



A Study of Chinese Vocabulary in the Donggan Language from the Perspective of Cross-Cultural Communication

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How to cite this paper: Lei, X.T. and Huang, D.L. (2026) A Study of Chinese Vocabulary in the Donggan Language from the Perspective of Cross-Cultural Communication. *Open Access Library Journal*, 13: e14946.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1114946>

Received: January 27, 2026

Accepted: February 27, 2026

Published: March 2, 2026

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Abstract

In Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan in Central Asia, there lives the Donggan ethnic group, whose ancestors were Hui people who migrated from Shaanxi, Gansu, and other regions in China during the late Qing Dynasty. The language spoken by the Donggan people is the Donggan language, a special overseas variant of Chinese. Derived from the northwestern dialects of Chinese, it serves as the ethnic language of the Hui people who migrated to Central Asia in the late Qing Dynasty. The Donggan language contains a large number of northwestern dialect words, which reflect the unique ethnic culture of the Donggan people. The Chinese vocabulary in the Donggan language holds significant importance for the study of Chinese northwestern dialects, international Chinese education, and the advancement of the “Belt and Road” Initiative. However, due to various reasons, the Donggan language has become an endangered language. This paper first analyzes the Chinese vocabulary in the Donggan language and explores the communication paths of the Donggan language using the “5W” model in communication studies, aiming to make a modest contribution to the research on Donggan studies.

Subject Areas

Culture, Linguistics

Keywords

Donggan Language, Chinese Vocabulary, Cross-Cultural Communication, International Chinese Education

1. Concept Definition

1.1. Brief Introduction to the Donggan Language

The Donggan people are descendants of the Hui people from Shaanxi and Gansu who migrated to Central Asia in the late Qing Dynasty. The Donggan language is the ethnic language of the Donggan people in Central Asia [1].

Originating from the northwestern dialects of China in the late Qing Dynasty, the Donggan language is based on the Shaanxi dialect and the Gansu dialect. Since the Donggan people are mainly descendants of the Hui people who successively migrated from Shaanxi and Gansu in China to Central Asia during the late Qing Dynasty, the Donggan language takes the basic vocabulary and grammar of the modern northwestern dialects of Chinese as its main body, with the Gansu dialect as its standard pronunciation. It has integrated linguistic elements from Central Asian Russian, Arabic, Persian, Turkic, and other languages, evolving into a cross-border Chinese language with certain changes. The currently used Donggan script was created with the assistance of the Soviet government and is written using the Cyrillic alphabet (Russian alphabet). It is the only phonetic script for a Chinese dialect in the world [2].

1.2. Concept of Cross-Cultural Communication

Cross-cultural communication refers to the interpersonal communication and information dissemination activities between social members from different cultural backgrounds. It also involves the processes of migration, diffusion, and change of various cultural elements in the global society, as well as their impacts on different groups, cultures, countries, and even the human community as a whole [3].

2. Vocabulary Features of the Donggan Language

Derived from the northwestern dialects of China in the late Qing Dynasty, the Donggan language includes a large number of northwestern dialect words in both its basic vocabulary and general vocabulary. It also retains many ancient Chinese vocabulary items and modern Chinese vocabulary items (referring to the vocabulary used from the late Ming Dynasty to the early Republic of China). Additionally, there are a large number of loanwords in the Donggan language, along with some newly created words. All these aspects reflect the inclusiveness and diversity of the Donggan language.

Composition of Donggan Vocabulary:

The vocabulary of the Donggan language is composed of inherent words, archaic Chinese words, modern Chinese words, Russian loanwords, and neologisms. Among these, Russian loanwords are mostly concentrated in modern fields such as politics, science and technology, and education, while inherent words frequently include characteristic terms of Northwest Chinese dialects like “sha” (what), “za” (how), and “beng” (don’t). Notably, some archaic Chinese words—such as “yameng” (government office in ancient China) and “langzhong” (traditional Chinese physician)—have gradually faded away in Mandarin but are stably

preserved in the Donggan language, reflecting its “linguistic fossil” trait. This study takes the Donggan vocabulary collected in Lin Tao’s *Donggan Language Dictionary* [2] as the research object to clarify the compositional characteristics of Donggan vocabulary.

