China’s Kam Minority: A Short Bibliographic Outline of Kam-Related Research Materials in the University of Melbourne Library

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While China’s Kam minority (who are known in Chinese as Dongzu 侗族) and their remarkable cultural traditions are not yet well known in the English-speaking world, they may be familiar to anyone who has followed UNESCO’s most recent recognition of Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage, or watched China’s hugely popular national “Youth Song Contest” (in Chinese, qingge sai 青歌赛), or travelled in more remote regions of southwestern China. In 2009, the Kam singing tradition known in English as “big song” was placed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity; since 2008 Kam singers have increasingly featured amongst the medal winners of that nationally televised song competition; and tourism in rural Kam regions—including Kam singing performances for tourists—have been steadily growing in popularity since the 1980s. Although research into these and other issues relating to Kam people is modest in size, it has also been slowly increasing—albeit almost exclusively produced in Chinese.

In the six years of research I conducted for my recently submitted doctorate, I focussed upon the contemporary face of Kam traditional Kam singing—and particularly upon the current situation regarding the Kam big song tradition. In the process of conducting this research I spent more than twenty months resident in rural Kam areas of southeastern Guizhou, where I was invited to learn to sing Kam song and to participate in many Kam song performances, and I was also very fortunate to have been able to access the excellent collection of Kam research materials now held in the University of Melbourne Library. As there is no widely used written form of the Kam language, songs have long been one of the most important traditional forms of recording and transmitting knowledge. Thus my study of Kam song has also required an understanding of many other aspects central to Kam life, as are noted in this brief bibliographic outline.

The sources mentioned below and listed in the selected bibliography are all held in the University of Melbourne Library—mainly the Baillieu Library—and all Chinese-language sources (the majority of written sources on Kam people) cited in this essay are held in the library’s extensive East Asian Collection. The sources are presented below in rough chronological order; as this outline clearly indicates, the University of Melbourne’s collection of research materials concerning Kam people is one of the most extensive and offers great research potential. Before describing the collection in detail, I first give a brief background regarding Kam people.
Kam People: A Brief Background

The Kam are one of China’s fifty-five recognized minorities and are described as a group with a population of 2.96 million[6] mainly resident in southeastern Guizhou Province and the adjoining border regions of Hunan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, as shown in Figure 1 (a small number of Kam are also resident in Hubei province).[7]

Figure 1: Left: Map of China, showing major cities and the two provinces (Guizhou and Hunan Provinces) and one autonomous region (Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region) where most Kam people reside. Right: Counties with the largest concentration of Kam residence, and nearby cities. Liping Kam Autonomous County, which has the highest proportion of Kam residents of any of these counties, is shaded. Maps by Wu Jiaping.

Many Kam people speak a dialect of Kam, a tonal Tai-Kadai language that is completely different from Chinese and has no widely used written form.[8] Besides the rich Kam musical and poetic traditions, Kam culture also has other distinctive features: architectural traditions such as the building of huge, wooden pagoda-shaped dare low or “drum towers” (see Figure 2), cloth weaving and dyeing with indigo (see Figure 3), indigenous forms of social governance, religious beliefs focussing on the female deity Sa, various ritual practices, and particular dietary habits.

This rich Kam culture—particularly performances of big song—has become an important part of the expanding Kam tourism industry. The development of this industry has been a major strategy for regional development, and has featured the representing, packaging, and selling of Kam images and costumes, singing and dancing.[9] However, the overall economic development of Kam regions has lagged far behind that of the nation as a whole, and traditional agriculture (centred around rice farming) remains the dominant activity within...
Kam regions. Statistics indicate that as of 2006 one third of the Kam population lived below the official “absolute poverty” line of 668 yuan per year (currently equivalent to $A107),[10] and the situation in recent years has seen only minimal change. Due to the economic difficulties experienced in Kam areas, emigration of Kam people to other areas to seek employment has become one of their most important livelihood strategies. This large-scale migration of Kam youth has consequently influenced Kam social structure and cultural transmission in many significant ways.

