Places, Landscapes and Lives: Towards an Ecocritical Reading of Selected Fiction of Gao Xingjian

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled "***Places, Landscapes and Lives*: Towards an Ecocritical Reading of Selected Fiction of Gao Xingjian"** is the result of investigation carried out by me at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision of Prof. Krishna Barua. The work has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other University/ Institution for a research degree.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Anurag Bhattacharyya has prepared the thesis entitled "***Places, Landscapes and Lives*: Towards an Ecocritical Reading of Selected Fiction of Gao Xingjian"** for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati. The work was carried out under my general supervision and in strict conformity with the rules laid down for the purpose. It is the result of his investigation and has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other University/ Institution for a research degree.

March 2012 **Prof. Krishna Barua**

IIT Guwahati Supervisor

Dedicated to Maa and Papa

Man follows earth, earth follows sky, sky follows the way, the way follows nature…

Gao Xingjian, *Soul Mountain*

Contents

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Preface

The most conspicuous development in literary studies in the postmodern age exists in a state of constant flux, in a period of rapid and sometimes disorienting change. The absence of sign of an environmental perspective in contemporary literary studies would seem to suggest that despite its "revisionist energies" (Glotfelty xv), scholarship remains academic in the sense of scholarly to the point of being unaware of the outside world. Although critical reading of literary texts and movements in relation to ideas of nature, wilderness, natural science, and spatial environments have been pursued for the better part of a century, the term ecocriticism or ecological criticism was coined only twenty years ago, and in the last decade has the study of literature in relation to environment begun, quite suddenly, to assume the look of a major critical insurgency.

For the purpose of the study the selected fiction of Chinese 2000 Nobel Laureate in Literature, Gao Xingjian has been chosen. Gao Xingjian's literary works have always functioned in the interstices between the East and the West. His fictional oeuvre comprises of *Soul Mountain* (2001) and *One Man's Bible* (2002) and a collection of short stories *Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather* (2004). Besides Gao Xingjian is also successful in making his mark as a playwright, a filmmaker and as a Chinese ink painter.

It is generally agreed that the study of geography has, at its core, the understanding of "place". Other terms cross-pollinate through place, such as home, dwelling, milieu, territory, regions, states, cities, neighborhoods, rural areas, wilderness, uninhabited areas, space and non-places.

The research topic would take in three dimensions of Place-based study, of 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. The role of Place, Landscape and Lives grounded in an awareness of the physical location, geographical and biological as well as nature-human relationships would also be under the purview of the study. The methodology employed is primarily the interdisciplinary interpretation of the novels through natural sciences and the conceptual tools of ecocriticism, like Deep Ecology, Eco-ethics, Ecofeminism, biotic and abiotic components of an ecosystem which question the very idea of anthropocentrism. And to identify how physical worlds owe their complex organization to the same process of natural selection that explains the physical organization of living beings.

Gao Xingjian being a highly speculative writer, to examine his fiction from an ecocritical perspective has been the main challenge. Moreover his works being in Chinese and French was also a language constraint. For further study the domain of comparative environmental literature could possibly be explored against the backdrop of contemporary environmental writings in Indian and other Southeast Asian literature.

Chapter I

Introduction

- **The Green Imagination: Background of Ecocriticism- Its Nature and Scope.**
- **Gao Xingjian Life and Works**

While related disciplines like history, philosophy, law, sociology and religion have been "greening" (Rigby 172) since the 1970's, Literary Studies have apparently remained unstinted by environmental concerns. And while social movements like the civil rights and women's liberation movements of the 60s and 70s have transformed literary studies, it would appear that the environmental movement of the same era has had little impact. "The recent acceleration of scholarly activity in the areas of environmental ethics, environmental history, ecofeminism, and ecotheology provides a clear indication that environmental consciousness is increasingly being reflected in both academic discourse and the institutional structures which underwrite that discourse. Environmental scholarship has finally infiltrated the discipline of literary studies, where it variously appears under the rubric of nature writing, environmental literature, nature/culture theory, place studies, ecofeminism, and a number of other sub-disciplines which may be constellated around the term ecocriticism" (Branch 92).

Cheryll Glotfelty in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xix). Literature and art have always shown deep affinities with nature. Ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies. Literary theory, in general, examines the relations between writers, texts and the world. In most literary

theory the world is synonymous with society-the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of "the world" (Glotfelty xix) to include the entire ecosphere.

Ecocriticism calls for a paradigm shift from the human-centric to the bio-centric, which transcends the mutually exclusive categories of centre and periphery. "Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth centred approach to literary studies"(Glotfelty xix). Ecological thinking about literature requires us to take the nonhuman world as seriously as previous modes of criticism have taken the human realm of society and culture.As Robert Kern puts it:

> Ecocriticism depends upon our willingness as readers to marginalize, if not completely overlook, precisely those aspects and meanings of texts that are traditionally privileged or valorized…what ecocriticism calls for, then, is a fundamental shift from one context of reading to another- more specifically, a movement from the human to the environmental…a humanism informed by an awareness of the more than-human. (*ISLE* 9-32)

Ecocriticism has developed into an increasingly worldwide movement in two main waves or stages: the first marked by a commitment to preservationist environmentalism, an ecocentric environmental ethics, an emphasis on place-attachment at a local or bioregional level, a prioritization of the self-nature relation, and forms of literary imagination that especially reflect these; the second marked by "a more socio-centric environmental ethics attaching special importance to issues of environmental (in)justice" (Buell et al. 433), to collective rather than individual experience as a primary historical force and concern in works of imagination, and increasingly to the claims of a global or

planetary level of environmental belonging. Throughout these shifts, however, a number of concerns have remained constant.

Glen A. Love in his book *Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology and the Environment* observes:

> Ecocriticism fairly urges its practitioners into interdisciplinarity, into science. Literature involves interrelationships, and ecological awareness enhances and expands our sense of interrelationships to encompass nonhuman as well as human contexts. Ecological thinking about literature requires us to take the nonhuman world as seriously as previous modes of criticism have taken the human realm of society and culture. That would seem to be ecocriticism's greatest challenge and its greatest opportunity. Taking the world seriously means, among other things, learning something scientific about how the natural world works. (47)

The philosophical basis of ecocriticism is ecological ethics which studies the relations between human beings and nature. As Worster says, the cause of ecological crisis we are facing today is not worked by the ecosystem, but by our ethical systems. To remove the crisis, we should recognize those ethical systems and apply the recognition to reform the ethical system (1993). Ecological Ethics expands the domain of "rights" from human world to the non-human world for the first time. If the extension of the subject of "rights" from a part of humans to the whole mankind is a cultural and moral progress, the extension of the subject of "rights" from humankind to the natural world is also a moral progress.

The term "Ecocriticism" was coined by William Rueckert in "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism", in 1978 but its antecedents stretch back much further. By Ecocriticism Rueckert meant "the application of ecology and ecological

concept to the study of literature" (Glotfelty xviii). Norman Foerster's *Nature in American Literature* (1923) sometimes said to have inaugurated the new academic field in American Literature. Some argue that the origin should be set much earlier, at least as far back as Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* (1836) the first canonical work of American Literature to unfold a theory of nature with special reference to poetics. Ecocriticism, as it now exists in the USA, takes its literary bearings from three major nineteenth-century American writers whose work celebrates nature, the life force, and the wilderness as manifested in America, these being Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). All three were members of the group of New England writers, essayists and philosophers known collectively as the Transcendentalists, the first major literary movement in America to achieve cultural independence from European models. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) has been defined as a work of nature writing, and the ecologically oriented work that has been the subject of most literary analysis. Henry David Thoreau can be considered as the father of ecocriticism. The environmental turn in literary studies or green studies which debates "Nature" in order to defend nature has been more issue-driven than method or paradigm-driven**.** The term means either the study of nature writing by way of any scholarly approach or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relationships in any literary text, even texts that seem oblivious of the nonhuman world.

English ecocritics believed that their legacy goes back to John Ruskin's *Modern Painters Volume III* (1856) and Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (Second Edition, 1800). John Ruskin, an admirer of Wordsworth, had been attempting to improve upon early romantic concepts of the relationship between art and the

environment. The writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge, John Clare(1793-1864) Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) William Morris (1834-1896) helped inspire the establishment of an array of environmental societies in the late 19th century who wished to turn England from the grimy backyard of industrialization into a garden. If ecocriticism's territory is the interplay of the human and the nonhuman in literary texts, there are ecosystemic relationships with wilderness, cityscapes, mountains and riverscapes in the fiction of Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, Herman Melville, John Steinbeck and Ernest Hemingway. They give us a vocabulary to find a common ground among books that might otherwise seem to have very little in common. The interplay among characters, species, and ecosystems in a literary text often demands an interdisciplinary approach to thoroughly interpret the texts as eco texts. Ecocritics are rediscovering early writers, rereading the classics from a 'green' perspective and beginning to frame their subject in a theoretical way. One of the prime concerns of the ecocritics is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world. Ecocritics need contact not just with literature and not just with each other, but with the physical world.

Early contributions to ecocriticism may be seen, in retrospect, in Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) and Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973), both seminal contributions to the criticism of pastoral literature in America and the United Kingdom, respectively. Williams's environmentalist commitments became clearer in later works such as *Resources of Hope* (1989), but it was in the early 1990s that the first wave of ecocriticism proper was launched: Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology*, a study of Wordsworth, was published in 1991, and Lawrence Buell's reevaluation of Thoreau, *The Environmental Imagination*, followed in 1995.

Some scholars like the term ecocriticism - over enviro- because, analogous to the science of ecology, ecocriticism studies relationships between things, in this case, between human culture and the physical world. Furthermore in its connotations, enviro – is anthropocentric and dualistic, implying that we humans are at the centre, surrounded by everything that is not us, the environment. Eco- in contrast implies interdependent communities, integrated systems and strong connections among constituent parts. For first-wave ecocriticism, "environment" effectively meant "natural environment" (Buell 21). Ecocriticism was initially understood to be synchronous with the aims of earth care. Its goal was to contribute to the struggle to preserve the "biotic community" (Coupe 4). The paradigmatic first-wave ecocritic appraised "the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action" (Howarth 69). In the process, the ecocritic might seek to redefine the concept of culture itself in organicist terms with a view to envisioning a "philosophy of organism" that would break down "the hierarchical separations between human beings and other elements of the natural world" (Elder 172).

Second wave ecocriticism has tended to question organicist models of conceiving both environment and environmentalism. Literature and environment studies must develop a social ecocriticism that takes urban and degraded landscapes just as seriously as 'natural' landscapes (Bennett 32). Second wave ecocriticism has so far concentrated strongly for example, on locating vestiges of nature within cities and/ or exposing crimes of eco-injustice against society's marginal groups.

Ecocriticism is dominated by the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) a professional association started in America in 1992. In the

1991 MLA special session entitled *Ecocriticism: The Greening of Literary Studies* was organized by Harold Fromm. In 1992, at the annual meeting of the Western Literature Association, ASLE was formed with Scott Slovic elected first president. Ecocriticism officially arrived at the Modern Language Association (MLA) on December 29, 1998. ASLE's mission was "to promote the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to literature that considers the relationship between human beings and the natural world" and to encourage "new nature writing, traditional and innovative scholarly approaches to environmental literature, and interdisciplinary environmental research". In 1993 Patrick Murphy established a new journal, ISLE: Interdisciplinary studies in Literature and Environment, "to provide a forum for critical studies of the literary and performing arts proceeding from or addressing environmental considerations. These would include ecological theory, environmentalism, conceptions of nature and their depictions, the human/nature dichotomy and related concerns" (Glotfelty xviii).

Scott Slovic in his essay "Ecocriticism: Containing Multitudes, Practicing Doctrine" states that Walt Whitman's understanding of the universe- "I am large, I contain multitudes"(Slovic160) echoes ecocriticism's large domain which contains multitudes. "There is no single, dominant worldview guiding ecocritical practice; no single strategy at work"(Slovic 160), rather it is "the study of explicitly environmental texts by way of any scholarly approach or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature relations in any literary text. In other words, any conceivable style of scholarship becomes a form of ecocriticism if it's applied to certain kinds of literary works; and, on the other hand, not a single literary work anywhere utterly defies ecocritical interpretation, is off-limits to green reading"(Slovic 160).

Gao Xingjian: Life and Works

Gao Xingjian was born on 4 January1940 in war-torn China soon after the beginning of the Japanese invasion. His father was a bank officer and his mother was an actress before her marriage. It was she who cultivated Gao‘s interest in the theatre and writing. He originally wanted to become a painter but realising that he would only be painting propaganda pictures he decided instead to study French literature at the Foreign Languages Institute in Beijing. By the time he graduated, he was already a serious writer, but by that time books were also being progressively banned, until a total ban was put into place during the Cultural Revolution.

In her introduction to the novel *Soul Mountain* Mabel Lee states- “Gao came to national and international prominence as a writer and critic during the early 1980s for his experimental works of drama, fiction and theory that contravened the guidelines established by the ideologues of the Chinese Communist Party. At the time, China was just beginning to emerge from the throes of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), a decade during which the self of the individual was virtually annihilated from intellectual and creative activities. Basic human instincts, sensitivities, thinking, perceptions and judgments were repressed and stunted, and extreme forms of socialist-realist and romantic-revolutionary representations of reality became the compulsory basis of all creative endeavors: literature and the arts therefore became representations of a distorted reality” (*Soul Mountain* v).

The People‘s Republic of China was founded by Mao Zedong in 1949. Under Mao, political control extended to all aspects of Chinese life, including literature and the arts: literary production, like all other modes of production, should serve the masses. Refusing to conform to Mao‘s guidelines for literature, Gao had no alternative but to write in secret. Gao came under investigation for his activities as the leader of a Red

Guard group, but before a campaign was properly launched against him he fled to a remotest mountain village, and resigned himself to spending the rest of his life working as a peasant in the fields rather than risk arrest and imprisonment. In that period (1970-1975), he again began to write in secret, but not before he had made elaborate preparations that would allow him to quickly hide what he was writing if necessary. During this bleak era, when people in China could not articulate their thoughts without endangering their own lives, Gao found that writing was his only salvation. It was only through writing down his thoughts and feelings that he could affirm the existence of his private self.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), when nonconformity was a serious crime, Gao was sent to a re-education camp where he felt it necessary to destroy a suitcase full of hundreds of manuscripts which he had written without any hope of ever getting published. In the years immediately following the Cultural Revolution, Gao Xingjian was the first to introduce to the Chinese literary and academic world the developments that had taken place in world literary theory and practice, and to re-introduce and to re-assess China's rich literary heritage in the light of modern times.

Gao Xingjian is often considered as an exponent of Root-seeking Literature; a literary movement that began in the early 1980s, has been the most pervasive and influential literary trend in post-Mao Chinese literature. “The primary locus of root-seeking literature is the Chinese countryside , where the political winds that swept China during the past century had only limited success. Agrarian society is thought to be the heart of Chinese culture, uncorrupted by Western influences and therefore retaining the primordial energies of humanity” (Ying 160). The writers were not satisfied with realistic representations of rural life and regional customs . “Influenced from the West and particularly by Latin American magic realism , they identified ancient Chinese traditions as a source of a new

literature that addressed profound, universal issues while expressing a subjective vision of art and life. Although the ancient roots that inspired the root-seekers were most often found in remote rural China, they also existed in the cities and were uncovered by the urban root-seekers" (Ying 160).

In his fiction Gao Xingjian sets out to discover the nation's past buried deep in the ancient lands and to examine its implications for the literary imagination. In the view of Han Shaogong who has initiated this movement stated in the manifesto:

> There was a gap between the ancient past and the present, and in the twentieth century, China had experienced a period of amnesia, in which the nation's rich past was erased from the collective memory of the Chinese. The responsibility of a writer was to help the nation reconnect to its past, to "sort out", the cultural roots. Only by doing so, they argued, would Chinese literature be able to "dialogue" with the rest of the world. The goal of the root-seekers, therefore, was to search for authentic Chinese. (Ying 159)

In their reading of Gao's works, critics have often perceived "China" as a significant symbol, be it a simplistic reference to nationality or a more general one to Gao's personal and cultural experience. In so doing, they clearly use "China" – in linguistic, cultural and/or political terms – as an important reference point. In other words, China is a frame in which Gao's works, as well as Gao as a person, are being interpreted and assessed. However, when "China" is used as a framework to understand Gao and his works, it will inevitably become a restrictive and even repressive force, leading to the exclusion and neglect of other aspects of his works. As a writer, Gao's most distinguished characteristic is his refusal and resistance to being framed, especially within the frame of China as a geo-political concept. Gao's stance implies that he has often adopted a critical approach towards his experience particularly of politically

motivated oppression in relation to China and the authorities in China, which is clearly demonstrated in his writings. Two incidents in particular, namely, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the Tiananmen Incident in 1989, clearly emerge as the most disturbing to the writer:

> At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, I was involved in rebel action as a leader of a Red Guard group. However, I soon became disgusted with the power struggles within the organization and tried very hard to get away from it. After the Tiananmen Incident, I renounced my membership in the Chinese Communist Party and decided never to join any political organization or participate in any political activities. (Tam 55)

In 1989, Beijing students began to gather in Tiananmen Square to petition the Chinese authorities to put an end to bureaucratic profiteering and to bring about democratic changes. Emotions were running high amongst the protestors. Protracted internal struggles at the highest levels of the Communist Party led to an indecisive response from the authorities, and as students from all parts of the country flocked to Tiananmen Square, an atmosphere of optimistic festivity developed. The military crackdown in the early hours of 4 June 1989 evacuated the students from the Square. A massacre of hundreds of protesters was followed by arrests, executions, beatings and imprisonments.

Like the rest of the world, Gao watched these events with horror on televised news broadcasts. He tore up his Chinese passport and applied for political asylum in France. In interviews for French television, the magazine *Le Sud* and the Italian daily *La Stampa*, he strongly renounced the actions of the Chinese authorities. He finally completed his novel *Soul Mountain*, which he had worked on for seven years, and

sent it off for publication. This for him was a symbol of his break with the country where he had spent the first forty-seven years of his life.

Gao had agreed to write a play about the events in China for an American theatre company, and in October he wrote *Fleeing*. The company arranged for a translation, but subsequently asked for changes because there were no student heroes. Gao declined to make any changes, paid the translator and withdrew his manuscript, stating that while he was in China the Communist Party could not persuade him to alter his manuscripts, so an American theatre company certainly would not.

It is worthwhile to mention that Gao's painting dominates his creative life till today. He initially wanted to create works like the European masters, but after visiting the galleries and museums of France and Italy in 1979 and 1980, he could see that it would take more than a lifetime to realize his ambition. It was at this point that he turned from oils, which he used from childhood, to Chinese ink painting. Like his writings, his ink painting is not bound by traditional practice. Instead, he has introduced the light and perspective of European art into his work, and has successfully expanded the aesthetic potential of Chinese ink painting. His works are invariably depictions of the inner mind, and convey an acute sense of loneliness and distance.

When Gao was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2000, many Chinese scholars and writers who live outside China rejoiced at the news. The same news, however, was received quite differently by the Chinese government and the official literary organizations on the mainland, such as the Chinese Writers' Association. They dismissed Gao as an unknown writer in China and denounced the Swedish Academy for awarding the prize to Gao with a political intent.

To the older generation of readers and theatre audience, Gao is still remembered for his controversial plays that are innovative in the indigenization of Western elements for a contemporary Chinese theatre. Gao was deeply involved in the debate over modernism in China in the early 1980s and he was a highly acclaimed playwright in the experimental theatre. He showed his talent as a writer and critic in his early works that include two theoretical treatises, *A Preliminary Exploration of the Techniques of Modern Fiction* (1981) and *In Search of a modern form of Drama* (1987), and six plays *Alarm Signal* (1982), *The Bus-stop* (1983), *Highlights from Modern Chinese Opera* (1984), *Monologue* (1985), *Wild man* (1985) and *The Other Shore* (1986).

In the academic world, Gao has long been recognized in Europe and North America as an avant-garde dramatist and hailed as the first Chinese dramatist to enter the world theatre. Gao is also known as an innovative stage director. His later plays, such as *Fugitives* and *Between Life and Death*, have been well received in Europe. Though in exile, he continues his writing. Some of his post exile plays, for example, *Between Life and Death, Nocturnal Wanderer* and *Weekend Quartet*, were first written in French, and then in Chinese.

Gao has now made his mark as an artist, playwright, choreographer, director, novelist and filmmaker. His work has brought him many honours in addition to the Nobel Prize. He was awarded the title Chevalier for Art and Literature in France in 1992, and in 2000 that of Chevalier in the Legion of Honour. In 2000 he also won the Italian Feronia Literary Prize. He received three Honorary Doctorates in 2001, from Sun Yatsen University in Taiwan, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Provence. In France, he was invited to serve as a Member of the

Committee for Lectures of the Comedie Francaise in 2002, and was elected a member of the Universal Academy of Cultures in 2003.

After settling in Paris, Gao Xingjian published *Soul Mountain* (2000), *One Man's Bible* (2002), and a collection of short stories, *Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandfather* ((2004). *Soul Mountain* is predominantly an introspective journey in the early 1980's into the remote mountains and ancient forests of Sichuan in southwest China. His displacement also denotes a journey of the self, trying to seek the meaning of life through an encounter with nature and ultimately to transcend it. *One Man's Bible* as Gao's fictionalized autobiography traces the life during China's political upheaval in the 1960s and seventies. This narrative depicts the schizophrenia perpetrated during the Cultural Revolution, leading Gao to develop an intense personal philosophy wherein the narrator became his own God and disciple, a defiant solution to the political turmoil that threatened to physically and mentally squash him. *Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandfather* is a collection of short stories comprising of six stories that transport the reader to moments where the fragility of love and life, and the haunting power of memory, are beautifully unveiled. The importance of a sense of place, as a living physical location, geographical as well as biological grounded in an awareness of nature-human relationships, including one's own relationship to the local environment forms the crux in these stories.

Gao Xingjian also wrote or revised the plays contained in his collection *Six Volumes of Plays by Gao Xingjian* (1995): *The Other Shore* (1986), *Fleeing* (1990), *Between Life and Death* (1991), *Romance of "The Classic of Mountains and Seas"* (1993), *Dialogue and Rebuttal* (1993), *Netherworld* (1995) and *Nocturnal Wanderer* (1995). In the same period, through solo exhibitions, and the publication of books of his

paintings and essays on his aesthetics and painting, Gao established his credentials as an artist.

The key words in the writings of Gao Xingjian – loneliness and the maddening crowd; detachment and engagement; public noise and personal voice; freedom, control, escape, survival etc are indicative of the idea that Gao has spent a lot of time reacting to and negating what the Cultural Revolution represented.

Gao is strongly opposed to literature that distorts truth for some cause or end, and he argues consistently for literature that is " the voice of the individual", that is "without isms", and that is "cold literature"- which entails fleeing in order to survive; it is literature that refuses to be strangled by society in its "quest for spiritual salvation...If a race cannot accommodate this non- utilitarian sort of literature it is not merely a misfortune for the writer but also a tragedy for that race"("The Case for Literature" 39). He advocates that literature should not become the tool of politics, it must return to the voice of the individual. He reiterates:

> When the individual confronts society as an individual, his existence is more real. If the self of the individual is dissolved in the collective big self, or what is known as "we", the individual self no longer exists. ("The Voice of the Individual" 133)

In his essay, "Cold Literature" (1990) Gao Xingjian expresses his view that the autonomy of the individual is progressively eroded as he vanishes into obscurity within one or another group identity. It is only in serious literary creations that can transcend financial gain and politics, and not follow fashionable trends, that the voice of the individual can be heard, and in which the individual can preserve his independence and integrity. To Gao Xingjian, literature has no relation to politics. It is

purely a personal undertaking, an observation, a look back at past experiences, a speculation, a cluster of sentiments, a certain expression of inner emotions, and a feeling of the satisfaction of contemplation. Therefore he advocates a "cold literature" i.e.; literature at its most fundamental, to distinguish it from didactic, political, social and even expressive writing" (Fong xvi). Literature according to Gao, is a highly personal endeavour, unrelated to other people, politics, social intervention or any form of utilitarian function. "It is only by being an unwaveringly solitary individual without attachment to some political group or movement that the writer is able to win a through going freedom" ("Cold Literature" 80). This is essentially Gao Xingjian's artistic manifesto, a declaration which defines the ultimate goal of his art and vision. Literature is a "lonely" business, thus a writer must equip himself with a "willingness to be lonely", to keep all political, moral and literary controversies at arm's length in order to achieve "self-salvation". The best position for a writer to take is to 'escape", to be on the margins of society in this way he can remain clear headed to carry out his "quiet observation" and "introspection", without being swallowed up by fads or social establishments:

> 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.
>
> ("Literature and Metaphysics" 103)

Literature Review:

It is generally agreed that modern environmentalism begins with "A Fable for Tomorrow", in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). The book is widely credited with helping launch the environmental movement. The book documented detrimental effects of pesticides on the environment, particularly on birds. However, pastoral peace rapidly gives way to catastrophic destruction.

The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in American Culture (1964) is a work of literary criticism by Leo Marx. This book does not mention ecology or environmentalism directly, but clearly situates its discussion in relation to the increasingly problematic place of technology in the American landscape.

Raymond Williams *The Country and the City* (1973), has been praised as a masterpiece of ecocriticism. The text profoundly influenced both Marxist readings of pastoral and the ecocritical responses that arrived later to qualify or contradict them; today widely valued as a precursor of ecocriticism. Inspired in part by his own experience of growing up in the rural Wales and his resultant dissatisfaction with the urbanist bias of much Marxist thought, Williams here seeks to recuperate the "song of the land, the song of rural labour, the song of delight in the many forms of life with which we all share our physical world" (271) for a progressive left green criticism and politics. His revaluation of the "green language" of Wordsworth and Clare in particular has provided ecocritics such as Bate with an invaluable point of departure for their own more explicitly ecological reconsideration of the legacy of romanticism.

The biological-environmental-literary connection reached its first major critical expression in 1974 with the publication of Joseph W. Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*. Meeker argued the inseparability of literature

from nature and the ecological whole. Jonathan Bate has influenced the rise of British ecocriticism through his *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991). Bate reconceived the represented cultural-environmental life-worlds of Jane Austen and Thomas Hardy as a barometer of nineteenth-century social change that attests to the persistence of an environmentally-aware sense of Englishness based on country life; this essay represents a green-revisionary turn within British traditions of literary-cultural critique that run back from Raymond Williams through F. R. Leavis to ancient roots in Matthew Arnold.

Lawrence Buell in *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995) succinctly defines ecocriticism as the study of the relation between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmental praxis. Buell provides a thorough critique of pastoral ideology in American fiction, with an extended treatment of Thoreau that moves from the evaluation of Walden's "environmental projects" through an analysis of the author's canonization in American literary history and, later, ecocriticism, to a reconsideration of the role and significance of nature writing in the literary canon. Walden is crucial to Buell's argument because it is a transitional work, at the midpoint of the movement from youthful anthropocentric transcendentalism to the mature, biocentric perspective revealed in the late essays on wilderness, the dispersion of seeds and the succession of forest trees.

The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology (1996), edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (1996) is the first general reader in ecocriticism. Cheryll Glotfelty's introduction is invaluable in providing a background to the emergence of ecocriticism and an outline of its concerns. Glotfelty defines the term ecocriticism as-

"the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xviii).

Richard Kerridge's definition in *Writing the Environment* (1998) suggests, like Glotfelty's, a broad cultural Ecocriticism. The ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis.

