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Research, Cultural Heritage, and Ethnic Identity

Evaluating the Influence of Kam Big Song Research of the 1950s

Research into the songs of the Kam (in Chinese, Dong) minority people in southwestern China began in the early 1950s, bringing about the so-called “discovery” of an important group of Kam choral songs that became known in Chinese as *dage* (big song). Research into big song radically altered academic views of Chinese music, brought about the creation of a new song genre, and had a major influence on the knowledge and promotion of big song outside Kam areas. Research in the 1950s and since has also both directly and indirectly influenced big song singing within Kam communities, and is thus critical to understanding contemporary cultural performance and its implications. Through focusing on 1950s research into Kam big song, this article explores the effects of musical research and demonstrates how deeply those effects can be interconnected with issues of cultural heritage and ethnic identity.

KEYWORDS: Kam (Dong) minority—China—big song—heritage—research—Guizhou

CHINA IS usually described as a multiethnic nation composed of fifty-five officially recognized minority groups in addition to the majority Han.* Despite several non-Han groups having held control of the region, the ancestors of China's many non-Han peoples were previously referred to using Chinese words for "barbarians" such as *Miao* 苗, *Man* 蛮, or *Yi* 夷. While the overt Han chauvinism (*da Han zhuyi* 大汉主义) or ethnocentrism that was rife even into twentieth-century China (LEIBOLD 2014, 6, 9) may not continue today, non-Han groups are still widely considered to be culturally and economically inferior to the Han Chinese and in need of assistance with modernization to "catch up" with the Han Chinese population (GLADNEY 1994; MACKERRAS 2003). Such modernization is conventionally undertaken through diffusing Han culture and education to ethnic minority regions, and by subjecting ethnic minority cultures to so-called "development" (see, for example, INGRAM et al. 2011). Thus, over the last century, China's non-Han cultures have moved from being seen by the (largely Han) mainstream as being at the margins of Chinese civilization to gradually becoming recognized within "Chinese culture" (LEIBOLD 2014, 2; BARANOVITCH 2010, 89), adding a further layer to the country's historically complex relationship between cultural heritage and ethnic identity.

The new, modern recognition of minority ethnicity and culture is reflected in the identification and utilization of Kam big song from the 1950s onwards. "Big song" is the usual English name for a genre of choral songs originating within certain Kam (in Chinese, Dong 侗) minority communities in southwestern China. The songs are also known by the Chinese name *dage* 大歌 (from which the English translation derives), and were inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009 (see *Grand Song* 2009).¹ As detailed below, their so-called "discovery" has been described as a result of research by Han Chinese researchers in the early 1950s, and was used as the first evidence demonstrating that the nation's music was not solely monophonic.² The documentation of big song was central in altering views of Chinese music in the eyes of the many Europeans who once considered polyphonic or homophonic music to be more advanced than monophony, and thus previously considered Chinese music as inferior to Western music.

The utilization of Kam big song to fill what was then perceived by some as a deficiency within Chinese culture also demonstrated the altered status of minority culture, and was an ironic contrast to centuries of prejudice against non-Han

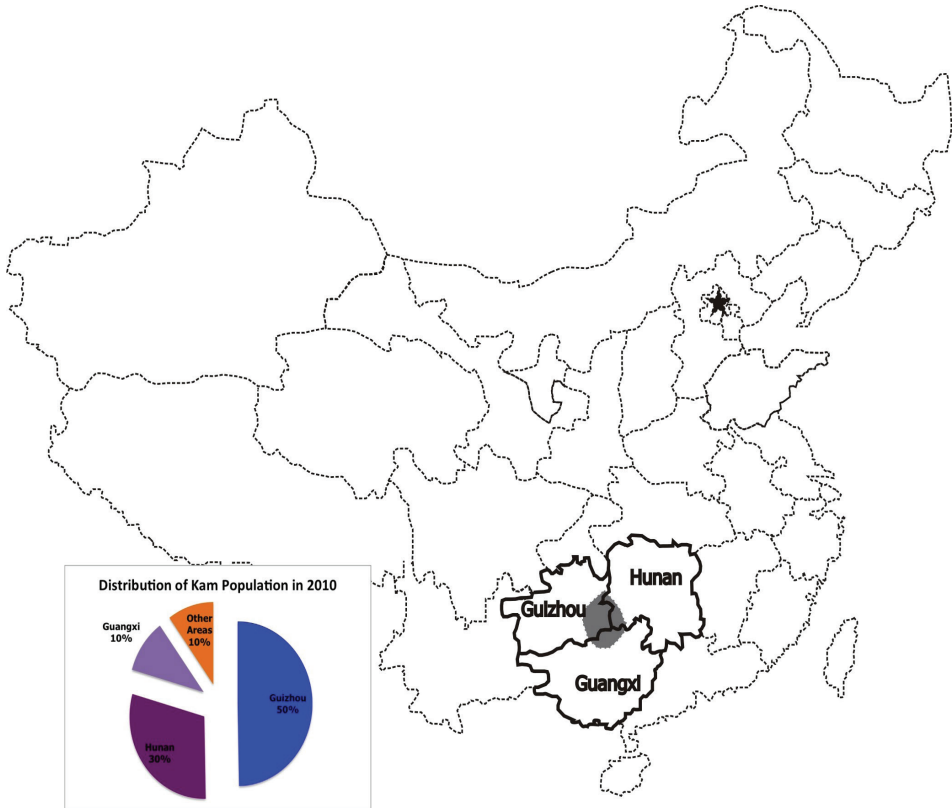


FIGURE 1. Center: Map of China showing Guizhou Province, Hunan Province, and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region—the three regions where most Kam people reside. The area shaded in grey indicates the precise location of Kam villages. Inset: Diagram showing the approximate distribution of the Kam population in 2010 (based upon data from GUOWUYUAN RENKOU 2012).

cultures and peoples. Research into Kam singing in the 1950s brought about the creation of a new song genre (that is, big song), and had a major influence on knowledge and promotion of big song outside Kam areas. Research undertaken and published during and following the 1950s has directly and indirectly influenced contemporary big song singing within Kam communities.

This article evaluates the influence—both within and beyond—Kam communities of the initial research into Kam big song that occurred in the 1950s, and explores how its impact is intertwined with issues concerning cultural heritage and ethnic identity. Through the case of big song we demonstrate the importance of considering the influence of previous research upon contemporary musical transmission and the performance of cultural traditions, while also foregrounding the ways that non-Han cultures are recognized and accepted to make the unified—and essentially Han-dominated—multinational state of China. Our analysis draws upon diverse disciplinary expertise and research experience. Catherine Ingram, an Australian-born ethnomusicologist based until recently in the United Kingdom,³ has conducted more than twenty-six months of participatory ethnographic fieldwork in rural Kam areas since 2004 and draws upon various experiences of learning, rehearsing,

performing, and discussing Kam music together with Kam villagers. Jiaping Wu, a Chinese-born human geographer now based in Australia, has conducted extensive research into the development of China—including the social and economic development of ethnic minority regions—and also draws upon his experience as a Kam person raised in a remote Kam village. This study thus combines multiple perspectives on the meanings of big song culture and its transmission and transformation.

