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Towards the Inclusion of Inter-Ethnic Studies in Comparative Literature in China

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Abstract: In their article "Towards the Inclusion of Inter-Ethnic Studies in Chinese Comparative Literature" Xiaoqing Han and Aaron Lee Moore advocate for the inclusion of inter-ethnic studies in Chinese comparative literature. The traditional definition for many Chinese comparative literature scholars continues to confine the discipline to "inter-national" or "cross-civilization" studies rather than including "inter-ethnic" studies, and Chinese ethnic minority writing continues to be underrepresented in the national literary canon. This article is in no way opposed to the continued growth and development of a Chinese national literature. But rather, it seems crucial that inter-ethnic studies should be included in the discipline of Chinese comparative literature, considering the fact that there are 55 officially recognized and registered Chinese minorities (少数民族), constituting nearly 8.5% (113 million) of the total population of China, each with their own distinct and rich cultural heritage and literary tradition.

Xiaoqing HAN and Aaron Lee MOORE

Towards the Inclusion of Inter-Ethnic Studies in Comparative Literature in China

The formation of a country's national literature is an important step in the growth and the development of the collective consciousness of a unified nationalist culture, although all the myriad definitions for national literature offered over the years tend to agree on one essential point: the concept of a national literature is an illusory fabrication created out of a political desire to shape a nation's collective sense of tradition and identity. As Charles Bernheimer points out, "nothing is more constructed than national literature departments, not only because "nationality" is something of a fiction, tuning out far more voices than it tunes in, but also because literature itself is irrepressibly mixed, stereophonic, porous, marked by exchanges and influences, international" (*Comparative Literature* 79). Indeed, even the term "nation" is a nebulous abstraction, whereas "state" is by comparison far more concrete. Joanna Sullivan notes, "in the designation of countries, objective and subjective criteria cleave the notion of country into two quite different entities: the state and the nation. The state is marked by a tangible, observable, recognizable set of facts. The state has borders, a central government, a population, an economy, and a bureaucracy, all of which act to maintain and perpetuate continuity. The nation, on the other hand, constitutes itself through the will and the imagination of the citizens of the state" ("The Question of a National Literature" 71).

However, the concepts of "ethnicity" and "ethnic literature" are almost as equally nebulous as "nation" and "national literature." Actually ethnicity in the modern sense has very little to do with race. In fact, in English the term "ethnicity" is relatively new, originally employed in the 1970s as an alternative to "race" due to its previous association with Nazi ideology (Wan and Vanderwerf, "A Review of the Literature" 3). The modern definition of ethnicity merely denotes commonality among a social group. Ethnic distinction might hinge on something as arbitrary as a geographical locale. For example, in the United States of America (USA), Appalachians are considered a distinct ethnic social group largely on account of their residence in the Appalachian Mountains in the eastern United States, regardless whether they maintain certain linguistic and cultural particularities and a shared sense of heritage and tradition. Within the large umbrella of the Appalachian ethnic minority and in addition to white Appalachians, generally of Irish or Scottish ancestry, there are many other ethnic minorities such as Native American, African-American, and Asian American. In China the concept of ethnic diversity is quite different from that of the USA due to the difference in immigration policies. Although there are unrecognized ethnic groups who privately identify themselves as ethnic minorities like Jewish, Tuvan, Oirat, and Ili Turki, it is virtually impossible for a foreigner to become a naturalized citizen of the People's Republic of China. Citizenship is only granted in extremely exceptional circumstances. One notable example in which citizenship was eventually granted is with Sidney Shapiro, the Jewish American scholar who lived in Beijing from 1947-2014. Shapiro was perhaps most famous for his translation of Shi Nai'an's classic novel Outlaws of the Marsh, one of the four great classical novels of China.

