. It's like reading much more verbose and overblown Russian classics in abbreviated sentence length. The names are nearly impossible. And he is always moving to NE or W Japan for inquiries and then yet AGAIN, comes three or 6 more locations all starting with the letter K and four more individuals' names all starting with the letter T. Not easy to follow and with so much repetition to a particular fact (the bloody shirt not working on a train or any public exposure method being one of those that was mentioned at least 50 times) or to a physical description? Because of that I would say it is almost at a cozy read level, but its as if you needed to use another type of alphabet to get there. And here I am, a reader who is stuck with only the 26 letters that I connote well.

But you do get to know Imanishi and his wife and her sister down to personality quirks. (Although the way he tells her to polish his shoes and get his green tea poured over rice just right, really did grate on me after awhile. Obviously hers is the fate to wait and to serve.) And yet, I would read the next one, but give it tons of time with easier reads around it. It can get quite tedious, be warned. I almost gave it 3 stars. But the last

quarter did make me round it up. This is far better than his short stories, IMHO.

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## David says

Inspector Imanishi Investigates? Yes he **does**. Even on bank holidays. He takes annual leave ... in order to investigate. He spends his wife's savings on investigating.

In the best traditions of these fictional detectives, Imanishi has annoying hobbies that have to be mentioned in every other chapter. His are haiku and bonsai. Yawn. It reminds me of a scene from the best TV comedy ever written, 'Spaced':

"Come up with any exciting literary characters lately?"

"Yeah, actually, yes. 'Dizzy Steinway'."

"I like it. I like it! What is she, some sort of crimebusting jazz singer?"

"No, actually it's the name I'm using to sign on."

"Mr Sekjigawa Shigeo will leave for Paris on an Air France flight on December 25th ..." I was at departures in Narita on 25th December one year! It was very busy, and we all watched Kojima Yoshio on the TVs around the lounges. The Air France flight to Paris was called and almost everyone boarded. I can't remember the exact figure but it was 11 or 15 left for the British Airways flight to London. On a 747! We're not talking about my carbon footprint.

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## Madhulika Liddle says

In the wee hours of a Tokyo morning, well before dawn, a dead body is found under a stationary train, its face bashed so badly as to prevent all identification. The Homicide Division of Tokyo Metropolitan Police is put on the case, and a clue surfaces: an old man, overheard talking in a distinctive accent to a young man. Inspector Imanishi leaves his beloved bonsai and his haiku and goes off by train with his young colleague, Yoshimura, to investigate—and runs up against a blank wall. Two months pass in fruitless questioning, in following up of leads, and then the case, because it cannot be kept open indefinitely, is closed, still unsolved.

But Imanishi is dissatisfied, and a series of coincidences, of things suddenly falling into place, of memories jogged, of details noticed, lead him back to the case. Why did a young woman scatter, confetti-like, pieces of white paper out of the window of a train? Why did a bar girl shift home right after Imanishi spoke to her? Why did a theatre actor, on the verge of telling Imanishi something important, drop dead of a heart attack? What can a group of avant garde young artists, architects, critics, composers, etc possibly have to do with the murder of a quiet and 'saintly' provincial old ex-policemen? Inspector Imanishi investigates.

Matsumoto Seicho's *Inspector Imanishi Investigates* is a page-turner. The narrative switches between Imanishi's investigation on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the members of the Nouveau Group, especially the young men Sekigawa and Waga, and the women involved with them: Emiko and Sachiko. There is definitely something fishy here, in the behaviour of the men, in their past—but who, if it *is* one of them, is the murderer? And what could possibly be the motive? The pace is fast, the intricacy of the plot superb.

Besides the fact that it's an excellent police procedural, the other thing I really liked about *Inspector Imanishi Investigates* was the insight into the Japan of the 50s: an interesting combination of modern and old, of east and west. A country still recovering from the war, and with the scars of the war far from healed. A country, too, that is torn between its past and its present.

I did think the language a little stilted at times, though I'm not sure—since I don't know Japanese, and therefore can't read the original—whether this is a reflection of the original style, or that of the translator.

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### **Jokoloyo says**

A Japanese crime fiction with a lot of locations for setting. Reading this novel made me want to imagine the sceneries. The story was moving a lot of times in this story in various areas and demographics in Japan, from Western Okayama to Northeast Akita; from modern Tokyo theatres to ancient Ise Shrine; from poor mountain village to elite and intellectual communities.

This story is not only telling police procedural investigation, but also private-eye style investigation of Inspector Imanishi. So, this is not a pure close-room murder. But the mystery is good, and I believe in 1960s the plot twist would be unimaginable.

Imanishi and other characters were written as round characters, and that made this novel more enjoyable than as crime fictions. I prefer to put it into general fiction. I highly recommend it for how the novel picturing the Japanese culture and social life of 1960s. Even the Japanese culture in police force is apparent if you compared it with USA or UK police force fictions.

