

# A Brief Analysis of Zuo Zongtang's Philosophical Thought of Governing the Army

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## Abstract

The fate of modern China was turbulent, and a group of people who wanted to save the country also emerged, and Zuo Zongtang was one of the representatives. Zuo Zongtang made countless achievements in his life. As an outstanding military strategist, his military contribution is unquestionable. Studying the issue of governing the army is of great significance to both war and peace, and to analyze the reasons for Zuo Zongtang's great achievements, the philosophical thoughts embodied in it are both characteristic and meaningful, and are worthy of further study.

## Keywords

Zuo Zongtang; Army; Philosophy.

## 1. Introduction

Modern China is an era of changes, full of internal and external troubles. In the face of national peril and China's entry into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, a large number of people with lofty ideals in the Chinese society were inspired to open the way to save the nation and survive. Zuo Zongtang was one of the representatives. Zuo Zongtang made outstanding achievements in governing the army and embodied many distinctive philosophical thoughts. He was a soldier in the army and had numerous victories, which is of special significance to the study of the philosophy and thought of governing the army.

## 2. The Reasons for the Formation of Zuo Zongtang's Philosophical Thoughts on Governing the Army

### 2.1. Political and Economic Background

Zuo Zongtang lived in the late Qing Dynasty, the society was plagued by disasters, and the Qing government was corrupt and did not act. After signing a number of humiliating treaties, China's decline can no longer be stopped. The war has destroyed all aspects of society, and ethnic conflicts have become increasingly intensified.

Western countries have completed the first industrial revolution, and they have made breakthroughs in all aspects. The productivity of the capitalist countries headed by the United Kingdom has been greatly improved, and more and more goods have joined the ranks of market commodities. They no longer use traditional production methods, but begin to use the power of science and technology, and the capitalist world system has begun to take shape. .

On the other hand, China under the Qing government locked the door of the country, and the production relations were still dominated by the feudal system, which deeply hindered the development of China's economy. Therefore, Britain easily used opium smuggling to pry open the closed door of China. After many wars ravaged the country, China, which thought it stood on the top of the world, finally opened its doors and was forced to open many seaports to import goods for foreign powers. The Qing government was burdened with huge foreign debts and had to turn its guns on the people. When faced with a large number of cost losses and indemnities,

they were passed on to the peasants by various means, which made people's grievances abound and class contradictions became more acute. People's livelihood was full of swing, and riots continued.

The intertwined internal and external contradictions prove that the previous rule of the Qing government is no longer suitable for this rapidly developing era, and the troops of the Qing government are far behind the world. Zuo Zongtang was reused at this time and realized that there must be principles and breakthroughs in leading the army, which had a certain impact on Zuo Zongtang's own thinking in governing the army.

## **2.2. Cultural Background**

Zuo Zongtang received the ideological indoctrination of Confucianism since he was a child, and has a good educational background and family style. Confucianism believes that human beings are the most distinctive species among all things, and they are connected with all things, and human beings must assume the responsibility of educating the world. Therefore, Confucian students must maintain their own nature and not get lost in the world's material desires and utilitarianism. Zuo Zongtang respected the traditional Confucian thought and actively studied hard to find the way to save the world.

The facts of internal and external troubles have proved that China's proud agricultural civilization has been unable to defeat the Western industrial civilization, unable to keep pace with the development of the world, and China's local culture has encountered unprecedented challenges. Followed by, is the prevalence of the trend of Western learning eastward, the spread of Western advanced culture in China has become the general trend. In order to save China from the brink of extinction, Confucianism once again played a role, and traditional Neo-Confucianism had to innovate and develop.

In the late Qing Dynasty, Neo-Confucianism began to revive after a series of twists and turns. The Qing government continued to improve the status of Cheng Zhu's Neo-Confucianism when formulating academic policies. Neo-Confucianism became popular, more and more academic groups of Neo-Confucianism became active, and more and more academic works were published. Cheng Zhu's Neo-Confucianism developed tremendously. Zuo Zongtang is intelligent by nature, ambitious, familiar with various books, abides by Cheng and Zhu's philosophy, adheres to the principle of applying the world to the world, and has the courage to innovate.

