

THE DOG-MEAT GENERAL

The abolition of the monarchy and the literary civil service examination system did not put an end to abuses of power or incompetence on the part of officials. To the contrary, disorder provided leeway for the rise of warlords, many of whom were not only incompetent and corrupt, but also brutal and destructive.

Below is an account of Zhang Zongchang (1881–1932), a poor boy who, in less than thirty years, rose from juvenile delinquent to general to governor of a province. When the Nationalist Party succeeded in its Northern Expedition against the warlords in 1928, Zhang retreated to Manchuria, then to Japan. On a visit back to his native area in 1932 he was assassinated by the son of one of his earlier victims. The article below was written after his death, based on the responses a magazine received when it solicited accounts of his cruelties and oppression from its readers.

Zhang Zongchang, nicknamed “Dog-meat General” and “Lanky General,” was from Yi county in Shandong. His father was a trumpet player (hired for funeral processions, etc.) and barber, and his mother was a shamaness. At the age of twelve or thirteen, Zhang started helping his father by playing the cymbals. When he was fifteen or sixteen he went with his mother to Yinkou, and worked as a servant in a gambling house, mixing with pickpockets and thieves. The gentry of the town, annoyed, drove him away. He then fled to Guandong [in Manchuria] to join the “bearded bandits.” His mother stayed on at Yinkou, and lived with the proprietor of a bathhouse, then with a cobbler, then with a cloth vendor. The cloth vendor, in a fit of jealousy, killed the cob-

bler, and was sent to jail. Because of this, Zhang’s mother was sent into exile. Lacking any means of transportation, she gave herself to a rickshaw puller so that he would take her back to Yi county. In this way she returned to the trumpet player. But the trumpet player was too poor to support her, so he sold her to a grain wholesaler named Jia for some millet. We all know that Zhang Zongchang had two fathers, and this is the explanation.

When the revolution started in 1911, Zhang led about one hundred “bearded bandits” from Guandong to Yantai [in Shandong] to join Commander Hu Ying’s army. When Hu resisted the revolutionary forces, Zhang went to Shanghai to join the regiment commander of the revolution-

ary army. At that time, there was a truce between the North and the South, and the regiment commander resigned, but not before he had made Zhang, who was not only strong but also brave, the leader of his men. Zhang and his army were then reorganized by Commander Cheng Dechuan of Jiangsu. Now called "Juangfu" troops, they were sent to Fengpei and Xiaoyi to put down bandits, and were under the Division Commander Leng Yuqin. When the Second Revolution started and Leng was defeated, Zhang took over Leng's soldiers and gained even more military power. However, because Zhang was connected with Leng, his troops were soon dissolved by Feng Guozhang, the honorary title "model supervisory regiment" given him was but an empty name. From then on, Zhang made a profession of murdering his revolutionary comrades. The assassination of Shanghai's commander, Chen Qimei, was Zhang's doing. Because of this, Zhang was taken into the confidence of Feng Guozhang. When Feng was the national vice-president, he appointed Zhang as the chief of his personal guards. . . .

Zhang was very brave in battle, but he had no mind for strategy. His soldiers were mostly bandits, and therefore very valiant warriors, which by and large accounted for his success in military ventures. But he also had an advisor who assisted him in military maneuvers, the fortune-teller Tong Huagu. During the Fengtian-Zhili war, Zhang was stationed to the east of the Xifeng pass. One day, Zhang came across Tong and went up to him for advice. Tong told him that his physiognomy revealed that he would achieve great distinction. He also predicted that the next day, when the Zhili troops passed by train, the train would derail, and if Zhang would take this opportunity, he could attack them and win a big victory. The next day, Zhang stationed his troops to wait for the Zhili troops. Just as Tong had predicted, the train derailed, and Zhang routed the enemies. At the time of the battle Tong paced back and forth on top of a hill, his hair untied, his mouth uttering words of magic. After the battle, Zhang asked Tong to step down from the hill, and with utmost deference appointed him as his military advisor.

From then on, Zhang followed Tong's words to the letter where military action was concerned.

It turned out that the fortune-teller was rather shrewd. The night that he met Zhang, he hired a few peasants to remove the screws connecting the rails over a bridge, thereby causing the derailment. Because he knew Zhang could easily be fooled, he used a fairy tale as a stepping-stone to a career. At any rate, on account of Zhang's military distinctions, he was finally appointed governor of Shandong. . . .

