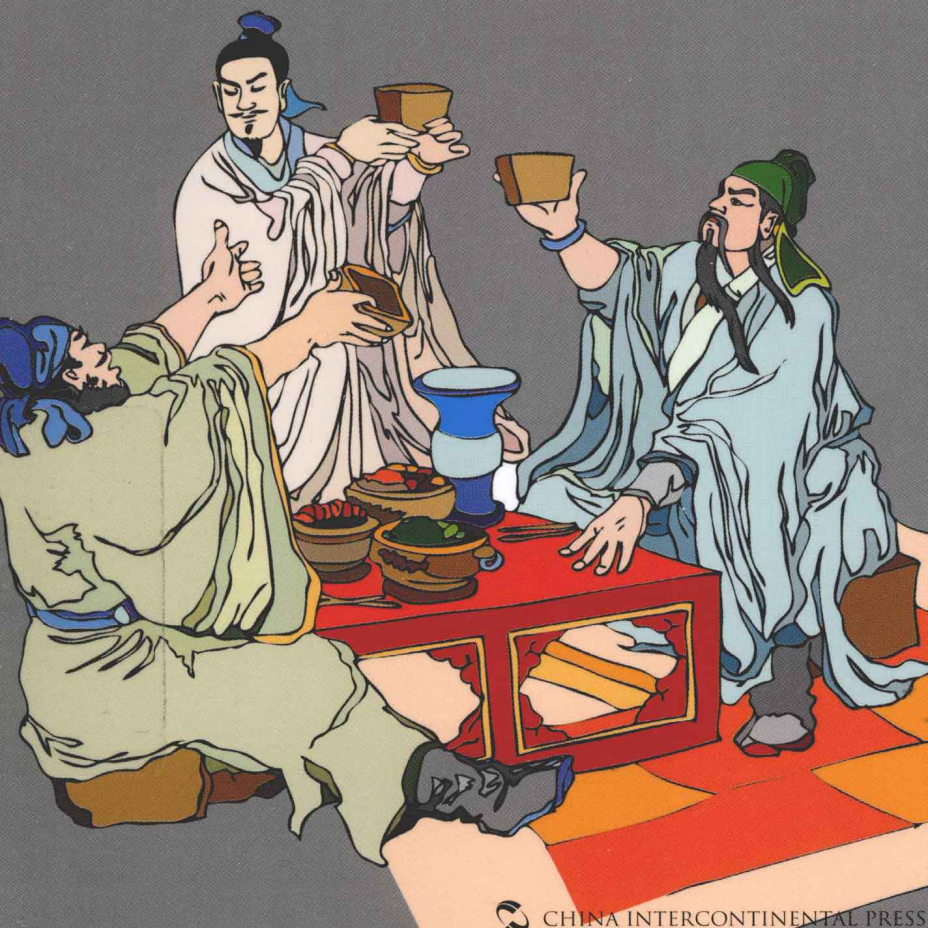


CHINESE CLASSICS

ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS

Luo Guanzhong © Retold by Wang Guozhen



CHINA INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS

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图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