Laurence Coupe's *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* (2000); has done a fine job of compiling a provocative collection of environment-relevant materials from the Romantic period up until the present. Laurence Coupe preferred the term "green studies" to the more specific term "ecocriticism". For we are not only concerned with the status of the referent and the need to do it justice, in the sense of taking it seriously as something more than linguistic; we are also concerned with the larger question of justice, of the rights of our fellow-creatures, of forests and rivers, and ultimately of the biosphere itself.

Jonathan Bate's *The Song of the Earth* (2000) constitutes a sustained reflection on the enduring value of written works of the creative imagination in an era of growing disconnection from, and devastation of, the earth. Bate proceeds to engage ecocritically with a wide range of literary and philosophical texts, primarily in the romantic tradition. Bate's hermeneutic is informed by social and environmental history, the sciences of evolutionary biology, ecology and chaos theory, German critical theory and phenomenology.

The publication of Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (2004) marks a significant milestone in the development of ecologically oriented literary and cultural studies. It is considered the first introductory textbook in this area, with a useful glossary, annotated list of further reading and extensive bibliography; it bears witness to the growth of tertiary studies in literature, culture and environment over the past decade.

Louise H. Westling's *The Green Breast of the New World: Landscape, Gender and American Fiction* (1996) provides a basic theoretical background for ecofeminist reinterpretation of classic American fiction. Westling analyses the strange combination of eroticism and misogyny that has accompanied men's attitudes towards landscape and nature for thousands of years.

Marc Augé's *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995) has coined the phrase "non-place" to refer to places of transience that do not hold enough significance to be regarded as "places". Edward Casey's *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (1998) is an imaginative and comprehensive study, one of the most incisive interpreters of the Continental philosophical tradition, offers a philosophical history of the evolving conceptualizations of place and space in Western thought. Kate Rigby's *Topographies of the Sacred: The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism* (2004) is a first book-length work of Romantic ecocriticism to examine British and German Romanticisms comparatively, focusing on the writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Clare, Scott, and Ruskin, on the one hand, and Goethe, Kant, Novalis, Schelling, Schiller, and Eichendorff on the other. Tim Cresswell's *Place: A Short Introduction* (2004) provides a succinct introduction to the fundamental concepts of place and the ways in which sense of place are manifest in the making of places and landscape. The book traces the development of place from

the 1950s through its subsequent appropriation by cultural geography and seeks to explain and explore central geographical and spatial concepts.

The Case for Literature (2006) a collection of essays by Gao Xingjian and translated into English by Mabel Lee, offers a provocative meditations on the meaning and importance of his literary creation. The volume includes Gao's brilliant Nobel Lecture, "The Case for Literature" (2000), "Without Isms" (1993), "Literature and Metaphysics: About *Soul Mountain*" (1992), "The Voice of the Individual" (1993) and others. These essays provide a good overview of Gao Xingjian's career and reveals the foundation upon which Gao builds hid utterly original house of fiction. The essays contained in this volume demonstrate the intellectual and aesthetic dimensions of the thinking that informs Gao's creative writings.

The Other Shore: Plays by Gao Xingjian (1999) is a collection of five plays of Gao Xingjian translated by Gilbert C.F. Fong from Chinese into English. The plays included in the volume includes- *The Other Shore* (1986), *Between Life and Death* (1991), *Dialogue and Rebuttal* (1992), *Nocturnal Wanderer* (1993) and *Weekend Quartet* (1995).

Soul of Chaos: Critical Perspectives on Gao Xingjian (2001) edited by Kwok-Kan Tam is a collection of critical studies on various aspects of Gao Xingjian's novels and plays. Though many articles and essays, in Chinese and European languages, have been published, this volume is the first collection in English entirely devoted to the study of Gao Xingjian's fictional works and his plays. Most of the articles that appear in this book were written Gao was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2000. The articles in this book provide critical readings of Gao's major works in the context of his contribution to the rejuvenation of Chinese tradition and his significance in world

literature. Some of the essays contained in the volume includes "World Literature with Chinese Characteristics: On a Novel by Gao Xingjian" (1993), "Gao Xingjian on the Issue of Literary Creation for the Modern Writer" (1999), "Pronouns as Protagonists: On Gao Xingjian's Theories of Narration" (1999) and "Language as Subjectivity in *One Man's Bible*"(2001).

Jessica Yeung's *Ink Dances in Limbo: Gao Xingjian's Writing as Cultural Translation* (2008) is a pioneering work that provides a critical introduction to Gao as a writer and a theatre practitioner. Yeung analyses each group of his writing and argues for a reading of Gao's writings as a phenomenon of "cultural translation".

The survey of current ecocritical scholarship reveals that ecological literary criticism is almost the limited province of American and British literature scholars. The attempt of the study is to allay this misinterpretation and show that ecocritical legacy also has diverse Asian roots in traditional thought systems and folk parables. The review also shows the literature on Gao Xingjian's works which covers almost entirely on his themes, language, modernism and philosophy. Except Moran's essay "Lost in the Woods: Nature in Soul Mountain", the review shows that there has not been any full comprehensive study based on ecocriticism on Gao Xingjian's fiction till now. Though Gao is acclaimed as one of the leading writers on speculative fiction, the study focuses his fiction on the behavioural and experiential aspects of ecological inter-relationships which serve as quasi autobiographical odyssey from the egocentric to the ecocentric.

Rationale and Objective of the study

For the purpose of the study the selected fiction of Gao Xingjian- *Soul Mountain* (2000) and *One Man's Bible* (2002) and a collection of short stories *Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather* (2004) has been chosen. Primarily the study would address the ecological strategy of three dimensions of Place, Landscape and Lives, by expanding preconceived understandings of the non-human environment as a geographical dimension of terrain grounded in an awareness of the physical location, the role of space, of memory, of biological and nature-human relationships. The study is an attempt to offer viable alternatives to thinking and reconstituting ecocritical ideas and representations in Gao Xingjian and to evaluate them in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis.

Methodology

The conceptual tools of interdisciplinary ecocriticism is applied here as the methodology for the study. The attempt is to incorporate Gao's theories of holistic thought on the environment in his writings. The texts are read through the central ideas of Deep Ecology, place-based ecocriticism, and ecofeminism. The study interprets the texts through natural sciences and shows that the novels derive their vital truth from laws of nature. It will also interrogate the biotic and abiotic components of an ecosystem, all identifiable entities or forms in the ecosphere- such as rivers, landscape, and even species which question the very idea of anthropocentrism.

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Chapter II

Learning the Terrain: Representing Place and Geography

Geography has always been involved in the analysis of place and this provides the first core concept. Lawrence Buell argues that environmental literature constructs places in a particular way not just by naming objects but by dramatizing in the process how they matter" (Buell 267). Place attachment thus becomes a "resource in the articulation of environmental unconscious" (Buell 44). Place like environment, encompasses human perceptions and aspirations as well as the biophysical characteristics that can be measured and monitored. The shape of the Earth's surface and the processes enacted upon it, both physical and human, are part of the essence of geography. Geographical place comprises location, or where we are on the Earth's surface in relation to geographical coordinates; distances measured in a variety of ways; and directions that complete the interrelationships of different locations on the Earth's surface. Maps, cartography, and, most recently, satellite images, qualified by scale and forms of representation, are the working tools for the understanding of geographical terrain.

Critical interest in place based literature is not new, though this topic of "ancient lineage" (Lutwack vii) is receiving renewed attention. Cheryll Glotfelty in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xix) some of which aspires to make place a central object of critical concern. Ecocriticism actually launches a call to literature to connect to the issues of today's environmental crisis. In other words, ecocriticism is directly concerned with both nature –natural

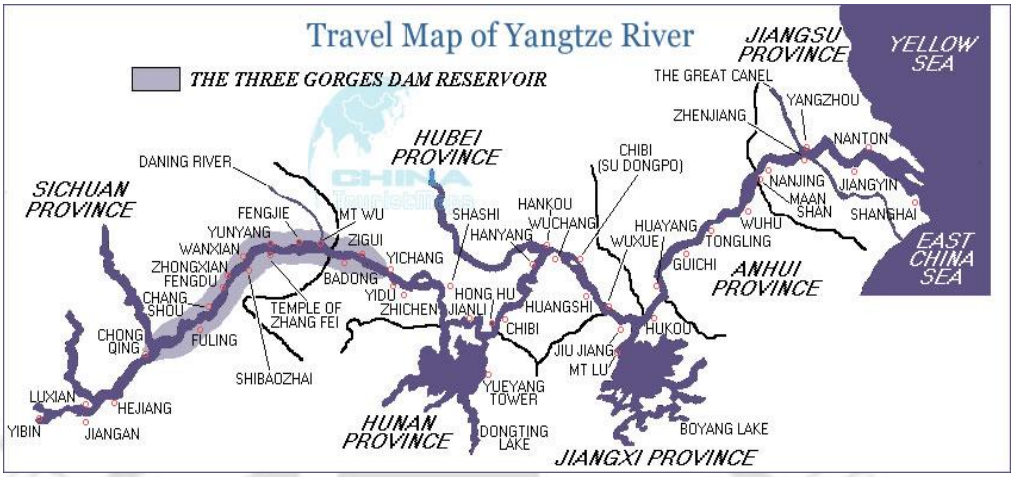
landscape and the environment which includes landscape both natural and urban. From the time of Thoreau there have been writings about texts that celebrate particular locale and place, through landscape ecology and geography.

Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain* (2000) is predominantly an introspective journey in the early 1980s into the remote mountains and ancient forests of Sichuan in southwest China. It 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. The thematic substance of *Soul Mountain* may be traced to two traumatic and interrelated events in Gao Xingjian's life: his 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 Xingjian'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.

Soul Mountain traces a five month journey of the protagonist from Beijing to Sichuan province and from there followed the Yangtze River to the coast. The description of the trip is supposed to be based on the author's journey along the catchment areas of the Yangtze River in 1983. There is a total of eighty-one chapters, each one a self - contained episode. Each chapter is about the individual's experience, material or psychological, in one place or at one time. Gao Xingjian in "Literature and Metaphysics: 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).



For a better understanding of the intertwining aspects of terrain, topography, biosphere, landscape, memory, place and geography in *Soul Mountain*, it can be divided into three segments based on the upper, middle and lower courses of the Yangtze River. The Yangtze River is the longest river in both China and Asia. Its basin, "extending for some 3,200 km from west to east and for more than 1,000 km from north to south" (Pletcher 63). From its source on the Plateau of Tibet to its mouth on the East China Sea, the river traverses or serves as the border between ten provinces or regions. The upper course of the Yangtze flows across the Plateau of Tibet and descends through deep valleys in the mountains east of the plateau, emerging onto the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. The plains in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River is composed of the Jianghan 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. On its left bank, from source to mouth, these are the Yalong, Min, Jialing, and Han rivers; those on the right bank include the Wu, Yuan, Xiang, and Gan rivers.

The journey in *Soul Mountain* begins from Qinghai Province which comprises the upper course of the Yangtze River and descends deep valleys in the mountainous terrain of the Sichuan and Guizhou Province. The middle course stretches from Sichuan, Guizhou up to the Hubei Province. The lower course of Yangtze River comprises of Hunan, Hubei, Anhui and Zhejiang Province.

The journey begins in the first triad of the upper course of the Yangtze valley, from Chapter 1 to Chapter 33. From Chapter 34 to Chapter 52 the journey follows the middle course and finally Chapter 53 to Chapter 81, completes the journey in the lower course of the Yangtze River. There are two exceptions in Chapter 30 and Chapter 47. In Chapter 30 the journey takes place in the Anhui Province which is in the lower course but in the novel it has been included in the narrative which delineates the upper course of the Yangtze. Similarly in Chapter 47 there has been a juxtaposition of the middle course and the lower course. The first part of the narrative takes place on Qingcheng Mountain which is in the middle course where as the second part, the setting shifts to Ou River which is in Zhejiang Province in the lower course of the Yangtze River.

Gao Xingjian's five month journey in the Chinese hinterland is the result of the political campaign that had been launched against him. These months of solitude allowed him to reflect on human existence, society and history, as well as his own life. Gao Xingjian came under investigation for his activities as the leader of a Red Guard group, but before a campaign was properly launched against him he fled to a

remote mountain village, and resigned himself to spending the rest of his life working as a peasant in the fields rather than risk arrest and imprisonment. *Soul Mountain* as an autobiographical novel traces the protagonist's voyage too into the mountains in the south west China along the Yangtze River in search of a place called *Lingshan*.

Soul Mountain uses pronouns instead of characters, psychological perceptions instead of plot, and changing emotions to modulate the style. The telling of stories is unintended, and they are told at random. It is a novel similar to a travel diary, and also resembles a soliloquy. The novel recounts two journeys that are woven together by alternating uses of a "you" and an "I." The splitting of the character makes it possible for him to differentiate his journey across the vast regions of China, from the Tibetan plateau to the east coast via the middle valley of the Yangtze River. The "you" is looking for the unlikely place named "Soul Mountain", which is always being pushed further away, towards the "other shore." This essentially internal journey parallels the geographical crossing carried out by the "I."

Chapter 1 of *Soul Mountain* begins with "The old bus is a city reject. After shaking in it for twelve hours on the pot holed highway since early morning, you arrive in this mountain county town in the south" (*Soul Mountain* 1). This is the beginning of a journey in search of a place named *Lingshan*. *Ling* meaning spirit or soul and *shan* meaning mountain in Chinese, which is located at the source of the You River. The person whom the "you" narrator met in the train tore up his empty cigarette box and drew a map of the route up *Lingshan* :

> You've never seen the place mentioned in travel accounts and it's not listed in the most up-to-date travel guides. Of course, it isn't hard to find places like Lingtai, Lingqiu, Lingyan and even Lingshan on provincial maps and you

> know very well that in the histories and classics, Lingshan appears in works dating back to the ancient shamanistic work *Classic of the Mountains and Seas* and the old geographical gazetteer *Annotated Water Classic*. It was also at Lingshan that Buddha enlightened the Venerable Mahakashyapa. You're not stupid, so just use your brains, first find this place Wuyizhen on the cigarette box, for this is how you'll get to Lingshan. (*Soul Mountain* 5)

Cheryll Glotfelty in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* states:

> Ecocritics and theorists ask questions like the following: How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre? In addition to race, class, and gender, should place become a new critical category? (Glotfelty xix)

Almost every place depicted in *Soul Mountain* has its own unique pattern or weave of elements. Place is a "meaning constructed by experience" (Tuan 152) whether it is home, dwelling, milieu, territory, regions, states, cities, neighborhoods, rural areas, wilderness, uninhabited areas and of course, space. Chapter 1 begins with "The old bus is a city reject. After shaking in it for twelve hours on the pot holed highway since early morning, you arrive in this mountain county town in the south" (*Soul Mountain* 1). This is the beginning of a journey in search of a place named *Lingshan*. *Ling* meaning spirit or soul and *shan* meaning mountain in Chinese, which is located at the source of the You River. Afterwards, the person tore up his empty cigarette box and drew a map of the route up *Lingshan* :

> You've never seen the place mentioned in travel accounts and it's not listed in the most up-to-date travel guides. Of course, it isn't hard to find places like Lingtai, Lingqiu, Lingyan and even Lingshan on provincial maps and you know very well that in the histories and classics, Lingshan appears in works dating back to the ancient shamanistic work *Classic of the Mountains and Seas* and the old geographical gazetteer *Annotated Water Classic*. It was also at Lingshan that Buddha enlightened the Venerable Mahakashyapa. You're not stupid, so just use your brains, first find this place Wuyizhen on the cigarette box, for this is how you'll get to Lingshan. (*Soul Mountain* 5)

Place-based ecocritics not only maintain the importance of a sense of place, but that it should be grounded in an awareness of nature-human relationships, including one's own relationship to the local environment. They claim that place should take into consideration "a living physical location, geographical and biological, as well as subjective human experience" (Ball 237).

Environmental literature constructs place in a particular way not just by naming objects but by dramatizing in the process how they matter. Place attachment thus becomes a resource in the "articulation of environmental unconscious" (Buell 21). Places change over time as both physical and human processes operate to modify Earth's surface as observed by Gao Xingjian:

> 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. I was searching for self realization and mode of living for myself ("Literature and Metaphysics" 103)

Marian Galik in his essay "Gao Xingjian's Novel *Lingshan* (Soul Mountain): A Long Journey in Search of a Woman" states:

> Gao Xingjian's odyssey, or far-away journey delineated in 81 chapters of the novel *Soul Mountain*, started in 1982. Some months before his real pilgrimage of about 15.000 kilometres through many parts of China started in Peking and was heading to Chengdu (Sichuan) and its surroundings mainly in the south, then through the east coast transversing the territories of national minorities, visiting many well-known and less famous places, Gao had troubles both with the Party authorities as one of the initiators of "spiritual pollution" and with his own health, since he was diagnosed with lung cancer. The first danger was imminent, the second one turned up to be false. (613)

In Chapter 2 of *Soul Mountain* the scene shifts to the Qiang region from which the Yangtze River originated, situated at an elevation of 16,000 feet up in the Qionglai Mountain in the border areas of the Qinghai- Tibetan highlands and the Sichuan basin and finally arrives in Wuyizhen. Sichuan province is located in the upper Yangtze River valley in the south western part of China. Sichuan is bordered by the provinces of Gansu and Shaanxi to the north, the territory of Chongqing municipality to the east, the provinces of Guizhou and Yunnan to the south, the Tibet Autonomous Region to the west, and the province of Qinghai to the northwest.

> You arrive in Wuyizhen, a long and narrow street inlaid with black cobblestones, and walking along this cobblestone street …in an old mountain town like this. (*Soul Mountain* 16)

A number of worldwide environmental problems, such as land degradation, biodiversity loss, and global climate change occupy the trend of their destructive

power of anthropogenic activities that accelerates the ecological alterations of landscapes in Chapter 8. Here a botanist discovers a giant metasequoia, a living fern fossil more than forty metres high. The botanist has come to collect specimens of cold arrow bamboo, the food of the giant panda. He says it takes a full sixty years for the cold arrow bamboo to go through the cycle of flowering, seeding, dying and for the seeds to sprout, grow and flower. The large scale destruction of these bamboos is responsible for the loss of habitat of the giant pandas. He is pointing to the fact that the indiscriminate wiping of the species is going to create ecological imbalance which indirectly is going to lead to the catastrophe of the biosphere. The botanist mentions clear cutting of forests, siltation of rivers, and the environment threat posed by the planned Three Gorges dam, and offers an explicit warning:

> Don't commit actions which go against the basic character of nature, don't commit acts which should not be committed. (*Soul Mountain* 48)

In Chapter 10 the narrative takes us through the linden and maple groves at an altitude of two thousand eight hundred metres and arrive at a conifer belt, where "patches of scattered light gradually appear and giant black hemlocks soar up, their branches arched like open umbrellas" (59). The experience is one of pristine ethereal purity:

> I take deep breaths of the pure air of the forest, inhaling and exhaling is effortless and I feel the very depths of my soul being cleansed. The air penetrates to the soles of my feet, and my body and mind seem to enter nature's grand cycle. I achieve a sense of joyful freedom such as I have never before experienced. (*Soul Mountain* 61)

Again in the same chapter there is a description of a landscape of gloomy linden and maple groves untouched by human activity:

> Then at an altitude of two thousand seven or eight hundred metres we come into a conifer belt – patches of scattered light gradually appear and giant black hemlocks soar up, their branches arched like open umbrellas. (*Soul Mountain* 59)

This description of a landscape relies on the importance of the sense of place and an awareness of nature-human relationships, including one's own relationship to the mythical environment. Place based ecocritics take into consideration a living physical location, geographical and biological, as well as subjective human experience. Moreover, as Evernden argues, "place-as-environment and place-as-subjective experience are equally interrelated, inseparable, and interdependent as are organisms and environments themselves" (Ball 237). Consideration of the interrelationship of particular environments and subjective human experiences provides a useful model for inquiry into literature's role in particular places.

Place is a center of meaning constructed by experience. Place is known not only through the eyes and mind but also through the more passive and direct modes of experience, which resist objectification. To know a place fully means both to understand it in an abstract way and to know it as one person knows another. Yi-Fu Tuan is often credited with introducing humanistic notions of place to the study of geography. Using the notions of topophilia and topophobia to refer to the desires and fears that people associate with specific places, his work alerted geographers to the sensual, aesthetic emotional dimensions of space. Tuan in his essay "Place: An Experiential Perspective" states:

> Places are constructed out of such elements as distinctive odours, textural and visual qualities in the environment, seasonal changes of temperature and colour, how they look as they are approached from the highway, their location

> in the school atlas or road map, and additional bits of indirect knowledge like population or number and kinds of industries. (Tuan 152-53)

An important theme of *Soul Mountain* is that place is presented here not just as a thing but a way of understanding the meaning of self. Gao 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" ("The Necessity of Loneliness" 165). Freedom depends on the ability to reflect, and reflection can only begin when one is alone.

Chapter 10 describes a landscape untouched by human activity; he walks through the gloomy linden and maple groves:

> Then at an altitude of two thousand seven or eight hundred metres we come into a conifer belt – patches of scattered light gradually appear and giant black hemlocks soar up, their branches arched like open umbrellas… This unadorned splendour and beauty in nature fills me with another sort of indescribable sadness. It is a sadness which is purely mine and not something inherent in nature. (*Soul Mountain* 59)

He firmly believes that the ability to endure loneliness is indispensable for strengthening character within social situations. This feeling of loneliness thus produces "a form of aesthetics" ("The Necessity of Loneliness" 164), as such while observing one's external environment, one is at the same time examining the self that is located within it, and to a certain extent this is an affirmation of one's own personal worth. Thomas Moran in his essay "Lost in the woods: Nature in Soul Mountain" states that a properly cultivated landscape is "the external manifestation of eternal human qualities" (Moran 211). Therefore looking at landscape teaches lesson about

humanity. The same idea finds manifestation in Chapter 10 when the narrator seems to promote a close relationship between the self and the landscape.

> All around me are only the black shapes of the fir trees and they are all exactly the same, the hollows and slopes are all the same. I run, shout out, suddenly lurching from one side to the other, I am deranged. But in every direction are towering grey-black trees, I can't distinguish anything, I have seen everything before, yet it seems I haven't. The blood vessels in my forehead start throbbing. Clearly, nature is toying with me, toying with this unbelieving, unfearing, supercilious, insignificant being. (*Soul Mountain* 62-63)

What Gao appreciates in nature, finds parallel with Emerson's impressions of the natural world. The ideas of Plato and Emerson, dating back with some of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Persian thinkers, saw the origin of Transcendentalism in 1836, who adopted the whole connection of the spiritual doctrine in nature. Emerson finds nature to be the situation which dwarfs every other circumstance, and all men come to her for solace:

> The tempered light of the woods is like a perpetual morning, it is stimulating and heroic…The incommunicable trees begin to persuade us to live with them…These enchantments are medicinal, they sober and heal us. These are plain pleasures, kind and native to us. (Emerson 4)

In Chapter 11 *Lingshan* is presented as a land on the other side of the river where wonderful things can be seen, where suffering and pain can be forgotten, and one can find freedom. *Lingshan* is merely a place women go in order "to pray for a son" (*Soul Mountain* 25). Towards the end of the novel in Chapter 76, the symbolic meaning and

unrealistic nature of the place become more obvious when the narrator asks an old man for the way to *Lingshan* and feels totally lost and uncertain of his own experience, memory and purpose of searching.

In *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Lawrence Buell states that place entails spatial location, and **"**a spatial container of some sort" (Buell 63**).** But space as against place connotes geometrical or topographical abstraction, whereas place is "space to which meaning has been ascribed" (Buell 63). Throughout the novel *Lingshan* is presented as something which is elusive in nature. By connecting the selves with their own past memories and with each other, the journey leads us to a deep exploration of the rich and complex inner world of human being. There are also numerous historical and legendary stories being told in these chapters, which allow us an extended examination of various forms of human relationships in historical and cultural contexts. It is a journey searching for meaning of life and purpose of living, for truth and ideals, and for love and companionship which are what Soul Mountain represents symbolically.

Bill McKibben in his book *The End of Nature* argues in similar terms that the advent of anthropogenic climate change, or global warming, has changed the situation, fundamentally contaminating the whole planet:

> We have changed the atmosphere, and thus we are changing the weather. By changing the weather, we make every spot on earth man made and artificial. We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature's independence is its meaning; without it there is nothing but us. (54)

Likewise in Chapter 18 gives an evocative description of the landscape on the shores of Caohai, where the Wu River begins. The chief ranger, in this chapter expresses his opinion about the changing landscape of the region because of the destruction of

ecology during the Cultural Revolution in the name of development and progress. The ranger says:

> Twenty years ago the thick black forests came to the shores of the lake and people often encountered tigers. Now these bald hills have been stripped bare and there is a shortage of firewood for cooking, not to mention heating. Especially during the past ten years, spring and winter have become intensely cold. Frost comes early and in spring there are severe droughts. (*Soul Mountain* 108)

In Chapter 20 there is a description of a Yi singer in the mountains behind Caohai, where the hills are rounder and the forest more luxuriant. A Yi cadre from the village takes him to Yancang to see the enormous ancient "facing heaven" (*Soul Mountain* 121) grave of a Yi king. The brunt of political upheaval during the holocaust is quite apparent here from the narrative of the cadre.

> During the time when people all went crazy about bringing land under cultivation for the sake of the revolution, they tore down the stones from the three-storey grave surrounds and reduced them to lime. They even dug up and smashed all the earthenware urns containing the remains and planted corn at the top of the bald mound. (*Soul Mountain* 122)

On the scienticizing attitude towards nature Gao Xingjian's attitude is closely related to British novelist John Fowles approach towards nature:

> A great deal of science is devoted to this…to providing labels, explaining scientific mechanisms and ecologies…. I spent all my younger life as a more or less orthodox amateur naturalist…I became slowly aware of the inadequacy of this approach:… a major human alienation, affecting all of ... (Fowles 33)

This approach of Gao Xingjian towards nature, is closer to the Wordsworthian point of view. In the conclusion of *Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower*, Wordsworth embodies the "recognition that all organic life, including human life, must come to the same condition of inertia, the condition of "mute insensate things" (Durrant 24). In poems such as "The Prelude" and "Tintern Abbey", Wordsworth's verses are those of consciousness becoming aware of itself, of man using contemplation of the natural world as a means of coming to terms with the extraterrestrial. Wordsworth's ideas about recollection, the meaning of childhood familiarities, and the influence of wits, bestow an acknowledgment on the objects it beholds, on the aptitude to record experiences carefully in the moment of observation, and to shape those same experiences in the mind over time. Wordsworth sees nature in its joyful abundance, feeling a divine presence in it. As Neary argues that the lines from *Tintern Abbey*, "And I felt …A presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts" (Neary 90), shows Wordsworth seeing the natural world in profusion.

