



The autumn season offers an excellent opportunity to spend more time reading books or watching films at home. The October issue of *The Japan Society Review* is here with some suggestions for you to enjoy in the warmest spot of the house watching the rain from the window.

The issue opens with two reviews that look at Japan from a personal perspective. In *My Families and Other Samurai: A Memoir*, Fukuda Haruko OBE weaves together the intricate threads of Japan's modern history with the lives of members of her family shedding light on the untold stories of Japan's elite. YouTuber Chris Broad presents a written extension of his video channel in *Abroad in Japan*, a depiction of personal experiences and anecdotes about Japan and Japanese culture gathered during his more than ten years living and working in the country.

Approaching two specific aspects of Japanese culture, origami and manga, this issue also includes the review of *Origami and Kirigami for the Home*, by Wei You, which shows the possibilities of making paper objects

for practical and display purposes around the home, and *Manga, Murder and Mystery - The Boy Detectives of Japan's Lost Generation*, by Okabe Mimi, an academic monograph exploring the historical and socioeconomic contexts of the figure of the *shonen* (boy) detective in commercially successful manga series such as *Detective Conan* or *Death Note*.

Honeybees and Distant Thunder by Onda Riku is our featured review in the domain of literary fiction. Set around an international piano competition and the lives of the competitors, Onda's book beautifully engages with ideas about sounds, nature, music and inspiration.

The October issue closes with a review of the Oscar-winning Japanese film *Drive My Car*, directed by Hamaguchi Ryusuke in 2021 and based on a short story by Murakami Haruki. The film is a thought provoking, melancholic drama on loss, regret and self-acceptance with superb performances and exquisite cinematography.

Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández

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Cameron Bassindale, Laurence Green, George Mullins, Tung Ken Lam and Michael Tsang.

Image: Still from *Drive My Car*.

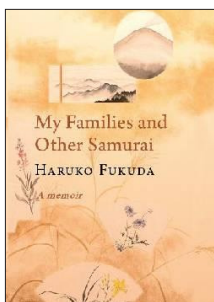
My Families and Other Samurai: A Memoir

by Fukuda Haruko

Richfield and Barr Publishing
Limited (2023)

ISBN-13: 978-1399959056

Review by Laurence Green



UK-based financier Fukuda Haruko will be familiar to many members of The Japan Society, not only as a former Joint Chair of the Society herself, but for her long and successful career in the cut and thrust world of finance, working as both a stockbroker and investment banker in the City of London.

Forging a distinctly international career that traces its roots back to a time when the process of reconciliation between Japan and the rest of the world was very much still a work in progress, Fukuda's story is clearly fertile ground for a memoir. But what makes *My Families and Other Samurai* such a compelling volume is that for every bit it is a story of her own life, it is also a testament to the lives of her parents Masaru and Yoko - their story bound up in an intricate, interconnected web of individuals moving in the very upper echelons of wealth and influence in 20th century Japan. What emerges is a glimmering portrait of socio-political history in which Fukuda's family and their forebears on both sides emerge as key players involved on the frontlines of not only the country's emergence as a modern nation, but also characters uniquely positioned to capture the flavour of the Japanese upper classes' way of life, something rarely documented so accessibly and candidly for Anglophone audiences before.

The book's early passengers extend out in broad fashion, detailing a complex dynastic structure of arranged marriages, samurai families and entrepreneurial 'new money' forged in the heat of Japan's Meiji Restoration. Fukuda's ancestors and extended family include Tanaka Heihachi - the legendary founding father of Japan's foreign exchange market - and Yamanashi Katsunoshin - a highly influential Admiral who would go on to become President of the very same Peers' school where Fukuda herself, as well as members of the Japanese Imperial Family, were educated.

