The Last Yugur Shaman from Sunan, Gansu (China)

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In Gansu Province of Northwest China, there lives a small minority, called Yugur. They consist of two distinct groups: the Kara Yugur who are the descendants of the Orkbon Uighur Empire and speak a Turkic language, and the Shira Yugur who are one of the so-called White Mongol tribes from the Amdo Region of Tibet. The Mongolic-speaking Shira Yugur follow Tibetan Buddhism while the Turkic-speaking Kara Yugur have preserved their shamanic traditions practiced by a specialist (elči) until recent times. The earliest information collected on Kara Yugur shamanic traditions date back to the beginning of the 1900s. In 2011 and 2013, I visited the Western Yugur and collected data on Korgui, the last elči to conduct the yaka ritual. I also recorded a short myth from his daughter on the emergence of the first shaman. The present article seeks to shed some light on the Kara Yugur shamans and their vanishing shamanic practices, as well as their relation to Tibetan Buddhism and the Shira Yugur religious traditions.

In August, 2011, I visited the Yugur minority of China in Sunan Yugur Autonomous County, Gansu Province. We travelled 433 kilometres from Xining, the center of the Qinghai Province (Amdo) by car across the picturesque Qilian Mountains and the Biandukou Pass (3,500 m). The Yugurs number around 15,000, and the majority of them live in Sunan

1 On my first trip, I was accompanied by former director of the Institute of Ethnology (Hungarian Academy of Sciences), Mihály Hoppál.
2 Amdo was the traditional name for the region in Tibetan. The current name Qinghai comes from the Chinese name of the great lake of the province (Köke-Naur in Mongol and Co-Ngoin in Tibetan meaning ‘Blue Lake’).
The center of Sunan is Hongwansi (红湾寺 Red Bay Temple) and four townships, Minhua, Dahe, Kangle, and Huangcheng (明花、大河、康乐, 皇城) have a significant Yugur population (map 1). The Yugurs are linguistically not homogeneous: the Western Yugurs speak a Turkic language (in Minhua and Dahe), while the Eastern Yugurs (in Kangle and Huangcheng) speak a Mongolic language. Western Yugur has some 4,000 speakers, while Eastern Yugur has around 2,000 speakers.

The Turkic Yugurs are believed to be descendants of the Orkhon Uighur Empire (744–840) (Golden 1992, 155–188) and its successor states (idem, 163–9) that existed here in Gansu (848–1036) with towns, like Ganzhou, Suzhou and Dunhuang. Later the Gansu Uighur state was conquered by the Tanguts and the Mongols. The Mongolic (Eastern Yugur) group is also called ınggar, and they are probably a Monguor (Tuzu) tribe that migrated here from Amdo during the Manchu Era in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was these Yugur groups that Hungarian Tibetologist Alexander Csoma de Kőrössy (1784–1842) wanted to visit, but he died during his trip to Lhasa (Ligeti 1931). The so-called Modern Uighurs (Chinese 维吾尔 weiwu’r) of Xinjiang Province in northwest China only adopted the ethnic name “Uighur” in 1921, and they are not directly related to the Yugurs of Gansu.

The Turkic-speaking Yugurs are also divided into two distinct groups: the Mountain (taglıg) Yugur in Dahe and the Plains (oylıg) Yugur in Minhua between Jiuquan (Suzhou) and Zhangye (Ganzhou).

The center of Sunan, Hongwansi got its name after a Tibetan Buddhist temple that was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). The town is situated by the Longsur (Mandarin Longche) River and

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3 Sunan Yugur Autonomous District has an area of 20,456 square kilometres, its population is over 50,000: 10,000 Yugurs, 10,000 Tibetans, 30,000 Han and as well as some Khalkha Mongols, Monguors, Hui and Dongxiang. The Yugurs live mainly in Minhua (3,000), Dahe (3,000) and Kangle (2,500), Huangcheng (2,000) townships.

4 See also Nugteren 2003.

5 See also Hahn (1998, 397; Nugteren 2003, 265). The Yugur–Chinese dictionary gives three meanings for the word ınggar: ‘hybrid calf (yak and cattle); foolish; Mongolic speaking Yugur’ (Lei 1992, 22).
nowadays it is developing rapidly, giving way to an influx of the Han Chinese. Young generations of Yugurs switch to Mandarin, so both Turkic and Mongolic (Shira) Yugur have become endangered languages.