In *Soul Mountain* the protagonist visits some places which are familiar to him as he can connect with these places through memories. Whenever the narrator revisits these places he immediately tries to juxtapose the image he had from his memories with the present landscape. It is interesting to note that time has profoundly altered the structure and function of landscapes and even the entire biosphere. In Chapter 22 the narrator arrives in Anshun, a district on the Yunnan-Guizhou border. He is walking on an old street where the houses on both sides are about to collapse and the eaves come right out over the road. The street is endlessly long, as if it goes through to the other end of the world. At this point he realises that this is the place which he visited during his childhood with his grandmother. He says:

> My deceased maternal grandmother seems to have brought me here; I recall that she took me out to buy a spinning top. The big boy next door had a top which filled me with envy but normally this particular toy was only on sale around the Spring Festival and even toy counters in the big shops didn't have them. My maternal grandmother had to take me to the Temple of the City God in the south of the city but there they only had performing monkeys and people practising martial arts. It was only in places where they sold dog skin medicinal plasters that tops might be found. I recall that when I went to the Temple of the City God to buy a top that I had gone along this kind of street. (*Soul Mountain* 133-34)

A sense of purposelessness is evident in the protagonist's search for Soul Mountain. On his way to the waterfall at Huangguoshu, further to the south he is travelling in a bus and expresses his feelings in these words:

> Shaking up and down in the speeding bus on the mountain road induces a sense of loss of gravity. I seem to levitate.I don't know where I'm drifting, and I don't know what it is that I am searching for. (*Soul Mountain* 136)

In Chapter 28 in *Soul Mountain*, there is a description of landscape largely untouched by human activity. The landscape is presented through the prism of a traditional aesthetic that values the integration of landscape and humanscape: Chapter 28 ends by a riverside village where the sounds, sights, and smells of nature meld with the voices of children, the gleam of tiled roof tops, and the fragrance of rice straw.

In Chapter 30 the narrator arrives in the mountain town of Anhui, a southern province where Qichun Snake is found. The narrator gives a description of the topography of this place:

> I keep watching out for Qichun snakes on the road to Fanjing Mountain, in a village called Wenxiao or Shichang, in the upper riches of the Chen River tributary of the Yuan River, in the still unpolluted and abundant flow of the Jin River. (*Soul Mountain* 171)

The novel refers to the human interference with the non-human world which is rapidly worsening the habitat of different species . It refers to an incident of killing of a giant panda named Hanhan by poachers. Undoubtedly Gao has a very sound knowledge of botanical taxonomy as is apparent in his description of the physical characteristics of the qichun snake:

> The scientific name is the beaked Pallas pit viper. Both are more than two metres long, not as thick as a small wrist but with a small tail section which is thinner. The body is a nondescript grey-brown with a grey-white triangular pattern, so it also has the common name of chessboard snake. They don't appear dangerous, and coiled on a rock would just look like a clump of soil. (*Soul Mountain* 171)

In Chapter 33, "he" meets a ranger in the "densely forested mountains" (186). The ranger is a tall middle aged man who is dark and thin, he has a crew cut and a dark lean face with stubble. He was first in the army and then a cadre. He has travelled to many places but he says he doesn't want to go anywhere now. He just watches over the mountain on his own and has been captivated by the mountain. This nature reserve at Heiwan River has a thick growth of forest is quiet and lonely devoid of human sounds. Thus the topography changes as he reaches the Hebei Province at the lower course of the Yangtze River.

> … going upstream on the Taiping River, the source of the Jingjiang, the mountain formations on the both sides becomes more and more bizzare. Here

> the thickly forested mountains begins to close in and the Heiwan River becomes narrow and deep. (*Soul Mountain* 186)

In chapter 39 the narrator arrives in Central China which comprises of Guizhou, Sichuan, Hubei and Hunan provinces. The topography here is more rugged. The Wuling Range seperates Guizhou from Hunan. The Wuling Range is also the home to many ethnic groups like the Tujia, Han, Miao and others. The Miao live in the southern mountains, near Guizhou and Yunnan provinces. The majority of the non-Han ethnic groups are fiercely independent and have maintained their traditional way of life.

> The main peak of the Wuling Range, at the borders of the provinces of Guizhou, Sichuan, Hubei and Hunan, is 3200 metres above sea level. The annual rainfall is more than 3400 points and in one year there are barely one or two days of fine weather. When the wild winds start howling they often reach velocities of more than three hundred kilometres per hour. This is a cold, damp and evil place. (*Soul Mountain* 222)

It is in Chapter 53 that the narrator arrives in the ancient city in Jiangling. Twenty kilometres from here is the ancient capital of the Chu Kingdom, where he visits the archaeological station where excavation is in progress. Often the change in the course of the river leads to the change in the topography of the land. The narrator witnesses that the lake of the earlier times has now become a small pond. Similarly water has receded in the lower reaches of the Yangtze and is now a heavily silted-up sandbar and even the city of Jingzhou is now below the riverbed. He feels a sense of profound and apparently disproportionate anguish when a loved landscape is altered out of recognition. In the words of the narrator:

> On the east, this hill right underfoot was a lake extending to the Yangtze River. The Yangtze at the time was in the vicinity of Jingzhou city but now it has moved south almost two kilometres. (*Soul Mountain* 318)

The dynamic ecosystem of the Miluo River is constantly adjusting to changing environmental conditions or disturbance. The change in the natural environment because of the destruction of forest and ecology leading to the shrinking of the Dongting Lake is referred to here.

> However, I do not go to the shores of Dongting Lake to retrace his footsteps because several ecologists I saw told me that of this eight-hundred-*li* stretch of water, only a third of what is on the maps now remains. They also predict with clinical coldness that at the present rate of silt accumulation and land reclamation, within twenty years the biggest freshwater lake in the country will vanish despite how it is drawn on maps. (*Soul Mountain* 319)

People attach special and often individual meanings to places, such as the place where they spent their childhood or the place they associate with some special event. Different people from different cultures may perceive and interpret the same area of the Earth's surface in different ways. The influences of locational factors such as latitude, longitude, altitude, and terrain are particularly potent in understanding the topography of a place.

Soul Mountain raises certain questions like—how does a young child understand place? What is the character of a young child's emotional tie to place? What events and activities can provide the infant with the feel of space? How does a young child perceive and understand his environment? Chapter 54 the relationship between the construction of place and childhood memories has been represented:

> What in fact are childhood memories? How can they be verified? Just keep them in your heart, why do you insist on verifying them? You realize that the childhood you have been searching for doesn't necessarily have a definite location. And isn't it the same with one's so called hometown? It's no wonder that blue chimney smoke drifting over roof-tiles of houses in little towns, bellows groaning in front of wood stoves, those translucent rice-coloured little insects with short forelegs and long hind-legs, the campfires and the mud-sealed wood pail beehives hanging on the walls of the houses of mountain people, all evoke this homesickness of yours and have become the hometown of your dreams. (*Soul Mountain* 328)

The journey in *Soul Mountain* also implies a visit to the past since these places are less advanced and modernized than his city of origin. Instead of being socialized and reconciled with the collective he feels increasingly alienated from the places and people he meets, and experiences a typical existential angst. In Chapter 55 there is a change in the setting from rural to the urban. The narrator arrives in a city and decides to visit his friend.

> I arrive in this bustling city ablaze with lights, streets full of pedestrians and an endless stream of traffic. At the change of traffic signals, like sluice gates opening, there is a surging tide of bicycles. And there are also the T-shirts, neon lights, and advertisements sporting beautiful women. (*Soul Mountain* 330)

Soul Mountain delineates the degraded natural environment caused by ignorance, greed and politics and describes conservation efforts by scientists. According to Gao Xingjian *Soul Mountain* deals with a world that, was much destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and will be even more so in the near future, by, for example, the

Three Gorges Dam in the Yangtze and by the ever-growing presence of the Han Chinese who today are to be found everywhere "there is money to be made" (*Soul Mountain* 242-3). Also revealing in this context is Gao's description of the few remaining pandas wandering through southwest China's ever shrinking forests wearing electronic transmitters.

> Destruction of ecosystems and the large scale extinction of wildlife, threats posing by the construction of the Three Gorges Dam are some of the major environmental concerns affecting modern China. The narrator witnesses how rivers are polluted and lakes are silted across the whole range of the Yangtze valley, from Caohai at the upper reach, to Dongting Lake in the middle and to Huangpu River in Shanghai near the sea coast. He also reconstructs conversations with all sorts of characters, on topics ranging from Chinese politics to the mythical Wild Man. He captures all he sees and hears in a mesmerizing manner: sometimes with unambiguous clarity and other times with a dreamlike quality. (Moran 214)

In Chapter 57 he enters Shennongjia through Fangxian in the north. He has come here to see whether the primitive forests still exists. He has come down all the way from the high plateau and the huge mountains of the upper reaches of the Yangtze and it would be a pity to miss out seeing this mountain region of the middle reaches. The ecology of this forest gets affected with the increase in the number of human inhabitants resulting in the decline in the habitats of the other species.

> The annual timber export was less than 150 cubic metres. From here all the way to Shennongjia there were only three households. Right up to 1960 the forest hadn't been damaged but after that the highway went through and

> everything changed – today every year 50,000 cubic metres of timber have to be delivered. As production developed the population increased. In earlier times, every year at the first clap of spring thunder the fish would emerge from the mountain caverns and if we blocked the mouths of the caves with large bamboo trays we would haul in a basketful. Nowadays we can't eat fish. (*Soul Mountain* 343-44)

The loss of biodiversity loss is a matter of concern, not only because of the aesthetic, ethical, or cultural values attached to biodiversity, but also because it could have numerous far-reaching consequences for the ecosphere as a whole. This idea is explored in Chapter 59 while describing the ecology of Shennongjia. It is located in the Hubei Province which is situated in the lower course of the Yangtze River. Before 1960 it was a vast expanse of virgin forest that even the sun was not visible and could only hear the sound of water. During the 1960s the Government made plans for logging the trees and in 1966 the road was put through. At present 900,000 cubic metres of timber is supplied to the state. People came in to illegally cut trees and to hunt. There are also those who come to look for the Wild Man.

The narrator emphasized the dangers of ignoring the non-human portion of the environment and man's relationship to it. Furthermore his concern for the protection of the ecosystem of Shennongjia finds expression here:

> I can only say that protecting the environment is important work and has implications for later generations of our children and grandchildren. The Yangtze has already become a brown river bringing down mud and silt, and yet a big dam is to be built on the Three Gorges! (*Soul Mountain* 363-64)

In Chapter 60 in *Soul Mountain* the narrator set out from Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province and arrives in Zhuzhou. He spent the whole day wandering along the Xiang River remembering the fact that he fled as a refugee through this very region twelve or thirteen years ago. It was this scrap of inconsequential memory that led him to spend an entire day at Zhuzhou when changing trains during the journey from Changsha. The chapter includes a story told by an old childhood friend of the narrator of a suspected wild man later turns out to be a rightist activist, who escapes from labour camp was hiding in the forest for twenty years. He was chased and later captured and found that it was not a wild man but a rightist who ran away from reform farm in Qinghai. He was stark naked and a pair of glasses tied to his head with a piece of string.

> We were going along a mountain ridge to cut down on the distance so that we could get to the campsite before dark. A patch of the forest under the ridge had been burnt off and planted with corn. Something was moving in the yellow cornfield and looking down we could clearly see it was some sort of wild animal. (*Soul Mountain* 385)

In Chapter 62 the narrator refers to an urban setting which he already visited in the past and attempts to recreate an image from his memory:

> As he goes along this busy street he feels more and more lonely and begins to sway as if he were sleepwalking. In the interminable noise of the traffic, in the glare of gaudy neon lights, he is squashed in the thronging crowds on the pavement. He wants to slow his pace but can't and is all the time being knocked and jostled by the people behind. If you look at him from an upstairs window over the street, he looks just like a discarded cork swirling helplessly

as it floats down the gutter after the rain, together with dry leaves, cigarette packs, icecream wrappers, used take-away plastic plates and the paper wrappings from all sorts of snacks. (*Soul Mountain* 394)

In Chapter 65 the narrator is in Haiba, more than 4000 metres into Tibet. Light snow is falling outside and up ahead is huge ice-clad mountains. He meets some university students who have come here for practical work. He returns back to the Huanggang Mountain in the Wuyi Mountain range and he could manage to photograph a splendid deciduous pine growing in the belt of conifers in the lowewr section of the sub-alpine grassy marshland adjoining the peak. The Wuyi Mountains is a mountain range on the border between Fujian and Jiangxi provinces in southeastern China. Situated in an area with many caves and spectacular scenery, the Wuyi Mountains have long been associated with cults of Daoism.

It is on Wudang Mountain that I see possibly the last Daoist of the Pure Unity Sect. He is the embodiment of this sort of evil. I heard about him on the way up the mountain at a place I made my camp site. An old Daoist nun has made her home in a ramshackle hut outside the wall of the Courtyard of Steles of the sacked Ming Imperial Palace. I ask her about this famous Daoist Mountain in those better times of long ago and she starts to talk about the main school of Daoism. She says there is only one old Daoist of the Pure Unity Sect alive. He is over eighty and has never come down the mountain, preferring to stay all year round keeping guard at the Gold Top. No-one dares to provoke him. (*Soul Mountain* 414)

Buell in his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism* illustrates the incorporation of urban and other severely altered, damaged landscapes – "brownfields" (88) as well as greenfields – into ecocriticism's accounts of placeness and place-attachment.

"Brownfields" is used more loosely to characterize anthropogenically degraded landscapes, particularly in urban and industrial zones. Gao in his fiction has analysed the built and the natural spaces and seems to develop a social criticism that takes urban and degraded landscapes just as seriously as "natural landscapes" (Bennet 32).

Chapter 71 gives a detailed description of Shaoxing, a small city famous for rice liquor. This place has also produced numerous famous personalities, including great politicians, writers, artists and heroic women whose old homes have now all been converted into museums. In Chapter 73 the narrator arrives on the coast of the East China Sea. A middle-aged single woman invites him for dinner to tell him a story of her friend which she wants him to turn into a novel.

In Chapter 75 the narrator reaches the city of Shanghai. But this huge metropolis with its teeming population of ten million people no longer interests him. Already in Chapter 54 the acute sense of loneliness and futility connected with urban life is presented:

> Although you were born in the city, grew up in cities and spent the larger part of your life in some huge urban metropolis, you can't make that huge urban metropolis the hometown of your heart. Perhaps, because it is so huge that within it at most you can only find in a particular place, in a particular corner, in a particular room, in a particular instant, some memories which belong purely to yourself, and it is only in such memories that you can preserve yourself fully. In the end, in this vast ocean of humanity you are at most only a spoonful of green seawater, insignificant and fragile. (*Soul Mountain* 328-29)

There is the description of the black Wusong River which goes through the city:

> The black Wusong River which goes through the city gives off a perpetual stench. Fish and turtles are extinct but the inhabitants of the city somehow

> manage to survive. Even the treated tap water used for everyday consumption is brackish and worse still always smells of chlorine. It would seem that people are hardier than fish and prawns. I have been to the mouth of the Yangtze. There, apart from the rustproof steel cargo ships floating on vast murky yellow waves, there are only reed-covered muddy shores which are washed by the same murky yellow waves. The silt in the water keeps building up and one day will turn the whole of the East China Sea into sandbars. (*Soul Mountain* 471)

Land-cover change works through habitat loss and habitat fragmentation. This idea is explored in Chapter 75 of *Soul Mountain* while passing through the city of Shanghai:

> I recall that when I was a child the water of the Yangtze was always clear, both on fine and rainy days. Along the banks, from early morning to dusk fish vendors had fish that were the size of a child, and they sold them in sections. I have been to many ports along the Yangtze but there are no longer any fish that size and it's even hard finding any fish stalls. It was only at Wanxian before the end of the Three Gorges, on the steps of the thirty- or forty metre stone embankment, that I saw a few of them and the fish in the baskets were all a few inches long and in days gone by would only have been used as cat food. (*Soul Mountain* 471-72)

"Places change in size and complexity and in economic, political, and cultural importance as networks of relationships between places are altered through population expansion, the rise and fall of empires, changes in climate and other physical systems, and changes in transportation and communication technologies" ("Xpeditions Archive"). *Soul Mountain* has ample references about the growing tourism in the Yangtze valley and how does it affect the region. There are many instances when the

narrator visits those places and every time there is a feeling that this industry is responsible for changing the natural landscape of the environment. Neil Evernden in his essay "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy" asserts:

> The tourist can grasp only the superficialities of a landscape, whereas a resident reacts to what has occurred. He sees a landscape, where a resident reacts to what has occurred. He sees a landscape not only as a collection of physical forms, but as the evidence of what has occurred there. To the tourist, the landscape is merely a facade, but to the resident it is the outcome of how it got there and the outside of what goes on inside. The resident is, in short, a part of the place, just as the fish is a part of the territory (99)

One Man's Bible (2002) is a companion novel to *Soul Mountain*. The links between the two are at the same time thematic and structural. Both the texts are quasi-autobiographical depicting an individual ill-fitted to the highly politicized life that has led to the subjugation of the individual and the latter's attempt to win freedom through the process of enduring loneliness.

The themes of violence, decay and degradation, cruelty in human nature and Nature form the crux in *One Man's Bible*. The novel shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. The time-frame of *One Man's Bible* spans over two decades and the events cover the vast geographic, political and cultural spaces of urban and rural China, Hong Kong, Europe and Australia. There is a marked difference between the style of writing for the description of life in China and that outside it.

In *Soul Mountain* the authorial self is dissected into "I", "you", "she" and "he", who together make up the protagonist , while in *One Man's Bible* 'you' stands for the

contemporary exiled author and "he" for the author at the time of the Cultural Revolution. In *One Man's Bible,* the use of pronouns allowed him the psychological space to scrutinize his own thinking and behaviour throughout the Cultural Revolution.

Place in *One Man's Bible* is a site of meaningful action for the individual. It is mainly drawn from linkages across space and time which transform it more of a dynamic web than a specific site or location. Some aspects of the structure of geographical space are well illustrated in the depiction of urban space in the fiction of Gao Xingjian. The "you" narrator in Chapter 16 of *One Man's Bible* is walking through the street of Central area in Hong Kong city noting particularly the importance of serial vision of places or centres, and of the content of those places:

> You are on an overbridge with an endless stream of cars speeding below. On Sunday, there are few people on this busy thoroughfare between the tall buildings and the shops. You lean on the rail and look down on the road below. (One *Man's Bible* 138)

Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather (2004) is a collection of short stories comprising of six stories that transport the reader to moments where the fragility of love and life, and the haunting power of memory, are beautifully unveiled. The volume is an exploration of the environmental, spiritual and cultural consequences caused by the Cultural Revolution. The stories depict the nature of the individual within society and to play with the boundaries of space and time aimed at developing a strong Chinese identity and authentic cultural memories. The backdrop of Chinese history is always present yet never explicitly examined. The importance of a sense of place, as a living physical location, geographical as well as biological grounded in an

awareness of nature-human relationships, including one's own relationship to the local environment forms the crux in these stories.

Physical characteristics of the land like climate, landforms, soils, hydrology, vegetation, and animal life along both sides of the valley is presented in vivid detail. Places in these stories are characterized by differentiation on specific lines of language, political systems and population distribution. The short story titled "Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather" observes how the human civilization could be a factor for changing the ecological landscape of a place. During one of his visit to the childhood village the protagonist feels that he has come to an unknown place and he could find any similarity with the place in his memory:

> I remember that every day on my way to school I had to pass a stone bridge, and the lake was right next to it. Even when there was no wind, there were waves lapping all the time, and I used to think they were the backs of swimming fish. I never imagined that the fish would all die, that the sparkling lake would turn into a foul pond, that the foul pond would then be filled in, and that I would not be able to find the way to my old home. (70)

Places change over time as both physical and human processes operate to modify the terrain. In the short story titled "Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather" the narrator is "flying in a plane over the great Taklamakan desert" (82) in North West China and gives a description of the topography of this place:

> The towering mountain range looks like the skeleton of a fish. The vast mountains will certainly be swallowed up in this burning, dry sea, yet in March the Taklamakan can be extremely cold. Those few blue circles are probably frozen lakes and the white edges are shallow beaches. The dark

> green spots that look like the eyes of dead fish are where the water is deep. (82)

Even Thoreau in *Walden* explains the contradiction between civilization and true wilderness and sees the wild as the ultimate destination of the New World. In Thoreau's words:

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach. (88)

William Cronon in *The Trouble with Wilderness* states:

> Wilderness is the natural, unfallen antithesis of an unnatural civilization that has lost its soul. It is a place of freedom in which we can recover our true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives. Most of all, it is the ultimate landscape of authenticity. (80)

Gao Xingjian is echoing Cronon in his powerful rejection of the urban world and going to the forests to establish his ecocentricism by dramatizing the ideas that natural system and their individual parts possesses intrinsic value, independent of human utility, and the humankind is an element within natural systems. In *Soul Mountain* he wanders along the Yangtze River to experience life in the wilderness in order to realize the idea of self.

We have been witness to places altering in Gao Xingjian's fiction through population shifts, climatic changes and physical systems against the economic, political, and cultural networks of relationships. The visual landscape of these fictional worlds is shaped by the exotic nature in a state of uncontaminated mountainous terrain, rivers, and wilderness.

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Chapter III

The Mystique of the Land: In Search of Myth and Deep Ecology

The long range Deep Ecology movement emerged more or less spontaneously and informally as a philosophical and scientific socio-political movement during the so-called Ecological Revolution of the 1960s. Its main concern has been to bring about a major paradigm shift-a shift in perception, values, and lifestyles-as a basis for redirecting the ecologically destructive path of modern industrial growth societies. “Since the 1960s, the long-range Deep Ecology movement has been characterized philosophically by a move from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism, and by environmental activism” (Sessions ix). The phrase "Deep Ecology" was coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1973, and gives it a theoretical foundation. In the essay “Politics and the Ecological Crisis”, Naess states:

> The main driving force of the Deep Ecology movement, as compared with the rest of the ecological movement, is that of identification and solidarity with all life. (Sessions 452)

The shift from a human centred to a nature-centred system of values is the core of the radicalism attributed to Deep Ecology, bringing it into opposition with almost the entirety of Western philosophy and religion:

> Deep ecology is concerned with encouraging an egalitarian attitude on the part of humans not only toward all members of the ecosphere, but even toward all identifiable entities or forms in the ecosphere. Thus, this attitude is intended to

extend, for example, to such entities (or forms) as rivers, landscapes, and even species and social systems considered in their own right. (Sessions 270)

The philosophical root of the Deep Ecology movement is found in the ecocentrism and social criticism of Henry David Thoreau, John Muir and D. H. Lawrence. Further inspiration for contemporary ecological consciousness and the Deep Ecology movement can be traced to the ecocentric religions and ways of life of primal peoples around the world, and to Daoism, Saint Francis of Assisi, the Romantic Nature-oriented countercultural movement of the nineteenth century with its roots in Spinoza, and the Zen Buddhism of Alan Watts and Gary Snyder. Deep ecologists have drawn a distinction between their "deep" approach to the natural world and the "shallow" human-centred perspective of those who are merely concerned with the effect on human communities of specific environmental problems. Arne Naess in the early 1970s is a seminal thinker in this tradition. Naess sets out eight key points of the Deep Ecology platform in George Sessions's definitive anthology *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century* in 1995:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human Life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are in de-pendent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. Present human interference with the non human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.

5. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. The changes in policies affect basic economies, technological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent worth) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.

(Sessions 14)

In Gao Xingjian, we are concerned with Chinese aesthetics and Daoism as Deep Ecology which assumes that the world of phenomena manifests the *Dao*, the Way of nature. The Dao is not a separate reality but rather the patterned processes of the natural world, or perhaps the disposition of the universe to act in a patterned, harmonious interactive way. The human ideal is to understand the Dao and act in harmony with it. This view of nature can appropriately be called "organic" (Miller 65) for various reasons. First, all of reality is included. There is no separate, transcendent realm and includes the triad: heaven, earth, and humans. The Second is that nature is self-creative. Rather than a separate creator who made the world in the past, nature by itself displays ongoing creation. *Zaohua*, the "Creative" (Miller 6) acts in spontaneous and unpredictable ways but is always skilful in creating the beauty and harmony of the natural world. Third, all things – including rocks and water -- have vitality, called

in Chinese *qi*, literally the “breath” (Miller 58) of life. Fourth, each phenomenon has an individual nature, and this consists not of some essence but of a distinctive *de* the “power” (Miller 5) and *shen* the “spirit” (Miller 139), and pattern of growth. And finally, all phenomena are organically interrelated. The world is one continuous field of *qi*, with each phenomenon not a separate thing but rather a temporary form within it, like a whirlpool in a stream.

Gao states that if he finds connections between “*Soul Mountain* and classical Chinese literary traditions, they lie primarily in its spirit” (“Literature and Metaphysics” 99). Rightly so, the Nobel citation proclaims that *Soul Mountain* is a "great novel", which "is based on impressions from journeys in remote districts in southern and south western China, where shamanistic customs still linger on, where ballads are recounted as the truth and where it is possible to come across exponents of age-old Daoist wisdom" (Press Release 2000). The novel is singled out by the Academy as a "pilgrimage" and a "rehearsal of freedom from goals and meaning" (Press Release 2000).

Gao Xingjian’s 506-page novel *Soul Mountain* is fictionalised autobiography superimposed upon a documentation of his five-month journey through the Chinese hinterland from July to November in 1983. A dynamic ecological system is brought before us that transparently links the “lower-outer-physical”, or earthly, and the “higher-inner-spiritual” (Yeung 32), or cosmic, levels of human life through Daoist religious thought and practice. From this kind of cosmological perspective, the interpenetrating “bodies” of individuals, society, the natural world, and the infernal and celestial spheres truly constitute a cosmic landscape pulsating with life.

The thematic substance of *Soul Mountain* may be traced to two traumatic and interrelated events in Gao Xingjian's life: his 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. His weeks of waiting while confronting imminent death induced a psychological review of his life, dislodging in the process large fragments of forgotten memory which re-surface in *Soul Mountain*. Gao attempts to give linguistic expression to these fractured memory to recreate his psychological state during this period of confrontation with death.

In "Literature and Metaphysics" Gao states that Chinese culture broadly speaking exists in four forms. The first is what is known as orthodox culture, and is associated with the Chinese Empire's generations of "feudal monarchs, the Great Wall and the Imperial Palace, and the rare antiques connected with the lifestyles of emperors, kings, generals, ministers and scholars". The second form of culture is "represented by Daoism, which has its origin in primitive shamanism and Buddhism" (98). The third form is represented by folk culture: myths and legends, customs and practices, folk songs and folk music, the itinerant arts of singing, storytelling and dance, and the plays that developed from sacrifices, as well as the huaben stories. The fourth form represents a purely Eastern spirit. This is largely manifested in the "nature based philosophies of Laozi and Zhuangzi, and the metaphysics of the Wei and Jin dynasties" (98). The culture in *Soul Mountain* is of course that of the latter three forms. *Soul Mountain* is imbued with a reclusive spirit, and it is in this respect that eastern literature is different from that of the west.

> I think that if one wants to find connections between *Soul Mountain* and classical Chinese literary traditions, they lie primarily in its spirit ("Literature and Metaphysics" 99).

Soul Mountain begins with the narrator's leaving the "contaminated surroundings" (12) and searching for an authentic life in nature. The impersonal city life sets the narrator off on a journey to forests and mountains in rural areas where the primitive practices of living an original life are still preserved and minimally contaminated by modern civilization. The narrator witnesses the reverence for nature in the age old Daoist practices in Chapter 49, the superstitious totem worship of animals among the Yi minority people in Chapter 20, the primitive instincts seeking sexual impulse and love in the Miao community's mating practices in Chapter 39, and the uncontaminated language of folk songs in Chapter 59.

