

= The Wrath of the Gods (1914 film) =

The Wrath of the Gods is a 1914 American silent drama film directed by Reginald Barker , and starring Sessue Hayakawa , Tsuru Aoki , Frank Borzage , Thomas Kurihara and Henry Kotani in the lead roles . This was the first feature film appearance of Hayakawa and the directorial debut of Barker .

The film is based on an American sailor who comes to the Yamaki family after his ship wrecks in the ocean . The sailor (Borzage) falls in love with the daughter (Aoki) of the family , unaware of the fact that she is cursed by God , such that if she marries , a nearby volcano will erupt and destroy the entire island on which the family lives . Writer and producer Thomas H. Ince got the idea for the film from the volcanic eruption on the island of Sakura @-@ Jima in 1914 . Hayakawa was paid \$ 500 a week , the highest paid of all oriental stars at the time .

Filming started on January 27 , 1914 and was completed on February 13 . The film was released to a warm reception on June 7 after a large @-@ scale publicity campaign . The visual effects of the film were widely appreciated by critics . It premiered in Japan on 15 September 1918 , where it was later banned for " bringing dishonor to the country " . Hayakawa , who played Aoki 's father in the film , married her before the film 's premiere .

= = Plot = =

Baron Yamaki (Sessue Hayakawa) is a fisherman who lives along with his daughter Toya San (Tsuru Aoki) on an island . The island is inhabited by Buddhists and Yamaki had been cursed by Buddha for an affront by one of his ancestors who in a murderous rage , defiled an altar of Buddha in the nearby temple . The curse was that if his daughter married anyone , then the nearby volcano would erupt . Toya finds it difficult to form relationships with boys because the village prophet Takeo (Thomas Kurihara) has spread the rumour that she is cursed . She is therefore unwilling to continue her father 's acceptance of the curse . When Yamaki takes Toya @-@ san to the Buddha shrine in the garden of his house to pray and try to get the curse removed , she vents her feelings about the god 's unfairness .

An American sailor , Tom Wilson (Frank Borzage) , whose ship has been wrecked in a storm comes to them for help and shelter . Wilson falls in love with Toya and teaches her about Christianity . To the consternation of her father , Toya decides to convert and marry Tom at the local Japanese @-@ American mission . However , her father also converts . The locals , who have been stirred up by Takeo , go on a murderous rampage against the family . They first go to the chapel but the newlyweds evade them and so they go to the beach house instead . When the mob reaches his house , Yamaki throws out the Buddha statue he had set up in his house and puts a cross in its place . The villagers are infuriated by this ; they beat him to death beneath the cross and burn his house . Eventually , the volcano erupts and the village is destroyed , and Takeo dies in an avalanche . Only Tom Wilson and Toya San survive . They are taken away from the destroyed village by a United States merchant vessel . At the end of the film , Tom tells his bride , " Your gods may be powerful , Toya San , but mine has proved his omnipotence . You are saved to perpetuate your race . "

= = Cast = =

Sessue Hayakawa as Lord Yamaki
Tsuru Aoki as Toya San
Frank Borzage as Tom Wilson
Thomas Kurihara as Takeo
Henry Kotani as Mr. Hoshida

= = Production = =

On 12 January 1914 , a volcano erupted on the island of Sakura @-@ Jima in Kagoshima prefecture , in the southern part of Japan . It was one of the biggest disasters in the history of Japan . Producer Thomas H. Ince immediately decided to make a film based on the incident . The Toledo Blade reported on 24 January 1914 that " News of the eruption was hardly a day old before Mr. Ince had built in Santa Monica canyon a whole Japanese village " . Ince had constructed a very large village in his studio Inceville in Culver City , California , and decided , where possible , to use Japanese people instead of Americans as extras . He gathered workers from the Southern California who were to work as peasants in the film . Approximately 1 @,@ 000 , mostly Japanese , extras were used . The film 's shooting began on 27 January 1914 , just 15 days after the eruption ceased . Actress Enid Markey was " badly injured " during the production ; during her scene in which the lava flow destroys the village she was surrounded by smoke and fumes and nearly asphyxiated , but had recovered by May 1914 . Six reels were used to film it in total .

