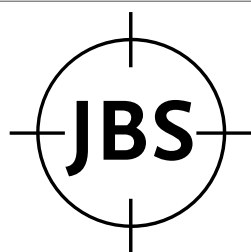


Welcome to Japan, Mr. Bond

Assessing Authenticity in *You Only Live Twice*

ADAM MILLER

Hollywood has a long history of Caucasian actors impersonating Asian characters, from Richard Barthelmess's "Yellow Man" in *Broken Blossoms* (1919) to Mickey Rooney's Mr. Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), both of which are as subtle as they are accurate. This article will examine the extent to which the filmmakers behind the fifth James Bond film adventure *You Only Live Twice* (1967) aimed to mix the exoticism of Japan with a genuine concern for tradition and authenticity. While the film may now be viewed with the ever-present undercurrent of "casual racism and sexism" (Jeffries 2020, n.p.) and has been spoilt by the laser-focused parodying in the *Austin Powers* films of "Dr. Evil mock[ing] Blofeld's business model" (ibid.), there are some aspects of the film that promoted the rapid modernisation of Japan, while also celebrating the rich and historical traditions that run throughout its culture. This is especially true if the film is viewed through the lens of 1960's Japanese society and culture. Therefore, this article will discuss the historical context of 1967 Japan, that country's tangential relationship to the Cold War, and the largescale, domestic political upheavals during the period of this film's release.



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COLD WAR TENSIONS AND STUDENT RIOTS

Firstly, a word on the film's plot. The Soviet Union and the United States are on an almost inevitable collision course with one another and nuclear warfare is only a hasty misstep away. The principal antagonist, Ernst Stavro Blofeld (Donald Pleasence), aims to capitalise on these tensions by pitting the two superpowers against each other, while allowing another country (unspecified in the film) to usurp their positions as a superpower. Blofeld creates this perfect storm by using a spacecraft that is capable of swallowing the space capsules of both the American and Soviet space programmes whole, and bringing the kidnapped astronauts back to his base of operations; a hollowed-out volcano located in Japan. Bond must team up with colleagues in Japan to thwart this evil plan, and the film shows the aptitude of the Japanese Secret Service and their effectiveness in averting international nuclear war. Why, precisely, Japan has an army of highly-trained soldiers with no particular enemy to fight is a juxtaposition that speaks to the complex relationship the country has with its armed forces. Following World War II, Japan was made to sign a constitution drafted by the Allied forces, of which Article 9 states that "land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained" in Japan (The Constitution of Japan 1946, n.p.). This forced adoption of pacifism seemingly conflicts with the presence of Tanaka's deadly *ninja* armed with rocket-propelled bullets. However, this is somewhat reflective of the complex history Japan has with its own Self-Defence Forces, formed in 1954. While Japan is constitutionally bound to not have armed forces, the funding for the Self-Defence Force has steadily increased over the years, and they recently secured their biggest financial budget in history (Johnson 2022, n.p.). This is a delicate fact that is noticed by many, but contested by few:

Although the establishment of the Self Defense Forces in 1954 seemingly contradicts the constitutional prohibition on armament, the Japanese government has avoided confronting this issue by claiming that the permissibility of such forces is a matter of interpretation. (Murakami 2005, 8)

In the 1960s, Japan began relying on the ambiguity of this situation to become a more active member in the Cold War. Its political and geographical location very much contributed to this: Japan became a port of call for Western troops or assets, and while they supported international conflicts, they never actively involved themselves in them. While this may not have directly violated their constitution, it was a point of controversy for many, including a vocal student

movement colloquially known as “Zengakuren”, a term which “has generally been accepted as a synonym for the Japanese student movement and its radicals” (Sunada 1969, 457). These young protesters were driven to take action on numerous occasions, including a large-scale protests just six months after the Japanese release of *You Only Live Twice*. As Kokobun Yutaka notes,

The U.S. Navy had applied for and received permission to send the nuclear aircraft carrier ‘Enterprise’ and its escort to Japan on January 19, 1968 while en route to Vietnam. The Sampa Zengakuren decided to try and stop the visit on the grounds that this would constitute a first step towards the creation of nuclear bases in Japan. (1970, 130)

Political tensions in Japan had been simmering to near-boiling point since 1960, when on 18 June, “hundreds of thousands of demonstrators, protesting the Japanese Diet’s approval of the United States-Japan security treaty, surrounded the Diet building in the center of Tokyo” (Krauss 1974, 1). Police clashed with these student protesters, leading to the death of one student named Kamba Michiko, which in turn led to the cancellation of President Dwight Eisenhower’s planned state visit to Japan, as well as the resignation of Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke. The event was a clash of youths and adults, left and right wings, and activists and the establishment. As Japan continued to align itself more and more with American capitalist ideals, and adopted a more bullish outlook towards international conflicts, these violent protests became evermore common.

