

# Syncretism in Salar Love Songs

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Having melded Oghuz-Turkic, Tibetan, and Northwest Chinese linguistic and cultural elements, the Salars might be expected to show an equal degree of syncretism in their love songs. Indeed, they have maintained a nearly extinct apparently native song form *yur*, while also adopting the regional Chinese form *hua'er* 花儿. *Yur* are Turkic at least linguistically, though the melodies show Tibetan influences. This paper examines the degree of cultural, linguistic, and musical syncretism in varieties of *yur* songs, with reference to local Chinese and Tibetan love song forms. The use of metaphor is uniquely Salar, whereas musical ornaments are strongly influenced by local prestige forms and usually are Tibetan in origin.

Love songs are strictly taboo in households and villages, and music in general is today frowned upon by most modern Salars. The Turkic *yur* form will likely vanish in the coming decades.

## *The northern Tibetan plateau in the Chinese cultural context*

The northeastern edge of the Tibetan plateau – today southeastern Qinghai and southern Gansu provinces – constitutes a cultural and geographic transition zone. Tibetans and speakers of Chinese (both Han Chinese and Muslim Chinese Huis) are numerically and culturally dominant in the region. Though the area is historically predominantly Tibetan, since the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Chinese culture has exerted a steadily increasing influence there. Musically, both Chinese and Tibetan traditional and pop songs are popular with all ethnic groups, including the Chinese.

Overall in the People's Republic of China (PRC), non-Hans constitute only 9% of the total population, but are spread over 40% of China's landmass, especially in border areas. China has successfully reconceived the great civilizations it has incorporated on its periphery as planets, which orbit around a Chinese center. Thus, the Uyghurs, Mongols, and Tibetans now count as National Minorities, their territories were “always” a part of China, their musical traditions, once deemed “feudal,” are at present considered excitingly raw and ethnic. To maintain the territorial integrity of the modern state, these minorities were encouraged (via the media, education, and selected preferential policies) to consider themselves first Chinese and secondly ethnic. Though government policy forbids ethnic chauvinism, in popular discourse, Han Chinese culture is

still considered superior to that of the minorities.<sup>1</sup> The arts of non-Han groups are not taken seriously, but are commodified, standardized, and staged as colorful tourist events. Many P.R.C. Han Chinese will assert that minorities are people who “love to sing and dance.”<sup>2</sup>

Capitalizing on the Western fascination with Tibet and the Japanese interest in the Silk Route, since the 1980s the Chinese government has promoted international tourism in minority areas. A decade later, domestic tourists followed suit. More than any other cultural force, however, popular music has begun to mitigate the extreme forms of Han chauvinism: since the 1990s, through local radio, television, and ubiquitous VCDs, the music of major ethnic minorities – particularly that of Tibetans and Mongols – has become quite hip for young people. A number of CDs featuring the “Three Tenors of the Grasslands”<sup>3</sup> have appeared. These and other pop artists sing in Chinese but freely make use of traditional melodies of their respective groups. To mark the performance as “ethnic,” native-language phrasal embellishments are often incorporated, and Inner Asian geography is evoked, such as the grasslands and the so-called “Qinghai”-Tibetan Plateau.

In the following excerpt from the popular Tibetan singer Han Hong, a resident of Beijing, the melody is derived from a traditional Tibetan folksong, while the lyrics adhere to acceptable Chinese pop themes, that is, nature, love, and Chairman Mao.

Figure 1: Han Hong 韩红 (2001), *On Beijing's Golden Mountain* [4'03"]

北京的金山上光芒照四方	On Beijing's Golden Mountain his rays spread to the Four Directions
毛主席就是那金色的太阳	Chairman Mao is that golden sun
多么温暖 多么慈祥	How warm, how kindly
把我们农奴的心照亮	Lighting the hearts of our serfs
我们邁步走在	We walk step by step
社会主义幸福的大道上	Down Socialism's prosperous road
哎 巴扎嘿 (in Tibetan)	Aaa.. [pa t̤sa xe]

<sup>1</sup> Actual and metaphoric references to the Hans are associated with masculinity, modernity, and “having civilization,” while references to minorities are associated with exoticism, femininity and sexuality, and “lacking civilization.” Though there is tremendous variation in the degree that people accept the strong form of this conceptual framework, it is still dominant among Hans. Even these minority groups themselves, as well as many foreign China specialists, at least unconsciously accept the idea of these minorities as inferior.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in 2003 more than one P.R.C. Han Chinese graduate student in the U.S., upon applying for a research assistantship on a project concerned with a non-Han group of China, actually made this very statement as a way of expressing interest in and knowledge of this group.