On the contrary, citizenship is granted regularly to immigrants in most Western countries, which fosters cultural assimilation. Therefore, in America naturalized citizens sometimes self-identify as Italian American, Irish American, and Chinese American, etc. Foreign expats in China, even if they had lived in China for a long time, would rarely self-identify as, for example, American Chinese, British Chinese, Australian Chinese, etc. One exception to this is with Korean immigrants (朝鲜族) who are a recognized migrant ethnic minority in China. Generally speaking, ethnic distinctions arise out of a strategic benefit achieved in associating oneself with a particular group. John M. Reilly makes the claim that, "ethnicity is not only identity, though. It is also strategy. The act of naming ourselves a member of a group emerges from necessity. We become aware that our group differs from others, and its well-being is determined by events beyond its direct control. Identity can be assumed without reflection, but a statement of identity involves consciousness and serves as the premise for an effort to see oneself in history and to become the subject of historical processes" ("Criticism of Ethnic Literature" 3). Ethnicity only matters when people think it matters. Admittedly, sometimes writers bank on their ethnic identity and its potential marketability. Some writers exploit the concept entirely. Sander L. Gilman notes, "Is the label "ethnic" a valuable commodity? In today's Germany Jewish writers are often self-identified as Jewish or are so defined by their publishers. This labeling often has nothing to do with religion; it may have everything to do with the marketability of certain forms of ethnicity. One of the leading Jewish writers in Germany is an American woman who was raised as a Roman Catholic and who writes in English. At the same time, self-labeled ethnic writers complain that they do not have a broad audience or that they have too broad an audience. Who is ethnic—the writer or the actual or implied reader or both or neither? In Germany, the United States, Great Britain, and Australia, scandals have recently revealed "ethnic" writers to be whites writing under ethnic pseudonyms" ("Introduction" 23).

In the 2015 version of *Best American Poets Anthology* a white writer by the name of Michael Derrick Hudson submitted a poem under the pen name of Yi Fen-Chou, which was then accepted for publication in the prestigious anthology. Previously Hudson had submitted the poem to numerous other journals, but it was rejected multiple times. The incident stirred up a great deal of controversy in America, and indeed does call into question the notion of ethnic identification and its legitimacy.

There are indeed strategic benefits and disadvantages to ethnic identification because the governments of many countries, including America and China, politicize ethnicity. For example, in both America and China ethnic minorities are given preferential treatment in the college application process. In America an applicant can indicate an ethnic minority affiliation such as Native American, Hispanic,

Asian, etc., and receive preferential treatment, as universities and colleges generally seek to foster "diversity" in their institutions. Additionally, Native Americans like Cherokee, one of the largest tribes of Native Americans in the US, may receive considerable benefits, such as access to special scholarships and other government benefits. Oftentimes, the application simply still lists this section under the heading "race." In China the situation is comparable. Maja Veselic comments,

With the shift in official rhetoric after the Cultural Revolution from class to development and the implementation of economic and political reforms, the government introduced preferential policies for ethnic minorities (youhui zhengce 优惠政策) in the spheres of education (bonus points on university entrance exams/lower university admission scores), family planning (exemption from the one-child policy) and criminal justice (more lenient punishments for similar crimes—see Sautman 2010). Their aim is to help minorities catch up with the Han-led modernization and to ensure national unity and stability. Moreover, as a part of its Great Opening on the West project (xibu da kaifa 西部大开发), the government channels large subsidies into minority regions, which tend to be among the poorest parts of China. ("From a Plate of Mixed" 106)

The government policies of China towards ethnic minority rights and autonomy have been a central political issue that is necessary in managing the culturally diverse nation, ever since the founding of the first Republic on January 1, 1912, following the revolution and the collapse of the Qing dynasty. Sun Yat-sen initially instituted a policy of "五族共和," meaning "Five Nation-Race Republic" which recognized five distinct ethnic groups including Han, Tibetan, Mongol, Manchu, and Hui. Later Sun would advocate for cultural unification and homogeneity (同化), as a result of minority demands for political autonomy and separation. After the fall of the first Republic of China and the establishment of The People's Republic of China in 1949, the communist government politicized "nationalities" based on the Marxist policies of Soviet Russia, requiring ethnic classification and registration of all citizens. The government then offered certain groups political, economic, and social rights, and granted "民族地方自治" (ethnic regional autonomy) to certain areas, populated largely by ethnic minorities (Veselic, "From a Plate of Mixed Appetizers" 103-105).

Some of the largest populations of Chinese ethnic minorities include Zhuang (壮族), Man (满族), Hui (回族), Miao (苗族), Uyghur (维吾尔族), Yi (彝族), Tujia (土家族), Mongols (蒙古族), Tibetans (藏族), Buyi (布依族), Yao (瑶族), and Koreans (朝鲜族). Only in the provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang do the minorities outnumber the Han majority. 10% of all of China's minorities, such as Hui, Uyghur, and Kazaks, reside in Xinjiang (Hannum and Yu, "Ethnic Stratification" 323). Some minorities live in government designated "ethnic autonomous areas," allowing for the preservation of ethnic languages and social customs. Thus, the government has fostered the continued growth and development of Chinese ethnic literature in its effort to preserve the cultural traditions of ethnic minorities. Why, then, is there such a polarizing debate raging between those who advocate a unified national literature versus those who advocate the inclusion of ethnic minority literature? And then the next question is: why has there been such a resistance on the part of some Chinese scholars for the inclusion of inter-ethnic studies in the fields of comparative literature and (comparative) cultural studies?

