



# Analysis of Shamanic Elements in the Oroqen Folklore Heritage “Mosukun”

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**Abstract.** Facing the impact of globalization, Oroqen and other small ethnic groups have been drifting passively under the impact of official culture and have become marginal and dependent groups in the society. Under the guidance of China's ethnic policy, Oroqen people have achieved the production and life in the process of "downhill settlement". The author summarizes the direction of cultural policy since the founding of New China into four major periods, but the shamanic elements in Oroqen folklore heritage "Mosukun" are gradually alienated, i.e., original ecology- questioned- intergenerational rupture- field limitation. The author avoids the either/or thinking of "culture or people" and proposes the perspective of traditional culture from the external factors of "national institutional factors and acceptance of multiculturalism" and internal factors of "the subject's own choice and adaptive capacity". From the perspectives of external factors "national institutional factors and multicultural acceptance" and internal factors "the subject of survival's own choice and adaptability", we put forward the hypothesis of modern construction of traditional culture, and come up with the practical explanation which is more suitable for the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage by Oroqen as a representative of small ethnic groups - both internal and external to realize the constant original power of intergenerational inheritance, so that the shamanic elements in "Mosukun" can adapt to the modernization context and achieve long-term stable development.

**Keywords:** Oroqen; Cultural Policy; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Mosukun; Shaman.

## 1 Introduction

According to the United Nations, there are at least 300 million small peoples (usually those with small populations and low levels of economic development) in more than 70 countries and regions around the world, each with their own distinctive cultures. However, under the impact of globalization and interconnection, these small ethnic groups are disappearing at a very fast pace. At the same time, their cultures are no longer being passed on to the world. In the author's opinion, although there are differences in the level of economic development between regions, the cultures of different ethnic groups cannot be classified as "good or bad". The cultures of small ethnic

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groups are important carriers of human civilization, so we should pay highly attention to their cultures and pass them on in an appropriate way. In addition, the hegemonic cultural aggression policy implemented by many western countries is suppressing and extinguishing the survival and development of the disadvantaged cultures, among which the cultural heritage is representative of the cultures of various ethnic groups and becomes the key carrier for the protection and inheritance of the cultures of various ethnic groups, so the protection of the cultural heritage of the disadvantaged is the key move for the disadvantaged cultures of the ethnic minorities to return to the public's view. Therefore, the protection of vulnerable ethnic cultural heritage is the key to bring vulnerable ethnic minority cultures back into the public eye.

The Oroqen are one of the least populated ethnic groups in the north-eastern region of China. According to the *China Statistical Yearbook-2021*, the Oroqen population is 9,168, living mainly in the vast grasslands of the Oroqen Autonomous Banner of the Hulunbeier League in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, and in the snowy and icy lands of the northern part of Heilongjiang Province. The Oroqen believe in "Shamanism" and do not have any written language, but mainly use Chinese at present. Because the culture of an ethnic group is continuous, it is more necessary to write down in writing than to narrate orally, so that the culture of the ethnic group can be continued. Oroqen in the long-term hunting production and social practice, Oroqen people have created a rich and colorful spiritual culture, oral creation, music, dance, plastic arts, etc., of which the highest popularity is the art of rap - the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage "Mosukun", in which the change of "shaman" element of Oroqen people is a typical example of Oroqen people's intangible cultural heritage inheritance work reacting to the changes of the external environment. The future direction of this work is of great significance to the protection and inheritance of ethnic minority cultural heritage.

