

A Colt Is My Passport NOTES – YouTube.com/CinemaTyler

A Colt Is My Passport—perhaps the coolest name for a movie I’ve ever heard (besides *Go To Hell, Bastards!*). But does the movie live up to the name? The short answer: HELL. YES.

[bump]

A Colt Is My Passport was directed by Takashi Nomura and stars that 60s gangster movie badass Joe “the Ace” Shishido. It was released in Japan in 1967, which you may remember is the same year Joe 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.

A Colt Is My Passport was released several months before *Branded to Kill* and there are a few notable similarities. (sniper scene—bird/butterfly)

A Colt Is My Passport is the best name for a movie I have ever heard. It is such a badass phrase. Like someone says, “How are you going to get out of the country without a passport?” Just say, “A colt is my passport, bitch.” Like, you can’t really do that with most movies. You can’t say, “The English patient, bitch.” Maybe they should have titled it that.

Sources:

No Borders No Limits: Nikkatsu Action Cinema by Mark Schilling

Shishido interview-

Joe Shishido: “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 Hasebe’s *Slaughter Gun* (*Minagoroshi no Kenju*, 1967) – 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” (Shilling 96).

Pg 140 – “Colt released several months prior to *Branded to Kill* and presaged several elements of Suzuki’s far more famous film, including Joe Shishido’s *deadpan hitman hero* and his stakeout with a sniper rifle.”

Pg 95 – Shishido was considered to be in *The Bad News Bears Go to Japan*, but his English wasn’t good enough.

A COLT IS MY PASSPORT: THIS GUN FOR HIRE

Made the same year as such fractured tough-guy fantasies as Seijun Suzuki's scat song of autoannihilation *Branded to Kill* and, on the other edge of the Pacific, John Boorman's similarly prismatic pulp-mortem *Point Blank*, Takashi Nomura's 1967 *A Colt Is My Passport* may have been one of the dying breaths of Nikkatsu's *mukokuseki* noirs, but what a hot, blistering belch of action savagery and truck-stop heartbreak it was!

Opening with the moans of a haunted harmonica, a sudden gunshot, and the florid, Morricone-oni twanging of an electric guitar, *Colt* begins by practically begging to be seen in the light of the spaghetti westerns that had been sweeping the globe since 1964. And much of what follows—in *mukokuseki* terms, anyway—remains true to that already distinctly hybrid Euro-American form, as triggerman Joe Shishido and his guitar-strumming sidekick, Jerry Fujio, go on the lam after a job Joe's done too well incurs the wrath of the very mobsters who hired him. **(A rare freelancer in the lingering days of long-term studio contracts, the Shanghai-born Fujio had already appeared in Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo*, for Toho, and in several films for archsatirist Yasuzo Masumura at Daiei; for Nikkatsu, his Eurasian looks would become yet another index of the genre's internationalism.)**

Fans longer familiar with *Branded to Kill* are often quick to note the similarities between the two films: a bird, rather than a butterfly, providing a sudden distraction for Joe's rifle sight; his occupation in both, a hit man on the run. But Nomura has his own, distinctively exuberant style: an alternately cramped and oblivionwide vision of destiny drawn in shotgun blasts rather than Suzuki's surrealist filigree. Dragging a golf bag filled with guns and a freshly crafted time bomb through a dust storm on some barren wasteland, Shishido prepares for the film's astonishing climax by digging a hole in the dirt: Is that his own grave? Is that tiny, skittering fly in the rubble a measure of his own mortality? The answers arrive in the sudden shapes of marksmen materializing from the swirling silt all around him.

