

Co-existence of Romantic and Postmodern Trends in *Soul Mountain*

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ABSTRACT: *This research scrutinizes the influence and impact of Romanticism in the development of Modern Chinese fiction through one of the novels of Gao Xingjian. The major area of this study aims to argue that Xingjian's novel Soul Mountain unveils the Romantic attributes through the Postmodern style; therefore stylistic diversity contributes to ventriloquize the depth of artist's Romantic quest. This explorative study ascertains the use of Postmodern fissured structure and disseminated rhetoric as the authorial subversive strategy to hit upon the schizoid self of the Confucianist. It delineates that the use of fragmented and dispersed plot is endemic for the Romantic revolutionist, who is in search of self-centeredness and self-actualization. As against the Postmodern non-lyrical rhetoric, Xingjian asserts the Romantic supremacy by using a medium of Romantic language that is exhibited through natural imagery, rhythm and musicality in the lines. The paper further substantiates the Romantic adherence by laying stress upon the dethronement of the Postmodern themes by the author of the novella. Consequently, it argumentatively validates its stand point that the leitmotif of Soul Mountain is Romantic in essence, conveyed affectively through the Postmodern rhetoric.*

Key Words: Postmodernism, Romanticism, Confucianism, Decentralization, Logocentricism.

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Introduction

This study explores the persistent and concrete expression of Romantic attributes borne in the apparently Postmodernist Chinese novel named 'Lingshan' and is translated as *Soul Mountain*: a gigantic piece of art by a Chinese writer, Gao Xingjian. Xingjian has won a Nobel Prize in Literature after facing an increasing official harassment for his writings. Ultimately he takes a ten-month walking journey along the Chang River, an experience that shaped his first novel *Soul Mountain*. Xingjian is not only a novelist but a dramatist, a translator, a critic, a director, a painter and is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000.

This research is divided into two parts: the first part delineates that the Postmodernist style opted by the author is a subversive device to connote to the Romantic theme embedded in the novel; however the second part accosts those aspects of the novel that clearly repudiate it as having Postmodern themes. The study ascertains that *Soul Mountain* accentuates Romantic aspirations through its representation of Nature, self-asseveration, mystic elation, imaginative reverie and revolutionary spirit.

The lunge of this bailiwick is to explore that the assortment of Postmodernism in *Soul Mountain* is the transmutation of Romanticism. This paper is the discovery of Romanticism in the novella, under the disguise of Postmodernist style. It is insisted that modern Chinese Literature needs to be re-interpreted as a "Romantic rebellion against an intellectual modernity of Republican period of China" (Green, 2009, p. 256) that "places Chinese modernism into a global framework of literary Romanticism" (p. 257). Therefore there is a need of re-definition of the major concepts of Chinese modernity under the framework of literary Romanticism.

The basic thematic concerns at the heart of Romanticism prevalent in the novel are encapsulated in the themes of quest, self-exploration, spiritual yearning, pantheism, mysticism, imaginativeness and Romantic ecology. The portico of being a Modernist through its fragmentary, disseminated and surrealist narration is adopted to thrust his individuality by determining a medium of expression which itself boasts of the author's uniqueness of self. By choosing the distinctiveness of style, he actually yearns for the Romantic notion of the fulfillment of self-expression and self-affirmation. Moreover his stress upon the metaphysical concerns, assertion of self, quest for the ideal, and spiritual

yearnings dominant in the novel are nonetheless suggestive of its Romantic tendency (Yeung, 2008, p.79).

The paper therefore explores the “dispute between content and form” (Yeung, 2008, p. 454), that is merely a strategy to highlight the Romantic theme of the novel; hidden under the Postmodern account. Finally Xingjian’s Romantic adherence is prevalent since he develops a medium of language that is Romantic in nature: natural imagery, poetic description, rhythm and musicality with which the language swings throughout the narrative is highly effectual to hint upon the Romantic bearings of the novella. In this way thematic, ecological, stylistic and linguistic concerns are explored in order to substantiate the Romantic crux of *Soul Mountain*.

Literature Review

This research is designed to analyze Xingjian’s novel *Soul Mountain* as a re-appropriation of the Romantic tradition despite its appeal for Postmodernists. It elaborates the basis of the co- existence of Postmodernism and Romanticism in the novel. This stylistic tendency though contributes to enrich the Romantic content but lags behind for the novel’s wider appeal for Romanticism.