KAM PEOPLE AND CULTURE

Kam people are mainly resident in eastern Guizhou, especially the southeastern part of Qiandongnan 黔东南 (or southeastern Guizhou, a joint Kam/Dong and Hmong/Miao autonomous prefecture) and the adjoining border regions of Hunan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, as indicated in FIGURE 1. According to the latest census, the Kam population was 2.88 million in 2010, accounting for 0.22% of China's total population (GUOWUYUAN RENKOU 2012). Approximately half the Kam population was distributed in Guizhou (49.7%), with the remainder in Hunan (29.7%), Guangxi (10.6%), and various other areas (10%). The first language for many of these people continues to be Kam—a tonal, Tai-Kadai family language with no widely used written form. Whether the Kam are native or migrant to their current region of residence is not clear. Analyses of Kam oral history and myths suggest that some of the ancestors of today's Kam people comprised a branch of the ancient Baiyue 百越 (Hundred Yue) people who long ago followed the rivers of the Duliu river system to reside in the area (see ZHANG 1993; 1994; SHI 1984). Large-scale migrations of Chinese from the east into today's Kam regions during the Ming and Qing periods are also documented (HERMAN 2007; GONG 1992, 907–30), and included the migration of ancestors of at least some of the people who now identify as Kam. Kam historical co-occupancy of the regions together with other ethnic minority groups also contributed to making the area culturally diverse.

Until recently Kam people relied primarily on farming, especially the farming of varieties of glutinous rice. They lived within a subsistence economy that integrated glutinous rice growing with hunting and fishing. Although rice farming remains a predominant economic activity (albeit with changes in the rice varieties grown), its importance as an income source has reduced. This has pushed many Kam people—particularly young people—to seek employment in cities. Income remittances from off-farm migrants have now become an important livelihood source for rural Kam villagers.

The migration of young people away from Kam villages for work, and sometimes also for study, has led to radical alterations in both Kam village society and the transmission of big song. Moreover, many of the migrants settle outside Kam areas: in the 2010 census, the proportion of Kam people resident in relatively developed areas on the eastern seaboard (including the provinces of Zhejiang, Guangdong, Fujian, and Jiangsu and Shanghai City) consisted of 7.2% of the total Kam population (GUOWUYUAN RENKOU 2012).

The villages in the rural regions where most Kam people live range in size from a few houses to a thousand households. The predominantly single ethnic group villages of the area are gradually increasing in ethnic diversity as more and more young Kam people travel away from their villages and marry others from an increasingly broad range of backgrounds. While previous generations of Kam established systems of local governance in later imperial periods, formal structures resembling independent nations were never developed. The tradition of Kam governance was characterized by a structure of Kam multi-village associations known in Kam and Chinese as *kuan* 款 (DENG and WU 1995; DENG 2001). The singing of songs from a range of Kam song genres—including big song, *ga sak-kun*⁴ (road-blocking songs), and *ga yeh* (*yeh* circle songs)—was an integral part of the social interactions underpinning these associations, and assisted in the diffusion of Kam songs. The use of place names and the names of specific villages, regions, or multi-village associations in the names of different categories of Kam songs within these and other genres further indicates the importance of regional interrelations (see WU and ZHANG 1991; INGRAM forthcoming).

Contemporary forms of distinctive Kam cultural and spiritual/religious traditions continue to be practiced in some rural Kam areas, and many of these traditions involve singing. For example, different genres of songs are used for greeting and saying farewell to visitors, entertaining important guests during a meal, celebrating the birth of a child, building a new house, weddings and engagements, and major communal village rituals. Today, the most well known of the many Kam song genres is big song. For generations, these songs have been sung in Kam villages within one small Kam region at New Year, when they are performed in the distinctive pagoda-shaped building known as the *dare low*.⁵ In this village context for big song singing, a group of male singers and a group of female singers sit opposite each other around the fire and take turns to sing big songs. The two different vocal lines of each song are sung at the same time, with each member of a singing group assigned to sing one of the lines. Since the Kam language has no widely used written form, the survival of these songs is essential for the continued transmission of much of Kam history, social structures, philosophy, and environmental knowledge (see MCLAREN et al. 2013, 59–76).

RESEARCH INTO KAM BIG SONG PRIOR TO THE 1950S

As was also the case for many other tribal peoples in southwest China, Kam people did not have an official name in Chinese history and were mentioned in various imperial records under a range of different names.⁶ Partly as a consequence of this situation, there are no descriptions of Kam singing prior to the 1950s that can be directly linked to current Kam musical practices, and the origin of big song is unknown. The most widely cited historical record describing the music of residents of today's Kam areas (and which mainly describes Kam areas of Guangxi) appears in the late Ming *Chiya* 赤雅 [A Dictionary About the South] (1635) by Kuang Lu 邝露 (1604–1650):

They do not like to kill, and are very good at music. They play the fiddle and the bamboo mouth organ. They sing long songs with their eyes closed, and bend up and down and kick their feet to perform a simple-minded dance.

(KUANG 1995, 46)

Although it is sometimes suggested that Kuang's statement "long songs with their eyes closed" is an early description of big-song singing, his description of the singing is hardly one that could pertain only to big song. Moreover, it is not even clear that Kuang visited today's big-song-singing areas.

The few firsthand records of Kam areas dating from the 1940s include those produced by Inez de Beauclair. De Beauclair briefly visited many Kam big-song-singing areas in 1947, and makes mention of the *dare low* where big songs are usually sung. In one instance she draws upon her own visit and also research by CHEN Guojun (1973) to describe the *dare low* and to mention that singing took place within it, but she does not elaborate on the type of singing performed:

A remarkable feature of the Tung-chia's [*Dongjia* 侗家, or Kam] culture is their drum tower [in Kam, *dare low*], which serves as a communal house.... In their own language the Tung-chia call the drum tower *ta lei*. Each village has to erect at least one tower on an open space within or close to the settlement.... When not accidentally destroyed by fire, the drum towers may reach a considerable age and finally collapse, as it is forbidden to tear them down. We saw such tumbled-down structures, which perhaps dated from the foundation of the village, and had been replaced by new ones.... Though the Tung-chia speak of the drum tower as an ancient institution, there is little mention of it in the records⁷ ... Though the women are admitted for the joint singing, the drum tower is predominantly a men's house.

(DE BEAUCLAIR 1986, 315–17)

RESEARCH INTO KAM BIG SONG DURING THE 1950S

Research into Kam big song during the 1950s needs to be understood in its historical perspective and in the context of ethnic research agendas of the period. The People's Republic of China (PRC) had been founded in 1949, and the 1950s were focused on recuperation after decades of war. The new socialist state actively carried out land reform and other key policies, and it was a time of idealism and utopian visions.

