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# 房龙地理

VAN LOON'S  
GEOGRAPHY

(英文原版)

房龙亲绘插图

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[美] 房 龙 著

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# 出版说明

《房龙地理》是著名荷兰裔美国作家、历史学家房龙的代表作之一，兼具知识性、文学性和趣味性，具有很强的可读性。房龙素以语言诙谐幽默、生动活泼见长，他将枯燥的地理知识深入浅出地娓娓道来，绘声绘色，引人入胜。

《房龙地理》不是一本传统意义上的地理书。它突破了常规地理书的写法，紧扣“人”的观念，站在全人类的高度讲述人类与环境之间的依存与改造，包括科学、艺术、商业、宗教和政治等活动。本书从历史的高度阐释了人与地理以及地球的关系，生动地演绎了“人文地理”这一概念，是一本阅读价值极高的人文地理学入门级读物。房龙在此书中贯穿了其惯有的行文风格，用诙谐幽默的文字化枯燥的地理知识于无形，使人在轻松愉快之际不仅领略把握了人类厚重历史发展的来龙去脉，且能在掩卷之际获得不少启发。房龙写作本书的目的，就是要让读者大众了解人文地理这门学科，正如他自己曾说过的，“我试着为普通读者和孩子们写书，以便他们学到这个世界的历史、地理和艺术。”

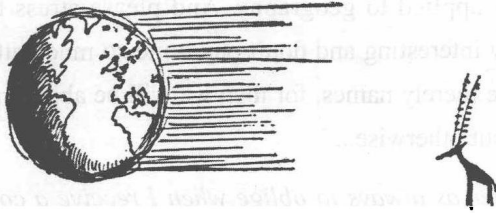
房龙作为 20 世纪上半叶的西方人，囿于自身和时代条件，一些观点和认识与当代现实颇有些距离和差异，因此请读者阅读时务必保持鉴别的眼光。这其中有知识上的差异，如书中称世界由五大洲构成，而目前公认世界上有七大洲；有测量数据上的差异，如珠穆朗玛峰（Mount Qomolangma）现在测定的高度为 8844.43 米，与当时的测量数据有一定出入；有史实性的差异，如奥匈帝国的民族构成与一般史料记载存在明显差异；有新旧地名的差异，如土耳其西部港市伊兹密尔（Izmir）在书中用的是旧称士麦那（Smyrna），波兰西南部城市布雷斯劳（Breslau）现名弗罗茨瓦夫（Wrocław）；有新旧拼写系统的差异，如将 Tianshan（天山）拼为 Tien-shan，将 Kunlun（昆仑）拼为 Kuen-lun；有地

理区划的差异，如印度河在作者写作年代属于印度，而 1947 年印巴分治后印度河属于巴基斯坦。另外，由于自身立场的局限，房龙在书中的一些说法难以避免地抹上了殖民主义的色彩，如称中国人为 Chinaman，称中国台湾为 Formosa，称珠穆朗玛峰为 Mount Everest，以及将 1838 年英国入侵阿富汗说成是帮助阿富汗人民推翻丧失民心的统治者。

当时的西方大众对中国普遍缺乏了解和认识，而房龙也对中国缺乏深入的了解和研究，因此他对中国长城、京杭大运河、黄河、台湾、太平天国、伪满洲国等的叙述都或多或少有不确之处。如他将台湾、西藏、新疆、伪满洲国、蒙古（内蒙古）等同国家并列。又如他在书中沿用了一些地区带有殖民色彩的名称，如亚瑟港（大连旅顺）等。再如，他对俄国十月革命及其对中国的影响的看法与我们当代主流看法颇有出入。还有他对两国之间界河、界山的名称也有些谬误之处，如中印边界范围的界定。此外作者对于八国联军侵华行为的粉饰、对于日本对外扩张原因的解释、对于美国对外侵略的理由都显示出其阶级性。这些都是作者囿于生活年代及生活背景以及参考资料的不全而做出的不确的叙述，读者了解即可。我们相信读者完全能够以正确的立场和价值观明辨是非，也能够辨识历史与当代的不同。

