

Portraits of Tibetan and Indian Teachers in a Tangut Engraving

The perfect engraving «The Completion of the Translation of the Buddhist Canon in the Tangut State»¹ preceding a Yuan edition of the Tangut translation of *Xianzai xian qie qian foming jing* «Sutra on the Thousand Buddha names of the Present Bhadra Kalpa» is well known. It was many times reproduced (seemingly all those involved in the Tangut studies could not resist the temptation to reproduce this masterpiece in their respective writings), the first publication was as early as in the 1970's (Tangut Tripitaka 1970–1971: 910) and the last one in the 2000 (Samosyuk 2000).

The Tangut wood-block with the engraving, 27 x 27 cm, is held in China in the Beijing Library. Chinese scholars while reproducing the engraving restrain from a precise dating of the wood-block defining it just as a «Yuan edition», which means that the wood-block (and the engraving?) was cut after 1280, i.e. in the times when the Tangut state (1032–1227) was already annihilated.

The engraving shows the team of Tangut translators of the Buddhist Canon (altogether nine monks) together with their assistants, eight laymen, and the emperor Chongzong (Weiming Qianshun, b. 1084, 1086–1139)² and his mother empress dowager Madame Liang (the so-called second Madame Liang).

We believe that the engraving was made to commemorate the great event in the life of the Tangut state – the completion of the translation of the whole Buddhist Canon into the Tangut language (for details see Kepping 1998: 361–364). And it is known (Shi 1988) that the Tanguts announced the 1090 as the year when the translation had been completed. The main translator, State preceptor Bai Light of Wisdom, was rewarded with the title «Calmly Completed»³ which seemingly is to be understood as «the one who has Calmly Completed the translation of the whole Buddhist Canon into the Tangut Language» (cf. the caption in the engraving «The one in charge of the translation of the whole Buddhist Canon, who has Calmly Completed the translation, State Preceptor Bai Light of Wisdom» (Kepping 1998: 361).

Each of the monks of the translator team has above him a caption with his name, which includes his surname and his monastic name. The surnames may be either Tangut-shaped or Chinese-shaped, which means that they are included either into the list of Tangut surnames in the Tangut indigenous dictionary

«Ideographic Miscellany» (Terent'ev-Katanskij forthcoming) or into the list of Chinese surnames of the same dictionary.

It is taken for granted (seemingly all the scholars without any exception hold this opinion) that the surname of a monk was a clue to his ethnicity. Thus, all those who bear Chinese surnames are regarded as Chinese and those who have Tangut surnames are necessarily defined as Tanguts. As R. Dunnell puts it, «Of the eight monks named in the engraving..., four bear Tangut surnames (Beique, Weiming, Xiyu, Lubu) and four may be Chinese (Zhao, Hao, Cao, Tian)» (Dunnell 1996: 67).

However, regrettably, the situation was not as simple as that. The Tanguts would not be the representatives of «the state of ten thousand secrets» (this is how the Tanguts in the indigenous Tangut texts name their country), if they use such an easy way of designation for the monks' ethnicity.

In our opinion the so-called Chinese surnames, which usually render Chinese names in such Tangut translations from Chinese as *Sun zi bingfa* (Kepping 1979) or *Lei Lin* (Kepping 1983) in the engraving never reflect the Chinese origin of the bearers, they point to the *non-Tangut origin of a person*, i.e. to a foreigner.

As to the monastic names of the monks given in the captions, they all are, as it is common in Buddhist religion, meaningful, e.g. Light of Law, Cloud of Wisdom, etc. However, here we also are faced with misleading simplicity, since it appears that the real names of the monks are encoded as well. Thus, it seems that the monastic names were «double-encoded».

This article will touch upon two Tibetan and one Indian translators depicted in the engraving whom we have tentatively identified below.

The appearance of the monks was a great help in the determining their ethnicity, since today we already have some ideas about the «diagnostic signs» in portraying a Tangut or a Tibetan face.

