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WAILING BARBARIANS AND BLOODY TEARS: AFFECT AND SELF-OTHER IMAGINATION IN MEDIEVAL EASTERN EURASIA*

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A rich body of records from across medieval Eurasia documents a funerary practice among the steppe nomads: Mourners wailed and lacerated their faces, releasing blood-stained tears to commemorate the dead. Over time, as the act grew independent from a funerary context, it became an expression of strong emotions in the service of living people and their active agendas, such as pleading against injustice and rallying for war. This article explores the varied meanings of bloody tears in the Türk empire (552–630, 682–742), Tang China (618–907) and the interactions between the Jurchen empire (1115–1234) and Song China (960–1276). I argue that this emotional behavior evinced shifts in the imagination of self and Other across ethnocultural boundaries. By showing how emotions and identities shape one another, I offer an affective perspective on ethnicity as a dynamic process rather than a fixed structure.

KEYWORDS: *bloody tears, affect, self-other imagination, ethnicity, Türks, Tang, Song, Jurchens*

Over the vast span of two millennia (ca. 400 BCE–1300 CE), a rich body of records across Eurasia documents a funerary practice among the steppe nomads: Mourners wailed and slashed their faces or ears, letting blood-stained tears flow to commemorate the dead.[1] Chinese, Indian, and Roman chroniclers

* I thank the editors for their exceptional efficiency and guidance throughout the publication process. I am also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers who went above and beyond to provide valuable sources and share their insights.

[1] This ritual has been recorded in sources in at least eight languages, including Chinese, Greek, Sogdian, Runiform Turkic, Sanskrit, Latin, Arabic, and Armenian, in addition to some visual representations. This article focuses on sources in the first four languages for their geocultural relevance and detailed content. Several scholars have studied the phenomenon of

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observed the practice with curiosity; Türks engraved a description onto a monument; and Sogdians portrayed wailing men with facial scars in their funerary art. Over time, the act of face laceration grew independent from a funerary context and became an expression of strong emotions. This article focuses on occurrences of bloody tears in transregional interactions during the 500s–1300s, when eastern Eurasia witnessed the rise and fall of the Türk empire (the First Qaghanate, 552–630, and the Second, 682–742), China's transition from the Tang (618–907) to the Song (960–1276) periods, and the emergence of the Jurchen dynasty (1115–1234). I explore the disparate meanings of bloody tears in three interconnected contexts—the Türk empire, Tang China, and the Jurchen-Song interactions—and argue that this emotional behavior evinced shifts in the imagination of self and Other across ethnocultural boundaries.

The kind of face/ear laceration under discussion is a specific phenomenon, not a general reference to any form of mutilation on the head. The practice appeared in medieval sources with distinctive markers, such as a Eurasian steppe connection, a consistency in being self-performed, and an association with a few specific contexts, such as funerals and pleading, all marked by an unusual emotional intensity. It was clearly distinguishable from face-mutilating punishments, which were inflicted by others, and tattooing, which primarily aimed at cosmetic changes to the body.[2] In addition, "bloody tears" differed from *qi xue san nian* 泣血三年 (crying blood tears for three years), the famous Confucian ritual of mourning for parents. Medieval exegetes insisted that the Confucian term did not refer to literal bodily fluid, as self-mutilation was abhorred in Confucian precepts.[3]

Crucially, the act of laceration was recorded with a distinct linguistic profile, predominantly characterized by the use of the singular verb *li* 撕 (carving). Appearing only sporadically in ancient texts, *li* originally referred to cutting and peeling off the surface (*bo* 剝), a unique form of carving distinguished from other common types

bloody tears. See, for example, Egami Namio 江上波夫, "Yūrashia hoppō minzoku no sōrei niokeru reimen, taji, senhatsu ni tsuite" ユーラシア北方民族の 葬禮における撕面、截 耳、剪髮について, in Egami, *Yūrashia hoppō bunka no kenkyū* ユウラシア北方文化の研究 (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1951), 144–59; and Lei Wen 雷聞, "Ge'er limian yu cixin poufu: Cong Dunhuang 158 ku beibi niepan bian Wangzi ju'ai tu shuoqi" 割耳撕面與刺心剖腹：從敦煌158窟北壁涅槃變王子舉哀圖說起, *Zhongguo dianji yu wenhua* 4 (2003): 94–104. Most scholars have limited their discussions to the Tang, and I intend to extend coverage to the Song.

The object of laceration in this ritual had some variations. In most cases, it involved the face or ears, though some instances included both, occasionally extending to the hair. For an example with all three elements, see the Manichean-Sogdian fragment M 549, transcribed by Walter B. Henning, in Henning, "The Murder of the Magi," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1944): 144. Scholars generally agree that these varying details should be studied together as variations of the same paradigm. See, for example, Egami, "Yūrashia hoppō minzoku no sōrei niokeru," 150–51.

[2] Both practices bore different linguistic labels, such as *kemian* 刻面, *cimian* 刺面, *qingmian* 黥面, and *momian* 墨面. All could refer to face mutilation as a punishment, with the first two also denoting face tattooing. For a recent study of face tattooing (*kemian*, *cimian*) in the Song military, see Elad Alyagon, *Inked: Tattooed Soldiers and the Song Empire's Penal-Military Complex* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Asia Center, 2023), 39–59.

[3] See Kong Yingda's 孔穎達 (574–648) official commentary in "Liji zhengyi" 禮記正義, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), 9.273.

represented by *ke* 刻, *ci* 刺, and *hua* 劃.[4] The term *limian* 撕面 (face carving) gained consistent visibility only in the Tang, where it was deployed as a niche term denoting the steppe style of face laceration.[5] As I will discuss below, other voluntary forms of face mutilation existed, and some became associated with *limian*, which caused the semantic expansion of the term in post-Tang times. However, the steppe connection with this specific verb persistently recurs in late imperial sources and seems to have maintained its central status throughout.

Affect—the term central to my methodology—is a portmanteau concept that differs from and yet encompasses emotion.[6] Following recent work on integrating the social and bio-constructionism of human emotions, I define *affect* as a composite, holistic stream of experiences ranging from pre-discursive bodily movements to recognizable emotional responses.[7] Affect, in this sense, is an energetic force which simultaneously recruits somatic and mental resources while remaining thoroughly

[4] Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. 50s–120s), *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963), 92.18A. Furthermore, in ancient texts, 撕 was often represented by phonetic loan words such as 梨 and 劗. See, for example, *Guanzi* 管子 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2019), 3.187, and *Fangyan jianshu* 方言箋疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 13.459.

[5] According to my searches, the term *limian* was only sporadically used in existing pre-Tang texts, such as one instance in Yuan Hong 袁宏 (328–76), *Hou Han ji* 後漢紀, *Siku quanshu* edition (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983–86), 13.4b and another in Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445), *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 23.716 (see also note 17). The count rises to eighteen in Tang texts and reaches seventy in Song sources, with all Tang references consistently alluding to the steppe custom. I conducted all searches in *Chinese Classic Ancient Ebooks* (*Zhongguo jiben guji ku* 中國基本古籍庫) and *Chinese Classic Ancient Books Database* (*Zhonghua jingdian guji ku* 中華經典古籍庫) and refined the results through manual deduplication.