There is ample detail too on the family residence Fukidecho, which occupied the plot of land immediately south of Tokyo's esteemed Hotel Okura. The moving descriptions of this home, along with the many photographs included in the book, offer a wistful

ode to the ceaseless march of time; the property eventually sold off and redeveloped bit by bit until - as is perhaps not a surprise to anyone that knows the nature of the Tokyo property market - the site is utterly unrecognisable in its present day form.

What follows is the heart of the book's premise - Fukuda's parents Masaru and Yoko, and their lives pre, during and post the Second World War. Even for a family in the elite of Japanese society, the years of Occupation following the war were not without their hardships, though what emerges as the most engrossing part of the tale is the family's ceaseless relocation - first to Washington, then London - as Masaru rises through the ranks of Japan's Ministry of Finance.

The life of a diplomatic family, bound as it is to 'service', is portrayed with elegance and verve in these chapters - we hear of Fukuda's invitation to the Kennedy White House during the family's time in the States - but we are also afforded the fine detail of Masaru's accomplishments in his involvement with the Japanese Government Sterling Bond Issue of 1963, an international first. As Fukuda points out - the surface level glamour of the diplomatic life; endless dinners, members clubs and shopping at the finest stores, always carried with it the double-edged sword of unceasing hard work.

Fukuda's own time in the UK also holds immense interest; schooled at Channing, and then her 'going up' to read history at Cambridge's New Hall. One wonders what it must have been like to be a Japanese in London in the 60s, still only a couple of decades after the War, and a woman at that - to then reach this bastion of British higher education. Fukuda's memories capture this with laser-like detail, and also grapple with the complex intensity of feelings as she ponders to what degree she feels removed from the country of her birth the longer she spends abroad.

The book's emotional and narrative climax comes, as it inevitably must, with Masaru's death in 1984. We are given a moving insight into his final wishes for Fukuda to help disseminate his collected economic writings to long-time friends and acquaintances, and also the meticulous detail by which he planned his own funeral. These pages lead into the book's elegiac finale, which necessarily speeds through the 80s and 90s (further details of Fukuda's own career during these times are promised in what will no doubt be an engrossing subsequent volume) to tell us of Yoko's time during widowhood, and the poignancy of her

100th birthday - which having happened during the COVID pandemic, is carried out via Zoom.

The reader is ultimately left with an engrossing family portrait that arguably does for 20th century Japan what the likes of Hugo Vickers and Simon Heffer have done for the aristocracy and political elite of Britain during the same period. Told with the crisp, breezy matter-of-factness of a historian, the emotion nevertheless comes through strongest in

the remarkable vividness in which Fukuda's parents are conveyed in the text. We feel their lives through their habits, their interests - but more than this, we feel their stoicism and unshakeable sense of service to both family and nation. This is, undoubtedly, the essence of the samurai conveyed in the book's title, but also, perhaps, a valiant attempt at getting to the very heart of the human condition itself, and the meaning we all, ultimately, aim to glean from the years allotted to us. §

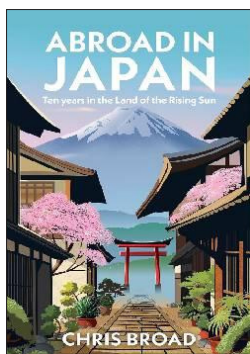
Abroad in Japan

by Chris Broad

Bantam (2023)

ISBN-13: 978-1787637078

Review by Cameron Bassindale



In the more than 10 years since he began his rise to Japanese YouTube super stardom, amassing almost 3 million subscribers along the way, Chris Broad of the immensely popular *Abroad in Japan* channel has made documentaries, appeared on NHK television programmes, and cycled the length of Japan. Now, he has written a book. *Abroad in Japan* charts Broad's journey through the JET programme, teaching in a high school in a far-flung corner of Tohoku through to the present day, where he educates and entertains his legions of Japan-mad fans. Published by Bantam (Penguin Books) and now on *The Sunday Times* best-sellers list, readers can expect a considered, interesting, and often hilarious read throughout.