The Yugurs were first described in modern scholarship by Grigoriĭ N. Potanin (1893). Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim (1911) visited them shortly in 1907, and mentioned some Buddhist characteristics of Yugur religious life, but referred to no shamans at all.6 It was the Russian Turkologist, Sergeĭ E. Malov (1880–1957) who, in turn, collected detailed information on Yugur shamans, among other linguistic and ethnographic data and folklore texts, during his field trip of 1910 and 1911.7 In an article Malov (1912a) gave a detailed account of his fieldwork on the elči shamans and their yaka8 rituals, an even photographed the ritual. Matthias Hermanns visited the Yugurs in 1935, and published an article (Hermanns 1940–1941) on the Yugur along with some linguistic data and two pictures, nos. 5 and 6, and a drawing, no. 8 in the original, connected with the yaka ritual. Nowadays Chinese colleagues tend to think that shamanic traditions are forgotten among the Yugurs, though Zhong Jinwen (1995) attempted to recognize some traits of shamanism in Yugur folk tales.9 So obviously I was curious about the current situation.

Having arrived to Hongwansi, I met two elderly sisters at a Yugur Minority social event: Chimitar (born 1939) and Renchirtan (born 1942). They were from the Yaglakar village (clan)10 of Dahe Township. I asked them if they had ever heard of the elči shamans and their yaka rituals. Soon it became clear that they happened to be the daughters of the last Yugur shaman, Korgai, who died in 1977, just after the Cultural Revolution ended. When we met them in Hongwansi, they were just

6 Mannerheim’s account was reviewed by Malov (1912b).
7 For further details see Thomsen (1959) with a list of Malov’s publications on the Yugur (idem, 1959, 565).
8 Some Yugur words like elči and yaka are pronounced with a voiced pharyngeal consonant that produced the pharyngealization of the proceeding vowel. It is indicated with a ʕ sign in the IPA system, but in order to simplify the transcript, I have omitted it.
9 It must be added that the Chinese author uses the term “shamanism” rather vaguely, what he speaks of in his article may better be classified as the “natural religion of the Yugur.” Later Zhong and Martti Roos (1997) added some complementary linguistic notes to the data they published in their 1995 article.
10 Yaglakar was the leading tribe of the Orkhon Uighur Empire founded by Kutlug Bilge in 744.
visiting Renchirtan’s son, Tümen Jastar (杜成峰 Du Chengfeng, from Sunan, Dahe), who lives in that town with his Tibetan wife.

The Elči Specialist

The following day I visited Chimitar and Renchirtan in Jastar’s home in Hongwansi (figs. 1, 2), where they showed me a picture featuring their father,\(^{11}\) and explained to me that there were two, or, more precisely, three types of elči. The em elči was a sort of healing shaman, while the kam elči performed rituals and evoked spirits.\(^{12}\) In addition, there was also a third type of shaman, called pör elči, who could perform both the healing and the spirit invoking rituals. Chimitar’s and Renchirtan’s father was a pör elči.\(^{13}\) (I consider elči a title of respect—like Old Turkic tarqan and Old Uighur baqši from Chinese boshi—given to different religious specialists: qam ‘shaman’ and emči ‘healer’.)

Chimitar and Renchirtan also showed us their father’s shamanic paraphernalia (dorvun)\(^{14}\), which closely resembled the headdress of some Tibetan Bonpo specialists (figs. 3, 4).\(^{15}\) It is interesting to note here that Malov (1912a, 63) remarks that Yugur shamans did not use any special attire, and that they performed ceremonies in their everyday dress.

Korgui could not pass on his tradition to his son—Malov also mentions that the Yugur shaman Sanıšqap planned to pass on his knowledge to his twelve-year-old son (1912a, 61) and that it often happened that shamans’ sons followed their fathers in their profession (idem, 1912a, 64)—due to the political situation during the Cultural Revolution, so the last Yugur shaman died having no pupils. Her daughters had only a limited knowledge of shamanic traditions and the yaka ritual, since girls were not allowed to participate at religious ceremonies. Only sons

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\(^{11}\) I took a picture of the old photograph, but its quality is too poor to be reproduced here.

\(^{12}\) See also Lei (1992, 27).

\(^{13}\) Malov (1912a, 63) explains that elči and qam were two different terms for the same shaman.

\(^{14}\) Malov also mentioned an object, called torvun (1912a, 63) saying that it was some kind of “magic bag,” hanging on the wall of the shaman’s house, but did not report anything about its usage.

\(^{15}\) Bon is a religious tradition of the Tibetans that developed alongside Buddhism from the eleventh century and it was practiced by the tertön specialists.
Fig. 1. Daughters of the last Yugur elči, Korgui: Renchirtan (left) and Chimitar (right) in Renchirtan’s son, Tümen Jastar’s home (Hongwansi, Gansu, China). Photo: Dávid Somfai Kara, 2011.

