

江戸
時代
探偵
小説
全集
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目
次

The Curious Casebook of Inspector Hanshichi

DETECTIVE STORIES OF OLD EDO

Okamoto Kidō

IAN MACDONALD, TRANSLATOR

THE CURIOUS CASEBOOK OF INSPECTOR HANSUICHI

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of Old Edo



Okamoto Kidō

Ian MacDonald, translator

University of Hawai'i Press



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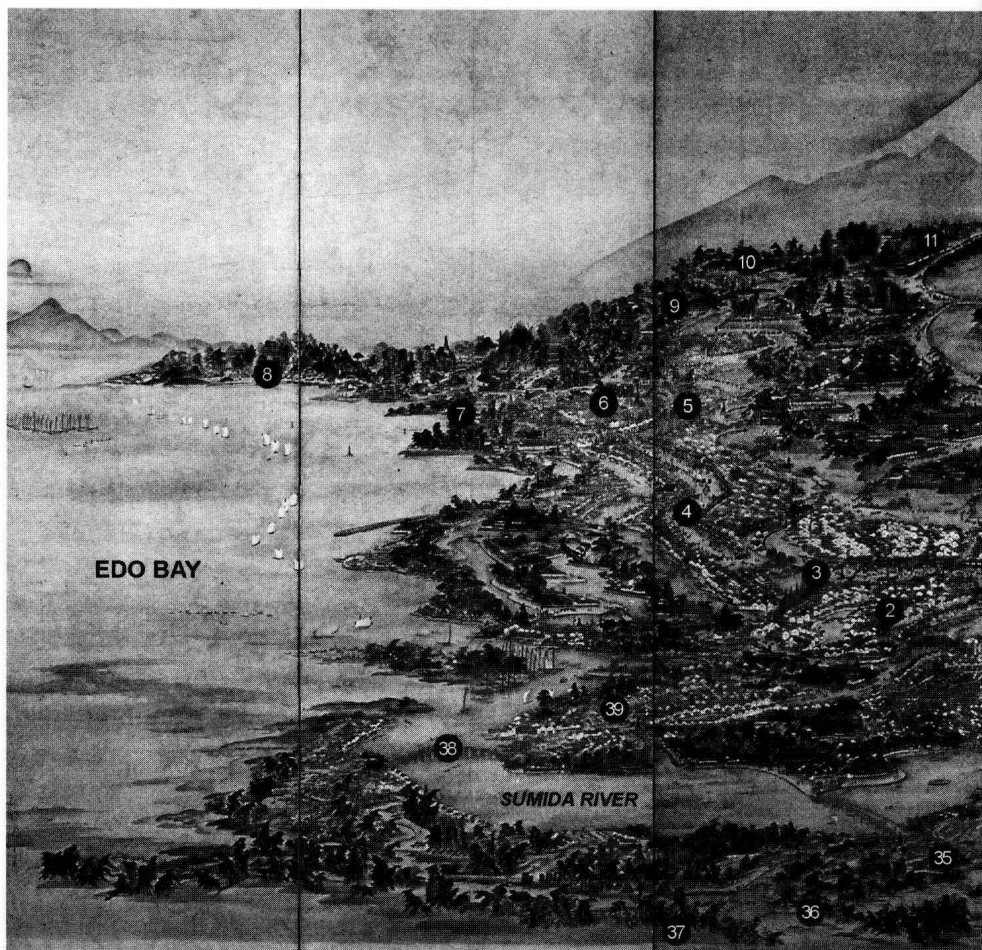
In memory of my father,
William McCullough MacDonald,
who loved a good detective story