During the 1950s, large-scale ethnic categorization was also formally established. As Thomas Mullaney persuasively argues, while "Chinese ethnologists and linguists working in the 1930s and 1940s had already committed themselves to the formation and stabilization of a highly synthetic view of non-Han peoples in China's southwest" (MULLANEY 2010, 333), the ethnic categorizations that they developed were for research rather than governance purposes. Only once groups were identified through China's ethnic classification (*minzu shibie* 民族识别) project that began in the early 1950s were these contested categorizations developed for adoption within state governance programs. Through this project, Kam people were officially recognized by the state as an ethnic group—"Dong."

In the 1950s, shortly after the establishment of the PRC, researchers and Com-

unist Party cadres were formed into investigative groups known as “centrally-authorized ethnic visiting teams” (*Zhongyang minzu fangwen tuan* 中央民族访问团) and were sent to ethnic minority areas to commence the lengthy process of minority identification and classification. The group that visited Guizhou was led by well-known ethnographer Fei Xiaotong. Besides the group being charged with publicizing ethnic policies, they were also engaged in social and economic investigation of the areas (FEI 1951; FAN 2010). For example, they helped to unify different groups under the name Miao, and the first Miao autonomous region (the Kaili Miao Autonomous Region (*Kaili Miaozu zizhi qu* 凯里苗族自治区) was established in Qiandongnan in 1951 under their direction (GUIZHOU SHENG DIFANG-ZHI 2002, 6). However, during this period the team did not visit the Kam regions of Qiandongnan or study the Kam (LU 2011).

Similar work was conducted in Kam areas in neighboring Guangxi (QIN 2008): a multiethnic minority autonomous region (for Zhuang, Yao, and Miao as well as Kam) was established in 1951 (the Longsheng Multiethnic Autonomous Region [*Longsheng gezu zizhi qu* 龙胜各族联合自治区]) and a Kam autonomous region (the Sanjiang Kam Autonomous Region [*Sanjiang Dongzu zizhi qu* 三江侗族自治区]) was founded in 1952 (*Sanjiang Dongzu zizhixian* 2004). These two developments were made quickly in order to establish political control of these areas, particularly through the establishment of local government, the undertaking of land reform, and the elimination of bandits.

Until the first census, in 1953, ethnic identities were based largely upon people’s self-claims. Following the 1953 census the techniques of ethnic observation in China were amended, with greater state intervention regarding ethnic classification leading to the national and large-scale project “Investigation of the society and history of ethnic minorities” (*Shaoshu minzu shehui lishi diaocha* 少数民族社会历史调查) that was undertaken in various locations across the country between 1954 and 1964.⁸ In Kam big-song-singing areas this minority field research project was conducted in the Sheeam (Ch. Sanlong 三龙) region during October 1958 and June 1959. The resultant publication, a twenty-eight-page booklet titled “Research Materials on the Society and Economy of Sanlong Township, Liping County, Guizhou Province” (*Guizhou sheng Liping xian Sanlong xiang Dongzu shehui jingji diaocha ziliao* 贵州省黎平县三龙乡侗族社会经济调查资料), appeared in 1963 (ZHONGGUO KEXUEYUAN 1963). Although the research and publication did not focus on Kam music, the project provides a valuable firsthand description of the history, customs, economics, and daily lives of villagers in the region.

The first published account of big song singing appears in a discussion of Kam folk music in the 1953 article “A Basic Introduction to Kam Folk Music” (*Dongjia minjian yinyue de jiandan jieshao* 侗家民间音乐的简单介绍) (XUE 1953), published in the leading Chinese music journal *People’s Music* (*Renmin yinyue* 人民音乐) under the authorship of Xue Liang 薛良—a pseudonym used by Guo Kezou 郭可猷. Guo later stated that during 1950–1951 he spent a year in Kam areas: “During that period I used some of the time to learn Kam folk music” (XUE 1994, 34). Yet Mao Jiale, a researcher who subsequently worked on the first monograph about big song, describes a slightly different beginning to big song research:

[Big song research] originated in 1952 when Xiao Jiaju 萧家驹 (Nianyi 念一) and Guo Kezhou 郭可淑 (Xue Liang), musicians with talented insight, went to Liping to take part in Land Reform and discovered the treasure of Kam folk music—multi-part, heterophonic big song.⁹ This raised a great degree of attention. After the work of Land Reform was finished, Xiao Jiaju returned to Guiyang and took on the role of director of the Music and Dance Department of the Guizhou Province Literature and Arts Union. He suggested that a group be formed to carry out the *caifeng* [采风, collection] of big song. (MAO 2003, 33)

Regardless of whether this initial research into big song occurred in 1950–1951 or 1952, it was clearly completed during or before 1952. As the former Chairperson of the Minority Music Association FAN Zuyin writes in his major monograph on multi-part singing in China: “Soon after [the music workers had ‘discovered’ Kam big song], they took a Kam folk chorus to perform at the First National Folk Arts Meeting held in Beijing in 1952” (1998, 4).

It seems most likely that the “First National Folk Arts Meeting” which Fan states was held in Beijing in 1952, was actually the First National Folk Music and Dance Meeting (*Quanguo diyijie minjian yinyue wudao huiyan* 全国第一届民间音乐舞蹈会演) which, according to PU and ZHANG (2003, 6), was held in Beijing in 1953; perhaps Fan gives the date 1952 because the members of the folk chorus chosen to perform in Beijing would probably have left their villages late that year. The first known staged performances of big song within Kam areas date from even earlier, in 1951, when on at least one occasion big song was used outside the *dare low* in a staged performance to vent grievances about landlords during Land Reform.¹⁰

Research into Kam singing traditions, including big song, appears to have continued throughout the 1950s and perhaps also into the early 1960s—as indicated through articles published by Zheng Hanfeng (as HAN Feng 1957), FANG Jishen (1959; 1960), HONG Tao (1959), Xiao Jiaju (as NIAN Yi 1960), and GU and ZHAO (2003).¹¹ Some early research also appears to be undocumented: for example, according to Yang Xiao:

From 1953 onwards, music scholars and experts came continuously to Xiao Huang 小黄 [a well-known big-song-singing village in Congjiang County, Guizhou] to do research with differing scope and objectives.... From 1953, Zhao Kuangren of the Central Music Institute came to do *caifeng* in Xiao Huang, and music scholars continued to come (YANG 2002, 9).

Unfortunately Yang does not list any of Zhao’s publications, and none have appeared in our own extensive investigation, so it is difficult to confirm his visit.¹²

The most significant research into Kam big song during this period took place from May to August 1957. During these months, a group of five researchers (including Xiao Jiaju and Mao Jiale) undertook research in Kam big-song-singing areas. Their travels between Kam villages were entirely on foot, since at that time very few of the villages were accessible by road. With only “an accordion, a semi-tone harmonica, and a stopwatch to help them in their work” (MAO 2003, 35) they notated more than 130 big songs and visited eleven Kam villages, eventually pro-

ducing the seminal monograph *Dongzhu dage* 侗族大歌 [Kam Big Song] (GUIZHOU SHENG WENLIAN 1958). According to Mao,

In April 1957 [permission was received for a group to be formed to carry out the *caifeng* of big song] ... and the Music and Dance Department members Xiao Jiaju..., Long Ting'en 龙廷恩 (Beidou 北斗), and Mao Jiale (Jialuo 珈珞), with the addition of Zheng Hanfeng 郑寒风 from the Provincial Song and Dance Troupe and Qian Mingzheng 钱明正 (Qianyi 钱漪) from the Provincial Broadcasting and Television Station, formed a group ... with Xiao Jiaju as leader.