<sup>3</sup> This is obviously a riff on the popularized Three Tenors of Europe; their grasslands counterparts are the Mongolian Tenger and the Tibetans Ya Dong and Rong Zhong Er Jia.

The murmured, percussive *pa ṭsa xe* (Tibetan *pa tra be*) constitutes ethnic quotation markers around the profoundly socialist Chinese text. *Pa tra* is a pattern with positive aesthetic associations: it resembles the auspicious endless knot, and is used in Tibetan literature to describe the pattern and texture of lush grasslands or of a carpet. *Pa tra* is also occasionally used in contemporized “traditional” folk songs accompanied by the Tibetan mandolin (*sgra snyan*), which emerged during the 1990s (also known as *rdung len*, see Anton-Luca 2002). The final particle *xe* is onomatopoeic for heroic or girlish laughter.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the use of Tibetan melodic contours and the final phrase in Tibetan serves to legitimate the traditional roots of modern Chinese ethno-pop.

Though the socialist content of such lyrics may appear anachronistic, in China, even among most members of minority groups, the lyrics go unnoticed or even evoke nostalgia. These Sinified Mongolian and Tibetan pop songs are popular in north Tibet as well. Though in form and substance they have little in common with the local love song forms, their dominance in the media has been a factor in the decline of the Salar *yur*.

### *The Salars*

One of China’s official minority nationalities, the Salars are a Turkic people in origin. They were likely the descendents of Salğur or Salır Turkmens who migrated eastward from Transoxiana to the northeastern edge of Tibet in the thirteenth century as a garrisoned contingent of the invading Chinggisid Mongolian army. Inter-marriage with Tibetans and later with Muslim Chinese has resulted in the development of a tricultural (and largely trilingual) group.

Living on the banks of the Yellow River on the northern edge of the Tibetan plateau, the Salars have a population of close to 90,000, approximately 30,000 of whom are fluent speakers. They trace their own origins to a mythic journey from “Samarkand” accompanied by a white camel and forty volumes of the Qur’an. Regardless of their religious status when they first arrived in northern Tibet, the next six hundred years witnessed the Salars’ involvement in all major streams of Islam in China; since the late 19th century, Kadirīyya and Jahriyya Sufism have been the best represented.

Increasingly, the local Salar religious leaders, *abuns* (*ākḥunds*), have been quite successful in disseminating the notion that good Muslims do not sing, especially not love songs. Contemporary Salar society is thus a paradox: their identity would not have survived without religion, yet precisely because of modern religious interpretation, all other indices of identity (i.e. folklore and language) are nearly extinct.

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Jermay Jamsu for the elucidation of *pa tra be*.

Music and dance are at least publicly frowned upon by most modern Salar, due to this particular interpretation of Islam. The two likely indigenous song forms exist only as artifacts among the a few older members of the population: *yur* [jʉr] love-songs and *sagheshi* [saxəʃi] bridal laments.<sup>5</sup>

Salar song forms, however, can only be meaningfully viewed from within the larger, overlapping Tibetan and Chinese lyric and geographic realms, of which the Salar region of the Yellow River littoral is a part. The Tibetan realm, full of metaphor and embellishments, is best represented by the Tibetan love song form *layi* [lajə]. The love song forms of numerically smaller local groups such as the Salar *yur* and the Monguor *kugurjia* [kʰukərtʃia] forms have been stylistically influenced by *layi*. Much further to the east, away from Salar areas in the Chinese realm, *shan ge* 山歌 love songs are sung. These bear an indirect relation to local song forms insofar as the popular pan-ethnic *hua'er* dialogic songs of the transition zone are in part historically derived from *shan ge* (Schimmelpenninck 1997). *Hua'er* is a genre of dialogic song form sung in Chinese in festivals located in sacred places, clustering temporally around the summer solstice. These songs, which are usually a contest of wits but can constitute a courtship, are beloved by young and old of all ethnic groups. *Hua'er* 花儿 (also know as *shaonian* 少年) singing remains stubbornly popular among all ethnic groups, flourishing despite the disapproval of local Islamic and Daoist leaders.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 2. Lyric realms of Amdo Tibet: a taxonomy of love-song forms