1) Northwestern Dialect Words

In the Donggan vocabulary, northwestern dialect words have always occupied a dominant position and form the main body of the Donggan vocabulary. These words not only reflect the overall features of the Donggan language but also demonstrate the close connection between the Donggan language and the northwestern dialects of China. Some words in the Donggan language are still commonly used in the current northwestern dialects of China. Examples are as follows:

- Architecture-related: xiàngzi (lane), lófáng (building), línjiā (neighbor’s house), qiánmén (front door), èrménzi (second door), ménlóu (gate tower), mànciáng (plaster a wall), guòdàozi (corridor), chuāngzi (window), suǒzi (lock), zàohuǒ (kitchen stove), máozi (toilet), kàng (kang, a heatable brick bed).
- Daily necessities-related: zhuōzi (table), yǐzi (chair), lìguì (vertical cabinet), guōzào (cooking stove), cháihe (firewood), yánghuǒ (match), xǐliǎn pénzi (wash-basin), yízi (soap), yángjiǎn (soap), xiàn gūlu (spool of thread).
- Address-related: xiānrén (ancestor), zhǎngguī de (shopkeeper), zhǔdōng (owner), zuìrén (sinner), duitou (opponent), hàihuò (troublemaker), xián dǎlàng (idler), xífán guǐ (fussy person), suìzuǐzi (chatterbox).
- Body parts-related: bēnlú (forehead), nǎoménzi (forehead), yǎnwō (eye socket), bí kūlong (nostril), qiāngzi (chest), jǐbèi (back), huáiwō (bosom), gōuzi (but-tocks), gēlǎowā (armpit), chuítóu (fist), zhǐtou (finger), hànjià (undershirt).
- Clothing-related: shānzi (unlined upper garment), jiǎjiāzi (waistcoat), máoshānzi (woolen sweater), ǎor (jacket), pàpazi (handkerchief), mián wōwo (cotton-padded shoes), mùshū (wooden comb).
- Diet-related: èshuǐ (waste water), mǐtāng (rice soup), guōkūi mó (a kind of thick pancake), huājuǎn juǎn (steamed twisted roll), hézi (a kind of stuffed pastry), qǐmiàn (leavened dough), làmiànzi (chili powder), tiáohé (seasoning).

It can be seen from the above examples that the basic vocabulary of the Donggan language is derived from the northwestern dialects. These words not only reflect the basic features of the Donggan language but also are of great significance for the study of the northwestern dialects of China. Through the synchronic study of languages, we can explore the evolution process of the northwestern dialects in Central Asia.

2) Archaic Words

A part of the words in the Donggan language originates from ancient Chinese and modern Chinese (referring to the vocabulary used from the late Ming Dynasty to the early Republic of China), which is identical to the Guanzhong dialect of China. For instance, the word “dié” in the Guanzhong dialect, which means “to eat”, comes from *The Story of the Zhongshan Wolf* by Ma Zhongxi. Most of the ancient Chinese words appearing in the Donggan language are also derived from

works such as *Shuowen Jiezi* (Explaining Characters and Analyzing Forms of Characters) compiled by Xu Shen, *Yupian* (Jade Chapters) from the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, *Er Ya* (The Ready Guide) and *Fangyan* (Dialects) from the Western Han Dynasty, and some even come from *The Book of Songs* and *The Rites of Zhou*. Several categories are listed as follows:

- Sǎ 鞞 [sa51]: Commonly used in dialects, it means to step on the back of cloth shoes with the heels. It is also frequently used in the Donggan language. For example, in *Sāo Húlu Bái Yǔ Xià de Ne* (The Mischievous Gourd under the White Rain), Page 64: “Qīngzǎo, zhè ne fān guólái, bǎ xié sǎ shàng, dào wàitou.” (Early in the morning, turn this over, slip on the shoes, and go outside.) In Chinese pinyin with Cyrillic transcription: “Чинзор, Жыни фанчелэ, ба хэ сашон, до вэту.” *Guang Yun* (The Broad-Ranging Rhymes): “鞞, sī hé qiè (phonetic notation in ancient Chinese), belongs to the Hé rhyme group with the radical 及, referring to slippers.” *Yupian* (Jade Chapters): “Xiān hé qiè (phonetic notation in ancient Chinese), meaning shoes. Also written as 鞞.” Tan Qiao of the Southern Tang Dynasty wrote in the Preface to *Tánzǐ Huàshū* (Master Tan’s Book of Transformations): “Zhàng sǎ ér qù.” (Leave with a cane and slippers on.) [3].
- Duō 掇 [tuə24]: Its original meaning is “to pick up”, and later it was extended to mean: 1) “to tidy up”: “Wǒ zǒu li nǐ bǎ jiā ne gěi shíduō hǎo.” (When I leave, you tidy up the house well). 2) “to embroider by stitching up and down on cloth or silk fabrics”, which is called “duō huā” (embroidery). 3) “to poke or point at”: “Āshè’ér nǎ shǒuzhǐ tou duō de shuō shì nǐ zǎ bù tīng huà.” (Asher pointed with his finger and said, “Why don’t you listen?”) *Shuowen Jiezi-Shǒubù* (Explaining Characters and Analyzing Forms of Characters-The Hand Radical): “Duō means to pick up.” Xu Hao of the Qing Dynasty wrote in *Shuowen Jiezi Zhù Jiān* (Annotations and Commentaries on Explaining Characters and Analyzing Forms of Characters): “Duō, in terms of its meaning, is related to zhù (to attach); it means to pick up by connecting things together” ([2]: p. 315).
- Zhuǎng 奘 [tʂuaŋ44]: Meaning “thick and big”: “A python coiled around a dry tree inside the iron support. The python was as thick as a small poplar tree and several chi (a traditional Chinese unit of length, approximately 33.33 centimeters) long.” *Er Ya-Shì Yán* (The Ready Guide-Explanations of Words): “Zhǎng means zǎng.” Guo Pu annotated: “Zǎng is equivalent to cū (thick).” *Yupian-Dàbù* (Jade Chapters-The Big Radical): “Zhǎng means big.” *Fangyan-Juǎn Yī* (Dialects-Volume One): “In the regions of Qin and Jin, people who are tall and big are called zhǎng, or alternatively zhuàng (strong)” ([2]: p. 317).
- Sōng 慵 [suŋ24]: Its original meaning is “mediocre, humble, lazy, and stupid”, and later it is often used as a term of contempt or a swear word: “Zéi sōng” (thief), “Xiā sōng” (fool), “Sōng li pǒ qióng, qióng li pǒ sōng” (A lazy person is bound to be poor, and a poor person tends to be lazy), “Tōu qián tōu xiāzi, qǔ pó yě qǔ mázi; Xiāzi méi kōng de, mázi méi sōng de.” (Stealing money from a

blind person and marrying a pockmarked woman; the blind person has no time to spare, and the pockmarked woman has no laziness in her.) *Fangyan-Juǎn Sān* (Dialects-Volume Three): “Yōng (mediocre person) is called sōng, which is a transferred term.” Guo Pu annotated: “Nowadays, people in the Longyou area (in the western part of the Qinling Mountains) call laziness sōng.” Wang Yi annotated: “Yōng refers to lowly and humble people” ([2]: p. 312).

A larger number of words in the Donggan vocabulary come from modern Chinese (referring to the vocabulary used from the late Ming Dynasty to the early Republic of China), such as “zàohuà” (nature, fate), “yíngpán” (military camp), “cáidōng” (landlord, boss), “duìtòu” (opponent), “shǐhuàn” (to employ), “píngsù” (usually), “fāshì” (to open for business), “duānxiàng” (to look carefully), “tánxiàn” (to admire), “shíduō” (to tidy up), “zuòhuó” (to work), “zǎn jìn” (to make efforts), “gēntou” (somersault), “dāngē” (to delay), “wèn míng” (to inquire about one’s name, a part of traditional marriage procedures), and “hónghuǒ” (prosperous, lively). Most of these words are derived from Yuan Dynasty zaju (a form of traditional Chinese opera) and novels of the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties. For example:

- Zàohuà 造化 [tsɔ44xua44]: Refers to nature, changes, and fate. The Donggan people often like to talk about “zàohuà” (fate) and “yùnqì” (luck), and this word is frequently used in both spoken and written language: “Zàohuà lián tóu de hàn, tài yáng yā shān, shè lǜ de xiē huǎn qù ne, wǔ diào hēi’àn.” (Sweat streaming down due to fate, the sun setting, planning to go to rest, and darkness covering everything.) In the 17th scene of *Huáng Xiào’zǐ* (Filial Son Huang) by an anonymous author of the Ming Dynasty: “Zàohuà shēng nú zuò děngxián, zhuāngyán quántǐ jù rén yán.” (Fate has made me an ordinary person, and I have a complete and dignified human body with the ability to speak.) In the second act of *Hé Hàn Shān* (The United Khan’s Shirt) by Zhang Guobin of the Yuan Dynasty: “Qiě xiū shuō yīn yáng de zhè zàohuà, xǔ lái dà gè de Dōngyuè shénmíng, tā guǎn nǐ shénme dùpí lǐ wáwa.” (Don’t talk about this fate determined by Yin and Yang. The great god of Mount Tai will not care about the baby in your womb.) In the second act of *Hēi Xuánfēng* (Black Whirlwind) by Gao Wenxiu of the Yuan Dynasty: “Jīnrì zàohuà dī, rě chǎng dà shífēi.” (Today, my fate is bad, and I have gotten myself into big trouble.) In Chapter 110 of *The Complete Outlaws of the Marsh*: “Xiōngzhǎng jì zhī zàohuà wèi tóng, hé gù bù là? Wànshì fēn dīng, bùbì duō yōu.” (Brother, since you know that your fate is not yet favorable, why are you unhappy? Everything is predestined, so there is no need to worry too much.) In Volume 24 of *Jīngshì Tōngyán* (Stories to Warn the World): “Xiǎosān, nǐ zhè gǒu gǔtòu, yě méi zàohuà chī zhè zìzài fàn, kuài zhe zǒu.” (Xiao San, you good-for-nothing, you don’t have the luck to eat this easy meal, so hurry up and leave.) ([2]: p. 340).
- Cháfàn 茶饭 [ts’a24f44]: Generally refers to food and drinks: “Jīnr èr méi yǒu hǎo cháfàn, wǒmen chī yī wǎn lǚmiàn.” (There is no good food today, so let’s have a bowl of hand-pulled noodles.) In Volume 10 of *Yùshì Míngyán* (Famous Stories to Enlighten the World): “Fùqīn jīnnián qīshíjiǔ, míngnián bāshí

qí tóu le, hé bù bǎ jiāshì jiāoxiè yǔ hái'ér zhǎngguǎn ε, chī xiē xiànréng chá-fàn, qǐ bù wéi měi?" (Father is seventy-nine this year and will turn eighty next year. Why not hand over the family affairs to your son to manage, so that you can eat ready-made meals? Isn't that nice?) In Chapter 59 of *The Plum in the Golden Vase*: "Li Píng'ér sīxiǎng guān gē'ér, měirì huáng yānyān, lián cháfàn r dōu lǎn dài chī." (Li Ping'er missed her son Guan Ge'er so much that she looked haggard every day and even didn't feel like eating.) ([2]: p. 324).

- Mài zuǐ 卖嘴 [mè44tsuei51]: To boast or talk big: "Tā mài zuǐ de ne, nǎ yǒu nà huí shìqíng." (He is just boasting; there is no such thing.) In the first act of *Sishēng Yuán·Nǚ Zhuàngyuán* (Four Sounds of Apes·The Female Top Scholar) by Xu Wei of the Ming Dynasty: "Bù shì wǒ Chūn Táo mài zuǐ, Chūn Táo ruò kěn gǎi zhuāng yī zhàn, guǎn qiàn qǐ tuò shǒu kuí míng." (It's not that I Chuntao am boasting. If I Chuntao am willing to dress up as a man and take part in the battle, I am sure to easily win the top scholar title.) In Chapter 84 of *Journey to the West*: "Bajie mài zuǐ dào páng biān: 'Māma'ér mò shuō hēihuà, wǒmen dōu huì fēi li." (Bajie boasted beside her: "Auntie, don't speak in code. We can all fly.") ([2]: p. 334).