JessiccaYeung (2008), while commenting upon the modernist, meta-narrative and self-reflexive style of Xingjian in *Soul Mountain* opines that his style is reflective of the theme of spiritual longing: “this, (modern) theme of writing is dependent on the theme of spiritual quest” (p. 85). Yeung, in one of the chapters of *Ink Dances in limbo*, named, “Negotiating Modernism” remarks that Xingjian rejects the objective use of language in wider appeal to subjective language. Yeung quotes Xingjian himself who proclaims that *Soul Mountain* has two plots i-e, “Literature and Metaphysics”. He considers this kind of oscillation in the narration as the shift between “reality and dream, memories and imagination” and affirms that it is a “stream of language” rather than stream of consciousness (Yeung, p. 85. Gao, 1991). Yeung comprehends this fragmented narration as the “Freudian chaos in man’s repressed soul” (p. 86).

Xingjian, in his essay “On Modernism and Contemporary Chinese Literature” (1987) distinguishes between Western Modernism and Chinese Modernism by saying, “unlike Western Modernism which is underlined by the negation of the Self, Chinese Modernism is founded on the affirmation of the Self” (Yan, 1998, p. xx). Chen, in “Personal Landscape”, while comparing Gao’s novel with *The Divine Comedy*

observed that, “like Dante’s *Divine Comedia*, the work begins with the mid-life crisis and adopts the mode of journey of self-discovery and re-affirmation” (p. 9).

According to Kirk (1996), Chinese Literature bears a strong note of Romantic thought. He lays emphasis on the fact that the principal focus of modern Chinese realism is not on the aesthetic means of representing the Real, but with the writer’s subjective experience in the work. Kirk also traces the cause of China’s political turmoil in history, owing to which China plunged into a ten-year of political fragmentation. It was due to the 2000 year old dynastic system of Universal Kingship in 1911 that led to the political disintegration in the form of May Fourth Movement in 1919.

Jonthan L Thorndike (2011) also claims that Xingjian shares with Rousseau the passion with the emerging concept of self. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was famous as a French philosopher, ethicist, novelist, and educator and also initiated the European era of Romanticism. He is strongly influenced by the natural surroundings, landscapes, trees, water, birds, and other external realities. Like most Romantics he revolted against the human institutions as well as the bizarre and sarcastic conspiracies that forced him into exile in his own country. According to Thorndike, in the narrator of *Soul Mountain* one finds the uncanny parallels to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Thorndike further argues that both Rousseau and Gao Xingjian find the origin of the self in the independent, imaginative experiment with language.

The book, *Memos from the Besieged City: Lifelines for Cultural Sustainability* by Djeil Kadir (2011) critiques the elements of self-assertion and Romanticism in *Soul Mountain*. While paying a tribute to Gao Xingjian, Kadir remarks that Xingjian was awarded with the Nobel Prize in 2000 “for an oeuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths in Chinese novel and drama”. Though the author’s exile from China was the self-banishment in order to escape the political repressions and subjugation in China but he didn’t “leave China empty-handed”. Kadir quotes Xingjian who asserts that escape “is the most reliable strategy for the protection of the self” (p.188).

In an “Introduction” to Gao Xingjian’s plays, “On The Other Shore”, Gilbert Chee Fung Fong (1999) comments that, to Gao Xingjian privateness is of high value. The factors that inhibit his artistic freedom were the political system of China, the totalizing regime bent on

Collectivism and the predisposition of the uniformity in ideology. Such heavy-headedness strangles “the freedom of expression, particularly in art” (p. xv). However, for Xingjian, “Literature has no obligation... has no relation to politics. It is purely a personal undertaking” (p. xvi).

Further, Fong (2005) in an “Introduction” to “Cold Literature” reviews that *Soul Mountain* is the festivity of the unspoiled, natural beauty of uncontaminated mountains and unpolluted streams: “These primordial signs point to the first innocence of human existence, the ideal oneness of man and nature which in the last chapter of the novel, is manifested in the image of frog in the snow” (p. xxvi). Therefore it is transparent that in Nature, Xingjian discovers the freedom of cosmic unity. Xingjian’s own environmental concerns are expressed by Fong: “he felt at home alone and by himself, among the unspoiled environment and cultures and living far away from the center of political power” (p. xxviii).

Lovell (2006), in his book, *The Politics of Cultural Capital* appreciates Xingjian’s literary contribution by saying that he has demonstrated in *Soul Mountain* the “impressive commitment to literary creativity in the solitude of exile (p.186). Further, Lovell challenges the Nobel Committee’s remark on Xingjian, of calling him a “perspicacious skeptic”. It is rather his Romantic impulse in Lingshan that conquers the skeptic claim upon Xingjian: “it emerges that the self being sought in Lingshan has regressed to the Romantic core...a marginal individual, both detached from and capable of speaking truth” (p. 168).

