THE ETYMOLOGY OF CHINGGIS KHAN'S NAME IN TANGUT¹

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Chinggis Khan's fate is closely associated with the Tangut State: it is generally accepted that he met his death in the Great State of the White and Lofty (= The Great State of *Yab-Yum*)² (982-1227), in the course of his Tangut campaign in 1226-27, when the once flourishing Tangut State had been completely subdued; shortly after it fell into oblivion.

But in spite of this, the list of sources written in a variety of languages describing Chinggis Khan's life and his military successes, lacks Tangut material, and this was and still is taken for granted, since it is widely held that Tangut historical records which, no doubt, had been compiled at the Tangut court, perished in the flames of the Mongolian invasion. However it may be, so far there are no traces of any historical records written in Tangut script.

The idea that some Tangut historical figures or figures connected with the Tanguts might appear in non-historical Tangut texts had never crossed my mind. That is why the mention of Chinggis Khan (as well as of two more persons – the Tangut heir, the son of the last but one Tangut emperor De-wang, and 'Phags-pa Lama³) in one of the Tangut poetic works (a ritual song) at first seemed to me unbelievable.

As it proved to be, among Tangut ritual songs $\{1\}^4$ kia⁵, which came to us in a cursive handwriting on the reverse sides of wood-block print pages, was one,

¹ I would like to thank my colleague Professor S. G. Kliaštornyj (St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies) for encouraging me to publish this fragment of my forthcoming study *Chinggis Khan's Last Campaign as Seen by the Tanguts.*

² The Tangut indigenous name for their state; for details, see Kepping 1994a; 1995.

³ There is one more person named in the text, but so far I have failed to identify him. He comes before all the other historical figures given in strict chronological order – Chinggis Khan, the Tangut heir and 'Phags-pa Lama. Obviously, in history this unidentified person preceded Chinggis Khan. Since I am here interested only in one figure, Chinggis Khan, the regrettable lack of information on the unidentified figure does not affect the results of this study.

⁴ The numbers in brackets {} refer to the List of Tangut characters at the end of this essay.

named $\{2\}$ sie pin 'u zour kia 'The Song Concerning How the Sacred Might Overcome All the Neighbouring Peoples'⁶, where I have found the names of the three afore-mentioned historical figures.⁷

The 'sacred might' obviously means the Tangut State. The term $\{3\}$ 'u I tentatively translate as 'all the neighbouring peoples'. The dictionary entitled 'The Sea of Characters' (Kepping *et al.* 1969, I: 296, no. 1764) defines this word as 'nine brothers 'u – the Khitans, Uighurs and others'. Obviously, the Mongols were also regarded as one of the brothers 'u.⁸

Tangut ritual songs which are permeated with Buddhist ideas, represent, in my opinion, secret Tantric knowledge transmitted orally from teacher to pupil. The wood-block print contains altogether about thirty ritual songs. The wood-block print itself contains several odes - {4} *ndzio* – which, I suppose, were performed openly during state rituals. The content of these odes has nothing to do with Buddhism and, in my opinion, they represent ancient indigenous odes which had been compiled long before Buddhist times and written down only in the times of the Tangut State.

Thus, this wood-block print really represents something special, since both Tangut ritual odes (printed) and Buddhist ritual songs in Tangut – on the reverse side in cursive – are collected in one and the same book.

One may suppose that the reason why the ritual songs were written down on the reverse sides of a printed book lies in an attempt to save secret Tantric knowledge in the face of the inevitable destruction of the Tangut State. (As far as I know, there is no printed text of these songs, at least in the Kozlov Collection in St. Petersburg.) Seemingly, it was not merely by chance that the ritual songs were put together with the odes: the choice of the text where the Tangut ritual songs were to be written down, was apparently quite deliberate. Tangut ritual poetry (odes performed openly during state rituals and songs sung at Buddhist liturgies) was to be found in one and the same book.⁹

⁵ I have already touched upon Tangut ritual songs (Chinese correspondence ge, Tibetan gyer) (Kepping 1994a: 365).

⁶ This is a tentative translation of the song's title.

