

## Concept of *Senl* in the River Basin Society of the Kam People in Guangxi and Hunan, China

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The language used for describing the ethnic culture and societies in Southern China and the aim of creating a unified expression for ethnic groups have limited the understanding of Chinese ethnic culture's diversity. This study aims to reevaluate ethnic culture through an examination of native folk concepts, rather than the national level administrative divisions, using the case of the Kam people. Kam intellectuals constructed their own ethnic history using a type of covenant that came from Chinese materials, while the local people hold a different sense of their living space, such as through the river and the river basin, called *senl* in the Kam language. Particularly, this study aims to reconsider the Kam society by focusing on the folk concept of *senl*. By analyzing the literature and the data collected from the field investigations in the neighboring area of Guangxi and Hunan, this study explores the diverse meanings of *senl* from the collective memory of local Kam people in various contexts, such as regional history and stories, geographical space, myth texts, folk beliefs, and intermarriage.

Keywords: Kam people, River Basin Society, *senl*, Southern China

### Introduction

During the Spring Festival in 2012, I visited a village inhabited by the Kam people (known in Chinese as *dongzu* 侬族)<sup>1</sup> to conduct a field study on kinship and social groups in the community. They primarily live in the northern part of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and the border area of Hunan Province in China. At that time, I was told that the Kam people are named after the geographical names of the rivers and mountains where they live and the historical characteristics of migration. Kam people, who live along flat riverbanks in the mountains, often form a basin society where several villages are located in the same river basin. The political, economic, linguistic, cultural, and folk tendencies seem to be different for each river basin community. This kind of local unit is called *senl*<sup>2</sup> in Kam language, which is a customary community closely linked by geographical ties, and it is said that it includes mutual support between relatives and villages.

The host of my homestay, named *neix qiv* (a female villager of Gaoxiu in her forties), is a member of the literary and artistic performance team in the village. She can sing folk songs, dance, and also play Guiju (桂劇 the opera of Guilin dialect). Therefore, she participates in folk-art exchange activities in the county every year. The Chinese New Year is her busiest time of the year. Except for performing on the village stage on New Year's Eve, from the second day of the Spring Festival to the beginning of February, they went to the surrounding villages with the Lusheng (蘆笙)<sup>3</sup> team almost every night to participate in the exchange visits between villages. Local people

call this *bail week yeek*<sup>4</sup>. There are not only songs and dances but also Kam drama (Dongxi 侗戲, a Chinese opera genre of Kam), Guiju, and other folk-art performances, which are extremely lively. Every time I went back to the village during winter vacation, I accompanied her everywhere for *bail week yeek*. Besides the theatrical performance team and Lusheng team, young men who return to the village from their workplaces also participated in these activities. During the Spring Festival from 2012 to 2018, I went with *neix qiv* to visit villages including Pingtan, Pingri, Gaoyou, Gaobu, Cencong, Yanglan, Gaotuan, Cenxiu, Dutian, and Hengling, the residents of which were also invited to Gaoxiu in turn. Interestingly, most of these villages are located around the same Pingtan River basin.

Among them, during the Spring Festival of 2013, we went to the Xiadutian Village located downstream of Pingtan River. On that day, the host village and the guest village wrote couplets for each other, while the Kam singer *bux sib* (a male villager of Gaoxiu in his sixties) embedded the name of both villages at the beginning and end of the performance to enhance traditional friendship that had been going on since the time of their ancestors. Therefore, I once again noted the importance of the regional relationships and associations related to *nynal* (means river) and *senl* for local residents.

The People's Republic of China is now a multi-ethnic country, and Han Chinese is also considered as one of its ethnic groups, along with 55 other ethnic minorities. This situation was created by the Chinese government's ethnic identification/classification project during the 1950s to 1980s, and the Kam is no exception. The Great Leap Forward policy from 1958 to 1961 and the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 destroyed China's culture, society, politics, and economy; rural areas, including ethnic minorities, were severely hit. Reform began in 1978, gaining strength in the 1980s. The ethnic policies have improved and there has been a trend of ethnic restoration of power and ethnic cultural revival in various regions. Throughout Southwest China, the popularization of ethnic characters and the introduction of school education were carried out during this period. Ethnic groups that had no written language were also forced to create ethnic characters based on Arabic Letters in the 1950s and experiments were conducted on these. However, owing to the theory of ethnic integration, the implementation was frustrating. As a symbol of the revival of ethnic culture, the experiment of ethnic character education has been selected again. In addition, triggered by the trend of sightseeing and preparation for the world heritage application, we can see the trend of re-understanding and activation of ethnic culture [So 2006: 30–31]. Under the background of the social trend of the transformation of ethnic and religious policies after the 1980s, and the compilation, construction, and emphasis of the 'ethnic culture' and 'ethnic history' of ethnic groups themselves, Kam elites are committed to creating the history and culture of their society as a single ethnic group. It is reflected in the accumulation of historical books, investigation reports, local magazines, and academic papers on national history and culture published after the 1950s.

Several cultural elements as symbols of the common origin, culture, or religion of the Kam people have also been prompted. Among them, the architectural culture, such as the Drum Tower (*gulou* 鼓楼, pavilion building with drum) and the Wind and Rain Bridge (*fengyuqiao* 風雨橋, wooden bridge with roof) are regarded as the Kam people's cultural symbols that are renowned all over the world since 1985 [Kaneshige1998: 135]. There are also discussions on the culture

of *gax laos* (Kam big song, *Dongzu Dage* 侗族大歌 in Chinese, means ritual singing), *Kuant* (a social system based on the covenant and customary law), *bux lagx* (patrilineal descents), and the faith of *sax* (a guardian god) or Lord *Feishan* (a tutelary deity, the god of ancestors) after 1990. However, according to Kaneshige's summarization, in the ethnic history books written by Kam intellectuals after the 1980s, such as *the General History of the Dong Nationality* (侗族通史), the created myth with incoherent accounts and suspicion of fabrication was quoted without notes, and the farfetched parts in the explanation of the historical process of the formation of the Kam were also superficial. These are historical accounts that contain the intentions and aspirations of Kam intellectuals and seldom discuss the differences in the understanding of Kam people living in the village society [Kaneshige 2019].

Kam elites claim their society to be a 'kingdom without a king,' as a covenant organization that used to widely exist in Kam people's residential areas, implementing military and autonomy according to customary law, which was called *kuant* 款 (*covenant* 盟約 in Chinese) [e.g. Yang 1990; Pan 1991; Deng & Wu 1995; Shi Kaizhong 2009; Geary et al. 2003: 62–76]. According to the results of my field investigation, since the Kam people do not have a written system, there is no clear record of the history of the social organization called *kuant*, and the local residents have no detailed knowledge or memory about it. But this does not mean that a traditional unity and network have not been formed in their community, such as the aforementioned *nyal* and *senl*.

