

Sinologist Fuchs and His Early Manchu Language Studies

Yue Dong*

Heilongjiang University, Harbin, 150080, China

*Corresponding author: goodluckdongyue@hotmail.com

Abstract: This paper systematically examines the contributions of the German sinologist Fuchs in the field of early Manchu studies, particularly his work in collating and researching Manchu-language documents. Focusing on his landmark 1936 publication, *Studies on Manchu Books and Documents*, the paper provides an in-depth analysis of his research methodology and academic significance. Fuchs' documentary work reflects the rigorous philological tradition of German sinology. He not only systematically catalogued fifty-six rare Manchu printed materials and early archival documents, meticulously examining their editions, physical formats, contents, and locations of preservation, but also, through detailed textual comparison and linguistic analysis, revealed the evolutionary trajectory of the Manchu script from its "unpointed" to its "pointed" form, as well as how the compilation of official Qing dynasty historical texts shaped historical narratives. His research scope is extensive, covering officially compiled historical records, official documents and set phrases, translated literature, and even Manchu-language seals, thereby situating Manchu documents within the broader context of the multi-ethnic governance and cultural interactions of the Qing dynasty.

Keywords: Fuchs; Manchu language; documentary classics

Introduction

The German sinologist Fuchs, also known as Walter Fuchs, was born in Berlin, Germany, in August 1902. He entered the Oriental Language College of the University of Berlin in 1921, majoring in Chinese with minors in Manchu and folklore, and obtained his doctoral degree in 1925. Shortly after completing his doctorate, he secured an opportunity to work in Shenyang, China, where he gained deeper access to Manchu language research. In 1938, he relocated to Beijing and began teaching at Fu Jen University. From 1940 onward, he worked at the Sino-German Institute in Beijing. Following the end of World War II, Fuchs returned to Germany. Starting in 1949, he served as a deputy professor at the University of Hamburg. Under the guidance of Erich Haenisch at the University of Munich, he acquired his professorial qualification in 1951. In 1956, he became a professor of sinology at the Free University of Berlin. From 1960 until his retirement, he held the newly established chair of sinology at the University of Cologne, which also marked the entry of Manchu language and philology into the stage of degree-granting education in Germany^[1].

Fuchs' research related to the Manchu people is primarily divided into two major categories: the Manchu language and Manchu history. His period of work in China represents the peak of his research on the Manchu language. In 1930 and 1932, he published successive articles in *Asia Major* titled "Zum mandjurischen Kandjur" (On the Manchu-Language Kangyur). In 1932, he also published the paper "Neues Material zur mandjurischen Literatur aus Pekinger Bibliotheken" (New Materials on Manchu Literature from Beijing Libraries) in *Asia Major*. In 1933, he published in succession "Fortschritte im Quellenstudium der Manschu-Geschichte" (Advances in the Study of Sources for Manchu History) in *Sinica* 8; "Über einige Landkarten mit mandjurischer Beschriftung" (On Several Maps with Manchu Inscriptions); and "The Long White Mountain in Manchuria" in *The China Journal*. His research output in 1934 and 1935 focused mainly on the history of the Jurchen people and the Qing dynasty. He published the paper "Frühmandjurische Fürstengräber bei Liao-yang" (Early Manchu Princely Tombs near Liaoyang) in 1934, and his 1935 paper investigated the issue of the sacrificial burial of Abhai, the primary consort of Qing Taizu Nurhaci.

In 1936, he published the work *Studies on Manchu Books and Documents* (Beiträge zur mandschurischen Bibliographie und Literatur). The main text of this work spans 130 pages and is divided into eleven chapters. The first chapter serves as an introduction, in which Fuchs compares his

work with Berthold Laufer's 1908 publication *Introduction to Manchu Literature* and analyzes the state of collection and organization of Manchu-language documents up to that time. Fuchs believed that the collection of Manchu materials at that stage more closely resembled a "mere catalog"^[2], as it neither provided page numbers for individual volumes nor distinguished and compared different editions of the documents. Fuchs systematically summarized the storage conditions of Manchu documents worldwide, with particular emphasis on outlining and organizing the manuscripts held in Shenyang and across various locations in Japan following the Russo-Japanese War.