Fig. 2. In Tümen Jastar’s home (from left to right): Chimitar, Renchirtan, Tümen Jastar and his Tibetan wife, and our Yugur guide (Ay-Kading or Zhong Li). Photo: Dávid Somfai Kara, 2011.
could inherit the secret knowledge of the shamans but, fortunately, in our case, the daughters heard about the myth of the first elči, who was a shaman. During my visit I also met an old man, Bai Huanzar (b. 1910), who took part at yaka ceremonies before 1966 (fig. 5).

Before giving the recently collected Yugur text here, it seems to be useful and convenient to quote Malov’s text of the same myth as he noted it down from his Yugur informant, Sanıškap from the village of Šar-Gudır on February 4, 1911:16

MİNTAN PİRİNTA YÜĞÜR BÔŁYAN QAN DEŅİR TAQŸAK TRO. YIŇ PİRİNTA PÇ QAN DEŅİR TAQŸAK TRO. TAT MİNDAKO QAN TEŅİRÎN YUS KÜRGEK TRO. XORWE WUÇIN ĐÊTU KIŞTAW, ZOR TAQQÀ ÖNDÜRİSTERGEN DRO. QAN DEŅİR MANÖ PÈR QOL İŞKE KERGENDRO, KERGEŞ YRYLAYAN DRO. YRÝLÎSA, QOLAQQA PÈR AT KISTEGEN ÂNÂLÝANDRO. ANDAQQAN TÜGETE:

“O! MEN MÎNDA KİSELÝ YERGE YETKENDAY.”

KAN DEŅİR YADQASI ZİÜRÝA ÇĂȘTAĞAN DRO ALTÇI PAY GÜZGE TÜŞKEN DRO. PAY KÜZDE BÈR ANIKA WAR MİDRO. ANIKA SÛÞIN YAYA-YAYA UZUĞAN DRO. Ôrôq tarqo (?) qam tüs-kindro; qarun algaş palaqqa târðuster-gendro. Andaqqan tûgete qarın iştekî yar palaq palaqqa şûkôp qalyan-dro, čûçaq şâzdiyâş, şanâyân-dro. Andan la qan deņir şâzdiqqa tûşken-dro, kisler şâzdiqqa çâłyân-dro. An la kisler anday dep-dro:

“MİŞ ŞÂZDIQQA ÇÂLŶMES ERE,” ANDAY DEP-DRO. ANN (ANNY ?) YÜRSE WUŽIN, LOM BUÇIN YER KSEGÉ KŬÇİRGEN-DRO. ANDAQ QAN TŬGETE LE WOSA EREREN ILÇI WOLYAN-DRO, İLÇI WOSA, QAN DEŅİR TÛSÉ, QAMNAYAK-TRO. QAMNATU QAMNATQAŞ, QARI İLÇILER EZERTKEŞ YÜRGETKEK-TRO, PÈR YIL MER İŞKE YIL MER YÜRGETKEŞ. AM BOSA, KEP KISE YUMUTU, YURMESİN ALYAQ-TRO. ALYAN TŬGETE AM WOSA PÇ PEZİK ELČI BOP-TRO. (MALOV 1967, 134)

Malov gives a Russian translation of this Yugur text (1967, 135–6), and he published a summary of the myth in his main article on Yugur shamanism (Malov 1912, 62).17 I herewith attempt to give an English translation of it, based on Malov’s Yugur original text:

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16 Malov published his data on Yugur shamanism in his first article (1912a), where he gives the most detailed description of his subject including some scattered linguistic data embedded into his Russian text, as well as Russian translations of some prayers (Malov 1912a, 67–72 and 74). However, his original Yugur texts were only published by Edgar R. Tenishev much later (Malov 1967). There is a whole chapter of shamanic texts in the book (Chapter 5, pp. 134–160). Malov’s dictionary and grammar of the so-called ‘Yellow Uighur’ (1957) also encompasses a shamanic vocabulary.

17 Malov also published another version of the same myth collected two years later in 1913 (Malov 1967, 137–8), which slightly differs from the previous version.
Earlier all the Yugurs venerated Kan-Deŋir. Even earlier this Kan-Deŋir went to the Tibetans, but the Tibetans treated him badly. They were shooting at him with slings and chased him to Mount Zur. Kan-Deŋir went away and entered a valley, then started to cry. When he cried, his ears heard the neighing of a horse: “It seems that I have reached a place [inhabited] by humans.”

