

The State of Translation and Research on Ethnic Classics in Inner Mongolia

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Abstract

The ethnic classics of Inner Mongolia constitute an important part of China's ethnic classical heritage. Distinctive in ethnic character and rich in cultural transmission, they serve as an essential source for scholarship on the history and folk customs of the Mongolian peoples. Research on these classics and their translation has grown considerably in recent years. Much of this work, however, remains limited in perspective, lacking both systematic scope and sustained inquiry, and little attention has been paid to emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. As a result, research methods have become outdated, and translation practice has seen little reform or innovation. Drawing on a review of the existing literature on the translation and study of Inner Mongolia's ethnic classics, this article examines the translation of major works such as *The Secret History of the Mongols*, *Jangar*, and *Yinshan Zhengyao* (*Proper and Essential Food and Drink*). On this basis, it identifies current trends and assesses the present state of research in the field, with a view to offering a reference for future studies of ethnic classics in translation.

Keywords

Inner Mongolia, Ethnic Classics, Translation and Research

1. Introduction

This article begins by defining ethnic classics translation and tracing its development. It then offers a systematic review of the collection, translation, and international dissemination of ethnic classics since the founding of the People's Republic of China. Several major works from Inner Mongolia—including *The Epic of Geser*, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, *Jangar*, and *Yinshan Zhengyao* (*Proper and Essential Food and Drink*)—are introduced and summarized, in both their original forms and foreign-language translations. Building on a close analysis of

the translation practices of these works, the article goes on to synthesize key aspects of current research: the state of academic institutions and research teams, major research projects and achievements, and existing problems, challenges, and possible responses. This paper adopts a literature review research method. Sources include Chinese academic databases such as Chaoxing Duxiu, the China Social Sciences Library, CNKI, and the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI), as well as relevant academic journals, dissertations, translated works, monographs, and publicly available materials released on authoritative institutional websites. The search keywords were “Translation on Ethnic Classics” “*The Epic of Geser*” “*The Secret History of the Mongols*” “*Jangar*” “*Yinshan Zhengyao (Proper and Essential Food and Drink)*” and others. The selected literature must meet the following criteria: the research objects are the outward translation and introduction of classic texts of ethnic minorities, translation studies or related translation activities, translator introductions, and research projects. For the purpose of this paper, the scope is further narrowed to Mongolian classical texts and to translations, institutions, and research findings directly related to the Inner Mongolia region. Together, these discussions aim to clarify development trends and map the current research landscape in the translation of Inner Mongolia’s ethnic classics, providing a reference for future scholarship in the field.

2. Defining Ethnic Classics Translation and Tracing Its Development

Ethnic classics translation is an integral component of classical texts translation. The two are mutually reinforcing, and together they serve as a vehicle for communicating Chinese culture to the world. Compared with traditional Chinese classics, ethnic classics possess distinctive cultural characteristics and intrinsic value: they are a precious treasury recording the history, politics, folk customs, and beliefs of China’s ethnic minorities. It is precisely the need for the international dissemination of these works that gives rise to the activity of ethnic classics translation. By definition, this refers to the practice of translating into foreign languages the classical texts that have emerged from ethnic minorities in the course of their historical development.

Scholars have offered various definitions of ethnic classics translation. From the perspective of English translation alone, for instance, the English translation of ethnic classics has been defined as “the rendering into English of all canonical works of the ethnic minorities other than the Han, and an important part of the global outreach of Chinese culture” (Li, 2017: p. 8). Taking a more holistic perspective, Chen Jiahuang, in his article “Dilemmas and Countermeasures in the Outward Translation of Ethnic Classics from the Perspective of Macro-Translation,” regards ethnic classics translation as “a vital channel for promoting the international communication of the ‘unity in diversity’ pattern of Chinese culture, and a cultural bridge for building a community with a shared future for mankind” (Chen, 2025: p. 41). In her article “Reflections on the ‘Going Global’ of English

Translations of China's Ethnic Minority Cultural Classics," Qu Xiuli argues that "the cultural classics of China's ethnic minorities refer to the classical works of the 55 ethnic groups other than the Han. They represent the essence of ethnic minority culture in China and also form part of the world's intangible cultural heritage" (Qu, 2023: p. 97). Luo Xuanmin, by contrast, integrates the study of ethnic classics with the perspective of "macro-translation." In his article "A Clarion Call: Macro-Translation and the Outward Translation of Ethnic Classics," he argues that "the combination of macro-translation and the outward translation of ethnic classics is an important move to advance the development of translation theory in China and the international communication of Chinese culture. From translating the world into China to translating China for the world, and back again—in this ever-deepening cycle of translation between civilizations, the outward translation of ethnic classics plays a crucial role" (Luo, 2025: p. 38).