In *Soul Mountain* Gao reflects Daoist religious cosmology that seeks the transformation of the individual as a celestial being who is fully translucent to the cosmic environment in which he or she is situated. While some Daoist schools emphasize the collective and institutionalised ritual regeneration of the society and the cosmos, many forms of the Daoist religion, especially those influenced by the Highest Clarity scriptures, are typically and ideally concerned with *Zhenren* the "perfected persons" (Miller 89). Such immortals or *xian* or "transcendent beings" (Miller 90) are able to penetrate beyond the gross physicality of ordinary existence to achieve an attentive harmony with the subtle and mysterious "alchemical" (Miller 88) transformations of the Dao (the ever changing flow of cosmic processes) at its root, primordial level.

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 philosophy of Daoism stresses unity with nature and with the self, and the spiritual as well as physical journey of the narrator in *Soul Mountain* is an attempt to achieve such a unity. The narrator of *Soul Mountain* is on a great search of what he assumes is meaning in his life, yet throughout the book he battles with his reasons for leaving modern civilization and traveling on his own to the mountains.

> I am on a journey – life. Life, good or bad, is a journey and wallowing in my imagination I travel into my inner mind with you who are my reflection. The perennial and perplexing question of what is most important can be changed to a discussion of what is most authentic and at times can constitute what is known as debate. But let others discuss or debate such matters; they are of no consequence for I who am engrossed in my journey or you who are on your spiritual journey. (*Soul Mountain* 313)

The Daoist universe is one and nameless, but infinitely diverse and particular. Its unity is implied by the fact that all dimensions of existence, from the budding of a flower to the orbit of the stars, is dominated in terms of *qi*, "a refined and potent form of the vital energy" (Miller 9) matter of the universe whose dynamic pattern is a cosmic heartbeat of expansion *yang* and contraction *yin*. Its diversity is a function of the complex interaction of the myriad cosmic processes, both light and fluid and heavy and dense. The universe is a single, vital organism, not created according to some fixed principle, but spontaneously regenerating itself from the primal empty-potency lodged within all organic forms of life.

Naess and the many other deep ecologists assert the fundamental equality and inherent value of all beings and then draw inferences for human action from their original anti-anthropomorphism. Deep ecologists see the first point as distinguishing their position from environmentalism; whereas 'shallow' approaches take an instrumental approach to nature, arguing for preservation of natural resources only for the sake of humans, Deep Ecology demands recognition of intrinsic value in nature. It identifies the dualistic separation of humans from nature promoted by Western philosophy and culture as the origin of environmental crisis, and demands a return to a monistic, primal identification of humans and the ecosphere. Deep ecology is best represented, perhaps, as a set of practical environmental policies underpinned by a set of normative principles which in turn are supported by a scientifically informed, but ultimately philosophical, view of reality and humankind. Among the policies advocated by Naess are radical reduction of the world's population, abandonment of the goal of economic growth in the developed world, conservation of biotic diversity, living in small, simple and self-reliant communities, and – less specifically- a commitment "to touch the Earth lightly" (Palmer 213).

Distinctive Deep Ecological attitudes, values in organically related and inextricably linked with the significance of the title Soul Mountain (*Lingshan*)- "*ling* meaning spirit or soul, and *shan* meaning mountain" (*Soul Mountain* 2) in Chinese. It goes to articulate and implicate a deep human presence with the earth and also to establish some imaginative footing for walking a path back to the actual historical and cultural complexities of the tradition. *Soul Mountain* is based on the Daoist doctrine yin-yang that everything in the world is made up of these two opposing but related forces. Yin is the "female" (Miller 164) force, associated with darkness, cold, dampness, and

submissiveness. Yang is "male" (Miller 164), with characteristics that are bright, hot, dry, and dominant. According to the Daoist tradition "everything consists of this balance, it is what constitutes reality" (Miller 54). Daoism takes this pattern to be a foundational pattern for the way all life operates. Each of these opposites produces the other: heaven creates the ideas of things under yang; the earth produces their material forms under yin, and vice versa. This production of yin from yang and yang from yin occurs in a cyclical motion and is continuous. "There is no factor of life to which the activities of yin and yang do not apply" (Ni 17).

It can be inferred that the narrator in *Soul Mountain* expresses the contrasting aspects and interrelationships of everything that exists in the universe. *Soul Mountain* has no fixed definition, which makes it virtually untranslatable. It is in tune with the nature of the Dao, that everything is constantly transforming itself and that opposites in the world are complementary. "Thus there can be no black without white and vice versa, no good without evil, no strength without weakness, no male without female, no boom without bust, and no joy without sadness. When one fully internalizes this realization, it becomes clear that the goal towards which human beings should strive is balance and harmony rather than the ultimate victory of one perspective over another – since there are no ultimates" (Miller 54).

Soul Mountain resonates with this aspiration on a micro-thematic, structural, and philosophical level. The protagonist of the novel, both in his "I" and "you" incarnations sets out on a multi-tiered quest, ostensibly in search of Soul Mountain. It is mentioned in the first chapter by a man the "you" narrator meets on a train, and described as a place of wild men and untouched forests: "It's all virgin wilderness" (*Soul Mountain* 3). The protagonist originally decides to search for this mountain as a way to assuage his nostalgia: "You've lived in the city for a long time and need to feel

that you have a hometown. You want a hometown so that you'll be able to return to your childhood to recollect lost memories" (*Soul Mountain* 8). In Chapter 2, this quest is echoed by its more rationalised variant expressed by the "I" narrator:

> While you search for the route to Lingshan, I wander along the Yangtze River, looking for this sort of reality. I have just gone through a crisis (…) I should have left those contaminated surroundings long ago and returned to nature to look for this authentic life. (*Soul Mountain* 12)

In Chapter 3, when the narrator reaches the town of Wuyi, he is transported back to his childhood by the sounds and smells of the mountain village, and believes he recognises the language of Song tales when he hears the peasants speak.

> The "you" chapters serve, throughout the novel, to expand on this theme of the roots of Chinese culture, and are continuously interlaced with references to the heterodox and popular tradition recorded in works such as *Of Mountains and Seas*, and other compendia of legends. Here, locality (hometown, childhood, the mountain village) serves as a geographical translation of marginality in that it fractures the idea of the national into countless variations and components. (Veg 39)

Chapter 11 presents *Soul Mountain* as a land of wonderful things, where "suffering and pain can be forgotten, and where one can find freedom" (68). Again in Chapter 22 On his way to the waterfall at Huangguoshu, further to the south he is travelling in a bus and expresses sense of hopelessness in his search:

Shaking up and down in the speeding bus on the mountain road induces a sense of loss of gravity. I seem to levitate.I don't know where I'm drifting, and I don't know what it is that I am searching for. (*Soul Mountain* 136)

In Chapter 25 “you” asks an older lady lady for the road to *Lingshan* and it is told that Lingshan is merely a place women go in order to pray for a son.

Chapter 76 in *Soul Mountain* “he” asks the way to Soul Mountain from a wise old man who tells him that Soul Mountain is always on the other side of the river, no matter which shore one is on.

> He goes up and politely asks, “Venerable elder, can you tell me the location of Lingshan?”
>
> “Where have you come from?” the old man asks instead.
>
> He says from Wuyizhen.
>
> “Wuyizhen?” The old man ruminates for a while. “It’s on the other side of the river.”(478)

This can be interpreted in two ways. First the possibility of an end to the quest, of anticipating a transcendental meaning beyond the journey itself, which is also a metaphor of the narrative itself, is denied. If there is no ultimate transcendental meaning of experience to justify life, then it must be taken as it is; the meaning of it then relates to this present life, not the other assumed life after death. A possible second reading is to relate it to the Buddhist concept of “the Other Shore” (Yeung 94). It is a metaphor for Nirvana – a state of spiritual enlightenment when the consciousness transcends the mundane world. In this state, the subject achieves ultimate union with the universe and “meaning” becomes irrelevant. In that state when meaning is irrelevant every kind of quest will be futile.

The convergence of the two quests-physical as well as spiritual demonstrates that by alternating imagination and reality, the narrator continues to seek a form of totality and authenticity: simultaneously the origin of Chinese civilisation, the true nature of his own self and origin, a pristine natural environment untouched by culture, and

finally the "truth" that literature purports to reveal. However, this quest for unity and authenticity fractures into myriad multiplicity. The most obvious thematic symbol of this is the fragmentation of Chinese culture, first into alternative popular traditions, in the imagination of the "you" narrator-Daoist legends, local folklore, such as the story of the qichun snake, a biji tale about a nun who washes her own intestines every day in Chapter 48, and simultaneously into the countless ethnic cultures in the anthropological research conducted by the shifting narrator.

> It's not unique to the ethnic minorities, the Han nationality also has a genuine folk culture which hasn't been contaminated by Confucian ethical teachings! (*Soul Mountain* 385)

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. In broad outline, this frame story coincides with Gao Xingjian's personal experience. Gao drew on his extensive understanding of narrative techniques employed in the fiction of both the East and the West. The goal of Daoists is to attain harmony with the Dao. This attainment of harmony with the Dao is seen as living in accord with nature.

It is in the Qiang region in the border areas of the Qinghai-Tibetan highlands that the narrator witnesses a "vestige of early human civilization" (*Soul Mountain* 10) the worship of fire in Chapter 2. Fire, the bringer of civilization, has been worshipped by the early ancestors of human beings everywhere. It is sacred to Daoism. Fire constitutes one of Daoist five elements or phases that "constitute traditional Chinese Cosmology" (Miller 76). The other elements are metal, water, wood, fire and earth. In Daoist tradition these five elements represent five elemental energies, or patterns of

movement, which both support and control one another. In Chapter 34 there is a reference to the mythical Daoist God of Fire:

> You go on to say that this red boy, this fire god Zhurong, is the spirit of these nine mountains. The old fire god temple at the bottom of Huri Peak had long fallen into disrepair, people forgot to make offerings and were only concerned with enjoying the meat and liquor themselves. The neglected fire god became enraged and wreaked havoc. (*Soul Mountain* 197)

In broad outline, this frame story coincides with Gao Xingjian's personal experience. Gao drew on his extensive understanding of narrative techniques employed in the fiction of both the East and the West. As in all of his writing, it was the psychological dimension of human behavior that he sought to explore, but in the case of *Soul Mountain*, it was his own psychology that he held up for scrutiny. It is a journey with a two-fold structure-a physical journey in the real world alongside a spiritual one in the realm of the imagination. It is a novel similar to a "travel diary" ("Literature and Metaphysics" 94), and also resembles a "soliloquy" ("Literature and Metaphysics" 94). The splitting of the character makes it possible for him to differentiate his journey across the vast regions of China. The "you" is looking for the unlikely place named "Soul Mountain," which is always being pushed further away, towards the "other shore" (Yeung 94). This essentially internal journey parallels the geographical crossing carried out by the "I." The spiritual quest is thus superimposed on an ethnological exploration that leads the narrator to meet diverse population groups and cultures spread over the mountainous regions of the southwest. Visits to remote temples and villages, the collecting of local songs and customs, the adaptation of stories and legends, all confer a deliberately composite construction to this ethno text. In *Soul Mountain* it is the use of pronouns instead of characters, psychological

perceptions instead of plot, and changing emotions in modulating the narration. The telling of stories is unintended, and they are told at random.

Correspondingly *Soul Mountain* is a fictionalised account of an ethnological research project. Its approach is undeniably original in the context of the 1980s. Gao Xingjian took a personal approach, far from the fads of the day and official supervision. By trying to revive the buried memory of peripheral cultures eclipsed by the vagaries of history and politics, "he" immediately put himself in opposition to the central government, where the followers of "culture" enter into more or less voluntary connivance with the dominant ideology. Gao Xingjian's fundamentally ethnological approach thus differs from the philosophers and historians who assign a consensual rather than a critical significance to cultural debates.

Gao Xingjian's approach, aims to unearth forgotten, threatened, and marginalised cultures, pointing to the hierarchies within the political frontiers, and dissenting from the official creed and common discourse on the subject. Returning to the sources does not in any way serve to magnify national culture, but rather to condemn discrimination and overshadowing. *Soul Mountain* thus presents a series of field researches, enriched with philosophical, historical, and literary meditations. Visits to remote temples and villages, the collecting of local songs and customs, the adaptation of stories and legends, all confer a deliberately composite construction to this ethno text. This formal heterogeneity coincides with the multiplicity of southern cultures, 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, Gao Xingjian 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, thanks to an imperial system backed up by Confucian orthodoxy.

This official culture gradually overshadowed the sometimes older cultural heritage of the South, traces of which can be seen among the ethnic minorities such as the Miao, the Yi, the Qiang, etc. So the narrator agrees with the archaeologists and the museum curators when he discovers the masks, which were used for the *nuo* theatre, usually associated with Daoist ritual.

In Chapter 24 there is a long description of an ancient mask. It is an anthropozoomorphic mask sculpted out of wood, no doubt dating back to the last Imperial Dynasty, and which survived the destruction of the anti-superstition campaigns and of the Cultural Revolution. The narrator found it in the storage rooms of a museum in the southern province of Guizhou, a region inhabited by ethnic minorities. The object excavated has fairly realistic features, with a pair of horns on the top of its head, two sharp fangs pointing up towards its nose, and two eyes with holes in them, giving it a threatening and surprised expression. In all likelihood, it "represents the god who opens the mountain 'Kaishan' or the god who opens the road at the beginning of the ritual" (Zhang 25). This episode gives pride of place to these divinities, taking up all of Chapter 24 and echoing the theme of the mountain in the novel. To the description the narrator adds a rather psychological interpretation of the mask: "This face also accurately expresses the animal nature in human beings and the fear of this animal nature within themselves" (*Soul Mountain* 141). This shocked reaction expresses the growing, sometimes painful awareness of man in self-contemplation, as an "understanding of nature and the self is fully encompassed in the

round black holes of the eye sockets" (*Soul Mountain* 141). These annotations thus show an attention that transcends the simple ethnological dimension of discovery, making a metaphorical use of it that connects with social relations and the examination of identity.

Gao Xingjian superimposes fiction on eyewitness accounts, a viewpoint that is both critical and self-reflective, pondering both orchestrated amnesia and personal forgetfulness. The author's ethnological propensity, as shown in *Soul Mountain*, proves transgressive in several ways: defending buried minority cultures, which are the casualties of the ravages of dominant culture, protecting individual memory from established historiography, and finally, examining the dark areas of one's personal past in order to become reconciled with oneself. This threefold cultural, political, and personal aspect allows us to compare Gao Xingjian's commemorative writing with a certain exorcist ritual, which makes it possible for him to defy prohibitions while casting out internal demons.

The sense of place and embeddedness within local, mythical, and ritual landscapes is important. The sense of place serve as pegs on which people hang memories, construct meanings from events, and establish ritual and religious arenas of action. All the novels of Gao Xingjian explored "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 positionings of a community of people. *Soul Mountain* contains numerous references to Chinese as well as Western myths and symbols. The novel makes a strong connection between the places visited on the journey and the entrenched Chinese cultural traditions behind the landscape. Land is

always read like a text with cultural and literary meaning embedded by the narrator in his search for cultural memories.

The protagonist "I" visits various remote villages, ethnic groups, nature reserves with ancient forests and the giant panda, isolated monastries and temples, and is witness to ancient folk and shamanistic practices. The "I" chapters, which also contain large segments of conversations, folk songs and chants, examine how primeval instincts are repressed by civilization and how attempts during the Cultural Revolution to eradicate superstitious practices has been to a large extent superficial.

In Chapter 48 in *Soul Mountain* there is a reference to a "*biji"* (145) tale of the Jin Dynasty. *Biji* comprises of anecdotes, quotations, random musings, philological speculations, literary criticism and indeed everything that the author deems worth recording. It is about a powerful and overbearing Grand Marshall and a mendicant nun who comes to his mansion seeking alms. The nun wishes to perform the seven times seven equals forty-nine day fast for his deceased mother and at the same time to pray to the bodhisattvas to bring good fortune and to eliminate misfortune. Every afternoon before changing the incense, the nun insists on having a bath which always takes two hours. His suspicion overcomes him and one day he was peeping through the crack in the door he is aghast to see the nun facing the door, "she has removed all her clothing and is sitting naked with her legs crossed in the tub, scooping water in both hands to wash herself" (*Soul Mountain* 283). Her face is totally transformed, it is radiant and she has white teeth, pink cheeks and a jade-white neck, smooth shoulders and plump arms – a veritable beauty. She takes length after length of the soft intestines into her bloody hands, washes and untangles them, then winds them around her wrists and finally she presses the intestines neatly together and crams them back

into her stomach. The white hands in the tub taking a pair of scissors and thrusting them hard into the navel and bright red blood instantly gushing out from it. He closes his eyes, unable to look. The tale manifests Shangqing, or the Highest Clarity, tradition of Daoism which stressed visionary experience and practice There is no explanation given at the end of the story but just provides a hint that it a political one or could be turned into a religious tale. The narrator concludes "any explanation is irrelevant, you simply wanted to retell it in the spoken language" (*Soul Mountain* 285)

Root-seeking movement that began in the early 1980s, has been the most pervasive and influential literary trend in post-Mao Chinese literature. The followers of this school set out "to discover the nation's cultural heritage buried deep in the ancient lands and to examine its implications for the Chinese literary imagination. Soon after, many writers, particularly those who had spent years during the Cultural Revolution in rural China as educated youths, eagerly joined the movement" (Ying 159). China had experienced a period of amnesia, in which the nation's rich past was erased from the collective memory of the Chinese. Gao feels that it is the responsibility of a writer, to help the nation reconnect to its past, to sort out, the cultural roots. Only by doing so, he argued, would Chinese literature be able to "dialogue" (Ying 159) with the rest of the world. The goal of the root-seekers, therefore, was to search for authentic Chinese national roots in order to claim a spot in the global literary scene.

In the essay titled "In Search of the Chinese Soul in the Mountains of the South" Kam Louie expresses her view in these words:

> 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. The search for alternative roots, however, took the 1980s writers south, with the poet Qu Yuan, the wilderness of the southwest and the Yangtze River as cultural icons. The sources for this alternative tradition are said to be found in the ancient The Songs of the South, local gazetteers and the numerous records and tales of the strange found in unofficial writings of the past millennia. (146-47)

He revels in the incantations and magical procedures (Chapter 2), the ritual dances, the ballads and funeral chants, which he sees as incarnations of a primeval vitality that will not tolerate any policy of uniformisation. Love songs echo in the depths of the valleys, expressing a spontaneity that becomes scarce in classical poems, imprisoned in the rules of prosody. The uncovering of these treasures is favoured by exploration of the terrain combined with rereading works banned from the Confucian canon, such as *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, which contains a mine of information about mythical collections and ancient geography. This ethnological approach calls into question an imperial culture that has managed to create the appearance of the enormous monolith it has become. Gao Xingjian subscribes to a renewed, lucid anthropology that breaks through the barriers of racial prejudice, discovering in supposedly "barbarian" traditions the buried roots of Chinese culture: what has been preserved of their primeval culture by those who are today minority peoples remains a priceless treasure of knowledge of Chinese civilisation itself. Some still carry in them an ancient shared tradition, while others have retained a snapshot of a forgotten stage of evolution. In Chapter 49 in *Soul Mountain* the narrator meets a Daoist folk singer in an old county town who was hesitant to perform Daoist rituals as "the government

doesn't allow the performance of superstitious practices" (287). Instead he sings a mountain love song:

> 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. (*Soul Mountain* 288)

The narrator is interested in getting knowledge about some rituals associated with Daoism and the Daoist singer turns out to be helpful in this regard. It becomes clear that the practices of Daoist rituals were banned during the Cultural Revolution and instead they were sent to the fields.

> Later on during the land reforms when the land was divided up and he could no longer practise as a Daoist priest, the government ordered him to return to his village and he worked in the fields again. I ask him about Yin-Yang and geomancy, the Five Thunder Finger Techniques, the Constellation Dances, physiognomy and massage. He explains each of these with such eloquence that I am positively elated. (Soul Mountain 289)

The narrator decides to visit the house of the Daoist singer because he is willing to watch the performance of Daoist rituals. After travelling twenty kilometers in a bus they arrived at a small town. The darkness of night had descended and in the paddy fields all around is the croaking of the frogs. Finally they arrived at a little mountain village where incense was burning as an offering to the large number of wooden and

stone carvings. There is the assumption that these were rescued from the Daoist temple some years ago when the "four olds" (292) were destroyed and temples and monasteries were smashed. During the actual performance of the rituals the old man

was wearing a tattered old purple Daoist robe adorned with the insignia of the Yin-Yang fish and the eight Trigrams, and was carrying the command tablet, the sword of office and an ox horn. First he took a bowl of clear liquid and, chanting, flicks the watery liquor into the four corners of the house. His eyes partly close, his mouth slackens and his face takes on a serious look, as if he is communicating with the spirits. Next he made a string of incantations to invoke the spirits of Heaven and Earth.

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. This ritual is associated with some songs. Before the sacrifice a decorated pillar had to be erected on the ground. All members of the family changed into new clothing and there is a fanfare of pipes and the beating of gongs and drums. A rope is tied to the ox's nose, wrapped its horn in bamboo wreaths and brought it out. The male head of the family sang loudly a eulogy took up a spear and stabbed the ox:

Ox oh ox,

Born in still waters,

Growing up on sandy banks,

You cross rivers with your mother,

You climb mountains with your father,

Fight the locusts for the sacrificial drum,

Fight the praying mantis for the sacrificial pipes

(*Soul Mountain* 239)

In Sichuan Province, Shamnastic customs and traditions still flourish. Gao Xingjian incorporates into his novel his experiences with monks, folk singers, and recluses, thus portrays the history and mythology of the people around him. Throughout Gao's writings history and reality blend with mythology and the natural distortion of time, and perceptions of the past and present blend with history and folklore into one experiential moment.

Gao Xingjian's writings appropriate Daoist concepts, according to which one pursues pure wisdom by exploring the paradoxes of truth. The contrast of truth and wisdom appears often in the book, especially when Xingjian discusses the earlier disillusionment upon discovering that his immersion in books did not endow him with wisdom, but rather prevented him from truly living. Deep ecologists see the world as 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. From the perspective of Deep Ecology the world in *Soul Mountain* is not seen as divided into mutually independent parts and mutually exclusive attributes: everything is seen as implicating, and being implicated in, the identities of other things, reality being a relational system of shared, interpenetrating essences. From this kind of cosmological perspective, the interpenetrating bodies of individuals, society, the natural world, and the infernal and celestial spheres truly constitute a cosmic landscape pulsating with life:

The first aspect of human–heavenly communication is evident in Daoism's appropriation of the phenomena of Shamanism. Shamanism is a religious phenomenon and important root of Daoism. A shaman is someone who through a variety of techniques often involving drugs or dancing enters into a state of ecstasy and makes a journey to the spirit world to encounter one or several deities. *Soul Mountain* presents some of performance of these Shamanistic rituals in detail.

> Women are more dominantly shamans; they performed exorcisms at certain times of the year, usually in times of trouble, like drought for example. The association of women is significant because the Taoist's ideal society is deeply connected with matriarchy and femininity; this is obvious as women represent the yin element of nature. (Hubbard 26)

The harmony that is sought in the Daoist worldview is thus not a static harmony, but a dynamic creative harmony in which caterpillars 'magically' turn into butterflies, and fish 'magically' evolve into birds (Miller 56). All these things are possible not because of some divine power that exists beyond the limits of human understanding, but because this radical creativity or 'supernatural' power is built into the natural constitution of the universe. Realizing that the world is actually like this leads naturally to a sense of awe and wonder. Where does all this extraordinary power come from? The answer is that it lies in the Dao, the Way itself. The power of transformation that is inherent within things does not – so far as we can tell – come from any external source or creator, but rather 'wells up' within things causing them to have life and to grow. Thus the Way is nothing more than the Power that lies within things, and the Power is itself the manifestation of the Way.

Soul Mountain presents an old Shaman woman in Chapter 14 who can communicate with the spirits and see the future. It has its origin in Daoism and is a way "to

communicate with gods, spirits and ancestors" (Miller 57). Inside the tiny room there is a table with an incense altar dedicated to the two "Daoist deities, the Venerable Lord Superior and the Great Emperor of Light, and to the Bodhisattva Guanyin" (82). The old woman sits down on the far side of the bed asks him the zodiac sign of his birth and discusses something with the fat woman who is the "spirit medium" (82). The medium puts her hands on her knees, close her eyes, and begins to meditate. The medium "burps" a couple of times and her whole body starts to "convulse" and "shake" giving the impression that she has come under the spell of the spirits. She is convulsing, I think, probably as a result of *qigong* during meditation. *Qigong* is the most popular practice of healing connected to Daoism. The principle of qigong is that by actively guiding and circulating qi throughout the body, the overall functioning of one's physiological system will be strengthened and enhanced. Qigong may also be performed on a person by an advanced practitioner. The practitioner uses his or her own qi to stimulate the qi of the other person. In Chapter 12 in *Soul Mountain* there is a reference to *qigong* as the narrator remembers his childhood friend who suggested him to visit a qigong related to "Eight Trigrams" (70) to cure his lung cancer.

The reminder of the contrast between the dominant culture and the minority cultures aims to shed light on the complicity between cultural policy and political culture, as relations between the Chinese and the ethnic minorities reflect those between the individual and society. The culture of the North, symbolised by the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, and the Confucian classics, according to the author, is at the service of the institution that, in parallel with the endangering of peripheral cultures, exercises repressive power over the individual. The survival of southern traditions testifies to the resistance of the South, the cradle of Daoism and Chan Buddhism, which, far from the Imperial power and Confucian orthodoxy, offered refuge over the course of

history to persecuted or disgraced scholars. While it cannot be reduced to this antagonistic dichotomy, *Soul Mountain* remains a parable of flight, which takes the narrator far from the censorious and persecuting capital on a salutary return to the sources in those far-off regions. Thus militant ethnology metaphorises the demand for individual freedom, mixed with the temptation to be a hermit, which is represented more forcefully in *One Man's Bible*.

For a true Daoist the objective of their existence is to reach and maintain harmony with the Tao. When this harmony is reached enlightenment has been achieved. Enlightenment is when they accept the plainness of their life. It cannot be found in a doctrine, rather it is found when one's energy is balanced and one's mind is clear. "When spirit is the directing energy in life, then the desires and impulses are balanced and harmonious and fulfill their natural function as expressions of the positive, creative, and constructive nature of the universe" (Ni 43). Daoism in its purest definition promotes simplicity, openness and wisdom.

