

# STEELED IN BATTLES

(by Hu Kuo)

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS  
PEKING 1955

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## *Preface*

For more than thirty long years the Chinese people, led by their Communist Party, had to wage heroic and bitter struggle against imperialism, feudalism and Chiang Kai-shek. But the people destroyed these terrible enemies and built anew their own country.

I am a member of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. I took a direct part in the day-to-day struggles. I personally experienced the people's righteous fight, as they strove to escape the destiny which the old days thrust upon them, and battled to break their chains and win for themselves a glorious new world. I firmly believe, nay, I know, that the people are an invincible force.

The Japanese invaders with their quislings and the reactionary forces besieged and starved our liberated areas and attempted to annihilate their population and the people's armed forces. They behaved with indescribable ferocity in every part of the country. The whole nation cried out for liberation. But, despite their apparent strength, it was imperialism, feudalism, and Chiang Kai-shek that were destroyed.

Struggling for dear life, millions of people joined the ranks of the army which was theirs—the People's Liberation Army. They armed themselves by seizing arms from the enemy. The P.L.A. grew ever bigger and mightier, and in

the course of battle, ordinary toiling people became tried military leaders and resolute revolutionaries. The very fight as they waged it steeled them. It was this schooling of the people in battle which was a major factor in our victory.

I was deeply stirred by what I experienced with the people. So many deeds I saw, illuminating so much of the greatness of my people, that I felt they must not go entirely unsung. I was carried away by a deep love for my comrades-in-arms, who unreservedly gave their whole selves to the people's cause. That is why I had to write this play. The episodes it describes are only some of many which took place in the great epoch-making events of the long drawn-out revolutionary period. And it is insofar that I have caught something of what my audience know themselves to be true that my play has been welcomed here in China.

\* \* \*

The first two scenes are more or less a prologue to the play as a whole, and describe the situation of the Chinese people in the ten years 1935-1945. Before the Anti-Japanese War began, except for a few liberated areas where the people's democratic rule prevailed, China's millions groaned under the barbarous rule of landlords, corrupt officials and warlords. The people themselves lived in abject poverty and distress. Act I Scene I tells of this time.

There is a lapse of ten years before the next scene. During these ten years, momentous changes took place.

The policy of black reaction which the Chiang Kai-shek gang pursued, of frenziedly massacring the people, and of acting as the willing tool of imperialism, gave Japanese imperialism the chance it wanted. In July 1937, Japan launched a full-scale war of aggression against China. Its

aim was to seize China's resources and people and monopolize them for a Japanese empire. But thanks to vigorous pressure from the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese people, who insisted that the invaders must be resisted, Chiang Kai-shek was forced to co-operate with the Communist Party and fight. The Communist Party led their armed forces deep behind the enemy lines and there established democratic anti-Japanese liberated areas. They called upon the whole people to rise, and mobilized guerilla groups. In eight years of bitter struggle the people's forces grew in number and strength until they became the main effective force against the invader. But while the people fought the Japanese, the reactionary officials and landlords turned into their lickspittles and collaborated with them, striking down and oppressing the very people who were resisting.

In 1945, the now mighty People's Liberation Army went over to the offensive. They swept over the enemy bases in rapid succession and enormously expanded the liberated areas. Their every victory was a joyful inspiration to the people. It is this period that I have in mind in Act I Scene II of the play, the period just before the Japanese surrender.

Then the Japanese surrender came. The Chiang Kai-shek gang, who had all along consistently obstructed resistance and oppressed the nation, now, with the ready help of American imperialism, promptly reorganized the pro-Japanese henchmen and took them into their army. Chiang Kai-shek launched a great offensive against the liberated areas, in a vain attempt to wipe out the people's army and drag down the people who had stood up and shaken off their shackles. He wanted to drag them back into the old life of darkness. To protect the dearly bought fruits of victory, the People's Liberation Army, supported by the people, far and wide, finally defeated the Chiang Kai-shek army in

three years of fierce fighting. The action from Act II and onwards takes place in the third year of this part of the struggle, when the People's Liberation Army had already gained the upper hand and the complete downfall of the Chiang Kai-shek regime was within sight. Now that it is possible to introduce this play to our foreign readers, I hope that it will not only further their understanding of New China, but also, through this understanding, serve the struggle of the world's people for peace and justice and help to strengthen the friendship and understanding of all peace-loving people wherever they may be.