Tibetan realm:	(Tibetan) layi	(sung in Amdo Tibetan)
Mono-ethnic,	(Monguor) kugurjia	(sung in Minhe Monguor)
monolingual:	(Salar) yur	(sung in Salar, and sometimes NW Chinese)
Both realms:	pop songs (e.g. Han Hong, 3 Ten-ors)	(sung primarily in standard Chinese)
Pan-ethnic :	hua'er 花儿 'flowers'	(sung in Northwest (NW) Chinese)
Chinese realm:		
Mono-ethnic:	shan ge 山歌 'mountain songs'	(sung in local Chinese dialects)

<sup>5</sup> Bridal laments (*sagheshi*) are extinct, though a few women of the oldest generation can recall and perform them. See Dwyer forthcoming 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Disapproval of *hua'er* is not limited to the Salar and Chinese Muslim religious leaders; a Daoist nun I met at the foot of Lianhua mountain in 2000 told me, despite her presence at the area's largest and most famous *hua'er* festival (southern Gansu), that her monastery in Shanxi did not condone *hua'er* singing because it was frivolous. Later in our conversation, however, she opened a bundle and out tumbled three of the latest *hua'er* audio cassettes.

The legacy of the Cultural Revolution (in which indigenous forms of cultural expression were persecuted) and fear of the local Imams have resulted in *yur* being taboo in the presence of household members; singers who still know them are very reluctant to sing them. The recordings which form the basis of this article are the result of a Salar colleague's (Mr. Ma Wei) and my coaxing of singers – who hadn't sung in eight or more years – to sing for us. I am indebted to Mr. Ma, and to the singers for their vocal generosity.

### *Salar music*

We know almost nothing about the Salar musical tradition, and have few clues at present: the Salars have no known record of having played musical instruments except the mouth harp (cf. Ma & Ma 1989), which is not in evidence today. In recent years, mouth harps (*kuxæ* < Ch. 口弦, cf. Modern Chinese 口琴) have become available for tourists in Xunhua county. This development reflects external political liberalization: once considered “feudal”, limited ethnic musical expression has been condoned since the 1980s. The mouth harp is also an expression of internal religious belief; several Salars professed to me that “the mouth harp is the only instrument the Prophet Muhammed allowed [his daughter] Fatima” (1993 interviews). It is conceivable under these political and ethno-religious conditions that the use of the mouth harp could be revived and innovated by Salars as a “new tradition.”

Religious music is unknown, nor is there a Salar *makam* or *usul* tradition. Scanty pre-20th century historical materials do not mention Salar music, but there must have been a vocal repertoire and the use of the mouth harp, at a minimum. In the last century, however, the social contexts for musical expression became extremely limited. Though thirty years of external political suppression of cultural traditions (ca. 1950-1980) was followed by a period of liberalization which continues to the present, internal interpretations of Islam conversely became more restrictive. Thus, the few remaining Salar song forms not extinguished by external political pressures have nearly disappeared under religious pressure.

What remains are a few *a cappella* secular song forms: love songs, work chants [*lodonj xaozi*] < Ch. 劳动号子, and lullabies. For the Salars I interviewed, however, the latter two forms do not count as “singing.” Given that the only other genre, love songs, are taboo, singing and, by extension, all musical expression are highly endangered in the Salar world today.

### *Salar yur*

Typical of the cultural transition zone of the Amdo plateau, Salar *yur* contain local metaphors and sensibilities and Tibetan and Chinese musical ornamentation. Etymologically, in many Turkic languages, *ır-yır* (the *y* is prosthetic) is a generic

term for ‘song’: Kyrgyz, Tuva, etc. *ır* ‘song’, Kazakh *zhır* ‘id.’, Uyghur *yur-la-* ‘to sing.’ In Salar, the term *yur* refers specifically to Salar-language love songs; other songs are simply called *ge* [kɤɿ] 歌, from Chinese ‘song.’

