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Gao Xingjian's Novel *Lingshan (Soul Mountain):* A Long Journey in Search of a Woman?

October 12, 2000 was a great day for Chinese literature. Gao Xingjian's (*1940) novel *Lingshan (Soul Mountain)* won the Nobel Prize for Literature, as "an oeuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese literature"(Press Release, 1). This is an important milestone, not only in Chinese, but maybe even in world literature. Gao's search for the cultural roots of his country in the multicultural society of Mainland China, brought its results and attained international acknowledgment. In this exceptional work of modern Chinese literature its author succeeded in showing until now insufficiently deeply explored, from the literary point of view, weighty treasures of indigenous traditions from the realm of shamanism, popular Taoism, Buddhism, folklore, the customs of national minorities, the everyday social life of different strata, and also introducing a gallery of Chinese women. They remind me of the *Hongloumeng (A Dream of the Red Chamber),* or Li*aozhai zhiyi (Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio),* but are mostly modern, or postmodern, of course, while not always being so as we shall see presently.

Here I shall try to analyze the last segment. It interested me for some reason most of all when I read the novel in the fkst days of early autumn of 2000, and I immediately selected chapters 39 and 63 for translation into Slovak *(Uterdrny tydennik, Slovenske pohddy).* There were two incentives for this decision. The first I read in Monika Motsch's (University of Bonn) essay entitled "Die Kupplerin Hongniang in Xixiangji, erotisch-komparatistisch betrachtet." Here she wrote that I am doing my "scholarly job not only academically, but to some extent erotically," that is with my heart and all my senses. And then she continued: "Probably his greatest achievement as a scholar and comparatist consists in his talent to be active as an intermediary between the "Lovers in East and West," that is

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between the Chinese and Western culture, to bring them together and to stimulate them to fruitful exchange of opinions"(Motsch 1998, 491). This well-known expert on Qian Zhongshu (1910-1998) (Motsch 1994), probably characterized my literary and critical endeavours to some extent in an exaggerated way as an "erotic comparatistics" (Motsch 1998, 491), but I am obliged to her for acknowledging my efforts for East-West (mostly Sino-Western) intercultural and interliterary understanding and communication. In this contribution I shall try to be worthy of her evaluation.

The second incentive was my meeting with Gao Xingjian on Christmas Eve 1995. One day before this occasion, during my lecture on Bing Xin p7JOi>] (1900-1999) at the Center for Chinese Studies, Central Library, Taipei, chaired by Chen Pengxiang (Galic 1993, 1995), Mabel Lee, the translator of the *Soul Mountain* into English, asked me to participate at the opening ceremony of the exhibition of Gao Xingjian's Chinese ink paintings, the first of its kind in Taiwan. My early impression was that Gao is shy and not very communicative, with the exception concerning his special friends, such as Chu Ke (1927) (Taipei), the late Helmut Martin (1940-1999) and his wife Liao Tianchi (Bochum), Jin Guantao and his wife Liu Qingfeng (Hong Kong), who were also present there. I did not dare to speak to him, but I enjoyed his Chanist canvases. Mabel was my companion and I reflected on the meaning of his paintings for me. Christmas Eve is the time of meditation for those who are waiting for the advent of Jesus. The moments approaching the evening and midnight of this day are most festive hours among hundreds of million inhabitants of the world. The words "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" is a beautiful message to humanity. For me Gao Xingjian's drawings presented another, but similar message. There was no God in them and, unlike medieval Chanist, but also classical Chinese paintings in general, where man, for example a Taoist hermit, is nearly invisible and gets lost in the surrounding Nature, Gao Xingjian's human individuum, whether lonely, or in a small group, is always in the centre of the depicted milieu. Only later, when reading him, I discovered that Gao is a believer in an Existentialism similar to that of Karl Jaspers. His self is always oriented towards other selves. He requires and seeks communication with them, even with strangers. "Being-oneself (Gao Xingjian believes in individualism, M.G.) is not real without communication, just empty liberty (or freedom, M.G.) is not real without manifesting itself in choice." Or: "My liberty posits and requires the liberty of everybody else" (Blackham 56).

Having this in mind, let me become your companion in Gao Xingjian's efforts for "erotic-comparative" *chercher la femme.*

1.

