

= Departures ( 2008 film ) =

Departures ( Japanese : ????? , Hepburn : Okuribito , " one who sends off " ) is a 2008 Japanese drama film directed by Y?jir? Takita and starring Masahiro Motoki , Ry?ko Hirose , and Tsutomu Yamazaki . Loosely based on Coffinman , a memoir by Shinmon Aoki , the film follows a young man who returns to his hometown after a failed career as a cellist and stumbles across work as a n?kanshi ? a traditional Japanese ritual mortician . He is subjected to prejudice from those around him , including from his wife , because of strong social taboos against people who deal with death . Eventually he earns their respect and learns the importance of interpersonal connections through the beauty and dignity of his work .

The idea for Departures arose after Motoki , affected by having seen a funeral ceremony along the Ganges when travelling in India , read widely on the subject of death and came across Coffinman . He felt that the story would adapt well to film , and Departures was finished a decade later . Because of Japanese prejudices against those who handle the dead , distributors were reluctant to release it ? until a surprise grand prize win at the Montreal World Film Festival in August 2008 . The following month the film opened in Japan , where it went on to win the Academy Prize for Picture of the Year and become the year 's highest @-@ grossing domestic film . This success was topped in 2009 , when it became the first Japanese production to win the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film .

Departures received mixed to positive reviews , with aggregator Rotten Tomatoes indicating an 81 % approval rating from 103 reviews . Critics praised the film 's humour , the beauty of the encoffining ceremony , and the quality of the acting , but took issue with its predictability and overt sentimentality . Reviewers highlighted a variety of themes , but focused mainly on the humanity which death brings to the surface and how it strengthens family bonds . The success of Departures led to the establishment of tourist attractions at sites connected to the film and increased interest in encoffining ceremonies , as well as adaptation of the story for various media , including manga and a stage play .

= = Plot = =

Daigo Kobayashi ( Masahiro Motoki ) loses his job as a cellist when his orchestra is disbanded . He and his wife Mika ( Ry?ko Hirose ) move from Tokyo to his hometown in Yamagata , where they live in his childhood home that was left to him when his mother died two years earlier . It is fronted by a coffee shop that Daigo 's father had operated before he ran off with a waitress when Daigo was six ; since then the two have had no contact . Daigo feels hatred towards his father and guilt for not taking better care of his mother . He still keeps a " letter @-@ stone " ? a stone which is said to convey meaning through its texture ? which his father had given him many years before .

Daigo finds an advertisement for a job " assisting departures " . Assuming it to be a job in a travel agency , he goes to the interview at the NK Agent office and learns from the secretary , Yuriko Kamimura ( Kimiko Yo ) , that he will be preparing bodies for cremation in a ceremony known as encoffinement . Though reluctant , Daigo is hired on the spot and receives a cash advance from his new boss , Sasaki ( Tsutomu Yamazaki ) . Daigo is furtive about his duties and hides the true nature of the job from Mika .

His first assignment is to assist with the encoffinement of a woman who died at home and remained undiscovered for two weeks . He is beset with nausea and later humiliated when strangers on a bus detect an unsavoury scent on him . To clean himself , he visits a public bath which he had frequented as a child . It is owned by Tsuyako Yamashita ( Kazuko Yoshiyuki ) , the mother of one of Daigo 's former classmates .

Over time , Daigo becomes comfortable with his profession as he completes a number of assignments and experiences the gratitude of the families of the deceased . Though he faces social ostracism , Daigo refuses to quit , even after Mika discovers a training DVD in which he plays a corpse and leaves him to return to her parents ' home in Tokyo . Daigo 's former classmate Yamashita ( Tetta Sugimoto ) insists that the mortician find a more respectable line of work and ,

until then , avoids him and his family .

After a few months , Mika returns and announces that she is pregnant . She expresses hope that Daigo will find a job of which their child can be proud . During the ensuing argument , Daigo receives a call for an encoffinement for Mrs Yamashita . Daigo prepares her body in front of both the Yamashita family and Mika , who had known the public bath owner . The ritual earns him the respect of all present , and Mika stops insisting that Daigo change jobs .

Sometime later , they learn of the death of Daigo 's father . A reluctant Daigo goes with Mika to another village to see the body . Daigo is at first unable to recognize him , but takes offence when local funeral workers are careless with the body . He insists on dressing it himself , and while doing so finds a stone @-@ letter which he had given to his father , held tight in the dead man 's hands . The childhood memory of his father 's face returns to him , and after he finishes the ceremony , Daigo gently presses the stone @-@ letter to Mika 's pregnant belly .

