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Salar

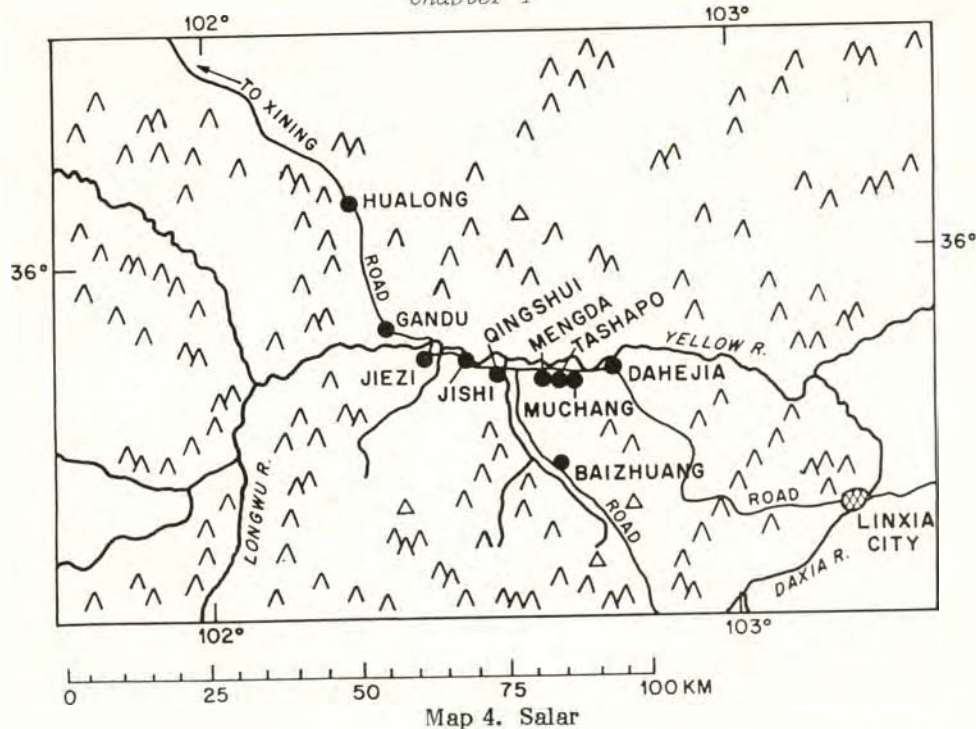
Size and Location

According to the 1982 census there were 69,102 Salars 撒拉 living in China,¹ compared to about 40,000 in the late 1960s.² Some seventy percent, or 50,000, of them are concentrated in the Xunhua 循化 Salar autonomous county in the eastern part of Qinghai province. Smaller groups of Salars live in Gandu 甘都 of neighboring Hualong 化隆 county and in Dahejia 大河家 township of the Bonan, Dongxiang and Salar autonomous county in Gansu province (see Map 4). A few Salars reside in the city of Xining 西宁 and in Gonghe 共和, Guide 贵德, and Qilian 祁连 counties in Qinghai as well as in Yining 伊宁 county of Xinjiang.³

Xunhua county extends for fifty kilometers from east to west and forty kilometers from north to south, with a total area of 2,100 square kilometers. It is located 160 kilometers from the provincial capital, Xining. The county consists of eight townships.

History

The self-appellation of Salar is believed to have been derived from the word Salor, the name of a Turkmen tribe.⁴ This tribe was already mentioned in the eleventh century by Mahmūd al-Kāshgarī, and later by Rashīdu-d'-dīn (fourteenth century) and Abū-l-gāzī (seventeenth century).⁵ The Salars' oral history supports the idea of the Salars having originated as a Turkmen tribe when



Map 4. Salar

speaking of the progenitors Haraman and Ahman, two brothers who set out from Samarkand and arrived in the Jiezi area of Xunhua on May 28, 1370.⁶ While still in Central Asia, the Salars were governed by a hereditary *darugachi*, a post established by the Mongols to supervise both military and civilian affairs in the conquered territories. After arriving in the Xunhua area during the Ming dynasty, the Salars were governed by their own hereditary *tusi*, a kind of headman, of whom there were three grades, one in charge of 100 households and two (a chief and an assistant) for each 1,000 households. They had authority over the militia, taxation, legal matters, and the provisioning of officials passing through the area.

By 1730 the Salar population had grown to the point where the area in which they lived was divided into twelve *gong* 工. Their number shrank to eight in 1781, after the Qing government had smashed a Salar uprising and inflicted heavy losses on them. Four *gong*, with forty-six villages, were located west of the present county seat of Jishi, and the other four *gong* were east of Jishi, with thirty-six villages. Soon thereafter Salars also moved north across the Yellow River into Hualong county where they established five additional *gong*. However, only relatively few Salars made their home north of the river, and to this day most of the population there is composed of Tibetans and Hui.⁷

The Xunhua and Hualong counties belonged to Gansu province until 1928 when they were transferred to the newly created Qinghai province.