(MAO 2003, 33)

Because of its foundation in empirical research, depth of analysis, clarity of expression, and level of detail, the resulting monograph remains one of the most important and useful publications concerning big song. In contrast, only a small portion of the subsequent literature on Kam people is based upon actual research in Kam areas, and even reports based upon fieldwork are rarely founded on lengthy stays in Kam areas such as those of the 1957 team.

CULTURE, ETHNIC IDENTITY,
AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 1950S “DISCOVERY”

Many Chinese written accounts confirm the so-called “discovery” of big song during the 1950s by describing how this “discovery” was then used to disprove Western musicologists’ statements that Chinese music was entirely monophonic. These Chinese accounts refer to comments such as those of VAN AALST, who wrote of Chinese music that “the melodies being always in unison, always in the same key, always equally loud and unchangeable in movement, they cannot fail to appear wearisome and monotonous in comparison with our complicated melodies.... It is incontestable that Chinese music compares unfavorably with European music...” (1964, 84). As Fan Zuyin writes:

Although there are some descriptions of this kind of folk art custom and activity [that is, any kind of multi-part choral singing] in a small number of historical travel writings by scholars and in a small number of old county records, only a handful of these writings include explicit records of “multi-part” performance forms.... Owing to the paucity of these records of folk arts, non-Chinese people (including professional musicians) maintained the view that “Chinese music has always been monophonic” and “Chinese folk music does not involve polyphonic music,” and for a long time this view was common both within and outside China.... Finally, in the early 1950s many types of this artistic form of multi-part folk songs were discovered. Among these, the earliest to be collected, arranged, and researched was multi-part Kam folk song from the southwestern region. When music workers from the Guizhou Provincial Arts Bureau of the Masses participated in Land Reform work in Kam areas, they discovered the “Kam big song” form of choral singing.

(FAN 1998, 3–4)

These early activities of the music workers and the “discovery” of big song are now mythologized and elaborated as part of Kam big song history (see, for exam-

ple, LIU 2005, 4–5). The ongoing contemporary focus on the role of research into big song further indicates how radically 1950s big song research altered views of the nation’s music, and highlights the contribution of non-Han minorities to current representations of China’s culture. It further indicates the perceived significance of the 1950s “discovery” of the genre, and demonstrates the important influence of 1950s research in helping to shape the modern identity of Kam people and wider views of Kam cultural heritage.

Although this 1950s “discovery” was seen as leading to new understandings of “Chinese” music, the writings from the 1950s and 1960s do not give a clear picture of whether or not the music was actually perceived as “Chinese” by the researchers involved, or indeed by Kam singers of the time: at that point, how to effectively accommodate non-Han ethnicities into the new political setting of China was not entirely clear. While the changed position of the status of non-Han groups within the Chinese state was illustrated through the recognition accorded to big song, the acceptance of minority peoples as part of the Chinese nation was not a completely radical shift from earlier viewpoints.

For example, Zhao observes that before the mid 1990s most Chinese tended to present China (*Zhongguo* 中国) as “refer[ing] to no peoples other than the Han group and China proper until the 1911 revolution” (ZHAO 2006, 4). However, he demonstrates that during the preceding Qing Manchu dynasty a more expansive official definition of China was adopted. He cites the Qianlong Emperor’s 1755 pronouncement that:

There exists a view of *China* (*Zhongxia*),¹³ according to which non-Han peoples cannot become *China*’s subjects and their land cannot be integrated into the territory of *China*. This does not represent our dynasty’s understanding of *China*, but is instead that of the earlier Han, Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties.

(ZHAO 2006, 4)

Zhao also notes the long-standing complex relationship between ethnicity and membership within the Chinese state:

The term *Zhongguo* was first used around the tenth century BCE. Its literal meaning is “central state,” but it referred to no specific ethnicity or location ... because those who founded new dynasties often emerged from groups with different ethnic attributes than their predecessors, their understanding of what *China* meant varied over time.... Notably, for the non-Han people, the adoption of the concept of *China* did not lessen their sense of their own ethnic identity. For example, though the Jin and Yuan rulers¹⁴ drew a sharp line between the Han and non-Han peoples, they clearly identified their states with *China*.

(ZHAO 2006, 6–7; italics in original)

Furthermore, even ethnic categorization itself was never fixed within Chinese history, and the boundary between Han and non-Han was always variable. One example of this is the long history of the Han encouraging non-Han groups to become “cultivated” (*shu* 熟), which saw some members of those non-Han groups move from being considered “uncultivated” (*sheng* 生) people to becoming civ-

ilized, “cultivated” Han subjects, and which further complicates perceptions of non-Han within the Chinese state.¹⁵

The 1845 *Liping Prefecture Gazetteer*, detailing historical records of today’s Liping County (the county with the highest proportion of Kam residents in the nation), provides a clear example of such a situation—with the term “Miao” used to refer primarily to the ancestors of today’s Kam people:

With the kindness and strength of our great dynasty, we successfully controlled [the “barbarians”]. Those who were stubborn and did not obey have all reformed in their ways. They have become good people. Also, charity schools were built with Confucian teachers to train and guide, and an increased quota of enrolments, to encourage those to change. Because of this more students attend school and pass examinations, and with these people there is no difference between aboriginal and Han people. *Those who were formerly known as uncultivated Miao have become cultivated Miao. Those who were formerly cultivated Miao have become today’s Han people.* Furthermore, from this time on things develop daily and monthly. We can expect this place with short people with buns [that is, this backward place] can be changed into an advanced place. And the customs of singing and dancing under the moon will not be affected by these changes.

(*Liping fu zhi* 1845: *juan* 5, *dili* 4, 19–20, italics added)

Many researchers now recognize the fluidity of ethnic categorization throughout Chinese history. Some point to “flexible peripheries” and “shifting ethnic boundaries” (WANG 2006a; 2006b) which permitted considerable fluidity in ethnic categorization; others, such as Stevan Harrell, describe more static conceptual categories that underwent gradual shifts over time:

There has never been a rigid boundary around the category “Chinese.” Since earliest times, the people who have called themselves Hua or Xia or Zhongguo ren (people of the countries in the middle) or, of late, Han, have held an ideology of both cultural superiority and inclusivist expansionism, conducting what I have elsewhere called a “civilizing project”... the general trend has been one of expansion of both population and geography, particularly towards the southern frontiers. And the boundary has always been a gradual rather than an abrupt one.

(HARRELL 1996, 6)

Early Kam research did not focus on the cultural identity of Kam as a group aside from the researchers’ clear political purpose in showing “new” (1950s) China as a unified multiethnic state. Researchers focused on identifying and recording the differences between the non-Han and Han Chinese, and highlighted individual cultural elements such as myths and music.