= = Production = =

= = = Cultural background = = =

Japanese funerals are highly ritualized affairs which are generally ? though not always ? conducted in accordance with Buddhist rites . In preparation for the funeral , the body is washed and the orifices are blocked with cotton or gauze . The encoffining ritual ( called n?kan ) , as depicted in Departures , is rarely performed , and even then only in rural areas . This ceremony is not standardized , but generally involves professional morticians ( ??? , n?kanshi ) ritually preparing the body , dressing the dead in white , and sometimes applying make @-@ up . The body is then put on dry ice in a casket , along with personal possessions and items necessary for the trip to the afterlife .

Despite the importance of death rituals , in traditional Japanese culture the subject is considered unclean as everything related to death is thought to be a source of kegare ( defilement ) . After coming into contact with the dead , individuals must cleanse themselves through purifying rituals . People who work closely with the dead , such as morticians , are thus considered unclean , and during the feudal era those whose work was related to death became burakumin ( untouchables ) , forced to live in their own hamlets and discriminated against by wider society . Despite a cultural shift since the Meiji Restoration of 1868 , the stigma of death still has considerable force within Japanese society , and discrimination against the untouchables has continued .

Until 1972 , most deaths were dealt with by families , funeral homes , or n?kanshi . As of 2014 , about 80 % of deaths occur in hospitals , and preparation of the bodies is frequently done by hospital staff ; in such cases , the family often does not see the body until the funeral . A 1998 survey found that 29 @.@ 5 % of the Japanese population believed in an afterlife , and a further 40 % wanted to believe ; belief was highest among the young . Belief in the existence of a soul ( 54 % ) and a connection between the worlds of the living and the dead ( 64 @.@ 9 % ) was likewise common .

= = = Conception and preproduction = = =

In the early 1990s , a 27 @-@ year @-@ old Motoki and his friend travelled to India ; just before going , at the friend 's recommendation he read Shin 'ya Fujiwara 's Memento Mori ( Latin for " remember that you will die " ) . While in India , he visited Varanasi , where he saw a ceremony in which the dead were cremated and their ashes floated down the Ganges . Witnessing this ceremony of death against a backdrop of bustling crowds going about their lives deeply affected Motoki . When he returned to Japan , he read numerous books on the subject of death , and in 1993 wrote a book on the relationship between life and death : Tenkuu Seiza ? Hill Heaven . Among the books he read was Shinmon Aoki 's autobiographical Coffinman : The Journal of a Buddhist Mortician ( ?????? , N?kanfu Nikki ) , which exposed Motoki to the world of the n?kanshi for the first time . Motoki said he

found a sense of mystery and near @-@ eroticism to the profession that he felt had an affinity with the film world .

Getting funding for the project was difficult because of the taboos against death , and the crew had to approach several companies before Departures was approved by Toshiaki Nakazawa and Yasuhiro Mase . According to the film 's director , Y?jir? Takita , a consideration in taking on the film was the age of the crew : " we got to a certain point in our lives when death was creeping up to become a factor around us " . Kund? Koyama was enlisted to provide the script , his first for a feature film ; his previous experience had been in scripting for television and stage . Takita , who had begun his career in the pink film genre before entering mainstream filmmaking in 1986 with Comic Magazine , took on the director 's role in 2006 , after producer Toshiaki Nakazawa presented him with the first draft of the script . In a later interview he stated " I wanted to make a film from the perspective of a person who deals with something so universal and yet is looked down upon , and even discriminated against " . Although he knew of the encoffining ceremony , he had never seen one performed .

Production of Departures took ten years , and the work was ultimately only loosely adapted from Coffinman ; later revisions of the script were worked on collaboratively by the cast and crew . Although the religious aspects of funerals were important in the source work , the film did not include them . This , together with the fact that filming was completed in Yamagata and not Aoki 's home prefecture of Toyama , led to tensions between the production staff and the author . Aoki expressed concern that the film was unable to address " the ultimate fate of the dead " . The first edition of the book was broken into three parts ; the third , " Light and Life " , was an essay @-@ like Buddhist musing on life and death , regarding the " light " seen when one perceived the integration of life and death , that is absent from the film . Aoki believed the film 's humanistic approach did away with the religious aspects that were central to the book ? the emphasis on maintaining connections between the living and the dead that he felt only religion could provide ? and refused to allow his name and that of his book to be used . For the new title , Koyama coined the term okuribito as a euphemism for n?kanshi , derived from the words okuru ( " to send off " ) and hito ( " person " ) .