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. The vision of death or a "retraining" camp in Qinghai Province pressed him to flee from Peking which seemed to be a dangerous place for him. After securing an advance royalty for the novel which more than fifteen years later was awarded the Nobel Prize, he decided to practice self-imposed travelling similar to that of Ulysses, Zhuangzi (4th/3rd cent. B.C.), Qu Yuan (ca. 340-278 B.C.), or their followers. It was danger or an overall political, ideological and social situation which forced or allured him into "free and easy (not always, M.G.) wandering" (xiaoyao you) (The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu, 29-35). Usually Soul Mountain is characterized as "both fictionalized autobiography and a documentation" (Lee 1997, 137) or as expressing a "confessional consciousness" (Bei Ming, 13). I personally agree with Chen Xiaoming (Peking), who regards it as a part of xungen wenxue, searching for roots, at least where the content of this novel is concerned. It is, of course, a fictional biography, confession and searching for traditional but still promising 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 Taoism and Buddhism, or their 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.

The Swedish Academy, certainly after consultation with Goran Malmqvist, has characterized *Soul Mountain* as "a work of polyphonic dimension which through its blend of genres ... recalls German Romanticism's magnificient concept of universal poetry" (Press Release, 1). If my assumption is true, Malmqvist surely knows what this high evaluation means. He knew, studied and translated Gao Xingjian more than any other modern Chinese writer. Malmqvist's pupil Torbjorn Loden already in 1993 classified the novel as a work of "world literature." This last statement is, maybe, a bit over-hasty because time is needed for its insertion into the global interliterary network, and another assertion of the jury that this novel is "one of those singular literary creations that seem impossible to compare with anything but themselves" (Press Release, 1), is illogical when judged from the point of view of Comparative Literature and comparativism in general. I still claim that *Soul Mountain* is a work worthy of reading and study. As a long novel of 562 pages, written within a long period of seven years (summer 1982-September 1989), it is probably the most comprehensive work of the "searching for roots" literature in China. And it certainly needed more time than other similar works, although the time aspect, where this kind of literature is concerned, is of great importance. Confucius's saying: "Yu su ze bu da" "Desire to have things done quickly prevents their being done thoroughly" (The Confucian Analects, Chap. 13, 17), is practically always valid. The movement for the "search of roots" was too short in modern Chinese literature (1984-1987) and therefore could not end with satisfying results. I tried to show this elsewhere (Galik 2000).

2.

Existentialist concern for freedom, communication and individual choice led Gao Xingjian to the renjian world of men. According to the book Zhuangzi, Yan Hui, the disciple of Confucius, went to the Wei and asked the master for permission. Confucius allegedly said to him:

> In ancient times Chieh put Kuan Lung-feng to death and Chou put Prince Pi Kan to death. Both Kuan Lung-feng and Prince Pi Kan were scrupulous in their conduct, bent down to comfort and aid the common people, and used their positions as ministers to their superiors. Therefore their rulers, Chieh and Chou, utilized their scrupulous conduct as a means to trap them, for they were too fond of good fame. In ancient times Yao attacked Ts'ung-chih and Hsu Ao and

> Yu attacked Yu-hu, and these states were left empty and unpeopled, their rulers cut down. It was because they employed their armies constantly and never ceased their search for gain. All were seekers of fame or gain—have you alone not heard of them? Even the sage cannot cope with men who are after fame or gain, much less a person like you! *(The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu,* 55-56).

Gao Xingjian when leaving Peking for a long journey had no Confucius to ask for permission to travel. According to his own words, He Jingzhi (*1924), the Deputy Head of the Propaganda Department of the CCP, allegedly declared that Gao's Chechan The Bus Stop was "the most pernicious play written since the establishment of the People's Republic" and therefore even more poisonous than Wu Han's (1909-1969) Hai Rui ba guan Hai Rui Dismissed From Office (1961) (Lee 1995, 84-85), a play condemned by orthodox Maoist criticism as an attack against the Great Helmsman, which later became a portent of the "Cultural Revolution" (1966-1976). Gao Xingjian followed the advice of Zhuangzi who through the words of Confucius told Yan Hui: "...you are bound to die if you come into the presence of a tyrant" *(The Complete Works of Chuang* T£#, 55). The best way out was to flee.

Why just Lingshan became later the tide of his novel? If we look at some good dictionary, as Zhongguo gujin diming da cidian, A Great Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Chinese Geographical Names (1396-1397) or in the books describing the old Chinese myths such as Shanhaijing Classic of the Mountains and Seas or Shuijing zhu Annotated Water Classic *(Lingshan* 6, *Soul Mountain* 5), we find some places with this name. To reach one of them, if they really exist (some of them are mythological), would not be difficult when using the transportation means of our days. According to Gao Xingjian's apprehension no one place is the target of his pilgrimage. Except for his strong Existentialist conviction, we find in him also an interest in xuanxue dark or mystic learning, or otherwise expressed, Neo-Taoism of the 3rd and 4th centuries (Gao Xingjian, 1992). It is possible that when selecting the tide for his novel Gao Xingjian had in his mind originally Gongsun Long's (3rd cent. B.C.) paradox saying; "What we point out we fail to arrive at, what we arrive at we do not detach" (Chuang-tzu. The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book Chuang-tzu, 284). I suppose that we can never reach Gao Xingjian's lingshan soul mountain, or spiritual mountain. It is not even the one where