In *Soul Mountain* it has been observed that the narrator achieved the state of highest wisdom in his intimate moments that he shares amidst nature. He feels one with nature and struck with a sense of awe and wonder. He recognizes the transience of all things of beauty, a sense of freedom and the ideal of tranquility. At that moment he realizes that the "universe as a vast integrated unit, not as discrete mechanistic parts. Nature is seen as unified, interconnected and interpenetrating, constantly relating microcosm and macrocosm" (Swearer 52). This implies a kind of great chain of being, linking inorganic, organic and human life forms. For the Daoists this linkage is based on the understanding that all life is constituted of *qi*, the material force or psychophysical dimension of the universe. This is seen as the unifying element of the cosmos and creates the basis for a profound reciprocity between humans and the

natural world. In Chapter 10, "I" narrator is overwhelmed by the serenity and sublimity of the place. The narrative adopts a different style to represent the beauty of this serene atmosphere:

> It has an ethereal purity and freshness and as I get closer, it seems to get taller – it is swathed in clusters of flowers with petals larger and thicker than those of the red azaleas I saw earlier. Lush white flowers are scattered beneath the bush. They have not begun to wither and are so charged with life that they exude a lust to exhibit themselves. This is pristine natural beauty. It is irrepressible, seeks no reward, and is without goal, a beauty derived neither from symbolism nor metaphor and needing neither analogies nor associations. (*Soul Mountain* 61)

Deep Ecology fully acknowledges the biocentric principle embedded in Daoism that stresses the fact that man is only one part in a huge and complex life net in nature in which everything has a certain value. That is why man is not allowed and entitled to reduce the richness and variety of the living world except for the satisfaction of his basic needs. Daoism generates the notion that there is a way, a logic or a rationale that governs the interrelationships between humans, the earth and the heavens. This is the Way, the evolving cosmic process in which these three dimensions of life are interrelated, and mutually constituted. This idea has been reflected in Chapter 8 in *Soul Mountain* when the Botanist expresses his concern for the declining ecology of the Yangtze valley:

> Man follows earth, earth follows sky, sky follows the way, the way follows nature…Don't commit actions which go against the basic character of nature, don't commit acts which should not be commited. … putting up a dam will destroy the entire ecology of the Yangtze River basin but if it leads to

> earthquakes the population of hundreds of millions living in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze will become fish and turtles!....when people assault nature like this nature inevitably takes revenge. (*Soul Mountain* 48)

Soul Mountain is about confession and search for tradition, cultural roots and identity. All this together has its own peculiar features due to Gao Xingjian's subjectivity formed against the background of both domestic traditions and foreign influences, the first connected with ancient and modern shamanism, philosophical Daoism and Buddhism, or the popular forms which he met on his wanderings, and the second connected with his wide reading, study and translations mostly of existentialist, modernist and absurdist writings of Euro-American and especially French writers:

> Gao's *Lingshan* is a product of his own imagination, a place of inner and socio-political freedom, of spiritual communion with equally free human beings, men and women, our countrymen, foreigners and strangers. In reality it is not possible to arrive to lingshan since it would mean to reach something ultimate or absolute (Galik 616)

From this ecological perspective, the world in *Soul Mountain* is not seen as divided into mutually independent parts and mutually exclusive attributes: everything is seen as implicating, and being implicated in, the identities of other things, reality being a relational system of shared, interpenetrating essences. Since the properties of a given individual are a function of its relations with individuals of countless other kinds, these properties do not belong exclusively to it: each individual owes its nature to others in the network. It follows that meaning-giving and value-endowing qualities such as mind or subjectivity or soul, and the value that accompanies them, cannot be

monopolized by human beings, but must be diffused throughout the systems of the natural world.

Daoism is an organized religious tradition that has been continuously developing and transforming itself through China, Korea and Japan for over two thousand years. Daoism bears witness to a history of continuous self-invention within a vast diversity of environmental contexts. The most influential Daoist text, *Daode jing* names this mysterious creativity 'Dao', which can be translated quite straightforwardly as 'way' or 'path'. These texts present an enlightened attitude towards the natural world, a "doctrine of harmony with the natural environment" (Capra 340).

The Chinese view of the cosmos was based upon the establishment and maintenance of order. Though the world had no clear creator and no teleological goal to attain, it did have a pattern of alternating forces and phases that shaped the rhythms of life. Actions in consonance with these patterns were deemed proper and morally good; those in opposition to the pattern were refractory, dangerous and evil. Many acts that we would see as harmful to the ecology were understood to be contrary to this pattern of life. The Daoists see themselves as administering immutable codes of law deriving from transcendent, divine sources that embody these principles. They work tirelessly to keep in check the forces of chaos and disorder that would otherwise overwhelm the natural world.

Daoism consists of the Dao or the way is the spontaneous process regulating all beings and manifested at all levels-in the human body, in society in nature and in the universe as a whole. It is also related with assorted naturalistic or mystical religions. . For Daoists the world is explainable and there exists a principle of communication between the various types of life in the universe because all forms of life and power depend upon the Dao as their mother or matrix. Dao centred philosophical reflection

engendered a distinctive ambivalence in advocacy- manifested in their indirect non-argumentative style, their use of poetry and parable. Dao is also used concretely to refer to a road or path to salvation.

The Daoist priest's observation in the Dragon Tiger Mountain in Chapter 63 of *Soul Mountain* is quite relevant:

> The Way is both the source and the law of the myriad things, when there is mutual respect of both subject and object there is oneness. This source gives birth to existence from non-existence and to non-existence from existence. The union of the two is innate and with the union of heaven and man there is the attainment of unity in one's view of the cosmos and of human life. For Daoists, purity is the principle, nonaction the essence and spontaneity the application; it is a life of truth and a life requiring absence of self. To put it simply, this is the general meaning of Daoism. (*Soul Mountain* 402)

Although these principles sound appealing to Gao Xingjian, he claims, "I doubt that I would be able to attain this realm of purity where there is an absence of self and lust" (403). This statement is a perfect reflection of the constant battle within Gao Xingjian the narrator as to which way he should take to achieve happiness- either purity and the absence of self and lust or, self-indulgence. He states, "I need to live my life unburdened. I want to find happiness but I don't want to take on responsibilities" (400). From this statement, it can be inferred that Gao Xingjian will be unable to commit fully to Daoism and therefore, continue his search for true happiness.

Like Wordsworth, Gao perhaps finds redemption only in nature, in its beauty and serenity. Hence the quest for *Soul Mountain*, of whose existence no one is certain. But unlike Wordsworth, who found meaning in nature and salvation in God, Gao renounces both the Buddhist and Daoist sects while failing to reach his destination. At

the end of the narrative, he proclaims, "I comprehend nothing, I understand nothing" (*Soul Mountain* 506).

In Daoism, art is the evocation of the spirit of phenomena, rather than a depiction of surface reality. Painters and writers, for instance, are supposed to capture the specific *qi* or spirit resonance of things. In order to accomplish this, the artist or poet must go through meditative practices that consist fundamentally of two things: removing the delusion of a separate self and the desires it produces, and concentrating upon the subject until there is a direct communion with it. Thus a major aesthetic concern was the relationship between self and nature, inner and outer. In Chapter 63 in *Soul Mountain* the Daoist nun in the Dragon Tiger Mountain gives reference to numerous instances of creative persons living in the monastery like Zhang Daqian the painter and Fan Changsheng of the Jin Dynasty and Du Tingguang of the Tang Dynasty "lived here as recluses in order to write" (401).

Gao believes that the true self lies in the prelinguistic state of human consciousness which is very much in line with the Daoist concept of intuition that emphasizes the non-linguistic and non-intellectual state of being. In the philosophy of Laozi and Zhuangzi, however the self remains a perceiving subject that tries to go beyond the intellectual boundaries set by language. 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" (Tam 218), which he took from Chan Buddhism. Gao shows a prelinguistic state in which the self is presented in a state of primordial non-distinction. The self is thus represented in a dualistic state of being as both the subject and the object. In such a state, the self is at the same time "subject-in-object" and also

"object-in-subject". This dualistic self as "subject-object" that transcends mere bodily experience is what Gao considers as the originary self.

Early traditional Chinese notions of an autonomous self have their origins in the Daoist writings attributed to Laozi and Zhuangzi. Embedded in the Daoist tradition is the opposition to restriction on the freedom and autonomy of action of the individual, both to the physical body and to the spiritual self. That the basic premise of human life was the individual's freedom to expression in speech and action was a dominant feature in the writings of Gao Xingjian. In his Nobel Lecture titled "The Case for Literature" delivered in December 2000 at the Swedish Academy, Stockholm he reiterates this view point:

> In order that literature safeguard the reason for its own existence and not become the tool of politics, it must return to the voice of the individual, for literature is primarily derived from the feelings of the individual: one has feelings and articulates them (*The Case for Literature* 33)

One Man's Bible is a work of memory that proves transgressive in several ways: "defending buried minority cultures, which are the casualties of the ravages of dominant culture, protecting individual memory from established historiography" (Zhang 25), and finally, examining the dark areas of one's personal past in order to become reconciled with oneself.

One Man's Bible as Gao's fictionalized autobiography traces the life during China's political upheaval in the 1960s and seventies. There are two threads of narrative in *One Man's Bible*, one historical and the other personal, thus serve more than as narrative functions. This narrative depicts the schizophrenia perpetrated during the

Cultural Revolution, leading Gao to develop an intense personal philosophy wherein the narrator became his own God and disciple, a defiant solution to the political turmoil that threatened to physically and mentally squash him. *One Man's Bible* can be read as the spiritual autobiography of a wandering Chinese incessantly trying to flee from political persecution and from the pressure of a collectivistic morality. The novel is an attempt in self-analysis "to uncover both traumas and spontaneous sexual activity", and "to make associations of earliest feelings with present attitudes" (Karl 172).

In *One Man's Bible*, the "he" chapters and "you" chapters alternate, weaving together the memories of the same character and his situation at present, and dispensing with the subject I. This was not just due to the special structure of the novel but also because when it came to writing about the red terror of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution in China, the individual's self had been annihilated by the totalitarian dictatorship. In this dialogue between "you" who had luckily survived and "he" of the past, time sequence is not a concern, and fragmented memories could come and go in an instant, giving great flexibility to the writing. The pronoun based structure made it possible to avoid lengthy narration of the protagonist's complicated experiences in China's grotesque social situation, and immediately allowed "you" of the present and "he" of the past to engage in dialogue.

> Enough! he says.
>
> What do you mean? you ask.
>
> He says enough, put an end to him!
>
> Who are you talking about? Who is to put an end to whom?
>
> Him, that character you're writing about, put an end to him.

You say you are not the author.

Then who is? (*One Man's Bible* 440)

For a true Daoist the objective of their existence is to reach and maintain harmony with the Tao. When this harmony is reached enlightenment has been achieved. Enlightenment is when they accept the plainness of their life. It cannot be found in a doctrine, rather it is found when one's energy is balanced and one's mind is clear. "When spirit is the directing energy in life, then the desires and impulses are balanced and harmonious and fulfil their natural function as expressions of the positive, creative, and constructive nature of the universe" (Ni 43). There is an instance in *One Man's Bible* in Chapter 52 when the "he" narrator arrives in a county town in the south to meet his old friend Lu. He was looking for the house of Lu which is on the "other side of the river, on the mountain" (398). It was informed to him by the local cadre that Lu built a thatched hut on the mountain and had become a Daoist, living on a vegetarian diet, and in his "quest for longevity, was refining cinnabar to arrest the aging process"(399). But the explanation given by Lu for leading such kind of a simple life is akin to what is prescribed by Daoism a purest way that promotes simplicity, openness, and wisdom:

I don't want to get my hands dirty again. This is fine, a thatched hut with a purple bamboo garden where I grow vegetables and read books. I'm not like you, you're still young. I'm getting old, and I am not going to do much more in life. (*One Man's Bible* 399)

The Daoist power of transformation that is inherent within things does not come from any external source or creator, but rather 'wells up' within things causing them to have life and to grow. Thus the Way is nothing more than the Power that lies within things, and the Power is itself the manifestation of the Way. In Chapter 37 in *One*

Man's Bible the narrator is walking in the southern outskirts of Stockholm around a lake that looks quite desolate, the atmosphere turns surreal and dreamlike:

> As you follow a track into the forest, the light around the lake vanishes, and, deeper into the forest, the trees seem to get taller, the tallest and straightest being the Korean pines. Suddenly, you hear the shouting of children, and you can't help feeling emotional. It's as if you have returned to your childhood, even though you know those times no longer exist. (*One Man's Bible* 293)

"Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandfather", develops as a response to the environmental, spiritual and cultural consequences caused by the Cultural Revolution, and aims at developing an authentic cultural memory. Daoism advocates the idea that all things – including rocks and water -- have vitality, called in Chinese *qi*, literally the "breath" of life. The world is one continuous field of *qi*, with each phenomenon not a separate thing but rather organically interrelated like a whirlpool in a stream. This particular idea has been presented in this short story in an interesting manner when "I" refers to a Daoist temple called Guandi. He remembers that the Guandi temple was" burnt down after being struck by lightning" ("Buying a Fishing Rod for My Grandfather" 74). This phenomenon is interpreted in the light of Daoist knowledge systems:

> My grandfather told me about it. He said that the spot attracted lightning because the *qi* energies underground were in disharmony, so they built the temple to drive away the demons and evil spirits. Still it ended up being struck by lightning, proving that the site was not suited to human habitation. (74)

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Chapter IV

The Ethics and Politics of Land: Lives and Biotic Community

The chapter seeks to make a study of the natural environment occupied by people and other biotic and abiotic components of the ecosystem. The environment, like place, encompasses human perceptions and aspirations, the biotic organisms including plants and animals as well as the biophysical characteristics that can be measured and monitored. Ecological science shows us that nature is not just an assembly of separate species all competing with each other for survival but that the organic world is made up of many communities of diverse beings in which the species all play different but essential roles.

Ecology is the science that studies the relationships between living organisms (biotic component) and their physical environment (abiotic component). In other words, ecology is concerned with the living organisms in their natural habitat. Ecosystem is a concept of ecology which is defined as "the system composed of physical–chemical–biological processes active within a space–time unit of any magnitude" (Lindeman 400). Ecosystems range in size from the smallest units that can sustain life to the global ecosystem or ecosphere. Exchanges of energy and materials between living organisms and their supporting environment characterize them. Central to the ecosystem concept is the notion that living organisms continually engage in a set of relationships with every other element constituting their environment. Extended to the global ecosystem, this notion is expressed in the aphorism that "everything is connected to everything else" (Glotfelty xix).

In *Soul Mountain*, a dynamic ecological system is brought before us that transparently links the "lower-outer-physical", or earthly, and the "higher-inner-spiritual" (Yeung 32), or cosmic, levels of human life through Daoist religious thought and practice. From this kind of cosmological perspective, the interpenetrating bodies of individuals, society, the natural world, and the infernal and celestial spheres truly constitute a cosmic landscape pulsating with life. *One Man's Bible* seeks to explore the diverse ways that place manifest themselves in the consciousness of the lived-in-world, describing the distinctive and essential components of place and placelessness as they are expressed in the landscape. The stories in *Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather* explore the nature of the individual within society and plays with the boundaries of space and time. The stories explore the nature of the individual within society and play with the boundaries of space and time. The backdrop of Chinese history is always present yet never explicitly examined.

Several decades of China's social history are compressed into the pages of the novel, dislodging in the process large fragments of forgotten memory which re-surface in *Soul Mountain*. Gao attempts to give linguistic expression to these fractured memories to recreate his psychological state during this period of confrontation with death. Interwoven into the fabric of Gao's five-month journey through the Chinese hinterland from July to November in 1983 is the fact of his birth in early 1940 soon after the Japanese invasion of China and the rise to power of the Chinese Communist party in the same period. Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain* is fictionalised autobiography superimposed upon a documentation of two traumatic and interrelated events in Gao Xingjian's life: his 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.

The author, on his long journey as a political refugee from Beijing, employs the strategy of storytelling to disperse his loneliness, and at the same time reconstructs his personal past as well the impact of the Cultural Revolution on both the human and physical ecology of China. Gao Xingjian's confrontation with death had filled him with a conscious resolve to live, and moreover to live a life which was authentically his own, one in which creative expression occupied a position of primary importance. Gao Xingjian fled to the safety of the provinces, while in Beijing; he was one of the main targets of the anti-spiritual pollution campaign. In the novel *Soul Mountain* Gao Xingjian documents his observation of Chinese history and ecology in the south-west provinces during his five month of travel in the south. Juxtaposed against this backdrop are his reflections on human existence, and on his own past life.

As a fugitive from the authorities, he kept to the margins of Han Chinese society, living much of the time on nature reserves and amongst ethnic people. These months of solitude allowed him to reflect on human existence, nature, society and history, as well as his own life. Mabel Lee in her introduction to the novel *Soul Mountain* states:

> *Soul Mountain* is a literary response to the devastation of the self of the individual by the primitive human urge for the warmth and security of an other, or others, in other words by socialized life. The existence of an other resolves the problem of loneliness but brings with it anxieties for the individual, for inherent in any relationship is, inevitably, some form of power struggle. This is the existential dilemma confronting the individual, in

> relationships with parents, partners, family, friends and larger collective groups. Human history abounds with cases of the individual being induced by force or ideological persuasion to submit to the power of the collective; the surrender of the self to the collective eventually becomes habit, norm convention and tradition, and this phenomenon is not unique to any one culture. (*Soul Mountain* vi)

Through the characters who are projections of his self, the author engages in intimate conversations with anonymous others to tell the stories of many different types of people who populate China, but yet who in the final analysis can be found in all societies and cultures. Reporting the life cycles of the peasants, mystics and wanderers of south west China and steeping himself in the growth processes out of a close interest in the biology of human affairs; a perspective which dwell mostly on the animal nature of human life questioning the reconciliation of people as people.

The autobiographical dimensions of *Soul Mountain* are richly overlaid with an exploration of various forms of human relationships and their implications for the individual. A rigorous and critical analysis of the self of one man is achieved by dissecting the authorial self into the singular pronouns, "I", "you", "she" and "he", who together constitute the composite protagonist. On his solitary journey, the protagonist seeks to alleviate his acute loneliness and creates "you" so that he will have someone to talk to. The "you", who is a reflection of "I", naturally experiences the same loneliness and creates "she" for companionship. The creation of an unnamed "she" allows the author "to project himself with immense freedom into the psyche of women" (*Soul Mountain* ix).

Three different pronouns are introduced into the narration of the one character, the character fragments into the different pronouns, and I, you and he become the structure of the novel, replacing the usual story and plot. This also allows for the introduction of the character's thoughts, so discussion, reflection, contemplation, memory, dream, and hallucination can all intermingle, and the literary form, too, can change freely because the flexibility of the structure allows the blending of prose and poetry into the narration.

In *Soul Mountain*, the main subject of the novel is Gao's five month journey in the Chinese hinterland, after fleeing Beijing and the political campaign that had been launched against him. He spent these five months travelling to the source of the Yangtze River then leisurely following it down to the sea.

Soul Mountain takes an ecological orientation towards nature. The author demonstrates his strong concern with the ecosystem in modern China, and presents a concrete and detailed discourse on nature. *Soul Mountain* finds China's environment out of joint and in its first chapter sets its narrator off on a journey to find something original, primitive and unspoiled that may still survive in the forested mountains of the south west China. The concept of disharmony in the relationship between humankind and nature and the possibility of finding a solution in traditional knowledge system is part of the discourse in the novel. Daoist ecocentrism is a key point of reference in Gao's novel along with Buddhism. It is the Daoist notion of the "unity of Heaven and human" (Moran 210) that finds expression in *Soul Mountain* with an interest in the environment.

The reminder of the contrast between the dominant culture and the ethnic cultures aims to shed light on the complicity between cultural policy and political culture, as

relations between the Chinese and the ethnic minorities reflect those between the individual and society. The culture of the North, symbolized by the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, and the Confucian classics, according to the author, is at the service of the institution that, in parallel with the endangering of peripheral cultures, exercises repressive power over the individual. The survival of southern traditions, testifies to the resistance of the south, the cradle of Daoism and Chan Buddhism, which is largely manifested in the nature based philosophies of Laozi and Zhuangzi. It offered refuge over the course of history to persecuted or disgraced scholars in order to flee political oppression. While it cannot be reduced to this antagonistic dichotomy, *Soul Mountain* remains a parable of flight, which takes the narrator far from the censorious and persecuting capital on a salutary return to the sources in those far-off regions. Thus militant ethnology metaphorises the demand for individual freedom, mixed with the temptation to be a hermit, which is represented more forcefully in *One Man's Bible*.

There is an obvious anti-Confucian tendency running through the novel *Soul Mountain*. The narrator sets off on his journey in order to flee the physically and culturally contaminated urban settings. Gao possesses an unusual and disinterested simplicity, a coarseness which verges on extreme physicality and violence. The stifling customs, instructions, rituals and teachings are abundant in the culturally-Confucian society of China which he wants to get rid of in order to be able to hear his own voice:

> You realize you will never return to the human world with its anxieties and warmth. Those distant memories are tiresome. You cannot stop yourself from giving a loud shout and charging towards this dark River of Forgetting. Running and yelling, roars of joy emerge from deep in your lungs and bowels like a wild animal. (*Soul Mountain* 418-19)

In *Soul Mountain* Gao shows "a strong antipathy toward the over-rational and over-civilized Confucian culture with its autocratic ideology and stifling hierarchy of authorities" (Lee vii). Gao's vacillating stance between the recluse and the worldly betrays his desire for staying within human society and locating himself in human relationship:

> I must return to the smoke and fire of the human world to search for sunlight, warmth, happiness, and to search for human society to rekindle the noisiness, even if anxiety is regenerated, for that is in fact life in the human world. (*Soul Mountain* 222)

Gao Xingjian bears the stamp of an excellent storyteller and his playful persona in *Soul Mountain* permeates the entire eighty-one chapters of the novel despite the serious philosophical and ethical issues addressed in it. A masterly prose writer with unique visual acumen, he captures the spirit of isolated, remote villages and the countryside of the Chinese hinterland in black, white and greys, as in artistic photography. This is the setting for *Soul Mountain* but it is not static setting and the specifics are detailed as he travels, both in fact and in memory, to the many places he had visited in childhood as a refugee, as well as in dream. Gao's creative techniques in dream are effectively transferred to the novel.

Barring a mixed feeling of being rejected, alienated and relieved he brings both his insider and outsider insights to his investigations into history, people and society on the journey. But the narrator refuses to be the conscience of the society. He claims very clearly that he only speaks through his own voice and for his own purpose. The basic premise of human life was the individual's freedom to expression in speech and action, a dominant feature in the writings of Gao Xingjian.

Gao Xingjian himself in "Literature as Testimony" states:

> It would be best for the writer to revert to being an observer, and to look with dispassionate eyes upon the various facets of human life. If he is able to soberly observe his own self in the same way, he will gain considerable freedom, find the act of observation fascinating, and give up foolishly trying to recreate the world. In any case, a person cannot recreate himself, so he is even less capable of recreating others. This sort of writing has no mission; it is unburdened, does not manufacture falsehoods and can approximate truth. (51)

The depiction of the varied biodiversity witnessed in the natural forests has an almost sacramental value: it holds out the promise of a renewed authentic relation of humanity and the earth. On his wanderings into the nature reserves Gao witnesses how people are shooting bears and even pandas; tress are being cut down a hundred times faster than before. Stones inscribed with historical inscriptions have been dynamited to yield materials for bridges that were never built. The novels focus on literature's potential to sensitize readers to the environmental or ecological aspects of a place.

Soul Mountain explores the degraded natural environment in south west China. 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. In Chapter 6, the scientist's efforts to save the vanishing animal species- the giant panda is recorded in detail: "In the 2500-metre giant panda observation compound at Haiba scientists are trying to preserve the ecosystem for the restoration of the pandas" (38). The co-

existence between man and animals is depicted here through an episode of creating a habitat artificially for the baby panda called Beibei:

> It's the baby panda they saved when it came fossicking for food, sick and starving! They've been waiting for it to come, they were certain it would come. It had already been ten days and they'd been counting the days. They said it would definitely come before the new bamboo shoots started to sprout. (*Soul Mountain* 38)

But the poachers are still engaged in killing these animals and only through the neckband that transmit signals they could be traced. These are signals transmitted from giant pandas which have been captured, tagged with wireless neckbands and then returned to the forest. The enclosing darkness hides "anxiety and restlessness" becomes "more perilous" (*Soul Mountain* 38) because of human intervention. This makes a botanist observe: "This world belongs to wild animals but human beings persist in interfering with it" (*Soul Mountain* 38).

Later on in Chapter 8 the irony is pointed out by an old botanist that while people are saving a species with no capacity for survival, people have no awareness of saving the environment, referring to the threat posed by the construction of the Three Gorges Dam. Deforestation in Shennongjia is chronicled in detail in Chapter 59. Even though environmental concerns have been raised and a nature reserve has been built up, the original ecosystem could hardly be restored. The rivers are polluted and lakes are silted, across the whole range of the Yangtze valley, from Caohai at the upper reach, to Dongting Lake in the middle, and Wusong River in Shanghai near the sea coast:

> The black Wusong River which goes through the city gives off a perpetual stench. Fish and turtles are extinct but the inhabitants of the city somehow manage to survive. Even the treated tap water used for everyday consumption

is brackish and worse still always smells of chlorine. It would seem that people are hardier than fish and prawns. (*Soul Mountain* 471)

The "I" does not address directly to solve this disharmony in the relationship between humankind and nature. However it can be inferred that the solution is implied in the language used and the philosophical outlook adopted in the novel. When nature becomes the focus in the novel, the multiple subjective perspectives uses the language of science with precision. Using Western scientific knowledge to dissect and analyse nature, there is also understanding of Oriental knowledge systems to comprehend nature as a whole. For example, the specific names of birds and plants are provided when the narrator explores a nature reserve area in Chapter 10. "I" narrator going through linden and maple groves at an altitude of two thousand seven hundred comes to a conifer belt:

> There is no longer any undergrowth and hemlock trunks are some round alpine azaleas. They are about four metres high and covered in masses of moist red flowers. The branches bow with the weight and, as if unable to cope with this abundance of beauty, scatter huge flowers beneath to quietly display their enduring beauty. (*Soul Mountain* 59)

A description of the degraded ecological environment of Caohai is presented vividly in Chapter 18:

> Twenty years ago the thick black forests came to the shores of the lake and people often encountered tigers. Now these bald hills have been stripped bare and there is a shortage of firewood for cooking, not to mention heating. Especially during the past ten years, spring and winter have become intensely cold. Frost comes early and in spring there are severe droughts. (*Soul Mountain* 108)

The interplay among characters, species, and ecosystems in *Soul Mountain* demands an interdisciplinary approach to thoroughly interpret the texts as eco texts. Ecocritics are rediscovering early writers, rereading the classics from a "green" (Buell 15) perspective and beginning to frame their subject in a theoretical way. One of the prime concerns of the ecocritics is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world. Ecocritics need contact not just with literature and not just with each other, but with the physical world. In *Soul Mountain* there is a preoccupation with exploring the degraded natural environment in modern China. During the journey which covers both human dominated cities and more nature-friendly rural areas, the impact of human interference with nature is widely observed and severely criticised by the people encountered by the narrator or through the voice of the narrator.

When *Soul Mountain* describes general topography and the traces of human history discernible on the land from a distance, it is landscape literature. The novel contains many passages about nature that are surprisingly vivid particularly when it gives a detailed description of the flora and the fauna of a particular ecosystem. The botanist in Chapter 8 finds a huge old "metasequoia, a living fern fossil more than forty metres high" (*Soul Mountain* 47), and comments that if it were not for a large hole in the tree's trunk, it would have been "cut for lumber" (*Soul Mountain* 47) The narrator mentions clear cutting of forests, siltation of rivers, and the environmental threat planned by the Three Gorges Dam:

> The Min River has turned into a black muddy river but the Yangtze is much worse yet they are going to block off the river and construct a dam in the Three Gorges! Of course it's romantic to indulge in wild fantasy but the place

> lies on a geological fault and has many documented records of landslides throughout its history. Needless to say, blocking off the river and putting up a dam will destroy the entire ecology of the Yangtze River basin but if it leads to earthquakes the population of hundreds of millions living in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze. (*Soul Mountain* 48)

Chapter 18 and Chapter 59 are two of *Soul Mountain*'s highlights as nature oriented literature. These chapters, which deal with Caohai and Shennongjia, detail environmental destruction caused by ignorance, greed and politics, and describe conservation efforts by scientists. The narrator talks about a biologist who came to Caohai in the 1950s from Shanghai to launch a breeding program to re-establish populations of coypu, ermine and bar-headed geese. Poachers beat the man to death. At Shennongjia, the narrator hears about researchers who study golden pheasants, giant salamanders, and other animals.