In Salar *yur*, a two-line melody is repeated to form a four-line stanza; the degree of embellishment depends on the singer. Both text and performance are characterized by indirectness; Salar *yur* are never sung in public and the lyrics usually allude to erotic themes rather than stating them explicitly. In terms of metaphor, then, Salar *yur* are closer to Tibetan *layi* than Chinese *bua’er*. Melodically, Salar *yur* vary in their degree of syncretism, from a Central Asian-sounding style to a highly Tibetan-influenced style, as described below. The melodic relationship between the Salar *yur* and its potential Central Asian (particularly Turkmen) relatives is a topic meriting research.

If sung in the fields or mountains, Salar *yur* are intended to be overheard, though a blatant public performance is taboo, as is singing in the home, village, and in the presence of elders.

They are usually six textual and melodic lines with an A-B A-B melodic pattern. Though the improvisation of some lyrics by the singer was once possible, what survives today is a small corpus of set lyrics and a few tune types. Today even professional Salar singers have trouble with more than two stanzas of lyrics.

Love and love-antics are only alluded to through metaphor, and rarely stated explicitly. Typical metaphorical images in *yur* include the mill-house, the turning millstone; soaring, narrow cliffs; the peony (should I pick it?); the yellow sparrow; the sweetness of brown sugar, the bite of garlic, the willow-waist of the girl. The message of Salar love songs must be indirect at all costs; for this reason even metaphor is a bit risqué; instead, subtle word play is preferred. For example:

Look at me, I’ll sing you a song.  
If you shed your hair-covering (pot<sup>h</sup>on+ jaz-),  
crops will grow by themselves.  
If wheat is sown (poyd+na jaz-), it will grow by itself.  
Its blossoming flowers are pure white, pure white.<sup>7</sup>

The text centers around a subtle play on words by the parallel use of homonyms (*jaz-* ‘to sow’ and ‘to loosen (the hair)’ and the near-homonyms *boghdi* [pɔwd+] ‘wheat’ and *boto* [pot<sup>h</sup>o] ‘woman’s cap.’ Uncovered long hair is considered far too erotic to be exposed to public view. Yet on first listening, both the second and third lines sound merely like a wish for the fertility of the soil and a good harvest.

<sup>7</sup> Excerpt of a *yur* (Salar corpus text 121), sung by Ma Jun 马俊, b. 1963. Recorded by the author on 26 March 1993 in Jishi zhen 集石镇, Xunhua county 循化县, Qinghai province. All recordings, transcriptions, and translations in this paper are by the author unless otherwise noted.

### *Salar Love Song Archaeology: a stylistic sampling*<sup>8</sup>

Given that Salar-language love songs are rarely if ever sung spontaneously anymore, the material collected represents a sort of excavation through successive accretions of musical and textual influences. One can state with some confidence that the sample, though small, is representative, as the stylistic patternings are also found in the sampling made in 1992–1993 (see e.g. section 4 above). Below, we take a tour through four strata, from highly analytical modern surface forms all the way down to a likely older style with Central Asian roots. There are four basic types: a “Salar medley” style, a Performatized Style, an Old Style, and a Tibetanized Hua’er Style. The first two types represent *yur* codified through a homogenizing process: academic study in the first case, and dominant cultural normative pressure in the second. The third and fourth type, in contrast, represent a more unimpeded evolution of the probable original *yur* form, from the Old Style – a lightly Tibetified Central Asian form – to the fourth highly syncretic Tibetified *hua’er* Style, manifesting prolonged contact with both the Chinese and Tibetan cultural realms.

The texts are presented in different orthographies to accommodate the widest range of readers: Texts A (Salar Medley Style) and D (Old Style) are in the International Phonetic Alphabet; Text C is in a practical Turkic orthography; and Text D is in Chinese, as it is sung in that language.