## 2 "Shaman" and "Mosukun"

Shamanism is a primitive religion. It is named after the Manchu-Tungus-speaking tribes who called the shaman a shaman. It has formed in the late primitive commune and has obvious characteristics of clan and tribe religion. Scholar Du Yonghao pointed out: the nation is gradually formed based on the disintegration of clans and tribes, and it is a community of people with common self-consciousness built based on common traditional culture. The most important symbol of Oroqen ethnic group is the formation of unified national self-consciousness.[1]

The three main elements of shamanism are: nature worship, ancestor worship and totem worship. The spirits under the rule of the shamanic world are of many nationalities. They are distributed in the vast territory from Changbai Mountain in the east to the north and south of Tianshan Mountain in the west via the Mongolian Plateau. They inhabit the valleys and plains in the valleys and valleys in the valleys of the Tarim River under the glacial snow-capped mountains from the Heilongjiang River and Ussuri River to the glacial snow-capped mountains. Before the founding of New China, it was widely prevalent in Oroqen, Daur, Hezhe, Ewenke and other ethnic

groups living in the northeast of China, and its inheritance has been inherited in a more complete way in the above-mentioned ethnic groups and part of the Xibo ethnic group. The inheritance of shamanic cultural beliefs varies from one ethnic group to another, among which the inheritance carrier of Oroqen is of typical significance.

In Oroqen culture, we can find the proof of protection and inheritance of shamanic culture- "Mosukun", a kind of oral art of rap widely spread in Oroqen, which is like the meaning of "song and dance" in Chinese. As a rare cultural carrier, "Mosukun" carries the shaman culture in the form of art and embodies the cultural beliefs of Oroqen people. This ancient folk oral art is often characterized by singing long narrative poems, and the shamanic culture as a national belief often becomes the narrative object of "Mosukun", so a song branded with the mark of nature worship, ancestor worship and totem worship in shamanic culture, "Mosukun" has been sung by generations of Oroqen people.

The concepts and beliefs of Oroqen folk are often reflected in Oroqen folk singing literature. The author thinks that although the relationship between "shaman" and "Mosukun" is the relationship between content and carrier, the most important adhesive between the two is the inheritor of this folk art and millions of people involved in the dissemination of "Mosukun" in the shamanic culture of the people, many of which the dissemination of rap literature is often as the core of the shamanic culture - the messenger of the gods "shaman". The singer Mo Yusheng's mother- Ju'e Ai is a dual-qualified figure.[2] She is a shaman who dances with the gods and as a master of oral folklore. The former is one of the cores of shamanic culture, the only intermediary between Oroqen people who believe in shaman and their objects of belief; the latter is the subject who has greater control over the content of cultural heritage interpretation in the process of protecting and passing on the national cultural heritage. When the intersection of the two is the same person or the same group of people, these people will have the dominant power over the form and content of the national heritage, thus leading the cultural development of the nation internally and externally. Therefore, the author believes that the only way to analyze the correctness and reasonableness of a series of adaptations is to conduct an in-depth study on the dynamic adaptation of shamanic culture in Mosukun by this group of people in the face of changes in the external environment, to give the future of the shamanic elements in Mosukun as a starting point for the promotion of the national culture. To objectively analyze the correctness and reasonableness of a series of adaptations, and then, from the point of view of promoting the national culture, give benign suggestions for the future transformation of the shamanic elements of "Mosukun".

### **3 Turning and Sorting out the "Mosukun" Shamanic Elements in the Settlement Process of the Oroqen People**

History is a long river that keeps on rolling forward, and it is difficult to analyze and interpret a fragment of history in a certain place alone. By clarifying the historical sources and streamlining the historical lineage, the author aims to understand the his-

torical logic of the change and development of the shamanic elements in the cultural heritage of Oroqen ethnic group "Mosukun" in the Northeast land.

The author takes the founding of New China as the basis for his study and summarizes the changes and updates of cultural policies into four periods: the early period of the founding of New China, the decade of exploration, the period before and after the "Cultural Revolution" and the new period. Respectively, the changes and updates of the "Mosukun" under the guidance of cultural policies at all levels of the various types of cultural policies in the various periods. The specific analysis in each period is below.