I have had the pleasure of being on this journey with Chris for the past decade, watching his videos go from pixelated rants about Japanese fast food in a tiny tatami room in Sakata to the highly produced, well-polished travel content he produces today. His abilities as a filmmaker and YouTuber are well established, but can he write?

The short answer is a resounding yes. You would be forgiven for thinking the whole book is a transcript of one long *Abroad in Japan* video, such is the strength of his voice shining through. For people familiar with his work, Broad's quintessentially British jibes and withering self-criticisms are wheeled out in full force and are instantly recognisable. The fact that, as I was reading, I could picture in my head Chris' body language and hear his distinctive home counties accent is a testament to how strongly his personality and *joie de vivre* is imbued in the book. Readers

unfamiliar with Broad's videos will find a narrator who is funny, engaging and refreshingly self-deprecating.

Fortunately, *Abroad in Japan* is helped along not just by its quirky narration but also by its genuinely bizarre situations. Within the space of a handful of chapters, Broad climbs Mt. Fuji, gives a speech about Family Mart fried chicken to hundreds of (presumably bemused) people and travels around Harajuku looking for a man famous for pushing nine Siamese cats around in a pram. Broad keeps the theme light and frothy for the most part and does not linger too long on any story, being no mean feat in what it is essentially an autobiography.

He does handle the more serious topics with gravity, however. When a student attempts suicide at the start of his second year of teaching, or when he receives a terrifying (false) nuclear missile alarm. I am not surprised, as in Broad's videos he does not shy away from more serious topics, and usually does so with sensitivity. Readers will appreciate *Abroad in Japan's* brief changes in tone, before Broad inevitably steers the narrative back towards eating, drinking and smoking.

Where the book does fall a little short, I am sad to say, is in its overall goal. I am not entirely sure who it was written for; it tries a little to be all things to all people. I went in with the expectation that it was written for fans of the *Abroad in Japan* channel. As such, I couldn't help but skip past the bits about how different convenience stores are in Japan, or Broad's sometimes clunky explanations of the Japanese social hierarchical culture. Interesting, for sure, but topics most people familiar with the *Abroad in Japan* channel, or an interest in Japan at all, have probably come across numerous times. Clumsy phrasing at points (two groups of people fall into a "chorus of snores" in a bus and then a hotel within two pages) gave me the impression that *Abroad in Japan* would have benefited from more editorial oversight.

All things considered, any issues I found with this book didn't at all impact my enjoyment of it. For a first book, Chris Broad can most certainly hold his head up high. His unromantic descriptions of feeling totally in over your head, riding an emotional rollercoaster everyday will make even the most seasoned Japan

"lifer" wistful for the time they first stepped off the plane and into a new world. For those who have yet to live in Japan, or for those who never will, *Abroad in Japan* is as realistic a depiction of a Brit in modern Japan as you are likely to come across. §

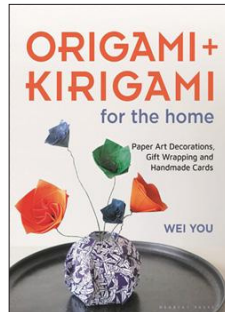
Origami and Kirigami for the Home

by Wei You

Herbert Press (2022)