In the second chapter, Fuchs enumerates information on fifty-six Manchu printed materials he collected. The description of each printed item begins with its title in Wade-Giles romanization, followed by its Chinese title, Manchu title, volume numbers, and binding format. The author provides a detailed analysis of the textual and structural features of each item. Taking the first included printed work, *Qingwen Duiyin Xiezi* (Manchu-Chinese Phonetic Glossary), as an example, Fuchs records the title of each volume of this block-printed edition, noting the absence of a frontispiece, prefaces, postscripts, or publication details. Regarding content and function, the author concisely introduces the main content and purpose of this printed edition. *Qingwen Duiyin Xiezi* contains Manchu-Chinese bilingual syllabic tables and 460 transliterated words. Based on early characteristics of the script and transliteration, the author concludes that this edition reflects the transitional state of Manchu documents before standardization in the early Qing dynasty, inferring it originated from the Shunzhi reign or the early Kangxi reign. Finally, the author also notes the repository where the block-printed edition is held.

In the subsequent introductions to the fifty-five Manchu printed materials, Fuchs continues this style of describing block-printed editions: he first presents the basic information of the edition, then offers certain evaluations or inferences based on this information, and finally specifies the repository where the edition is held. At the beginning of this chapter, Fuchs categorizes these fifty-five Manchu block-printed editions into three major groups: editions not recorded in any previous bibliographies, unknown versions of known works, and editions that, although already listed in the Union Catalog of Manchu Books, require in-depth discussion due to their rarity. This classification facilitates a direct response to and supplementation of earlier work by scholars such as Laufer. By specifically listing documents that, despite being included in the Union Catalog of Manchu Books, warrant detailed discussion due to their rarity, Fuchs demonstrates that he pursued not only quantity but also emphasized the uniqueness of documents and the depth of research. Fuchs also standardized the format for these fifty-six documents, stating in advance details such as "the Chinese book titles in parentheses are not original to the works" and "dimensions of the printing frame are based on the first page." This approach prevents reader misunderstanding and ensures consistency in subsequent cataloging formats. For documents lacking a frontispiece, prefaces, postscripts, or author information, Fuchs also recorded these details. This practice both faithfully reflects the common state of early Manchu documents and demonstrates his rigorous philological expertise, transforming the compilation of a catalog itself into a critical examination of the history of document transmission and the formation of knowledge.

1. Early Manchu Block-Printed Editions and Archives

When collating specific block-printed editions, Fuchs first focused on the preservation status of early Qing dynasty documents. Although the Qing rulers were Manchus from beyond the Shanhai Pass, they placed great emphasis on the translation of Chinese classics and historical texts into Manchu, incorporating this into the official translation program even before entering the Pass in 1644. Fuchs organized his collation work primarily around the translators, key figures among whom included Dahai, Asitan, and Emaotu. Fuchs did not merely record the biographies of these translators and the documents they translated. He endeavored to record the information for each block-printed edition as comprehensively as possible, including its titles in Manchu and Chinese, the number of volumes, the format and dimensions, page numbers, publication year, and other details. He specifically noted physical characteristics such as "lacks frontispiece, prefaces, or postscripts," "archaic style of script," and "skewed printing frame," which serve as important evidence for determining the approximate period of the edition and understanding its circulation history. Simultaneously, he clearly recorded information about the collectors or holding institutions, providing tangible leads for subsequent research. Fuchs was not limited to objective cataloging; he frequently appended criteria for dating, content analysis, or scholarly investigation after describing the physical form of an edition. When collating the translated works of the translator Dahai, he pointed out that Dahai's translation titled *Xingbu Huidian* referred to the Ming *Lüli*, as the latter could be found within the "Ministry of Justice" section of the Ming *Huidian*. Paul Pelliot believed that the Ming *Lüli* was a separate, specialized translation distinct from the Ming *Huidian*, while Paul Georg von Möllendorff and Berthold Laufer

were unaware of this work titled Ming Lüli. Fuchs inferred that the Ming Lüli and the Ming Huidian were the same work. This is because the Veritable Records, as a source of information, is highly reliable. In the Veritable Records, the Xingbu Huidian is recorded as Beidere jurgan-i uheri kooli bithe (?), and there is no specific mention elsewhere of the Ming Lüli being a translation by Dahai. This indicates that the "Ming Huidian" commonly mentioned in relation to Dahai's translations actually refers only to a specific part of it, namely the "Ministry of Justice" section, which is the Ming Lüli^[3].

