

## The Verb in Tangut \*

It is quite understandable that today those who work with the Tangut material, as a rule were trained as sinologists, since the bulk of sources on the Tanguts, which is readily available, represents Chinese-language material (in the first place Chinese dynastic histories). However, today it has become clear, that Tangut material in many cases has to be considered in the context of Tibet.

The Tangut state (982—1227) widely known by its Chinese name — *Xi Xia* — had its own, indigenous name for the state — The Great State of White and Lofty, which means The Great State of the Union of the Female and Male Principles (= The Great State of Yab-Yum). Founded by people of mixed Tibetan and Turkic origin it was situated on the territory of present-day Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and parts of Gansu, Shanxi and Inner Mongolia (China). A Buddhist kingdom with the Tantric tradition being the most popular among its population, it was an outstanding phenomenon in the history of Central Asia. Significantly, in 1038 the first Tangut emperor Yuan-hao (1032—1048) claimed to be the equal of the Chinese emperor. It was during his reign that an indigenous ideogrammatic script had been worked out. This script was estimated by its first explorers in the 20th century as the most complicated system of writing ever invented by a human mind (B. Laufer). It was the only state in the 11th century that undertook such a grandiose enterprise as translation and publication of the whole Buddhist Canon in its own script, and it was made in a record short time of fifty three years (cf. in China this process took a millennium).

The existence of such a state on Chinese borders was a ground-shaking event, since it manifestly violated the Far Eastern traditional notion according to which China was the center of civilization, whereas all other peoples were perceived as barbarians. And seemingly in this context the most irritating was the definition the Tanguts applied to their state — the State of the Center (cf. *Zhongguo* for China). This clearly shows that the Tanguts possessed their own world-view obviously different from the Chinese.

It goes without saying (mind their origin) that the Tanguts had a lot in common with the Tibetans. Obviously they have been following in the

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Tibetans' steps while choosing the Tantric form of Buddhism and the process of translation of Buddhist texts was modeled after the Tibetans. It is interesting to note that they even had a female great teacher Meritorious Woman (second half of the 12th century), cf. the Tibetan great teacher Ma-gcig bslab-kyi s Gron-ma (1055—1149).

Regrettably, specialists in Tibet are not much interested in Tangut studies. May be they are hindered by the fact that Tangut language having a very complicated script is so far poorly studied. I hope that my paper devoted to the most important part of speech — the verb — will contribute to arising interest in Tangut studies.

**1.A.** Tangut language has a complicated system of verbal prefixes, which by their origin indicated the direction of the action.

There are six prefixes of perfective aspect (*a, na, ki, vie, ndi, tha*) which are in complimentary distribution, since in principle each Tangut verb is associated with one and only one of these prefixes (e.g., the verb «to be angry» can have only the prefix *a*, the verb «to receive» — only the prefix *ndi*, the verb «to drown» — only the prefix *na* and so on). It means that these six prefixes have one and the same meaning and it proves to be the meaning of perfective aspect.

When I have compiled lists of verbs which are associated with each of these six prefixes, it became clear that the prefixes were connected with certain directions of action: the list of verbs occurring with the prefix *a* shows that these verbs indicate an upward movement, whereas the list of verbs occurring with the prefix *na* shows that these verbs indicate the opposite direction, i.e. downward. Since the prefixes indicate opposite directions, it is possible to arrange them in the following pairs:

#### Prefixes of perfective aspect

<i>a — na</i>	upwards — downwards
<i>ki — vie</i>	here — there, inside — outside
<i>ndi — tha</i>	towards the speaker — away from the speaker

It is to be stressed that in the language of the 12th century these prefixes already do not show the direction of action, they are only aspect markers and their original meaning of direction of action was revealed only by means of lists of verbs associated with a given prefix.

**1.B.** There are five prefixes of optative mood (*in, nin, kin, viei, ndin*), which are much less used in the Tangut texts I have studied. Although data on the optative markers is rather limited, it still shows that these prefixes are also associated with certain groups of verbs. Therefore it was quite natural to conclude that the optative mood markers following the pattern of the perfective aspect markers were in complimentary distribution as well. My analysis of the usage of the prefixes of optative mood has revealed that:

1) each of the prefixes of the optative mood is associated with a certain group of verbs,

2) these verb groups coincide with the groups singled out as occurring with certain prefixes of perfective aspect,

3) the prefixes of optative mood originally expressed a certain direction of action, hence they can be arranged into pairs of prefixes juxtaposed by the direction they convey:

#### Prefixes of optative mood

<i>in</i> — <i>nin</i>	upward — downward
<i>kin</i> — <i>viei</i>	here — there, inside — outside
<i>ndin</i> — ?	towards the speaker — ?

