Tangut (Xixia) degrees of mourning

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1. Introduction

The law code of the Tangut state published recently by E. I. Kychanov\(^1\) has an article, (a)nɪn¹ t səw¹ "Degrees of Kinship" (Article 41 in Kychanov's numeration), compiled, in all likelihood, on the model of the Chinese "Degrees of Mourning" (b)(Sānɡ Fù). A list of kinship terms appears

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\(^1\) Henceforth all Tangut and Chinese forms cited will be listed in their original script at the end of the article, immediately before the References. [Ed.]

\(^1\) Of the four projected volumes devoted to the editing of the Tangut Codex, only two have been published at the moment of writing this article (April 1989). The text of the Codex itself has been published up to and including Article 456 (Kychanov 1987, 1988).
in this article, classified into five groups depending on the length of time that mourning was to be observed for one or another relative. The length of mourning was determined by the proximity of kinship, so that the mourning grades serve to group kin by closeness of relationship.

The article "Degrees of Kinship" in the Tangut code furnishes uniquely valuable material for Tangut research. Above all, the data in this article permit the reconstruction of the Tangut system of kinship, which up to the present time had remained a blank page in Tangut studies: all of our notions about Tangut kinship had been based on wholly unreliable data from Tangut dictionaries (see below), or on the chance use of one or another term in a text. By contrast, the article "Degrees of Kinship" offers a unique source where Tangut kinship terminology is presented as a system.

In addition, "Degrees of Kinship" appears to be crucial in the composition of the Tangut code itself. Without an understanding of it the interpretation of many other articles is difficult or impossible, e.g. Article 40, "Eight Judgments about Persons Having the Right to a Mitigation of Punishment" (Kychanov 1987:37-38), which refers to the grades of the emperor's relatives, as well as many articles concerned with the murder of relatives or theft committed against relatives. Thus, for a reconstruction of the social life of the Tangut state—an area virtually unknown to scholarship—it is clearly necessary to decipher the article "Degrees of Kinship" in the Tangut Codex.

It is hardly likely, however, that a specialist in the typology of kinship systems would learn the Tangut language in order to use "Degrees of Kinship" for reconstructing the Tangut kinship system. Therefore, in the present article I try to give my interpretation of "Degrees of Kinship," without by any means claiming it to be a definitive resolution of the problem—it is only another attempt to read a very complex text, itself a collection of enigmas. It is entirely possible that my proposed interpretation of Tangut kinship terms will someday not only be refined but even subjected to fundamental revision. For precisely that reason this study presents a detailed, step-by-step description of the process of analysis of "Degrees of Kinship," so that the line of argument will be clear to future students of the Tangut kinship system.

Before proceeding directly to an analysis of Article 41, let us briefly examine the current state of Tangut kinship studies.

2. Reconstruction from Texts of the Tangut Kinship System

Up to the present it was considered as a matter of course that the
Tangut kinship system was typologically close to the Chinese. Such a notion was based on the sole source available to researchers that dealt with the Tangut kinship system: the Sino-Tangut list of kinship terms in the dictionary *The Tangut-Chinese Timely Pearl in the Palm* (Zhāng Zhōng Zhīù) (preserved in St. Petersburg), a list embracing three generations of blood relatives (the first ascending generation, the generation of ego, and the first descending generation). All information about kinship terms was drawn exclusively from this source. Thus, the well-known Tangutologists Nishida Tatsuo (Nishida 1964:207) and Shi Jinbo (Shi 1986:190) in the relevant sections of their works render Tangut kinship terms with the same glosses to be found in the Chinese portion of the dictionary *Pearl in the Palm*, without submitting them to further analysis.

Yet, while translating the Tangut version of an original Chinese text, *Newly Collected Notes on Compassion and Filiality,* a work devoted to relations between close kin, I encountered an unexpected difficulty: the terms of kinship used in the composition of this text defied translation. Evidently the dictum, well-known since the time of L. H. Morgan, that it is impossible to translate the kinship terms of one system by relying on the terms of another system that is typologically distinct from the first, is confirmed once again in this case. The conventional notion in Tangut studies positing the typological affinity of the Tangut and Chinese systems of kinship must thus be placed in doubt.

In order to translate *Newly Collected Notes on Compassion and Filiality,* it was first necessary to compile a list of Tangut kinship terms. To this end, I took as a base the list of kinship terms in the dictionary *Pearl in the Palm,* and checked them against the material in all the Tangut dictionaries and Chinese secular compositions in Tangut translation, preserved in the St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The result was a list of thirty-five Tangut kinship terms, primarily referring to three generations of blood relatives (see Kepping 1988):

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2 [RWD]: See Luc Kwanten's (unauthorized) publication of the manuscript in his *The Timely Pearl,* Indiana University Uralic and Altaic Series, Vol. 142 (Bloomington, Ind., 1982).
3 [RWD]: This text, which has now been prepared for publication by Professor Kepping, is described in Z. I. Gorbacheva and E. I. Kychanov, "Tangutskie rukopisi i ksilografy" (Moscow, 1963), p. 56, #31.
4 [RWD]: Lewis H. Morgan, known as "L. G. Morgan" in Russian transcription, was an American anthropologist of the nineteenth century whose studies on the family greatly influenced Marx and Engels, and whose work is well known among Russian scholars.
5 By "Chinese secular compositions in Tangut translation" I have in mind those Tangut texts that form the basis of my study *The Tangut language: Morphology* (Moscow, Nauka Press, 1985).
LIST I: BASIC TANGUT KINSHIP TERMS

A. Blood Relatives

1. 舅 舅 vja1'o1 grandfather (father's father)

2. 媛 媛 ma1nI1 grandmother (father's mother)

3. 菜 vja1 father

4. 父 ma1 mother

5. 兄 vjei1 father's brother

6. 妹 nI1 father's sister

7. 弟 'te1 mother's brother