No one would deny that today China has a fully formed national literature, and the intent of this essay is in no way to challenge the national literature; instead, we want to advocate for a less Han-centric national literature, which is more inclusive of Chinese ethnic minority literature—the so-called "marginal literature." A national literature is established mainly through canonization—the highly selective and reductive process in which alleged "great" works, most indicative of a culture's mainstream values and mores, circulate among a mainstream audience. This, in no way, threatens the national literature, but rather augments the national literary canon much in the manner in which multiculturalism has enriched the traditional western canon of literature. This may easily be accomplished. Just as a national literature is formed in the interest of creating a national identity and sense of collective tradition, so does ethnic literature, on the smaller marginal scale, seek a pronouncement, recognition, and affirmation of shared identity and tradition as a contribution to Chinese national literature. Once a national literature has been firmly established, recognized, and propagated, the inclusion of more ethnic minority literature under the umbrella of national literature becomes the next stage in establishing a national literature, indicative of cultural diversity and heritage. As in the United States, following the canon wars of the 1980's and the 90's, the national literature expanded to include the multicultural voices of its citizens. This is plainly observable in nearly all American Literature Anthologies, like those published by W. W. Norton or Bedford presses, which now include a significant portion of literature by African-American, Hispanic-American, Asian-American, and Native-American authors. This multicultural inclusion has not, as many traditionalist scholars have argued, come at the expense of traditional canonized American literature. Anthologies have admittedly grown a lot larger, but the literary giants at the center of the American canon, like Hawthorne, Poe, Whitman, Twain, Faulkner, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald, are not omitted from anthologies and still retain their significant spot as required readings in the high school and university curricula.

Chinese classical and contemporary literature anthologies are notoriously Han-centric and make little effort to include the literature of Chinese ethnic minorities. In the second half (下) of a popular 1998 anthology, 中国当代文学作品选 (Chinese Contemporary Literature Anthology) published by 人民文学出版社 (People's Literature Press), works of fifty poets and twenty-eight prose writers are featured; however, only five out of the seventy-eight total writers are noted as Chinese ethnic minorities, making the anthology only 6.4% inclusive of the ethnic minority writing. These five minorities include Bai (白族), Mongolian (蒙古族), Uyghur (维吾尔族), Yi (彝族), and Zhuang (壮族). The anthology also features an anonymous Yi minority long narrative poem, "阿诗玛" (Ashima). The minorities, generally associated with certain religions such as Hui (Muslim) and Tibetan (Buddhism), are not represented at all in

this anthology. But it should be noted that this anthology does include a bibliography at the very end of the volume under the heading of "全国少数民族文学获奖作品" (Nationwide Prize-winning Minority Literary Works). In another major 1999 anthology, featuring works from 1919-1949, 中国现当代文学作品选 (Chinese Modern Contemporary Literature Anthology) ethnic minority writing is not noted or distinguished at all. Contemporary ethnic literature is represented in China, as many anthologies and compilations do feature ethnic minority writing, but for the most part it seems to be segregated from the Han literary canon, and is treated separately.

In general, the discipline of comparative literature in China is more reserved and narrowly focused than that of other countries. Unlike most western universities, Comparative Literature departments in Mainland China are not grouped in the school of foreign languages, but are rather grouped in the Chinese language department (Lin and Huang, "About the Chinese School" 3). Though comparative literature in China is a booming field that attracts a great many scholars and receives significant university funding, traditionalist Chinese scholars still view the discipline in a state of crisis; a crisis that is due to a shift of focus from "literariness" and textual analysis to extra-textual literary and cultural theories, beyond New Criticism and Formalism (Zhou and Tong, "Comparative Literature in China" 7). Furthermore, some Chinese scholars remain resistant to the full incorporation of interdisciplinarity into the discipline of comparative literature (see Moore). The resistance to the inclusion of inter-ethnic studies and an insistence on inter-national studies comes as no surprise and hints at larger ideological and political issues today, facing Chinese ethnic minorities in China.