⁷ I have not found any mention of historical figures belonging to the period after the fall of the Tangut State in other ritual songs in the Kozlov collection. I have cursorily read all of them and may claim that all of them definitely belong to the times of the Great State of *Yab-Yum*. So, 'The Song Concerning How the Sacred Might Overcome All the Neighbouring Peoples' is the only one now surviving which was compiled in the decades after the fall of the Tangut Empire (not earlier than the end of the 13th century).

⁸ Professor S. E. Yakhontov (St. Petersburg University) believes that $\{3\}$ '*u* is a general designation for non-Tangut peoples (perhaps with the exception of the Chinese and Tibetans), to wit, the barbarians [personal communication]. Cf. Li Fanwen's definition as $\underline{\xi}$ yi 'barbarians' (Li 1986: 423, no. 44B62).

⁹ I believe this fact represents a corroboration of my idea that the contents of the suburgan in Khara-Khoto, where P. K. Kozlov found Tangut texts in 1909, 'was not just a heap of occasional articles... [it] was a message to posterity' (Kepping 1999).

Let us turn to the technical characteristics of the wood-block print. The woodblock print (Tang. 25)¹⁰ measures 25 x 16.5 cm and the original binding was a butterfly binding. At present, for convenience of reading both sides of the page, the butterfly binding has been undone and each page was inserted into a separate plastic envelope.

Because of the improper method of restoration employed in the 1960s, it is nowadays impossible to define the original condition of the paper. Obviously while being restored the paper was pressed, stretched and steeped in glue made of flour or gelatine. On the edges of the paper there are layers of extra paper used for restoration. Now in the middle of the pages the colour of the paper is dark grey and at the edges it is dark yellow. The thickness of the paper in the middle of a page is about 0.25 mm and at the edges (together with the paper used for restoration) it is about 1.35 mm. (N. M. Brovenko, artist-restorer of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, personal communication.)

According to the colophon at the end of the text of the odes, the woodblock print was cut in 1185-86, to wit, in the reign of Renzong, Weiming Renxiao (r. 1139-93), the period which is usually regarded as the golden age of the Tangut Empire. Obviously the ritual songs on the reverse side were written later. I suppose that this happened not earlier than the end of the 13th or beginning of the 14th century, since the song at issue in this essay mentions 'Phags-pa Lama's death, which took place in 1280.

'The Song Concerning How the Sacred Might Overcome All the Neighbouring Peoples' (altogether 438 characters) consists of 33 lines, 30 of them being full and three shortened. Two shortened lines, both consisting of three characters, indicate a turning point in the song and one shortened line (of six characters) is at the end of the song. A full line has 14 characters (seven and seven) with a caesura after the fourth character in each seven-syllable phrase:

____/___ ___/____

The content of the song is really fascinating – being permeated with strong anti-Mongolian feelings, it is a call to fight. Thus, despite the fact that many decades had passed since the fall of their Empire, the Tanguts were still heart-broken and they did not abandon the idea of resistance. Throughout the centuries the song has conveyed the laments of an unknown Tangut poet (probably a Buddhist monk) who had been watching in despair the disastrous consequences of Chinggis Khan's invasion. It seems to me that even today the reader will be deeply impressed by the despair expressed in the following two lines:

¹⁰ Since we are interested only in the reverse sides of the wood-block print, I do not touch upon the technical characteristics of the text on the right-hand side of it.

{5}	phu-rie 'in-'iu mə tie ngwə	mə ndo ndju-rje ngwə mi ngwu
	mbi-rie na-'iu ldiə tie phe	ldiə 'a mbu-ngiei ldiə mi tśiu

[I] am looking upward - there is only the blue Heaven,

[I] complain to the Heaven - [but] the Heaven does not respond.

[I] am looking downward - there is only the yellowish-brown¹¹ Earth,

[I] rely on the Earth – but the [Earth] does not protect me.

I find these touching lines to be high poetry and it seems to me that 'The Song Concerning How the Sacred Might Overcome All the Neighbouring Peoples' is a real work of art.