Many words used by the Donggan people in the late Qing Dynasty are rarely seen in modern Chinese now, and even gradually forgotten in the northwestern dialects. For example, they call "zhèngfǔ" (government) "yámén" (government office in feudal China), "lǐngdǎo" (leader) "tóuzi" (head), and "dírén" (enemy) "duìtòu" (opponent). Therefore, the study of the northwestern dialect words in the Donggan language can supplement the ancient northwestern dialect words and reflect the folk culture of a specific era.

3) Innovative Words

There are some innovative words in the Donggan language. With the tide of historical development and the changes of the times, new things have emerged, and the Donggan people have created words with their wisdom.

The innovative words in the Donggan language cover various categories. In terms of occupations, there are words such as "biǎohuà de" (announcer), "kēxué rén" (scientist or intellectual), "chàngjiāzi" (singer), "xiějiāzi" (writer), "xiūgàì jiā" (architect), and "tiáoyǎng jiā" (educator). In terms of daily utensils, there are "xiǎokàn dà" (magnifying glass), "zìwā huǒ" (lighter), "yáyào" (toothpaste), and "xītǔ jī" (vacuum cleaner). In the field of culture and education, the Donggan people have created words like "jiàotáng" (classroom), "kǎoshòu" (examination), "chá-kàn huó" (reviewing test papers), "wáwayuán" (kindergarten), "biǎoshuō" (to narrate and explain), and "gěishuō" (to broadcast). These words are colloquial, reflecting the Donggan people's understanding of new things, enriching the Donggan vocabulary, vividly explaining new things, and demonstrating the simplicity, diligence, and wisdom of the Donggan people.

In terms of the formation of innovative words in the Donggan language, some are created based on existing words. For example, the Donggan people call "máo bǐ" (writing brush) "shēnghuā" (literally meaning "producing flowers"). Later, when "gāngbǐ" (fountain pen) appeared, they called it "gāng shēnghuā" (literally

meaning “steel flower-producing pen”).

There are also some words that are formed by combining words from the Donggan language with those from other ethnic languages, becoming fixed phrases. For example, “kàn gēnnuò” (to watch a movie, a Chinese-Russian phrase), “dà bāzā” (grand market, a Chinese-Turkic phrase), “bāyī lǎoye” (landlord, a Uyghur-Chinese phrase), and “dòng nǎifūsi” (to lose one’s temper, a Chinese-Arabic phrase). There are many such phrases in the Donggan language, that embody the inclusiveness and multicultural integration of the Donggan language.

4) Loanwords

The Donggan people have lived in a multi-ethnic environment for a long time, so their language has inevitably been influenced by the languages of other ethnic groups during its use. They borrow some words from other ethnic languages, which are loanwords. The Donggan language mainly borrows vocabulary from Russian, Persian, Arabic, and Turkic languages.

Among the loanwords in the Donggan language, the largest number are borrowed directly or indirectly from Russian, according to statistics by Donggan scholar Ф.Н. Hawazi, there are as many as several thousand such words, accounting for approximately 7% of the total vocabulary of the Donggan language ([1]: p. 166).

The words borrowed from Russian in the Donggan language mainly relate to military affairs, politics, daily necessities, and other fields. Examples include “bā’ěrjī” (party, from Russian “партия”), “wūlā” (long live, from Russian “ура”), “kǎmùnísíè” (communist, from Russian “коммунист”), “dàokètǎolè” (doctor, from Russian “доктор”), “gēnnuò” (movie, from Russian “кино”), “tǎkèxī” (taxi, from Russian “такси”), “fútèjiā” (vodka, from Russian “водка”), and “hélièbā” (bread, from Russian “хлеб”).