Ma Rong, sociology professor and one of China's foremost scholars who advocates for total depoliticization of ethnicity and complete dismantling of ethnic minority rights, has pointed out that there is confusion in Chinese terminology between "民族" (minzu) and "族群" (zuqun), which have often been used interchangeably, while having two separate concepts ("A New Perspective" 3). The term "民族" may be translated as "nationality," whereas the term "族群" may be translated as "ethnic group" or "ethnic minority." Obviously the distinction is very important. Ma Rong proposes that from now on "族群" (zuqun), rather than "民族" (minzu), should be used when referring to the fifty-six different ethnic groups for the following reasons:

First, the social and cultural connotations of the minority groups such as Mongolians, Manchus, Tibetans, Uygurs and Hui in China approximate to 'racial and ethnic minorities' in other countries, such as the American Indians, African-Americans, and Hispanics in the U.S. Thus, the term 'ethnic groups' reflects the structure of ethnicity in China more accurately. Second, differentiating these terms prevents conceptual confusion resulting from two different meanings (the 'Chinese nation' and 'ethnic groups' making up the 'Chinese nation') for the same term in Chinese. Finally, if we translate China's fifty-six ethnic groups (minzu) as fifty-six 'nationalities', and name their requests on behalf of economic and cultural interests as 'nationalism', we will seriously mislead English-speaking readers who might associate these groups with independent political entities who have the right to carry out 'national self-determination' and establish their own independent 'nation-states.' (4)

The problem we encounter with defining the objectives of comparative literature is much deeper than one of simple terminology that is inter-national versus inter-ethnic versus cross-civilization. Privileging of "inter-national" and disregarding of "inter-ethnic" reveals a disregard or under-privileging of Chinese ethnic minority writing in both national literary and comparative literary scholarship in China. The terminology reveals a bias, just like past academic writing in America, for example, once neglected to use gender-neutral terminology such as "man," as a synecdoche for "humanity." A patriarchal bias was inherent in academic rhetoric largely before the 1960's and the 1970's, prior to the feminist movement in the USA. It is on this basis that the term "inter-national," with regards to cross-national comparative literature scholarship, is too reductive and not wholly appropriate. This exclusion of both the term and principle of inter-ethnic comparison in China is not in keeping with the ideology of comparative literature. Steven Totosy de Zepetnek states, "Comparative Literature has an ideology of inclusion of the Other, be that a marginal literature in its several meanings of marginality, a genre, various text types, etc" (*Comparative Literature* 13). Furthermore, on the basis of Totosy's "general principles of comparative literature" this neglect on the part of some Chinese scholars of inter-ethnic comparison violates the seventh general principle of comparative literature, which is "its theoretical, methodological as well as ideological and political approach of inclusion. This inclusion extends to all Other, minority, and peripheral, and it encompasses both form and substance" (17). Regardless of the minority or minority literature, all ethnic groups should be worthy of inclusion.

The inclusion of inter-ethnic study within the field of Comparative Literature in China is a current topic of debate. Chen Dun and Liu Xiangyu co-authored the book 比较文学概论 (An Introduction to Comparative Literature), first published in 2000, which provides a definition of comparative literature with some innovative new ideas. Chen and Liu state, "Comparative Literature is an open field of literature, which has a macro and an international perspective regarding the objectives of inter-ethnic, inter-lingual, inter-cultural and inter-disciplinary literary relations. There are self-consciousness of comparison and an all-embracing attitude towards different cultures in theory and methodology" (21). Chen and Liu's definition for comparative literature is extremely progressive by Chinese standards, as it makes no mention of "inter-national" and posits an "inter-disciplinary" objective. In contrast, we present Cao Shunqing's definition for comparative literature. Professor Cao is one of the foremost comparative literature scholars in China and the author of the recent 2013 volume, *The Variation Theory of Comparative Literature* (see Cao "Variation Theory and the Reception of Chinese Literature in the English-speaking World). Professor Cao, editor of 比较文学教程 (The Course of Comparative Literature), defines the aim of Comparative Literature as follows: "With a global vision and mind to engage in a comparative study between the literatures across different nations, civilizations, and disciplines,

comparative literature primarily studies the homology, variability, similarity, heterogeneity, and complementarity of various literatures which cross boundaries. With the empirical Influence Study, Variation Study, Parallel Study, and General Study as the basic methodology, its aim, with a global vision, is to summarize the universal laws of literature and literary aesthetic characteristics, strengthen the mutual understanding and integration of world literature, and promote the development of world literature" (30-31).