It was within this climate that *You Only Live Twice* was released, which seemed to suit the franchise’s style perfectly, as the film’s setting had the multifaceted benefit of being both prescient and engaging while maintaining an exotic and titillating appeal to viewers. This combination had the potential to appease Japanese audiences and entice wider, global audiences who were fascinated by Japanese culture – a combination that has been argued to be at the center of the franchise’s success. As José Arroyo argues,

The Bond films are a fantasy bred from the Cold War [...] Part of the fantasy was that the appearance of the Iron Curtain created new sites of conflict as well as new types of heroism. Since the battle was international and covert, the hero’s manhood could be tested in luxury hotels and resorts all over the world rather than in grimy battlefields. The skills required were no longer

merely physical and moral but also social, intellectual and sexual. (2000, 237)

While the film may speak to the capability of Japan's armed forces, it does not show them acting on an international stage; it instead indicates that Japan is well-armed, well-trained, and well-disciplined; but the fight against Blofeld takes place within the borders of Japan, and not against any specific or named nation. This means the rules outlined by the Japanese Constitution are not violated, and the grey zone in which Japan's politics are nestled remains undisturbed.

LOCATIONS, LOCATIONS, LOCATIONS

It is not uncommon for films set in Japan to be filmed elsewhere, such as the depiction of Okinawa in *Karate Kid 2* (1986), which was actually filmed in Hawaii, USA; or the ever-looming presence of Mount Fuji in *The Last Samurai* (2003), which was filmed on Mount Taranaki in New Zealand. While many of the interior shots of *You Only Live Twice*, including the gargantuan set of the volcano lair, were filmed in Pinewood Studios in the UK, and some of the sequences of Little Nellie firing missiles and rockets were filmed over the hills of Spain due to Japan's reluctance to have such scenes filmed over a national park, there are extended scenes set in actual Japanese locations. The production traversed almost the full length of the country – starting in the neon-lit capital city, Tokyo, and ending on the peaceful coastline of Kyushu – looking for interesting destinations that would serve the story. As production designer Ken Adams stated, “we covered literally two thirds of Japan in about three weeks. Flying seven hours every day” (qtd. in *Inside “You Only Live Twice”* 2000). The locations became so important to the film that the filmmakers ended up altering the narrative to accommodate the filming sites they found: in the literary *You Only Live Twice* (1964), Blofeld was based in a coastal castle nestled behind a gigantic sea wall and rows of trees. However, his counterpart on celluloid was hidden underneath a retracting metal roof that mimicked the turquoise pool within a volcanic crater. As Martijn Mulder recounts,

Unable to find any castles in the coastal area [...] the [filmmakers] went looking for other storyline options. It wasn't until they flew over the Kirishima National Park and saw the green crater lake of Mount Shinmoe [...] that the idea of the volcano base began to emerge. (2017, 23)

But while the volcanic base of an international criminal mastermind may not have been reflective of contemporary Japan, many of the other scenes were. Bond's arrival in Japan is compounded with a montage of neon signs that decorate the Tokyo nightscape; this fascination with the rapid modernisation of Japan may well have been appreciated by both domestic and international audiences, as a very similar scene can be found in Suzuki Seijun's colourfully manic *Tokyo Drifter* (1966). From here Bond strolls down real Tokyo alleyways, and is led into the bowels of a sumo stable, before being led out into a crowd watching the national sport. Director Lewis Gilbert noted that the fighting in the sumo ring could not be staged; authenticity was stubbornly insisted upon, as the wrestlers would "not do it unless it's real. You can't do like wrestling and just shout 'fall down'; they have to do it for real" (qtd. in *Inside "You Only Live Twice"*). This adherence to tradition and authenticity makes the scene much more effective, and is arguably the film's pinnacle in showing what a very specific aspect of Japanese life is really like. This authenticity is further augmented by the thousands of extras that were used to fill the seats. The film's dubbing editor, Norman Wanstall, explains that "[a]ll those wonderful crowd sounds used were original soundtracks. The actual falls were very dramatic; the cries [the wrestler's] made and the slapping of bodies" (qtd. in *ibid.*). Not only were the wrestlers themselves true to the sport, the Japanese audience members also added to the sense of faithfulness.