Figure 2: Views of two Kam villages in southeastern Guizhou The distinctive pagoda-shaped Kam dare low (“drum tower”) can be seen in each of the villages. Photographs by Catherine Ingram.
Kam People in Pre–Twentieth Century Sources

Pre–twentieth century written sources contain only “relatively infrequent”[11] mention of the ancestors of today’s Kam people, and do not mention the Kam using the Chinese name by which they are identified today. The Kam were only formally recognized as Dongzu during the state ethnic identification processes of the 1950s, initiated under the first decade of Communist rule. In earlier times, not only were the residents of today’s Kam areas referred to by many different names, but different groups of people who spoke what are now recognized to be dialects of the Kam language were identified in different ways, complicating Kam historical research.[12] The earliest descriptions of Kam people’s ancestors and/or their environment that seem likely to be based upon first-hand observations and that appear in these pre-twentieth-century sources date from the late
Song Dynasty (960–1279). These include *Lao xue’an biji* [Notes Made at the Old Student’s Cottage] by Lu You 陆游, *Ximan congxiao* 溪蛮丛笑 [Collected Tales of the Barbarians of the Southwest] by Zhu Fu 朱辅,[13] and *Lingwai daida* 岭外代答 [A Categorical Description of the Region Beyond the Passes], by Zhou Qufei 周去非. The principal Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) source is the *Chiya* 赤雅 [A Dictionary About the South], by Kuang Lu 邝露.[14]

Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) sources dating from before (or at the turn of) the twentieth century include a far greater number of descriptions of the ancestors of today’s Kam people.[15] These sources include the 1690 *Qian shu* 綿书 [Book of Guizhou], by Tian Wen 田雯; two eighteenth-century works by Tan Cui 檀萃 (*Shuo man* 说蛮 [Regarding the Barbarians]) and *Qian nang*. *黔囊* [A Handbook about Guizhou]), and the 1778 *Chu dong zhiu* 楚峒志略 [Brief Records of the “Dong” in the Chu Kingdom], by Wu Shenglan 吴省兰. Nineteenth-century sources which mention Kam ancestors include the 1813 *Qian ji* 綿记 [Records of Guizhou], by Li Zongfang 李宗昉, *Guzhou zaji* 古州杂记 [Miscellaneous Records Concerning Guizhou], by Lin Pu 林溥, the 1842 *Jiaqing chongxiu yitong zhi: Guizhou* 嘉慶重修一統志: 貴州 [Revised Unified Gazetteer of the Jiaqing Reign Period (1796–1820): Guizhou], and the 1845 *Liping fu zhi* 黎平府志 [Liping Prefecture Gazetteer].[16]

Other important pre–twentieth century sources on this research area held in the collection include reproductions of the various illustrated works that mainly date from the late Qing and which are known as *Bai miao tu* 百苗图 (“Miao Albums”).[17] Also of note are several first-hand English-language accounts that provide general descriptions of the region and date from the late Qing.[18] Finally, several recent historical works provide important data on Kam people, environment and culture preceding the twentieth century, including: *Guizhou tongshi* 贵州通史 [A General History of Guizhou] of both the Ming and Qing,[19] collections of essays on the history of Guizhou and of Kam regions of Hunan,[20] and several recent English-language analyses of the region’s situation during late Imperial times.[21]

1900 – 1960s

The first half of the twentieth century was a turbulent period in China’s history, and little research concerning Kam people and culture was carried out. Notable exceptions are Chen Guojun’s 1942 article entitled “Dongjia zhong de gulou” 侗家中的鼓楼 [Kam Drum Towers],[22] and the information on the Kam appearing in the 1946 Sanjiang county gazetteer.[23]

After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, ethnic identification became a major state project. From that time until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1966), research in this area was promoted.[24] Although relatively few publications date from this period, many of these publications remain of immense value to researchers today.
One of the first—and the earliest article on Kam music—was Xue Liang’s 1953 article entitled “Dongjia minjian yinyue de jiandan jieshao” 侗家民间音乐的简单介绍 [A Simple Introduction to Kam Folk Music].[25] The first full-length book on Kam singing, *Dongzu dage (ga lao) Guizhou minjian yinyue jikan* 侗族大歌（嘎老）贵州民间音乐集刊 [Kam Big Song (Ga Lao), Guizhou Folk Music Collected Periodical]), published in 1958, was another milestone in research and publications on Kam culture, and is held in this collection. Also of great value are three slim booklets consisting of reports on research conducted during the 1950s in Kam areas of Guizhou and Guangxi.[26] Two draft surveys of Xinhuang and Tongdao counties, Hunan, also date from this period, as does a collection of historical materials relating to Chinese Communist Party history of Sanjiang County during 1943–87.[27]

