

Book Review

Li Hongquan & Zhuxian (eds.): *Jindai Menggu Wenxian Daxi* [The Great Series of Modern Mongolian Documents]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2018–2023.

Reviewed by **Wurihan Dai**, Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing, China,
E-mail: wurhen@163.com. <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5828-6692>

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Jindai Menggu Wenxian Daxi [The Great Series of Modern Mongolian Documents, 《近代蒙古文献大系》, hereinafter referred to as *The Great Series*], edited by Li Hongquan (李红权) and Zhu Xian (朱宪) as editors in chief, is a comprehensive compilation of historical materials published by the Zhonghua Book Company after several years of meticulous effort. This compilation systematically assembles Chinese-language documents connected to Mongolia¹ between 1840 and 1949. It encompasses a diverse range of sources such as periodicals, magazines, newspapers, memoirs, and official gazettes, providing an extensive collection of materials that spans more than a century. From December 2018 to March 2023, 12 volumes have been published, including *Overview Volume* (《概览卷》), *Observations Volume* (《见闻卷》), *Military Volume* (《军事卷》), *Political Volume* (《政治卷》), *History Volume* (《历史卷》), *Education Volume* (《教育卷》), *Economic Volume* (《经济卷》), *Transportation Volume* (《交通卷》), *Customs Volume* (《风俗卷》), *Geography Volume & Religion Volume* (《地理卷 宗教卷》), *Biographical Volume & Literature and Art Volume* (《人物卷 文艺卷》), *Culture Volume & Health Volume* (《文化卷 卫生卷》), and so on. Its content is extremely rich in genres, with nearly thirty styles ranging from travelogues and investigative reports to editorials, interviews, speeches, and dispatches to poems, novels, and essays.

In terms of authorship, the documents in *The Great Series* can be roughly divided into two primary categories: the Chinese writing by foreigners, and the Chinese borderland writing by Chinese. Among the foreigners, there are scholars, military officers, travelers, etc.; these three categories are also included in Chinese authors, and the majority of them are individuals or groups who are enthusiastic about the borderline issues. Also, those foreigners are mainly from Japan, Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. *The Great Series* features a large number of articles translated from these four countries, especially from Japan and Russia (Soviet Union).

¹ The term “Mongolia” in *The Great Series* refers to both the Mongolian plateau and the Mongolian nation. See Li Hongquan and Zhu Xian, eds., *Jindai Menggu Wenxian Daxi*, [The Great Series of Modern Mongolian Literature-Overview Volume], Book 1, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2018, “Preface”, p. 1.

Generally speaking, the quantity of translations or introductions of foreign explorers in *The Great Series* is comparatively fewer than those written by the Chinese authors; however, the academic significance of these works should not be underestimated. For academic study related to cultural communication in East Asia and worldwide cultural interchange, they have at least three major implications.

To begin with, the quantity and alterations of translations and introductory texts related to foreign literature are significant. These resources have provided historical material support for further exploration of Chinese Studies, specifically from the perspective of the frontier. The large number of translations and introductory pieces in *The Great Series* offer a macroscopic perspective on the varying levels of attention on Chinese frontier throughout different historical periods by different nations. There is considerable variation in the number of books within different volumes of *The Great Series*. The initially published *Overview Volume* includes 8 books, whereas the *Political Volume* boasts to 18 books, and the *Economic Volume* even reaches 19 books. Conversely, some volumes were combined into one single book due to a limited amount of documentation, such as *Culture Volume & Health Volume*, and *Geography Volume & Religion Volume*. The difference in the number of books between different volumes reflects the diverse focuses of attention on Mongolia-related matters during that era. Notably, volumes with more books also have more translations, further emphasizing their significance and depth of study. Examining the differences in the number of translations from different countries in the various volumes of *The Great Series* helps us to overview the motivations and concerns behind different countries' focus on border issues. By delving into the translations from various countries in *The Great Series* and combining them with foreigners' writings related to other parts of China, Chinese Studies could be enhanced and expanded in a more comprehensive manner. Take Japan as an example, since the modern era, a significant number of Japanese scholars have visited China. Certain individuals, including Ryunosuke Akutagawa (芥川龍之介, 1892–1927), have undertaken journeys to southern such as Shanghai and Suzhou. Others, like Tetsuo Uno (宇野哲人, 1875–1974) and Jitsuzo Kuwabara (桑原隲藏, 1871–1931), have traveled to Confucius's birthplace in Shandong province. As for border regions of China, apart from the highly anticipated Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang and other western regions were also visited by many Japanese expeditions. The arrival of these Japanese, within the wider context of modern Sino-Japanese relations, were interconnected with Japan's expansionist imperialistic policies. However, in terms of different regions within China, their missions and writings had different emphases. Digging deeper into the similarities and differences among them could promote the research of modern Sino-Japanese relations.