Fuchs also collated early Manchu archives, which are compilations of original documents written in the archaic "unpointed" Old Manchu script from the first half of the 17th century. In 1905, Naitō Konan discovered manuscript copies of these archives in Shenyang. Between 1931 and 1935, the original archival volumes were found in the Forbidden City in Beijing. As official records of the reigns of Qing Taizu and Taizong, these archives served as the foundational source texts for all later Chinese-language official historical compilations. Their exceptionally high historical value stems from the fact that they were not subsequently altered. Fuchs focused his analysis on the Dictionary of Unpointed Characters (Tongki fuka akō hergen-i bithe), compiled during the Qianlong reign by Ortai and Xu Yuanmeng. The archaic, unpointed Old Manchu script was difficult for later generations to decipher. To preserve the original script and explain ancient vocabulary, the Dictionary of Unpointed Characters extracted difficult terms from the old archives, presented them alongside their equivalents in the then-current "New Manchu" (pointed script), and organized them according to the twelve head characters. Fuchs outlined the complete trajectory of these early Manchu archives: from being stored deep within the palace in the early Qing, to being revisited and systematized during the Qianlong reign, and finally to their discovery and publicization by modern Chinese and Japanese scholars. He primarily analyzed the characteristics of Old Manchu as reflected in the Dictionary of Unpointed Characters from a linguistic perspective. For instance, from an orthographic standpoint, the letter *k* often retained its Mongol script form before consonants, with less frequent use of the specific Manchu form; *o* and oo were used interchangeably (e.g., komsoo/komso), and the distinction between long and short vowels was not strict. Phonologically, the vowel system was unstable, exhibiting phenomena of weakening and elision. Furthermore, the transliteration of Chinese loanwords was inconsistent, and the transliteration of proper names showed considerable arbitrariness. Through Fuchs' systematization, the evolutionary traces of the Manchu script from its "unpointed" to its "pointed" form become visible.

Fuchs dedicates an entire chapter to a comprehensive study of the Qing dynasty's Veritable Records, introducing their compilation process, various editions, and information on extant copies. As the most authoritative chronologically arranged official historical compilation of the Qing dynasty, the Veritable Records documented significant state affairs, imperial edicts, and memorials during each emperor's reign. The emperors themselves read the Veritable Records of previous reigns daily to inform their governance. Fuchs meticulously lists the number of volumes (juan), the number of physical books (ce), and the start and end dates of compilation for the Veritable Records from the reign of Taizu to that of Wenzong. He specifically points out the existence of multiple versions of the Veritable Records of Taizu. These include the original 1636 version titled Veritable Records of the Martial Emperor Taizu, the illustrated Manzhou Shilu (Manchu Veritable Records, a 1781 facsimile), the revised Kangxi version, and the finalized Qianlong version. Through his analysis of examples from these texts, Fuchs demonstrates to readers the process by which Qing rulers shaped the orthodoxy of their own origin narrative. For instance, the original 1636 Veritable Records of the Martial Emperor Taizu used terms such as bangshi (scribe), Heitu Ala (a place name), Sukesuhu River, and guanzhang (local head). In the 1781 Manzhou Shilu (Qianlong facsimile), these terms were revised to baksi (a Manchu term for a learned person), Hetu Ala, Ukdun River, and buzhang (tribal chief). "Baksi" is a transliteration of the Manchu word baksi, referring to a scholarly person, whereas "bangshi" might be an earlier Chinese translation. The revised text thus places stronger emphasis on the term's origins as a Manchu title. Changing "Heitu Ala" to "Hetu Ala" represents a shift from a simple transliteration to a standardized Manchu place name, lending it greater gravitas. These alterations appear only in the Chinese-language versions. By collating the Manchu and Chinese texts, readers can precisely trace which content was modified and identify the specific time period when these revisions occurred.