In this paper, I attempt to analyze the social characteristics of the Kam people by focusing on a traditional concept, *senl*, which is related to the region or community space. This study aims to clarify what *senl* is and how it relates to Kam culture from various contexts of the field site such as regional history and stories, geographical space, myth texts, folk beliefs, and intermarriage, among other. In this interest, I will first outline a brief introduction of the Kam people and their culture and then analyze what *senl* means to the local people, and how they structure and practice a local community as a *senl*, by referring to literature and using records collected from uninterrupted field investigations in the neighboring area of Guangxi and Hunan from January 2012 to August 2017.

### Kam people and culture

The Tai ethnic groups are more distributed from the Southeast Asian mainland to South China, among which, the Kam people mainly live in the northeast region of these areas. Although the Kam community is politically separated from the category of Southeast Asia, from the perspective of the ethnic system, it can be said that it belongs to the Southeast Asian mainland [Obayashi 1984: 2]<sup>5</sup>. Kam people have been categorized as one of the 55 ethnic minorities in China since 1953. They are mainly resident in eastern Guizhou, especially the southeastern part of Qiandongnan 黔东南 (or southeastern Guizhou, a joint Dong, and Miao autonomous prefecture) and the adjoining border regions of Hunan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, which is at the eastern border of the Yunnan Guizhou Plateau in China (as indicated in Figure 1). According to the 2010 census, the Kam population was 2.87 million in 2010, accounting for 0.2161% of China's total population [Guowuyuan Renkou Pucha Bangongshi & Guojia Tongjiju Renkou he Jiuye Tongjisi (eds.) 2012], of which about half (1.43 million, 49.7%) was distributed in Guizhou, with the remainder in Hunan (0.85 million, 29.7%), Guangxi (0.3million, 10.6%), and various other



Figure 1. The residential area of Kam people in China (made by author)

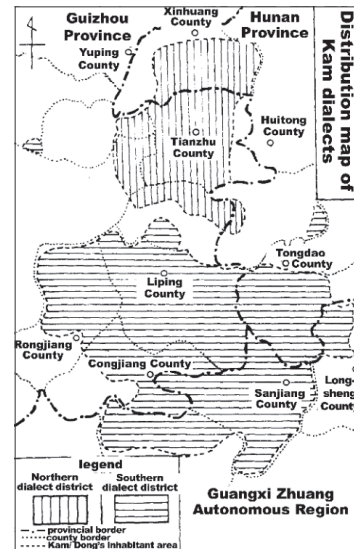


Figure 2. Distribution map of the Kam dialects (based on the figure made by Kaneshige [1998])

areas (10%). Moreover, since the mid-1980s, the number of Kam people in Zhejiang, Guangdong, Hubei, Fujian, and other cities has gradually increased, as more and more young people seek work there.

The first language for many of these people continues to be Kam—a tonal, Tai-Kadai family language with no widely used written form. The Kam people are different from many other Tai ethnic groups in China, such as the Dai people in Xishuangbanna. They do not belong to the Theravada Buddhist circle, but to the cultural circle of Chinese characters in history and have been deeply influenced by the culture of Han Chinese, which often appears in their folk beliefs and local documents. Moreover, they started using the Han surname very early. Even today, newborn children are named after their father's surname to show that they have the same surname as their paternal ancestors.

Among the cultural elements of the Kam people, public buildings such as the Drum Tower and the Wind and Rain Bridge are prominent and eye-catching. Drum Tower is the gathering place of a Kam village and was called *gulou* in Chinese because it was equipped with a drum to sound an alarm to prevent bandits and foreign enemies from invading their territory. The Wind and Rain Bridge refers to a bridge with a roof that can serve as protection against wind and rain, which also becomes the reason why it is called *fengyuqiao* (among which *feng* means wind, *yu* means rain, *qiao* means bridge) in Chinese. The interior is equipped with a stool, which can be used for rest, shelter from the rain, or social communication. Many Taoist deities such as *Guangdi* (關帝, Lord Guan) and the god of the land (土地神) are enshrined in the bridge. However, people in the survey area hardly use these two words in their daily life. Instead, they used the words *liang tingc* (涼亭) and *jiuc* (橋).

Kam is divided into two dialect regions. According to the dialect, it is roughly divided into

the northern and southern dialect areas, bounded by Qimeng (啓蒙, placename) in the south of Jinping County, Guizhou [Edmondson & Solnit 1988: 21] (refer to Figure 2). The northern and southern dialects do not differ much in terms of vocabulary and grammar, but obvious differences exist in pronunciation and tone. In addition, the Kam culture is quite different. The northern dialect areas of Kam include Zhuxian, Jinping, Jianhe, and other Kam autonomous counties. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Han people migrated to the region in large numbers, focusing on the timber sales in the Qingshui River basin, and the local economy was prosperous [Luo 2012]. Therefore, through contact and exchanges with the Han people, the Kam were deeply influenced by the Han culture. In contrast, the southern dialect areas of Kam include Rongjiang, Congjiang, Liping County in Guizhou, Sanjiang, Longsheng, and Rongshui County in Guangxi, and Tongdao County in Hunan. The Chinese culture reached these areas slowly with a weaker influence than that of the north, which helped retain many unique languages and cultures of the Kam. For example, as far as the distribution of drum towers and wind and rain bridges are concerned, there are more of them in the southern dialect area, but fewer in the northern dialect area [Wang 1987: 48; Qin 1991: 167]. Therefore, the local social system *senl* that this paper focuses on also mainly take the southern dialect area as the research object.

Kam people have no native characters, so when taking notes, they use Chinese characters to mark the Kam language in both phonetic and ideographic aspects. In 1958, the government produced the phonetic notation of Kam using the Roman script, which was then formulated as Kam characters. After the revision, it is now popularized through school education. Few Kam people can use this Roman script, but for the Kam elites, it plays an important role in recording and preserving their ancient songs and folklore that had only been orally transmitted before.

### Diverse meanings of *senl* in the Kam language

The Kam word *senl* has many meanings. In recent years, a survey of Kam language texts pointed out that *senl* is a geographical concept, which can refer to its spatial scope (including the world of rivers, mountains, etc.), while *senl* also has abstract and specific meanings [Zhang et al. 2008: 66]. In the former case, for instance, *senl jinc* means people living in the mountains, *senl nyal* means people living near rivers, *senl deih* means this world or the world all humans live in [Zhang et al. 2008: 66]. According to Kaneshige's survey of *fengshui* in the Linxi Township, the layout of villages in Linxi Township is mainly divided into two types: *senl* and *longl*, that is, 'villages on the flat land between rivers and mountains' and 'villages in mountains far away from rivers' [Kaneshige 2007: 27]. In short, *senl* mainly refers to the flat land between mountains and rivers, while *longl* mainly refers to mountains, mountainous areas, or hillsides. Moreover, according to his research on the worship of the *sax* (the guardian god of the Kam village) in Linxi Township, the village of Yanzhai has a general altar of *sax*, called *sax senl* or *sax yangp*, which is positioned as the guardian god which protects several villages in a specific area. The word *senl* here refers to a specific area and the word *yangp* refers to the township. There is also a section of the folk song '*sax yangp mags dah suik naenl jinh xil liu*', which discusses that *sax yangp* has a higher status than other guardian gods but lost to the *sax* of *xil liu* (placename) [Kaneshige 2013: 36]. It can be seen here that both *senl* and *yangp* represent an area with a relatively certain range.