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### **Masanaka Takashima says**

I liked Inspector Imanishi very much. He is a hardworking, self-giving and family-loving commoner police detective, who persists to tackle a difficult murder case everybody else has given up to solve. He is a kind of a guy people want to exist and work for the community's peace and order. The 1960s was Japan's good old time, and it is seen and felt fully in this good natured book. The capture at the airport was meaningful, and should be like this. The emerging young people in the cultural vanguard group weren't so important to the establishments.

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### **Mizuki says**

*The Castle of Sand (Suna no utsuwa)* by Seicho Matsumoto is a surprisingly engaging 4.5 stars read. The book has always been considered by many as Mr. Matsumoto's best novel, and despite of the the 500+ pages of the book, the novelist still managed to construct a solid mystery with vivid characters, believable human dramas and struggle without losing any entertainment value.

The story begins when the body of an unknown old man was discovered in a Tokyo railway station, the victim's face was so badly damaged that police had a hard time only to figure out the victim's identity. Once the victim was finally identified, the police was surprised to learn the victim was a well-respected retired cop who had visibly no enemy. With no suspect, no motive, no evident and no eyewitness being found, the police's investigation quickly met a dead-end.

With the investigation team being disbanded, only two police officers (mostly the memorable Inspector Imanishi) had remained to work on the mystery, and their search eventually leaded them to a group of famous young artists; but what is the link between a retired cop and a group of up-and-coming artists? Who would want to kill a well adored retired man when there is seemingly no motive? Would the police be able to catch up with the murderer before the witnesses were all silent?

*The Castle of Sand* is not one of those *Godlike Detective v.s Superman Murderer* 'game of wit' mystery novels (although I enjoy game of wit mystery novels just as fine), the mystery part of this novel is decent enough but there are not many fancy twists and turns; still the author, Seicho Matsumoto masterfully breathed life into his characters (especially Inspector Imanishi and his peers) and he also drew a fine picture of the 1960s Japanese society, which enable us to understand why the murder would take place and also to understand the complicated reasons of why a good-natured man would end up being brutally killed.

I am impressed by how Mr. Matsumoto wrote the two police officers and described how they interacted with their families and coworkers. I also like the pair of police officers are no Godlike Detectives, they are not even outstandingly smart, they are only a pair of ordinary cops who solve their cases with a lot of hard work, careful observation and patience. I especially enjoy a scene with Inspector Imanishi spending a whole day walking along the railway, looking for tiny pieces of evident which might not even be there, it's scenes like this endear the main characters of this book to me.

Through the writing, I come to know what the daily life of the Japanese 1960s working class was like. I'm especially impressed by how Mr. Matsumoto wrote the landscape of the T?hoku region (North Eastern region of Japan) when one of the officers traveled to a small town in Akita Prefecture to look for clue.

Yes, I had been to T?hoku region once and Mastumoto's writing makes those North Eastern landscapes come to life before me.

To be honest, some parts of the book are a bit dry and dull, but it is still an breathtaking, touching mystery novel with depth and insight into human nature and suffering. After reading the novel, I'm ready to watch its 1970s movie adaptation.

Information of the 1970 movie: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castle\\_o...](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castle_o...)

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### **lisa\_emily says**

I've never read a Japanese mystery novel before and within the first few pages, I knew I will want to read more. I'm not sure this Inspector Imanishi has a series, or if many books are translated, but I wish I could read more. I especially enjoy the insight of Imanishi's relationship with his wife and his sister, the little rituals of his eating, his smoking on his stomach, his going to the public baths. Etc. I think this is one two main reasons why I read any mystery series, to be invited to how a character thinks- his/ her logic and mental process when encountering a puzzle (the mystery) and the day to day habits that build up a character. There

are many little Japanese characteristics revealed, I found it fascinating.

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### **Mizuki says**

The original title of this novel should be 'The Vessel of Sand', I didn't know that it was renamed 'Inspector Imanishi Investigates' when the book was translated into English.

*Updated@02/01/2017:*

The English version of this story is much difficult to read because the text contents so many names for locations, towns and train lines. But I'm still deeply impressed by how Mr. Matsumoto managed to capture the outlook of the Japanese society in the 1960s and the details of these characters' lives.

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### **Bill says**

Old fashioned police procedural with a side of sushi. This is one of Soho Press's fine series of international crime fiction. "Inspector Imanishi" was published in Japan in the late 50's and has a nifty post-war noirish sensibility. The protagonist is an aging police detective who writes haiku for relaxation. The plot is engaging and Matsumoto is more gifted at portraying relationships and character than many of his better known contemporaries. Plenty of red herrings and blind alleys to contend with, so the wrap up is actually suspenseful.

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