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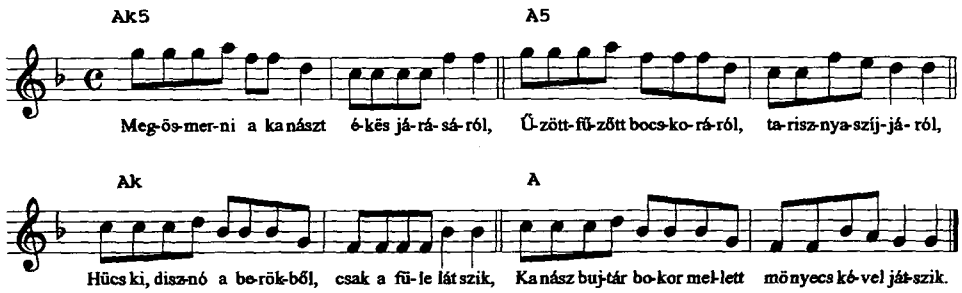
Similar musical structures in Turkish, Mongolian, Tungus and Hungarian folk music

While studying Mongolian folk music, I discovered that the Tungus *Evenkis* in Inner Mongolia and certain Mongol tribes use a special musical structure. Until now most European scholars have known this structure to exist only in Hungarian folk music and in that of the Cheremis-Chuvash front. Let us take a Hungarian *example* of the quintal-shift structure.

Example 1. **Hungarian melody with a quintal-shift by Vargyas (1981), N^{o}01**



The essence of the phenomenon is that the melody is composed of parts, the second part being four tones (a quint) lower than the first one. This is what we call the *quintal-shift* structure.[1] The shift can be strictly parallel note by note, but the second (shifted) part of the melody often contains modifications. Further characteristics of these melodies are the pentatonic scale and the descending melodic line.

The pentatonic scale, the quintal-shift construction or the descending character can be found in the folk music of various peoples. If these phenomena coincide, and, moreover, if such melodies form a melodic style, then it calls for closer scrutiny.

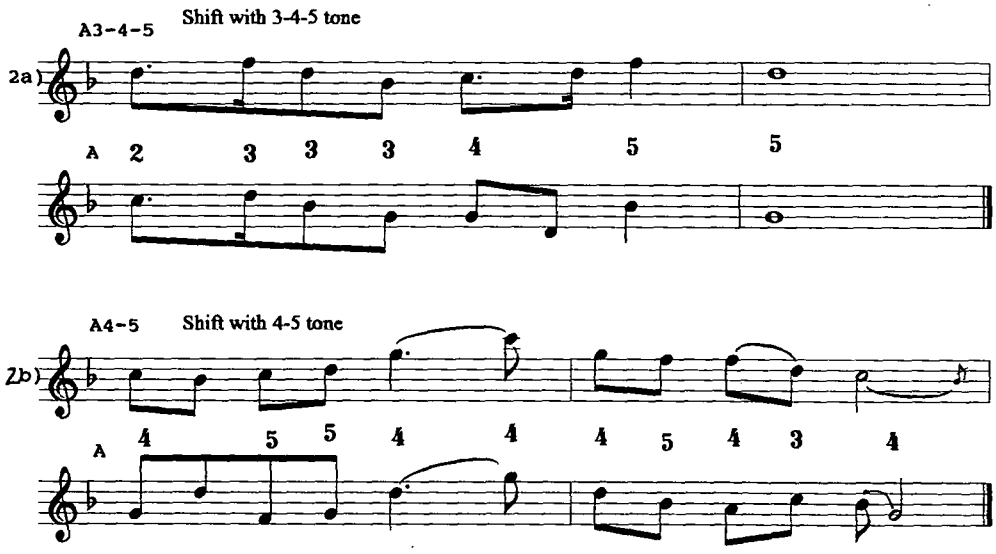
1 Bartók B. (1924), *A magyar népdal,* Budapest; Kodály Z. (1973), *A magyar népzene,* Budapest.

