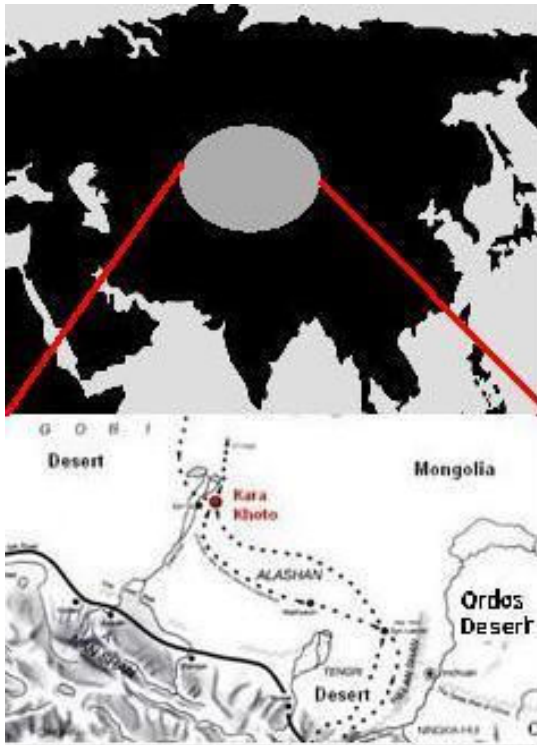


## The Tangut Culture

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The western and northwestern regions of what is now China was inhabited as early as the third millennium BC by a group of tribes known under the name of '**Qiang**' (1), a name clearly related to "**Khang**" meaning emperor or ruler of the ancient Turkic people. I gave different pronunciations of this title in Chapter **5-Climatic changes**. The Central Asiatic region where the ancient Qiang resided has also been the location of several subsequent nations, such as the Uighurs, the Tanguts, the Tartars, the Tibetans, the Tunghuns known under the name of Tungus, the Xia, the Kushan, the Huns, the Gökturks and many other names already mentioned in Chapter 1. These names are not listed chronologically because the focus is on cultural relationships rather than on historical events based on linear time. They all belonged to a common ancestry and spoke different but related Altaic languages.

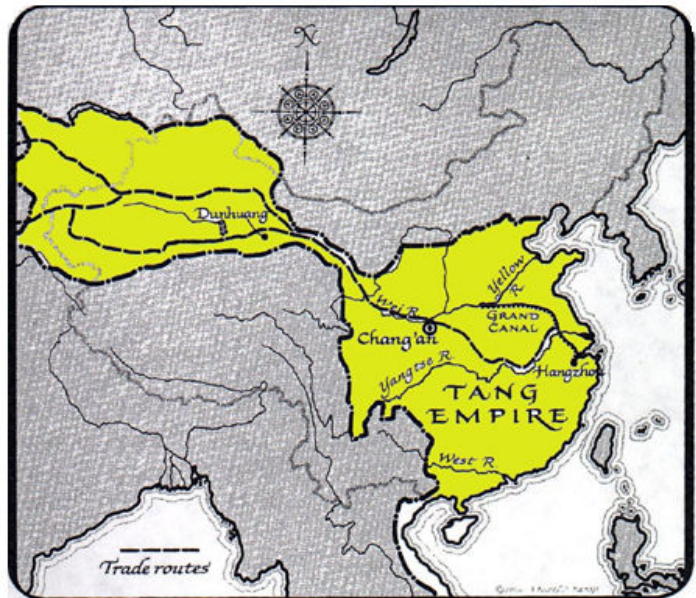


**Kara-Khoto among deserts**

On the left we see this vast region of Asia located in the center of the map and a close-up under it. This region which is surrounded with vast deserts nowadays was the location of the Tangut Empire. **Kara-Khoto**, which was the capital city of the Tanguts is presently submerged under an inhospitable deserts. The name of the city can be better understood if 'Khoto' is read as '**Khut**', which means 'sacred'. The famous Asiatic author Yusuf Has Hacib (1017 - 1077) wrote a book entitled **Kutadgu Bilig**, meaning The Sacred Knowledge. The word 'Kutadgu' contains the root word 'Kut' meaning 'sacred'. Thus Kara-Khoto means "The sacred land", since 'kara' still means 'earth' or 'land' in Turkish.

Similarly the meaning of 'Tangut' becomes clear when it is written as **Tang-Khut** meaning "Sacred Sunrise", since **Tan** means 'sunrise' in Turkish and **Tengri** (Sky-God) is **Tan-Geri** meaning "beyond the sunrise".

The Turkish word 'geri' means 'beyond' or 'hidden behind'. Thus the Sky-God **Tengri** meant "**the unseen force (or entity) behind the sunrise**" and the sun was nothing else than the apparent physical vision of this hidden force. This is why the Asiatic shamans usually performed their sacred rituals during sunrise around a sacred fire. Below, on left we see a shaman performing a sacred ritual during sunrise and on the right the extension of the Chinese Tang Empire.



The Tangut people, before adopting Buddhism were worshipping the sky-god Tengri and shamanism was the main spiritual belief system of the society, from the court to the common people. The Chinese Tang dynasty, which existed between 618 and 907 AD, was related to the Tangut people of Central Asia as can be seen on the map above. The independent Tangut state lasted from 900 until 1227 and was destroyed by the Mongol armies of Cengiz Han. Even today, the western regions of China is the region of the present Turkish speaking Uighur state. (See article **31-Dunhuang Manuscripts**).

The region of Khara-Khoto was once surrounded by rivers and lakes. The city was located at the mouth of the river Heishui and the Lake Juyan (see map below). We can identify the **Tengri Desert** at the south-east of the region. Khara-Khoto was a rich stopover center on the trade-route known as **The Silk Road**, but is presently covered with sand dunes as can be seen below right.



The Tangut people, besides believing in Buddhism did not relinquish their ancient sky-god belief and their shamanic practices. The Kara-Khoto collection of wall paintings called **Tanka** or Tang-kan (made for the Sky-God Tang) contain several images of the sky-gods, many planets and constellations. Developing alongside Buddhism was the Tantric tradition based on **Tantras**. These were texts written in coded, symbolic language, which taught the **Mantras**. Tantrism gave birth to one of the richest dimensions of Buddhist iconography: that of the sacred symbol called **Mandala** (see Article **6-Universal Symbols**).

If we consider that central Asiatic tribes, due to climatic changes, were forced to disperse in all directions many thousand years ago, we can safely guess that they influenced and transformed the cultural base of the neighboring people, including the Chinese, the Tibetan and the Indian culture.

In Chapter **17-The Indus Valley Script**, it has been shown that there is a clear correlation in the dressing style of the ancient Sumerian kings, the Indus Valley kings and the spiritual leader of present Tibet, where the right arm is always left uncovered. The same dressing style is found among Buddhist monks of Kara-Khoto as shown in the two examples below (2). Such similarities cannot be pure coincidence. There should be an underlying common culture which is being slowly unraveled.



## References

- (1) **Lost Empire of the Silk Road**, Thyssen-Bornemisza Foundation publication, Edited by M. Piotrovsky, page 49, 1993, Milano, Italy.
- (2) Idem, pages 107 and 117.