In sum, ethnic classics translation refers to the translation and dissemination of the classical texts of ethnic minorities for international audiences. Its function lies not only in effectively conveying the content of these texts; it is also an important practical undertaking that advances the global outreach of Chinese culture and promotes the development of translation theory for classical texts in China. In the new era, as the Belt and Road Initiative continues to deepen, the outward translation and dissemination of ethnic classics can further showcase the outstanding cultural elements of China's ethnic minorities and embody the sense of community for the Chinese nation—a community characterized by unity and mutual assistance among all ethnic groups, by shared weal and woe, and by an interdependence in which "you are in me and I am in you". Doing this work well, and with refinement, therefore serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, it further reveals to the world the rich humanistic content embedded in ethnic classics and the folk customs of ethnic minorities, thereby helping to protect and transmit these classics. On the other hand, it contributes to improving the theoretical framework, translation strategies, translation principles, translation vision, and translation methods of Chinese classics translation, thereby promoting the high-quality development of classical texts translation in China as a whole. To avoid conceptual confusion, this paper provides the following operational definitions for three related concepts. First, "ethnic classics" in a broad sense, refers to the classical texts formed by China's various ethnic minority groups in the course of their historical development. Second, "Mongolian ethnic classics" specifically refers to the classical texts created and transmitted by the Mongolian people, and constitutes a sub-category of ethnic classics. Third, "ethnic classics in the Inner Mongolia region" refers to ethnic classics that originated or circulated in the Inner Mongolia region, or whose compilation, translation, and research have been mainly undertaken by local institutions and scholars in Inner Mongolia. This category consists primarily of Mongolian ethnic classics, but is not limited to them. The classical texts selected in this paper, the research institutions and teams discussed, and the research findings reviewed all adopt the third definition; materials involving ethnic classics

from other regions appear only as background information for the development of research on and translation of ethnic classics.

According to existing records, the earliest translation of China's ethnic classics was undertaken in the early nineteenth century by Benjamin Bergmann, who rendered Chapters 8 and 9 of *The Epic of Geser* in his *Nomadic Wanderings among the Kalmyks* (Tashi, 2004: p. 88). In the late nineteenth century, the French missionary Paul Vial (Père Vial) translated a Yi myth concerning the origin of the universe in his book *Les Lolos*, presenting the Yi script and its French rendering in parallel columns (Ma, 2006: p. 184). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the German missionary A. H. Francke translated *Gesar* into English, publishing it under the title *The Lower Ladakhi Version of the Kesar Saga* (Zang & Ma, 2022: p. 13), further demonstrating the international renown and influence of the epic *Gesar* of the Zang people. It should be noted that *Gesar* is an epic of the Zang-language textual tradition. Unless otherwise specified, *Gesar* in this paper refers to the Mongolian epic of the Mongolian-language tradition. *Gesar* belongs to the same epic cycle as the *Gesar* preserved by the Mongolian ethnic group in the Mongolian-script tradition, but the two pertain to different ethnic and linguistic traditions. In 1939, Joseph F. Rock, an American scholar who had once traveled to Yunnan, translated the Naxi narrative poem *Lu Ban Lu Rao* into English and published it (Liu, 2016: p. 268).

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the government has attached great importance to the cultural work of ethnic minorities. A series of measures were introduced to collect, unearth, and organize ethnic classical texts, and active efforts were made to translate these classics into Chinese and into foreign languages. Li Zhengshuan and Wang Xin have divided the history of ethnic classics translation since 1949 into distinct periods. In their article "Seventy Years of Ethnic Classics Translation," they identify three stages: "the first seventeen years after the founding of New China," "the Cultural Revolution period," and "the era of reform and opening up." Their survey covers ethnic classics and their translations across six regions: Northeast China (with the Daur, Hezhen, and Manchu as the main ethnic minorities), North China (predominantly Mongolian), Northwest China (predominantly Uyghur and Kyrgyz), Southwest China (with the Zang, Yi, Naxi, Dai, Lisu, Lahu, Bouyei, Miao, and Bai as the main ethnic minorities), and Central and South China (predominantly Zhuang, Yao, and Tujia). In this way, the article sketches the seventy-year trajectory of ethnic classics translation since the founding of the People's Republic (Li & Wang, 2019).