Language and Literature⁸

The Salar language belongs to the Ughs branch of the Turkic group of the Altaic family of languages.⁹ It is related to the East Turkic spoken in parts of the Xinjiang Uighur autonomous region, and its lexicon contains mostly Turkic words.¹⁰ Before 1949 some Salars could read the Arabic script of the Koran and other religious material. Today literacy has greatly increased, but it is exclusively in Chinese. There is no independent script for the Salars.¹¹

The Salar language has thirty-four basic phonemes. The eight vowels are:

<u>a</u> as in <u>ana</u> 'girl'	<u>o</u> as in <u>ot</u> 'fire'
<u>ε</u> as in <u>sarε</u> 'yellow'	<u>o</u> as in <u>dōjin</u> 'slippery'
<u>e</u> as in <u>em</u> 'medicine'	<u>u</u> as in <u>su</u> 'water'
<u>i</u> as in <u>ini</u> 'younger brother'	<u>y</u> as in <u>syt</u> 'milk'

The twenty-six basic consonants are as follows:

<u>b</u> as in <u>baʃ</u> 'head'	<u>tʃ</u> as in <u>atʃ-</u> 'to open'
<u>p</u> as in <u>poŋ</u> 'body, health'	<u>ʃ</u> as in <u>aʃ</u> 'food'
<u>m</u> as in <u>men</u> 'I'	<u>j</u> as in <u>jin</u> 'sleeve'
<u>f</u> as in <u>fu-</u> 'to blow'	<u>g</u> as in <u>gun</u> 'sun'
<u>w</u> as in <u>wusi</u> 'raw material'	<u>k</u> as in <u>kes-</u> 'to cut'
<u>d</u> as in <u>dil</u> 'tongue'	<u>ŋ</u> as in <u>enŋer</u> 'saddle'
<u>t</u> as in <u>tiʃ</u> 'tooth'	<u>x</u> as in <u>ex</u> 'kind, sort'
<u>n</u> as in <u>naŋ</u> 'what'	<u>ɣ</u> as in <u>deɣ-</u> 'to touch'
<u>l</u> as in <u>liŋa</u> 'socks'	<u>ʒ</u> as in <u>enʒox</u> 'front cover'
<u>r</u> as in <u>riyi</u> 'very'	<u>q</u> as in <u>qessa</u> 'short'
<u>s</u> as in <u>sen</u> 'you'	<u>x</u> as in <u>ax</u> 'white'
<u>z</u> as in <u>ziliu</u> 'intelligent'	<u>ɣ</u> as in <u>daɣ</u> 'mountain'
<u>dʒ</u> as in <u>dʒadax</u> 'big'	<u>h</u> as in <u>heli</u> 'money'

In addition, the consonantal dʒ, tʃ, ʃ, and z are used exclusively for Chinese loan words.

Salar shares with other Turkic languages most phonetic and morphological features, and its vocabulary is preponderantly Turkic. Stress is generally on the last syllable, word order is subject—object—predicate, and Salar also observes the rules of vowel harmony. There are, however, some differences. Whereas in most Turkic languages (excluding Yohur), plosives and fricatives are divided into voiced and unvoiced, Salar has only unvoiced aspirates and unaspirates. Examples include the following:

<u>bal</u> 'honey'	<u>pal</u> 'bubble, blister'
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daʁən 'to scatter'
gumur 'charcoal'

taʁən 'fried noodles'
kumur 'bridge'

Besides, Salar has fewer Arabic and more Chinese loan words than other Turkic languages spoken in China. For example, 'history' is tarix in Uigur but ligi in Salar and 'method' is usul in Uigur but fonfa in Salar. In 1960 Kakuk discovered about 7 percent of the Salar lexicon being Arab-Persian and another 7 percent Chinese loan words, but during the past two decades the share of Chinese loan words has greatly increased.¹²

Salar has no dialects but has two vernaculars.¹³ The Jiezi 街子 vernacular is spoken in Jiezi, Qingshui 清水 and in Baizhuang 白庄 of Xunhua county, in Gandu of Hualong county (both counties located in Qinghai), in Dahejia of Gansu, and in Yining county of Xinjiang. The Mengda 孟达 vernacular is spoken in Mengda, Muchang 木厂 and Tashapo 它抄坡 of Xunhua county.

The two vernaculars differ in only a few, relatively minor ways. The Mengda vowel a is pronounced ə in Jiezi, as in zorax—zorəx 'hat'. In some words, the Mengda vowel e is i in Jiezi, as in demur—dimur 'iron'. The initial b in Mengda is v in Jiezi, as in bol—vol 'to be'. The voiced fricatives z, ɣ, and ʒ at the end of syllables in Jiezi become unvoiced fricatives s, x, and χ in Mengda, as in guzgu—gusgu 'mirror'; dəɣ—dəx 'to touch'; jaɣmur—jaxmur 'rain'.