#### *A. The “Salar medley” style*

The first kind of *yur* that a researcher is likely to encounter are published texts written in Chinese.<sup>9</sup> These were collected in the mid-1980s by a small team of researchers headed by the Salar folklorist Han Zhanxiang. As they worked without recording devices, they committed what they heard to memory and to paper. Since modern Salar no longer has an orthography, however, Mr. Han and his team translated the *yur* texts directly into Chinese. Thus, no texts were ever written down in the Salar language itself. The published *yur* texts are sanitized amalgams rather than translations of any single *yur* performance. Similarly, when Mr. Han performs *yur*, he draws on his encyclopedic knowledge of *yur* melodies and texts to produce a composite performance that we dub here the Salar Medley Style.

In his performances, the highest-frequency metaphors from the love songs he has collected over the years are combined in one text. The melodic line is a bit choppy and singsong. Syllables are sung short and clipped, a fact which is only striking after hearing the elongated ‘steppe style’ syllables of the Tibetanized and

<sup>8</sup> All recordings and annotations by the author, with the kind permission of the singers.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Xunhua Salazu (eds.), 1989.

Old Styles. Both filler syllables and ornamentation are absent. The singing sounds routinized. Nonetheless, both research on folklore and this particular singing style have been politically tolerated since the mid-1980s and the style is moderately influential. Mr. Han sings *Bashi guliuliu* ‘Little Round-head’ in this style; the text is in a phonemicized IPA transcription,<sup>10</sup> with filler syllables marked with curly braces { }:

Figure 3. *Bashi guliuliu* (sung by Han Zhanxiang, folklorist, b. 1942, Alitiuli. Rec. Jan. 1999)

{ey} baʃi guliuliu babin joχmaχan	Round head, no ideas of her own.
{eh} belɪ leskitʃux belʌa jaraʃʒan	Slender little waist, suited for [a fitted gown] a waist.
{eh} toχə leskitʃux dolaxa <sup>11</sup> jaraʃʒan	Slender ankles, suited for stockings.
{eh} belɪ leskitʃux belʌa jaraʃʒa::n	Slender little waist, suited for [a fitted gown] a waist.

The text of this particular *yur* at least has been stable for nearly fifty years; Kakuk’s earlier research in the late 1950s<sup>12</sup> also includes a *Bashi guliuliu* text that is remarkably similar to this 1999 recording.

### B. The Performatized love song

This type constitutes the homogenizing response of the dominant cultural center to ethnic musics. With cultural liberalization in the early 1980s, the Chinese government began to sponsor local song and dance troupes of the official nationalities. Selected young local talent was professionally trained and scheduled for regular local and annual national performances with other minority nationalities. The small Salar troupe is based in the county seat (Jishi zhen) of Xunhua County – the only county in the world to include “Salar” in its official name in Qinghai province. One of its singers, Mr. Ma Jun, graciously allowed me to record him in 1993.

His singing is, expectedly, very different from all the other styles. The melody appears to be a highly stylized composition produced by the troupe and embellished by the singer. Ma Jun sings with passion and delicacy, with great soaring swoops of melody but very light ornamentation. Formal training is evident in his

<sup>10</sup> International Phonetic Alphabet; here, voiceless obstruents [p] [t] [k] [y] [tʃ] [pʰ] [tʰ] [kʰ] [qʰ] [tʃʰ] and so on have been phonemicized to b d g c ɕ p t k q ʈ and so on. The text in Romanized (*pinyin*-based) transcription is as follows: {ey} bashi guliuliu babin yoxmaghan / {eh} belɪ leskichuk bulgha yarashgan / {eh} toge leskichuk dolagha yarashgan / {eh} belɪ leskichux belgha yarashgan.

<sup>11</sup> *Dolaq* also has the variant *doldoq* ‘stockings.’

<sup>12</sup> Kakuk’s sole consultant was the Salar linguist Han Jianye (Kerimu) in Beijing, so apparently this *yur* is considered by Salar researchers to be representative of the genre (Kakuk 1961: 102).



This style has been politically supported (since 1990), and is moderately influential, though there are very few trained practitioners. It is likely that this Performatized Style and the Salar Medley Style are tolerated because doing so fits in so well with the Chinese model of dealing with the arts of the minorities: standardizing, translating, sanitizing. (See figure 4)

The Performance Style, though politically sanctioned, has very few practitioners. They enjoy relatively wide exposure, however, since they are public performers. Among ordinary Salars this form is widely tolerated, if officially disapproved by the Imams.