In the case of Kam big song, its recognition can be seen as also representing the recognition of Kam culture (and, accordingly, the cultures of all China’s minorities) as part of the culture of the Chinese nation, thereby clearly indicating the status of minorities within the new Chinese state. Yet it is also significant for simply representing one particular stage in a long-standing and complex interrelation among notions of ethnicity, culture, and Chinese nationalism or identification.

THE INFLUENCE OF 1950S BIG SONG RESEARCH
ON KAM CULTURAL HERITAGE AND IDENTITY

The research on Kam song that was conducted in the 1950s drew particular attention to big song singing, and as the first published research documenting China's multi-part singing traditions, it gave big song further significance in both national and international domains. It contributed to the ensuing focus on big song above other Kam song genres, and was thus influential in big song becoming a primary cultural resource through which the state has engaged with Kam people. Moreover, the official recognition of big song has had an important role in shaping Kam people's feelings of affiliation with both their own wider Kam minority group and the entire nation, and its effects have been felt beyond the small area of big song's origins to impact on the whole Kam community.

Yet despite these processes, the exact positioning of Kam ethnic identity within the Chinese environment retains a degree of ambiguity. The use of big song in state-supported staged performances—many of which are given in the context of the unification of regional minorities or the celebration of official events related to the state or the Chinese Communist Party—has contributed greatly to a sense of Kam inclusion within the Chinese environment. It has also promoted certain aspects of Kam culture, especially among younger generations of Kam people. However, some members of the Kam community—especially those who have had limited or no experience of Chinese-language education and little exposure to modern notions of citizenship and statehood (particularly middle-aged women and older people)—do not experience such inclusion to the same degree.

The different positioning of Kam and Han people from the perspective of many rural Kam residents was particularly apparent at the time of China's nationwide celebrations for the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic in 2009 (further described in INGRAM 2009). Only a week or so before the 1 October anniversary, a group of Kam big song singers won a prize of 10,000 RMB (then approximately US\$1,450) in one of a series of high profile singing competitions held in locations central to the establishment of the PRC. The singers involved had a clear impression about the significance accorded their singing through this award, but ideas about the significance of the competition as a whole and its relationship to national politics seemed vague. A few days later, members of the same community enjoyed watching the sixtieth anniversary National Day celebrations on television, but many rural Kam residents described the festival as being "theirs" (not "ours")—as apparent through comments such as *kay da sep* ("they [that is, Han people] are holding a festival")—indicating a sense in some parts of the Kam community of being distanced from the festivities. Yet a major Kam traditional festival held just a few days after the National Day celebrations was widely attended by and obviously significant to Kam people, despite many complaining about the difficulty of listening at length to loud, clashing performances of *gen* (Kam bamboo mouth organ; in Chinese, *lusheng* 芦笙) that formed the focus of the festival.

From the standpoint of the early twenty-first century, it appears that 1950s research into Kam big song contributed to shaping Kam and non-Kam perspectives of Kam cultural heritage in the three main areas detailed below. First, 1950s

research was influential in promoting knowledge of big song outside Kam areas. Second, the research influenced subsequent increases in the cultural and symbolic capital associated with big song that were connected with the broader promotion of the genre. Finally, the new categorization of the choral genre was a clear result of this early phase of research. In addition, the social and economic transformations of the region since China's market reform that began in the 1980s have increased the ongoing impact of these early influences.

The Promotion of Big Song Outside Kam Areas

As noted above, research in the 1950s had a major role in promoting knowledge of Kam big song outside Kam areas and subsequently in radically altering understandings of Chinese music. These developments were an important foundation for the wider promotion of big song, and especially the development of staged Kam big song performances outside Kam communities. FAN Zuyin's comment regarding the direct connection between the "discovery" of big song by researchers and the immediate use of big song in staged performances (1998, 4) clearly underlines the connection between research and wider big song promotion.

The use of big song in staged performances, which began in the 1950s, followed immediately and directly from Han Chinese research into Kam musical traditions. Versions of Kam songs have now been performed in a wide variety of staged contexts ranging from village performances and county-level competitions to "Ten Thousand People Singing Big Song" (2005) and performances in major cities both within and beyond China—including in New York's Carnegie Hall (in 2009), in Australasia (in 2012), and in Washington, D.C. (at the United States White House in 2012 and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 2014). Today, the performance of big song literally "gives voice" to Kam people in both the national and international context, and is becoming the new symbol of Kam identity. Big song singing has since become a cultural marker that serves to unite Kam people (especially those who are outside of the original big-song-singing area), and the genre is now taken by some researchers, officials, and tourism promoters to be the core of Kam expressive culture.

Yet, at the same time, contemporary staged big song performances usually exhibit many differences from performances of big song in the village context or "village tradition." TABLE I outlines some of the main differences between the village and staged performance formats in terms of repertoire, lyrics, pitch, social context, and aesthetic evaluation (see also INGRAM et al. 2011; INGRAM 2012a; 2012b). Almost all the features of the big song "staged tradition" can also be found in the staging of Han folk singing—although the latter less frequently emphasizes the representation of allegedly "authentic" musical culture.¹⁶

Staged big song performances, now the product of more than six decades of development, have exerted a very significant influence upon Kam cultural heritage. In one sense, they have created a new, modernized expression of Kam cultural heritage which to date has been much favored outside Kam communities. Yet at the same time they have transformed elements of a dynamic singing tradition with great social significance into a static art form that is entirely divorced from

FEATURE	BIG SONG:	
	“VILLAGE TRADITION”	“STAGED TRADITION”
Repertoire	All songs selected by each group from their own local repertoire learned from a song expert in own village	Many songs are arranged versions of songs from different local repertoires, many recent performances consist of a “medley” of phrases from completely different songs
Lyrics	The most valued songs have meaningful lyrics with complex rhyming patterns, and can be up to 15 minutes in length	The most valued songs are not evaluated in relation to lyrics; those most frequently performed are melodically interesting, their lyrics often lack rhyming patterns (and sometimes also any logical meaning), and are rarely longer than 3–4 minutes
Pitch	Natural voice at a pitch suitable for each group	“Trained” voice at a high pitch
Social context	Sung as a meaningful social interaction between groups	Sung to entertain, as a symbol of authentic Kam culture, and as a source of income
Aesthetic evaluation	Singers demonstrate ability through possession of a large repertoire of high quality songs	Singers demonstrate ability through difficult vocal techniques and appealing voice quality and physical appearance

TABLE I. A comparison of some of the most significant differences between big song performances within the village context or “village tradition” and in the staged performance format.

its original cultural context. As noted earlier in this article, the village and staged contexts for big song singing have now formed two largely distinct “traditions.”

Throughout most of the twentieth century it was the village form of big song singing that provided the main musical material for the staged performances. Moreover, as relatively few Kam villagers were previously involved in performing big song on stage, staged big song singing had little direct connection with local big song singing and exerted little influence upon big song singing within Kam villages. Only a very few villagers had participated in staged performances, and there were no televisions and VCD or DVD players in Kam villages where people could hear these performances. Until the 1990s, when young people began migrating out of Kam villages (as explained below), systems of village song transmission had also remained largely intact (although most transmission did cease temporarily during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution).

