# Mr. Sun Hongkai's academic life

Li Daqin Wang Yunjia Yubao October 5, 2022 12:01

大家

## 踏遍千山万水 追寻万语千言

### ——孙宏开先生的学术人生

□ 李大勤　王前佳

**在田野中淬炼学问**

**调查之后重在保护**

**构建汉藏语历史类型学**

**学人小传**

Sun Hongkai was born in Zhangjiagang, Jiangsu in 1934. He is a linguist

and honorary member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He graduated

from the Chinese Academy of Sciences of Peking University in 1954.

Department of Literature, and worked at the Institute of Linguistics, Chinese

Academy of Sciences (now Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences)

Institute of Ethnology and Humanities, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

Institute of Language Studies, member of the Expert Advisory Committee of the Chinese Language

Resources Protection Project, and member of the Chinese National Languages and Culture Research Institute.

Honorary President of the Language Society. Discovered 15 species

He has also conducted systematic research on more than 30 Sino-Tibetan

languages.

Language Research, "Brief Records of Qiang Language", "Brief Records of Dulong Language"

He has edited the series "Research on Newly Discovered Chinese Languages"

and "The Tibeto-Burman Languages in the Eight Rivers Basin".

A Brief History of Ethnic Minority Languages,

"Ethnic Languages and Dialects Studies" series, "Sino-Tibetan

"Phonetics and Vocabulary", etc.

# How many languages are there in China?

**What are the characteristics of languages? How do they relate to each other?**

For 70 years, Sun Hongkai has been looking for answers to these questions.

The answer.

He climbed the Miao Mountains, crossed the 100,000 Great Mountains, crossed

the Min Mountains, the Biluo Snow Mountains, the Gaoligong Mountains, the Himalayas, and the

Raya Mountain... China's Southwest Minority Living Area

Every mountain valley he lived in bore

traces of his **quest .**

**Hongkai has painted a picture of the Chinese language for the world.**

**Magnificent picture.**

## Refining knowledge in the fields

In 1934, Sun Hongkai was born in Yuelai Township,

Zhangjiagang, Jiangsu Province, into a Han intellectual family.

During the war years, his study experience as a teenager was not smooth.

He moved to many places including his aunt's home and his grandmother's

home, and attended four primary schools, Fanxian, Yuelai, Tianfu, and

Hexing, before he barely completed his primary school education.

At that time, the society was in turmoil and the

financial situation of the Sun family was quite difficult.

Leftover rice (a kind of rice made from barley

If there was no leftovers at home, he would go hungry at noon and would have to wait until he got home from school in the evening to have a meal.

potluck.

"At that time, I was most afraid of going to school on snowy days, as the road was long and muddy. Walking barefoot in the summer was not a big problem. But in winter, especially when it was windy and snowy, the cold wind bit my bones, and the slippery, icy muddy road was so slippery that I stepped on it with one foot deep and one foot shallow. I am still scared when I think about it now. From elementary school to middle school, I experienced such days for nearly ten years." Sun Hongkai recalled

Memory.

In 2005, Mr. Sun Hongkai conducted a historical survey in Muli, Sichuan.

language

In 1952, Sun Hongkai was admitted to Peking University with excellent grades. He was in his prime and had infinite vision for the future. He even thought about becoming a scientist like Mi Qiulin: "In high school, I even wanted to do such an experiment: put cotton seeds in the water of Impatiens.

The cotton seeds absorb nutrients from the Impatiens and will produce colorful cotton like the Impatiens.

..." However, he was assigned to the language training department. It was the first and only time that Peking University

A two-year language major was established.

Although I hesitated for a while, I was able to make it through the guidance and influence of teachers such as Luo Changpei and Yuan Jiahua. Under the influence of the situation, Sun Hongkai still accepted the arrangement. At Peking University, there were well-versed and highly respected scholars, and professional courses tailored for him.

Guiding Sun Hongkai to step into the national language

Luo Changpei and Wang Jun

A professor opened a course for them called "Phonology" and "Phonetics".

Mr. Tang Lan taught them "Chinese Characters", Mr. Gao Mingkai

taught them "General Linguistics", Mr. Yu Min taught them

"Modern Chinese", Mr. Fei Xiaotong taught them "National Theory

and National Policy", Mr. Jin Peng, Mr. Wang Fushi and Mr. Li

Sen taught them "Tibetan Language" and "Miao Language" respectively.