本书是一部可读性很强的经典地理学著作。在全书结尾，房龙借孩童的口问道：“不去旅行，学地理有什么用？”作为一本地理学入门读物，《房龙地理》不仅能引发读者对地理学的兴趣以及对地球的热爱，还能扩大视野，开拓心胸，激发读者对更辽阔的宇宙及未知世界的探寻。

## Preface



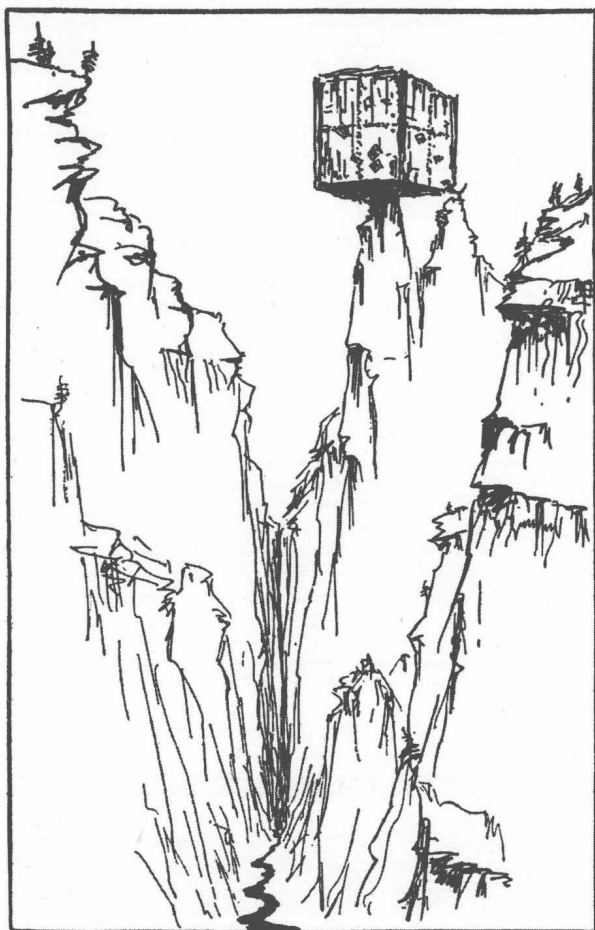
*Ten years ago you sent me a letter and today you get your answer.  
What you wrote (I am quoting from the original) was this:*

“... Yes, but how about geography? No, I don’t merely want a new geography. I want a geography of my own, a geography that shall tell me what I want to know and omit everything else and I want you to write it for me. I went to a school where they took the subject very seriously. I learned all about the different countries and how they were bounded and about the cities and how many inhabitants they had and I learned the names of all the mountains and how high they were and how much coal was exported every year, and I forgot all these things just as fast as I had learned them. They failed to connect. They resolved themselves into a jumble of badly digested recollections, like a museum too full of pictures or a concert that has lasted too long. And they were of no earthly value to me, for every time I needed some concrete fact, I had to look it up on maps and in atlases and encyclopedias and blue books. I suppose that many others have suffered in the same way. On behalf of all these poor victims, will you please give us a new geography that will be of some use? Put all the

mountains and the cities and the oceans on your maps and then tell us only about the people who live in those places and why they are there and where they came from and what they are doing — a sort of human interest story applied to geography. And please stress the countries that are really interesting and don't pay quite so much attention to the others that are merely names, for then we will be able to remember all about them, but otherwise..."

*And I, eager as always to oblige when I receive a command from your hands, turn around and say, "My dear, here it is!"*

HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON





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## Chapter 1. And These Are the People Who Live in the World We Live in

**I**t sounds incredible, but nevertheless it is true. If everybody in this world of ours were six feet tall and a foot and a half wide and a foot thick (and that is making people a little bigger than they usually are), then the whole of the human race (and according to the latest available statistics there are now nearly 2,000,000,000 descendants of the original Homo Sapiens and his wife) could be packed into a box measuring half a mile in each direction. That, as I just said, sounds incredible, but if you don't believe me, figure it out for yourself and you will find it to be correct.