[6] Affect is neither a mere hypothesis nor something mysterious. I follow the work of affective scientists and psychologists who have substantiated the existence of affect in actual bodies and social relations. See the clinical analysis of affect by psychologists, e.g., Lisa Baraitser and Stephen Frosh, "Affect and Encounter in Psychoanalysis," *Critical Psychology* 21 (2007): 76–93; the elucidation of affective transmission by psychoanalytic theorists, e.g., Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), particularly her idea of "chemical entrainment"; and the study of mirror neurons as evidence for intersubjectivity by neuroscientists, e.g., Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia, *Mirrors in the Brain: How Our Minds Share Actions and Emotions*, trans. Frances Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[7] An exemplary integrative model I follow is Margaret Wetherell's "affective practice," a concept built on the massive integration of recent studies of affect across the social and cognitive sciences and the humanities. See Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2012). The integrationist view has also become popular with historians who consider emotion as a multimodal process on the basis of collapsing the dualisms of body/mind, psychological/social, and so forth. See William Reddy's use of "emotive" in Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Monique Scheer's "emotional practice," Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion," *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 193–220; Ruth Leys's discussion of meaning-making in affect, Leys, *The Ascent of Affect: Genealogy and Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); and the overall methodologies of Jan Plamper and Rob Boddice, in Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, trans. Keith Tribe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), and Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

embedded in sociocultural contingencies.[8] For example, wailing bloody tears is an emotional behavior with fully recognizable qualities, which places it on the surface where the affective flow is solidified. In the interest of studying a society, affect can be held across a crowd intersubjectively, and in fact, is never "wholly owned," but constantly "intersecting and interacting."[9]

Adopting the affective perspective requires one to go beyond a fixation on rationality and to acknowledge the existence of feelings and virtual possibilities as part of human experience. While the pre-discursive part of affect remains under the threshold of conscious contemplation and thus beyond the comfort zone historians are habituated to, the recurrence of a visceral emotive subject, like bloody tears, sends a resounding reminder that the operation of certain tempestuous forces lies at the heart of human experience, something historical authors felt and accordingly conveyed. Their interest in invoking bloody tears urges modern scholars to acknowledge the phenomenon's most immediate feature—affective intensity—reminding us that body-to-body communication always preceded the verbalization of meanings.

In the extended ontology that acknowledges the energetic beyond the hard, rational world, a society features an affective landscape "like the networks of pipes and cables," and affective energies concentrate around certain social contexts—in the current study, death rituals, socio-legal justice, and interregional warfare.[10] It is no accident that an intense bodily action like shedding bloody tears was repeatedly invoked in these contexts, as it served well as the "dominant performative mode" of heightened affective energies.[11] Even in cases when such an act did not factually happen, authors were prompted to use it as a trope due to the intensity they felt. This is why I do not dwell on the putative dualism of bloody tears, as they appear sometimes as an emotive act (e.g., a procedure of mourning that actually happened) and other times as a discursive motif (e.g., an expression of strong feelings that may or may not have involved the physical act). I do not value the former as a legitimate historical subject while dismissing the latter as a metaphor. Instead, I take both uses as clues to the affective experience, albeit in different forms: Both acts and words were enactments of emotive forces felt by historical figures. Rather than accept a hard demarcation between experience and representation, norms and "true feelings," I propose to explore historical emotions as the multimodal gestalt available to us in the sources.[12] As Rob Boddice puts it, historians should focus on "getting at the emotional

[8] I follow Klaus Scherer's idea of synchronous recruitment; see Scherer, "Unconscious Processes in Emotion: The Bulk of the Iceberg," in *Emotion and Consciousness*, eds. Lisa Feldman Barrett, Paula M. Niedenthal, and Piotr Winkielman (New York: The Guilford Press, 2005), 314. For a systematic discussion of affect as energy, see Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*.

[9] Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion*, 25.

[10] Nigel Thrift, "Intensities of Feeling: Towards A Spatial Politics of Affect," *Geografiska Annaler* 86B (2004): 58.

[11] Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion*, 89.

[12] For classic studies of emotional conventions premised on the separation of experience and representation, see Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," *The American Historical Review* 90.4 (1985):

experience of past actors" by taking them "at their word," rather than dismissing their language as mere fluff due to modern prejudice against it; Boddice's reminder is particularly on point for the seemingly exotic case at hand.[13]

Indeed, bloody tears call for a turn to affect, and the affective perspective facilitates an understanding of this emotional behavior by heeding its nuances beyond verbal normalization. The current study focuses on the changing meanings of bloody tears across contexts, a framing distinct from a typical interpretation centered around reason. In the latter, an act like lacerating one's face is foremost defined by its semantic and contextual meanings—such as cultural tradition and social circumstances. This, in turn, leads one to see each instance of bloody tears as an empirically singular event. For example, the bloody tears shed by a Türk chief at a funeral should be categorically different from those flowing on the face of a Tang woman pleading against injustice, even when they operated contemporaneously and were aware of each other's actions. In contrast to the reason-centric perspective, my analysis starts with the affective heat of blood-stained tears—something shared by the chief and the pleader—and recognizes the act as a process of actualizing meaning amid social interactions rather than a ready-made set of immutable significations.

A last note concerns the concept *ethnicity*, which refers to a relatively consistent framework which distinguished self from Other by claims of common ancestry, shared history, and certain cultural practices.[14] I endorse ethnicity as indispensable for modern scholars to adequately account for conceptions of human difference in premodern times, with an awareness that ethnicity was neither the only framework of identity nor necessarily the primary one.[15] My observation of fluctuations on the self-Other axis through an affective lens arises precisely from the understanding that historical identities operated with different normative saliences over time.[16] Additionally, *ethnocultural identity* refers to a self-concept based on both ethnic

813–36; and Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006). For efforts to bridge experience and representation, see William Reddy's coinage of the "emotive" in Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling* and Boddice, *The History of Emotions*, 78–79.

[13] Boddice, *History of Emotions*, 75, 163.

[14] John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6. For applications of this definition in medieval China, see Marc S. Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Nicolas Tackett, *The Origins of the Chinese Nation: Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); and Shao-yun Yang, *The Way of the Barbarians: Redrawing Ethnic Boundaries in Tang and Song China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018).

[15] Geraldine Heng holds a similar stance on race in medieval Europe. See Heng, *Invention of Race in European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Some scholars have questioned the applicability of ethnicity to premodern China, and this healthy skepticism has thus illuminated other identity axes; see, for example, Pamela K. Crossley, "Thinking about Ethnicity in Early Modern China," *Late Imperial China* 11.1 (1990): 1–35; and Naomi Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossings in Liao China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006). It is more productive, I believe, to channel these discoveries into a pluralistic understanding of historical identity politics without setting aside the formative impact of ethnicity.

[16] The concept of identity salience refers to the normative power that historical authors assigned to identity in organizing narratives and/or constructing causalities; this definition is inspired by the use of identity theory in sociology, in which salience is designated as the importance

groupings and a dichotomy between civilization and barbarity, as these two axes of identity were in constant intersection in medieval times.

Türk Bloody-Tear Diplomacy

The analysis of bloody tears must begin with the Türks, not only because they profusely shed blood-stained tears but also because they thrust the practice into the political spotlight across Eurasia. The Türks were known for using face laceration as a funerary custom, and more importantly, their rulers deployed it as a power tactic in interactions with China, Byzantium, and other nonnomadic Eurasian states. The staged presentation of shedding bloody tears and the coerced participation of non-Türks represent a deliberate use of emotional energy, hammering the self-Other divide in affective terms.

The special visibility of the Türks in Chinese-language sources closely matches the rise and fall of pre-Islamic Turkic regimes. A survey of the Chinese archive shows that at least forty narratives were composed between the sixth and tenth centuries, which covered the Türk Qaghanate (First, 552–630, and Second, 682–742) and its successor states, such as the Uyghur (744–840) and Khazar empires (630–965).[17] Among the face slicers, Türks or their Turkic-speaking neighbors (e.g., the Toquz-Oghuz) constituted the largest identifiable cultural group. In addition, some records of laceration mention the Sogdians, traders who were the main go-between in eastern Eurasia and important participants in the Turkic cultural matrix.

The salient focus on one specific people barely exists in pre-500s Chinese sources on bloody tears. While occasionally attributed to the Xiongnu, face laceration belongs to a trope used to describe unspecified nomads, or "barbarians" (*hu* 胡), wailing at the deaths of Chinese authorities.[18] Serving primarily to accentuate Chinese supremacy, the trope offers no specific clue for identifying these "barbarians" and does not suggest that face laceration might be a custom unique to these peoples. The faceless barbarians cried submissive, affectionate bloody tears only to prop up their sagacious Chinese overlords.

After the first Türk Qaghanate came into being in the 500s, face laceration became an active behavior clearly associated with the Türks and their concrete socio-political experiences. Multiple Chinese sources describe bloody tears as a funerary custom unique to the Türks. In the event of the death of a Türk aristocrat, his followers would perform an elaborate mourning ritual involving face mutilation and wailing. The *History of the Zhou* (*Zhou shu* 周書) includes the following record:

a person assigns to an identity and the probability of her acting it out in a situation. See Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke, "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63.3 (2000): 230.

