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## Early Chinese Tattoo

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## Early Chinese Tattoo<sup>1</sup>

Carrie E. Reed

If a lord is aggressive and wants to rise in power, he will be forced to employ his own people. Then the people will love me, instead, with the love of parents. They will find my scent like that of the iris and epidendrum. They will turn from their lord and look upon him as if he were tattooed, as if he were their sworn enemy.

(Xun Qing 荀卿 [ca. 313-ca. 238 B.C.E.])<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, I hope to provide a brief introduction to the various modes of tattoo as represented in several types of early Chinese texts.

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<sup>1</sup> A shorter version of this paper has appeared in *JAOS* 120.3 (September, 2000). Readers are also directed to two interesting articles on tattoo in China that have come to my attention since the writing of this article. They are: Chen Yuanming 陳元明, “Shenti yu huawen—chuantong shehui de wenshen xishang ji qi liubian” 身體與花紋—傳統社會的文身習尚及其流變 (Chen Yuanming’s own translation: “Tattooing the Body in Traditional China”). Taipei: Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1999; and Marco Ceresa, “Written on Skin and Flesh: The Pattern of Tattoo in China--Part One: Generalities.” in *Studi in Onore Di Lionello Lanciotti*, (Naples: Instituto Universitario Orientale, 1996), pp. 329-340. I thank John Kieshnick and Thomas Moran for bringing these to my attention.

<sup>2</sup> Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842-1917), *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Collected Explanations to Xunzi) (Taipei: Lantai shuju, 1972), 5.32. Or see Xun Qing 荀卿 (ca. 313-ca. 238 B.C.E.), *Xunzi (Sibu beiyao [Sbby])*, 5.11b.

These include early prose works such as the *Shang shu* 尚書 (Hallowed Documents),<sup>3</sup> historical works such as the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Historian)<sup>4</sup> and later dynastic histories, dynastic penal codes, *zhiguai* 志怪 (records of the anomalous) and *biji* 筆記 (noteform narrative) works and so on. This paper does not aim to provide a comprehensive or a chronological history of tattoo in China; rather, through focusing on certain representative passages from selected Chinese textual sources, it will serve as a brief survey and as a starting point for more in-depth study of this largely neglected topic.

Secondly, this paper provides a complete translation into English of the twenty-five entries on tattoo found in the ninth-century miscellany, *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎 (Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang).<sup>5</sup> The author of *Youyang zazu*, Duan Chengshi 段成式 (c. 800-863), has a special place in this study because of his extraordinary interest in all types of tattoo, but particularly because of his meticulous description of Tang dynasty figurative and textual tattoo.

For the sake of organizational convenience the paper treats separately several types, or modes, of tattoo, with some inevitable overlapping of types. After this general introductory survey the *Youyang zazu* entries are presented. They appear in their original order; for easy reference, nevertheless, I have given an entry number with each piece.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The dating of the various parts of this text is controversial. Some parts probably date from as late as the fourth century C.E. and some from as early as around 1000 B.C.E.

<sup>4</sup> Dating from 100 B.C.E.

<sup>5</sup> Duan Chengshi 段成式 (800?-863). Fang Nansheng 方南生, ed., *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 8.76-80. As all of the entries appear on these four pages and are clearly numbered, I will not footnote them separately in the pages below.

<sup>6</sup> The entry numbers are given according to the numbering system of the 1981 Zhonghua shuju edition of *Youyang zazu*.

The types of tattoo that are mentioned in early Chinese sources are as follows: tattoo as one defining characteristic of a people of cultural difference from the majority population; tattoo as punishment; tattoo of slaves; tattoo as facial adornment; tattoo in the military; and figurative and textual tattoo. Each of these will be taken up separately below.

As this study takes a widely cross-temporal view and since the original texts describe tattoo of many peoples and places, naturally the terms found that are used for tattoo vary widely as well. There is not great consistency in terminology; it is not the case, for example, that tattoo as punishment is always called by one name and tattoo as decoration always by another name. Nor is it the case that one term is exclusively used in one era and a different term in a later period. Some of the terms encountered in these early texts are (with a literal translation given in parentheses) *qing* 黥 (to brand, tattoo), *mo* 墨 (to ink), *ci qing* 刺青 (to pierce [and make] blue-green), *wen shen* 文身 (to pattern the body), *diao qing* 雕青 (to carve and [make] blue-green), *ju yan* 沮顏 (to injure the countenance), *wen mian* 文面 (to pattern the face), *li mian* 斲面 (to cut the face), *hua mian* 畫面 (to mark the face), *lou shen* 鏤身 (to engrave the body), *lou ti* 鏤體 (same), *xiu mian* 繡面 (to embroider [or ornament] the face), *ke nie* 刻涅 (to cut [and] blacken), *nie zi* 涅字 (to blacken characters), *ci zi* 刺字 (to pierce characters), and so on. These terms are sometimes used together, and there are numerous further variations. In general, if the tattooing of characters (字) appears in the term, it refers to punishment, but this is certainly not true in every case. Likewise, if a term literally meaning “to ornament” or “decorate” is used, it does not necessarily mean that the tattoo was done voluntarily or for decorative purposes.

All of the types of tattoo, except perhaps for the figurative and textual, are usually described as inherently opprobrious; people bearing them are stigmatized as impure, defiled, shameful or uncivilized. There does not ever seem to have been a widespread acceptance of tattoo of any type by the “mainstream” society; this was inevitable, partly due to the early and long-lasting association of body marking with peoples perceived as barbaric, or with punishment and the inevitable subsequent ostracism from the society of law-abiding people. Another reason, of course, is the

Confucian belief that the body of a filial person is meant to be maintained as it was given to one by one's parents.

It will become clear that the major exception to this negative assessment of the practice of tattooing lies in the records of Duan Chengshi. This collector of curious information usually simply observes and records; occasionally, he allows himself to praise and openly to reveal his sense of wonder. Tattoo does not give rise to revulsion in this unusual man; rather he finds it fascinating and marvelous, an aberration, perhaps, but a lovely one, often skillfully done and worthy of attention and even of admiration.

### **Section one: Introduction to early tattoo**

#### *Tattoo as a descriptive feature of non-Han "barbarian" tribes*

The first kind of textual reference to tattoo to be discussed is probably the most widely known among Sinologists. We know from historical records, poetry and other sources that many peoples in the areas surrounding the "central kingdoms" tattooed their bodies. Most of the records refer to Man 蠻 or Yi 夷 "barbarians," broad terms that refer to various tribes located mostly in the regions south of the Yangzi River, such as present-day Guangzhou, Zhejiang and northern Vietnam. One commonly mentioned group is the Yue 越; this is again usually understood as a general term for the non-Chinese peoples south of the Yangzi, including all the way to Guangdong and Vietnam to the south, and to Zhejiang and Jiangxi to the north.<sup>7</sup> In

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<sup>7</sup> For a readable, brief introduction to the various southern tribal groups, see Edward Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird: T'ang Images of the South* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 9-17, 48-78. For a more detailed study of specific problems in identification of the Yue, see Heather Peters, "Tattooed Faces and Stilt Houses: Who were the Ancient Yue?" Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Dept. of Oriental Studies, *Sino-Platonic Papers*, Number 17 (April,

some cases the comments made by Chinese literati about these people indicate a fairly disinterested curiosity, and sometimes they are merely straightforward records of the important ethnographic details that separated these peoples from the majority (civilized) people. Occasionally the records reveal a relatively open-minded soul, one willing to accept customs of other peoples as aberrant but not necessarily abhorrent. There is a passage in the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (Intrigues of the Warring States)<sup>8</sup> in which the king argues that his people should not, out of principle, follow one superior custom, but that clothing and customs may be adopted according to the occasion. He mentions that the Ouyue people 甌越之民<sup>9</sup> are characterized by disheveled hair, tattooed bodies, engraved arms and with only the left shoulder covered; these things, he claims, appear strange merely because we are ignorant of them. Chinese should familiarize themselves with these customs and, if necessary, adopt them. The issue of whether one's behavior is honorable or practical is more important than the consistent maintenance of one's own familiar customs.<sup>10</sup>

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1990). Peters stresses that the Yue were most likely not a well-defined ethnic group, and that "the various cultural traits cited by archaeologists as ones linking the ancient Yue with the Tai are better understood as markers of a broad Southeast Asian culture area which can be contrasted with the Han or Sinitic cultures based in northern China" (p. 19-20).

<sup>8</sup> Liu Xiang 劉向 (79-8 B.C.E.), comp., *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (Intrigues of the Warring States) (*Sibu congkan* [Sbck]), 6.18b.

<sup>9</sup> For a translation of this passage, see James I. Crump, *Chan-kuo Ts'ue* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1996), 290-291. Of the Yue, and Ouyue, Edward Schafer says, "All we can say with some faint hope of certainty is that for the Chinese Han of the Yellow River watershed, Yueh (Viet) was the more general term for the coastal peoples south of the Yangtze, while Ou and Lo (Lak) stood for some of their tribal units." See Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird*, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> In the *Shiji* (Records of the Historian) we read of two nobles who did accept the customs of the Man barbarians of Jing (zhou) 荊蠻, and went so far as to tattoo

The *Han Shi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (Han Ying's Anecdotes on the Classic of Songs), dating to around 150 B.C.E., contains an amusing anecdote about an emissary sent by the King of Yue to Jing 荆.<sup>11</sup> A certain official of Jing asked to be allowed to receive the Yue emissary first since the Yue were a barbaric people. The Jing official instructed the Yue envoy that he would have to wear a hat if he wanted to have a proper audience with the king of a civilized land. The Yue envoy countered that the Yue people had originally been compelled to settle in a riverine environment and presently associated not with great and civilized people but with various water creatures. He continued that the Yue people only settled there after tattooing their bodies and cutting off their hair (presumably as apotropaic aids to living in this dangerous environment). "Now I have come to your esteemed country, and you insist on saying that I will gain audience only if I wear a hat. Since it is like this, how would it be if when your noble country sends an emissary to Yue, for his part he will have to cut off his nose, be branded, tattoo his body and cut off his hair before being granted audience?" The King of Jing came out and, in full court regalia, granted audience to this intelligent and witty Yue envoy.<sup>12</sup> This same type of passage is also seen in the first section of *Zhuangzi*, a text of the third or fourth century B.C.E. There we read of

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their faces and cut their hair. See Sima Qian 司馬遷 (147-85? B.C.E.) *Shiji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 4.115.

<sup>11</sup> In the Zhou period Jing was the area later referred to as Chu 楚. This was the largest of states in the Warring States period, comprising parts of modern-day Sichuan, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, Anhui, Shaanxi, Hunan and Jiangsu provinces.

<sup>12</sup> Han Ying 韓嬰 (fl. 180-140 B.C.E.), *Han Shi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (*Xuejin taoyuan*, v. 4) 8.1a. Also see James Robert Hightower, *Han Shih Wai Chuan: Han Ying's Illustrations of the Didactic Application of the Classic of Songs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 252-253.



the futility of a man of Song attempting to sell ceremonial caps to the short-haired, tattooed men of Yue.<sup>13</sup>

The *Liji* 禮記 (Record of Rites) describes the eastern Yi 夷 barbarians as having disheveled hair and tattooed bodies, and includes the statement that some groups eat their meat raw.<sup>14</sup> Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648) notes that the Yue people have a custom of tattooing their bodies as an apotropaic device, to ward off *jiao* 蛟 dragons.<sup>15</sup> To do this they cut their flesh and darken it by rubbing red and green pigment into it.<sup>16</sup> There is mention of this practice in some of the works contained in the great sixth-century literary anthology, *Wen xuan* 文選 (Selections of Refined Literature), as well. Zuo Si 左思 (ca. 250-ca. 305 C.E.), for example, writes admiringly of tattooed peoples in his “Wu du fu” 吳都賦 (Wu Capital Rhapsody) thus:

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<sup>13</sup> *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (*Sbck*), 1.14b. The *Huainanzi* 淮南子, a collection of essays dating from before 139 B.C.E., is another early text that attests to the tattooing of the body with images of scaly creatures, practiced by the southern barbarians of Yue. See Liu Wendian 劉文典, ed., *Huainan honglie jijie* 淮南鴻烈集解 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1992), 1.19.

<sup>14</sup> Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648) et.al., *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義 (*Sbby*), 12.15b. The dating of the *Liji* is a very controversial subject. Possibly parts of it were composed in pre-Han times, but most parts probably date from the Han.