三国演义故事：英文 / 王国振编著. — 北京：五洲传播出版社，2012.1
ISBN 978-7-5085-2233-3

I. ①三… II. ①王… III. ①章回小说—中国—明代—英文 IV. ①I242.4
中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2011)第279760号

英文改编：王国振

策划编辑：荆孝敏

责任编辑：郑磊

设计总监：闫志杰

封面设计：叶影

设计制作：蔡育朋

出版发行：五洲传播出版社

地址：北京市海淀区北三环中路31号生产力大楼B座7层

邮编：100088

网址：www.cicc.org.cn

电话：010-82005927, 010-82007837

印刷：北京冶金大业印刷有限公司

开本：889×1194mm 1/32

印张：10

版次：2012年2月第1版 2012年2月第1次印刷

定价：88.00元

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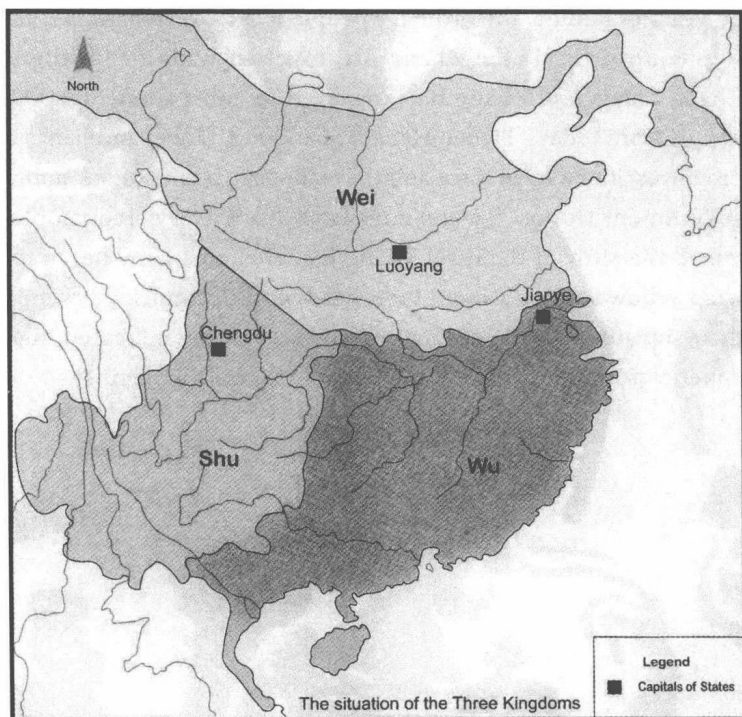
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In the late years of the Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 25—220), because of the corruption of the state administration exacerbated by years of famine, the ordinary people lived a very hard life. In Julu county, local man Zhang Jue, together with his brothers Zhang Liang, and Zhang Bao, managed to enlist some 500,000 people from today's Hebei, Henan, Shandong, Hubei and Jiangsu provinces, into a rebel force and they launched a joint attack upon government troops. Several days later, from every side people joined the army of the rebel Zhang Jue. The rebel army began to wrap yellow scarves around their heads and this quickly became their signature. As the strength of the rebel army increased, the imperial troops became less and less able to control them.



CHAPTER 1

Dong Zhuo Monopolizes Power

In those days, the Emperor had ten eunuchs as trusted advisers. Emperor Ling placed far too much trust in them, with the result that the rule of the Eastern Han Dynasty was in serious danger.

High Counselor Liu Tao passionately advised Emperor Ling to dispense with the ten eunuchs, but the Emperor instead imprisoned Liu Tao and threatened to have him executed. The Minister of the Interior Chen Dan beat his forehead against the steps of the throne in protest. The Emperor grew angry and ordered his imprisonment with Liu Tao. That night Liu Tao and Chen Dan were executed. From then on, no officials dared to raise their voices in protest again.

In the summer of AD 189, Emperor Ling became seriously ill and summoned He Jin into the palace to arrange for the succession. The Empress Dong had long tried to persuade her son to name Xian as the Heir Apparent, and the Emperor did indeed

have great affection for the baby and was disposed to do as his mother desired. When he fell ill, one of the eunuchs, Jian Shuo, said, "If Liu Xie succeeds to the throne, He Jin must be killed to prevent countermeasures." The Emperor saw this too and summoned the Imperial Guardian He Jin.

He Jin came from a humble family of butchers, but his sister had become a concubine of great rank and



had borne a son to the Emperor, named Liu Bian. After this she became Empress He, and He Jin was appointed to the powerful position of Imperial Guardian and Regent Marshal. On his way to his audience with the emperor, at the gates of the palace, He Jin was warned of the danger he was in. He rushed back to his quarters and called on the ministers who supported him. They met to consider what to do and how to kill all of the eunuchs. Emperor Ling soon died of his illness. He Jin mustered five thousand royal guards, commanded by the Imperial Commander Yuan Shao, and they entered the palace. In the hall where lay the coffin of the late Emperor they placed Liu Bian on the throne.