While the book and film share the same premise , the details differ considerably ; Aoki attributed these changes to the studio making the story more commercial . Both feature a protagonist who endures uneasiness and prejudice because of his job as a n?kanshi , undergoes personal growth as a result of his experiences , and finds new meaning in life when confronted with death . In both , the main character deals with societal prejudices and misunderstandings over his profession . In Coffinman , the protagonist was the owner of a pub @-@ caf? that had gone out of business ; during a domestic squabble his wife threw a newspaper at him , in which he found an ad for the n?kanshi position . He finds pride in his work for the first time when dealing with the body of a former girlfriend . Koyama changed the protagonist from a bar owner to cellist as he wanted cello orchestration for the film score . Other differences included moving the setting from Toyoma to Yamagata for filming convenience , making the " letter @-@ stone " a greater part of the plot , and an avoidance of heavier scenes , such as religious ones and one in which Aoki talks of seeing " light " in a swarm of maggots . Koyama also added the subplot in which Daigo is able to forgive his late father ; taken from a novel he was writing , it was intended to close the story with " some sense of happiness " .

= = = Casting = = =

Motoki , by then in his early 40s and having built a reputation as a realist , was cast as Daigo . Veteran actor Tsutomu Yamazaki was selected for the role of Sasaki ; Takita had worked with Yamazaki on We Are Not Alone ( 1993 ) . Although the character of Mika was initially planned as being the same age as Daigo , the role went to pop singer Ry?ko Hirose , who had previously acted in Takita 's Himitsu ( Secret ) in 1999 . Takita explained that a younger actress would better represent the lead couple 's growth out of naivety . In a 2009 interview , Takita stated that he had cast " everyone who was on my wish list " .

Motoki studied the art of encoffinement first @-@ hand from a mortician , and assisted in an

encoffining ceremony ; he later stated that the experience imbued him with " a sense of mission ... to try to use as much human warmth as I could to restore [ the deceased ] to a lifelike presence for presentation to her family " . Motoki then drilled himself by practising on his talent manager until he felt he had mastered the procedure , one whose intricate , delicate movements he compared to those of the Japanese tea ceremony . Takita attended funeral ceremonies to understand the feelings of bereaved families , while Yamazaki never participated in the encoffinement training . Motoki also learned how to play a cello for the earlier parts of the film .

To provide realistic bodies while preventing the corpses from moving , after a lengthy casting process the crew chose extras who could lie as still as possible . For the bath house owner Tsuyako Yamashita , this was not possible owing to the need to see her alive first , and a search for a body double was unfruitful . Ultimately , the crew used digital effects to transplant a still image of the actor during the character 's funeral scene , allowing for a realistic effect .

= = = Filming and post @-@ production = = =

The non @-@ profit organization Sakata Location Box was established in December 2007 to handle on @-@ location matters such as finding extras and negotiating locations . After deciding to shoot in Sakata , Location Box staff had two months to prepare for the eighty members of the film crew . Negotiations were slow , as many local property owners lost interest after learning that the filming would involve funeral scenes ; those who agreed insisted that shooting take place outside of business hours .

Toyama was both the setting of Coffinman and Takita 's home prefecture , but filming was done in Yamagata ; this was largely because the national N?kan Association , headquartered in Hokkaido , had a branch office in Sakata . Some preliminary scenes of snowy landscapes were shot in 2007 , and primary filming began in April 2008 , lasting 40 days . Locations included Kaminoyama , Sakata , Tsuruoka , Yuza , and Amarume . The NK Agent office was filmed in a three @-@ storey , Western @-@ style building in Sakata built between the mid @-@ Meiji and Taish? periods ( 1880s ? 1920s ) . Originally a restaurant named Kapp? Obata , it went out of business in 1998 . The Kobayashis ' caf? , called Concerto in the film , was located in Kaminoyama in a former beauty salon . From a hundred candidates , Takita chose it for its atmosphere as an aged building with a clear view of the nearby river and surrounding mountain range . The scene of the shooting of the training DVD took place in the Sakata Minato @-@ za , Yamagata 's first movie theatre , which had been closed since 2002 .

The soundtrack to Departures was by Joe Hisaishi , a composer who had gained international recognition for his work with Hayao Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli . Before shooting began , Takita asked him to prepare a soundtrack which would represent the separation between Daigo and his father , as well as the mortician 's love for his wife . Owing to the importance of cellos and cello music in the narrative , Hisaishi emphasized the instrument in his soundtrack ; he described the challenge of centring a score around the cello as one of the most difficult things he had ever done . This score was played during shooting , which according to Takita " allowed [ the crew ] to visualize many of the emotions in the film " and thus contributed to the quality of the finished work .

Upon completion , Takita declared Departures " perfect " , and praised the crew for their self @-@ reliance in developing the content and the humble , " hand @-@ made " quality of the film . That the film 's initial success depended largely on word @-@ of @-@ mouth was also a source of pride for the director . Coffinman author Shinmon Aoki praised Motoki 's performance and the film 's ability to show the importance of family and interpersonal connections , despite his disappointment at the dropping of the story 's religious aspect .

