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VAR 6/3/81

Elianaika
(So What)
(JAPANESE-COLOR)

Cannes, May 26.

Shochiku Co. Ltd. release and production. Features entire cast. Directed by Shohei Imamura. Screenplay, Ken Miyamoto, Imamura; camera (Eastman-color), Masahisa Himeda; music, Shin-ichiro Ikebe. Reviewed at Cannes Film Fest (A Certain Look-non-competing). May 15, '81. Running time: 151 MINS.

With: Shigeru Izumiya, Kaori Momoi, Ken Ogata, Shigeru Tsuyuguchi, Masao Kusakari.

A tale of Japan during the 1870s, when foreign influences were being felt and things were changing, is shown mainly through the ordinary people rather than the clan heads, governmental tyros, samurais, etc. They are all involved, but schematically so, while the teeming masses carry this colorful saga along.

It is hard to understand the shifting loyalties and changes but, perhaps, the people also had trouble following trends. There is a teeming feel to this robust pic that sends up many myths of military codes, samurai honor among them.

A Japanese, a castaway during a shipwreck who is picked up by an American boat, comes back to Japan. He had lived in the U.S. for six years and had become an American. He is immediately thrown in jail on reaching his country of origin. He escapes with a robust peasant from the (at the time) untouchable area of the country.

The man finds his wife has gone off with a carnival, having been sold to them when the family needed money. He finds her doing a sort of nautch act in a big city. He wants her to go back to America with him and almost arranges it but she refuses to go. She feels her soul would float there when she dies.

The man gets mixed up in clan and political struggles. He helps buy American Civil War rifles for one side. His wife is intermittently faithful. One day the crowd, during a ceremony, builds up a frenzied dance and crosses a forbidden bridge to a local military power. The soldiers at first will not fire. Loyalties change, and finally, the man who controlled them is shot just as they are disbanding and going back.

Pics by director Shohei Imamura has mainly been shown in auxiliary sections at festivals. But his directorial flourish, his epic flair that eschews stereotype, should have him landing in competition with a clearer narrative still incorporative his iconoclastic views. This straightforward take-off on historical change will also help his rep with film regulars.

—Mask

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