

# Director of *Drive My Car* surprised by Oscar, popularity

By Mari Yamaguchi  
The Associated Press

**T**OKYO — Japanese director Ryusuke Hamaguchi says he was surprised by the international popularity of his Oscar-winning film *Drive My Car*, but attributes it to the universality of the short story by Haruki Murakami on which it is based.

The movie centers on an actor played by Hidetoshi Nishijima who is directing a multilingual production of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. Still mourning the sudden loss of his wife, the actor, Kafuku, leads the cast in rehearsals in which they sit and read their lines flatly, ingesting the language for days before acting them out.

The three-hour-long story of grief, connection, and recovery won an Academy Award last month for best international feature film.

"Actually I was surprised by how widely this film has been accepted," Hamaguchi said at a news conference in Tokyo last month.

While attributing its popularity to the universality of Murakami's story, Hamaguchi said the actors "put it on the screen in a very convincing way, even though I'm sure it was an extremely challenging task for them to embody Haruki Murakami's worldview."



The "inner reality" of the characters in the story is both the charm and difficulty of turning Murakami's story into visuals, Hamaguchi said.

"Describing inner reality ... is something movies are not very good at," Hamaguchi said. So he decided not to trace the written language of the original story. "The more attractive a story is, the harder it is for visuals to surpass the images already formed in the minds of readers," he said.

Hamaguchi said he decided to visualize the core of the story — the relationship between Kafuku and his much younger driver Misaki — who has also suffered the

loss of her mother in a mudslide — which gradually deepens through their conversations in his beloved red Saab, one of few colorful items in the movie.

The film combines the inner worlds of Murakami and Chekhov and reflects their similarities, Hamaguchi said.

Conversations between Kafuku and Misaki contrast with those of Vanya and Sonya in *Uncle Vanya*, and when Kafuku acts as Vanya during the performance, he comes to realize his own inner words toward recovery.

"So I found *Drive My Car* and *Uncle Vanya* wonderfully intertwined as if they

**INTERNATIONAL POPULARITY.** Producer Akihisa Yamamoto, film director Ryusuke Hamaguchi, and actor Hidetoshi Nishijima (L-R) share a light moment while posing for a photo after a news conference about their award-winning film, *Drive My Car*, in Tokyo. Hamaguchi was surprised by the international popularity of the film. (AP Photo/Hiro Komae)

translated each other," Hamaguchi said.

Hamaguchi said he wanted to thank Murakami at the Oscar awards ceremony but missed the chance because his "thank you" after giving a long list of actors' names was misunderstood as the end of his speech.

"I still wanted to thank Murakami-san and my staff," he said.

Hamaguchi's films, which include the anthology *Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy* released last year, are acclaimed, but he was not widely known in Hollywood before an award for best screenplay at last year's Cannes Film Festival brought attention to *Drive My Car*.

Hamaguchi said international audiences now see Asia as a source of interesting films, and he hopes his fellow filmmakers can create movies that can "pierce through the hearts of audiences" and live up to their expectations.

His goals for his next film? "I just want to be able to say I made one that is a little better than my previous one," Hamaguchi said.

## Major Japan railway now powered only by renewable energy

By Yuri Kageyama  
The Associated Press

**T**OKYO — Tokyo's Shibuya is famed for its Scramble Crossing, where crowds of people crisscross the intersection in a scene symbolizing urban Japan's congestion and anonymity. It may have added another boasting right.

Tokyu Railways' trains running through Shibuya and other stations were switched to power generated only by solar and other renewable sources starting April 1.

That means the carbon dioxide emissions of Tokyu's sprawling network of seven train lines and one tram service now stand at zero, with green energy being used at all its stations, including for vending machines for drinks, security camera screens, and lighting.

Tokyu, which employs 3,855 people and connects Tokyo with nearby Yokohama, is the first railroad operator in Japan to have achieved that goal. It says the carbon dioxide reduction is equivalent to the annual average emissions of 56,000 Japanese households.

Nicholas Little, director of railway education at Michigan State University's Center for Railway Research and Education, commends Tokyu for promoting renewable energy but stressed the importance of boosting the bottom-line amount of that renewable energy.