<sup>15</sup> On the *jiao* dragon see M.W. de Visser, *The Dragon in China and Japan*. Verhandelingen der koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam. Afdeeling Letterkunde. Nieuwe Reeks, Deel 13, no. 2, Amsterdam, 1913. Also see Schafer, *Vermilion Bird*, 217-221.

<sup>16</sup> *Liji zhengyi* 12.16b. Pei Yin's 裴駰 (fl. 450) note to a *Shiji* passage reiterates this information. See *Shiji* 4.115. Also see Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 B.C.E.), *Shuo yuan* 說怨 (Garden of Persuasion) (*Sbby*), 11.5b. Also, see Fan Ye 范曄 (398-445), *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (History of the Latter Han Dynasty) (Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 76.2861.

Warriors with tattooed foreheads  
 Soldiers with stippled bodies  
 Are as gorgeously adorned as the curly dragon  
 And are a match for the *kog* and *tya*.<sup>17</sup>

In Yang Xiong's 揚雄 (53 B.C.E.-18 C.E.) "Yulie fu" 羽獵賦 (Plume Hunt Rhapsody) the emperor orders swimmers from the tattooed peoples to catch water creatures for him.<sup>18</sup> It is not clear how the tattoo was seen to protect these swimmers; perhaps it functioned as a simple charm, but also possible is that the tattoo was thought to render the swimmer indistinguishable (and thus safe) from certain dangerous water creatures, as the function of a kind of sympathetic magic.

The *Wei zhi* 魏志 (Chronicles of the Wei), compiled before 297, states that all of the men among the people of Wo 倭 (present-day Japan) tattoo their faces and bodies. According to the text this was originally for the purpose of warding off harm in the water but now is also decorative.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Wen xuan* 5.75. Translation is from David Knechtges, *Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature* vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 419. The translator has used modified Old Chinese transcription, *kog* and *tya*, for the words *jiao* 蛟 (the horned dragon) and *chi* 螭 (the hornless dragon).

<sup>18</sup> Xiao Tong 蕭統 (500-529), ed., *Wen xuan* 文選 (Selections of Refined Literature) (Taibei: Zhongwen, 1971), 8.134.

<sup>19</sup> Chen Shou 陳壽 (233-297), *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 30.854-856. For a translation of this *Wei zhi* passage, see Robert van Gulik, *Irezumi: The Pattern of Dermatography in Japan* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1982), p. 247. For an interesting and concise study of the history of tattoo in Japan see Iizawa Tadasu's essay in Iizawa Tadasu 飯沢匡 and Fukudo Katsushiga 福土勝成, eds., *Genshoku Nihon irezumi taikan* 原色日本刺青大鑑 (A Survey of Japanese Tattoo in Original Colors) (Tokyo: Hago shoten, 1973), 155-171 (p. 159 for mention of the *Wei zhi* passage). Also see Eiichiro Ishida, *Japanese Culture: A Study of Origins and Characteristics* (Honolulu:

More than seven-thousand *li* (tricents [one-third of a mile]) to the northeast of the nation of Wo lies Wenshen guo 文身國 (Land of Tattooed Peoples), according to the *Nan shi* 南史 (History of the Southern Dynasties). The bodies of the inhabitants are patterned (with tattoos, presumably) like animal skins, and on their foreheads are three marks. Those with straight marks belong to the nobility, and those with small marks are of low rank. Though they do live in houses, they are not city dwellers; they are a humble, happy folk. Their king's residence is decorated with gold, silver and jewels, and they use jewels for money. Normally, the historian relates, they use whipping to punish crimes, but for crimes deserving of capital punishment, they throw the offender to fierce wild animals to be eaten alive. If the person is innocent, the beasts will avoid him, and if he remains unharmed overnight, he will be pardoned.<sup>20</sup>

In the *Sui shu* 隋書 (History of the Sui) we read that the people of Liuqiu guo 流求國 (modern day Taiwan) eat with their hands. The women tattoo their hands with ink, in designs of insects and snakes, while the men remove all of their body hair.<sup>21</sup>

The *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (New History of the Tang) lists a number of peoples who practice tattoo. Among them are three tribes of the southern Man barbarians: the Xiujiao 繡腳 (Embroidered [decorated] Feet) type, who tattoo patterns

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University of Hawaii Press, 1974), p. 43. Also see Donald Richie and Ian Buruma, *The Japanese Tattoo* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1980), for a thorough and concise treatment in English of the Japanese tattooing tradition. In another place an anecdote in the *Wei zhi* says that in the eastern sea there is an island inhabited only by women. They wear clothes like those of the Chinese, but their sleeves are longer. Once one of these people was taken alive from the water from a wrecked boat; on her neck was another face (possibly a tattoo?). She didn't eat so she died. See *Sanguo zhi* 30.847.

<sup>20</sup> Li Yanshou 李延壽 (fl. 629), *Nan shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1975), 79.1975.

<sup>21</sup> Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580-643), et. al., comps., *Sui shu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 81.1824.

from the ankle to the calf; the Xiumian 繡面 (Embroidered Face) type who tattoo their faces black; and the Diaoti 雕題 (Carved Forehead) type<sup>22</sup> who tattoo both face and body. Along with these (and of only incidental interest here) are the people who pierce their noses and through the hole insert a ring one foot in diameter that hangs below the jaw.<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere in the same text we read of the Kirghiz whose males tattoo the hands as a mark of valour and whose women tattoo the nape of the neck as a sign of marital status.<sup>24</sup>

Slightly different from tattooing *per se* is the cutting of the face by certain northern and western tribes, such as the Xiongnu and the Uighurs, to express great

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<sup>22</sup> The Diaoti have already appeared in the "Wu Capital Rhapsody" passage above. The Diaoti people (or perhaps the practice of tattooing the forehead) are also mentioned in the *Chuci* 楚辭 (Songs of the South) poem "Zhao hun" 招魂 (The Summons to the Soul). The speaker in that passage wonders why the soul would want to go to an inauspicious place where blackening the teeth, tattooing the forehead and human sacrifice are practiced. See *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補註, 9.328. The Diaoti tribe 雕題 (lit., "carved forehead") were a nation that tattooed the face and body with patterns that looked either like scales or like brocade cloth. See Li Fang 李昉 (925-996), et. al., eds., *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (Imperially Reviewed Compendium of the Taiping Period) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 790.3501.

<sup>23</sup> Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) and Song Qi 宋祁 (998-1061), comps., *Xin Tang shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 222C.6325.

<sup>24</sup> *Xin Tang shu* 217B.6147. Also see *Xin Tang shu* 222C. 6328 for description of other tattooing practices. Today the Kirghiz live in Central Asia, but their ancestors, the Jiankun 堅昆, originally were located in Northeast Asia. They were said to have red hair, fair faces, and green irises, as do many Kirghiz still to this day.

sorrow and mourning. In addition they are described as cutting their faces to show determination or to establish trustworthiness.<sup>25</sup>

Wang Bao 王褒 (1st c. B.C.E.) writes that there are countries whose people braid their hair, scar their faces, blacken their teeth, and whose eyes are set deep, like the eyes of owls. There are those that cut their hair, tattoo their heads and go about with naked, tattooed bodies; all of these peoples “hasten to make tribute offerings to the Chinese empire and take joy in returning allegiance to China.”<sup>26</sup> The specific customs described by the Chinese in these texts vary, but in most cases the purpose of the passages seems to be, as in this one, to highlight the differentness of the peoples who practice tattoo. This sense of otherness is strengthened by the mention of activities such as eating raw meat or eating with the hands, going about naked, wearing rings in the nose and so on; from the point of view of a civilized Chinese person these are habits hardly distinguishable from those of animals. Tattoo is, in a sense, the epitome of uncivilized practices since it renders the human body patterned like the skin of an animal or water creature.

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Chen Shou 陳壽 (231-297), *Sanguo zhi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 15.513, and Liu Zhen 劉珍 (second century), *Dongguan Hanji* 東觀漢記 (*Siku quanshu* [Skqs]), 8.14a. The Tujue (Turks) practiced this custom of cutting the face in mourning as well. For example, see Linghu Defen 令狐德棻 (583-666), et. al., *Zhou shu* 周書 (History of the [Northern] Zhou) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1971), 33.576. Many medieval Central Asian wall-paintings at sites such as Qizil (near Kucha), Bezäklik (in the Turfan Basin), and Dunhuang (western Gansu) depict the Buddha in nirvana (passing into extinction) surrounded by individuals of various ethnicities who are cutting their foreheads out of grief. For graphic depictions from these and other death scenes, see J.P. Mallory and Victor H. Mair, *The Tarim Mummies: Ancient China and the Mystery of the Earliest Peoples from the West* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000), p. 79, fig. 31.

<sup>26</sup> *Wen xuan* 51.710.

*Tattoo as punishment for crimes*

Tattoo was considered a highly effective means of punishment in China for most of recorded history. Although we do not have verifiable information about pre-Zhou times, we can infer from texts written in the Zhou 周 (ca. 1100-256 B.C.E.) and the Han 漢 (206 B.C.E.-221 C.E.) that the tattooing or branding of criminals was probably widely used in ancient times as well as in dynasties possessing relatively reliable historical records.<sup>27</sup>

Doubtless the effectiveness of tattoo and the other physically defiling punishments derived from the shame that a criminal must have felt upon re-entering society, having had a part of his or her body mutilated or even removed and thus being permanently marked as an untrustworthy individual. From early times until recently there has been a strong stigma attached to failing to preserve one's physical body; by not keeping the body intact and undefiled, one has failed in one of the most important filial duties and has brought shame on one's family--past, present and future. In the very beginning of the *Xiao jing* 孝經 (Classic of Filial Piety) Confucius tells his disciple Zengzi 曾子 that filial piety is the thing most necessary for civilized society and that the basis of filial piety lies in avoiding injury to the skin, hair and body that

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<sup>27</sup> It has been widely accepted that the character often used (in conjunction with others) for tattoo, 文 *wen* ("to pattern") in fact was originally a representation of a person with a tattooed chest, and the other meanings of this character were derived from this original meaning. See van Gulik, *Irezumi*, p. 5. Also see *Jiaguwen bian* 甲骨文編 (Beijing: Zhongguo kexueyuan, 1965), 372-373.

For a discussion of the ancient penal use of tattoo (as well as a brief treatment of the etymologies of certain other terms meaning brand or tattoo) in a study of the inscription on a ninth-century B.C.E. bronze vessel, see Sheng Zhang 盛張, "Qishan xinchu Ying yi ruogan wenti tansuo" 岐山新出 𠄎 匜若干問題探索, *Wenwu* 文物 1976.6: 40-42.

one receives from one's parents.<sup>28</sup> The existence of this kind of social pressure must have made punishments such as the injuring of the skin by tattoo or branding particularly fearful.<sup>29</sup>

There are several passages in the *Shang shu* (Hallowed Documents) that mention tattoo as one of the ancient physical punishments for crime.<sup>30</sup> In the section known as the "Tang shi" 湯誓 (The Oath of Tang)<sup>31</sup> the minister Yi Yin 伊尹 advises Tang 湯, the founder of the Shang dynasty, stating that there are nobles, high officials and even princes who engage in activities such as drunken dancing and singing; they suffer from addiction to wealth, women and hunting; they do not heed the words of the sagely ancients, are not filial and so on. Ministers who do not remonstrate with this type of ruler in an attempt to change his behavior shall be punished by branding, or tattoo.<sup>32</sup> In another passage, the so-called "Miao people" 苗民 are criticized for having excessively carried out physical punishments such as tattoo, cutting off the ears, nose or testicles, and, in fact, for relying on this kind of punishment rather than

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<sup>28</sup> *Xiao jing zhushu* 孝經注疏 (Commentary and Subcommentary on the Classic of Filial Piety), in Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764-1849), *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (Commentary and Subcommentary to the Thirteen Classics) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 1.2545.

<sup>29</sup> For a good, brief discussion of this matter see Anders Hansson, *Chinese Outcasts* (Leiden: Brill--Sinica Leidensia, Vol. 37, 1996), 22. For a discussion of social status from early times through the Qing, see pp. 19-54.