The Mongolian quintal-shift style

After studying some 700 Mongolian melodies, I found that one out of every ten melodies uses the quintal-shift.[2] The melodies in question originate from Inner Mongolia, mainly from the singers and musicians of the Mongolian *Barin, Khorchin, Arkhorchin and Keshikten* tribes living in the *Jŏ uda* area.[3] Let us investigate the main melody types of this Mongolian style.

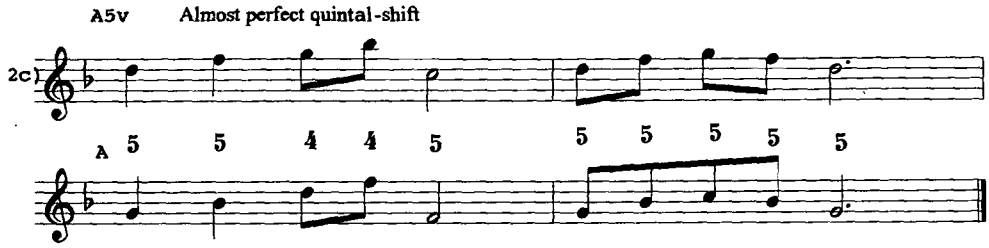
In short, two-section melodies we usually hear a partial quintal-shift. In *example 2a* the interval of the shift is a third, a fourth and a fifth, in *example 2b* the shift is a fourth and a fifth and in *example 2c* the shift is almost exactly a fifth.

Example 2. **Mongolian two-section quintal-shift melodies a) MO1 N^0 281; b) MOE N^0 123; c) MO1 N^0 57**



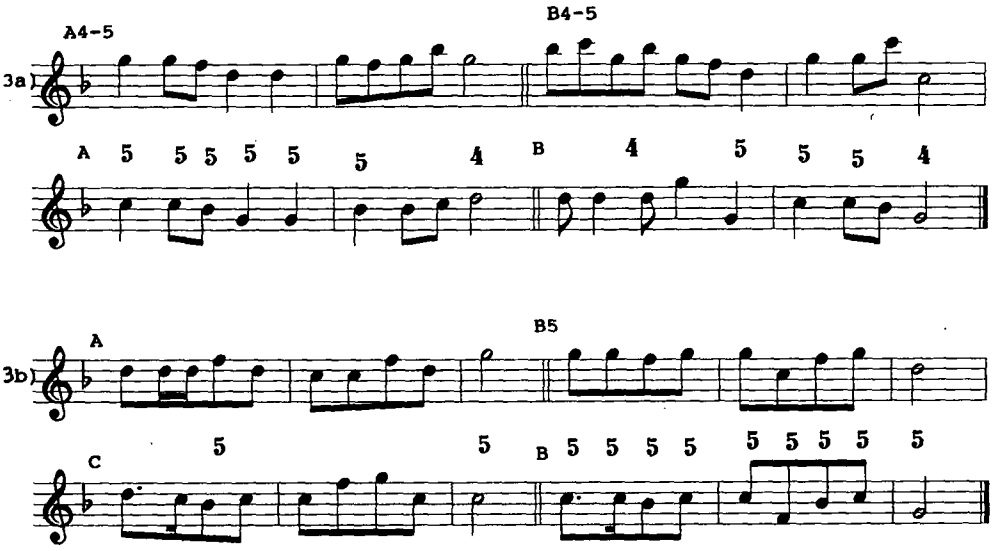
2 *Mongγol arad-un mingγan daγū,* Vol 2, *Aju bayidal jang jangsil-un daγū,* Köke-Qota 1981, *Öbör mongγol-un Arad-un Keblel-ün Qoriy-a,* Köke-Qota 1981, *Jŏ-uda arad-un daγū,* Köke-Qota 1982; Emsheimer, E. (1943), Music of Eastern Mongolia, collected by H. Haslund-Christensen. In: *Reports from the scientific expedition to the north-western provinces of China under the leadership of Dr. Sven Hedin,* VIII. Ethnography 4, The music of the mongols, Stockholm.