Not long after Zhang became governor, two phrases were heard all over the cities: "Cut apart to catch light" and "listen to the telephone." The former referred to the human heads which were treated like watermelons, cut in halves to bask in the sun; the latter referred to the same, except the heads were hung from telephone poles, and from afar they seemed to be listening on the telephone. At the same time, at the train stations along the Jiaoji and Jinpu lines, people started to hear the strange expression, "My head is my passport; my ass is my ticket." This was because people were being regularly kicked, beaten up, abused in vile language, and spat in the face by the soldiers. To the sights of the city of Jinan there were also added White Russian soldiers, who were drunkards, ruffians, and rapists. Living in Shandong at this time, one could really feel the truth in the saying, "A man's life is worth less than a chicken's."

Soon after Zhang Zongchang came to his post, he unveiled his ugly nature and started his vile deeds. Under his "steel sword" policy, the once-flourishing academies disappeared, the better students fled, and the provincial assembly was silenced. On the other hand, clever people moved with the current and began buttering Zhang up. Upholding the philosophy that "In an age of chaos, don't miss the chance to loot during the fire," they went after offices. From circuit intendants and county magistrates to bureau chiefs, all positions were refilled with much pomp. Whenever these henchmen went to a local district, their first priority was to extort and exploit, so that they could repay past favors and secure future ones, whereas the people were becoming skinnier daily.

Too true was the proverb, "In the official's house, wine and meat are allowed to rot, but on the roads are the bones of those who starved to death."

Zhang Zongchang came to Shandong in June of 1925, and he fled on the 30th of April, 1928. In these three years he took a total of 350,000 dollars of the people's blood money.

Zhang Zongchang was a warmonger, by nature fond of disorder. After his arrival in Shandong, there was not even one day of peace. In the Lusu war, Zhang fought with Sun Chuanfang back and forth between Bangfu, Xuzhou, Hanzhuang, and Lincheng. In the Luyu war, he battled Jin Yune and Li Ji at Mount Tai. In the battle at Baliwa, he almost lost all his arms and men. In the battle at Nankou, he fought side by side with the Fengtian and Zhili troops against the Nationalist army, forcing them into Gansu and Shaanxi. During the Nationalists' Northern Expedition, Zhang fought like a wounded beast along the Jinpu railroad.

After each battle, the field was strewn with bodies. The loss of the soldiers required replacement, which in turn required military funds, which resulted in higher taxes. When funds were raised, more soldiers were drafted, and another war was in the making. This cycle was repeated again and again. This was the way Zhang Zongchang ruled the province of Shandong from 1925 to 1928. The white banners of recruitment flew all over the province, and young people were driven straight into their graves. In such a situation, how could the people of Shandong escape hardship and poverty?

TAXATION

During the less than four years that Zhang Zongchang ruled, there was not one day that he failed to take money from the people. Besides the regular taxes, there were special taxes and blatant extortions. Whenever he needed a sum of money, he would issue an order to several counties for them to come up with the cash. And when he spent the money, well, that was the end of that. Thus,

the people of Shandong were really in deep water, and they suffered more than the rest of the nation.

The regular land taxes were eight to twenty dollars for each tael of land value. After the Northern Expedition, the Provincial Bureau of Finance released a statistics report showing that "From the day Zhang Zongchang came to Shandong till the day he left, the recorded land taxes, tributes, and special taxes that he collected amount to a sum which, if figured by regular rates of taxation, would exceed all taxes to be paid until 1939."

Below are the various types of taxes he collected:

1. One-time special land tax for military reconstruction
2. One-time special tribute rice for reconstruction
3. One-time special land tax for suppressing the Reds
4. Tribute for suppressing the Reds
5. Special land tax for military purposes
6. Supplementary land tax for military purposes
7. Supplementary tribute rice for military purposes
8. Supplementary tax for the Lidong Pass
9. Special tax for relief funds
10. Special supplementary tax for river conservancy works
11. Supplementary tax for highway works
12. Tax for barracks works
13. Military loans
14. Government bonds for reconstruction
15. Special tax on tobacco and liquor
16. Government sales special tax
17. Registration fees for establishments
18. Stamp tax for registrations
19. Registration fees for real estate
20. Tax for license to distribute paper currency
21. Stamp tax on paper currency
22. Long distance telephone fees
23. Tax on tobacco seeds
24. Fines on tobacco saplings
25. Business license fees
26. Donations for army shoes

27. Pension certificates for the families of soldiers in the First Army Corps who were killed in Jiazi war
28. Pension certificates for the families of the soldiers in the Zhilu Army Corps who were killed in the war against the Reds
29. Fees for license to examine tobacco
30. Stamp tax for license to sell tobacco
31. Donations for the construction of a living shrine for Zhang Zongchang
32. Donations for a bronze statue of Zhang Zongchang
33. Advance for firewood and straw
34. Donations for the entertainment of the officers and soldiers
35. Restaurant taxes
36. Tax on dogs
37. Tax on dwellings
38. Tax on wealthy families
39. Poll tax
40. Exclusive sales of opium by government operated stores
41. Tax on opium-pipe lighters
42. Tax on light vehicles
43. Tax on rickshaws
44. Stamp taxes
45. Tax on livestock
46. Local tax on already-taxed foreign goods
47. Tax on vegetables
48. Exclusive sales of nightsoil by government-operated "golden-juice" stores
49. Tax on prostitution houses
50. Tax on theatrical performances
51. Tax on chickens . . .

