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Research Article

Muqam transmission in the Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region: negotiating artistic individuality in present-day Uyghur muqam performance practices[1] [2]

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Abstract

The Uyghur Muqam of Xinjiang, also known as the Art of Chinese Xinjiang Uyghur Muqam (Ch. 中国新疆维吾尔木卡姆艺术), was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity in 2008, representing a dynamic interplay between tradition and contemporary influences. This paper examines the evolving dynamics of present-day Uyghur *muqam* transmission, focusing on the negotiation of artistic individuality in contemporary performance practices. Central to this discussion is the Uyghur concept of *puraq* (lit. scent/flavour), a term that describes the distinctive ornamentation and stylistic nuances in Uyghur music, yet remains underexplored in academic discourses both in China and the West. Drawing on ethnomusicological fieldwork conducted in Xinjiang in 2021 (Li, 2022), this research integrates insights from interviews with proficient *muqam* performers and scholars, offering a detailed analysis of how *puraq* manifests and is refined across different performance contexts, encompassing both vocal and instrumental practices. The study further explores the interdisciplinary connotations of *puraq* between music and linguistics, particularly highlighting the role of *shëwe* (En. vernacular accent) and its influence on the stylistic interpretation of the Uyghur *muqam*. The findings reveal that the multifaceted term of *puraq* is a crucial element in sustaining the living tradition of the Uyghur *muqam*, serving as a point of convergence for cultural continuity and transformation. By situating the discussion within the broader framework of the active transmission of ICH (Ch. 非遗活化传承), the study contributes to ongoing debates concerning the preservation of cultural heritage. It illuminates the ways in which authenticity and adaptation interact in a tradition deeply rooted in the historical cultural exchanges along the Silk Road, offering new perspectives on the evolving role of the Uyghur *muqam* in the contemporary cultural landscape of modern-day China.

Keywords

applied ethnomusicology, China, intangible cultural heritage preservation, puraq (flavour), Uyghur muqam transmission

Introduction

The classical Uyghur Twelve Muqam, being one of the four main regional performance traditions of the Uyghur Muqam of Xinjiang, is an ICH inscription encompassing all canonised repertoires of *muqam* performance in Xinjiang (Li, 2008). Consisting of a set of twelve suites of sung poetry of the Uyghurs, a texture of close heterophony where traditional Uyghur instruments imitatively follow the vocal melody is present throughout the repertory. The following section delves into the historical and cultural significance of the Uyghur *muqam* as a recognised masterpiece of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). By contextualising its inscription on the UNESCO list, we can better understand how contemporary practices are shaped by both global heritage discourses and local cultural policies. This historical framework serves as a foundation for analysing the complexities of *muqam* transmission in present-day Xinjiang.

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[1] This article is produced from my own Bachelor's dissertation submitted to King's College London.

[2] Note on Transliteration: The transliteration of Uyghur Arabic to Latin script remains contested within scholarship. This paper adheres to the Uyghur Latin Yéziqi (ULY); however, instances arise where non-standard transliterations outside the ULY system are employed, such as "Yarkand" instead of "Yeken." Terms are annotated as follows: Uyghur (Uy.); Chinese (Ch.); English (En.); Farsi (Fa.); and the corresponding literal meaning of a term is indicated as "lit.".

Current Context of Muqam Transmission as an ICH Masterpiece

Wang (2008) posits that the transmission ecology of the Uyghur *muqam* has remained inextricably linked to patronage since its initial compilation by Amannisa Khan in the 16th century. The government has consistently served as the most steadfast and influential patron in sustaining all forms of traditional Chinese music (Wang, 2008, p. 12). Following the Ministry of Culture's dispatch of musicologist Wan Tongshu to Xinjiang, who orchestrated the recording project of "the sole master capable of reproducing the full set of the Uyghur Twelve Muqam"—Turdi Akhun—in the 1950s, *muqam* has not only been rescued and preserved but, in recent years, the Xinjiang Muqam Ensemble (Ch. 新疆木卡姆艺术团) has embarked on international tours across 14 countries (Wang, 2008, pp. 12-13).

Since the convening of the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012, the most prominent Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) in contemporary China has been the "forging of a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation" (Ch. 铸牢中华民族共同体意识), within which a framework termed "pluralistic integration" (Ch. 多元一体) has been proposed (Pan et al., 2023, Chapter 1; Smith, 2006, pp. 29-34). The Uyghur *muqam*, akin to numerous other ethnic-minority heritage traditions in China, originates geographically along China's territorial periphery. Consequently, it is imperative to heritage agencies and practitioners that such traditions are preserved under the stipulation that they coexist and actively integrate with the Chinese nation—a collective identity continuum inherently diverse in geography, language, religion, folklore, and culture (Pan et al., 2023, pp. 29-32). The Uyghur Muqam of Xinjiang epitomises an intangible heritage masterpiece that not only demonstrates integrity through multiple canonised musical suites resulting from heritage inscription but also comprises diverse regional performance traditions encompassing a wide array of dialects, each possessing a unique framework for the expression of artistic individuality.