The narrator listens to a report from overwhelmed leaders and cadres of the forest reserve in Shennongjia in Chapter 59 but he stops taking notes when he realises he can do nothing to help:

> I can't even manage to protect myself, so what can I say? I can only say that protecting the environment is important work and has implications for later generations of our children and grandchildren. The Yangtze has already become a brown river bringing down mud and silt, and yet a big dam is to be built on the Three Gorges! (*Soul Mountain* 363-64)

In chapter 28 in *Soul Mountain* the "I" narrator is on a bus ride on the Jiangkou highway when his bus was intercepted by a small van carrying inspectors from the Highway Management Department. The driver of the bus was charged a penalty for breaking the law. This becomes a very frustrating experience for all the passengers

locked in the bus under the blazing sun. Finally when this problem got settled the driver stopped the bus at the side of the highway declared the bus could not run as "the bus has to refuel" (157). In this situation there is a cryptic observation regarding irrationality in the human world, "I suddenly realized that there isn't in fact any rationality in the human world. If I hadn't got on this bus, wouldn't I have avoided all this stress?" (*Soul Mountain* 158).

The observation shows that as the excessive present human interference with the non-human world is increasing, the habitat of different species is rapidly worsening. In Chapter 30 in *Soul Mountain*, the "I" narrator arrives in a mountain town in Southern Anhui Province which is renowned for deadly Qichun snake commonly known as "five-steps dragon" (167). He meets a peasant here who had lost a hand as he chopped it off after it had been bitten by a Qichun snake.

Chinese culture, first into alternative popular traditions, in the imagination of the "you" narrator covers the Daoist legends, local folklore, such as the story of the qichun snake, a biji tale about a nun who washes her own intestines every day in Chapter 48, and simultaneously the anthropological research conducted by the I-narrator into the countless ethnic cultures. In Chapter 59, the I-narrator marvels: "it's not unique to the ethnic minorities, the Han nationality also has a genuine folk culture which hasn't been contaminated by Confucian ethical teachings!" (*Soul Mountain* 385).

There are many myths and legends about Qichun snake and all sorts of incantations are common which the mountain people believe will give protection from snake bite when silently intoned. When people go into the mountains for firewood they always wear strap on leggings or else "put on long canvas socks" (*Soul Mountain* 167). But

according to Tang Dynasty scholar Liu Zongyuan this snake has some medicinal value which is "highly effective for relaxing muscular tension, aiding blood circulation, getting rid of rheumatism and getting rid of colds" (*Soul Mountain* 170). On the road to Fanjing Mountain the narrator sees dried Qichun snakes tied in coils in the ceiling drying area of a trading depot. Gao undoubtedly has a sound knowledge of biological taxonomy as is apparent in his description of the physical characteristics of the qichun snake:

> The scientific name is the beaked Pallas pit viper. Both are more than two metres long, not as thick as a small wrist but with a small tail section which is thinner. The body is a nondescript grey-brown with a grey-white triangular pattern, so it also has the common name of chessboard snake. They don't appear dangerous, and coiled on a rock would just look like a clump of soil. But if one looks closely, the rough dull brown triangular head has a scaly upturned-hook beak and a pair of small, pitiful, and lacklustre eyes. (*Soul Mountain* 171)

In Chapter 33 in the densely forested mountains "he" meets a Ranger- tall middle aged man who is dark and thin and a dark lean face with stubble. He has travelled to many places but doesn't want to go anywhere now. He just watches over the mountain on his own and has been captivated by the mountain. There is a conviction that egalitarian attitude towards nature is mainly due to the philosophy of not seeking fame and wealth, adversely admitting the incomprehension of an isolated life away from human communication. The Ranger explains his rapport with the peasants:

> … It's peaceful and I'm not troubled by many anxieties. My work is simple, there's only the one path up the mountain, its right under my eyes, and I have

only to fulfil my duty of keeping watch over this mountain (*Soul Mountain* 188)

It is during a walk along a road on the shady side of the Qingcheng Mountain in Chapter 47 in *Soul Mountain* that the "I" narrator finds a Daoist priest sitting there and reading a book. To his amazement, the priest is found to be more peaceful and relaxed living in the cave than in the village. Later, at the old stone pagoda on the island in the middle of the Ou River there is an encounter with a shaven head monk wearing a crimson cassock who pronounces: "the true traveller is without goal, it is the absence of goals which creates the ultimate traveller" (*Soul Mountain* 277).

In Chapter 49 in *Soul Mountain* the narrator meets a Daoist folk singer in an old county town who was hesitant to perform Daoist rituals as "the government doesn't allow the performance of superstitious practices" (287).

In Chapter 53 "I" narrator on his way to Hunan Province passes along the Miluo River in which Qu Yuan drowned himself. The alarming rate at which silt accumulation is taking place in the shores of Dongting Lake the "I" narrator was told by some ecologists:

> ...that of this eight-hundred-*li* stretch of water, only a third of what is on the maps now remains. They also predict with clinical coldness that at the present rate of silt accumulation and land reclamation, within twenty years the biggest freshwater lake in the country will vanish despite how it is drawn on maps. (*Soul Mountain* 319)

In a retrospective view of childhood in Chapter 54, there is a scene where a home got destroyed by a bomb or a fire and had never been rebuilt. There is remembrance of the green bristle that grew in the rubble and broken walls, where there were different species of crickets:

> There was a very clever type of cricket called Black Satin Cream and when their shiny ink-black wings vibrated they made a clear, resonating sound. There was also another kind called Locust which had a big body and a big mouth and was good at fighting. (*Soul Mountain* 325)

In Chapter 57 "I" meet the section chief in the forest of Shennongjia which is famous for Wild Man. The physical characteristics of the Wild Man are given by the section chief in detail:

> This creature is bigger than humans, generally its more than two metres in height. The body is covered with red fur and it has long hair. It's fine talking about it like this but to really see one is quite frightening. However it doesn't set out to hurt people, as long as people don't hurt it. (*Soul Mountain* 344)

Further in the same chapter it has been pointed out by the section chief how the construction of the highway in the reserve forest area of Shennongjia led to the depletion of the biodiversity:

> Right up to 1960 the forest hadn't been damaged but after that the highway went through and everything changed – today every year 50,000 cubic metres of timber have to be delivered. As production developed the population increased. In earlier times, every year at the first clap of spring thunder the fish would emerge from the mountain caverns and if we blocked the mouths of the caves with large bamboo trays we would haul in a basketful. Nowadays we can't eat fish. (*Soul Mountain* 343-44)

Further complicating the journey, the protagonist has a series of short lived relationship with a series of women, always referred to as "she". The relation ranges from ephemeral to platonic to carnally real. Yet the sexuality that Gao Xingjian explores in *Soul Mountain* has overtones of misogyny. Gao described one of the "she"

as a "struggling wild animal" who "suddenly turns docile" (78) with him. Many stories collected along this journey involve cruelty. The first woman that he comes across describes her nausea before love, her constant suffering and her desire for a wealth that will cause others to pity and admire her, a martyrdom. Hostile encounters in the novel seem to allude to Xingjian's experiences with the Chinese government. One story that directly addresses the Cultural Revolution involves the savage execution of political enemies of radicals.

Soul Mountain broke through conventional fictional patterns and yet tenaciously retained a firm control on the narrative viewpoint of the characters simply by fragmenting the protagonist into three different pronouns. However the different females in the book are all denoted as "she", thereby constructing a composite female image or what may be called multiple variations of the female. And this too is derived from the viewpoint of the male protagonist in the book. It is difficult for a man to fathom women and a women's inner world, so this multiple identity, she, intermingled with the male imagination, fluctuates between reality and non reality and becomes even more indefinite.

Significantly Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain* is precisely an experiment in ecofeminism. The movement that emerged in the mid-1970s sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and green movements, while at the same time offering a challenge to both. It "takes from the green movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women" (Mellor 1). Ecofeminism tends to share the perspective of deeper greens that humanity is not just reliant on its physical

environment, but that the natural world, including humanity, should be seen as an interconnected and interdependent whole. This raises fundamental questions about the socio-cultural human world in relation to the non-human natural world, including humanity's own physical existence. While ecofeminism shares with greens "a concern about the ecological damage caused by contemporary socio-economic and military systems" (Mellor 2), it also challenges the failure of the ecology movement and its theorists to address adequately male domination and woman subordination. Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain* explores these concerns of the male/female differences that brings together a critique of male power. A dualist view of men and women in relation to nature was synthesized by Elizabeth Gould Davis in her book *The First Sex*:

> Man is the enemy of nature: to kill, to root up, to level off, to pollute, to destroy are his instinctive reactions. Woman is the ally of nature, and her instinct is to tend, to nurture, to encourage healthy growth, and to preserve ecological balance. She is the natural leader of society and of civilization, and the usurpation of her primeval authority by man was resulted in uncoordinated chaos. (335-36)

Gao's *Soul Mountain* is a product of his imagination, a place of inner and socio-political freedom, of spiritual communion with equally free human beings, men and women, countrymen, foreigners and strangers. Galik claims that the novel "supplies us probably with the richest depictions of female sex in all his works" (616). Most of the women in *Soul Mountain* display an extraordinary resilience and energy in their attempt to improve the present condition. In *Soul Mountain*, Gao Xingjian effectively appropriates the female voice by, as the press release points out, "his unrestrained use of personal pronouns", so that "I, you and he/she become the names of fluctuating

inner distances" (Galik 614). The violation of the female body is a powerful image used by Gao Xingjian that reinforces the extent of the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution. The rape of the female body simultaneously symbolizes the violation of the self of the author, and that of the Chinese population by the wanton megalomaniacal politics of Mao Zedong. There are numerous references of excessive brutality and violence perpetrated to women during the Cultural Revolution. Chapter 33 in *Soul Mountain* relates the story told by a ranger of a nature reserve at Heiwan River. He believes "women are troublesome" (187). He remembers the days of the Cultural Revolution when he was a soldier. "A nineteen-year-old girl, who had civilian militia training", shot five soldiers during an armed battle. "The company commander was angry and gave orders to take her alive. Afterwards, when she ran out of ammunition, she was caught, stripped, and a soldier fired a magazine of bullets from his submachine gun into her vagina" (187). Such awful acts of savagery brutality are accepted as commonplace in the retelling of the Cultural Revolution in which women Red Guards are sometimes depicted as a trope for disorder and licentiousness. All the gratuitous violence and sexual promiscuity highlighted in *Soul Mountain* are similarly played out on women's bodies. The novel contains lurid and sensational details of oppression of women perpetrated by patriarchy. According to ecofeminist critic Andree Collard this patriarchal oppression of women could be liked to nature in general and animals in particular:

> In Patriarchy, nature animals and women are objectified, hunted, invaded, colonized, owned, consumed and forced to yield and produce. This violation of the integrity of wild, spontaneous being is rape. It is motivated by a fear and rejection of life and it allows the oppressor the illusion of control, of power, of being alive. As with women as a class, nature and animals have been kept in a

state of inferiority and powerlessness in order to enable men as a class to believe and act upon their 'natural' superiority/dominance. (Collard 1)

Again in Chapter 11 in *Soul Mountain* women are depicted as suffering creatures staggering over the path of death, who says that "she really wants to die, it would be so easy. She would stand on the high embankment; close her eyes and just jump" (*Soul Mountain* 65) to eliminate her suffering. She naively thinks that her death will be beautiful, that people will be sorry for her, pity her, and weep for her.

In Chapter 13 in *Soul Mountain* the narrator tells a story of a *zhuhuapo* (76), a term "for beautiful young woman" (76). From Gao's narrative we know that she "was sitting sedately on the stone bench of a pavilion on a mountain road so that the road ran between the two stone benches" (*Soul Mountain* 76-77). When going through, one had to pass her. She is a young woman with skilled hands that were able to cure complicated illnesses from infantile convulsions to paralysis. She is seductive and beautiful. Two wicked brothers raped and then killed her. Only a black shrike with white toes remained there in her place between the two stone benches. The transformation of the feminine spirit into "black shrike with while toes" is suggestive of the ecofeminist view point that "women have a biological affinity with nature" (Mellor 56).

The female voice in *Soul Mountain* plays the role of listener, pleading again and again for him to "tell me a story" (116), and he is indeed a good storyteller. A major part of his seduction strategy involves telling tales of lust and horror. In Chapter 17 the narrator captivates her with the story of a shaman woman who is terrifyingly vengeful because as a girl-bride she was raped by her father-in-law and then "later on, she tried cuddling her young husband but the boy only bit her nipples" (107). At the end, the

listener succumbs to the combination of the ghastly and erotic and pleads, "Come over, I'm frightened"(107). The feminine voice in the polyphony of *Soul Mountain* is thus usually a frightened and beleaguered one. "I'm terrified", she often says. And when she is asked: "what are you terrified of, she answers "I'm not terrified of anything but I want to say that I'm terrified" (115). The female characters here are extensions of the protagonist's carnal desire. In one of his encounters with women in Chapter 46, the protagonist says:

> She wraps herself around you, kisses you wildly, wet kisses on your face, your body, and rolls around with you. She has won; you can't resist and again sink into carnal lust, unable to free yourself (*Soul Mountain* 274).

When we come to *One Man's Bible* it appears as a companion novel to *Soul Mountain*. The links between the two are at the same time thematic and structural. Both texts talk about the same scepticism towards literature and representation. Both the texts are quasi-autobiographical depicting an individual ill-fitted to the highly politicized life that has led to the subjugation of the individual and the latter's attempt to win freedom through the process of enduring loneliness. Both are creations specifically designed to realize the author's intense autobiographical impulse by telling truthfully and fully the story of the author's own multidimensional self. At one level, these novels incorporate elements of Gao Xingjian's creative agility in moving across genres and using different media. In another level, they incorporate Gao Xingjian's genius in creating a narrative technique that allows for a very rich portrayal of the self, i.e. his own self, that he is intent on exploring. And, at yet another level, and of equal importance, these two novels incorporate the bold pronouncements of Gao Xingjian's intellectual self that reveals his keen insights on

human psychology and behavior and, above all, his firm belief and uncompromising stance regarding the integrity, freedom, autonomy and independence of the individual.

> To be self-activated and to exist for yourself is a freedom that is not external to you. It is within you, and it depends on whether you are aware of it and consciously exercise it. Freedom is a look in the eyes, a tone of voice, and it can be actualized by you, so you are not destitute. Affirming this freedom is like affirming the existence of a thing, like a tree, a plant, or a dewdrop, and for you to exercise this freedom in life is just as authentic and irrefutable. (*One Man's Bible* 302)

One Man's Bible is made up of sixty-one chapters, each containing either an episode of events, or a stream of thoughts as reflection on certain issues sometimes directly and at other times indirectly related to the events narrated in preceding chapters. The recounting of many single events in the narrator's past experience is often completed within individual chapters. Each of these chapters is a fragment of "his" experience in the Cultural Revolution. Although these events do not follow a strictly chronological order, nor is the exposition composed in such a way that an intrigue is constructed or that a dramatic climax is reached, there is an intrinsic continuity among these events, namely, a single individual's life within a period in history. The relationship between the episodes is strong. One event does lead to another, although they can also be read as free-standing episodes. Indeed this induces the readers to trace a chronological and logical order for the events. In this way, it is tighter and more focused than the structure of *Soul Mountain*.

The major narratological difference between these two novels is that the "I," "you," and "she" in *Soul Mountain* is reduced to "you," "he," and "she" in *One Man's Bible*.

Liu Zaifu argues that, as the novel deals with the Cultural Revolution, the "I" is inevitably strangled by merciless reality. In other words, in the frenzy of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the individual "I" cannot survive. Unlike the "I" in *Soul Mountain*, who can embark upon self-imposed exile, the "I" in the latter novel must be eliminated. Such a narrative technique clearly sets Gao apart from the authors of the many Cultural Revolution memoirs that have flooded the market in recent years.

Although "he" is the subject in memory while "you" are supposed to be living the present life, "his" life is depicted with much more concrete and colourful details than that of "yours".

One Man's Bible can be read as the spiritual autobiography of a wandering Chinese incessantly trying to flee from political persecution and from the pressure of a collectivist morality. It is an attempt of self-analysis "to uncover both traumas and spontaneous sexual activity" (Tam 306), and to make associations of the earliest feelings with present attitudes. In the novel, protest against political persecution in China is welded with confessions of the protagonist's split selves.

> You will not go back. Not even in future? Someone asks. No, it is not your country. It exists in your memory only, as a hidden spring gushing forth feelings that are hard to articulate. This China is possessed by you alone, and has nothing to do with the country. (*One Man's Bible* 443)

Gao's work is not an attempt to condemn the large-scale persecution so prevalent in modern Chinese history, but a sincere and sometimes brutally honest examination of the human psyche in exile, in form of placelessness. The story begins with an

encounter between "you" and a Jewish woman Margarethe in Hong Kong on the eve of the crown colony's turnover to the motherland, and cuts back and forth between the current "you" and the past "he." "You" is Gao's alter ego, one who has been living in the West and appears in Hong Kong for performances of his plays. His meeting the Jewish woman, an old acquaintance from China, calls to mind historical similarities between the Jews' fate in World War II and the fate of the Chinese during the disastrous ten-year Cultural Revolution often “referred to in China as its own holocaust” (Zaifu 119). But the two individuals deal with the past very differently; "she" needs to remember and seems to enjoy the masochistic pleasure of shouldering the sufferings and sorrows of all Jews, while "you" wants to for-get everything, which inevitably leads to the creation of "he," who travels back to the past. "He" recalls how he was once a fervent participant, until finally realizing that he was nothing but a pawn in a political struggle among higher powers. "He" tries to flee from the cruelties perpetrated on environment and man for no obvious reason other than by mass madness. While "he" relives the past, "you" is also forced to reflect upon his former self and the process of writing.

> It is he that you must allow to emerge from your memory, that child, that youth, that immature man, that daydreaming survivor, that arrogant fellow, and that scoundrel who gradually became crafty. That you of the past had a conscience, and, while vestiges of kindness remained, he was wicked, and you must not make excuses or repent for him. As you observe and listen to him, you naturally feel an irrepressible sorrow, but you must not let this emotion lead to vagueness or a drifting off into sentimentalism. While observing and examining him unmasked, you must turn him into fiction, a character that is

> unrelated to you and has qualities yet to be discovered. It is then that writing is interesting and creative, and can stimulate curiosity and the desire to explore. (*One Man's Bible* 182-83)

After a short reminiscence in episodic detail of the narrator's childhood before the establishment of Communist China in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 immediately cuts into the scenario of "you" with Margarethe, a German woman of Jewish origin, in what is supposed to be the narrative present. This present narrative is set in Hong Kong, at the time a British colony but soon to revert to China, in other words, shortly before the territory's handover on 1 July 1997. "You" and Margarethe met once in Beijing shortly after the Cultural Revolution and the present meeting in Hong Kong is their first encounter after that early one and is a pure coincidence. Margarethe's obsession with his past life in China grows, she urges him to tell her more, including aspects other than his relationships with women. At first he refuses to disturb the repressed memory. It appears to be a psychological need to leave behind that part of his life, a time that was unbearable to live through and now undesirable to relive, even in reminiscence. However her insistence gradually becomes an agent to break his psychological barrier. He starts to retrieve his memory and confront it. Her insistence, which at first seems to be an irritation, gradually turns into a much more positive force. After they have parted and she has returned to Germany, he goes on to recount his life during the Cultural Revolution, and the events he recalls make up the main line of the novels narrative.

> She has aroused your past, and it stands there before your eyes. She is already fused with your memories, and you can't help wanting to retrieve both your fresh and almost forgotten memories. (*One Man's Bible* 139)

One Man's Bible represents the emotional trauma and terror of the Cultural Revolution, where young women instinctively seeks the warmth and protection of young men. It tells of the protagonist's fear, sense of utter powerlessness and his cowardice that led to his sexual involvement with numerous women and writing in secret to remind himself that he was still alive, while living in what he describes as hell. However, his equating of sex to an affirmation of life, a lust for life, in situations of extreme terror is best portrayed in his depictions of women.

It is these episodes with the women that constitute the more dramatic writing in the novel. In Chapter 3 refers to the girl at the university who confesses to the Party about some derogatory comments "he" makes to her on a revolutionary novel. This act of betrayal has made a drastic impact on him and he completely lost his faith in women. His second lover Lin, in Chapter 9, a colleague a few years older than him and with whom he has his first sexual experience. Lin is from a family of revolutionary background and is already married to a man from a family with an equally favourable background. The relationship is eventually broken up under constant pressure as they have to keep things private, which is very difficult in a society of surveillance. But before they are separated Lin warns him of a report about his father once possessing a gun.

Another significant relationship which the "he" narrator recollects in Chapter 30 in *One Man's Bible* is his marriage with a girl whom he meets during a trip to the provincial areas. The two are stuck in the same room in an inn since there is no other room. A skirmish among different cliques of Red Guard breaks out in the town on the night of their stay. Both of them are afraid that they might be swept up in bloodshed. When they hear sounds of Red Guards coming to their door, their shared fear and feelings of helplessness lead to an overwhelming mutual sympathy. That night they

express their mutual sympathy by clinging to one another in bed and ended up in carnal lust. This woman, Qian, later becomes his wife in the remote mountain village to which he had fled to escape being publicly denounced and arrested for his activities as a leading member of a rebel group of the Red Guards at his Beijing workplace. The marriage effectively ends the following day, after she reads what he has been writing. In a violent attack of hysteria, Qian accuses him of being a counter-revolutionary:

> Qian picked up the chamber pot in the corner and hurled it at him. He raised his arms to fend it off, but he was soaked. The acrid smell was worse than the humiliation. He gritted his teeth and brushed off the urine streaming down his face. His lips were salty and bitter, and he spat out with unconcealed derision, "You've gone crazy! (*One Man's Bible* 333)

In Chapter 30 After this violent episode with Qian and her threat to expose him as a counter-revolutionary, he resolutely suppresses his sexual urges. In his loneliness and state of repressed sexuality, he writes in secret to gratify his lust for life.

> He wrote because he needed to. It was the only way he could enjoy total freedom; he didn't write for a livelihood. He also did not use his pen as a weapon to fight for some cause, and he didn't have a sense of mission. He wrote for his own pleasure, talking to himself so that he could listen to and observe himself. It was a means of experiencing those feelings of the little life that remained for him. (*One Man's Bible* 419)

Here, as in *Soul Mountain*, the themes of violence, decay and degradation, cruelty in human nature and Nature occupies an important role. The novels share the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affecting by it.

Ecofeminism with its inter phase between natural sciences and culture linked environmentalism with feminist theory through its emphasis on parallels between the oppression and exploitation of women and that of the natural world. This emphasis on localism relied on various forms of poetics of place and local belonging as a foundation of eco- thought and ethics.

One Man's Bible narrates an encounter of "he" narrator with the school student Xiao Xiao in Chapter 28, soon after the beginning of Cultural Revolution who came to him, offering herself. She had come to him out of fear and a sense of utter powerlessness, but at the time he did not know that she was soon to be sent to the countryside. Many years later, when he bumps into her that he learns she was raped soon after she arrived in the countryside, and that she had been raped many times afterwards.

In Chapter 50 in *One Man's Bible* during the Cultural Revolution the "he" narrator was working as a teacher in the school in the town, where the student Sun Huirong, comes to him one night, clearly offering herself to him; however, afraid of jeopardizing his job, he quickly pushes her out of his room. On graduating, Sun is sent to work as a peasant in a production brigade. Some months later, he learns that Sun was pregnant after having been raped by Hunchback Zhao the party secretary of her work brigade. He reads the testimonies from the court case. She had either been raped by Hunchback Zhao, as she claimed, or had slept with him in order to gain enough "merit points to get a work permit to" (384), as Hunchback claimed.

The descriptions of most of the women in the novel are brief. Characterization is minimal. They are little more than the objects with which "he" or "you" expresses sexual potency and the only exception is Margarethe. Of Jewish origin, Margarethe has grown up in Italy, lived in various places in Europe before she meets "you" in

Hong Kong. She speaks a number of European languages and holds a job in Germany at present. She is obsessed with his history as he has personally lived through the Cultural Revolution; therefore the Chinese collective memory of the Cultural Revolution is also his personal memory. Contrary to Margarethe, Sylvie the French woman, who is another close friend of the narrator whom he meets in Sydney, is not interested in his history at all which she finds boring and tedious.

In *One Man's Bible*, the "he" chapters and "you" chapters alternate, weaving together the memories of the same character and his situation at present, and dispensing with the subject I. This was not just due to the special structure of the novel but also because when it came to writing about the red terror of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution in China, the individual's self had been annihilated by the totalitarian dictatorship. In this dialogue between "you" who had luckily survived and "he" of the past, time sequence is not a concern, and fragmented memories could come and go in an instant, giving great flexibility to the writing. The pronoun based structure made it possible to avoid lengthy narration of the protagonist's complicated experiences in China's grotesque social situation, and immediately allowed "you" of the present and "he" of the past to engage in dialogue.

> Enough! he says.
>
> What do you mean? you ask.
>
> He says enough, put an end to him!
>
> Who are you talking about? Who is to put an end to whom?
>
> Him, that character you're writing about, put an end to him.
>
> You say you are not the author.
>
> Then who is? (*One Man's Bible* 440)

Soul Mountain and *One Man's Bible* clearly and consistently articulate Gao Xingjian's self-obsession with individualism. In his 2000 Nobel Lecture he tells that it was during those bleak years of the Cultural Revolution that he realised the importance of literature to humanity: when he was denied self-expression, he was able to achieve self-affirmation through writing. The intensity of Gao Xingjian's autobiographical urge reflected in these two novels about himself stem from psychological trauma on a number of fronts. In order to obtain closure he was driven to write about himself. His mother had volunteered to work on a farm and had died from drowning, his father's health deteriorated during his time in a labour camp and he died from lung cancer not long after being exonerated, and Gao himself had confronted death from a wrong diagnosis of the same disease in 1983. He had witnessed cruel killings, physical and psychological suffering, as well the distortion of human behaviour induced by the fear of the individual against the collective. Above all, he was acutely aware that the perceptions of his self being eroded by Mao Zedong's rigorous measure to annihilate the self of the individual.

There are numerous instances in *One Man's Bible* as well as *Soul Mountain* which are redolent with Gao Xingjian's own life. In Chapter 44 the "he" narrator gives a description of his mother's death by drowning in the river during her stay in the labour farm where she was sent to be re-educated which bears close resemblance to the life of Gao Xingjian.

> At dawn, after working a night shift, she went to the riverside to wash herself and fell into the river; it was not clear whether she was overfatigued or weak from malnutrition. At daybreak some peasants herding ducks to the river discovered her corpse in the water. (*One Man's Bible* 342)

Gao had an unhappy married life which bear resemblance with the “he” narrator in *One Man’s Bible*. Gao’s wife at the time of Cultural Revolution had reported to the authorities on the "unsavory" (Lin 12) content of his writings and this episode has been portrayed in Chapter 43 in *One Man’s Bible*, “You’re a counter revolutionary, a stinking counter revolutionary” (*One Man’s Bible* 332).