ISBN-13: 978-1789940824

Review by Tung Ken Lam



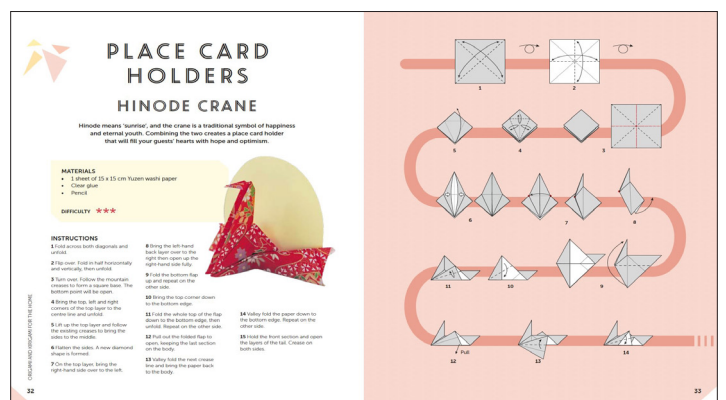
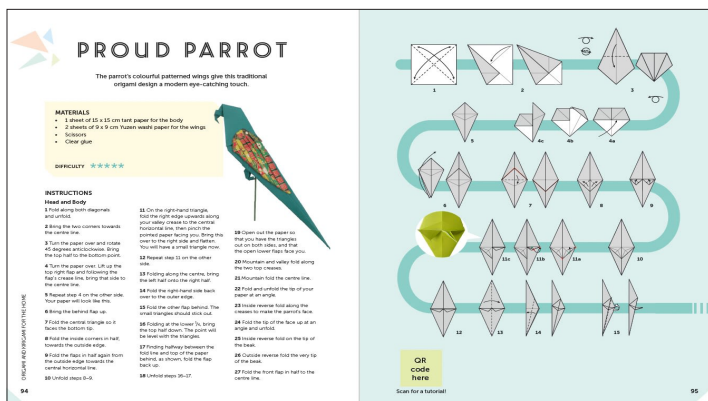
This attractive book by author Wei You shows you how to make paper objects for practical and display purposes around the home. *Kirigami* - a variation of origami in which the paper is also cut as well as being folded - is second main word of the title, so origami 'purity' (i.e., achieving results by folding alone) is not a priority and all of the following are encouraged: cutting, decorating, glueing, mounting on wires, etc.

This review considers several criteria and, with some important reservations, Wei You's book succeeds in all of them. In the first place, regarding the overall look and feel, this is an attractive book with full colour images throughout. Moreover, in relation to the content of the book, the projects are enjoyable to make and there is enough variety and interest. In addition to origami decorations and items to display, 35 pages are devoted to gift wrapping and greeting cards with a good representation of the different genres of papercraft, folding and cutting.

usually better than photographs for showing what's important when folding. Photos are used later in the book for projects like gift wrapping and projects involving cutting and glueing. Near-standard origami symbols are used, but curiously the "push-in" symbol only seems appears in the double-page spread of basic folds. Some steps have errors in the diagrams, for instance, the step 5 at page 53 has only valley fold lines for an inside reverse fold (mountain fold lines and push-in arrows would be correct). Some diagrams omit folding arrows when they would help the reader, for example in the lower half at page 39.

A more important problem is that the illustrations for the steps in the origami diagrams are too small and often cramped, as in page 46 with almost 30 steps. Even when there are fewer steps, the steps are still small – page 36 has steps that are only 15 mm wide. The basic crane in page 83 has 12 steps yet there is empty space 4 cm tall at the top and bottom of the page. I admit that I myself have used illustrations this small, but this book has pages four times the size of my book, *Origami From Surface To Form* (2022)

One way of making more space would have been to refer to the basic folds instead of repeating instructions on how to make the preliminary fold (square base) and bird base in each project that uses it (*hinode crane*, p. 32; *hakobu crane*, p. 36; geometric base, p. 38; flamboyant flamingo, p. 44; square flower tiles, p. 76; crane, p. 83).



Another criteria to consider is if the instructions that are clear and easy-to-follow. In this regard, this book uses a sensible mix of diagrams and photo-diagrams. The origami projects use diagrams drawn on a computer, a good decision as diagrams are

My fourth criteria to review focuses on how much the book relies on special and decorated paper and if the projects could work using ordinary plain

paper. In Wei You's book, copy paper is recommended as an economical source, although fancy paper is mentioned too. Curiously, no explanation of grams per square metre is given.