### **3.1 Early Years of the New China: Original Shamanic Elements in "Mosukun"(1949-1956)**

New China's basic cultural policy was formulated under the guidance of two major meta-cultural policies: *the Theory of New Democracy*, written by Comrade Mao Zedong in January 1940, and *the Speech at the Yan' an Literary and Artistic Symposium* published by Comrade Mao Zedong in the early 1940s. Under the guidance of such a programmed policy, Oroqen, as a member of ethnic minorities, has been tirelessly integrating the nomadic culture inherited from the past generations into the folk customs, which has become a part of the national memory. The nomadic culture is the core of Oroqen ethnic structure, and it is the key to understand the historical development of Oroqen ethnic group. The original ecological shamanic elements in "Mosukun" is the concrete example of Oroqen ethnic group retaining many shamanic beliefs in the early period of the establishment of New China.

In the ideology of Oroqen people, the concept of spirits and primitive beliefs such as shamanism are dominant, both in production and daily life with the help of this power. Although the shaman in "Mosukun" in this period could not reproduce the rituals and primitive religious scenes of hundreds of years ago, the belief and worship of the gods were still integrated into "Mosukun", which was presented as a gesture to promote the production and life by the power of the gods. At the same time, both myths and epics directly largely reflect the common belief system of the ethnic society and show its most fundamental social concepts. It can be said that the original shamanic elements in "Mosukun" in this period are the concentrated embodiment and the last legacy of Oroqen's original history. Although the subsequent "downhill settlement" improved the living conditions of Oroqen people's production and life, it also fundamentally destroyed the inheritance of the hunting culture, needless to say the "Mosukun" which is the background of the narrative.

### **3.2 Ten Years of Exploration: the Questioning of the Shamanic Element in "Mosukun" (1957-1965)**

Oroqen people in 1956 completed from the nomadic culture under the guidance of the nomadic to learn the agricultural production of the "settlement" transformation. After the settlement, the traditional social structure of Oroqen society has been shaken fun-

damentally, and the natural evolution of hunting culture has been gradually interrupted, which is reflected in their religious beliefs.

As mentioned before, spirits and shaman are the cores of Oroqen shaman culture, and people rely on the power of spirits to ensure smooth production and peaceful life. All kinds of deities have their own duties and jurisdictions. For example, there is a clear division of labor as to which deities can cure what illnesses, and one must make offerings to the deities in charge of what illnesses. In general, ordinary people could not communicate directly with the deities, which led to the emergence of the shaman, an intermediary between people and the deities, who could make a connection between ordinary people and the deities. The shaman is not the ruler of the deity but the possessor. At his request, the deity will possess his body, and at that time the shaman has the color of the deity, i.e. the mortal body of the shaman and the deity become one. Healing is the most important function of the shaman. The shaman has mastered some primitive healing methods, and some minor illnesses have been cured, but for the most part they will not be spiritual, so those who have been cured of major illnesses rely on the self-physiological immune function to regain their health, and these people, as individual achievers, are often recognized by the shaman as the successors of the new shaman. People's respect for the shaman is not so much based on the extent of the rituals, but more on the fear of harm from the spirits and the fear of the shaman himself. After the settlement, the government made great efforts to improve medical conditions, and general illnesses could be cured immediately after treatment. This kind of intuitive understanding made people from skepticism to final rejection of shaman. Especially when people see some shamans get sick also need to find doctors to treat, the illusion of shaman completely broken. The Oroqen people, who were shamans, had a high social status in the hunting society, and once people began to doubt the shaman's divine power, it meant the disintegration of a society.

### **3.3 Before and after the Cultural Revolution: Intergenerational Rupture of the Shamanic Element in "Mosukun"(1966-1976)**

The *May 16th Circular* of 16 May 1966 kicked off the "Cultural Revolution", and the "Cultural Revolution", with its focus on "class struggle", began in earnest. "During the Cultural Revolution, the correct cultural policies of the Communist Party of China at the beginning were not implemented, and the situation of "a hundred flowers blossoming and a hundred schools of thought contending" no longer existed. In terms of cultural endeavors, many outstanding traditional national cultures were dismissed as "four olds" and "superstitions". During the period of "all the country's mountains and rivers are red", the traditional cultural forms of the ethnic minorities were transformed into a period of concealment, with everything from religious beliefs to food, clothing and shelter in line with the official culture. The traditional music and dance heritage of ethnic minorities, whether it was good, whether it had any aesthetic value, and whether it could be inherited and developed, was treated as "feudalism and cultivation" and put in the cold palace.

