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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 (Clauson, 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

the Tangut Empire encompassed the territory once occupied by the Da Xia dynasty, the Chinese used the historical name Xia to describe the Tangut State, whereas this name evidently meant nothing to the Tangut themselves. It should be noted that in Tangut poetry the word (7) *ndziwe* "summer" is used only as a designation for the season itself. Also quite typical is the purely Chinese word order in the combination (10) *tha ndziwe Da Xia* "Great Xia", where the adjective precedes the noun it modifies. It is to be stressed that Name 1 is aesthetic and well-balanced: (1) *phon mbin lhie tha* "The Great Kingdom of the White and Lofty" (mind the Tangut word order in the collocation (8) *lhie tha* "Great Kingdom" — lit. "Kingdom Great"), whereas I consider Name 2 to be awkward and un-Tangut-like in that it combines two disparate conceptions of the state, i. e. both the Tangut and Chinese notions: (2) *phon mbin tha ndziwe lhie* "The Kingdom of the Great Xia of the White and Lofty". This is why I believe that only Name 1, (1) *phon mbin lhie tha* "The Great Kingdom of the White and Lofty", is the native and traditional name the Tangut made for their country, whilst Name 2 represents a Sino-Tangut "hybrid". The usage of the Name 1 on the stelae near the tombs of the Tangut emperors shows that it represents the official name of the Tangut State which contrasts with the unofficial name of the state — (11) *mi lhie* "The Kingdom of Mi (= Tangut)" used in the text of Tangut Code. The name of the Tangut State on the title-page of the Tangut Code would be very significant, but, alas, the title-page is lost (Kychanov 1987b: 245).

At the beginning of the 1930's scholars became acquainted with the Tangut original names for their country. The difference between the two names for the Tangut state has not been a source of controversy among scholars, all of whom agree that (7) *ndziwe* "summer" points to the Xia dynasty. As for the shared component in the two names, viz. the collocation (12) *phon mbin* "white and lofty", all attempts to arrive at consensus have failed, and the issue has given rise to a polemic amongst scholars. The debate on the meaning of the collocation (12) *phon mbin* "white and lofty" was opened by Wang (1932), who asserted that in the name of the Tangut country the character (5) *mbin* was used phonetically with the value [mi]. Wang made the supposition that the Tangut word for "man" must have been pronounced something like [mi], as in the Tibetan word *mi* "man". According to his view, the collocation in question is purported to signify "White Mi", which was supposed to have meant "White People", leading Wang (1932: 77–88) to the conclusion that Name 1 should be translated as "The Great Kingdom of the White Mi". Accordingly, Name 2 would have to be translated as "The Kingdom of the Great Xia of the White Mi". Wang's contention is all the more remarkable in that it raises the question why the Tangut did not in this context use the character (13) *mie* "man", (14) *mi* "Tangut" or (15) *mi*, the first component of (16) *mi niau* "Tangut" (from Tibetan *mi-nag* "Tangut"), all of which sounded similar to Tibetan *mi* "man", the latter two even specifically denoting "Tangut". Nevsky took issue with Wang's interpretation in his famous "O nazvanii tangutskogo gosudarstva" ("On the Name of the Tangut State") (1960: 1, 33–51) in which he meticulously analyses Wang's theory and advances a number of arguments which disprove it. In particular, Nevsky rightfully points out that if the combination (12) *phon mbin* were to signify "white people", the adjective (4) *phon*

"white" would have to follow the "noun", which it does not. Nevsky made use of the ode "Hymn to the Sacred Ancestors of the Tangut", a previously unstudied Tangut native text later published by Kychanov (1970: 217–31), and the Tangut encyclopaedia "The Sea of Meanings Established by the Saints". The first three lines of the "Hymn to the Sacred Ancestors of the Tangut", in Nevsky's opinion, define the location of the Tangut State. These lines are quoted below with Nevsky's translation [1] and my translation [2]:

(17) u	nia	ldu	we	tshon	zie	mbiu
head	black	stone	town	desert	river	beside
ni	nin	via	lhiao	ma	phon	mbin
face	red	father	tomb	river	white	high
mi niau	ndzio	'in	lhie	tha	viei	
Tangut	tall	possessive	state	here	is	

- [1] The stone city of the black-headed ones on the banks of the desert waters.
The paternal burial mounds of the red-faced ones along the upper reaches of the White River.
Here is to be found the land of the tall *mi-niau* (viz. Tangut).
[2] The stone city of the black-headed ones on the banks of the uninhabited river.
The paternal burial mounds of the red-faced ones [at the foot of the mountain] the "White and Lofty Mother".
Here is to be found the land of the tall *mi-niau* (viz. Tangut).

On the assumption that the first two lines of the ode are precisely parallel in construction, Nevsky juxtaposes the three-ideogram collocation in line 1 (18) *tshon zie mbiu* "desert river beside" to the three-ideogram collocation in line 2 (19) *ma phon mbin* "river white high".

Nevsky did not actually call the words (20) *mbiu* and (5) *mbin* postpositions, but it is evident from his analysis that he perceived them as such. Nevsky maintained that the word (5) *mbin* "high, lofty" in line 2 meant "upper reaches", corresponding to Chinese *shang* (later this proved to be incorrect, see below), and that the three-ideogram phrase (19) *ma phon mbin* is to be translated properly as "upper reaches of the White River", whereby Nevsky isolates the phrase (19) *ma phon mbin* in the meaning "upper reaches of the White River". Nevsky identifies the "White River" with the Bai Shui in the Minshan mountains in modern Sichuan province. He arrives at this conclusion for two reasons: 1) The Bai shui is believed to have been the habitat since the Han dynasty of the Qiang tribes, the ancestors of the Tangut. Subsequently, according to Nevsky, when later the Tangut had established their own realm they named it after their native homeland where lay the ancestral graves of the Tangut. In this way, their new state came to be called "The Great Kingdom of the Upper Reaches of the White [River]"; 2) In the "Hymn to the Sacred Ancestors of the Tangut", the borders of the Tangut state are indicated, with the Minshan mountains constituting the southern border. Nevsky (1960: 1, 48) mentions that the prominent Chinese scholar Luo Fucheng also interpreted (19) *ma phon mbin* as *Bai Shang* "upper reaches of the White [River]". According to Luo, this name could