Green (2009) opines that Romanticism is a current against as well as a product of modernity. The Romantic critique of modernity is bound up with an experience of loss. The Romantic’s vision, he writes is “characterized by the painful conviction that in the modern reality something precious has been lost” (p.257) and certain essential human values have been alienated that is often experienced as exile.

Jonathan Bate, in *The Song of the Earth* develops a further argument that a specifically literary use of language can reconnect one to the natural world. While privileging metrical writing he suggests that such a discourse “answers to nature’s rhymes” (Bate, 2000, p. 76). Poetry becomes all the more important in recalling and sustaining a non-mechanical relationship to the world. It is in this sense that poetry might be said to be “the place where we save the earth” (p. 283).

The analysis substantiates the Romantic self-centeredness, imaginative flights and ecological inclination of the novelist followed in

Soul Mountain. Postmodernist stylistic tendency is not hindrance rather an aid to endorse and instigate the Romantic crux of the travelogue.

Materials and Methods

The research seeks to unearth the streaks and strains of British Romanticism embedded in the so called Postmodernist novel *Soul Mountain* by Gao Xingjian. The qualitative method is opted for conducting the research in order to meet the explorative pre-requisite of the dissertation. The Postmodern Theory of Jacques Derrida (1967) that rejects the possibility of a fixed traditional meaning and Jacques Lacan's (1977) notion of impossibility of attaining the final meaning through the medium of language would help to justify the disintegrated language, intentionally opted by Xingjian. The Romantic propagation of John Keats, William Wordsworth and William Blake are incorporated in order to substantiate the argument of the study. Jonathan Bate's (2000) modern environmentalist theory based on Romantic revival further delineates Xingjian's footsteps in the Romantic world. Thomas Moran (2002), exclusively explores the ecological depiction of *Soul Mountain* "*Lost in the Woods: Nature in Soul Mountain*". He accentuates the novel to be the ecological rendering and asserts Xingjian's *Soul Mountain* as nature-oriented literature or environmental literature.

The paper substantiates its stand point through various tools: reviews, research papers, newsletters, internet journals, primary and secondary sources were the touchstone in order to make it more argumentative and concrete.

Discussion and Analysis

Literature itself generally has no mission, no group, no movement, no ideology; the writer is solitary, unique. The placards of various ideologies have been attached to the writer by others so that he can be easily identified and put into archives or else put up for sale (Xingjian, 2000).

Gao Xingjian strongly revolts against his works being adherents of any 'ism' because such precincts and reservations through its mere austere approach thwart the vastness of the texts by confining it in a deadlock; that provokes an entry in a room of no exit. But this paper centers upon Xingjian's novel *Soul Mountain* as not bearing one creed, rather the richness and diversity of his art renders his novel to become the proponent of many philosophies and ideologies. It is only the readers who baronies his texts as the figments of Postmodernism or Romanticism but

he never intended to embrace such intentions while writing them. While rejecting his art to be the adherent of any label, he proclaims: “it was more appropriate to place himself at the meeting point between Eastern and Western cultures and between history and present” (Xingjian, 20000, p. xviii). If we substantiate this stance, we can readily prove that Xingjian’s works are the fusion of Western Modernism and European Classicism: following the traits of Romanticism and having clear strains of Modern narratology.

a. Postmodern Style Connotes to the Romantic Core:

According to Charles Baudlaire, the Twentieth Century allegorical relationship is characterized by Bricoleurism and heterogeneity; “obscurities in connection between meaning and sign” (Jennings, 1987 p. 108. Litrupp, p. 76). It is a broken and arbitrary language in which “any person, anything, any relationship can mean anything else” (p.76). The narratology of *Soul Mountain* also follows such a sequence; the stories are “all fragments without any sequence” (Xingjian, 2000, p.452) that itself is just another signifier without absolute meaning in it. Xingjian has also chosen for his text the use of allegory which refers to non- fixity of the signified. There is a gap between sign and meaning which is the dominant concern of Modernism, but such indeterminacy of the text also pinpoints towards the uncertainty of one’s self that constantly “multiplies into many startling forms” (p. 150). This kind of narration is the subversive technique to promote fluid subjectivity and ever changing and non- conclusive self which is the touchstone of beginning the Romantic quest.

