

# The Meshrep from a Garden in Hanbin County, Yining City of China

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**Abstract** - For the song-and-dance ethnic minority Uyghur, Meshrep is one of their most enthusiastic ways to express emotions. As one of triple constituents of Uyghur Muqam, Meshrep originally means a mass rally for entertainment, while now its meaning evolves to song and dance music. Exultance, ardency and intense emotional appeal are the unique hallmarks of Meshrep. Based on my survey, I would like to expound Meshrep with the special case of the Meshrep from the garden of Hanbin County, Yining City.

**Index Terms** - Muqam, Hanbin County, the Meshrep, Gultajaq, Gulti

## 1. Introduction

Bordering Kazakhstan, Ili Kazak Autonomous Prefecture lies in northwestern Xinjiang and its capital is Yining City. In Ili there are 13 nationalities, among which the Uyghur and Kazak account for most. Ili, known as "the humid oasis in the vast desert", owns relatively abundant rainfalls and a mild climate, which make Ili richly endowed with fertile farmland, lush grasslands, and fragrant melon and fruit. Nurtured on this prolific land, the shining pearl of Muqam also exudes dazzling light.

## 2. Several Large-scale Population Migrations in History

With emerald mountains and clear rivers, Ili has a reputation of "small Jiangnan(south region of Yangtze River)", and in history Ili acted as an important political, economic and cultural center in Xinjiang for several times. Since the epic envoy journey to the west in Han Dynasty, which established the communications between Ancient China and Western Regions, enormous Chinese goods henceforth flooded Western Regions. Besides material goods, prosperous culture and art were brought along, which enhanced the intricate relationship between the Western Regions and Ancient China. Ili is an oasis with abundant water and pasture, thus people on this piece of grassland lead nomadic lives. According to historical literature, from Han to Qing Dynasty, this fertile land has witnessed continuous large scale of population immigrations.

"During Han Qianyuan year three to four (177 – 176 BC), Yuezhi tribe dwelled between Dunhuang and Qilian. Hun's leader Modu Chanyu attacked Yuezhi, and Yuezhi moved west along the river to the Ili River basin, forcing the Scythians originally living in this area to move south.[1]

During Han Houyuan year three to four (161 - 160 BC), Wusun's leader Kunmo Liejiaomi led his troops to attack the West Yuezhi with support of the Huns. The majority of Yuezhi

moved westward, Liejiaomi established his regime in the Ili River basin, known as "Wusun Country".[2]

Qianlong year 25 (1760 AD) of Qing Dynasty, an army commanded by Aksu acting minister Kuei entered and stationed in Ili with imperial order, and Kuei led 300 Uyghur farmers from Aksu to Ili to act as both garrison troops and peasants . [3] " and so on.

It is obvious to conclude that as early as Han Qianyuan year three (177 BC) the Ili River Basin has seen a migration of the population and an establishment of a capital. Envoy Zhang Qian of Han Dynasty made a journey to the Western Regions and thereafter the link between Ancient China and the Western Regions was hugely strengthened, and further exchange of politics, economy, and culture progressed considerably. Ili, the oasis on northwest border, also became a focus for a time. The favorableness of the macro-environment therefore brought different connotations to Ili Muqam-the shining pearl on this fertile land, and developed it into another wonder of Uyghur Muqam in Xinjiang.

## 3. The Special Case of Ili Meshrep

Muqam is an Arabic word which means Large divertimento, divertimento and etc.; the Twelve Muqam is 12 sets of Large divertimento consisting of Lak, Qebiyate, Muxawulak, Qarga, Panjiga, Wuzihair, Aiqa, Wuxak, Bayati, Nawa, Siga, Yilak. Every Muqam of the Uyghur Twelve Muqam is divided into 3 parts as Qiunaeman, Dasta and Meshrep, and the main accompanying musical instruments are Satar, Tambur, Rawab, Dap, Dutar and so on. The popular "Twelve Muqam" in Ili includes only "Mukdiman", "Dasta" and "Meshrep". While the original meaning of Meshrep is a mass rally for entertainment, while now evolves into folk song and dance music. Typically Meshrep includes 2-4 pieces of the basic rhythm type with rhythms of  $\frac{7}{8}(\frac{3+4}{8})$  and  $\frac{2}{4}$ . In general,

the music is song and dance music, exultant, ardent and with intense emotional appeal.

Melodious rhythms accompanied by aesthetic singing and dancing, dancing on the flower carpet, passing people's joy, inspiring every audience--this is the Uyghur Muqam, an art with special charm and appeal. With a love for the Muqam, for the first time I followed my instructor Mr. Zhou Ji and his party to go to Ili and carried out an on-the-spot observation of Ili Muqam on June 23, 2006; and participated in a Meshrep held in a garden in HanBin County, Yining City . This 2-hour

long Meshrep bore traditional features both in content and form, which imposed a deep impression on me. Therefore I took a detailed record as follows:

#### A. Props

Prop One, the "flower stick" or "flower wand", also called "(gultajaq<sup>1</sup>)" in Uyghur, existing in both Southern and Northern Xinjiang, was first made with twigs (commonly Mulberry twigs) to maintain order; the stick consists of two parts, the handle and the lower part for beating. The handle is about 20cm long, and the beating part is about 40cm in length. The beating part is a whole rectangular piece of wood, one end sawn into 4 and the other end connected with the handle (see Fig. 1, Fig. 2).