"Buddha enlightened the Venerable Mahakashyapa (or Ananda" *(Lingshan* 6, *Soul Mountain* 5) that is Lingjiushan Grdhrakuta (Vulture Peak) of Mahayanist Buddhists (Soothill and Hodous, 488b), originally situated in India, or Penglaishan in the Fairy Land of the Taoists, allegedly in Bohai Bay (A Great Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Chinese Geographical Names, 1396). 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. If we reach something, "what we arrive at", that is zhi [31], "we do not detach", that is bu jue (Zhuangzi yinde, 93) "we are not able to detach ourselves from it," as for instance, from a happy embrace, which, alas, lasts only for a fleeting moment. It was for me a surprise when the editor of my translation of *Soul Mountain*, Chapter 63, highlighted, as the most interesting for Slovak readers, the following passage:

> There are so many people in this big world and so many places to visit but there is nowhere for me to put down the roots, to have a small refuge, to live a simple life. I always encounter the same sort of neighbours, say the same sort of things, good morning or hello, and once again am embroiled in endless daily trivia. Even before this becomes solidly entrenched, I will already have tired of all. I know there is no cure for me. *(Lingshan* 442, *Soul Mountain* 400)

Mabel Lee in one of her essays briefly mentioned that Gao Xingjian who, uses the personal pronouns instead of the names of protagonists, which is typical both of his fiction and dramas, when employing "you", "is given immense freedom to explore his own past relationships, particularly with women (underlined by me, M.G.), and his own past"(Lee 1997, 139). Zhao Yiheng in one of his essays claims that Soul Mountain supplies us "probably with the richest depictions of the female sex" (Zhao Yiheng 2001, 59) in all his works. I believe that it is true, although much in this novel is similar to depictions in his plays.

In Chapter 63 there are two younger girls who try to prevent him proceeding with, or at least to make him interrupt his wanderings. The one of Guiqi very modestly enticed him to the house of her parents allegedly because they "like having guests" *(Lingshan* 441, *Soul Mountain* 399). The other one, a young Taoist nun with "delicate fair skin and a beautiful face" *(Lingshan* 443, *Soul Mountain* 400), is a graceful personality

exuding dignity and freshness in the Shangqinggong Palace of Supreme Purity. Reading these words brought to my mind the Taoist nunneries in Chang'an in the times of the Tang Dynasty (618-906), where not only the daughters of Emperors lived, but also excellent women poets, such as Yu Xuanji (ca. 845-ca. 868). The monastery where Gao Xingjian stayed for some days was similar to that of Xianyiguan where Yu Xuanji lived and hosted her lovers or admirers, among others also the great Late-Tang poet Wen Tingyun (ca. 812-ca. 870) (van Gulik, 175). The fair nun says to him that everybody in the monastery, both men and women like him. "She says everyone, but does not say she herself." *(Lingshan* 443, *Soul Mountain* 401). Maybe it was a veiled declaration of love. She says that he can stay here so long as he would like and to write or create as some have done long before him, for instance, Du Tingguang (not Du Guangting of the Tang Dynasty after his failure in the State examinations *(A Great Dictionary of Chinese Names*, 461). Gao Xingjian is a different kind of man. In his search for self-preservation the monasteries were not ideal places. Although he enjoyed the tranquility and fragrance of the place, solitude and austerity of the buildings and Taoist philosophy together with the *Weltanschauung* of its followers, yinyi jingshen reclusive spirits (Gao Xingjian 1992, 213) and even the view of a young nun putting the arm on the shoulders of a young monk (within the framework of this mood), he preferred the way of the old Neo-Taoist philosophers and men of letters of the Jin Dynasty (265-419). One of the recluses of this dynasty Fan Changsheng allegedly lived in this monastery *(Lingshan* 443, *Soul Mountain* 401). If the "I" in the Soul Mountain really expresses the *état d'âme* of the writer, then we may believe Gao's statement:

> I am not a recluse and still want to eat from the stoves of human society. I can't say that I am staying because of the charming spontaneity of her movements and her (the young nun's, M.G.) unaffected gracefulness. (*Lingshan* 443, *Soul Mountain* 401)

Gao should leave this place pushed by the force of his striving after freedom. For him, I suppose, it was just the same, as for Guo Xiang, (or was it Xiang Xiu), to be equal to the mythic bird peng roc, with wings like clouds and flying ninety thousand li, or a little dove that can get as far as the elm or the sapan-wood tree, because "though there is a difference between the great and the small, their happiness is the same"

