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GaoXingjian's *Soul Mountain*: Autobiographical Overtone

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Abstract

This research entitled Xingjian's Soul Mountain:Autobiographical Overtone depicts the story of a wandering man himself. It merges his past and present and thus lends an autobiographical overtone. It includes personal typicality, spiritual reality, and objective truth and makes the novel a historical autobiography. It reveals the intertwining aspects of physical environment. The novel accordingly analyzes how literature can provoke environmental reflection by expanding preconceived understandings of the non-human environment as a dimension of personal and communal sense of place. Xingjian, in the novel, presents the problems faced by himself. He records his own past, and society of China because his aim is to expose his own reality.

Keywords: autobiography, record, spiritual reality, historical, objective, truth

The present thesis analyses Gao's novel *Soul Mountain* in the light of Autobiography concept of reflection of writer's own life. Gao has resigned himself to death that brings him a transcendent peace. However, soon after this diagnosis, an x-ray reveals that his lung cancer is non-existent. At this time Gao hears rumors of plans to have him sent to the hellish prison farms of Qinghai province, and thus quickly makes decision to flee Beijing. In the cultural revolution of China from 1966 to 1976, females also have participated and become martyrs.

Soul Mountain is an examination in narrative techniques of an author that provides the deep knowledge of both Chinese and Western literature. Gao's artistic and critical writings during the 1980s are of historical importance. The most distinguishing feature of the novel is that the characters are unnamed.

Writer, dramatist, critic, and artist Gao was born in China. His father was an employee of a bank. Young Gao grew up reading his way through a sizeable collection of Chinese literature and a small number of volumes on Western literature and art. His love for the theatre also began in the early years of his life when his mother became a performer in a patriotic national salvation theatre group. It was also his mother who insisted that he kept a diary and got him into the habit of writing. This practice later grew into an addiction for linguistic expression of his rich imagination and intense curiosity about life.

Gao in this novel is fighting to shape himself rather in a different way than other uneducated ignorant and orthodox blacks of the south. He gives up on going to religious ceremonies disobeys his senior family members and relatives, fights against his friends at school and abuses the educational system of the south.

In China, Chinese revolution movement varied from public to private programs. Such programs included recruitment, quotas for women, minorities, and the

disabled. The novel contains numerous references to Chinese myths and symbols that make a strong connection between the places visited on the journey and the entrenched Chinese cultural traditions behind the landscape. The Yangtze valley is always read like a text with cultural and literary meaning embedded by the narrator in his search for cultural memories. During the Cultural Revolution when stringent measures were imposed on writers, he knew that his writings were highly problematical, that there was no possibility of his having them published. As a compulsive writer he in effect wrote for himself. He was author, reader and critic of his works and this is a stance he still resolutely adheres to in all of his writings.

When the Cultural Revolution ended and China came into view from decades of loneliness, there was a universal liberalization in all areas of cultural life, albeit with intermittent cycles of repression. Gao in his novel explores environmental landscape that connects human and spirit dwelling places, including forests, mountains, rivers and streams. Folktales, myths, oral histories, ballads, ritual incantations and ordinary stories of daily life all invoked in real or imagined detail the spatial positioning of a community of people. Gao's writings nevertheless brought him under the scrutiny of the authorities. His writings clearly promoted freedom of expression, not just for the writer but also for the readers and the characters in fiction.

Gao wandered for five months in the Chinese hinterland until the more liberal faction regained power in Beijing. Gao in this work is struggle to shape himself rather in a different way than other uneducated ignorant and familial tension. Though Gao presents his anger of the Chinese authority, more dominant in the novel is his contempt towards whites. He presents the miseries of blacks for which the whites are responsible and rejects their values and finally, leaves for Soul Mountain. There was a rumor that Gao was involved in cultural revolution. To avoid detection by the

authorities, he travelled on the margins of conventional society observing diverse human responses to socialized existence and to the natural environment and reflecting on the rationale for various human traditions and practices. That journey covering 15,000 kilometers (from Beijing to Sichuan and then following the Yangtze from its source down to the coast) provides the physical setting for his epic novel *Soul Mountain*.

Gao, Chinese Nobel Laureate in literature is known for his highly innovative narrative style and whose creative use of language undoubtedly place him in the forefront of world literature. His fiction *Soul Mountain* (2000) depicts an introspective journey into the remote mountains and ancient forests of Sichuan in southwest China in the early 1980s. The novel discovers the environmental scenery of the Yangtze valley that connects human/spirit dwelling places, including forests, mountains, rivers and streams. Folktales, myths, oral histories, ballads, ritual incantations and ordinary stories of daily life all invoked in real or imagined detail the spatial positioning of a community of people. The paper seeks to examine the intertwining aspects of physical environment and analyze how literature can provoke environmental reflection by expanding preconceived understandings of the non-human environment as a dimension of personal and communal sense of place. Further it seeks to bring out a better understanding of the intertwined aspects of landscape and the self in ethnographic representation and its depiction in *Soul Mountain*.

However, Chinese are still under the conflict between equality of opportunity and of outcome. The search for true life in *Soul Mountain* becomes an attempt to return to the authentic life, which the protagonist finds in the folk songs of the ethnic tribes such as the Qiang and the Miao. During the journey, which covers both human dominated cities and more nature friendly rural areas, the impact of the human

interference with the environment is widely observed and severely criticized by the people encountered.

Chinese revolution movement ranged from public to private programs. Moreover, it stressed job training, professional education, employment and the placement of government contracts. The goal of these programs moved from equality of opportunity to equality of outcome. Many Chinese object to this idea. They strongly oppose quotas and policies that restrict individual's freedom. The challenge of pluralist democracy is to balance these conflicting values. Gao shows a paralinguistic state in which the self is presented in a state of primordial non-distinction.

On his long journey as a political refugee from Beijing, Gao employs the strategy of storytelling to disperse his loneliness, and at the same time narrates the impact of the Cultural Revolution on both the human and physical ecology of China. The philosophy of Daoism stresses unity with nature and with the self and the sacred as well as physical journey of the narrator. *Soul Mountain* is an attempt to achieve such a unity. The narrator is on a great search of what he assumes meaning in his life. Yet throughout the book he battles with his reason for leaving modern civilization and travelling on his own to the mountains.