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Fig. 3. Renchirtan and her son, Jastar examining the headdress (dorwun) of the last Yugur shaman. Photo: Dávid Somfai Kara, 2011.

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18 Kan-Deŋir is the deity or spirit of the Sky that was widely venerated by Turkic and Mongolic peoples of Inner Asia. The word *deŋir* means ‘sky’ and it is not an almighty god or creator, just one of many deities.
Kan-Deŋir settled down on the edge of Mount Zur and he went down to Bay-ğüz. In Bay-ğüz there lived an old woman. The old woman was just churning milk, and she fell asleep. Kan-Deŋir turning into a kam came down and took her container, and threw it against the wall. The butter in the container stuck to the wall, the curd spilled on the woman. Kan-Deŋir thus ascended to the woman, so people venerated her but then they said:

“We should not venerate a woman,” so they said. So by faith (nom) [the ability] was transferred to males. After that males started to become elči. Having Kan-Deŋir ascended [the ability] the elči became a kam. To become a kam they follow the old elči who teaches them. One year or two years he teaches and

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19 A container, made of a bubble of the tripe or rumen (karn) of a sheep, used for storing liquids.
then a lot of people gather. They accept his sacrifice \([\text{yürme}]^{20}\) and he [disciple] becomes the big \(\text{elçi}\).

Now let us see the version in my own translation of a simplified philological transcription, as told by Renchirtan at August 20, 2011. I recorded her account in her native Yugur tongue, and later her son, Jastar helped me to transcribe and translate the recording.

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20 The \(\text{yürme}\) was a sacrifice performed in exchange of initiation by the spirits (Lei 1992, 281).
Am la dîyü-tu bir Kangay digek bir yerde bar edi, ertele bir aniga alton gaš yasagan, anigaga bir ogil bar edi, kûnerte xos süt sağırgan nime-di, bu süt sağırganda la aniga ortakka yel-sıgırtkı kelgende ürkitke, anika mindakka títirege çamlap kiripti, andan la anika bagayasn alınga, yiğe esik biyen kirge, bagayani alttrakka salmas nime-di, alttrakka saiwetke le . . . . degen edi:

“Uzaktan kelgen uzut bolsa, kaydan kelse, kaygama, birkan bolsa niyler bolsa maga lar et!” andan la örę bir karaganda künšümün böšta kök kus tüskie olırgan edi, öst birkan dadıp keldi. Andan la aniga manın alıp aška la ogıllıga bolgay, andan kartı elći la ogıllıga bolgay, andan yugur yaka bitirgen edi.21

In old times there was a place called Khangai. A long time ago there was an old woman in her sixties. The old woman had a son, the whole day she was milking animals. While she was milking, suddenly a strong wind started to blow and frightened her. So the old lady started to shake and shiver. Then the old lady took her milking bucket. She entered the house by the door. She had never dropped her bucket. But this time she dropped it . . . . and said:

“If you are a demon (üzüt)22 from a distant place, go back where you came from, if you are a Burkan, tell me what you want!”

When she looked up to the top of the tent, a blue bird was sitting there. It was a Burkan. Later the old woman passed on her shamanic ability to her son. When the shaman (kam elći) became old, her ability passed to her son. Since then the Yugurs perform the yaka ritual.

21 When she finished the myth, Renchirtan continued by telling another short text. In the following, I give its transcription I made with the help of her son, Jastar. However, the meaning of these lines is not clear to me, and it was not understandable even for Jastar. I hope to be able to clarify this text in the future:

Uzı bası tünde baštı altı, kaska kaitan kask altı,
ak ileden yıgaš altı, (ursaš baştan) ursaš duganadan dun altı,
yazı belden yastık altı, baka baştan konuk altı,
gorgulıgdan dorvun altı, kara yüsten yıṣık altı,
čañ dartıp, deň dartıp, peš dartıp, Kangayga kelgen kam elći.