The improvised nature of Uyghur *muqam* performance and its implications have been frequently explored within Chinese ethnomusicological scholarship (Perhat, 2017, p. 124; Wang & Zhang, 2011, pp. 131-132). A Uyghur term, *puraq*, most accurately translated into Chinese as "韵味" and into English as "flavour," is ubiquitously employed in everyday discourse concerning the distinctive ornamentation patterns in traditional Uyghur music. However, this term has seldom been examined or systematically theorised in either Western or Chinese academic literature. In the following section of this paper, diverse conceptualisations of *puraq* will be discussed in relation to various facets of Uyghur *muqam* performance, encompassing both instrumental and vocal practices. Towards the conclusion, I will demonstrate that *puraq* also has an extra-musical dimension when it is considered alongside the concept of *shëwe* (En. vernacular accent). In doing so, I advocate for the theorisation of individuality in Uyghur *muqam* performance through an interdisciplinary approach that bridges music theory and linguistics. Given that the collection of oral histories from *muqam* heritage bearers has also been advocated as a crucial method for preserving the tradition (Wang, 2015, pp. 69-71), this paper juxtaposes the findings from my fieldwork (Li, 2022) with existing scholarly attempts to theorise Uyghur *muqam* performance over the years

In Search of a Puraqsiz (En. Without Flavour) Improvisatory Framework - Issues in Muqam Transcriptions and the Implications for Muqam Transmission

I observed during my 2021 ethnomusicological fieldwork that *puraq* represents the elaboration of ornamentation patterns, akin to microscopic decorations, based on the presumption that a bare melodic skeleton exists on a macroscopic level. My interviewees concurred, referring to the basic framework of *muqam* improvisations using three Uyghur terms: *ustixan* (lit. bone, skeleton), *tüz* (an adjective meaning straight, leveled, or flat, implying a lack of meandering ornamentations), and *jaza* (lit. frame, a Chinese loanword). A thorough understanding of *puraq*, therefore, must be built upon a clear idea of what this basic skeleton exactly is in order to analyze the ways in which *puraq* contributes to the microscopic stylistic manifestation of the Uyghur *muqam*.

Sir Zhou Ji (Dec. 2008), an accomplished ethnomusicologist specialised in the Uyghur Muqam and former head of the Xinjiang Arts Research Institute (Ch. 新疆艺术研究所), argued that there exist “fluctuating tones” (Ch. 游移音) within the Uyghur Twelve Muqam repertoire, as well as “multiple tones possessing the same scale degree of a *muqam* mode” (Ch. 一级多音现象) (Zhou, 2016, p. 163). Based on these two phenomena, Zhou (2016) proposed two fundamental concepts pertaining to the construction of a *muqam* mode (p. 163):

- The manner in which a tone in a *muqam* mode is ornamented plays an essential role in defining the mode itself—a *muqam* is characterised by a pitch class that encompasses not only “stable tones” (within the twelve-tone equal temperament framework) but also “fluctuating tones” with specific idiosyncratic characteristics.
- Multiple “stable” or “fluctuating” tones can be attributed to the same scale degree of a *muqam* mode.

Zhou Jingbao (1983) was one of the earliest comparative studies that placed the Uyghur *muqam* in dialogue with various maqam traditions in the Middle East, featuring a lengthy discussion of the modal contrasts between Arabic *maqam* and Uyghur *muqam*. In contrast to Zhou Ji’s account of “multiple tones possessing the same scale degree of a *muqam* mode,” discussed above, Zhou attributed the “fluctuating tones” to be “uncommon tones” that are elaborations of “fixed” tones, which form a basic modal skeleton (p. 12). Such debates bear resemblance to the modal attributes of neighbouring musical traditions, such as the Indian Raga, wherein tones with specific ornamentation patterns may be attributed to the same scale degree in different contexts of melodic movements. The following extract, taken from the famous ethnomusicologist Joep Bor’s (1999) *The Raga Guide*, is worth considering to improve the current modal theory of the Uyghur *muqam* (p. 1):

> “As Harold S. Powers puts it: “*A raga is not a tune, nor is it a ‘modal’ scale, but rather a continuum with scale and tune as its extremes.*” Thus a raga is far more precise and much richer than a scale or mode, and much less fixed than a particular tune.”

The theorisation of the modal characteristics of the Uyghur *muqam* was facilitated in the 1980s when a Stroboconn electronic tuner was transported to Ürümchi, the provincial capital of the XUAR, for a conference at the Xinjiang Arts Research Institute from Beijing (Zhou 2016, pp. 158-159). Convened in October 1985, the conference utilised the Stroboconn tuner to detect and identify notes (Ch. 测音) from several *muqam* recordings, including those of Turdi Akhun (Zhou, 2016, p. 159).

Zhou (2016) highlights that the results obtained from the Stroboconn tuner demonstrated that the Twelve Muqam repertoire contains inconsistent pitch intervals of 51, 56, 66, 67; 132, 133, 134, 136, 141, 142, 143, 147, 150, 151, 152, 154, 155, 156, 158, 160, 162, 163, 165, 167, 168, 169, 170; 230, 232, 236, 240, 242, 250, 264, and 346 cents (1 semitone = 100 cents, 1 quarter tone = 50 cents) (pp. 158-159). Despite this, the conference participants collectively agreed on the necessity of introducing quarter-tone accidentals in future *muqam* transcription projects based on the aforementioned results. The “quarter-tonal phenomenon” (Ch. 四分音现

象) (Zhou, 2016, p. 163) of *muqam* modes can be translated into English as follows:

> "It is commonplace to observe the presence of several quarter-tonal pitches within a particular modal step, resulting from distinctive melodic movements."

Zhou Ji specifically advocated for the recognition of the "fluctuating-tone phenomenon" (Ch. 游移音现象) and the "quarter-tone phenomenon" as two distinct musical concepts:

> "Since individuals have scarcely encountered 'quarter tones' and 'fluctuating tones,' and given their significance in defining the unique style of the Uyghur *muqam*, I reaffirm that both 'quarter tones' and 'fluctuating tones' manifest at distinct scale degrees within a *muqam* mode (albeit, in certain instances, a tone may concurrently be both a 'quarter tone' and a 'fluctuating tone')."

