



HU WAN-CHUN

Man of a Special Cut

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Preface

Hu Wan-chun is a writer of working-class origin. His first attempt at writing was a report on the emulation drive of the steel workers, published in 1951 in the May 13 edition of *Labour Daily* in Shanghai. It read as follows:

The workers of the Yuan Shun Rolling Mill have recently been studying the Regulations on the Punishment of Counter-Revolutionary Elements. In group discussions they laid various charges against the counter-revolutionaries. The trade union has seized the opportunity to carry out propaganda and encourage the workers to open up an emulation drive on the production front. As the result of a competition between A and B shift, A shift rolled more than twelve tons of x-inch reinforcement steel with periodical section within eight hours and thirty minutes. This constitutes a forty per cent increase over previous efforts and thus creates a new record.

(Reporter, Hu Wan-chun)

At that time, Hu Wan-chun was a steel worker with only four years of schooling. He had no idea of becoming a writer. The various reports which he wrote with the help of the editorial board of *Labour Daily* and mailed to the press were mainly on problems encountered in his work, and were written for the purpose of finding a

practical solution. However, his ability as a writer has undergone quite a change since then. It would be hard for his readers to identify the author of "Man of a Special Cut" as the young reporter of that first short news item.

In the course of the various political movements that have taken place since the liberation, Hu Wan-chun took the initiative in writing reports for the press. He became correspondent for several papers and studied in the correspondents' class organized by *Liberation Daily*. Later he became a member of a workers' writing group. With the help of the editorial department, he raised his ideological level and improved his skill as a writer. Extensive reading of literary works broadened his knowledge and stimulated his development as a creative writer.

The nine stories in this book are taken from three of his collected works. As stories, they are first-rate. Moreover they are stamped with the special characteristics of his style.

His first short story "Repair of a Steel Mill" was published in March 1952, in *Wen Hui Pao*. Following this, he published several short stories and feature articles. The Union of Chinese Writers began to pay close attention to this young writer and gave him further help.

The Party committee of the Shanghai No. 2 Iron and Steel Works also gave him their ardent support. They saw to it that he was given the facilities and the time for his writing.

The early works of Hu Wan-chun are stimulating, simple and lively. They reflect the life and outstanding political struggles of the workers. Of course a certain amount of roughness and lack of style was unavoidable, and the characters are not so moving as we should like.

Like many another young writer just stepping into the literary arena, Hu Wan-chun was influenced by the literary works he read in his early days.

When he first started writing he wavered between several methods of presentation.

The story "First Time We Met" is a reproduction of a street conversation. But by the time he wrote "Flesh and Blood" in 1955, a change had taken place. "Flesh and Blood" marks a turning point in Hu Wan-chun's creative work.

In February 1955, Hu Wan-chun had been sent at the instance of the Party branch to study for three months at the Cadres' School of the All-China Heavy Industry Trade Union. Here he studied Marxism-Leninism systematically, and this had a profound influence on his later work. His study of the theory of surplus value in particular tore the scales from his eyes. It was as though he saw his own past clearly for the first time. Here lay the root of the cruelty and darkness of the old society, here lay disclosed the source of the capitalist exploitation of the workers. He now understood the true nature of the relations between the workers and capitalists. Now he could review his past life with a new and deeper understanding. There arose in him an unconquerable desire to write. He felt compelled to write about the hardships he had suffered in the past. He wanted to indict the exploiting class; indict the whole of old society. And this he did, in "Flesh and Blood". It was from his own past that he drew the subject matter for "Flesh and Blood", and likewise the characters.

"Flesh and Blood" is a vehement indictment of the reactionary exploiting class. Both ideologically and ar-

tistically, it reaches greater heights than any of his previous works. In 1957 it won an award of honour at the World Youth Festival.

In the days that followed, Hu Wan-chun wrote "Ride On! Go On Fighting!", "Instructor Chiang" and other stories. Drawing on his experience gained in writing "Flesh and Blood", he adopted a simple style which combined realism with lyricism. Both of these stories reflect the outlook of the advanced elements of the working class, and the communist style of work of the older generation of workers. Although the main characters of the two stories have much in common, in temperament they are entirely different. Whereas Cheng Teh-tsai is patient, purposeful and careful, Instructor Chiang is outspoken to the point of impetuosity.