3 Ligeti L. (1933), *Rapport préliminaire d'un voyage d'exploration fait en Mongolie Chinoise 1928-1931,* Budapest.



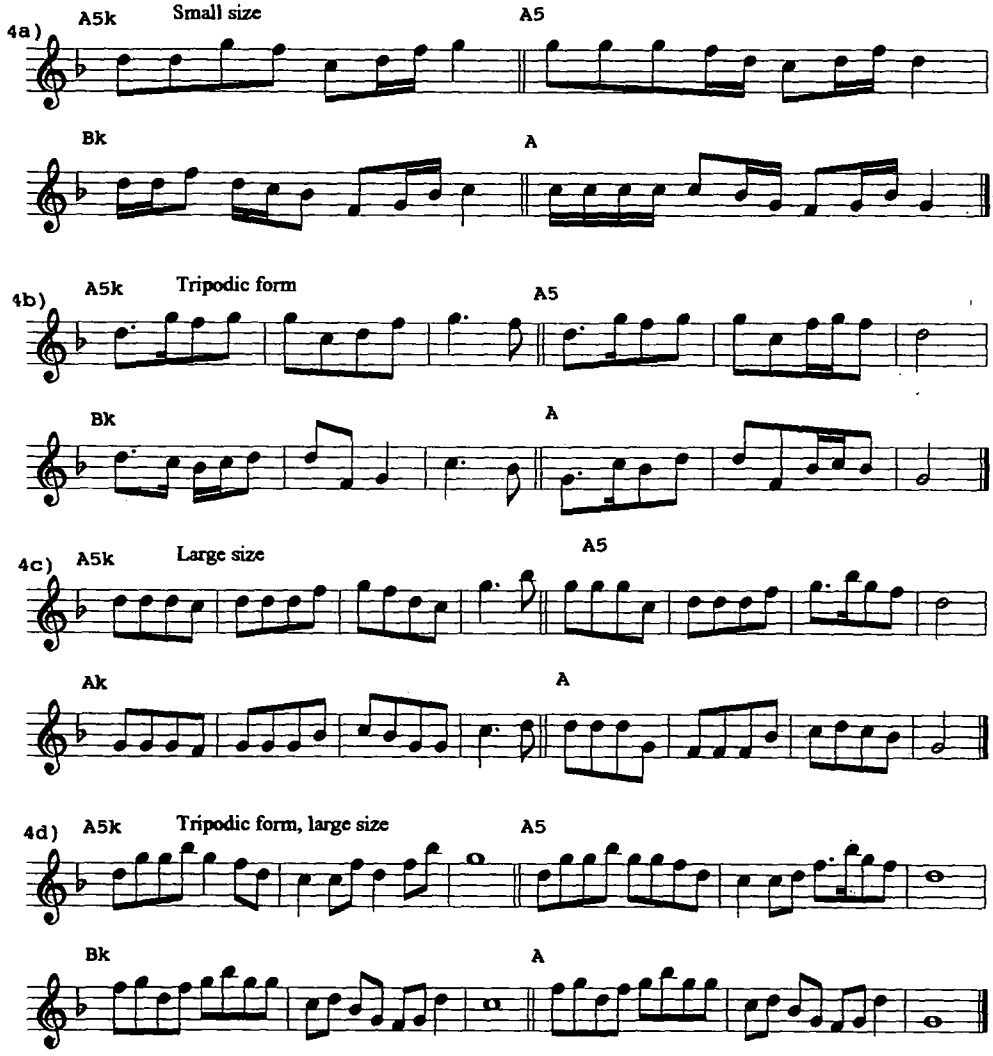
Some four-section melodies shift their first half by a third and a fourth. We can see this phenomenon in *example 3a*. In *example 3b* only one of the sections (section B) is transposed.

