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TATTOO IN EARLY CHINA

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The paper introduces various modes of tattoo as described in several types of pre-modern Chinese texts. Although the study takes a widely cross-temporal view, covering texts from the Zhou to the Ming dynasties, its organizing focus is the twenty-five entries on tattoo found in the ninth-century miscellany, *Youyang zazu*. The author of this work, Duan Chengshi (c. 800–863), is remarkable because of his extraordinary interest in all types of tattoo, but particularly for his meticulous description of the voluntary decorative tattoos of his contemporaries. Given the fact that in China permanent body-marking was highly stigmatized, and cause for social ostracism, the information given in the *Youyang zazu* and other texts on tattoo is thought-provoking and valuable.

An aggressive Lord who wants to rise in power will be forced to employ his own people. They will then love me with the love of parents, and 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, and as if he were their sworn enemy.

Xun Qing 荀卿 (ca. 313–ca. 238 B.C.)¹

TATTOO IS REPRESENTED IN SEVERAL types of early Chinese texts, including early prose works such as the *Shang shu* 尚書,² historical works such as the *Shiji* 史記³ and later dynastic histories, dynastic penal codes, *zhiguai* 志怪 and *biji* 筆記 works and miscellanies. This paper introduces a selection of representative passages from Chinese texts that mention tattoo and is intended partly to serve as a starting point for further study of this largely neglected topic. The twenty-five entries on tattoo found in the ninth-century miscellany, *Youyang zazu* 齊東野語⁴ are both stimulus for and focus of the

paper; it is, in fact, their content that determines the types of tattoo to be considered. The author of *Youyang zazu*, Duan Chengshi 段成式 (c. 800–863), deserves our gratitude because of his extraordinary interest in all types of tattoo, but particularly because of his meticulous description of Tang-dynasty figurative and textual tattoo. His beautiful descriptions of full-body tattoo raise many questions, questions of immense interest for students of Tang life and culture, as well as of informal narrative literature. What do we learn from the entries in a collection of informal narratives, such as a miscellany, that we do not learn from other types of texts? In what way does this collection of entries augment information already available? Besides communicating fascinating and educational data about the socio-cultural world of his time, Duan's tattoo entries may reveal something of Duan's own interests and world-view in general. Their place in his larger collection is of interest—why did he place them where he did, in *juan* eight, with entries on dreams and lightning?

For the sake of organizational convenience, the paper treats separately several types, or modes, of tattoo, with some inevitable overlapping of types. The specific *Youyang zazu* entries that represent each type are presented after a brief discussion of that type. Since the pieces do not appear in their original order, I have given the entry number of each for easy reference.

I thank Professor Stephen H. West of the University of California, Berkeley, for numerous suggestions and corrections on an earlier draft of this paper.

¹ Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842–1917), ed., *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Taibei: Lantai shuju, 1972), 5.32. Cf. *Xunzi (Sbby)*, 5.11b.

² The dating of the various parts of this text is controversial. Some parts probably date from as late as the fourth century A.D., and some from as early as around 1000 B.C.

³ Dating from 100 B.C.

⁴ *Youyang zazu*, ed. Fang Nansheng (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.

The types of tattoo that are most often mentioned in early Chinese sources are: tattoo as one defining characteristic of a people different from the majority population, tattoo as punishment, tattoo of slaves, tattoo as facial adornment, tattoo in the military, and figurative and textual tattoo. Although the last two types are not always related, in *Youyang zazu* they seem to be taken up together and so they will not be treated separately here.

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 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 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 *qing* 黛 (to brand, tattoo), *mo* 墨 (to ink), *ci qing* 刺青 (to pierce [and make] green), *wen shen* 文身 (to pattern the body), *diao qing* 雕青 (to carve and [make] green), *ju yan* 沮顏 (to injure the countenance), *wen mian* 文面 (to pattern the face), *li mian* 烙面 (to cut the face), *hua mian* 畫面 (to mark the face), *lu shen* 鏤身 (to engrave the body), *lu 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), and *ci zi* 刺字 (to pierce characters). 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 are usually described as opprobrious; people bearing them are stigmatized as impure, deviant, and uncivilized. There does not ever seem to have been a wide-spread 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 inevitably subsequent ostracism from the society of law-abiding people. Another reason, of course, is the belief that the body of a filial person is meant to be maintained as it was given to him by his parents.

The exception to this negative textual assessment lies in the collection of informal narratives of Duan Chengshi, a collector of curious information who usually simply observes and records, who occasionally allows himself openly to reveal his sense of wonder. Tattoo does not give rise to revulsion in this unusual man; like much of what he observed and recorded he finds it fascinating

and marvelous; an aberration, perhaps, but a lovely one, often skillfully done and worthy of attention, and even of admiration.