Instead of giving them a language survey and analysis course on the Uyghur language,

they gave them a course on the theory and methods of language and dialect survey.

The one who taught the "Law" course was Mr. Yuan Jiahua.

Mr. Yuan Jiahua is regarded as his mentor.

He guided him in his studies, gave him meticulous care in his life,

and constantly encouraged **and spurred him spiritually. From**

**then on, Sun Hongkai made it his mission to devote his life**

**to the cause of ethnic minority languages and writing.**

**The belief of life.**

After graduating from university, Sun Hongkai was assigned to

Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Sciences (abbreviated as "Language Institute")

Soon after he arrived at the Institute of Linguistics, Mr. Lu

Shuxiang asked him to write a manuscript to discuss whether

Chinese has word classes and how to divide word classes. After

Sun Hongkai submitted the manuscript,

Mr. Lu Shuxiang wrote many

Comments: "This analysis makes sense" and "You

The arrow was shot off target"... Finally, there is a summary

There are some good points, but the arrangement is too exaggerated and not

standard enough. I need to practice the format and method of writing articles. "Lu

# Mr. Shuxiang's earnest teachings had a profound influence on the young Sun Hongkai.

Shuxiang, Ding Shengshu, Fu Maoji and other older generations of language
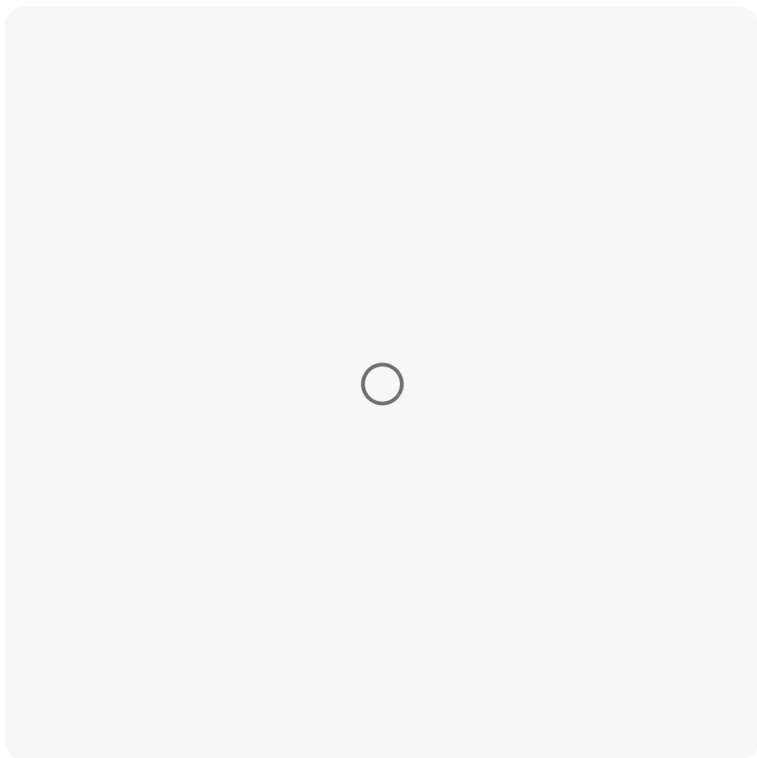
Under the guidance of scholars, Sun Hongkai had enough

confidence and courage to invest in the study of ethnic minority

languages. After repeated field investigations, he gradually

became the first generation of outstanding researchers in New China.

Ethnolinguist.



In 1976, Mr. Sun Hongkai (first from left) and others were in Tibet.

Darang

In 1956, the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the State Council

Organized a national language survey activity, with more than 600 national

language workers forming seven

The working group went to various parts of the country to conduct investigations.

Kai was assigned to the seventh team, whose main task was to investigate

Tibetan, Qiang, Jiarong, Pumi and other languages.

In July, Sun Hongkai began to conduct language field research in Heishui and

Wenchuan, and traveled to many places in the mountains and dense forests of

Heishui, Wenchuan, Lixian, Maoxian, etc.

In 1960, Sun Hongkai, who was investigating the Qiang language in Aba,

Sichuan, received a telegram from the Institute asking him to go to Yunnan to

investigate the languages of the Dulong and Nu peoples.

He immediately put down his work, packed his backpack and headed straight for

the western border of Yunnan.