In addition, the Donggan language has borrowed some Islamic vocabulary from Persian and Arabic. For example, words like “húdá” (Allah, from Persian “خدا”), “nǎimǎzi” (prayer, from Persian “نماز”), “shūmí” (bad luck, misfortune, from Persian “شومند”), and “dùshīmán” (enemy, from Persian “دشمن”) are borrowed from Persian. Words such as “ānlā” (Allah, from Arabic “الله”), “mùsílín” (Muslim, from Arabic “مسلم”), “gǔ’ěrbāng” (Eid al-Adha, from Arabic “فُرْبَان”), “dōuwǎ” (prayer, from Arabic “دعاء”), “báiliǎ” (disaster, from Arabic “بلاء”), and “yáwǎbù” (answer, from Arabic “إجابة”) are borrowed from Arabic. Moreover, some names of the Donggan people are also derived from Persian and Arabic, such as “Mùhànmòdé” (Muhammad), “Ālǐ” (Ali), and “Āyīshā” (Aisha). These all reflect the integrative characteristics and religious beliefs of the Donggan language.

The Turkic loanwords in the Donggan language have certain regional characteristics. Some are borrowed from Kyrgyz, such as “ālègāi” (elder brother, from Kyrgyz “алай”), “bājiā” (brother-in-law, husband of one’s wife’s sister, from Kyrgyz “бара”), and “sāhāt” (hour, from Kyrgyz “саат”). Some are borrowed from Kazakh, such as “dōngbùlā” (dombra, a two-stringed plucked instrument, from Kazakh “домбыра”), “xiāzǎi” (now, from Kazakh “сейчас”), and “ālāsh” (ancestor, from Kazakh “Алаш”). There are also loanwords from Uyghur, such as “bāzhā”

(market, farmers' market, from Uyghur “بازار”), “bālángzi” (child, from Uyghur “بالا”), “tuōyī” (wedding, from Uyghur “توي”), “yàkèxī” (good, from Uyghur “ياخشى”), “yàmàn” (bad, from Uyghur “يامان”), and “hǎimǎisī” (all, from Uyghur “هممه”).

The prepositions in the Donggan language have enriched the possibilities of vocabulary expression in the Donggan language, but they have also caused assimilation and dissimilation in its vocabulary and grammar.

3. Research Value of Donggan Vocabulary

3.1. Contributing to the Sustained Vitality of the Donggan Language

With the acceleration of the bilingual and multilingual process of the Donggan people in Central Asia and the popularization of Russian education, some groups of the Donggan people are losing their mother tongue. A typical example is the Donggan people living in the Osh region in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan. Geographically, most of the people who use the Donggan language live in rural areas, while most Donggan people living in cities mainly use Russian, and the Donggan language only serves as an auxiliary tool for them. Similar to the dialects in China, most of the current speakers of the Donggan language are the elderly, women, and children. Scholar Lin Tao believes that the Donggan language is gradually disappearing in some regions and among some groups of people. The main reasons for this situation include the influence of the multi-ethnic language environment, the impact of dominant languages, inter-ethnic marriages, changes in attitudes towards the mother tongue, and restrictions from official language policies. Therefore, preserving and developing the Donggan language has become an urgent task. In this regard, the study of Donggan vocabulary can raise people's awareness and understanding of the Donggan language and attract external attention. It is of great significance for the protection and inheritance of the Donggan language and Donggan culture, and for safeguarding the Donggan language, a wonderful overseas variant of Chinese.

3.2. Serving as Evidential Material for the Study of Northwestern Dialects

The Donggan language still retains many ancient northwestern dialect words to this day. With the development of the times and the nationwide popularization of Mandarin Chinese, many dialect words have gradually disappeared from people's daily language, especially the old words used during the Yuan, Ming, Qing Dynasties, and the early Republic of China. For example, “bāngbàn” (a temporary assistant set up in some institutions during the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, in addition to the person in charge or supervisor) [4].

However, the Donggan language has developed independently overseas. Although it has also been influenced by the languages of other ethnic groups, it still retains the basic characteristics of the former northwestern dialects, and many

ancient dialect words are still in use among the Donggan people, which reflects the independence of the Donggan language. Therefore, the Donggan language has relatively completely preserved the ancient and modern Chinese vocabulary (referring to the vocabulary used from the late Ming Dynasty to the early Republic of China) in terms of vocabulary, especially the modern Chinese vocabulary, providing reliable materials for the diachronic study of the northwestern dialects.