Xingjian’s adoption of the Modernist technique of stream of consciousness in the novel is apt and pertinent to portray the fragmented and schizoid existence of man. But the novel is not the re- assertion of such morbid notions, rather seeks freedom and escape from such redundant existence and breaths a life of “pure spirituality” (p.504). Ironically behind this disseminated, dispersed eloquence, the novel aspires for the wholeness of being. The style is fragmented but the thought and aspiration of the text is to promote “lofty purity, tranquility and serenity” (p.444), unity and cohesion; the crucial objective of Romantics. For instance, the mask in Chapter 24, which is a carved wooden mask, can be perceived both as a beast and man. Similarly the Modernist narration of the novel is just a mask to conform to the extant age, but dormant under it is the dungeon of Man’s soul. When the mask of civilized language is dug out, it comes up with the darkness and savagery of man’s spiritual abyss. If Romanticism is the journey towards self-

fulfillment, then in such an endeavor if one encounters primitive man, it should not cease its movement towards self-knowledge. In *Soul Mountain*, various meta-fictional elements come together to create an apparently disjunctive narrative. It displays reflexivity at every level of observation. History, Sexuality, Art, Gender Study, Religion, Spirituality and Metaphysics, all are condensed into a multi-dimensional rhetoric. Moreover the narrator cobbles together a mix of folklore, character sketches, and snapshots of the rural Chinese countryside to create a modernist mosaic. The purpose is not to dig fissures into structures, rather to give a Romantic plethora of life as seen in its abundant complexity. The intentional formlessness in narratology is for the sake of expressing the dispersed self. This self-search bears a romantic cult and therefore the absence of form in the narrative structure is reflective of the chaos that one has to undergo in order to give form to his macabre self-identity. Towards the end, when the fractured identities come to achieve unification, "I'm calling your spirit, I'm calling you" (p.489), the fragmented narrative also gains fluency and glibness: "my mind is crystal clear, I see the transparent night, the blue forest laden with snow" (p.489).

The plot of the novel parallels the progression of the artist's journey or in other words, the structure also is in a constant state of journey of unease. When the diasporic self I, You, He, She, attains unification towards end, the narration becomes surrealistic, serene and smooth. It is intriguing to note that the fragmented and dispersed pronouns undergo a Romantic progression. With the passage of novel's time and space these characters come close and consequently mingle with each other. Yeung accentuates that, towards the end of the novel "the structure parallels the progression of the sexual desire into gratification and relaxation" and such unification is the "gratification of a psychological need" (2008, p.85). Therefore one can say that the fractured identities are represented in the form of these pronouns, gradually come to achieve the Romantic wholeness of being through the fulfillment of sexual longings. Moreover, the disintegrated narration throughout the novel comes to attain fluency and glibness in the concluding chapters. Over there the narration breaks the confines of language and moves in time and space to give the effect of dream-like structure. Therefore, one can say that the structure of the novel is Postmodernist but the basic end of such a structure is to add to the Romantic theme of the narrative.

In the tradition of Post-Modernists, the novel doesn't aim for any plot but it nonetheless delineates the inner plot of man's Self. Xingjian remarked in his Nobel Prize speech about the structure of *Soul Mountain*:

“the book is not plot-oriented but based on the inner world of the author, rather than plots and incidents; my heart is its basic structure” (2000). Therefore this inner journey has to be narrated in the sequence of artist’s development, progression and attainment of his inner solace and selfhood, and indisputably declares its Romantic cult. The novel, *Soul Mountain* does not have any progression, except perhaps an inward progression towards understanding. The plot is not a gripping one, wobbles in several random directions, twirling about until the narrator drags the story forward again. The stories, he says “are all fragments without any sequence” (p. 452). He says that a story can have a “beginning and no ending..... parts which are developed but aren’t completed.... about which there is nothing more to”(p.452).

The novel ends with the non-conclusive style of the Postmodernist, “with no ending...parts which are developed but aren’t completed” (p.453), to give the Romantic space and freedom to the reader. The elusive ending is actually a tool for not thrusting the author’s authority by comprehending its conclusion. This technique allows the reader to exercise his inimitability and distinctiveness for its comprehension, long been aspired by the narrator of this Romantic text. Since the process to attain the internal, metaphysical Lingshan is persistent, constant and relentless, “I am a monster with human mind and can find no refuge” (p. 229), therefore the voyager can never attain the goal, neither can his journey end and nor the novel could clinch with the full stop at its end!

Xingjian, during the course of the novel incorporates various writing devices: the use of variety of narratorial voices, cinematography, fragmented, dreamlike narration, poetry in prose, pastiche and other Post-Modernist features to enrich it thematically. The indeterminate tendency in the narration is the clue to the possibility of multiplicity and undecidability in the theme. It is none other than self that is the leitmotif of the novel, the self that is constantly at move and is incomprehensible; therefore the use of meta-narration serves to complement the theme of the book. Yeung quotes Xingjian himself who accepted the use of Modernist technique in *Soul Mountain*, not to promote the Modernist content and thought rather to exploit the Romantic notions. Hence the use of surrealistic narration is an apt *modus operandi* to give currency to the underlined meaning and substance of the novel, “the unconscious, dreams and psychological processes visualized in images. A language is invented to mean them... the boundary between external reality and internal feelings are transgressed”. (Xingjian, 1980, p. 55, Yeung, p. 25).