Some new musical material was introduced through the performances of *xuan-chuan dui* 宣传队 (propaganda teams). These groups operated during the collective period and were composed of local villagers who earned work points through

giving staged performances rather than exclusively earning points through manual labour. The teams performed arranged or “artistically processed” (*yishu jiagong* 艺术加工) versions of big songs, especially those songs with lyrics praising the Communist Party that had become popular during the 1950s. While many of those songs are remembered fondly by older singers today, they are relatively small in number and were never considered appropriate for *dare low* performances.

However, since around the year 2000 large numbers of Kam villagers have become involved in increasingly larger-scale staged big song performances. In Kam villages, the viewing of recorded staged performances of big song on VCDs, DVDs, and now sometimes also the internet has also become common. These developments have led to many more villagers gaining familiarity with staged big song performances, and such performances becoming increasingly influential within the village context. For example, some village singers have begun to prefer singing the staged big song repertoire rather than the big song repertoire of their own region, and are frequently using the higher pitch and faster speed typical of staged big song performances when singing in the village context. While this more recent influence of staged big song singing upon village big song performances might appear to be adversely influencing local cultural heritage, the effect of the promotion of big song through staged performances within the dynamics of local cultural heritage maintenance is complex. As noted in INGRAM et al. (2011), the recent growth in the promotion of staged big song singing has largely coincided with the massive recent social changes occurring in rural Kam areas.

From our fieldwork it is clear that the majority of young Kam people aged between approximately 16 and 29 years of age (previously the key cohort of big song singers in Kam villages) have now migrated out of their communities. This migration has resulted from the gradual lifting of controls over mobility previously enforced by the *hukou* 户口 policy—a household registration system that categorized all Chinese people as either agricultural or nonagricultural residents, and controlled their movement between urban and rural areas.

In 2006, 43.7% of the 2.03 million people that comprised the total rural labor force in Qiandongnan (the largest area of Kam concentration) moved to seek employment in other places (QIANDONGNAN NIANJIAN 2009). In 2009, another survey showed that, of the young Kam people still living in Zhaoxing village, 60% preferred migration to staying in the village (XU et al. 2012, 54) (the survey apparently excluded those who had already migrated and were living outside of the village).

Many of these Kam migrants not only seek employment elsewhere but also settle outside Kam areas. The proportion of the Kam population resident in the traditional homeland of the bordering areas of Guizhou, Hunan, and Guangxi (as presented in FIGURE 1) has reduced, according to census data, from 93.7% in 2000 to 89% in 2010, while those living outside the region—in particular in the coastal areas—increased during the same period (GUOWUYUAN RENKOU 2012). For example, the proportion of Kam people in Zhejiang Province increased from 0.6% in 2000 to 3.1% in 2010.

Over a similar period more than 27,700 Kam people moved to Guangdong, which increased its share of the total Kam population from 1.9% to 2.9% (GUOWUYUAN RENKOU 2012). Similar large increases in the resident Kam popula-

tion also occurred in Fujian and Jiangsu provinces and Shanghai City (GUOWUYUAN RENKOU 2012). This migration is inspired primarily by economic reasons (WU and WANG 2012). However, the outcomes undermine the socioeconomic fabric of traditional communities. The cultural values of individuals, families, and communities and their cultural practices have been increasingly integrated with and in turn shaped by the culture of migration. Children grow up expecting to spend part of their lives outside Kam areas, and young villagers who do not migrate are seen by both the broader community and, especially, their own age group, as lacking ability. Another major change has been the development of ethnic tourism or village tourism, which is characterized by the commodification of the region's ethnic culture. This commodification is achieved through representing, packaging, and selling images of Kam culture and includes Kam singing and dancing performances (WU 2014).

Big song performance has become a tourist brand or key “selling point” to promote the Kam tourism industry, leading to the construction of a new image of the region. Through the joint promotion of big song by both local governments and the media, big song has become more widely known and the region now appears more attractive to investors and tourists. One prominent example of the role of big song in these developments is the huge “On-Location Performance of Kam Big Song from Guizhou” (*Guizhou Dongzhu dage shijing zhanyan* 贵州侗族大歌实景展演) that has been performed regularly in the evenings since March 2015 in a specially constructed three-thousand-seat outdoor performance arena near the county center of the main Kam county of Liping.¹⁷

In addition to the performances of big song in national and international arenas, annual big song festivals have been established in many big-song-singing villages such as Xiaohuang 小黄 in Congjiang County, and Yandong 岩洞 and Zhaoxing 肇兴 in Liping County. In Zhaoxing, for example, the tourism industry contributed 20% of the village's gross total income in 2009 (XU et al. 2012, 57). Big song performance has accrued symbolic capital to the region and enhanced the economic participation of the villagers.

These various social changes have adversely influenced the “village tradition” of big song and many other Kam song genres, and the earlier forms of big song transmission—whereby young, mostly unmarried people learn and perform the songs—have been shattered. However, the use of big song in staged performances and the involvement of married women in performing the songs (an activity that would previously have been prohibited in most big-song-singing areas) have provided an indirect stimulus for the same group of women to relax earlier prohibitions and take up public big song singing within their own villages.

Over the last decade this new form of village transmission and performance of big song has grown in popularity and has clearly played a crucial role in sustaining the tradition. The involvement of women in new social roles has also contributed to greater gender equality within rural Kam communities (as further detailed in INGRAM et al. 2011).

The Increased Cultural and Symbolic Capital of Big Song

The 1950s research into Kam big song was pivotal in attracting attention to the genre from those outside Kam communities. It thus had a major role in increasing the cultural and symbolic capital that has long been associated with Kam big song, and which can be observed in many Kam communities today. One interesting example of the recent strengthening of cultural and symbolic capital is the first staged performance of big song in 1953 mentioned above. As noted by Zhang Jing, the performances in Beijing in 1953 then led to one of the singers, Wu Peixin, being invited to perform outside China:

In 1953 ... Wu Peixin and three other young women from Liping performed big songs in Beijing for the first time. Wu Peixin was also the first Dong [that is, Kam] singer to perform outside of China, in [*sic*] Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 1953 and in the former Soviet Union in 1957. (ZHANG 2007)

Although Zhang carefully avoids mentioning the type of Kam songs Wu Peixin sang in her performances in Korea and the former Soviet Union, local reports and anecdotes about the performance that are in circulation within and beyond Kam villages claim that Wu Peixin performed big song in her international performances.