Fuchs also collected and collated Qing dynasty bilingual Manchu-Chinese documents related to "set phrases" and "word combinations," which primarily fall into three major categories. The first category consists of official Qing government document collections such as Shangyu Chengyu (Imperial Edict Set Phrases), Man Han Gongwen Chengyu Cihui (Manchu-Chinese Official Document Set Phrases and Vocabulary), and Liubu Chengyu (Six Ministries Set Phrases), which mainly cover commonly used terminology from imperial edicts and government paperwork. The second category is related to traditional classics. Man Han Jingwen Chengyu (Manchu-Chinese Classical Text Set Phrases) excerpts

set phrases from Confucian classics like the Book of Documents and the Book of Songs and translates them into Manchu. The third category comprises comprehensive reference works. *Qingwen Dianyao Daquan* (Complete Compendium of Essential Manchu Writing) arranges commonly used two-to-four-character set phrases by radical, while *Qing Han Wenhai* (Sea of Manchu-Chinese Writing), similar in function to the *Peiwen Yunfu*, contains over 37,000 entries. Fuchs did not merely list these documents; he also delved into investigating the origins and lineages of their editions. Based on Laufer's research, the *Liubu Chengyu* was first published in 1816, drawing upon a similar list found in Dai's dictionary from 1722. Through Fuchs' own investigation, the 1722 version was not the earliest of its kind either; a compilation of Six Ministries terminology already existed as early as 1693, in the third volume of the *Tongwen Huiji* (Collected Writings in a Common Script)^[4]. Fuchs honestly indicated missing bibliographical information using terms like "undated," "lacks a Manchu title," and "publisher unknown." Furthermore, he posed open-ended questions regarding the survival of certain documents and their potential intertextual relationships, leaving them for scholars to investigate further.

2. Further Development and Supplementation of Prior Research

In this work, Fuchs provided supplements and revisions to his previous scholarly publications. In 1932, he published the paper "Neues Material zur mandjurischen Literatur aus Pekinger Bibliotheken" (New Materials on Manchu Literature from Beijing Libraries) in *Asia Major*, which primarily introduced newly discovered and organized Manchu documents from several libraries and archives in Beijing at that time. In the present book, Fuchs first supplemented the understanding and leads related to the documents discussed in that earlier paper. For example, he detailed the possible sequences of Manchu manuscripts for the *Zhazhongci Liezhuan* (Biographies from the Temple of Loyalty), added other related biographical sequences, annotated their respective compiling institutions one by one, introduced their general content, and also corrected several errors from the aforementioned paper regarding spelling, the placement of annotations, and Chinese characters.

In addition to Manchu literary works, Fuchs also focused on Manchu-language seals and their related historical documents. He systematically traced the extant physical artifacts, their storage locations, shapes, and styles of Manchu seals dating from the 17th century onward, as well as seals for which physical objects no longer exist but which are preserved only in documentary records. While organizing the developmental history of Manchu seals, Fuchs did not shy away from addressing contentious issues. The Russian Manchu scholar Zacharow posited that the inscription on one of Qing Taizong's seals contained non-Manchu characters, suspected to be 'Phags-pa script. However, Fuchs questioned this assertion. He argued that if a non-Manchu script were used as the model, it would be difficult to account for the clearly recognizable Manchu letters on the seal as an exemplar. Furthermore, he noted that this script shared no common features with the Mongolian square script derived from Tibetan letters. Fuchs' compilation reveals the standardization process of official documents and the seal system during the Qing dynasty. The Qing rulers issued specific decrees regulating seal types and material specifications, which also reflects the meticulousness in constructing a political symbolic system and an awareness of cultural inheritance during the Qing period.

At the conclusion of the book, Fuchs provides a fresh summary of various extant Manchu documents as of 1936. He first categorizes the pure Manchu manuscript biographies stored in the Forbidden City Library (Shou'an Palace) in Beijing and those housed in the University of Tokyo Library. Fuchs employs a three-column comparative layout: the left column lists Chinese character names (some of which are Chinese characters transliterating Manchu sounds), the middle column presents Wade-Giles romanization, and the right column provides Manchu-Latin transliteration. Some rows contain only Chinese characters or only transliterated forms, likely because certain names exist solely in Chinese characters or solely in transliteration. Subsequently, he organizes and summarizes Manchu block-printed editions dated before 1661. Fuchs divides these into editions that can be definitively dated, editions that cannot be precisely dated, and archival documents from the same period. The block-printed editions consist mainly of Manchu translations of Chinese texts, while the archives record a substantial volume of original military and administrative documents. These include the forty-volume *Old Manchu Archives* from 1607 – 1636, which represent the oldest surviving Manchu documents from that era. Finally, he lists rare special collections among the block-printed editions, marks potentially unique copies with a cross-shaped symbol, and identifies the publishing institutions for Manchu-Chinese dictionaries and Manchu block-printed editions.