Xingjian's Modernist fragmented rhetoric not only instigates the theme of dispersed self, conversely it also serves as a useful technique to thrust one's individuality and self-righteousness. The confined soul, when yearns for expression speaks out the language of unsaid, by disqualifying all the confines of conventional grammar: "the lips can't produce sound" (p. 351), the artist is predisposed to flee into the language of his own soul. Therefore, the co-existence of Romantic Self and Modern language is embedded in Chinese literature. Such paradigmatic confusion between words and ideas, to verbalize the unspoken thoughts: "exploding exploding exploding exploding explo- explo- explo- explo- -ding -ding -ding-ding- then again absolute silence" (p. 504) is also the quandary faced by the Romantics. This disseminated style is here a way to explain the seeker's incomprehensible mystic elation for which he has been striving so long. In order to comprehend such a predicament the gap between signifier and signified widens so much that words remain incomprehensible to portray the thought behind them and hence acquire the Postmodernist disbelief on language. Xingjian's narrator also wants to 'transcend the limitations of phrase and sentences' in order to "give expression to the suffering and fear of death, distress and joy, loneliness and consolation..." (p.351) adhering to Postmodern as well as Romantics.

Xingjian's self-reflexive narration is again an expression of free spiritedness, commenting about his own art is a use of his non-Confucianist free will. This "revolutionary fiction" (p. 455), if thwarts the traditional art form, still conforms to the Romantic notion of self-actualization but out of its own will.

b. Romantic Supremacy upon the Postmodern Rhetoric

"The exotic quest, like art, is democratic: It promises salvation to all seekers". (Dorothy, 1994, p.10).

This exotic quest is indubitably a journey, no matter physical or spiritual. Xingjian's own quest and his yearning for distant shores places him within the bounds of literary Romanticism. Moreover if the quest is irresistible and the seeker is restless and squirmy, it has to be deficient of immobility. It is bound to be a constant strife which leads to a lethargic and tiresome journey, and in such an endeavor one can never give any premonition of a promising goal. Journey is also the leitmotif of the book, it is the textual kinesism. The background theme of journey gives an illusion that the journey is linear and there is also a progression in it. This reinforcement of the idea of journey in *Soul Mountain* is at the heart of

Romanticism. Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Tennyson's *Ulysses* and *Lotus Eater*, Homer's *Odyssey* all state the theme of journey. Therefore, if the novel deals with the pursuit like journey, it entails the Romantic attribute i-e a journey that aspires for a certain quest: "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..." (p. 312).

The motif of journey in *Soul Mountain* is the only action in the whole novel and the source of its development, plot and progression. The various departures and arrivals in the novel are the only physical actions that give a sense of movement and make one conscious of its being a travelogue: "you arrive in this mountain country in South" (p. 1).

Gao Xingjian believes in 'no-ism', but he is particularly harsh about Postmodernism. According to him, in the name of Postmodernism, art has vanished, it is "the means of what has become an end in itself" (Fong, 2005, p. xvii) and therefore anybody can become an artist because, "artistic skills are not required as prerequisites" (Fong, p.xvii).

It is true of the author of the book not to bear the tag of the Modernist, since his novel clashes at various instances with the Postmodernists themselves. Unlike Postmodernist challenge of ethnocentricism, *Soul Mountain* retreats to Chinese myths, customs and folk tales: "the shaman will come in person on the twenty seventh day of the twelfth month to invite the goddess..." (p. 162). Instead of dethroning Chinese identity, Xingjian's novel is the celebration of Chinese ethnicity, Chinese language, and Chinese rituals. In Chinese Romantic Literature, one can encounter many identical elements of Classical poetry: the images appearing in the Chinese literature such as cult of suffering, the appearance of the lonely wanderer who proudly turned his back on society, folk tales, myths and symbol of a wild man; all these streaks of Chinese Romanticism are clearly followed by the novelist, thrown aside by the Postmodernists.

Romanticism lays emphasis on the "extreme assertion of self and the value of individual experience" (Day, 1996, p. 1). Xingjian, in *Soul Mountain* leaves behind the nihilistic philosophy of the decentralization of self and emphasizes logocentricism, rejected by the Postmodernists. For Postmodernists, self is fragmentary and reduced to the point of a mere linguistic discourse. The idea of the centrality of self, put forward by Xingjian is of a coherent and harmonious self, unlike the Post- Modernist notion of self as endlessly recreated and revised, "ephemeral and discontinuous" (Powel and Owen, 2007, p xii). Therefore the

Postmodernist rejection of individual uniqueness and inter-subjectivity is condemned by the author through the endorsement of the idea of self as the logos and center of being. Wordsworth also evaded such a realization of the decentered self because, “it would empty the self of the substance and transcendental dimension that he will attribute to it” (Day, 1996, p. 123). Wordsworth’s poetry, said Hazlitt, “is not external but internal” since “he lives in the busy solitude of his own heart; in the deep silence of thought” (McFarland, 1998, p. 296. Hazlitt, p. 113).

