

Doro No Kawa

("Muddy River")

Japan : 1981 : dir. Kohei Oguri : Kimura

: 105 min

prod: Motoyasu Kimura : scr: Takako Shigemori : dir.ph.: Shohei Ando

Nobutaka Asahara; Minoru Sakurai; Makiko Shibata

Takahiro Tamura; Yumiko Fujita; Mariko Kaga; Masako Yagi; Gannosuke Ashiya

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	≠	M	♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Source: Film Yearbook vol 2

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"A not unserviceable effort from debut director Oguri to breathe new life into the *shomingeki* genre (melodramas with and about completely ordinary people) made internationally famous by Ozu. Set in Osaka in 1956, he describes the daily experiences of the 9-year old son of a war veteran who runs a small restaurant with his wife. The little boy is bored, until one day a riverboat moors in the neighbourhood. He comes to know the people aboard it, who live a (to him) unfamiliar and adventurous life. ** "

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001 review:

"Life in post-war Japan, as perceived by two young boys. Stunning, memorable, Ozu-like tale, with lively b&w photography. Independently produced. ***1/2 "

Bloomsbury Foreign Film Guide review:

"Nine-year old Nobuo (Asahara) makes friends with Kiichi (Sakurai), a boy of his own age who lives on a barge with his sister (Shibata) and their widowed mother (Kaga). When Nobuo's parents (Tamura and Fujita) learn that the widow is a prostitute, they warn him not to visit the barge at night. The theme of friendship between children has been extensively covered in the Japanese cinema over the years, including works by Ozu and Shimizu, so this extremely promising first feature suffered somewhat from comparisons. The main flaws occur in the latter sequences, when Nobuo witnesses the sexual activities of his friend's mother. Nevertheless, most of the film minutely builds up a loving picture of children and their relationship with adults (all excellently played) against a well-observed backdrop of riverside life

in Osaka in 1956. The film received an Oscar nomination."

The Film Yearbook volume 2 review:

"A beautifully understated debut from Oguri detailing life in mid-fifties Japan through the eyes of two nine-year old boys. Its great simplicity and resonance won it an Oscar nomination in 1982. Based on the novel by Teru Miyamoto."

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"A return to one of the traditional themes of Japanese cinema, childhood, but done with considerably less insight than the greatest practitioner in this field, Shmizu, brought to it. A small boy lives with his parents in the run-down, working-class restaurant they run on the banks of the river (in Osaka, in 1956); he makes friends with another boy and is fascinated by a whore who lives on a barge. * "

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

"The best film about the friendship of children since **"FORBIDDEN GAMES"** (1951). A youngster delights in his blossoming friendship with another child until he finds out a secret about his pal's family. ***1/2 "

Radio Times Guide to Films review:

"Adapted from a novel by Teru Miyamoto, yet clearly inspired by Yasujiro Ozu's delightful studies of childhood friendship, Kohei Oguri's Oscar-nominated debut makes striking use of its black-and-white imagery to evoke a sense of both nostalgic innocence [sic] and the grinding poverty that so many Japanese experienced, even at the height of the fifties boom. As the nine-year old son of comfortable restaurateurs, Nobutaka Asahara is touchingly awestruck as he

learns some harsh lessons about class and sex from the widow who works as a prostitute on the houseboat she shares with her kids. Dramatically satisfying, visually authentic and beautifully played. In Japanese with English subtitles. **** "

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"The story of a necessarily short-lived friendship between children, set in a riverside suburb of Osaka in the mid-1950s, not yet witness to Japan's Economic Miracle. A war widow and her two kids moor their houseboat opposite a small restaurant, and the kids befriend Nobuo, the shy young son of the restaurateur. The woman surreptitiously carries out the only trade she can to support herself and her children. The film centres on Nobuo, the lower middle class boy, and observes (without undue sentimentality) his discoveries in rapid succession of class difference and sex. The movie is based on a novel, whence doubtless the metaphor that underpins the tale (the mud of experience), but Oguri's direction is not in the least literary: he trusts his sharp black-and-white images to dramatise the spaces between the characters, and gets performances of natural maturity from his young actors. Oguri's first feature, it's one from the heart."

NAMBLA Bulletin - vol 4/2 - media note:

"Recent movies: a Japanese black-and-white, **"MUDDY RIVER"**, set in the 1950s, shows the friendship of two 9-year old boys living by a small river. One has a regular family, the other's mom is a prostitute. Despite good reviews, I found the story dull, the boys dull, the costumes dull... " - Nat M Black

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "The Critics' Film Guide", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. I last saw this some fifteen years ago, in Japanese with Dutch subtitles, so detailed comment is not possible, but I was not struck by the film in any sense. Nothing else is known of Asahara, Sakurai or Shibata.

See subject index under [ASIA](#), **DISCRIMINATION / PREJUDICE** and [SEX & SEXUALITY](#), and under **BOATS / FISHING** for other stories set on and around houseboats or barges.