Colt was another riveting star turn for the insouciant Shishido, who was discovered in a New Face competition at Nikkatsu in 1954. His first films were all supporting parts, and worried that his career might stall before it started, he decided in 1957 on a new face of his own, undergoing plastic surgery that would result in the puffer, comically roguish cheeks and immediately distinctive countenance we now recognize from numerous Suzuki classics. **Nomura had been making *mukokuseki* movies with Shishido since 1961. By 1969, he had turned to directing *jitsuroku* (true story) *yakuza* epics like *Showdown at Nagasaki*; by 1976, he had disappeared from Western view.**

What Nomura and all the other *mukokuseki* action directors at Nikkatsu during those wildly inventive days left us with is an indelible legacy of luminous, and sometimes outright loony, images of a world in vibrant chaos, a widescreen wonderland of mighty guys and long-suffering *secondarios*, gunsels and gamines and crooked uncles, whose collective motto could well have been drawn from one of *Colt's* longest-resonating lines, a bit of epically hard-boiled hyperbole that concludes: "All that's left for me is dust, and the smell of men and gasoline."

Chuck Stephens lives and teaches in Nashville, Tennessee.

French new wave connection

- Connection to the coolness of the Belmondo and Delon in the French New Wave.

Jerry Fujio (freelancer appeared in [Yojimbo 18:14](#))

- Connection to the coolness of the Belmondo and Delon in the French New Wave.
- Connection of the ending to the showdown of a Sergio Leone film.
- Musical number sort of like music in the Marx Brothers films?
 - Nikkatsu about entertainment—giving the audience a pleasurable experience for their eyes and ears.
- Directors managing to be artful in an assembly-line-like studio.

<http://www.nikkansports.com/entertainment/news/1476547.html>

“Takashi Nomura of film director (Nomura Takashi) 's 10 minutes 5:00 pm 9, had died in Musashino-shi, **Tokyo hospital for pneumonia. He was 89 years old.** Born in Osaka. Funeral - funeral I went in the next of kin. Chief mourner is TsumaYoko (Yoko) 's.

In '55, he joined Nikkatsu. Yukio Hashi and Sayuri Yoshinaga has played "a dream at any time", of Yujiro's starring Ishihara "night fog of blues", Shishido starring "pistol (Colt) is my passport", etc., of a number of youth movie and action movie director the I served.”

Movie notes

1:00 – music/aesthetic - opening title sequence features stylish black titles over a textured white background. The song is amazing—whistle, plucked guitar, and harmonica—reminiscent of a spaghetti western.

2:00 – structure - within the first minute of the movie, we are already on the plot. Following an assassination target’s routine. The exposition for the initial premise lasts under a minute and the plot is entirely set up within the first six minutes.

3:00 – music – classy jazz music reminiscent of the French New Wave

6:10 – music – western style theme

6:10 – one thing about these movies is that we always get something exciting and interesting to look at (target practice). And everything is shot in a hyper-stylized way.

7:30 – style - we return to the same ‘target routine’ locations from the opening. The camera pans, tracks, and dollies to reveal possible locations where Joe Shishido would carry out the hit. This is a very interesting choice because it gives us visual information as if it is a POV shot from outside of the diegesis of the film. It is a clever stylistic choice because these shots have no point within the film’s events—Joe is not on the roof. No one is. We are looking at an empty space. These shots allow the audience to feel more involved in the story even at such an early point and it heightens the intrigue and mystery of where the hit will be carried out.

9:10 – aesthetic – Joe is presented as cool as a cucumber. This character is no different than a character like Ryan Gosling’s character in Drive. We love these movies because we identify with the protagonist and therefore, feel cool and badass ourselves. The difference is that the cool characters Joe Shishido plays often not only lose control of the situation at times, but can become completely unglued. A trait that current incarnations of this archetype seem to shy away from. What’s great about this aspect of the 60s yakuza movies is that we get such a stark contrast between the emotionless and the emotional.

10:20 – structure – we can learn from a few things that didn’t work out so well. For instance, the clerk at the hotel starts to double back toward the room after Shishido has already started assembling the gun. What I’m pretty sure is happening is that we are supposed to feel suspense that the man will attempt to get back in the room while Shishido is in a compromising position, but it turns out that this is not the case and he just happened to spot a bit of trash on the floor and went over to pick it up. This doesn’t seem to read well because we aren’t given enough time to take in the suspense of the man doubling back. It would have worked better if he were further away or had already gone downstairs and started walking back up the stairs for a different reason. Also, the bit of trash is an empty pack of cigarettes, which at first comes across as being something Shishido dropped, but I don’t think this is the case.