In *Soul Mountain*, the self is presented as both the perceiving subject as well as the perceived object by adopting the method of self transcendent observation which he took from Chan Buddhism. The themes of violence, decay and degradation, cruelty in human nature and nature form the crux of the novel. The novel shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. The novel focuses on the behavioral and experiential aspects of ecological inter relationships and serve as quasi autobiographical odysseys from the

egocentric to the eccentric. Gao considers his state of loneliness as an essential requirement for the examination of both the external and the internal worlds. He firmly believes that "Loneliness is a prerequisite for freedom. Freedom depends on the ability to reflect and reflection can only begin when one is alone" (165). Gao has repeatedly emphasized the importance of fleeing for the revelation of one's true selves. Only by fleeing from culture, politics, history, society and even the limitations of one's own self, can a person be totally free and detached to examine his true identity.

Gao's protagonist cannot become one with another culture, especially because that culture's own access to cultural and emotional authenticity is already problematic, not least because of the Cultural Revolution. They are not abstractions or concepts, but are directly experienced phenomena of the lived world and hence are full with meanings, with real objects, and with ongoing activities. Terrain here is always read like a text with cultural and literary meaning embedded by the narrator in his search for cultural memories. Like other biological organisms, humans live and act on landscapes, and thus have influenced, and been influenced by landscapes. Instead, the protagonist interacts with and reads the others' cultural artifacts, which are, at the same time, the remains of history. One of the most interesting examples of such an interaction comes in chapter 24 when the "I" finds a ritual mask, the fragment of a lost practice. Confiscated as superstitious objects in the early fifties, the set of masks it belongs to has been miraculously saved from the ravages of the Cultural Revolution, locked into the vaults of a museum that catalogues, stores and keeps them hidden from view.

The importance of a sense of place and landscape, as a living physical location, geographical as well as biological grounded in an awareness of nature-

human relationships including own relationship to the local environment forms the crux of this novel. By carrying this literary feature, *Soul Mountain* locates itself solidly within the Chinese literary tradition and connects to a wider Chinese literary discourse.

Gao's *Soul Mountain* presents an intrinsically dynamic, interconnected web of relations in which there are no absolutely discrete entities and no absolute dividing lines between the living and the nonliving, the animate and the inanimate, or the human and the nonhuman. The ethnography and landscape of the Yangtze valley thus presented calls us to examine the very nature of the human place in the natural world.

From this perspective, it makes sense that the protagonist's fascination with ethnic minorities and their cultures plays an important role in *Soul Mountain*. From the outset, all the trappings of *Searching for Roots* are in place, while the text itself takes great pains to disavow this very aesthetic affiliation. In the novel's first chapter, for instance, the narrator's voice delivers a deliberate pastiche of *Searching for Roots*.

During his writing of *Soul Mountain* Gao notes that regrettably for Chinese literature Lu Xun had chosen the path of politics instead of literature. Lu Xun was painfully aware of the implications of his choice and he documents his ordeal in a series of prose-poems which were later published as a collection called *Wild Grass* in 1927. He knew that this choice would leave him like a corpse with his heart gouged out and reverted to writing classical Chinese poems to ease his agony.

Soul Mountain thus expresses the indirect relationship between land and landscape, text and ethnography, and recognizes that man is not separate from the world of nature. The ecosystem thus presented calls us to examine the very nature of the human place in the natural world. In its extreme, history thus becomes recorded

and a marked absence of signification. At the end, it comes to signify two things that are beyond signification proper: one that is beyond meaning, namely affect as expressed in the repeated exclamation "oh history," and one that is above meaning, the meta- reflection on the manipulatively of history. More than half a century later, no less of a cultural critic than Lu Xun and having experienced the Cultural Revolution, Gao argues vehemently against the inroads on the individual in modern times wreaked by tyrannical politics, mob action, religious fundamentalism, and crass commercialism. For both Lu Xun and Gao, literary creation is the solitary act of the individual.

When the protagonist chances upon to make autobiography of the author himself that becomes a node for different temporalities: it has been marked by China's recent history and touched by modernity's inscriptive media, for instance photography, even as it embodies the uneasy threshold between human and animal as imagined by a minority culture in the late Qing dynasty. In this sense, underlined by the aged face portrayed the part old man, part ferocious animal the mask is not merely an object marked by time, but a reflection on temporality itself.

In *Soul Mountain*, Gao depicts cultural revolution of China that makes victimized to many innocent Chinese people. He depicts a history beyond signification, as crypto history. His text puts up resistance to meaning, negating history as a structure conducive to deciphering. As crypto history, an alternative type of testimony, in the form of the individual's interpretation of history, is necessary. And yet, in order to keep its creative potential alive, history has to remain cryptic . This series of definitions of history, a list that exhausts different possible readings and endorses none, thus proposes an encrypting, rather than a decrypting of history. Paradoxically, this is precisely what frees history from logos, from the necessity to

signify. Ultimately, history becomes both unreadable in the sense that it does not really form a coherent, meaningful whole and immensely a textual production by and through the reader, of history.

Numerous critics have examined *Soul Mountain* and Gao with various perspectives. Some critics have analyzed it on the basis of memory and its impact in his writing. Others have focused on the work he has produced comparing it with the external realities. In this act of examining literature review, Mabel Lee argues that "the image created in the novel, *Soul Mountain* is a part of Gao's effort to avoid undue painstaking life" (78). She means that today writer writes to show who he/she is and what has happened in his/her life. Like Lee, Crox Jeffers also believes "jerk of life enforce writers to go through autobiography, as per the Gao (9)". He means that modern people feel much frustration agony and such frustration is expressed in the novel. While choosing mode of expression, they take the help of auto-biography. In this regard, Gao is too no exception. He being frustrated made the journey of Chinese county. As a personal record of the author autobiography reaches nearer to the history and presents a picture of ever changing 'self' and mental interaction between two opposite forces of mind and heart, it reaches in the domain of psychology. For the novel, Gramham Rony Case, writes:

Soul Mountain presents the journey of a person trying to come to terms with himself to comprehend the meaning of the world as it relates to him. The novel uses pronouns instead of characters, psychological perceptions instead of plot, and changing emotions to modulate the style. The novel recounts two journeys that are woven together by "I". (12)

In above lines Rony aims to claim that Gao has used "I" to say that he has visited many holy places. He feels as if he has known his ancestor of human being. He has

also visited the old man who is taking wine from a bowl. In this regard, Gao wants to write about his self creating an unknown narrator.