TATTOO AS A DESCRIPTIVE FEATURE OF NON-HAN "BARBARIAN" TRIBES

The first kind of 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, extending all the way to Guangdong and Vietnam to the south, and to Zhejiang, and Jiangxi to the north.⁵ In some cases the comments made by Chinese literati about these people indicate a fairly disinterested curiosity, and sometimes they are straightforward records of the important details that separated these peoples from the majority (viz., civilized) people. Sometimes the tattoo is information peripheral to an anecdote or lesson of some kind. In the first section of *Zhuangzi*, a text of the third or fourth century B.C., for example, we read of the futility of a man of Song attempting to sell ceremonial caps to the short-haired, tattooed men of Yue.⁶ The *Hanshi waizhuan* contains an amusing anecdote about an emissary sent by the King of Yue to Jing 莊. A certain official of Jing asked to be allowed to receive the Yue emissary first, since the Yue were a barbaric people. The

⁵ For a readable, brief introduction to the various southern tribal groups, see Edward H. Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird: Tang Images of the South* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1967), 9–17, 48–78. Also see Heather Peters, "Tattooed Faces and Stilt Houses: Who were the Ancient Yue?" *Sino-Platonic Papers* 17 (April, 1990).

⁶ *Zhuangzi* (Sbck), 1.14b. The *Huainanzi* 淮南子, a collection of essays dating from before 139 B.C., 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 *Huainan honglie jijie* 淮南鴻烈集解, ed. Liu Wendian (Taibei: Wenshi zhe chubanshe, 1992), 1.19.

⁷ In the Zhou period, Jing was the area later to be 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, and Jiangsu provinces.

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 send an emissary to Yue, he for his part 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.⁸ The Tang commentator Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) notes that the Yue people have a custom of cutting their hair and tattooing their bodies as an apotropaic device, to ward off *jiao* 蛟 dragons.⁹ To do this they cut their flesh and darken it by rubbing red and green pigment into it.¹⁰ There is mention of this practice in some of the works contained in the great sixth-century literary anthology, *Wen xuan* 文選, as well. Zuo Si 左思 (ca. 250–ca. 305 A.D.), for example, writes admiringly of tattooed peoples in his "Wu du fu" 吳都賦 (Wu Capital Rhapsody) thus:

Warriors with tattooed foreheads
Soldiers with stippled bodies
Are as gorgeously adorned as the curly dragon
And are a match for the *kog* and the *tya*.¹¹

⁸ Han Ying 韓嬰 (Han dynasty), *Han shi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (*Xuejin taoyuan*), 8.1a.

⁹ On the *jiao* dragon, see M. W. de Visser, *The Dragon in China and Japan* (Amsterdam: Royal Academy of Sciences, 1913). Also see Schafer, *Vermilion Bird*, 217–21.

¹⁰ *Liji zhengyi* 12.16b. Pei Yin's 裴駢 (fl. 450) note to a *Shiji* passage reiterates this information; *Shiji* 4.115. Also see Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 B.C.), *Shuo yuan* 說苑 (*Sbby*), 11.5b. Also see Fan Ye 翁暉 (398–445), *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (*Zhonghua shuju*, 1965), 76.2861.

¹¹ Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–31), comp. *Wen xuan* (Taipei: *Zhongwen*, 1971), 5.75. Translation is from David R. Knechtges, *Wen xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1982), 419. It must be remembered that however admiring this is, the praise is of the type given to animals and fantastic creatures, not to people.

In Yang Xiong's 揚雄 (53 B.C.–18 A.D.) "Yulei fu" 羽獵賦 (Plume Hunt Rhapsody) the emperor orders swimmers from the tattooed peoples to catch water creatures for him.¹² It is not clear how the tattoo protected these swimmers; perhaps it functioned as a simple charm, but also possible is that the tattoo rendered 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, 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 done for the purpose of warding off harm in the water, but now is also decorative.¹³

More than seven thousand *li* to the northeast of the nation of Wo lies Wenshen guo 文身國 (the Land of Tattooed Peoples), according to the *Nan shi* 南史. The bodies of the inhabitants are tattooed like animal skins.¹⁴ In the *Sui shu* 隋書 we read that the women of Liujiu guo 流求國 similarly tattoo their hands with ink, in designs of insects and snakes, while the men remove all of their body hair.¹⁵ The *Xin Tang shu* lists a number of peoples who practice tattoo—among them are three tribes of the southern Man barbarians: the Xiujiao 繡腳 ("embroidered feet"), who tattoo patterns from the ankle to the calf, the Xiumian 繡面 ("embroidered face"), who tattoo their faces black, and the Diaoti 雕題 ("carved forehead"),¹⁶ who tattoo both face and body. Elsewhere

¹² *Wen xuan*, 8.134.