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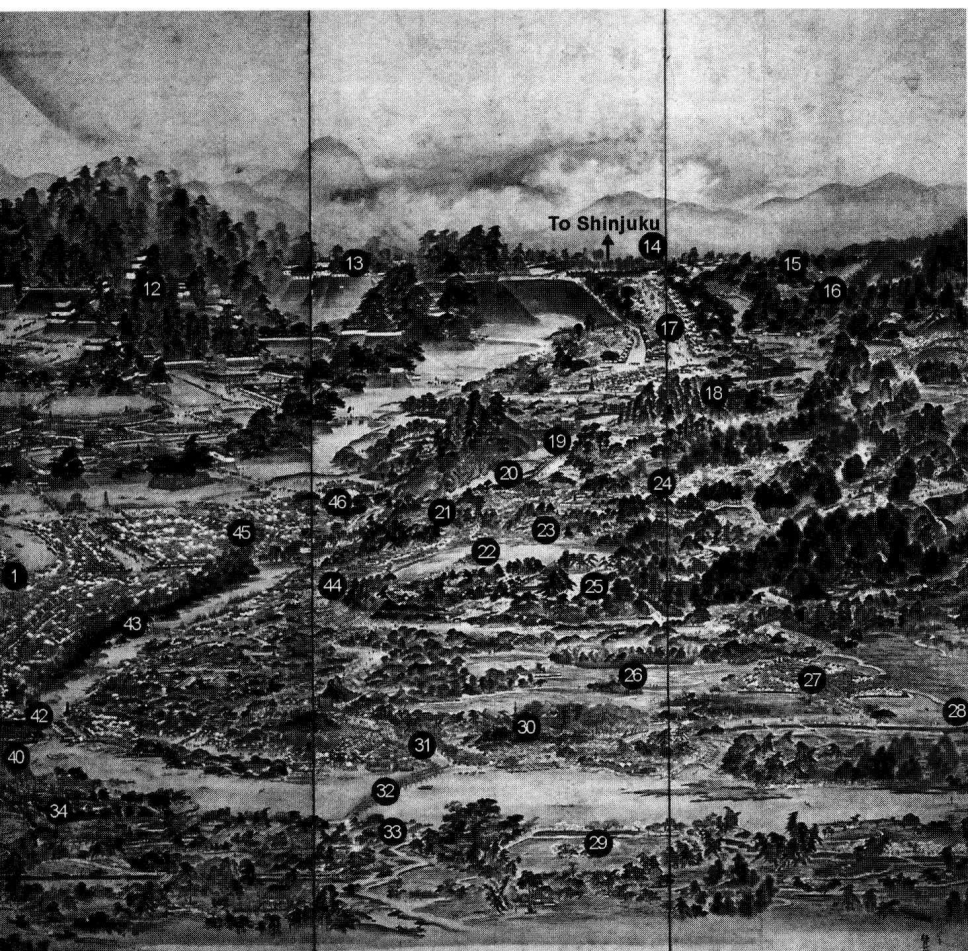
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Map of Old Edo

- | | |
|---|---|
| Akasaka (Old Han-shichi's house) 10 | Hamachō 39 |
| Asakusa 31 | Hatchōbōri 2 |
| Atagoshita 5 | Hongō 24 |
| Azabu 9 | Honjo (including Aioichō) 34 |
| Azuma Bridge 32 | Ichigaya 14 |
| Banchō 13 | Ikenohata 23 |
| Confucian School and Kanda Myōjin Shrine 21 | Iriya 26 |
| Edo Castle 12 | Jūmantsubo 37 |
| Eitai Bridge 38 | Kanda 45 |
| Fukagawa 35 | Kawaramachi and Motomachi (Genmori Bridge) 33 |



Koishikawa 18
 Kudan Hill 17
 Kyōbashi 3
 Mikawachō (Hanshichi's house) 46
 Mukōjima 29
 Nagatachō 11
 Nihonbashi Bridge 1
 Ochanomizu 20
 Otowa 16
 Rōgetsuchō 4
 Ryōgoku Bridge 40
 Ryōgoku (Hirokōji) 41

Senju (Kozukappara execution grounds) 28
 Sensō Temple (Asakusa Kannon temple) 30
 Shiba 6
 Shibaura 7
 Shinagawa (Suzugamori execution grounds) 8
 Shinobazu Pond (Benten Shrine) 22

Shitaya 44
 Suidō Bridge 19
 Sunamura 36
 Ueno 25
 Yanagibashi 42
 Yanagihara 43
 Yoshiwara (licensed quarter) 27
 Zōshigaya (Kishibojin Shrine) 15

Introduction



The *Curious Casebook of Inspector Hanshichi* (*Hanshichi torimonochō*) must certainly be one of the last great, and beloved, works of early-twentieth-century popular Japanese fiction to find its way into English translation. This fact, however, in no way reflects any neglect of the work in Japan, where today, nine decades after the first stories in the series were published, it remains in print — in multiple editions, both hard-cover and paperback, no less. *Hanshichi* is that rare example of Japanese detective fiction that provides both a view of life in feudal Japan from the perspective of the period between the First and Second World Wars and an insight into the development of the fledging Japanese crime novel.

