

L.A. WEEKLY March 26-April 1, 1982

**MUDDY RIVER (Doro No Kawa)**  
Japan, 1981. 6:30 p.m.

Films about children? Give me anything but the cloying, annoying, sentiment produced from the inane perspective of Disney studios. So it is a relief to see Kohei Oguri's film which embraces the tentative, solemn point of view of the child — in this case a Japanese boy named Nobuo (Nobutaka Asahara) — engulfed in the bizarre world of adulthood. Set in the years just after

World War II, Nobuo lives with his parents in their humble riverbank restaurant in Osaka. A houseboat docks nearby and the quiet Nobuo befriends the children Kiichi (Minoru Fujita) and Ginko (Makiko Shibata). The two are ashamed of their comparative poverty and nomadic lifestyle, but Nobuo overcomes their reticence and invites them to his home for dinner. Nobuo's parents encourage the friendship though they secretly disapprove of the children's widowed prostitute mother. Unrestricted by the caste divisions and social prejudices of their parents, the children observe all with wide-eyed expressions of acceptance. Their friendship evolves and when Nobuo's father gives the two boys money to attend a festival, Nobuo entrusts the sum to his poor friend in a gesture of confidence. When Kiichi loses the money, he tries to camouflage his disappointment by bullying Nobuo, showing him the cruel aspect of his personality. Gleefully he douses live crabs with gasoline and sets them on fire. In trying to stop him, Nobuo finds himself at a window through which he sees Kiichi's mother with a client. His illusions shattered, he runs away. When he returns to make amends, Kiichi and the houseboat are leaving. This modest vignette, filmed in black and white, bears a sense of privacy and wonder, recalling the feeling of once again *being* a child and all those painful, confused emotions. In this, it is an especially moving and intimate film. In Japanese with English subtitles. (Hunter Drojohowska)

**EIJANAIIKA**  
Japan, 1981. 4 p.m.

Japan's Meiji Restoration of 1868 returned the Emperor to power and opened the country to trade and influences from the West. After 200 years of isolation imposed by the Shogunate forces, the resulting civil strife and culture shock traumatized the nation. This tumultuous atmosphere is the background for Shohei Imamura's brilliant and textured epic film. It is a tapestry of accelerating chaos, black humor and apocalyptic vision woven together by the personal dramas of the characters.

Genji (Shigeru Izumiya) returns to Japan and his wife Ine (Kaori Momoi) after six years in America. He finds it difficult to adjust to a number of changes, not the least his wife's employment as an erotic dancer in a carnival. He chafes under the prejudices of the traditional society: women sold into prostitution by their families; farmers working the land as serfs. "In America they freed the slaves," he notes. Ine works for Kinzo (Shigeru Tsuyuguchi), the duplicitous master of the brothels and black market who exploits both the Shogunate and the Imperial forces to his own advantage. He pressures Genji into joining his band of thugs in a series of comedic robberies. Genji wants the money to return to America, but finds that he cannot convince his wife to join him. Their vacillating relationship is paralleled by escalating political intrigue. The cost of living is soaring, the farmers are rioting, all in contrast to the wealth gained by the profiteers, who are trading with the Americans. Juxtapositions of Western and Eastern culture become more extreme, throwing the populace into a state of alienation. Genji, Ine and other characters are caught up in a maelstrom that leads to a rabid dance of protest, the carnival and town people joining together in the ritual chant "Eijanaika." The phrase translates loosely as "What the Hell," the attitude manifest in a society which perceives its future as wholly uncertain. Interestingly enough, it is a film that unmistakably echoes much of the panic and insecurity of our contemporary situation. This is one of the most challenging and complex films to come out of Japan in years. In Japanese with English subtitles. (Hunter Drojohowska)