
TO THE HISTORY OF ORIENTAL TEXTOLOGY

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THE OFFICIAL NAME OF THE TANGUT EMPIRE AS REFLECTED IN THE NATIVE TANGUT TEXTS

In the last decade academic interest in Tangut civilization has rapidly grown and recently (August 1995) even a special conference on Tangut problems was held in Yinchuan, China [1]. This is explained by the fact that many scholars throughout the world became aware both of the unique and extremely high level of Tangut culture, as well as its significance in the history of Central Asia. However, not long ago Tangut studies were regarded as one of the backwaters of Oriental studies, while the Tangut state was supposed to be an Empire in quotation marks, which did not play any significant part in history (Clouston, 1964: 54). Such a change in the approach to the Tangut culture is due to the systematic work of an international team of scholars whose mutual efforts have created a new branch of Oriental studies, namely — tangutology. In this connection first of all the great Russian scholar N. A. Nevsky (1892—1937) is to be remembered, since precisely his works have laid the foundation of modern tangutology.

However, it must be kept in mind that now almost everything we know about Tangut is based on Chinese source material (mainly on Chinese dynastic histories). At the same time hundreds of Tangut texts are kept in different parts of the world, the largest collection — the Kozlov collection in St. Petersburg, Russia — having more than ten thousand items. Tangut collections usually consist of texts translated from other languages. For tangutology these texts are not as important as the native Tangut texts are. By native Tangut texts I mean the texts not translated from other languages, but primarily written in Tangut language (Tangut code, poetry, proverbs, official documents, etc.). These texts are kept only in the Kozlov collection in St. Petersburg. However, and specialists know it quite well, up to now some of the native Tangut texts are still beyond comprehension due to their extremely complicated content.

My assertion that native Tangut texts are of exceptional significance is corroborated by the fact that only in these texts one can find the official name of the Tangut kingdom — (1) [2] *phon mbin lhie tha* “The Great Kingdom of the White and Lofty”. This name is not to be found in Chinese dynastic histories where the Tangut Empire is referred to as *Xia Guo* “the Xia State” (*Song shi*) or *Xi Xia* “the Western Xia [State]” (*Liao shi* and *Jin shi*). The character *xia* “summer” in the name of the Tangut Empire goes back to the ancient Chinese dynasty *Da Xia* (III—II millennium B.C.). Later in the 5th century A.D. on the territory of the *Da Xia* was situated the state of Xiong-nu(?)

prince Ho-lien Po-po and his state was also named *Xia*. Thus, it is quite clear that *Xia* is the name which Chinese (= the foreigners) used to designate the Tangut Empire, whereas (1) *phon mbin lhie tha* “The Great Kingdom of the White and Lofty” obviously represents the name Tangut made themselves. It goes without saying that without an adequate understanding of the meaning concealed by the Tangut in the official name of their state one will get a wrong idea about the whole Tangut culture.

In Tangut texts one can find two names of the Tangut Empire: the one I have already mentioned (1) *phon mbin lhie tha* which character by character denotes “white”, “high, lofty”, “kingdom”, “great” (henceforth: Name 1) and (2) *phon mbin tha ndziwe lhie* which character by character stands for “white”, “high, lofty”, “great”, “summer”, “kingdom” (Name 2). The both Names are almost similar. Each contains the noun (3) *lhie* “kingdom, state, realm” and the three adjectives (4) *phon* “white”, (5) *mbin* “high, lofty” and (6) *tha* “great”. A diagnostic sign of the class of adjectives in Tangut language is their position with respect to the noun they modify. As a rule, in Tangut the adjective follows the noun it modifies. The difference between Names 1 and 2 lies, first of all, in the “superfluous” character (7) *ndziwe* “summer” (= *xia*) and, secondly, in the position of the adjective (6) *tha* “great”, which in Name 1 modifies the noun (3) *lhie* “kingdom”, but in Name 2 modifies the noun (7) *ndziwe* “summer” (*xia*): (8) *ndziwe tha* “The Great Kingdom” in Name 1 vs. (9) *tha ndziwe lhie* “The Kingdom of the Great Xia” in Name 2. Name 1 and Name 2 have their own domain of usage. In the collection of Tangut and Chinese texts published by Shi (1988: 231—330), which comprises prefaces and epilogues to Tangut translations of Buddhist and other works, only Name 1 occurs in Tangut texts prior to 1227, *i. e.* at the time the Tangut state itself actually existed. What is more important, only Name 1 is used on the stelae erected near the tombs of the Tangut emperors. It is Name 1 which stands at the beginning of the Tangut translation of the Buddhist Canon (*fig. 1*). And the famous Liangzhou stela begins with the Name 1 (Nishida 1964: 161). Name 2 does not occur in such texts, but occurs exclusively in Chinese texts written in the Tangut state. Name 2 began to appear in Tangut texts only after the fall of the Tangut Empire. This is only natural in view of the fact that the collocation (10) *tha ndziwe* “Great Xia”, as we already know, constitutes the Chinese name for the Tangut Empire. Since