Conclusion

Prior to Fuchs, sinologists and Manchu language scholars had already undertaken the collection and organization of Manchu block-printed editions and manuscripts scattered across the world. The German-American sinologist Berthold Laufer published the paper "Skizze der mandjurischen Literatur" (Sketch of Manchu Literature) in 1902. For over two decades after its publication, this paper remained a useful guide for the study of Manchu literature in Europe and America. Fuchs himself had already collated and summarized Manchu documents in Beijing in his 1932 publication "Neues Material zur mandjurischen Literatur aus Pekinger Bibliotheken" (New Materials on Manchu Literature from Beijing Libraries). Leveraging his work opportunity in Shenyang, he conducted on-site investigations of Manchu documents, culminating in this specialized bibliography and research work that systematically organizes Manchu literature. This marks the transition of Western Manchu studies from fragmented textual interpretation to the stage of systematic documentary collation.

Fuchs' documentary collation exhibits characteristic features of German sinology, namely a tradition that emphasizes documentation, classification, and textual criticism. He regarded Manchu documents as an independent field of research, providing scientific descriptions of their editions, locations, and contents, thereby establishing a reliable foundation for retrieval and research by subsequent scholars. His classification and cataloging were not limited to classics and renowned works but also encompassed regulations, archives, vocabularies, textbooks, and administrative texts, examining the historical role of the Manchu language from the perspectives of state operation and institutional development. In his textual criticism of block-printed editions and manuscripts, Fuchs did not avoid problems; instead, he faithfully recorded instances where certain documents were "known only by title, with no physical copy seen." He promptly pointed out errors made by other scholars in their citations and raised open-ended questions to stimulate academic discussion. Fuchs' research positioned Manchu as a medium for knowledge circulation and the exercise of power within the multi-ethnic Qing state. Consequently, he was not confined to Manchu documents alone but also paid attention to their connections with Chinese, Mongol, and Tibetan materials, focusing on differences in versions, structure, and content across multilingual documents. This revealed the process through which the Qing government achieved cultural integration and administrative governance via language translation. Fuchs meticulously cataloged numerous Manchu translations of Chinese literary classics, such as Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Water Margin, The Plum in the Golden Vase, and The Romance of the Western Chamber. He analyzed the additions, deletions, annotations, and adaptations in the Manchu translations of these works, exploring how translators "transcoded" Chinese cultural concepts, ethics, and aesthetics for Manchu readers while preserving distinct Manchu cultural characteristics. Fuchs' research leaned towards history and geography, particularly the early history and geography of Manchu tribes. The collection of ancient Manchu books he assembled established the foundation for the Peking University Library's holdings, characterized by many fine and unique editions of Manchu antiquarian books^[6]. Through Fuchs' collation and textual criticism, the Manchu textual world of the Qing dynasty became a historical subject open to research, discussion, and comparison.

Fund Project

This thesis is part of the 2025 Heilongjiang Provincial Key Research Project on Economic and Social Development, entitled "International Communication of Heilongjiang's Ethnic Cultures from the Perspective of the Belt and Road Initiative: Based on the Translation and Interpretation of German Sinological Literature" (WY2025103).

References

- [1] ZHU Xianwen, XIE Jianxiu, and ZHAO Jingwei. *A Brief Analysis of the International Dissemination and Talent Cultivation of the Manchu Language*[J]. *Manchu Studies*, 2019(04), p. 75.
- [2] Fuchs, Walter. *Beiträge zur Beiträge zur manschurischen Bibliographie und Literatur*[M], Tokio: Otto Harrassowitz, 1936. S.1.
- [3] DENG Ke and XIA Dengshan. *Divergent Views Between China and the West in the 18th–19th Centuries on the Norms for Translating Chinese Classics into Manchu*[J]. *International Sinology*, 2024(04), p. 43.
- [4] Fuchs, Walter. *Beiträge zur Beiträge zur manschurischen Bibliographie und Literatur*[M], Tokio:

Otto Harrassowitz, 1936. S.40.

[5] *ZHANG Liangchun, editor. Studies on China Abroad, Volume 1[M]. Guilin: Lijiang Publishing House, 1991, p. 69.*

[6] *LI Xiongfei and GU Qianyue. A Brief Account of the Manchu Ancient Books Held in the Peking University Library[J]. Manchu Language Research, 2020(2), p. 63.*