Example 3. **Mongolian four-section partial quintal-shift melodies a) MO1 N^0 174; b) MO1 N^0 273**



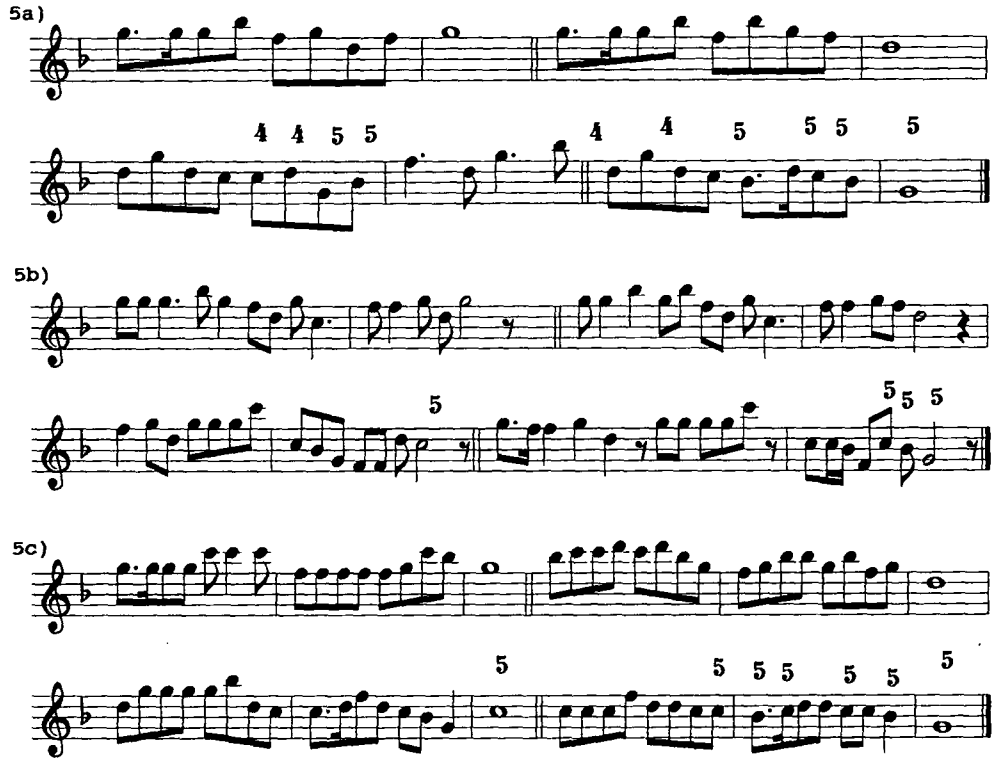
At the same time a great many short four-section melodies contain a perfect or almost perfect quintal-shift structure. We can see this phenomenon in small size *(example 4a)*, in tripodic form *(example 4b)*, in large size *(example 4c)* and in large size tripodic form *(example 4d)*.

Example 4. Mongolian four-section quintal-shift melodies a) MO1 N^0 209; b) MOE N^0 162; c) MO1 N^0 107; d) MO1 N^0 103



