S7699 STRAWBERRY FIELDS (USA, 1997)

Credits: director, Rea Tajiri ; writer, Kerri Sakamoto.
Cast: Suzy Nakamura, James Sie, Heather Yoshimura, Marilyn Tokuda.
Summary: Melodrama set in the U.S. in 1971. Irene Kawai (Nakamura), a young Japanese American woman, struggles with her family and cultural identity. In one central scene in a high school classroom in Chicago, a discussion of Lt. Calley and the My Lai massacre rips the classroom apart in passionate argument. Everyone agrees that Calley is a scapegoat. The massacre of innocent Vietnamese villagers is a crime against humanity; but the question of who should be held responsible goes unanswered. Calley’s strongest defender is an Asian-American student, who says, callously, “A gook’s a gook.” Irene Kawai, suffers from the same sort of introjected, race-based contempt, which takes the outer form of perversion and obsessional neurosis. She is a pyromaniac with a schizophrenic personality. The central theme in the film is Irene’s attempt to resolve her self-hate. The answer lies in the Strawberry Fields of the World War II Poston internment camp, where Irene’s grandfather, out of shame, burned everything of sentimental value which represented his Japanese heritage.


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