3.3. Promoting the Study of International Chinese Education

With the proposal of the “Belt and Road” Initiative, many students from Central Asian countries have come to study in China, among whom are many Donggan students from Central Asia. “The common national language of the Donggan people takes the basic vocabulary and grammatical structure of the modern northwestern dialects of Chinese as its main body” ([1]: p. 28). Since most of the vocabulary of the Donggan language is derived from the Shaanxi dialect, and its grammatical structure is also based on the Shaanxi dialect, the study of the development process of the Donggan language makes it relatively easier for the Central Asian Donggan students who have mastered the Donggan language to learn Chinese.

3.4. Facilitating the Construction and Dissemination of the “Belt and Road” Initiative

The Donggan vocabulary reflects the social life and features of the Donggan people. The study of the Donggan language can promote cultural exchanges among ethnic groups along the Silk Road. “The Donggan language is an important communication tool within the Donggan ethnic group, a link maintaining the emotions of the Donggan people, an obvious symbol of the Donggan people’s ethnic identity, a major feature of the Donggan ethnic group, and an effective way to establish social connections and integrate into social networks” [5]. From an academic perspective, the study of the Donggan language can strengthen the connection between Chinese scholars and scholars from Central Asian countries; from the perspective of language identity, it can enhance the ethnic identity of the Donggan people; from the perspective of foreign trade, language is a tool for communication, and the study of phonetics can promote trade between China and Central Asian countries.

4. Dilemmas in the Inheritance of the Donggan Language from the Perspective of Cross-Cultural Communication

Firstly, the Donggan language is surrounded by the languages of other ethnic groups and faces the crisis of assimilation. Scholar Lin Tao points out that in the contact between the Donggan language and the surrounding languages in Central Asia, integration and dissimilation have occurred in its vocabulary and grammar. “These integrations and variations have promoted the integration of the Donggan people with various ethnic groups in Central Asia and the common development and prosperity of the cultures of various ethnic groups in Central Asia. However, it is

precisely these integrations and variations that make the development of the Donggan language difficult and its future not optimistic” [6].

Secondly, the number of people using the Donggan language is decreasing. “The Donggan ethnic group is a small ethnic group in Central Asia, accounting for only 2% of the total population. The Donggan language can only be used within Donggan communities and families and cannot play a communicative role externally” ([2]: p. 2). Whether it is inter-ethnic marriages, the acceleration of urbanization, or changes in the attitudes of the Donggan people towards the Donggan language, all these factors have led to a significant decrease in the usage rate of the Donggan language, resulting in dilemmas in the inheritance of the Donggan language.

Scholar Hou Yu believes that the current crisis in the inheritance of the Donggan language and script mainly lies in several aspects: “the ‘dissimilation’ of the Donggan language, the ‘imperfection’ of the Donggan script”, “the decline of the Donggan language and script”, “the shrinkage of Donggan language teaching”, “the decline of Donggan language media”, and “the decline of Donggan literary creation and Donggan studies”. Therefore, how to protect and inherit the Donggan language has become an urgent problem to be solved.

5. Exploration of Cross-Cultural Communication Paths of the Donggan Language in Central Asia

To truly promote the “going global” of the Donggan language, it is first necessary to maintain the integrity of the Donggan language. Based on Lasswell’s “5W Model” (Who, Says What, In Which Channel, To Whom, With What Effect), we can explore the cross-cultural communication paths of Donggan vocabulary from five aspects: the communication subject, the communication content, the communication method (media), the audience, and the communication effect.

5.1. “Communication Subject”—Self-Protection of the Donggan Language and Donggan Culture

The best way to protect and preserve a language is to increase its usage. Wang *et al.* [7] made two trips to Central Asia in the 1990s and found that the Donggan people had also attempted several approaches to protect the Donggan language. The Donggan people have also tried some methods in the path of protecting the Donggan language, such as creating the Donggan script time and time again, developing education on the Donggan language and culture, creating Donggan literary works, using Donggan language radio tools to spread Donggan culture, and producing Donggan language TV programs. These are all excellent ways of self-protection and inheritance. At the same time, adhering to their own cultural behaviors, such as the Donggan people continuing the traditional wedding form—the “Six Rites” (a set of traditional Chinese marriage procedures), is conducive to protecting the integrity of the Donggan language. On this basis, the Donggan people can create songs in the Donggan script and adapt Donggan

ballads into songs, with music as a medium to make the Donggan script known to the world.