Again during the Cultural Revolution, when nonconformity was a serious crime, Gao was sent to a re-education camp where he felt it necessary to destroy a suitcase full of hundreds of manuscripts which he had written without any hope of ever getting published. This incident has been recreated in Chapter 9 when the authorities picked up the friend of the “he” narrator for interrogation; he destroyed his manuscripts which include a novel, and other writings:

> He locked the room, lifted a corner of the curtain to see that all the lights were out in the neighbouring homes of the courtyard, closed the curtain and carefully checked that there were no gaps. He then opened the coal stove, put a bucket next to it, and began to burn his manuscripts: a pile of diaries, and notes in several dozens of books of all sizes that he had kept since his university days. (*One Man’s Bible* 68)

Gao had been wrongly diagnosed with lung cancer, the disease that had killed his father. Although a follow-up X-ray confirmed that a wrong diagnosis had been made, he had confronted death for more than two weeks while waiting for the results of the second test. He resigned himself to imminent death until a later X-ray revealed that a wrong diagnosis had been made. In Chapter 2 in *Soul Mountain* there is a reference to this incident:

> The doctor who gave the wrong diagnosis saved my life. He was quite frank and got me to compare the two chest X-rays taken on two separate occasions –

> a blurry shadow on the left lobe of the lung had spread along the second rib to the wall of the windpipe. It wouldn't help even to have the whole of the left lobe removed. The outcome was obvious. (*Soul Mountain* 12)

In the short story titled "Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather" the narrator, buys a fishing rod and brings it home without any idea of what to do with it. Its only function is as a homage to his dead grandfather who loved fishing and hunting. But he was worried that his young son might break it instead he decided to take it back to his hometown. *Buying a Fishing Rod* also refers to some tales of human encounter with wild animals. The grandfather often used to tell stories of the hungry wolves intruding the human habitat for food.

> Crazed with hunger after starving all winter, the wolves came into the villages and stole piglets, attacked cows, and even ate young cowherd girls. Once they ate a girl and left only her pigtails. (*Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather* 66-67)

Representation of external reality is entirely eschewed; instead the story is based on what goes on in the protagonist's mind. In this case, his dream articulates the way he feels about his life in the imagined past and his present way of living. This is immediately followed by an episode in which he asks his way around; because he no longer recognises the place he grew up in. As his surroundings become increasingly unfamiliar, the narration gradually turns into expressionistic images, arranged in the form of stream of consciousness, of the reminiscence he has of his grandfather and his childhood. The grandfather is consistently associated with discontinuous images of the ancient city of Loulan, of Persian and Han cultures, and ruins of palaces and cities; in this way a connection between the grandfather and lost cultures and childhood memories is established. Then there is a sudden intrusion of modern images

such as Maradona, the Argentine football team and the World Cup. At this point the story reveals that the trip the "I" narrator undertakes to his hometown is in his dream. There are recollections of his childhood memories when he fondly remembers his grandfather possessed a German shotgun with which he used to hunt rabbit but he could not keep it as during the Cultural Revolution it was considered a "lethal weapon" and "confiscated it" (*Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather* 67).

Later human civilization is shown to be a factor for changing the ecological landscape of a place.

> I remember that every day on my way to school I had to pass a stone bridge, and the lake was right next to it. Even when there was no wind, there were waves lapping all the time, and I used to think they were the backs of swimming fish. I never imagined that the fish would all die, that the sparkling lake would turn into a foul pond, that the foul pond would then be filled in, and that I would not be able to find the way to my old home. (*Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather* 70)

The short story "The Temple" is about a young Chinese couple on their honeymoon and their visit to the 'Temple of Perfect benevolence' on a mountain village. The second story "The Accident" is a retelling of a bus accident in a major Chinese city, and has a vivid sense of place and time. This is followed by the story "In the Park" which is a dreamy conversation between a man and a woman meeting for the first time in years. Their history is vaguely implied as they observe an aborted assignation amongst the trees and bushes. The story "Cramp" is a lonely tale of a swimmer nearly drowning at sea, while the tale in "In an Instant" contains numerous paragraphs, each a snapshot of street scenes or of the subjective imagination of a person's mind and is

told as if in a dream state. Here Xingjian is both obscure and compelling. The surreal style may be hard to read, but he captures well the state of semi-consciousness that comes with a dozy sleep or a driving awareness of brief moments in time.

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Chapter V

The Spatial Environment: Spaces, Landscapes and Non-Places

This chapter examines how spatial imagination registers, judges, and seeks to affect the environmental process whereby the significance of "environmentality" (Buell 3) is defined by the self-conscious sense of an inevitable but uncertain and shifting relation among being, landscape and physical context. "Environmental criticism arises within and against the history of human modification of planetary space" (Buell 62). The chapter also seeks to bring out a better understanding of the intertwining aspects of landscape, memory and spaces in ethnographic representation and its significance in Gao Xingjian's fiction.

Place entails spatial location, entails a spatial container of some sort. But space as against place connotes geometrical or topographical abstraction, whereas place is "space to which meaning has been ascribed" (Carter xii). Places are "centers of felt value" (Tuan 4), "discrete if 'elastic' areas in which settings for the constitution of social relations are located and with which people can identify" (Agnew 263). Each place is also "inseparable from the concrete region in which it is found" (Casey 31) and defined by physical markers as well as social consensus. Landscapes and places "serve as pegs on which people hang memories, construct meanings from events, and establish ritual and religious arenas of action" (Stewart 3).

The sense of place and embeddedness within local, mythical, and ritual landscapes cannot be ignored. The fiction of Gao Xingjian explores the "environmental landscape" (Stewart 3) 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. *Soul Mountain* contains numerous references to Chinese as well as Western myths and symbols. The novel makes a strong connection between the places visited on the journey and the entrenched Chinese cultural traditions behind the landscape. Land is always read like a text with cultural and literary meaning embedded by the narrator in his search for cultural memories.

In *Soul Mountain* place is presented here as a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world. Places are characterized by their physical and human properties. Their characteristics include climate, landforms, soils, hydrology, vegetation, and animal life. Their human characteristics include language, religion, political systems, economic systems, population distribution, and quality of life. After arrival in the small mountain town there is a detailed description of the folk customs of the Qiang people:

> When friends meet they don't just give a nod or a handshake in the meaningless ritual of city people, but rather they shout the person's name or thump him on the back. Hugging is also common, but not for women. By the cement trough where the buses are washed, two young women hold hands as they chat. The women here have lovely voices and you can't help taking a second look. The one with her back to you is wearing an indigo-print headscarf. (*Soul Mountain* 1-2)

Gao Xingjian's concept of physical environment exhibits various spatial patterns on different scales--- biological organisms organized into populations and communities

across landscapes. Gao's *Soul Mountain* presents a landscape which is as diverse and complex, as it is beautiful and inspirational. The insistence on spatial heterogeneity is the most salient feature that characterizes Gao's idea of landscaping. Like other biological organisms, humans live and act on landscapes, and thus have influenced, and been influenced by landscapes:

> This creature known as man is of course highly intelligent, he's capable of manufacturing almost anything from rumours to test-tube babies and yet he destroys two to three species every day. This is the absurdity of man. (*Soul Mountain* 49)

The idea of landscape gives us a meaningful context into which we can set notions of place and community. Landscape refers to the perceived settings that frame people's sense of place and community. The term landscape signifies the specific arrangement of pattern of "things on the land: trees, meadows, buildings, streets, factories, open spaces and so forth" (Atkinson 49). Landscape refers to the look or the style of the land: that is, it refers not just to house types, trees, tree and meadow arrangements or the order or make up of a place. Landscape represents a way of seeing; that is, while landscape signifies the look of the land, it also signifies a specific way of looking at the land. Landscape developed as a way of seeing, a composition and structuring of the world so that it may be appropriated by a detached, individual spectator to whom an illusion of order and control is offered through the composition of space according to the certainties of geometry. The visual landscape of *Soul Mountain* is shaped by the exotic nature in a state of uncontaminated pristine glory- mountainous terrain, rivers and wilderness. Chapter 4 in *Soul Mountain* presents a wonderful vignette of place, landscape and community:

> The forest is quiet but there is always a stream somewhere not too far away, for I can hear the sound of trickling water. It's been ages since I have had such freedom, I don't have to think about anything and I let my thoughts ramble. There's no one on the highway, and no vehicles are in sight. As far as the eye can see it is a luxuriant green. It is the middle of spring. (*Soul Mountain* 23)

Place also includes the mental maps and images that define places subjectively. People attach special and often individual meanings to places, such as the place where they spent their childhood or the place they associate with some special event. Different people from different cultures may perceive and interpret the same area of the Earth's surface in different ways. We see and make landscapes as a result of our shared system of beliefs and ideologies. Landscape in *Soul Mountain* can be seen as a cultural construct in which our sense of place and memories inhere. In this way landscape is a cultural construct, a mirror of our memories and myths encoded with meanings which can be read and interpreted. Simon Schama in *Landscape and Memory* contends that landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.

The idea of landscape in Gao's fiction gives us a meaningful context into which we can set notions of place and community. Landscape provides a contextual horizon of perceptions, providing both a foreground and a background in which people feel themselves to be living in their world. In chapter 54 of *Soul Mountain the* "you" visits a place whose landscape is reproduced through memory:

> You visit these old places but find nothing. The rubble heap in front of the small two-storey building is not there, nor is the heavy black door with the metal ring-latch, nor even the quiet lane in front of the house, and certainly not

> the courtyard compound with the carved screen. Probably that place has already been turned into a bitumen road heavy with traffic… (*Soul Mountain* 326)

In Chapter 54 "you" introspects that even living in the urban metropolis, there was not a place, a corner, or a particular room where he could identify himself. His nostalgia for places disturbs him frequently in his imagination and dreams:

> You are always searching for your childhood and it's becoming an obsession. You want to visit each of the places you stayed during your childhood, the houses, courtyards, streets and lanes of your memory. (*Soul Mountain* 325)

Landscapes are diverse, complex, beautiful, and inspirational. Spatial heterogeneity is the most salient feature that characterizes all landscapes. While the physical environment exhibits various spatial patterns on different scales, biological organisms are organized into populations and communities across landscapes. Like other biological organisms, humans live and act on landscapes, and thus have influenced, and been influenced by, landscapes. Unlike other biological organisms, however, humans represent an unparalleled force that has profoundly altered the structure and function of landscapes and even the entire biosphere. A number of worldwide environmental problems, such as land degradation, biodiversity loss, and global climate change, clearly attest to this destructive power of anthropogenic activities.

The chief ranger during his meeting with the "I" on the shores of Cohai in Chapter 18 describes the degraded ecology of the landscape:

> Twenty years ago the thick black forests came to the shores of the lake and people often encountered tigers. Now these bald hills have been stripped bare and there is a shortage of firewood for cooking, not to mention heating.

> Especially during the past ten years, spring and winter have become intensely cold. Frost comes early and in spring there are severe droughts. (*Soul Mountain* 108)

In Chinese aesthetics the viewer is not separated from the territory he surveys. The perceiver is as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on. Human identity is linked with all the elements in the surrounding landscape-the mountains, canyons, cliffs, and the plants, clouds and sky. In the Daoist tradition, the artist or poet must go through meditative practices that consist fundamentally of two things: removing the delusion of a separate self and the desires it produces, and concentrating upon the subject until there is a direct apprehension of the image. The insistence on spatial heterogeneity is the most salient feature that characterizes Gao's idea of landscaping. Like other biological organisms, humans live and act on landscapes, and thus have influenced, and been influenced by landscapes. In Chapter 18 promotes a close relationship between the self and the landscape:

> On the lonely lake, even the aquatic birds have gone. The dazzling surface of the water imperceptibly grows hazy, twilight emanates from the reeds and the cold rises from underfoot. I am chilled all over, there are no cicadas chirping, no frogs croaking. Can this possibly be the primitive loneliness devoid of all meaning that I seek? (*Soul Mountain* 112)

In Chapter 28 of *Soul Mountain*, there is a description of landscape largely untouched by human activity. The landscape is presented through the prism of a traditional aesthetic that values the integration of landscape and "humanscape" (Moran 211). Chapter 28 ends by a riverside village where the sounds, sights, and smells of nature meld with the voices of children, the gleam of tiled roof tops, and the fragrance of rice straw.

Landscape also is understood to be a built morphology- the shape and structure of a place mainly "built" or "natural" constituted simultaneously by subjective perception and by institutionalised social arrangements. It also refers to a form of representations both as an art and as a complex system of meanings. The key issue in landscape study is how these different meanings or senses of the term relate to each other and comprise something of a social totality. In Chapter 16 in *One Man's Bible* describes a particular urban locale of Hong Kong in detail:

> High buildings soar up on both sides of the road, and for a while you can't get your bearings. You follow the road, but, oddly, there aren't many pedestrians, yet Central is usually thronging with crowds and very noisy. Also, there is not the usual traffic congestion, there aren't many cars, and the traffic is moving briskly. Afterward, you find that the shops are all shut, although the windows still have their displays on show. The tall buildings block out most of the sunlight, so it is only the middle of the road that is bright. You can't help feeling that you are daydreaming. (*One Man's Bible* 133)

The place to begin an analysis of the interrelationship of landscape as form, meaning and representation is with the understanding that any morphology, any patterns, arrangements and looks, any representational act, does not just arise spontaneously in place. At the most abstract level, all these are the result and reflection of the cultural imperatives of those who make and represent the landscape. A clearer analysis of the practices that make landscape, and the varying meanings that are attached to it, can be had by understanding that the landscape actively incorporates the social relations that go into its making. The landscape in all its senses is both an outcome and the medium of social relations, both the result of and an input to specific relations of production

and reproduction. Landscape in David Harvey's words, "a geographically ordered, complex, composite commodity" (233) that is fixed in space and thus quite unlike many other commodities that circulate more freely.

Place has a physical form, i.e. landscape. Landscape is often understood as a panoramic view, or a scenery. It is something perceived by seeing. Landscape is always a kind of "sensescape" (Casey 24). Landscape can undergo significant changes but the place stays constant. Casey points out the fact that unlike places landscapes are seldom named. What makes the experience of place different from that of landscape is the concept of 'time' and the act of memory associated with the former. Landscape can undergo significant changes but the place stays constant. He compares that to the fact that one does not name one's body even though one has a name for oneself. Casey ends up in a conclusion that body and landscape are the boundaries of place: body is the inner boundary and landscape is the outer one. "Place is what takes place between body and landscape" (Casey 29). Moreover it is ornamented with the traces of human culture, "landscape teaches history, and only knowledge of history permits one to fully appreciate a landscape" (Moran 211). In Chapter 7 in *Soul Mountain* there is the meeting in the pavilion by the river:

> You say there are town records dating back to the *Historical Records* and that in early times this crossing used to be called Yu Crossing. Legend has it that when Yu the Great quelled the floods, he crossed here. On the river-bank there used to be a round carved stone with seventeen barely discernible tadpole-like ancient ideograms on it. However, as no-one was able to decipher them, when stone was needed to build the bridge they dynamited it. Then they couldn't raise enough money and the bridge wasn't ever built. (*Soul Mountain* 42)

Landscape 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*. In Chapter 9 there is a story related to the death of a girl who killed herself by drowning in the river. Her body was found thirty *li* downstream at Xiashapu and later on "Yu Crossing" (*Soul Mountain* 42) was curved into the rock and painted in red and the tourists all climb to it to have their photos taken. Thus a physical space endowed with meaning becomes landscape a contextual horizon of perceptions, providing both a foreground and a background in which people feel themselves to be living in their world:

> 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. (*Soul Mountain* 54)

Almost every place depicted in *Soul Mountain* has its own unique pattern or weave of elements. Place is a "meaning constructed by experience" (Tuan 152) whether it is home, dwelling, milieu, territory, regions, states, cities, neighbourhoods, rural areas, wilderness, uninhabited areas and of course, space. Gao Xingjian's concept of physical environment exhibits various spatial patterns on different scales--- biological organisms organized into populations and communities across landscapes. Gao's *Soul Mountain* presents a landscape which is as diverse and complex, as it is beautiful and

inspirational. The insistence on spatial heterogeneity is the most salient feature that characterizes Gao's idea of landscaping. Like other biological organisms, humans live and act on landscapes, and thus have influenced, and been influenced by landscapes.

Landscape in *Soul Mountain* can be seen as a cultural construct in which our sense of place and memories inhere. In this way landscape is a cultural construct, a mirror of our memories and myths encoded with meanings which can be read and interpreted. *Soul Mountain* stresses on the notion that the folktales, oral histories, ethnography, ballads and ordinary events of daily life all invoked in the spatial positioning of a place. The novel presents a lively vision of the customs, folk songs and traditions preserved by national minorities, most of which have been lost among the Han people. These songs provide valuable insights into understanding the "ethnoecology" (McLaren 4) of the region. Ethnoecology has been defined as a "traditional set of environmental perceptions- cultural model of the environment and its relation to people and society" (Kottak 26).

Root-seeking movement that began in the early 1980s, has been the most pervasive and influential literary trend in post-Mao Chinese literature. The followers of this school set out "to discover the nation's cultural heritage buried deep in the ancient lands and to examine its implications for the Chinese literary imagination" (Ying 159). Soon after, many writers, particularly those who had spent years during the Cultural Revolution in rural China as educated youths, eagerly joined the movement. Several writers, including, Han Shaogong, explores new methods in fiction writing published his "root-seeking proclamations." Han's article, "Wenxue de gen" (Roots of Literature), gave the movement its name, was the most influential and widely regarded as the unofficial "manifesto" of root-seeking literature. Han urged his fellow writers to "transcend reality" and to explore "the mysteries that define the

development of a nation and of human existence." In the view of Han, there was a gap between the ancient past and the present, and in the twentieth century, China had experienced a period of amnesia, in which the nation's rich past was erased from the collective memory of the Chinese. Following this view Gao opines that it is the responsibility of a writer, to help the nation reconnect to its past, to sort out, the cultural roots. Only by doing so, he argued, would Chinese literature be able to "dialogue" with the rest of the world. The goal of the root-seekers, therefore, was to search for authentic Chinese national roots in order to claim a spot in the global literary scene. Gao Xingjian sets out to discover the nation's past buried deep in the ancient lands and to examine its implications for the literary imagination. Han Shaogong who has initiated the root seeking school opines that there was a gap between the ancient past and the present, and in the twentieth century. According to Shaogong China had experienced a period of amnesia, in which the nation's rich past was erased from the collective memory of the Chinese. The responsibility of a writer was to help the nation reconnect to its past, "to sort out, the cultural roots" (Ying 159).

The traditional folk customs and performing arts of the Yangtze Delta is no longer in active transmission as part of a living culture in the delta today. The narrator gives a detailed introduction about the Caohai region and its inhabitants the Yi minority community. In Chapter 20 the narrator during his visit to the Guizhou Province witnesses the folk tradition of Yi community. Yi people are mostly located in the delta regions of the Jinsha River and its tributary the Yagong River. Their earliest ancestors are the Qiang people. "The Yi women have dark skin, a high nose bridge and long eyes and they are very beautiful" (117). Young people who fall in love can

only meet secretly in the mountain. Yi love songs all seem to be "sad and tearful outpourings":

A pigeon and a chicken search for food together,

The chicken has an owner but the pigeon does not,

If the owner of the chicken takes the chicken home,

The pigeon is left all alone… (*Soul Mountain* 118)

The narrator also meets a *bimo*, an Yi prist who is singing a funeral dirge written in the ancient Yi language. The sustained rising and falling crescendo of the high pitched singing of the *bimo* rises from the throat, hits the back palate, passes through the nasal cavity causing it to resonate, then charges out through his forehead. During the funeral procession that he witnesses: "people beating gongs and drums, blowing the *suona*, carrying flags on poles, paper people, and paper horses. The women are riding on horses and the men have rifles which they fire along the way" (120).

These practices are not unique to the Yi people in the mountain stockades of the highlands, vestiges of these rituals are still to be found throughout the vast delta of the Yangtze but, generally, they have become "vulgarized" (120) and have lost the original meaning thereby threatened with extinction by the effects of uniformisation. Recent research on the Yi people has advanced evidence that Fuxi, the first ancestor of the Han people, had the tiger totem of the Yi people. Cloth hats embroidered with red tiger totems is common in the mountain regions of southern Jiangxi province and southern Anhui province. Even the clever and intelligent Jiangsu and Zhejiang people, who originate from the ancient Wu and Yue kingdoms in the lower reaches of the Yangtze, retain a fear of tigresses that makes the "I" narrator speculate that a connecting link relates these ethnic tribes from different region.

Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* says that landscapes are not produced "in order to be read and grasped, but rather to be lived by people with bodies and lives in their own particular ...context" (143). In *Soul Mountain* there is an interpretation of local folk literature, myths and legends and would seek to examine community directly by considering how their scholarship might have an impact on the people who actually live there. *Soul Mountain* presents a collection of folk songs and customs in circulation amongst the commoner classes of the lower Yangzi Valley which have been terminated entirely during the Cultural Revolution. The narrator in the course of his journey found elderly performers who could sing relatively long narrative type mountain songs. The narrator in some of the chapters toured villages and collect material from villagers who remembered narrative songs from the past.

Soul Mountain explores the environmental landscape that connects human and spirit dwelling places, including forests, mountains, rivers and streams; and is important in understanding the meanings of landscape. In chapter 39 the narrator arrives in Central China which comprises of Guizhou, Sichuan, Hubei and Hunan provinces. Furthermore there is a vivid description of the dragon boat festival at the Shidong Miao stockade in the capital of the Miao Autonomous district. The captain at the prow of the boat beats the drum and gets the rowers to stand up. A middle aged fellow with a vat of liquor in both hands walks straight into the thigh deep water without rolling up his trouser legs and presents bowls of liquor to the crew. At the prow, a large carved wooden dragon rears its head. At dusk young women in groups of five or six come to the river bank and begin calling their lovers. Melodious singing rapidly fills the vast night. Young women are everywhere, still with their parasols up and also holding a handkerchief or a fan. In each group, one girl leads the singing and the other girls harmonise.

> The sounds seem to travel from the soles of the feet then shoot up between the eyes and the forehead before they are produced-no wonder they are called "flying songs". It is totally instinctive, uncontrived, unrestrained and unembellished, and certainly devoid of what might be called embarrassment. Each woman exerts herself, body and heart, to draw her young man to her. (*Soul Mountain* 228)

It is during a walk along a road on the shady side of the Qingcheng Mountain in Chapter 47 in *Soul Mountain* that the narrator finds a Daoist priest sitting there and reading a book. The narrator to his amazement finds that the priest found it more peaceful and relaxed living in the cave than in the village. It is at the old stone pagoda on the island in the middle of the Ou River that the narrator encounters a monk with a shaven head wearing a crimson cassock tells him that "the true traveller is without goal, it is the absence of goals which creates the ultimate traveller"(*Soul Mountain* 277).

The monk reveals the reasons for his abandonment of the human world and narrates his experience that when he was sixteen, he ran away from home to join the revolution and fought for a year as a guerilla in the mountains. After graduating he was allocated work as a cadre in the city health bureau although he really wanted to continue to work as a doctor. One day he offended the branch party secretary of the hospital and was expelled from the party, branded a rightist element and sent to work in the fields in the country. During this time he married a village girl and three children in succession were born. However for some reason he wanted to convert to Catholicism and when he heard that a Vatican cardinal had arrived in Guangzhou, he travelled there to ask the cardinal about the faith. For this crime he was expelled from the commune hospital and he had no option but to spend his time studying traditional

medicine on his own and mixing with vagrants in order to eat. One day he came to a sudden realization – the Pope was far away in the West and inaccessible, so he might as well rely on Buddha. From that time "he renounced society and became a monk" (*Soul Mountain* 279).

In Chapter 49 in *Soul Mountain* the "I" meets a Daoist folk singer in an old county town who was hesitant to perform Daoist rituals as "the government doesn't allow the performance of superstitious practices" (287). Instead he sings a mountain love song:

> 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. (*Soul Mountain* 288)

The narrator is interested in getting knowledge about some rituals associated with Daoism and the Daoist singer turns out to be helpful in this regard. It becomes clear that the practices of Daoist rituals were banned during the Cultural Revolution and instead they were sent to the fields.

> Later on during the land reforms when the land was divided up and he could no longer practise as a Daoist priest, the government ordered him to return to his village and he worked in the fields again. I ask him about Yin-Yang and geomancy, the Five Thunder Finger Techniques, the Constellation Dances, physiognomy and massage. He explains each of these with such eloquence that I am positively elated. (*Soul Mountain* 289)

The narrator decides to visit the house of the Daoist singer because he is willing to watch the performance of Daoist rituals. After travelling twenty kilometers in a bus they arrived at a small town. The darkness of night had descended and in the paddy fields all around is the croaking of the frogs. Finally they arrived at a little mountain

village where incense was burning as an offering to the large number of wooden and stone carvings. The narrator assumed that probable these were rescued from the Daoist temple some years ago when the “four olds” (292) were destroyed and temples and monasteries were smashed. During the actual performance of the rituals the old man was wearing a tattered old purple Daoist robe adorned with the insignia of the Yin-Yang fish and the eight Trigrams, and was carrying the command tablet, the sword of office and an ox horn. First he took a bowl of clear liquid and, chanting, flicks the watery liquor into the four corners of the house. His eyes partly close, his mouth slakens and his face takes on a serious look, as if he is communicating with the spirits. Next he made a string of incantations to invoke the spirits of Heaven and Earth.

Environmental problems, such as land degradation, biodiversity loss, and global climate change occupy the trend of their destructive power of anthropogenic activities that accelerates the ecological alterations of landscapes in Chapter 8. Here a botanist discovers a giant metasequoia, a living fern fossil more than forty metres high. The botanist has come to collect specimens of cold arrow bamboo, the food of the giant panda. He says it takes a full sixty years for the cold arrow bamboo to go through the cycle of flowering, seeding, dying and for the seeds to sprout, grow and flower. The large scale destruction of these bamboos is responsible for the loss of habitat of the giant pandas. He is pointing to the fact that the indiscriminate wiping of the species is going to create ecological imbalance which indirectly is leading to the catastrophe of the biosphere. The botanist mentions clear cutting of forests, siltation of rivers, and the environment threat posed by the planned Three Gorges Dam, and offers an

explicit warning: “Don’t commit actions which go against the basic character of nature, don’t commit acts which should not be committed” (*Soul Mountain* 48).

He further says:

> Look at the Min River you came along on your way in here, the forests on both sides have been stripped bare. The Min River has turned into a black muddy river but the Yangtze is much worse yet they are going to block off the river and construct a dam in the Three Gorges! Of course it’s romantic to indulge in wild fantasy but the place lies on a geological fault and has many documented records of landslides throughout its history. Needless to say, blocking off the river and putting up a dam will destroy the entire ecology of the Yangtze River basin but if it leads to earthquakes the population of hundreds of millions living in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze will become fish and turtles! (*Soul Mountain* 48)

In *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Lawrence Buell states that place entails spatial location and “a spatial container of some sort” (Buell 63). But space against place connotes geometrical or topographical abstraction, whereas place is “space to which meaning has been ascribed” (Buell 63). Throughout the novel, *Lingshan* is presented as something which is elusive in nature. By connecting the selves with their own past memories and with each other, the journey leads us to a deep exploration of the rich and complex inner world of human being. There are also numerous historical and legendary stories being told in these chapters, which allow us an extended examination of various forms of human relationships in historical and cultural contexts. It is a journey searching for meaning of life and purpose of living, for truth

and ideals, and for love and companionship which are what Soul Mountain represents symbolically.