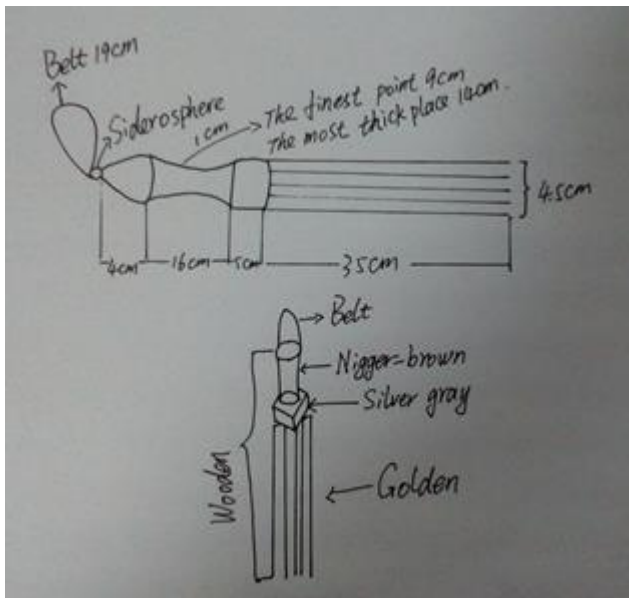


Fig. 1 The sketch of the flower stick



Fig. 2 The photo of the flower stick

The beatings can generate extremely loud sound, like a gavel in court. Another prop of different material, called "tiwil5a" in Uyghur, has the same function of the flower stick.

Prop Two, a bouquet tied up by the Chinese rose and green grass (no special provisions of the type of flower), called "gulti" (international phonetic system) in Uyghur. The bouquet has two effects:

First, in the game part of the Meshrep, the one who holds the bouquet has to recite poetry and then return the bouquet to whom he gave it to. If the bouquet is returned to the wrong person, some punishments ensue, which include singing, dancing, storytelling etc.; and if the dancer performs well, the executant will rotate coins above the dancer's head and so on. Coins must be rotated around every dancer's head, which means good performance and popularity with everyone. If the Meshrep is at a wedding, headscarves will be used for women, and hats instead of coins for men, and of course the coins in the game will be given to the musicians in the band as a reward. Most people in the game would choose to dance and sing, and songs such as "a bit of pain" are common choices.

Second, when one Meshrep is over, the last person who holds the bouquet (in the summer with flowers, winter with grains) will be the host of the next Meshrep (see Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. The bouquet

#### B. Preparatory Work

Choose the right place to hold Meshrep, lay the carpet and cotton pad well, and prepare the fruit, grill and washing utensils.

Before the start of the Meshrep, a person holding the "flower stick" (hereinafter referred to as "stick-holder") will beat the ground hard, making "flap flap" sounds to arouse attention and tell everyone that the Meshrep will immediately start. And the stick-holder will ask the persons sitting in the middle (usually the prestigious or elder one) for consent to launch the Meshrep. Once permitted, the serving ones (also participants in the Meshrep) take out two sets of pots (one brass and the other silver) and some basins for participants to wash their hands; and the hand-washing begins to take turn from the middle to both sides and a towel is passed on to wipe hands at the same time. This procedure takes five to six minutes, but it is a process of order and humility. After that, they will unfold the dinner cloth in front of the participants, and the already prepared food are then presented in front of people; the three musicians sitting in the northeast corner are as well tuning their musical instruments for the Meshrep. The accompanying instruments include Dutar, Satar, violin and each for one. At this moment, the stick-holder beats the "flower stick" again, telling everyone that Meshrep just begins.

<sup>1</sup> Marked with IPA Pronunciation, hereinafter the same

### C. Record of the Meshrep

Accompanied by three musicians' melodious music, the Meshrep just formally begins, the stick-holder and two Uyghurs (one is the host of the last Meshrep) went to the north side of the site, facing the venerable elder man, and they communicate to announce the formal start of the Meshrep.

The first part of the Meshrep – *the Singing*: the stick-holder beats the flower stick and goes to the middle of the site. At the same time the elder man announces the start of the Meshrep by shouting: "Start ....." The three musicians (accompanist, hereinafter referred to as a musician) touch their beloved instruments, the whole Meshrep has just begun in such a relaxed and cheerful atmosphere. People begin to sing along with the melody, which lasts nearly for one hour, while there is no sign of fatigue can be seen on people's faces nor complaints heard from people's mouths near the end. Only exultant songs continue, and this first section of the Meshrep comes to an end in "aah ..... ooh ....." yells.

