

THE BLACK-HEADED AND THE RED-FACED IN TANGUT INDIGENOUS TEXTS

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In a few years it will be already a centenary since Russian traveler and Central Asian explorer colonel P. K. Kozlov discovered in 1909 the Tangut treasure hidden in a *suburgan* (Mongolian for *stūpa*) in Khara Khoto. From this time on, the Tangut material from Khara Khoto (both written and artistic) is being systematically studied by scholars in different countries. But nevertheless, today, as many years ago, the Tanguts and the civilization they created in some aspects remain a mystery. Such situation first of all is due to the fact that Tangut indigenous texts are still beyond scholarly comprehension.

In order to reveal the Tangut mystery and reconstruct Tangut world-view, it is necessary to decode the information given in indigenous writings, particularly, in poetry (ceremonial odes and ritual songs), and to find its reflection in art objects¹, since both written and artistic parts from Khara Khoto *suburgan* represent a single source of information on the Tanguts (for details see Kepping 1999a).

Especially significant in this aspect are Tangut ceremonial odes, which, in my opinion, belong to the most ancient layer in Tangut poetry. They contain Tangut mythological ideas about the provenance of Tangut people, the place the people originated from, their wanderings, their pre-Buddhist beliefs, etc. The content of the odes today is actually impenetrable, since, on the one hand, the odes are partly written in a special language (Tangut ritual language, for details see below), which demands special study; on the other hand, hints and symbols peculiar to the parts of odes written in common language are still not known to the scholars.

It is clear that a laborious preparatory work is to be done, which includes establishing the meaning of some crucial terms constantly used in Tangut poetical

1 Due to the exhibitions of Tangut art objects from Khara Khoto *suburgan* throughout the world in the 1990s, not only scholars, but general public as well, had an opportunity to appreciate the fascinating pieces of Tangut art (Piotrovsky 1993). In this essay I have made an attempt to find in Tangut *tanka* corroboration of my ideas deduced from examining Tangut written sources (see notes 24 and 26).

works. Without understanding the meaning of these words, it is impossible to penetrate the content of the odes and the translation of the odes will inevitably represent a kind of senseless “threading words on a string”.

There are two terms, namely, “black-headed” and “red-faced”, which are often used not only in poetry, but in other Tangut indigenous texts as well. These terms were singled out in the 1930s by the great Russian scholar N. A. Nevskij and defined by him as terms of Tanguts’ self-designation. Since then, the problem of the black-headed and red-faced was discussed by many scholars, but despite all the efforts, no scientifically grounded interpretation was suggested so far and today these two terms still remain a puzzle.

Below I give my understanding of these two terms, which, I would like to stress, in no way pretends to be ultimate, since not all examples of the usage of these terms in the odes (because of their obscurity) are recorded in this essay. But first of all let us turn to the explanations of these terms given by different scholars in course of past decades.

In his famous article “On the name of the Tangut state” published in the 1930s², Nevskij had cited the first lines of a previously unknown Tangut “Hymn to the Sacred Ancestors of the Tanguts” where the two terms stand at the beginning of the first two lines:

- {1} *’u nja ldu we tshon zje mbju*
ni nin vja lhjuo ma phôn mbin
*mi niau ndzjo ’in lhiã tha vjet*³

The stone city of the black-headed ones on the banks of the uninhabited (lit. desert) river,

The paternal burial mounds of the red-faced ones [by the foot of the mountain] White and Lofty Mother.

Here is to be found the land of the tall *mi niau* [viz. Tangut].⁴

In his efforts to understand the meaning of the two terms, Nevskij’s speculations run as follows. The Tangut term “black-headed” may correspond to the Chinese *qianshou* (lit. black-headed) meaning “the common people”.

As to the term “red-faced”, Nevskij believed that the Tanguts had been following Tibetan custom and painting their faces red, because:

1. Tibet before the spreading of Buddhism was named “The Land of the Red-faced Ones”;

2 The article was republished in his *Tangutskaja filologija* (Nevskij 1960, I: 33–51).

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

4 This is my translation. Nevskij’s translation is as follows: “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. in the “History of the Tang dynasty” it is said that the Tibetans were colouring their faces with red paint;
3. of the usage of the term “red-faced” in Tangut poetry.

However, as Nevskij states, at the moment the lack of sufficient data hinders establishing the difference between the two terms. Nevertheless, Nevskij provided several possible explanations of the meaning of the terms:

1. The two terms represented metaphorical designation of the Tangut people.
2. The terms were the names of different classes of the Tangut society.
3. The terms were popular names of the two main tribes, which founded the Tangut State.

As to his personal opinion, Nevskij saw more ground in the interpretation of the two terms as being synonym expressions for the Tangut people as a whole.

Japanese scholar Nishida Tatsuo first presumably supported Nevskij’s opinion: he translated these terms respectively as “the black-headed ones (the Hsi-Hsia)” and “the red-faced ones (the Hsi-Hsia)” (Nishida 1964: 170). Later Nishida seems to avoid a clear definition of these terms (Nishida 1986: 39). However, in the same article while discussing, as he puts it, two layers of Tangut vocabulary (I and II), he supposes that “vocabulary I” (he names it “a difficult language”) was used by the nomads, whereas “vocabulary II” (“an easy language”) – by the agricultural labourers (Nishida 1986: 74).⁵

Chinese authors are very cautious while translating these terms. Some of them keep silent on the meaning of them, just giving corresponding Chinese words (*hei tou – chi mian*) without any comment. The others following basically the explanations of the terms given by Nevskij, state that seemingly these terms represent Dangsiang (= Tangut) names for themselves and because of their connection with “desert waters” and the “White River” (see Nevskij’s translation in footnote 4), it is quite possible that they are linked with the origin of Dangsiang nation (Shi 1986: 139–140).

Kyčanov’s view on this problem has undergone certain development. First he stated that the black-headed and the red-faced were synonyms for designation of the Tangut people, i.e. he took after the explanation given by Nevskij in the 1930s (Kyčanov 1974: 46). However, in 1997 Kyčanov gave not a scientifically grounded definition of the terms, but, as he himself put it, his “guess-work” of their meaning:

The “black-headed” are descendants of the White Crane, the children of the Heavenly Height, White Loftiness, paternal line, the fore-fathers of the ruling family. The “red-faced” are descendants of the Sun-hipped girl (woman)⁶, the children of the Earth,

5 In my opinion, Nishida’s “vocabulary I” and “vocabulary II” represent respectively Tangut ritual language and Tangut common language (for details see below).