While Bond is shown to speak Japanese in his successful rendezvous with Aki, he is clearly a fish out of water in this scene, and his coded greeting of "I love you" is spoken uncharacteristically coyly. But the obvious nature in which Bond stands out from the crowd does not actually alienate him from the Japanese viewing audience; in fact, it could be argued that his social isolation is a trope that was often relied upon in 1960's Japanese cinema. As Isolde Standish asserts,

"[H]istorically in Japanese cinema one of the dominant forms of idealized masculinity has been encoded within a discourse of untamed nature and a naïve innocence [...] This image of masculinity is at odds with a society founded on a utilitarian system of restraint – the subordination of individual desires and needs for the greater good of the group and/or the avoidance of shame. (2000, 172)

Japanese films of the 1960s were often centered around a male "wanderer" or social outcast who is at odds with the world around them; the aforementioned

Tokyo Drifter is just one such example. While Bond's wide-eyed observations of Japanese culture acts as a helpful excuse to showcase different aspects of modern Japan to the audience, this facet may, in fact, have made him all the more appealing to Japanese viewers, who had a tendency to root for a figure battling against the grain of social norms (often to no avail), as within "a society that advocates adherence to the norm [such as Japan], displays of difference can be liberating" (Standish, 172). This may explain why the Japanese populace were so intrigued by the arrival of the film's production crew and its leading man, Sean Connery. Not only was Connery "sophisticated, polished, clever, and sexually appealing in a ruggedly masculine way" (Sikov 2020, 132), he was a literal outsider, a *gaikokujin*, which is the polite term to describe foreigners in Japan. (The kanji can also be rather clumsily translated to "outside country person" [外国人], a fact which further stresses Connery/Bond's disconnection from Japan).

THE BOND GIRLS

The film opens with Bond being betrayed by a seductress in Hong Kong (Tsai Chin), who traps him in a retractable bed, slamming it into a wall with Bond still laying under the covers. Gunmen then rush in and the bed is decimated with gun fire, supposedly killing the secret agent in the opening scene. While only a ruse, this is just one example of a female character playing a key role in the narrative of the film. It could be argued that there are three "Bond girls" in the film, Mia Hama's Kissy Suzuki (who is unnamed throughout), Akiko Wakabayashi's Aki, (who works for the Japanese Secret Service and assists Bond with his mission), and Karin Dor's Helga Brandt (an agent of Blofeld's acting as a secretary for the Osato Chemical company). At a glance, a cynical view of these characters can be drawn, showing them to be disposable (two of them die) and inconsequential – an opinion shared by Roger Ebert at the time:

The girls (breathtaking Japanese lovelies) are beautiful and sexy as always, but they don't really emerge as characters the way Pussy Galore did. They're just there, decorating the place, running around in bikinis and, worst of all, not presenting much of a threat to old 007 most of the time. ("You Only Live Twice" 1967, n.p.)

However, the women in *You Only Live Twice* are actually far more interesting than Bond. Aki, Helga Brandt, and Kissy are the advance guard of the new Bond girl; in other words, they hold their own with Bond and help him out of more than a few scrapes with death (Rubin 1995, 464). Focusing on the two Japanese

characters – Aki and Kissy – it could be argued that they each represent a different side of the same coin. Aki can be read as a representation of the contemporary and cosmopolitan Japanese woman in the 1960s “gradually breaking away from traditional restraints” (ibid., 8). She wears modern clothes, speaks English very competently, is strong, driven, and independent, and is the inverse of a damsel in distress, having to rescue Bond on several occasions. She is also sexually confident and self-assured, pursuing Bond instead of being the reluctant target of Bond’s attention. Kissy, on the other hand, could be seen as Aki’s antithesis: visually she is only shown to wear traditional Japanese clothing, be that a wedding kimono, a summer *yukata* (a cloth robe), or a white bikini (a functional costume for a fisherwoman). While Kissy assists Bond in his raid against Blofeld’s volcano lair, she does not actively rescue Bond herself, but instead runs to get help from Tanaka and his highly trained *ninja* soldiers. And although she begins her “married” life with Bond by refusing his advances, it is not long before she is won over by his guile and becomes his fourth sexual conquest in the film. Aki has clearly embraced Japanese modernity, whereas Kissy actively rejects it. After their “wedding” ceremony, Kissy takes Bond back to her home and prepares food for him; she serves him and him alone. She is very much representative of a more archaic, and largely patriarchal model of an *ie* (家-household). As Michael Ashkenazi and Jeanne Jacob note,

Throughout much of Japanese history, *ie* (“house”, as in “House of”) constituted, a corporate, indissoluble unit, which has had statutory existence and rights until the end of World War II. Individuals were recognised solely as members of a particular *ie*, and the head of the *ie*, normally an adult male, had rights to punish and reward as he saw fit. (2000, 52)

As part of his cover, Bond must take on the role of a husband in a rural area, which makes him the new head of the household, allowing him an inflated status. While this may not have been the norm in all households in 1960’s Japan, especially in the bustling streets of Tokyo, it is a fairly representative picture of what life in a small Japanese fishing village was like, where “[m]any rural households [...] still maintain an *ie* form” within which patriarchs “rarely participate in housework, and women do almost all shopping, cooking, and much of the child-raising chores” (ibid., 52).