22 Besides the numerous deities or spirits of nature (burkan) there are two additional types of spirits mentioned in the Yugur materials: üzüt (cf. üzüt ‘zloĭ dukh; evil spirit’, Malov 1957, 132a) or uzut (cf. uzut ‘dusha umershego cheloveka; a spirit of the deceased’, Malov 1957, 129a) is a harmful spirit or demon, while yil (cf. yil ‘veter, vdokhnovenie, dukh – pomoshchnik shamanà; wind, inspiration, the shaman’s helping spirit;) is a spirit that helps the elći during its rituals and healings (Malov 1957, 40).
Again, let me give a short summary of Malov’s account on the yaka ritual (1912a, 65–72). Malov describes the yaka as the only ritual performed by the elči. It was performed at the request of a family at their home on a designated date of the year, the second month according to the Chinese calendar. One week before the ritual the hosting family prepares a small tree that symbolizes the mythical yaka tree decorated by ribbons (čüwek). The yaka tree consists of four branches of a thorny bush (tiken). The branches are inserted into a hummock covered with grass, called soka. The four branches are decorated with three different colors (green, white, and blue). The longest branch is called yasıl yıgaš ‘green tree’ having seven green ribbons. In front of it, there is the ak yıgaš ‘white tree’ with white and blue ribbons. The blue ribbon (kök čüwek) is also called tır “Milky Way.” There is another small branch called buržek ‘corner’ connected to the white tree by four threads. In front of the buržek is the last branch of blue colour (kök yıgaš ‘blue tree’) with two blue and one green ribbons. The blue tree is also called tır “Milky Way” like the blue ribbon of the white tree. There are carvings on each of the three branches (seven on the green, five on the white, four on the ‘corner’ and three on the blue tree).

The yaka is performed in the house of the family arranging the ritual. It is not a community event and only a few neighbours are invited by the hosting family. The elči sits in front of the yaka tree that is placed in the house by the wall facing the entrance, where the Buddhist altar can also be found usually in a niche. A dish filled with cereals (sokpa and tārg) is placed on the ground in front of the yaka tree. Nine Buddhist butter lamps (marmi/marme from Tibetan dkarme or yula in Yugur) are put on the top of the cereals. When the elči arrives, the lamps are lit.

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23 The name of the ritual comes from the name of a mythological tree that connects the Middle World inhabited by human beings to the Upper World of the deities. It is called yaka yıgaš in Yugur, and its name in Mongolian is jaqa-yin modun ‘tree of the edge’. Mongolian jaqa-yin mondun can be found in epic tales (Vladimirtsov 1926, 19).

24 It is the second month (eryue 二月) after the Chinese New Year (chunjie 春节) according to the lunisolar calendar (second new moon after winter solstice between 21 January and 20 February), so it starts in February or March.

25 In Yugur-Chinese dictionary soka/soga is a type of needle-grass belonging to the genus of Achnaterum, called čiŋ in the Kypchak-Turkic languages.
and the shaman starts to sing a song to Altan Khan\textsuperscript{26} and throws some bits that were previously cut from the four branches on the hummock. Afterward follows the sacrificing of a sheep. The animal is standing on a felt rug (yonak) or a sack (sumal) spread on the ground, and the \textit{elči} sprinkles “white water” (ak su) on the animal from a big spoon (čot kazdık). The “white water” is a mixture of water and curd (čužak). If the sheep shakes itself, it means that the spirits accept the sacrifice. The sheep is killed by cutting a hole into its chest and then tearing apart its aorta by hand. The \textit{elči} starts sprinkling milk towards the sky, while the killed sheep is carried into the house to the altar. Then the participants of the ritual take it back to the courtyard, cut off its main parts including the head, the neck, the lungs and the ribs (pogsı),\textsuperscript{27} and cook them separately, and put them on a dish to the ground in front of the \textit{elči}. The shaman washes the head with “white water” and rubs it with butter. The forehead of the sheep symbolizes Sumeru Mountain (\textit{Sumır tag}),\textsuperscript{28} its eye-teeth Azgash Khan and the four legs Pagdash Khan, while its tail represents the “deity holding a whip” (čalıg tutkan). Then the shaman sings a song to the spirits and gives the pogsı to the burkans.\textsuperscript{29}

The ritual ends at this point for the day. The head and the legs of the sacrificed sheep are place in front of the burkans, the rest is consumed by the shaman and the participants at the ritual—this happens in the evening. After the meal the shaman goes to sleep; the ritual is finished on the following day, usually not too early. The \textit{elči} goes to the grasslands outside the house and its courtyard, and while sprinkling milk to the sky, he sings another song. The participants of the ritual bring another sheep and a harnessed horse and make them stand on a felt rug spread on the ground in front of the house. The \textit{elči} smokes the animals with

\textsuperscript{26} The name means “Golden Khan” in Mongolian. Altan Khan (1542–1582) was the leader of the Tümed Mongol State (founder of the city of Köke-qota). He proclaimed Tibetan Buddhism as the official religion and gave the title of Dalai Lama to the Tibetan theocratic leader in Lhasa.

\textsuperscript{27} A similar custom exists among the Mongols who call these parts of the sacrifice \textit{ǰülde}.

\textsuperscript{28} The Sumeru or “Great Meru” Mountain is a mythical sacred mountain in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist tradition. Sumeru is the highest mountain and the polar centre of the mandala-like flat Earth, a complex of mountains and seas.

