

## 《葛成》

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Ge Cheng of Suzhou (*Folklores of Suzhou*)

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Ge Cheng's grave is located in Shantang Historic District. The calligraphy on his tombstone "Sage Ge's Grave" was written by Donglin scholar Wen Zhengyu, and a monument "General Ge's Epitaph" was composed by Chen Jiru as a commemoration.

In 1601, court eunuch Sun Long was deployed to Suzhou to serve the city's tax administrator. In his post, Sun devised complicated tax schemes to accrue revenues from the people. For street vendors or menial workers, the tax was ten percent; for brick-and-mortar businesses it was twenty, and for fabric manufacturers, thirty. Businesses that were doing weaving, dying and so forth were greatly affected, and because of this heavy taxation, many fabric suppliers went out of business, and workers out of job. Having once served the Chief of Textile for Suzhou and Hangzhou; Sun understood the industry very well. As his policy grew fiercer, he stipulated that all finished textiles must obtain tax stamps at the Taoist Xuanmiao Temple before they could be sold in market. Therefore a folk tune circulated, "The rain of April kills the wheat, and that of May kills the rice, turning the fields into swamps. More brutal than the rain is the tax officer killing me." Suzhou had experienced two bewitching months of rain by then. The fields were gone and no harvest was made. Silk price also peaked, while the tax officers took advantage of routine audits to blackmail civilians. Textiles workers have had it enough. They finally revolted.

On the 6th of June, a group of thousands led by worker Ge Cheng gathered at Xuanmiao Temple, "Capture Sun Long alive!", "We won't back off until the tax dog was slayed!", and thousands more joined in the process. A righteous and kind man, Ge Cheng once divulged his entire saving to help his neighbor Mrs. Han redeem her daughter back. Mrs. Han's late husband owed the authority fabric; he was later exempted but the tax officers didn't let him go; as they came to him a few times, they took their daughter Yun as collateral. During the tax revolt, Ge Cheng was voted the leader as a result. He carefully planned the moves, the guidelines and the secret codes of the revolt, and divided people into six groups, to be summoned by the signal of his banana-leaved fan. They stormed into the tax officer's mansion, turned the bureau up-side-down and beat tax dogs Huang Jianjie, Xu Yichun to death. That alerted Changzhou county magistrate, who responded by arresting two other tax officers Tang Sheng and Xu Cheng into prison in a furtive effort to protect them. Ge Cheng was sharp enough to spot his trick. As he led a group and besieged the county bureau, the magistrate had no option but to give the mob Tang and Xu in chains. The group swarmed up and beat the two to death. The mob had very defined rules and disciplines; their only target was the tax officers, and on no account were they allowed to fish in troubled water, therefore their movement was supported by civilians from all walks of life. Thousands led by Ge Cheng gathered around Sun Long's Tax Administrator Office, yelling, "Capture Sun Long! Abolish the tax rules!" As an overwhelming amount of people had surrounded the bureau, Ge Cheng guided them with his banana leaves like a veteran general. Trapped inside, Sun Long waited till dusk to come out; he feigned a businessman en route to Hangzhou, and was never again seen in Suzhou. The city magistrate Zhu Mieyuan was therefore forced to renounce the new tax. Victory won.

Later, troops were dispatched to control the situation. To protect others, Ge Cheng stood up as the ringleader, and was jailed for "instigating riot". In 1613, for fear of the dissenting voice from all around the country against tax rules, Emperor Shenzong retracted tax officers from every region; it also marked the end to Ge Cheng's twelve-year in prison. He was revered as "Sage Ge" by local people. Countless poems based on his story were popular in the area, for example, screenplay Qi Kuancheng's "Story of the Banana Leave", Li Yu's "Peace for All" and so forth. Ge Cheng later established his house near the Five's Grave,

and he passed away in 1630. On his former residence, Suzhou people donated to a tombstone to commemorate him forever.