On the way, Sun Hongkai and the caravan traveled together, climbing over

snowy mountains, sleeping on grass, crossing vine bridges, climbing ladders,

and passing through primitive forests before reaching their destination.

They had to be on guard against attacks from poisonous snakes and leeches, and

were harassed by mosquitoes and insects when camping, often unable to sleep all

night. It was in such a difficult environment that Sun Hongkai completed an in-

depth investigation of the monoglot language and other languages.

It is not an easy task to record a strange language. Take Qiang

language for example.

We visited 34 survey sites and filled more than a dozen thick notebooks

with information.

The outline listed more than 3,600 commonly used words. At that time,

Qiang language had no written language. In order to reflect the actual

situation of Qiang language as accurately as possible, he used the

International Phonetic Alphabet to record it.

The language survey also records sentences (usually more than 400

sentences), and records long stories or conversational materials as

much as possible. Next, we need to analyze the pronunciation,

summarize the word classes, refine the sentence patterns, sentence

patterns and sentence classes based on **these** sentences, and

comprehensively and clearly reflect the system of the language through rich languag

**Overall appearance.**

The rich experience accumulated before and after the national language survey

The language materials were later compiled into manuscripts and

included in the "Brief Records of Chinese Ethnic Minority Languages Series".

Among them, Sun Hongkai not only wrote three books including "A

Brief History of Unique Dragon Language", but also participated in the

daily manuscript collection and review work of this series of books.

Reprinted "A Brief History of China's Ethnic Minority Languages"

The "Book" was revised under the leadership of Sun Hongkai.

In 1976, shortly after undergoing gastric surgery

Sun Hongkai began to participate in the Menba, Lhoba and Qiang people

Language survey. On the way to the survey site

The harsh mountain environment made his already weak body even

weaker. In addition, he also suffered from malaria, intestinal

Sun Hongkai suffered from gastritis repeatedly and experienced multiple

collapses. Even so, he did not stop his heavy investigation work. This

time they brought back the door

Languages such as Cangluo, Darang, and Geman

It provides valuable materials for scholars to clarify the relationship

between these languages and examine the dialect differences between them.

objectively assess the closeness and distance between ethnic groups.

The 1980 edition of the book "Door" laid a solid foundation.

The Languages of the Ba, Lhoba, and Qiang Peoples is

Written on the basis of materials.

A Brief History of Qiang Language compiled by Mr. Sun Hongkai

Before and after this, Sun Hongkai was also supported by Yunnan and the four

Sichuan and other local people's committees invited him to participate in the White Horse

The ethnic identification of the Ersu people has led to the discovery and

confirmation of the Ersu language, the Meiya language, the Ergong language, the Shi

Xing, Zhaba, Namiyi, Queyu,

New languages such as Guiqiong, Baima, and Rouruo

This laid the foundation for the later description and research of these blank

languages.

The rich language survey practice triggered Sun Hong

He started to think about the theory of language recognition in his books

Language Recognition and Ethnicity (1988) and Using Science to

Looking at my country's language recognition problem from a different perspective

(2005) and others proposed and developed a

A set of language recognition theories that are in line with China's national conditions.

In 2009, the American magazine Science published a column on this issue.

Published a comment, arguing that the issue of language recognition should

be further explored based on Sun Yat-sen's theory.

discuss.

**After the investigation, the focus is on protection**

According to the language recognition standards that have been gradually established

**In order to ensure accuracy, Sun Hongkai has been organizing**

**academic efforts to identify languages within China.**

In the early 1950s, China was identified

**There are only 48 languages spoken; a survey of ethnic languages**

Later, the number increased to 59; the supplementary survey

in the early 1960s increased the number to 64;

Recognized by the Chinese Encyclopedia·Language Volume

The Chinese language is only **about 80** years . 2007

old. In 1976, the book "Languages of China" edited by Sun

Hongkai and others was published, which included 129

languages in China, of which nearly 60 were newly discovered after 1976

In 2017, Sun Hongkai co-edited the three-volume "Encyclopedia

of Chinese in 140 Languages"

(English version) was published, and the book introduces China

There are 5 language families, 10 language groups and more than 20 languages in the country.

A total of 140 languages are available.

People understand the diversity and complexity of Chinese language resources

It provides an important window into the issue of gender and also answers

questions with more **detailed** materials and clear language identification standards.

**The mysterious question "How much do you know about Chinese?"**

question.