<sup>30</sup> Several examples are to be found in *Shang shu zhengyi* 尚書正義 (Orthodox Interpretation of the Hallowed Documents) (in *Shisan jing zhushu*) 3.130, in the "Shun dian" 舜典 (Canon of Shun), and in 4.139 in the "Gaoyao mo" 皋陶謨 (Plan of Gaoyao).

<sup>31</sup> The dating for this text is not clear, but it was presumably written sometime during the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1100-256 B.C.E.).

<sup>32</sup> *Shang shu zhushu* 尚書注疏, Sbby 8.9a.

some more benevolent means to regulate their society.<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that it is their overuse of these violent means that is criticized, not their use of them *per se*.

The mention of the possibility of fining or of symbolic punishments that sometimes take the place of tattooing and of other corporal punishments makes it clear that there was indeed a penal practice in ancient China of cutting off or into various parts of the body.<sup>34</sup> The *Shang shu* gives details about what kinds of fines to use if in doubt about a crime. Since crimes deserving of tattoo are the "lowest," the fine substituting for it is the cheapest: six-hundred ounces (lit. one-hundred *huan* 鍰) of copper.<sup>35</sup> If the judge deciding a case is not absolutely certain whether the criminal's behavior warrants his nose being sliced off, he should fine the person one-thousand two-hundred ounces instead. The fine to pay to substitute for having one's feet or testicles removed is three-thousand ounces. The substitution for the death penalty is six-thousand ounces. The crimes that are usually punished by tattoo but that may, in doubtful circumstances, be substituted by the payment of money number one-thousand, compared with five-hundred crimes usually punishable by cutting off the feet and two-hundred crimes usually deserving of the death penalty.<sup>36</sup> This passage demonstrates the large numbers of crimes that were ordinarily punishable by tattoo and also indicates a potential for leniency if a criminal were both wealthy and able to establish doubt as to his guilt.

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<sup>33</sup> *Shang shu zhushu* 19.10b.

<sup>34</sup> For further information on the corporal punishments, tattoo in particular, see Derk Bodde and Clarence Morris, *Law in Imperial China: Exemplified by 190 Ch'ing Dynasty Cases* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967) p. 76 and pp. 96-97.

<sup>35</sup> Following Legge on using "copper" instead of some other metal. See James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. III (London: Oxford University Press, 1865), pp. 604-606.

<sup>36</sup> See *Shangshu zhushu* 19.15a. Or see *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義 19.249. This passage is from the "Lü xing" 呂刑 (The Punishments of Lü), a text that probably dates from the beginning of the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 B.C.E.).



In *Shangshu dazhuan* 尚書大傳 (early Western Han) we read of another practice, that of substituting a cloth head-covering for tattoo and the other physical punishments. The text says that the “Symbolic Punishment under Yao and Shun” 唐虞之象刑 involved having criminals who committed the worst crimes wear an ochre-dyed cloth with no borders. Those who committed crimes of the middle level should wear variegated hemp sandals, and those who committed crimes of the lowest level should wear a black cloth. The criminals should then be made to go live in their hometowns and suffer the ignominy of being looked down upon by the people there.<sup>37</sup>

There does not seem to be any way to prove through textual evidence that tattoo and other corporal punishments were or were not widely used in China in remotest antiquity.<sup>38</sup> The extant texts are often difficult to date, and the customs that they describe are often difficult, if not impossible, to ascribe to any one particular people or time. Even if the punishments were utilized widely, the desire to create an impression of an earlier halcyon age makes it likely that writers in the late Zhou and Han would attempt to minimize the importance attached to the use of mutilating punishments (except by barbaric peoples such as the “Miao”), and to emphasize the regular use of symbolic punishments in their stead. Suffice it to say that in the “Treatises on Punishment” (Xingfa zhi 刑法志) and in other places in the dynastic histories from the Han dynasty onward there is confident (if scanty) mention of tattoo in “ancient times.” For example, the *Han shu* “Treatise on Punishment” says that there were five-hundred crimes punishable by tattoo in the Zhou period. The text goes on to state that tattooed people were sent to guard the city gates, those whose noses had

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<sup>37</sup> See Fu Sheng 伏勝, attr. (2nd c. B.C.E.), *Shang shu dazhuan* (Sbck), 1B.8a-b. Also see *Xunzi jijie* 12.9, where this passage is quoted.

<sup>38</sup> Judging from the increasingly numerous archeologically recovered representations of humans dating from the Shang to the Han, it is apparent that tattoo was quite common, particularly among the non-Chinese people who came from the north and the west. These tattoos were not necessarily the marks of punishment, however.

been sliced off were sent to guard the passes, and so on; the severity of the punishment was apparently in direct proportion to the distance from the center of "civilized life."<sup>39</sup> The term used in that text is *mo zui* 墨罪 (ink crimes), and Yan Shigu's 顏師古 (581-645) note identifies this as *qing* 黥, a term more commonly used for tattoo punishment.

Although tattoo theoretically was abolished, along with the other mutilating punishments, by Emperor Wen 文帝 (reg. 179-155 B.C.E.) in 167 B.C.E., it was apparently continued as a punishment during the Han<sup>40</sup> and the period of disunion following the Han. There is no mention of tattoo in the Tang penal code though examples of the actual continuation of the practice are to be found in the histories and in *zhiguai* 志怪 ("records of anomalies") texts.<sup>41</sup> It was reinstated as a legal form of punishment later, and there are many references to it in the Song, Yuan and Qing dynasties. Tattoo was often combined with exile, ensuring that the defiled person be removed as far as possible from law-abiding, civilized people. For example, the "Punishment treatise" of the *Song shi* 宋史 (History of the Song) states that there are two-hundred crimes punishable by tattoo and banishment. Among these, in the case of relatively minor offenses, it was possible to modify the punishment to a lighter sentence involving only penal servitude or banishment but without tattoo. However, if

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<sup>39</sup> Ban Gu 班固 (32-92), *Han shu* 漢書 (History of the Han) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 23.1091-1092.

<sup>40</sup> For example, see *Han shu* 23.1097.

<sup>41</sup> Empress Wu Zetian's 武則天 (reg. 684-705) tattooing of the female official Shang'guan Wan'er 上官婉兒 (664-710) is only one example of the actual continuation of the practice of tattooing as punishment. See Liu Xu 劉昫 (887-946), comp., *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Old Tang History) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1975), 51.2175, and *Xin Tang shu* 76.3488.

the criminal were to commit another crime, he was immediately tattooed and enlisted in the military.<sup>42</sup>

A specific description of one type of punishment is given in the same text. We read that a ring should be tattooed 刺環 (*ci huan*) behind the ear in all cases when a person is convicted of robbery or banditry. If it is a case where penal servitude or banishment is also in order, the tattoo should be square. If it is a case where flogging is also in order, the tattoo should be round. After three cases wherein a criminal has been punished by flogging, the tattoo should then be done on the face. Each tattoo should not exceed five tenths of an inch in diameter.<sup>43</sup>

One of the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) legal codes, the *Yuan Dianzhang* 元典章 (Yuan Code), is a remarkably rich source for descriptions of specific tattooing punishments. In the section on illicit sexual relationships we read that, in general, on the first offense the adulterous couple will be separated, but if they are “caught in the act” a second time, the man (it is not clear if the woman is tattooed as well) will be tattooed on the face with the words “committed licentious acts two times” (犯姦二度) and banished.<sup>44</sup> Numerous examples are given to illustrate this type of punishment. In another section called “Unrighteous Acts” (不義) there is a description of an interesting case entitled “Improper Tattooing of a Righteous Man.” In the year 1295 one Cao Guige 曹歸哥 was taken to court after attacking Cao Yingding 曹應定 on the back of the neck with an iron axe. At the tribunal, after having been flogged one hundred and seven times, Guige explained that some time back Yingding forcefully had had characters tattooed upon his face, causing him to be disgraced for his entire

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<sup>42</sup> Tuo Tuo 脫脫 (1313-1355), et. al., *Song shi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 201.5008.

<sup>43</sup> *Song shi* 201.5020. For many specific descriptions of tattooing and exiling, see *Song shi* 30.561, 30.576, 33.630, 33.635, 33.742, 34.641, 63.1382, 181.4415 and 201.5016-5018.

<sup>44</sup> *Da Yuan sheng zheng chao dianzhang* 大元聖政朝典章 (in Dong Kang 董康 [1867-1947], comp., *Song fen shi congkan* 誦芬室叢刊 [1917]), 45.16b.

life. One day, when drunk, he had been overcome with anger over his fate and had taken the axe to Yingding's neck. The decision in the case was in Guige's favor, stating that Yingding deserved to be chopped in the neck for having unlawfully tattooed Guige who had been punished and shamed for life for no lawful reason. Guige was released.<sup>45</sup>

Also of peripheral interest here is another passage in the same section of the *Yuan dianzhang*. In the year 1309 a man named Qian Waner 錢萬二 beat his wife, tied her down with restraints and violently tattooed her back and legs with demons and dragons. He then showed off her tattoos in the streets.<sup>46</sup> When the woman's family brought forth a complaint, the case was tried in court. The decision in the case stated that, since the husband had destroyed, rejected and abandoned public morals, it was apparently difficult for the couple to live together(!). The couple was separated.<sup>47</sup> This is one of the rare instances in which a Chinese text mentions decorative tattoos upon a woman's body rather than a man's.

One final example from this text is worthy of mention, if only because it involves monks. It seems that, just as religious practitioners were not immune from the desire to filch other people's things, neither could they escape the usual punishments that resulted. We read of a monk who was tattooed on the arm in the year 1279 for stealing another monk's robes; this case was cited as precedent in the judgement of a case in 1297; because of that precedent, the monk in the latter case was tattooed on the face for stealing a horse.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Yuan dian zhang* 41.23a-b.

<sup>46</sup> This suggests a public voyeuristic interest in tattoo that could be financially exploited. This brings to mind phenomena such as "the tattooed lady" (or other "abnormal-looking" persons) of nineteenth and twentieth-century carnival life in the United States. Of course an alternative interpretation is that the husband was attempting specifically to shame his wife publically for some reason.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid* 41.24a.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid* 49.28a.

*Tattoo of slaves and concubines*

In most cases, in the early texts, the passages that describe punishments seem to apply to commoners and slaves alike. There are a few special types of tattoo that pertain naturally only to slaves, such as the forehead brand identifying a person as someone who had attempted escape, or the facial brand of ownership. In addition there are some records that describe the tattooing of slaves or concubines because of jealousy. One particularly instructive case shows to what extent a jealous wife will go to ensure that her husband does not notice other women. In the *Wei zhi* 魏志 (Chronicles of the Wei) Pei Songzhi's 裴松之 (fl. 424) note to a passage in the biography of Yuan Shao 袁紹 (fl. 168-180) tells us that after Shao died, his wife had all five of his concubines killed. Since she believed that the dead have consciousness, she then had their hair cut off and their faces branded, to destroy their appearance in the afterlife, and to cause Shao not to want to see them.<sup>49</sup> We shall see more of this type of tattoo in the pages of the *Youyang zazu* below.

*Tattoo as a punishment or guard against escape in the military, and as an oath taken by military men*

A short anecdote by Kong Pingzhong 孔平仲 (fl. 1065) draws our attention to several issues that are of interest to this study. It concerns two men who are working together in the Bureau of Military Affairs in the Palace Secretariat. Apparently, Wang Boyong 王伯庸 (n.d.) “regularly teased his colleague Di Qing 狄青 (n.d.) about his tattoos. He would say, ‘They are finer and brighter than ever.’ Di replied, ‘Can it be that you don’t like them? I wish, respectfully, to present you with one line of them.’

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<sup>49</sup> *Sanguo zhi*, 6.203.

Wang was deeply ashamed.”<sup>50</sup> Although the meaning of the exchange is not absolutely clear, a few things can be learned from it. First, there was at least one official working in the military branch of the Palace Secretariat sporting decorative tattoos; these may have included lines of poetry, which suggests an appreciation of literature. The gentility and good humor of the tattooed man is such that the man making fun of him is ashamed of himself. Second, the very fact that his colleague regularly made fun of his tattoos (常戲狄之涅文) is of interest. Of course, we may guess that Wang personally found Di’s body markings unusual, but more likely this little exchange suggests that although this military official had tattoos, the practice was not common, and it was also probably not entirely acceptable in polite society. We shall see other examples of tattooed officials below in Duan Chengshi’s entries on figurative tattoo; the focus in this section, though, is the widespread and varied use of tattoo in the military. It is very likely that a large percentage of tattoos after at least the Han dynasty were in some way connected with the military. Tattoo was used to brand men as part of a particular regiment, as a means of identification (dead and alive), to prevent them from escaping and to mark prisoners of war.<sup>51</sup> Valiant individuals also tattooed themselves with oaths, proclaiming their wholehearted dedication to a particular nation or to a certain military or personal cause.