6 Seemingly Kyčanov meant that the hips of the girl were in the shape of the sun.

maternal line, in the past they were conjugal partners of the black-headed. (Kyčanov 1997: 56)

It is hardly possible to discuss seriously Kyčanov's definition of the terms, since it does not represent a result of a scientific study, all the more his speculations lack Tangut characters. However without going into details, two remarks may be made on his "guess-work":

1. the collocation "Heavenly Height" or "White Loftiness", seemingly is Kyčanov's translation of the {2} *phôn mbin* (Chinese correspondence *bai gao*) "White and Lofty" included into the name of the Tangut State ("The Great State of White and Lofty"). Today when the main rules of Tangut grammar are defined and easily accessible in the respective literature, the translation of the *bai gao* collocation as "White Loftiness" is inadmissible (see Kepping 1994). This collocation is rather to be translated as "Lofty Whiteness".

2. According to Kyčanov (1997: 1, 86–92, 95), Tangut culture was a part of Far Eastern culture. However, the idea of a girl with hips in the shape of the sun (Sun-hipped girl) is hardly in keeping with the Far Eastern traditional notions.

The terms "black-headed" and "red-faced" are mainly used in a parallel fashion in Tangut poetry. But sometimes they may occur separately, such examples are found in Tangut proverbs (Kyčanov 1974: 123, No. 343) and in Tangut ritual songs. Significantly, these terms are never used in the Tangut Codex (Kyčanov 1987–89).

It is clear that these terms definitely represent some ancient Tangut ideas about two groups of people peculiar *exclusively* to the Tanguts. This may be observed in the well-known Liangzhou bilingual (Tangut-Chinese) stele: used only in the Tangut text of the stele (Nishida 1964: 170), these terms lack in the Chinese text of it (Nishida 1964: 158–160).

Before turning to the usage of the terms "black-headed" and "red-faced" in Tangut writings, it is necessary to give some information on Tangut poetry, since, as it was already said, these terms are mainly used in a parallel fashion in Tangut poetical works. Today nearly nothing is known about Tangut poetry⁷ (this subject has never been studied so far). It should be kept in mind that the following information on Tangut poetry is just some concise data available at the moment and important for this study.⁸

In Tangut translations of Chinese secular (non-Buddhist) texts (see e.g. Kepping 1983) I came across several terms which rendered Chinese designations

7 So far even genres of Tangut poetry have not been singled out, and, as a result, sometimes scholars are not able to tell one genre from another. Thus, Kyčanov (1997: 57–58) uses one and the same Russian word meaning "ode" to translate different genres, namely, {3} *ndzjo* "ode" and {5} *kīa* "ritual song".

8 I do not touch upon the problem of rhyme in Tangut since it is not relevant for this study.

for poetical works: {3} *ndz̄io*, {4} *ngin*, {5} *k̄iā* and {6} *lda*. The first two – {3} *ndz̄io* and {4} *ngin* are usually standing for the Chinese term *shi* “verse”, irrespective of both, the length of the verse (it differs from two lines up to eight lines) and the line (from four to ten characters in a line). The character {5} *k̄iā* renders the Chinese term *ge* “song”. As to the word {6} *lda*, it stands for Buddhist term *gāthā*.

Three out of these four terms I have encountered in Tangut indigenous texts. They are {3} *ndz̄io*, {5} *k̄iā* and {6} *lda*. According to my definition, they mean respectively “ceremonial ode”, “ritual song” and *gāthā*. Below I will touch upon {3} *ndz̄io* “ceremonial ode” and {5} *k̄iā* “ritual song”, since the terms “black-headed” and “red-faced” are used here. I am leaving aside the term {6} *lda*: so far in the *gatha* known to me I have not found these two terms (certainly it does not mean that these two terms are never used in {6} *lda*).

Significantly, {3} *ndz̄io* “ceremonial ode” and {5} *k̄iā* “ritual song” came to us in one block-print (Tang. 25, No. 121). According to the colophon, the block-print was cut in 1185–1186, to wit, in the reign of Renzong, Weiming Renxiao (r. 1139–1193), the period which is usually regarded as the golden age of the Tangut Empire.

This block-print contains printed ceremonial odes, whereas on the reverse side of the pages of the block-print in cursive handwriting (sometimes almost illegible) Tangut ritual songs are written down. Mind that the ritual songs preserved in St. Petersburg, have come to us only in written form (I suppose that they have never been printed).

Thus, the most precious Tangut indigenous material, which may reveal the mystery of this perished civilization (it seems that one does not have to prove this thesis) – the ceremonial odes and the ritual songs – have come to us in one and the same block-print.

This fact does not seem to me to be a coincidence – I do not think that the block-print with ceremonial odes was just taken at random for transcribing the ritual songs. I believe that it was a well thought-out choice.

In the last decades of the 14th century in the face of inevitable destruction, saving their cultural treasure (for details see Kepping 1999a), the Tanguts, among other objects, seemingly wanted to preserve the ritual songs, which, I believe, represented Tantric secret knowledge. This knowledge could be transmitted only orally from teacher to pupil. Some of these ritual songs were obviously compiled not earlier than the end of the 13th century⁹, i.e. no less than in a century after the publication of the ceremonial odes. And when it came to decide *where* the ritual songs were to be written down, the block-print with ceremonial odes was chosen.

The fact that we got in one book Tangut ceremonial odes, which, I believe were performed openly during state rituals and Tangut ritual songs, which belong to

9 I have made such a conclusion, since one of the ritual songs mentions 'Phags-pa Lama (1235–1280) (for details see Kepping 1999b).

Tantric secret knowledge, may serve as a corroboration for my idea that the contents of Khara Khoto *suburban* “was not just a heap of occasional articles ... [it] was a message to posterity” (Kepping 1999a).

Originally the block-print contained at least five odes, namely, “The Ode on Ritual Verses (?)”, “The Great Ode”, “The Ode on Monthly Pleasures”, “The Ode on Sayings” and “The Ode on Wisdom”. Only three of them (“The Great Ode”, “The Ode on Monthly Pleasures”, “The Ode on Sayings”) have come to us in a complete form. “The Ode on Wisdom” lacks its last part, while only fragments are left from “The Ode on Ritual Verses (?)”. On the reverse sides of the pages of the block-print there are about thirty ritual songs (twenty-eight are preserved in a complete form and from one (two?) song we got only fragments).