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, ethnic classics translation has taken on a trend of diversified development, which is largely attributable to the favorable policies introduced by the State. In her article "A Visualized Analysis of Research on the Translation of Chinese Ethnic Classics (1986-2021)," Yang Yan notes that "in 2009, the State launched the comprehensive implementation of the 'Translation and Publication Project of Chinese Cultural Works,' providing large-scale support for Chinese culture to 'go global'; in 2012, the first National Aca-

demographic Symposium on the English Translation of Ethnic Minority Classics was held at Guangxi Minzu University; and in 2013, the major initiatives of the ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ and the ‘21st Century Maritime Silk Road’ were put forward, ushering research on the translation of ethnic classics into a new round of important historical opportunities” (Yang, 2021: p. 177). Some well-known ethnic classics have been retranslated, while others have received their first English translation. For instance, the Zang epic *King Gesar* was translated into English by Wang Guozhen and his colleagues and published in 2011 by China Intercontinental Press. In 2013, a publication symposium was held for *Buluotuo*, a Zhuang creation epic compiled and translated into a trilingual Zhuang-Chinese-English edition under the direction of Professor Han Jiaquan of Baise University. Upon its release, the book won the Shan Hua Award for Chinese Folk Literature and Art (Folk Literature Work category). Scholars have accordingly commented that “the publication of *The Epic of Buluotuo*, its winning of a major prize, and the successful holding of the symposium mark a new era in the creation of Chinese folk literature and the outward translation of ethnic classics, carrying profound significance and far-reaching influence for the in-depth excavation, transmission, and wide dissemination of Zhuang culture, and for its journey onto the world stage” (Yan & Huang, 2014: p. 96). Professor Zhang Zhigang of Dalian Minzu University has focused primarily on translating the classics of the ethnic minorities of Northeast China into English. Representative of his work are *Shaolang and Daifu*, a long narrative poem of the Daur people, published by The Ethnic Publishing House in 2012, and *Wuchin Folk Narrative Poems of the Daur*, a collection of Daur folk narrative poetry also published by The Ethnic Publishing House, in 2017 (Zhang, 2024). These English translations of ethnic classics provide important scholarly materials for further research into the cultural patterns of the ethnic minorities of Northeast China.

Ethnic classics translation today is characterized by diversity. Translation efforts are led primarily by renowned translators and expert scholars at home, whose objects of translation cover the surviving classical texts of major ethnic minorities across different regions of China. This not only further showcases to the world the rich cultural content of ethnic classics and the distinctive folk customs of ethnic minorities, but also lays a solid foundation for implementing the strategy of “Chinese culture going global”.

3. Representative Works in the Foreign-Language Translation of Inner Mongolia’s Ethnic Classics

The ethnic classics of Inner Mongolia are dominated by Mongolian classics, among which *The Epic of Gesar*, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, *Jangar*, and *Yinshan Zhengyao* (*Proper and Essential Food and Drink*) are the most representative. With long histories behind them, these classics cover such subjects as the historical development, cultural customs, and medicine and pharmacology of the Mongolian people. They are treasured gems of ethnic minority culture, and

an ever-growing body of related translations has greatly promoted their international dissemination and exchange.

3.1. *The Epic of Geser and Its Major Foreign-Language Translations*

The Epic of Geser is an epic masterpiece of Mongolian literature. It depicts, above all, how Geser leads his army to slay demons and monsters and rid the people of evil. The work not only presents the legendary exploits of the hero Geser, but also records the folk customs of ethnic minorities. The main extant canonical editions of *The Epic of Geser* include the Beijing woodblock-printed edition, the Longfu Temple edition, the Usutu Juu edition, and the Ordos edition (Xiu, 2023: p. 19). At present, the foreign-language translations best known to readers are mostly based on these canonical editions of *The Epic of Geser*.

These translations exist mainly in English, Russian, Japanese, and German, of which the Russian versions are the most numerous. The earliest foreign translations of the epic were made by Russian translators: “The Russian traveler P. S. Pallas, in his 1776 book *Travels through Various Provinces of the Russian Empire*, first introduced *The Epic of Geser* to Russian readers” (Wang, 2014: p. 29). In his article “A Survey of Foreign Studies on *Gesar*,” Xu Guoqiong gives a detailed account of how *The Epic of Geser* was first introduced to foreign readers:

“In 1776, the Russian scholar P. S. Pallas published, in Volume 1 of the *Sammlung historischer Nachrichten über die mongolischen Völkerschaften* (*Collection of Historical Materials on the Mongol Peoples*), printed in St. Petersburg, an article introducing *Geser*. The article discussed the epic’s performance forms among the common people and the scriptures associated with Geser. The author spoke highly of the epic’s hero, Geser, comparing him to Achilles and Heracles, heroes of the Homeric epics. In Volume 3 of *Travels through Various Provinces of the Russian Empire*, published in St. Petersburg between 1771 and 1776, Pallas reported on and described the Geser Temple. Pallas is the earliest scholar known today to have studied *Geser* abroad” (Zhao, 1994: p. 2302).