Much of the readily available information on military tattoo comes to us from Song and Ming texts, and most of them agree that the practice of military tattooing was either started or reinstated in the Posterior Liang Dynasty 後梁 (907-922). For example, Su Xun 蘇洵 (1009-1066) tells us in his *Bing zhi* 兵制 (Military Regulations) that during the Five Dynasties (907-960) Liu Shouguang 劉守光 (fl.

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<sup>50</sup> Kong Pingzhong (fl. 1065), *Kong shi tanyuan* 孔氏談苑, in Wu Shenglan 吳省蘭 (*jinshi* 1778), ed., *Yihai zhuchen* 藝海珠塵 vol. 2 (Taipei: Yiwen, 1968), 2.13b.

<sup>51</sup> Iizawa Tadasu suggests that on a battlefield, where bodies are sometimes stripped of all of their identifying belongings, a tattoo is a very valuable form of identification. See *Genshoku Nihon irezumi taikan*, p. 160.

911)<sup>52</sup> reinstituted the rules of tattooing the face and hands. Thereafter, “the entire realm took it as a common practice.”<sup>53</sup> Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086), in describing the general societal breakdown and rise of banditry in his own time, tells us that there was a practice of seizing and tattooing ordinary citizens, making them slaves of the armies. In his *Lei shuo* 類說 he elaborates at length on this practice, particularly as it occurred in Shanxi 山西. This kind of tattooed military slave was termed *Yi yong* 義勇.<sup>54</sup> A passage in the *Song shi* 宋史 details how the highways were filled with panic-stricken, terrified common people who frightened each other with stories of the armies capturing people and tattooing them in order to make up their quota.<sup>55</sup>

Zeng Cao 曾慥 (fl. 1136-1147) gives a name to the person responsible for allowing this kind of phenomenon to occur. He says that the general custom of tattooing soldiers' faces was begun by the First Emperor of (Posterior) Liang 後梁 (Liang Taizu 梁太祖, reg. 907-914). This is reiterated in a passage found in Sima

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<sup>52</sup> He was one of the sons of Liu Ren'gong. Perhaps Su Xun is confusing the son with the father since Liu Ren'gong is noted elsewhere as responsible for the reinstitution of tattooing. See below, note 58.

<sup>53</sup> Su Xun 蘇洵 (1009-1066), *Bing zhi* 兵制 (Military Regulations) (Changsha: Shangwu, 1939), 5.44-47.

<sup>54</sup> Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086), *Sima wengong wenji* 司馬溫公文集 (Collected works of Sima Guang) (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1937), 5.120-121. Besides the meaning found here of a military slave taken by force from the populace, the term “Yiyong” has two other meanings: one is the spirit of being willing to take up weapons for a just cause; and another is that in the Northern and Southern Dynasties locally raised peasant armies called themselves “Yiyong.”

<sup>55</sup> *Song shi* 193.4806. Also see Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578-1642), *Yehuo bian buyi* 野獲編補遺 (Supplement to Private Gleanings) (Tang Yao shi chong jiao kanben 塘姚氏重校刊本, 1869), 3.4a. This Ming author simply records that Song soldiers had their faces tattooed to prevent desertion.

Guang's *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government) where we read that in the first year of the First Emperor of the Posterior Liang (907) the emperor had all of his soldiers tattooed with the record of their military post and rank in order to prevent escape and absenteeism. Sima continues that some of the soldiers were homesick for their villages and attempted to escape anyway. Since the villagers did not dare to give refuge to the soldiers, the escapees were either killed or were forced to gather in the mountains or marshes and become bandits. When this eventually became a major social problem, a general amnesty was granted through imperial proclamation, and the tattooed men returned to their home villages. In this way the bandits were reduced by seventy or eighty percent.<sup>56</sup>

Slightly different from this tattooing of the soldiers in one's own armies is the tattooing of a message on the faces of one's enemies prior to releasing them to return home. This was an effective means both to provide irrefutable proof that one had indeed captured certain prisoners and to show the extent of one's clemency.<sup>57</sup>

Tattoo was used by soldiers in some armies as a way to demonstrate one's devotion to a cause. Usually a brief oath of several words would be tattooed on the arms, back or chest; very likely the purpose was to instill a sense of strength and valour and to prove this valour both to others in one's own regiment and to enemies.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (*Sbby*), 266.14b-15a.

<sup>57</sup> For example, see the description of De Guang 德光 (the second emperor of the Liao [907-1124]) tattooing the faces of Jin 晉 prisoners with the words "Following Imperial command: Do not kill," prior to releasing them to go back to the south. See Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072), *Xin Wudai shi* 新五代史 (New History of the Five Dynasties) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 72.896.

<sup>58</sup> Another type of oath tattoo not dealt with here is the lover's oath. Hu Yinglin says that lovers sometimes mutually declare their intentions by tattooing messages on their bodies. See Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551-1602), *Shaoshi shanfang bicon* 少室山房比叢 (Collected Jottings from a Cottage on Mt. Shaoshi) (*Guangya congshu*), 2.7a.



This oath tattoo was presumably somewhat more dramatic than the mere cutting of one's arm to draw blood for a blood oath.<sup>59</sup> We read that the armies of Shu 蜀 tattooed themselves with the shape of an axe to give themselves renewed courage when they learned that they were going to be attacked<sup>60</sup> and that others tattooed (up to eight or more) characters on their chests, proclaiming their dedication to the nation.<sup>61</sup> We know that this was a time-honored practice, not just something done by armies of relatively late eras. One earlier example appears in the biography of Liu Ren'gong 劉仁恭 in the *Xin Tang shu*. In an effort to help recapture an area he had lost in battle, Liu enlisted into the army all men over the age of fifteen. He tattooed their faces with the words "Ding Ba" 定霸 (establish the hegemon). The soldiers in addition tattooed on their own arms the words "Yixin shizhu" 一心事主 (serve the ruler with undivided heart) to help muster enthusiasm for the fight.<sup>62</sup>

Undoubtedly the best-known example of a military man bearing a tattooed oath is the famous Song general Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103-1141), tragic and heroic subject of many plays and stories that center on his attempts to recapture northern China from the Jurchen "barbarians." Shen Defu even claims that the practice of tattooing oaths

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<sup>59</sup> An example of a hero cutting his arm to inspire faith may be found in Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 (ca. 1330-ca. 1400), attr., *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms) (Shanghai: Yadong tushuguan, 1933), 9.4.

<sup>60</sup> See Lu You 陸游 (1125-1210), *Lao xue 'an biji* 老學庵筆記 (Notes from an Aged Scholar's Hut) in *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* 筆記小說大觀 (A Parade of Note-form Informal Narratives) vol. 3 (Taipei: Xinxing, 1974), 1.14b.

<sup>61</sup> For example, see Chen Fu 陳孚 (1240-1303), *An 'nan jishi shi* 安南即事詩 (Topical Verse from Annam) (*Skqs*) 2.32a-b. Also see Bi Yuan 畢沅 (1730-1797), *Xu Zizhi tongjian* 續資治通鑑 (Continuation of a Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government) (*Sbby*), 86.9a.

<sup>62</sup> *Xin Tang shu* 212.5987. Also see this incident described in Gao Cheng 高承 (Song), *Shiwu jiyuan* 事物紀原 (A Record of the Origins of Things) (*Xiyin xuan congshu* 惜陰軒叢書 edition), 10.1b.

in the military originated with Yue Fei,<sup>63</sup> though as we have seen this was a practice before Yue Fei's time. Shen sighs in admiration, citing Yue Fei's tattooed oath as a sign of the ultimate in loyalty.<sup>64</sup> Yue Fei's dynastic history biography says briefly that he had a tattoo on his back that said "Jinzhong baoguo" 盡忠報國 (Serve the nation with absolute loyalty).<sup>65</sup> This bit of information was incorporated into many literary works, one of the most interesting of which is the *chuanqi* drama "Rushi guan" 如是觀 (A View of Justice and Evil). In it is a vivid description of Yue Fei's mother crying as she pierces her son's skin by using an embroidery needle, and then rubs ink (that her daughter-in-law has carefully ground) into the fresh wounds.<sup>66</sup>

One fascinating aspect of the oath tattoo is that, unlike all of the other types of permanent body marking, it carries no negative connotation; on the contrary, the man bearing this type of tattoo is considered positively heroic, at least in the popular imagination. Presumably a man who swears upon his very body to devote himself to a cause greater than a personal concern is above normal rules of propriety.

#### *Figurative tattoo and textual tattoo*

In a late nineteenth-century text are recorded details for the procedures that are followed during a coroner's autopsy. In the examination of a dead body two of the

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<sup>63</sup> *Yehuo bian buyi* 野獲編補遺 (Supplement to Gleanings from the Wilds) 3.2b-3a. Also see 3.4b for more discussion of this practice.

<sup>64</sup> Shen Defu 沈德符, *Bizhou xuan shengyu* 敝帚軒剩語 (Leftover Words from the Humble Broom Pavilion) (Taipei: Guangwen, 1970), A.43.

<sup>65</sup> See *Song shi* 365.11393 and 380.11708. For another example of the same tattooed oath see *Ming shi* 272.6984.

<sup>66</sup> This *chuanqi* drama is attributed to the Qing playwright Zhang Dafu 張大復 (n.d.). See Du Yingtao 杜穎陶, ed., *Yue Fei gushi xiqu shuochang ji* 岳飛故事戲曲說唱集 (Collection of Dramas of the Yue Fei Story) (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi, 1981), 246-250, esp. p. 249.

identifying marks to be looked for are tattooed characters, *ci zi* 刺字, and decorative tattoos, *diao qing* 雕青. In addition, any signs of tattoo removal by moxibustion were to be recorded.<sup>67</sup> It is significant that the two types of tattoo are noted separately: the mark of punishment and that used as decoration are not considered as one and the same. The only connection is that they are both denoted as distinguishing features of a corpse.

Here, we are concerned with the second type of mark noted by the coroner in the above passage, that is, the figurative tattoo which, unlike the brand, apparently was often done voluntarily. In the vernacular narrative work that traces the history of the Five Dynasties, *Wudai shi pinghua* 五代史評話 (Plain Tale of the History of the Five Dynasties), of particular interest for the study of figurative tattoo is the portion of the text treating the life of Liu Zhiyuan 劉知遠 (高祖, reg. 947-948). Liu Zhiyuan was the founder of the Posterior Han dynasty 後漢紀 (947-950). The *pinghua* account is considered a kind of historical fiction rather than official history; nevertheless, it portrays accurately the subject of Liu's early life and career as it appeared in the popular imagination, starting at least in the Yuan dynasty (1206-1367). According to the *pinghua* story, in his youth, Liu Zhiyuan went out, took the money and hired a tattoo artist (lit. "needle brush artisan" 針筆匠) to tattoo his body. On his left arm he had the man tattoo an immortal fairy maiden and on his right arm he had tattooed a treasure-snatching green dragon. On his back was tattooed a "yaksha (demon) who laughs at Heaven." This, along with his drinking and gambling, infuriated his family, and Liu was kicked out of the house. Eventually Liu became humbled by his own losing streak at gambling, and he set out to reform himself. His worth was recognized by Li Jingru 李敬儒, a man skilled in physiognomy, who wanted to help Liu to stay out of the army since, once in, it was so difficult to get out. Mr. Li was forced, because of Liu's tattoos, however, to give Liu a job "in the back" feeding the horses. Supernatural occurrences eventually convinced this man of Liu's special qualities so,

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<sup>67</sup> Huang Liuhong 黃六鴻 (fl. 1874-1879), *Fuhui quanshu* 福惠全書 (The Complete Book of Blessings and Benevolence) (Baohan lou 寶翰樓, 1879), 15.8b-9a.

in spite of the tattoos, he married his daughter to Liu. This set Liu Zhiyuan on the road to his social rehabilitation and to his eventual seat on the dragon throne.<sup>68</sup> Liu Zhiyuan's official biography makes no mention of any of this; in fact, the very first thing it points out when discussing Liu's character is "when the emperor was young he was not fond of amusements; he was serious and taciturn."<sup>69</sup> Naturally, in light of the colorful popular legends surrounding Liu, this comment might be interpreted as indicating an official attempt to rectify for posterity the rather notorious reputation of the sovereign.