If we transported that box to the Grand Canyon of Arizona and balanced it neatly on the low stone wall that keeps people from breaking their necks when stunned by the incredible beauty of that silent witness of the forces of Eternity, and then called little Noodle, the dachshund, and told him (the tiny beast is very intelligent and loves to oblige) to give the unwieldy contraption a slight push with his soft brown nose, there would be a moment of crunching and ripping as the wooden planks loosened stones and shrubs and trees on their downward path, and then a low and even softer bumpity-bumpity-bump and a sudden splash when the outer edges struck the banks of the Colorado River .

Then silence and oblivion!

The human sardines in their mortuary chest would soon be forgotten.

The Canyon would go on battling wind and air and sun and rain as

it has done since it was created.

The world would continue to run its even course through the uncharted heavens.

The astronomers on distant and nearby planets would have noticed nothing out of the ordinary.

A century from now, a little mound, densely covered with vegetable matter, would perhaps indicate where humanity lay buried.

And that would be all.

I can well imagine that some of my readers will not quite like this story and will feel rather uncomfortable when they see their own proud race reduced to such proportions of sublime insignificance.

There is however a different angle to the problem — an angle which makes the very smallness of our numbers and the helplessness of our puny little bodies a matter of profound and sincere pride.

Here we are, a mere handful of weak and defenceless mammals. Ever since the dawn of the first day we have been surrounded on all sides by hordes and swarms of creatures infinitely better prepared for the struggle of existence than we are ourselves. Some of them were a hundred feet long and weighed as much as a small locomotive while others had teeth as sharp as the blade of a circular saw. Many varieties went about their daily affairs clad in the armor of a medieval knight. Others were invisible to the human eye but they multiplied at such a terrific rate that they would have owned the entire earth in less than a year's time if it had not been for certain enemies who were able to destroy them almost as fast as they were born. Whereas man could only exist under the most favorable circumstances and was forced to look for a habitat among the few small pieces of dry land situated between the high mountains and the deep sea, these fellow-passengers of ours considered no summit too high and found no sea too deep for

their ambitions. They were apparently made of the stuff that could survive regardless of its natural surroundings.

When we learn on eminent authority that certain varieties of insects are able to disport themselves merrily in petroleum (a substance we would hardly fancy as the main part of our daily diet) and that others manage to live through such changes in temperature as would kill all of us within a very few minutes; when we discover to our gruesome dismay that those little brown beetles, who seem so fond of literature that they are forever racing around in our bookcases, continue the even tenor of their restless days minus two or three or four legs, while we ourselves are disabled by a mere pin-prick on one of our toes, then we sometimes begin to realize against what sort of competitors we have been forced to hold our own, ever since we made our first appearance upon this whirling bit of rock, lost somewhere in the darkest outskirts of an indifferent universe.

What a side-splitting joke we must have been to our pachydermous contemporaries who stood by and watched this pinkish sport of nature indulge in its first clumsy efforts to walk on its hind legs without the help of a convenient tree-trunk or cane!

But what has become of those proud and exclusive owners of almost 200,000,000 square miles of land and water (not to mention the unfathomable oceans of air) who ruled so sublime by that right of eminent domain which was based upon brute force and sly cunning?

The greater part has disappeared from view except where as "Exhibits A" or "B" we have kindly given them a little parking space in one of our museums devoted to natural history. Others, in order to remain among those present, were forced to go into domestic service and today in exchange for a mere livelihood they favor us with their hides and their eggs and their milk and the beef that grows upon their flanks, or drag such loads as we consider a little too heavy for our own

lazy efforts. Many more have betaken themselves to out-of-the-way places where we permit them to browse and graze and perpetuate their species because, thus far, we have not thought it worth our while to remove them from the scene and claim their territory for ourselves.

In short, during only a couple of thousand centuries (a mere second from the point of view of eternity), the human race has made itself the undisputed ruler of every bit of land and at this present day it bids fair to add both air and sea as part of its domains. And all that, if you please, has been accomplished by a few hundred million creatures who enjoyed not one single advantage over their enemies except the divine gift of Reason.

Even there I am exaggerating. The gift of Reason in its most sublime form and the ability to think for one's self is restricted to a mere handful of men and women. They therefore become the masters who lead. The others, no matter how much they may resent the fact, can only follow. The result is a strange and halting procession, for no matter how hard people may try, there are ten thousand stragglers for every true pioneer.