Let us begin with the ceremonial odes. The Tangut dictionary “The Sea of Characters” gives such a definition of the word {3} *ndzjo*:

{7} *ndzjo ta ndeu lje nwə ngwo ndə ndzjon rin tshje ndzjo viə 'in' i*

[The word] *ndzjo* means sayings, proverbs¹⁰, fine words. For example, *ndzjo* are compiled about scholarly knowledge (Kepping et al. 1969, I, p. 469, No. 2901).

The word {3} *ndzjo* has only one homophone¹¹ – {8} *ndzjo* “ceremony”, “ritual” (Kepping et al. 1969, I, p. 469, Nos. 2900, 2901). So, the listeners may perceive the titles of the odes as “The Great Ceremony”, “The Ceremony on Monthly Pleasures”, “The Ceremony of Sayings”, etc. That is why I think that these odes were performed during some important state rituals in Tangut Empire.

The ceremonial odes lack Buddhist vocabulary and do not mention Buddha’s name. I believe that they represent the most ancient layer of Tangut poetical works, no doubt, pre-Buddhist, which contains precious information on Tangut mythology and, importantly, Tangut ideas about their provenance. Being compiled long before Buddhist times, the odes were written down only after 1036 (the year when Tangut script is said to be put in use). I believe that these odes represent the ideas of Tangut indigenous religion, the Root West (for details see below).

The study of the odes has revealed the fact that the Tanguts had a ritual language.¹² This phenomenon is known to exist in other Tibeto-Burman languages as well (e.g. in Belhare, B. Bickel, personal communication, March 1996), and it is rather widespread throughout the world (some AmerIndian tribes possess ritual (secret) languages as well). But Tangut case is something special, since here we

10 Tangut proverbs (didactic expressions) are arranged in two parallel parts (Kyčanov, 1974).

11 About the importance of the homophones in Tangut writings see Kepping 1994: 366.

12 It was Nishida Tatsuo (1986: 39–73), who was the first to discover the two layers in Tangut language, which he names respectively as “vocabulary I” and “vocabulary II”. Ten years later I have put into circulation the terms “secret language” (stands for Nishida’s “vocabulary I”) and “common language” (Nishida’s “vocabulary II”) (see Kepping 1996). Now instead of the term “secret language” I use “ritual language”.

have a *written* form of a ritual language. Each passage in the ode is given twice – first it is expressed in the ritual language, and then the same passage is given in the common language.¹³ The text of the odes is divided into passages from six to twenty-five characters in a passage. In most cases a passage consists of a line (mind that it is poetry) of seven characters with a caesura (= pause) after the fourth character. In case of twenty-five characters, they may form three lines: 11–7–7. First the passage is expressed in the Tangut ritual language and then the same text is rendered in the Tangut common language. Usually the number of characters in the ritual language corresponds to that of the common language; the difference is no more than two characters.

A comparison of a passage in Tangut ritual language with the same passage rendered in common language has shown that

1. The text in ritual language is not translated verbatim into common language, the text in common language is rather a rendition of certain ideas expressed in ritual language.
2. The words with the same meaning (synonyms) in ritual language and common language as a rule are completely different both in their appearance and phonetic value, i.e. neither on visual level nor on the audio level of a character the reader gets a slightest idea on the semantic closeness of synonyms in the two languages.
3. One-syllable words in common language irrespective of the class they belong (except verbs) usually correspond to two-syllable words in the ritual language.
4. The ritual language lacks grammatical morphemes. There are no postpositions, almost no verbal prefixes, even the interrogation is expressed by the verb “to ask”. The relations between the words in a sentence are ruled by the word order.

On the whole the ritual language gives an impression of an artificial language.

That the Tangut odes are written in two languages – ritual and common – gives us a perfect opportunity to compare a passage in the ritual language with the same passage in the common language and to establish correspondence between the two Tangut vocabularies, ritual language vocabulary and common language vocabulary.

As to the ritual songs on the reverse sides of the pages of the block-print, regrettably the explanation of the word {5} *kīq* “ritual song” in the dictionary “The Sea of Characters” is lost. But it is obvious that Tangut ritual songs {5} *kīq* correspond to the Tibetan *gyer* “ritual song” (Kepping 1994: 365).

13 Regrettably, Kyčanov failed to reveal the structure of the odes as being compiled simultaneously in two different languages, ritual and common, and, as a result, his translation of the odes proved to be inadequate (Kyčanov 1997: 23–27, 217–223).

Quite contrary to the ceremonial odes, the ritual songs are permeated with Buddhist ideas. Thus, comparing *ndzjo* “ceremonial odes” with *kja* “ritual songs”, we may claim that the odes were compiled earlier than the songs. The ancient provenance of the odes (besides the already mentioned absence of Buddhist vocabulary) can also be seen in the fact that while the odes mention only the Tibetans and Chinese, the ritual songs name the Jurchens, Khitans, Uighurs, Mongols (?), etc.

Because of that, I suppose that the ritual songs being Buddhist by their origin, belong to much later times. Obviously the tradition of compiling the ritual songs did not cease altogether with the break-up of the Tangut state: as was said, there is evidence that the songs were compiled at least up to the end of the 13th century (see footnote 9).

The odes and songs differ in their length. The songs were rather short (from 106 up to 559 characters); seemingly they were compiled to mark some particular events (e.g. to praise the Teacher, the inventor of the Tangut script, or a pilgrimage to Buddhist sacred places, etc.), while the ceremonial odes consist of no less than thousand characters (“The Great Ode” and “The Ode on Monthly Pleasures” each has more than 1400 characters, while “The Ode of Sayings” consists of 2117 characters, as it is stated by a note in handwriting at the end of the ode) and presumably were performed on some important occasions on the state level.