[17] In my definition, each "narrative" features a distinct occurrence of bloody-tear shedding, though the total number of sources is higher due to duplication. The same principle applies to note 55.

[18] For an example of laceration among the Xiongnu, see Fan, *Hou Han shu*, 23.716. For an example among unspecified barbarians, see Chen Shou 陳壽 (233–97), *San guo zhi* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 16.513. Scholars have also discovered human figurines marked as *hu nu* 胡奴 (barbarian slaves) with facial scars dated to the 200s. See Hsing I-tien 邢義田, *Hua wei xin sheng: huaxiang shi, huaxiang zhuan yu bihua* 畫為心聲：畫像石，畫像磚與壁畫 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 227.

> The body of the deceased is kept in a tent. The children, grandchildren, relatives, and male and female members of the family venerate [the deceased] by each killing sheep and horses and presenting them in front of the tent. [They then] walk the horse around the tent seven times, come to the tent door, slash their faces with knifes, and wail, with blood and tears streaming down. They eventually stop after performing the procedure seven times. […] On the day of burial, family members perform sacrifices, walk the horse around [the tent], and slash their faces, just as they do in the ritual for the initial [moment of] death.
>
> 死者，停屍於帳，子孫及諸親屬男女，各殺羊馬，陳於帳前，祭之。繞帳走馬七匝，一詣帳門，以刀撏面，且哭，血淚俱流，如此者七度，乃止。[…]葬之日，親屬設祭，及走馬撏面，如初死之儀。[19]

The Türks' self-narratives corroborate Chinese documentation, and one source dated to 735 speaks squarely to this issue. Known as the "Bilgä Qaghan Inscription," the text was engraved on the funerary stele dedicated to Bilgä (684–734), the third qaghan of the second Türk empire. It describes how Türk subjects expressed their grief by shedding bloody tears at the funeral of Bilgä Qaghan:

> So many people cut their hair and ears.
> bunça bodun saçın kulkakın bıçdı.[20]

Face laceration did not merely remain a practice internal to the Türk community, however, as their rulers deployed—indeed, flaunted—this practice in meetings with other Eurasian regimes. Chinese and Byzantine chroniclers recorded bloody-tear diplomacy as memorable moments in the two states' dealing with the Türks. The two sources I discuss below are both from the 570s, when the newly founded qaghanate was rapidly becoming a formidable power. The Türks captured much of the western steppe, vanquished the Hephthalite Empire, and built strategic contacts with the Sasanians and Romans. In the east, they subjugated a series of regimes, including parts of China, which at this time was divided among competing statelets amid the "Period of Disunity" (220–589). The Northern Zhou, for example, was one regional "Chinese" state that paid tribute to the Türk Qaghanate.[21] On a diplomatic visit in 572, the Zhou envoy, Wang Qing 王慶 (fl. 570s), came upon the sudden death of the Türk ruler, Mughan Qaghan (r. 553–72). The new qaghan demanded that

[19] Linghu Defen 令狐德棻 (582–666), *Zhou shu* 周書 (hereafter ZS; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1971), 50.910. This passage appears with slight, negligible variations in multiple Tang sources, such as the *Bei shi* 北史and *Tong dian* 通典.

[20] For the transcription of the text, see Hao Chen, *A History of the Second Türk Empire* (ca. 682–745) (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 214; see also Talat Tekin, *A Grammar of Orkhon Turkic (Uralic and Altaic)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1968), 246.

[21] Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), 127–31.

Wang join Türk subjects in mourning with bloody tears, but Wang firmly declined, an act of resistance later praised by the Zhou ruler.[22]

While Wang Qing had the audacity to reject the Türk request, others complied. Menander Protector (fl. 500s) recorded that in 575–76, the Byzantine emissary Valentinus wailed bloody tears at the funeral of Silziboulos (fl. 500s), a ruler of the western part of the Türk Qaghanate. Valentinus's mission was to reinvigorate Roman–Türk relations at a time when the Türks had grown suspicious of Byzantium following the latter's secret alliance with the Avars, an enemy of the Türks. Chastised by Türk authorities for this treachery, Valentinus immediately agreed to lacerate his face, a gesture that appeased the Türks and helped to further negotiations.[23]

Türk rulers obviously wielded bloody tears as an instrument of intimidation and submission, which Byzantine and Chinese chroniclers clearly understood to be a power tactic. In Menander Protector's phrasing, Valentinus cut his face to "follow" (*hepomenous* ἑπομένους) the "custom" (*nomōi* νόμῳ) "among you" (par' hymin παρ' ὑμῖν), drawing attention to his act as a gesture of subservience and compliance.[24] Fu Yi 傅奕 (555–639), a Tang official who served during the Period of Disunity, recollected that previous envoys sent by the regional states had to "lacerate their faces as if they were the servants of the [Türk] regime" (撈面如國臣).[25] Except for the heroic Wang Qing, numerous Chinese officials accepted the position of servant as a condition of their negotiations with the Qaghanate.

The Türks employed this method only when the Qaghanate was strong enough to tip the power balance in its favor. In the examples above, both China and Byzantium needed an alliance with the Türks. The Northern Zhou was one of many tributary states of the Qaghanate, and Byzantium wanted the Türks as an ally against Sasanian Iran. The case of Bilgä Qaghan provides a contrasting example. A Tang envoy named Li Quan 李佺 (fl. 730s) was present when the bloody tears were shed, as recorded in the Bilgä Qaghan inscription, but no evidence indicates that Li joined the Türks in lacerating his face or that he was asked to do so.[26] At the time, the unified Tang empire asserted unilateral dominion over much of the steppe, including the second Türk Qaghanate, and Bilgä conceded after some thwarted attempts to claim parity.[27] The Türk state was no longer strong enough to contend with China for dominance.

[22] ZS 33.575–76.

[23] Menander Protector, *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, ed. and trans. Roger C. Blockley (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1985), Fragment 19.1, 177. See also the analysis in Mark Whittow, "Byzantium's Eurasian Policy in the Age of the Turk Empire," in *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, c. 250–750*, eds. Nicola Di Cosmo and Michael Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 282.

[24] Menander Protector, *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, 177. My analysis is inspired by comments from one of the anonymous readers and Dorota Dutch.

[25] Du You 杜佑 (735–812), *Tongdian* 通典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), 200.5473.

[26] For Chinese records on Li's attendance at the funeral, see Liu Xu 劉昫 (888–947), *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (hereafter JTS; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 194a.5177.

[27] Jonathan Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors: Culture, Power, and Connections, 580–800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 108.

Despite their grudging participation in the bloody-tear ritual, the agriculturalist neighbors of the Turkic world resented the practice, condemning it as a nomadic cruelty. Princess Ningguo (d. 791) of the Tang dynasty, wife of Emperor Tängridä Bolmish Il Itmish Bilgä Qaghan (747–59) of the Uyghur qaghanate, was forced to lacerate her face at her husband's funeral, a request she reluctantly accepted only to avoid being buried as a human sacrifice. The Tang princess expressed her discontent vocally, implying that both customs were woefully barbaric to her.[28]

A number of Eurasian religions prevalent during this time also disapproved of bloody tears, asserting a distinction between civilization and barbarism. The Confucian tradition famously disparaged any form of bodily mutilation, because the body was a parental gift to be carefully preserved by a filial child.[29] While face-slashing Türks were present in some images of Zoroastrian funerals, Zoroastrian doctrines clearly condemned the act as detrimental to mourners as well as the deceased (Figures 1 and 2).[30] Manichaeism, too, regarded the behavior as a cultic element that deviated from orthodox guidelines.[31] Taken together, the religious verdicts on bloody tears share the same condescension towards the "barbaric" deviation from a presumed civility.[32]

The Türks nevertheless persisted in flaunting bloody tears in interstate politics, effectively pummeling a self-Other distinction into everyone's feelings. During an instance of bloody-tear diplomacy, affective energies flew into cementing the intergroup difference, and the confrontation between Türks and non-Türks blasted forth with an aggressive "affective grip."[33] The central goal of the Türk authorities

[28] JTS 195.5202.

[29] *Xiaojing Zheng zhushu* 孝經鄭注疏, ed. Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞 (1850–1908) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), 1.13.