It is only "nations" and "civilizations," rather than "ethnic groups," that are mentioned in this definition. Cao's definition is also notably different from Chen and Liu's in that he mentions not only studies of "similarity" but also of "heterogeneity," that is, differences among cultures. There is also no mention of interdisciplinarity. In this manner, Cao's theory of variation is a deviation from other western theories of comparative literature that traditionally fixate on homogeneity rather than heterogeneity. Of course Cao is not opposed to ethnic or minority literary studies in China on the whole. Also, generally, Chinese universities and colleges are very progressive and inclusive of ethnic minority studies. Sichuan University, for example, offers courses on Tibetan studies. Many universities in China are deemed "民族大学" (National Universities), like "西北民族大学" (Northwest University for Nationalities), because of their focus on one or more Chinese ethnic minority studies. However, Cao remains resistant to inter-ethnic comparison in comparative literature scholarship and feels these studies should remain under the umbrella of national literature.

Professor Cao's position is made clear in his book, 比较文学概论 (Introduction to Comparative Literature), in his discussion of "国民文学" (national literature) and "民族文学" (ethnic literature). There, he claims that the natural pattern of development of a nation's literary development is from ethnic literature to national literature, and from national literature to regional literature, and finally from regional to world literature: "从"民族文学"发展到"国民文学"，再发展到"区域文学"，最后发展到"世界文学"，是人类文学横向发展的基本规律" (236). Cao states that in the course of this development ethnic literature eventually "expires" ("过去") when it matures into national literature (240). Although overall, Cao's broad summary of the development is solid enough, the claim that ethnic literature simply "expires" in the face of national literature is too reductive. In today's America, for example, the multitude of ethnic literatures, such as Native American Literature, Hispanic Literature, Asian American Literature, African-American Literature, Jewish American Literature, etc., surely have not expired in the face of national literature, even though America is basically united in the common language of English. Furthermore, in countries like India and China, where cultural and linguistic differences between certain ethnic groups are considerably vast, the concept of a homogenous national literature is illusory and misrepresentative. Ethnic literature and the complex heterogeneity within a nation is the reality behind the shadows on the wall, which is a homogeneous national literature.

Since the 1980s and following the Cultural Revolution, Chinese comparative literature has become a burgeoning field. It has brought opportunities for ethnic literature study in China. Ethnic literature study in China has already achieved a great deal in the modern era. Recently in college classes, teachers are using phrases and statements like "Ethnic Comparative Literature," and "Ethnic literature is Comparative Literature." Some scholars treat the stereotypical study of King Ge Saer as a comparative literature study, or the image study of Yue Yaer as well. Translation studies of ethnic literature are designated as translatological studies. Xiaoqing Tang claims, "the relationship between Chinese ethnic literatures includes literary study which crosses nations, languages, cultures, and disciplines, and its research objects, methods, and ideas belong within the scope of Comparative Literature" (137). Some scholars now even claim that minority literature study is an indispensable branch of comparative literature in China.

The early application of the ideas and research methods of comparative literature to ethnic literature study in China was first proposed by Xianlin Ji (1911-2009) and Jia Zhifang (1915-2008), who represent outstanding achievements in this field. Ji studied abroad early in his life and is proficient in English, German, Sanskrit, and Pali, and can read Russian, French, and Tocharian (a language of an independent family of Indo European languages, which is the most widely distributed in the modern world). He simultaneously conducts research on Buddhism, Chinese literature, comparative literature, and literary theory to the fullest extent. Ji spent ten years in Germany between 1935 and 1945, not only because of an abiding interest in Indian culture but also due to his study of Indian culture's influence on Chinese tradition. His research methodology reflects an understanding of modern scholarship. In Comparative Literature and Folk Literature, published in the early 1990s, Ji argues that ethnic literature research should be included in the field of Comparative Literature. Zhifang Jia, a famous writer, translator, and scholar, is one of the founders of the discipline of Comparative Literature, as well. When he went to Japan to study at the University of Tokyo, he was engaged in literary creation and translation. Jia's attention to ethnic literature also began in the early 1990s, and he was one of the first minority students majoring in Comparative Literature, and became an expert among the domestic scholars. Ji and Jia both categorize ethnic literature research in the scope of the study of comparative literature and try to establish a system of ethnic comparative literature.

