

Sharpening your own knife: towards understanding Kam 'big song' lyrics

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Abstract

Kam 'big song' is the main multi-part vocal genre of the Kam people, one of China's Kam-Tai language-speaking minority groups. 'Big song' is one of many indigenous Kam musical genres and for centuries has played an important role as a primary means of recording and transmitting Kam oral history, culture and language, doing so in multi-lingual songs whose texts include highly structured rhyming patterns, extensive cultural symbology and great aesthetic sensitivity. Drawing upon 18 months of fieldwork (2004-06) in Kam villages of Guangxi and Guizhou provinces (China), this paper discusses the most significant features of the lyrics of 'big songs'. It also considers the methodology and complexities of fieldwork that includes the study of song lyrics, and addresses some of the problems faced when attempting to present these lyrics in written English.

Technical Requirements

DVD projection, Powerpoint projection (both sound and visuals involved)