[30] Some famous examples include a sixth-century Sogdian funerary bed preserved in the Miho Museum and a mural in Temple II in the Sogdian site of Panjikent. For an introduction to these materials, see Judith Lerner, "Central Asians in Sixth-Century China: A Zoroastrian Funerary Rite," *Iranica Antiqua* 15 (1995): 179–90; and Boris Marshak, "La thématique sogdienne dans l'art de la Chine de la seconde moitié du VIe siècle," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres Année* 145.1 (2001): 227–64. For the Zoroastrian critique, see Frantz Grenet, "Zoroastrian Themes on Early Medieval Sogdian Ossuaries," in *A Zoroastrian Tapestry: Art, Religion and Culture*, ed. Pheroza J. Godrej and Firoza Punthuakey Mistree (Middletown, NJ: Grantha Corporation, 2002), 92.

[31] Mourning with bloody tears was discussed in a Manichaean-Sogdian manuscript, Fragment M 549. David Scott points out that the act was associated with the cult of Goddess Nana, a conclusion shared by Frantz Grenet and Boris Marshak in their study of Sogdian materials. See Scott, "Manichaeism in Bactria: Political Patterns and East-West Paradigms," *Journal of Asian History* 41.2 (2007): 119; Grenet and Marshak, "Le Mythe de Nana dans L'Art de la Sogdiane," *Arts Asiatiques* 53 (1998): 5–18.

[32] Face laceration also appeared in some Buddhist images, notably in one Dunhuang mural on the Buddha in nirvana. See Lei, "Ge'er limian yu cixin poufu," 95–96. The face slicer has obvious physical markers of Inner Asian ethnicity, but it is unclear whether Buddhism opposed the practice in the same way as other religions, given that scriptures written in blood claimed a unique sanctity in the tradition. See Jimmy Yu, "Blood Writing as Extraordinary Artifact and Agent for Socioreligious Change," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 7.3 (2020): 1–9.

[33] Nick Crossley, *The Social Body: Habit, Identity and Desire* (London: Sage, 2001), 102.

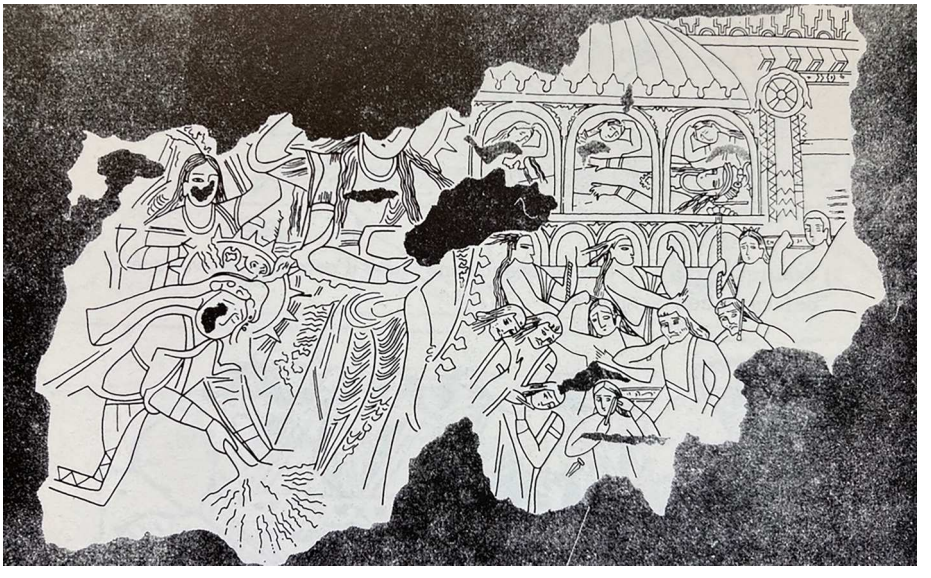

Fig. 1. Mourning scene from Temple II, Panjikent. After Frantz Grenet, *Les Pratiques Funeraires dans L'Asie Centrale Sedentaire: De La Conquete Grecque a L'Islamisation* (Paris: Centre National De La Recherche Scientifique, 1984), pl. XLVII.

Fig. 2. Close-up of a mourner's scarred face, mourning scene from Temple II, Panjikent.

was to seek the other party's subordination while presenting themselves as a striving interstate equal—if not a new superpower. And subordination only occurred on an us-them premise. The practice of shedding bloody tears marked the selfhood of the Türks, and its ritual setting particularly helped articulate an in-group/out-group division.[34] While voluntary participation might suggest comingling, the forced

[34] For the function of rituals to distinguish in-groups from out-groups, see Mona M. Abo-Zena, "Rituals," in *Encyclopedia of Identity*, vol. 1, ed. Ronald L. Jackson II (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2010), 646. Skaff offers a detailed analysis of the role of rituals in eastern Eurasian diplomacy, see Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors*, 148–55.

participation of a non-Türk diplomat indicated the opposite—a stark acknowledgement of the Türk identity from a stance of inferiority. From the perspective of agriculturalist states, the us-versus-them divide also implied a civilization-barbarity hierarchy, which the Türks subverted by doubling down on the "barbaric" practice of face laceration and imposing it on "civilized" diplomatic visitors.

The Türk authorities achieved their goal by deliberately manipulating affective energy. The staged presentation of bloody tears compelled everyone to lock onto the visceral shock of facial disfigurement and gory wounds, pressing them into a due response. In the current case, the response could only be compliance, given the foregrounding of compulsion. The self-Other difference was thus not only normative but indeed coercive since there was political duress. A diplomat attending the funeral swam into the affective zone centering on the situation and immediately latched onto the central normative structure under its staunch, tightening affective pull.[35]

In the history of bloody tears, the Türk episode is unique for its overt purposefulness. The Türk elites deliberately employed the ritual act of face laceration to drive towards a conscious aim—"our" domination over "them." The governing authorities practically spelled out the meaning of the bloody tears. This conspicuous control does not exist in the following two episodes on Tang and Song, when the trope of shedding bloody tears circulated openly in society as a potential act, which people chose to adhere to or flinch away. The voluntary responses to this emotional act, therefore, offer insight into the salience of certain social norms, particularly in the fluctuating relationship between selfhood and Otherness.

Pleading with Bloody Tears in the Tang

The escalating interregional tensions between pastoralist and agriculturalist regimes drove up the burst of sanguineous lachrymosity in Tang records with a robust Turkic connection. Nevertheless, the act acquired new meanings in its new context. Instead of remaining attached to the Türks as their exclusive feature, bloody tears blended with another prevalent social action—a pleading strategy—which spread across various communities on both sides of the civilization-barbarity divide. The transcommunal vitality of bloody tears attested to a considerable flexibility in Tang self-Other imaginations.

Bloody tears stood out prominently in Tang social landscapes, and the most famous example involved a member of the highest echelon of the Tang elite, Prince Li Chengqian 李承乾 (618–45). Known as a Turkophile, Li spoke the Türk language, dressed in the Türk style, recruited retainers with a physical resemblance to the Türks, and organized them into Türk-style regimental units. He even went so far as to conduct a mock Türk burial, lying down as if he were a dead qaghan and having his followers gash their faces and wail bloody tears.[36]

Li's mimicry of Türk customs demonstrates the possibility that bloody tears might traverse a significant division, in this case between the barbaric Türks and

[35] For the swimming metaphor, see Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion*, 140.

[36] Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–72), *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (hereafter XTS; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 80.3555–6.

the ruler of the civilized world.[37] The increasing tendency of bloody tears to flow across ethnocultural lines is evident in their new social function as a pleading strategy, no longer associated with death but in the service of living people and their active agendas. The transformed context of the bloody tears maintained, however, the same hierarchy between an authority and a subordinate and the aggressive eagerness of the underdog who sought to fulfill their own interests.