The residents of Linxi Township often call the area or village where Kam people live *senl senl xaih xaih*. Furthermore, they called the neighboring Kam villages *danh senl* and the Kam villages that live together by the same river *senl nyal* (*nyal* means river). For villagers of Gaoxiu Village, Gaobu, Qiaozai, Yanglan, Pingtan, and other Kam villages in Hunan at the upper reaches of the Pingtan River, and Linxi, Guandong, Pingyan, Chengyang, and other villages at the lower reaches of the Pingtan River (also called Linxi River in local society), are both regarded as *danh senl*. For the residents of the Kam village group in the Pingtan River, the Kam village groups in the Miaojiang River, Rongjiang River, Bajiang River, and other basins in Sanjiang County are also called *senl nyal*. As each *senl nyal* is separated by mountains, the living space is relatively blocked. Even the upper reaches of the Pingtan River and the lower reaches of the Pingtan River are separated by a mountain called ‘Maoshan (猫山)’ so that the villages of each river basin become different *senl nyal*. Kam people in the survey area also have the words *senl daol* or *senl jiu<sup>6</sup>*, which means ‘our *senl*’ or ‘the place where we live’. Moreover, residents call going out to work *bail senl dav gong<sup>7</sup>*. The phrase *bail senl* here, depending on the situation, means ‘going to a place far away from where you live’, ‘going far away from your hometown’, or ‘going out and seeing the world’. In this case, for residents, *senl* is a relatively remote space and at some distance from their location. The term *bail senl* is used to refer to the situation when someone left his/her hometown where he/she had lived for many years and went to Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, Shenzhen, Guangzhou and other cities in Guangdong Province to work, study, or do business.

While few people clearly remember the history, many Kam villages have legends about how their ancestors came to their current residence (called *ongs bux laos senl* in the Kam language). They have legends about the history of each resident area. For example, in the legend of Linxi Township, Sanjiang County, Guangxi, and its nearby residents, titled ‘the head is in Guzhou (a place in Guizhou) and the tail is in Liuzhou (a place in Guangxi)’ and sang “*ongs bux laos senl, sax bios laos menl, juis laos wenc, nyenc laos senl, liebc dih jiv menl, liebc senl jiv xaih, liebc xaih jiv nyenc.*”<sup>8</sup> The translation is as follows, “(It’s said that at that time) *ongs bux* (ancestor) entered the *senl* (this place of residence), *sax bios* (the god of thunder) entered the sky, *juis* (the soul of the dead) entered the cemetery, and *nyenc* (humans, human beings) born in the *senl*. After the earth is built, the sky is opened up. After establishing the *senl*, *xaih* (village) is created [Wu & Liang (eds.) 2009: 559–560].” It can be seen from this that the word *senl* here is the place where ancestors first settled, and Kam people living in *senl* today are considered to be an ethnic group with a common ancestor. Moreover, after the establishment of *senl* for human life, as the subordinate unit of *senl*, a smaller regional unit *xaih* was built. That is to say, *senl* was established before *xaih*.

In another case, the word *senl longl* refers to the world where people live in high mountains, dangerous peaks, or remote areas; here the word *senl* refers to specific geographical spaces. According to the abovementioned oral heritage of the Kam people about *kuant biingc<sup>9</sup>*, *senl* is often considered a river basin-based society. As what is sung in the oral legend named ‘*xebc nyih biingc dul xil saml biingc kuant*’ (12 gathering places, 13 covenant organizations 十二款坪十三款場款) spread among Kam people in Longsheng County, Sanjiang County in Guangxi, and Tongdao County in Hunan, there are 13 covenant organizations in the neighboring areas of Hunan and Guangxi, which is a joint organization of several villages adjacent to the same river or nearby area (see Figure 3). As seen from this oral legend, *senl* seems to be the unit corresponding to the combination of



villages, especially villages that have a close relationship with the same river. My area of investigation is one of them, named as the sixth *senl*. In these Kam language texts, the space scope of *senl* and the location of their gathering places are located are described with fixed phrase expressions such as *dinl senl* (downstream of the river), *gaos senl* (upstream of the river), *dav senl* (center of the river)<sup>10</sup>, *biingc* (flat, gathering place), *abs kuant xih* (formed a covenant organization), among others.

There are similar legends in Linxi Township, Bajiang Township, and Dudong Township of Sanjiang County, Guangxi, or Congjiang County and Liping County, Guizhou. For instance, according to the ‘*jus kuant biingc kuant*’ (nine gathering places 九款坪款), nine covenant organizations in Guangxi and Hunan had been composed of several villages along the river, among which there are also several river courses of overlapping with the scope of *senl* mentioned in the above legend. Local people clearly remember the scope of each specific *senl* by referring to the village names on both ends of the river section and the location where the member villages gathered. The above cases are all villages in river areas, and the *senl* of the basin society based on rivers can be considered equivalent to the covenant organizations in previous studies. While there are also cases where the covenant organizations don’t overlap with the river basin-based society and are composed of villages in mountainous areas, these are outside the scope of the present study.

*Senl* can also refer to a natural village or an administrative village. Kam people in Linxi Township, Longsheng County, and Sanjiang County, Guanxi have a popular saying, ‘*yedx sagc laos xaih, songk juis haih nyenc, daol geis xiut mao mungx gaeml, laeml mao ugs senl*’ [Wu & Liang (eds.) 2009: 524–525], which means ‘If there is someone who has brought a thief into the village or released poison to harm others, we will drive him/her out of the village because such Kam people are not necessary for us.’ In this situation, *senl* can be regarded as *xaih* and can refer to a village. The word *senl* is often used to refer to ‘village’ in the lyrics of the love songs in Linxi Township. For example, in the words of a song, ‘*maenl kenp liix tuh jonv senl yaoc*’ [Shi Zuxun 2016: 80], meaning ‘the road is far away, my village’, *senl* means ‘village’.

