

*A Colt Is My Passport* TRANSCRIPT – YouTube.com/CinemaTyler

*A Colt Is My Passport*—perhaps the coolest name for a movie I’ve ever heard. But does the movie live up to the name? The short answer: HELL. YES.

*A Colt Is My Passport* was directed by Takashi Nomura and stars that 60s gangster movie badass Joe “the Ace” Shishido. It almost slipped into relative obscurity until the Criterion Collection released it on DVD in 2009 for their Eclipse series 17: Nikkatsu Noir. It is also available to stream on Hulu Plus.

*A Colt Is My Passport* was released in Japan in 1967, which you may remember is the same year Shishido starred in Seijun Suzuki’s *Branded to Kill*. Shishido was a busy man—he appeared in 170 films while under contract at Nikkatsu and yet, he counts *A Colt Is My Passport* as his personal favorite.

It is possible that he holds a special place for *Colt* because it was kind of his big break. In an interview with Mark Schilling, Shishido said:

“Before that one I was just playing the bad guy to Keiichiro Akagi and Akira Kobayashi. That film was a good break for me—I had a starring role fall into my hands. When I was making *Dirty Work* I felt that my life as a star had begun. Then I got *A Colt Is My Passport* and ... *Slaughter Gun*...– those were my big leading roles. If they’d let me have leading roles from the beginning, my career as a star would have been longer. But I’ve been in 300 movies –170 for Nikkatsu. I don’t think anyone can beat me there” (Schilling 96).

Shishido was even considered for a major role in the Hollywood film *The Bad News Bears Go to Japan*, but his English wasn’t good enough (Schilling 95).

*A Colt Is My Passport* director, Takashi Nomura died last month of pneumonia at 89 years old. Aside from directing, he was also an actor and actually had a role in Suzuki’s *Branded to Kill*, but his part isn’t credited. He played a fairly large role in Shion Sono’s 2001 horror film titled *Suicide Club* and it was his first acting role after a 27 year hiatus.

*A Colt Is My Passport* was released several months before *Branded to Kill* and there are a few notable similarities. For example: the assassination scene.

Joe Shishido plays Yakuza hitman Shûji Kamimura tasked with assassinating a rival boss and in this scene near the beginning of the film, he pays the owner of an apartment building to view a unit on the fourth floor that overlooks a tea house where the his boss and the rival boss are scheduled to have a meeting.

To watch the full assassination scene, click this button to open a new window.

One can't help but notice how the scene parallels the sniper scene in *Branded to Kill* where, instead of a chirping bird distracting Shishido, it is a butterfly. The chirping bird adds a wonderful texture to the otherwise silent scene, which I believe is much more effective than if they used music. It gives us calm and suspense all at the same time.

Even though this is a rather simple sequence, we get a wide variety of shots and cinematography techniques including: tilts, close-ups, frame-within-a-frame, extreme long shots, extreme close-ups, point-of-view, zooms, and foreground elements.

Shishido getting ready for the assassination is fascinating to watch because it is made up of unique concepts that pertain to an interesting line of work. Assembling a sniper rifle from pieces in a suitcase, checking the wind speed with a cigarette, and sitting on the suitcase are things that the average person has no knowledge of, but they are clever solutions to issues someone might face as a hitman for the Yakuza.

Everything about Shishido and this assassination is clean and its precision is mirrored in the precision of the cinematography, but also in the pristine apartment. If he had broken into a dirty cluttered apartment instead, we might expect that something would go wrong, but like this apartment, the kill is efficient and organized. Shishido's outfit remains neat, he removes the shells from the scene and packs everything perfectly back into his suitcase, but he notes in the car ride that, as clean as he was, his bullets are still in the target's body.

There are several features of *A Colt Is My Passport* that Suzuki applied to *Branded to Kill*, but none more obvious than this scene. While *Colt* inspired a fair amount of *Branded to Kill's* style—"including Joe Shishido's deadpan hitman hero," ([Schilling 140](#))—Takashi Nomura's main inspiration for *A Colt Is My Passport* was, in the cinema outside of Japan.

These films were considered *mukokuseki*—or "borderless" action films. *Mukokuseki* means "statelessness" and also refers to racial ambiguity of some anime characters, but in this case it refers to Japanese films that use elements, style, and content found in films from cultures outside of Japan. They drew a great deal of inspiration from western culture—mainly French and Hollywood films and what was created was a brilliant hybrid of Eastern and Western style. Some *mukokuseki* films even went as far as featuring cowboys in contemporary Japan.

With *A Colt Is My Passport*, you can immediately see similarities to the spaghetti western, and we hear them as well—the theme of the film is very Ennio Morricone(esque). But perhaps even more substantial are the similarities to the films of the French New Wave.

It is obviously shot very economically with most likely a very low budget; there is a fair amount of real locations, as well as subversive shot choices.