= = Style = =

As they are the movie 's " central dramatic piece " , the encoffining ceremonies in Departures have received extensive commentary . Mike Scott , for instance , wrote in The Times @-@ Picayune that these scenes were beautiful and heartbreaking , and Nicholas Barber of The Independent described

them as " elegant and dignified " . James Adams of The Globe and Mail wrote that they were a " dignified ritual of calming , hypnotic grace , with sleights of hand bordering on the magically " . As the film continues , Paul Byrnes of The Sydney Morning Herald opined , the audience gains an improved knowledge of the ceremony and its importance . Viewers see that the ceremonies are not simply about preparing the body , but also about " bring [ ing ] dignity to death , respect to the deceased and solace to those who grieve " , through which the encoffiners are able to help repair broken family ties and heal damage done to those left behind .

There is an idealization of the *onsen* as presented in the film . In all but one case , the dead are either young or already made @-@ up , such that " the viewer can easily tolerate these images on the screen " . The one corpse that had not been found for several days is never shown on screen . No bodies show the gaunt figure of one who has died after a long illness , or the cuts and bruises of an accident victim . Japanologist Mark R. Mullins writes that the gratitude shown in Departures would probably not have occurred in real life ; according to Coffinman , there " is nothing lower on the social scale than the mortician , and the truth of the matter is that [ the Japanese people ] fear the coffinman and the cremator just as much as death and the corpse " .

In a montage , scenes of Daigo playing his childhood cello while sitting outdoors are interspersed with scenes of encoffining ceremonies . Byrnes believes that this scene was meant to increase the emotional charge of the film , and Roger Ebert of the Chicago Sun @-@ Times considered it a " beautiful fantasy scene " through which the camera is " granted sudden freedom " from the generally standard shots . Yoshiko Okuyama of the University of Hawaii at Hilo found that Daigo 's deft movements while playing the cello mirrored the high level of professionalism which he had reached . Several reviewers , such as Leigh Paatsch of the Herald Sun , questioned the need for the shot . Throughout the film 's soundtrack , cello music remains dominant . Takita drew parallels between the instrument and the encoffining ceremony , stating that

... ironically , there is something similar between the process of encoffinement and the act of playing the cello . When you play the cello , the instrument has a human , curvaceous form . The cellist embraces that form when playing the instrument , very loving , affectionate . That 's very similar , physically , to the actions of the encoffiner , cradling the body , being tender and gentle with it .

Byrnes found that Departures used the symbol of the cherry blossom , a flower which blooms after the winter only to wither soon afterwards , to represent the transience of life ; through this understanding , he wrote , Japanese people attempt to define their own existence . Natural symbols are further presented through the changing seasons , which " suggest delicate emotional changes " in the characters , as well as the letter @-@ stones , which represent " love , communication , [ and ] the baton being passed from generation to generation " . The film 's settings are used to convey various sensations , including the solitude of the countryside and the intimacy of the public bath house . The colour white , manifested through snow , chrysanthemums , and other objects , is prominent in the film ; Okuyama suggests that this , together with the classical music and ritualized hand gestures , represents the sacredness and purity of the death ceremonies .

Departures incorporates aspects of humour , an " unexpected " complement to the theme of death which Ebert suggested may be used to mask the audience 's fears . Betsy Sharkey of the Los Angeles Times opines that , through this use of humour , the film avoids becoming too dark and instead acts as a " warmhearted blend " of whimsy and irony . This humour manifests in a variety of manners , such as a scene in which " a mortified Daigo , naked except for a pair of adult diapers , is the reluctant model " for an educational video regarding the encoffining process , as well as a scene in which Daigo discovers that the person he is preparing is a trans woman . Takita stated that the addition of humour was deliberate , as " humans are comical by nature " , and that the humour did not conflict with the film 's darker themes .

= = Themes = =

Several critics discussed the theme of death found in Departures . Scott highlighted the contrast between the taboo of death and the value of jobs related to it . He also noted the role of the encoffiner in showing " one last act of compassion " by presenting the dead in a way which

preserved proud memories of their life . Initially , Daigo and his family are unable to overcome the taboos and their squeamishness when faced with death . Daigo is alienated from his wife and friends owing to traditional values . Ultimately it is through his work with the dead that Daigo finds fulfilment , and , as Peter Howell of the Toronto Star concluded , viewers realize that " death may be the termination of a life , but it 's not the end of humanity " . Okuyama writes that , in the end , the film ( and the book on which it was based ) serves as a " quiet yet persistent protest " against the discrimination which people who deal with death continue to face in modern Japan : death is a normal part of life , not something repulsive .