The difference in the number of translations from various countries not only reveals the international trends of that time, but also shows that the Chinese

contemporaries, represented by the many translators, had a good grasp of international trends, both academic and political. A thorough examination of *The Great Series* shows that translators' choice of texts from different countries shifted noticeably over the course of a century. For instance, in the *Overview Volume*, before 1912, there were a great number of translations from Japan and Russia; during the 1920s, there was a noticeable increase in articles translated from the United States, including introductions of American scholars' research; and by the 1930s, the number of translations from Japan had once again increased. The fluctuations in the number of translations provide a footnote from the border about different international relations in different periods, also indicate the keen observation of international relations by the Chinese during the modern history of China. In addition to longitudinal analysis, the division of the volumes offers a framework of cross-sectional analysis. For example, comparing the articles in *History Volume* and *Culture Volume & Health Volume* during the 1930s, there were significantly more translations of Mongolian history research and archaeology from foreign countries than those in the *Culture Volume & Health Volume* during this period. In addition of showing the tendency of foreign attention to China, this numerical divergence also to some extent reveals that Chinese scholars have different emphasis on foreign writings in different fields. The reasons are not only related to the development of relevant disciplines in China at that time, but also the resistance to Japanese colonial expansion and accompanying discourse. By integrating both longitudinal and cross-sectional perspectives and connecting the advancement of Chinese Studies in different nations during corresponding timeframes, we can better explore the development of Chinese Studies at different levels due to diverse practical demands in different eras. This approach enables a more complete outline of the development of Chinese Studies.

Moving on to the next point, the ordering of the articles in the various volumes of *The Great Series* were arranged chronologically based on the year of publication. This arrangement reflects the changing understanding that Chinese people had towards the "academic investigations" by the expeditions during different periods. The translational selections of interpreters reflect China's keen insight into global academic developments at that time. Meanwhile, the "Translator's Notes" attached to a large number of translations, as well as the changes in articles introducing foreign expeditions, highlight their increasingly defined sense of subjectivity. Between 1921 and 1931, there were seven articles in the *Observations Volume*, *Geography Volume & Religion Volume*, *History Volume* that either translated, introduced, or mentioned the American archaeologist Roy Chapman Andrews (1884–1960). Apart from "Observations of Urga" (《库伦写真》, translated in 1921), the other six mainly dealt with translating and introducing his archaeological

activities. Among foreigners, Andrews is the one who gets more attention. From the translation of “Did Human Originate in Mongolia” (《人类是在蒙古起源的么》); in 1924 to the discussion of Andrews’s in “The Process of the Central Asiatic Expeditions Investigative Trip to Mongolia: Zhang Xizhi’s Report on the Investigation” (《中亚调查团赴蒙调查之经过—中国团长张席提君之调查报告》); in 1931, the transition shows the significant shift in Chinese scholars’ perceptions of foreign expeditions and explorers to China. Before 1931, Andrews’s archaeological reports were deemed as objective knowledge that could be learned, and the translations and presentations of his writings did not show caution against the imperialist discourse of power behind the “academic investigations”; but in 1931, Chinese scholars stated bluntly: “In the past, Mr. Andrews used the excuse of hunting to deceive our authorities and obtained a hunting passport. He organized teams to go to Mongolia year after year to excavate, as if no one was around. The unique fossils and specimens he obtained were all displayed in The American Museum of Natural History.”² It is obviously a critique of the rationality behind Andrews’s former exploratory endeavors in China, illustrating a prominent sense of subjectivity and an assertion of both academic and national sovereignty. The subjectivity is also reflected in the 1930 article, “Recordings of the Archaeological Finds from the Khara-Khoto by the Russians” (《俄人黑水访古所得记》).