Within the realm of *muqam* transmission, from a music learner's perspective, distinguishing between these two concepts is an impractical endeavour, particularly when one is occasionally required to produce a tone that juxtaposes both concepts. In Western ethnomusicological scholarship, Zhou Ji's (1993) detailed transcription of the Twelve Muqam has been regarded as a laborious effort, primarily seen as transcribing the music in an exceptionally exhaustive manner, rather than establishing it as a set of prescriptive improvisatory frameworks for performance. However, Zhou Ji (1994) explicitly clarified that "sophisticatedness was favoured over neglectfulness" to more effectively capture the stylistic particularities of a specific artist performing the Uyghur *muqam* (p. 29). Nevertheless, Zhou Ji's utilisation of quarter-tone accidentals does not consistently align with the *muqam* recordings, thus such transcriptions give rise to discrepancies and confusions in the realm of *muqam* transmission—they do not establish an unequivocal framework for improvisation that can be expanded into fluid ornamentations inherent in Uyghur music.

During my fieldwork in Ürümchi in 2021, my ustaz (En. master), YPA, travelled to the provincial capital to participate in a recording session I had organised to discuss the melodic skeleton (Uy. *tüz/jaza*, Ch. 即兴框架) of the free-metered, improvisatory *muqeddime* of Nawa Muqami. After recording his rendition of Nawa *muqeddime*, I enquired whether each *muqam* artist (Uy. *muqamchi*) would render their *puraq* differently from one another and whether he perceived the existence of an improvisational framework for the *muqeddime*. Enthusiastic about assisting me in transcribing what he regarded as a "*puraqsiz*" version (lit. one without *puraq*), I completed my transcription of four couplets of Nawa *muqeddime* (Fig. 1).

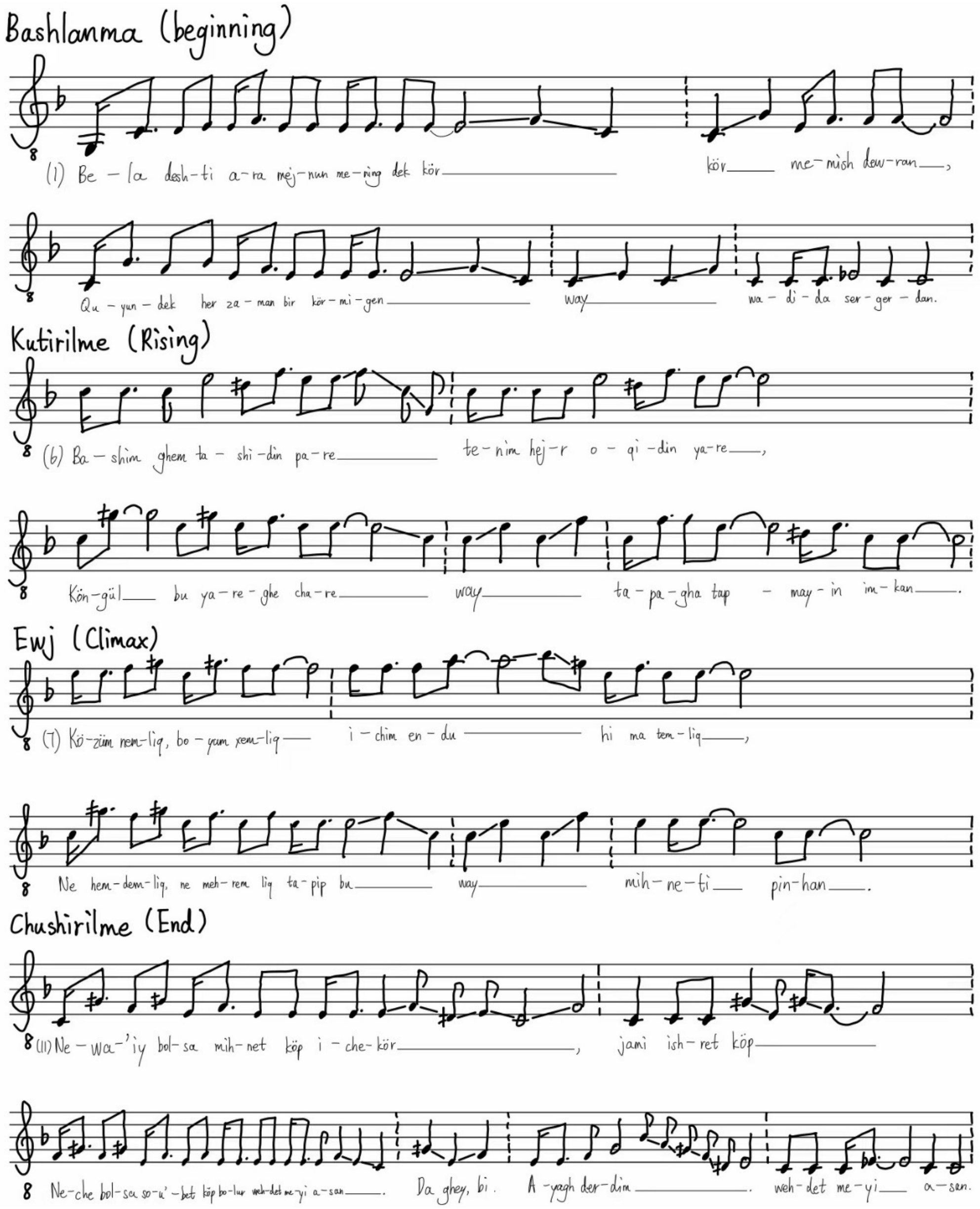
Bashlanma (beginning)
(1) Be - la desh-ti a-ra mej-nun me-ring dek kör kör me-mish dew-ran,
Qu - yun - dek her za - man bir kör-mi-gen way wa - di - da ser - ger - dan.
Kutirilme (Rising)
(6) Ba - shim ghem ta - shi-din pa-re te-nim hej-r o - qi-din ya-re,
Kön-gül bu ya-re-ghe cha-re way ta-pa-gha tap - may-in im-kan.
Ewj (Climax)
(7) Kö-züm nem-liq, bo-yum xem-liq i-chim en-du hi ma tem-liq,
Ne hem-dem-liq, ne meh-rem liq ta-pip bu way mih-ne-ti pin-han.
Chushirilme (End)
(11) Ne-wa-'iy bol-sa mih-net köp i-che-kör, jami ish-ret köp
Ne-che bol-sa so-u'-bet köp bo-lur weh-det me-yi a-san. Da ghey, bi. A-yagh der-dim. weh-det me-yi a-sen.
8