Finally, I have considered the voice of the author and if they encourage creativity and suggest other paths and sources to follow up. In this regard, this book does not include any credits for the creators of the models. To be fair, some are traditional, and others are direct applications of standard papercraft techniques. However, despite the author's stated scientific background and interest in geometric origami (p. 159), opportunities have been missed to note, let alone explain, some accessible origami geometry, for example dividing an edge into thirds (p. 57), folding a 60° angle (p. 25) and approximating a regular pentagon (p. 21).

As seems standard with modern books, this book lacks an index. Another standard is the author directing the reader to her video tutorials (her YouTube channel has a playlist for the book that is not accessible

without scanning the QR codes in the book). Another missed opportunity is to recommend other resources such as books, websites and origami societies to help the reader to build up their knowledge and connect with other people. For example, origami purists may prefer books in English such as *Home Decorating with Origami*, by Tomoko Fuse (2000), *Origami for Parties*, by Kazuo Koboyashi and Makoto Yamaguchi (1987), *Origami for Displays*, by Florence Temko (1974), and *Paper Home: Beautifully unique origami projects*, by Esther Thorpe (2016). For general papercraft, there are similar publications such as *The Ultimate Papercraft and Origami Book*, by Paul Jackson and Angela A'Court (1997) or *Paper Only: 20 Ways to Kick-Start Your Creativity*, by The Papered Parlour (2014).

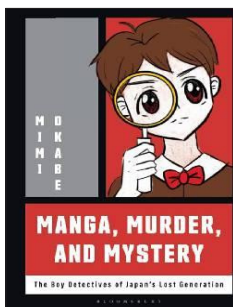
Overall, despite some problems with the diagrams, *Origami and Kirigami for the Home* may be the best bet for its combination of diagrams and videos, and for the variety of papercrafts used in its projects. §

Manga, Murder and Mystery - The Boy Detectives of Japan's Lost Generation

by Okabe Mimi

Bloomsbury Academic (2023)
ISBN-13: 978-1350325098

Review by Laurence Green



Speak of "boy detectives" and British readers may call to mind something of a mid-20th century whiff of Enid Blyton - quaint, somehow all so innocent thrills and spills of a particularly youthful nature. Harking back further, there lie the Baker Street Irregulars, street boys employed by none other than Sherlock Holmes as intelligence agents. Suddenly, a whole potential oeuvre of youthful detective fiction beckons, and as Okabe Mimi's exciting new study lays forth, it arguably finds its nexus not only in Britain, but in Japan.

Contextualising the study against a backdrop of the post-bubble economy of late 80s/early 90s Japan - often called the Lost Generation - Okabe sees the trope of the boy detective as a powerful reaction against a creeping social unease that began to arise in Japanese society at the time. Opening with a recounting of many of the most notorious incidents of the period - including the horrific murders and sexual assaults carried out by Miyazaki Tsutomu in the

late 90s - we are presented with a portrait of a society coming to terms with a kind of lost innocence.

In this sense, then, the boy detective - as characterised here in detailed studies of its manifestation in Japanese popular culture such as manga and anime - is a tool to construct a convenient playground in which youth, crime, notions of 'good' and 'bad', as well as justice and logic come together in intricate and often tantalisingly powerful combinations. Here, the figure of the boy detective is not merely a fresh-faced successor to the likes of Enid Blyton and Arthur Conan Doyle's protagonists but is also a mirror held up to Japan working its way through various manifestations of socioeconomic malaise and national trauma.