5.2. “Communication Content”—Absorbing Nutrients from the Chinese Language

The origin of the Donggan language is the northwestern dialects of Chinese. Following the principle of “returning to where it came from”, absorbing new words and expressions from the northwest Chinese dialects can inject new vitality into the Donggan language and also serve as a way to enrich the expression and communication methods of the Donggan language. In addition, the Donggan language contains numerous archaic Chinese words. For the explanation of certain terms in the Donggan script, reference can be made to these archaic Chinese expressions. Incorporating classical Chinese texts and stories into textbooks will help students identify the commonalities between the Donggan language and Chinese.

5.3. “Communication Channel”—Education, Scientific Research, and Online Platforms

At present, in the process of the Donggan people transitioning from a monolingual to a bilingual ethnic group, a phenomenon of interrupted language inheritance has emerged. According to statistics from the National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan in 2000, 3% of the Donggan people regard Russian or other ethnic languages as their mother tongue [8]. Given the current situation, schools can offer the Donggan language as an elective course to expose all students to it. In addition, many universities in China have also enrolled a large number of Donggan students, such as Northwest Normal University, Shaanxi Normal University, and Xi’an International Studies University. In terms of scientific research, strengthening the exchanges between Chinese scholars and Donggan scholars, conducting cooperative research on the Donggan language, and opening up research channels for the Donggan language will be beneficial to the research on the Donggan language. In addition, the development of the Donggan script can be made into a documentary to bring the life and culture of the Donggan people to the public’s attention; furthermore, online video calls can be used to strengthen the ties between the Hui people in China and the Donggan people in Central Asia.

5.4. “Audience”—Providing Strong Support for Donggan Language Teaching

With the intensification of the multilingualism process, the Donggan people’s use of the Donggan language is gradually declining. Scholar Lin Tao points out that not all Donggan people use their mother tongue; only those living in rural areas still insist on using the Donggan language in both family and external communication contexts [9]. The inheritance of a language lies in the joint efforts of successive generations. Besides the informal exposure to the language within families,

language education at school is also an essential aspect. Students are the best inheritors of the Donggan Language. Therefore, we should provide Donggan teachers with opportunities to receive Chinese language training in China, which offers a strong guarantee for the development of the Donggan language teaching staff. Sending Chinese language teachers to participate in the Donggan mother tongue classes is also an effective means to safeguard the teaching of the Donggan Language.

5.5. “Communication Effect”—Contributing to the Construction of the “Belt and Road” Initiative

In recent years, with the proposal of the Belt and Road Initiative, exchanges between China and the Central Asian countries have become increasingly close. Strengthening the inheritance and protection of the Donggan language can further foster mutual understanding among peoples and harmony of public opinions between the two sides. At present, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) act as the mechanisms and channels for China and the Central Asian countries to carry out cooperation and dialogue. If the influence of the Donggan script in the Central Asian countries can be continuously expanded, it will further advance the economic and cultural exchanges between China and these countries.

6. Conclusion

The Donggan language, spoken by the Donggan people in Central Asia, is an overseas variant of the northwestern dialects of Chinese. It has high linguistic value, especially in the study of Donggan vocabulary, such as promoting the study of Chinese northwestern dialects, the study of modern Chinese vocabulary (referring to the vocabulary used from the late Ming Dynasty to the early Republic of China), and the study of the mutual influence between languages. However, due to various reasons, the Donggan language is facing the crisis of extinction. Language is the carrier of culture, and protecting a language means safeguarding its culture. How to inherit and protect the Donggan language has become an important issue. The “Belt and Road” Initiative proposed by President Xi Jinping has once again opened up the path for international cultural exchanges. Central Asia has been a must-visit place on the Silk Road since ancient times, and more open international cooperation and exchanges with the Central Asian region will be inevitable. The Donggan language and the northwestern dialects of China are homologous languages, and the study of the Donggan language can narrow the distance between them. In response to the above problems, the author explores a new model for inheriting the Donggan language from the perspective of the “5W Theory” in communication studies, aiming to make a modest contribution to the inheritance and protection of the Donggan language.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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