There are also some lexical differences between the two vernaculars, involving mostly loan words. For example, 'sour milk' is su (<Tib. སུ) in Jiezi and eran (native) in Mengda; and 'male mule' is erkix eʃex (native) in Jiezi and dɔly (< Chin. jiao liu) in Mengda.

The Salars do not have their own script, but use Chinese.

Several different kinds of folk literature can be discerned among the Salars.¹⁴ Perhaps the richest kind is the so-called Salar song which is a long lyric poem sung with Salar words and Salar melodies. The themes of these songs are invariably love stories, such as the very popular "Baxiguliulu," the 108-line long "Salar Saisibuduo," "Ayijigumu," "Aidao," and "Huangshang Awunie" (Emperor Awunie). At least one Salar song strongly suggests that in ancient times, almost certainly before they left Central Asia, the Salars had been hunters. The traditional love story of Suleiman and Waliya features Suleiman, a young hunter who can perform wondrous feats with his bow and knife, and Waliya, the only daughter of the old hunter Yusuf.

Another genre of folk literature is the "Salar flowers" which are the most common folk songs. Some of them trace back to Tibetan folk songs and are similar to the "flowers" found in the Xining and Linxia areas.

So-called banquet songs are sung on special occasions, like weddings. Some praise the bridal gown, like "Alima," while others relate uprisings during the Qianlong period (1736-1795). A special sub-category is called shahes which is a tearful tune bemoaning the girl's leaving her parent's home. Finally, one can

find several Hui songs which the Salars adopted, such as "Fang si niang" (No. 4 Fang girl) and "Ma wu ge" (No. 5 Ma brother).

An important place in Salar literature is folk stories and ghost stories. Two examples are "Huangdi duo qi" (The emperor takes a wife) and "San qiao Anuonazihu," respectively.

There were said to be a fair number of plays in the past, but the only one extant today is "Duiweiyi," also known as "Loto wu" (Camel dance) which is sometimes still performed at weddings.¹⁵

Society¹⁶

Like in all other nationalities of Northern China, marriages among the Salars used to be arranged by parents. First, the boy's parents picked a matchmaker and submitted her name to the girl's parents for their approval. Then the girl and close relatives were also asked for their approval. The boy's parents set a date for the matchmaker's first visit to the girl's family. Sometimes several visits were required before all details could be agreed upon. Next, the boy's parents sent betrothal gifts which differed in value, depending on economic circumstances. Usually one to four horses were given, along with gifts of cloth and sugar. Finally, both sides agreed on a wedding date and asked the village ahung (Muslim priest) to officiate.

This ceremony was conducted outside the door of the girl's home; the boy knelt before the ahung and the girl listened from the inside. After the ceremony, gifts of gugumama, a kind of fried dumpling, were distributed among the guests, and then the bride was accompanied by both families to the boy's parents' home.

Divorce among the Salars was extremely simple. The husband had merely to announce "I don't want you any longer," and the woman left the home. She was free to marry again, but if she decided to leave without her husband's consent, nobody would marry her.

When a person died, his corpse was bathed and wrapped in a white shroud. Then it was taken to the cemetery and interred without a coffin. Family members attending the funeral tossed objects, such as money, tea leaves, salt, and matches into the grave. The deceased's clothing was customarily given to the officiating ahung and to close relatives. On the third day after the burial, the next-of-kin invited the village elders and others to a feast.

The Salars lived in flat-roofed adobe houses, surrounded by a courtyard which in turn is enclosed by an adobe wall. A white rock is placed on each of the four corners of the wall, a practice which the Salars probably adopted from the Tibetans. Salar courtyards almost always are full of fruit trees, a custom not found among neighboring nationalities but still in evidence in the Samarkand area of Central Asia from where the Salars' forefathers had come. In the

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mountainous Mengda area where timber is relatively ample, two-storey houses are constructed of wooden beams and frames and adobe walls. The upper floor contains the bedrooms while the downstairs is taken up by the kitchen, living room and, sometimes, by a shed.



Illus. 8. Salar Farmer

Salar men like to wear a white unlined garment with a red sash and their headgear is usually a white or black cap, either round or six-cornered. Older persons wear a long gown, called don and, during religious services, a white turban, called dasdar, which is identical to the Uigurs' sällä. During winters Salars wear unlined sheepskin coats and leather shoes. Young girls wear colorful dresses, and as they approach marriagable age, they prefer green. After marriage and especially after the birth of the first child, the basic dress color is black. Women over fifty years of age wear white clothes (see Illustrations 9a and b).