Figure 1. My *puraqsiz* transcription of YPA’s rendition of Nawa *muqeddime*

Despite suggesting that a *puraqsiz* version would reflect the elementary stage of *muqam* learning, YPA struggled to produce such a version without taking numerous pauses to meticulously consider the bare melodic skeleton. Every note in my transcription was essentially reduced to theoretical, imaginary “stable tones”, necessitating the addition of straight lines to indicate notes requiring ornamentation to articulate *puraq*. This demonstrates that *puraqsiz* is an abstract concept; however, it remains one warranting further attention to establish a theorised improvisational framework for the *muqam*. That being said, *puraq* constitutes a set of intrinsic vocal ornamentation patterns in Uyghur music that each *muqamchi* refines over their lifetime, rather than a subtle musical element inserted into the repertoire. Attempting to reduce ornamentations in

Nawa *muqeddime* to stable, pure tones found on the twelve-tone equal-tempered scale is impractical, as YPA himself believes that some tones are innately unstable even without the articulation of *puraq*. To account for these discrepancies in pitch, I adopted the quarter-sharp symbol in my *puraqsiz* transcription of Nawa *muqeddime*, in a similar way as demonstrated in Zhou Ji's (1993) transcription.

The *aruz* (Fa. عروض, the metrical system used in Chaghatay poetry) metre of Nawa *muqeddime* is: *Mafāʿīlun Mafāʿīlun Mafāʿīlun Mafāʿīlun*, where each line of the poetry repeats a short-long-long-long metrical rhythm four times. This is reflected motivically in the melody as a basic rhythmic pattern consisting of a reverse-dotted quaver rhythm followed by two straight quavers (Fig. 2), which is present and developed throughout Nawa *muqeddime*.

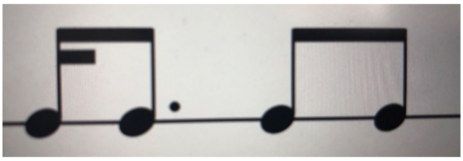

Figure 2. The fundamental motif of Nawa *muqeddime*, rhythmically parallel to its *aruz* poetic motif - *Mafāʿīlun*.

Certain long syllables are significantly elongated with elaborate melismas, whereas short syllables are never elaborated in such a manner. It is evident that the rhythmic improvisational framework for Nawa *muqeddime* is closely linked to, and informed by, the poetic metre. In the subsequent section, ways in which *puraq* could be effective articulated will be discussed alongside other notions and implications of this multifaceted term in Uyghur music.

Diverse Notions of Puraq in Muqam Performance - Ways in Which Instruments Could Articulate Puraq

Puraq is an omnipresent term among all performers of Uyghur music and is pivotal in determining the degree of authenticity in one's performance. Throughout my interviews with musicians in Yarkand and Ürümchi, I did not encounter a single musician who lacked an understanding of the term. In the preceding section, I argued that *puraq* is not merely a set of musical ornamentation patterns reducible to abstract, stable scale degrees for analytical purposes; rather, it is an intrinsic property tied to Uyghur music, without which a melody would not manifest its Uyghur-ness.

To further investigate the stylistic features of Uyghur music, I centred my fieldwork interviews on negotiating the various notions of *puraq* concerning the aspects of Uyghur music the term encompasses. I discovered that it is beneficial to consider *puraq*'s various notions among two primary classifications of Uyghur musicians: vocalists, and instrumentalists.

In the preceding section, I focused on the role of *puraq* in the vocal aspect of *muqam* performance. While *puraq* is inherently tied to human expression and is difficult to typologise—making the human voice the most natural medium for emotional conveyance—it is equally compelling to examine how Uyghur musicians express *puraq* through their traditional instruments.

Professor Abdusemi Abduraxman (2011), an ethnomusicology professor at the Xinjiang Arts Institute (p. 68), affirms Zhou Ji's theory that both "quarter tones" and "fluctuating tones" exist at specific scale degrees of a *muqam* mode. Concurrently, he indicates that *muqam* artists also introduce such ornamentations randomly on an improvisatory basis, thus articulating what the Uyghurs call *puraq* (Abduraxman 2011, 68). Intrigued by Professor Abdusemi Abduraxman's theory on the improvisatory nature of *puraq*, I interviewed a *muqam* enthusiast in Yarkand, ANA, in 2021, during which an insight into the roles of traditional Uyghur instruments in articulating *puraq* was offered:

> "The Uyghurs share similar musical terms with the Persians, such as *ahang* and