Across its six chapters, Okabe's book offers up a strikingly informative literature review of the history of the detective trope both in regards to boy detectives internationally, but also the crime genre within Japan. This then turns to look at manga specifically in the next chapter, with the works of Osamu Tezuka trailblazing the aesthetic and archetypes many subsequent series would follow. These are epitomised in the focus of the next two chapters, which take *Detective Conan* (also known as *Case Closed*) and *The Case Files of Young Kindaichi* - arguably the two most famous examples of the boy detective trope - as models for analysis; examining how manga might be seen as a crucial

response to the failure of Japan's educational system to protect its youth. Here, the values of friendship, community and teamwork are held up and 'reified' as key elements of an idealised boyhood; but crucially, as the study moves on to the 21st century, darker alternatives are also offered. Therefore, in series like *Death Note* and *Moriarty the Patriot*, we see more machiavellian values rise to the fore, as protagonists of these series see fit to take justice into their own hands.

The book draws to a close with a final chapter putting forth future angles for investigation - hinting that this study could act as a springboard for a whole further field of research; following the figure of the boy detective further and further into the many

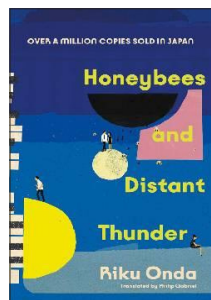
manifestations of Japan's expansive popular media mix. An academic tome to its core, *Manga, Murder and Mystery* is nevertheless a thrillingly accessible read that will delight both fans of its subject matter, as well as those coming to it through a passing interest in Japan in general, or detective fiction as a wider oeuvre. From the likes of Sherlock and Poirot through to the ingenious youths that populate these pages, this book's key takeaway must surely be the universality of the genre. The particular resonance of the stories featured here hold particularly true to Japan's Lost Generation, yes, but just like the cold, clinical logic that lies behind many of those very same cases, the thrill of the mystery is ultimately timeless. §

Honeybees and Distant Thunder

by Onda Riku
translated by Philip Gabriel

Doubleday (2023)
ISBN-13: 978-085752795

Review by George Mullins



Over the past month I have had the pleasure of reading this wonderful book by Onda Riku. *Honeybees and Distant Thunder* is a book about sounds, nature, music and inspiration. The story is set around an international piano competition and follows the journey of its competitors.

The story focuses on the fictional Sixth Yoshigae International Piano Competition, being held in Japan. We follow the prestigious competition and its group of international competitors from the entry auditions to the opening of the contest and all the way until its completion. The book's chapters are segregated into corresponding parts of the competition, following this order: entry, round one, round two, round three and the finals.

What I found most intriguing about *Honeybees and Distant Thunder* is that rather than following the story from the point of view of one character in particular, the competition actually unfolds from the perspective of many different actors. We start by learning about some of the judges, and then the personalities of the competitors. We even observe the competition from the eyes of more minor players such as the piano tuner, a reporter and a competitor's wife. Each performer has their own style and relationship with music. There are child geniuses, and

one competitive character sees the competition as akin to a sporting event. Another character describes himself as a family man playing 'ordinary man music'. Learning about the different performers, their history and relationship to music is a particular pleasure of the story.

This shifting perspective gives us a comprehensive overview of this fictional international piano competition, providing a deeper sense of reality. This multiple-view perspective also allowed me to pick my own favourite competitor and follow their journey. Without wanting to spoil anything, I will say that the character I was rooting for does not win the competition in the end!

Although there are many different characters and performers, an important story flowing alongside the competition is that of pianist named Jin Kazama, or 風間塵 in Japanese. The author tells us that, rather ironically, the "Jin" in his name uses the same kanji as "dust" or "rubbish"! Jin is a young and unconventional performer, whose idiosyncratic style of playing both impresses and appals the judges in equal measure. His laid-back attitude and genius act as an interesting catalyst for book.

Lovers of classical music will surely enjoy this book. Characters discuss famous classical piano ballads and concertos and the author wonderfully describes the sounds of the pianists. For instance, she describes one character's playing as 'free and easy, so generous, yet with a haunting insight'. Readers with a good knowledge of classical music will take pleasure in imagining melodies as they read about the different characters' styles of playing.