Blood-stained tears often occurred among those who pleaded for political placement. For example, various chiefs in the Western Regions slashed their faces and wailed while sending off Guo Yuanzheng 郭元振 (656–713), a Tang official leaving the position of Protector-General of the Western Regions (*Anxi duhu* 安西都護). The Central Asian chiefs acted so because they wished to retain Guo, and to the imperial audience, their emotional behaviors attested to Guo's exemplary performance during his tenure.[38] Tian Chengsi 田承嗣 (705–79), a regional military governor intent on becoming the ruler of Weizhou and Xiangzhou, had some of his generals lacerate their faces in front of the inspector sent by the central government and successfully obtained the title he desired.[39] Similarly, some residents in Weizhou persuaded the court to appoint Yang Qiao 陽嶠 (fl. 670s–710s) as their prefect by slashing their ears.[40]

Notably, in the examples above, the ethnocultural identity of face slicers was increasingly obscured and tucked into the background. While the chiefs in the Western Regions bore perceptible steppe connections, those who pleaded for Tian Chengsi and Yang Qiao appeared with no ethnic identification. Pockets of steppe populations indeed existed in northwestern borderlands such as Weizhou and Xiangzhou, but the narrators felt no need to identify anyone with ethnonyms to make sense of the stories. In other words, those who slashed their faces/ears did not have to be "barbarians."

Detachment from a steppe origin was even more visible in another purpose fulfilled by bloody tears—to express grievance and appeal for redress. Those who pursued justice with bloody tears could be steppe or Sinitic peoples. Ashina Huseluo 阿史那斛瑟罗 (fl. 670s), a Türk who submitted to the Tang and took residence in the Chinese capital, was once framed by Lai Junchen 來俊臣 (651–97) for plotting rebellion. Ashina gathered a few dozen of his followers to gash their faces, a move that theatrically broadcast his loyalty and protested against injustice, eventually saving him from execution.[41]

[37] The Tang imperial house emerged from a Sino-Turkic geo-ethnic background, and Sanping Chen argues that the Turkic lifestyle might as well be a norm among the Li family in the early years. See Chen, *Multicultural China in the Early Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 15–16. While the Turkic heritage might not have been alien to the Tang royals in their personal lives, it was not something they flaunted in their public image. In this sense, Li Chengqian's behaviors still certainly stood out.

[38] *Quan Tang wen*全唐文 (hereafter QTW), ed. Dong Gao 董誥 (1740–1818) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 391.2355.

[39] JTS 141.3838.

[40] JTS 185b.8413.

[41] JTS 186a.4840.

Many others who protested mistreatment by cutting their heads were Chinese subjects. Zhang Guang 張光 (fl. 720s) severed an ear at the imperial court to save his brother Zhang Yue 張說 (667–731), who he believed was wrongly accused by a censor.[42] After Pei Mian 裴冕 (703–70) was framed and exiled from his ministerial position, some of his retainers protested by slashing their ears.[43] Three women, Yan Zhending 顏真定 (654–737) and her two sisters, staged a protest by severing their ears to save their uncle from a wrongful conviction. Pei Mian and Yan Zhending descended respectively from the Pei Clan of Hedong and the Yan Clan of Langya, some of the most entrenched aristocratic families and self-professed heirs of classical Chinese culture.

In response, the Tang state issued multiple orders to prohibit self-mutilative pleading, which further indicated the prevalence of the practice. Three bans book-ended the Tang, appearing in the early years of the dynasty (639) and in its declining days (834, 852). All orders were issued as part of the state penal code, stipulating that anyone who "imposed harm on themselves" (*zixinghai* 自刑害) to appeal for redress would be punished with forty strokes.[44] The 834 order specifically censures the behavior of "appealing by cutting ears" (*jinzhuang you lier* 進狀又劈耳).[45] None of the bans invokes any ethnonym, indicating that they were intended for the entirety of the population rather than specific groups.

Harkening back to the cases of Pei and Yan, readers may wonder if they mimicked the "barbarians" or engaged their own form of self-mutilation which merely bore some similarities with contemporaneous Eurasians. Indeed, mutilation to the head was not foreign to the Sinitic majority in pre-Tang times. For example, *ge'er* 割耳 (ear cutting) signified a kind of self-harm often performed by women who wished to demonstrate "sincerity" (*cheng* 誠) or wifely virtues, as evidenced in phrases such as *ge'er zhi cheng* 割耳之誠 (ear-cutting sincerity) and *ge'er zi shi* 割耳自誓 (attest [to one's own account] by cutting one's ears).[46] From this gendered association, Yan Zhending's ear cutting is certainly related to this tradition and by no means an invention wholly derived from foreign ideas.

Nevertheless, I have observed that indigenous practices became conflated with the Turkic traditions of bloody tears, and the two gradually enveloped each other in a shared social presence during the Tang. Linguistic evidence affords clear signs of this transformation. For one, the various acts of face/ear cutting came together under the umbrella of grievance complaints as their unified purpose. The various verbal phrases, particularly *ge'er*, *li'er*, and *limian*, all became legitimate pleading acts preceding the term "seeking redress for a grievance" (*su/song/cheng yuan* 訴/訟/稱冤). This association was new for both verbs, *li* and *ge*. No "barbarian"

[42] JTS 97.3051.

[43] JTS 117.3398.

[44] Wang Pu 王溥 (922–82), *Tang huiyao*唐會要 (hereafter THY; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1955), 41.745.

[45] Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (962–1025), *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 160.338.

[46] See, for examples, Datong Beichao yishu yanjiuyuan 大同北朝藝術研究院 ed., "Bei Qi Yuan Yan qi Yu shi muzhi" 北齊元讞妻于氏墓誌, in *Beichao yishu yanjiuyuan cangpin tulu: muzhi* 北朝藝術研究院藏品圖錄：墓誌 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2016), 112; JTS 193.5138.

would *li*-lacerate their faces to make a plea until the Tang, and rarely did any Chinese person (particularly a man) *ge*-slash their ears to protest injustice before this point.

Two cognate linguistic phenomena occurred, both involving the rise of neologisms. First, a phrase such as *ge'er suyuan* 割耳訴冤 (cutting ears to seek redress for a grievance) appeared in Tang writings as a new coinage.[47] This means that the act of ear cutting specifically associated with *ge'er* had acquired a new social purpose in grievance redress, expanding beyond its previous association with the female gender and displays of sincerity. Second, the term *li'er* 撕耳 became a set phrase in formal statutory vocabulary describing acts of self-mutilation during grievance complaints.[48] Note that the term was coined specifically with *li*—the "barbaric" cutting—not *ge*, the more prevalent verb for indigenous practices of self-harm.[49] These new designations transcended the linguistic norms of the self-Other line.

The expanded lexicon, the transverse movement of behavioral tropes, and the sheer volume of accumulated writings together lead to another observation: During the Tang, interest was piqued in textualizing conspicuous self-mutilation of the head. While it would be imprudent to hastily conclude that heightened attention represented an actual flourishing of the practice, the interest itself already poses a notable contrast with the Song. Records on face/ear mutilation among contemporary people are absent from the Song archive. The term *li'er* indeed appears once in the *Unified Penal Code of the Song* (*Song xing tong* 宋刑統) as a form of self-harm to be prohibited. But the majority of the article, including language and content, largely reiterated the corresponding Tang law.[50] Without corroboration from the type of individual narratives prevalent in Tang sources, it remains unclear where the Song reference falls on the spectrum between an actual governmental concern with contemporary behaviors and a mere inheritance of existing terminology.[51] While it is uncertain if Song

[47] For examples, see appearances of *ge'er suyuan* in Tang inscriptions, such as in Zhao Yue 趙鉞 (1778–1849) and Lao Ge 勞格 (1819–64) eds., *Tang shangshusheng langguan shizhu timing kao* 唐尚書省郎官石柱題名考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 3.105; and QTW 344.2071.

[48] The first cluster of *li'er*—all four of them—all appear in Tang legal writings; see QTW 81.847, 966.10038. So far as I can tell, there is only one earlier precedent, which appeared in the "Xiao nü Cao E bei" 孝女曹娥碑 by Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–63). However, the original stele was destroyed long ago, and various versions of the inscription have circulated widely. It remains unclear whether the term *li'er* was present in the earliest pre-Tang version because at least one latter iteration (recreated in 1093 on a new stele) did not include the term. The allegedly original rubbing is housed in the Liaoning Provincial Museum, and the 1093 stele is still preserved in the Cao E Shrine in Shangyu.

[49] A search in *Chinese Classic Ancient Ebooks* shows that *ge'er* was associated with twenty-nine cases of self-harm by Sinitic individuals with no apparent connections to the steppe, of which twenty-six were women. This contrasts with *li*, which rarely appears in this context except in the Tang legal codes I discuss above.