> *neghme*. However, these shared musical terms usually refer to different musical concepts in the two cultures. In Uyghur music, folk songs are *ahang*, *muqam* is *neghme*, and music is *pede* (En. fret). The key to understanding Uyghur instrumental music is, therefore, knowing how Uyghur musicians tie frets on their lutes, e.g., the *satar*, *dutar*, etc. Nowadays, the frets on Uyghur instruments are all tied in twelve-tone equal temperament, correct? Over the years, the ingenious Uyghur instrumentalists have developed a set of distinct ornaments on twelve-tone equal-tempered frets, and tunes are named after each *pede*. For example, we have folk tunes called *üch pede* (lit. three frets) and *bom pede* (lit. bass frets). I believe that despite the inevitable imperfections and compromises made after Uyghur instruments underwent renovations in the mid-20th century, the authenticity of our instruments was retained, such as the sympathetic strings. This is also what has made the Uyghur *muqam* distinct from other traditional musics across the Silk Road. [...] The *muqam*, like any other practices of intangible heritage, is being actively transmitted through generations. Abdulla Majnun (dec. 2022) is a musician who composed numerous *muqam* and could virtuously articulate his distinctive *puraq*. However, at the same time, we cannot neglect the importance of canonised recordings since they exemplify the integration of different styles into a rich repertory. As a Uyghur *muqam* enthusiast who is optimistic about the future of *muqam* transmission, I ask if we could even shift our frets away from twelve-tone equal temperament into, for instance, the Persian modal system, or even completely remove them from our instruments."

ANA explains that *puraq* is articulated through a set of specialised ornamentation techniques developed on Uyghur lutes, which are fretted in twelve-tone equal temperament in their modern form. My interview with the renowned Uyghur ethnomusicologist MLY in Ürümchi in 2021 corroborates ANA's theory of articulating *puraq*. MLY adds that *puraq* comprises unique, stylistic finger movements on the strings of a Uyghur lute that bridge the gap between frets, and such movements should be explained as "fluctuating tones" within a *muqam* mode. This suggests that *puraq* is articulated as "fluctuating tones" based on twelve-tone equal-tempered Uyghur lutes. If Zhou Ji's (2016) theory on the quarter-tonal quality of *muqam* modes holds true, it implies that monophonic *muqam* melodies must have resulted from the vocal and instrumental parts compromising each other in terms of temperament, as well as ornamental patterns.

Although further exploration into the specificity of *puraq* as "quarter tones" or "fluctuating tones" would be valuable, it is necessary to investigate whether the improvisatory articulation of *puraq* still exists among *muqam* musicking communities in Yarkand and Ürümchi.

Returning to Yarkand for my final fieldwork visit, I had the opportunity to interview additional folk *muqam* artists. I conducted a thought-provoking interview with a *tembur* (Uyghur long-neck plucked lute) artist, YNN, who performs the *muqam* repertoire on his instrument but has never participated in the singing:

> "In our local terms, *puraq* is *mung*. We also have *yerlik* (En. local; vernacular) *puraq*. If a performance is *puraq*-heavy, it will be favoured by an audience, and vice versa. The articulated *puraq* determines the skills of a musician—since every *muqamchi*'s (vocal) range and timbre (Uy. *awaz tüsi*) is different, we adapt our *puraq* to our voice. However, because of how I was born, my vocal cords are not suited for *muqam* singing. Although my voice does come out, it doesn't produce the desired aesthetics because it is rough and hoarse. Even though I don't sing the *muqam* out loud, through studying the *muqam* via recordings and other masters,

> I was trained to sing silently in my head to play the music properly. However, when there are many instruments playing together in tutti, we can't add too much of our own *puraq*."

The Uyghur term *mung* (En. affliction, Ch. 伸冤) refers to the timbral quality that conveys a sense of sadness or sorrow through the Uyghur vocal style or instrumental timbre. Discovered during my later fieldwork in Ürümchi, the articulation of *puraq* in *muqam* performance is also connected to several other terms—starting from the bare melodic skeleton (Uy. *tüz/jaza*), factors including a performer's vocal or instrumental timbre (Uy. *awaz tüsi*), *mung*, and emotions (Uy. *hëssiyat*). Nathan Light (2008), through his interview with a *muqam* performer named Ömer Akhun, documented that mung is not only generated by the vocals but also by specific ways of tuning the 12 sympathetic strings of the Uyghur long-neck bowed lute—the *satar* (p. 199):

> "The *satar* is not a *ğejäk* (*ghëjek*), not a *tämbur* (*tembur*), not a *dutar*. Those play everything the same. Those cannot make *muñ* (*mung*) come out. [...] (On the *satar*) I play the main strings, and the rest go *uuuuu*, each note's string has its own tone [*šivä* (*shëwe*)], right? I tune each note, and it calls out (*qišqar-*) in response and helps the note. The strings on the *satar* are tuned according to each note. When you press on top of each fret, it makes a *muuuu* sound and calls to the string. The string makes a sound. [...] The new instruments such as *tämbur*, *ğejäk*, and *xuštar* have one kind of tuning [*pädä* (*pede*)]. They do not sound good. They have no sweetness (*mäzzilik*), no flavour (*puraq*), no beauty (*čiraylik*). They just play the music straight."

It is significant that both Ömer Akhun and ANA agree that Uyghur instruments themselves have the potential to articulate *puraq*—their unique timbral qualities are produced by specific tuning and playing techniques. Simultaneously, ANA pointed out during our interview that much of the *puraq* has waned over time due to the renovation of Uyghur traditional instruments in the mid-20th century, as well as the impact of canonisation largely based on Turdi Akhun's recording.