Similarly, it can enter into the domain of other disciplines and genres e.g., philosophy, politics, poetry, fiction and so on. Willam C. Spengeman writes, "Autobiography made its way from the realm of history to that of literature by slow process that began years" (209). As a work of art, any autobiography consists of fact and fiction and can make use of literary devices, symbols and images, as well as biographical materials. Consequently, host of critics appeared in the domain of autobiography. Some of them associated this autobiography with the fiction and others with poetry. Gao's novel helps his many hidden matter of the writers such association was intensified by the new critical hostility shown against historical biological and psychological interpretation as well. It performed the already reduced association between autobiography and historiography and at the same time. Similarly, Kam Louie expresses his view as:

Both Gao's novel and the root-seeking school are concerned with individual explorations of and nostalgia for imagined pasts that are incongruent with official histories. These official histories, be they Confucian or Communist, show a China which is centered in the north, with Confucius, Beijing and the Yellow River as prominent cultural symbols. (147)

What Kam Louie is trying to assert is that *Soul Mountain* is the writer's nostalgic record of the past that he has faced during Cultural Revolution.

Autobiography is a record of one's own life in the form of literature. It is defined as self-exploration. Life has a certain course of its own. It is a sequence of events from birth to death, during which s/he has many names and relations, jobs and experiences, joys and sorrows, meetings and separations, aspirations and

commitment, success and failures etc. which are the parts of his/her life, and these are the things that s/he generally has to live with. Thus, autobiography is the medium of exploring those personal things. It reveals the person as he/she is to himself or herself. Therefore, autobiography is a self-written document. According to Steven Keynes, "Autobiography is the reconstruction of the movement of a life or part of a life"(106). It means that is self representation of the writer's life, past and history.

In other words, autobiography is not self history of his/her whole life but an unfinished harmonious record or rendering and reconstruction of the self. It deals with the significant past experiences, feelings, circumstances, life events etc. of an individual by himself/ herself. Thus, it is generally a self-written biography. M. H. Abrams says, Autobiography is a biography written by the subject about himself or herself (15). He explains, "It is to be distinguished from the 'memoir' in which the emphasis is not on the author's developing self but on the people and events that the author has known or witnessed, and also from the private diary or Journal, which is a day to day record of events in a person's life" (15). Abrams asserts that autobiography is not a memoir but it is somehow related to the biography in the sense that there is record of the person's own history, habit and mastered events.

A good autobiography, however, includes both. Nevertheless, self-revelation is not an easy task. So, the autobiography takes the help of symbols which refer to any aspect or the non-symbolic region. In this sense, it would not be improper to say that autobiography employs symbolic as well as biographical materials. Rather it deals with author's developing self and only those events and experiences, which have public concern.

William Spengeman argues about self and says, "Autobiography, thus, becomes synonymous with symbolic action in any form, and the word ceases to

designate particular kind of writing"(168). Autobiography has a distinct place as a literary as well as a critical form. It is the outcome of continuous struggle. Edwin G. Boring, aptly writes, "Autobiography improves with age as it ripens into history" (11). It means that it is the record of the writer's own history.

Similarly, autobiography deals with the self-recollection. It seeks to connect the writer's past with present to find the change in him/her in between. Personal typicality, spiritual reality, and objective truth formed the original foundation of historical autobiography. According to Cuddon, "From classical themes history and autobiography was almost the same thing"(69). So, autobiography can be a useful medium to know personal history of the person. The very quality made autobiographical writings popular, and it is still taken that autobiography as an instrument of knowledge. When he ascribes the present wisdom, the autobiography seriously complicates the act of selecting the experiences to include in the autobiography. Spengemanwrites, "For any historical autobiography who makes his present knowledge the effect of casually connected experiences in his past" (37). However, the proper way to recall the past days or make a record of those days in narrative is through autobiographical writings.

There are many kinds of autobiography such as historical, poetic, philosophical and so on. Historical autobiographers have worked on the various themes. Some examples are in response to the continuously changing ideas about the nature of self. The way of realizing and identifying the self and the appropriate methods to communicate these apprehensions have concerned those writers. However, the focus may change from person to person. If we observe an autobiography, written by any writer, we can find the writer interested in many aspects as in the memory, recollection of the previous actions, the aspiration and

commitments, the surroundings and society, jobs, friends, laws, religions, feelings, emotions, thoughts, dilemmas, conclusion of life and life philosophy and the developing self itself of the writer etc. But to carry out all these things through word is a very difficult task to the writer to use different literary devices e.g. symbols, images, personification etc. for his convenience. Not all autobiographies can be of the same nature. In this regard, historical autobiography also is not an exception. Many critics and readers have studied them by dividing into various forms. St. Augustine designed three styles: historical, philosophical and poetic. Spengeman writes:

The autobiographer discovers the truth from his/her own life by projecting an unbroken life through the very experiences that have caused his/her problem in the first place. For these three methods of self-knowledge, Augustine devised three autobiographical forms historical self-recollection, philosophical self-exploration, and poetic self-expression from which every subsequent autobiographer would select the one most appropriate to his own situation.

(99)

From Spengeman's opinion, the completely autobiographical works can be studied under three categories: historical self-recollection, philosophical self-exploration and poetic self-expression. This is more scientific and practical distinction than others .

Philosophical autobiography does not deal with the self-recollection but with the exploration of the self. In this type of autobiography, we may not find the self-events of the author. However, it aims to do something the life has not done, conveying through inquisitive action to self-knowledge. Every new discovery seems not only to review the existence of hitherto unsuspected world of facts but also to question the very concepts that had led to the discovery. J.A. Cuddon argues,

"Disagreeable facts are sometimes glossed over or repressed, truth may be distorted for the sake of cinematic or harmony" (68). Every work of art more or less consists of the fact and fictions.