As was already said, the engraving «The Completion of the Translation of the Buddhist Canon in the Tangut State» depicts the team of translators of the Buddhist Canon which consist of the main translator sitting in a lotus posture and four monks on his right hand and four monks on his left hand all sitting on benches (?).

The monk who sits second to the main translator's left hand, his name in the cartouche is *tshieu tsie mbi*, Chin. Zhao Fa-ming, to wit, Zhao Light of Law, is obviously not a Tangut. He bears a Chinese-shaped surname, which, as already was said before, means that he is not a Tangut.

His appearance corroborates him not being a Tangut – he does not have the «diagnostic signs» of Tangut ethnicity. However he does not look like a Chinese either.

We believe that he is a Tibetan, since he possesses arched eyebrows, which, according to our observation, are a «diagnostic sign» for people of Tibetan origin (seems to be valid for this engraving only).

His personal name Light of Law, which in Tangut is *tsie mbi*, we believe, represents the Tangut transcription of his Tibetan name – Rtsa-mi.

One more monk identified in the engraving, sits first to the main translator's left hand, i.e. he sits side by side with the Tibetan teacher Rtsa-mi and because he is sitting «higher» than Rtsa-mi, his role in the process of the translation seems to be more important than that of Rtsa-mi. His encoding in the engraving seems to be more complicated than Rtsa-mi's, and that is why we examine his name and possible identification after Rtsa-mi.

This monk's name in Tangut is *pu ngwi zi lhie*. The first two syllables of his name obviously are his surname — *pu ngwi* and this surname is to be found among the Tangut surnames in the «Ideographical Miscellany». R. Dunnell following Professor Shi Jinbo (1988: 76) renders this Tangut surname into Chinese as Beique (Dunnell 1996: 67).

The monastic name of this monk is *zi lhie* which means Prajna Moon.

However in his appearance one could not find either Tangut «diagnostic signs» or Tibetan «diagnostic signs», but proceeding from his Tangut surname we may suppose that he is one of the so-called Xi Xia monks.

These were Indian monks who fled Muslim invaders in the eleventh and twelfth centuries seeking refuge in Central Asia and China. Passing on their way the Tangut state, some of them remained there (Dunnell 1996: 29–34). There was an interesting episode (Shi 1988: 29, 334; Dunnell 1996: 34) connected with a group of nine Indian monks who while returning to India in 1036 (sic — the year when the Tangut script was put into use) from a visit to China were detained (Shi Jinbo even writes *qiu jin* «imprisoned», 1988: 334) by Yuan-hao in Xiazhou⁴.

The biographies of several such Indian by origin, but residing for rather long time in the Tangut state and named «Xi Xia monks» are included into Yu Qian's *Xin xxu gaoseng zhuan siji* (Dunnell 1996: 29).

R. Dunnell (1996: 32) translates the biography of one of these «Xi Xia» monks called Budong who appears to fit to be identified with *pu ngwi zi lhie*:

«Shi Budong's Sanskrit name is Aksobhya (*a shan pie*) Woziluo (Skr. *vajra*), in Chinese Budong Jingang (Unshakable Vajra), called Budong for short. Originally an Indian, when he first left home he traveled widely around India, thoroughly mastered the revealed and esoteric doctrines, and completely understood nature and its phenomenal expression. His reputation spread to neighboring lands. Then he came to Xi Xia and stayed at the Huguo Temple /in Wuwei/. He translated Esoteric teachings and disseminated widely the prajna Vajra teaching called Yoga... Budong only transmitted the Vajra part, so he was named Vajra Supreme Master (*jingang shangshi*). This name was given to him at the time of his consecration. As for Aksobhya, it means at very beginning relying on the law of the Aksobhya part and practicing it... Because he sustained his life solely on the «ambrosial truth» (*ganlu*), he was also given the title Master of the Sweet Dew Dharma. His disciple Lebu transmitted this teaching and it was again transmitted by Bao'an; yet a third transmission /was carried out/ by Weide Zhuang. Now the transmissions are especially numerous... It is not known when Budong died».