Another, and far better known, literary treatment of tattooed heroes is that found in the sixteenth-century vernacular novel *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Outlaws of the Marsh). In this story there are five tattooed men in the band of outlaws that gathers under the leadership of Song Jiang 宋江 at Liangshan Marsh; they are Yan Qing 燕青, Lu Zhishen 魯智深, Shi Jin 史進, Zhang Shun 張順 and Song Jiang himself. Song Jiang's tattoo is a facial brand; the most interesting passage regarding it is in chapter seventy-two when Song Jiang is about to go to the capital city. The question is asked: "Song Jiang is a man with the tattooed face of a criminal; how can he dare go to the capital city?"<sup>70</sup> Song then engages a skilled doctor to "remove" or burn off his tattoo with moxa; the man also removes the red scar that results from the "removal."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Anon. (Yuan), *Xinbian Wudai shi pinghua* 新編五代史評話 (New Edition of the Simple Story of the History of the Five Dynasties) (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1926), A.4.

<sup>69</sup> *Jiu Wudai shi* 舊五代史 (Old History of the Five Dynasties) 99.1321-1341. Presumably this statement is meant to counter popular opinion to the contrary.

<sup>70</sup> *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Outlaws of the Marsh) (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1932), 72.61-62.

<sup>71</sup> Moxibustion, commonly used in Chinese medicine in conjunction with acupuncture and other traditional remedies, involves burning on the skin small pellets of the leaves of *Artemisia vulgaris latifolia*. See W. R. van Gulik, *Irezumi: The Pattern of Dermatography in Japan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982), 29. It was also used

Of greater interest to this section, however, are the figurative tattoos of the other four. Shi Jin, for example, is known by all as the “Nine-patterned dragon” 九紋龍. Early on in the novel we learn that his father, anxious to help young Shi Jin in his goal to become a great martial arts fighter, not only engages weapons experts but also hires a tattooist to work on his son. Jin becomes tattooed on his shoulders, arms, chest, and belly with a pattern of nine dragons.<sup>72</sup> Later in the novel, another of the “decorated” heroes, Yan Qing, is obliged to cover his tattooed body with a cassock robe so that he will not be recognized by the body markings.<sup>73</sup> In another passage a woman named Li Shishi 李師師, whose support Yan is attempting to garner, indicates a desire to see his famous tattoos. “Li Shishi laughed and said, ‘I’ve heard that Elder brother’s body is covered with beautiful tattoos; how would it be if I asked for a look at them?’ Yan Qing smiled and replied, ‘Although this humble man of lowly form does have some ornamental tattoos, in the presence of a lady how could I dare to remove my clothes and reveal my body?’” Needless to say, Lady Li’s will prevails: “Yan Qing had no choice but to strip naked. When Li Shishi saw his tattoos, she was greatly pleased, and she caressed his body with her slender jade hands.”<sup>74</sup> The social

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for tattoo removal, as we see here. Article 281 of the Qing dynasty penal code explains policy regarding the removal of tattoos in this way in the Qing Dynasty. It was expressly forbidden for a private individual to remove a tattoo, but under certain circumstances removal could be sanctioned by the authorities. See William C. Jones, tr., *The Great Qing Code* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 266-267.

<sup>72</sup> *Shuihu zhuan* 2.28. Perhaps the tattoo gave him a kind of spiritual strength which completed the outward martial arts training received by the youth. For another description of Shi Jin’s tattoos, see *Shuihu zhuan* 2.25.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid* 74.90.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid* 81.7. It has been suggested elsewhere that the popularity of and fascination for figurative tattoo among certain social groups in Japan is a cultural phenomenon that has prevailed since the seventeenth or eighteenth century to the present day as a direct result of the popularity of the novel *Shuihu zhuan* (Suiko den)

inappropriateness of tattoos, as well as their sexual allure is made abundantly clear in these passages.<sup>75</sup>

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in Japan. In particular the responsibility lies with a certain woodblock printing artist named Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾北齋 (1760-1849) and his pupils. To a large extent they created the visual images associated with the novel in Japan and later, back in China. These artists portrayed, as tattooed, more heroes than those originally described as such in the novel; the gorgeous full-colour illustrations in the Japanese editions of the novel helped to fuel a tattoo craze in Japan. For a fascinating discussion of the influence of *Shuihu zhuan* on tattoo culture in Japan see Robert van Gulik, *Irezumi: The Pattern of Dermatography in Japan*, pp. 44-52. Also see *Genshoku Nihon irezumi taikan*, p. 162. The Ming dynasty bibliophile Hu Yinglin also mentions the tattooed heroes of *Shuihu zhuan*, saying “while the work is not reliable history, at least it can prove that at the time the custom was practiced. See *Shaoshi shanfang bicong* 20.7a.

<sup>75</sup> For more examples of literary descriptions of big, hulking, brave tattooed men or tattooed scofflaws see Meng Yuanlao 孟元老 (fl. 1126-1147), *Dongjing menghua lu* 東京夢華錄 (The Eastern Capital: A Dream of Splendours Past) (*Xuejin taoyuan*), 7.12a. Also see Shi Hui 施惠 (Yuan), *Yougui ji* 幽閨記 (Record of Dark Inner Quarters) (*Xiyong xuan congshu*), 1.23a. Also see Anon. (Yuan), *Xuanhe yishi* 宣和遺事 (Past Events of the Xuanhe Era) (*Sbby*), A.22b. In Marco Polo's writings, as well, there are several interesting descriptions of tattoo practices. See for example: Manuel Komroff, ed., *The Travels of Marco Polo (the Venetian)* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926), pp. 198-199, 209 and 255.

**Section two: Duan Chengshi's entries on tattoo, found in the first part of *juan* eight of *Youyang zazu*<sup>76</sup>**

The focus of this section is the twenty-five entries on tattoo found in Duan Chengshi's ninth-century miscellany, the *Youyang zazu*. Duan writes of tattoo as a practice of peoples peripheral to China, as punishment in ancient times, as a means to brand slaves and as a kind of cosmetic. The most fascinating entries are those that describe the figurative and textual tattoos that grace the bodies of people from many walks of life. I translate them below in the order that they originally appeared, to preserve the weird sense engendered by the complex sequencing, and indeed, by the seeming lack of ordering in Duan's text. Although many of the shorter informational pieces are placed together toward the end of *juan* (scroll) eight, the overall jerky juxtaposition of literary types and of subject matter helps to highlight the fascinating nature of the material, and, among other things, helps to persuade the reader to continue reading.

Among Duan Chengshi's entries on tattoo, there are only four that specifically focus on tattoo as a practice of non-Han peoples. They are entries 290, 295, 299 and 303. In these few pieces Duan Chengshi does not offer much new information; most of his sources are former records. In entry 290 he does mention his personal interest in contemporary tattoo of residents of the south, and his remarks indicate that the slaves to whom he talks might have come from among non-Han peoples who practice tattoo. Duan refrains, however, from making any comments that reveal his own opinion; in each of these four pieces he simply records a few brief lines of rather dry information.

There are also only four brief entries that pertain to tattoo as punishment. They are entries 296, 297, 298 and 301. In these pieces Duan is concerned mainly with terminology and with re-recording interesting tidbits he had read in earlier works.

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<sup>76</sup> The other topics in this *juan* are thunder (lei 雷), with eight entries, and dreams (meng 夢), with fifteen entries.

In entries 296 and 301 he describes actual tattoos; the other two entries are concerned with substitute punishments. There is no mention of current practice or of his personal familiarity with this type of tattoo.

Entries 286, 288, 293 and 300 are on tattoo used to brand servants.. Entry 288 is reminiscent of the passage on the wife of Yuan Shao described above; similarly, the jealousy and pettiness of a primary wife are the focus, but Duan characteristically dwells as well on the gory details of the tattooing to create a vivid image of the procedure. It is one of the only passages in early Chinese literature that clearly mentions using different colors to produce a tattoo of shades other than the usual dark blue-green or black. Entry 293 elaborates on the same type of situation and attempts to explain the provenance of certain contemporary facial adornment fashions. Entry 300, a brief "how-to" informational piece, describes the exact placement, size and shape of tattoos that were to be applied in the case of escaped slaves, but it does not specify to what period of time it refers. In the eerie little story in entry 286 Duan demonstrates that the marks of tattoo penetrate to the very bone. He probably means this to be the primary lesson of his anecdote (since he places it in this section of his book, under the heading of tattoo), but in it he also subtly inveighs against treating the remains of the dead with disrespect and indicates the good that can come from honoring the dead, whatever their status might have been in life. In this one short piece Duan illustrates the mutual reliance of residents of this world and the next and marvels at the central place of the tattoo: originally a mark of shame that ended up benefiting both the dead man (since it allowed him to be buried properly) and the living (by making him rich).

In the two entries on tattoo as a kind of cosmetic technique Duan again aims to explain current customs, but here there is no connection with punishment or slavery; the alluring tattoo in entry 292 is originally caused by a seemingly innocent drunken accident. The second piece, entry 294, constitutes a simple explanation of a contemporary custom. It is clear that in some cases people were willing to overlook the negative connotations that tattoo carried; this second piece shows that there were people who actually marked themselves to look as if they were tattooed; although the exact reason for *living* people to do this is not made clear, it appears that it might be



some sort of attempt to be of benefit to one's descendants. The usual stigma of a tattoo mark on the face is not mentioned in either of these cases.

As interesting as all of the above types are, it is perhaps the decorative, or figurative tattoo that is the truly compelling sort for many readers. The *Youyang zazu* is far and away the most comprehensive extant source for learning about decorative tattoo in early China. The eleven entries that describe figurative and textual tattoo<sup>77</sup> are fascinating and very informative for the scholar wishing to understand more deeply Chinese culture, particularly of the Tang period. Duan Chengshi's text reveals a world in which many kinds of people, of various social ranks, were tattooed with pictures or with literary texts, or both. Many of the descriptions are of people who lived during his own time, and some are of people with whom he was personally acquainted and whose tattoos he examined himself. Since the majority of entries in this section of *Youyang zazu* deal with this variety of tattoo, it appears that this may have been the type that interested Duan most.

Although tattooed members of the official class (as well as religious practitioners) are represented, many of the subjects of Duan's entries are rather unsavory types and are described as riff-raff, bandits, criminals and ne'er-de-wells; in general, the scum of society. Duan describes the official reaction to these people as violently negative. Their tattoos rendered them even more abhorrent to the authorities than their nefarious activities alone would have done. His meticulous manner of description of tattoos (as if he were recording details of works of art) followed by the review of their destruction indicates that he feels that this negative reaction (particularly the destruction of the tattoos) is a rueful thing.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> They are entries 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 287, 289, 291 and 302.

<sup>78</sup> In 843 Duan and several friends went on a holiday tour of seventeen of the most famous temples of Chang'an. In *juan* five and six of the *Xu ji* (sequel) of *Youyang zazu* he meticulously and lovingly chronicles his impressions of the artwork, grounds and buildings that he saw on this tour. In 845 Emperor Wuzong 武宗 (reg. 841-846) undertook a large scale destruction of Buddhist places of worship and forced

Duan also tells of tattooed military men or of those who had been tattooed during their enlistment when young. It is clear not only that soldiers were tattooed as a measure against escape and as a brand of ownership, as outlined in the section above; they were also often decoratively tattooed, of their own volition.<sup>79</sup>

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return of monks and nuns to laity. During this persecution of Buddhism, most of the artwork and artifacts (and many of the temples themselves) that Duan had described were destroyed. (See *Zizhi tongjian* 248.1708 and 18A.604-605.) Duan, a devout believer in this "foreign" religion, never reveals how much this destruction must have pained him; he feels free to say only that he was saddened in 853 to discover that most of his diary records were worm-eaten and illegible. An interesting, if unprovable, hypothesis is that Duan's feeling about the negative official response to the threats posed by (barbaric, uncivilized) tattoo is parallel to his feeling regarding the imperial attitude toward the foreign religion of Buddhism. His relatively straightforward indication of sorrow over the official attempt at erasure of the great art represented on the bodies of men may be a means for him indirectly to express his sorrow over other such acts, particularly the short-lived but violent quashing of Buddhist institutions.