Almost fifty years later, in 2002, a large archway commemorating Wu Peixin's overseas performances was built over the entrance to a section of one Yandong village where she had lived. Chinese characters on the archway read: "Sizhou [village], Yandong—the first Kam village to take Kam big song abroad" (*Yandong Sizhou Dongzu dage chuqu guomen diyizhai* 岩洞四洲侗族大歌出国门第一寨; pictured in ZHONG 2007, 130). Many people (both Yandong officials and others) claim that Wu Peixin sang big song in her performances outside China, thus Yandong villagers were the first to sing big song overseas (see, for example, SHI 2003, 90; LIPING XIAN LÜYOU 2005, 34). It remains unclear whether Wu herself voluntarily made this claim or whether it was developed and promoted by state media and representatives; indeed, on a visit to Wu's natal home in 2005 a host of newspaper clippings that praised her achievement were displayed in a glass frame. Yet Kam people from other areas disputed the claim and disparaged the archway, pointing out that any claim of Wu singing big song on her solo overseas visit must be false since big song is a choral musical genre and hence cannot be sung by one person alone.

The fact that the performance of big song outside China was considered worthy of the construction of an archway, and the concern expressed by Kam villagers, clearly demonstrates the degree of capital understood to be conferred through big song performance. This is one of many examples indicating how deeply the capital associated with staged big song performance is significant within Kam villages. It also shows that any big song performances outside Kam communities—even those that are clearly within a "staged tradition"—are significant to Kam people as rare opportunities for the representation of Kam culture to a wider audience.

The New Categorization of Big Song

The third and final way in which 1950s research into Kam big song has influenced Kam cultural heritage concerns the new categorization of big song that was

established through the 1950s publications. In those early writings, the Kam choral songs sung in New Year exchanges in the *dare low* first became classified as a genre known in Chinese as *dage* (and, subsequently, known in English as “big song”). *Dage* is a translation of the name of the most important category of songs sung in these exchanges—known in Kam as *ga lao*. *Ga* translates as “song,” and *lao* can be variously translated as “big,” “old,” “main,” or “important.” Other categories of two-part songs were (and are) also sung in such exchanges, but each category has its own name (the names and actual categories vary among regional repertoires, but often also include *oy-hoy-ding*, *ga ma*, and *ga sor*, among others). However, 1950s researchers took *ga lao* to refer generically to all the different categories of songs with two vocal lines, not just to one of these categories.

As a result, in recent times and in certain contexts, Kam villagers now sometimes also use either the Chinese *dage* or its Kam equivalent *ga lao* to refer to all categories of choral songs sung in this context, thus revealing an altered and broader contemporary definition for the Kam name *ga lao*. However, in other instances some older villagers continue to understand the Chinese *dage* as equating only to the one particular category of choral songs that were originally known in Kam as *ga lao*. Clearly, the 1950s research in effect “created” a new genre of Kam singing that is now known as big song/*dage*, and which has influenced the way in which Kam cultural heritage is conceptualized by subsequent generations of Kam people.

While the initial categorization of big song was undertaken by Han people, it would be erroneous to view the categorization simply as the assimilation of a Kam folk genre to Han Chinese practices. The categorization made by Han Chinese was part of a trend in musical categorization that has parallels in many other countries—drawing on music research paradigms from Europe and elsewhere—and there is no indication that it was ethnically motivated. Moreover, the fact that the new big song genre is and has been recognized by many Kam and other non-Han researchers complicates viewing this categorization as being ethnically motivated.

SUBSEQUENT RESEARCH INTO KAM BIG SONG

After the research into big song conducted in the 1950s and early 1960s, the next period of empirical big song research did not occur until the late 1970s and early 1980s. As Stephen Jones notes regarding music research in the nation as a whole, “[Ethnomusicological] research was forced to cease around 1964 on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, not reviving again until around 1978” (JONES 2003, 290). Many Chinese-language publications about big song have been produced since that time, albeit rarely based on the kind of lengthy or participatory study of big song singing that forms the basis for the major works of the 1950s. While studies of recent decades cover a range of topics in relation to big song, many deal with issues of preservation of the genre and the ways in which big song might have value within cultural tourism projects (see also INGRAM et al. 2011, 75–80). For example, Fan Zuyin, in the published version of his opening remarks to the 2002 first symposium on Kam big song and the Ninth Annual Conference on Chinese Minority Music (held in Liping county, Guizhou), urges researchers to

actively participate in preserving the cultures they research by providing assistance to local governments wishing to present these musical traditions on stage:

We must earnestly practice what we preach, and actively participate in work towards the protection and transmission of minority musical cultures.... We must initiate provision of assistance to relevant local governments in their organization and development of minority musical cultures, with the aim of [developing] all kinds of musical arts activities (such as the “Drum Tower Culture and Arts Festival” occurring along with this conference). (FAN Zuyin 2003, 5)

The promotion of big song—and especially of staged big song singing—has resulted in the production of staged forms of the tradition, in new musical arrangements of big song, and in the reinforcement of new systems of big song categorization as outlined above. Such promotion has indirectly benefited Kam musical culture by providing a useful foundation for villagers in maintaining big song singing in the face of rapid social change. Yet it presents other challenges for cultural maintenance—for example, big song promotion rarely focuses upon the aspects of the songs that form the basis of the genre (such as the themes and structure of song lyrics), or on indigenous Kam aesthetic principles (see INGRAM et al. 2011).

One recent event that has been significant to more recent research on big song has been the inscription of big song on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The application for such inscription relied heavily on research of the 1950s as well as the continued efforts of recent scholars. Over the last decade, the research on big song and other UNESCO-inscribed folk traditions has also been utilized within a newly introduced official system purported to enhance the transmission of China’s folk traditions through the identification of particular villagers as “representative transmitters” (*daibiaoxing chuanchengren*).¹⁸

In the context of big song singing such identification has been problematic, and the payment of individuals for their roles in this system has led to conflicts over the traditional roles of cultural custodians in a number of communities. For instance, some song experts who are not recognized by the state as “representative transmitters” have been reluctant to assume their traditional role of song teaching—thus threatening the ongoing existence of the very musical tradition that would supposedly be supported by the identification of particular villagers in this way.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Early research into big song during the 1950s had a major influence on how big song has since been perceived, understood, and promoted, and consequently has both directly and indirectly influenced big song singing within Kam communities. It has also been closely connected with many important developments concerning notions of Kam cultural heritage and ethnic identity. As discussed here, in Chinese-language research, Kam singing has been used to address a perceived deficiency in “Chinese” musical styles—specifically, the lack of polyphonic music. As the unique singing style of a non-Han Chinese population was accommodated into expanded notions of national music forms within a multiethnic state, the status of Kam culture was enhanced and along with it Kam economic opportunities.

However, the initial phase of big song research had a major role in changes to the big song genre. It influenced the knowledge of big song outside Kam areas, the cultural and symbolic capital associated with big song, and the categorization of the genre. The social and economic transformations of the region since China's market reforms that began in the 1980s have further contributed to the degree to which these effects have influenced the current situation.

By identifying the ways in which 1950s research into big song has influenced big song singing today, this analysis demonstrates the importance of critical engagement with previous research in understanding current musical practice. It also shows the importance of music in understanding contemporary minority culture and cultural identity. Within Kam and other cultures that do not rely on transmission through written forms, music is particularly important in both cultural transmission and cultural representation or the creation of identity. That big song—a musical form—took on the function of signifying the status of minorities within communist China of the 1950s was not as surprising as it might seem, since musical forms have always been closely linked to ethnic identity within cultures that do not rely on languages with written forms. This was further expanded with the use of big song in staged performances that continued to promote and “fix” Kam identity.