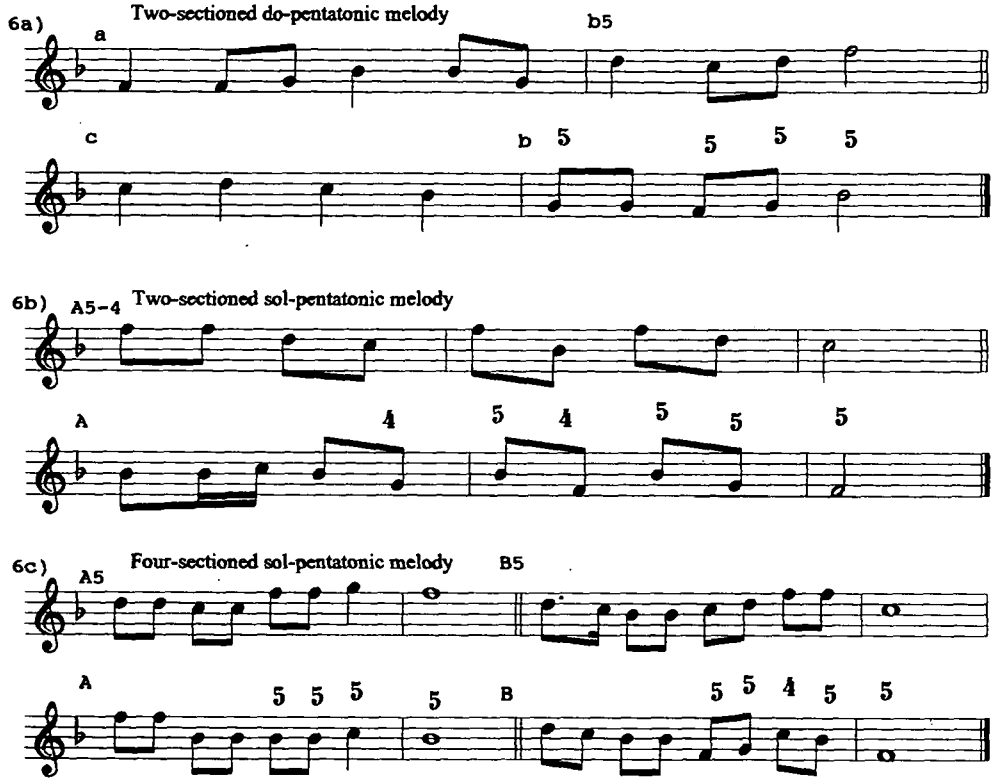
All of these melodies have their counterpart without a quintal-shift. I show a tripodic melody *(example 5a)*, a large size one *(example 5b)* and a large size tripodic one *(example 5c)*.

Example 5. **Parallels Mongolian quintal-shift melodies a) MO1 N^0 76; b) MOE N^0 118; c) MO1 N^0 201**



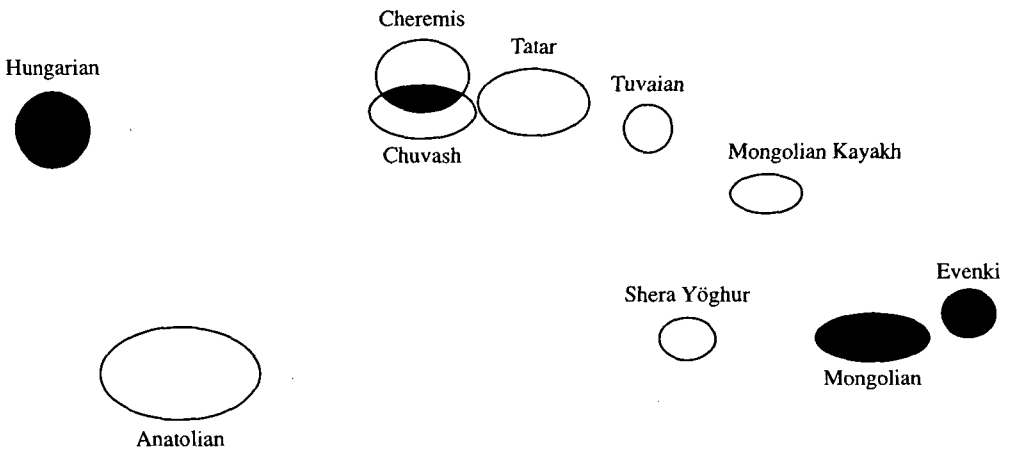
The scale of these quintal-shift melodies is usually *la*-pentatonic. Quintal-shift melodies with *do*- or *sol*-pentatonic scales are less frequent. *Example 6a* is a two-section *do*-pentatonic melody, *example 6b* is a two-section sol-pentatonic melody and *example 6c* is a four-section *sol*-pentatonic melody.