Zuo Zongtang's family education from childhood also had a deep influence on him. In the Zuo-style family style, the most important one is that people should aim high and take the world in danger as his own responsibility. He has a strong will and perseverance, and the nourishment of this spirit has become his lifelong belief. When he was an official in the DPRK, he thought about the people, and when he was fighting, he moved forward bravely. Secondly, Zuo Zongtang takes it as his duty to protect the country, not for the pursuit of fame and fortune, but only for the safety of one side of the people. He has applied what he has learned, and his down-to-earth spirit is also a solid paving stone on his way forward.

## **3. Contents of Zuo Zongtang's Philosophical Thoughts on Governing the Army**

### **3.1. The People-oriented Concept of Attaching Importance to People's Livelihood**

The People-oriented thought is a very important part of the Confucian ideological system. It compares the people to the water and the king to the boat, and believes that the two are the relationship between "water" and "boat". Without the support of the people, it is difficult to maintain the society. Zuo Zongtang's People-oriented thought was influenced by Confucianism. He not only worried about the country but also the people, and naturally understood the

dialectical relationship between "water" and "boat". Zuo Zongtang has been on the battlefield for many years. The cruelty of the war and the innocent casualties of the people have given him a heavy blow, which made his People-oriented thinking more solid. The thought of "seeking the interests of the people first in government" put forward by him is one of the principles of his government and one of the contents of his army training.

Zuo Zongtang's house is kind-hearted, treats the people like hurt, insists on putting the people first and benefiting the people first. He believes that as long as you are an official, no matter how big or small you are, you must have the heart of loving the people, take the needs of the people as your needs, and take the people's urgency as your urgency. If there is a gap between the officials and the people, there will be no stability in the place. According to records, a considerable part of his salary was used for people's livelihood, which is reflected in the subordinates of this army composed of the people: when he was in arrears, he used his salary for military supplies and army expenses; It is even more reflected in the lives of ordinary people: he loves the people, benefits the people, and shares the common people's hardships. He donated 10,000 taels of silver to flood relief, repair the academy, and led his subordinates to donate silver to buy sheep seed to revitalize the animal husbandry industry in the northwest. There are endless.

### **3.2. The Concept of Righteousness and Profit that Values Righteousness and Lightness of Interest**

The so-called righteousness and profit, namely public and private. As for Zuo Zongtang's view of righteousness and interests, some people commented: "Gao Fengliangjie, ancient and modern are perfect." He not only required himself to have a clear distinction between righteousness and interests, but also regarded it as the first priority of an official, and also required his subordinates to use this as a major criterion for selecting talents.

Zuo Zongtang attaches great importance to the discipline of generals and soldiers in the army, and believes that "the way of using soldiers, discipline is the first", so he strictly enforced military discipline and ruled the army with law. After the official establishment of the Zuo-style Hunan Army, Zuo Zongtang personally formulated the basic laws and regulations for governing the army and named it "Chu Army Camp System", which stipulated strict army discipline. And strong measures to punish such behavior. Since the Zuo-style Hunan Army recruited a large number of peasants at the beginning of its founding, the general cultural quality of the Zuo-style Hunan Army was low. Therefore, only strict discipline can adjust the state of the army, gather its subordinates, and form the most powerful force.

"Rewards and punishments are the most important things to control the generals." Zuo Zongtang's military thoughts not only included punishments, but also rewards. In his philosophical system of governing the army, a very important point is "sympathy for officials". The so-called "sympathy for officials" means that not only the officials, but also the generals and soldiers should be sympathetic, which reflects his humanistic thoughts in the process of governing the army. His compassion for his subordinates still has a positive impact on how we run the army today. For the integrity of the military, he gave enough rewards to encourage more people to learn this behavior. Zuo Zongtang often used his modest salary to sympathize with his subordinates, as well as to praise the behavior and subordinates he advocated with a sense of justice.

Zuo Zongtang's view of righteousness and interests is also reflected in his attitude of "supporting and suppressing each other" towards the prisoners. The so-called cuddling means the method of counteracting and recruiting cuddling, and the so-called suppression is the technique of annihilating without leaving future troubles. Zuo Zongtang had countless military exploits and faced countless enemies. His ability to handle it properly had a lot to do with this method. In the process of governing the army, he educated the soldiers to take measures to

destroy the stubborn and unshakable enemies, and took measures to persuade and appease the swaying and even surrendering enemies, which expanded his team and boosted his own morale.

### **3.3. Strive for Peace of Mind in Military Ethics**

In terms of governing the army, Zuo Zongtang is best at starting from psychological warfare and forming a strong psychological protection among the soldiers. He comforted the soldiers by cultivating the arrogance and morale of the army, so that the soldiers could be comforted psychologically and pave the way for the training of the army.