The big leap forward in 1958 acted as a spur to Hu Wan-chun. The Party called on the writers to go deep among the masses, to write about their creative efforts and the heroes of the times, and reflect the communist spirit of "Daring to think, daring to say and daring to do". Responding to this call Hu Wan-chun wielded his pen as a weapon in the service of politics and production. "What Instructor Pu Kao Thought" and "It Happened in a Steel Mill" both belong to this period.

The "Man of a Special Cut" is an exceedingly well-written short story with Wang Kang, a cadre, as the main character. Wang Kang has executive ability, the characteristics of a worker and the taste of an artist. In his personality these three aspects are as well merged as metals are merged in alloy-steel. The author has created a real person endowed with the qualities of the future.

Hu Wan-chun's greatest artistic achievement is his ability to create veteran workers of distinctive personality. Through Instructor Pu Kao, Instructor Chiang and Cheng Teh-tsai, we see the lofty qualities of the working class and their unselfish, heroic spirit in building socialism, as well as the nobility of working-class life.

Hu Wan-chun's work demonstrates the great significance of the Party's guidance in the field of literature. The political and artistic theories and education of the Party were the determining factor throughout Hu Wan-chun's whole process of development. In Hu Wan-chun's own words: "The reason that I'm able to write is because of our beloved Communist Party. Without the Party I wouldn't even have an education, let alone being able to write! Without the Party I wouldn't be able to exist at all."

Hu Wan-chun's development as a creative writer vividly reflects the growth of a new force which in the ten years since liberation has found its way into the literary arena of our country. It also demonstrates the Party's tremendous help and utmost concern given to the training of the young literary talent found among the masses, and the growth of the working class in the fields of politics and culture. It may be added that many working-class writers today are taking the same road as Hu Wan-chun.

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A Little Red in the Sky

It had rained the night before, but in the morning the sky was clear and the sun, which had just risen above the horizon, was pleasantly warm. A woman in her fifties trudged along the muddy road. Arriving at the gatehouse of Construction Site 218, she set down her heavy basket and beat the dust from her blue cloth jacket with her handkerchief. Then she hailed the man in the bamboo gatehouse.

"Is this Construction Site 218, old brother?"

The man smiled. "It is. Who are you looking for?"

"I've come to see Ah-chen. . . ."

"Are you a relative?"

"Me? I'm her mum."

"We've got thousands of people working here. I don't know what section your Ah-chen is in. . . ." Seeing the worried expression gathering in the woman's eyes, the gate-keeper hastened to add, "But if you'll just tell me her full name, we're sure to find her. You don't have to worry. Come in and rest a while. I'll have someone take you to her soon."

After giving the necessary particulars, Ah-chen's mother entered the gatehouse and sat down on a bamboo chair. The old gate-keeper became very busy just then, for big trucks, laden with all kinds of equipment, started rolling in and out of the site, engines roaring, tyres churning up

the mud and flinging it high. There certainly was plenty of activity.

Seated in the bamboo chair, Ah-chen's mother realized how tired she was. She had been unable to sleep a wink the previous night on the steamer from Ningpo, thinking of the daughter she hadn't seen for two years. When the girl's father had found work in Ningpo, she and Ah-chen had stayed on in Shanghai. But later the mother joined her husband in Ningpo, leaving Ah-chen in the city to finish her schooling.

Ah-chen's father had laboured for more than twenty years in the old days, doing the dirtiest and heaviest jobs, earning only enough to provide his wife and daughter with bran gruel and clothe them in rags. Thinking back on the hardships they had endured, the older generation were naturally determined to provide the best for their children, now that the country had been liberated. Ah-chen's mother had borne six children before Ah-chen came into the world, but they had all died for lack of proper nourishment. Ah-chen was the couple's only living child; is it any wonder they treasured her so? After the People's Republic was established, her father's wages rose to over a hundred yuan a month. Life was comfortable. Ah-chen's parents always gave her the choicest morsels at their table and clothed her in the best garments they could afford. The older she grew, the more they spoiled her.

Ah-chen's mother had worked as a housemaid before the country was liberated. She had seen the pampered daughters of the rich, how weak and delicate they were, and had vowed to herself that she'd never let her daughter

become like them. But at home she did all the housework; she wouldn't let Ah-chen lift a finger.

For the past two years everything had been fine, but she still worried about Ah-chen. Several times she had people write letters for her telling the girl to come to Ningpo. She felt that only if she had her daughter by her side could she be at ease about her. But Ah-chen wrote that she couldn't leave school in the middle of a term. Then one day a letter arrived from the girl announcing that she was already working at a construction site. . . .