This prompted me to delve more deeply into exploring the impacts of canonisation on articulating *puraq*. Having interviewed the most versatile percussionist in Yarkand, MTT, I began to recognise the substantial role of the Uyghur *dap* (En. Uyghur frame drum) in *muqam* performance:

> "You have already interviewed many traditional lute players here in Yarkand, and their *puraq* is articulated by finger movements between the *pede* (lit. fret). When it comes to *dap* rhythms, except for the free-metered *muqeddime* section, they are present in all other sections of the *muqam*. In Uyghur *dap* performance, we have a basic rhythmic concept called *udar*, which is the fundamental rhythmic cycle of each subsection of a *muqam*, e.g., *te'ezze*, *jula*, etc. The *dap* plays a significant role in *muqam* performance since a *dapchi* (En. *dap* player) needs to familiarise themselves with the improvisational frameworks of other instruments and vocalists. It is considered shameful for a *dapchi* if other instruments take over the lead. If a *dapchi* is not familiar with an *udar*, then other musicians will become confused due to his failure. When it comes to articulating *puraq* on the *dap*, one needs to be 100% confident in playing the correct *udar* before making rhythmic variations on it. Articulating *puraq* (producing stylistically authentic rhythmic variations) on the *dap*, therefore, takes years to develop."

Thus far, we have observed that regardless of whether one is a vocalist, instrumentalist, or percussionist, the effective articulation of *puraq* not only requires a *muqam* artist's virtuosity with their own instrument but also depends upon their awareness of, and active compromise with, the stylistic ornamentations of the other performers with whom they are collaborating. The sophisticated nature of *puraq* in *muqam* performance has consequently given rise to a grassroots discourse that a *muqam* apprentice needs to imitate their *ustaz* for years before they are permitted to freely express themselves in the *muqam* repertoire, much like Kippen's (2008) fieldwork notes on the hereditary traditions in Hindustani classical music (pp. 125-140).

Up to this point, I have demonstrated that the term *puraq* primarily encompasses and depends on two interconnected concepts in a successful *muqam* performance:

- The specific, authentic manner of melodic ornamentations, which is an extrinsic property.
- The exhibition of authentic timbral qualities of the vocal and instrumental parts, which is an intrinsic property.

An Extra-musical Facet of Articulating Authentic Puraq

After nearly two years of studying the tenth suite of the Uyghur Twelve Muqam—Nawa Muqami with *Ustaz* YPA, I was invited to perform what I had learned before an accomplished Uyghur composer, AMA. Despite being moved by my musical sensibility, he remarked:

- "I can tell that you have a good grasp of *puraq*, but your performance lacks authentic *shëwe*."

AMA's comment convinced me that I needed to seek instruction to refine my pronunciation by correcting my non-native realization of *muqam* texts. I interpreted that he was also trying to suggest the extent to which linguistic intonations, extra-musically, contribute to an authentic rendition of the Uyghur *muqam*. Here, I affirm that Professor Qian Rong's (2020) analytical theory on the "sonic, melodic dimensions of the articulation of a musical text" (Ch. 唱词音声解析) offers new avenues for studying the contributions of *shëwe* articulations in an authentic Uyghur *muqam* performance, although substantial preliminary acoustical and phonological studies of both Uyghur speech and music are needed to even begin such research. I was fortunate to receive *muqam* lessons from a senior lecturer of the *muqam* performance (vocal) major at the Xinjiang Arts Institute (Ch. 新疆艺术学院), MTA. Through these lessons, I realised that the acquisition of *puraq* in *muqam* transmission remains an essential component at the institution.

During our *muqam* lessons, I often questioned what Uyghur musicians meant when they described *puraq* as a "gene" that "flows in every Uyghur's blood." One day, MTA unravelled the extra-musical dimension of *puraq*—its connection to *shëwe* (En. vernacular accent):

> "*Puraq* is closely connected to the *shëwe*, and since the Uyghur Twelve Muqam originates from Kashgar (Uy. *Qeshqer*) in southern Xinjiang, its style reflects the nuances of the Kashgarian subdialect (Uy. *Qeshqer shëwisi*). When Kashgarians speak, the sound emerges from deep within their abdomen and resonates at the back of their oral cavity—a pompous-sounding tone indeed. Additionally, in the Kashgarian subdialect, the letter /a/ is pronounced as a diphthongised vowel [ɑᵒ] instead of just [ɑ]. This is reflected in *muqam* performance as well. [...] While we have all these refined linguistic nuances in the *muqam* repertoire, we need to respect the impacts of the renovations of traditional instruments and the most ideal tunings on those instruments for the most effective *muqam* performance. Since our voices are built differently, we must also explore how we can adapt a monophonic melody, conventionally performed in a high key suited to the vocal range of tenors and sopranos. I have, therefore, chosen to incorporate the piano into my *muqam* lessons so I can teach each student to sing in any key that best suits their voice."

Throughout her teaching career at the Xinjiang Arts Institute, MTA has sought ways to adopt scientific singing methods (primarily from the Western classical tradition, such as *bel canto* singing) into a set of techniques for vocal performance of the Uyghur *muqam*, commonly known as the "ethnic style" (Ch. 民族唱法) in Chinese academia. Although the Uyghur *muqam* may seem stylistically distant from *bel canto* singing, there is a consensus that the *bel canto* method is more "scientific" and better protects the voice than grassroots singing styles. This should not, in any way, imply that authentic articulations of *puraq* cannot be preserved.