Whither the route of march will eventually lead us, that we do not know. But in the light of what has been achieved during the last four thousand years, there is no limit to the sum total of our potential achievements — unless we are tempted away from the path of normal development by our strange inherent cruelty which makes us treat other members of our own species as we would never have dared to treat a cow or a dog or even a tree.

The earth and the fullness thereof have been placed at the disposal of Man. Where it has not been placed at his disposal, he has taken possession by right of his superior brain and by the strength of his foresight and his shot-guns.

This home of ours is a good home. It grows food enough for all

of us. It has abundant quarries and clay beds and forests from which all of us can be provided with more than ample shelter. The patient sheep of our pastures and the waving flax fields with their myriads of blue flowers, not to forget the industrious little silk-worm of China's mulberry trees — they all contribute to shelter our bodies against the cold of winter and protect them against the scorching heat of summer. This home of ours is a good home. It produces all these benefits in so abundant measure that every man, woman and child could have his or her share with a little extra supply thrown in for the inevitable days of rest.

But Nature has her own code of laws. They are just, these laws, but they are inexorable and there is no court of appeal.

Nature will give unto us and she will give without stint, but in return she demands that we study her precepts and abide by her dictates.

A hundred cows in a meadow meant for only fifty spells disaster — a bit of wisdom with which every farmer is thoroughly familiar. A million people gathered in one spot where there should be only a hundred thousand cause congestion, poverty and unnecessary suffering, a fact which apparently has been overlooked by those who are supposed to guide our destinies.

That, however, is not the most serious of our manifold errors. There is another way in which we offend our generous foster-mother. Man in the only living organism that is hostile to its own kind. Dog does not eat dog — tiger does not eat tiger — yea, even the loathsome hyena lives at peace with the members of his own species. But Man hates Man, Man kills Man, and in the world of today the prime concern of every nation is to prepare itself for the coming slaughter of some more of its neighbors.

This open violation of Article I of the great Code of Creation

which insists upon peace and good will among the members of the same species has carried us to a point where soon the human race may be faced with the possibility of complete annihilation. For our enemies are ever on the alert. If *Homo Sapiens* (the all-too-flattering name given to our race by a cynical scientist, to denote our intellectual superiority over the rest of the animal world) — if *Homo Sapiens* is unable or unwilling to assert himself as the master of all he surveys, there are thousands of other candidates for the job and it oftentimes seems as if a world dominated by cats or dogs or elephants or some of the more highly organized insects (and how they watch their opportunity!) might offer very decided advantages over a planet top-heavy with battle-ships and siege-guns.

What is the answer and what is the way out of this hideous and shameful state of affairs?

In a humble way this little book hopes to point to the one and only way out of that lugubrious and disastrous blind-alley into which we have strayed through the clumsy ignorance of our ancestors.

It will take time, it will take hundreds of years of slow and painful education to make us find the true road of salvation. But that road leads towards the consciousness that we are all of us fellow-passengers on one and the same planet. Once we have got hold of this absolute verity — once we have realized and grasped the fact that for better or for worse this is our common home — that we have never known another place of abode — that we shall never be able to move from the spot in space upon which we happened to be born — that it therefore behooves us to behave as we would if we found ourselves on board a train or a steamer bound for an unknown destination — we shall have taken the first but most important step towards the solution of that terrible problem which is at the root of all our difficulties.



We are all of us fellow-passengers on the same planet and the weal and woe of everybody else means the weal and woe of ourselves!

Call me a dreamer and call me a fool — call me a visionary or call for the police or the ambulance to remove me to a spot where I can no longer proclaim such unwelcome heresies. But mark my words and remember them on that fatal day when the human race shall be requested to pack up its little toys and surrender the keys of happiness to a more worthy successor.

The only hope for survival lies in that one sentence:

WE ARE ALL OF US FELLOW-PASSENGERS ON THE SAME PLANET AND WE ARE ALL OF US EQUALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE HAPPINESS AND WELL-BEING OF THE WORLD IN WHICH WE HAPPEN TO LIVE.