A heavy truck abruptly ground to a halt at the gate, startling Ah-chen's mother from her thoughts. The gatekeeper brought in a middle-aged driver. "This old mother wants a lift to her daughter's place," he said.

"Where is Ah-chen?" her mother asked.

"Number Seven Barracks," said the driver. He picked up the basket, helped her into the driver's cab, then set the truck in motion.

She gazed through the window at the construction site. Weird-looking machines were puffing blue smoke and snorting forward, pushing and levelling the uneven earth. Machines with long steel arms snatched huge chunks out of the ground, then swung around and deposited them into trucks, one scoop filling an entire van. She watched, amazed. Does Ah-chen drive one of those strange vehicles? She wondered.

"What have you brought for your Ah-chen, Old Mother?" the truck driver asked.

"Dried *longan*, red dates, two bottles of honey. . . ."¹

¹ In China, these foods are regarded as tonics for delicate people.

"Ah, good nourishing food!"

"Yes. My Ah-chen's health is poor. She is always so pale and colourless. I'm really a little worried. I don't know what she does here, whether she's strong enough. . . ." Noticing the grin on the driver's face, she quickly changed the subject. "Ah-chen wrote me that she does some electric something-or-other work," the mother said. "Does that mean she drives one of those machines crawling around out there?"

The driver shook his head. "She's an electric welder."

"Where does she work, then?"

"There! You see?"

Ah-chen's mother looked in the direction he was pointing. Six or seven structures reared up into the sky like tremendous black thermos bottles. She estimated they must be every bit of four or five stories high.

"What are they?" she asked curiously.

"Blast furnaces, Old Mother. They smelt iron."

"Oh! Oh!" She suddenly observed many black dots moving about on the scaffolding that embraced the furnaces. "Aiya! People working so high up. . . . Ah-chen — does she do that too?"

"Yes, Ma'am," the driver replied casually. "She certainly does."

Ah-chen's mother fell silent. She was almost afraid to think. A girl like Ah-chen who couldn't even wash a handkerchief properly — how could she dare . . . dare to climb all the way up there? In her mind's eye she could see Ah-chen standing pale and trembling on the high scaffolding. . . .

The driver braked to a stop. "Here we are!" he said. He took her basket, gave her a hand down from the cab

and led her to the door of Number Seven Barracks. "Hey! Young Hsu, a visitor—" he shouted.

"Shh! Not so loud!" said a young man who hastily emerged from the outer room.

"What's the matter?" demanded the driver. "This old lady has come to see Ah-chen. She's her mother."

"That's fine. Please take a seat, Ma'am." Young Hsu pulled over a bench powdered with white particles and wiped it clean with the sleeve of his work tunic. "It's not dirty," he assured her. "It's only cement."

The driver gave Young Hsu a playful tap on his woven willow work helmet. "Where's Ah-chen? Where have you hidden her?"

"She was up all night. She's gone to bed."

"Even her mother can't see her?"

Young Hsu thought a moment, then said helplessly, "All right, all right, I'll take her in."

The driver laughed, waved farewell to Ah-chen's mother, and departed.

"This way, Ma'am," said Young Hsu. "But please don't disturb her. She was working in the rain all night. She didn't get any sleep!"

Why, this young fellow with his helmet of woven willow seemed even more concerned about her daughter than she was herself.

"Thank you, Comrade," she said gratefully. "It's nice of you to take such good care of Ah-chen."

They entered the sleeping quarters. The inner room wasn't very large. Near one of the walls was a bamboo platform resting on two wooden benches. On this bed, covered by a quilt and lying on her side was Ah-chen,

fast asleep. Young Hsu placed the basket on a table and whispered:

"You stay here. I'll bring your lunch at noon time." He left quietly.

Sitting down on a stool beside the bed, the mother stared at her daughter. Ah-chen had changed. Her oval face was sunburnt, ruddy. Her brows were still gracefully arched, but they were no longer so fragile, so vapid. Why, the girl was glowing with health! The mother could scarcely believe her eyes. Tears of joy blurred her vision. Rays of sunlight streamed in through the skylight and illuminated the small table. Shining and soft, they lay across the table and the floor like a golden carpet.