"I would stress the bigger impacts come from increasing electricity generation from renewable sources," he said. "The long-term battle is to increase production of renewable electricity and provide the transmission infrastructure to get it to the places of consumption."

The technology used by Tokyu's trains is among the most ecologically friendly options for railways. The other two options are batteries and hydrogen power.

And so is it just a publicity stunt, or is Tokyu moving in the right direction?

Ryo Takagi, a professor at Kogakuin University and specialist in electric railway systems, believes the answer isn't simple because how train technology evolves is

complex and depends on many uncertain societal factors.

In a nutshell, Tokyu's efforts are definitely not hurting and are probably better than doing nothing. They show the company is taking up the challenge of promoting clean energy, he said.

"But I am not going out of my way to praise it as great," Takagi said.

Bigger gains would come from switching from diesel trains in rural areas to hydrogen powered lines and from switching gas-guzzling cars to electric, he said.

Tokyu paid an undisclosed amount to Tokyo Electric Power Co., the utility behind the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, for certification vouching for its use of renewables, even as Japan continues to use coal and other fossil fuels.

"We don't see this as reaching our goal but just a start," said assistant manager Yoshimasa Kitano at Tokyu's headquarters, a few minutes' walk from the Scramble Crossing.

Such steps are crucial for Japan, the world's sixth-biggest carbon emitter, to attain its goal of becoming carbon-neutral by 2050.

Only about 20% of Japan's electricity comes from renewable sources, according to the Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies, a Tokyo-based independent nonprofit research organization.

That lags way behind New Zealand, for instance, where 84% of power used comes from renewable energy sources. New Zealand hopes to make that 100% by 2035.

The renewable sources driving Tokyu trains include hydropower, geothermal-power, wind power, and solar power, according to Tokyo Electric Power Co., the utility that provides the electricity and tracks its energy sourcing.

Tokyu has more than 64 miles of railway tracks serving 2.2 million people a day, including commuting "salarymen" and "salarywomen" and schoolchildren in uniforms.

## U.S. drone company Zipline starts delivering medicine in Japan

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"You can totally transform the way that you react to pandemics, treat patients, and do things like home healthcare delivery," Zipline chief executive Keller Rinaudo told The Associated Press.

Although drones have been used in Japan for photography and aerial exhibitions, such as the Tokyo Olympics last year, they're not in wide use, especially in urban areas because of regulations. It remains to be seen if Zipline's healthcare service will help win over skeptics.

Rinaudo was optimistic the technology will be accepted in a nation known for robotics prowess, which

has a large elderly population but needs better healthcare in isolated areas. Medical services are the focus because "there was a real moral imperative to get that right first," he said.

"Communities will deeply understand the value of the service. And it was also easier to get regulators comfortable with what we were doing when every flight was potentially saving a human life," Rinaudo said.

By delivering medicine precisely, the service helps reduce stockpiles and, potentially, waste. The zero-emission quiet flights can go as far as 186 miles and are inexpensive compared to other modes of transport,

according to Zipline, based in South San Francisco, California.

The coronavirus pandemic has made deliveries of vaccines more pressing than ever, Rinaudo said. Blood supplies, insulin, and cancer treatment have already been delivered with Zipline drones.

A subsidiary called Sora-iina will carry out the operations, managing a distribution center and flight services from Fukue Port on Goto Islands. It's the first distribution center in Asia, and 14th in the world to operate Zipline's "autonomous instant logistics" technology. Three major Japanese distributors of pharmaceuticals have agreed to be partners.

Since the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, when a tsunami set off by a massive earthquake sent three reactors into meltdowns, Japan has shut down most of its nuclear plants and ramped up use of coal-fired power plants.

The country aims to have between 36% and 38% of its energy come from renewable sources by 2030, while slashing overall energy use.

Tokyu Railways has sought to publicize its effort with posters and YouTube clips.

Still, Ryuichi Yagi, who heads his own company that used to make neckties but has switched to wallets appeared surprised to learn he was riding on a "green train."

"I had no idea," he said.

Yagi switched his business because of Japan's "cool biz" movement. It encourages male office workers to doff their suits for open-necked short-sleeve shirts to conserve energy by keeping air conditioning to a minimum in hot summer months.

In a sense, he said, "I lead a very green life."

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