¹³ Chen Shou 陳壽 (233–97), *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Beijing: *Zhonghua shuju*, 1959), 30.854–56. For a translation of this *Wei zhi* passage, see Robert van Gulik, *Irezumi: The Pattern of Dermatography in Japan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982), 247. For a concise study of the history of tattoo in Japan, see Iizawa Tadasu's essay, *Genshoku Nihon irezumi taikan* 原色日本刺青大鑑, ed. Iizawa Tadasu and Fukudo Katshuiga (Tokyo: Haga shoten, 1973), 155–71, which also mentions (p. 159) the *Wei zhi* passage. Also see Eiichiro Ishida, *Japanese Culture: A Study of Origins and Characteristics* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1974), 43. See Donald Richie and Ian Buruma, *The Japanese Tattoo* (New York: Weatherhill, 1980), for a concise treatment in English of the Japanese tattooing tradition.

¹⁴ Li Yanshou 李延壽 (fl. 629), *Nan shi* (Beijing: *Zhonghua*, 1975), 79.1975.

¹⁵ Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643) et al., compilers, *Sui shu* (Beijing: *Zhonghua shuju*, 1973), 81.1824.

¹⁶ The Diaoti appeared in the "Wudu fu" passage above. The Diaoti people (or perhaps the practice of tattooing the forehead) are also mentioned in the *Chuci* 楚辭 poem "Zhao hun" 招魂. The speaker in that passage wonders why the soul would want

in the same text we read of the Kirghiz, whose men tattoo the hands as a mark of valor, and whose women tattoo the nape of the neck as a sign of marital status.¹⁷

Wang Bao 王褒 (1st c. B.C.) 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 houlets. 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."¹⁸ The specific customs described by the Chinese in these texts vary, but in most cases the purpose of recording the passages seems to be, as in this one, to highlight the separateness of the peoples who practice tattoo. This impression of otherness is heightened by the mention, besides tattoo, of activities such as eating with the hands, going about naked, wearing rings in the nose, and so on; from the point of view of a civilized Chinese, these are habits hardly distinguishable from those of animals. Tattoo is in fact the epitome of uncivilized practice, since it patterns the human body like the skin of an animal or water creature.

Among Duan Chengshi's entries on tattoo, there are only four that focus on tattoo as a practice of non-Han peoples, but, like the other types that he takes up, their inclusion is crucial to his overall contribution, as I shall discuss later. In these 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 the contemporary practice of tattoo by 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. Except in entry 303 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, the likes of which will sound familiar to readers of the passages I have mentioned above. At the end of entry 303 Duan does mention his belief, revealed elsewhere in *Youyang zazu* as well, that ignorance about tattoo, as about anything, is a most shameful thing. Though he intimates that he is an educator, he then provides a disclaimer, saying that he is just record-

to go to an inauspicious place where blackening the teeth, tattooing the forehead, and human sacrifice are practiced. See *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注, 9.328. See also *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽, ed. Li Fang et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 790.3501.

¹⁷ *Xin Tang shu*, 217B.6147. Also see *Xin Tang shu*, 222C.6328 for description of other tattooing practices.

¹⁸ *Wen xuan*, 51.710.

ing these notes as amusement. In the original order, this entry is the final entry of the tattoo section.

Entry 290

The craftsmanship of men of Shu 蜀¹⁹ is such that their tattoos are as clear as paintings. Some say that if one uses eyeblack, the color will be freshest; but I asked the slaves and they said you simply have to use good ink.

Entry 295

The Yue people are accustomed to being in the water. They always tattoo their bodies to avoid trouble from *jiao* dragons. Now, in the south the practice of tattooing the faces of men and boys is probably a practice inherited from the Diaotu tribe.²⁰

Entry 299

Also, according to the *Han shu*,²¹ 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 303

The *Tianbao shilu* 天寶實錄²² says that the Jiu 廣 mountains in Rinan 日南 country²³ are a connected range of who knows how many *li*. The Luo (lit., naked) people live there. They are descendants of the Bo people.²⁴ They

¹⁹ Modern-day Sichuan.

²⁰ See also *Taiping guangji* 太平御覽, ed. Li Fang et al. (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1991), 482.527.

²¹ Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 94A.3772.

²² According to *Xin Tang shu*, 58.1472, there was a book called *Xuanzong shilu* 玄宗實錄, and in Tuo Tuo 脱脱, (1313–55) et al., *Song shi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 203.5088, there is a notice of a book called *Tang Xuanzong shilu*, both in 100 *juan*. This *Tianbao shilu* could be a record no longer extant of the Tianbao period (742–56) of Xuanzong's entire reign (reg. 712–56).

²³ The Tang country of Rinan was in the northern part of present-day Vietnam.