[50] Dou Yi 竇儀 (914–66) et al., *Song xing tong* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 24.377; and *Tang lü shuyi jian jie* 唐律疏議箋解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 24.671. It is also common knowledge among legal historians that *Song xing tong* was largely based on a reproduction of Tang laws. See, for example, Xue Meiqing 薛梅卿, *Song xingtong yanjiu* 宋刑統研究 (Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 1997).

[51] Among the scarce specific mentions of self-mutilation in Song records, the practice of "nailing one's hand" (*dingshou* 釘手) stands out, which seems to have shifted the focus from the head to the hands and made self-harm less conspicuous. See Xu Song 徐松 (1781–1848), *Song Huiyao ji gao* 宋會要輯稿 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1976), *juan* 226, *xingfa* 刑法 3.16.

people refrained from mutilating their faces when pleading, it is clear that their interest in documenting such a behavior had considerably waned.

The mutual entanglement of head-mutilative acts in the linguistic-textual world indicates that participants experienced a unifying affective factor. While the activities were separated contextually from a reason-centric point of view, the intensity, perturbance, and shock springing from bodily mutilation constituted the palpable common core that tied them together in the immediate experience of historical actors. Nearly all witnesses of face laceration implied that they felt sensibly assailed and thereby compelled into reacting. The causal relation at the forefront is that one body affected another, which was then followed with actions and rationalizations. The efficacy of bodily mutilation was loud and clear in the affective register, driving a witness to process, accept, or reject the use of it.

The choice of individuals from diverse backgrounds to embrace the potency of bloody tears for their own purposes implies an acknowledgment of a unity in the affective, which entailed the straight transference of others' sensations to convey one's own. The affective practice which buoyed bloody tears opened a field for assembling and reconfiguring meanings. This recruiting process, as shown, was not defined by the self-Other axis; instead, the affective energy overpowered the configuring influence of this normative structure. From an individual perspective, the emotional heat of shedding bloody tears resembled a "shared feeling voyage," where the practitioner felt empowered and inspired to serve their own purposes, despite an awareness of the fraught Eurasian connection in head-mutilation.[52]

The relative ease in achieving an affective transference indicates that the framework of identity and ethnocultural Otherness had a comparatively low normative strength. This is not to imply, however, that such a structure did not exist in the Tang. Some Tang subjects adopted self-mutilation in protest precisely because of the stigma that this "barbaric" act held in defying mainstream norms. For example, Li Chengqian's most intense Turkophile behaviors occurred after his father, Emperor Taizong, executed his same-sex paramour.[53] But the fact that a "barbaric" practice became so well blended with the self-expression of numerous Tang subjects indicates how bloody tears had migrated successfully. The fluidity of affective communication, indeed, was a testament to the strength of the normative.[54] Affect opens a new window onto the dynamics of identity politics that otherwise could only be accessed by words in their tendency to solidify meanings.

[52] Daniel Stern, *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 172.

[53] For the liberating effect of mimicking an ethnic Other, see Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China*, 12; for Li Chengqian's experience, see Jack Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty: On Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010), 44–45.

[54] For the discussion of the normative, see Lauren Berlant, "Thinking about Feeling Historical," *Emotion, Space and Society* 1 (2008): 4.

Jurchen Bloody Tears Beheld by the Song

The plethora of bloody tears in social scenes quickly evaporated as China transitioned from the Tang to the Song. Not only did mentions of self-mutilation subside in accounts of strategies of remonstrance, the diversity of steppe ethnic groups also vanished from the stage for performing bloody tears, leaving but one actor in the spotlight: the Jurchens. To a great extent, the wailing of bloody tears became an exclusive marker of the Jurchens and signified their salient ethnicization under the Sinitic gaze.

Statistics shed light on the Song distinction. The number of narratives addressing bloody tears in the period from the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries noticeably drops to around ten, and the majority are Chinese-language sources focusing on only the Jurchens.[55] These records consistently employ the verb *li*, as in either *limian* or *li'e* 撩額 (lacerating the forehead), showing a linguistic consistency with the earlier records concerning the Türks.

Two clarifications should be entered at this point. The term *limian* witnessed some expansion in the Song with two minor divergences. One case involved a Buddhist hagiography where the Chan Master Baozhi 寶志 (418–514) slashed his face and revealed their true form as Guanyin.[56] In another, the Song poet Lu You 陸游 (1125–1210) used the term to describe a Tang woman who gashed her face to refuse remarriage.[57] But these two are among fifty-five occurrences of *limian* in Song writings, and the predominant majority maintain the same focus on steppe-related accounts.[58]

Second, the Song authors wrote extensively on bloody tears in previous ages, but they rarely attributed the practice to their own times except for describing the Jurchens. For example, among the fifty-five uses of the term *limian*, forty two referred to individuals of Turkic/steppe backgrounds in the Tang and Five Dynasties (907–79). In other words, bloody tears either belonged to the past or to the most formidable contemporary foreign enemy, and in both cases, they served to epitomize alterity.

The Song's special focus on the Jurchens deserves critical scrutiny. We should not assume that the Jurchens naturally practiced the steppe custom because they were another steppe people. In fact, the Jurchens were significantly distant from the Turkic cultural zone that encompassed the majority of previous bloody-tear wailers. They originated at the eastern end of Eurasia, furthest from the constantly

[55] The two exceptions include a thirteenth-century Chinese record on the White Tatars and one record on the Kyrgyz by an Italian missionary; both people were of Turkic origins. See Zhao Gong 赵珙 (fl. 1220s), *Meng da beilu jianzheng* 蒙鞑備錄箋證 in Wang Guowei 王國維, *Wang Guowei quanji* 王國維全集, vol. 11 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 2011), 335; and Giovanni da Pian del Carpine (1185–1252), *The Story of the Mongols Whom We Call the Tartars*, trans. Erik Hildinger (Wellesley: Branden Publishing, 1996), 69.

[56] Daoyuan 道原 (fl. 1010s), *Jingde chuaneng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2009), 27.77.

[57] Lu You, *Nan Tang shu* 南唐書, Jigu ge edition (1632), 17.8b, 6.10b. Lu singularly used *limian* to describe a behavior predominantly phrased as *kemian* in pre-Song writings.

[58] Six referred to the Jurchens, forty two to Eurasians in the Tang and Five Dynasties, and one used face slicing as a metaphor for a fierce wind, one which felt like a knife across one's face.

west-migrating Turkic zone. Moreover, the Jurchens emerged two centuries after the demise of the Turkic empires, followed a sedentary lifestyle, and spoke a non-Turkic language. Also, between the Jurchens and the farther western part of the steppe, the Khitans did not seem to practice face mutilation. We can detect little contiguity between the Jurchens and the previous steppe "barbarians" who wailed bloody tears. Ironically, the Jurchens might have picked up the custom from Tang precedents.[59] Another ironic point is that the Jurchens were well known for actively integrating steppe and Sinitic customs, and when lachrymation was described, most Jurchen monarchs wailed sanitized tears sanctioned by Confucian-style rituals in their official biographies (e.g., *Jin shi* 金史, *History of the Jin*).[60] While it may be empirically true that some Jurchens practiced the ritual, we should keep in mind that the highlighted association of Jurchens with bloody tears was a Song construal.

The records on Jurchen bloody tears converge on two central themes. The first presented face laceration as a funerary custom. As described in the *Compendium on the Northern Treaties Among the Three Dynasties* (*San chao bei meng huibian* 三朝北盟彙編, hereafter *Three Dynasties*):

> At the death of [a Jurchen person], [the mourners] slash their foreheads with knives and let blood and tears stream down together. It is called a "send-off with bloody tears."
>
> 其死亡，則以刀撏額，血淚交下，謂之送血淚。[61]

This record was reproduced in *The Chronicle of the Great Jin* (*Da Jin guo zhi* 大金國志, hereafter *Great Jin*) with negligible variations.[62] Another account appeared in *Facts about the Caitiff Court* (*Lu ting shishi* 虜庭事實), which employs a visibly different language and thus should be seen as independent from the *Three Dynasties* account.[63] The three documents, all by Song authors, are the only extant records in any language on the Jurchen funerary practice. Veracity notwithstanding,

[59] Pan Ling 潘玲, "Limian xisu de yuanyuan he liuchuan" 撏面習俗的淵源和流傳, *Xiyu yanjiu* 4 (2006): 102.