Subsequently, on the basis of the canonical editions of *The Epic of Geser*, Schmidt and others rendered it into other languages. These translations have greatly widened the epic’s renown and influence across Europe and the English-speaking world, attracting the attention of foreign scholars and readers alike and providing important materials for research on *The Epic of Geser* outside China.

3.2. *The Secret History of the Mongols and Its Major Foreign-Language Translations*

The Secret History of the Mongols, composed in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, is a work that traces the development of the Golden Family of Genghis Khan and records several hundred years of Mongol history. It remains today an important documentary source for research in such fields as Mongolian language, culture, aesthetics, and art. In his book *The Social System of the Mongols*, B. Ya.

Vladimirtsov once described *The Secret History of the Mongols* as “a work of the aristocracy of the Mongolian steppes, steeped in an ‘epic’ mood, adept at employing the narrative-poetic style, and often engaged in narrative-poetic composition” (Vladimirtsov, 1980: p. 16). As a historical compendium for studying Mongolian culture and history, *The Secret History of the Mongols* combines the literary quality of poetry interwoven with prose with the value of a historical source, and stands as an outstanding representative classic among the cultural treasures of the Chinese nation. It is precisely because of the prominent value of this work among the classics of ethnic minorities that Yang Yi, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, has commented: “It should be said that *The Secret History of the Mongols* is the great product of an era when the nation’s vigor was at its peak and its vitality at its fullest—an era in which the vigor and vitality within were transformed into written words... It absorbs the quintessence of Mongol folk culture from the remotest antiquity onward, pioneers the written culture of the Mongols, and serves as a classic source for the study of Mongolian history, Yuan history, and medieval world history, suffused with the grand and sublime spirit of the epic” (Yang, 2000).

Although a considerable number of foreign-language translations of *The Secret History of the Mongols* are extant today, the versions that have exercised significant influence in academia are mainly Cleaves’s English translation, de Rachewiltz’s English translation, Onon’s English translation, and Arthur Waley’s English translation. As a translation of scholarly reference value, Cleaves’s English version from Harvard University “is the first complete English translation of *The Secret History of the Mongols*, and a landmark work that plays a foundational role for all future research on the translation of the text” (Tian, 2023: p. 9). Compared with other foreign translations, de Rachewiltz’s English version emphasizes a consciousness of modern English in translation. His reason for stressing this modern-English approach is that “his translation has a clear positioning for the general modern reader. This is, on the one hand, certainly connected with Professor Poppe’s original proposal, but more importantly it reflects the translator’s own active and deliberate choice” (Xing, 2010b: p. 152). Professor Urgunge Onon of Cambridge University produced a complete English translation; in pursuit of accuracy and to facilitate understanding among readers of the target language, Onon’s version makes extensive use of annotations, so that the relatively complex proper nouns in the source text, along with the relevant Mongolian cultural and historical background, can be effectively conveyed, and “owing to its translation with distinctive ethnic-cultural characteristics, it occupies an important position in the international Mongolian studies community” (Tian, 2018: p. 95). The English translation by the renowned British sinologist Arthur Waley is mainly a partial translation and adaptation. “In 1963, Arthur Waley translated the narrative portion of *The Secret History of the Mongols* from the Chinese general translation, and included it in the book *The Secret History of the Mongols and Other Pieces*, published by George Allen & Unwin” (Xing, 2010a: p. 79). In contrast with earlier foreign trans-

lations, Waley's version weakens the previous translations' inclination to prioritize "history" as a translation premise and content constraint, and instead places greater emphasis on uncovering the literary quality of the source text, thereby endowing his translation with greater literary value and highlighting its effect as popular literature for a broad readership.

3.3. *Jangar* and Its Major Foreign-Language Translations

Jangar is a celebrated heroic epic of the Mongolian people. It tells, above all, how the warriors and heroes under *Jangar*'s command struggle against their enemies to defend their homeland and ultimately win victory. Scholars hold different views on the circumstances of the epic's genesis; the mainstream position today holds that *Jangar* "originated in the region at the western end of the Mongolian Plateau, namely the Altai Mountains and the Irtysh River basin" (Rong & Zhao, 2000: p. 260). As a monumental folk work transmitted in the Mongolian oral tradition of singing and recitation, and as one of China's three great epics (the other two being the Kyrgyz epic *Manas* and the Zang epic *Gesar*), *Jangar* is widely circulated not only in Mongolian-populated areas such as Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang, but is also well known in Mongolia, Russia, and other countries. Through its literary portrayal, this long heroic epic provides vivid material for understanding and studying the social formations, lifeways, political life, economic development, and cultural features of the Mongolian people in ancient times. Moreover, by virtue of its rich artistic achievements, *Jangar* occupies an important position in Mongolian cultural and intellectual history, representing the highest achievement in the development of Mongolian literature.