Now let us turn to the terms “black-headed” and “red-faced”. It is to be noted that there are three fixed pairs of these terms which occur in Tangut texts – two pairs in the ritual language (r.l.) and a pair used in the common language (c.l.):

Terms used in the ritual language

“black-headed” – {9} *ndzju phôn* (lit. white crane) and {10} *lijwu mü*

“red-faced” – {11} *za ngje* and {12} *lhiwe šjwe*

These terms are used in two pairs:

{9} *ndzju phôn* “black-headed” (lit. white cranes) – {11} *za ngje* “red-faced”

{10} *lijwu mü* “black-headed” – {12} *lhiwe šjwe* “red-faced”

Terms used in the common language

{13} *’u nja* “black-headed” – {14} *ni nin* “red-faced”

Thus, there are two different designations for each of the term in the r.l. and only one for each term in the c.l.

The terms “black-headed” and “red-faced” occur in all Tangut odes preserved in the block-print Tang 25. However, only “The Great Ode” represents a single source of information on the meaning of these terms giving a juxtaposed description of each group of people. In other odes these terms are also used (even some passages from “The Great Ode” are repeated), but while reading these odes one gets an

impression that the reader is supposed to be in possession of the crucial information on “black-headed” and “red-faced” from “The Great Ode”.

Below are cited four sentences from “The Great Ode”, which, I believe, on the one hand, give an idea of the structure of the odes (sentences about the black-headed expressed in two languages precede the sentences about the red-faced, which are also written in two languages), and, on the other hand, show the basic difference between the black-headed and the red-faced (the former are connected with the Heaven, while the latter – with the Earth)¹⁴:

{15} *ndźiu phôn tshwu kīę me 'in viə*

(r.l.) White cranes are making the Heaven and they turn into the wind ...
(The Great Ode 3B-5)

{16} *'u nīa mə vīę liə rīę ka*

(c.l.) The black-headed are making the Heaven and [they] are equal to the wind ...
(The Great Ode 3B-6)

{17} *ža ngīę tsę ndzieu kqu mbi tshīęi*

(r.l.) The red-faced are cultivating the Earth and are going away like smoke ...
(The Great Ode 3B-6)

{18} *ni nin ldīə ndīon nī rə vīę*

(c.l.) The red-faced are cultivating the Earth and are dispersed like clouds ...
(The Great Ode 3B-7)

It seems more convenient (let alone the difficulties of reading the Tangut text in the r.l.) first to examine the sentences written in the c.l., since the pair from the c.l. {13} *'u nīa* “black-headed” – {14} *ni nin* “red-faced” being used in odes and ritual songs occurs more frequently than the pair from the r.l. Let us begin with the first occurrence of the terms in “The Great Ode”, which touches upon the problems vital to each group of people:

{19} *'u nīa 'u ldīə si ? nīə*

(c.l.) The black-headed have two heavy burdens – death and old age.
(The Great Ode 1B-5)

{20} *ni nin tsīu vīę ndzie ? niə*

(c.l.) The red-faced are working for two [things] – food and clothes.
(The Great Ode 1B-6)

These examples clearly show that the black-headed and red-faced both were mortal beings (see also examples 29 and 30). More examples:

14 This has already been noticed by Kyčanov (1997: 55).

{21} *tʰu ʼu n̄ja ž̄iɛ n̄juo ndz̄io*

(c.l.) Thousand of black-headed because of being not numerous scatter [in the air].
(The Ode on Ritual Verses [?] 31B-4)

{22} *khi ni nin liɛ niɛ ka*

(c.l.) Ten thousand of red-faced [because of being] numerous differ in their nature (lit. hearts).
(The Ode on Ritual Verses [?] 31 B-5)

Now let us turn to the examples found in Tangut ritual songs, which, as was said above, as a rule, were written in the c.l. Of a great significance for the study of the meaning of the terms “black-headed” and “red-faced” are three lines of a ritual song “Building a New [Palace for] the Great Teaching”¹⁵:

{23} *mi ngo no š̄iɛ ngwi š̄iɛ nda ʼiwə ʼa thiwi tʰu ʼu n̄ja ndo t̄sh̄ia ndz̄iɛ miɛ me phi me
n̄juo lh̄iɛ ndz̄io ʼiə khi ni nin ʼin ti lh̄wi t̄iɛi*

The Tangut Teacher,
having put the sacred phrases and the sacred words together with the script,
[was] the one, who taught virtue to the thousand black-headed.
[Out of] the holy aspirations and the holy expressions the ceremonial odes¹⁶ were
compiled [for being] heard,
They are the source where ten thousand of the red-faced take their examples.
(Ritual Song)

According to the first two lines of the song, the Tangut Teacher (apparently he is the inventor of Tangut script) having invented the script (“having put together the sacred phrases and the sacred words together with the script”) transferred the knowledge of the script (“taught virtue”) to the black-headed. Thus, we may assume that the black-headed were literate, since they had received knowledge directly from the Tangut Teacher.

The third line states that the red-faced are getting the knowledge (lit. take examples) while listening to the ceremonial odes. So, the red-faced seem to be illiterate.

Thus, one may suppose that the way of perception the knowledge is different for the black-headed and the red-faced. This is supported by the fifth character in the second and the third lines: in the second line, which touches upon the black-headed, the character {24} ʼiwə “script” is used, whereas in the third line, which speaks about the red-faced, stands the character {25} lh̄iɛ “to listen”. Here again we have an indication that the black-headed were literate, while the red-faced were not, being restricted only to listening.

15 The ritual song “Building a New [Palace for] the Great Teaching” was published by Nishida Tatsuo (1986: 23–24).

16 Mind that the ritual song names here {3} *ndz̄io* ceremonial odes.

No less important in this aspect is the content of the example 26, which proclaims that it is the red-faced who *listen* to the black-headed (first line), the red-faced are not named here, but it is obvious that they are meant. The second line states that the red-faced are deferentially greeting the black-headed with folded hands – a gesture by which a priest is greeted. Mind that in this line the black-headed are also not named directly:

- {26} *tü 'u nĩa ki mi mi ngəw lda 'a ndziə khi ni nin tha ndzię ndzię twu tshĩa ldıęi 'ön*
 (c.l.) All those who listen (= the red-faced) to the thousand of the black-headed deferentially greet them with folded hands, Everywhere, where ten thousands of red-faced live, [they] praise [the black-headed for their] virtue and mercy.
 (Ritual Song)

More examples:

- {27} *ngwə khıu 'u nĩa lıo mbi mbin phıo tshĩa ni nin sıę mi ka*
 (c.l.) Under the Heaven thousand of the black-headed are unequal in [their] blessing¹⁷,
 On the Earth ten thousand of the red-faced are not equal in [their] wisdom.
 (Ritual Song)
- {28} *ngwə khıu 'u nĩa tsıęi mbâi nıə 'in lıo 'ıu tıęi phıo tshĩa ni nin 'wê ni zıə'in tha sju ngu*
 (c.l.) [The Ganying Tower is the place, where]
 the black-headed under the Heaven seek blessings for two – pain and happiness,
 [for] the red-faced on the Earth it is the source for two – strength and weakness.
 (Nishida 1964: 170)

Even a cursory analysis of the usage of the pair {13} 'u nĩa “black-headed” and {14} ni nin “red-faced” in the c.l. shows that

1. of the two terms the term “black-headed” is always mentioned first;
2. the black-headed were connected with the Heaven, while the red-faced were associated with the Earth;
3. in the Tangut Empire the red-faced were ten times as numerous as the black headed, i.e. the proportion was “thousand of black-headed corresponds to ten thousand red-faced”.

So far we have used only the pair of the terms belonging to the c.l. However, we have at our disposal a pair of the same terms, which is used in the r.l. Let us put in front of the afore-cited examples (19, 20, 21, 22) given in the c.l. their respective rendition in the r.l. (i.e. let us restore the sequence of the sentences in the Tangut text of the odes):

17 The meaning of the word {48} *lıo* is not quite clear. Chinese authors (e.g. Shi 1986: 139) translate it as *fu* “good fortune”, “blessing”, “happiness”. I follow Nishida’s English translation of this word as “blessing” (Nishida 1964: 170). Obviously this word means a special ability (power) given to the black-headed by the Heaven. I have translated it elsewhere as “grace” (Kepping 1998: 369, n. 21).

{29} *ndźiu phôn mb̄ie ʼiə thi rə źīe*

(r.l.) The white cranes have two burdens (lit. stone) ...¹⁸ death and old age.
(Great Ode 1B-5)

{19} *ʼu n̄ia ʼu ldīə si ? nīə*

(c.l.) The black headed have two heavy burdens – death and old age.
(The Great Ode 1B-5)

{30} *ża nḡīe nd̄ə ndźion nga thin lhwu*

(r.l.) The red-faced are working in the cold [to earn their] food and clothes.
(The Great Ode 1B-5)

{20} *ni nin t̄s̄ju v̄īe nd̄zīe ? nīə*

(c.l.) The red-faced are working for two [things] – food and clothes.
(The Great Ode 1B-6)

{31} *ʼie ʼa ndźiu phôn mi l̄īe ka*

(r.l.) Hundred of tens¹⁹ (i.e. one thousand) of white cranes are not numerous [and they] scatter [in the air].
(The Ode on Ritual Verses [?] 31B-3)

{21} *t̄u ʼu n̄ia źīe n̄iuo ndźio*

(c.l.) Thousand of black-headed because of being not numerous scatter [in the air]...
(The Ode on Ritual Verses [?] 31B-4)

{32} *ma so ża nḡīe źīīə ndo ndo*

(r.l.) Ten thousand of red-faced differ in [their] wisdom ...
(The Ode on Ritual Verses [?] 31B-5)

{22} *khi ni nin l̄īe n̄īe ka*

(c.l.) Ten thousand of red-faced [because of being] numerous differ in their nature (lit. hearts).
(The Ode on Ritual Verses [?] 31B-5)

See also examples 15–16 and 17–18.

There is an example in “The Great Ode” which touches upon one more difference between the black-headed and red-faced, but regrettably the idea is not clear for me: white cranes (= the black-headed) are said to be silly as bears (?), while the red-faced are characterized by being deaf as monkeys (bears?). In case of the red-faced, supposedly the statement about their deafness is somehow connected with their way of perception knowledge – being illiterate they have to listen (see examples 23 and 26), but I have no idea how to explain the silliness of the black-headed:

18 Here I have not translated one character.

19 There is a lacunae in the text; I have tentatively inserted the word “ten”.

{33} *tshwu mə ndzju phôn ndon nja wni*

(r.l.) Under the Heaven the white cranes [and] black bears (?)²⁰ are silly.
(The Great Ode 2A-4)

{34} *ngwə khju 'u nja lhi su mu*

(c.l.) Under the Heaven the black-headed are more silly than bears (?)²¹.
(The Great Ode 2A-4)

{35} *tsn phjo za ngjə vjəi lhje lda*

(r.l.) On the Earth the red-faced and monkeys²² are deaf.
(The Great Ode 2A-5)

{36} *phjo tshja ni nin zəu su mba*

(c.l.) On the Earth the red-faced are more deaf than bears.
(The Great Ode 2A-5)

It is not clear, why in the r.l. the red-faced are compared with monkeys, whereas in the c.l. they are compared with bears, i.e. why “monkey” in the r.l. (example 35) is rendered in c.l. as “bear” (example 36). Mind that in the example 36 for “bear” stands the word quite common for Tangut texts (see its usage in Kepping 1990, p. 31–32, Tangut text – p. 176), whereas in sentences 33 and 34 are words meaning “bear”, which I have never met in any other Tangut text (see footnotes 20 and 21). Thus, the last four sentences remain a puzzle (anyway, it seems very strange that both the black-headed and the red-faced are compared with one and the same animal).

If we examine the usage of the terms in the above-cited sentences which represent juxtaposed statements about the black-headed and the red-faced taken respectively from the r.l. and c.l., we will find that the usage of the terms in r.l. in general corroborates the idea about the meaning of these terms we got from Tangut text in c.l.

On the grounds of the examples given above, we may compile a list of peculiarities for each group (it is to be stressed that in future these lists will be inevitably enlarged, since not all examples from the odes, as was said above, were cited in this essay).

20 The character {49} *ndon* is defined by Nevskij as “black?” (Kepping et al. 1969, II, p. 122, No. 439), Nishida (1986: 75) instead of its meaning puts a question mark, but Li Fanwen defines it as “black bear” (Li 1986: 264, 14A58).

21 Nevskij (Kepping et al. 1969, II, p. 143, No. 4630) and Nishida (1986: 75) put a question mark instead of the meaning of the character {50} *lhi*. However, Li Fanwen defines it as “bear” (Li 1986: 441, 48A41).