Autobiography, as a work of art, also may consist of fiction. Cuddon writes, "An autobiography may be largely fiction. Rousseau's *Confessions* is a case in point. This is unreliable as literal truth; it has a different literary value" (68). Thus, literary work can be used as a source of information about the author if not about the other people and society. Cuddon refers to Dr. Johnson: "In Dr. Johnson's opinion no man was better qualified to write his life than himself" (68). Thus, almost all autobiographies can be studied in two ways: as a source of information and as a literary form for pleasure. Some works can be studied either as a mere source of information or as an aesthetic form or both.

It is true that autobiographers cannot possibly include all of his experiences. So, he is obliged to decide which one is the most important and most interesting. The autobiographer is not completely free to make choices because he is restricted as much to the aesthetic criteria as to the strict demands of truth. Philosophical autobiography was generally a matter of external and biographical record. However, the modern notion of autobiography is not close to the biographical aspect; rather it is a literary form, which has a distinct and independent identity. It gives the best account of the individual and reflects the self of the author during the time of creation rather than factual presentation of the self. Therefore, it may be the imaginative work combining the facts and fiction in any forms e.g., novel, poetry, etc. However, the historical or biographical aspects of the author cannot be ignored.

As a personal record of the author autobiography reaches nearer to history and presents a picture of ever changing 'self' and mental interaction between two opposite

forces of mind and heart, it reaches in the domain of psychology. Similarly, it can enter into the domain of other disciplines and genres e.g., philosophy, politics, poetry, fiction etc. Spengeman writes, "Autobiography makes its way from the realm of history to that of literature by slow process that began step of years" (209). As a work of art, any autobiography consists of fact and fiction and can make use of literary devices, symbols and images, as well as biographical materials. Consequently, host of critics appeared in the domain of autobiography. Some of them associated this autobiography with fiction and others with poetry. It performed the already reduced association between autobiography and historiography and at the same time, it enabled this genre, autobiography as a freestanding literary form. Then it is read separately like other narratives such biography, journal, story, etc.

Philosophical autobiographical writing moves from recollection to reflection, and to plausible reaction, and ultimately it moves to spontaneous exposition and again to the next recollection and so on. St. Augustine's *The Confessions*, Rousseau's *Confessions* and Wordsworth's *The Prelude* are the classic examples. Spengeman thus notes, "Wordsworth forgoes explanation to 'make rigorous inquisition' through himself in search of some ultimate wisdom, a universal truth that can inform the long philosophical poem which his autobiography is a necessary prelude" (74). What he trying to say is that Wordsworth wrote the poem, "Prelude" but he expresses his own past throughout the poem.

Poetic autobiography does not aim to give his readers his own biography but also helps to express feeling and ideas in poetic way. Only symbolic expression can catch and display an autobiographer's unique and lyrical nature. Through symbols the poet realizes and expresses the self to the readers so that they could share his achieved state of being and the view of the world. Kenneth Pletcher writes:

The effect of such an autobiography will be not to inform the reader but to transform him. By participating in the symbolic actions through which the writer realizes that divine me of his; the reader comes to share the autobiographer's achieved state of being and view of the world. As the words of the text are come and adequate symbol of the writer's spiritual evolution.

(113)

Such autobiography provides many symbolic experience in which the reader may participate. Similarly, it counteracts the anarchic effects of social mechanism. Ralph Steven Keynes writes:

Auto in autobiography can be auto sense but entrancing not in astringent level but narrative I ever be there. Now many claims and chains are to be fragmented. I shall mount above these clouds and opaque. Airs in which I live-opaque though they seem transparent and form the heaven of individual existence and totalitarian effects of truth I shall see and compare my relations and know what I am doing. (63)

This expression hints that autobiography is written in first person pronoun "I" and writer mentions about himself, his family members and their contemporary scenario.

Some students and critics of autobiography are inclined to divide the autobiographies in various ways as spiritual and secular, humanistic, private and public, religious, subjective and social national and political. In addition, there are other divisions of it like according to time as 4th century autobiography, Renaissance autobiography, 18th, 19th and 20th century autobiographies etc. and according to the country, as English autobiography, French, German, American autobiographies, etc.

Autobiography has a long history. It has come across from many critical situations. There was a time where its value was much neglected. Up to the 1930s,

many critics admitted it only as a subcategory of biography. Its present status is the outcome of long struggle. It has a changing nature. It is always going towards prosperity but its concept is changing with the time and its emphasis is also shifting. If one consciously reads the criticism and the autobiographies themselves written over years, one can notice a shift of emphasis from the biographical and historical facts recorded in it to the psychological state depicted in it. At the same time, he can find its criticisms and definitions embracing a wider variety of literary forms. Edwin Boring writes:

People who make list of autobiographies tend to restrict the definition quite severely, for purely practical reasons. Those who wish to extract from autobiography information about the writer's life and times will regard the genre as comprising only works that contain this sort of information. (185)

Here, Edwin Boring is trying to resolve the problems of definition. He answers all types of questions from various fields and approves its widespread scope. It shows that there were many turns and up-downs in its history. Similarly, the purpose of the autobiographies may vary from author and reader to reader. Today, autobiographies can be found in different forms and size but no one can challenge its distinct identity among the genres. Autobiography as a genre can comprise many other literary and critical forms such as poetic, dramatic, narrative, critical forms of genres etc.

Truly, autobiography has been accepted as a freestanding genre. It has developed its own critical methods, which are applied to read the autobiographical works. To say autobiographical approach is enough to study and analyze literary works. Therefore my research questions are: how do the major events in protagonist's life refer to major events in the novelist's life in Gao's *Soul Mountain*? How does the protagonists journey to different places echo the novelist's similar journey?

Gao's *Soul Mountain* is an autobiographical novel in its depiction

of the story of a wandering man who takes a journey in search of the self and its relation to the collective. It is a journey with a two-fold structure—a physical journey in the real world alongside a spiritual one in the realm of imagination. The novel depicts the "I" narrator's travel along the Yangtze River valley and the "you" narrator's highly symbolic spiritual journey in search of Lingshan.