According to available records, the earliest foreign-language translation of *Jangar* was produced by the German Bergmann. "During his travels among the Kalmyk tribes of the Volga region in 1802-1803, he collected and recorded a large number of epics and folk tales from the Kalmyks. From among these he selected the chapter 'The Fierce Khara Kenas' of *Jangar*, translated it into German with annotations, and published it in Riga in 1804. He also published legends relating to *Jangar* together with his own essay, giving the epic high praise and introducing it to European scholars" (Jiamucha, 1996: p. 323). Bergmann's German translation of "The Fierce Khara Kenas" marks the first recorded instance of *Jangar* being translated into a European language and published. Subsequently, other translations of *Jangar* also attracted scholarly attention, including "F. Erdmann's German translation," "B. Zaklodkin's Russian translation," "Bater Basangov's Russian translation," "the Russian translation by the five scholars Bitkeev, Ovalov, Kudya-rov, Sangadzhiyev, and Kursunkiev," and "Ashikchikov's German translation," among others (Zhang, 2013: pp. 53-54). These works render the epic, whether systematically or partially, in translations of high quality and elegant style, making a great contribution to the dissemination of *Jangar* in the Western world.

At present, English translations of *Jangar* remain extremely scarce. Among the better known is the Mongolian-Chinese-English parallel edition of *Jangar* under

the chief editorship of *Jiamucha*, published by Xinjiang University Press. *Jiamucha*'s English version was produced when he "organized the compilation and publication of the Mongolian-Chinese-English trilingual edition of *Jangar*, the first English translation in the history of international *Jangar* studies, a work of epoch-making significance" (Zhang & Huang, 2024: p. 41). In terms of morphology, syntax, and discourse, the translation faithfully renders the content of the original *Jangar* and is distinguished by its "beauty in sound," "beauty in sense," and "beauty in form," making it the English version most commonly used in overseas research on *Jangar* today. In addition to *Jiamucha*'s translation, there are also *The Legend of Jangar* compiled by He Dexiu and translated by Pan Zhongming (published by China Intercontinental Press in 2011), and Wu Songlin's Chinese-English parallel edition of *Jangar* (published by Jilin University Press in 2012). All three English versions of *Jangar* were produced by translators at home, a fact that reflects the importance China now attaches to the outward translation and dissemination of ethnic minority classics such as *Jangar*.

3.4. *Yinshan Zhengyao* (Proper and Essential Food and Drink) and Its Major Foreign-Language Translations

As a classic Mongolian work on medicine and nutritional health, *Yinshan Zhengyao* was compiled by Hu Sihui, court physician of the Yuan dynasty. Recording the dietary regimen and dietary therapy of the imperial court, the work was not only commended and printed under the patronage of the Yuan emperors and nobility; printed copies also circulated among the common people, making it an important source for the study of Chinese food and dietary therapy. *Yinshan Zhengyao* vividly displays the dietary and medicinal customs of the Mongol royal house. Taken as a whole, its content is marked by two main features: "First, this book is not merely a Yuan-era recipe collection but also an ancient monograph on dietary therapy. In addition to expounding the methods of preparing various foods and drinks, it pays particular attention to explaining their properties, flavors, and nourishing effects—that is, the relationship between diet and nutritional hygiene—a subject not covered by ordinary recipe books. Second, this book embraces Mongolian and Chinese foods and drinks alike, while taking Mongolian cuisine as its mainstay" (Yao, 1993: p. 44). *Yinshan Zhengyao* therefore not only profoundly displays the rich Mongolian food culture and the efficacy of dietary therapy, but also provides important reference material for research on ancient Chinese health-preserving practices and the food repertoire of ethnic minorities.

As an important Mongolian monograph on dietary hygiene in China, its foreign-language translations first appeared in the middle and late decades of the last century. Most of the foreign-language versions of *Yinshan Zhengyao* from this period are partial translations, rendering only some chapters of the original work, and the first English translation of *Yinshan Zhengyao* did not appear until 2000. The translators of this complete English version are Paul D. Buell and Eugene Anderson; it was "first published in 2000 by the British publisher Routledge, and a

revised edition was issued in 2010 by Brill, a scholarly publisher long devoted to the publication and dissemination of international scholarship in sinology” (Liu et al., 2020: p. 55). This complete English version of *Yinshan Zhengyao* not only systematically presents to readers of the English-speaking world the Mongols’ time-honored food and dietary-therapy culture, but also, for the first time, brings the content of the original work to the world in English.