The modern piano (excluding one modified in temperament through unconventional extended techniques in modern music) is significantly less versatile than an instrument like the violin, on which the player can freely glide across a fretless fingerboard without complying with discrete levels of pitch. Therefore, MTA's decision to utilise the piano in *muqam* pedagogy is, in itself, rendering a *puraqsiz* version of the *muqam* melodies. She firmly believes that every type of *puraq* can essentially be reduced to discrete scale degrees within the twelve-tone equal temperament system.

MTA's colleague at the Xinjiang Arts Institute, Abdukërim Osman, in his yet-to-be-published transcription of the full set of Uyghur Twelve Muqam, provides an alternative theoretical explanation for both the "quarter-tone phenomenon" and "fluctuating-tone phenomenon" proposed by Zhou Ji (2016). While Abdukërim Osman (forthcoming) adopted an accidental marker for quarter tones, he argues that all quarter tones in *muqam* performance are "fluctuating" in nature (pp. 380-385):

> "This transcription adheres faithfully to the theories of ethnomusicology, and every note is transcribed as closely to its authentic manner as possible. To fully reproduce the *puraq*, more accurately, the articulation of *shëwe* in Uyghur music, the 'fluctuating tones' (also referred to as 'quarter tones' in research) encountered in traditional Uyghur music are marked with quarter-tone accidentals of ↑ or ↓, representing a note sharpened or flattened by half of a semitone, respectively. This also signifies a note that would smoothly, silkily glide upwards or downwards. The *puraq-shëwe* symbol (i.e., the mordent symbol in western classical music) is also employed to illustrate the most widely encountered type of ornamentation in Uyghur music. However, the particularities of this type of ornamentation have not yet been theoretically established."

Contrasting the widely accepted quarter-tonal theory of Uyghur *muqam* modes established by Zhou Ji and most other Chinese ethnomusicologists (Meng et al., 2020, Chapter 2), Abdukërim Osman (forthcoming) argues that within a Uyghur *muqam* mode, there exists no scale degree that is innately quarter-tonal—all quarter-tonal pitches are, therefore, a result of "fluctuating tones" characterised by the articulation of *puraq* and/or *shëwe* (pp. 380-391). This analysis aligns more closely with Zhou Jingbao's (1983) arguments on the modal attributes of the Uyghur *muqam*.

The most significant contribution of Abdukërim Osman's (forthcoming) theorisation is the proposition of the term *puraq-shëwe*—a term that has shifted the analysis of the Uyghur *muqam* away from a monodisciplinary examination of musical modes, advocating for an interdisciplinary, musico-linguistic approach to further typologise the stylistic ornamentations that once existed solely within the aural-oral realm of Uyghur *muqam* performance. Future scholarship should, therefore, employ interdisciplinary methodologies, such as Qian Rong's (2020) theory on linguistic musicology, to uncover the enigma of expressing artistic individuality in Uyghur *muqam* performance.

Conclusion

To deepen our understanding of *muqam* transmission, it is crucial to consider the various institutional and grassroots mechanisms that influence this process. The multiple modes of transmission—ranging from professional ensembles to informal, community-based practices—offer a more nuanced view of how *muqam* is sustained and negotiated across diverse contexts. The following conclusion explores how these different transmission modes intersect and contribute to the evolving identity of Uyghur *muqam* in modern-day China.

Multiple Modes of Muqam Transmission in Dialogue

Throughout this paper, it has been demonstrated that the concept of *puraq* is crucial in determining both the effectiveness and authenticity of Uyghur *muqam* performance. In the first section, I outlined how *puraq* introduces ambiguities in the theorisation of the modal system in Uyghur *muqam*. Notably, there has been no consensus on the precise scale(s) or temperament(s) that underpin the modal structures of the Uyghur *muqam*, even in instances where artists like YPA attempt to produce a *puraqsiz* (lit. without *puraq*) reduction for the sole purpose of assisting my attempt of modal analysis. In the latter part of the paper, I explored the diverse applications of *puraq* in instrumental and vocal performance, revealing its engagement with a type of extra-musical nuance known as *shëwe* (En. vernacular accent). While Abdukerim Osman's (forthcoming) proposal of the composite, musico-linguistic composite term *puraq-shëwe* is somewhat ambiguous, it offers valuable insight into how future research into the theory of Uyghur *muqam* could benefit from an interdisciplinary approach, bridging music theory and linguistics.

The concept of "articulating authentic *puraq*" is also closely linked to various modes of *muqam* transmission. Zhou Ji (2005) identified four key modes of transmission in Xinjiang (p. 55):

- ➢ The "grassroots (authentic) transmission" (Ch. 原生态传承) of regional folk artists.
- ➢ The "professional transmission" (Ch. 专业传承) of state-established troupes.
- ➢ The "instructional transmission" (Ch. 教育传承) in academic institutions.
- ➢ The "textual and media transmission" (Ch. 文本传承和媒体传承) facilitated via technological media.

Throughout this paper, the current states, implications, and future prospects of all these modes of *muqam* transmission, except for media transmission, have been discussed. It has been demonstrated that different modes of *muqam* transmission have given rise to key, ongoing debates on the theorisation of both the modal theory and stylistic authenticity of Uyghur *muqam* performance. I once observed how a leader of a state-funded, professional song-and-dance troupe disdained the entirety of the folk *muqam* musicking communities, firmly believing that professional troupes are the more capable agents of *muqam* transmission:

> "Why do you bother? Nowadays, the folk culture (of grassroots muqam performance) is completely detached from professional ensembles. The folk artists are aging, illiterate (in reading music), and therefore nowhere near capable of joining an ensemble like ours. You should also question whether any of them could perform the *muqam* repertoire without making any mistakes! What I am rather interested in is how we could establish a new type of *puraq* through a set of brand-new staging aesthetics, choreographed dances, and re-composed *muqam*."