Liu Bian succeeded to the throne, but Empress Dong, the mother of Emperor Xian, was not happy. The eunuch Zhang Rang gave her some counsel. She was very happy with this advice. Next day she held court and issued an edict to make Liu Xian Prince of Chenliu and Dong Chong General of the Flying Cavalry. She also allowed the eunuchs to once again participate in state affairs.

When Empress He saw this, she prepared a banquet to which she invited her rival Empress Dong. In the middle of the feast, when all were merry with wine, Empress He rose and offered a cup to her guest advising her not to meddle in state affairs. Empress Dowager Dong lost her temper and began to shout at her young rival.

Empress He too became enraged. That night Empress He summoned her brother to the palace and told him what had occurred. He went out and met with the principal officers of state to discuss how to remove the Empress Dowager Dong and Dong Chong. Next morning a court session was held and a memorial was presented, ordering that the Empress Dowager Dong be removed into her original fiefdom of Hejian. The secret emissaries of He Jin poisoned Empress Dong in her residence in

the country. Many guards were placed around the Imperial Uncle Dong Chong's dwelling. They took away his seal of office and he, knowing this was the end, killed himself in his private apartments.

Commander Yuan Shao went one day soon after to see He Jin and advised him to destroy the ten eunuchs as early as possible. Soon after He Jin told Empress Dowager He of his plan to put the eunuchs to death. Empress Dowager He had a lot of time for Zhang Rang and some of the others, so she did not approve. Yuan Shao presented his scheme to He Jin, asking him to summon his forces to the capital and kill the eunuchs. But Counselor Chen Lin thought that nothing good could come of it, nothing but chaos and disorder and he objected. Then Cao Cao, one of the court secretaries, clapped his hands, and laughed.

He Jin asked Cao Cao why he laughed. Cao Cao said, "A gaoler would be ample force to employ against this kind of evil. Getting rid of the main culprits is quite sufficient. Why increase the confusion by summoning troops from the regions?" Hearing this, He Jin was very angry and said in a sneering voice that perhaps Cao Cao had some scheme of his own that he sought to advance. Cao Cao left the meeting, proclaiming, "the one throwing the world into chaos is He Jin!"

Dong Zhuo, a warlord, leading a force of 200,000 troops, was sent to Xiliang in northwest China. He was a man of great ambition. One day, he received a summons from He Jin and was very happy. He ordered his son-in-law Li Ru to draft a memorial stating plainly their aims and intentions so that ministers would be clear about where they stood. Then they proceeded to the capital Luo Yang.

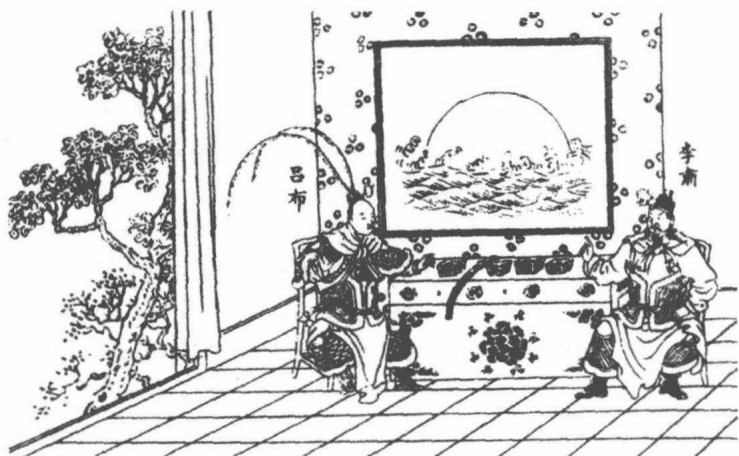
Zhang Rang and the other eunuchs knew this move was directed against them and they recognized that their only chance of survival was to strike the first blow. So they hid away a band

of fifty armed bandits at the Gate of Grand Virtue in the Palace of Happiness, then they went in to see Empress He, and asked her to summon the General. Not knowing that it was a trap, she summoned He Jin to the palace. He Jin felt that the Ten Regular Attendants would not try anything against the man who had the fate of the empire in the palm of his hand. Many advised him against this foolhardy course of action, but he was deaf to their counsel. At the Gate of Grand Virtue, he was met by Zhang Rang and Duan Gui, and then the assassins appeared and cut He Jin to pieces.