This translation serves as an important reference and textual basis for overseas scholarship on traditional Chinese medicine and, to a certain extent, has also promoted the outward dissemination and exchange of Chinese food culture. Precisely because of the significance of this first complete English translation of *Yinshan Zhengyao*, Wang Shanshan and her coauthors give it high praise in their article “A Study of the English Translation of *Yinshan Zhengyao* from the Perspective of Schema Theory”: “The first English translation of *Yinshan Zhengyao* offers much inspiration for the interpretation of ethnic medical classics and for the dissemination of the distinctive features of a culturally heterogeneous tradition” (Wang et al., 2022: p. 62).

A survey of the translation practices of the four classics discussed above reveals several common translation issues. First, the choice of source text directly determines the style and quality of the translated text; translators therefore need to select appropriate source texts in light of their own translation practice. Second, there is a lack of unified standards for translating technical terms across different versions, which calls for comparative analysis and comprehensive consideration. Third, both the quantity and quality of annotations in translated texts can affect target-language readers’ understanding of the source text; translators should therefore provide meticulous and thorough annotations. Fourth, the various translations adopt different translation methods and techniques in rendering different cultural content, yet each method has its own strengths and weaknesses. These common issues indicate that, in translating ethnic classics from Inner Mongolia for international audiences, further efforts are needed in the selection of source texts, the standardization of technical terms, and cultural interpretation.

4. The Current State of Research on the Translation of Inner Mongolia’s Ethnic Classics

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the translation of Inner Mongolia’s ethnic classics entered a new stage of development. Since the launch of reform and opening up, research in this field has also entered a period of comprehensive development—a result both of policy support and of the unremitting efforts of numerous translators and scholars. Research at this stage displays breadth of academic direction (such as studies of translation and cultural dissemination, translation reconstruction, text translation, and translation thought), depth of theoretical grounding (such as relevance translation theory, functional equivalence theory, memetics, and schema theory), diversity of research methods (comparative studies of different versions, corpus-based translation studies, biblio-

metric research, multimodal translation research, and case study research), and plurality of research forms (research on translation annotation, lexical features, syntactic features, and discourse-level features in translation). Overall, from the literature reviewed in this paper, research on the translation of Inner Mongolia's ethnic classics today is characterized by a large volume of achievements, clearly delineated levels of research, and clearly defined research subjects. However, most of this research still rests on the foundations of traditional translation studies, and there is a lack of research outcomes that make use of large-scale artificial intelligence technologies. How to conduct research on the translation of Inner Mongolia's ethnic classics with artificial intelligence technologies, and how to make full use of large language models to enhance the efficiency and precision of translation research, has therefore become one of the priorities of future scholarly work in this field.

4.1. Academic Institutions and Research Teams

At present, the institutions engaged in research on the translation of Inner Mongolia's ethnic classics are mainly the social science academies and universities within the region. Their research on the compilation, excavation, and translation of ethnic classics is complementary and mutually reinforcing, and has made a great contribution to the development of the field.

As a comprehensive research institution of philosophy and social sciences directly under the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, the Inner Mongolia Academy of Social Sciences plays an important role in the compilation and study of Mongolian classics. For example, its Institute of History has “collated, annotated, and published more than thirty scholarly works on Mongolian historical documents, chiefly collation and annotation projects on *The Secret History of the Mongols*, *Altan Tobchi*, *Gangyn Urusqal*, *Altan Tobchi (The Golden Wheel with a Thousand Spokes)*, *The Biography of Altan Khan*, and *A Study of the History of the Holy Lord Genghis Khan*, which have exerted considerable influence at home and abroad” (Inner Mongolia Academy of Social Sciences, 2024). The work of the Inner Mongolia Academy of Social Sciences in compiling and collating traditional Mongolian classics provides important textual support for the outward dissemination and foreign-language translation of ethnic classics.

As the only university in Inner Mongolia under the national “Double First-Class” initiative, Inner Mongolia University has made the research and practice of translating Mongolian classics into English, Japanese, and Russian—as well as their translation into Chinese—a distinctive feature of translation studies at its Foreign Languages and Literature research base (Inner Mongolia University, School of Foreign Languages, n.d.-a). This has not only broadened the range of languages available for research on the translation of Inner Mongolia's ethnic classics, but has also further raised the level of translation and research on Mongolian classics at Inner Mongolia University. In addition, the MTI Education Center of the School of Foreign Languages at Inner Mongolia University has established dedicated

translation tracks such as “Ethnic Classics Translation” and “Translation for Characteristic Industries,” and created a specialized translation teaching model aligned with translation projects on the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Inner Mongolia (Inner Mongolia University, School of Foreign Languages, n.d.-b). To a certain extent, this has provided important educational practice for the outward translation and research of Mongolian classics, supplying a steady stream of professional and practice-oriented talent for the translation and research of Inner Mongolia’s ethnic classics, and thereby further raising the overall level of research in this field.