\textsuperscript{29} Malov (1918, 64–5), referring to Sanıškap as his source again, writes that the Yugur had thirteen spirits or deities (\textit{bırkan} or \textit{burkan}) of the skies. Second rank deities number nine. Malov mentions the following deities by name: Pagdaš Khan, Azgaš Khan, Surei Khan, Mongol Khan and Ktai Khan.
some joss-sticks and offer the two animals to the spirits. The sheep is let loose immediately, but the horse is tethered in the courtyard, as it will be needed later. Afterwards, all go back to the house, where the shaman sprinkles milk on the wall and the yaka tree, and starts to sing again. Then the shaman sprinkles liquor with another song. Finally, the rest of the meat is consumed and all the participants of the ritual go out to the courtyard and sit down on the felt rug. The shaman also comes out from the house, holding the yaka tree in his hands, while one of the participants brings a tray with two cups on it: one filled with liquor mixed with black tea (kara arakı), the other filled with red liquor (kızıl arakı), liquor mixed with some reddish ingredient. The shaman makes a libation with the drinks, and touches the head of each participant with the yaka tree. One of the young men takes the tree and mounts the richly dressed up horse, while the women throw themselves down in front of the tree. The young man gallops out and throws the tree away outside. The elçi enters the house and examines the lamps to find out whether the deities (spirits) have accepted the sacrifice.

And now, let us see Rençintar’s account about her father and how he performed the yaka ritual before 1966. Since the two daughters were young girls in those days, their father did not pass on to them his spiritual knowledge, but they saw him perform the ritual several times.

(1) elçi la yaka bitirgende bir yılda altayda layuerdîy altayda yaka bitirge le nime-di, yaka bitirgende la nige-gul bu sokamı turgak kazıp kelge(n), iš yğaşi: kök, yasl, ak yızlı oraga, ak yıymi oraga(n), o nige sokamı üzesinge tüyge(n), andakkala yaka bitirge nime-di, biri-kusin la yaka bitirgek nime-di, soñs kun la bir goy ölirgek nime-di, goymi moyni užın Ölirmes, goymi özegek, özegende bu töstî uraga, nige gul bičak biyen tilge, mnda bir siz yöga(n), sizdi mindakka bu yürekke düüp bergek, yürekke düüp bergende la goy ölîp kaptı, andak kandan la goymi yene kiçîg su uyn nige gul yun tanla azuz-isti, yun tanlaga kiltir-etke, am la bo goymi yakasin, ickisin aîs etke, am la goyga nokta tolaga, nokta-çîbdır tolaga, am la dorwın dorwınni gunda diîmdiktîy gündan kuçi aska la dorwın altinga salga, am la bo elçi yaka bitirgek nime-di, bitirgenden la yylaga, lar-etke . . .

(2) . . . am yakani bitirge la bir xondurga la, soñs küni la yene bir yigaš mañîrdagak nime-di, yigaš mañîrdaganda la esiktî bózik aîska, am la kînden bir eren am la bu yigaşî bir alay-alay la elçe bergende, elçi bu ygaşî öri-öri le uñışga, kisi omanı baš xoğa mindakka tiyirge, andakkandan gul yakta bir eren kisi čokîy olırganda yigaşî bergende la, am la dogir kisiler la goymi töstî alninga, mindakka kurîy-kurîy
The Last Yugur Shaman from Sunan, Gansu (China)

la ardında arakı mañdırtı nime-di, am la ča kawačk alıngan nime, süt alıngan nime, yun alırdıgan nime, mindaka kury la kirgek nime-di, kuryga kirgende la elči ma andakka kač ags söster, anda degende la yığastı ündirgek nime-di, etti şartka, yığaštı yene uzakka etke, anda barga.