Although it is a product of the early period of Japanese modernism — when writers such as Akutagawa, Tanizaki, and Kawabata began experimenting with psychological realism — *Hanshichi* does not seek to challenge literary conventions. Instead it aims to entertain and thrill its readers with well-crafted prose, realistic dialogue, and compelling plots, enabling them to escape into a world both strange and familiar. Strange, in that the customs of mid-nineteenth century Japan must have seemed antiquated, even quaint, to readers of the late 1910s and early 1920s. Familiar, in that *Hanshichi* was not an imitation of Western fiction — as was much crime writing of the time — but boasted characters and settings uniquely Japanese. In short, it is a work widely read in Japan that is crucial to our understanding of the Japanese during their nation's ascendancy to the ranks of world powers, and of their aspirations toward a literature that steps outside the shadow of the West to stand on its own.

The Restoration

In November 1867, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, the last shogun, reluctantly ceded sovereignty to the young emperor Mutsuhito (later to be known by his reign name, Meiji), bringing to an end nearly three hundred years of Tokugawa dominion over Japan. In April of the following year, pro-imperial armies marched into Edo, the shogun's capital, and defeated the last holdouts of the ancien régime. This relatively bloodless, if not entirely peaceful, transfer of power known as the "Restoration" (*ishin*) replaced the autocratic shogunate with a constitutional monarchy that, over the next thirty years, instituted a series of democratic reforms. To make the transfer of power complete, the new government took the symbolic step of renaming Edo "Tokyo" — the "eastern capital" — in July 1868 and, two months later, changing the era name from Keiō to Meiji, meaning "enlightened rule." Finally, in the spring of 1869, the emperor abandoned his palace in Kyoto, the imperial seat for over a thousand years, and moved to Tokyo to take up residence in the castle of the deposed shogun.

As these events were unfolding, a samurai by the name of Okamoto Keinosuke fled Edo to nearby Yokohama, hiding out in the foreign concession there for some time. The eldest son of a minor samurai family from northern Japan, Keinosuke, like many samurai from outside Japan's political and geographic center, had been a member of the pro-Tokugawa faction (or *sabakuha*) during the waning days of the shogunate. As a shogunal loyalist, his fortunes were upset by the Restoration; but in the end he proved to be luckier than the vast majority of samurai under the new Meiji government: he managed to secure a job at the British legation in Tokyo, remaining faithfully employed there until his death in 1902.

Keisuke had a son, Keiji, who under the Japanese lunar calendar was born on the fifteenth day of the tenth month of 1872. Seven weeks later, Japan officially adopted the Western solar calendar, jumping ahead one month to January 1, 1873. Due to the

traditional practice of counting children as aged one at birth and adding another year to their age each New Year's Day, the infant Keiji turned two on the day the new calendar was adopted. Much later, writing under the pen name Okamoto Kidō, Keiji assigned no small significance to the timing of his birth. The change in the calendar was symbolic of the many social and political changes taking place as Kidō was growing up,¹ even becoming a minor theme in his later work: Kidō's fictional hero, Inspector Hanshichi — an old man in the 1890s when the narration of the series is set — represents many Japanese at the turn of the century who had not entirely adjusted to the changes of two to three decades earlier. Hanshichi (who in the stories shares the same birthday as Kidō, October 15) still thinks of the seasons and the weather in terms of the old lunar calendar, wherein New Year's fell sometime in late winter (as does the Chinese New Year today). Unable to adjust completely, he feels himself somewhat out of tune with the modern world. Likewise, many traditional customs and practices persisted in Japan amid the onslaught of modernity. Western democracy and industry were embraced as more "advanced" and "enlightened" than Japanese institutions, but the feudal order proved surprisingly durable.

Kidō's coming-of-age in the early years of Meiji also sheds light on his efforts to adapt Western artistic forms to Japanese tastes. The trajectory of his career illustrates the difficulties many Japanese experienced in adapting to the new social order, as well as the opportunities it afforded. His father arranged to have Kidō tutored by members of the British legation, and by all accounts he acquired an excellent command of English. In his youth the family seems to have been comfortably off, so much so that the talented boy met with no resistance when he announced his intention of pursuing a career as a kabuki playwright. But all that changed when Kidō was sixteen and his family was bankrupted by his father's guarantee of a loan for a friend whose business collapsed. During the three years it took for his family to disentangle itself from the ensuing legal morass and restore its assets,

Kidō was forced to forgo a university education. He was instead apprenticed to a newspaper at the tender age of eighteen. In this, he was typical of the literati of his generation, many of them former samurai who earned their living by the pen rather than the sword. As a journalist, Kidō pursued a career that had not even existed prior to 1868, one that enabled him to witness at first hand the changes that were literally transforming the fabric of the old city around him and, as a correspondent during the Sino-Japanese war of 1894–1895, to observe Japan's increasing role in the outside world.

