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ATARASHIKI TSUCHI

A SALUTE TO NAGAMASA AND KASHIKO KAWAKITA

Thursday, October 19, 1978 at 2:30

A TARASHIKI TSUCHI (THE NEW EARTH)/DIE TOCHTER DES SAMURAI (THE SAMURAI'S DAUGHTER). aka THE LOVES OF MITSU; CHERRY-BLOSSOM TIME, GEISHAS AND VOLCANOS. 1936. Produced by Nagamasa Kawakita, Yoshio Osawa and Arnold Fanck for Towa Shoji (Tokyo) and J.O. Studio (Kyoto). Written and directed by Arnold Fanck (Note: Mansaku Itami simultaneously directed another version based on Fanck's script. The film is usually referred to as co-directed by Fanck and Itami.) Photography: Richard Angst, Walter Rimpl. Art director: Kenkichi Yoshida. Music: Kosaku Yamada. Script consultant: Kashiko Kawakita. Costumes: Matsuzakaya. Editor: Alice Ludwig. Print courtesy of the Library of Congress. In Japanese and German. 90 minutes.

With: Setsuko Hara (Mitsu), Sessue Hayakawa (Mitsu's father who is also Teruo's adopted father): Isamu Kosugi (Teruo), Ruth Eweler (the German girl), Eiji Takagi (Teruo's natural father), Max Hinder (Mitsu's German tutor) and Misao Tokiwa, Kanae Murate, Haruyo Ichikawa, Yuriko Hanabusa, Kichiji Nakamura.

SYNOPSIS:

Amid volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, a poor Japanese farming family receives the news of the return of their son, Teruo, who has been studying in Germany.

On the ship Teruo finally musters the courage to explain to his lovely German travelling companion that he is an adopted son. This ancient practice entails, he confesses, taking his adoptive father's surname as his own, and marrying the daughter of the house. The two friends discuss the ideal of individual freedom, represented by Teruo's European education, as opposed to the subordination of individual to the feudalistic family system of Japan, and the German girl comes to the realization that her lover is scheduled to marry his childhood fiancée on arrival home.

Once on Japanese soil, Teruo argues with his adoptive father, refusing to marry the demure and hopeful Mitsuko because he does not love her. To his German friend he promises a new life in the Japanese colony of Manchuria (source of the Japanese title of the film, ATARASHIKI TSUCHI or "New Earth"). But Teruo's urbane stepfather and rural natural father do their utmost to convince him that he is "an important link in the ancient chain." He becomes thoroughly confused as he looks at Japan again.

While Teruo returns for a visit to his family home in the country, Mitsuko's father and German tutor explain the situation to the German girl. As she gains an education in Japanese culture she tries to make friends with Mitsuko, who shows her a beautiful kimono that is worn "only once in a lifetime." Amid warnings from the tutor about the hysteria of Japanese women that seethes below the calm surface--like a volcano--the German girl decides to withdraw. Teruo's adoptive father also makes oblique reference to storms "coming from the east for you, from the west for us."

A family council is called to deal with Teruo's "unruliness," but he himself fails to appear. Mitsuko eavesdrops, and giving up on her hopes of marriage to the man she had been promised all her life, she sets off with her wedding kimono in the direction of the volcano, leaving a poem behind.

Teruo arrives at last to find Mitsuko gone. Seeing her poem, he realizes what she intends and sets out after her by automobile, but he is checked by a flat tire. In desperation he swims a pond steaming with volcanic heat, clambers sock-footed up the mountain, and finds Mitsuko at the mouth of the bubbling crater just as she is about to leap.

Awakening with bandaged feet from his ordeal, Teruo learns for the first time that Mitsuko has studied German in anticipation of his return. She falteringly promises to be a good wife, and Teruo reads his German friend's farewell letter.

In Manchuria Teruo and Mitsuko, with their new baby, labor in the fields to plant the new earth, while a Japanese soldier stands guard.

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Towa film company, founded 50 years ago this month by the Kawakitas, is Japan's most distinguished importer of foreign films. Mr. Kawakita is chairman of the board of Toho-Towa; Mrs. Kawakita is executive director of the Japan Film Library Council.

Suggested Reading:

"The Japanese Film: Art and Industry" by Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie, pp. 148-149.

This tribute to the Kawakitas is presented in collaboration with The Japan Society. Special thanks are extended to Mari Eijima, Alan Poul, Peter Grilli, Jay Fortgang, Audie Bock, Donald Richie, Paul Spehr and Alan Twyman for their invaluable aid.

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