Example 6. Mongolian *do*- and *sol*-pentatonic quintal-shift melodies a) MO1 N^{0} 10; b) MO1 N^{0} 69; c) MO1 N^{0} 196



These Mongolian melodies form a homogeneous musical style which contains melodies of various lengths, numbers of sections and melodic movements. Evidence also exists that melodies with a quintal-shift are related to melodies without one.

Map of the examined are:



Quintal-shift construction in the folk music of other peoples

In Europe, according to the evidence in the available material, this phenomenon appears only in Hungary. What exists in Europe is nothing other than partial quintal-shift parts within non-pentatonic melodies.[4] However, this phenomenon exists as a fully developed style in the region of the Cheremiss-Chuvash front, but moving away from the area, this style vanishes.

I have examined a large amount of Turkic musical material to determine whether the folk music of these peoples contains pentatonic melodies with a quintal-shift.[5]

In Anatolian folk music the pentatonic scale can be found only in traces, and among 5000 melodies I have managed to find very few with a quintal-shift. In any case, the link between these few melodies and the main Turkish melody types is not the least bit likely.[6]

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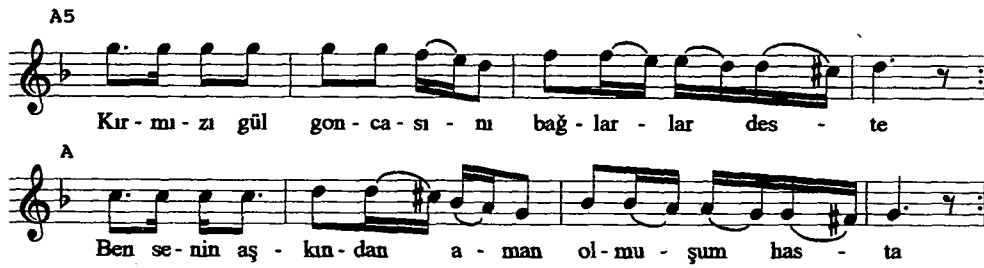
4 Vargyas L. (1980), *A magyar zene őstörténete*, Ethnographia XCI.

5 The choice was made according to the presence of the available material of any reliable collection. It is also possible that the phenomenon under investigation appears.

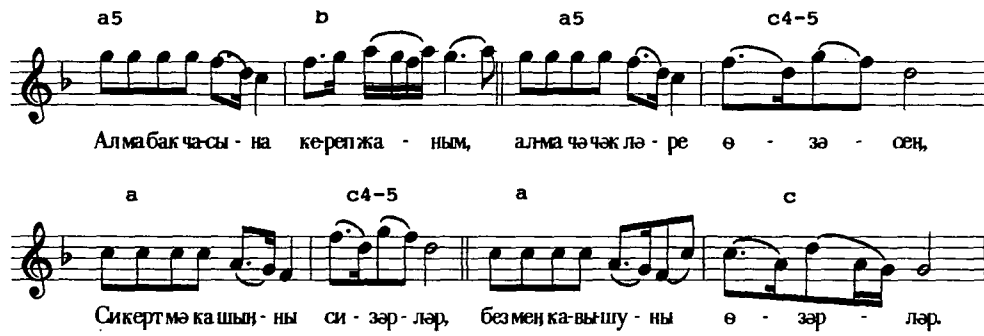
6 Sipos J. (1993-1994), *Török Népzene I-II.*, Budapest.

Example 7. **Anatolian quintal-shift melody, TRT N^{0} 1625**



I analysed some thousand *Tatar* melodies[7], and it seems to me that Tatars do not use the quintal-shift construction. But the downward transposition with a third, fourth or fifth is not rare in Tatar folk music.