June 16, 1954

*Hu Ko*

## TIME

### ACT I

SCENE I *A peasant home in a village in Yutze County, autumn, 1935.*

SCENE II *A peasant home in a village on the outskirts of Taiyuan, autumn. Ten years later.*

### ACT II

*Battalion H.Q. of the Eighth Route Army, in the newly liberated area. Three years later.*

### ACT III

SCENE I *No-man's-land, outside the village in Act I Scene II. Forward post of the battalion. A few days later.*

SCENE II *The wall and gate of the village. The evening of the same day as Act III Scene I.*



## CHARACTERS

*(in order of appearance)*

**CHAO LAO-CHUNG** *a poor peasant, in his fifties. He is worn out by incessant toil.*

**CHAO TIEH-CHU** *his son; in Act I Scene I he is a young peasant in his twenties. He later becomes a battalion commander in the Eighth Route Army, and changes his name to Chao Kang.*

**MRS. CHAO** *Chao Tieh-chu's wife; in Act I Scene I she is in her twenties.*

**CHAO HEI-TAN** *Chao Tieh-chu's son, a five-year-old in Act I Scene I. His name is changed to Shih-tou in Scene II.*

**YANG YU-TEH** *local despot and landlord in his fifties, in Act I Scene I. He becomes a pro-Japanese traitor and subsequently a high-up in the Kuomintang secret service.*

**YANG YAO-TSU** *his son, a young upstart in his twenties in Act I Scene I. Later he becomes a commander in the Japanese puppet police force and subsequently battalion commander in the Kuomintang Security Force.*

**OLD CHING** *a peasant in Chao Lao-chung's village; in his fifties.*

**AUNTY TSANG** *a peasant woman, in her fifties. She lives in the village outside Taiyuan.*

**CHOU** *Battalion Political Instructor in the Eighth Route Army, aged thirty.*

**SZE-HAI** *Battalion Runner aged twenty. He comes from Hupeh, and has a midlands accent.*

**SHUANG-ERH** *Battalion Runner aged twenty: comes from the border regions.*

**BATTALION LITERACY TEACHER** *(All units of the Eighth Route Army have schooling in reading and writing.)*

**WANG TEH-CHUN** *a seasoned soldier.*

TSUI TA-CHIU *a seasoned soldier.*

OLD CHI *Battalion Cook.*

FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, ETC. FIGHTERS *Eighth Route  
Army soldiers.*

SIGNALS OPERATOR.

SOLDIERS A AND B *in Japanese puppet army.*

KUOMINTANG SOLDIERS A, B, C, D, E, F, G . . . ETC.

PEASANT CROWD *old men and women, lads and lasses,  
children, etc.*



## ACT I

### SCENE I

"The yamen entrance faces south,  
Those who seek justice but lack money  
Had better stay outside."

*An autumn evening in 1935.*

*Inside a peasant home in a village near Yutze County town, Shansi Province, North China.*

*The room is scantily furnished—just a kang (the big clay bed of North China, heated by a flue), stools and shelves. There are farm tools on the wall.*

*A door leads to the courtyard. When the curtain rises there is no one in the room.*

*Chao Tieh-chu, an upstanding young peasant lad, comes in from the fields, looking thoroughly cast down. He throws down his long-handled spade with a thud. Mrs. Chao, his wife, enters, leading five-year-old Hei-tan.*

MRS. CHAO: (with a questioning look at her husband) Whatever's the matter with you? Your face

is as long as a fiddle. Has someone got across you?

CHAO: (*ignores what she says. After a pause*)  
Where's dad?

MRS. CHAO: He went to look for old Uncle Ching. He wants to get some arsenic to clean the fields with before we plough the land and sow our wheat. He's been gone some time now.

CHAO: (*heavily*) Plough the land? Sow wheat? I can tell you straight—we haven't got wheat land to plough.

MRS. CHAO: What! Have the Yangs been able to grab our three *mou* after all? And we've been fighting them in court for a whole year! I can't believe it . . . ?

CHAO: (*in rising rage*) Fighting in court? What the hell's the use of fighting them in court?

MRS. CHAO: For goodness' sake . . . you look as though you'd swallowed gunpowder. Here we've been tilling this land for ten years and more, and those Yangs think they can take it away from us by faking a little scrap of paper. Dad plans to go to town again tomorrow, if we win. . . .

CHAO: Win? (*Bursting out*) We've lost already! (*Brings out a notice of the court's decision from his pocket and shakes it violently in her face.*) Here's the yamen's judgement. We've lost! The rich man's won.

MRS. CHAO: (*stunned*) What? But we're in the right . . . we've lost?