**1970s and 1980s**

While publications dating from the 1970s and 1980s, following the end of the Cultural Revolution (in 1976), are mainly focused upon general accounts of major aspects of Kam culture, language, environment and society, they also represent the firm beginnings of more detailed research exploring particular aspects relating to Kam people. Several English-language studies dating from this period are articles by You Yuwen and Peng Jianqun,[28] and chapters by Yang Quan and Zheng Guoqiao in the 1988 linguistic study of the Tai-Kadai language family (a collection of essays entitled *Comparative Kadai: Linguistic Studies Beyond Tai*).[29] Many other important studies on the Kam language (written in Chinese) also date from this period, as do various Chinese-language collections of Kam song. Of particular interest is the rare *Dongzu zuxian nali lai (Dongzu gu’ge)* 侗族祖先哪里来（侗族古歌） [Where Did the Kam Ancestors Come From? (Ancient Kam Songs)],[30] which contains the lyrics to twenty Kam songs of migration, thus constituting an important source for studies of Kam social history. A selection of these numerous and varied sources—which also include a number of gazetteers of counties in Kam areas—are listed in the selected bibliography below.

**1990s – 2010**

From the 1990s onwards, publications on Kam people, culture, language, society, history, and contemporary situation have increased markedly, and many focus upon specific aspects relating to Kam people. The University of Melbourne holds more than one hundred and twenty works from this period, which cannot all be listed or discussed here. English-language sources from this period include the second full-length book on the Kam people written in English,[31] two monographs on Kam architecture,[32] a book-length study of the Kam language in Guizhou province,[33] discussion of Kam indigo-dyeing,[34] and two bilingual English/Chinese sets of Kam song audiovisual recordings.[35] Three Kam dictionaries, some of which include English introductions and referencing, are also held.[36]
Far more extensive is the Chinese-language collection. This includes numerous gazetteers, several e-books, important collections of essays (particularly recommended are *Dongzu dage yanjiu wushi nian* [Fifty Years of Big Song Research]) and the two-volume *Dongzu bainian shilu* [Veritable Records of One Hundred Years of the Kam]), and a wide range of works in other areas, a selection of which are listed below. The collection is particularly strong in the areas of Kam singing and Kam architecture, and the publications are increasingly specialized by region, with works focussing only on Kam people in Hunan, Guangxi and, especially, Guizhou. There has also been a growth in publications recognizing the importance of space and place in relation to Kam music-making and other forms of culture.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the breadth and depth of this collection offers a very valuable research resource in both historical and contemporary materials. It permits a degree of longitudinal Kam-related studies that is unlikely to be available in many other collections throughout the world, and offers an extremely comprehensive insight into the research in many Kam-related areas that has been carried out by Chinese scholars. It would provide a rich background for any researchers preparing to conduct fieldwork in Kam areas, or undertaking comparative research relating to southwestern China and/or amongst Tai-Kadai-speaking communities. The collections of transcribed songs and song lyrics are also likely to be helpful to researchers working in areas related to Chinese music or poetry. Finally, the collection would be extremely useful for research in contemporary Chinese politics and/or society relating to Chinese state attitudes towards minority groups, and for studies of Chinese scholarly research amongst Chinese minorities. It would also be of use to anthropologists and social scientists interested in researching cultural change, and to human geographers exploring localized conceptions of space and place.

As the many rich and diverse aspects of Kam people and their fascinating culture continue to gain national and international attention, it can be expected that the collection at the University of Melbourne Library will prove to be of increasing use to researchers working in greatly diverse fields and disciplines.

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**Endnotes**

[1] Very special thanks to Bick-Har Yeung (Head Librarian, East Asian Collection, University of Melbourne Library) for her interest and great efforts in developing this excellent Kam-related research collection.
I gratefully acknowledge Dr Wu Jiaping (伍家平) for contributing the description of the current Kam socioeconomic situation, for the two maps reproduced in this article, and for comments on the relevance of the collection in relation to the discipline of human geography.


While the selected bibliography given below mainly covers books in the collection, it also includes publications in periodicals not currently available through CNKI, but held by the University of Melbourne Library. Journal articles are an important research resource, but as they are now widely available online they are not discussed here.


See Wu Wanyuan 吴万源, “Hubei E’xi Dongzu kaocha ji” 湖北鄂西侗族考察记 [Records of Investigation into the Kam of Western Hubei]. In Dongzu bainian shilu (shang xia ce) 侗族百年实录(上下册) [Veritable Records of One Hundred Years of the Kam], edited by “Dongzu bainian shilu” bianweihui [Veritable Records of One Hundred Years of the Kam” Editorial Committee], 726–32. (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe [China Literature and History Press], 2000).

A romanized Kam orthography was promulgated in 1958, but is not widely used.


[12] Some of the many names used to refer to the ancestors of today’s Kam included: Dongren 洞人, Dongjia 洞家, Dongmiao 洞苗.


[15] However, not all descriptions appear to be based on first-hand observations and there is much replication amongst these sources.