Neither Aki or Kissy is seen as a preferred “ideal” and both seem to win the heart of Bond on some level and at various stages throughout the film. The

film is not deriding either reading of contemporary Japanese women, but clearly shows that both of these figures exist, each recognisable to domestic audiences of the time.

FOOD AND MANNERS

Not only is the filmic Bond of *You Only Live Twice* unphased by the predicaments in which he finds himself, he also seems far more versed with the Japanese language and the culture than his literary counterpart, who often acts as a cipher for the reader's own ignorance of Japan. Connery's Bond is confident in his knowledge and gains the admiration of all around him; as he informs Money Penny, "[y]ou forget I took a first in Oriental Languages at Cambridge". In the opening pages of the novel, Bond is far more perplexed by the language, as he can only guess the meaning of the in-flight announcements (Fleming 1979, 17-18).

It is not only the Japanese language that confuses the literary Bond, but also Japanese customs, including the serving style of *sake*; on asking for large glasses he is gently teased by Tanaka: "You do not know much of these things. And you seem to know as little about *sake*. It is stronger than you think!" (ibid., 5). In the film, Bond is well versed in the custom of *sake* and Tanaka praises Bond's knowledge instead of ridiculing his ignorance.

TANAKA

Do you like Japanese *sake* Mr. Bond? Or would you prefer a Vodka Martini?

BOND

No, no. I like *sake*. Especially when it's served at the correct temperature; 98.4°F, like this is.

TANAKA

For a European, you are exceptionally cultivated.

It is not only Bond's understanding of Japanese culture that is note-worthy here, but the authenticity that is prescribed to what would otherwise be a throw-away scene, which has the dual purpose of dumping exposition and pushing the narrative forward. The *sake* is served in small cups, known as *ochoko*, and is accompanied with a serving pitcher, known as a *tokkuri*. While *sake* is usually drunk with two hands (held in the right and supported by the left), Bond drinks with only his right hand; this could well be an indication of recognition of his lower

status in comparison to Tanaka, but this is confused by the fact that Tanaka holds his glass slightly below the table, showing that he sees himself as of lower rank than Bond, as those with a notable lower status would keep their drink at a lower level (“Basic Sake Etiquettes”, n.p.). This could be read as each of them recognising the superiority of their counterpart, and both of them respectfully taking on the role of the *kohai* or less senior person; or it could more cynically be seen as the film not examining the minutiae of Japanese table manners. Either way, the scene shows a mutual respect between the two agents, and a frankness with each other that skirts the borders of politeness and friendliness. This delicate balance is an important aspect of drinking culture in Japan, which allows people freedom to speak their minds, so long as social and culture norms are largely maintained, as such events “are important to Japanese social customs: they allow an important informal channel of communication in a society that formalizes practically all aspects of life” (Ashkenzai and Jacob, 195). While it may seem that Tiger and Bond are relaxing while discussing the points central to the film’s narrative, even “acts of drinking and eating, in themselves presumably pleasurable, are subjugated to the needs of the social event” (ibid., 52) in Japan; despite the bond forming between the two agents, the “rules” of the occasion must still be followed, and Bond navigates these potentially dangerous waters exceedingly well.

A “TRADITIONAL” WEDDING

Another extended scene which aims to encapsulate a traditional aspect of Japanese life is Bond’s traditional wedding to Kissy. The wedding is held on Mount Nachi on the famous Kumano walking route. While the scene does jump around a little, as “the wedding party finds its way to the front of the main temple [...] [and] moves on to the neighboring Kumano Shrine, where the actual wedding ceremony was filmed” (Mulder, 87), this is undoubtedly a very sacred and well-regarded location for the wedding, and one which may not be as instantly recognizable for international viewers. Situated in Wakayama prefecture, it may well have been recognised by some Japanese viewers for being one of the three Grand Shrines of Kumano (Kumano Sanzan), which also include Kumano Hongu Taisha and Kumano Hayatama Taisha, or for being located next to Nachi Falls, which are the highest falls in Japan. But perhaps it was chosen as a location as it is an extremely beautiful area that is located a commutable distance from Kobe City, for ease of production. While this setting is exceptional in its beauty and rich history, holding a wedding ceremony in such a shrine is far from inaccurate, as