The early years of Kidō's literary career were spent working full-time editing newspaper copy and writing theater reviews. His spare hours were devoted to penning historical fiction adapted from Western literature and plays that were occasionally published but never performed. His first breakthrough came with his 1909 play *Shuzenji monogatari* (Tale of Shuzenji), a historical drama set in the early thirteenth century about an imagined romance between the deposed shogun Minamoto Yoriie and the daughter of a mask carver. First staged in 1911 at the Meijiza Theater, with the great Sadanji playing the lead, *Shuzenji* today remains Kidō's best-known work apart from the *Hanshichi* series and is still occasionally performed. Propelled by this success, Kidō became active in writing, producing, and even performing in dozens of plays annually throughout the 1910s, enabling him to give up journalism once and for all. By the late 1920s he had even garnered an international reputation as *Shuzenji* and other of his works were translated into English and various European languages.

And yet, for a man who by his own account had set his heart on becoming a kabuki playwright at the age of fifteen, it is ironic that Kidō should be remembered principally as the author of a series of short popular fiction rather than for his dramatic oeuvre. He attempted to merge the two in 1926 by adapting three *Hanshichi* stories for the stage (translated here as "The Death of Kampei," "The Dancer's Curse," and "The Room over the Bathhouse"),

with Onoe Kikugorō VI (1885–1949) playing the starring role. Yet he seems to have done so more in response to popular demand (and perhaps financial incentive) than out of a genuine desire to see his famous detective spring to life from the printed page. In this regard, he perhaps felt much the same about his creation as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle did about Sherlock Holmes: when word got out in 1897 that Conan Doyle was writing a play featuring his legendary sleuth, he reportedly told his mother, “I have grave doubts about Holmes on the stage at all—it’s drawing attention to my weaker work which has unduly obscured my better.”² Like Conan Doyle, Kidō never repeated his experiment of dramatizing *Hanshichi*. Instead, he continued writing new *Hanshichi* episodes for magazine serialization while reserving his dramatic gifts for the tales of historical intrigue that were his true love.

The Serialization of *Hanshichi*, 1917–1937

In 1916, when Kidō began writing the first stories in the *Hanshichi* series at age forty-four, he had already secured his reputation as one of Japan’s preeminent literary figures by virtue of his activities as a war correspondent in China, drama critic, author of short historical fiction, and playwright. Between June of that year and the following March, he completed the first seven stories that would be serialized monthly in the popular magazine *Bungei kurabu* (Literature club) starting in January 1917. The serialization, shortly followed by a book containing the first six stories, met with immediate acclaim, and Kidō resumed work on the series later the same year. By April 1918 he had brought the total number of stories to thirteen, eleven of which appear in the volume translated here.³ Over the next two decades—until just two years before his death in February 1939—Kidō would go on to write a total of sixty-nine stories featuring his master sleuth, Hanshichi, a police detective in mid-nineteenth-century Edo. Although Kidō is also recognized as a major figure in the so-called *Shin-kabuki* (New kabuki) theater movement, who is credited

— in collaboration with the actor Ichikawa Sadanji II (1880–1940) and other playwrights — with introducing modern, Western-influenced conventions into this best-loved of Japan's traditional dramatic forms, his most enduring literary legacy by far has proven to be Inspector Hanshichi, an icon of Japan's feudal past.

While particular emphasis is always placed on the longevity of the *Hanshichi* series, it should be noted that most of the episodes were written in relatively brief spurts that, all told, account for less than half of its total twenty-year run. The period beginning with the publication of *Ofumi no tamashii* (translated here as “The Ghost of Ofumi”) in January 1917 and lasting until 1920 — when *Hanshichi* appeared exclusively in *Literature Club* — saw the production of roughly half the stories. In the early to mid-1920s, a handful of the sleuth's adventures popped up in the pages of several other weekly and monthly periodicals. Then, in 1926, Kidō put *Hanshichi* on hiatus for the better part of a decade.⁴ In his memoirs, he wrote: “The [*Hanshichi*] stories have piled up in large numbers without my quite realizing it. . . . Given that the author himself has already lost interest in them, I can't imagine that they are of interest any longer to readers.”⁵ Like Conan Doyle before him, however, Kidō was mistaken. In 1934 he resumed serialization of *Hanshichi*, this time in *Kōdan kurabu* (Storytelling club), which published all but one of the final twenty-three episodes⁶ before Kidō's ill health finally put an end to the series in February 1937.