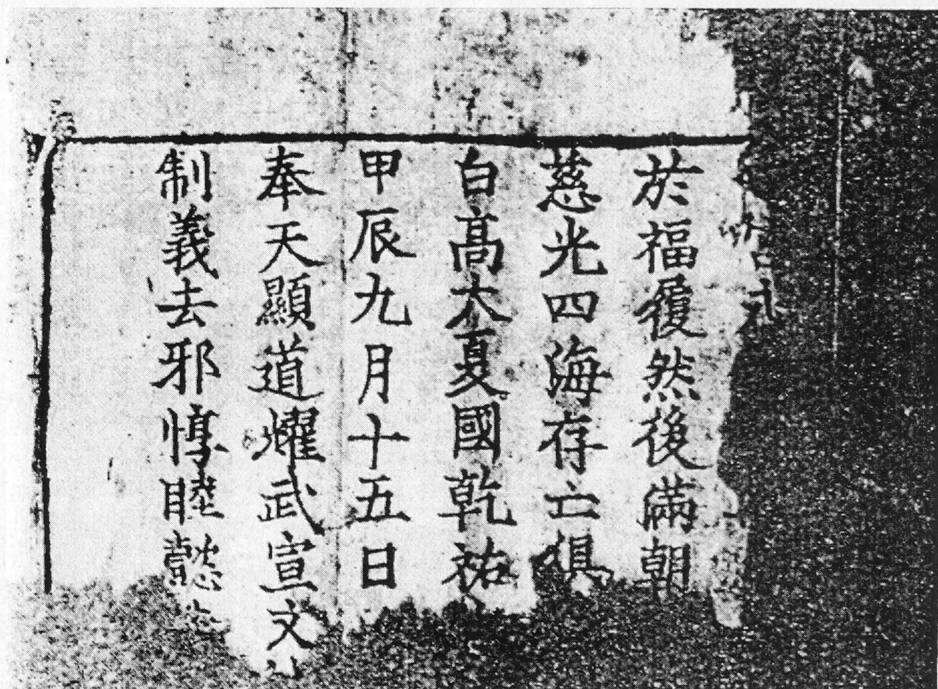


Fig. 2

be taken either as indicating that the Tangut lived to the west of the loop of the Yellow River, in other words, along its upper reaches where its waters are not yet yellow, or, alternatively, that the Tangut lived along the upper reaches of the White River, i. e. the Bai Shui.

In the 1960s E. I. Kychanov again raised the question of the interpreting of the name of the Tangut State. E. I. Kychanov has found among Chinese texts published in the Tangut state a Chinese translation of the name of the Tangut Empire — *Bai Gao Da Xia Guo* (fig. 2). From that time on we have at our disposal an authentic (not a later reconstruction) Chinese name for the Tangut State used in the times when this empire was still alive. And, as we see, in this Chinese name the Tangut character (5) *mbin* is rendered into Chinese as *gao* “high, lofty” (not *shang*!). Supporting Nevsky in his criticism of Wang, E. I. Kychanov nevertheless disagreed with what he maintains is one of Nevsky’s main premises, viz. that the Tangut State’s southern borders extended as far south as Sichuan. The fact that the ancestors of the Tangut lived in Sichuan does not necessarily imply that the Tangut would centuries later link the name of their realm to that of a river in their ancestral homeland. E. I. Kychanov (1968: 53–54) casts doubt on the interpretation of (12) *phon mbin* as “upper reaches of the White [River]”, emphasizing the fact that the word “river” itself is left out of the text entirely. E. I. Kychanov does not provide his own interpretation for the name of the Tangut State. Rather, based on a translation of the name for the Tangut State by Chinese contemporaries, *Bai Gao Da Xia Guo* “White High Great Xia State”, E. I. Kychanov (1968: 55) proposes that the Name 2 for the Tangut realm be tentatively translated as the “White and High Kingdom of the Great Summer”. Later, however, E. I. Kychanov without explanation translates the name of the Tangut kingdom as the “White High Great Hsia” (1978: 25), the “White, High and Great Empire” (1984: 386), and as “The Great White and High Kingdom” (1987a: 134). But in E. I. Kychanov’s translation of the Name 1 there is a grammatical mistake. If his translations were to be correct, in which all three adjectives shared the same syntactic status as attributes to the noun (3) *thie* “kingdom”, then all three adjectives would have to occupy the same position with respect to the noun and would, more specifically, have to come after the noun. Instances of three adjectives in succession following a noun are attested in Tangut (Kepping 1985: 384, ex. 951). Of the three adjectives in the name for the Tangut realm, however, only one — (6) *tha* “great” — follows the noun, whilst the other two precede it. In Tangut grammar the different positions of these adjectives with respect to the noun unequivocally indicate a difference in syntactic function. The translations “White High Great Hsia”, “The White, High and Great Empire”, “The Great White and High Kingdom” for (1) *phon mbin thie tha* are therefore incorrect. In the 1990s E. I. Kychanov gave another translation for the collocation (12) *phon mbin*, viz. “white heights” (1993: 49, 53; 1994: 94). However, this translation also proves to be grammatically incorrect, since, first, (5) *mbin* “high, lofty” is not a noun, it is an adjective, and, secondly, if (5) *mbin* were a noun, then the adjective (4) *phon* would have to follow the “noun”, which it does not.

Most modern Chinese scholars are of the opinion that the combination (12) *phon mbin* “white lofty” is to be interpreted as “upper reaches of the White River”. The interpretation of (1) *phon mbin thie tha* as *Bai Shang Da Guo*

“White Upper Great State” is so widespread in China that Bai Shang in the meaning “Tangut State” has even become an entry in standard reference book (Cai Meibiao 1986: 121).