“[m]ost Japanese hold a traditional Shinto *shinzen-kekkonshiki* wedding ceremony, attended by a *kannushi* priest, *miko* shrine maidens, and close family members and friends” (Varnam-Atkin 2014, 68). Not only are the formalities of the wedding ceremony honored, but so are the uses of traditional clothing, as Bond wears “a kimono with gray split-trousers (*hakama*) and a long loose black jacket (*haori*) bearing his family crest (*mon*)” (ibid.). The *mon* that Bond wears appears to be a representation of a shamrock or oxalis leaf, a motif that has a long standing and importance in Japanese culture: as a symbol of vitality. This crest may well have been chosen for Bond to further bolster his undercover identity, tying him to a family with longevity. It could also be seen as an apt reading of the character of Bond himself, a person who is constantly knocked down and threatened, but refuses to give in. Kissy’s kimono is also decorated in telling motifs; namely golden cranes, which represent longevity (proverbially, cranes live for one thousand years) and, when seen as a pair, they also foresee a long and successful marriage. Kissy’s clothing is as authentic as Bond’s and the clothing for traditional Japanese weddings are strongly connected to the aforementioned *ie* or household mentality, and the bride’s willing submission to her new husband’s patriarchal role. Kissy’s kimono is white, a colour traditionally associated with death in Japan. In this case, the kimono’s whiteness symbolises both the death of the bride’s natural ties to her parents and a willingness to dye the garment in the colours of her husband’s family. (ibid, 69). Once again, this shows Kissy’s more archaic relationship to Bond.

There are no “rules” in regards to how a Shinto ceremony will be conducted, as “Shinto ethics are relative. There is no absolute word handed down from a transcendent source of authority” (Ross 1965, 108), so the production could not refer to any scripture or singular text to ensure points of authenticity were met. It is clear, however, that some pains were taken to ensure a scene approaching an accurate depiction was created, with the wedding procession, the sharing of *sake*, and the bride and groom’s clothing all ringing true for a traditional wedding in Japan.

WHY PURSUE AUTHENTICITY?

The film franchise and Sean Connery were both at the height of their fame when *You Only Live Twice* was filmed, as “Sean Connery’s arrival at Tokyo airport was heralded by a fanfare from an all-girl brass band. He stayed at the Hilton Hotel and was hounded by both the fans and the press” (Wanstall qtd. in *Inside “You Only Live Twice”*). Paired with this, the franchise had, by 1967, perfected the

recipe for a perfect Bond film that was in line with audience and genre expectations. Richard Maltby notes that

[t]he auteurist cinema of the 1970s addressed a young, well-educated target audience, but in the main those movies failed to capture the less-educated younger audience. In many respects, the prototype for the type of movie that would reliably appeal to this audience was the most consistently successful movie series of the 1960s, the James Bond pictures produced by Cubby Broccoli and Harry Saltzman for UA. By the third Bond movie, *Goldfinger* (1964), the producers had fully developed both the conventions and the financial regime of the series. Financed at relatively low budgets by UA and using their British production base to access film subsidies, the Bond movies were action adventure stories designed to appeal to international audiences through their multiple-nationality casts and exotic locales. (2003, 180)

Following this successful formula, *You Only Live Twice* also relied both on its British production base, as well as the “exotic locale” of Japan, which of “all the locations in the Bond films, [...] stands firmly as the most exotic ever used” (Mulder, 19). Not only did Japan tick the box of being exotic, it was also in keeping with Fleming’s writings, as his final Bond novel was written only after his own eye-opening trip to Japan, his experience of which was mirrored in his writings – most notably with the immortalisation of his friends and travel companions Richard Hughes and the writer Toaro Saito as the characters Dikko Henderson and Tiger Tanaka, respectively (ibid., 21). Fleming’s love of Japan comes through in the novel, and so does the extensive research of the film’s production team in the film. This curiosity about Japanese culture was no doubt embraced by the Japanese people working with the production, and they clearly did their utmost to instill an air of authenticity, while allowing for some creative freedom to ensure the exoticism which the filmmakers desired was ever-present. From cheering crowds and enthusiastic wrestlers, to stoic customs and long traditions, the film does represent a version of Japan; perhaps not one that was entirely accurate, but one that was authentic enough to both please Japanese people and interest international viewers, while also being fantastic enough to garner the audience’s attention without bending reality to breaking point.

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