Now let us turn to the main subject of this essay – Chinggis Khan's name, Temujin, in Tangut rendition. In 'The Song Concerning How the Sacred Might Overcome All the Neighbouring Peoples' one line (14 characters) is devoted overtly to Chinggis Khan:

{9} ldiə thi 'o liwe / mbin 'iə reu mbi vie tiei min / tśja na-tôn

The demon-strangler from the underworld Blacksmith Thunder-peal appeared in a way one could not avoid [him].

Chinggis Khan's designation occupies half of the line (seven characters), which thanks to the caesura can be easily divided into two parts – 'the demonstrangler from the underworld' (first four characters) and 'Blacksmith Thunderpeal' (the following three characters).

Let us start with the three characters {10} *mbin 'iə reu*, which I translate as 'Blacksmith Thunder-peal'. Since the word 'blacksmith' is included in the Tangut rendering of Chinggis Khan's name, it means that we have every reason to assume that 'Blacksmith Thunder-peal' corresponds to the name Temujin, which, as is widely held, was given to Chinggis Khan at birth (in view of the heaps of materials on this subject, I do not think that I have to prove this thesis).

As in Mongolian, Chinggis Khan's name in Tangut rendition consists of three syllables. The difference lies in the third syllable. In Mongolian the third syllable is supposed to be included in the word 'blacksmith', while in Tangut the first two syllables already mean 'blacksmith' and the third syllable seemingly is the name of the blacksmith (cf. {11} nga mbiu tshjetu sja 'general Zhao She'; see Kepping 1979: 478, 2-1b-3).

^{11 &#}x27;Yellowish-brown' is my translation of the adjective {6} phe, which, I suppose, conveys the idea that the earth has withered and does not bear fruit any more. I have already touched upon this adjective (Kepping 1985: 334-335). Being used mainly in Tangut proverbs (Kyčanov 1974), it seems to be a poetical epithet with the meaning of fading or wilting. As in the cited phrase from 'The Song Concerning How the Sacred Might Overcome All the Neighbouring Peoples' it is often contrasted with the adjective {7} ngwə 'green', 'blue' (Chinese 青), e.g. {8} śjə ngwə śje phe kêu niuo kêu 'Grass turns green, grass fades year after year' (Kyčanov 1974: 93, no. 37; Tangut text, p. 158).

The word 'blacksmith' – {12} *mbin 'iq* – is expressed in the song in the secret language,¹² since both parts of this word, in my observation, belong to the vocabulary of the secret language, the first character {13} *mbin* standing for 'gold', 'metal' (Kepping *et al.* 1969, II: 87, no. 3980) and the second character {14} '*iq* – for 'master' (Li 1986: 330, no. 27A17).

The word {17} śion kię (literally 'iron' + 'master') stands for 'blacksmith' in the common language. This word is to be found in the Tangut Code (Kyčanov 1989: 650). Thus, {12} mbin 'iə 'blacksmith', literally, 'gold' ('metal') + 'master', is an exact calque of the same word in the common language.

It is noteworthy that the first word in the collocation $\{12\}$ mbin 'i? 'blacksmith' expressed in the secret language, is homophonous with the word $\{18\}$ mbin 'membrum virile' (Kepping *et al.* 1969, II: 87, no. 3981). Thus the listeners may perceive this collocation as 'membrum virile + master'. Another homophone for the same word $\{13\}$ mbin is $\{19\}$ mbin 'high', 'lofty', which is included into the Tangut indigenous name for their Empire – $\{20\}$ phôn mbin lhị? tha 'The Great State of the White and Lofty' (= The Great State of Yab-Yum).

The third syllable of Chinggis Khan's name, which stands immediately after the word 'blacksmith', is expressed by the character {21} *retu* 'marsh', 'swamp' (Li 1986: 471, no. 53B41), but I believe that this character here stands for its homophone, namely, {22} *retu* 'thunder-peal' (Li 1986: no. 53B38 – mind that Li Fanwen writes 雷聲 *lei sheng* 'sound of thunder'), i.e. actually the word 'thunderpeal' was 'hidden' by means of its homophone. (Such tricks are known to be widespread in Tangut texts, see Kepping 1994a.) Mind that in the song both parts of Chinggis Khan's name are conveyed in a cryptic way.