<p>{ejo:: ijo ijo ajo} miniyi jenggu cajnaxə</p> <p>{eəa} jenggu cajnaxə cajnaquma {jaəe}</p> <p>{hæ} gagan alxə ja.</p> <p>gagan almasa</p> <p>goxu joxturon ohtes joxturon</p> <p>{ejo:::} az suzi cajnasa darı var a {tʃi}</p> <p>jenggu cajnasa {jaχa} darı joxturon</p> <p>ejo: miniyi jenggu cajnaxə joə</p> <p>{jo::a} daəlı dalunı sen netəteye juhkurdzi</p> <p>{eəe} deəli dermenni {jaha} sen netəixi iləndzi</p> <p>{dəe} daəlı dalunı menixi gozə ujnəəni</p>	<p>Oh, oh oh oh.....my ebullient girl!</p> <p>Esh! Ebullient girl, don't be so obstreperous.</p> <p>Hey...Elder Brother wants you.<sup>14</sup></p> <p>If he can't have you</p> <p>He won't have anything.</p> <p>Oh, boiling a little water has a limit.</p> <p>But there is no limit to your boiling temper.</p> <p>Oh, my ebullient girl, yosh!</p> <p>[Girl:] So why are you running on the main road?</p> <p>Esh! Why should the stone mill turn?</p> <p>[Boy:] Esh, my lambs are playing on the main road,</p>
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<sup>14</sup> Chaste interpretations would gloss this phrase as: “Elder Brother wants you [as his bride]”.

ujne[me] t̪ɕix geld̪ɕi {jaha} jengu gajnaɕ+ne	I came out to play too, my ebullient girl.
{ejo::} samzax+ samzaxn+ aɣ a d̪ɪr qama	Oh! There is nothing whiter than garlic
ji bard̪ɕana andan ad̪ɕ+ɪs+ mar+ joxturon	After eating it there is nothing hotter.
gara ɕataŋni sen gara digeme	Don't say that brown sugar is brown.
{eɕ} jengu gajnaɕ {jaha} jise dehli dur {ɕ}	Oh, but to taste the bubbly girl is sweet.
{eɕ} ɕazɪ qolt̪ɕ+id̪ɕ+g+{s} qom[ux] qolt̪ɕ+ digi	Esh, in the desert valley, in the desert valley,
gɪzɪl torux d̪ɪr: torux d̪ɪr ler	these are as red as sand dates,
{eɕ} uɕere gɪzɪl dur {t̪ɕere} jise dehli dur	Esh, they are red to the eye, and sweet to taste.
{eɕ} jengu gajnaɕ	Esh, bubbly girl!
gillaquma {jaha} gagaŋ alɕ+ jo	Don't be anxious, your brother wants you.
gagaŋ alasa {jaha} ohteɕ joxturon	If he can't have you, he will have nothing.
terden terdaron {je}	...narrower than ye...

### C. The Old Style

This style is exceedingly rare and in this author's view the gem of these recordings. Both the text and the melody of this style are distinctive. The melody has an A-B A-B pattern, with a long, high, level, unornamented initial syllable. The melody descends through each line with a great deal of ornamentation. The loudness and length of the initial syllable is well adapted to the mountainous Inner Asian geography, as it is a sound designed to carry.

The use of metaphor in the text in Inner Asia at least is unique to the Salars, e.g. the swooping sparrow (below). Tibetan *layi* includes nature imagery as well, but favors eagles and other raptors. Also, while the nature imagery of *layi* is generally confined to the first stanza, the imagery in Salar *yur* continues in the second stanza.

Indirectness is absolutely essential to *yur*, and is created both by the extensive use of metaphor and by the use of evidential marking. The short, almost whispered *demish* "it is said that..." that occurs at the end of every stanza serves to distance the singer from his subject; he is not to be held fully responsible for the suggestive content of his lyrical performance. (See figure 5)

The question-and-answer format at the beginning of the second stanza (*nan-nighi yolinda dur ar i dese?* "If I asked, how would that be?") is also found as a didactic form in another nearly extinct Salar artistic genre, the wedding speech.