²⁴ The Baimin, or Bomin (白民) were a legendary people mentioned in texts such as the *Shanghai jing* and the *Bowuzhi*. They had "white" (transparent) bodies and disheveled hair. See, for example, *Shanghai jing* 7.42a. Imamura Yoshio takes this, however, to mean *pingmin* 平民 (also *pingding* 平丁 or *botu* 白徒), terms used to denote untrained soldiers.

tattoo their chests with a design of flowers. There is something like purple-colored powder that they paint below their eyes. They remove their front two teeth and think 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²⁵ always said it was deeply shameful not to know even one thing. How much more so when punishments of the "inking" sort, such as the time that it was established by physiognomy that Qing Bu 鯨布²⁶ would become king, or that on the licentious a red flower will always be marked,²⁷ are plain to see in classical documents. I have in my idle hours recorded what I remember, to send to friends of like mind. It will amuse them and serve to unfurrow their brows.

TATTOO AS PUNISHMENT FOR CRIMES

For most of recorded history tattoo was considered a highly effective means of punishment in China. Although we do not have verifiable information about the earliest times, we can infer from texts written in the Zhou 周 (ca. 1100–256 B.C.) and the Han 漢 (206 B.C.–220 A.D.) that the tattooing or branding of criminals was probably as widely used in ancient times as it was in dynasties possessing relatively reliable historical records.²⁸

²⁵ This refers to Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536) of the Liang.

²⁶ This refers to Ying Bu 英布 (?–196 B.C.). As a youth he was told by a physiognomist that, once punished, he would eventually become king. He was 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 to power and eventually, in the Han, was "rehabilitated" and became king of Huainan. See his biography in *Shiji*, 91.2597–2608.

²⁷ 淫著紅花欲落. This section is not clear, and I am not sure how to translate it.

²⁸ It has been speculated that the character often used for tattoo (文 *wen*) in fact originally was 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*, 5. Also see *Jiaguwen bian* 甲骨文編 (Beijing: Zhongguo kexueyuan, 1965), 372–73. This is refuted by Mizukami Shizuo 水上青夫 in *Kokotsu kinbun jiten* 甲骨金文辭典 (Tokyo: Yuzankaku shuppan, 1995), 590; he says that 文 (*wen*) was originally a representation of a pattern or decoration on a person's clothing. For a discussion of the ancient

The effectiveness of tattoo and of other physically defiling punishments derived from the shame that a criminal felt upon re-entering society, having had a part of his or her body mutilated or even removed, and thus being permanently marked as a criminal. From early times until recently, there has been a strong stigma attached to failing to preserve whole one's physical body; he is seen to have failed in one of the most important filial duties, and has brought shame on his family, past, present, and future. In the beginning of the *Xiao jing* 孝經, 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 is received from one's parents.²⁹ This kind of weighty injunction rendered particularly fearful punishments such as the marking of the skin by tattoo or branding.³⁰

There are several passages in the *Shang shu* that mention tattoo as one of the ancient physical punishments for crime.³¹ In the section known as the "Tang shi" 湯誓 (The Oath of Tang),³² Yi Yin 伊尹 states to Tang 湯, the founder of the Shang dynasty, 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 and are not filial. Ministers who do not remonstrate with this type of ruler, trying to change his behavior, should all be punished by branding or tattoo.³³

The mention of the possibility of fining or of symbolic punishments to take the place of tattooing and the other corporal punishments makes it clear that there was indeed a penal practice in ancient China of cutting off or

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 bronze vessel, see Sheng Zhang 盛張, "Qishan xinchu Ying yi ruogan wentansuo," *Wenwu* 文物 1976.6: 40–42.

²⁹ *Xiao jing zhushu* 孝經注疏 (*Shisanjing zhushu*) (rpt., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 1.2545.

³⁰ For a good, brief discussion of this, see Anders Hansson, *Chinese Outcasts* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 22.

³¹ Several examples are to be found in *Shang shu zhengyi* 尚書正義 (*Shisanjing zhushu*), 3.130, in the "Shun dian," and in 4.139 in the "Gaoya mo."

³² The dating for this text is not clear, but it was written sometime during the Zhou dynasty.

³³ *Shang shu zhushu* 尚書注疏 (*Sbby*), 8.9a.

into various parts of the body.³⁴ 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* 鎔) of copper.³⁵ If the person deciding a case is not certain whether the criminal’s behavior warrants his feet or testicles being sliced off, he should fine the person three thousand ounces instead. 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.³⁶ 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.

In *Shangshu dazhuan* 尚書大傳 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” involved having criminals who committed various types of crimes wear an ochre-dyed cloth with no borders, hemp sandals, or a black cloth. The criminals should then be made to go live in their hometowns and suffer the shame of being looked down upon by the people.³⁷

There does not seem to be any way to prove that tattoo and other corporal punishments were widely used in remotest antiquity. The extant texts themselves 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 they were utilized widely, the desire to create an impression of a “Golden 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 and to emphasize the regular use of symbolic punishments in their stead. Suffice it to say that in the “Treatises on Punishment” (刑法志) and in other places in the dynastic histories from the Han dynasty onward there is confident 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 then states that tattooed criminals were sent to guard the city gates, those who had lost their noses 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.”³⁸ Although theoretically tattoo was abolished along with the other mutilating punishments by Emperor Wen 文帝 (reg. 179–155 B.C.) in 167 B.C., tattoo was apparently continued as a punishment during the Han³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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 persons be removed as far as possible from law-abiding, civilized people. For example, the “Punishment treatise” of the *Song shi* 宋史 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 the criminal were to commit another crime, he was immediately tattooed and enlisted in the military.⁴¹ 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 where 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

³⁴ For further information on corporal punishment and penal tattoo, in particular, see Derk Bodde and Clarence Morris, *Law in Imperial China: Exemplified by 190 Ch'ing Dynasty Cases* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), 76, 96–97.