<sup>79</sup> It is important to note this connection with the tattoos used in the military for identification and punishment and those used in the military for decoration. It is probable that tattoo was most acceptable among members of the armies. Perhaps decorative tattoo was employed by these people as a way to cover or hide other types of tattoo. The problems associated with bearing a tattoo in ordinary society were undoubtedly numerous, as has been mentioned, and of course it could well have led to ostracism from society; this was, indeed, one of the primary reasons that it was an effective punishment. People thus shut out from proper society might naturally seek to associate with others like themselves, to create a new "in-group." Bands of tattooed military men, outlaws and street ruffians, then, can be seen to have partly arisen naturally and directly out of the prevailing attitudes and fears about tattoo.

Duan's entries paint a picture of the streets of Jingzhou, Chang'an<sup>80</sup> and other cities that is not seen elsewhere; this picture is, for reasons explored elsewhere in this paper, usually avoided in the writings of the literati class. Duan pricks the reader's imagination with these entries; particularly when he mentions cases like the man in entry 284, who holds a respectable position, but under whose concealing robes lies a full-body tattoo of an undulating snake. As Duan possibly intended, the reader cannot help but wonder if there were others like this man, or if he was an anomaly.

In his descriptions of figurative tattoos Duan tells us that tattoo was sometimes known to endow the wearer with supernatural strength. The tattoo might be of a god who was believed to directly bestow his power to the person who bore his image; alternatively, the tattoo might have been considered an effective apotropaic device.

Perhaps one of the most interesting types of tattoo is described in entry 282. There, the entire body of a street policeman is tattooed with the literary corpus of his favorite poet. This is not the only example of literary text used as tattoo, but it is certainly the most tantalizingly unusual one.

In a few entries Duan describes the fine quality of the tattoos that he saw. We do not know the exact technique by which some of the large and complex figurative tattoos were created, but in entry 291 Duan describes a simple stamping technique by which a small tattoo could be acquired instantly by any passerby on the street. This entry is truly astounding in its implications. The existence of a pattern book from which a client could order standard or specialized tattoos, and the capability of producing instant, high quality tattoos by means of a needle-studded stamp, indicates a large demand for tattoos in some regions. We may speculate that the clients served by these tattoo artists were primarily local bullies, travellers, soldiers and so on, but there is a possibility that among the general commoner population there was also some interest in this kind of fast, relatively painless permanent body marking.

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<sup>80</sup> Particularly important to note is that Duan not only describes figurative tattoo in southern localities. The capital cities of the north had their own tattoo culture too, it seems.

*Translation*Entry 279<sup>81</sup>

In the shopping streets of the capital (Chang'an) most of the young toughs are shaved bald and have their skin tattooed with the shapes of all kinds of things. They presume on their position in the various armies to beat others violently and to steal by force. There are those who gather like snakes in wineshops<sup>82</sup> or beat people with the clavicles of sheep. The present Metropolitan Administrator, Lord Xie Yuanshang 薛公元賞 (fl. 827-846), after three days in office,<sup>83</sup> ordered the ward chiefs secretly to apprehend these (ruffians); approximately thirty men were all beaten to death, and their corpses were exposed in the marketplace. All of the city residents with tattoos destroyed them with moxibustion.

At the time (previously) a strongman of Daning ward, Zhang Han by name, had tattooed his left arm with the words "Alive, I do not fear the metropolitan administrator," and on his right arm he tattooed "Dead, I do not hold in awe King Yama."<sup>84</sup> Also there was a man called Wang Linu (Powerful Wang) who had hired a tattoo artist for five thousand cash. On his chest and belly appeared mountains, pavilions, parks, ponds and kiosks, grass and trees, and birds and animals. There was nothing that wasn't included. The tattoo was so fine that it was as if it had been painted on with repeated fine washes of color. Lord Xie Yuanshang had both of these men beaten to death. There was also the bandit Zhao Wujian who, on one-hundred

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<sup>81</sup> Also see See also Li Fang 李昉, et. al., eds., *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Extensive Records Collected During the Taiping Reign Period) (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1991), 263.4.

<sup>82</sup> Or, "gather in wineshops because of the snakes" (in the wine, for example), or, "carrying snakes into wineshops."

<sup>83</sup> Following *Taiping guangji* which says 上三日.

<sup>84</sup> Yama is king of the netherworld.

and sixty places, had tattooed overlapping impressions of wheeling magpies and other birds. On his left and right arms he had tattooed the poem:

Wild ducks resting overnight on a sandbank,  
 Attacked by falcons morning after morning.  
 Suddenly in alarm they fly into the water,  
 Their lives spared until this morning.

Furthermore, in Gaoling county,<sup>85</sup> a man named Song Yuansu, whose body was tattooed, was arrested. He was tattooed in seventy-one places. His left arm said:

In days gone by, before my house was poor,  
 I wouldn't begrudge a thousand gold pieces<sup>86</sup> to form a close friendship;  
 Now I've lost my way, and I seek those close friends,  
 Yet roaming over every pass and mountain, not a single one appears.

On his right arm was tattooed a gourd; from out of its top emerged a person's head. It looked like a puppet in a string puppet show. The county official<sup>87</sup> didn't understand and asked him what it signified. He explained that it was the spirit of the gourd.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Corresponds to present-day Gaoling county 高陵 in Shaanxi 陝西 province.

<sup>86</sup> Following *Taiping guangji*: 千金不惜.

<sup>87</sup> *Xianli* 縣吏.

<sup>88</sup> 葫蘆精. This may be a pun on 胡蘆, which means to laugh or sneer at. Other compounds with 胡蘆 mean muddled, or confused. So here, "spirit of the gourd" could mean something like "sneering spirit," or "muddled spirit." However, there is another, more likely, understanding of this passage. The bottle gourd has long had profound mythic and symbolic importance in the areas surrounding China, and in China itself, particularly in Daoist traditions. Depictions of the gourd were used as charms for longevity and healing, among other things. Early texts such as the *Zhuangzi* and *Liezi* describe a Master of the Gourd, a being who has transcended the dualistic constraints of this world. For a detailed study of the significance of the bottle

Entry 280<sup>89</sup>

Li Yijian 李夷簡 (756-822)<sup>90</sup> was in Shu at the end of the Yuanhe period (806-820). A Shu city (Chengdu) resident named Zhao Gao was always getting into fights and was often in prison. His entire back was tattooed with the Heavenly King Vaiśravaṇa.<sup>91</sup> Whenever the constables were about to have him flogged, they would stop short when they saw the tattoo. Counting on this, he gradually came to be a major problem for the ward market. Li Yijian's assistants reported this to him, and Li became furious. He seized the tattooed man and took him in front of the court. He got a newly-made stiff club, three inches wide at the head, and shouted at the caner to beat the Vaisravana tattoo and to stop only when it was completely gone. He applied more than thirty strokes, but the man still did not die.<sup>92</sup> After ten days, Zhao Gao went from door to door, with his upper garment removed, howling and begging for meritorious offerings to repair the tattoo.<sup>93</sup>

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gourd, see Victor H. Mair, "Southern Bottle-gourd (hu-lu 葫蘆) Myths in China and Their Appropriation by Taoism," in *Zhongguo shenhua yu chuanshuo* 中國神話與傳說 (Chinese Myths and Legends) (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1996), pp. 185-228, esp. pp. 204-205, and p. 228, Fig 5, a woodblock print depicting a scene remarkably similar to that in the tattoo in Duan's entry.

<sup>89</sup> Also see *Taiping guangji* 264.6.

<sup>90</sup> For Li's biography, see *Xin Tang shu* 131.4509-4511.

<sup>91</sup> The Chinese transcription of the Sanskrit is Pishamen 毗沙門. This is originally a Hindu god, also worshipped by Buddhists. He is associated with wealth.

<sup>92</sup> Following *Taiping guangji*: 不死.

<sup>93</sup> Imamura Yoshio suggests that Duan Chengshi was poking fun at Zhao here, hinting at the irony in the picture of a man begging for money to restore the efficacy of a money-making tattoo (since Vaiśravaṇa is the god of wealth). See Imamura Yoshio, Vol. 2, p. 84. Duan might just be interested in the perceived sacred nature of the tattoo's image, the restoration of which might earn contributors the same kind of merit as the restoration of a sacred building.

Entry 281<sup>94</sup>

The Lesser Commander<sup>95</sup> of Shu, Wei Shaoqing 韋少卿 was Wei Biaowei's 韋表微<sup>96</sup> (fl. 821-836) paternal (older) cousin. When young, he wasn't fond of studying; rather, he had a fetish for tattooing. His uncle once had him remove his clothes so that he could have a look at the tattoos. On his chest was tattooed a tree on whose branches were perched several dozen birds. Below the tree hung a mirror; its central knob was fastened with a rope which was being pulled by a person standing off to the side. His uncle didn't understand so he asked what it meant. Shaoqing laughed and answered, "Hasn't uncle read the poem of Lord Zhang of Yan?<sup>97</sup> (One line of it) goes: 'Pull the mirror, and in winter crows will come to gather.'<sup>98</sup> That's all it means."

Entry 282<sup>99</sup>

Ge Qing, a street patrolman of Jingzhou, was brave and valiant. From his neck on down he was completely tattooed with the poems of Secretary Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846). A Jingzhou resident, Chen Zhi, and I once summoned him so that we could have a look. We had him take off his clothes, and he could recite from memory even the poems on his back; he could also put his hands behind his back to point to the exact places where they were tattooed. When he came to the line, "It is not that, of

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<sup>94</sup> See *Taiping guangji* 264.6.

<sup>95</sup> *Xiaojiang* 小將.

<sup>96</sup> A Tang scholar-official, who, for a time was a Hanlin academician. Wei Biaowei's son, Wei Shan 韋蟾 (fl. 860), was a friend of Duan Chengshi, and Duan might have heard this information from Shan. For Wei Biaowei's biography see *Xin Tang shu* 177.5274-5275, and *Jiu Tang shu* 189 B.4979.

<sup>97</sup> Lord Zhang of Yan, Zhang Yan Gong 張燕公, refers to Zhang Yue 張閱 (667-731). See *Xin Tang shu* 125.4404-4412.

<sup>98</sup> I can not find this line in Zhang's collection in *Quan Tang shi* (The Complete Tang Poems).

<sup>99</sup> Also see *Taiping guangji* 264.7.

these flowers, I only love the chrysanthemum” 不是此花偏愛菊,<sup>100</sup> there was a picture of a person holding a cup of wine, standing near a cluster of chrysanthemums. Again (with the line) “On the carved-out hollows on the yellow dyeing blocks, even in the winter the trees have leaves” 黃夾纈林寒有葉<sup>101</sup> the man then pointed to an image of a tree. On the tree were hanging wood blocks for dyeing, and the carvings on the blocks were exceedingly fine. Altogether there were more than thirty poems tattooed on him, and on his body there was not a single bit of intact skin. Chen Zhi called him “A walking illustration of Bai Juyi’s poems. “

#### Entry 283

Every time my retainer, the groom <sup>102</sup> Lu Shentong<sup>103</sup> engages in tests of strength in the army (camps) he is invariably able to chew dozens of pieces of gravel. He is able

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<sup>100</sup> This line is a misquote of a line from a poem by Yuan Zhen, a friend of Bai Juyi’s. The original line goes “Bu shi hua zhong pian ai ju” 不是花中偏愛菊 (It is not that of the flowers I only love the chrysanthemum). See the poem “Chrysanthemum” in *Yuan shi Changqing ji* 元氏長慶集 (The Collected Works of Yuan Zhen) (Sbby), 16.1b. Bai Juyi possibly referred to chanting Yuan’s “Chrysanthemum” poem in his piece entitled “Facing Chrysanthemums in the Imperial Liveing Quarters on the Ninth and Thinking of Yuan Zhen” (Jinzhong jiuri dui ju hua yi Yuan Jiu 禁中九日對菊花憶元九. See *Bai Xiangshan ji* 白香山集 (Collected works of Bai Juyi) (Beijing: Wenxue guji kanxing she, 1954), 13.68.

<sup>101</sup> This is a line from Bai Juyi’s poem entitled “Fan Tai hu shu shi ji Weizhi” 泛太湖書事寄微之. See *Bai Xiangshan ji* 54.66.