Cultural Revolution, in full Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, it is upheaval launched by Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong during his last decade in power to renew the spirit of the Chinese Revolution. Fearing that China would develop along the lines of the Soviet model and worried about his own place in history, Mao threw China's cities into confusion in a monumental effort to reverse the historic processes underway. During the early 1960s, tensions with the Soviet Union won over Mao that the Russian Revolution had gone off target, which in roll made him fear that China would follow the same path. Programs carried out by his contemporaries to bring China out of the economic gloominess caused by the Great Leap Forward made Mao doubt their revolutionary commitment and also resent his own diminished role. He especially qualms town social stratification in a society as traditionally elitist as China.

The thematic substance of *Soul Mountain* may be traced to two traumatic and interrelated events in Gao's life and h is being targeted for criticism at a time when the memory of the persecution of writers during the Cultural Revolution was still palpable, and his being wrongly diagnosed as having lung cancer. Gao's close encounter with death had dislodged many forgotten fragments of his past and he recaptures these as well as his emotional experience of confronting death in his novel. It traces a five month journey of the protagonist from Beijing to Sichuan province and

from there followed the Yangtze River to the coast. James Miller writes:

Soul Mountain thus presents a series of field researches, enriched with philosophical, historical, and literary meditations which the author seeks to rehabilitate in the face of an orchestrated amnesia. At a time when his contemporaries are preoccupied with glorifying the national heritage that was significantly destroyed by the Cultural Revolution. (23)

The lines tell that in Cultural Revolution, many people has sacrificed their life. In the early 1980s, Gao faced a great deal of criticism in the wake of the Chinese Cultural Revolution as he was suspected of being involved in Chinese Cultural Revolution.

The novel *Soul Mountain* has eighty-one chapters and each chapter is about the individual's experience, material or psychological, in one place or at one time. Gao in *The Case for Literature* about *Soul Mountain* makes the following observation:

In order to write it, I made three trips to the Yangtze River during 1983 and 1984, the longest of which was a journey of fifteen thousand kilometres. I have wandered along the Yangtze, from the giant panda reserve that is the home of the Qiang people right down to where it meets the China Sea, and from folk customs and practices I have returned to urban life. (103)

The writer says that to write the novel, he makes great toil to visit Yangtze river during three years. Gao writes in *Soul Mountain*:

Powerful atmosphere instantly permeates the room, the inside of which is black from smoke. The glow of the flames licking the iron pot of mutton stew makes his eyes glint. This is all starkly real. While you search for the route to Lingshan, I wander along the Yangtze River looking for this sort of reality. I had just gone through. (474)

Gao's narrator says that he finds great healing power in the Yangtze river which sees him fresh and innovative. The writer himself confesses that the novel is his autobiographical work because he clearly asserts that he has traveled many territories of China. Plethcher writes:

While the narrator that means writer himself travels mostly in the southern and southwestern hinterland of China, he also carries out a psychical journey within his inner world, seeking the symbolic and elusive goal of reaching the place called Soul Mountain. There is a rich description of the geographical features of that region, the scenery and ethnography of the Yangtze valley.

(63)

Soul Mountain is a novel but it contains all such things, which a novel is not supposed to have. The first one-third part of the book is rather engaging and enjoyable but the second one-third part of the book is dense and confusing.

Gao already knew that this unconventional style of writing fiction would elicit objections from the general readers, that is why, he includes a short chapter about what counts as fiction. The autobiography is always written in first person pronoun. For the novel, a critic, Gramham Rony Case writes:

Soul Mountain presents the journey of a person trying to come to terms with himself to comprehend the meaning of the world as it relates to him. The novel uses pronouns instead of characters, psychological perceptions instead of plot, and changing emotions to modulate the style. The novel recounts two journeys that are woven together by "I". (12)

In these lines, the writer has used "I" to say that he has visited many holy places. He feels as if he has known his ancestor of human being. He has also visited the old man

who is taking wine from a bowl. Gao feels that it is the responsibility of a writer to keep a narrator to express his personal feeling and ideas.

Truly, the novel examines the intertwining aspects of physical environment and analyzes how literature can provoke environmental reflection by expanding preconceived understandings of the non-human environment as a dimension of personal and communal sense of place. Further it seeks to bring out a better understanding of the intertwined aspects of landscape and the self in ethnographic representation. Kam Louie expresses his view:

Both Gao's novel and the root-seeking school are concerned with individual explorations of and nostalgia for imagined pasts that are incongruent with official histories. These official histories, be they Confucian or Communist, show a China which is centred in the north, with Confucius, Beijing and the Yellow River as prominent cultural symbols. (147)

The lines in *Soul Mountain* are the writer's nostalgic record of the past that he has faced during Cultural Revolution. It is an autobiographical work in which Gao portrays his journey of seven years, which is at once physical and spiritual.

In the novel, while the narrator travels mostly in the southern and southwestern hinterland of China, he also carries out a psychological journey within his inner world, seeking the symbolic and elusive goal of reaching the place called Soul Mountain. There is a rich description of the geographical features of that region, the scenery and ethnography of the Yangtze valley. The 1500 kilometers journey in Soul Mountain takes him to the provinces of Sichuan and Qinghai in the southwest of China and then along the Yangtze River to the provinces of Jiangsu and Jiangxi in the east. Gao's close encounter with death had dislodged many forgotten fragments of his past and he recaptures these as well as his emotional experience of

confronting death in his novel. From the narrator's activities and visit of different places, narrator himself seems to be Gao. Lines from *Soul Mountain*:

I have travelled by boat several times past Kuime
and people on board always eagerly
point out the spot for me, but even now .

I am in this ancient city
of the White Emperor, I am still not sure of the location.(305)

In fact, the writer himself has traveled to Kuimen, so he will not remember how many places he meets, whom he meets, what people say.