Along with this theme of death , Takita believed *Departures* was about life , about finding a lost sense of feeling human ; Daigo gains a greater perspective on life and comes to know the diversity of people 's lives only after encountering them in death . This life includes family bonds : Daigo 's coming to terms with his father is a major motif , encoffinement scenes focus on the living family members rather than the dead , and even in the NK Agent office , conversation often revolves around family issues . Mika 's pregnancy is the catalyst for her reconciliation with Daigo .

Ebert writes that , as with other Japanese films such as *Tokyo Story* ( Yasujiro Ozu ; 1953 ) and *The Funeral* ( Juzo Itami ; 1984 ) , *Departures* focuses on the effect of death on the survivors ; the afterlife is not given much discussion . He considered this indicative of a " deep and unsensational acceptance of death " in Japanese culture , one which is to be met not with extreme sorrow , but with contemplation . Takita stated that he intended to focus on the " dialogue between people who have passed away and the families that survive them " . The film touches on the question of the afterlife : the cremator likens death to " a gateway " , and Okuyama writes that in this sense the cremator is a gatekeeper and the encoffiners are guides .

Byrnes found that *Departures* leads one to question the extent of modernity 's effect on Japanese culture , noting the undercurrent of " traditional attitudes and values " which permeated the film . Although the encoffining ceremony was traditionally completed by the dead person 's family , a decreased interest in it opened a " niche market " for professional encoffiners . Okuyama wrote that , through this film , Takita was filling a " spiritual loss " caused by the departure from tradition in modern Japan . Tadao Sato connected this theme of modernity to that of death , explaining that the film 's unusually non @-@ bitter treatment of death demonstrated an evolution in Japanese feelings about life and death . He considered the film 's treatment of n?kan as an artistic rather than religious ceremony to reflect the agnostic attitudes of modern Japan .

= = Release = =

The taboo subject of *Departures* made prospective distributors wary of taking on the film . Surveys conducted at pre @-@ release screenings placed it at the bottom of the list of films audiences wanted to see . Ultimately , the film 's debut at the Montreal World Film Festival in August 2008 , which was rewarded with the festival 's grand prize , provided the necessary incentive for distributors to select *Departures* ; it finally received its domestic Japanese release on 13 September 2008 . Even then , owing to the strong taboo against death , Takita was worried about the film 's reception and did not anticipate commercial success , and others expressed concern that the film lacked a clear target audience .

This fear was misplaced ; *Departures* debuted in Japan at fifth place , and during the fifth week of its run hit its peak position at third place . It sold 2 @.@ 6 million tickets in Japan and generated 3 @.@ 2 billion yen ( \$ 32 million ) in box office revenue in the five months after its debut . The film was still showing in 31 theatres when its success at the Academy Awards in February 2009 renewed interest ; the number of screens on which it was showing was increased to 188 and the film earned another ¥ 2 @.@ 8 billion ( \$ 28 million ) , making a total of ¥ 6 billion ( \$ 60 million ) . This made *Departures* the highest @-@ grossing domestic film and 15th top @-@ grossing film overall for 2008 . Executive producer Yasuhiro Mase credited this success to the effects of the Great Recession on Japan : viewers who were seeking employment after recently being downsized empathized with Daigo .

From the beginning an international release of the film was intended ; as English is considered a

key language in international film festivals , English subtitles were prepared . The translation was handled by Ian MacDougall . He believed that the workings of the mortician 's world were as far from the experience of most Japanese as from that of a non @-@ Japanese audience . As such he felt a faithful translation was best , without going far to accommodate foreign audiences to unfamiliar cross @-@ cultural elements .

In September 2008 , ContentFilm acquired the international rights to Departures , which by that time had been licensed for screening in countries such as Greece , Australia , and Malaysia ; the film was ultimately screened in 36 countries . North American distribution was handled by Regent Releasing , and Departures received a limited release in nine theatres beginning on 29 May 2009 . Overall , the film earned almost \$ 1 @. @ 5 million during its North American run before closing on 24 June 2010 . In the United Kingdom , Departures premiered on 4 December 2009 and was distributed by Arrow Film Distributors . The film attained a worldwide gross of nearly \$ 70 million .

= = = Adaptations and other media = = =

Before Departures premiered , a manga adaptation by Akira Sas? was serialized in twelve instalments in the bi @-@ weekly Big Comic Superior , from February to August 2008 . Sas? agreed to take on the adaptation as he was impressed by the script . He had the opportunity to view the film before beginning the adaptation , and came to feel that a too @-@ literal adaptation would not be appropriate . He made changes to the settings and physical appearances of the characters , and increased the focus on the role of music in the story . Later in 2008 the serial was compiled in a 280 @-@ page volume released by Shogakukan .