Each optative marker correlates in principle with one and only one perfective aspect marker. Such pairs of prefixes of perfective aspect and optative mood I call prefixes-correlates:

#### Prefixes-correlates

perfective aspect		optative mood
<i>a</i>		<i>in</i> upwards
<i>na</i>	<i>nin</i>	downwards
<i>ki</i>		<i>kin</i> here, inside
<i>vie</i>	<i>viei</i>	there, outside
<i>ndi</i>	<i>ndin</i>	towards the speaker
<i>tha</i>	? (not attested)	from the speaker

The phonological correspondence between the perfective aspect marker and the optative mood marker which designated one and the same direction of action, reveals their common origins, since in general a pair of prefixes-correlates has one and the same initial consonant and an identical following vowel, while the difference between them lies mainly in the final consonant. Although the phonological resemblance within a pair of prefixes-correlates does not represent my primary argument for establishing a similar original meaning for the prefixes-correlates, nevertheless it strongly supports the idea that prefixes of optative mood were derived from the prefixes of direction of action, combined with a certain grammatical morpheme meaning optative (apparently something like \*-n).

1.C. According to Chinese scholars, the category of direction of action is regarded as a distinctive feature of the ten languages spoken in *Chuanxi minzu zoulán* (according to Sun Hongkai, it is a strip of territory extended from southern Gansu and eastern Qinghai down through western Sichuan and southeastern Tibet to western Yunnan and the northern Burmese and Indian frontiers), which stands in contrast with both Tibetan and Loloish. These ten languages belong to the Qiangic branch of Tibeto-Burman languages.

The number of prefixes in the Qiangic languages varies from three to nine, but usually there are five to six prefixes altogether. The directional prefixes in these language may be united in pairs showing diametrically opposite directions:

upward — downward  
 here — there (inside — outside, upstream — downstream)  
 to the river — to the mountain

The system of directional prefixes is strikingly similar to the corresponding system in Pumi and Ergong. The similarity between the system of directional prefixes in Tangut and Pumi even includes details such as the grouping of the verbs according to the connection with a certain prefix.

It seems that the development of direction indicators into aspect (mood) markers which in Tangut language was almost completed, is still an on-going process in Qiangic languages.

Obviously Tangut language in its development has gone further than these modern TB languages, which had retained archaic features, viz. direction indicators.

2. After the verb in Tangut language may stand agreement markers and tense markers. The tense markers — *ndi* for the present tense and *si* for the past tense — follow the agreement markers.

The Tangut verbal agreement system, which concerns only first and second person singular and plural pronouns, is rather complicated.

There are three suffixes, agreement markers — *nga*, *na*, *ni* (*nga* is first person singular pronoun, whereas *na* and *ni* are homophonous respectively with second person singular pronoun and second person singular honorific pronoun). Being attached to a verb these suffixes show respectively agreement with the first person singular (*nga*), second person singular (*na*) and first or second person plural (*ni*). The verb never agrees with the third person pronouns, as well as with nouns.

The agreement of an intransitive verb does not present any difficulties, since the verb agrees with the only possible actant in the sentence (subject), in case it is expressed by a first or second pronoun (singular or plural).

The agreement of a transitive verb is much more interesting, since in this case there are two actants which can be expressed by first or second person pronouns and the verb agrees only with one of these pronouns. The rules are:

- 1) if there is only one pronoun in the sentence, the verb agrees with it irrespective of its function in the sentence,
- 2) if there are two pronouns in the sentence, the verb agrees with the one which stands for the object.

Thus, it means that, for example, the verb «to kill» in such Tangut sentences as «The hunter kills you» and «You kill the hunter» in both cases agrees with the second person pronoun (the first rule).

Whereas in such Tangut sentences as «I beat you» and «You beat me»

the verb agrees respectively with the second person pronoun and with the first person pronoun

The verbs of giving agree with the addressee in case it is first or second pronoun singular or plural. If the object has an attribute expressed by a first person singular pronoun, the agreement can be with the first person pronoun (examples with other pronouns are not attested).