[16] A rare microform copy of the Liping fu zhi is held in the library’s collection.


[18] Including Alexander Hosie, Three Years in Western China: A Narrative of Three Journeys in Ssu-Chuan, Kuei-Chow and Yun-Nan. 2nd ed. (London: George Philip & Son, 1897); and Samuel R. Clarke, Among the Tribes in South-West China (Taipei: The Chinese Association for Folklore, [1900] 1984).


Beauclair’s *Ethnographic Studies: The Collected Papers of Inez de Beauclair* (Taipei: Southern Materials Centre, Inc, 1986) are also a useful source dating from this period, although not one held in this collection.


*Other significant early articles by Fang Jishen 方暨申 and Hong Tao 洪滔, both published in 1959 in *Yinyue yanjiu* 音乐研究 [Music Research], are available through CNKI; Fang’s article is also republished in Zhang and Yang, ed. *Dongzu dage yanjiu*, 165–87.*

Autonomous County, Guangxi), edited by Zhongguo kexueyuan minzu yanjiusuo Guangxi shaoshu minzu shenhui lishi diaochazu 中国科学院民族研究所广西少数民族社会历史调查组 [Society and History Research Committee for Guangxi’s Minorities at the Nationalities Research Institute Chinese Academy of Science], 1965.


[38] Zhang and Yang, ed. Dongzu bainian shilu.


Selected Bibliography of Kam-Related Research Materials

Materials are divided chronologically, corresponding to the discussion in the main text. For ease of reference, edited works produced by groups (rather than individuals) are listed under their title. All materials listed here are held in the University of Melbourne Library.

Pre–Twentieth Century Sources


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**Newsletter No. 56 (July 2010)**


**Jiaqing chongxiu yitong zhi: Guizhou** 嘉庆重修一统志：贵州 [Revised Unified Gazetteer of the Jiaqing Reign Period (1796–1820)], *yuan* 185–189 *ce*, *juan* 499–515 [original books 185–189, volumes 499–515]. (Cut-off date for administration was 1820, gazetteer completed 1842, ethnographic material mainly dates from mid-1700s: see David Holm, *Recalling Lost Souls: The Baeu Rodo Scriptures Tai Cosmogonic Texts from Guangxi in Southern China*. (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2004), 42). Reproduced in Zhongguo gudai dili zongzhi congkan 中国


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Newsletter No. 56 (July 2010)

古代地理总之丛刊 [Collection of Ancient Chinese geographical knowledge], Volume 32.


Li Zefeng 李泽奉, and Liu Ruzhong 刘如仲, eds. Qingdai minzu tuzhi 清代民族图志 [Illustrated Records of Ethnic Groups During the Qing Dynasty]. Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe [Qinghai People’s Press], 1997.


1900 – 1960s


Pingdeng Research Mtls. (Full title: Guangxi Longsheng ge zu zizhixian Pingdeng renmin gongshe Pingdeng shengchan dadui Dongzu shehui lishi diaocha cailiao 广西龙胜各族自治县平等人民公社平等生产大队侗族社会历史调查材料 [Research Materials on Kam Society and History of Pingdeng Large Production Team, Pingdeng Commune, Longsheng Multi-Ethnic Autonomous County, Guangxi]). Edited by Zhongguo kexueyuan minzu yanjiusuo Guangxi shaoshu minzu shehui lishi diaocha ziliao 中国科学院民族研究所广西少数民族社会历史调查组 [Society and History Research Committee for Guangxi’s Minorities at the Nationalities Research Institute Chinese Academy of Science], 1965.


Siyang Research Rpt. (Full title: Guangxi Shangsi xian Siyang xiang Tongzu shehui lishi jingkuang diaocha baogao 广西上思县思阳乡侗族社会历史情况调查报告 [Research Report on the Kam Socio-Historical Situation of Siyang Township, Shangsi County, Guangxi Province]). Edited by Zhongguo kexueyuan minzu yanjiusuo Guangxi shaoshu minzu shehui lishi diaocha ziliao 中国科学院民族研究所广西少数民族社会历史调查组 [Society and History Research Committee for Guangxi’s Minorities at the Nationalities Research Institute Chinese Academy of Science], 1963.
EASTERN ASIAN LIBRARY RESOURCES GROUP OF AUSTRALIA

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Tongdao Dongzu zizhixian gaikuang (chugao) 通道侗族自治县概况（初稿）[Tongdao Kam Autonomous County Survey (Draft)]. Edited by Tongdao Dongzu zizhixian bianji weiyuanhui 《通道侗族自治县概况》编辑委员会 [“Tongdao Kam Autonomous County Survey” Editorial Committee]. Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe [Hunan People's Press], 1959.