Soul Mountain is not only a physical quest but also explores in the bliss of solitude, the deep hidden realities of Man’s Self. But this path towards self-fulfillment is disillusioned and thwarted repeatedly by the physical, psychological and instinctual desires. Once he is succeeded in overcoming such enticements, the road to Lingshan becomes smooth and comfy. Gao Xingjian writes in his powerful narrative of the search for personal identity and spiritual meaning: “I don't know if you have ever observed this strange thing, the self. Often the more you look, the more it doesn't seem to be like it, and the more you look, the more it isn't it” (p. 150).

Xingjian’s protagonist, in the course of the journey also discovers the self as fluid, ever changing and in the perpetual process of becoming. The more one discovers the inner recesses of one’s heart, the more one is lost. Thus, he denies the notion of self as static essence: “If you concentrate on looking yourself, you will find that yourself will gradually separate from the self you are familiar with and multiply into many startling forms” (p.150).

Therefore, *Soul Mountain* clearly averts Postmodernist emphasis upon depthlessness, the traveller rather lays stress on viewing things with multiple perspectives by introducing the technique of cinematography where he flashes the same object with dark, bright and dim lights in order to unearth the reality of the picture behind the picture. This is the Romantic trait of going into the heart of the matter or manipulation of the soul. The emphasis on viewing things with depth is an attempt to explore keenly until the core of the matter is unearthed. As opposed to the Post-Modernist stress on depthlessness and simulation, he proposed the technique of “zoom lens of the camera” (p. 355) to promote multiple perspectives for the sake of probing into deep.

In *Soul Mountain* also, the eagle rock in Chapter 16, assumes threefold connotations. Here Xingjian is positing mobility around images. His own perspective mingles with the stationary object, the atmosphere

fluctuates between light and dark and the perception of the rock constantly shifts. Eagle rock is initially perceived as a human figure, then a shaman and finally as a young woman and a beautiful girl. Although Xingjian here imbeds a powerful impressionistic technique exercised by postmodernists as well as Romantics but the basic aim of such a technique is to rather promote a contradictory preposition of postmodernists themselves, of viewing into the deep meanings of the structure, bearing a Romantic connotation. An active principle at the heart of Romanticism is “anxiety, a state of perpetual becoming, interrogation, quest, and struggle” (Lowy and Sayre, 2001, p. 23). All these codes are clearly and evidently practised in *Soul Mountain* by the protagonist of the novella. In his quest of self- exploration, the narrator has to surmount all the physical, historical, geo- political, geographical, mythical impediments. But the protagonist undergoes an evolutionary process and learns that throughout his journey of life he “comprehend(s) nothing, understand(s) nothing” (p. 506). The journey moves from knowledge to ignorance, from pragmatism to the innocence and to the state of divinity.

Xingjian has dissected the self on purpose. All the pronouns, I, you, he, she, are an extension of self and are created to overcome the loneliness that he experiences. These pronouns are his fictive overtures to assume order within the chaotic realm of his mind “You know that I am talking to myself to alleviate my loneliness” (p. 312). The text is not structured to stress upon the Postmodernist decentralization of Self rather tends to attain a Romantic vision of self-centralization.

The journey is Romantic as it is also at personal level since Lingshan is located at the source of You River indicating his internalization of concept of journey. This dive into the river is the plunge into the heart of darkness; he is confronting the collective guilt of Man, It is like sleep walking in the impenetrable darkness of the River of Death. The impenetrable, immeasurable, mysterious, fluid and unpredictable self is hard to be known and the attainment of Lingshan is the accomplishment of his journey of his search of self. This vehement quest for self-actualization and self-assertion is a Romantic pursuit, where individual is considered to be the member of a meaningful whole. Romanticism seeks to locate man’s place in the universe, The narrator’s quest is also in the pursuit of finding a meaning of the self: “I ponder what I might do in the remaining years of my life” (p. 308).

Xingjian’s protagonist revolts against self- persecution: in the course of his journey he is rather covetous to fully commit himself to the creative expression of his own reality and no authority other than self

would again be allowed to dictate the judgment of that reality. Romanticism bears its roots in the cult of solitude, aloofness and melancholy. The first requirement in the attainment of self is to let the artist experience the seclusion. For that purpose the explorer plunged into Nature in order to attain the spiritual glory.