The 'blacksmith' etymology of Chinggis Khan's name is well known.¹³ However, surprisingly, it is missing from the *Secret History of the Mongols*, where it is stated (1st chapter, paragraph 59), that Chinggis Khan's father named him Temujin after a Tatar whom he had captured shortly before Chinggis Khan's birth.¹⁴ The same story is included in the *Yuan shi* (I, 8a (7240)). Significantly, neither the *Secret History of the Mongols* nor *Yuan shi* mentions the 'blacksmith' etymology of the name.¹⁵

¹³ P. Pelliot (1959: 290) has convincingly demonstrated that Temujin means 'blacksmith'.

¹⁴ According to Rashid al-Din, the captured Tatar was later put to death (Smirnova 1952: 75).

¹⁵ Altan Tobchi, a Mongolian manuscript written in the 17th century, repeats the story about naming Chinggis Khan after a defeated enemy, but as an additional reason for such naming it states that Chinggis Khan was rocked in an iron cradle (*Altan Tobchi*, p. 66).

¹² Here it is necessary to provide some explanations. There are two separate layers in Tangut vocabulary, namely, common language and secret (ritual) language. The latter is used mainly in Tangut odes {4} ndzio. Each word in the common language has its pair in the secret language and, as a rule, the words with the same meaning in the common language and in the secret language are completely different both in their appearance and phonetic value, e.g. common language 'sun' {15} nə corresponds to {16} tie lie 'sun' in the secret language (for details, see Kepping 1996).

The 'blacksmith' etymology of Chinggis Khan's name is corroborated by the Franciscan friar Rubrouck (Willielmi de Rubruquis) who visited the Mongol court in the 1250s. First (in the 19th chapter), Rubrouck calls Chinggis Khan 'a certain workman Chinggis who used to steal animals...' (Malein 1911: 94) and later in the 48th chapter he states that Chinggis Khan was a blacksmith (Malein 1911: 162).

If we turn to Chinggis Khan's name (Temujin) in Chinese, we will find here a variety of renderings. However, for the last syllable in most cases there stands \underline{A} *zhen* 'truth', which is homophonous with the word $\underline{\mathcal{R}}$ *zhen* 'thunder', only their tones being different. Hence we may suppose that we have here, firstly, the same trick as we have observed in the Tangut song – the use of a homophone when transcribing Chinggis Khan's personal name – and, secondly, a corroboration of the 'thunder-peal' etymology. Seemingly Chinese renderings of the name Temujin retained some traces of the 'blacksmith' etymology as well, since the monk Hyacinth (N. Ja. Bičurin), whose works were based exclusively on Chinese sources, stated that Temujin meant 'the best iron' (Monk Hyacinth 1829: 378).

As to the first two characters of the name, today there is a standard Chinese transcription, namely, 鐵木真, which obviously adopts the 'blacksmith' etymology (*Yuan shi*, I: 7d (7239); Cai 1986: 409).¹⁶ But the earlier writings lack a unified transcription for Chinggis Khan's name – a fact which seems rather surprising for such a figure as Chinggis Khan. This observation I made while reading the *Mengda Beilu* (Munkuev 1975), where one finds two different Chinese transcriptions of the first two syllables in Chinggis Khan's name.

The text of *Mengda Beilu* (compiled in 1221 and published by Wang Guowei in 1926) is based on the 14th century sources. It gives 态没真 Temozhen (Munkuev 1975: 246, 247, 259 or 2b, 3a, 9a of the Chinese text), whereas the commentary now gives *《*没真 Temozhen (as in the text itself) (Munkuev 1975: 243, 268, 269, 270, Chinese text 1a, 13b, 14a, 14b), now 帖木真 Tiemuzhen (Munkuev 1975: 253 – four times, Chinese text 6a). It is to be stressed that none of the transcriptions in *Mengda Beilu* includes the word 'iron', thus leaving no trace of the 'blacksmith' etymology.

Since the commentary includes extracts from *Yuan shi* (compiled in 1370), it means that *Mengda Beilu*, which we have at our disposal, represents a text revised in keeping with the demands of the times. Definitely by this time the attitude towards Chinggis Khan had changed: he was already looked upon as the founder of the Yuan dynasty, the original *cakravartin*.¹⁷ Certainly, it would not be proper for him to be a blacksmith.