Yuan Shao and Cao Cao waited for a long time. By and by, impatient at the delay, they called out, "The carriage awaits, General!" In reply the head of He Jin was flung over the wall. Yuan Shao and Cao Cao were very angry. Brandishing their swords, Yuan Shao and Cao Cao broke into the palace and slayed the eunuchs with no regard for age or rank. Fires raged, destroying the buildings.

Meanwhile, Zhang Rang and Duan Gui had spirited away the Emperor and the Prince and had escaped. They burst through the smoke and fire and traveled without stopping till they reached the Beimang Hills. It was then the third watch. They heard a great shouting behind them and saw soldiers in pursuit. Zhang Rang, seeing that all was lost, jumped into the river, where he drowned.

The Emperor and the Prince of Chenliu were found amidst the heap of straw and the guards turned to escort them home. The cavalcade had not proceeded far when they saw coming towards them a large body of soldiers with fluttering banners hiding the sun and raising a huge cloud of dust. The General leading this great force was Dong Zhuo. Dong Zhuo escorted the Emperor and the Prince of Chenliu to the palace and made camp outside the walls. Every day he was to be seen in the streets with an escort



of armored soldiers so that the common people were in a state of constant fear.

He also went in and out of the Palace armed with his sword. The next day Dong Zhuo threw a feast and invited many guests. He suddenly proposed the overthrow of the Emperor and the installing of the Prince Liu Xie in his place. The assembly listened in perfect silence, none daring at first to utter a word of dissent. Ding Yuan, Imperial Protector of Jingzhou stood up in his place, smote the table and vehemently opposed the proposal. Dong Zhuo drew his sword and made straight for the objector. But he had noticed standing behind Ding Yuan a particularly dangerous looking bodyguard, who was now handling his halberd threateningly, and whose eyes were blazing with anger, so he suddenly halted his murderous charge.

But the next day he learned that Ding Yuan had left the city with a small army and was challenging him to a battle. Dong Zhuo, with his army, went forth to accept the challenge. The two armies were drawn up in proper array. The battle went in Ding Yuan's favor thanks to the reckless bravery of Lu Bu and Dong Zhuo fled for his life.

Afterwards Dong Zhuo called his officers to a council. Li Su mentioned that he was a fellow villager of Lu Bu and knew him well. As long as Dong Zhuo was willing to give his fine horse, Red Hare, and gold and pearls to Lu Bu, he could persuade him to come over to his side. Dong Zhuo agreed.

Lu Bu bade the guards lead out the horse. It had a coat like the glowing red sun; not one hair of another color. Lu Bu was delighted with the horse. Next day, with the head of the murdered man as his gift, Lu Bu betook himself to Li Su, who led him to Dong Zhuo. Lu Bu bowed to him as his adopted father.

Thence Dong Zhuo's power and influence increased rapidly. He overthrew the previous Emperor giving him instead the title of Prince of Hongnong, and placed on the throne the Prince of Chenliu.

The new Emperor was nine years old and had no capacity to rule the country. Dong Zhuo became Prime Minister, and grew even more powerful and arrogant. When he bowed before the Throne, he would not take off his sword. Ministers were ordered to just do his bidding.

One who had opposed the plot to depose the Emperor and place the Prince on the throne in his place was Yuan Shao. He went to Jizhou Region in a state of great anger. Dong Zhuo thought it politic to pardon Yuan Shao and offer him the governorship of Bohai.

After this the deposed Emperor, his mother, and the Imperial Consort, Lady Tang, were removed to the Palace of Eternal Calm. The entrance gates were locked against all comers. The deposed Emperor showed his resentment through the poems he wrote. Dong Zhuo was told of this and so he had the emperor poisoned. The Empress He was thrown out of her window.

After this Dong Zhuo's behavior became more atrocious