The remains of shamanistic activities in modern times have never had the chance to be included in the scope of freedom of religion, because it has never been a real

religion. Strictly speaking, it is only a kind of spontaneous faith inherited from generation to generation, and it is passed down from generation to generation in Oroqen as a kind of national faith that penetrates all aspects of spiritual life of specific communities, so this kind of faith has a nationwide nature in some ethnic groups. The development of Mosukun as an art form of singing as a powerful carrier of shamanic inheritance was stagnant in this period, and the data showed that "Mosukun", as an oral art of speaking and singing, was seldom recorded in the books and passed down to the world. so the national influence was extremely low. Not only that, but shamanism was simply recognized as are religion during this period. which was seriously inconsistent with official ideology and was not tolerated in any way, and even in these "Mosukun", it is almost impossible to find a tune in which shamanism is the main object of narration.

Therefore, the shamanic elements in "Mosukun" in this period were disconnected from the previous one, and this kind of intergenerational cultural disconnection is a fatal blow to the preservation and inheritance of Oroqen ethnic cultural heritage, which forms a great challenge to the reconstruction of the image of shaman in "Mosukun". It is a great challenge to reconstruct the image of shaman in "Mosukun".

### **3.4 The new Period: the Limits of the Field of Shamanic Elements in "Mosukun"(1977 to the Present)**

After the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, respect for national languages, customs and religious beliefs was restored. During the Cultural Revolution, they were regarded as "four olds", "backward" and superstitious" and were "swept away". The excellent traditional culture of Oroqen ethnic group which was regarded as "four olds", "backward" and "superstitious" in the "Cultural Revolution" has been gradually restored. Folk stories are being told, traditional folk songs are allowed to be sung, and many good customs are being respected.

Regarding the safeguarding and transmission of the intangible cultural heritage, in 1997 UNESCO enacted *the Law on the Selection of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*. *The International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* was adopted in 2003. "Mosukun" on 20 May 2006 was included in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage list. 2007 was included in the first batch of intangible cultural heritage list in Heilongjiang Province. The protection and inheritance of "Mosukun" seems to be carried out in an orderly manner, but the author studied a large amount of information and found that only a few specific singers or non-hereditary inheritors are really involved in this work.

Scholar He Qun's survey results show that Oroqen people of different ages have different expectations and understanding of traditional culture. The middle-aged generation, facing personal development and effectively shouldering the responsibility of national prosperity, feels that the remains of shaman culture in some "Mosukun" are obstacles and burdens to development. While the old generation tends to be easily immersed in the past, and has little ability and vision to accept new things and feel the reality of the serious situation of national development. The new generation, born in

the era of modernization, tends to be attached to traditional things and has different expectations and understanding of traditional culture.

Not only that, some Oroqen and foreigners who don't know the art of "Mosukun" are misinterpreting it more and more seriously. People's cultural quality of intangible cultural heritage continues to dissolve. traditional oral works gradually alienated, utilitarian purpose is more and more prominent, and even become an advertisement to promote local tourism culture, to obtain economic benefits. This move further divorces "Mosukun" from its cultural normality.

#### **4 Conceptualization of the Possible Trend of Reconstruction of Shamanic Elements in Oroqen's "Mosukun" in the Context of Modernization**

Exploring the cultural construction of small ethnic groups, represented by the Oroqen, is a concern for the results of their cultural changes and their prospects.

The problem is that when a culture thrives, the quality of life of its bearers is usually guaranteed.[3] However, even if the culture itself begins to decline and eventually dies out, the people it contains do not disappear with it. Therefore, for those small communities facing the gradual withering away of their traditional culture, they need to enhance their adaptive capacity to cope with the changing environment to maintain their survival. Under such circumstances, we may be faced with a dilemma: should we stick to traditional values or choose to adapt to the new environment? In response, some scholars have raised the question, "To culture or to people?" From a practical point of view, the contradiction in this question often stems from the following factors: small communities, while facing the gradual fading of traditional culture from their horizons, also realize that they need to accept the influence of modern civilization.