³⁵ Following Legge on using “copper.” See James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 3 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1865), 604–6.

³⁶ See *Shangshu zhushu* 19.15a; *Shangshu zhengyi* 19.249. This passage is from the “Lu xing” 吕刑 (Punishments of Lu), a text that probably dates from the beginning of the Spring and Autumn period (722–481 B.C.).

³⁷ See *Shang shu dazhuan*, attrib. Fu Sheng (2nd-c. B.C.) (*Sbck*), 1B.8a–b; also *Xunzi jijie*, 12.9, where this passage is quoted.

³⁸ *Han shu*, 23.1091–92.

³⁹ For example, see *Han shu*, 23.1097.

⁴⁰ Empress Wu Zetian's 武則天 (reg. 684–705) tattooing of the female official Shangguan Wan'er 上官婉兒 (664–710) is an example of the actual continuation of the practice of tattooing as a form of punishment. See Liu Xu 劉昫 (887–946), comp., *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書, 51.2175, and *Xin Tang shu*, 76.3488.

⁴¹ *Song shi*, 201.5008.

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. In diameter each tattoo should not exceed five-tenths of an inch.⁴²

One of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) legal codes, the *Yuan dianzhang* 元典章, is a 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 will be tattooed on the face with the words “committed licentious acts two times” (犯姦二度) and banished.⁴³ Numerous examples are given to illustrate this type of punishment.

The *Youyang zazu* has, again, only four brief entries that pertain to tattoo as punishment. In these pieces Duan is mainly concerned with terminology and with re-recording interesting tidbits he had read in earlier works. In entries 296 and 301 he describes actual tattoos; the other two entries are concerned with substitute punishments. It is significant that there is no mention of current practice or of his personal familiarity with this type of tattoo.

Entry 296

There were five hundred⁴⁴ crimes punishable by tattoo as described in the *Zhouguan* 周官 (i.e., *Zhouli*). According to Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200), first the face was cut, and then ink was used to stop up the wound. The person with tattoos made thus by putting ink in wounds was made to guard the gates. According to the (*Shangshu* apocryphon) *Shangshu xing te fang* 尚書刑德放,⁴⁵ the so-called “*zhuolu*” 涠鹿 was a punishment wherein the person’s forehead was drilled into. The punishment called “*qing*” 黣 involved the use of a horse-branding iron to engrave people’s faces. Zheng Xuan

⁴² *Song shi*, 201.5020. For specific descriptions of tattooing and exiling, see 30.561, 30.576, 33.630, 33.635, 33.742, 34.641, 63.1382, 181.4415, and 201.5016–18.

⁴³ *Da Yuan sheng zheng chao dianzhang* 大元聖政朝典章, *Song fen shi congkan* 詠芬室叢刊 (1917), 45.16b.

⁴⁴ Following the “*Maoben*” (Mao Jin’s 毛晉 [1599–1659] edition of *Youyang zazu* [found in the *Xuejin taoyuan* 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* (*Shisanjing zhushu*), 36.242.

⁴⁵ Following *Taiping yulan* in reading *fang* 放 instead of *kao* 敗. This book is one of the apocryphal texts, and is not extant.

said, “Those who suffered the *zhuolu* and *qing* were referred to by people of their day as ‘people of knife and ink.’”⁴⁶

Entry 297

The *Shangshu dazhuan*⁴⁷ says that the “*Yu Shun* symbolic punishment” was to make people who had done a crime punishable by tattooing wear a black cloth instead. In the *Baihu tong* it says, “‘*mo*’ 墨 is tattooing on the forehead. It is an example of fire defeating metal.”⁴⁸

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* 春).⁴⁹

Entry 301

The *Liang Dynasty Miscellaneous Regulations*⁵⁰ 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.

TATTOO OF SLAVES AND CONCUBINES, AND TATTOO AS COSMETIC

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 naturally only pertain 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

⁴⁶ See also *Taiping yulan*, 648.2898.

⁴⁷ *Shangshu dazhuan*, 1B.8a–b. For this quotation, see also *Taiping yulan*, 648.2898.

⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁹ This refers to Emperor Wen’s abolition of the corporal punishments of tattoo and slicing off the nose and feet. See *Han shu* 23.1099.