22 As it is common for the ritual language, here for the word “monkey” stands the word {46} *vjəi* which means “monkey”, a symbolic animal in the cycle.

THE BLACK-HEADED

The black-headed are

1. always mentioned before the red-faced,
2. connected with the Heaven,
3. not numerous,
4. mortal beings,
5. named as white cranes,
6. equal to the wind,
7. personification of the male principle (the Heaven and the wind are “male”),
8. possessing blessing, given by the Heaven,
9. greeted by the red-faced with respect,
10. do not have to labour,
11. literate (the Tangut script was invented for them),
12. taught the virtue by the Tangut Teacher,
13. possessing virtue and mercy,
14. silly.

THE RED-FACED

The red-faced are

1. always mentioned after the black-headed,
2. connected with the Earth,
3. numerous,
4. mortal beings,
5. similar to monkeys (bears ?)
6. equal to clouds,
7. personification of the female principle (the Earth and clouds are “female”),
8. possessing wisdom,
9. greeting the black-headed with respect
10. labouring to earn their living,
11. illiterate (they can only listen to the ceremonial odes, they cannot read them),
12. taught the virtue by the black-headed,
13. possessing strength/weakness,
14. deaf.

Comparing these lists, we may straight away claim that the meaning of the Tangut term “black-headed” does not coincide with the meaning of the same term in Tibetan, Chinese and Mongolian, where, as it is widely held, it means “common

people”, “a commoner”. It is quite clear that in the Tangut tradition the black-headed meant something completely different from the common people, i.e. this term stands in Tangut for some high-ranked people.

The black-headed obviously belonged to the not numerous elite of the Tangut society, which enjoyed a privileged social status (they did not need to work). The black-headed identified with the white cranes, were connected with the Heaven, which supplied them with blessing. They had enormous influence on the lives of the red-faced (could disperse them like the wind disperses clouds), etc.

As to the red-faced, they apparently formed the numerous common people. They had to work to earn their living. Compared with monkeys, they were connected with the Earth. They respected the black-headed. They were wise/not wise, strong/weak, etc.

It seems that the term “red-faced” corresponds to the Tibetan term with the same meaning. This term was known to be used in respect to the Tibetans by their neighbours: besides the Chinese sources, a Khotan text of the 7th century names them as the “red-faced” as well (Snellgrove & Richardson 1986: 30). Here, I believe, is another corroboration for the notion that the Tanguts and Tibetans are of the same origin. However, it is to be noted that the Tibetan term “red-faced” is traced back to the ancient, pre-Buddhist times, whereas the Tanguts retained the usage of this term up to the end of the existence of their state.

Thus we have got a general idea of the meaning of the terms “black-headed” and “red-faced”. What follows is a more detailed description of the two terms.

THE BLACK-HEADED

When examining the lists of features peculiar to each of the group, one gets an impression that the black-headed possessing blessing given by the Heaven, served as mediators between the Heaven and the red-faced (the Heaven gave the knowledge to the black-headed and they transferred the knowledge to the red-faced). Such situation is characteristic for the relations between a priest and a layman.

The Tangut black-headed wore felt hats. This fact is mentioned in “The Ode on Monthly Pleasures”. It is stated here for the fifth month:

{37} *kje rje liwu mu mbni liwu piu*

(r.l.) [In the fifth month] the black-headed put grass²³ on [their] felt (lit. hairy) heads.
(The Ode on Monthly Pleasures 11A-3)

23 The name of the grass is not specified in the Tangut text.

{38} *phu ru 'u nja swi mbou tsêi*

(c.l.) [In the fifth month] the black-headed put ...²⁴ grass on their felt hats.
(The Ode on Monthly Pleasures 11A-8)

The colour of the hats is not specified, but one gets an impression that what was on the heads of the black-headed, obviously was of black colour (if the colour of the felt hats was not black, it should be pointed out). Mind that the grass on the heads was black (see footnote 24).

It is known that in pre-Buddhist times priests in Tibet were wearing black caps. While depicting the performance of a mystery-play at the Himis monastery in Ladak (this performance is acted at the end of the year), L. A. Waddell states that the first to come out after the commencement of the play is "a crowd of the *pre-Lamaistic black-mitred priests* (italics mine – K. K.), clad in rich robes of China silk and brocade, and preceded by swingers of cencers" (Waddell 1985: 521–522).

Thus, we may state that the Tangut term "black-headed" originally designated some kind of Tangut pre-Buddhist priests. All the more the proportion is one to ten: the same correlation for priests/laymen was pointed out by L. A. Waddell for Sikkim and Bhutan (Waddell 1985: 171).

One more corroboration for the statement that the black-headed were priests, is found in the cited above example {26}, where it is stated that the red-faced deferentially greet the black-headed with folded hands. This is the way the Buddhist priests are known to be greeted.²⁵ But we may suppose that this tradition may be ascribed to the pre-Buddhist times as well.

So, we may suppose that the term "black-headed" stands for Tangut priests in the pre-Buddhist times and that this term seems to originate from some kind of felt black hats worn by these priests.

The statement that the white cranes (example 15) or the black-headed (example 16) "are making the Heaven" could (besides the mentioned above influence on the red-faced) also hint to the ability of the black-headed to affect the weather, i.e. that they had some supernatural power. Perhaps the black-headed were looked upon as wizards. Anyway, I suppose the black-headed possessed certain skill, which the red-faced lacked.

I have already written elsewhere (Kepping 1996) that in pre-Buddhist times the Tanguts had a religion, {39} *mə lje* which, is to be translated as the "Root West" –

24 The name of the grass is not clear, but obviously its colour is black (Kepping et. al. 1969, I: p. 34, No. 7).

25 In one of the Tangut *tanka* now preserved in the Hermitage State Museum we may see the Tangut Emperor and Empress greeting in a similar way a Buddhist Teacher, no doubt, of a very high rank (Samosyuk 1993b). That this pair represents the royal couple is seen in the golden ornament of the woman's dress. Such golden dress ornament, as the Tangut Code states, was forbidden for everybody, seemingly except the women from Emperor's family.

not the West Root (mind the word order), but the “Root West”, in the sense that “our Tanguts’ root (origin) is the West”. I suppose that the Root West is to be considered as a religion, since according to the dictionary “The Sea of Characters” the Root West had its own priests (Kepping et al 1969, I, p. 44, No. 81) and seemingly a set of rituals reflected in the odes.