**Based on the investigation, Sun Hongkai**

**Begin to call for and participate in the rescue of endangered languages.**

Since the 1980s, while investigating the languages of China's ethnic

minorities, he has been committed to preserving and protecting

Endangered languages in China.

The "Chinese Blank Language Survey" was launched in 1994.

An In-depth Survey of Newly Discovered Languages of China's Ethnic Minorities

Research" is all about research on endangered languages in China.

In addition, in 2003 and 2011, Sun Hongkai was invited to attend the

Global Endangered Languages Experts Conference and suggested the

formulation of the Convention on the Protection of Endangered

Languages.

Mr. Sun Hongkai wrote a book entitled "Research on Qiang Languages of the Tibeto-Burman Language Family".

Research

In 2006, Sun Hongfa published a paper entitled "A Study on the

Vitality Ranking of China's Ethnic Minority Languages", which divided

China's ethnic minority languages into six categories: 1.

**1. The vitality of ethnic languages is 2. The vitality of ethnic languages**

**is 3. The vitality of ethnic languages is declining ,** such as the Qiang

language and the Naxi language; 4. The vitality of ethnic languages is

insufficient, and they are **endangered, such as the Gelao language and**

**the Oroqen language; 5. The vitality of ethnic languages is very poor,**

**and they are endangered, such as** the Hezhe language and the She

language; 6. The vitality of ethnic languages is weak, and they have no

**communicative function, such as the Manchu language. By** ranking the

vitality of ethnic languages, Sun Hongkai hopes to distinguish the priorities

and rescue the most endangered languages first. This article has been well

received by the international academic community.

It has been translated into English, French, Spanish, Japanese and other

languages, and has become an important document for people from all

walks of life to understand the current ecological status of Chinese ethnic languages.

offer.


Based on in-depth investigation and research

On this basis, a large series of books entitled "Research on Newly Discovered

Languages in China" has been published one after another.

I have reviewed and finalized the manuscripts, and also wrote "A Study of

the Anong Language", "A Study of the Rouruo Language", "Bai

"Malaysian Studies" and "Shixing Language Studies" and other manuscripts.

"This series of books is much more difficult than the Language Guide.

There are many, mainly because these small languages are difficult to

discover, investigate, identify and publish. "As the editor-in-chief, Sun

Hongkai is well aware of the difficulties in compiling the series, but he

still perseveres. So far, the series has published nearly 50 monographs,

covering more than 45 languages in China that have not been

systematically described in the past, filling in the gap in language

description in China to a large extent.

It not only provides new and valuable resources for the world's

language treasure house, but also provides a solid language basis for

the country to formulate language and cultural policies.

**The study of dialects of China's ethnic minority languages is also**

**This is a key point of Sun Hongkai's research.**

In the 1980s, in order to reveal the laws of language development and

evolution, Sun Hongkai edited the series "Dialectical Studies of China's

Ethnic Languages", Liu Guangkun's "Study on Mawo Qiang Language",

Zhou Maocao's "Study on Maqu Tibetan Language" and other books.

"Study on the Puxi Qiang Language" by Huang Chengchang, etc.

Nearly 20 monographs on minority language studies have been published.

In addition, under the promotion of Sun Hongkai,

He edited the "Chinese Minority Languages Series"

"

"Li-Chinese Dictionary", "Chinese-Jia-Rong Dictionary", etc.

Bilingual dictionaries of some minor languages, as well as some bilingual dictionaries with

relatively large differences in dialects such as the Chinese-Miao Dictionary (Qiandong Dialect)

The compilation and publication of these two series of books not only

provides a rich platform for the research on minority languages, but also

provides a new platform for the research on minority languages.

The rich corpus has also expanded the breadth and depth of our country's

ethnic language research to a certain extent.

**In 2015, the Chinese Language Resource Protection Project**

**(abbreviated as the "Language Protection Project") was officially launched.**

**Participated in the planning, design, and implementation of the entire project**

Sun, who was already over 80 years old at the time,

Hongkai, while in charge of the 21 language sites of the endangered

language group of the first phase of the language preservation project, also

took the initiative to apply for the endangered language project of Anung.

**"If we don't conduct investigations and video recordings, these**

**spoken languages will probably disappear in the long river of history.**

middle".