Example 8. **Tatar partial quintal-shift melody, Ključarev (1955) N^{0} 102**



There are theories according to which the folk music of the *Shera yöghur* people shows similarities to that of Hungarians, because the pentatonic Yöghur material contains numerous quintal-shift melodies.[8] I have sifted through the articles by Zhang Rei and investigated approximately 200 Yöghur melodies. However, I succeeded in finding only two quintal-shift melodies in spite of the fact that this material originates from the propagator of the Yöghur quintal-shift construction.

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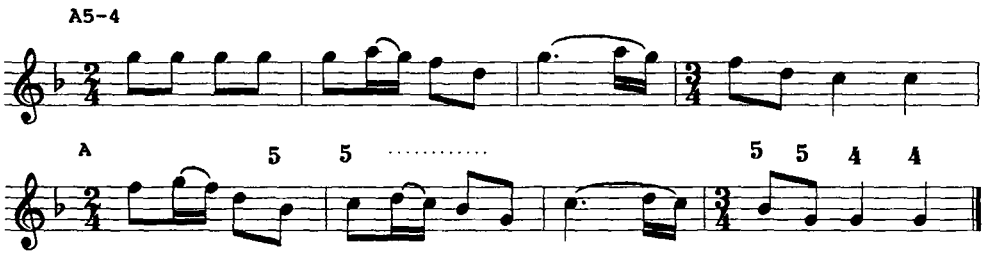
7 Nigmedzjanov, M. (1970), *Tatarskie narodnye pesni,* Moskva; Nigmätǰanov, M. (1976), *Tatar halïk žïrlarï,* Kazan; Nigmedzjanov, M. (1984), *Tatarskie narodnye pesni,* Kazan.

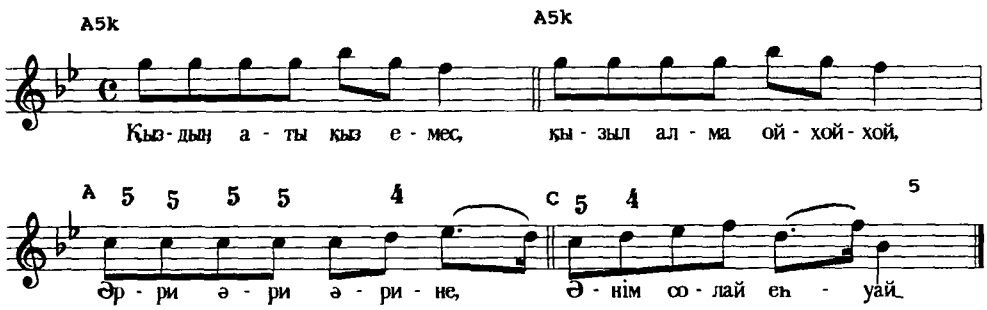
8 *Yu-gu, tung-xiang, bao-an, sa-la, tu-zu melodies,* Beijing 1986.

Example 9. **Shera yöghur quintal-shift melody, Zhang (1985) example 5.**



After analysing the folk music of the *Mongolian Kazakhs*, I concluded that the role of the transposition of a section or even a motif is very small in their ancient folk music. I succeeded in finding only two melodies with a partial quintal-shift among 323 songs.[9]

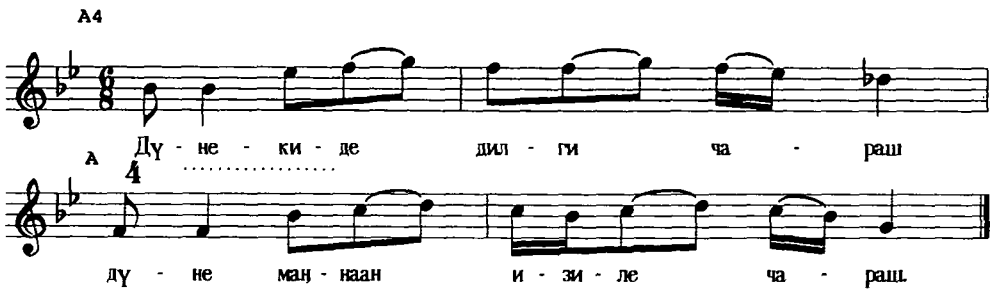
Example 10. **Mongolian Kazakh partial quintal-shift melody, KA1 N^0 242**



I examined more than 150 *Tuvanian* melodies.[10] None of these contained a quintal-shift, and only one melody consisted of a downward transposition with a fourth.