10:35 – style – 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 and checking the wind speed with a cigarette 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.

12:24 – style – a bird starts chirping as Shishido is looking through the scope of his sniper rifle. It is important to note that A Colt Is My Passport came out in the same year as Branded to Kill, but Colt was released several months earlier. One can’t help but notice the similarities to the sniper scene in Branded to Kill where, instead of a chirping bird distracting Shishido, it is a butterfly.

12:24 – style – the chirping bird adds a wonderful texture to the otherwise silent scene, which I believe is much more effective than if they used music. The chirping bird gives us calm and suspense all at the same time.

14:00 – aesthetic – everything about Shishido and the first assassination is clean. Everything about the hotel room is pristine. The kill is efficient and organized. Shishido’s outfit remains neat and 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.

17:40 – music – leit motif in theme music. Ennio Morricone (esque)

18:18 – structure – the predicament—the rival gang is staking out the airport and they are stuck.

19:45 – structure – Joe is cocky and doesn’t listen to the warning not to go to the airport.

21:00 – aesthetic – little interesting gadgets (car microphone, hidden break pedal)

22:13 to 25:00 – structure – there is always something interesting going on, even in downtime. (car driven into water, room may be booby-trapped, girl- hidden phone)

30:00 – structure – Side story. Similar to the Sanjuro movies—an ultra-cool badass character following his own story arc gets caught up in a second story arc in taking place with the locals in the setting he finds himself in and he affects the second story arc with his presence. Jerry Fujio actually appears in Yojimbo in an uncredited role as a samurai who’s arm is cut.

45:00 – style/aesthetic – Joe Shishido’s character speaks in a calm low tone, almost never smiles, wears a clean pressed black suit with a neat haircut. Great line: “We’ve been in fixes like this before...”

45:50 – structure – song break. **A film is 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. 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. Elvis’ movies promoted his music and there could even be extra money brought in by releasing the soundtrack. We can even see nods to this in contemporary film—look at this scene from the Punisher and (Kill Bill?).**

53:17 – structure - The stakes get raised. Now the boss who was protecting Shishido has teamed up with the rival gang and they want Shishido dead. False solution: Shishido plans to take a boat out of the country.

56:30 – aesthetic – great shot from behind a window that gets broken and you can see Jerry getting beaten up through the gaps in the shards.

1:04:07 – Style – zoom reaction shot to the back of Shishido’s head at the news that the rival gang took his friend hostage.

1:11:14 – Structure – beginning of the final setpiece. Setting up the end. Both sides prepare for the final battle. Shishido can see the other side planning.

1:12:54 – Style – campy: the mob boss’ house plays helicopter sounds over loud speakers to mask shooting practice. Quick zooms

1:14:30 – structure – building the bomb. We get small hints at what will happen – magnet, timer, etc.
Style – silence: only the sounds of him building—calm and tense. Visual information he will only have 5 seconds.

1:18:40 – aesthetic – it is like he is digging his own grave

1:20:15 – style – we get a call back as Shishido is distracted yet again, but this time by a fly.

1:20:40 – style – what makes this setpiece work so well is that it first, 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.

1:21:20 – Style – the action rests and builds the tension yet again for the final climactic moment. And we get my favorite shot in the whole film. 1:21:40 – 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 Shishido’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.

1:22:59 – style – the editing in the climactic moment is made up of quick cuts of various imagery leading to what is about to happen. What is 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.

1:23:37 – music – outro. The music always plays in between the action scenes and never during. There is usually no music when there is visual information or something interesting to see. It's as if the imagery speaks for itself and the music is just a tool to help move the story along from scene to scene.

Honor – Reservoir Dogs commentary pt. 7 5:36-6:56

Jerry Fujio in Yojimbo – 18:14

Style – inserts, quick zooms, unique angles