Xosı mnıjar et yige, yığaštı anda döngge salıwatka nime-di, am nime taki ma dun ayak bar edi, takı mnıñ kire bir ayaktnı iške smak, süt taki mün, takı kan, am ċok kasıg, mnıñ uzan kasıg biyen la mindakka bir-bir yumırga, yüge le bu smak mindakka smak la kurılylaganya bözik mindakka yanla, elči artka karamas andak nime-di, yan-yan etti kık bözge tüygeške la, o mnıjar yigeck nime-di, am la kuşkan etti tüdge la, am la agıl-xolım bözık-kıšig kısını kıydıp keltı, yigeckı am la njur kisi kelge, yısi ma ola bitkek nime-di, andan taki bir marmı tamırdırgak nime-di, marmını üstin bıltını orının beş yan kouxian bözik marmını kuzga la ola tamırga la, am la oga o yakı marmını elči karaga la nime-di, am la senin yıde nişik uşıgiriptı, kaydan ni optı, ani-xoni marmı ište karaga, taki bir yanzı elči nişegir sısu mañdırgak nime-di, kızıl öşküni öldiriwalga, dört aralgaga tilik aška, urdakka la pudege tañskirtırga, nokta-čılbır ni kınaga, ezer, yunak kınaga, am la yene nişegul inşıgaška la, dasıgı andakka bitinje dadıwatka nime-di, bitinje dadıwatka, onı la išt-kus yigergek nime-di, anda nime la kaš yanzı bolıst-tarı, am la bir nimesin undurup-tar oo.

(1) The shaman performed the yaka in the sixth and twelfth months of the year. When they performed a yaka they put up a soka. Three trees were wrapped with blue, green and white cloth and white wool. This was put up on the top of the soka. This way they performed the yaka, the first day of the yaka was performed there. Next day they killed a sheep, but not by cutting the sheep’s neck. The sheep was killed by the diaphragm (özek), they cut it through the breast. They cut it by a knife or sometimes they also chipped a stake, the stake this way was stabbed to the heart. When they stabbed into the heart, the sheep died. Then the sheep was boiled in water to make some soup, they brought the soup. Now this sheep was taken to the yakha, its stomach was taken away. They put a halter (nokta) and a leading-rein (čılbır) on the head of the sheep. The shamanic paraphernalia was hanging down from the smoke-hole of the Yugur tent (kara yı). When the paraphernalia was taken off the shaman started to perform the yaka, when he performed it he was singing and talking.

30 See fig. 6.
(2) . . . when the first day of the yaka is over, the next day another tree is taken there. When they bring the tree, they open the door wide. Now that man takes the tree and passes it to the shaman. The shaman holds the tree up and prays. He touches the head of all the people there. Then over there a man takes a seat and passes on the tree. Then all the people take the meat from the breast of the sheep. The (shaman) says kurui-kurui, a spreads some milk liquor over his back. Now he takes a big spoon. They bring some milk and some wool too. He continues to sing kurui-kurui. When the shaman sings kurui-kurui he also says some words (but I have already forgotten). After saying them the tree is taken out (of the tent). They cook the meat and take away the tree and they go there. Everybody eats the meat, and they put the tree on a mound. They also take various bowls there. In one of the bowls there was kumis, as well as milk, soup and blood. There was a long spoon (čot kazdık) that they used to spray (the drinks). In the house they blessed the meat with a loud kurui song. The shaman was performing it by turning his back. All kinds of meat were put on blue cloth and they ate it. The meat was cut and then cooked. The whole village (nomadic camp), big and small was invited.

A lot of people came to eat the meat. They ate it by the house and by an owoo (üle). Then they lit another lamp (yula). Instead of the wick of the lamp they used wool (口线 kouxian). They made a big lamp and lit it up. Now the shaman was looking into the lamp. He could see what problems you had in your family, what happened. He could see everything in the lamp. Sometimes the shaman also sacrificed the scapegoat (šušu). The killed a red goat and they cut it into four parts. That meat was eaten by the dogs and birds. They performed all kinds of things. I might have forgotten some of them.