We made a supposition that *pu ngwi zi lhie* may be identified with this «Xi Xia»

monk, Budong Jingang.

As was said earlier, the two-syllable Tangut surname *pu ngwi* is rendered by scholars into Chinese as *beique*, which seems in this case to be rather misleading (to be sincere I do not know where this Chinese equivalent comes from, since Shi Jinbo does not explain the origin of it). However the *reconstruction* of the first syllable in this surname is *pu* (Sofronov 1968: 341, No 2876) and this hints to the possibility that *pu* may stand for the first syllable of the Chinese collocation *budong*.

It seems that only the first syllable of the surname was used as a surname while the three remaining characters – *ngwi zi lhie* – comprise the monastic name of this monk. And these three characters seem to convey *Woziluo*, which, as we know from the Chinese text of Budong's biography, stands for Sanskrit word *vajra*.

We believe, that the name *pu ngwi zi lhie* is a Tangut rendition of the name Budong (Chin. Unshakable) Woziluo (Skt. *vajra*), thus we have in Tangut the same, as in Chinese, «mixture» of Chinese (the Tanguts have used the Chinese reading of the word *vajra* = *Woziluo*) and Sanskrit words.

Since, as we know, his appearance confirms that he is neither Tangut nor Tibetan, but the fact that he got a Tangut surname, seems to point to him being one of the so-called Xi Xia monks, i.e. being Indian by his origin he got a Tangut surname (actually only the first syllable), because he was apparently regarded as a «Xi Xia monk».

The biography of Budong gives a clue for identification of one more monk – the last one in the row on the main translator's right hand.

Budong's biography mentions his disciple Lebu (Chin. Lebu, see Shi 1988: 76; Dunnell 1996: 264) and we may suppose that it is the last monk in the row on the main translator's right hand, whose name is quite similar with *lebu* – Lupu, his monastic name being *sie ni* Cloud of Knowledge.

The two-syllable surname Lupu is included into the list of Tangut surnames. But seemingly – judging from his appearance (arched eyebrows) – Lupu is a Tibetan. The reason why he got a Tangut surname apparently is connected with his teacher, Budong, who despite being an Indian was regarded as a «Xi Xia monk», hence his disciple, whoever he was, might be looked upon as a «Xi Xia monk» as well.

That Lupu was Budong's disciple may be corroborated by his position in the engraving – he is the very last in the row, while Budong sits the first in the opposite row.

Thus, it seems that we have identified three out of nine monks depicted in the engraving «The Completion of the Translation of the Buddhist Canon in the Tangut State» – a Tibetan teacher Rtsa-mi, an Indian teacher Budong Jingang and his disciple Lebu. Their presence in the engraving which shows the great event of 1090 shows that all three were members of the translation team when the Tanguts announced the completion of the translation of the Buddhist Canon into the Tangut language.

Notes

¹ The engraving, while being reproduced, was usually named as «The Translation of the Buddhist Canon in *Xi Xia*» (see, for example, Shi 1979). However it appears it should be rather entitled as «The Completion of the Translation of the Buddhist Canon in the Tangut State» (for details see Kepping 1998: 360-364).

² As to the emperor depicted in the engraving, there are conflicting opinion on his identification. Professor Shi Jinbo believes that it is Huizong (Weiming Bingchang, b. 1061, r. 1068–1086) (Shi 1988: 74). R. Dunnell follows him (Dunnell 1996: 67).

³ It seems that in Chinese the word *jing* stands for the Tangut word meaning «calmly». A calligraphicly written word *jing* often decorates scholars' study in China.

⁴ R. Dunnell doubts the trustworthiness of this episode, but seemingly it was absolutely in keeping with Yuan-hao's personality and his strong wish to make the translation of the Buddhist Canon in the best way (mind that the Tangut script included a list of Tangut characters devised especially to transfer Sanskrit words).