(Fung Yu-lan 228). Guo did not agree with Zhuangzi and with his Jin commentators that one has to be wuwo no-self in order to enjoy absolute freedom and absolute happiness (Zhuangzi) (Fung Yu-lan, 109-10), or relative freedom and relative happiness (Guo Xiang) (Fung Yu-lan, 228-30). He always stressed free individuality and independent thinking and doing. In front of hundreds of thousands, and maybe of millions readers of good literature, he declared at the Prize Award Ceremony:

> What I want to say here is that literature can only be the voice of the individual and this has always been so. Once literature is contrived as the hymn of the nation, the flag of the race, the mouthpiece of a political party or the voice of a class or a group, it can be employed as a mighty and all-engulfing tool of propaganda. However, such literature loses what is inherent in literature, ceases to be literature, and becomes a substitute for power and profit. (Gao Xingjian 2001, 9)

3.

Not all women in his quest were, of course, Han Chinese. Those most attractive and for him most interesting, seem to be the daughters of national minorities. Two of them appear in Chapter 39. The first one, an unnamed Miao Lolita, as in the ancient Shijing Book of Songs (llth-6th cent. B.C.), or from the novelletes or short stories by Shen Congwen (1902-1988), lures him to come to her and be his love companion. "She is still a child... If I give the slightest sign I know," Gao writes, "she will come away with me, snuggle and, all excited, put up her parasol. But this tension is unbearable. I quickly smile, no doubt very awkwardly, resolutely shake my head, then turn and walk away, not daring to look back" *(Lingshan* 242, *Soul Mountain* 229).

Another young woman is a Miao Shulamite whom not the "daughters of Jerusalem" but all young men from the Black Miao mountain stockade near Qingshui river, Guizhou Province, and also probably many other boys of the Miao Autonomous District admire and love. She is not a "rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys" (Song of Songs, 2, 1) She is "black, but comely" (ibid., 2, 5), or in Gao Xingjian's words she is a "beautiful white orchid" *(Lingshan* 243, *Soul Mountain* 230). According to the narrator: "Her bright red lips are like the camelias of early spring and her teeth are like small pearls. Her flat childlike nose and round face make her eyes look far apart, always smiling, and the flashing black pupils of her eyes add to her extraordinary radiance" *(Lingshan* 243-44, *Soul Mountain* 230). Unlike the "daughters of Jerusalem" who are asked not to stir up nor to

awake the Beloved (Song of Songs, 2, 7, 3, 5 and 8, 4), sons of the Black Miao are blowing so hard on reed pipes that they are wrecking them and developing blood blisters on their lips. This is a Miao love song! She does not need to lure anyone from the present players. Her love waits for her on the other shore of the river. These two maidens are still primitive, simple products of the environment, only slightly or not at all influenced by the Han, Christian and modern globalizing developments. Their "customs and traditions" (fengsu xiguan) are traditional, they preserve and "highlight the sexual freedom, which takes the form of dances by moonlight, assignations and premarital sex, and marriages arranged by the young people themselves." (Diamond 101).

We find a nearly "angelic woman" in Chapter 27. We do not know whether she is a Han Chinese or not. She is a young virginal girl who adores pink petals of lotus (a symbol of purity in Buddhism) (Eberhard 91 and 168) and "the Holy Mother, the way the Holy Mother holds the Child, her eyes looking down, the delicate fingers of her gentle hands" *(Ungshan* 164, *Soul Mountain* 154). She protests when the "you" narrator tries to hold her hands, but enjoys when he hears her confession. For her, interhuman communication is a kind of sacred, pure music. This is one of the two places, provided I read Lingshan carefully, where the impact of Christianity is clearly seen. The second one we may find in Chapter 40. In contrast to the "angelic woman", this one is mulier adultera. "She doesn't know what happiness is", although "she has everything she should have—a husband, a *son"(Lingshan* 245, *Soul Mountain* 232). Everybody would say a perfect little family, even according to the ideal of the PRC government. Her husband is a computer engineer, his income is perfectly good. She says that she loves only her son. This is a lie. Gao's "you" says that she loves only herself. She is not a Christian, but she feels at peace only when she listens to the organ and songs of Mass at church. She is fond of Johann Sebastian Bach and cannot stand popular music. She is sexually frustrated in spite of having orgasms with her husband. She is repeatedly committing adultery with another colleague who admires a sweater she designed and knitted herself. She does not love (and allegedly hates) this colleague and she knows that her husband is better than he. Shakespeare would probably sarcastically say: "And prompt me, plain and holy innocence" (Shakespeare 1149).