Gao has resigned himself to death that brought him transcendent peace. However, soon after this diagnosis, an x-ray revealed that his lung cancer was non-existent. At this time Gao heard rumors of plans to have him sent to the hellish prison farms of Qinghai province, and thus quickly made the decision to flee Beijing. In the novel:

During the Cultural Revolution women also joined in causing havoc. There was this nineteen-year-old girl who had civilian militia training and was one of the top-ranking shooters of the province. During the armed battles, she went with her group up the mountain. (187)

Lines tell, females also have participated and became martyrs in the revolution. There is cultural repopulation in which females also participate massively. To be its activists, young girl also takes militia training.

People used to die at this spot all the time, you say, and they were very often children and women. Children would dive off the rock in summer, the ones who didn't re-surface were said to have been trying to die and had been reclaimed by parents of another life. Those forced into taking their own lives are always women

defenceless young students sent here from the city, young women who had been maltreated by mothers-in-law and husbands.

Moran writes:

He captures all he sees and hears in a mesmerizing manner: sometimes with unambiguous clarity and other times with a dreamlike quality .By talking with them, he finds some sorts of healing. He writes in vague manner because his travelling is too many andfacing and faces many more. (214)

He means thatwhatever he sees, he mentions all in detail in the novel. He does not hesitate to explain all in detail. His journey is so difficult because he has to spend days and nights in forests or natural reserves, where he talks with forest rangers, archeologists, and local residents, most of who are members of ethnic minority groups. The Yangtze River is the longest river in both China and Asia. The upper course of the Yangtze flows across the Plateau of Tibet and descends through the deep valleys in the mountains east of the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. The middle reaches of the Yangtze River is composed of the Jiangnan Plain in Hubei Province, the Dongting Lake Plain in Hunan Province and the Boyang Lake Plain in Jiangxi Province; and the plains in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River is made up of the Chao Lake Plain in Anhui Province and the Yangtze River Delta in Jiangsu Province, Zhejiang Province and Shanghai City. More than three-fourths of the river's course runs through mountains. The Yangtze has eight principal tributaries. Lines taken from *Soul Mountain*:

Observation compound at Haiba,water drips everywhere and my bedding is damp. I've spent two nights here. During the daytime I wear the padded clothes issued byte camp but still feel perpetually damp. The most comfortable time is in front of the fire drinking hot soup and eating but groping seems to

sound worthy.(36)

Above lines hint that to get equanimity, he visited Haiba water fountain where his bedding damp. Gao's father is suspected with cancer as Gao falsely proved to be so. In such a condition, like his narrator, he visited Haiba water drips to console his pain. Landscape here refers to the perceived settings that frame people's senses of place and community. A place is a socially meaningful and identifiable space to which a historical dimension is attributed. This idea can be illustrated from an episode in *Soul Mountain*.

Thus a physical space endowed with meaning becomes landscape a contextual horizon of perceptions, providing both a foreground and abackground in which people feel themselves to be living in their world.

The Government authorities of China considered him a man whose ideas are inclined towards the capitalist west. At that time, in 1983 Gao discovered that he had lung cancer. It was the wrong diagnosis but had affected him irrevocably. Therefore, Gao fled Beijing and traveled formmonths through southwest China. In this novel Gao symbolically portrays his quest for his self by the quest of Soul Mountain. In this quest, he encountered different experiences. He met with Chinese ethnic minorities and documents their traditions and customs. He visits temples and forests but his basic desire remains the companionship of humans. Henry Bullel writes:

Gao Xingjian has repeatedly emphasized the importance of fleeing for the revelation of one's true selves. Only by fleeing from culture, politics, history, society and even the limitations of one's own self, can a person be totally free and detached to examine his true identity. Landscape in *Soul Mountain* refers both to "geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness. (83)

He means that instead of writing oneself, the novelist has explained in detail about history, culture, politics, history though he is fleeing from them. In tense mood Gao had to flee home to Wuyizhen, The reason to flee is that there is a rumor that he involves in Cultural Revolution. Gao writes:

Take the train to Wuyizhen, then go upstream by boat on the You

River. "What's there? Scenery? Temples? Historic sites?"

you asked, trying to be casual.

"It's all virgin wilderness. "Ancient forests?"

And the county with flowery. (3)

The above lines clearly hint that like the narrator, Gao has taken the train and visited, You River where he can feel soothe and clam by viewing temples and historic sites. Similarly, cultural Revolution, an activist, Qui jin is killed heroically and government declares her as martyr. Gao writes: "Young girl on the mountain picking tea, Your young man is down cutting brushwood, In both places startled mandarin ducks fly up, Young girl quickly marry your young man" (288). Through these lines Gao expresses the real situation of China which has happened to almost all male and female citizens. Therefore, Gao asserts both male and females disguise in some places in some form to save life same as he did.

Soul Mountain thus presents a series of field researches, enriched with philosophical, historical, and literary meditations. This formal heterogeneity coincides with the multiplicity of southern cultures, which the author seeks to rehabilitate in the face of an orchestrated amnesia.

At the time when his contemporaries are preoccupied with glorifying the national heritage that was significantly destroyed by the Cultural Revolution, Gao takes it upon himself to challenge Han supremacy, which is far from favourable to

peripheral cultures. Behind this inquisitorial account lies a historical distinction. As the author reminds us, there is a traditional dichotomy between the cultures of the North and of the South, respectively symbolised by the Yellow River and the Blue River (The Yangtze). The culture of the North gained influence over the centuries, due to an imperial system backed up by Confucian orthodoxy. In the revolution, females also actively participate. Like his narrator, Gao has also visited her home to watch hanging photograph. Gao narrates:

heroic revolutionary martyr Qiu Jin who believed it was her duty to save her race was doomed from the outset. Her photo is hanging in her old residence. This talented daughter of a big family wrote beautiful poetry and prose and has elegant eyebrows, bright eyes and a gentle expression and thought. (447)

Above lines clearly say that Gao has visited Qiu Jin residence to view her hanging photo. She is so talented in literature but sacrifices her life for the sake of nation supporting the movement.

When this novel is awarded the Nobel Prize, Chinese Foreign Minister, Hua Xun has said that this award was nothing but a political maneuver and hence the Chinese nation has no pride on it. The members of the Chinese Communist party-line literati have questioned that whether the author and the novel are Nobel material or not. The Chinese government authorities were not happy as his novel challenged communist ethos. Fortunately, Goran Malmqvist, who had translated the Gao's plays and produced them for Stockholm is an expert on China and also one of the academy member. In gaining Nobel Prize, he has said that it is his own exploration of self.