The Japanese scholar Nishida Tatsuo (1964: 161; 1986: 69) obviously supports the “upper reaches of the White River” theory, as is clear from his translation of the name of the Tangut state — *Pai-shang*.

In my opinion, the grammatical mistakes in the translation of the name of the Tangut State are:

1. on the level of the vocabulary — the adjective (5) *mbin* “high, lofty” is translated into Chinese as *shang*, whereas there is no doubt that it has to be translated as *gao*;

2. on the syntactic level — a) adjectives occupying different positions with respect to the noun are translated as sharing one and the same syntactic function, b) adjectives standing in preposition to a noun are regarded as attributes to this noun.

In my opinion, grammatically correct translation of the official name of the Tangut Empire is “The Great Empire of the White and Lofty”.

Now let us turn to the idea concealed in the collocation “white and lofty”, which obviously served as a symbol of the Tangut Empire.

In my work (the first publication of the results of this work is Kepping 1994) I have used the same Tangut material which Nevskij had at his disposal:

1. Tangut 12th century dictionaries kept in the Manuscript Department (Kozlov collection) of the Institute of Oriental Studies in St. Petersburg:

1a. (22) *mi za ngwu ndzie mbu pa ngu nie* “Tangut-Chinese Timely Pearl in the Palm”, usually referred to in scholarly circles by its abbreviated Chinese name *Zhang Zhong Zhu*, published in various editions by Nishida (1966: 186–223), Kwanten (1982), Huang *et al.* (1989);

1b. “Ideographic Miscellany”, referred to by its Chinese name *Za Zi*, prepared for publication by Terentyev-Katansky (forthcoming);

1c. (23) *we ngon* “Sea of Ideograms”, generally referred to as the *Wen Hai*, published by Kepping *et al.* (1969) and by Shi *et al.* (1982). The “Sea of Ideograms” provides a graphic analysis for each Tangut character and its constituents. If the meaning of an ideogram is unclear, additional data can be obtained on the basis of the graphic analysis. Of extreme importance are the groups of homophones which are marked by full stops in the text of the dictionary. A group of homophones runs from one full stop to another. The homophones have one and the same initial consonant and belong to one and the same rhyme.

2. The ode “Hymn to the Sacred Ancestors of the Tangut”, Nevsky (1960: I, 36) translates the word (24) *kia* in the title as “ode”, but the term apparently corresponds to Chinese *ge* and Tibetan *gyer* “ritual song”.

3. The Tangut proverbs (Kychanov 1974).

4. The examples adduced by Nevsky (1960: I, 51) from the Tangut encyclopaedia “Sea of Meanings Established by the Saints”.

5. Tangut poems.

Before setting forth my own view point, I would like to pursue Nevsky's analysis of the tripartite collocation (19) *ma phon mbin* to its logical conclusion to show why the translation "upper reaches of the White River" is unfounded.