Is it realistic, then, to fully restore traditional culture? What is the likely historical end of simple culture? If we avoid the either/or way of thinking and put forward the hypothesis of the modern construction of traditional culture, we may arrive at an explanation that is more relevant to the reality of small peoples.

The determinants of the construction of a modern context for the traditional culture of small peoples come mainly from both internal and external sources. As far as external factors or the external environment are concerned, the first is the national policy of the State and the ruling party and the second is the mainstream society's correct appraisal of indigenous cultures and the degree to which it respects, develops and assimilates traditions. External factors, on the other hand, are the capacity of the development subjects themselves, including the state of cultural change and the level of awareness and cultural self-awareness of small peoples of the changes in the outside world.

#### **4.1 External Factors: National Institutional Factors and the Acceptance of Multiculturalism**

One of the important dimensions of the living environment of small ethnic groups, not only in my country, but also among nations, is the national policy of the State. China's national policy provides a favorable environment for the economic and cultural development of ethnic minorities. And as a result, the folk cultural heritage has been given great opportunities for development. In terms of policy, the State's insistence on the direction of national integration and development is correct, but mistakes are inevitable in the process of advancing the policy in practice at all levels.

The "advanced peoples" provide a great deal of economic and cultural help to the "backward peoples", and this is achieved through a wide range of institutional arrangements or policy orientations as well as through the implementation of specific measures. This has both positive and negative effects. The government's help has formed a pattern of thought and emotion of Oroqen society's dependence on the government's preferential policies, support and care, which is not conducive to the self-esteem, self-reliance and self-improvement of this group. For example, modernization process leads to the inevitable disappearance of "shaman" profession and Oroqen people do not think. Losing the core position of "shaman", "Mosukun" art singing seems to be gradually limited to the specific occasions between the inheritors and the government invites the inheritors to sing, i.e., its protection and inheritance is carried out in a relatively closed field, and the shallow effect can be foreseen. The effect is also predictable.

Therefore, how to take care of the traditional cultural characteristics of ethnic minorities while promoting their adaptability in the process of modernization, and how to strike a balance between the two and maintain an appropriate degree of equilibrium, are major issues that need to be considered in the Government's work related to ethnic minorities. The author is here only to throw light on this issue.

#### **4.2 Internal Factors: the Ability of the Surviving Subject to Make its Own Choices and Adaptations**

How to establish their own development prospect in the wave of modernization and how to deal with the relationship with the official culture from passive to active has become a problem that the small ethnic groups represented by Oroqen, especially the inheritors of cultural heritage among them, should seriously think about.

For the Oroqen, the transmission of their culture relies heavily on the members of their society, especially the older ones who hold on to traditional values. However, as these older generations passed away, the younger generation began to get educated and leave their homelands in search of better life opportunities. In addition, the prevalence of inter-ethnic marriages had a disruptive effect on the traditional community structure, especially with the wide dissemination of television, which provided the Oroqen people with a whole new perspective. This transformation has led to a fundamental change in their understanding of their own culture, as well as a deeper understanding of the outside world. All these factors together constitute a great impact on



traditional values. Today, traditional culture is no longer the main basis for people's cultural choices.

Consider this from the point of view of "To culture or to people". As a spiritual and cultural phenomenon, the creation and development of shamanism is inseparable from the early childish cognitive abilities of human beings and their reverence for nature. Nowadays, the shaman faith gradually fades out of people's lives, but as the ecological embodiment of a nation's psychological characteristics, it transcends the limitations of time and space, and is preserved in the "collective unconscious" of orogen people. The historical grandeur of shaman jumping to the gods will not be reproduced, but the primitive spiritual state like jumping to the gods will be regenerated, and the spirit of trust and loyalty between man and god and man can be given to the modern form of expression with the existence of the soul.[4] This is the key point to objectively investigate the deep accumulation of orogen shaman culture in the root of Chinese traditional culture, and it is the key move for the inheritors of "Mosukun" to make the choice of tradition and modernity", and the dissemination of the culture on the basis of this is the only way to comply with the trend of modernization, on this basis, the dissemination will be able to comply with the trend of modernization and actively promote the possibility of social and cultural transformation.