Exile functions as a welcome vehicle for the author's Romantic aesthetics and his nostalgia seems to be motivated by a Romantic impulse that he shared with the British Romantics. The protagonist of *Soul Mountain* is a modern man fraught with the inner conflicts; he is in search of harmony, love and a lost home. His nostalgia arose from the sense of homelessness and the agony of displaced self. In order to fill the gap, to alleviate his loneliness, he selected an alternative to express his artistic selfhood. He elected a medium of writing which, according to him is a vehicle to "show that you're still alive, that you still exist" and is a means of "protecting the self" (Fong, 2005). But such a non-secular writing demands freedom from the social constraints, a solitary confinement where he is stifled by the image of his own self. Thus the writer must equip himself "with the willingness to be lonely" in order to achieve "self-salvation" (Fong, *Cold Literature*, 2005 p. viii).

Spiritual or mystic ecstasy is needed in order to reach Lingshan : "Ling meaning spirit, shan mean mountain" (p.4). Throughout the Romantic journey, his constant endeavor is to let the soul be elated, by dethroning the physical impulse: "your soul flees through the orifices of your body" (p. 438) and "you seem to glide in the air, disintegrate, disperse, lose physical form, then serenely drift through into the deep valley, like a thread of drifting gossamer" (p. 419). From "the rotting human flesh" (p. 492), his stark naked soul protrudes and he comes to feel that each object of Nature is staring at him. He fears the stare of cat's eyes, is petrified of the attack of tiger and fox, afraid of the strong glare of the snow (p. 490) and ultimately confronts the "wide open" (p.506) eye of the frog.

The pantheistic and mystic ecstasy is hard to achieve, it is the exhaustive and tiresome quest. In the second last chapter he himself says that: "it is a struggle...You can fall over with every step, so you fall over, then struggle as you slide and crawl" (p. 501). At each and every moment he is keen, cautious to conceive any hint of communication with the Higher Being. But up till now his vision is not cleared enough to have the one to one communication with God. The natural surroundings give him no hint except the ambiguous and vague images. Finally the confrontation with God in the last chapter reaches the epochs of his spiritual rupture. It

is the visitation of God in the image of a ‘small green frog’ (p. 505). There is a deliberate emphasis on the eye movements of the frog. The wide open eye is unmoving and staring at him constantly as if trying to communicate through Para lingual gestures. The extra sensory communication is established through the medium of optical sensation. The gaze of the “intelligent round eye” is the signifier of the harmony and fusion with the Higher Being: “he is talking to me with his eyes by opening and closing them” and “watches to see if I will understand”. The image of the blinking frog signifies the strange link between man and God, this contradictory state symbolizes that God is at the same time gracious and distant, benevolent and malevolent, merciful and wrathful. But he remains unable to comprehend its meaning. Since the other eye denies communication, one may say that his pursuit is still incomplete. The One to One relation is still to be attained and the journey still knows no bounds as “his other eye opens and closes as it speak a language incomprehensible to humans” (p. 505).

It is not clear whether the pursuer did attain the zenith of spirituality or Lingshan but if his search is spiritual, the novel ceases to find its scope in the disciple of Postmodern. The Postmodern affirmation towards decenteredness of universal being, absolute value or absolute truth thwarts *Soul Mountain* to be a Postmodern rendering, in its wider appraisal towards Romantic ties.

Xingjian’s eco-romantic concerns find validation in the novel *Soul Mountain*; for the novel is a presentation of Romantic ecology and also condemns the exploiters of green land. He shows dissatisfaction with the materialistic, mechanistic view of the world: “I should have left those contaminated surroundings long ago and returned to nature to look for this authentic self” (p.12). Xingjian’s Romantic reverie is attained by breathing in the pure and authentic natural surroundings: “Although you were born in the city, grew up in the cities and spent a larger part of your life in some huge urban metropolis, you can’t make that huge urban metropolis the hometown of your heart” (p. 328). This refuge in nature is to experience the unpolluted and pristine world of nature, where no man-made philosophies, political power and social or utilitarian would hinder his movement towards self-fulfillment.

Soul Mountain’s abundant representation of pristine and pure nature is clearly evaded by the proponents of Postmodernism. Theirs is the deserted land devoid of natural beauty or in T.S Eliot’s phraseology, “*Waste Land*”, borne by the post-war regiment.