In Chapter 45 we find a young librarian who could be placed between the last two. She is a demivierge who is waiting for defloration, but in vain. The "I" narrator tries to be nice to her and hears her confession to being an intact virgin. On the other hand, she is quite uninhibited, drinks with him, clinks her cup with his and empties it in one gulp. She lets him completely

undress her, kiss her from neck to nipples and she even parts her moist thighs to him... She is afraid that he would not marry her after... When she asks: "Don't you like me?", the "I" doesn't reply. He wants not to deceive her. He is bored and wants to have some fun. He is not too cruel and does only what preceeds the last act of love. This is their aura. "Why didn't you take me?" was her question after waking. No reply from his side. Upon parting, she lets him embrace her but not to give her a farewell kiss.

There is at least another woman in Chapter 13 who evokes our deep sympathy. It is zhuhuapo, a term for a woman which remained only transcribed in Mabel Lee's rendition. It reminds, at least me, of some good Chinese fox fairies (hulijing) (Monschein 262-97), for instance, in Pu Songling's stories, Homer's wailing Sirens in the *Odyssey*, or some European ballads. From Gao's narrative we know that she "was sitting sedately on the stone bench of a pavillion on a mountain road so that the road ran between the two stone benches" *(Lingshan* 81, *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, but in contrast to Sirens, she does not damage those who follow her. 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. It is her dead spirit. This is probably a completely invented story.

4.

I suppose that the many stories in the *Soul Mountain* are not invented, but certainly they are more or less subjectively modified. I do not know how much we may believe its "I" narrator from the Chapter 26:

> I do not know if you have ever observed this strange thing—the self (ziwo)… I once looked at the photo of me... At first I thought I had a charming smile, then I thought that smile at the corners of the eyes was rather of scorn, arrogance and indifference, all deriving from self-love, self-adoration and a sense of superiority. But there was also an anxiety which betrayed acute loneliness (gudu) (underlined by me, M.G.) and I doubted that sort of happiness. This was very scary, it was like a void (kongxu), a sense of falling without somewhere to land...
>
> After that I went observing other people, but whenever I observed other people, I found this detestable omniscient self of mine interfering, and to this day there is not one face it hasn't interfered with. This is a serious problem, for when I am scrutinizing someone else, I am at the same time scrutinizing myself... Even when I am observing a woman, my senses react to her and my experiences and imagination are activated in making a judgment. My understanding of others, including women, is actually superficial and arbitrary. Women I like are inevitably illusions I have created to delude myself, and this is my tragedy. As a result, my relationships with women will inevitably fail. *(Lingshan* 161, *Soul Mountain* 151)

Even more Existentialist than this passage is another one from Chapter 52:

> You know that I am just talking to myself to alleviate my loneliness (jimo).
> You know that this loneliness of mine is incurable, that no-one saves me and that I can only talk with myself as the partners of my conversation.
> In this lengthy soliloquy (dubai) you are the object of what I relate, a myself who listens intently to me — you are simply my shadow.
> As I listen to myself and you, I let you create a she, because you are like me and also cannot bear loneliness and have to find a partner for your conversation.
> So you talk with her, just like I talk with you.
> She was born with you, yet is an affirmation of myself. *(Lingshan* 340-41, *Soul Mountain* 312)

Here Gao Xingjian speaks like God at the beginning of biblical Genesis. His assertations are a bit exaggerated. Otherwise his long journey would be completely imaginary. He would not be able to persuade the members of the Swedish Academy and his readers. In any case the element of his subjectivity is quite strong and it depends on the strength and charge of his individuality. Due to the last factor, he tries to undervalue somehow the importance of the object of his personal communication within the framework of the existential situation of human society and its magnitude in bilateral relationships of involved persons of both sexes.

Some of the female characters in the *Soul Mountain* are essays in literary psychology. They are often suffering creatures staggering over the path of death, like the one in Chapter 11, 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" *(Lingshan* 69, *Soul Mountain* 65). Or she naively thinks that her death will be beautiful, that people will be sorry for her, pity her, and weep for her. Death may be beautiful in the eyes of the Romantics and Decadents. Gu Cheng (1953-1993), Gao's younger colleague, supposed just the same and his and Xie Ye's (1956-1993) death was terrible, as we know (Li Xia). Her neurotic psyche works and in the process of the flow of consciousness in some seconds she comes to a quite