⁵⁰ *Liang chao zalu* 梁朝雜律. *Sui shu*, 25.697–98 describes a work called the *Liang lü* 梁律, in twenty 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 crime. Also see *Taiping yulan*, 648.2898.

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, Pei Songzhi's 裴松之 (fl. 424) note to a passage in the biography of Yuan Shao 袁紹 (fl. 168–80) 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 wish to see them.⁵¹ We see more of the tattooing of slaves or servants in four entries of the *Youyang zazu*. Entry 288 is reminiscent of the passage just described; again, the jealousy and pettiness of a primary wife is the focus, but Duan dwells on the gory details of the tattooing to create a vivid image of the procedure. It is one of the rare passages in early Chinese literature that mentions using different colors to produce a tattoo of shades other than the usual dark blue-green or black. Entry 293 attempts to explain the provenance of certain contemporary facial adornment fashions. Entry 300, a brief informational piece, describes the exact placement, size, and shape of tattoos to do in the case of escaped slaves, but it does not specify to what period of time it refers. In the eerie little anecdote in entry 286, Duan proves that the marks of tattoo penetrate to the very bone. He probably means this to be the primary lesson of his anecdote, since he placed the piece 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 short piece Duan illustrates the mutual reliance of the dead and the living, giving central importance to the tattoo; originally a mark of shame that ended up benefiting both the dead man (by allowing 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 tattoo in entry 292 is originally caused by a seemingly innocent drunken accident. The second piece 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 are people who actually marked themselves to look as if they were tattooed; although the exact reason for doing this is not clear, it appears that it might be some sort of attempt to benefit

one's descendants. The usual stigma of a tattoo mark on the face is not mentioned in either of these cases.

Entry 286

My cousin⁵² Jang, during the Zhenyuan period (785–805) once stopped at Huang keng 黃坑.⁵³ 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 ("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 them deep in the ground, I will bring you good fortune." That 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 288

Fang Rufu's⁵⁴ (second) wife was of the Cui clan. She was jealous by nature.⁵⁵ The slave girls around her were not allowed to wear thick makeup or high coiffures. Each 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. Her makeup was slightly finer (than the others'). Mrs. Cui angrily said to her: "So, you like makeup, 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

⁵² "Cousin" here is 三從 (*san zong*); he was a relation with the same great-grandfather as Duan Chengshi.

⁵³ I am not clear to what place this refers. In Fujian province, Longyan county 龍巖縣, there is a Huangkeng mountain 黃坑山. Perhaps this is what is meant. See Imamura Yoshio, *Yuyō zasso*, 2: 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.

⁵⁴ Fang Rufu 房孺復 (753–94) was the son of the Prime Minister Fang Guan 房琯 (696–763). See *Jiu Tang shu*, 111.3325.

⁵⁵ Ms. Cui, the second wife of Fang (Fang had earlier harassed his first wife, *née* Zheng, to death), was famous for her cruel and jealous behavior. Fang's *Jiu Tang shu* biography mentions her whipping two servant girls to death out of jealousy, and having them buried in the snow. Although Fang, as the Prime Minister's son, had not been inconvenienced by the death of his first wife, this new scandal caused him to be demoted, and to live separately from his wife.

⁵¹ *Sanguo zhi*, 6.203.

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 scars left there were just like makeup.

Entry 293

The “flower seed marks” that women use to decorate their faces nowadays originated with the fashion of Shangguan Wan’er 上官婉兒 (664–710).⁵⁶ Prior to the Dali period (766–80), 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 300

The *Jin ling* (The *Jin Orders*)⁵⁷ says, “When a male or female slave has escaped for the first time, do a tattoo with copperas⁵⁸ like ink. Tattoo the two eyes. Later if he or she escapes again, tattoo on the two cheeks. For a third escape, tattoo a horizontal line below the eye. All of them should be one and a half inches long.”⁵⁹

Entry 292

In makeup fashions of today, high value is placed on the facial “mole.” For example, there is the 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.⁶⁰ Sun He favored her. Sun He was once dancing drunkenly and with abandon, when he accidentally cut Lady Deng’s cheek, drawing blood. Deng was delicate and weak, and became more and more miserable, so Sun He called the palace physician to mix some medicine. 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 to buy the white otter before they were able to mix the ointment. They added too much amber, however, so the ointment was in-

terior and the scar didn’t disappear. On Lady Deng’s left cheek there was now 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.⁶¹

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.

TATTOO IN THE MILITARY AND VOLUNTARY FIGURATIVE OR TEXTUAL TATTOO

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 “regularly teased his colleague Di Qing 狄青 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 was hoping respectfully to present you with a line (or column) of them.’ Wang was deeply ashamed.”⁶² The meaning of the exchange is not absolutely clear but 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 seem to have included lines of poetry, which suggests an appreciation of literature. The behavior 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 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 probably was not entirely acceptable, in polite society. It is very likely that a large percentage of tattoos, voluntary or not, 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

⁵⁶ For the relevant story about Shangguan Wan’er, the female official who was tattooed by Empress Wu Zetian, see Duan Gonglu, *Beihulu (Baibu congshu)*, 3.13b–14a.