As a key university of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Inner Mongolia Normal University has accumulated profound foundations in research on the translation of Mongolian classics. As Vice President Jia Meilin noted at the International Academic Symposium on Multilingual Documents and the Ethnic History of China’s Northern Frontiers, the university has “consistently been committed to the compilation, translation, and study of multilingual documents, and to the inheritance and promotion of the fine traditional culture of China” (Inner Mongolia Normal University, School of Mongolian Studies, n.d.). The holding of this symposium demonstrates, to a certain extent, the contribution and efforts of Inner Mongolia Normal University in the translation and research of Inner Mongolia’s ethnic classics.

Although the relevant academic institutions and research teams have already produced a certain number of achievements in this field, as far as the literature covered in this paper is concerned, the overall number of institutions and teams conducting in-depth research remains small, and these institutions have yet to form effective mechanisms of cooperation or platforms for resource sharing. This is the author’s assessment based on the foregoing review, which remains to be verified through more comprehensive data. There is also a lack of guiding documents and policies that comprehensively integrate research on the translation of Inner Mongolia’s ethnic classics. On the other hand, the integration of research on ethnic classics translation with teaching practice in the region’s universities remains insufficient. This is especially the case at the level of MTI education, where the content of classics translation has not been organically incorporated into educational practice. How to introduce the content of ethnic classics translation into foreign-language teaching practice is therefore an issue that universities in the region should take into account in the current stage of foreign-language teaching reform.

4.2. Major Research Projects and Achievements

In the compilation of and research on the translation of Inner Mongolia’s ethnic classics, Inner Mongolia University has successively secured a number of national-level major projects, providing important academic support for the field. For example, the National Social Science Fund Major Project “Collection and Collation

of Chinese and Foreign Annotated Editions of *The Secret History of the Mongols*, with a Comprehensive Study of the Original Text,” led by Professor Burenbatur, and the National Social Science Fund Major Project “Excavation, Collation, and Research of Zang-Script Mongolian Classics of the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties,” led by Researcher Shulin, an expert flexibly recruited by the university, have both laid a solid academic foundation for the excavation, collation, interpretation, and translation of Mongolian documentary classics. These projects have supplied important textual material for the outward translation and dissemination of Mongolian classics and have provided valuable references for related work.

In addition, many scholars have published papers related to the translation of Inner Mongolia’s ethnic classics in major academic journals. These include Xing Li’s “A Review of Arthur Waley’s English Translation of the Mongolian Classic *The Secret History of the Mongols*, with a Discussion of the Disciplinary Positioning of Research on Ethnic Classics Translation” (*Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages*, 2010, no. 2); Xing Li’s “The Popular Canonization and Dissemination of Ethnic Literary and Cultural Classics: A Review of de Rachewiltz’s English Translation of *The Secret History of the Mongols*” (*Studies of Ethnic Literature*, 2010, no. 3); Tian Zhenjiang’s “Cultural Textual Research on Mongolian Origins in Onon’s English Translation of *The Secret History of the Mongols*” (*Qianyan*, 2018, no. 4); Zhang Suojun and Tian Zhenjiang’s “Exploring the Translation of *The Secret History of the Mongols* from the Perspective of Intertextuality” (*Ethnic Translation Studies*, 2020, no. 2); and Zhang Yuan and Huang Jinyang’s “A Study of Thick Description in Jiamucha’s English Translation of *Jangar*” (*Ethnic Translation Studies*, 2024, no. 2). Approaching these classic works from the angles of comparative study of different versions, or of different translation strategies, methods, and modes of cultural dissemination, these studies have examined the translation of Inner Mongolia’s ethnic classics in fine detail, thereby providing important content for organizing Mongolian classic translations and broadening the outward translation of the relevant classics.