By any measure, Kidō's output was rapid and prolific — all the more so considering that he was simultaneously besieged with commissions for plays and other short fiction, not to mention plagued by frequent bouts of illness and various chronic medical complaints, exacerbated by overwork, that left him bedridden for weeks and often months at a time (these included anemia, rheumatism, stomach ulcers, flu, ear and sinus infections, and toothache so severe he eventually had all his upper teeth removed). While on the one hand Kidō's poor health undoubtedly curtailed his literary activities, on the other the time he spent recuperat-

ing from these afflictions — often at resort spas in scenic locales such as Hakone, the Izu peninsula, and central and northern Japan — evidently left him feeling refreshed, and sometimes even furnished him with new ideas for historical settings to use in future writing projects. It was on his trip to the hot spring town of Shuzenji in Izu, for example, that he conceived *Tale of Shuzenji*. During another of his extended illnesses, Kidō is said to have read *Edo meisho zue* (The illustrated famous sites of Edo) — a twenty-volume bestseller published between 1829 and 1836, depicting in words and pictures virtually every aspect of daily life in the shogun's capital — a work Kidō credited in part for having inspired him to create the world of Inspector Hanshichi.

A Tale of Two Cities

Hanshichi is set in two cities, Edo and Tokyo, occupying the same geographic space at different historical moments. The implicit contrast between past and present, accompanied by a palpable sense of nostalgia for what has been lost in the process of modernization and industrialization, is one of the series' defining features.

Some may conclude that Kidō's use of a traditional Japanese setting represents a rejection of the West and a retreat into a familiar, safer time; but it might as validly be argued that Edo itself would have seemed more "foreign" to Kidō's younger readers and was in fact more, not less, dangerous than the present. Kidō does not paint a rosy picture of Edo as belonging to some idealized golden age: his stories are about crimes and the often sad and tragic lives of the people affected by them. He does not stint on depicting the social ills of that era and those who preyed on the weak: unscrupulous slave traders, lecherous monks, shady con men, murderous *rōnin* (masterless samurai), greedy merchants, compulsive gamblers, to name but a few. Also described are the anonymous threats posed by fires, earthquakes, epidemics, social unrest, and financial instability, not to mention foreign

“barbarians,” faced by the denizens of Edo. In short, Kidō took a calculated risk in writing stories that swam against the rising tide of modernization. He did not set them in Edo so as to appeal more to his readers. On the contrary, he turned to the detective genre as a way of bringing the past to life.

When *Hanshichi* was launched in 1917, very few of Kidō’s readers would have had firsthand knowledge of Edo in the 1840s to 1860s, the period when the adventures are set. As the series progressed and more and more of the old city vanished (most notably after the Great Earthquake of 1923), decreasing numbers of his readers could have recalled what Tokyo had been like in the time before Japan’s overseas wars with China and Russia in 1894 and 1904, respectively. And by the time *Hanshichi* concluded in 1937, with the nation on the brink of world war, the majority of *Hanshichi* fans would have been born well after the death of the fictional sleuth.

Like the modern city that replaced it, Edo had consisted of two halves: the “high city” (*yamanote*) in the western foothills and the “low city” (*shitamachi*) in the flatlands near the bay and around the mouth of the Sumida River flowing into it from the north.

The high city consisted of the shogun’s castle, set within extensive grounds and surrounded by inner (*uchibori*) and outer moats (*sotobori*). Between these moats lay the mansions of the *hatamoto*, the shogun’s highest-ranking direct vassals, comprising the neighborhoods of Jimbōchō and Banchō (home today to Yasukuni Shrine) to the north and northwest, respectively, and Kasumigaseki, Nagatachō, and Kōjimachi to the south and southwest. The northern portion of the outer moat was formed by a man-made waterway known as the Edo River above where it flowed into the moat near Banchō from the north, and as the Kanda River from there until it emptied into the Sumida just above Ryōgoku Bridge. Beyond the outer moat lay more samurai residences in (starting from the north and moving counterclockwise) the areas of Hongō, Koishikawa, Ushigome, Ichigaya, Yotsuya, Akasaka, and Shiba. More government buildings and