⁵⁷ *Jin ling* 晉令: a book in forty *juan* that is not extant. See *Jiu Tang shu*, 46.2009.

⁵⁸ Copperas is a green hydrated ferrous sulfate.

⁵⁹ Also see *Taiping yulan*, 648.2898.

⁶⁰ Sun He 孫何 (224–53) was the son of Sun Quan 孫權 (d. 252), first ruler of the state of Wu (Wu Dadi 吳大帝 [reg. 222–52]).

⁶¹ A version of this story also appears in *Beihu lu*, 3.13b. Also see *Taiping guangji*, 218.425.

⁶² 王常戲狄之涅文云愈更鮮明狄云莫愛否奉贈一行伯庸大慚 Kong Pingzhong (fl. 1065), Kong shi tanyuan 孔氏談苑, in Wu Shenglan 吳省蘭 (*jinshi*, 1778), ed. *Yihai zuchen* 藝海珠塵, vol. 2 (Taipei: Yiwen, 1968), 2.13b.

or alive), to prevent recruits from escaping, and to mark prisoners of war.⁶³ Valiant individuals also tattooed themselves with oaths, proclaiming their wholehearted dedication to a particular nation, or to a certain military or personal cause.

Most of the readily available information on military tattoo comes to us from rather late Song and Ming texts, and most of them agree that the practice of military tattooing was either started or reinstated in the Later Liang Dynasty 後梁 (907–22). For example, Su Xun 蘇洵 (1009–66) tells us in his *Bing zhi* 兵制 (Military Regulations) that during the Five Dynasties (907–60) period, Liu Shouguang 劉守光 (fl. 911)⁶⁴ reinstated the rules of tattooing the face and hands. Thereafter “the entire realm took it as a common practice.”⁶⁵ In describing the general societal breakdown and rise of banditry in his own time Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–86) tells us that there was a practice of seizing and tattooing of 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.⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷

Zeng Cao 曾慥 (fl. 1136–1147) names the person responsible for allowing this to occur. He says that the general custom of tattooing soldiers' faces was begun by the First Emperor of (Later) Liang (Liang Taizu 梁太祖, reg. 907–14). This is reiterated in a passage found in Sima Guang's *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, where we read that in the first year of the First Emperor of Later Liang (907) the emperor had all of his soldiers tattooed with 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

⁶³ Iizawa Tadasu suggests that on a battlefield, where bodies are sometimes stripped of all belongings, a tattoo is a very valuable form of identification. See *Genshoku Nihon irezumi taikan*, 160.

⁶⁴ 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 reinstatement of tattooing.

⁶⁵ *Bing zhi* (Changsha: Shangwu, 1939), 5.44–47.

⁶⁶ *Sima wengong wenji* 司馬溫公文集 (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1937), 5.120–21.

⁶⁷ *Song shi* 193.4806. Also see Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578–1642), *Yehuo bian buyi* 野獲編補遺 (1869 ed.), 3.4a. This Ming author simply records that Song soldiers had their faces tattooed to prevent desertion.

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 bandits were reduced by seventy or eighty percent.⁶⁸

Tattoo was used by soldiers in some armies as a way to demonstrate 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 valor and to prove this valor both to others in one's own regiment and to enemies. We read that the armies of Shu tattooed themselves with the shapes of axes to give themselves renewed courage when they learned that they were going to be attacked,⁶⁹ and that others tattooed characters on their chests, proclaiming dedication to the nation.⁷⁰ Undoubtedly the best-known example of a military man bearing a tattooed oath is the famous Song general Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103–41), tragic and heroic subject of many plays and stories that center on his attempts to recapture northern China from the Jurchen barbarians. Shen Defu 沈德符 even claims that the practice of tattooing oaths in the military originated with Yue Fei,⁷¹ though as we have seen this was a practice before Yue Fei's time. Shen cites Yue Fei's tattooed oath as a sign of the ultimate in loyalty.⁷² Yue Fei's official biography says that he had a tattoo on his back that read, “Jinzhong baoguo” 繼忠報國 (serve the nation with absolute loyalty).⁷³ This bit of information was incorporated into many literary works, one of the most interesting of which is the *chuangqi* drama “Rushi guan” 如是觀. It has a vivid description of Yue Fei's mother crying as she pierces her son's skin using an embroidery needle and rubs the ink into the fresh wounds.⁷⁴ A

⁶⁸ *Zizhi tongjian*, (Sbby), 266.14b–15a.

⁶⁹ See Lu You 陸游 (1125–1210), *Lao xue'an biji* 老學庵筆記 in *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* 筆記小說大觀, vol. 3 (Taibei: Xinxing, 1974), 1.14b.