FLOODING THE MARKET WITH PAPER MONEY

Zhang Zongchang issued the following paper currencies:

1. Banknotes of the Provincial Bank of Shandong
2. Military stamps
3. Co-op certificates

Altogether several tens of millions of dollars were issued, all without any reserve to back them up. When he was losing his battles on the frontiers, these forms of currency came to be regularly discounted and financial chaos resulted. Zhang's soldiers continued to use his paper money for purchases, however, without accepting a discount on the face value. If anyone objected they would use their fists, legs, and foul tongues against their opponents. For this reason, arguments and fights were frequent, and the merchants suffered. There is a story that a store refused to accept military stamps. Zhang gave orders to arrest the owner, who was beaten up and then shot.

EXTORTION FOR MILITARY EXPENSES

In order to raise funds to pay his soldiers and buy arms, Zhang Zongchang frequently "borrowed" from various banks and commercial unions. Though these were loans in name, they were extortions in fact. The Gongli Banking House, which had operated in Shandong for over a decade, went out of business because of such extortions, and its manager went into exile. . . .

BUILDING A LIVING SHRINE AND CASTING A BRONZE STATUE

To manifest his own "merits and distinctions," Zhang planned to build a living shrine and a bronze statue for himself along the Daming Lake of Jinan. The expenses were extorted from the people. He shipped a full trainload of granite from Mount Tai for the construction. But because of the rapid advance of the troops of the Northern Expedition, there was not enough time for the actual work to begin. However, the "donations" for these purposes had been collected in full. . . .

YOUTH SQUADS

Zhang Zongchang especially recruited an army of teenagers for his son, calling them "young stu-

dents of war.” Their arms were specially designed small foreign-made rifles, and they were given good uniforms, food, and pay. Zhang appointed his son the leader, and put several thousand such youths under his control. The youth squads were stationed at the southern barracks of the Jinan area. When they were in training, they would sing the children’s song, “There is a fat little baby in our family.” Consequently, they came to be known as the “Baby Squads.” . . .

NOT PAYING THE TROOPS

Zhang kept all the money that he extorted from the people for his personal use, seldom paying his soldiers. Consequently, his men lost their confidence in him, and he lost many battles. In order to improve the morale, he raised some money to pay the men, but it turned out to be too little. When each soldier only got fifty cents, they said to each other, “Let’s fight another fifty cents’ worth of war for Zhang Zongchang.”

SALVOS AGAINST HEAVEN

In the summer of 1927, there was a severe drought in Shandong. Not a drop of rain fell, and the crops were all dying. Zhang Zongchang ordered a general fast and personally went to the “Dragon King Temple” to pray for rain. But the Dragon King was apparently not impressed, and the drought continued. In a rage, Zhang slapped the Dragon King’s face many times. He then went to the Zhangzhuang Arsenal and fired cannon balls into the sky for hours, so as to vent his anger at Heaven. Nevertheless, it still did not rain. . . .

STATE SALES OF OPIUM

Zhang Zongchang decreed that opium could only be sold by the state, but an opportunist opened up a store in a newly built shopping center, calling it “Opium Quitting Center.” But in fact it was an

opium store, and every month this person presented a gift of “state sales tax on opium” to Zhang.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Once Zhang Zongchang held a meeting of high-ranking military officers in the governor’s office, and these officers introduced themselves, one saying, “I graduated from X university,” another saying, “I am attending Y university,” Hard-pressed, Zhang Zongchang said, “I, Zhang Zongchang, am a graduate of the College of the Green Forest.”*

DRAFTING SOLDIERS

Zhang literally dragged young people from the streets to become his soldiers so that he could send them to the frontiers, using their flesh against the cannon balls of the enemy. Many students were dragged away, and only after negotiations, were released. In order to prevent such incidents, the schools issued each student a cloth tag with his name and the school’s seal printed on it. In this way the students were distinguished from the common people.

CLEARING THE STREETS

Whenever Zhang came out of his office, he would clear the streets, and all traffic was stopped. The main street in front of the governor’s office was sprinkled with clean water. In front of this motorcade, he had the showy white Russian cavalry squad. Soldiers were stationed all along the streets, their rifles loaded with real bullets, their backs to the street. All precautions were taken against possible assassins. . . .

Translated by Clara Yu

* The Green Forest was a term for the hideout of bandits.