contrary idea that nothing is more nauseating than death. "She can't get rid of the nausea" *(Ungshan* 70, *Soul Mountain* 66). This nausea reminds me of Jean Paul Sartre's novel L« *Nausee (Nausea)* (1938). There is not much about her life, as in the case of Sartre's Antoine Fromentin, and disgusting aspects of the absurd existence, but Gao Xingjian here pregnantly delineates death as a situational limit. In this chapter she is scared of death, just as of everything which at some important moments of life had a nauseating effect on her, for example, putting a condom into the trouser pocket of her husband and finding it there after the sexual encounter. Her first act of love made her vomit. She does not want to have a child. She hates her work in the hospital, her family, even her father. Life for her is similar to the small hotel where she probably met the narrator of the novel. It is like the sheets on which all kinds of men sleep, they are not changed for many days, not washed and reek of men's sweat. She should never come to such a place. Her way is typical Sartrean *être en soi* (being-in-itself), where the human being is nothing more than a slave of "facticity," of the existential situation, and the opposite of *être pour soi* (being-for-itself), where the human being finds its reasonable realization, transcends the nothingness, alienation, feelings of loneliness, anxiety as the inevitable components of existence, and moves towards the "being-for-others" and full-value interhuman communication and understanding (Blackham 110-48).

There are more hysterical females in Gao Xingjian's novel. Maybe the most interesting clinical case is delineated in Chapter 46. The "you" narrator lies in bed with "her," who has a knife in her hand. She is young and says that "he" (i.e. "you") has ruined the best years of her life. She must be his girl friend from earlier years. She is not only hysterical, she is also nymphomanic. She needs lovemaking "right away." In her embrace, over her naked body and drooping breasts with the cold blade of the dagger upon his spine. "You" says that he hates her. She says that he hated her for a long time but he was too cowardly to say it. She screams, her body is shaking and she wails hysterically... When "you" tries to get hold of the knife, she grabs after the blade and the red blood drips from her palm. Overhelmed by feelings of pity, "you" embraces her and she needs to be penetrated. "You" says that he is not an animal. She screams that "you" are an animal and asks him immediadetely to indulge. Two "animals" end in the act of carnal lust.

A woman from Chapter 44 is similar. She is hysterical, but not nymphomanic. She is no longer young, but getting old. The deep wrinkles at the corners of her eyes cannot be hidden. She cannot stand the loneliness, she is more communicative. She allegedly likes to dance,

provided you do not see her wrinkles. She wants the seeds from "you" and is prepared to give birth to a child and never betray the identity of the father. All her thoughts written down by the narrator are a long flow of her irrational and illogical sentiments. For instance, she can find other men and console herself, she is empty, she has no feelings, she no longer controls her body, she has not enough courage to commit suicide, she does not even exist. Humiliation (by men and by the narrator who once loved her, but does not loves her any longer) and suffering (coming from her psychical illness) killed her. She asks "you" to leave.

The "she" from Chapter 50 is put into a similar natural environment as the zhuhuapo referred to above. "She" and "you" walk along a precipice, come to the dark green abyss where the road becomes more and more narrow. She suspects him of preparing her murder, pushing her into the waters of the river below. She sends him to Hell. He is incapable of loving her. Why does he try to seduce her? She is just as psychotic as the two "shes" above with the difference that she wants to return "back to his little room" *(Ungshan* 332, *Soul Mountain* 302). The "you" is not meant to stay there, but her other lover. "You" is a monster who brought her to this desolate wilderness. Her lover is a hundred times more sincere than "you," "you" is a hundred times more hypocritical. Her lover did not want to marry her, but "you" tormented her soul more cruelly never saying a word about this, her inner deske. It is enough to say a word and she will cling to "you" and she will be ready to pay a visit to the King of Hell together with you. She does not want to search for Lingshan. Here Gao Xingjian's subjectivity is most pregnant in the whole novel and his imagination most conspicuous.

5.

There are some women in Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain* for whom a kind of "happy abandon" is typical and they are not so restrained psychologically, and even morally, as those we have just analyzed. The one of them delineated in Chapter 60 seems to be a good, faithful wife. She is a medical doctor, likes to dance, she also works as a model (not only for one painter). She feels happy with the narrator, enjoys talking to him, but if he supposes that it is not quite true, he is probably right. She says to him that she is married and leaves his place. In Chapter 64 she comes to his room once again as a completely uninhibited "fox fairy":

> "You are all talk but you never do anything." "Do what?"

"Make love. I know that's what you need."
"Make love?"
"A woman, you need a woman." She is quite blunt.
"Then what about you?" You stare into her eyes.
"It's the same, I need a man." Her eyes flash provocatively.
"I don't think one would be enough." You feel hesitant.
"Then let us say I need men." She is more direct than you.
"That's more like it." You relax.
"When a man and a woman are together-"
"The world no longer exists."
"And there is only lust," she adds.
"I surrender." You really mean this. "Then right now a man and a woman are together here-"
"Then let's do it," she says. "Draw the curtains." *(Lingshan* 447-48, *Soul Mountain* 408).