On the other hand, people like me with only a layman's grasp of music can also easily enjoy this

book too. The stress and tension of the competition is palpable and the characters' (and author's) love of music shines through each page, making it a very inspiring read. I found myself sitting on the edge of my seat as I got more and more invested in certain characters and wanted them to succeed in the competition. The countless references and descriptions of famous piano pieces also act as a good springboard for learning more about classic music. For example, thanks to this book I have discovered a wonderful piece called *Je te veux* by a French composer Erik Satie.

The author of *Honeybees and Distant Thunder*, Onda Riku, is a celebrated writer in Japan. When this book was first published in Japanese in 2017, it became a bestseller, selling over a million copies. It also became the first novel to win both the Naoki

Prize and the Japan Bookseller's Award. In 2019, the book was even turned into a successful Japanese film.

The translator, Philip Gabriel, does a great job on this English translation. He gives us some useful explanations regarding Japanese language and culture, helping us understand nuances that can often get lost in translation. His description of a character's name, Aya Eiden, whose last name Eiden, 栄伝, roughly means 'to convey glory' in English, springs to mind. I feel that this kind of information allows us to better grasp the story and are helpful to anyone interested in Japan.

I would highly recommend *Honeybees and Distant Thunder* not only to those interested in classical music, but also to anyone who has a vague passion for music, and wants to learn more about Japan. [S](#)

Drive My Car

Directed by Hamaguchi Ryusuke (2021)

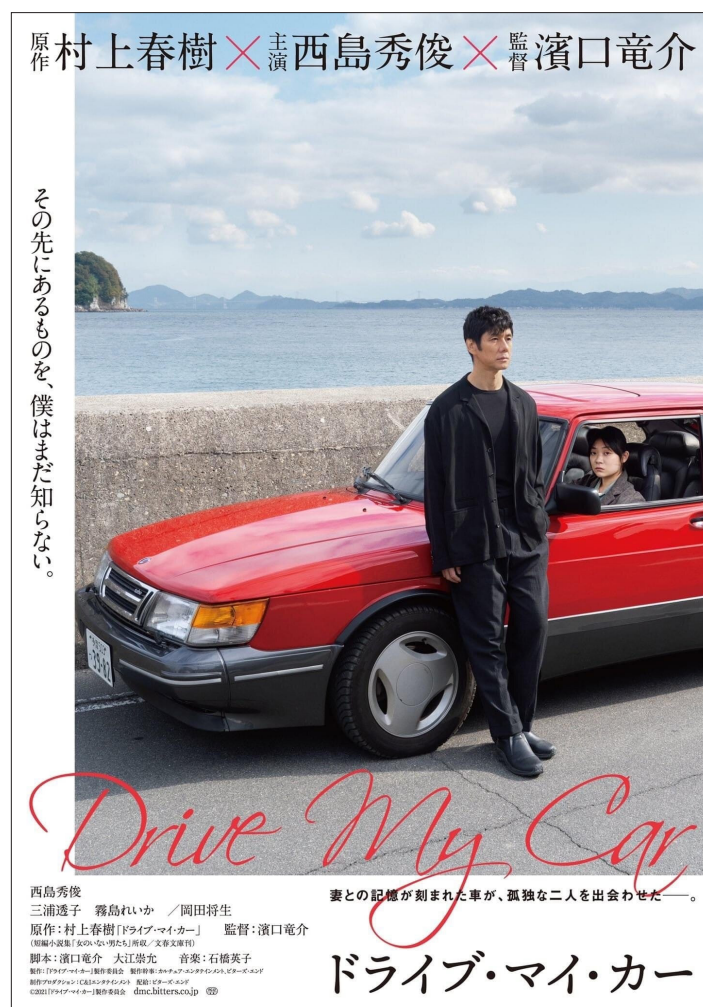
Cast: Nishijima Hidetoshi, Miura Toko, Okada Masaki

Review by Michael Tsang

Whether you like Hamaguchi Ryusuke's 2021 Oscar-winning *Drive My Car* or not, you at least have to give him credit for expanding Murakami Haruki's source text – a short story of a few pages – into a three-hour full feature film. This augmentation allows Hamaguchi to reinterpret Murakami's story with a different depth and world view, exploring new themes absent in Murakami's version.