In the recent research on the Kam’s oral text, when Kam researchers translated the scope of the Kam word *senl* into Chinese, they interpreted *senl* as ‘village’ (called *cun* 村 in Chinese) which is almost equivalent to the current administrative division unit. Almost all Chinese translations of the textbook *Dongzu Kuanqi* and *Dong Kuan* (all means *kuant cix* 款詞, a type of oral text of the Kam) translate *senl* into ‘village’. As seen in the new creations of oral inheritance by singers or other

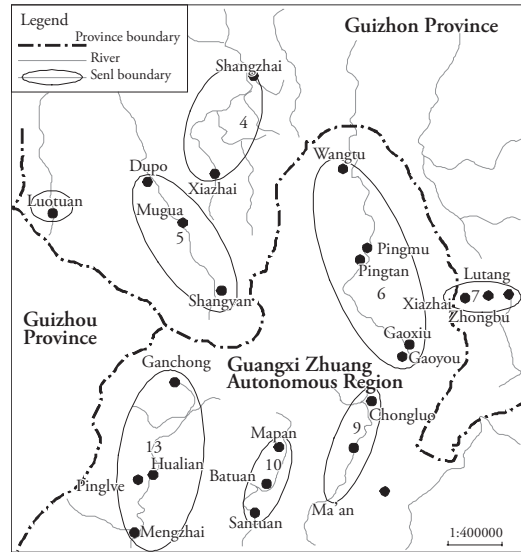


Figure 3. Examples of *senl* located in the neighboring areas of Guangxi and Hunan according to the ancient songs<sup>11</sup> (based on the figure made by Kaneshige [2002])

inheritors in recent years, ‘village’ is often translated into *senl*. For example, in the legend of ‘*angs kuant kaenp senl*’ [Yang Zaimao 2014: 59–60], which is widely spread in Kam village in Sanjiang County, *senl* means ‘the whole village’<sup>12</sup>. At the beginning of the story, there is a sentence ‘*jus mags eis dah wags, wags mags eis dah senl.*’ The translator said that its meaning is, ‘Although the family is big, the patrilineal descent is bigger than the family, and the village is bigger than the patrilineal descent.’ On the other hand, in other ancient legends, ‘village’ is expressed as *xaih*. Therefore, while *senl* has also been used to refer to ‘village’ in recent times, it basically means ‘basin society’ or ‘basin circle’.

### The usage of *Senl* to mean a river

In the ancient songs of the Kam people in the survey area, *senl* is often represented as equivalent to *nyal*, which means ‘river’. Some Kam residents in Gaoxiu and Gaoyou Village have heard the words to a song, ‘*naemx il jiuc nyal uip, bix xeengl pangp taemk, xegt il senl nyenc, bix xiangp hoc qip,*’ meaning ‘because we live in the same river, we can’t compete with each other, because we are people of the same *senl*, you can’t destroy the harmony and friendly relationship with each other,’ but the source of this song is unknown. Local people sing praises or Kam *kuant* (a kind of oral song) to the villages they visit during traditional festivals and activities. The main content of these songs is to praise the history of the local Kam people, good *fengshui*, and features of the village. In the words of the songs praising houses, drum towers, villages, mountains, streams or rivers of a specific area, *senl* is often mentioned as a regional unit associated with rivers. There is a folk song that the Kam singers in Gaoxiu and Gaoyou are familiar with, whose lyrics ‘*jinh liaox il jiuc nyal buc il jiuc nyal, jinh liaox il jiuc senl buc il jiuc senl,*’ mean ‘when entering a river, we sing a song to praise the river. when entering a *senl*, we sing a song to praise the *senl.*’ In this sentence, *senl* is equivalent to *nyal* or *il jiuc nyal*, and refers to a river, or a place formed on the basis of a river basin for local people.

As *ongx yeh* (a male villager of Gaotuan, born in 1947) put it, it is generally believed that *senl* can be used to indicate the structure and location of the river basins. Based on the text, the following will show how a *senl* has been described.

Table 1. The examples of *senl* described in the local Kam text

Text in Kam language	English translation
<i>dinl senl liongc ngamc seis</i>	the feet/lower part of <i>senl</i> (downstream of the river) is like a male dragon’s cave
<i>gaos senl liongc ngamc meix</i>	the head/upper part of <i>senl</i> (upstream of the river) is like a female dragon’s home
<i>dav senl liix saic nyaenc</i>	the middle part of <i>senl</i> (middle reach of the river) is full of gold and silver, guarding every vital place
<i>yenl yuih ongc siv tangp</i>	the elder has an ancient book, which records each <i>senl</i> (river basin), each <i>xaih</i> (village) and each <i>biingc</i> (gathering place) of the Kam people
<i>xadt xul laox liqx il bens</i>	
<i>dinl senl wangc tut</i>	the lower part of the <i>senl</i> (downstream of the river) is Hengling 横岭 and Wangtu 王土
<i>gaol senl gaos yux gaos xuh</i>	the upper part of the <i>senl</i> (upstream of the river) is Gaoyou 高友 and Gaoxiu 高秀
<i>dav senl biingc tanx biingc muh</i>	the center of the <i>senl</i> (middle reach of the river) is Pingtan 坪坦 and Pingmu 坪暮
<i>qak biingc daih hac</i>	<i>biingc</i> (gathering place) is Daheping 大河坪
<i>abs kuant xih dih liogx</i>	<i>abs kuant</i> (formed a covenant organization of villages) is the sixth



According to the content of these texts, the following points about *senl* become clear.

First of all, a *senl* is a regional group unit consisting of multiple villages that obviously exist along the same river. It is divided into three parts, namely *dinl senl* (*dinl* refers to the foot, so *dinl senl* refers to the lower part or foot of *senl*, and can also refer to the downstream of the river), and *gaos senl* (*gaos* refers to the head or upper part, so *gaos senl* refers to the upper part or head of *senl*, and can also refer to the upstream of the river), and *dac senl* (*dac* refers to the center or the middle, so *dac senl* refers to the middle of *senl*, and refers to the middle reaches of the river). As such, in oral inheritance, the scope of each *senl* is a section of the river and is often expressed by the names of villages or places located downstream and upstream of the river. The location of the places where member villages of each *senl* gathering are also described, which is in the middle reach of the river, or near it. The name of the gathering place is *biingc* (written in Chinese as *ping* 坪 or *kuanping* 款坪), which is the same as the name of the gathering place of the patriarchal descent group and the village. *Biingc* is the center of the river section where the *senl* is located and there is wide and flat open space nearby.