First of all, it is necessary to say a few words about the names of the rivers in Tangut. In Tangut texts in the meaning "river" I have never met the word (25) *ma* which is used in the collocation (19) *ma phon mbin*. The meaning "river" in Tangut texts is usually expressed by the word (26) *zie*. In keeping with the Tangut grammar the names of the rivers, nouns, stand in front of the word (26) *zie* "river", e. g. (27) *kin zie* the Jin River, whereas adjectives stand after the word "river", e. g. (28) *zie nia* the Black River (famous *Hei Shui* or Edzina). I have found the word (25) *ma* only as a proper name of a river (noun) in a collocation (29) *ma zie*. This collocation in Tangut translations of Chinese texts stands for the Yellow River (in Chinese *Huang He*). This is corroborated by the use of (25) *ma* in the Tangut expression (30) *tshwu ma* "Milky Way" to be found in the dictionary *Zhang Zhong Zhu*, whereby it is probable that the Tangut shared the view of the ancient Chinese that the Milky Way was the heavenly continuation of the Yellow River in the firmament. It should be noted that in the "Sea of Ideograms", the dictionary entry for the ideogram (25) *ma* first lists the combination (29) *ma zie* as an example, a collocation which I believe meant the Yellow River. Therefore the collocation (19) *ma phon mbin* is to be translated as "The white and lofty Yellow River". I was very much surprised by the fact that for the name of the Yellow River in Tangut, (25) *ma*, the dictionary "Sea of Ideograms" lists sixteen (!) homophones (Kepping *et al.* 1969: 1, 138—9, No. 718—734), one of them (No. 734) being *ma* "mother". Most of the homophones are connected with the meaning "female", "mother", but there are also real homophones, e. g. No. 730 (62) *ma* "presumably". It seems that the ideogram (25) *ma* in the Tangut name of the Yellow River symbolizes the river as the embodiment of the female principle, i. e. "Mother River". Consequently, the collocation (19) *ma phon mbin* "the white and lofty Yellow River" and (31) *ma phon mbin* "the white and lofty Mother" are homophonous. However, only a part of the collocation (19) *ma phon mbin* serves as a symbol of the Tangut Empire and is included into the official name of the Tangut Empire, namely, (12) *phon mbin* "white, lofty". I believe that this is a fixed collocation which expresses the idea of the union of the female and male principles, since (5) *mbin* has a homophone (32) *mbin* "membrum virile" (Kepping *et al.* 1969: 2, 87, No. 3981), whereas (4) *phon* can easily stand for the female principle (in Tangut the sun, which represents the female principle, has a fixed attribute "white"; for details see below).

Corroboration for the hypothesis that the collocation (12) *phon mbin* symbolizes the union of the female and male principles, corresponding to Tibetan *yab* and *yum*, is found in the sense in which (4) *phon* and (5) *mbin* are used on a Tangut icon on a display in the Hermitage (Rudova 1993: 206). The icon which represents Guan-yin (= Avalokiteshvara) bears Chinese captions alongside two figures of donors in the bottom right-hand corner (fig. 3). These two female figures in rich gold-embroidered red robes evidently belong to the emperor's family — Tangut laws prohibited gold-embroidered robes even for the emperor's

relatives (Kychanov 1987b: 223). They differ in age, the woman on the left is obviously older than the one on the right. The similarity of the two women suggests that they are mother and daughter. The cartouche to the left of the elder woman bears the caption *Bai shi tao hua* "Peach flowers from Madame Bai", and to the left of the younger woman the caption is *sin fu Gao shi yin jiang xiang* "Incense from the newly wed Madame Gao" [3]. I presume that this is an allegory: the elder lady — Madame Bai — is the Tangut empress, and as such, personifies the female principle *bai*, "white", whereas the younger lady — Madame Gao — is her daughter, the princess, bearing her father's (the emperor's) symbolic surname *Gao*, representing the male principle. In other words, in Tangut culture the female and male principles were personified by the emperor and empress respectively. It seems that the characters *bai* and *gao* were taboo and could not be used as the surnames for the common people, since among the Chinese family names listed in the above-mentioned Tangut dictionary "Ideographic Miscellany" in the section (33) *za mie me* "Chinese surnames", the names (4) *phon* (= *Bai*) and (5) *mbin* (= *Gao*) are not listed, and corresponding Chinese names are rendered by other characters — (34) *phe* for *Bai* and (35) *keu* for *Gao*.

The Tangut collection held at the British Library contains a fragment of an imperial copy of a manuscript, call number OR 12380 (3302), written on yellow paper, as was customary for both the Chinese and Tangut cultures for personal copies of manuscripts belonging to the emperor. Both sides of the manuscript bear a fragment of the 21st *juan* (scroll) of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. In the middle of the manuscript, on a background especially darkened with imperial ochre appear the emphatically enlarged ideograms (5) *mbin* and (36) *tshia* "virtue" immediately followed by the name (37) *nin po tsa* "Emperor Bodhisattva", the last three characters being smaller than the first two. The "improper" position of the adjective (5) *mbin* "lofty" gives here a clear hint that what was actually intended is its homophone (32) *mbin* "membrum virile" in the function of an attribute to the following noun. I believe that the five-character combination (38) *mbin tsia nin po tsa* means "Emperor Bodhisattva [possessing] the VIRTUE OF MBIN". It seems that the Tangut emperors were regarded as "sacred kings". If so, then we are now faced with a challenge of trying to reconstruct the rituals concerning Tangut sacred kings recorded in native Tangut texts.