[60] The Jurchen court began to adopt Confucian funerary practices as early as a decade after Aguda's passing. See Liu Pujiang 劉浦江, "Nüzhen de Han hua daolu yu Da Jin diguo de fumie" 女真的漢化道路與大金帝國的覆滅, in Liu *Songmo zhijian: Liao Jin Qidan Nüzhen shi yanjiu* 松漠之間：遼金契丹女真史研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 242–44.

[61] Xu Mengshen 徐夢莘 (1126–1207) ed., *Sanchao beimeng huibian*, vol. 1 (hereafter SCBM; Taipei: Dahua shuju, 1978), 3.24.

[62] Yuwen Maozhao 宇文懋昭 (ca. 1200s), *Da Jin guozhi jiaozheng* 大金國志校證 (hereafter DJGZ; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 39.551. Most scholars agree that the *Da Jin guozhi* was cobbled together from a motley collection of sources ranging from Song to Yuan writings. But as Cui Wenyin 崔文印 points out, the part on the rise of the Jurchens comes from earlier Song writings. See Cui, "*Da Jin guozhi* xinzheng" 大金國志新證, *Shi zheng tue shi yanjiu* 3 (1984): 46. This section, for instance, is obviously an abbreviated version of the *Three Dynasties* account.

[63] Wen Weijian 文惟簡 (fl. 1090s), *Lu ting shishi* 虜庭事實 (hereafter LTSS), in Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (1321–1407), *Shuo fu* 說郛, vol. 55 (Wanwei shan tang, 1646), 4b–5a.

it was an orchestrated assertion on the Song side that mourning with bloody tears was a characteristic Jurchen behavior.

The second theme of bloody tears involved the founding emperor of the Jin dynasty, Wanyan Aguda 完顏阿骨打 (1068–1123). In 1115, Aguda, leader of the Jurchen war of independence against the Liao dynasty (916–1125), faced a full-on Liao invasion intent on eliminating the Jurchens. The *Three Dynasties* narrates the following story:

> Aguda gathered the various chiefs, slashed his face with a knife, and wailed to the heavens: "Since the beginning when I started the war together with you, we have suffered cruel harassment by the Khitans and wanted to establish our own regime. As of now, if we surrender [to the Liao] with humility, we will perhaps dodge calamity. [The Liao] seeks to eradicate us all, and we could only resist if everyone swears to fight to death. Why don't you kill my clan and surrender, so you can turn crisis into fortune?" The chiefs bowed in front of [Aguda's] tent and said, "Since we are already here now, [we] will follow any of your orders and resist to the death."
>
> 阿骨打聚諸酋，以刀劈面，仰天哭曰："始與汝輩起兵，共苦契丹殘擾，而欲自立國爾！今吾為若卑哀請降，庶幾免禍，乃欲盡剪除，非人人効死戰，莫能當也，不若殺我一族，汝等迎降，可以轉禍為福。"諸酋皆羅拜帳前，曰：事已至此，唯命是從，以死拒之。[64]

Likely an elaborated paraphrase of a line from *Records of the Barbarian Descendants*' *Reckoning with China* (*Yi yi mou Xia lu* 裔夷謀夏錄), this account later reappeared with fewer details in the *Great Jin*.[65] In addition to these Chinese sources, another account appeared in the *History of the Liao* (*Liao shi* 遼史), a Chinese-language treatise composed by multiethnic editors under Mongol rule.[66] No other extant sources beyond these four mention the incident. For example, *History of the Jin*, a compilation primarily based on the official chronicles assembled by the Jurchen court, does not include the story in the official biography of Aguda.[67]

Scholars have observed that early Jurchen history had multiple contradictory versions by authors with different ethnopolitical associations and competing ideological agendas.[68] In this case, Aguda's bloody tears were primarily presented by the

[64] SCBM, vol. 1, 3.28.

[65] "Yi yi mou Xia lu," in *Quan Song biji*, ser. 5, vol. 1, 1.81; DJGZ 1.13.

[66] Tuotuo (1315–55), *Liao shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 28.372. Although the *Liao shi* was written in the Chinese language, it built upon the northern textual tradition, which primarily consisted of official Khitan chronicles along with Jurchen and Mongol accounts of Liao history. See Liu Pujiang, "Qidan kaiguo niandai wenti" 契丹開國年代問題, in Liu *Song Liao Jin shi lun ji*宋遼金史論集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 11.

[67] The imperial biographies in the *Jin shi* relied to a significant extent on the official Jurchen chronicles. See Qiu Jingjia 邱靖嘉, *Jin shi xiuzhuan kao* 金史修纂考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2017).

[68] For a recent summary of this debate, see Cheng Nina 程尼娜, "*Jin shi* 'cuangai kaiguo shi' bian" 金史"竄改開國史"辯, *Shixue bikan* 1 (2022): 4–18.

Song Chinese (and to a lesser extent by the Khitans) rather than acknowledged by the Jurchens themselves. This story may not have been fabricated by Song authors, but the prominence of face slashing in the narrative was certainly a result of Song editorial choices.

The *Three Dynasties* is perhaps the best extant source for investigating the Song agenda of ascribing bloody tears to the Jurchens. In addition to providing the most elaborate version of the Aguda story, this text also introduces face laceration as a Jurchen funerary practice and thus is the only existing source to include both themes in describing Jurchen bloody tears. The *Three Dynasties* also offers the most comprehensive record on the rise of the Jurchens, as its author Xu Mengshen 徐夢莘 (1124–1207) integrated an extensive collection of contemporaneous sources into a composite narrative.[69]

A deep reading of the *Three Dynasties* is thus in order. The text is clearly structured in three parts. The first section delineates the early history of the Jurchens from their origin to the tenth century, and the second provides an ethnographic profile of the Jurchen people, introducing their ancestral homeland, local products, and various customs, including the traditional "send-off with bloody tears" at funerals.[70] The third part elaborates how the Jurchens built the Jin Dynasty, when Aguda's bloody tears occurred.[71]

While the establishment of the Jurchen empire was indeed a political undertaking, the Song author pointed to a unified Jurchen ethnic identity as the backbone of the project. Xu wrote with two overarching assumptions that contradicted each other to some extent. On the one hand, he presumed a timeless, quintessential Jurchen ethnic identity by invoking the classic formula of ethnicity as a concept encompassing a common ancestry, shared kinship, and certain cultural practices, such as wailing bloody tears. On the other hand, Xu kept an astute eye on the process by which the Jurchen leaders, especially Aguda, brought together the highly scattered tribal clans to form an ethnic entity, a process fraught with struggle and intrigue. In describing how a fixed Jurchen ethnicity achieved its normative impact only as a result of political maneuvering, Xu combines an essentialist view with a constructivist approach. The tension between the two views remains unresolved throughout the document, and yet the contradiction itself informs Xu's heightened attention to the rise of the Jurchen ethnicity.

Xu's complex stance is evident in his two references to bloody tears. The ethnographical account of funerary face laceration, which appears in the second section, illustrates the quintessential Jurchen identity. Xu upheld this immutable identity even though in the first section he had mentioned a variety of factors undermining the validity of such a claim: the nebulous origin the Jurchens shared with their contemporary neighbors (e.g., the Balhae people), the wide dispersion of the Jurchens in geo-communities across Manchuria, and the distinctive local traits that the Song saw when first meeting Jurchens. Thus in the first two sections Xu guided the reader

[69] For an analysis of Xu's collating work on this section, see Qiu Jingjia, "Nüzhen shiliao de shenfan yu jiantao: *San chao bei meng hui bian* juan san yandu ji" 女真史料的深翻與檢討：《三朝北盟彙編》卷三研讀記, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 2 (2019): 195–229.

[70] SCBM, vol. 1, 3.21–22, 3.22–26.