She asks the partner to do it allegedly because in this way she could forget herself. Then she doesn't need it. She yearns only after the last act and its preliminaries. "You 'are a demon (nugui),″ he says. "I am a goddess (niishen)," she replies. A new, modern yunyu "clouds and rain" is at hand. Here no Soul Mountain is visited but Wushan [Mill] Magic Mountain, where according to Song Yu (3rd cent. B.C.), a poet of Chu kingdom, a king of his country met in a dream a celestial fairy who introduced herself in the following way: "In the morning I am the dawn cloud,/ in the evening I am driving rain" (Frankel, 121). When the dawn was about to break, the woman asked her companion: "Come do it again, once more..." Are such goddesses still living in the Chu territory of antiquity?

In Chapter 67 we meet another young woman. It is on a journey where the author of the novel was travelling with his friends for several days on a network of waterways. One of them is a lawyer and his girl friend speaks the gentle Suzhou dialect. Since in one of the following chapters, Lu Xun's birthplace Shaoxing is depicted and Tiantaishan, the Mountains of Heavenly Terrace *(Lingshan* 497, *Soul Mountain* 447), I think that it is Zhejiang Province. She is beautiful. They are good communication partners and they become his best guides. The boat journey occurs during a moonless night with a bottle of liquor, a bag of beans and two candles which remain unlighted. Chemical fertilizer plastic bags serve as curtains to protect from wind und rain. In the narrow cabin she squeezes between them, since women "always need warmth"(Lingshan 482, *Soul Mountain* 432). Such boats were always and still are used by prostitutes and their

guests. The description of the environment is quite realistic, although made during the dark night. A typical yu mi zhi xiang a land of fish and rice, similar to that I enjoyed in 1959 as a young post-graduate student when visiting Mao Dun's (1896-1981) birthplace Wuzhen in Tongxiang County. As to the natural surroundings we read:

> I vaguely know that there are cultivated fields up from the embankments on both sides and that in the places where there are no embankments there are reed marshes. After passing a series of inlets the boat enters a waterway with such a dense growth of reeds that a person could be killed and the corpse disposed of without leaving a trace, (loc. cit.)

As to the I-narrator and the couple:

> She has already turned to her side. My heels are touching her spine and her buttocks are pressed against my thighs but I am past caring... Her body has an unaffected feminine sensuosness which seductively draws you to her and to want to caress her. Cuddled in his arms she must have sensed the warmth of my body and she puts an arm on my thigh as if to comfort me, though I can't tell if is out of playfulness or kindness, (loc. cit.)

The trio engaged in mutual erotic sympathy hears the words of an interesting and unknown folk-song. They try to persuade the old boatman to sing it for them. The old man does not respond and plies slowly his punt-pole. The I-narrator does not know why the girl grasps his hand. Neither of them wants to spoil the mystical pulsations of the atmosphere.

The I-narrator and the girl hear a hoary voice of the singer of a "woman's sweet-smelling breasts" and the words of the song are indistinct but alluding to that which highlights those most noble and exalting sentiments between the sexes: "... stamens of flowers and a blushing face... don't fondle the stamen of the lotus... dazzling white shirt on a slender waist... taste of the persimmon is a bitter taste...waves with a thousand eyes... roaming dragonflies skimming the water...don't, oh don't entrust yourself to..." *(Lingshan* 484, *Soul Mountain* 434). Was it an invitation to action? She pinched his hand, but there was no move from either side.

Was it a kind of shange mountain song of Wu country we know from Feng Menglong's (ca. 1574-1646) work (Topelmann), or its modern creation (ibid., 58-68)?

Nearly at the end of the novel, in Chapter 78, the "I" narrator sees her and another man—"you" against the background of the dead village sealed

by heavy snowfall. All the inhabibants were murdered. The killers used broad axes. Was it reality or a dream? She is another kind of angelic woman. She doesn't want to hear his declaration of love. She knows that he wants only to sleep with her, that lovemaking for him is only a momentary need and she can't make love without really being in love. She is walking in the snow, wearing a woolen scarf and "you"—her companion is barefoot. She doesn't yearn after physical love, but after tenderness, a gentle embrace, friendly talk and interhuman communication. She can't bear the loneliness. This is the most congenial womanly creation of a Northern girl in Gao's novel.

6.

Mabel Lee, who has known the author of the *Soul Mountain* for many years, answered my question concerning the attitude of Gao Xingjian to the feminine generic species in this way: "No comment on Gao Xingjian's relations with women. Best to read his books to get a fictionalized account" (E-mail dated April 17, 2001).