To help publicize the production , Ince reported to the newspapers that lead @-@ actress Tsuru Aoki was a native of the island of Sakura and she had lost all her relatives in the eruption ? she was actually from Obara Tsuru city , Kyushu , 180 miles north of Sakura @-@ Jima . Ince also embroidered her biography so that she would appeal to the middle @-@ class audiences as the heroine of a melodrama , claiming that she was the daughter of an illustrious Japanese artist . The biographical @-@ type publicity added emotional and psychological authenticity to the character that Aoki played in the film .

Sessue Hayakawa , Aoki 's soon @-@ to @-@ be husband , played her father in the film ; they married on May 1 just before the film 's release . Hayakawa was paid \$ 500 a week and , seeing another chance to publicize his production , Ince stated that Hayakawa was " the highest paid of all oriental stars . " The film 's shipwreck scene was shot off the coast of Santa Monica , and an erupting volcano was also included among its lavish effects . This was the first feature film appearance of Hayakawa and the directorial debut of Barker .

= = Publicity and release = =

Targeted at the middle class , a large @-@ scale publicity campaign was organized by the New York Motion Picture Corporation . Four months prior to the release , New York Motion Picture Corporation put an advertisement in the 14 February 1914 edition of the New York Clipper , announcing : " Wait for The Wrath of the Gods . " Major journals carried full @-@ page advertisements of the film every week with pictures , various ad lines and photographs taken on the film set . An advertisement of the film featured an angry looking statue of Buddha and a young woman in a kimono praying in front of it . The marriage of the lead actors Tsuru Aoki and Sessue Hayakawa was also included in the publicity campaign . The film was released in a new theater called The Strand , on 7 June 1914 .

Variety noted that " special and incidental music was written by Joseph Littau , pianist of the orchestra there . The stage [at the Strand] was given a Japanesey air and atmosphere by the management . " The Wrath of the Gods was purported to have attracted 21 @,@ 000 spectators when Marcus Loew screened it along with a vaudeville bill at the opening of his summertime evening entertainment at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn .

= = Reception = =

The film was well received by critics , particularly for its visual effects , especially the volcano eruption scene . An advertisement for the film in the Williamsport Sun @-@ Gazette stated " Nothing like the " Wrath of God " has ever been seen . Pandemonium . Thrilling . Superb . " The Reading Times called the film a " genuine masterpiece " , stating that it contained " the greatest volcano scenes ever filmed " at the time . The New York Critics also hailed the film as a masterpiece , and the Brooklyn Daily Eagle considered it to be the best film of 1914 . The Washington Post wrote that the " scenic effects obtained are especially picturesque , a volcano in full action becoming the central sensation " . The Chicago Daily Tribune called the film " impressive " , and spoke of the "

scenic splendor " and the " vigorous beauty of the outdoor settings " . True Republican wrote that " In the motion picture field [the film] was greater than *The Darling of the Gods* in drama , or *Madame Butterfly* in opera . " It also wrote that the volcanic eruption and typhoon scenes " can never be obliterated from the mind . "

The film was praised for its happy ending even though the Aoki 's character lost her village . Critic Gina Marchetti proposed in her book *Tragic and Transcendent Love in the Forbidden City* that the film was " simultaneously warning against miscegenation while celebrating romantic love . " The lead actress Tsuru Aoki 's acting was also highly appreciated for adding " the sense of naturalness to the archetypal narrative between Japan and the United States . " However , in Japan the lead actors Hayakawa and Aoki were considered insults to the country . The Japanese film critics labeled the film " Anti @-@ Japanese " for portraying the country and its people in a primitive manner . The film premiered in Asakusa 's Fujikan Theater on September 15 , 1918 but was banned a few weeks later for bringing " dishonour to the country " .

The father Yamaki sacrifices himself in order to cut all ties between her daughter and Japan hoping that she would be protected by Tom and his Christian God . While referring to the film in particular , the film theorist Kaeriyama Norimasa said " Isn 't it a huge loss that Japanese producers don 't make any film for export and have all the greatly unique landscape of Japan by foreigners ? " Daisuke Miyao , in *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinema* , states that the film and its narrative of a religion collision " emphasize the difficulty for a Japanese woman to become submissive to Christianity and the American family system " , stating that the film is first and foremost " an archetypal fable pitting the civilized West , embodied by an American sailor , against the primitive East , embodied by the Japanese woman , told as a religious battle between Buddhism and Christianity " .

The film was screened along with *The Dragon Painter* , which also stars Sessue Hayakawa , at the 30th Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival on May 4 , 2014 . The film 's DVD was released in the United States on 18 March 2008 .