The Salar diet consists largely of steamed buns and a variety of noodles made of wheat, highland barley, and buckwheat. Other staples are vegetable soup, spiced with garlic and pepper, and mutton which is eaten, Mongolian-style, in large chunks. On special occasions meat dumplings and cakes are offered. The principal beverage is tea. Like all other Islamic nationalities the Salars may not drink alcoholic beverages nor eat pork.

Salar



Illus. 9a and b. Salar Costumes

Religion¹⁷

The Salars were among the most devout Muslims in China, participating in every Muslim uprising since the seventeenth century. They are Hafanis whose religion was introduced to the Salar area around 1750 by a certain Muhammad Amin. Several sects developed among the Salars as well as neighboring nationalities.¹⁸ The Xunhua area had no less than seventy-four mosques and twenty-two cemeteries. Each gong had one major mosque which controlled smaller mosques in each village. The oldest mosque, located at Jiezi, was built early during the Ming dynasty and is the second most important mosque in Qinghai province.

Before the attack against the clergy in 1958, there was a chief mullah for the entire county, and each gong had its own mullah, assistant (fu) mullah, and junior (xiao) mullah, known collectively as the "three heads" (san tou). During the so-called cultural revolution of 1966-1976 all religious practices were banned, but now they are once again permitted.

Recent Developments

Communist armies occupied the Xunhua area on September 3, 1949 and two days later they reached the provincial capital of Xining.¹⁹ Since that time both the economy and education in Xunhua county have developed.

The county grows a number of food crops, but it is best known for its many orchards which grow winter melon, grapes, apricots, jujube (Chinese dates), and apples.²⁰ Apple orchards alone take up more than 4,700 mu (about 775 acres). Xunhua is also famous for its hot spice, called Xunhua huajiao, or simply Xunjiao, and its walnuts which are sold far beyond the county. In the mountainous parts of the county are found Rheum palmatum (dahuang), Codonopsis pilosula (dangshen), Chinese ephedra, Moschus moschiferus (shexiang),²¹ and other medicinal plants. The 1978 food crop was 150 percent higher than in 1953, and the number of cattle increased 71 percent over the same period. Like in many other counties in this part of China, afforestation has been promoted for many years.

Industry is relatively underdeveloped; only electric generators and building materials are presently manufactured. There are also a few shops for repairing farm implements. Dirt roads connect all townships and most production brigades, and a bridge has been built across the Yellow River to link the two parts of the autonomous county.

Before 1949, the literacy rate is said to have been as low as 3 percent whereas official statements aver almost universal literacy today.²² Whatever one's definition of literacy may be, education has unquestionably progressed among the Salars. When the Xunhua Salar autonomous county was established in

1954, only twenty-four schools existed. By 1978 they had increased to 164 including a new teacher's college. Some graduates from these schools have been sent to Qinghai University in Xining, the Northwest Nationalities Institute in Lanzhou and the Central Nationalities Institute in Beijing. The county also has a hospital and first-aid stations at township seats, a bookstore, a culture palace, and a movie theater.

Notes

- ¹Minzu yanjiu 23 (1983), 81.
- ²Jiankuang, v. 5, 38.
- ³Lin and Han, 517; Salarzu jianshi, 3.
- ⁴Jiankuang, v. 5, 38; Zhongguo, 54. See also Kakuk 1962b, 162.
- ⁵Tenishev 1962, 254. For additional details of early Salar history, see Salarzu jianshi, 8-15.
- ⁶Salarzu jianshi, 13.
- ⁷Tenishev 1962, 253-254.
- ⁸Unless otherwise noted, linguistic information is taken from Lin and Han.
- ⁹Some foreign linguists do not consider Salar an independent language. For example, on the basis of a word list published by Potanin in 1893, Poppe declares that Salar "belongs, beyond doubt, to what is generally known as East Turki....It is only one of its dialects and is not an independent language" (p. 477).
- ¹⁰Jiankuang, v. 5, 38.
- ¹¹Ibid.
- ¹²Kakuk 1962a, 173. She also found a few Tibetan and Mongolian loan words.
- ¹³See also Salarzu jianshi, 2.
- ¹⁴Information on Salar literature is adapted from Salarzu jianshi, 90-98. See also Zuopin xuan, v. 2, 360-361.
- ¹⁵Salarzu jianshi, 11.
- ¹⁶Op. cit., 87-90.
- ¹⁷Op. cit., 84-87. See also Jiankuang, v. 5, 38 and Zhongguo, 155.
- ¹⁸See the chapters on the Dongxiang and Bonan nationalities for further details.
- ¹⁹Salarzu jianshi, 81.
- ²⁰Economic data are from Zhongguo, 158.
- ²¹For detailed descriptions, see Zhongyao dacidian (Shanghai, 1977), pp. 102, 1837, 2221, and 2740.
- ²²Educational data are from Zhongguo, 158-159.