It is unknown how many singers are still able to perform this style of *yur*, at the most, there are perhaps a dozen singers, all elderly. They are in any event self-censored, as this type of singing, particularly for older people, is neither relig-

iously nor politically sanctioned. Still, it obviously brought Mr. Han great pleasure to sing for us in 1999.

Figure 5. Old Style *yur*, performed by Han Hasan (Sheyis), Altıuli, b. ca. 1935 (recorded Jan. 1999)

{hej} daɣlɨ gayanɨ, daɣlɨ gayanɨ	The rocky cliffs, the rocky cliffs
{e} sɨngnɨ tɕɨkkali ɕɨzɨl gayanɨ	Little Sister emerges from the ruddy cliffs.
{he} jarɨ ət gelse {je} arasɨnda {ja}	my beloved comes by between them
{e} salar sedɕiur, birur var a {tɕɨ}	there is one solitary Salar sparrow
{he} ətkan ətɕɨ, kondan kon ar a	she passes by, and it is more than I can bear
{he} ɣɕɕen ɣɕɕɨ dɛrden dɛr ar a{ɨ} yɛngu::	She flies by, and the cliffs are narrower than ye, girl....
...demiɕ.	...it is said.
{he} nannɨɨ jolɨnda dur ar i dese	If I asked, “How would that be?” <sup>15</sup>
{he} gɔxli asmannɨ samanda uɕɕen	flying through the azure sky
{he} sɛn bir qoɕnɨɨ gamuɕ ganatɨ	with your pair of bamboo-green wings
{e} sɨnglɨ mɛxanda gara ganɨ(t)lɛr	Little sister, with your black wings
{he} chorlenmɛxan da {he::} anɨɨ jɛngu	Girl, I cannot face you
{e} zhuazhualarɨna <sup>16</sup> qerin goxada	the claws scrape the skin
{he} anɨ jolɨnda {je::} jɛngu qejnaxan	On that way, oh my bubbly girl
{e} dɛrden dɛr ar {ɔɨ} dɛrden dɛr ar {ɔɨ} jɛngu	[the cliffs] are narrower than ye, narrower than narrow...girl...
...demiɕ	...it is said.

#### D. The Tibetanized Hua'er Style

Since the Old Style singers are few, elderly, and generally unwilling to sing, and since the Performatized Style is too decontextualized, the only recourse younger Salar would-be singers have today is to emulate regional styles, i.e. Tibetan layi and pan-ethnic Chinese-language hua'er. The early North Tibetan Salars intermarried with Tibetans and freely adopted Tibetan social structures and language forms. In the 13th century the early Salars moved into the upper Yellow River littoral region, which was populated by ethnic Tibetans. Salars and Tibetans sometimes still live in the same villages, and in any case still live in proximity of each other. Still, for Salars today, Tibetan love songs are far less accessible than *hua'er*

<sup>15</sup> Lit., “On which road would it be?”

<sup>16</sup> This is a Chinese lexeme, but its sense here is unclear to both me and my Salar colleagues. 抓 [tɕua] are claws. Alternatively, 髻髻 (in standard Ch. *zhūājī*, i.e. [tɕuatɕɨl]) was a bun hairdo worn by women in the past; it could conceivably be pronounced as [tɕuatɕua] in rapid singing, in which case the line might read, “Her maiden hairstyle will be shorn”.

singing is: *layi* is more strictly in an exclusively Tibetan domain and is not associated with annual festivals devoted to that song form and to ritual. *Hua'er*, in contrast, can be enjoyed and sung at several dozen area festivals with people of all regional ethnicities, and is also sung “out of season” on the riverbank and in fields. *Hua'er* has, however, been strongly influenced by *layi* in its ornamentation.

The recordings sampled here represent a strongly Tibetan-ornamented *hua'er* style that is sung in Salar and Chinese, though overwhelmingly in Chinese. When singing for us, the talented singer Mr. Ma Zhongliang sang two samples in Salar before switching to Northwestern Chinese, commenting that “singing these in Salar is a bit awkward.”

