
TEXT AND ITS CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

K. B. Kepping

MI-NIA (TANGUT) SELF-APPELLATION AND SELF-PORTRAITURE IN KHARA KHOTO MATERIALS

Nowadays the terms “Tangut” and “Xia” (“Xi Xia”) [1] are commonly used in scholarly literature to designate both the Tangut state (982—1227) and the people who have founded it. However, it is well known that these terms, foreign to the Tanguts, belong to those who contributed to the fall of the Tangut state and to the scattering of the people: the term “Tangut” was used by the Mongols (in 1227 the Tangut state fell victim to the Mongolian invasion), while “Xia” (“Xi Xia”) — by the Chinese (later, in the last decades of the fourteenth century, when Yuan dynasty was giving its place to Ming, the process of extermination of the Tangut people was seemingly completed; at least such was the situation in Khara Khoto — being destroyed it was abandoned by its inhabitants just at that time) [2]. However, in Tangut texts there do exist Tangut indigenous names for the Tangut state, {1} [3] *phon mbin lhjə lje* “The Great State of the White and Lofty” [4], and for its people — {2} *mi* and {3} *mi-niauw*. But the tradition of using the foreign designations is so stable that, despite the fact that today these indigenous terms are quite familiar to the scholars, the foreign designations are still preferred [5].

For more than half a century lasted a scholarly polemic on the interpretation (translation) of the name of the Tangut Empire [6]. The translation “The Great State of the White and Lofty (=High)”, suggested by me, was accepted by some scholars, for example, Ruth W. Dunnell [7]. As for Tangut self-appellations [8], two words, {2} *mi* and {3} *mi-niauw*, are generally used in the scholarly literature. However, my study of Tangut self-appellations has shown that there are two more Tangut words with the same meaning, {4} *lhjwe* and {5} *lhjwe-ndzei*, which in Tangut poetry written in a specific language (the ritual language, see below) correspond to {2} *mi* and {3} *mi-niauw* respectively.

Quite unexpectedly, the analysis of the Tangut self-appellations from the ritual language has shed new light on the depiction of the people in Tangut paintings, providing indications that some may be identified as representatives of the two Tangut tribes (see below). Accordingly, the first part of this article focuses on the Tangut self-appellations, whereas the second — on the images of the Tanguts in paintings and engravings from Khara Khoto. It is to be noted that in the second part of the article I have made

an attempt to use, instead of foreign designations, one of the Tangut self-appellations, namely, {3} *mi-niauw*. I hope that other scholars will do justice to the Tanguts returning them the name the Tanguts used themselves.

As was said above, there are four words meaning “Tangut” which occur in texts: {2} *mi*, {3} *mi-niauw*, {4} *lhjwe* and {5} *lhjwe-ndzei*. The difference between them has not been determined yet. E. I. Kychanov translates {2} *mi* as “Tangut-*mi*” and {4} *lhjwe* as “Tangut-*lhi*” [9], thus revealing his opinion that these Tangut terms are not identical, standing for different groups of the Tanguts. In the respective commentary to his translation, Kychanov admits that for the time being it is difficult to determine the difference between the two terms. However, he supposes that {2} *mi* may be compared with the Tibetan word *mi* “man”, while {4} *lhjwe* — with the Tibetan word *lha* “sacred” [10].

My study of the four Tangut self-appellations has shown that the choice of the term depends on the character of the Tangut text: {2} *mi* and {3} *mi-niauw* are used in the texts written in the common language, while {4} *lhjwe* and {5} *lhjwe-ndzei* — in the ritual language. Note that the Tangut self-appellations differ in class they belong to: one-syllable self-appellations are adjectives, while two-syllable self-appellations are nouns.

It is important to explain here what I mean by “common language” and “ritual language”. It was Nishida Tatsuo who was the first to discover two different vocabulary layers in Tangut odes {6} *ndzjo*; he named them “vocabulary I” and “vocabulary II” [11]. Ten years later, having found that the grammar of the texts of the odes written in the “vocabulary I” differs from that of the texts written in the “vocabulary II”, I put into scholarly circulation the terms “ritual language” (Nishida’s “vocabulary I”) [12] and “common language” (Nishida’s “vocabulary II”) [13].

The majority of Tangut texts, both indigenous and translations, is written in the common language. These texts may be divided into three groups:

1. **Tangut official texts** which include Tangut Law Code [14], documents, colophons, etc.;