The academic community has paid sustained attention to foreigners’ writing on China, with numerous introductions and translations of related travelogues, investigative reports, and scholarly writings. While fully recognizing the academic value of these historical documents in the field of Chinese Studies, there have been many studies on the relationship between the “academic investigation” and imperialist expansion, as well as the imperial hegemony behind knowledge production. *The Great Series* provides these studies with a variety of responsive information from Chinese contemporaries during the production of knowledge in Chinese studies, which could form an effective dialogue with the research of contemporary scholars, enabling us to explore the history of China’s engagement and exchanges with the world since modern times from a broader perspective, and restoring the complex original appearance of history.

Finally, *The Great Series* provides a comprehensive understanding of historical sources, revealing the number and diversity of translators with a keen interest in the borderlands and international situations in modern times. Studies of cultural interaction between China and the world often centered on the acceptance and response of “key figures” to Western, but the translators in *The Great Series* are mostly overshadowed in by famous translators such as Lin Shu, Yan Fu, Liang

2 Zhang Xizhi, “The Process of the Central Asiatic Expeditions Investigative Trip to Mongolia: Zhang Xizhi’s Report on the Investigation”, in *Geography Volume & Religion Volume*, p.25.

Qichao, and Lu Xun, and could be considered “unknown” in the history of translation, literature, and ideology, with some translations even remaining anonymous. However, the cultural exchanges and transformations between East Asia and the world are not limited to notable historical figures alone. Numerous “minor figures” who have not been extensively documented in mainstream narratives also play a significant role. Their translations and introductions reveal the extensiveness and complexity of the process, complementing and validating the narratives of more well-known translators. *The Great Series* provides a solid historical foundation for studying the voices of these often-overlooked individuals. *The Great Series* offers a rich historical source for exploring the discourse of these “unknown” figures.

In conclusion, *The Great Series* has enriched our understanding of the intellectual exchange and cultural interaction within East Asia, even on the exchange between East Asia and the world. It contributes a Chinese perspective to complement the existing narratives. In addition to the several articles mentioned above, many of the documents collected in *The Great Series* have not yet been extensively utilized by the academic community, and will provide researchers with many innovative ideas and perspectives. This evaluation is grounded on the translations and documents related to foreign expeditions to China in *The Great Series*. In fact, when viewed as a whole, *The Great Series* as a large historical resources collection has other important meanings.

Firstly, *The Great Series* could bring new inspiration for the study of domestic newspapers. *The Great Series*’ extensive collection of newspaper articles encompasses a large group of periodicals, allowing newspaper researchers to discover and thoroughly examine previously overlooked publications. Each article within *The Great Series* is meticulously labeled with title and date of publication, retaining its original form with only minor textual notes or corrections as necessary. This methodical approach to compilation not only greatly facilitates researchers, but also allows those who do not have access to the original text to utilize the documents for preliminary research.

Secondly, *The Great Series* could bring Mongolian Studies and Chinese Studies closer together, producing richer and more valuable academic results. Naturally, those historical materials could produce the most direct scholarly value in Mongolian studies. In the Chinese academic context, Mongolian Studies, much like Tibetology and Manchu Studies, is recognized as a subset of Chinese Studies. However, the previous domestic examination of Mongolian Studies paid more attention to the introduction of overseas Mongolian Studies inquiries, as well as the collation and absorption of pertinent outcomes, which has, to some extent, ignored the dialog among scholars within China. *The Great Series* provides direct and indirect writings of Mongolia over a century by Chinese scholars, which could be

interpreted as research on Mongolia in a broader sense. Together with the value in Chinese Studies, as previously mentioned, *The Great Series* is significant in providing a solid foundation for connecting and deepening the understanding of Mongolian Studies and Chinese Studies.