[71] SCBM, vol. 1, 3.26–29.

to see the bloody-tear custom as a sweeping characteristic of all Jurchens, a fixed quality that presumably transcended any experiential fluidity.[72]

The story of Aguda's bloody tears appears in Section Three, as he is about to overcome a major challenge in unifying the Jurchens. Xu placed the episode in 1115, after the Jurchens had won several battles against the Khitans and before the inauguration of the imperial Jurchen state. Aguda rallied a number of tribal clans and officially launched his anti-Liao campaign in 1114, a timeline unequivocally confirmed in Song, Khitan, and Jurchen records. From 1114 through the last quarter of 1115, Aguda defeated the Khitans in at least five regional battles, which provoked the Liao emperor Tianzuo (r. 1101–25) into launching a massive campaign to extinguish the Jurchens.[73] At the crucial moment, Aguda slashed his face and delivered a speech in bloody tears. Consequently, the Jurchens thwarted the Liao assault and took a major step towards the founding of the Jin empire in 1117/1118.

A comparison helps to clarify the implication of Aguda's bloody tears. Notably, the narrative presented by the Jurchens includes no instance of face laceration and does not follow the same timeline. According to the *History of the Jin*, the Jurchen dynasty was founded by Aguda in the first month of 1115, immediately after a handful of regional victories against the Khitans and before Liao's sweeping invasion.[74] In the Jurchen self-narrative, Aguda was already the emperor—a victor who shed no tears—at the time in the Song record when he lacerated his face.

By including the bloody-tear episode, Xu highlights Aguda's effort to rally the tribal clans as a necessary strategic move; more important, he demonstrates the ethnic nature of Aguda's unification project. Aguda was bringing the tribes together under the ethnic Jurchen banner, a message made explicit in his performance of face laceration. In their second appearance in the narrative, bloody tears are a proxy for the immutable Jurchen ethnicity, a signal to maintain a unified group identity amid temporary perturbances. Aguda used words to make "pragmatic" suggestions addressing the circumstances that might break the coalition, but he deployed the much more powerful bloody tears to drown out distracting thoughts.

The reality beyond Xu's depiction of ethnic unification might be more complicated, however. During Aguda's mobilization, the warriors in his coalition might or might not have identified with the Jurchen name as they gathered for the immediate political purpose of winning the war. In Xu's own description, the "Jurchen tribal clans" (*Nüzhen buzu* 女真部族) joined Aguda's rebellion because of Liao colonial oppression, forming a grievance-based collective for whom the importance of ethnic identification remains uncertain.[75] The war zone was inhabited by multiple ethnic groups, including the Jurchens, the Balhae, and the Koguryŏ, among others. Contemporaneous Jurchen records make it clear that many tribes, such as the Tieli 鐵驪 and Wure 兀惹, consisted of diverse populations and became

[72] SCBM, vol. 1, 3.21–22.

[73] For a detailed study of these regional battles, see Tsugio Mikami 三上次男, *Jin dai nüzhen yanjiu* 金代女真研究, trans. Jin Qicong 金啟琮 (Heilongjiang: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1984), 6–126.

[74] Tuotuo, *Jin shi* (hereafter JS; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 2.23–28.

[75] SCBM, vol. 1, 3.27.

"Jurchen" only ex post facto.[76] Xu was not necessarily unaware of the complications, as he spares no detail in describing Aguda's use of intrigue and violence in annexing the tribes under the Jurchen name. Nevertheless, Xu highlights Jurchen ethnicity as the driving force of the war.

The Song authors strictly ascribe bloody tears to the Jurchens to the extent that the subject has become a tool for ethnicization. This tendency, coupled with the societal subsidence in discussions of self-mutilation, indicated a rejection of this emotional behavior along the self-Other divide. The renewed attitude towards bloody tears was a disparate result of the affective test when the normative was staunch. The perturbed energy arising from face mutilation tracked along the self-Other axis and recruited meanings that only entrenched the distinction. For an individual who entered the affective field, there was an immediate draw to the normative, causing them to perceive this perturbed energy as menacingly foreign and summon the strength to counter it. Taken together, the affective and the normative produced a dynamic rivalry: while the energetic could overwhelm a weak framework, it could also be subdued by a prevailing structure and turned into a predominantly solidifying force.

The comparison of bloody tears in the Tang and Song compels two further considerations. The first is empirical, contributing to the current understanding of Tang and Song histories. A popular argument is that the Tang exhibited greater cosmopolitanism than the Song, a view supported by this study.[77] I hope to add some affective depth to this thesis, showing that the manifestations of cosmopolitanism went beyond the material availability of cultural resources and ideological declarations. Foreign cultures were abundantly present in both the Tang and the Song. A self-proclaimed universal empire, the Tang aggressively expanded its borders deep into the steppe and hosted an array of Eurasian populations.[78] Although its access to the farther western portion of the Eurasian steppe had been severed, the Song continued to engage regularly with the Khitans, Tanguts, Jurchens, and Gaochang Uyghurs, and actively pursued maritime activities with cultures around the Indian Ocean.[79] However, the accessibility of diverse cultural elements did not

[76] JS 2.25–27. For a detailed study of Aguda's effort to engineer a unified ethnic identity out of an extant multicultural diversity, see Iguro Shinobu 井黒忍, "Joshin to Korikai: Tōhoku Ajia ni okeru shoshūdan no keisei"女真の形成——東北アジアにおける諸集団の興亡, in *Kin Joshin no rekishi to Yūrashia tōhō* 金・女真の歴史とユーラシア東方, ed. Furumatsu Takashi 古松崇志 et al. (Tokyo: Benseisha, 2019), 136–39.

[77] For a critical review of the argument/counterargument on Tang cosmopolitanism, see Skaff, *Sui-Tang China and Its Turko-Mongol Neighbors*, 9–11.

[78] For a history of foreigners in the Tang, see Charles Holcombe, "Immigrants and Strangers: From Cosmopolitanism to Confucian Universalism in Tang China," *T'ang Studies* 20–21 (2002–03): 71–112.

[79] For a comprehensive view of the Song's interactions with these regions, see Tao Jingshen 陶晉生, *Song dai waijiao shi* 宋代外交史 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 2020); Li Huarui 李華瑞, *Song Xiao guanxi shi* 宋夏關係史 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2010); Chen Jiahua 陳佳華, *Song Liao Jin shiqi minzu shi* 宋遼金時期民族史 (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 1996), particularly Chapter 6 for the Gaochang Uyghurs. For an overview of Song maritime activities, see Angela Schottenhammer, "China's Emergence as a Maritime Power," in *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 5, Sung China, 960–1279* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2018), 437–525.

necessarily indicate their actual integration. To bridge this gap, I argue that the affective perspective illuminates whether people possessed a personal affinity for foreign cultures. Also, every time period includes verbalized stances that contradict one another. During the Tang, there were grandiose pronouncements of assimilationist rhetoric alongside ethnized, exclusionist statements.[80] The current inquiry probes into people's motivations—areas of flexibility and becoming—between positions fixed by words.

The second consideration concerns a methodological understanding of affect and its utility in discussing identity. Speaking as a historian looking for evidence, I frame affect as a testament to changing social norms. But in describing its ontology, we should see the enveloping existence of affect as the cause, effect and texture of social formations. In the Song case, for example, the affective perturbance of bloody tears was both the antecedent and consequent of feeling the Jurchen Otherness as well as the main content of the feeling itself.

The affective perspective thus offers an analytical vocabulary for examining ethnicity as an ongoing and ever-shifting process. As Sarah Ahmed nicely puts it, emotions "create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and outside in the first place."[81] The us-versus-them categorization is essentially felt and lived through a profoundly emotive register. For an individual who reacted to the perturbance of bloody tears, his feelings co-varied and co-constituted with the self-Other construct, leading into the enactment of the latter in a specific configuration limned with an affective texture unique to himself.

Conclusion

Blood-stained tears reached various communities across eastern Eurasia, leaving a trail of documentation that pulses with forceful energy. The Türks wielded the ritual presentation of face laceration in asserting selfhood, exemplifying the connection between this emotional gesture and negotiations of the self-Other boundary. The affective thrust of bloody tears then put Tang and Song China to the test, evincing the varied normative saliences of the self-Other imaginaries in their different contexts. Crimson tears remind us that a primary force that made and unmade identity boundaries resided in affect, which compelled people to feel, moved them from body to body, and guided them along the journey of knowing the self and understanding others.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

[80] See Abramson, *Ethnic Identity in Tang China*, 141–49, and Yang, *The Way of the Barbarians*.

[81] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 10.

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