The study of Tangut poetry and proverbs has demonstrated that the Tangut believed that the surrounding world at all levels (cosmos, nature and man) reflected the coalescence of the female and male principles. In the proverbs the sun is always connected with the female principle, the moon with the male principle. In the following proverb the mother is directly compared to the sun, which bears the female epithet "white", and the father is compared to the moon, which bears the male (?) epithet "red":

(39) <i>tu</i>	<i>mbe</i>	<i>phon su</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>ldiu</i>	<i>ldwon</i>
thousand	sun	white compare	mother	beauty	hot
<i>khi</i>	<i>lhie</i>	<i>nin su</i>	<i>via</i>	<i>sie</i>	<i>sweu</i>
ten thousand	moon	red compare	father	wisdom	bright

(Proverb No. 8)

A mother's beauty is hotter than a thousand white sun,
A father's wisdom is brighter than ten thousand red moons.



Fig. 3

From the proverbs it becomes clear that the epithet "white" for the sun and the "red" for the moon were apparently fixed collocations: see for example proverb No. 199 (Kychanov 1974). Similarly (40) *me* "heaven" is often compared with (41) *ldie* "earth", whereby heaven apparently represented the male principle and the earth the female principle. The term (41) *ldie* "earth" has a synonym (42) *ma* "earth", homophonous to (43) *ma* "mother". In the following proverb (40) *me* "heaven" bears the "male" epithet (5) *mbin* "lofty, high":

(44) *me* *mbin* *mi* *ton* *ni* *mbi*
 heaven high not help clouds low
ldie ? *mi* *ton* *tsia* *ru*
 land broad not help road narrow

(Proverb No. 335)

A high heaven will not help if the clouds are low
 Extensive lands are of no use if the road is narrow [4].

In the Tangut ritual songs the opposition of (45) *lie lan nge* "in the west are the Helan mountains" vs. (46) *vie ma nio* "in the east is the Yellow River" recurs again and again. The Yellow River, which, as we have established, is a female entity, is associated with the east, while the Helan mountains, embodying presumably the male principle, are linked to the west. It should be noted that the word (47) *nio* "river" in the collocation (46) *vie ma nio* "in the east is the Yellow River" is a homophone of the words (48) *nio* "east" and (49) *nio* "source". The following table shows pairs of nouns which are regularly opposed to each other in Tangut texts as female and male personifications:

female (4) <i>phon</i> "white"	male (5) <i>mbin</i> "lofty"
sun	moon
earth	heaven
east	west
Yellow River	Helan mountains
any river	any mountain
empress	emperor

I suppose that a central, prevailing Tangut notion is that the Tangut State was born from the merging of the lofty Helan mountains in the west, the male principle, and the white waters of the Yellow River in the east, the female principle. When for the first time I have visited the territory which previously belonged to the Tangut Empire I was deeply impressed by the two natural dominants in the landscape — the mighty flow of the Yellow River and the impressive beauty of the Helan mountains. And — it is of importance for this study — the tombs of Tangut emperors are located at the foot of the Helan mountains. This is really an unforgettable view: one can easily imagine the influence and significance which the Yellow River and the Helan mountains had in the everyday life of the Tangut eight centuries ago.

Now let us turn again to the collocation (19) *ma phon mbin* "the white and lofty Yellow River" which is homophonous to "the white and lofty Mother".