As for graduate theses, Liu Xueting’s “A Comparative Study of English Translations of the Mongolian Epic *Jangar*” (Inner Mongolia University, MA thesis, 2019), Hu Chunlan’s “A Study of Translation Shifts in Two English Translations of *The Secret History of the Mongols*” (Inner Mongolia University, MA thesis, 2022), Tong Biqigetu’s “A Comparative Study of the Translation of Myths and Mythological Elements in *The Secret History of the Mongols*” (Inner Mongolia University, MA thesis, 2022), and Cui Xinyu’s “A Study of the English Translation of the Mongolian Medicinal-Diet Classic *Yinshan Zhengyao*” (Inner Mongolia University, MA thesis, 2022) likewise select well-known ethnic classics of Inner Mongolia as their objects of translation research. Addressing the content of the original texts, most of these theses probe the strengths and weaknesses of different translations of Mongolian classics from the perspective of comparative study of versions, thereby offering suggestions and criteria for the selection of translations of the relevant classics.

4.3. Existing Problems, Challenges, and Response Strategies

Although the compilation, outward translation, and dissemination of Inner Mongolia's ethnic classics have yielded notable results, and both the quality and quantity of related scholarly research have improved markedly compared with the past, current research still faces multiple structural problems and challenges. First, ethnic classics contain a large number of culture-loaded terms rich in local cultural color and connotations. These terms embody concepts peculiar to ethnic minorities; the target language sometimes lacks corresponding vocabulary, and the translation of specialized terminology remains inconsistent—all of which creates obstacles for translation research at the lexical level. Second, current research on the translation of Inner Mongolia's ethnic classics focuses only on comparison, error correction, and the application of translation methods, strategies, and techniques at the level of translation practice, while lacking the construction and summation of related translation theory for ethnic classics. This has resulted in a disconnect between theoretical research and translation practice. Some studies impose Western translation theories on the translation of Inner Mongolia's ethnic classics through excessive interpretation, causing cultural distortion of the source text's content and a tendency toward vacuousness in research. Finally, most current research analyzes and summarizes translation by relying on traditional translation techniques and research methods. However, within the scope of the literature retrieved in this paper, with little research conducted on the translation of ethnic classics against the backdrop of artificial intelligence, making it difficult to achieve breakthroughs in translation research at the technical level. It can be said that all these practical problems pose obstacles to future research on the translation of Inner Mongolia's ethnic classics.

Therefore, in response to the above issues, future research may proceed in three aspects. First, strengthen the cultivation and pipeline development of interdisciplinary talent. Relying on universities in the region such as Inner Mongolia University, cultivate interdisciplinary translation professionals for ethnic classics who are proficient in both ethnic minority languages and foreign languages and possess interdisciplinary knowledge. Based on translation practice, establish a comprehensive training system for such interdisciplinary translation talent. Second, establish the application of artificial intelligence as an explicit research agenda and strengthen AI technological support. For example, by building bilingual parallel corpora and terminology databases for Inner Mongolia's ethnic classics, a translation research model of "AI + human assistance" can be explored. Current mainstream large language models may be used to conduct AI analysis, interpretation, and translation of complex culture-loaded words, sentences, and discourse with rich cultural connotations in the original texts of ethnic classics. Experts familiar with ethnic cultures can then review the output—that is, perform human-assisted AI post-editing and proofreading—thereby ensuring translation accuracy. Third, manually correct unsupported statements in AI-generated content, and reject questionable translations that cannot be properly verified or justified.

Overall, the “AI + human assistance” model can not only effectively enhance the efficiency of translating, disseminating, and researching ethnic classics, but also contribute to innovating research methods in classics translation and to enriching and improving the construction and development of translation theory for ethnic classics, thereby providing reference for future research on ethnic classic translation.

5. Conclusion

The Inner Mongolia region boasts a long history and profound cultural heritage. Over centuries of exchange and integration, the various ethnic groups have forged a path of harmonious multi-ethnic coexistence characterized by unity, shared destiny, and mutual guardianship. Enhancing the translation and research of Inner Mongolia’s ethnic classics therefore not only helps to safeguard ethnic unity and promote the development of both theory and practice in ethnic classics translation at home, but also provides experience and reference for the outward dissemination of ethnic classics—a vivid interpretation of the pattern of unity in diversity of Chinese culture.

Overall, research on the translation of Inner Mongolia’s ethnic classics is facing unprecedented opportunities for development. At present, translation and research in this field play an important role in innovating methods and approaches, upholding the standpoint of Chinese culture, actively disseminating ethnic culture, and advancing the global outreach of Chinese culture. Through outward translation and academic research, an ever-growing number of ethnic classics are becoming known to an ever-wider audience.

Therefore, building on past experience and achievements, future translation and research on the ethnic minority classics of Inner Mongolia should adopt an “AI + human assistance” model in interpreting the texts, exploring their cultural connotations, and carrying out translation and dissemination. In this way, artificial intelligence can truly serve as a tool for improving research efficiency and accuracy, thereby providing useful reference for the translation, dissemination, and study of related classics.

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