

Subject: Toward the Horizon of Media Content: A (Preliminary) Study on the Reception of *Suna no Utsuwa* in North America

Speaker: TSUNODA Takuya, Assistant Professor, Columbia University, USA

Translator: KASHIMA Takumi

In 1989, Soho Press, a publisher founded in 1986 and specializing in specific genres such as suspense fiction, published an English translation of *Suna no Utsuwa*. This book remains available for purchase in North America to this day. The translator for this work was Beth Cary, who has not only translated Matsumoto Seicho's works but has also worked on books related to Studio Ghibli and served as an interpreter for Miyazaki Hayao. The English version is titled *Inspector Imanishi Investigates*. In this title, the character of Detective Imanishi is emphasized as a central figure to the story.

This time, I would like to introduce a book review that appeared in *The New York Times*. The author of this review was Herbert Mitgang, who was also a journalist and an author himself. The title of the book review is 'Tea Ceremonies, Haiku, And of course, a Body.' The literal translation is 'Tea ceremony, haiku, and, of course, a corpse.' It is a humorously titled review that prominently features Japanese elements like tea ceremonies and haiku. Matsumoto Seicho is introduced as 'one of the most popular authors in Japan.' Furthermore, the review delves into various genres such as 'detective fiction' and 'police procedural,' with Mitgang even using terms like 'forensic novel' and 'scientific investigation story.' One noteworthy aspect of his review is how Mitgang provides a comparative framework by mentioning the names of Western mystery novelists like Georges Simenon (Belgium) and Nicholas Freeling (United Kingdom). Regarding Simenon, the series centered around the character Inspector Maigret is well-known. As for Freeling, Amsterdam serves as setting, and his novels feature Inspector Van der Valk as the protagonist. By explicitly referencing renowned Western novelists who base their works around characters, the review can be analyzed as focusing on Matsumoto Seicho's 'inspector Imanishi' while evaluating "Suna no Utsuwa."

I would like to transition to the topic of streaming services. *Suna no Utsuwa* has been available for streaming since 2017, under the title *Castle of Sand*. When examining its significance in the context of Japanese film history in English-speaking regions, I will explore the insights provided by Nomura Yoshitaro's *Suna no Utsuwa* by introducing the keyword 'media

genre.'

The Criterion Collection, Inc., founded in 1984 and based in New York, is engaged in sale of media formats such as DVDs and Blu-rays, licensing for sales, and digital remastering. One of its distinctive features is its focus on world cinema masterpieces rather than Hollywood-driven entertainment works, and it also places a significant emphasis on high-quality digital restoration. Software released by the Criterion Collection, Inc., which is used exclusively in university classes, is highly regarded.

In 2018, the Criterion Channel, a subscription-based streaming service dedicated to films, was launched. It is noteworthy that *Suna no Utsuwa* is available for streaming on this unique platform and remains accessible. Currently, five Nomura-Matsumoto collaboration works can be viewed on the platform. These include *Kichiku*, *Suna no Utsuwa*, *Kage no Kuruma*, the well-known *Zero no Shoten*, and *Harikomi*.

A film critic named Benjamin Mercer contributed an article titled 'The Crime Thrillers of Studio Maverick Yoshitaro Nomura,' on the Criterion official website. While directors like Kurosawa Akira and Oshima Nagisa are widely recognized in North America, Nomura Yoshitaro is not so well-known. Benjamin Mercer positions Nomura as 'genre filmmaker' in this context. Another crucial point to note is the generational perspective presented here. Specifically, while Kurosawa is associated with the golden age of the studio system, and Oshima is seen as a leader of the Shochiku Nouvelle Vague, the generation of Nomura Yoshitaro is portrayed as somewhat neglected. He is considered too young for the golden age and not as young as Oshima's Nouvelle Vague generation, placing Nomura in an 'intermediate' category as an underappreciated filmmaker.

For those who watch films in unique media environment like the Criterion Channel, what significance do the works of Nomura Yoshitaro and Matsumoto Seicho hold today? In the age of the attention economy, we observed that Japanese films are 'emerging' through recommendation systems. Additionally, through streaming, one can consider the works of Nomura and Matsumoto as a media experience that has been brought back to life.