Mr. Sun Hongkai et al., "Study on White Horse Language"

Sun Hongkai is well aware that his own ability in conducting

ethnic language research is limited. He hopes that more young people

will stay in this field and that all ethnic groups can cultivate more native

speakers.

The ethnic intellectuals are engaged in the protection and promotion of their own ethnic languages.

Cultural heritage work.

**"We need to cultivate a team of professionals with good professional quality,**

**A team with ambition and the ability to fight tough battles.**

**The team should have long-term goals, but also be down-to-earth**

**and start from small things.**

Sun Hongkai has devoted a lot of effort to the reserve force of ethnic

language research. Many young and middle-aged scholars who are now

active in the field of ethnic language research in China have entered the

field of ethnic language research under his encouragement, training and support.

Study the road.

Sun Hongkai's academic influence on the field of ethnic language studies

Sun Hongkai treats all scholars equally , **no matter where they come from, whether they are Han or from a minority ethnic group, as long as they are willing to engage in minority language research and have a certain foundation in linguistics, and enthusiastically introduces them into the team of ethnic language research.**

**As a result ,** there are quite a number of "cross-border" scholars in the field of ethnic linguistics, such as Professor Wei Lin, who is engaged in the research of White Horse Language .

Professor Sun Hongkai was brought over from the classical literature team

Professor Zhang Sihong, who is engaged in the research of Ersu language, is from the foreign language academic

community, and Song Ling, who is engaged in the research of Guiqiong language, is from the foreign language academic community.

Professor Li comes from the Chinese academic community.

**Constructing a historical typology of Sino-Tibetan languages**

As early as the 19th century, linguists believed that

Chinese, Tibetan, Miao and other languages have close historical ties.

The Sino-Tibetan language family hypothesis was proposed. Later scholars further

divided the Sino-Tibetan language family into

There are many language families, such as the Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, and Miao-Yao. Each language

family has several branches and languages. However, what are the characteristics of the Sino-Tibetan

language family, how should it be classified, and what are the characteristics of the Sino-Tibetan language family?

endlessly.

Sun Hongkai has been engaged in the study of Chinese ethnic minority languages for many years.

Many of the languages he investigated were from the Sino-

Tibetan language family, which laid a solid foundation for

his historical comparative study of Sino-Tibetan languages.

Base.

In January 1979, at the founding conference and first academic

discussion meeting of the Chinese Society of Ethnic Languages, Sun

Hongkai submitted a paper entitled "The Affiliation Problem of Qiang Language"

A preliminary study on the origin of the Chinese culture puts forward the

following view: "In western Sichuan, there are still the Meiya (Miyao) and Er

Su (Duoxu), Ergong, Guiqiong, Namiyi,

Shixing, Zhaba and other languages are also relatively close to

Qiang, Pumi and Jiarong, and may be classified as one language

branch. "After 1985, Sun Hongkai launched a series of

grammatical research projects, further discussing the historical

status of Qiang and Qiang branch languages in the Tibeto-

Burman language family, and the cultural commonalities of Qiang branch lan

The determination of the historical status of Qiang language and its support

The discovery and positioning of language was an important event in

the field of research on Chinese ethnic minority languages in the 1980s.

This is a major event that has received widespread attention in the international linguistics community, especially in Sino-Tibetan

It is highly recognized by linguists of the language family, and its

academic influence has expanded to history, ethnology, and anthropology.

Studies and other related fields.

In studying the historical evolution of Sino-Tibetan languages

During the process, Sun Hongkai discovered that a group of languages of the same or

**similar** type may have different characteristics due to their long differentiation time and differences.

# If we can integrate various languages,

# The evolution of various language types

**process and reason, the grammaticalization path of various grammatical categories**

**If we understand the path and mechanism of Sino-Tibetan**

**languages, we can naturally construct different levels of Sino-Tibetan langu**

**Various features (including cognates and morphological markers)**

**The overall characteristics of the Sino-Tibetan language family.**

Based on the existing theoretical achievements, Sun Hongkai

proposed the "Historical Typology of Sino-Tibetan Languages".

This is a new academic thought.

Sino-Tibetan historical typology involves the Sino-Tibetan language family

Syllable structure types and their evolution, grammatical structure types

types and their evolution, historical evolution of semantics, etc.

# Through field research, we found

Through in-depth analysis of oral materials, Sun Hong discovered the Tibetan-Burma
""""""""

and other new grammatical categories, and convincingly demonstrated that

these grammatical categories are independent in Tibeto-Burman languages.

