

The multinational team of translators of the Buddhist canon into Tangut (Images of Tanguts, Tibetans, Indians)

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The well-known Tangut engraving “The Translation of the Buddhist Canon into Tangut” shows at the final stage of the translation (1090) the team of the translators of the Buddhist Canon – the head of the team the State Preceptor (*guo shi*) Bai Zhi-guang and his eight assistants.

The names of the monks in captions are either Tangut (four surnames) or Chinese (five surnames). Usually it is stated that those who have Tangut surnames are Tanguts, while those who have Chinese surnames may be Chinese”. However such approach proved to be ineffective.

Tangut written sources declare that “the Tanguts are people with crossed eyes”. A drawing from Khara-Khoto shows a face of a Tangut: he has almond-shaped upward-turned eyes and his eyebrows following the shape of the eyes are descending to the temples. Such eyes and eyebrows are “a diagnostic sign” for a Tangut. Accordingly, four monks may be defined as Tanguts: Bai Zhi-guang, two monks sitting to his right – Tian Shan-zun and Siyu Zhi-yuan, and one sitting to his left – Weiming Guang-yuan (Weiming was the surname of the Tangut emperors).

In course of the translation period two monks in turn served as the head of the translators’ team – first Bai Fa-xin and then Bai Zhi-guang, both were State Preceptors. So far they are defined either as being Uighurs or Tuyuhuns. I believe that the surname Bai in both cases stands for “Bai” (lama Vairochana) – obviously the Tanguts took after the Tibetans (cf. Tibetan translator Bai lo- za-wa). Both Bai Fa-xin and Bai Zhi-guang undoubtedly were Tanguts.

The person sitting first at Bai Zhi-guang’s left hand, his name in Tangut *pu ngwi zi lhie*, represents the famous Budong Jingang (Unshakable Vajra). The Tangut transcription uses the first syllable of the collocation Budong (*pu*), whereas *ngwi zi lhie* is the Tangut transcription of the word vajra. He belonged to the so-called Xi Xia monks. Being by origin an Indian, he nevertheless received a Tangut surname, since he was regarded as a Xi Xia monk.

Budong’s biography mentions his disciple Lebu. Last in the row opposite Budong sits a monk, his name *lupu sie mi* Lubu Zhi-yun. Seemingly it is Lebu: his position may indicate that he was Budong’s disciple. He does not look like Budong (his origin remains a mystery). The reason why he got a Tangut surname apparently is connected with his teacher: Budong’s disciple, whoever he was, might be looked upon as a “Xi Xia monk” as well.

Next to Budong sits tshieu tsie mbi Zhao Fa-ming. The surname Zhao points to the non-Tangut ethnicity of the monk (his appearance is non-Tangut). The character tshieu (chin. surname Zhao) has only one homophone – *tshieu* (chin. *you* “teacher”), thus, we have “The Teacher *tsie mi*”, which, I believe, stands for the well-known Tantric teacher Tsa-mi. His appearance and the way his name is rendered into Tangut shows that he was not a Tangut, but a Tibetan.

Since three Tantric teachers (Budong Jingang, Lupu, and Tsa-mi) were involved in the final stage of the translation of the Buddhist Canon, we may suppose the Tanguts from the very beginning have chosen Tantrism as their state religion.