The usage of this collocation in native Tangut texts shows that most likely this collocation denotes a mountain, not a river. This meaning is evident from the adduced below example from the encyclopaedia "The Sea of Mean-

ings Established by the Saints". The text of the encyclopaedia is arranged in vertical lines, wherein the basic text consists of segments of four to six ideograms, each segment immediately followed by a trailing commentary written in slightly smaller ideograms. This example is taken from the section entitled "Names of Mountains":

(50) *nge* *kwe* *wa* *ndzio* *vie* *nge* *zie* *ndzio*
 mountain body broad tall snow mountain all tall

mi *mba* *riu* *lhie* *zi* *ni* *me* *ion*
 not interrupt all state all reach root source

ma *phon* *mbin* *ngu*
 Yellow River(= mother) white high is

The mountain ridge is wide and long. [Commentary:] The snow-capped mountains are high and long. They go on continuously and reach all countries. The place where [our country] begins is the "White and Lofty Mother [mountain]".

Since the entire section "Names of Mountains" is devoted specifically to alpine toponyms, it seems obvious to assume that (19) *ma phon mbin* denoted a mountain within the Tangut realm, most likely in the snow-capped Helan mountain ridge. The assertion that (19) *ma phon mbin* is not a river toponym is corroborated by the fact that this name is lacking in the section (51) *ma ngon* "Rivers and Seas" of the dictionary "Ideographic Miscellany" (Terentyev-Katansky, forthcoming), whereas (29) *ma zie*, the name for the Yellow River, is included. Furthermore, graphic analysis of the ideogram (52) *so* "high, tall", which is an adjective often found in contexts where snow-capped mountains are specifically involved, provides further support for our assertion. The ideogram (52) *so* consists of the left portion of the ideogram (4) *phon* "white", representing the female principle, and of the entire ideogram (5) *mbin* "lofty, high", representing the male principle. Graphically, therefore, the ideogram (52) *so* symbolizes the union of the female and male principles. The adjective (52) *so* "high, tall" is used in the following proverb:

(53) *nge* *kha* *vie* *tiei* *ta* *so*
 mountain on snow lie topic high
mie *ngu* *tshia* *ndziei* *ta* *piu*
 person among virtue possess topic respect

(Proverb No. 297)

If there is snow on the mountain, the mountain is tall
 If a man has a sense of dignity, he is respected.

The next example, this time from the Tangut poems, is another prove for the assertion that (19) *ma phon mbin* means a mountain:

(54) *ma* *phon* *mbin* *me* *u* *ldie* *mie*
 Yellow River white lofty heaven head earth tail
 (= mother)

The head of the White and Lofty Mother is [in] the heaven, [her] tail is [in] the earth.

The earliest (A.D. 1346) Tibetan source on the Tangut (*Hung Shi*) begins the description of the Tangut state mentioning a mountain somewhere near Liangzhou (modern Wuwei in Gansu province). This mountain is a residence of

a spirit [5]. The sacred Tangut mountain reflected in the Tibetan texts was known to R. A. Stein (1947–1950) as early as in the 1940's. Can this mountain be identified with the mountain "The White and Lofty Mother"? Today I have no answer to this question.

Now let us return to the second line of the "Hymn to the Sacred Ancestors of the Tangut" (see (17)) which Nevsky (1960: 1, 38) translated as "the paternal mounds of the red-faced ones in the upper reaches of the White River". The word (55) *lhiuo* used in this line is usually translated as "grave". Yet in the texts I have studied another word stands for "grave", viz. (56) *lwa*. Graphically the ideogram (55) *lhiuo*, according to the native Tangut dictionary "Sea of Ideograms", consists of parts of the ideograms (52) *so* "tall", (57) *ndziu* "ten" and (58) *rie* "skillful", and the contexts in which it is used indicate that (55) *lhiuo* should be translated specifically as "emperor's tomb" or "imperial grave". Hence, the following two conclusions can be drawn: 1) "the paternal burial mounds of the red-faced ones" are the graves of Tangut emperors; 2) the Tangut emperors were believed to have been the fathers of "the red-faced ones". The first conclusion is important to the present study. The ramifications of the second conclusion is dealt with in Kepping (forthcoming). The second line of the "Hymn to the Sacred Ancestors of the Tangut" should therefore be translated as "the tombs of emperors, fathers of the red-faced ones, are located near [the mountain called] the "White and Lofty Mother"". The tombs of Tangut emperors, as we know, are located at the foot of Helan mountains. And apparently the mountain the "White and Lofty Mother" is somewhere in Helan mountains as well. Hence the "White and Lofty Mother" was the name of a peak in Helan mountains and everybody understood