Marry Miller writes:

Gao Xinxiang's *Soul Mountain* presents us with a vision of the habits, customs, occupations and daily manners of the local people. It also leads into an

investigation into the religious, moral, social and emotional climates of the society in that area of China. This is the setting that provides the narrator with abundant resources in his search for authentic. (99)

She means that the novel is not only the exploration of self but within it, autobiography and other investigation has been mixed.

On his long journey as a political refugee from Beijing, Gao employs the strategy of storytelling to disperse his loneliness, and at the same time narrates the impact of the Cultural Revolution on both the human and physical ecology of China. The novel explores the environmental landscape of the Yangtze valley that connects human/spirit dwelling places, including forests, mountains, rivers and streams. In *Soul Mountain*, the existential self of the protagonist is constantly tormented by the basic question of human existence such as meaning of life and its goal, authentic self and the accompanying existential emotions such as despair and anxiety.

The search for true life in *Soul Mountain* becomes an attempt to return to the authentic life, which the protagonist finds in the folk songs of the ethnic tribes such as the Qiang and the Miao. He collects these songs because he is searching for lives and life is shown more clearly in these old songs than in the more modern one-minded songs of his era. Some chapters are made up of folk legends or tales, and the style of different types of oral literature or classical fiction is adopted. Chapter 41 describes the ox sacrificial ceremony of the Miao community. Lia-hya Ying remarks:

In *Soul Mountain*, the existential self of the protagonist is constantly tormented by the basic question of human existence such as meaning of life and its goal, authentic self and the accompanying existential emotions such as despair and anxiety. The search for true life in *Soul Mountain* becomes an attempt to return to the authentic life, which the protagonist finds in the folk

songs of the ethnic tribes. (99)

What Ying trying to say is the protagonist is searching self which has close affinity with the writer because he himself visited several places like his narrator. So it is an autobiographical overtone.

Gao was diagnosed with lung cancer and faced imminent death. But six weeks later, a second examination revealed there was no cancer. Faced with a repressive cultural environment and the threat of a spell in a prison farm, Gao fled Beijing and began a journey of 15,000 kilometers into the remote mountains and ancient forests of Sichuan in southwest China. Like the narrator, he has also visited Qionglai Mountain. Later Gao like his narrator visits Qionglai Mountain which is boarder of Sinchuan:

It is in the Qiang region halfway up Qionglai Mountain, in the border areas of the Qinghai-Tibetan highlands and the Sichuan basin, that I witness a vestige of early human civilization – the worship of fire. Chinese folk culture and cultural diversity within Chinese civilization that are found. (10)

Quoted above extract is trying to assert is that Gao visits Sincuan because it is a holy place where he can feel fresh and heal his mood. So he always longs to be there.

The novel contains numerous references to Chinese myths and symbols that make a strong connection between the places visited on the journey and the entrenched Chinese cultural traditions behind the landscape. The Yangtze valley is always read like a text with cultural and literary meaning embedded by the narrator in his search for cultural memories and detail explanation of many places. Lia Hua Yin writes:

An important theme of *Soul Mountain* is that landscape is presented here not just as a thing but as a way of understanding the meaning of self. Xingjian considers his state of loneliness as an essential requirement for the

examination of both the external and the internal worlds. He firmly believed that Loneliness is a prerequisite for freedom. (88)

The lines clearly hint that Gao in real life wander much because he thinks loneliness can give him solace from internal and external world. As an interacted, he visits his father home

In the novel, *Soul Mountain*, we notice many autobiographical overtones. Gao had begun writing novel while he was still living in Beijing in the summer of 1982. Later was finally published in Taiwan. In the story narrator is also writer, the author was also diagnosed with lung cancer. Later Gao himself confess that he reaches Kaiyuan reign where he watches historical places. In this regard, his narrator is himself the author.

Built in the third year of the Kaiyuan reign period of the Song Dynasty and repaired in 1962. This stone was laid in 1983." It no doubt marks the beginning of the tourist industry here. Two food stalls stand at the end of the bridge. Areas of Beijing to travel in different is of Chinese place along the Yangzi River. (7) Above extract clearly illustrates is that the write has gone to watch historical places which in build in 1962.

In fact in the real life of Gao, he has tremendous problem. For example. His father has died due to lung cancer. It was rumored that he was involved in Cultural Revolution, so Chinese government if found him, would put him into jail. The Government authorities of China considered him a man whose ideas are inclined towards the capitalist west. Gao extremely loves his father's homeland, Qiang. So like his narrator, he goes to visit the same village

I set out from the hostel of the nature reserve and go back to the house of the Qiang retired village head. A big padlock is hanging on his door. This is the

third time I've been back but again he's not there. It seems that this door which can lead me into that mystical world has closed for me. (23)

Extracted lines expose that Gao is going to visit a village head. Here head means his father who is a respected person of Qiang County. So like the narrator, he flees from beginning in remote areas to get spiritual healing. Like the narrator, he also visits forests of Sichuan, Yangtze River, the districts of Qiang, Miao, Yi, Han Chinese. Like the narrator, Gao is healthy but the doctor said to him that he has lung cancer. So he feels tension and goes on a physical journey to find Soul Mountain.

In fact it is a journey of spiritual quest. He is very frustrated with the disease because the same disease killed his father. He is sad but, but a second set of X-rays shows that he is quite healthy and can live many years. He starts his journey from the western part of China and moves eastward. Early in his wanderings, he hears of Soul Mountain in which he longs to visit so that his soul would get eternity. The narrator wanders through remote parts of southern Sichuan and reaches Hunan Province.