Xingjian's *Soul Mountain*, for the eloquence of the Romantic thoughts coins the medium of expression through Romantic language that matches the poetic thoughts of the narrator. Bate also, while privileging metrical writing suggests a mode of writing that "answers to nature's own rhythms" (Bate, 2000, p. 76). The rhythm and musicality in the lines that swing in to and fro motion is heightened with his use of natural imagery, metaphors and personification. The choice of Romantic language is opted by Xingjian in order to thrust the uniqueness of his self. The self-assertion when yearns for expression, speaks out the language of unsaid or the inarticulate language that breaks all the confines of syntactical order. In order to embrace the Romantic freedom of self, one has to surpass and overreach the rules of language as well. When language fails to speak out the depths of one's heart, when "the lips can't produce sound" (p 351), the artist is predisposed to flee into the language of his own soul. Romantic language is an apt expressive medium to sing the song of the earth:

The poetry of earth is never dead (Keats).

But there remains the song that names the earth (Heidegger).

(Bate,2000 The Song of the Earth).

The depiction of the natural land seeks meticulous description that can only be mediated in a new kind of literary language which Clare calls "green language" (Clark, 2011) and the research names it as a romantic language. Such a language must have to be informally vernacular that swings with nature's rhymes with its colorful deviations from the lexicon, grammar and linguistic confines that is Romantic in nature rather than following the dispersed and enigmatic Postmodernist rhetoric.

The writer has presented a heterogeneous text in *Soul Mountain* and rejects itself of being a novel: "This isn't a novel...A novel must have a complete story" (p. 452). The text questions from its readers the decidability of its genre; whether it is a painting or a prose, poem or fiction, autobiography or historical record, travelogue or epic, Romantic journey of anthropological record? If the book is the hybrid of all, it is Postmodernist pastiche. But at the same time the protagonist himself discards it to be a Postmodern: "This is modernist; it's imitating the West but falling short" (p. 453). This falling short in its modernist appeal is actually the Romantic inclination of the author to take the liberty required by the writer as well as to give freedom to the individuality of the reader, and let it be interpreted in a number of ways.

No matter how much the biographer chooses to side with the Post-Modernist tendency to not reach, to not to be conclusive, he does in fact reach the vantage point in his journey to Lingshan. He is able to confront himself; he is able to see the workings of his mind, the workings of the nature present within and without, the male and female sexuality, the passion for creation, the amalgamation of the universe with all its cosmological and terrestrial realms: “it was then that he understood, his sufferings all came from his physical body” (p. 409). The unfettering of the spatial and temporal boundaries is the magic moment that Yeats talks about, the mystical moment, the twilight that reveals and makes a passage into the collective unconscious: “I have been invariably made to listen...waited in vain for some kindly divinity to intervene, to turn Heaven and Earth and get me out of my predicament” (p. 410).

Postmodernist belief in hyper reality: “technology can give us more reality than nature can” (Eco 1993, p.203) is deterred in the novel. Lingshan is not laid on the foundation of unreal or copy, rather witnesses the real and authentic. He is surprised by the unbearable beauty of the natural surroundings and confrontation with stark real that appears to him a dream: “it is a fine day with not a trace of cloud in the sky... the dream is like this” (p. 245). The Postmodernist logo of hyper- real is clearly averted in *Soul Mountain*, since the protagonist has plunged into Nature in order to witness the palpable reality present in the wild forest. In the grand cycle of Nature: mountains, seas and rivers, he escapes from the hyper real world of China, where the truth and reality of his art was marred under the pretense of shallow collectivism.

Postmodernist’s skepticism of grand-narratives and formal aesthetics in favor of minimalist designs is not applicable on the novel like *Soul Mountain*. Since this research itself is the exploration of the novel being a revival and rejuvenation of Romanticism in the modern era and its succession of becoming a grand narrative and Classic old aesthetic.

Conclusion:

This paper establishes through its extensive analysis that the novel is Romantic in its essence and content. The journey is an embankment into a land of one’s selfhood through the medium of Romantic self-expression, imaginativeness, spirituality. Such is Xingjian’s Romantic creed of spiritual yearning; his allotting of anthropomorphist attributes: viewing god in the objects of nature is the pursuit of a mystic. Moreover, the scenic splendors, the flora and fauna, the freshness of the beauteous

surroundings breathed by the ecological land have to be expressed in the poetic, rhythmical and Romantic lyrical language.

To encapsulate, it is apparent that the Post- Modernist style is opted for the text out of authorial intention. The Post-Modernist stylistic tendency is exploited to contribute to the Romantic content but lags behind for the novel's wider appeal for Romanticism. The façade of post-modernist narrative in the heart of hearts is the re-affirmation of the Romantic tradition that expresses author's defiance as well as conformity to the traditional art. In addition, the poetic description of the green land bears the cult of Romantic and thematically it also comes to embody the Romantic culmination of the narrative.

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