In the spiral process of history, although the transformation of the shamanic elements of Mosukun has lost its true nature in terms of "form", it has even been treated as a subcultural element to be commercially adopted as a kind of aesthetic style for the profit of cultural and tourism performing arts. However, with the emergence of a new concept of human folklore. the essence of this kind of variation is innovation, "form" is scattered, "spirit" is not scattered, is the contemporary "Mosukun" in the shamanic elements of the destination.

#### **4.3 Internal and External Cultivation to Realize the Permanent Origin Impetus of Intergenerational Transmission**

In the author's opinion, the cultural policy environment and other social environments in which Oroqen "Mosukun" is now living are favorable for some parts of it to be creatively transformed to obtain the space to continue to grow, and the shamanic elements in it can be inherited and developed in a brand-new way. The degree of Oroqen's identification with their own traditional culture - shamanic culture, the ability of cultural self-awareness, determines the status of this culture in the world of multiculturalism. The retention and innovation of shamanic elements in "Mosukun" is expected to achieve the permanent original power of intergenerational inheritance by internal and external cultivation, and the author believes that it needs to go through two stages, which are: spontaneous production of related discourse system by the inheritors and the cohesion of cultural identity of Oroqen people.[5]

First, it is the discourse system of shamanic elements spontaneously produced by the inheritors. The flow of time and space is inevitably accompanied by the disappearance and partial deterioration of shaman culture. At this moment, "Mosukun" folk heritage protection and inheritors play a vital role, their records and dissemination can be made with the deceased with the extinction of personal cultural memory together,

become a shaman culture in the long river of life and the survival of the collective memory fragments. The previously mentioned ethnic-friendly policies and cultural support are the basis for attracting more Oroqen people to join the team of folk heritage inheritors, and only through the "spontaneous cultural identity", which will be described below, can we continuously consolidate the national will and provide spiritual impetus for the practice of preserving and inheriting folk heritage.

Secondly, it is the cohesion of Oroqen people's cultural identity. Regardless of the differences in the understanding and attitude of Oroqen society towards the relationship between traditional culture and modernization, an obvious fact is that the national cohesion of this people is increasing.

The two phases are not completely isolated but are intertwined. In addition, inter-generational education has helped the younger generation to accept the core of shamanic culture and to creatively transform it into a modern and sustainable "Mosukun", considering their modern perceptions. The deep roots and mass foundation of shamanic culture have enabled the shaman to survive for a long time with its ever-changing mysticism. The author believes that even though the whole community basically gave up shamanism and changed to believe in materialism, we should not prematurely declare the end of shaman culture, shaman culture, those who are known as the art of the things and those who will never be the art of the things will flow through their own channels. What is called art in shamanic culture and what will never be art will be passed on through their own channels.

## 5 Conclusion

Today, as the wave of modernization sweeps across the globe, culture is characterized by both homogeneity and diversity. In the process of history, should the dilemma of the modernization of the less populated ethnic groups be attributed to the backwardness of their own cultures, or the current social order forcibly defines the "backwardness" of their national cultures? According to Foucault's power-discourse theory, the Oroqen ethnic group selected by the author as a representative of the world's millions of small ethnic groups are often in a disadvantaged position in the power mediation between their geographic location and the powerful ethnic groups, and in the enjoyment of supportive policies, we should be vigilant against the phenomenon of indulgence in degradation, and always keep a clear understanding of the modernization of the excellent traditional culture of our nation, which is the key way to let the cultural treasures of our nation continue to shine.

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