Gao, through his narrative novel, is trying to search his roots and explore the Chinese culture, habit, customs and so on. While doing so, he himself writes his self-identity in detail. For example, while wandering like the narrator, Gao reaches Jiangxi which was his motherland province. While reaching there, he becomes homesick and remembers his dead mother and grandmother. From Jiangxi, he proceeds eastward to Zhejiang Province, where he continues to visit remote wilderness areas. He stays away from cities, but on occasional visits, he finds city people who are aware of his published writing and eager to meet him. Firstly, for Gao there can be no pristine cultural ground, no tradition untainted by civilization's and history's violence. The dialogue in chapter 21 between the "I" and a member of the Yi that I referred to earlier is actually about questions of civilization, savagery, and cruelty. Upon the

"I's"enquiries regarding the barbaric customs of the Yi, his interlocutor has no difficulty convincing him that cruelty and violence are also to be found in Han culture, most recently in the Cultural Revolution. What is more important, however, neither the Han nor the Yi have a monopoly either to violence or to non-violence, to civilization or to barbarism.

The various examples of the protagonist's thoughts about the similarity between minority cultures and what is perceived as Han culture throughout the novel show the investment of "searching for roots" in one's own cultural other to be flawed from the beginning: in order to claim the other as one's own roots.. An ironic reminder of the flawed temporal logic of bothering is the culmination to the fetishistic fixation on the wild man throughout the text.

In this sense, alternative cultures with their cultural expression can only always become the simulation for another culture's desire for authenticity. These cultures and the would-be alternative characteristics others seek in them are Chinese, in the sense that what is called "Chinese" culture has always been the outcome of cultural contact and hybridization to begin with. In fact, the narrator has written many books. The writer and his narrator of the novel *Soul Mountain* has many resemblances. For example, like the narrator, Gao has two brothers who are fond of hunting. They would use traps to kill deer for musk:

The brothers had gone into the mountain to lay traps. There's good money in musk. Laying traps has been modernized – a trap can be made with a small piece of wire pulled out of a steel construction cable and a person can lay several hundred in a day on the mountain, falls, shamans and fountain peak
(27)

Above lines illustrate Gao's brother activities of hunting. Due to poverty, they make hunt and make good money by selling musk. The result of this epic voyage of discovery is *Soul Mountain*. The more autobiographical tone comes from the lines: Lines tell that his doctor falsely diagnoses his cancer by viewing X- ray report. Like his narrator, Gao also has faced the same.

The head doctor as usual was wearing his glasses and sitting in his swivel chair. He read the diagnosis on my medical record, examined the two chest X-rays and said that an X-ray from the side would have to be taken. He immediately wrote a note for another X-ray that later diagnose falsehood. (71)

These lines tell that the doctor falsely diagnoses his cancer by watching x- ray report. Like his narrator ,Gao faces the same pain. In his fleeing stage Chief ranger, a volunteer has come to visit him in Shanghai. Gao narrates:

He is the chief ranger of the reserve and he is shaking his head. He says that during the 1950s a man with an overseas PhD came here voluntarily from Shanghai, all full of enthusiasm. He brought along with him four biology and marine life graduates. The ranger makes the fascination gossip to reveal the self identity(109)

These lines tell us that so as to know why Gao flees just hearing rumor of his involvement in the revolution, the ranger has come to visit him.

To sum up, every piece of art reflects society. No art can be set apart from the social circumstances. The literary works of various periods portray the life style, culture and human civilization. In the representation of life, a work of art goes much deeper than one's sight reaches at a glance. Gao, one of the renowned twenty first century Chinese in *Soul Mountain* records self of himself. The novel, as the title suggests, presents a typical spiritual and self-quest to create his identity going beyond

to different landscape and natural places.

It was an innate intellectual curiosity that led Gao to investigate the rationale for the techniques, strategies, and linguistic devices employed in various literary genres. His reading across cultures and his interrogation of genres informed and nurtured in him a unique aesthetics. His aesthetics, the indiscriminate denigration of cultural antecedents by modernity and its subsequent incarnations, viewed as a political dynamic driven by ideology. That has infiltrated national and global cultural infrastructures. Significantly, this meant that the individual as author, reader, and fictional characters was empowered of psychological, intellectual, and physical autonomy. Therefore, the novelist exiles himself in France as refused to compromise his integrity as a writer and at the same time he could not be happy in his native land.

When Gao began to construct the theoretical framework of *Soul Mountain*, he had envisioned that it would be a long novel that would incorporate his years of pondering on fiction as a modern genre. Although as an individual Gao had readily denounced the Chinese authorities as his name published in the media, keeping his photograph to find him and put in jail as he has been doubted to involve against the Chinese government. However, he refused to compromise his integrity to that war.

Instead, he acknowledges that he is informed by the achievements of his predecessors, although he is resolute in his search for new paths for his own creative explorations. His creations represent the actualization of an aesthetics aimed primarily at his own aesthetic fulfillment as a multi-talented individual and he demands the freedom to create without political influence. At the same time, while respecting the freedom of readers or viewers to choose whether or not to engage with his texts, their responses play no role in his creations. In other words, he refuses to pander to the

dictates of any authority, that of politics or the market. He creates for his own personal aesthetic fulfillment.

Like his protagonist, Gao faced a great deal of criticism in the wake of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. His narrator in the novel false diagnosed with lung cancer. Similar case happens in Gao's life because It was during this time, in 1983, that the author was diagnosed with lung cancer during a regular health screening. His narrator father also dies of cancer. As a result, like his narrator, with the memory of his father's death by the same cause just two years earlier still fresh in his memory, Gao resigned himself to death, which brought about calmness.

However, soon after this diagnosis, an x-ray revealed that his lung cancer was non-existent. At this time Gao heard rumors of plans to have him sent to the hellish prison farms of Qinghai province, and thus quickly made the decision to flee Beijing. This decision led him to begin the journey that forms much of the autobiographical portion of the novel.

Thus, Gao, in writing an autobiography, is not limited to present the problems faced by himself. He writes the history, culture and society of China in general. He wants to reconstruct his identity by following the path of loneliness and by wandering with a view getting some sorts of healing power. He attempts to construct himself by exploring the self. To make the autobiography, Gao keeps the self-portrayal narrator. Like his narrator, Gao has also falsely said to be suffered by cancer. He has also fled from home because he is accused of involving in Chinese Cultural Revolution. Gao, like his narrator, has visited You River, Qiang region, Yangtze valley and so on to heal his mind.

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