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31 Xurai (qurui) is a magic word for invoking the spirits during a sacrifice in Mongolian, 'sámánek stb szellemidéző szava; spirit invoking word in shamanic songs' cf. Kara (1998, 616b).
32 Kumis is the Russianized Turkic name for fermented mare’s milk, but it is called smak in Yugur (Chinese 酸奶).
33 Malov writes čok-kazdık but the Yugur-Chinese dictionary has čot for sacrifice of spray.
34 Mongolian owoo ‘heap’ is a sacred cairn built for the spirits usually at mountain paths or other sacred sites. The Yugur name for it is üle.
35 The šušu is a scapegoat or animal sacrificed to take away curses and demons (see Lei 1992: tizuishu 替罪畜).
In 2013 I revisited Sunan with Mongolist Zsolt Szilágyi. During our short stay in Hongwansi we could not meet the two old Yugur women, but we met again Renchirtan’s son, Tümen Jastar, who had hosted us two years earlier and had shown us his grandfather’s shamanic dress (dorwun) (figs. 3, 4). We also had the opportunity to meet a local Yugur researcher and writer Khawar—his Chinese name is Dalong Dongzhi 达隆东智—who was from the inggar or Eastern (Mongolic) Yugur group and thus could not speak Western, or Turkic Yugur. However, he is an enthusiastic collector of both Western (Turkic) and Mongolic (Eastern) Yugur folklore with the help of the local native speakers. He also publishes the journal named Yovhur puchig (pronounced yoγur pučig ‘Yugur Culture’) in Chinese (尧熬尔文化 Yao’ao’r wenhua) with texts of Western and Eastern Yugur folklore transcribed in the Pinyin Latin alphabet. Mr. Khawar explained to us that only the Turkic Yugur (whom they called Khara Yugur or Black Yugur) had shamans (kam elči) and Eastern Yugur (or Yellow Yugur/Shira Yogur as they call themselves) had no word for such religious specialists. The Yellow Yugur migrated to the Gansu from Tibet during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). They are related to the so-called White Mongols (Monguer, Chinese 土族 tuzu) of Huzhu County. These Mongolic tribes were called Khor in Tibetan. Later these White Mongol groups were conquered by the Manchu in the eighteenth century and administered by the same governor (amban in Manchu) together with the Yugurs of Gansu. In order to differentiate themselves from the mostly non-Buddist Western Yugurs they started to use the term Yellow or Buddhist Yugur (coming from the color of the Tibetan Gelug Buddhism). The Mongolic-speaking Yugurs only have a legend that the Tibetans captured the Yugur deity Kan-Deŋir and confined him to the Nechung Monastery, the site of the

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36尧熬尔 yao’ao’r is different from the official Chinese name 裕固 yugu for the Yugurs.
37Mongolist Mátyás Balogh (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest) who studied the Shira Yugur and Monguor languages also confirmed that the Huzhu dialect of Monguor was closer to Shira Yugur than the Minhe dialect of Monguor, which in turn related to the Bonan language.
38The Tibetan word khor means ‘foreigner’ and it was used to designate the Turkic and Mongolic peoples of the region (White Mongols/Tuzu and Yugurs) but not the Muslims.
39Gelug means ‘yellow hat,’ which the lamas of the reformed sect wear. The sect was founded by Tsongkapa (1357–1419) in Amdo (Kumbun Monastery) and became an official religion of Tibet and Mongolia in the sixteenth century.
state oracle not far from Lhasa. Even though the Shira Yugurs do not have any \textit{elči} specialists and they follow Tibetan Buddhism (Gelug-pa) sometimes, in case of disease and other misfortune, they used to order rituals from the Kara Yugur shamans.

\textbf{A Summary}

Malov (1912a, 62) rightly wrote that the Mountain Yugurs (taglıg yugur) had better preserved their traditions than the Yugurs living in the

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\footnote{Nechung was the residence of Pehar, a deity of the Khor, who lived to the east of Lake Köke-naur. According to tradition, he is held to have been originally brought to Samye Monastery by Padmasambhava who bound him to protect the \textit{dharma}. According to a legend, the Nechung Oracle or Pehar was brought to Tibet by a Bon general, Tara Lugong, who took possession of the meditation school near Ganzhou of the Khor-pa (a tribe of Uighurs), about the end of the eighth century A.D.}

\footnote{A similar cultural exchange can be observed among the sub-ethnic groups of Altay Turkic people, the Altay Kizhi and the Telengit. The Altay Kizhi religious tradition (ak \textit{jang}) strictly prohibits the activity of the \textit{kam} 'shaman' but in case of serious illness and disasters the Altay Kizhi also visit a Telengit \textit{kam} secretly (Somfai 2014, 153–4).}
plains (*oylıg yugur*). Among the Yugurs of Plains in Minhua, we could find only the 90 year-old man, Bai Huanzar (fig. 5), who remembered the *yaka* from his childhood (1920–30s), while Korgui from Dahe continued performing the ritual until the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Korgui, who also possessed the traditional paraphernalia (*dorwun*), had been converted to Buddhism. While the sedentary Yugurs of the plains lived in Chinese type adobe houses (*balık*), the Mountain Yugurs were nomadic and used the Tibetan type tent (*kara yü*), where the *yaka* ritual took place (fig. 6).

The Modern Yugur minority is a creation of the People’s Republic of China, when Turkic Yugurs and Mongolic ınggar (Shira Yugur) were designated as one ethnic group, although they were linguistically and culturally distinct. Mongolic Yugurs use the term Shira (Yellow or Buddhist) Yugur to differentiate themselves from the Turkic Yugurs, who were not Buddhist thus called Kara Yugur.42

References


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42 The same distinction can be found among the Altay Kizhi and Telengit (*ak and kara jang*) or the Khori Buriad (*šarin and xarin šažan*).
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