The encounter in a snowy winter environment of the Chinese North to a great measure responds to the needs of the main protagonist of the novel. He was returning back to the cold atmosphere where he would live for the years to come. Living in loneliness, he strove after the communication, since he knew that it is the best solution to his dilemma. According to Karl Jaspers we live between loneliness and communication (Jaspers 60-73). Not only the protagonist but also the author himself might well understand the stream of consciousness of the girl walking in the snowy wilderness:

> I am not sleepy at all, my mind is crystal clear, I see the transparent night, the blue forest laden with snow. There is no starlight and no moonlight but all this can be seen clearly. It is a very strange night. I want to stay forever with you on this snowy night. Don't go away, don't abandon me. I want to cry. I don't know why. Don't abandon me, don't go so far from me, don't go kissing other women. *(Ungshan* 543-44, *Soul Mountain* 489).

* * *

"Woman" was certainly not the main target of Gao Xingjian's long journey. His aims were manifold. He tried to experience freedom outside the heavy and for him dangerous situation of Peking in the Zhuangzian "world of men." It consisted in a lively communication with women and men of the Han nation and other nationalities, of different social strata and ideological, philosophical and religious orientations. "Search for roots" was for him a

"search for identity" different from but also uniting the inhabitants of Mainland China with the peoples of the world in our age of globalization striving for intercultural understanding and communication.

Gao mentions four sources of "Chineseness": 1) Confucianism and traditional culture connected with it, 2) primeval shamanism, later Taoism and Buddhism, 3) popular culture, and 4) that what he calls "a kind of pure Eastern spirit" (Gao Xingjian 213).

Only the last three are worthy of further development in our modern era. The first one, although being in full bloom in certain historical periods, suffocated human individuality (zhixi ren de gexing) and therefore is unacceptable for the modern democratic age. As for the second source, the first two of which are autochthonous and the third of Indian origin, both are different from the Western Christian culture. They were never closely connected with politics and they often provided asylum for men of letters. Popular culture, according to Gao Xingjian, includes myths, legends, customs, rituals, folk songs, different kinds of narratives, operas (xiqu) and novellas (huaben) [. In the final fourth source Gao mentions Zhuangzi's philosophy of nature, Neo-Taoist dark or mystic learning of Wei and Jin Dynasties (225-419) and unreligious Chan [/|p] Buddhism (ibid. 212-13)

When writing *Soul Mountain,* Gao tried to find inspiration in different kinds of ancient and medieval stories and later novels: zhiren zhikuai, stories about people and fantastic things; chuanqi, classical tales; zhanghui xiaoshuo ppilnM^], novels in chapters, biji xiaoshuo [SjiE lE/htS], literary sketches; the works by Pu Songling, Shi Nai'an. (fl. around 1550), Cao Xueqin and Liu E (1857-1909), from Chinese; and Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka, James Joyce and some works of the French *noveau roman,* from Western literature. Gao's use of "grammatical characters" probably came from this last kind (ibid. 213).

In *Soul Mountain* Gao Xingjian united the old, but from the literary point of view progressive Chinese with modern, if not postmodern European literature. He has done it differently than those authors of the "search for roots" who mostly follow the outstanding Latin American writers, for instance Gabriel Garcia Marquez (*1928) or Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) (Galik 2000). He has processed his literary *Staff* with a high degree of mastership.

I was astonished especially by the psychological characteristics of some Han women in the Chinese South. Some of these ladies are either

psychically ill (as has been shown in my analysis) or for obvious reasons "the wildest womenfolk in the world, they do not know law and moral manners. It does not matter if they are interested in money or a foreign penis" (Kubin 83). There are some who have our sympathy. The time of the ideal of a Chinese woman as a liang qi xian mu, good wife and wise mother, is probably a matter of the past. After the "Cultural Revolution" a set of ten criteria "popularly circulated among urban young women who are looking for suitable mates" (Chu 265-66), which are shocking. There is no mention of love, mutual sympathy, knowledge, ethical standards. Just good housing, high income, even the children are not taken into account. No good prospects for the future of China. I do not think, as *Soul Mountain* reviewer Linda Jaivin does, that Gao Xingjian "invents a female companion" and the passages concerning the seduction of this imaginary lover are "excruciatingly tedious at best and mysogynistic at worst"(Jaivin 2). What if the "ten criteria" are really "ten commandments" for many young or middle-aged Chinese women of our days? Then tedious or mysogynistic is a misplaced judgment.

In the *Soul Mountain,* some women are worthy of a long search and Gao Xingjian does not write only "obsessively on the subject of lust" (Jaivin 2). The lust, mostly lost, is a part of the endeavours of his and other Chinese writers in the post-"Cultural Revolution" era.

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