Moreover, such spatial units are characterized by the definition of concepts related to the *fengshui* term ‘dragon vein’, such as *liongc ngamc seis* (male dragon) and *liongc ngamc meix* (female dragon), which are both mountain names. As for local people, the bridges at both ends of the river is believed to help improve the *fengshui* of a Kam village and leave good fortune in the village. Like this, the dragons on both sides of *senl* also have the *fengshui* significance of maintaining the prosperity and wealth of residents of the whole *senl*. This is also related to residents’ spatial awareness, such as the mountains behind the village (called “dragon veins” by local people) is where ‘*qi* 气’ gathers, and the underground is where canals and water flow. Water is blood. Water collects in the river and underground, just like human blood circulates in the body. For the villagers in the survey area, there are rivers or streams in each village in *senl*. The stream flowing through the village is as important as human blood<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, local people also believe that the river is the dragon itself. For example, *bux wunv* (a male villager of Gaoxiu in his sixties) said that, for them, water is a dragon, the dragon swam from the river to the bridge and looked back at the village, guarding the peace of villagers and livestock. Kam people in the neighboring village Gaobu also regard water as a dragon and build bridges at the water gap (*shuikou* 水口)<sup>14</sup> at both ends of the village to block the dragon so that it can stay in the village. Therefore, it is believed that the dragon should stay in the village to protect the peace and prosperity of the villagers.

As the text shows, the lower reaches of



Figure 4. Location of the *senl* concerned in the border of Guangxi and Hunan (made by author)

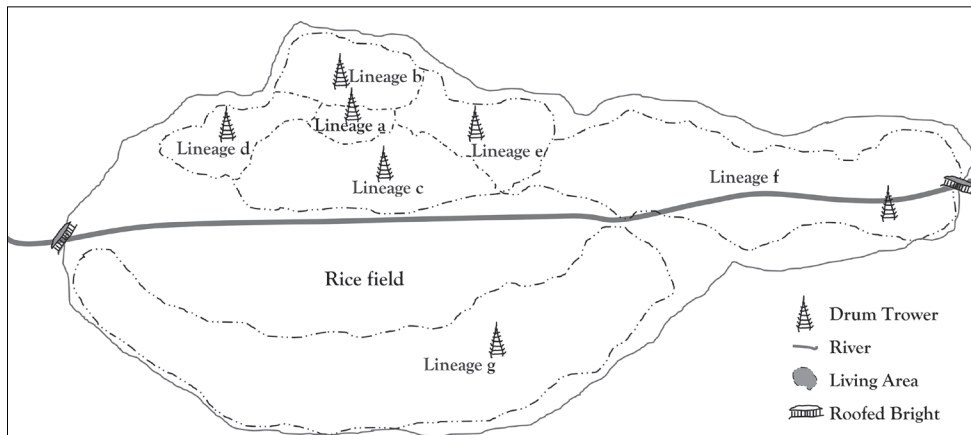


Figure 5. The village space of Gaoxiu Village (made by author)

the river are like a male dragon cave, and the upper reaches are like the home of a female dragon, and hence the villages in the middle of the river are full of wealth and happiness. Water flow may bring good or bad luck to residents. It is said that this is because they have a unique understanding of space beyond their ideas of *fengshui* [Kaneshige 2010]. Therefore, in order to avoid misfortune and attract auspiciousness and good fortune, various practices such as digging dragon wells and building bridges have been carried out.

In the opinion of local people, the village space is the space surrounded by two wooden roofed bridges built at the two ends of the river flowing through the village, the upstream and the downstream of the river, and the surrounding mountains. Similarly, the space of a *senl* is composed of multiple villages located along the same river, with two villages at both ends of the river section (refer to Figures 4 and 5). Although the space of *senl* is a geographical range determined to a certain extent, it can be said that it has nothing to do with the administrative divisions of previous dynasties. For example, Gaoxiu and Gaoyou Village belong to Linxi Township, Sanjiang County, Guangxi, according to the administrative division, but they belong to different rivers from other villages in Linxi Township, such as Chengyang and Guandong Village, so although they belong to the same administrative unit, they belong to different *senl* and different regional units. That is because there is a watershed divide between the Linxi River and the Pingtan River, which is stipulated by geographical factors. Such topographic features can be said to be one of the reasons for the establishment of *senl* as a river basin unit<sup>15</sup>.

There were 13 regional units based on the respective rivers in the adjacent area of Sanjiang County and Tongdao County, until the end of the Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China according to some villagers. Specifically, the villages along the river form their own regional units in the tributaries of canal water in Tongdao County, such as Boyang 播陽, Linkou 臨口, Pingtan 坪坦, Shuangjiang 双江, and other river basins in Sanjiang County, such as Linxi 林溪, Wuluo 武洛, and Mengjiang 孟江. *Senl* formed a closed basin society to some extent in the geographical environment based on such mountains and rivers.

### *Senl* and the origin myth of Kam people

In the origin myth of the Kam people, *senl* represents the Kam’s residential area and is related to their ideas about how humans and the world emerged. The folk song widely inherited in the survey area, called *kuant dens nyenc*<sup>16</sup> or *kuant dangp xiul* (meaning ‘telling the ancient past’), is about Kam people’s ethnic origins includes the following parts, such as ‘beginning of heaven and earth’, ‘origin of humans’, ‘flood’, and ‘*Jiangliang* and *Jiangmei* created humans.’ Among them, the construction of *senl* in ancient times is described below.

Table 2. The examples of *senl* described in the origin myth of the local Kam people

Text in Kam language	English translation
<i>dangl xul yac daol jungh lagx jangl gus wangc bonc gux laox jangl gus jiv menl, bonc gus jiv dih max wangc jiv nux, hus wangc jiv singv gangl xanl jiv douc dih, gangl xuit jiv liongc wangc jiv mas dos gaos jenc, jiv munv doc dinl longl jiv meiv dos jenc xeenl, jiv nyenc doc senl yangp</i> <sup>17</sup>	at that time, they were the descendants of King Zhanggu and King Pangu Zhanggu (Jianggu) opens the sky and Pangu creates the land King Ma opened the road, King Wu created the surname the mountain stands between heaven and earth, and the dragon king is born in the river create clouds for the mountain top and fog for the mountain foot create forests for the ridge of mountains and create humans for villages and towns
<i>jongl gus jiv qinp, banc gus jiv dih max wangc jiv nux, hus wangc jiv singv xanl xangh jiv tut dih, hah xuib jiv liongc wangc jiv liongc dos nyal, jiv bias dos menl jiv munc dos gaos jenc, jiv nyenc dos yangp senl jiv munc dos gaos liangc, jiv nyenc dos senl yangp</i> <sup>18</sup>	Jianggu set up the sky and Pangu opened up the land King Ma made the crossbow, and King Wu created the surname the land is set on the mountain, and the Dragon King is set under the water arrange the dragon in the river and thunder in the sky arrange clouds to float on the mountain and arrange for humans to live in the villages and towns arrange fog around the ridge, and arrange for humans to live in all over the countryside
<i>ongx bux laos senl, sax bias laos menl, juis laos wenc, nyenc laos senl, liebc dih jiv menl, liebc senl jiv xaib, liebc xaib jiv nyenc. (Part of “the head is in Guzhou and the end is in Liuzhou”)</i>	Ancestors are in the <i>senl</i> , the God of Thunder is in heaven Spirits of the dead are in the cemetery, humans are in the <i>senl</i> Earth’s ground is built and then heaven is constructed Villages are built after the <i>senl</i> has been constructed Human beings begin to grow after villages are built