Theatre director Kafuku is invited to Hiroshima (note the symbolism of this setting) to direct a multinational, multilingual production of Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. He is required to allow the theatre's designated driver, a young woman named Misaki, to escort him off and to work. The driver and the passenger begin to reveal their stories, with Kafuku reflecting on his wife's affairs and then death, and Misaki slowly disclosing her upbringing. Meanwhile, as it turns out, the actor called Takatsuki who plays the male lead in Kafuku's production was one of the men with whom the wife had an affair. When this male lead gets himself into another trouble, Kafuku had no choice but to play the title role himself.

Veteran actor Nishijima Hidetoshi (as Kafuku) and popular actors Miura Toko (as Misaki) and Okada Masaki (as Takatsuki) all deliver more than competent performances, but the international cast of the *Uncle Vanya* performance also stole the show.



Nishijima's looks always have a tinge of melancholy and is impeccably cut out for the role of Kafuku. Miura captures Misaki's blunt and slightly awkward personality with precision. Meanwhile, Okada's own commercial success parallels his character in the film who is also a popular actor, and he portrays Takatsuki's impetuosity well.

One main difference between Murakami's textual version and Hamaguchi's filmic version is scale. Whereas Murakami's original story mainly explores heterosexual relationships, Hamaguchi's scales up the story to explore national and international traumas that Japan is involved. The change in setting from Murakami's Tokyo to Hamaguchi's Hiroshima is obvious; so is the change from Murakami's yellow Saab to Hamaguchi's red. Red – as in the red dot on the flag of Japan. Therefore, the film can be read on an allegorical level – the red Saab, Kafuku and Misaki all representing an aspect of Japanese society – as Hamaguchi stealthily embeds a symbolic Japanese flag in the film's scenes and aesthetics abundantly. Examples include an ultra-long shot showing the red Saab speeding along the highway of Tokyo amidst its surrounding white buildings, or the car amidst the snow of Hokkaido, or importantly, in the film's ending scene when it is revealed that Misaki is now in Korea and the red Saab is parked amongst a carpark of white cars.

But Hamaguchi does not stop there. He further aggrandizes his exploration to transnational traumas as well. The *Uncle Vanya* production that Kafuku directs in the film features a multinational cast with each cast member performing in their own language. Thus the Taiwanese female lead who plays Sonya speaks Mandarin Chinese. Kafuku also casts a Korean actress who cannot speak and communicates with

sign language. The celebration of multilingualism perhaps suggests Japan's need to embrace diversity as the viewer is presented with a dissonant harmony during the rehearsal scenes and the few shots of the actual theatre performance.

Thus, if Murakami's text mostly explores Kafuku's trauma of being betrayed by his wife, Hamaguchi's film adds into the mix national traumas of Japan – both traumas that Japan had experienced and that Japan made other countries or communities experience. The mute Korean actress for example takes on an allegorical meaning, representing Japan's neglect of the *zainichi* Korean population. Although some may find a muted Korean character in a Japanese film problematic, one central message of the film is perhaps that trauma and living come in pairs, and 'how to live on *with* trauma' is not something unique to Japan.

One may even be tempted to see Hamaguchi suggesting potential solutions. In Murakami's source text, Kafuku being forced to relinquish the driver's seat to Misaki allows him to let go of rational control (the steering wheel) in his life and verbalising, in the passenger seat and perhaps for the first time, his feelings of being betrayed by his wife. Allegorically, perhaps it is now time for women and the younger generation (embodied by Misaki who nonetheless has her own trauma) to take charge and help the nation face with its traumas, as Misaki has helped Kafuku. §