CHAO: (*unfolds the paper and flicks it with his hand*) Can't you see? Here it is. Look at the blasted great seal on it. Damn them and their ancestors. I shan't rest easy till I tear them to pieces.

(*Silence. Sound of an old man's cough outside.*)

MRS. CHAO: That's dad back! He can't have heard yet. Better not tell him for a bit, he's just beginning to feel better. If he hears this news it'll put him right back.

(*Old Chao, a bent old man with a straggling beard, comes on stage, and picks up Hei-tan.*)

MRS. CHAO: (*trying to sound casual*) Hallo, dad! Back, eh? Well, let's eat.

OLD CHAO: (*gives Mrs. Chao a small packet he is carrying. He seems rather excited*) I got some arsenic. We'll use it when we plough the land before sowing. Now, Hei-tan, you mustn't touch this. Little boys mustn't eat this, it's nasty poison! (*To his daughter-in-law*) Put it in the black jar right away. Ah, there really are some good men in the world. Good old Ching even helped me out with my fare. When we win the lawsuit we shan't forget our old Uncle Ching. H'm, h'm; he's quite right in what he says, we can't possibly lose. If we were going to, they'd have

pronounced judgement long ago. Our case has been with the Higher Court now for over two months; you'll see, great magistrates are really careful. As long as we've got right on our side. . . .

CHAO: (*interrupts, unable to stay silent*) Right! That means damn-all against the money some people have. Money calls the tune for the devil himself.

OLD CHAO: (*with simple faith*) My son, money means nothing against the right. Righteousness can stand up against anything in the world; there must be just magistrates somewhere. (*His son is bursting to speak out, but his wife signs to him to keep quiet.*) A just magistrate will shed tears when he sees us peasants being bullied. I know there are impartial magistrates to be found.

CHAO: (*impatiently*) If you ask me, we shouldn't waste our time, messing about going to court with them. The only thing to do would be to set fire to their place and burn up every last one of the bastards.

OLD CHAO: You young people only think of your own feelings, from the way you talk. But we mustn't break the law, you know; being in the right is what counts. We hold the title-deed. We ordinary peasants have to rely on deeds, as the magistrates rely on their seals; we'll fight the

Yangs all the way to Peking and we'll not fear the outcome. . . .

MRS. CHAO: All right, dad, all right . . . let's eat now. You're letting supper get cold.

OLD CHAO: (*not to be put off*) I bought this land with twenty dollars paid on the nail. I didn't call on any man's labour, but worked on the well, come wind come weather, all on my own. I didn't even wait to get myself a roof over my head. I got going on the well first of all. It was only after that that the land became watered land. Then, when the original owner died, those Yangs saw their chance, and cooked up a fake title-deed. With his fifty strings of coppers he thinks he can claim that land from me. D'you think I can be fooled around with like that? (*Coughs and trembles. Mrs. Chao hurries over to pat his back.*) . . . What's it to me if you're rolling in filthy money, I'll sue you. You may be a great bully, but the laws of the country will have something to say. I'll go to Taiyuan tomorrow to. . . .

CHAO: You needn't.

OLD CHAO: Eh, eh, why not?

MRS. CHAO: (*looking at Chao meaningly*) Father, you're not yourself yet. He's (*nods at her husband*) afraid you'll fall ill again if you go away from home. . . .



OLD CHAO: I'm all right. It all depends on this trip whether the four of us in this family can continue to exist, and whether we can pull down the Yangs. There's no turning back from it now. (*To Chao*) You go and fetch old Uncle Ching, I'll ask him to give us a hand. You young people can't do much at your age. . . .

CHAO: Dad, there's no need to fetch him.

MRS. CHAO: Go on, you'd better. (*Chao is still hesitating, Mrs. Chao hands child to him.*) All right, you stay here with dad, I'll go myself. (*Goes out.*)

OLD CHAO: (*hopefully*) When we've won the lawsuit we'll see about getting the wheat in. The Yangs must pay us compensation for the money we've spent going to law all this year. Tieh-chu, you tell me. . . .

CHAO: (*unable to restrain himself*) Dad! The court's decree has been issued.

OLD CHAO: What's that? What d'you say?

CHAO: The decree's issued.

OLD CHAO: Aha! So the three *mou* of watered land will belong to us after all.

CHAO: No, dad. We've lost.

OLD CHAO: (*taken completely by surprise*) What? Lost? Lost . . . we lost?

CHAO: Yes. We've lost. And not only will the land go to the Yangs, but *we've* got to pay *them* money