According to the above text and its variants, in the imagination and expression of the local Kam people, *senl* is a kind of space on the earth (*dih*), similar to mountain/mountain range (*jenc*) and river (*nyal*) space, compared with that in the sky (*menl*) where the Chinese god of thunder (*sax bias*) lived. Relative to the space of mountain/ mountain ranges (*jenc*) where clouds, fog and forests were arranged, *senl* is the space where *nyenc* (humans, Kam people) began to settle since the ancestors (*ongx bux*). Therefore, some researchers pointed out that in this sense, *senl* is an entity concept, which can refer to the main residential area of Kam people (*nyenc gaeml*), namely the adjacent area of Guizhou, Hunan, and Guangxi. From this point of view, *senl* is used by Kam people to distinguish their living space from that of other ethnic groups represented by Han Chinese and Miao/Hmong [Zhang et al. 2008: 6–8]. According to *kuant dens nyenc* sang in Gaoxiu, villagers describe the corresponding relationship between the living space of Kam people, Han Chinese, and Miao/Hmong people as follows.

Table 3. The living space of different ethnic groups among the local Kam people

Living space	Nationality/ Ethnic group
<i>senl</i> (river basin)	— <i>nyenc gaeml</i> (Kam people)
<i>senl kiep</i> (the other <i>senl</i> / the other river basin)	— <i>nyenc gadx</i> (Han-Chinese)
<i>longl</i> (ridge, high ridge)	— <i>nyenc miul</i> (Miao/ Hmong people)

Local people found the reason why *senl* has become the living space of Kam people from the flood myth. *ongx shengs* (a male villager of Gaoxiu, born in 1951) said,

At that time, only a pair of siblings survived the flood—the elder brother *Jiangliang* and the younger sister *Jiangmei*. In order to survive, they got married and became the ancestors of humans. Later, they gave birth to an ugly girl without a nose, eyes, head, and feet. Since the child refused to eat, they heard about the treatment from the Jade Emperor. According to the advice of the Jade Emperor, they had to cut the child into pieces and distribute it to all *senl* and *xaih* (*nyank digs senl*, *nyank digs xaih*). The meat of the child later became the Kam people, her intestines became the Han Chinese, and her bones became the Miao/Hmong people.

That story tells the origin of the Kam people, Han Chinese, and Miao/Hmong people. Relevant contents are also recorded in the local oral heritage (refer to the following text).

Table 4. Example of description of human origin in the Kam song of the neighboring area

Text in Kam language	English translation
<i>nanx biinv kuenp gaeml gaeml lail nuv,</i> <i>sais biinv kuenp gadx gadx nyenc guail,</i> <i>lags biinv kuenp miul miul lags guas,</i> <i>saemb ggongs saemb bux nyaoh gaos jenc</i> <sup>19</sup>	the meat becomes Kam people. Kam people are beautiful the intestines become Han Chinese, Han Chinese is smart the bones become Miao people, Miao people have strong bones they have lived on high mountains for generations

In this way, the oral inheritance of human origin spread in the survey area represents three categories: Kam, Han Chinese, and Miao. The local residents realized that they were Kam, and almost all villagers know that it belongs to the ‘Dongzu 侗族’ in Chinese. The ID card and household registration issued by the residents’ public security bureau all bear the ethnic name of ‘Dongzu’. They also have a strong awareness of the non-Kam people living around, especially the Miao people known as *miul*, and the Han people known as *gax/gadx*, which are different from their own ethnic groups. Another proverb expresses the differences in the characteristics of these three ethnic groups. Some local proverbs, like the ancient songs mentioned above, only focus on the differences among Miao, Han Chinese and Kam. For example, they say, ‘Kam pays attention to his/her head, Miao pays attention to his/her waist, and Han Chinese pays attention to his/her feet.’<sup>20</sup> In the same logic, *senl* refers to the living space of the Kam people and is considered a distinguishing feature from Miao and Han Chinese.

### *Senl* as an intermarriage circle

As mentioned earlier, the area I surveyed belongs to one of 13 covenant organizations in the area

of Hunan and Guangxi as the sixth *senl*, and includes 13 villages such as Gaoxiu, Gaobu, Pingtan, Yanglan, Hengling, Gaotuan, Gaoyou, among others. Kam people who live in these villages often said that they want to marry the local people. As for the residents, most of the 'local people' refer to people from the same village, such as *nyenc jaos puk* (Gaobu people), *nyenc biengv tanc* (Pingtan people), *nyenc gaos xuh* (Gaoxiu people). Residents have the tendency to find a partner from the Kam people who live in the same village or in the same *senl*. For example, Gaoxiu has two natural villages, Gaoxiu village and Mashao village. People in Gaoxiu claim that people in Mashao are also Gaoxiu people who live in other places, and people from both villages intermarry frequently. At least until the 1980s, except for the villagers, Gaoxiu people mainly intermarried with villagers of Gaobu, Gaoyou, Pingtan, and Yanglan in the sixth *senl*. The intermarriage between villages can be seen from the list of donors left behind after the repair and reconstruction of the drum tower, especially the list of *ul bal* (the collective of married sisters)<sup>21</sup>.

Local people said that before the 1990s, when searching for marriage partners, people in the same *senl* had more priority than those in other regions. They preferred to intermarry with neighboring villages in the same *senl*, because they had similar customs and dialects. Therefore, there is an old saying among local Kam people, "*nyenc naoc ongp maix, bail paiv senl nyal weex bebv jaidt*," which means "Kam people who are still not married can find people who make clothes for them in the villages of the same *senl* (that is, where their wives can be found)." In other words, young people are allowed to intermarry within the *senl*. Residents regard *senl* or the part of the river where they live as an intermarriage circle and tend to intermarry within this range. Even after 1987, the women in Gaoxiu mainly came from the village, and some from neighboring villages such as Gaoyou, Yanglan, Longcheng, Gaobu, Pingtan, Sixiang, and Huangtu, but rarely so. Intermarriage frequently occurs between the Yang family in Gaoxiu, the Long family in Yanglan, and the Long family in Gaoyou.

### Gathering place and customary law of *senl*

What is the relationship between *senl* and villages? As mentioned earlier, an ancient song named *ongs bux laos senl* says that *xaih* was built later, since *senl* was built first. Therefore, *senl* is prior to the village in the view of local people. According to the current situation, the sixth *senl* is characterized by multiple villages adjacent to the same river, but its function as a political organization is weak. Because there is no permanent leader in the sixth *senl*, the villagers are coordinated by the elders in the political and other day-to-day aspects of life, such as dispute arbitration in the drum tower of the patrilineal descent and the village assembly.