Ah-chen's mother sighed peacefully. How comfortable and relaxed she felt! Her hand brushed against her daughter's canvas work clothes which were hanging over the foot of the bed. They were cold and damp. She pictured Ah-chen working in the rain and the dark, the wind whistling about her ears as she crouched on the high scaffolding against the tall edifice that resembled a thermos bottle. Ah-chen wore a willow helmet and her canvas work clothes. Neither wind nor rain could stop her! The heavy canvas was soaking wet, but she refused to come down. . . .

The mother remembered something the girl had written in one of her letters: "Mum! We're building socialism, we're building the foundations of communism." Ah-chen's mother smiled proudly. Removing the helmet, she quietly spread the damp clothes on the table and smoothed them out with her hands, letting them dry in the golden square of sunlight.

In the immediate area of the sleeping quarters, it was very still. But the noise of machines could be heard faintly in the distance.

The bamboo bed creaked and Ah-chen's mother turned around. The girl had rolled over on her back. She stretched lazily without opening her eyes and again lapsed into deep slumber. It reminded her mother of that day back in 1937 when the Japanese attacked Shanghai. An artillery barrage was making the windows rattle and the ground tremble. "The battle with the invaders from across the eastern sea has begun!" She had rushed into the bedroom where her little daughter was sleeping. Then too Ah-chen had extended her small fists, poked up her belly, and stretched. She would never forget that moment. Picking up the child, she had hurried out and joined the shouting, weeping, disorderly throngs of fleeing refugees. Years of hardship and chaos followed. But struggling every step of the way, she had managed to bring her daughter up and get through the long tragic period.

Today Ah-chen was twenty-two. It hadn't been easy! Who but a mother could love a daughter as she did? Just then the door opened and Young Hsu tiptoed in. He said in a low voice:

"I've brought your lunch, Old Mother. Come on and eat."

She followed him to the outer room, and they dined together. "Have some more vegetables, Old Mother," the young fellow kept urging politely.

"On my way here on the boat last night, the rain was terrible," she said. "Did Ah-chen still have to work?"

"Emergency protection measures," he explained simply.

She nodded. "Ah-chen is very timid. Did she . . . did she climb up that big furnace that looks like a thermos bottle?"

"Ho! She's faster than any of us. While we were still struggling to get up, she shone her flashlight down to show us the way!" Young Hsu unconsciously let his voice rise. Suddenly he remembered that Ah-chen was still asleep, and he lowered his tone. "To tell the truth, your daughter has come on wonderfully. She's the leader of our Youth League shock brigade."

These words brought warmth to the mother's heart. She couldn't repress a pleased smile.

"She was pretty spoiled when she first came here," Young Hsu continued. "Once we Youth Leaguers volunteered to move some steel. The next morning at five o'clock, everyone met at the agreed place. But she never showed up."

"Why?" Ah-chen's mother asked quickly.

"Why?" Young Hsu blinked. "She overslept."

"Hmm," the mother said disapprovingly. "The minx."

Young Hsu flung out a hand in a wide gesture. "Her attitude towards work wasn't so good then. Later, we held a meeting of our Youth League group and criticized her."

"How did she take it?"

"She cried. . . ."

Ah-chen's mother put down her bowl. For a moment she said nothing. She could just see her daughter, weeping in a corner, averting her face and pouting. The mother sighed.

"The minx. That's how she is. What happened next?"

"Next?" Young Hsu blinked. "We held another small group meeting," he said firmly.

"Oh! And this time?"

"This time we really told her off." Young Hsu again made a sweeping gesture.

Ah-chen's mother paled, plainly distressed.

Young Hsu looked at her, put down his bowl and burst out laughing. "We were only trying to help her, you know. It was for her own good. True, we overdid it a bit, but we truly helped her."

The mother couldn't help smiling.

"Don't you believe it? Just ask her. She's very thankful to everybody now!" Rising to his feet, Young Hsu inquired solemnly: "Old Mother, who do you think is even more concerned about us than our own parents?"

"Mothers are always very concerned about their children," she replied.

"Well, whether your daughter or me, in addition to our own mothers we have another mother who loves us even more, a mother who makes very strict demands!" Young Hsu pushed his bowl and chopsticks aside and took off his willow helmet. "This mother is our Communist Party. The Party has taught your daughter and me to be the way we are today. Take your daughter. I don't know how many times the secretary of the Party branch came to me and said, 'We've got to help her, look after her. But only by steeling her in difficulties, only by making strict demands on her, will we be showing her true love. The best daughters of the Party have all been steeled in struggle. That's why they can withstand any storm!' We carried out the Party secretary's instructions, and your daughter progressed. The Party looks after us