

Big in Japan



Steven Tabor
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I got the style but not the grace
I got the clothes but not the face
I got the bread but not the butter
I got the window but not the shutter

But I'm big in Japan
I'm big in Japan, hey, but I'm big in Japan
I'm big in Japan

I got the house but not the deed
I got the horn but not the reed
I got the cards but not the luck
I got the wheel but not the truck

But hey I'm big in Japan
I'm big in Japan, but hey, I'm big in Japan
I'm big in Japan

I got the moon, I got the cheese
I got the whole damn nation on their knees
I got the rooster, I got the crow
I got the ebb, I got the flow
I got the powder but not the gun
I got the dog but not the bun
I got the clouds but not the sky
I got the stripes but not the tie

But hey, I'm big in Japan
I'm big in Japan
I'm big in Japan
I'm big in Japan
I'm big in Japan

Hey-ho, they love the way I do it
Hey-ho, there's really nothing to it
I got the moon, I got the cheese
I got the whole damn nation on their knees
I got the rooster, I got the crow
I got the ebb, I got the flow
I got the sizzle but not the steak
I got the boat but not the lake
I got the sheets but not the bed
I got the jam but not the bread

But hey, I'm big in Japan
I'm big in Japan
I'm big in Japan
Hey, I'm big in Japan
I'm big in Japan
I'm big in Japan

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"Big in Japan" is a 1999 song by Tom Waits from the album Mule Variations. "Big in Japan" is also an expression that can be used to describe Western musical groups who achieve success in Japan but not necessarily in other parts of the world. However, the expression is commonly used ironically to mean successful in a limited or possibly unverifiable way.

To me, the song "big in Japan" has a "Lost in Translation" feeling to it. It's as if a Westerner finds himself somewhere in Japan and can't really understand what is going on around him, nor can he understand himself at that point. To illustrate this somewhat lost feeling, I present a set of Noh mask portraits from an exhibition in the Leiden Siebold Museum close to a decade ago.

Noh is a traditional form of Japanese dance-theater, dating back to the 14th century. It is based on tales from traditional literature with a supernatural being transformed into a human form as a hero narrating a story.

Emotions are primarily conveyed by stylized conventional gestures while the Noh masks represent the roles such as ghosts, women, deities, and demons. Noh is extremely codified and regulated by the iemoto system.

As it tells the stories of Japanese commoners from the 12th to the 14th century, it's pretty hard for most Westerners to relate to what they are seeing.



































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