While it is challenging to establish meaningful dialogues directly between professional troupes and folk artists, I envision researchers in academic institutions as vital intermediaries in knowledge production and mediating controversial debates on *muqam* transmission. However, this is contingent upon their deep immersion in various communities that hold disparate, often conflicting views on *muqam* transmission. Once such engaged ethnomusicological work has been undertaken, the Uyghur *muqam*, as a masterpiece ICH entity, would become a more distinctive exemplification of “pluralistic integration” in present-day China.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Future Research

This study introduces the multifaceted concept of *puraq* as a crucial element in Uyghur *muqam* performance, which opens new avenues for future research in several key areas. First, further interdisciplinary enquiry could explore the complex intertwined relationships between *puraq* and the *shëwe* (En. vernacular accent) within Uyghur dialects, examining how linguistic nuances inform stylistic interpretation. Incorporating advanced linguistic methodologies, such as phonetic and phonological analyses, would deepen the understanding of the *shëwe*’s role in shaping *puraq* across diverse linguistic regions of Xinjiang.

In addition, there is a need for deeper comparative studies that examine the unique stylistic ornamentations like the concept of *puraq* in Uyghur *muqam* across various classical musical traditions along the Silk Road, including Persian, Arabic, and Turkic repertoires. Such studies could contribute to a broader understanding of how ornamentation techniques and modal systems reflect cultural exchanges within these interconnected musical traditions.

Furthermore, the implications of temperament on the instrumental articulation of *puraq* warrant a more focused organological enquiry. Researchers could explore how contemporary modifications in traditional Uyghur instruments, particularly the establishment of twelve-tone equal temperament frets (Uy. *pede*), affect both the authenticity and evolution of Uyghur *muqam* performance practices. Future work should aim to document and analyse *puraq* in other linguistically-contrasting regional variants of the Uyghur *muqam*, such as those in Turpan and Qumul, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its diverse manifestations.

Finally, as the current study focuses primarily on the musicological and linguistic aspects of *puraq*, future research could expand on the socio-political dimensions of *muqam* transmission. The intersection of Uyghur *muqam* with state policies on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) offers a fertile ground for investigating how cultural preservation initiatives influence the negotiation of authenticity and innovation within ethnic-minority musical traditions in China. In particular, studies could address the impact of digital media and contemporary staging ideologies on the transmission of *muqam*, considering how new technologies reshape the relationship between professional ensembles and grassroots musicians.

Recommendations for Practitioners

For muqam practitioners and pedagogues

This research provides valuable insights for Uyghur *muqam* practitioners, particularly in enhancing the pedagogical approach to *puraq*. Musicians and ethnomusicologists alike could benefit from a deeper engagement with the concept of *puraq* as both a theoretical and practical framework for performance. By adopting the interdisciplinary perspective of this study, musicians can refine their improvisational skills through a more conscious articulation of *puraq*, not merely as a type of “musical ornamentation” but as a core element of expressive individuality through vocal, instrumental, linguistic (poetic) improvisations.

For Uyghur *muqam* pedagogues, especially those in academic institutions like the Xinjiang Arts Institute, this research motivates reassessment of teaching methodologies. The integration of linguistic aspects of *shëwe* into *muqam* pedagogy, as proposed in this study, could lead to more nuanced vocal training programs. Uyghur *muqam* pedagogues might also explore the potential of incorporating new tuning systems or even fretless, non-tempered instruments into *muqam* instruction, as a way to place the Uyghur *muqam* onto international dialogues with various performance practices across the Silk Road.

For heritage preservation specialists

Practitioners involved in the preservation of ICH will find this research particularly relevant in understanding the balance between innovation and authenticity in heritage transmission. By highlighting the adaptability of *puraq* within the framework of state-led heritage discourse, this study provides a roadmap for cultural policymakers and heritage specialists to develop strategies that support both the safeguarding and the dynamic evolution of the Uyghur *muqam*. It also underscores the importance of engaging local musicians in heritage preservation, encouraging practitioners to facilitate more meaningful collaborations between professional and grassroots transmission modes.

Limitations of this Study

While this study offers significant contributions to the understanding of *puraq* in performance practices of the Uyghur *muqam*, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research focuses primarily on fieldwork conducted in Ürümchi and Yarkand, leaving other important regional variations of the *muqam* less explored. The lack of ethnographic data suggests that future studies should incorporate a wider range of regional *muqam* traditions to capture the full diversity of *puraq* manifestations across Xinjiang.

Second, the analysis of *puraq* in this paper largely remains on the abstract level. Further research could integrate phonetical data transcribed into the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which may provide a more granular understanding of how *puraq* interacts with specific regional linguistic variations.

Third, the study does not delve deeply into the technicalities of recording and transcription, especially in relation to the previously-proposed “fluctuating-tone phenomenon” and “quarter-tone phenomenon” within *muqam* modes. Although this paper references Zhou Ji’s transcriptions, the absence of a thorough comparative analysis encompassing both musicological and linguistical theories of existing transcriptions limits the scope of this study’s theoretical contributions to modal analysis. Future research could address this gap by comparing multiple transcription methods and investigating how they influence the pedagogical and performance aspects of *muqam* transmission.

Lastly, while this research draws on ethnographic data, it could be strengthened by a more extensive longitudinal approach to fieldwork. The short duration of the field visits, while valuable, may not fully capture the dynamic, evolving nature of *muqam* performance over time. Thus, future research might benefit from extended, participatory observation to better understand the long-term processes involved in *muqam* transmission and the role of *puraq* within it.

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