Even though a few Nikkatsu directors like Suzuki and Nomura brought a unique voice to the table, Nikkatsu was still a business and their business was to make entertaining, and therefore, profitable movies. Nikkatsu modeled itself after Hollywood and we can see a nod to classic Hollywood in the scene where Shûji's sidekick, Shun—played by Jerry Fujio performs a song on an acoustic guitar. These films are a feast for the eyes and the ears. This sequence harkens back to the western studio pictures featuring talented performers like Elvis and the Marx Brothers who would break in the middle of a story to share their musical abilities. This happened quite often in earlier Hollywood films, presumably because media wasn't so readily available and either the studio wanted the films to be packed with as much entertainment as possible or they wanted to showcase a talent that could be lucrative in other avenues. It is likely that Nikkatsu noticed the success of this concept and adopted the practice themselves. Elvis' movies promoted his music and there could even be extra money brought in by releasing the soundtrack. This concept still pops up on occasion in contemporary films—look at this scene from the Punisher.

Nearly all actors were under contract to one studio and would only appear in that studio's movies. Jerry Fujio was a bit of a rarity. He was a “freelancer” and actually played a small role in Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo*, which was produced at Toho ([Stephens](#)).

Leading up to the final showdown, the rival gang kidnaps Shun and makes a deal with Shûji that they will let Shun go if he gives himself up. What is interesting is how they do the exchange. Shûji agrees to the deal and the rival gang just releases Shun. Shûji then calls the rival gang and tells them where to meet him for the final showdown. This seems strange because, at this point, Shûji, Shun, and the tag-along, Mina are safe and they have a boat. They could just leave the situation and everything would be fine, but Shûji upholds his side of the deal and meets with the rival gang completely outnumbered.

This reminded me a lot of the end of *Reservoir Dogs*. Please click this button to skip the spoiler if you have not seen *Reservoir Dogs*.

At the end of *Reservoir Dogs* Joe and Eddie are dead, Pink leaves, the cops are moments away from rescuing Orange, but Orange tells White the truth that he is an undercover cop.

Quentin Tarantino: “Matter of fact, in Japan they have a word. Like, to describe it. Not only is there not an English language equivalent of the word, there's no adjective in the English language that can really do the word justice as far as describing it. The word is called 'jingi' j-i-n-g-i, jingi. The closest thing to jingi as far as like trying to describe it in America is honor and humanity, but that's a weak description of jingi. Jingi is beyond honor. Jingi isn't beyond humanity, but it is beyond honor with a little bit of humanity in there. The best way to describe jingi,

and it's most often used in like, Yakuza movies, it's the thing you must do even if you don't want to."

Before the final showdown, the Yakuza bosses retrofit their car to be completely bulletproof, so they can watch the showdown safely. Shûji sees this and builds a bomb in a captivating scene that features no music or dialogue. It's communicated entirely visually that the bomb is magnetic and has a five-second timer on it.

To watch the final showdown in its entirety, click this button.

We get a call back as Shûji is distracted yet again, but this time by a fly. Whereas the butterfly motif is revisited in *Branded to Kill* as the object of Misako's obsession, in *A Colt Is My Passport*, it is revisited as fly—free to flutter away from the dire situation Shuji finds himself in.

What makes this setpiece work so well is that first, it pushes the tension to the breaking point—we've been waiting almost the whole movie for this moment.

Second, Nomura incorporates every stylized cinematography technique you can think of including pans, zooms, sideways tracking shots, and deep staging. And third, tension is maintained by integrating the bomb plot point into the first battle.

The action rests and builds the tension yet again for the final climactic moment. And we get my favorite shot in the whole film. Talk about a hero shot. The tension is somewhat alleviated as we go into the more playful music leading up to the final confrontation as the men in the car play right into Shûji's plan. The aim for these movies is to be both exciting and fun. There is a time to subvert expectations and there is a time to give the audience what they are begging for and right now, we're begging to see these guys get blown to smithereens. The music choice plays into that nicely. We know what will happen.

The editing in the climactic moment is made up of quick cuts of various that build the tension to its absolute peak and then the pace slows down slightly for the climactic moment. What's really interesting is that the style of editing in this climactic moment is very similar to the editing in the final moment of *Bonnie and Clyde*, which happened to come out 7 months after *A Colt Is My Passport*, so it is possible that inspiration was taken from this scene. *Bonnie and Clyde's* editor, Dede Allen had mentioned that it was her assistant who did the rough cut for that scene and she fixed it up, but we can see a similar action editing style in another of her films, *Dog Day Afternoon*.

Nomura joined Nikkatsu in 1955 and by 1969, Nomura left mukokuseki and started making what's known as jitsuroku or "true stories." By 1976 he faded into obscurity in the West ([Stephens](#)).

Thanks for watching! I'd like to thank my first Patron, Carl Lohman! If you would like to support this channel click this button to check out my Patreon page. I'm working on implementing a poll to give you the opportunity to choose the subject of a What I Learned From Watching episode. Pledge any amount and you'll get the ability to suggest and vote. And if you're new here, please hit that subscribe button now because there are plenty more videos on the way for cinephiles like you.

Thanks again for watching!