The idea of landscape gives us a meaningful context into which we can set notions of place and community. Landscape refers to the perceived settings that frame people's sense of place and community. What makes the experience of place different from that of landscape is the concept of time and the act of memory associated with the former? Landscape can undergo significant changes but the place stays constant. The term landscape signifies the specific arrangement of pattern of "things on the land: trees, meadows, buildings, streets, factories, open spaces and so forth" (Atkinson 49).

In Chapter 1 in *One Man's Bible* the narrator revisits the old city, where he had spent his childhood looking for the "old courtyard compound" at the back of the bank where his father had once worked. He asked people coming in and out if such a courtyard used to be there, but no one could say for sure. Personal artefact and objects may be elusive but etched in the deep recesses of memory, but they are not physically present:

> While still in China, he had revisited the old city, looking for the old courtyard compound at the back of the bank where his father had once worked. He found only a few cheaply built cement residential buildings that would have been constructed a good number of years earlier. He asked people coming in and out if such a courtyard used to be there, but no one could say for sure. He remembered that at the rear gate of the courtyard, below the stone steps, there was a lake. (*One Man's Bible* 2)

Landscape is thus a contextual horizon of perceptions, providing both a foreground and a background in which people feel themselves to be living in their world. While we may tend to think of this in rural terms or as an aspect of 'nature' it may apply

equally to urban and rural sites because they are all equally moulded by human actions or by human perceptions.

While place has often been conceptualized as some kind of definable, bounded space, geographers have been keen to show how the spatial characteristics of place are highly nuanced. In Gao's fiction questions of ecology, identity, gender, ethnicity, class, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, or globalization plays an important role. With him, although places may be located in relation to an oriented space, they are not the creation of the directional system by which they can be located, forming a component of a knowledge system that links the past to the present.

Space is more abstract concept than place. When we speak of space we tend to think of outer-space or the spaces of geometry. Spaces have areas and volumes. Places have space between them. Yi-Fu Tuan has likened space to movement and place to pauses-stops along the way.

> What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value...The ideas 'space' and 'place' require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place. (Tuan 6)

Space in Gao Xingjian's fiction is understood here not merely as place but as place inhabited and animated by a network of social relations and practices. In this sense the focus is not on space as a physical entity with quantitative properties but on topological space that draws attention to its qualitative properties, its constitutive

elements, connections and convergences, continuities and discontinuities, which therefore also incorporates the dimension of time, of change and history. Space is not merely a geographical, physical or topographical terrain, but also includes relationships and emotional states. Everyday life is full of space: where we live, where we work, and how we commute. Social relations determine the nature and extent of space. In order to understand this formulation it is important to look at the difference between space and place. Space is an abstraction, an idea, a concept. Place is lived space.

The sense of exile as a conscious attempt of fleeing presented in *Soul Mountain* is further developed into a quest for meaning in a "life of diasporic existence" (Tam 18) in *One Man's Bible*. In Chapter 2 during his visit to Hong Kong Margarethe, explains:

> You say that China is already very distant from you. She says she understands. You say you have no homeland. She says her father is German but her mother is a Jew, so she has no homeland either. But she can't get away from her memories. (*One Man's Bible* 16)

Home is a concept that appears throughout this novel. As an elementary and ideal form of place it lies right at the heart of human geography. The creation of 'nice place to live' is one of the central ways in which places are produced. The idea of home as an ideal kind of space has particularly negative consequences for the homeless-people without place. In his article "A View of Geography" Tuan described geography as the study of Earth as the home of people. The central concept for Tuan is 'home":

> Home obviously means more than a natural of physical setting. Especially, the term cannot be limited to a built place. A useful point of departure for

> understanding home may be not its material manifestation but rather a concept: home is a unit of space organised mentally and materially to satisfy a people's real and perceived basic biosocial needs and, beyond that, their higher aesthetic-political aspirations. (Tuan 102)

Home in *One Man's Bible* acts as a kind of metaphor for space or physical environment in general. For Cresswell, "home is an exemplary kind of place where people feel a sense of attachment and rootedness. Home, more than anywhere else, is seen as a centre of meaning and a field of care" (Cresswell 24). Home is an intimate place of rest where a person can withdraw from the hustle of the world outside and have some degree of control over what happens within a limited space.

Gao Xingjian's has repeatedly emphasized the importance of home – an intimate and personal space for giving expression to his creativity. Home for Gao is a particular kind of safe place where people are relatively free to forge their own identities. He is fleeing from culture, politics, history, society and even the limitations of one's own selves to win intellectual freedom. In China political repression suffocates his creative faculty as countless writers have been shot, imprisoned, exiled or punished with hard labour. His quest for a home finally led him to flee from his country and based in Paris. In Chapter 3 in *One Man's Bible* his enthusiasm for home has been portrayed:

> He needed a nest, a refuge, he needed a home where he could be away from people, where he could have privacy as an individual and not be observed. He needed a soundproof room where he could shut the door and talk loudly without being heard so that he could say whatever he wanted to say, a domain where he as an individual could voice his thoughts. He could no longer be wrapped in a cocoon like a silent larva (17).

One Man's Bible seeks to explore the diverse ways that place manifest themselves in the consciousness of the lived-in-world, describing the distinctive and essential components of place and placelessness as they are expressed in the landscape. A major concern in the novels of Gao Xingjian is to suggest that certain places are more authentic than others, and that community, belonging and a "sense of place" (Cresswell 7) can only emerge in places where the bond between people and place is deep rooted. In Gao's view people imbue their surroundings with often highly idiosyncratic meanings and a sense of nostalgia for those places seemingly untouched by trends of "modernization and progress" (Atkinson 43).

One Man's Bible is primarily about a person in exile finding his identity by connecting his present with his past in his homeland through the act of narration, as "language" (419) is the only unbroken link between him and his past, and through which a unity of the self is created. *One Man's Bible* starts with a thematic sentence commenting on the possibility of alternative lives:

> It was not that he didn't remember he once had another sort of life. But, like the old yellowing photograph at home, which he did not burn, it was sad to think about, and far away, like another world that had disappeared forever. (*One Man's Bible* 1)

One Man's Bible is built upon the dialogical constitution of the protagonist's self disguised in the "he" and the "you". The "he" and "you" are used as psychological representations of the temporal and spatial dimensions of experience in the split selves of the protagonist. Gao places his speaking subject in new temporal and spatial dimensions. Then "he" represents the protagonist in the past, his memories of his experience in China, while the "you" denotes the protagonist in the present, his

experience as a writer in exile outside China. In this "he-you" dialogical framework, the selves of the protagonist are explored in the spatiality of exile, with the past fusing with the present, and the dislocated existence in confrontation with national identities. Gao's non-traditional mode of narrative enables him to represent spatial relationships that are heavily loaded with psychological meanings. In the novel, Gao uses a "cinematic mode, which he borrows from the *nouveau roman*, to fuse the temporal with the spatial to create a narrative of subjectivity interspersed with scenes of memories of persecution and anxiety of dislocated existence" (Tam 16). The sense of exile as a conscious attempt of fleeing presented in *Soul Mountain* is further developed into a quest for meaning in a "life of diasporic existence" (Tam 18) in *One Man's Bible*. In Chapter 2 Margarethe, the half German- half Jewish woman makes an attempt to explain to the "you" narrator during his visit to Hong Kong the difficulty in escaping from the memories connected with the homeland:

> You say that China is already very distant from you. She says she understands. You say you have no homeland. She says her father is German but her mother is a Jew, so she has no homeland either. But she can't get away from her memories. (*One Man's Bible* 16)

Each of these chapters here is a fragment of "his" experience in the Cultural Revolution. Although these events do not follow a strictly chronological order, nor is the exposition composed in such a way that an intrigue is constructed or that a dramatic climax is reached, there is an intrinsic continuity among these events, namely, a single individual's life within a period in history. Indeed this induces the readers to trace a chronological and logical order for the events. In this way, it is tighter and more focused than the structure of *Soul Mountain*.

The attachment to landscape is part of the identity of every individual and every culture. The familiar streets, squares, parks, canals, fields and hills of childhood are an integral part of people's psychological make-up and sense of rootedness in a place. When these things are lost – whether through exile, development or wilful destruction – their character often becomes even more important to people's inner life. This is true to Gao Xingjian as for the last two decades he was living in exile in Paris and his only way of experiencing these places of "felt value" (Tuan) is through the power of memory by constructing these places out of such elements as "distinctive odours, textural and visual qualities in the environment, seasonal changes of temperature and colour" (Tuan 152). "The Memory Place" depends, not merely on a unique performance of place-attachment, but also on appeal to paradigmatic experiences: to the ecology of childhood attachment to special places, which seems especially luminous when they are protected and "natural" (Cobb 50). By place-memory Casey means- "the ability of place to make the past come to life in the present and thus contribute to the production and reproduction of social memory" (Cresswell 87). As the "you" narrator in "Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather" during his visit to his old country town recollects:

> This is the river where my grandfather once took me, but now there is no water even in the gaps between the rocks. (*Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather* 78)

Edward Relph in *Place and Placelessness* examines that the changing character of places through time is related to "modifications of buildings and landscapes as well as to changes in our attitudes, and is likely to seem quite dramatic after a prolonged absence" (31). Landscape here refers to the perceived settings that frame people's

sense of place and community. Place and memory are inevitably intertwined. Some places change over time as both physical and human processes operate to modify Earth's surface and thus constituted in memory:

> There is the common sensation of returning to a familiar place after an absence of several years and feeling that everything has changed even though there have been no important changes in its appearance. Whereas before we were involved in the scene, now we are an outsider, an observer, and can recapture the significance of the former place only by some act of memory. (Relph 31)

Space, landscape and place are clearly highly interrelated terms and each definition is contested. The French urban theorist Henri Lefebvre has produced a much more sophisticated account of space in which he distinguishes between more abstract kinds of space and lived and meaningful spaces. Place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world. Place at the basic level is space invested with meaning in the context of power. Tuan argued that through human perception and experience we get to know the world through places. The term "topophilia" was developed by Tuan to refer "to the affective bond between people and place" (Tuan 4). Tuan defined place through a comparison with space. He develops a sense of space as an open arena of action and movement while place is about stopping and resting and becoming involved.

Edward Relph scrutinize the way in which places are tied into global flows of people, meanings and things has led some to perceive an accelerating erosion of place. A combination of mass communication, increased mobility and a consumer society has been blamed for a rapidly accelerating homogenization of the world. More and more

of our lives, it has been argued, take place in spaces that could be anywhere- that look, feel, sound and smell the same wherever in the globe we may be. Fast food outlets, shopping malls, airports, high street shops and hotels are all more or less the same wherever we go. These are spaces that seem detached from the local environment and tell us nothing about the particular locality in which they are located. The meaning that provides the sense of attachment to place has been radically thinned out. Ralph was concerned that it was becoming increasingly difficult for people to feel connected to the world through place.

In the modern world, Relph argues that we are surrounded by a general condition of creeping placelessness marked by an inability to have authentic relationships to place because the new placelessness does not allow people to develop an authentic attitude to a place. The processes that lead to this are various and include the ubiquity of mass communication and culture as well as big business and central authority. Tourism, Relph writes, is particularly to blame as it encourages the disneyfication, museumization, and futurization of places. A place like Disneyland represents the epitome of placelessness constructed, as it is, purely for outsiders and now reproduced across the globe. Superhighways also play their part in the destruction of place as they do not connect places and are separated from the surrounding landscape- they "start everywhere and lead nowhere" (Relph 64). Before the highways the railways were the culprits destroying authentic sense of place:

> Roads, railways, airports, cutting across or imposed on the landscape rather than developing with it, are not only features of placelessness in their own right, but, by making possible the mass movement of people with all their fashions and habits, have encouraged the spread of placelessness well beyond their immediate impacts. (Relph 90)

Evernden's observation asserts the idea that places must have some relationship to humans and the human capacity to produce and consume meaning. Landscape is thus a contextual horizon of perceptions, providing both a foreground and a background in which people feel themselves to be living in their world. In Chapter 1 in *Soul Mountain* the narrator arrives in the small county town in the south in Qinghai province and he finds the this region is not a favourite place tourists would like to visit:

> Those places have been transformed by tourism, coaches are parked everywhere and tourist maps are on sale. Tourist hats, tourist T-shirts, tourist singlets and tourist handkerchiefs printed with the name of the place are in all the little shops and stalls, and the name of the place is used in the trade names of all the "foreign exchange currency only" hotels for foreigners, the "locals with references only" hostels and sanatoriums, and of course the small private hotels competing for customers. (*Soul Mountain* 4)

If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike "Baudelairean modernity" (Cresswell 33), do not integrate the earlier places: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of "place of memory", and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position.

Relph connects various forms of increased mobility to what he calls "mass culture" and mass values which again dilute authentic relations to place. Places become other

directed and more alike across a globe of transient connections. Mobility and mass culture lead to irrational and shallow landscapes.

In a similar way the anthropologist Marc Augé has argued that the facts of postmodernity point to a need for a radical rethinking of the notion of place. Place, Augé argues, has traditionally been thought of as a fantasy of a society anchored since time immemorial in the permanence of an intact soil. Augé's argument is that such places are receding in importance and being replaced by "non-places":

> The multiplication of what we may call empirical non-places is characteristic of the contemporary world. Spaces of circulation (freeways, airways), consumption (department stores, supermarkets), and communication (telephones, faxes, television, cable networks) are taking up more room all over the earth today. They are spaces where people coexist or cohabit without living together. (Augé 110)

Non-places are sites marked by their transience-the preponderance of mobility. Augé's use of the name non-place does not have the same negative moral as Relph's placelessness. By non-place Augé is referring to sites marked by the "fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral" (Cresswell 46). Non-places include freeways, airports, supermarkets- sites where particular histries and traditions are not allegedly relevant-unrooted places marked by mobility and travel. Non-place is essentially the space for travellers.

Abstract knowledge about a place can be acquired in short order if one is diligent. The visual quality of an environment is quickly tallied if one has the artist's eye. But the feel of a place takes longer to acquire. It is made up of experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over the span of years. (Tuan 183)

Place and memory are, it seems, inevitably intertwined. Memory appears to be a personal thing- we remember some things and forget others. But memory is also social. Some memories are allowed to fade- are not given any kind of support. Other memories are promoted as standing for this and that. One of the primary ways in which memories are constituted is through the production of places. Monuments, museums, the preservation of particular buildings (and not others), plaques, inscriptions and the promotion of whole urbun neighbourhoods as "heritage zones" are all examples of the placing of memory (Cresswell 85).

Understanding how sense of place develops and changes is relevant to understanding how people interact with their environment and how the childhood landscape forms a part of people's identity and constitutes a key point of comparison for considering subsequent places later in life. A place is a socially meaningful and identifiable space to which a historical dimension is attributed. A sense of place is caught up in a landscape, be it natural or urban. Place has the ability to bring an emotional response from an individual. Sense of place is linked to meaning and permanence. Landscape is a subjective and intersubjective interpretation of environment and dependent on the meanings and values of a particular culture. They usually have names and boundaries. Few places remain unchanged for long and these changes have a wide range of consequences. In Chapter 1 of *One Man's Bible* there is reference to the Immortal Grotto Temple which was visited during childhood. At that time there was no transport system and people were "carried up the mountain in sedan chairs" (7). These places frequently appears in his dream and when he revisited the site of the temple he could not find the temple. "Even the ruins had vanished without a trace". (*One Man's Bible* 7). Places undergo change in size and complexity and in economic, political, and cultural importance as networks of relationships between places are altered

through population expansion, the rise and fall of empires, changes in climate and other physical systems, and changes in transportation and communication technologies. A place can be dramatically altered by events both near and far. Out of these processes emerge new places, with existing places being reorganized and expanded, other places declining, and the accelerating erosion of place lead to its disappearance thus transforming into space. Space has been seen in distinction to place as a realm without meaning-as a fact of life which, like time, produces the basic coordinates for human life.

Lawrence Buell in *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* asks how literature can provoke "environmental reflection by expanding preconceived understandings of the nonhuman environment as a dimension of personal and communal sense of place" (260). He argues that environmental literature constructs places in a particular way "not just by naming objects but by dramatizing in the process how they matter" (267). Place attachment thus becomes a "resource in the articulation of environmental unconscious" (Buell, *Future of Environmental Criticism* 28).

Gao Xingjian's unique visual acumen captures the spirit of isolated, remote villages and the countryside of the Chinese hinterland in black, white and greys, as in artistic photography. The landscape in his short stories is not static one and the specifics are detailed as he travels, both in fact and in memory, to the many places he had visited in childhood, as well as in dream. Gao's creative techniques in dream are effectively transferred in shaping the landscape in his stories. Gao believed that perceptions and values attached to landscape encode values and fix memories to places that become a source of personal identity. The protagonist in "Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather" visits his home town Loulan but he fails to locate his home as the

surrounding landscape is not familiar to him. The physical landscape undergoes lot of changes and with time and he is helplessly trying to juxtapose the image in his memory with the present condition:

> I remember that every day on my way to school I had to pass a stone bridge, and the lake was right next to it... I never imagined that the fish would all die, that the sparkling lake would turn into a foul pond, that the foul pond would then be filled in, and that I would not be able to find the way to my old home. ("Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather" 70)

Environmental criticism must also confront the proposition that "non-places are the real measure of our time" (Buell, *Future of Environmental Criticism* 69) as anthropological theorist Marc Augé has claimed. In the world of "supermodernity" (Cresswell 45) that we inhabit now, people are born and die in clinical settings, and in between spend much of their time shuttling about through offices, malls, clubs, and transport designed as neutrally benign and predictably interchangeable spaces (Augé 78–9) What most fascinates Augé about "the experience of non-place is its power of attraction, inversely proportional . . . to the gravitational pull of place and tradition" (Augé 118).

> Although you were born in the city, grew up in cities and spent the larger part of your life in some huge urban metropolis, you can't make that huge urban metropolis the hometown of your heart. Perhaps, because it is so huge that within it at most you can only find in a particular place, in a particular corner, in a particular room, in a particular instant, some memories which belong purely to yourself, and it is only in such memories that you can preserve yourself fully. (*Soul Mountain* 328)

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Chapter VI

Conclusion

"The way follows nature": An Ecological Representation

The narrative in these fiction certainly raises issues of how the ecological representations in fiction differ from cultural representations, political representations, and national representations. How is the environment represented in the selected fiction and what can we inherit from these representations? What is it that connects humans and dwelling places, including forests, mountains, river, streams and also urban spaces? Are folktales, myths, oral histories, ethnography, ballads and ordinary events of daily life all invoked in the spatial positioning of a place? Or does the ecological lie beyond the limit of representation? Or is it no longer possible to separate the human from the ecological?

It can be inferred that the fiction under study focuses on places as fusions of human and natural order and are the significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world. Place refers both to "geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness" (Buell 83). They are defined by unique locations, landscape and communities as well as by the focussing of experiences and intentions into particular settings. Places 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.

Undertaking its own odyssey, *Soul Mountain, One Man's Bible* and *Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather* provides a detailed account of a journey through space, landscape and terrain. The perspective changes rapidly, the narrative voice shifting

among first, second and third person. Gao blurs the distinction between personal and social identities where his enigmatic prose and shifting narrative perspective force the reader to search for various interpretations.

Gao's advocacy of using shifting narrative points of view in the representation of the subjective is perhaps inspired by the use of flowing perspectives in traditional Chinese painting. Being a painter himself, Gao is fully aware that effects of multiple perspectives are achieved not analytically, but intuitively. Gao has the following observation about flowing subjectivity:

> When a person closes his eyes and translate the visual picture into mental images, he sees them flowing before his eyes, without depth and not following the perspectivism of proportion. Let me call the sense of depth in these mental images "pseudo perspective", which arranges objects into different layers and with different points of view that, nonetheless, form a picture with organic unity. This is an improvised space, and it does not follow the principle of perspective. It may not have a focus, or it may have random focuses. ("The Aesthetics of Creation" 292)

Rightly "*Soul Mountain* is a novel of a pilgrimage made by the protagonist to himself and a journey along the reflective surface that divides fiction from life, imagination from memory" (Nobel Prize Press Release 2000). The journey in *Soul Mountain* traverses through the landscape which creates a dreamlike, meditative series of interrelated fragments, images that includes nature as a dynamic but fragile target of human greed, suppressed folk cultures, the recovery of childhood and spirituality, symbolized by the elusive Soul Mountain. Dramatizing the ideas that natural system

and their individual parts possesses intrinsic value, independent of human utility, and that humankind is an element within natural systems. Through crowded trains, hitch-hikes and travels on foot, the shifting protagonist travels the hard way into the interior of China, often blown off or staying longer than necessary in one place. Each chapter's viewpoint reflects aspects of a single, fractured consciousness.

Looking at the terrain in *One Man's Bible* is like an episode of events as reflection on certain issues sometimes directly and at other times indirectly related to personal and political events. There is a unique perspective of terrain in the "he-you" dialogical framework, where the selves of the protagonist are explored in the spatiality of exile, with the past fusing with the present, and the dislocated existence in confrontation with national identities. Then "he" represents the protagonist in the past, his memories of his experience in China, while the "you" denotes the protagonist in the present, his experience as a writer in exile outside China. Gao's non-traditional mode of narrative enables him to represent spatial relationships that are heavily loaded with psychological meanings. In the novel, Gao uses a "cinematic mode, which he borrows from the *nouveau roman*, to fuse the temporal with the spatial to create a narrative of subjectivity interspersed with scenes of memories of persecution and anxiety of dislocated existence" (Tam 16).

Buying a Fishing Rod for my Grandfather delineates a world of dynamic harmony with the natural world. The non human world is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history. The text articulates the symbiotic relationship between land and landscape, text and terrain, and recognises that language is not separate from the world of nature. It redefines our place in the cosmos, since it is born out of deep

experiencing of the great web of interconnections and interpenetrations of which we are a part. Gao here talks about a language that needs to discard the rhetoric of humanism that silences nature. He talks about a language free from an obsession with human pre-eminence that reflects the ontological humility implicit in evolutionary theory, ecological science, and postmodern thought.

> The connotations of the language of literature must be voiced, spoken by living people, to be fully expressed. So as well as serving as a vehicle for thought literature must also appeal to the auditory senses. The human need for language is not simply for the transmission of meaning, language is also needed for one to listen to, and for affirming one's own existence. Born at the start of human civilisation, language, like life, is full of wonders, and its expressive capacity is limitless. It is the task of the writer to discover and develop the latent potential inherent in language. The writer is not the Creator and he cannot eradicate the world even if it is too old. ("The Case for Literature" 45)

Gao Xingjian's experiments in the narrative modes in his novels have been inspired by the special features of the Chinese language. Many times he has commented that the Chinese language, being an uninflected language, facilitates shifting the perspective of narration. In the essay "Literature and Metaphysics" Gao states:

> In the Chinese language the subject is often omitted and the verb is not inflected according to the pronoun, so the narrative angle can change with great ease. It can shift freely from "I" with a subject to "I" without a subject- in other words, from I, to the deletion of "I", to the nonexistence of "I"- then change to "you", then to "him". "You/I" is the objectivised forms of me, and

> "he/I" may be regarded as me departing from my physical body to quietly contemplate or to observe and reflect, so there is enormous freedom. In writing *Soul Mountain* I discovered this freedom. ("Literature and Metaphysics" 92)

In Gao's fiction the self is presented as both the perceiving subject as well as the perceived object by adopting the method of "self transcendent observation" (Tam 218), which he took from Chinese Daoist tradition. Gao shows a prelinguistic state in which the self is presented in a state of primordial non-distinction. Gao believes that the true self lies in the prelinguistic state of human consciousness which is very much in line Chinese Zen Buddhism concepts of intuition and subjectivity that offers a new perspective in "understanding the self which goes beyond linguistic and psychical analysis" (Tam 11). Gao said in his Nobel Lecture:

> In my fiction I use pronouns instead of usual characters and also use the pronouns I, you and he to tell about or focus on the protagonist. The portrayal of one character by using different pronouns creates a sense of distance. As this also provides actors on the stage with a broader psychological space, I have also introduced the changing of pronouns into my drama too. ("The Case for Literature" 45)

In these selected texts, Gao does away with disruptive discourses that posit the idea of nature as an impediment to human progress. His representation aims to re-enact, rethink and fluidize the dialogic balance between Nature and Man as species of the eco system , engaging in an intellectually fairer and more empathetic communication.

Life itself becomes a process of signification within place which, in Gao's hands is a resource in the construction of the "environmental unconscious" (Buell 44).

We find a design, a search for a sense of control in Gao Xingjian's understanding of the broad processes of human life and environment, the interplay among characters, species, ecosystems and with the physical world As if Gao out of the simplicity of his indignation had been just primitive enough to call men back to their humanity. For Gao's primitivism is essentially creative, and for all his natural simplicity of spirit, it falls squarely into certain central truths about the nature of life. Gao's perspective on human life always gives him a sense of process, an understanding of the circuits through which the human mind can move, providing an endless contrivance of surface paradox of simplicity and violence; articulated reactions which can be both eruptive and disruptive. It is as if Gao has created his own ecofiction- the fiction with an environmental subtext.

The main argument on Gao Xingjian's environmental literature is his perspective on Daoism as a manifestation of Deep Ecology where human and non-human becomes a part of nature. This view gives humans a paradoxical status within nature. Man is the only phenomena that fail to exhibit naturalness, yet having a responsibility to act in a natural way. Although there are numerous different meanings of the word "nature," two meanings have been particularly influential. One would call it "dualistic": nature is whatever humans have not created or manipulated. The opposite of this notion of nature would be "culture" or "human." The second notion of nature we could call "monistic": nature is whatever exists in the world. Chinese aesthetics is based on a third, "adverbial" notion of nature.

In his consideration of man and the natural world, Gao Xingjian emphasises the ideal of the freedom of all beings to pursue their natural fulfilment. This freedom is not chaotic but self organizing. Neither human society nor the natural world needs order imposed on it; indeed, attempts at the imposition of order results in disorder. In his inaugural speech titled "Environment and Literature: What we are Writing Today" Gao Xingjian expresses his concern:

> The present environment confronting literature is indeed one of many problems in the relationships between man and nature, and between man and society. The pollution of the natural environment is worsening by the day, global warming is troubling the whole of humankind, and while the deterioration of the natural ecological environment has been a common political and media topic for a long time, there is no sign of any effective policies and measures even to slow slightly the deterioration of the very environment humankind relies on for its existence. Instead, the destruction of the natural environment is accelerating. (International PEN Congress Tokyo 2010)

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 nature. In *Soul Mountain* the protagonist, through his trip of fleeing into the mountains, comes to see how human nature has been distorted in the process of civilization and subsequently calls for a return to nature:

> I should have left those contaminated surroundings long ago and returned to nature to look for this authentic life. In those contaminated surroundings I was

> taught that life was the source of literature, that literature had to be faithful to life, faithful to real life. My mistake was that I had alienated myself from life and ended up turning my back on real life. Life is not the same as manifestations of life. Real life, or in other words the basic substance of life, should be the former and not the latter. I had gone against real life because I was simply stringing together life's manifestations, so of course I wasn't able to accurately portray life and in the end only succeeded in distorting reality. (*Soul Mountain* 12)

Places, Landscapes and Lives in Gao Xingjian's fiction is 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 ecosystem thus presented calls us to examine the very nature of the human place in the natural world:

> "Man follows earth, earth follows sky, sky follows the way, the way follows nature, he proclaims loudly. Don't commit actions which go against the basic character of nature, don't commit acts which should not be committed". (*Soul Mountain* 48)

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