<sup>102</sup> *Menxia zou* (門下驕). As the designation for an office of the bureaucracy, *Menxia* indicates the chancellery or palace, but these meanings do not seem to fit here. The term actually more often signifies service in a powerful or wealthy family, hence here it may refer to the personal household of Duan Chengshi.



to lift a stone step<sup>104</sup> and a basket<sup>105</sup> full of six-hundred catties of stones. The Heavenly Kings<sup>106</sup> are tattooed on his back. He says himself that he is imbued with the power of these spirits when he goes into the contest arena; with the help of the spirits his strength increases. On the first and fifteenth days of the month he always prepares milky gruel. He burns incense and sits with his tattoos exposed, and then he has his wife and children make offerings to the kings and worship them.

#### Entry 284

Cui Chengchong 崔承寵 (n.d.) when young was an enlisted man who was skilled at mule polo. When shooting or avoiding the ball he would wield his mallet so nimbly it was as if he were stuck to it with glue. Later he became the Surveillance Commissioner of Qiannan.<sup>107</sup> When he was young, he had had his entire body tattooed with the image of a snake. It started from his right hand with the mouth gaping open between his thumb and forefinger. It circled his wrist and went once around his neck and then locked tightly around his stomach. It stretched out over his

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<sup>103</sup> In Buddhism, the word *shentong* 神通 mean “supernatural power.” It connotes the spiritual power with which one is imbued after having undergone religious training or austerities.

<sup>104</sup> I emend 石簦 (stone parasol) to 石磴 (stone step), though a stone parasol is not entirely unimaginable.

<sup>105</sup> I am not sure how to translate this difficult passage. Here I emend 𪚩 (to drag the feet, sandal) to 𪚩 (book box, basket). An alternate rendering is: “he was able to carry a stone step and drag six-hundred catties of stones behind his feet.”

<sup>106</sup> They are 持國天王 (Dhṛtarāṣṭra), 增長天王 (Virūḍhaka), 廣目天王 (Virūpākṣa) and 多聞天王 (Dhanada, or Vaiśravaṇa).

<sup>107</sup> 黔南. In the Tang, Qianzhou 黔州 was the area that comprised fifteen areas of the Jiangnan circuit 江南道. The seat of government was located in what is now Pengshui 彭水 county of Sichuan province. Perhaps Qiannan refers to Qianzhou or to the area just south of it.

thigh, and the tail extended to his shin bone. When facing guests and comrades, he would usually cover his hand with his robe, yet when he would become intoxicated with alcohol, he would strip down, posture with his arm and make a halberd of his hand. He would grasp hold of the entertainers and would threaten, "The snake is going to bite you!" The entertainers would scream right away and act as if they were hurt. In this way they would make a game of it.

Entry 285<sup>108</sup>

During the Baoli period (825-826) a certain commoner had his arms tattooed and several dozen people gathered to watch the process. Suddenly a person wearing a white gown and a brimmed hat appeared. He inclined his head, smiled a faint smile and then left. Before the man had gone ten steps, the blood flowed from the commoner's tattoos like that from a nosebleed, and he felt the pain penetrate to his bones. In just a short while he had lost more than a *dou* of blood.<sup>109</sup> The crowd of people suspected that it had something to do with the one who had looked at him before, and they told the tattooed man's father to find him for help.<sup>110</sup> That (mysterious) person was not willing to take responsibility, and only after the father had made obeisance to him dozens of times did he finally scoop up a pinch of dirt and say something like an incantation. (Then he said,) "You can put this on it." When they did as he said, the bleeding stopped.

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<sup>108</sup> See also *Taiping guangji* 286.151.

<sup>109</sup> Here, the exact amount is not clear. As a liquid measure, *dou* 斗 is variously defined as 2.34 gallons, 1.63 gallons, the amount that will fit into a ladle, or simply as a large quantity. This last definition makes the most sense here.

<sup>110</sup> Or "try to implore him to stop it."

## Entry 286

My cousin,<sup>111</sup> Jiang, during the Zhenyuan period (785-804) once went past Huangkeng 黄坑 (“Yellow Pit”).<sup>112</sup> There was one among his entourage who was collecting bits and pieces of skull bones to use as medicine. On one of the pieces appeared the three characters 逃走奴 (*taozou nu* [escaped slave]). The marks were like light ink traces. It was then that they realized that tattoo penetrates all the way to the bone. In the night that man in my cousin’s group had a dream of a person whose face was hidden and who wanted the bones that had been collected. He said, “My shame is great. If you, honored sir, would bury the bones deep in the ground, I will bring you good fortune.” The man awoke in alarm; his hair was standing on end. He went immediately to rebury the bones for the sake of the ghost. Later, whenever something was about to happen, the spirit would appear to him as if in a dream and tell him what to do. With this help he amassed great wealth; at his death he had almost one-hundred thousand (cash).

Entry 287<sup>113</sup>

In the military camp of the Shu general Yin Yan there was a soldier who arrived half an hour late for evening muster. Yan was about to reprimand him. The soldier was drunk, however, and explained himself in a loud voice. Yan became angry and had him beaten twenty times or so, to the point that he nearly died. The younger brother of the soldier was the camp jailer. He was friendly and kind by nature, but he

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<sup>111</sup> “Cousin” here is 三從 *san zong*; he was a relation with the same great grandfather as Duan Chengshi.

<sup>112</sup> I am not clear to what place this refers. In Fujian province, Longyan county 龍巖縣, there is a Huangkeng mountain 黄坑山. Perhaps this is what is meant. See Immamura Yoshio, *Yuyo zasso*, vol. 2, p. 91. However, it is possible that this is simply a local term for a real pit, or a tomb. In this piece, the latter speculation seems to make more sense.

<sup>113</sup> Also see *Taiping guangji* 122.674.

considered Yan's actions unfair so he tattooed the words "Kill Yin" into his skin and blackened them with ink. Yin Yan secretly found out about it and had someone beat him to death on another pretext. Later, when the southern barbarians invaded during the Taihe period (827-835), Yan employed tens of thousands of soldiers to protect Qiongxia pass.<sup>114</sup> Now Yin Yan was stronger than anyone else, and he would often joke around with those near him, beating their shins with a knotted jujube staff. As he beat them, their muscles would become swollen, but there would be absolutely no outward trace of the beating. Counting on this strength of his, the entire army left the pass and followed the barbarians for several *li*. The barbarians launched a surprise attack from both sides, and Yin Yan's army suffered a crushing defeat. Yin's horse collapsed, and Yin was killed, pierced by several dozen spears.

At first, on the day that the army had ridden out of the pass, the jailer that Yin Yan had had killed suddenly reappeared, going along at the head of the army. The man was carrying a yellow table as big as the hub of a wheel. Yin Yan had a bad feeling about it, and he asked those around him, but none of them could see the spectre. In the end he did die in the battle.

#### Entry 288

Fang Rufu's<sup>115</sup> (second) wife was of the Cui clan. She was jealous by nature.<sup>116</sup> The slave girls around her were not allowed to wear thick makeup or high coiffures. Each

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<sup>114</sup> Qiongxia guan 邛峽關 was on a mountain in Sichuan, west of Rongjing county 榮經縣. The Nanzhao 南詔 invasion of Shu lasted five years, starting in 829. Duan Chengshi's friend and mentor Li Deyu took over the reconstruction and repair of the pass in 832. See *Zizhi tongjian* 244.1679.

<sup>115</sup> Fang Rufu 房孺復 (753-794) was the son of the Prime Minister Fang Guan 房琯 (696-763). See *Jiu Tang shu* 111.3325.

<sup>116</sup> Mrs. Cui, the second wife of Fang (Fang had harrassed to death his first wife, *née* Zheng, earlier), was famous for her cruel and jealous behavior. Fang's *Jiu Tang shu* biography mentions her whipping of two servant girls to death out of

month she gave each girl one *dou* of rouge and one coin's worth of powder. There was one slave who had just recently been purchased, and her makeup was slightly finer (than the others'). Mrs. Cui angrily said to her, "So, you like to make up, eh? I will make you up!" Then she had someone slice the girl's eyebrows off, and she used blue-green ink to fill (the wounds) in. Then she heated an iron bar and burned the skin (starting) at the corners of each eye. The skin scorched and rolled up wherever she touched. Then she tinted the wounds with vermillion. When the scabs came off, the marks were just like makeup.

Entry 289<sup>117</sup>

When Yang Yuqing 楊虞卿 (*jinsshi* 810) was Commissioner of the capital,<sup>118</sup> in the city markets and wards there was someone called "San Wangzi" 三王子 (Third Prince) who was so strong that he could lift up huge stones. His entire body was tattooed with pictures; there was not one piece of skin intact on his whole frame. From first to last he was sentenced with the death penalty many times, but he always took shelter with the army and thus managed to avoid having it carried out. One day he slipped up, and Yang Yuqing commanded several of his personal followers<sup>119</sup> to capture and arrest him. They barred the gates and flogged him to death. The decision in this case read: "He tattooed his four limbs, and he called himself 'Prince.' What need is there to examine it (judicially)? It is a matter of course that he is guilty."

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jealousy and having them buried in the snow. Although Fang, as the Prime Minister's son, had gotten away with the death of his first wife, this new scandal caused him to be demoted and to live separately from his wife.

<sup>117</sup> See also *Taiping guangji* 264.6-7.

<sup>118</sup> He took this position in 835 and was demoted only two months later to the position of Revenue Manager of Qian Zhou 虔州; he died shortly thereafter. See his biography in *Jiu Tang shu* 176.4561-4563 and in *Xin Tang shu* 175.5247-5249. The reasons for his demotion were apparently unrelated to the incident described here.

<sup>119</sup> Following *Taiping guangji*: 所由數人.

Entry 290

The craftsmanship of men of Shu 蜀<sup>120</sup> is such that their tattoos are as clear as paintings. Some say that if one uses eyeblack, then the colour will be freshest, but I asked the slaves, and they said you simply have to use good ink.

Entry 291<sup>121</sup>

In Jingzhou, during the Zhenyuan era (785-804) there were tattoo vendors (artists) in the street. They had imprinting stamps (seals) into which they would press needles together closely into the shapes of all kinds of things, like toads and scorpions, mortars and pestles, or whatever people wanted. Once they'd imprinted the skin (with this needle stamp), they would brush (the pricked area) with black lead. After the wound had healed, the tattoo was finer than (the picture ) on the pattern from which the customer had originally ordered.

Entry 292<sup>122</sup>

In makeup fashions of today, high value is placed on the facial "mole." For example, there is a mole of a crescent moon shape, which is called a "yellow star mole." The fame of the so-called "mole inlay" derives no-doubt from Lady Deng, wife of Sun He of the state of Wu.<sup>123</sup> Sun He favored her. Once, when Sun He was dancing drunkenly and with abandon, he accidentally cut Lady Deng's cheek and drew blood. Deng was delicate and weak and became more and more miserable so Sun He called the palace physician to mix some medicine for her. The physician said that he should be able to get rid of the mark if he could procure some bone marrow of white otter and mix it with powders of jade and amber. Sun He had to spend one-hundred gold pieces

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<sup>120</sup> Modern-day Sichuan.

<sup>121</sup> See also *Taiping guangji*, 263.5.

<sup>122</sup> Also see *Taiping guangji*, 218.425.

<sup>123</sup> Sun He 孫何 (224-253) was the son of Sun Quan 孫權 (d. 252), first ruler of the state of Wu (Wu Dadi 吳大帝 [reg. 222-252]).

to buy the white otter before they were able to mix the ointment. They added too much amber, however, so the ointment was inferior, and the scar didn't disappear; on Lady Deng's left cheek there was a red spot that resembled a mole. When people saw it, they found her even more imbued with fascinating charm. Those of Sun He's consorts who wished to gain his favor all marked dots on their cheeks with cinnabar. Only then would they gain his attention.<sup>124</sup>

#### Entry 293

The "flower makeup" that women use to decorate their faces nowadays originated with the fashion of Shangguan Wan'er 上官婉兒 (664-710).<sup>125</sup> Prior to the Dali period (766-779), among the wives of the official class, many of those who were jealous and cruel would tattoo the faces of the slave girls and concubines who failed, even in small ways, to please them. This is how there came to be the so-called "moon spot" and the "money spot (tattoo)."