Xinhuang Dongzu zizhixian gaikuang (chugao) 新晃侗族自治县概况（初稿）[Xinhuang Kam Autonomous County Survey (Draft)]. Edited by Xinhuang Dongzu zizhixian bianji weiyuanhui 《新晃侗族自治县概况》编辑委员会 [“Xinhuang Kam Autonomous County Survey” Editorial Committee]. Publication details unclear, probably Changsha, 1959.


1970s – 1980s


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Yuping Dongzu zizhixian gaikuang 玉屏侗族自治县概况 [Yuping Kam Autonomous County Survey]. Edited by Yuping Dongzu zizhixian bianxiezu 《玉屏侗族自治县概况》编写组 [“Yuping Kam Autonomous County Survey” Editorial Committee]. Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe [Guizhou People’s Press], 1985.


1990s – 2010


Dongzu bainian shilu (shang xia ce) 侗族百年实录（上下册） [Veritable Records of One Hundred Years of the Kam]. Edited by “Dongzu bainian shilu” bianweihui 侗族百年实录编辑委员会 [“Veritable Records of One Hundred Years of the Kam” Editorial Committee]. Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe [China Literature and History Press], 2000.

Dongzu jianshi 侗族简史 [A Brief History of the Kam]. Edited by Dongzu jianshi bianxiezu 侗族简史编写组 [Editing and Writing Group for “A Brief History of the Kam”] and Dongzu jianshi xiuding ben bianxiezu 侗族简史修订本编写组 [Editing and Writing Group for a Revised Edition of “A Brief History of the Kam”]. Beijing: Minzu chubanshe [Minorities Press], 2008.


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Huang Yong 黄勇. Hanyu Dongyu guanxi ci yanjiu 汉语侗语关系词研究 [Research into Words Connecting the Han and Kam Languages]. Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe [Tianjin Ancient Records Press], 2002.


Liu Yahu 刘亚虎, ed. Tianlai zhi yin: Dongzu dage 天籁之音：侗族大歌 [The Sound of Heaven: Kam Big Song]. Ha’erbin [Harbin]: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe [Heilongjiang People’s Press], 2005.


Ni Dabai 倪大白. Dong Tai yu gailun 侗台语概论 [An Introduction to the Kam-Tai Languages]. Beijing: Zhongyang minzu xueyuan chubanshe [Central Nationalities Institute Press], 1990.

Pan Nianying 潘年英. Qiandongnan shanzhai de yuanshi tuxiang 黔东南山寨的原始图象 [Images of the Primitive Mountain Villages of Southeast Guizhou]. Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe [Shanghai Cultural Press], 2005.


Qiandongnan fangyan zhi. 2007. (full title: Qiandongnan fangyan zhi: Qiandongnan Miaozu Dongzu diqu hanyu fangyan diaocha yanjiu 黔东南方言志：黔东南苗族侗族地区汉语方言调查研究 [Records of the Dialects of Southeast Guizhou: Investigation and Research into the Han Dialects of Miao and Kam Areas of Southeast Guizhou]). Edited by Qiandongnan


Shi Kaizhong 石开忠. Dongzu kuan zuzhi jiqi bianqian yanjiu 傣族款组织及其变迁研究
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Yang Quan 杨权, and Zheng Guoqiao 郑国桥. “Dongzu” 侗族 [The Kam]. In Dong, Shui, Maonan, Mulao, Li Zu wenhuazhi 侗、水、毛南、仫佬、黎族文化志 [Records of the Culture of Kam, Shui, Maonan, Mulao and Li Ethnic Groups], edited by Wang Yao 王耀 (chief ed.), Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe [Shanghai People’s Press], 1998.


Zhongguo minjian gequ jicheng Guizhou juan (shang) 中国民间歌曲集成：贵州卷（上） [Anthology of Chinese Folksong: Guizhou (Volume 1)]. Edited by Zhongguo minjian gequ
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These works are not included in the Selected Bibliography, but are cited in the main text. Not all works are held in the University of Melbourne Library.


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Wu Wanyuan 吴万源. “Hubei E’xi Dongzu kaocha ji” 湖北鄂西侗族考察记 [Records of Investigation into the Kam of Western Hubei]. In Dongzu bainian shilu (shang xia ce) 侗族百年实录（上下册）[Veritable Records of One Hundred Years of the Kam], edited by “Dongzu bainian shilu” bianweihui 侗族百年实录编辑委员会 [“Veritable Records of One Hundred Years of the Kam” Editorial Committee], 726–32. Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe [China Literature and History Press], 2000.