The second part of the Meshrep – *the Game*: then the musicians and people who participate in Meshrep start to drink tea, eat grill, fruit and relax for a while; later on, there is an old man holding his bouquet (international phonetic system) comes to the center field, then he hands over the "gulti"(international phonetic system) to the stick-holder. The stick-holder now holding the "gulti"(international phonetic system) announces that the second part of the Meshrep-the game-is to get started. Meanwhile, the stick-holder gives the "gulti"(international phonetic system) to a fellow participant and tells him to pick the next person to participate in the game, and some questions are being asked. The person to receive the bouquet should stand up to show respect when awaiting, then he receives the bouquet and answers the questions, and in this manner the cycle (see Fig. 4) goes on.



Fig. 4 The Game part of the Meshrep

If the person who receives the bouquet does not answer the questions or his answer is incorrect, or the one who hands over the bouquet to the wrong person, he would have to accept the punishment. In this process, there is no musical accompaniment, only laughter and cheer, which convoy

greetings ,good wishes and mutual trust, friendship and familial affection ... Near the end of the game part, the musicians play Dutar, indicating that the third part of the Meshrep is about to start.

The third part of the Meshrep (climax) –*the Dance*: the stick-holder just walks towards the elder man in the north to request for consent for the start of the third part, and then informs the musicians of the start and asks them to get prepared. After tuning of the instruments, the musicians begin to play music, and people start to sing songs with it. At the same time, a dancer sways to center of the site, while extending casts a unique ritual of dancers for the invitation and replaces the inviter, then he goes on dancing in the pool. Their dancing steps are mainly three-step lift or a serial of small steps, with their arms waving back and forth and shoulders shrugging up and down. This form of dance does not exist in the Muqam in Southern Xinjiang. They sometimes jump in a circle around the site and sometimes move forward or backward in small steps. The whole site is thoroughly filled with ebullience and the majority of people are infected with it, coming to dance in the pool. In getting near the end of the music, eventually the third part of the Meshrep – the dance concludes with the closing of the music.

The fourth part of the Meshrep (end) – *the Selection*: Start by the beating of the stick-holder, this part is just the least time-consuming one in the Meshrep. The aim of this part is literally to select the person who is responsible to host the next Meshrep. After the performance of the previous three sections, people select the next host by communication and discussion. The selection is considered both a honor and a pleasure. The selected one will take the bouquet(international phonetic system) home and keep it with care, and wait for the next Meshrep.

The entire Meshrep lasts over two hours, which ends after everyone covers his face with both hand (a ritual of Islam).

### 4. Meshrep in Ili

According to my resources collected during the on-the-spot observation, I've drawn several thoughts about the Meshrep held in Hanbin County, Yining City:

Firstly, the biggest distinction between the traditional Ili Meshrep and those in Southern and Eastern Xinjiang is that men and women are separated, and there is no noninterference between the Meshrep held by the genders, i.e. women are not allowed to participate Men's Meshrep and vice versa. This recorded Meshrep is held by men, whose process generally lasts for one hour to two hours, and possibly longer, depending on the participants' moods.

Secondly, the dance in traditional Ili Meshrep is different from that in the Meshrep in Southern and Eastern Xinjiang. Dance in Southern and Eastern Xinjiang are mainly three-step lift, movements by head and lower limbs, while movements are mainly above shoulders, such as shrugging. During the entire Meshrep, there were not many dancers, mostly one on one dancing, the dancer in the pool kept inviting the audience to

join him, and once someone stepped into the pool, the inviter would walk out of the pool and get seated. Thus the Ili Meshrep seems to be a little less ardent than the Meshrep in Southern Xinjiang.

Furthermore, musical instruments used in the Meshrep are mostly stringed ones, and there is not much requirements for the number of instruments-merely three instruments at least, which are Dutar, Satar, Violin and each for one, sometimes there are Dap and the unique Ili Dobake. The band is organized mainly in accordance with the scale of the Meshrep., and the rhythm is chiefly DTT DT|DTT DT|| or DTT DT|DT DT||.

In addition, during the entire Meshrep, the order keeper – i.e. the holder of the flower stick, plays the role of transition and bridge. He announces the start and finish of the Meshrep and conveys information in all aspects while maintaining order. He is as well responsible for enlivening the atmosphere of the entire Meshrep and plays a supporting role in the selection of the next host, to whom he will hand over the bouquet.

Finally, during the entire Meshrep there is not Muqam music solely. The music is mixed up of various Ili folk songs. Especially in game section, the songs sung are mostly Ili folk songs, such as "*a bit of pain*" (aka "*your little torment to me*") and so on.

To conclude, due to the several large-scale population movements in history, Ili possesses a different historical and cultural backgrounds, and the special geographical

environment also makes songs in Ili different from those vicissitudinous and rough ones in Southern Xinjiang. It makes a good indication that music in Northern Xinjiang is delicate and aesthetic. The dance also includes shrugs of the shoulder, making the dancing more elegant and attractive. These differences make the Muqam in Northern Xinjiang distinguishing from the vicissitudinous one in Southern Xinjiang especially the Dolan region, reflecting the unique charismata.

### Acknowledgment

I would like to thank and recall my instructor Mr. Zhou Ji. It is none other than those wholehearted and enthusiastic workers devoted to national music research that have brought more unveiled national music in front of people, and have made more people to understand and cognize, through their hard work, field survey and collection and reorganization.

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