#### Entry 294

Among commoners there are sometimes people who apply to the face a bluish mole that resembles a tattoo. There is an old saying that in case a woman died in childbirth, her face must be marked with ink; otherwise, it would be unlucky for later generations.

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<sup>124</sup> A version of this story also appears in Duan Gonglu's 段公路 *Beihu lu* 北戶錄 (Record of the Land of Northward Facing Doors) (*Baibu congshu jicheng* edition), 3.13b.

<sup>125</sup> For the relevant story about Shangguan Wan'er, the female official who was tattooed by Empress Wu Zetian, see Duan Gonglu, *Beihu lu* 3.13b-14a.

Entry 295<sup>126</sup>

The Yue people are accustomed to being in the water. They always tattoo their bodies to avoid trouble from *jiao* dragons. Nowadays the practice of tattooing the faces of men and boys in the south is probably a practice inherited from the Diaoti tribe.

Entry 296<sup>127</sup>

There were five-hundred<sup>128</sup> crimes punishable by tattoo as described in the *Zhouguan* 周官 (i.e., *Zhouli* [Rites of Zhou]) According to Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) first the face was cut; then ink was used to stop up the wound. A person with tattoos created by putting ink in wounds in this way was made to guard the gates. According to the *Shangshu xing de kao* 尚書刑德攷 the so-called *zhuolu* 涿鹿 was a punishment wherein the person's forehead was gouged. The punishment called *qing* 鯨 involved the use of a halter to cut people's faces. Zheng Xuan said, "Those who suffered the *zhuolu* and *qing* were referred to by people of their day as 'people of knife and ink.'"

Entry 297

The *Shangshu dazhuan* 尚書大傳<sup>129</sup> says that the "Yu Shun symbolic punishment" was to make people who had done a crime punishable by tattooing wear a black cloth

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<sup>126</sup> See also *Taiping guangji*, 482.527.

<sup>127</sup> See also Li Fang, et. al., eds., *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (The Imperially Reviewed Compendium for the Taiping Reign Period), 648.2898

<sup>128</sup> Following the "Maoben" (Mao Jin's 毛晉 [1599-1659] edition of *Youyang zazu* [found in the *Xuejin taoyuan* 學津討原 and *Jindai mishu* 津逮秘書 collectanea]) rather than the "Zhaoben" (Zhao Qimei's 趙琦美 [1563-1624] edition found in *Sbck*) which has "three-hundred." The *Zhouli* has "five-hundred" as well. See *Zhouli zhushu* 周禮注疏 (Commentary and Subcommentary on the Zhou Rites) in *Shisan jing zhushu*, 36.242.

<sup>129</sup> *Shangshu dazhuan* 1B.8a-b. For this quotation see also *Taiping yulan* 648.2898.



instead. The *Baihu tong* (Debate in the White Tiger Hall) says, “*Mo* 墨 is tattooing on the forehead. It is an example of fire defeating metal.”<sup>130</sup>

#### Entry 298

The *Han shu* says that instead of the physical punishment, the person deserving of tattoo is shaved bald and shackled and (if a man) made to do wall building labor (*chengdan* 城旦) for four years or (if a woman) to do grain pounding punishment (*chong* 舂).<sup>131</sup>

#### Entry 299

Also the *Han shu*<sup>132</sup> records that Wang Wu 王烏 and others were sent as envoys to pay a visit to the Xiongnu. According to the customs of the Xiongnu, if the Han envoys did not remove their tallies of authority, and if they did not allow their faces to be tattooed, they could not gain entrance into the yurts. Wang Wu and his company removed their tallies, submitted to tattoo, and thus gained entry. The Shanyu looked upon them very highly.

#### Entry 300<sup>133</sup>

The *Jin ling* (The Jin Orders)<sup>134</sup> says, “When a male or female slave has escaped for the first time, do a tattoo using coppers,<sup>135</sup> like ink. Tattoo the two eyes. Later, if he

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<sup>130</sup> Following *Taiping yulan* which has 取法 instead of the *Youyang zazu* texts which have 取漢法. This line is difficult to understand. It is possible that the dominance of the fire element in the Han is credited with a greater use of tattooing over other cutting punishments favored in other times.

<sup>131</sup> This refers to the time when Emperor Wen 文帝 (reg. 179-157 B.C.E.) abolished the corporal punishments of tattoo and slicing off the nose and feet. See *Han shu* 23.1099.

<sup>132</sup> *Han shu* 94A.3772.

<sup>133</sup> Also see *Taiping yulan* 648.2898.

or she escapes again, tattoo on the two cheeks. For a third escape, tattoo a horizontal line on the lower eyelid. All of them should be one and a half inches long.

#### Entry 301

The *Liang Dynasty Miscellaneous Regulations*<sup>136</sup> says that for all people who are imprisoned but whose cases have not yet been decided, the character 劫 (*jie* “robber, thief”) must be tattooed onto their faces.

#### Entry 302

In the Buddhist work *Sāṃghika-vinaya* 僧祇律<sup>137</sup> the so-called “Black scar print” 涅槃印<sup>138</sup> is done when the Buddhist priests practice the Rite of the Brahma King. They tear their flesh and, with the bile of peacocks and with copperas and other things, they paint on the cuts on their bodies. They make written characters as well as the shapes of birds and beasts. They call it “print tattoo” 印黥.

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<sup>134</sup> *Jin ling* 晉令: a book in forty *juan* that is no longer extant. See *Jiu Tang shu* 46.2009.

<sup>135</sup> Copperas is a green hydrated ferrous sulfate.

<sup>136</sup> *Liang chao za lü* 梁朝雜律 (Miscellaneous Rules of the Liang Dynasty). *Sui shu* 25.697-698 describes a work called the *Liang lü* 梁律 in 20 sections. Perhaps this is the same work. *Sui shu* 25.699 says that the character 劫 is tattooed on the face in cases of serious crimes. Also see *Taiping yulan* 648.2898.

<sup>137</sup> This is an abbreviation for *Mahāsāṃghika-vinaya* 摩訶僧祇律 (Great Canon of Monastic Rules) translated into Chinese by Fa Xian 法顯 (fl. 399-416) in 40 *juan*.

<sup>138</sup> Reading 癍 (scar) for 槃 (coiled). *Niepan* 涅槃 is a transcription for Nirvana, so this tattoo may also be called “Nirvana Print.”

## Entry 303

The *Tianbao shilu* 天寶實錄 (Veritable Record of the Celestial Treasure Reign Period)<sup>139</sup> says that the Jiu 廐 mountains in Rinan 日南 county<sup>140</sup> are a connected range of an unknown number of *li*. A Luo (lit.: naked) man lives there. He is a descendant of the Bo people.<sup>141</sup> He has tattooed his chest with a design of flowers. There is something like purple-colored powder that he has painted below his eyes. He has removed his front two teeth, and he thinks of it all as beautiful decoration. I am of the opinion that if a gentleman does not understand something he should be ashamed. Tao Zhenbai 陶貞白<sup>142</sup> always said that it was a deeply shameful thing not to know even one thing. How much more shameful is it that in the statute books the ink kinds of punishments are not revealed, such as the time that it was established by physiognomy that Qing Bu 黥布<sup>143</sup> would become king or that on the licentious a red

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<sup>139</sup> According to *Xin Tang shu*, 58.1472 there was a book called *Xuanzong shilu* 玄宗實錄 (True Record of Xuanzong's Reign), and in *Song shi* 宋史, 203.5088, there is a record of a book called *Tang Xuanzong shilu* 唐玄宗實錄, both in 100 *juan*. This *Tianbao shilu* could be a no-longer extant record of the Tianbao period (742-755) of Xuanzong's entire reign (reg. 713-755).

<sup>140</sup> The Tang county of Rinan 日南 was in the northern part of present-day Vietnam.

<sup>141</sup> The Baimin, or Bomin (白民), were a legendary people mentioned in texts such as the *Shanhai jing* 山海經 (Classic of Mountains and Seas) and the *Bowuzhi* 博物志 (Account of Wide Ranging Matters). They had "white" (transparent) bodies and disheveled hair. See, for example, *Shanhai jing* 7.42a. Imamura Yoshio, however, takes this to mean *pingmin* 平民 (also *pingding* 平丁 or *botu* 白徒), used to denote untrained soldiers.

<sup>142</sup> This refers to Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (452-536) of the Liang dynasty, an important figure in the early history of Daoism.

<sup>143</sup> This refers to Ying Bu 英布 (?-196 B.C.E.), who, as a youth was told by a physiognomist that, having been punished, he would eventually become king. He was

flower will always appear.<sup>144</sup> I have in my idle hours recorded what I remember, in order to send them to my friends of like mind. It will amuse them and serve to unfurrow their brows.

## Conclusion

At the end of the last entry of *juan* eight, Duan himself says (besides the usual disclaimer in *xiaoshuo* writings that it is all just meant to amuse) that the impetus for his writing these entries on tattoo is to educate other gentlemen who seem to be completely ignorant of many things that exist in front of their very eyes. He repeats twice that this kind of ignorance is a deeply shameful thing.<sup>145</sup> One of the interesting effects of reading through Duan's entries is that one feels both that tattoo was certainly highly interesting and strange to the author, but also that it was not really out of the ordinary. Duan convincingly shows, as he does so often in the *Youyang zazu*, that the only reason that we think of something as unusual is that we have not noticed how ubiquitous it really is. Duan strongly valued the curiosity that leads people to open their eyes, to learn about their own society, and even to notice differences that exist among the seemingly uniform practices of the majority population. He not only possessed this curiosity, but, fortunately for later readers, he took copious notes as he satisfied it.

In spite of the information given by Duan Chengshi, it appears that the practice of tattoo (other than the penal use) never achieved any level of general acceptance or widespread use among most parts of ancient Chinese society of any era. It is possible,

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in fact later punished and marked with tattoo, whereupon he fled to the hills to become a bandit. During the chaos at the end of the Qin he was able to rise in power and eventually, in the Han was "rehabilitated" and became king of Huainan. See his biography in *Shiji* 91.2597-2608.

<sup>144</sup> 淫著紅花欲落.

<sup>145</sup> See *Youyang zazu* 8.80, the last part of the final entry in this section.

nevertheless, to argue that Duan's material shows that among certain classes decorative tattoo did enjoy periods of popularity, both in the northern and southern cities; this apparently was especially true for certain relatively low-class groups.

Tattoo in China, in some ways, seems quite limited; there does not seem to have ever been any use of tattoo as a rite of passage into adulthood, as a mark of sexual maturity or marital status, as a mark of identification in a special occupation, or in the other roles that it has played in other cultures around the globe. Tattoo as punishment, as beautifying cosmetic, as mark of bravery and as apotropaic device are, on the other hand, among the uses that China's tradition shares with some of these same cultures.

Unfortunately, for the scholar interested in clues that might be seen in visual arts or in current tattoo practices, visual representations of ancient tattooed peoples are not in abundance for the medieval period when Duan was writing; likewise there is not a current tattoo practice that can be said to be a direct influence of ancient practices in that country. We do have texts, however; the sources examined in this paper describe a fairly broad range of uses, but naturally the glimpse they provide into the world of tattoo practice is limited, partly due to the generally negative connotation associated with permanent body marking by the literate classes.

Finally, we may echo the great scholar Hu Yinglin in his comments on the tattoo in the novel, *Shuihu zhuan*. As he said about that work, although the passages discussed in this paper might not all be historically verifiable, and despite their various limitations, they do (at the very least) indicate that there was an active tattoo practice in pre-modern times.

In the author's forward to his work *Body Marking in Southwestern Asia*, Henry Field says that "his former chief," the late Sinologist Berthold Laufer, had intended to contribute to his book a chapter on tattoo from Iran to China. His death in 1934 prevented him from writing that work.<sup>146</sup> There is very little work in western

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<sup>146</sup> Henry Field, *Body Marking in Southwestern Asia* (Cambridge: Peabody Museum, 1958), p. V.

languages on ancient Chinese tattoo; certainly, if he had lived, Dr. Laufer would have remedied that situation with his characteristic erudition and thoroughness, and this paper would undoubtedly not have been written. Rather than making a vain attempt to "fill his shoes," I present this paper merely as a starting point for scholars interested in pursuing the topic; it is written in the same spirit of curiosity and respect that both Duan Chengshi and Berthold Laufer shared.

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