On 10 September 2008 , three days before the Japanese premiere of Departures , a soundtrack album for the film ? containing nineteen tracks from the film and featuring an orchestral performance by members of the Tokyo Metropolitan and NHK Symphony Orchestras ? was released by Universal Music Japan . Pop singer Ai provided lyrics to music by Hisaishi for the image song " Okuribito / So Special " ; performed by Ai with an arrangement for cellos and orchestra , the single was released by Universal Sigma on 10 September 2008 along with a promotional video . Sheet music for the film 's soundtrack was published by KMP in 2008 ( for cello and piano ) and Onky? in 2009 ( for cello , violin , and piano ) .

Shinobu Momose , a writer specializing in novelizations , adapted Departures as a novel . It was published by Shogakukan in 2008 . That year the company also released Ishibumi ( Letter @-@ Stone ) , an illustrated book on the themes of the film told from the point of view of a talking stone ; this book was written by Koyama and illustrated by Seitar? Kurota . The following year Shogakukan published an edition of Koyama 's first draft of the screenplay . A stage version of the film , also titled Departures , was written by Koyama and directed by Takita . It debuted at the Akasaka ACT Theater on 29 May 2010 , featuring kabuki actor Nakamura Kankur? as Daigo and Rena Tanaka as Mika . The story , set seven years after the close of the film , concerns the insecurities of the couple 's son over Daigo 's profession .

= = = Home releases = = =

A dual @-@ layer DVD release , with special features including trailers , making @-@ of documentaries , and a recorded encoffining ceremony , was released in Japan on 18 March 2009 . A North American DVD edition of Departures , including an interview with the director , was released by Koch Vision on 12 January 2010 ; the film was not dubbed , but rather presented with Japanese audio and English subtitles . A Blu @-@ ray edition followed in May . This home release received mixed reviews . Franck Tabouring of DVD Verdict was highly complimentary toward the film and the digital transfer , considering its visuals clean and sharp and the audio ( particularly the music ) " a pleasure to listen to " . Thomas Spurlin , writing for DVD Talk , rated the release as " Highly Recommended " , focusing on the " unexpected powerhouse " of the film 's quality . Another writer for the website , Jeremy Mathews , advised readers to " Skip It " , finding the DVD an apt presentation of the source material ? which he considered to " reduce itself to clumsy , mug @-@

filled attempts at broad comedy and awkward , repetitive tear @-@ jerker scenes " . Both DVD Talk reviews agreed that the audio and visual quality were less than perfect , and that the DVD 's extra contents were poor ; Mathews described the interview as the director answering " dull questions in a dull manner " .

= = Reception = =

= = = Reviews = = =

Departures received generally positive reviews from critics . The review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes sampled 103 reviewers and judged 81 % of them to be positive , with an average score of 7 @. @ 0 out of 10 . The aggregator Metacritic gives the film 68 out of 100 , based on 27 reviews .

= = = = Domestic reviews = = = =

Initial reviews in Japan were positive . In Kinema Junpo , Tokitoshi Shioda called Departures a turning point in Takita 's career , a human drama capturing both laughter and tears , while in the same publication Masaaki Nomura described the film as a work of supple depth that perhaps indicated a move into Takita 's mature period , praising the director for capturing a human feeling from Motoki 's earnest encoffining performance . Writing in the Yomiuri Shimbun , Seichi Fukunaga complimented Takita for using a moving , emotive story laden with humour to reverse prejudice against a taboo subject . He commended the performances of Motoki and Yamazaki , particularly their playing the serious Daigo against the befuddled Sasaki .

In the Asahi Shimbun , Sadao Yamane found the film admirably constructed and extolled the actors ' performances . Yamane was especially impressed by the delicate hand movements Motoki displayed when he performed the encoffinement ceremony . Tomomi Katsuta in the Mainichi Shimbun found Departures a meaningful story that made the viewer think about the different lives people live , and the significance of someone dying . Writing in the same newspaper , Takashi Suzuki thought the film memorable but predictable , and Y?ji Takahashi opined that the film 's ability to find nobility in a prejudiced subject was an excellent accomplishment . Sh?ko Watanabe gave Departures four out of five stars in The Nikkei newspaper , praising the actors ' unforced performances .

Following the success of Departures at the Academy Awards , critic Sabur? Kawamoto found the film to show a Japan that the Japanese could relate to , in that , in a nation whose customs put great weight on visits to ancestral graves , a death was always a family affair . He believed the film had a samurai beauty to it , with its many scenes of families sitting seiza . Critic Y?ichi Maeda gave the film a 90 % rating , and credited the performances of the two leads for much of the film 's success . He praised its emotional impact and its balance of seriousness and humour , but was more critical of the father ? son relationship , which he considered overdone . Maeda attributed the film 's international success , despite its heavily Japanese content , to its clear depiction of Japanese views on life and death . He found the film 's conceptual scale to have an affinity to that of Hollywood ( something he considered lacking in most Japanese films ) .