Zuo Zongtang's "the technique of peace of mind" is first reflected in the cultivation of the heroic spirit of the army in governing the army. He believes that soldiers must first have a strong determination and confidence to "see everything in the world", that is, before fighting, they must believe that they can succeed, eliminate the fear of uncertainty, and give full play to people's subjective initiative. "The strength of a soldier depends on the rise and fall of Qi." Zuo Zongtang mentioned the problem of mutual transformation of strength and weakness in war, which is exactly the problem we see transformed by both sides of the contradiction. Only by constantly gathering strength and encouraging soldiers can transform quantitative change into qualitative change. In a situation where the enemy is outnumbered, constantly cultivate the self-confidence and arrogance of the army, and when the enemy is arrogant and slack, turn the weak into the strong and win. This also has an enlightening effect on the construction of our current militarized system.

With regard to morale, Zuo Zongtang believes that in order to manage the army, one must first nourish the qi, just as one must first nourish the heart when treating a disease. The morale emphasized by Zuo Zongtang, combined with the philosophical viewpoints of Neo-Confucianism, refers more to a kind of spiritual power, that is, to resolutely defend the rule of the feudal monarch, and in Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, the rule of the feudal monarch is Heaven. Zuo Zongtang publicized this spirit in the army, which made the army have the consciousness and firmness to consolidate the feudal rule, and better achieve the effect of defeating the enemy.

Zuo Zongtang still insists on "the most important thing to train troops is to train the heart first". This kind of thinking has obvious class nature, which is why his left-style Hunan Army became a courageous and thoughtful patriotic army, which was even more commendable at that time.

### **3.4. Guaranteeing the Production Concept of the Economy**

For a strong force, logistics is a top priority. With the support of a good economic foundation, the army can charge into battle without any worries, and keep the people on one side safe. Zuo Zongtang knows this very well. His series of measures to stabilize the economic foundation not only make the troops more united, but also make the lives of the people in the regions more stable.

The economic base determines the superstructure, and the strength of an army cannot be without economic security. Zuo Zongtang, as a general of the Hunan Army, was concerned about the current situation and naturally understood the importance of the guarantee of the economic foundation. He led an army to the west, and the economy of the northwest was backward. In response to this situation, the Qing government adopted the policy of a system of rationing. The so-called cooperative rate system is a measure taken by the Qing government in order to coordinate the inequality between the rich and the poor among various regions, that is, financial allocation, to allocate the finances of the financially wealthy areas to the areas in urgent need of money. However, this kind of payment system cannot solve the problem in a timely and effective manner. Zuo Zongtang led the army to the northwest for more than ten years, and the biggest problem was the lack of payment. But he worked hard to raise money to solve the problem. On the one hand, he used his salary to subsidize military supplies and provide

economic security for the troops. However, he could not solve the problem on his own, so he began to borrow money from the westward expedition. According to historical records, between 1867 and 1881, Zuo Zongtang borrowed foreign debts six times, with a principal of about 16 million Kuping silver taels. It is precisely because of Zuo Zongtang's tireless borrowing that he can ensure the basic expenses of the army's military supplies, lay a good economic foundation for the army, and provide guarantees for the army's victories again and again.

Not only that, the Zuo's Hunan Army paid more attention to the combination of farming and warfare in combat. The Zuo-style Hunan Army was not only an invincible fighting army, but also a production and construction army. The Zuo-style Hunan Army has a major characteristic, that is, "to use peasant families, not to accept idlers", therefore, this army is different, composed of simple and honest peasants. While leading the troops to fight, Zuo Zongtang called on his subordinates to rectify water conservancy, cultivate fields, revitalize the market, and restore the economy. No matter when he was a civilian scholar or when he was an official of the imperial court, he did not forget the true nature of a peasant, whether he was developing from Hunan or the northwest. He not only donated money for relief, but also did his own work in Shimoda. His attitude infected his team, and he consolidated the strength of the army, and the army achieved unprecedented unity.

China's traditional farming thought is based on agriculture and attaches importance to agriculture and mulberry. This series of military strategies not only provides food security for the troops to solve their worries, but also minimizes the damage to the place where the troops are located by the war, so that the people life quickly recovered and stabilized after the war.