9 *Mongolija qazaqtarïnïŋ halïq änderi.* Ölgiy 1983.
10 Kyrgys, Z. (1992), *Pesennaja kul'tura tuvinskogo naroda.* Kyzyl.

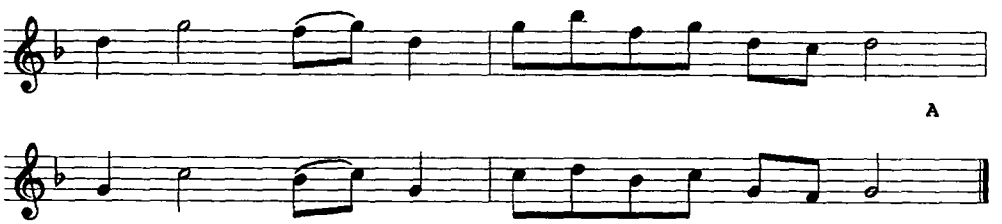
Example 11. **Tuvanian melody with fourth-transposition. Kyrgys, Z. (1992) N^{0} 9**



The descending pentatonic character of the folk music of the Turkic peoples involves the possibility of the quintal-shift, even if this construction as a homogeneous musical style appears only on the Cheremiss-Chuvash front.

The quintal-shift construction plays an important role in the music of the *Tungus* people. Tungus *la*-pentatonic quintal-shift melodies are short and in two sections.

Example 12. **Evenki quintal-shift melody, EVE N^{0} 47**



What does all this mean? First of all, the fact that the quintal-shift construction also appears in Inner Asia refutes the idea that this style was born at the point of contact of the Finno-Ugrian and Turkic cultures.

We can consider of the Altaic theory: we see parallelism between the folk music of the Turkic, Mongolian and Tungus peoples. But the quintal-shift construction is not universal among all Turkic, Mongolian and Tungus peoples. Furthermore, a detailed musical analysis reveals that the general character of the quintal-shift melodies of various peoples is more or less different. For example, the Hungarian material contains melodies with the *la*-pentatonic scale, and the melodic movements of the short sections are smooth. The Cheremis and Chuvash materials utilise *la-*, *do-* and *sol*-pentatonic scales, the sections are long and the melody movements are larger. The Mongolian material, with respect to the melody movements, reassembles the Cheremis-Chuvash material, while the scale of these Mongolian melodies is *la*-pentatonic, as is that of the Hungarian material. The Evenki melodies are simple and in two sections, revealing a relatively basic stage of development. I found only a few Evenki four-section quintal-shift melodies, but their scale is *sol*-pentatonic.

How can this inter-ethnic phenomenon be explained? We know that descending pentatonic melodies play an important role in Chinese, Mongolian, Turkic and Hungarian folk music. In descending melodies, parallelism can take shape between the melody sections. The distance between these parallel sections can easily be just four tones (a quint), so it is not surprising that in the folk music of nations such as the Turkic, Mongolian, Tungus and Hungarian peoples, melodies with quintal-shift construction have come into existence. The structure of these melodies is well-developed and simultaneously easy to remember. This may explain why in the folk music of some peoples the quintal-shift melodies form a homogeneous musical style.

In conclusion, these styles have probably developed from a somewhat similar pentatonic and descending melody base, and have crystallised independently from each other. What caused the crystallisation? This question will perhaps never be answered.

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