Thirdly, the volumes of *The Great Series* are organized according to modern disciplinary classifications. Although many modern Mongol-related writings exhibit an integrative nature, it is somewhat diluted by this divisional approach. Still, in the current academic context, this divisional approach makes it easier for various disciplines to find relevant issues and develop corresponding viewpoints based on their respective disciplinary features. *The Great Series* provides informative materials from the frontier perspective for academic fields such as anthropology, economic history, education history, political history, military studies, and many others. It is worth noticing that the division of volumes by the editor, based on contemporary subject classifications, is to some extent misaligned with the disciplinary divisions in history. If *The Great Series* reveals the results of disciplinary fixation, then the changing degree of specialization in the content of its articles over the course of more than a hundred years reveals the process and history of disciplinary refinement and specialization. Therefore, through a comprehensive and in-depth examination of the content of each volume, a bird's-eye view of the historical development of various disciplines could be gained. By combining with the corresponding historical background, it is possible to explore the underlying reasons behind the development path of various disciplines.

Fourthly, from a bibliographical point of view, *The Great Series* forms a mutual complementarity with past compilations of Mongolia-related historical materials. Those previous collections either emphasized certain disciplinary areas, such as *Historical Records of Inner Mongolia Education* (《内蒙古教育史志资料》, two volumes, 1995) and *Examination of Old Inner Mongolian Newspapers (1905–1949.9)* (《内蒙古旧报刊考录 (1905–1949.9)》, 2010), or introduced overseas Mongolian Studies, such as large-scale historical compilation project *Foreign Language Historical Document Series of Inner Mongolia* (《内蒙古外文历史文献丛书》, 10 volumes published between 2012–2015) and the translated bibliographic work *Bibliotheca Mongolica Part I: Works in English, French, and German* (《蒙古学书目——英、法、德文著作》, two volumes, 2020). Gleanings from the histories of modern historical figures is also quite comprehensive, but mainly focuses on “key figures”. A representative example is the two-volume *A Collection of Historical Materials About Gunsangnorbu* (《贡桑诺尔布史料拾遗》, 2012). The compilation of *The Great Series* considers literature across different disciplinary fields, although it relies on Chinese resources, it also presents the development of foreign Mongolian Studies and its engagement with Chinese scholars from the perspective of “acceptance”. In terms of historical personalities, in addition to highlighting the presence of numerous

“anonymous” translators as mentioned earlier, the *Characters Volume* & *Literature and Art Volume* explores the historical records of diverse individuals who were focused by scholars during that period. While relatively concise, it offers an entry point for further research; therefore, *The Great Series* affords us a holistic perspective on the intricacies of past events by integrating with previous historical materials. Additionally, its sources of historical materials and the way it is divided into volumes serve as a benchmark for the collation and amalgamation of regional documents, facilitating the revision and enhancement of local histories.

To summarize, whether viewed from a particular aspect of its content or as a whole, *The Great Series* is of utmost academic value and significance. The “Preface” of *The Great Series* accurately describes this set of complicated historical source material possesses the characteristics of a “modern ‘encyclopedia’ of Mongolia”,³ which is characterized both by its extensive and diverse range of literature and the breadth and profundity of its scholarly value. *The Great Series* offers a rich collection of foundational documents for studying internal East Asian exchanges and the cultural interactions between China and the rest of the world, greatly facilitating in-depth research in these fields. At the same time, as a large-scale historical summary with a scientific method of division the segmentation method employed in *The Great Series* is scientific and aligns with contemporary disciplinary classifications, while the comprehensive nature of the source materials adds to its value. Such an extensive historical material compilation carries great reference value, theoretical value and practical significance for scholars of bibliography and other disciplines, as well as for the development of international academic exchanges.

3 *Overview Volume* (Book 1), “Preface”, p. 1.