And what is absolutely fascinating, is that the word “root” from the collocation the Root West is homophonous with the first syllable from the collocation {40} *mə wn* “crane” (Kepping et al. 1969, II, p. 170, Nos. 4938 and 4939). Mind that the word {40} *mə wn* “crane” belongs to the r.l. In the c.l. it corresponds to the word {41} *ndźju* “crane”, to wit, to the word, by which in the passages of the ceremonial odes written in the r.l. were named the black-headed.

Thus, we may suppose that in the Tangut pre-Buddhist religion, the Root West, the priests were named as the black-headed who were equal to the white cranes.²⁶

When Buddhism, which is renown for its flexibility in adjusting itself to local traditions, had penetrated the Tangut society, no wonder, that it was the Black Hat Sect (Karma-pa), which activity in the Tangut state in 12th–13th centuries is registered in Tibetan sources (Karmay 1975: 42; Samosyuk 1993a: 82–83).²⁷

Quite possibly, the term “black-headed”, which originally stood for priests of the Tangut indigenous religion, the Root West, later was used to designate the monks of Karma-pa.

As to the Tangut mythological notions, the white crane (= black-headed) was definitely associated with the male principle (it was connected with the Heaven and wind, both representing male principle) and, thus, we may suppose that the white crane in the eyes of the Tanguts personified their male totem.

THE RED-FACED

As was stated above, the term “red-faced” coincides with the similar Tibetan term in the meaning “the common people”. However in the r.l. one finds two terms, {11} *ža ngię* and {12} *lhiwe śiwe*, both with completely transparent etymology “red-faced”. So far the difference between these two terms was not clear. Fortunately, in “The Ode of Sayings” there are lines where these two terms stand side by side.

26 Being not competent in the field I do not dare to draw any parallels between the Root West and Bon religion. As to the Daoist parallels, it seems that the Tangut idea of the white cranes (= the black-headed) apparently does not correspond with the Daoist mythology: a “Tangut” white crane was a mortal being, whereas a “Daoist” crane was connected with immortality (it symbolized longevity and was used by the immortals as a charger).

27 One of the Tangut *tanka* now held in the Hermitage State Museum even depicts a monk who supposedly is identified with the patriarch of the Karma-pa, Dusum Kyenpa (1110–1193) (Leonov 1993).

These lines shed light on the difference between these terms giving access to the most important Tangut idea about the provenance of the Tangut people:

{42} *mi mbi ma so ndźiwu kau xwai lhiwe śiwe ndźiwu niə mə ʒa ngiɛ lhiwe śiwe tje
we tshəu*

(r.l.) In a upland (lit. not low) [dwelt] ten thousand people. [They were] cross-eyed. There were two kinds of red-faced (*lhiwe śiwe*): red-faced (*ʒa ngiɛ*) and red-faced (*lhiwe śiwe*). [The latter] were wise [and could] speak.

(The Ode of Sayings 19A-7)

{43} *phio ʔwan mbin khi ndźiwu ndźie mei ndon ni ? ʒi mi ndźiwu mɪə ni tha nin siɛ
śie nda*

(c.l.) In a upland (lit. high territory) dwelt ten thousand people. [They were] cross-eyed. [Those who had] hair [on their] faces were not men. Men were those whose faces had become red. [They] were wise²⁸ [and were] first to speak.

(The Ode of Sayings 19A-8)

The cited above lines represent a fragment from the Tangut myth on the provenance of the Tangut people. It may be tentatively reconstructed as follows.

Somewhere in a upland dwelt ten thousand people. They were cross-eyed. The number of people shows that it was the common people, the red-faced. First there was no difference between the men and the animals. But in course of time the faces of some of them became red – these turned into men. Those who had hair on their faces remained animals.

Let us turn to the terms with the meaning “red-faced” used in the cited above passage. Out of the two terms it is {12} *lhiwe śiwe*, which means Tangut (sic!) common people, since the syllable {44} *lhiwe* in the collocation {12} *lhiwe śiwe* is homophonous with the word {45} *lhiwe* “Tangut” (Kepping et al. 1969, I, p. 451, No. 2786 and p. 452, No. 2787). This means that the collocation {12} *lhiwe śiwe* “red-faced” may be perceived by the listeners as “red Tanguts”. That exactly {12} *lhiwe śiwe* is used in the sense “Tangut common people” may also be seen in the usage of this term in “The Ode on Monthly Pleasures”: it stands here alongside the term “black-headed” in the meaning “all Tangut people” – {10} *liwu mu* and {12} *lhiwe śiwe* “black-headed and red-faced” (mind that {11} *ʒa ngiɛ* “red-faced” is not registered in “The Ode on Monthly Pleasures”).

As to the other collocation with the meaning “red-faced”, {11} *ʒa ngiɛ*, seemingly it signified “red-faced” – men and animals, when they were not differentiated yet. That is the reason why this term is not found in “The Ode on Monthly Pleasures”: this ode describes the activities of Tangut *men*.

28 Mind that here is used the same word “wise” as in the example No. 30, where I translated it as “wisdom”.

As to the animal named in the Tangut myth as “red-faced”, it seems that we have all grounds to define it as a monkey. In example {35} written in the r.l. the red-faced are compared with {46} *vi̇ei*. This word means “monkey”, but as one of the symbolic animals used in the cycle. However in other odes in the passages written in the r.l., I have observed instances of using a designation for a symbolic animal instead of a common word with the same meaning (thus, in “The Ode on Monthly Pleasures” instead of the word “sheep” stands the word with the same meaning from the cycle).

It is to be noted that the word {46} *vi̇ei* “monkey” (symbolic animal) is homophonous with the word {47} *vi̇ei* “man” (Kepping et al. 1969: I, p. 334, Nos. 2024, 2025), which undoubtedly corroborates the idea of the identity of a man and a monkey in Tangut mythology. So, I think that the term {11} *ža ngi̇e* “red-faced” stands for both, monkeys and men, when they in keeping with the Tangut mythological notions represented a homogenous entity.

Apparently in the Tangut mythology monkey was a female animal (totem), since it was connected with the Earth and with the clouds.