¹⁶ Mongolian scholars seemingly do not support the 'blacksmith' etymology, transcribing Temujin as Tiemuzhen 帖木真 (Tie is a surname). See, for example, Daoruntibu 1980 and Bayar 1981.

¹⁷ Professor H. Franke's expression (1981: 309).

No wonder that in the sources which were exposed to Sino-Mongolian influence in the second half of the 14th century the image of Chinggis Khan was ennobled and the 'blacksmith' etymology had been wiped out, giving place to a more fitting story about the captured Tatar leader whose name was given to the newly born baby. This very story was included both in the Secret History of the Mongols and in Yuan shi.

It seems that the 'blacksmith' etymology is preserved exclusively in those writings of the 13th-14th centuries which were inaccessible for revision by respective authorities: in the writings of Franciscan friars (Rubrouck), Tangut sources, and so on.

Professor S. G. Kliaštornij has directed my attention to the 5th chapter of Joannes de Plano di Carpini's account of his journey to the Mongols in the 1240s (Menestò 1989: 357; Malein 1911: 22) where it is stated that Chinggis Khan was killed by a thunderbolt. It may mean – in Kliaštornij's opinion – that, in the eyes of the Mongols, one and the same power, the Eternal Heaven, had first begotten Chinggis Khan and then punished him.

The idea of turning to the accounts of the Franciscan friars who visited the Mongol Empire in the middle of the 13th century (as has already been said, Carpini in the 1240s and Rubrouck in the 1250s) proved to be rather fruitful. In his 48th chapter Rubrouck relates the contents of a letter to Louis IX, king of France, written by the Great Khan Möngke in June 1254 (Malein 1911: 162). The letter obviously is to be regarded as an official document and hence the name of Chinggis Khan – 'Demugin Hingei' – mentioned in the first lines was seemingly his officially adopted name. It is explained by Rubrouck as *sonitus ferri*, i.e. 'sound of iron'. According to P. Pelliot (1959: 289), Rubrouck adds the explanation: *Ipsi vocant Chingis sonitum ferri*, *quia faber fuit* ('They themselves call Chinggis "sound of iron", since he was a workman').¹⁸

We know for certain that Rubrouck was not satisfied with his interpreter and constantly complained of his inadequate translation (Malein 1911: 83, 86, 92, 103, 115, 120, 122, 149, 155),¹⁹ hence we have every reason to suppose that in this case we are also faced with a corrupt translation. I suppose that the idea which the Mongols wished to convey to the friar was that the sound of thunder resembles the noise which a blacksmith makes while working. Thus, the translation *sonitus ferri* is a corrupted 'thunder-peal' (= the sound of the thunder) resulting from misunderstanding between the Mongols and Rubrouck. Thus, the idea of a loud sound expressed in Chinggis Khan's name is shared by both the Tanguts (mind Li Fanwen's *lei sheng*) and Rubrouck.

¹⁸ I would like to thank my colleague Dr. A. L. Khosroyev (St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies) for the translation of this sentence from Latin.

¹⁹ Chapters 12, 15, 18, 24, 31, 33, 44, 46.

Here I would like to diverge from the main subject for a while. In the very first chapter of his *Istoria Mongalorum* Carpini writes that in Mongolia in summer there are very loud peals of thunder and lightning which kill a large number of people (Malein 1911: 4). Rubrouck evidently supports Carpini, when in his 9th chapter (Malein 1911: 78) he states that the Mongols are extremely afraid of thunder and that they stay still, having wrapped themselves in black felt till the thunder is over.