Today, big song is not only very important in transmitting Kam culture but also in literally “giving voice” to Kam people. It creates a space for and heightened awareness of Kam people and culture within both national and international contexts, and enhances the capital associated with Kam cultural forms. As Tim Oakes notes in a study of Han communities in Guizhou, “heritage preservation and display are viewed by many Chinese scholar officials and villagers themselves as powerful tools of modernization and development” (OAKES 2013, 387). For the Kam too, modernization is achieved in a certain sense through cultural tradition. However, the coexistence of two clearly recognized Kam big song traditions—one in the village, and one on the stage (further detailed in INGRAM 2012a; 2012b)—is one of the most obvious distinctions between the Kam situation and that of the Han in Guizhou as described by Oakes. The coexistence of these two Kam “traditions” indicates that no matter how Kam heritage is presented on stage, or the degree to which Kam people might seek to—or have the ability to—control that presentation, big song singing clearly retains a deep significance within Kam communities themselves.

Given the importance of big song singing within Kam communities, and its significant connections with ethnicity and heritage, research into big song must be considered as having played an important role in determining the contemporary status of the Kam people. But despite the unprecedented social transformations of recent decades, the fact that contemporary forms of big song singing continue within Kam communities demonstrates that Kam people have maintained their own cultural heritage in the face of extreme external pressures and a lack of impartial state support. The great significance of this achievement also demands recognition.

NOTES

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1. TAN and CHENG (2003) and HAO (2013) give the population in Kam big-song-singing areas as “less than 100,000” and “approximately 100,000” respectively. These big-song-singing areas include many parts of southern Liping County, as well as some adjacent areas of Congjiang and Rongjiang counties, and comprise approximately 4% of the total Kam population. Before big song was inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009, it was among the four Kam musical genres identified in 2006 by the Chinese state as National-level Intangible Cultural Heritage (see ZHOU 2006).

2. Many Chinese musical genres may be categorized as “monophonic” or *danshengbu* 单声部 (single part/melody): of these, apart from those involving a solo musician, most are better described as heterophonic because of the widespread aesthetic preference or expectation for different performers in the group to play or sing variations of the same melody at the same time, rather than singing or performing a single melody in strict unison.

3. During the period 2013–2014, when most of the work on this article was undertaken, Ingram held a Newton International Fellowship at SOAS, University of London. She has since taken up a new position at the University of Sydney.

4. Because of the lack of data regarding the variant of the second lect of southern Kam spoken in big-song-singing areas, and because of the differences between this variant and the lect used to develop the official Kam orthography (that was promulgated in 1958 and based on the first lect of Southern Kam), Kam words in the main text of this article are transcribed using a practical phonemic orthography based on the Roman alphabet and commonly accepted (Australian) English pronunciation (see INGRAM 2010b; 2014).

5. According to Kam people, the name *dare low* is only used to refer to these tall, wooden, pagoda-like buildings and has no other meaning; it does not translate as *gulou* 鼓楼 (“drum tower/building”), as is usually used in Chinese and sometimes thence translated into English.

6. The various Qing dynasty *Bai Miao tu* (百苗图 Hundred Miao Albums) show some of that diversity in late imperial times (see, for example, YANG and PAN 2004; DEAL and HOSTETLER 2006). On the Kam and their ancestors in other historical sources, see INGRAM (2010a; 2010b).

7. It is unclear how de Beauclair comes to this conclusion. For example, the *dare low* of today may be similar to those documented in earlier written sources, including the 1845 *Liping fu zhi* [Liping Prefecture Gazetteer]: “Besides the pagodas (*ta* 塔) and multi-storeyed buildings (*lou* 楼) inside the prefecture and county center, [there are] so many [such buildings] in the countryside in all directions that they cannot all be recorded” (*Liping fu zhi* 1845, *juan* 7, *guanjian* 2, 30).

8. The connection between these 1954–1964 minority field studies and the ethnic identification project is not well understood. From the findings of the “centrally-authorized ethnic visiting teams,” and from the perspective of the establishment of the ethnic autonomous regions that began in the early 1950s, the work of ethnic identification and the ethnic identification project clearly began early in the decade. The aforementioned 1954–1964 field studies, which began with a team that visited Yunnan in 1954, continued and added to the earlier work.

9. Ji Zhou (2003, 508) gives a full biography of Guo Kezou (1917–1998) and Xiao Jiaju (1909–1996); as of a meeting in 2005 Zheng was retired but still active, and details about his life appear in YANG (2003, 493–94) and LING (2005). MAO (2003, 33) uses the Chinese term *zhisheng* 支声 (usually translated as “heterophonic”) in his statement, although I have never observed Chinese language sources on multi-part singing to consider heterophony as a category of multi-part music.

10. Interview with Yang Guoren 杨国仁 on 28 November 2005. As a young People’s Liberation Army soldier during the early 1950s, Yang was involved with implementing land reform in Kam villages in Liping County. Although of the Han majority, he became fluent in Kam and later had a major role in managing the first professional Liping County Kam performance troupe, then went on to research and publish extensively on Kam culture (see YANG 2003).

11. The original date of Gu and Zhao’s publication is not given in the 2003 collection, but it probably dates from the 1960s. Several other short general articles for this period that make some mention of Kam music (although again not necessarily big song) include ZHU and YANG (1956), LI (1959), and YANG (1961); Kam music is also mentioned in *Guizhou Sheng Liping* (1985).

12. Zhao’s research does not appear in any of the major journals of the period.

13. Italics as they appear in Zhao’s translation of the *Huangchao wenxian tongkao* (see HUANG 1965, 7338) in ZHAO (2006, 4).

14. The Jin were Jurchen people and the Yuan were Mongolian.

15. This process of so-called cultivation can be considered to have begun with the Tang *jimi* 羁縻 (“bridle and halter” or “loose rein”) policy, and was followed by various approaches in the Ming and Qing dynasties including subjugation through Confucian education, military force (including the establishment of permanent garrisons), and “using barbarians to control barbarians” 以夷制夷 (*yi yi zhi yi*), particularly through the native chieftain system (*tusi zhidu* 土司制度).

16. China’s minority cultures are those most frequently exoticized or “essentialized”; see, for example, SCHEIN (2000) and CHIO (2014).

17. The performance involves Kam staged folk singing (including the performance of one big song), and is similar in conception to Zhang Yimou’s “Impression Series” (*yinxiang xilie* 印象系列; see YUE [2013]).

18. *Daibiaoxing chuanchengren* 代表性传承人 has no conventional English equivalent and is translated here as “representative transmitters.” In this context, *daibiaoxing* can be understood as “representative” or “typical,” while *chuanchengren* is a person who does the action of “transmitting,” “passing on to future generations,” or “continuing a tradition.”

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