Thus, we may state that the pair of Tangut totem ancestors is “white crane – monkey” (cf. the pair of totem ancestors “wolf – doe” in Mongolian mythology).

Tangut notions about their provenance remind us of the Tibetan pre-Buddhist legend that the Tibetans have originated from the union of the monkey and mountain demoness. However in Tibetan mythological notions monkey was a personification of a male principle. Nevertheless the similarity between Tibetan and Tangut notions about their provenance is quite evident.

* * *

Thus, the analyses of the usage of the two Tangut terms “black-headed” and “red-faced” in Tangut indigenous texts has shown that these two terms stand for two groups of Tangut people, respectively, the Tangut elite, seemingly descended from the priests of the Tangut indigenous religion, Root West (“black-headed”), and numerous Tangut common people (“red-faced”).

In Tangut mythology these terms are traced back to the pair of Tangut totem animals: white crane (“black-headed”), male principle, and monkey (“red-faced”), female principle. Their union gave birth to the Tanguts. One may suppose that “white crane” and “monkey” originally were names of two tribes, which formed the Tangut people.

That for so many years the meaning of these Tangut terms was obscure and beggared description, seemingly was connected with the Chinese (as well as Mongolian and Tibetan) notion of “black-headed” as common people, which proved to be quite contrary to the Tangut idea of this term.

The incompatibility of the term “black-headed” in Tangut and Chinese probably explains the fact that the terms “black-headed” and “red-faced” used in the Tangut version of the Liangzhou bilingual stele, as it was noted at the beginning of this essay, have no correspondence in the Chinese part of the stele.

Importantly, one has to keep in mind that Tangut studies still represent an ongoing process. As was already said, this essay represents my understanding of the two Tangut terms, “black-headed” and “red-faced”, which reflects the idea of the terms I was able to get at the moment. Actually – and it is quite clear now – the problem of the black-headed and red-faced is much more complicated than it is shown here and it certainly needs further elaboration. But one has to begin.

APPENDIX:

The Term “Black-headed” in *Altan Tobči*

Thus, the Tanguts had their own notion of the term “black-headed”, which was different from its meaning shared today by the Chinese, Tibetans and Mongols. But could the “Tangut” understanding of this term completely disappear from the texts giving place to the idea of the black-headed as common people? It seems to me that some traces of the “Tangut” meaning might be left in the sources.

In search of these traces, I looked through the *Altan Tobči*, a Mongolian chronicle written in the 17th century by lama Lubsan Danzan (Šastina 1973). Here I have found a passage where the term “black-headed” is used several times, however the contents of this passage is rather obscure.

The chronicle “*Altan Tobči*” relates a story about a Tangut scout whose arrival was predicted by Chinggis Khan. He said: “... a curly-haired black man with a bluish-grey horse will come in.” According to Chinggis Khan’s prediction, the scout arrived. When he was caught by the Mongols, he said: “This is my bluish-grey horse called Kūsbūled, which is not overtaken by any footed horse. He was caught up with. His four feet were exhausted. I am called the Black Boar who Causes Wounds, and I am not overtaken by any black-haired man. I was overtaken by the black-haired men. My black head became exhausted” (Bawden 1955: 139).

In English translation this passage is rather obscure. There is also a Russian translation of the same chronicle (Šastina 1973), which is more precise than Bawden’s, since Šastina presents the speech of the scout in a form of a verse and hence the comparison between the horse and the black-haired man becomes more explicit:

Конь мой сизо – серый, что зовется Күц-Болод,
Которого догнать немогут быстроногие кони,
Ныне догнан и четыре ноги у него ослабели.
Клыками наносящий раны я, что зовусь Хара Бодун,

Которого хикто из простых людей не мог захватить,
 Схвачен я [ныне] / простыми людьми,
 Черная голова моя ведь погибнет!
 (Šastina 1973: 236–237)

I believe that the Tangut scout sent to Chinggis Khan was a “black-headed” man in Tangut sense. And in his speech there is a play upon words, which includes both meanings (Tangut and Mongolian) of the word the “black-headed”.

Below the verse is given in the translation made in 1992 by Dr U. Bläsing (Leiden University), to whom I am grateful for his patience in our mutual efforts to understand these lines. In his opinion, the verse consists of two separate four-lined parts, made in absolutely parallel fashion: the first (I) is devoted to the horse and the second (II) to the man:

- I.1. This is Küsbüled, the so-called bluish-grey horse.
- 2. He was never overcome by any [quick-] footed (hoofed ?) horse.
- 3. [Now] he is overcome by a [simple] horse.
- 4. His four hoofs became exhausted.

- II.1. I am the task-wounder, the so-called Kara-Bodun.
- 2. I was never overcome by any black-headed (= high-ranked) man.
- 3. [Now] I was overcome by a black-headed (= common) man.
- 4. My black-head (high rank) became exhausted.²⁹

Here it is worth noting that in Old Turkic epigraphic texts and manuscripts of 8th–11th centuries *qara bodun* (= Kara Bodun from II, the first line) means “common people” (lit. black people) in contrast with *begler* “noblemen”³⁰. So we may suppose that the name of the scout, Kara Bodun, was also involved in the play upon the words – “I am the task-wounder, a commoner”. However, I believe that despite proclaiming himself to be a commoner, the scout implied that he was a black-headed in Tangut sense (see also footnote 29). I suggest the following translation of the second four-lined part of the verse:

- 1. I am the task-wounder, a black-headed (= high-ranked) man.
- 2. I was never overcome by any other black-headed (= high-ranked) man.
- 3. Now I was overcome by a black-headed (a commoner).
- 4. My black-head (high rank) became exhausted.

29 The same episode connected with the Tangut scout is included into another Mongolian chronicle *Qad-un undusun-u Erdeni-yin Tobchi* written by Sagang Sechen in the 1660s. However here the version of the episode has diverged from the primary one and in English translation one cannot even find a trace of the play upon the words (Kahn 1998: 182–183). In English translation the Tangut scout is named “a commoner” (= a black-headed), which obviously means that in the primary version the term “black-headed” was used in Tangut sense.

30 I am greatly indebted to my colleague Professor S. G. Kljaštornyj (Institute of Oriental Studies, St. Petersburg, Russia) for this information. He also pointed out that in the Turkic texts of 10th–12th centuries *qara – baš* “black-headed” meant “servant”.

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