According to the memories of the elders of Gaoxiu and Pingtan villages, the activities that used to be carried out in the sixth *senl* before the 1950s were mainly meetings and discussions for the formulation of folk customary laws among all villages to restrict the behavior of residents, the settlement and mediation of disputes, and the joint defense against the invasions of Han people (including the Constitutional Nationalist Party and bandits) and the surrounding ethnic groups. There are also customs such as mutual visits between villages (called *weex yeek*) and rituals to drive away evil spirits. All these were carried out at the place named *biingc daih hac* (Daheping) located in the center of Pingtan river near Yanglan village. Since the second half of the 1980s, the formulation

of customary law and the mediation of disputes have been carried out in administrative villages, leaving only the communication and etiquette exchanges between villages.

Among them, the most important thing is to formulate a customary law through joint discussions by the elders of all villages for solving the matters of custom reform, and the mediation of conflicts or disputes. According to *ongx wenc* (a male villager of Gaoxiu, born in 1931), the reason why customary law has been given special attention in the sixth *senl* is that before 1949, they produced a lot of rice, and thanks to the river transportation and mountain passes, some villagers were engaged as porters, carrying rice or other products for trade, and hence their lives were relatively stable. However, theft and robbery in various villages occurred frequently since the era of the Kuomintang; bandits and thieves even came to the villages to destroy public security. People had taken refuge in the surrounding valleys, but there was no person or law to solve these problems. Since there is no political power or leadership to govern villages and maintain the order of the whole area in the sixth *senl*, these kinds of problems were solved by the elders according to the rules they formulated.

The customary laws jointly designated by villages of the sixth *senl* are divided into village level and *senl* level, which are binding on residents of the corresponding regional units respectively, so they play an important role in maintaining the daily life order from the village to the whole area. Specifically, all matters related to agricultural production planning, ecosystem protection, punishment for crimes such as theft or robbing, agreement on the customs of birth, marriage, funeral, and sacrifice, and defense of security and public order are negotiated and resolved at the village elders' meeting. In case of any dispute, the elders mediated and got the violator punished. In other words, all kinds of problems in social life are solved in accordance with the customary law or regulations jointly decided by the collective.

After the respected elders jointly signed the content of the customary law, they built a stone tablet on the traffic arteries and engraved the content on the stone tablet to convey to all villagers. At the same time, in March and September of the lunar calendar each year, the elders gathered the residents at the drum tower of the village or at the gathering place of the *senl* at Daheping and passed down the content orally. Due to oral inheritance, recently most elders still remember the customary law in the village, but few remember the rules of *senl*.

*Ongx liangv* (a male villager of Yanglan, born in 1941), is an intellectual who is well-versed in the history of the village and the region. According to him, the sixth *senl* never had permanent leadership. When major events occur, such as folk custom reform, forest disputes, timber sales, public security management, and joint defense, it is said that responsible persons were temporarily elected from respected elders to hold the assembly meeting to solve them. Local people named the leader of the village or *senl* '*nyenc touc*' in the Kam language, which is written as 'touden 頭人' in Chinese, literally translated into 'head man' and is used to refer to leaders. Kam people in Gaoxiu and the neighboring Villages write 'head man' as 'shoushi 首士' in Chinese. They have the habit of writing the name of the project leader or person in charge, the carpenter, and the time of the beam-raising ceremony of public buildings. 'Shoushi' is the project leader. According to these records, most of the people in charge of various construction projects, public welfare undertakings, and other affairs in the village are village heads. And most of them are Shamans or leaders of patrilineal descent.



Besides the rules to be observed jointly, there are also regulations that only the residents of the *senl* should abide by. Residents have the tendency that, according to these regulations, disputes related to mountain forests disputes in the village should be resolved in the village, and disputes within the *senl* should be resolved within the *senl*. Even after the establishment of the police and the law system, it seems to have continued to a certain extent. The following is a case told by *ongx guns* (a male villager of Gaoxiu, born in 1946) who served as the village director in the 1980s.

In the winter of 1982, some young people from Gaobu came to visit their relatives here during the Lunar New Year. They destroyed the door of the young woman's house and burned the dry straw that villagers put on the bridge or in the field. After that, villagers gathered in Gaobu to ask for the perpetrators. They didn't find the culprits and took a pig and a cow back. The next day, villagers from Gaobu came to ask for the pig and cow taken by force. A fight among the young also happened. Later, the local government came. In the end, the settlement of the dispute was handed over to the elders of both villages. The elders gathered and educated the culprits in accordance with customary law and required the villagers to pay compensation for the pig and cow. Residents tend to handle the dispute resolution through the respected elders in the village and *senl*. The education of the elders helps the young get better and serves as a warning about the current behavior of children and helps strengthen friendly relations.

In other words, the elder of the village concerned acts as a representative to mediate disputes. The reason is that all villages in the *senl* are fraternal communities that maintain mutual exchanges. Since their ancestors settled here, they have kept communicating for years. Another reason is that villagers within a *senl* intermarry frequently, therefore, as *sax fangs* (a female villager of Gaoxiu, born in 1952) and *ongx jiev* (a male villager of Gaoxiu, born in 1941) put it, most of the residents are not only relatives and friends, but also the mainstay of mutual help and support in public welfare activities.

### Discussion and conclusions

Kam culture has been long expressed as a unified entity, while considerable regional differences can be seen within the larger community. There are many problems in the general and special theories of Kam's culture of kinship groups, clothing, language, folk beliefs, political systems that described by the village, township, county, province, ethnic group, and other units, as the administrative divisions of the Kam people in the past. Especially, the unified expression of Kam as a single ethnic group conceals the diversity of Kam culture. Through the discussion of the Kam word *senl*, this paper tries to explore an appropriate unit for rethinking and reconstructing the studies on the Kam community's local social system.

From the data of the survey site, *senl* has the following characteristics. Specifically, 1) *senl* is a concept of geography and space. It is posited clearly that *senl* is flat land or basin between mountains and rivers, which is the Kam people's living space, different from the hillside where Miao people live. 2) *Senl* is a river basin circle. The villages of Gaoxiu and Pingtan concerned belong to the sixth *senl* 'Pingtan river basin circle'. The legend also points out that *senl* has a

structural system of upper/central/lower, which all correspond to specific villages and relatively clear geographical locations. 3) The space of *senl* is related to *fengshui*. Local people believe in *fengshui* and pay more attention to water. For them, the water is ‘blood’, and the river is a simulated human body. From the upstream to the downstream, it is the head, the middle body, and the feet of the human. It was mentioned that there are male dragons and female dragons living in the head and feet of each *senl*, or in the upper and lower reaches of a river. They store blessings and protect all the villagers. Some also believe that the river or *senl* is the dragon itself. They build wooden bridges to make the dragon stay in the village or *senl*, so that it can protect the happiness of villagers. 4) In the survey area and Linxi area around it, the Kam people offered sacrifices to the regional patron saint *sax* in units of villages and the river basin, which is also one of its characteristics. 5) Historically, the internal relationship of villages in a *senl* was considered as a village alliance for joint defense and social integration. Although there is no permanent leadership connecting villages and building social relations, the dispute resolution and public security maintain has been offered by the elders through the customary law formulated by them. 6) *Senl* is an important circle of family communication, especially through intermarriage, cultural exchange, entertainment, and sacrificial activities, to build cumulative social relations such as geography and intermarriage circle, among others.