This style is thus the most syncretic form recorded; in fact, it is dubious whether this style can really be included in the *yur* genre. Due to contact with singers of both *layi* and *hua'er*, the metaphor is of a nature-inspired, indirect Tibetan style, while the music constitutes a mixture of Tibetan and *hua'er* styles. It has the highest degree of ornamentation, and many carrier filler syllables are used to carry the ornamentation.

As in the Old Style, the stanza begins with one long, high, fortissimo syllable. But in this Tibetanized Style, the initial syllable climbs in pitch with many improvised embellishments on the way to the high tone, and forms a crescendo. Mr. Ma sings with enormous feeling, ranging from almost-whispered syllables to shatteringly loud ones.

Unlike in the other styles, carrier syllables can even be inserted between syllables of a word (cf. *cang* {a} *ying* 苍{a}蝇 < *cangying* ‘fly’ in line 4 below). The final intonational filler syllables, however, come directly from the *hua'er* singing style characteristic of Xunhua county on the north bank of the Yellow River. (See figure 6.)

The number of singers of this style is greater than that of the other types, and it is probably the most viable style of all surveyed here. However, the form will only survive in the Chinese language as a local *hua'er* variant. As such, it may well evolve into a form with few if any musical traces of Salar music at all.

Figure 6. *Yur* performed by Ma Zhongliang (Shulima), b. 1954 (in Chinese, recorded Jan. 1999)

哎::: {ŋe me bad}	Ah,
我 角里 {ŋe} 切肉呵 {li jad}	In the corner, I am cutting meat.
{aja} 我右手俩 {a ta dʒiu} 切噢	Cutting with the right hand,
{le ŋe} 左手俩 {jo} 打了个 苍蝇 {ajaid}。	Swatting at a fly with the left.
哎呀我 {a} 打觉苍蝇者 {a::}	Aiya, though I got the fly
你妹妹收 {ya} 肉 {呵 jad}。	Sister, you take the meat.
哎呀, 你的味道们	Aiya, your flavors... (sniffs)
它就卷不来 苍蝇 {be ja::} 跟肉 {zhe::} 转	they cannot be rolled into the fly and the
{a::lia::jai}	meat. <sup>17</sup>

### *Syncretization: impact and theoretical implications*

*Yur* is beloved but low-prestige and viewed as immoral. The tug-of-war between the love of singing and devotion to local interpretations of Islam, combined with the historical pressures of the Cultural Revolution, has resulted in the demise of Salar-language *yur*. In all but the last style, the lack of ability to improvise and embellish indicates that the song form is already fossilized. Stylistically, at least the Old Style Salar *yur* samples resemble Turkmen *aydım* songs in their A-B A-B structural patterns. The ornamentation of the two is quite different; this fact, however, does not provide supporting evidence for or against a possible Turkmen connection, since ornaments and filler syllables are the most subject to matrix cultural influence and ad hoc modification.

In the syncretization of love songs in the Tibetan-Chinese cultural realms, it is worth considering the possible parallels between musical contact and language contact. Musical ornamentation, like linguistic phonology, appears to be easily copied, with Tibetan musical ornamentation appearing in the last two naturally syncretic styles. Since improvisation is possible largely through this embellishment, it is easy to see how such a style can be copied so long as a song form is in active use. Similarly, where language contact is concerned, phonology is the level where contact effects are very noticeable. In the Salar case, a retroflex series of sounds was copied from local Chinese and Tibetan varieties.

Metaphor, however, appears much more resistant to language and cultural contact. Least easily copied is the basic poetic structure and melody, at least for the song forms (C & D) which have been allowed to evolve on their own.

<sup>17</sup> While outsiders may have their doubts about the positive associations about meat, flies, and attractive young women, several independent local listeners confirmed that the language used here was extremely clever and evoked adroitness and deliciousness. Thanks to Dr. Wang Xianzhen for deciphering parts of the Chinese audio.

As for the future of the Salar *yur*, the only viable, productive song forms are those cast in the North Tibetan tradition (*hua'er/layi*) and mostly sung in Chinese. Since singing and all music are not condoned internally, the only available social context for music is outside of the Salar realm, e.g. at *hua'er* festivals or in staged performances. Song will no doubt live on with the Salars, but most likely in a language and a musical idiom other than their own. What may persevere, however, is Salar metaphor and poetic expression.

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