Reviewer Takur? Yamaguchi gave the film an 85 % rating , and found the treatment of its subject charming . He praised its quiet emotional impact and humour , the interweaving of northern Japan scenery with Hisaishi 's cello score , and the film 's Japanese spirit . Media critic Sadao Yamane found a moving beauty in the dextrous hand movements Sasaki teaches Daigo for preparing bodies , and believed that a prior reading of the original script would deepen the viewer 's understanding of the action . Mark Schilling of The Japan Times gave the film four stars out of five , praising the acting though criticizing the apparent idealization of the encoffiners . He concluded that the film " makes a good case for the Japanese way of death . "

= = = = International reviews = = = =



Internationally , Departures has received mixed ? mostly positive ? reviews . Ebert gave the film a perfect four stars , describing it as " rock @-@ solid in its fundamentals " and highlighting its cinematography , music , and the casting of Yamazaki as Sasaki . He found that the end result " functions flawlessly " and is " excellent at achieving the universal ends of narrative " . Derek Armstrong of AllMovie gave the film four stars out of five , describing it as " a film of lyrical beauty " which is " bursting with tiny pleasures " . In a four @-@ star review , Byrnes described the film as a " moving meditation on the transience of life " which showed " great humanity " , concluding " it 's a beautiful film but take two hankies . " Howell gave the film three stars out of four , praising its acting and cinematography . He wrote that Departures " quietly subverts aesthetic and emotional expectations " without ever losing its " high @-@ minded intent " . In a three @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half star review , Claudia Puig of USA Today described Departures as a " beautifully composed " film which , although predictable , was " emotional , poignant " and " profoundly affecting " .

Philip French of The Observer considered Departures to be a " moving , gently amusing " film , which the director had " fastidiously composed " . Sharkey found it an " emotionally wrenching trip with a quiet man " , one which was well cast with " actors who move lightly , gracefully " in the various settings . In Entertainment Weekly , Owen Gleiberman gave the film a B ? , considering it " tender and , at times , rather squishy " , though certain to affect anyone who had lost a parent . Barber found Departures to be " heartfelt , unpretentious , [ and ] slyly funny " , worth watching ( though ultimately predictable ) . Mike Scott gave the film three and a half stars out of four , finding that it was " a surprisingly uplifting examination of life and loss " , with humour which perfectly complemented the " moving and meaningful story " , but lent itself to characters " mug [ ging ] for the camera " .

Meanwhile , Kevin Maher of The Times described Departures as a " verklempt comedy " with wearisome " push @-@ button crying " , though he considered it saved by the quality of the acting , " stately " directing , and " dreamy " soundtrack . Another mixed review was published in The Daily Telegraph , which described the film as a " safe and emotionally generous crowd @-@ pleaser " that was not worthy of its Academy Award . Philip Kennicott wrote in The Washington Post that the film was " as polished as it is heavy @-@ handed " , predictable yet ready to break taboos , immersed in death yet incapable of escaping " the maddening Japanese taste for sentimentality " . In Variety , Eddie Cockrell wrote that the film offered " fascinating glimpses " of the encoffining ceremony but should have had a much shorter run time . Paatsch gave Departures three stars out of five , describing it as a " quaintly mournful flick " that " unfolds with a delicacy and precision that slowly captivates the viewer " but considering some scenes , such as the montage , " needlessly showy flourishes " . Edward Porter of The Sunday Times wrote that the film 's success at the Academy Awards could be blamed on " a case of the Academy favouring bland sentimentality " .

The A.V. Club 's Keith Phipps gave Departures a C ? , writing that though it featured " handsome shots of provincial life " and encoffining scenes with a " poetic quality " , ultimately the film " drips from one overstated emotion to the next " . A. O. Scott wrote in The New York Times that the film was " perfectly mediocre " , predictable , and banal in its combination of humour and melodrama . Despite its sometimes touching moments , he considered Departures " interesting mainly as an index of the Academy 's hopelessly timid and conventional tastes " . Tony Rayns of Film Comment gave a scathing review in which he denounced the script as " embarrassingly clunky and obvious " , the acting as merely " adequate " , and the film as but a " paeon to the good @-@ looking corpse " . Adams gave Departures two out of four stars , praising the emotionally and visually arresting scenes of encoffinments and " loving attention to the textures , tastes and behaviours of semi @-@ rural Japan " but condemning the predictability of the plot ; he wrote that " Forty @-@ five minutes in , [ viewers have ] prepared a mental checklist of every turn that Daigo Kobayashi will face , then negotiate ? and be danged if Takita doesn 't deliver on every one " .