In the early part of this century, in the same book (revised edition), Chen and Liu distinguish between comparative literature and national literature study. They consider comparisons between Li Bai and Du Fu, Wordsworth and Cole Ritchie, The Scarlet Letter and Moby-dick, The Ramayana and The Mahabharata, as not belonging to comparative literature, because such studies are just using the comparative method in the same national scope; on the other hand, in a multi-ethnic country, the comparison between many ethnic literatures should fall within comparative literature. For instance, comparative studies in Canadian literature between certain works of English and French literature constitutes inter-ethnic study, and comparative study in Chinese literature between Tibetan literature and Mongolian literature would also constitute inter-ethnic study in the field of comparative literature. In 比较文学： 文学平行本质的比较研究——清代蒙汉文学关系论稿 (Comparative Literature: Literature Parallel

Comparative Study—The Nature of the Qing Dynasty and Mongolian Literature Relationship Theory), Zha LaGa reviews the history of the discipline of comparative literature and puts forth the idea that from the study of comparative literature, research on relations between different ethnic literatures of one nation should be placed "in the scope of Comparative Literature" (8). He thinks that comparative literature is the study of relations of literary parallel nature and the laws of the development as a discipline, and in its focus on several literary relations, research on the relations between different ethnic literatures is the foundation of the concept of comparative literature. In their essay, "四川少数民族文学研究与比较文学联姻三十年" (The 30-year Marriage of Sichuan Ethnic Literature Research and Comparative Literature), Yang Rong and Xu Qichao explain that, "literariness, comparability, crossing, and characteristics of comparative literature determine the comparison of different ethnic literatures which are systematically self-established within a multi-ethnic country belonging to the category of comparative literature, which internally determines the possibility, the necessity, and inevitability of the marriage between ethnic literature and comparative literature … a number of comparative studies between systemically self-formed ethnic literatures will become one of the highlights of the theory advocated by the Chinese school of Comparative Literature" (171). All of these aforementioned scholars think comparative study between ethnic literatures belongs to the field of Comparative Literature.

Based on all of the scholars' research achievements, the study between ethnic literature and comparative literature can be divided into two parts: one is the application of the method of comparative literature to ethnic literature research; the other is the study of the relationship between ethnic literatures. The field of ethnic literature research falls into three different categories: literary relations between ethnic literatures, between ethnic minority literature and Han literature, and between ethnic literature and foreign literature. To apply the idea and method of comparative literature to ethnic literature research is worthy of affirmation and advocacy. Comparative study between ethnic and foreign literature is also possible. The Chinese ethnic groups have 3 major epics: Gesar from the Tibetan people, Janggar from the Mongolian people, and Manas from the Kirgiz people. The Greeks have Homer's epics: The Iliad and the Odyssey. The early Middle Ages in Europe witnessed the birth of heroic epic poem Beowulf, filled with supernatural elements such as dragons and monsters; the patriotic and heroic epic The Song of Roland in France, Cantar de Mio Cid in Spain; Nibelungenlied in Germany. In literature studies, great focus has been placed on the study of the literature of ethnic groups and the comparison study of these epic works. The Chinese studies on Homer, the western studies on the three Chinese heroic epics, and the comparison studies on Chinese and western epics, are all good examples. Although these studies involve literature of Chinese ethnic groups, we cannot deny that those studies should belong to the category of comparative literature. Ethnic literature, as a branch of national literature, should be classified in the domain of internal research of a national literature, of course, including the comparative study between ethnic literatures of different countries. Comparative study between Mongolian and Tibetan literature, the comparative studies between Mongolian or Tibetan literature and Han national literature should both fall within the field of comparative literature. At present, some academic circles are still accustomed to regard comparison of all ethnic literatures of one country as domestic national literature research or ethnic literature research and refuse to consider them as comparative literature research. Ethnic literature forms an internal part of a country's literature and is also the crucial component, which manifests diversity and heterogeneity among the literatures of different nations and within a single nation.

The definition of comparative literature as encompassing inter-national and cross-civilization studies is acceptable, but the exclusion of inter-ethnic studies in comparative literature in China is not acceptable because of the high degree of ethnic diversity and distinction among many Chinese ethnic groups. Apart from inconsequential racial differences, territorial differences, religious differences in some cases, and the linguistic differences between certain ethnic groups are diverse enough to warrant comparative literary study. Tibetan and Mongolian literature, for example, constitute an integral part of the rich tapestry that is Chinese national literature, yet the literature of these two completely distinct ethnic groups are also unique tapestries in themselves, transmitting a unique cultural identity, and certainly worthy of comparative study.

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