#### **4. The Significance of Zuo Zongtang's Philosophical Thought in Governing the Army**

Zuo Zongtang abides by Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism and believes in the principle of applying the world to the world. His way of governing the army reflects his ideology, and of course, it also further develops Neo-Confucianism. He enriched the philosophical connotation of Neo-Confucianism, made more people belong to Neo-Confucianism, and cultivated a group of talents who believed in Neo-Confucianism. Of course, the study of Zuo Zongtang's philosophical thoughts on governing the army is more of great significance to the army training at that time. At the same time, it also eased the sharp contradictions at that time, and brought a trace of vitality and hope to the declining Qing Dynasty.

##### **4.1. Alleviate Social Conflicts and Develop Military Industry**

Zuo Zongtang's way of governing the army effectively alleviated the sharply deepening and sharp social contradictions at that time. In the late Qing Dynasty, the lack of security for the lives of the people in Limin was the most fundamental reason for the civil strife in the Qing Dynasty. Zuo Zongtang, as an official of the imperial court and a famous war general, deeply understands the current situation of society, cares about the people, and does everything he can to improve the lives of the people, putting the people first and benefiting the people first. He has adopted a series of official measures and private donations based on the people, so that the lives of many ordinary people can be basically guaranteed. In the middle and late Qing Dynasty, there were countless wars. After the war, it was the innocent people who suffered the most. In the places where the Zuo-style Hunan Army went, the battles were often resolved quickly, and the discipline to protect the people was extremely important. Without hesitation, he emphasized that the people must be protected before the thieves can be killed. After the war, he also incorporated local farmers into the team, which not only strengthened the team, but also lightened the burden on many families. With the increasing influence of this move, the people saw a glimmer of light in the corrupt Qing Dynasty ruling government. Together with

the army, those who could join the army would join the army, and those who were unwilling to join the army would open up wasteland together with the Zuo-style Hunan Army. Farming, peasants and the army, and even the imperial court, gradually showed signs of integration from the incompatibility of water and fire. This phenomenon effectively alleviated the increasingly prominent social contradictions at that time and alleviated the suffering of the working people at the bottom of the society.

In addition, Zuo Zongtang's personal donations and a series of measures such as the combination of farming and warfare have effectively enhanced the military logistics support. In every battle, he led his subordinates to the fields to help farmers cultivate, and brought the fruits and vegetables that were abundant in southern Hunan to various places of the war, which not only helped the local areas to enrich their products and restore economic production, but also helped his troops. With enough melons, fruits and vegetables, the soldiers no longer have to worry about the future when they charge forward. They not only have sufficient food, but also have a balanced nutrition, so that even if their troops are fighting in different places, they can taste the fruits and vegetables in their hometown. Logistics support is very sufficient.

#### **4.2. Actively Expand Armaments and Prepare for War, and Consolidate the Morale of the Generals**

Zuo Zongtang led the troops to start from two aspects, fight all the way, and expand all the way. First, Zuo Zongtang took measures to both appease and suppress the army in his thought of governing the army, to capture the prisoners and appease them, and finally make good use of these resources and incorporate them into the battalion, further expanding the strength of the team. Second, Zuo Zongtang is admired and trusted by everyone wherever he goes. In order to solve the suffering of the people, he also accepts the poor local people to join the army, provide them with basic security, and expand the strength of the army while improving people's lives. This practice set an example for other troops of the Qing Dynasty and expanded the troops of the entire Qing Dynasty.

Zuo Zongtang's idea of psychological warfare has opened up a new path to strengthen the army from the psychological aspect. The outstanding feature of the army he led was patriotism. Throughout Zuo Zongtang's life, he turned his love for the motherland as a driving force, making many places in a state of peaceful development for a long time. The left-style Hunan Army guarded the frontier without fear of hardships, led the Xiangjiang region to patriotic arrogance, and left a large number of patriotic soldiers who were infected by it for the country. They played an important role in defending the country. In addition, Zuo Zongtang's original method of defeating the enemy with psychology has greatly improved the combat efficiency, and the Zuo-style Hunan Army has also become a psychologically powerful force. Before the battle, they boosted morale. During the battle, they charged forward and took the lead. After the battle, they summed up experience and learned lessons. They are convinced that with excellent generals, a perfect combat plan, and adequate logistical support, there is no battle that cannot be won or an enemy that cannot be defeated. Such a high morale made the Zuo-style Hunan army have the courage, determination, and fear of strong enemies. In the Qing Dynasty, which was attacked by internal and external enemies and retreated steadily, it created an almost impossible invincible army. This injected blood, confidence and strength into the lifeless Qing army.

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