In summary, the concept of *senl* helps understand the diversity in Kam people across the three provinces of China, how these differences are formed, and what meanings they are given in their daily lives. And, according to the existing research, the Dai people in Yunnan and Vietnam formed a basin country named *muang* based on irrigation long before modern countries (see the research of Kato [1991; 2000] and Okada [2012] for details). Kam’s local system *senl* has similar geographical characteristics to the formation of this social structure, but there are extensive differences between them. The comparative study of this kind of social structure is of great significance for understanding the differences within the Tai groups, which can be a subject for prospective future research.

\*This paper uses a part of the data collected during the relevant survey of my doctoral dissertation (Titled *A folkloric study on ‘Senl’: analysis of the regional social system of river basins among the Dong (Kam) in southern China*, submitted to Kyoto University in March 2019 with Summary published online), mainly the oral tradition of *senl* and the local Kam people’s views on *senl* in the survey area. By supplementing relevant new data, this paper breaks through the original perspective of social relations, re-examines and corrects the perspectives that have not been developed and still need deficiencies in my doctoral research from various aspects.

#### Notes

- 1 The Dong people call themselves *gaeml* or *jaeml*, or *nyenc gaeml*. The Shui, Zhuang, and other ethnic groups living in the vicinity of Dong’s residential areas also call them *gaeml* people. According to international practice (Indigenous Human Rights Act), the international standard corresponding to *gaeml* is translated as Kam.
- 2 The Kam language has nine tones. When recording sounds with Roman characters, the last letter of a syllable represents the tone. The tones are as follows: l (55), p (35), c (11), s (323), t (13), x (31), v (53), k (453), h (33) (according to the five-tone scale). For example, *kuant*=kuan13 (origin from the Chinese word, means clauses or treaties), *senl*=sen11 (means watershed unit), *bail*=bai55 (means going), *yal lengc*=ya55 leng11 (means woven cloth made of fine twisted yarn called Kam brocade), *bux*=bu31 (means father), *xaib*=xai33 (means village).
- 3 Lusheng is a kind of musical instrument that resonates with long bamboo tubes. It is used not only by Kam people but also by Miao/Hmong and other ethnic groups in the surrounding area in Southwestern China.
- 4 For the word *weex yeek* in Kam language, *weex* means do or make, and *yeek* means guest, mainly a group composed

of several people. This phrase refers to the exchange of visits between villages, usually during the first month of the lunar calendar or the Spring Festival. Adding *bail* (meaning to go and go forward) before *wexx yeek* means going to the *wexx yeek*, or to participate in the exchange of visits between villages.

- 5 This is from the perspective of the language system. It is generally believed that the Kam language belongs to the Tai-Kadai language (sometimes also known as Tai) and refers to the group as the Kam-Tai (or Zhuang-Dong) family, Kam-Sui branch within China (see the research of Li [1997]).
- 6 In Kam language, *daol* and *jiul* both mean ‘we’ or ‘our’.
- 7 In this context, *bail* means go. *dav gongl* is a word derived from the Chinese word *dagong* 打工, which means ‘working for a job’ (meaning going out to work for a job). Add *dav gongl* at the end of *bail senl*, which means ‘go working outside’.
- 8 Meaning: It is said that when ancestors came to *senl* (this place), the god of thunder went up to heaven, ghosts entered tombs, and people stayed in the *senl*. When heaven was separated from earth, the world was created and then *senl* was created, soon afterwards villages were built and then people grew.
- 9 *Kuant biingc* was once considered a vast flat land for village gatherings on a regional basis.
- 10 *dinl* refers to feet or below. *gaol* refers to the orientation of the head or above, *dav* refers to the middle or center.
- 11 According to the note [Kaneshige 2002: 196], the province boundary and county boundary shown in the figure was the administrative division during the Republic of China era, the *senl* boundary was simply made by the two villages located downstream and upstream of the river, and the gathering place (village) in the middle.
- 12 The original text is “The family is not as big as the patrilineal descent, and the patrilineal descent is not as big as the village” [Yang Zaimao 2014: 60]. However, since the word *jus* in Kam language means a family, and *wagx* means the people living around the drum tower and the whole village space formed from them [Kaneshige 2000]. This sentence means that, in fact, *wagx* (people) is bigger than family (or patrilineal descent), and *senl* is bigger than *wagx*.
- 13 Residents of other Kam villages in Linxi Township near the survey site have similar ideas. See the research of Kaneshige [2003: 69] for details.
- 14 The water gap in *fengshui* refers to the inlet and outlet of water flow. Traditional geomantic omen believes that water is the source of wealth, so the water gap is considered to have an important position in geomantic omen. In the narrow sense, it refers to the outflow of water, that is, wells and springs. In the broad sense, it refers to the outflow of *qi*, that is, the outlet of *qi* that is used to flow well.
- 15 Due to the geographical isolation, it is difficult for the two rivers to communicate with each other, thus forming their own regional units/*senl*.
- 16 *Kuant* means tell/talk about/say/narrate, and *dens* means origin and beginning. *Kuant dens nyenc* combines these words with *nyenc* (meaning ‘people/humans’), meaning ‘to tell/talk about the origin of humans/Kam people’.
- 17 This ancient song is also included in *Dongzu Kuan* (I) [Wu & Liang (eds.) 2009: 8–10].
- 18 This ancient song is also included in *Dong Kuan* [Hunansheng Shaoshuminzu Guji Bangongshi (ed.) 1988: 259].
- 19 The oral text of Guangxi collected by Wu and Liang has similar content [Wu & Liang (eds.) 2009: 41–45].
- 20 This proverb means ‘Dong (male) wears cloth on their heads, Miao (female) wears belts on their waists, and Han people wear shoes on their feet’. According to the characteristics of clothing, the three nationalities are classified [Kaneshige 2002: 74].
- 21 Kam people collectively referred to ‘*ul*’ (the appellation for relatives, father’s younger sister) and ‘*bal*’ (the appellation for relatives, father’s elder sister) as ‘*ul bal*’, which refers to the group of married daughters. On the survey site, *ul bal* is written as ‘guba 姑巴’ in Chinese. In the documents written on the stone tablet or board to commemorate the completion of the Drum Tower, the list of *ul bal* donors is often written separately from the list of people who are also members of patrilineal descent group and other relatives.

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