It seems that fear of thunder was and seemingly still is widespread amongst those who inhabit the steppes.²⁰ Apparently the Tanguts shared this fear and it was reflected in their proverbs:

{23} ndie 'êi źeur-źeur thie mbi lhiq-lhiq (Kyčanov 1974: 116, no. 257; Tangut text p. 198).
A sound of thunder – laments and cries

A flash of lightning $-?.^{21}$

In my opinion, this proverb means that thunder-peals cause death, hence laments and cries.²²

It is known that Chinggis Khan was associated with Heaven's judgment on sin and that he himself claimed that he was God's (evidently Eternal Heaven's) judgment on the sins of people (Smirnova 1952: 252). This notion is also corroborated by Rubrouck's text: describing a Mongolian custom which requires one not to wash one's clothes, he stresses that otherwise God (= the Eternal Heaven) will be filled with anger and there will be a thunder-peal (Malein 1911: 78). Thus, thunder in the eyes of the Mongols is caused by Heaven's anger, hence Chinggis Khan himself represented the embodiment of Heaven's anger.

The Tangut song, however, shows that Chinggis Khan was associated with the underworld rather than with Heaven. Seemingly, this point may elucidate the provenance of the word 'Tartar' (from 'Tartarus') used in Europe for centuries to refer to the Mongols. Since the Tangut song defines Chinggis Khan as 'the demonstrangler from the underworld', we may suppose that because of his terrible cruelty Chinggis Khan was perceived to be 'the one who came from the underworld'. Later such a definition was used to designate Mongolian troops and, ultimately, the whole Mongolian people. Obviously this European notion of the Mongols did not

²⁰ I still cannot forget a thunderstorm in the vicinity of Kustanai in Kazakhstan in July 1954 where our family was to reside – almost black sky, lightning and terrifying sounds of thunderbolts. This lightning killed someone, I remember a body covered with a tarpaulin.

²¹ The characters which I have not translated, namely,{24} lhio-lhio are registered in Tongyin (Li 1986: 473, no. 54A48). Li translated them as 滔滔 taotao 'to glitter' and 蕩漾 tangyang 'to ripple'.

²² Kyčanov (1974: 116), however, has translated the proverb as 'Peals of thunder resemble cries of grief, flashes of lightning resemble?'

originate in Europe frightened by barbarians, as is sometimes stated, – it roots are to be seen already in Tangut writings.

As to the statement that Chinggis Khan appeared in such a way that one could not avoid him, no doubt it is a hint at the rituals which the Tanguts used to perform to avoid disasters (Nevskij 1960, I: 52).

We may suppose that because of his wanton cruelty Chinggis Khan had struck fear not only into his enemies but into his compatriots and allies as well, and this fear made him equal with the most terrible natural phenomenon in the steppes which also kills without any distinctions – thunderstorms and hence he was given the nickname – Thunder-peal.

It is also interesting to note the use of the prefix $\{25\}$ na 'downward' with the verb $\{26\}$ tôn 'to appear', 'to come out'. This verb, as a rule, occurs with another prefix, namely, $\{27\}$ 'a 'upward', but in this case it has the prefix $\{25\}$ na 'downward', i.e. the prefix indicating direction of action 'downward' precedes a verb which expresses direction of action 'upward'.²³ So far I cannot explain what lies behind this grammatical phenomenon.

Thus, the study of the sources written shortly after Chinggis Khan's death, such as the Tangut 'Song Concerning How the Sacred Might Overcome All the Neighbouring Peoples', as well as the accounts of the Franciscan friars, have shown that Chinggis Khan's name Temujin originally meant 'Blacksmith Thunderpeal'. Yet later, in the 14th century, the 'blacksmith' etymology did not correspond to the image of a Great Khan and the wish to ennoble Chinggis Khan's descent yielded the story of a more respectable provenance which was introduced into circulation. This resulted in inconsistency in rendering Chinggis Khan's name which is especially noticeable when it comes to conveying it in an ideogrammatic script (i.e. in Chinese).

Those who are working with Tangut materials could hardly ever have dreamed that such a precious source (at the same time being a real work of high art) for elucidating the history of the Tanguts, as well as their enemies, the Mongols, as 'The Song Concerning How the Sacred Might Overcome All the Neighbouring Peoples', would ever be found among thousands of Tangut manuscripts and woodblock prints the bulk of which represents Buddhist texts. So far, to the best of my knowledge, nothing of such a kind is known to be found in any Tangut collection in the world.

²³ On the usage of Tangut prefixes of direction of action, see Kepping 1994b.

THE LIST OF TANGUT CHARACTERS

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