⁷⁰ For example, see Chen Fu 陳孚 (1240–1303), *An'nan jishi shi* 安南即事詩 (Skgs 2.32a/b. Also see Bi Yuan 畢沅 (1730–97), *Xu Zizhi tongjian* 續資治通鑑 (Sbby), 86.9a.

⁷¹ *Yehuo bian buyi*, 3.2b–3a. Also see 3.4b for more discussion of this practice.

⁷² *Bizhou xuan shengyu* 敝帚軒剩語 (Taibei: Guangwen, 1970), 1.43.

⁷³ See *Song shi*, 365.11393 and 380.11708. For another example of the same tattooed oath, see *Ming shi*, 272.6984.

⁷⁴ This *chuangqi* drama is attributed to the Ming playwright Zhang Dafu 張大復 (n.d.). See Du Yingtao, ed., *Yue Fei gushi xiqu shuochang ji* 岳飛故事戲曲說唱集 (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi, 1981), 246–50, esp. p. 249.

military-oath tattoo such as Yue Fei's carries no negative connotation; on the contrary, the man bearing this type of tattoo is, at least in the popular imagination, considered positively heroic.

A late nineteenth century text records details for procedures that are followed during a coroner's autopsy. In the examination of a dead body, two of the 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.⁷⁵ The two types of tattoo are noted separately; the tattoo as a mark of punishment and that used as decoration are not considered to be the same.

Here we are concerned with the second type of mark looked for by the coroner in the above passage, that is, the figurative tattoo, which unlike the brand, was often done voluntarily. In a vernacular narrative work that traces the history of the Five Dynasties, *Wudai shi pinghua* 五代史平話, the portion of the text treating the life of Liu Zhiyuan 劉知遠 (Gaozu, reg. 947–48), founder of the short-lived Later Han dynasty (947–50), is of particular interest as an example of this kind of tattoo. The *pinghua* account is historical fiction rather than official history; it portrays the subject of Liu's early life and career as it appeared in popular imagination starting at least in the Yuan dynasty. According to the *pinghua* story, in his youth, "Liu Zhiyuan went out, 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 "yakṣa who laughs at Heaven." This, along with his drinking and gambling, infuriated his family and Liu was kicked out of the house. Eventually Liu is humbled by a losing streak at gambling, and he sets out to reform himself. His worth is recognized by Li Jingru 李敬儒, a man skilled in physiognomy, who wants to help Liu to stay out of the army. Mr. Li, however, can only give Liu a job "in the back" feeding the horses, because of the unsightliness of his tattoos. Supernatural occurrences eventually convince Li of Liu's special qualities, so in spite of the latter's tattoos, he marries his daughter to Liu. This sets Liu Zhiyuan on the road to social rehabilitation and to his eventual seat on the dragon throne.⁷⁶ Liu Zhiyuan's official biography makes no mention of any of this, and in fact, the first thing it points out when discussing Liu's

character is that "when the emperor was young he was not fond of amusements, and was serious and taciturn."⁷⁷

Another literary treatment of tattooed heroes is that found in the sixteenth-century vernacular novel *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳. 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; those of the other four, however, are figurative tattoos. Shi Jin, for example, is known by all as the "Nine-patterned dragon" 九紋龍. His father, eager to help young Shi Jin in his goal of becoming a great martial arts fighter, not only engages weapons experts, but also hires a tattooist to work on his son. Jin is tattooed on his shoulders, arms, chest, and belly with a pattern of nine dragons.⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹ 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. She caressed his body with her slender jade hands."⁸⁰ The social inappropriateness and, in this

⁷⁷ *Jiu Wudai shi* 舊五代史 99.1321–41. Presumably this statement is meant to counter popular opinion to the contrary.

⁷⁸ *Shuihu zhuan* (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1932), 2.28. Perhaps the tattoo gave him a kind of spiritual strength, which completed the physical martial arts training received by the youth. For another description of Shi Jin's tattoos, see *Shuihu zhuan*, 2.25.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.90.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.7. It has been suggested elsewhere that the popularity of and fascination for figurative tattoo amongst certain social groups in Japan is a cultural phenomenon that has prevailed since the seventeenth or eighteenth century, as a direct result of the popularity of this novel in Japan. In particular, the responsibility lies with the famous woodblock-print artist Hokusai (1760–1849) and his pupils. They to a large extent created the visual images associated with the novel in Japan, which were later imported back to China. These artists portrayed as tattooed more heroes than those originally described as such in the novel; the gorgeous full-color illustrations in Japanese editions helped to fuel a tattoo craze in Japan. For a fascinating

⁷⁵ Huang Liuhong 黃六鴻 (fl. 1874–79), *Fuhui quanshu* 福惠全書 (Baohan lou 寶翰樓, 1879), 15.8b–9a.

⁷⁶ Anon. (Yuan), *Xinbian Wudai shi pinghua* (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1926), 1.4.