== Awards ==

At the 32nd Japan Academy Prize ceremony held in February 2009 , Departures dominated the

competition . It received a total of thirteen nominations , winning ten , including Picture of the Year , Screenplay of the Year ( Koyama ) , Director of the Year ( Takita ) , and Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role ( Motoki ) . In the Outstanding Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role category , Hirosue lost to Tae Kimura of All Around Us , while in the Outstanding Achievement in Art Direction category Departures 's Tomio Ogawa lost to Paco and the Magical Book 's Towako Kuwashima . Hisaishi , nominated for two Outstanding Achievement in Music awards , won for his scoring of Studio Ghibli 's animated film Ponyo . In response to the wins , Motoki said " It feels as if everything miraculously came together in balance this time with Okuribito " .

Departures was submitted to the 81st Academy Awards as Japan 's submission for the Best Foreign Language Film award . Although eleven previous Japanese films had won Academy Awards in other categories , such as Best Animated Feature or Best Costume Design , the as yet unattained Best Foreign Language Film award was highly coveted in the Japanese film industry . Departures was not expected to win , owing to strong competition from the Israeli and French submissions ( Ari Folman 's Waltz with Bashir and Laurent Cantet 's The Class , respectively ) , but was ultimately the victor at the February 2009 ceremony . This was considered a surprise by several film critics , and The New York Times 's David Izkoff termed Departures " The Film That Lost Your Oscars Pool for You " . Motoki , who was expecting the " wonderful " Israeli submission to win , was also surprised ; he described himself as a " hanger on who just observes the ceremony " , and regretted " not walk [ ing ] with more confidence " upon his arrival .

Departures received recognition at a variety of film festivals , including the Audience Choice Award at the 28th Hawaii International Film Festival , the Grand Prix des Amériques at the 32nd Montreal World Film Festival , and Best Narrative Film at the 20th Palm Springs International Film Festival . Motoki was selected as best actor at several ceremonies , including at the Asian Film Awards , the Asia Pacific Screen Awards , Blue Ribbon Awards ; he was also viewers ' choice for best actor at the Golden Rooster Awards . At the 29th Hong Kong Film Awards , Departures was selected as Best Asian Film , beating three Chinese films and Ponyo . Following the 21st Nikkan Sports Film Award ceremony , in which Departures won Best Film and Best Director , Takita expressed surprise at the film 's awards , saying " I did not know how well my work would be accepted . " By December 2009 the film had won 98 awards .

== Impact ==

The international success of Departures received considerable attention from the press in Japan , particularly its win at the Academy Awards . The win led to a theatrical re-release in Japan and to Aoki 's book selling out in stores ? more than 230 ,000 copies were purchased .

After the film 's success , Sakata Location Box set up a hospitality service called Mukaebito ? a pun on the film 's Japanese title indicating " one who greets or picks up " another , rather than " one who sends off " . The service maintains shooting locations and provides maps of these locations for tourists . In 2009 , Location Box opened the building that served as the NK Agent office to the public . For a fee , visitors could enter and view props from the film . Under a job creation program , between 2009 and 2013 the organization received ¥ 30 million from Yamagata Prefecture and ¥ 8 million from Sakata City for the building 's maintenance and administration . The site attracted nearly 120 ,000 visitors in 2009 , though numbers quickly fell ; in 2013 there were fewer than 9 ,000 visitors . Safety fears due to the building 's age led to the Sakata municipal government ending the organization 's lease , and the building was closed again at the end of March 2014 . At the time , the City Tourism division was considering options , such as limiting visits to the first two floors . The building used as the Concerto café has been open to the public since 2009 as the Kaminoyama Concerto Museum , and the Sakata Minato Cinema has also been opened to tourists . Takita 's hometown of Takaoka , Toyama , maintains a Film Resources Museum ; staff have reported that at times over a hundred Takita fans visit per day .

The film 's success generated greater interest in encoffining and the n?kanshi . Even the model of hearse driven in the film was merchandised : the Mitsuoka Limousine Type 2 04 , a smaller ,

less expensive version of the film 's vehicle , was put on the market on 24 February 2009 . The manufacturer , Mitsuoka Motors , is located in Takita 's home prefecture of Toyama . In 2013 , Mitsuki Kimura , from a family of n?kanshi , founded the Okuribito Academy together with nurse and entrepreneur Kei Takamaru . It offers training in encoffining , embalming , and related practices .

= = Explanatory notes = =