

XI - 79 - 3. A Play About China

C. Production Note to Act I - 2 pages

PRODUCTION NOTE TO ACT I

GENERAL WANG ~~SHIH-PU~~ SHIH-PU is turned 60, over 6 ft. tall, strongly built. Always wears a gray-blue cloth cotton uniform, seldom with a belt. No insignia ~~with~~ of rank. ~~xxxxxxx~~ His cap is the regulation soldier cap of blue-gray with the white sun insignia. Since he often goes up to the battlefield, Chinese ~~soldiers~~ officers who are serious-minded seldom wear officer's belts, except occasionally around headquarters. They try to look like soldiers to escape capture or from being singled out by the enemy and killed. General Wang Shih-pu is a morose, tortured man, limited in mind, sincere and desperately in earnest. He has a shady past and the nation sometimes remembers still that he was once known as a puppet, or traitor who worked with the Japanese as a friend. Few people except intriguing politicians distrust him, but he is tormented by his past and is sensitive to every reference to it. Even indirect and unintended references. But he speaks frankly of his past mistakes to his close friends.

COLONEL WU YEH-TZE, chief-of-staff to General Wang at the front is in his middle thirties. He is a tall, thin, frail man with thin shoulders and appears to have tuberculosis. Once a professor. An intellectual. A cultured, learned man, deeply sensitive; passionate about the war and about the corruption within it. He exercises the greatest influence on General Wang. He is like General Wang's own son. His blue-gray uniform hangs sloppily on him, but it is clean, though unpressed. (No Chinese uniforms at the front are pressed or chic.) Col. is tormented by the backwardness, self-interest, and lack of social vision of his country's leaders. He is frank and open in his talk.

Major-General Chou Tien-ying, commander of a division under General Wang Shih-pu. In his late thirties, shorter than Col. Wu, more strongly-built. Pleasant face. Not handsome especially. Uniform more neat and exacting. Once a professor, then studied military science. A passionate patriot, democratic like Col. Wu, friend of General Wang Shih-pu. He is the Col. Chou mentioned repeatedly in the ~~xxxxxxx~~ Prologue. Sometimes wears an officers belt, but no insignia of rank. About him is a calm, reserved, thoughtful manner which sometimes suddenly breaks, when he speaks ~~harshly~~ with brutal passion. Like Col. Wu a man of learning and culture, facing death and searching for a way for his country out of the morass of corruption and inefficiency.

Frances Stone, American woman writer and artist, who does first-aid work at the front, when not writing and sketching. Sun-tanned skin, blonde hair, turned thirty. An intellectual tormented by the policy of her own country toward China and by fear of war which she constantly tries to conquer.

Lin Seng, young Chinese ~~journalist~~ journalist and poet, in his early twenties. Soldier's uniform. Intellectual in appearance, given to flights of romantic poetry and thoughtlessness. Driven by a passion for his country's liberation and the passionate desire to write a great epic poem of the war. Assistant to Frances, with whom he travels.

General Li is the commander of a Chinese Army from western China, under the general command of General Wang Shih-pu at the front. General Li was a high official, a governor of his province. He is about 45, tall, thin, cruel-faced, in manner and speech like a saber. A Fascist, advocate of totalitarianism. Enemy of both Communism and democracy. He is new to the front, arrogant and boastful, making oblique references to General Wang's past. Wears a chic khaki uniform, with a Sam Brown belt and shoulder-strap, high, polished leather boots, a sword with a golden handle and the regulation Chinese official Army cape--long and black and flowing with ~~xxxxx~~ red satin lining. A picture-book general and generally a son-of-a-bitch.

Captain Lo is a lower commander in a guerrilla detachment under Communist command which operates on the Central front under General Wang Shih-pu's general command. They operate in the rear of the enemy. Capt. Lo is about 25, hungry-looking, thin, worried about friction between his guerrillas and General Li's troops. He wears clothing made of many seasons of uniforms. A friend of General ~~xxxxxxx~~ Chou and Col. Wu.

Kuo-hwa is a little boy of 10 or 11, a war-orphan, orderly in General Wang's headquarters. A wisful child whose great ambition is to get a captured Japanese pistol and fight the Japanese. He's afraid of dogs, foreigners, Japanese, and lice.

Old Donkey Driver, with his donkey loaded with hay, is the eternal common people of China, something like history. About 60, wrinkled, amusing and amused, interested in learning everything, willing to accept anything that sounds decent. He will stop anytime, anywhere, to look and listen to anything. He hasn't any ambitions, but his son is a guerrilla, his daughter has joined the Students Front Service Corps, and his wife has joined the Women's Anti-Japanese Association. It's all amusing and interesting--just so much more water under the bridge. He's a little afraid of his wife, and so gives her a wide berth. Seeing these new women, of which his wife is one, he thinks they ought to fight the Japanese and leave their husbands alone.

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Except for the curtain scenes before each act--which require no scenery, all the scenes of every act, except the ~~second~~ scene of Act III, are laid in the Field Headquarters of General Wang Shih-pu at the front. The Headquarters are in a mountain range of Central China. A range of mountains are in the background and off stage right, from which perpetual roar of artillery, and sometimes the roar of planes and dropping of bombs, come. This ceases only on dark nights. The field headquarters of General Wang are in a group of houses near a village. These houses are of mud brick and stone and either gray cheap tiled roofs or thatch. They are one-storey only. One big door, generally double, with wooden doors, always stands open and gives light to the main room within. There is a big tree with a very broad trunk, or two trunks half-joined near front of stage, left, and beneath it a big table with benches about it near which most of the action takes place. The officers work on the table during the day and eat on it at night. The village is 2 miles away, left.