the name of the Tangut State in terms of metonymy, named after a geographical landmark, much in keeping with the traditions of the neighbours (cf. *Liao guo* was named after the *Liao* River). However, the actual significance of the name of the Tangut Empire becomes evident only at the level of written language, i. e. script itself. In the name of the mountain instead of the ideogram (43) *ma* "mother", its homonym (25) *ma* "Yellow River" was used. To demonstrate the inseparable union of the female and male principles a mountain (personification of a male principle) was called a river (personification of a female principle).

In conclusion I would like to stress the significance of native Tangut texts not only for the reconstruction of the complex of knowledge about Tangut Empire which is called in Tangut ritual songs (61) *khi ndvu lhie* "the State of ten thousand secrets", but at the same time because these texts reveal some deep-rooted notions which played a significant part in the relations between the so-called dynasties of conquest (Tangut, Khitan, Jurchen, Mongol). Perhaps these notions were shared by all these dynasties as well. If I am correct in my interpretation of the official name of the Tangut State as a mountain, that means that Tangut Empire itself personified the male principle. Then we have to assume that the Liao State, called after the Liao River, personified the female principle. As to the Jin (= Jurchen) dynasty, the Cambridge history of China (1994: 221) states that it was named after the An-chu-hu River, which means that the Jin State has personified the female principle as well. No doubt these mythological notions were decisive not only at the level of the marriage alliances, but shaped the whole civilization of the dynasties of conquest [6].

List of Characters

1. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 2. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 3. 𐰇𐰆 4. 𐰇𐰆
5. 𐰇𐰆 6. 𐰇𐰆 7. 𐰇𐰆 8. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 9. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆
10. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 11. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 12. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 13. 𐰇𐰆 14. 𐰇𐰆 15. 𐰇𐰆
16. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 17. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆
18. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆
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26. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 27. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 28. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 29. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 30. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆
31. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 32. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 33. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 34. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 35. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆
36. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 37. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 38. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 39. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆
40. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆
41. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 42. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 43. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 44. 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆 𐰇𐰆𐰏𐰤𐰭𐰆

45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62.

Notes

1. The 1st International conference on tangutology in China has gathered about 120 scholars. More than 100 were Chinese scholars, however among the participants were representatives of Russia, Japan, USA, Germany, France, Korea, Taiwan as well. The conference had three working shops — history, archeology and linguistics.
2. Number in () brackets in front of a character (characters) corresponds to the number in the List of Characters.
3. It was Prof. W. Idema from University of Leiden who kindly prompted me the idea that character (59) *jiang* stands here for its homophone (60) *jiang*.
4. This translation is mine. E. I. Kychanov's translation reads: "A high sky is not much help to a low cloud, broad lands are no help to a narrow road".
5. I am grateful to Prof. Chen Qingying (China) who kindly gave me his unpublished work "A Brief Account on Notes about Xi Xia in Tibetan Historical Texts".
6. I would like to thank my teacher S. E. Iahontov (St. Petersburg University) for attentive reading of this article and useful remarks on its content.

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Illustrations

- Fig. 1.** The preface to the Tangut translation of the Buddhist canon (Stockholm Ethnographical Museum, Courtesy of the trustees of the Sven Hedin collection).
- Fig. 2.** Fragment of the Chinese MS containing the sūtra about bodhisatva Sheng-i (St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, TK-145).
- Fig. 3.** 12th century scroll on silk (Courtesy of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg).