Through scientific and rigorous analysis, he confirmed the existence of such

terms as "body", "attitude", "style", "pronoun", "style", etc.

Grammatical categories also exist in the Tibeto-Burman languages.

In addition, Sun Hongkai also studied the Tibetan-Burman language.

In-depth study of grammatical categories such as "causative" and "number"

For example, in his On the Grammatical Category of Causative Verbs in

Tibeto-Burman Languages (1998),

The article points out that the causative grammar of Tibeto-Burman

languages not only uses agglutinative means, but also uses analytical

means such as inflectional means and function words. Moreover, the

inflectional means are almost used throughout the vowels, rhymes, and syllables.

In all the syllable elements such as vowels and intonations.

**Based on some solid research results on the subject**

**He studied the historical evolution of the grammatical structure types**

**of Tibeto-Burman languages and successfully explored the similarities**

**and differences in the evolution of grammatical structure types.**

**There are genetic relationships between languages within a language.**

Tie.

It is particularly noteworthy that the historical evolution of Tibeto-

Burman grammatical structure types and Tibeto-Burman phonological structures

The evolution of the types of structures is almost synchronous, but

different regions are affected by different environments.

The speed and manner of their evolution vary greatly.

Different languages are different, but the historical relics and common innovations in

different languages can all become the basis for the division of Sino-Tibetan languages.

As early as the early 1980s,

Writing the introduction to the book "Tibeto-Burman Phonology and Vocabulary"

Sun Hongkai attempted to establish a Tibetan-Burman language by revealing

the main phonetic correspondence rules behind the Tibetan-Burman cognates.

A theoretical framework for the types of phonetic evolution in Tibeto-Burman languages

Then, we discuss the origin of some of the Tibeto-Burman sound

changes, the types of complex consonants in Proto-Sino-Tibetan, and the

In the process of studying the Tibetan syllable reconstruction and other

issues, Sun Hongkai put forward an important point:

**The complex and diverse phenomena of phonetic variation in various languages**

**It reflects the different historical evolution of various languages.**

**process or stage of evolution.**

In order to give full play to the modern technology

Under the guidance and promotion of Sun Hongkai, the "130 Languages

Vocabulary and Phonetic Database and Retrieval System" and "Chinese

Tibetan Cognate Word Data Retrieval System" "East Asian Languages

Vocabulary and Phonetic Data Retrieval System" and other Sino-Tibetan historical

Comparative research platforms have emerged one after another.

It has played an active role in the study of Sino-Tibetan cognates.

Use.

Over the past 40 years since the reform and opening up, Sino-Tibetan studies,

especially the demonstration of the Sino-Tibetan language family hypothesis, have been

Achieved unprecedented achievements. Sino-Tibetan Language Studies

We have made great progress in the accumulation and organization of corpus.

Significant progress has been made in the study of cognates based on newly

discovered language materials and the extraction of phonetic correspondence rules.

More consensus has been reached;

Classification at the level of language family, language group, and even language branch

Compared with previous generations, it is more detailed, specific and scientific, and has made a more detailed

and detailed analysis of the Sino-Tibetan language family in terms of both historical heritage and common innovation.

The overall characteristics of each aspect have also become clearer.

In terms of theoretical methods, the Sino-Tibetan historical typology

proposed by Sun Hongkai is the representative

Theoretical creation based on linguistic facts in China

All of these are for the final

Solving the problem of proving the Sino-Tibetan language hypothesis laid the foundation for

A solid foundation.

This year, Mr. Sun Hongkai has reached his 100th birthday.

He is still expanding his research on the

historical typology of the Sino-Tibetan language family.

**That oath - "Dedicate my life to the people I love"**

**"National Language and Culture Research Project".**

About the author: Li Daqin is a professor at Communication University of China; Wang Yunjia

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University of China. Source of the article: Guangming Daily, September 29, 2022, page

11. Source of the picture: Li Daqin, Wang Yunjia.

Source of the title picture: "Language Resource High-tech Innovation Center" official account

◯ **Recommended** ◯

ÿYubao StoryÿSun Hongkai: Yubao and I

◯

ÿ1

ÿYubao's AppointmentÿMr. Sun Hongkai talks about Yubao (Part 2)

ÿA Date with Language TreasuresÿSun Hongkai: 60 years of protecting endangered

languages (Part 1)

Remember to click and watch