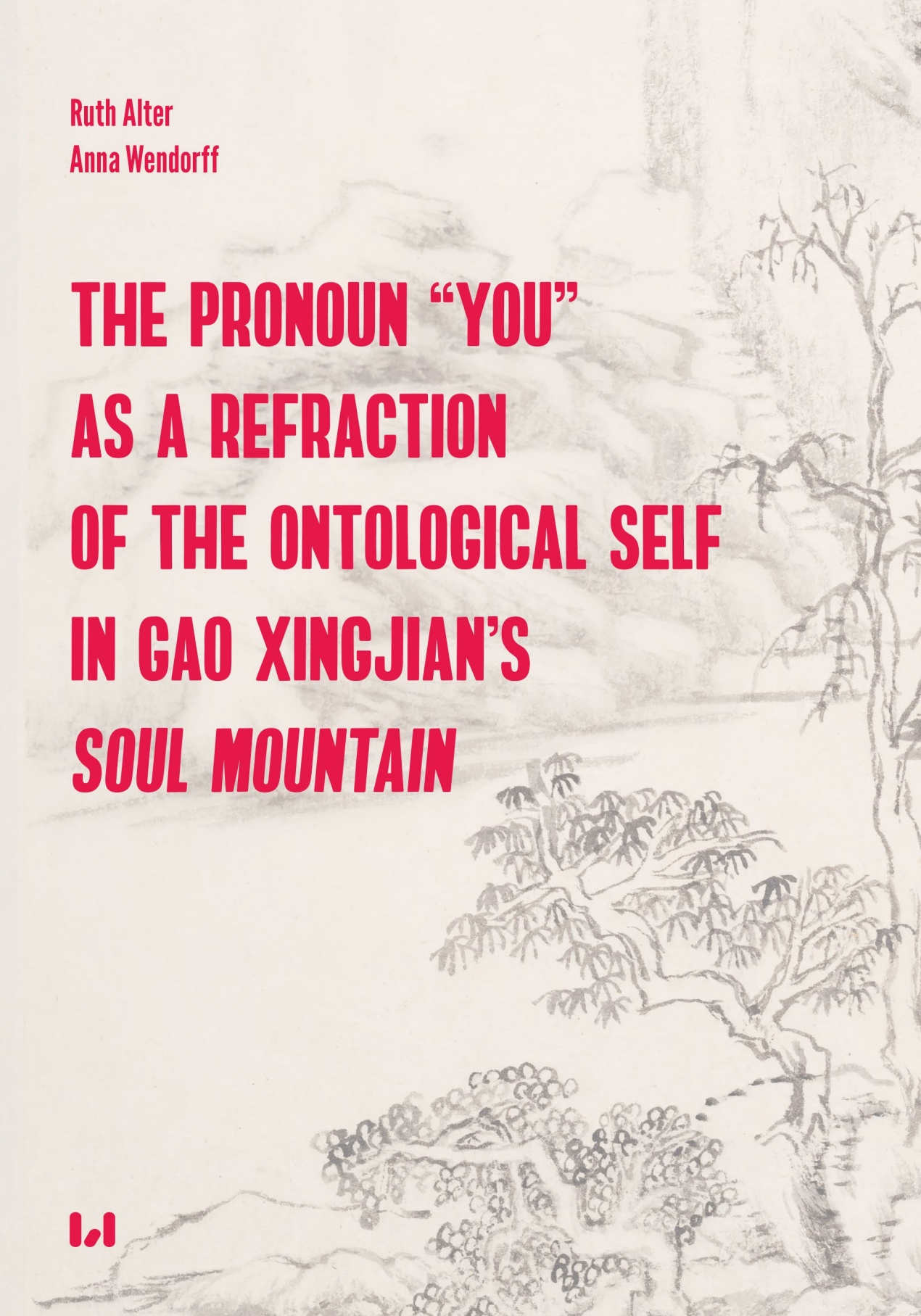
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INTRODUCTION

The literature of Gao Xingjian, a novelist, playwright, essayist, painter and the Nobel Literature Prize winner (2000), constitutes the essential reference point in contemporary times. Xingjian consistently searches for novel literary conventions and rejects restrictions imposed by ideologies. Through his books, he repeatedly reveals interest in the subject of individual consciousness, artistic freedom, and complex human existence. His most outstanding and highly acclaimed novel, *Soul Mountain* (*Lingshan*, 1990), integrates autobiographical elements, travel writing, folklore, mythology, philosophy and experimental narrative methods, exploring landscapes of China, as well as the author's inner world.

What distinguishes *Soul Mountain* is its use of multiple narrative perspectives: instead of portraying a single protagonist, Gao Xingjian splits consciousness into several grammatical persons, namely 'I', 'You', 'She' and 'He'. By doing so, he challenges conventionally understood identity and encourages the reader to reconsider the connection between subjectivity, memory, imagination and existence. Within this structure, particular significance is attached to the second-person pronoun 'You', which seems familiar and distant at the same time. Assuming the role of neither a conventional character nor a plain narrative device, it functions as a medium through which the self explores, reflects on and reconstructs its own identity.

Soul Mountain has attracted considerable attention from academic circles; yet most studies have examined its autobiographical traits, narrative experiments, cultural affiliations, ecological aspects, and metaphysical concerns. Such critics as Mabel Lee, Marián Gálik, Thomas Moran, Ming Jian, Gang Gary Xu and Andrea Bachner have attempted to interpret narrative approaches and philosophical questions applied by Gao, failing to address ontological implications of the novel's pronoun system sufficiently. Contemporary scholars often treat the pronoun 'You' as an alter ego, a psychological projection, a parallel narrative figure or an external manifestation of consciousness, disregarding the possibility that 'You' may represent a distinct ontological manifestation of the self.

The present study employs a qualitative hermeneutic and narratological approach to analyze Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain*, addressing the shifting pronoun structure, particularly with regard to the second-person pronoun 'You'. It explores the 'Ontological Self' and presents arguments that instead of being understood merely as a parallel narrative figure or external manifestation of consciousness, 'You' should be perceived as a unique way through which self may examine its own existence.

This relationship is conceptualized based on the analytical framework, which is the concept of 'refraction' used as a hermeneutic and narratological metaphor rather than in its scientific sense. Refraction means the process

through which the 'Ontological Self' adopts different narrative perspectives that enable perception of its own experience. Contrary to reflection, which simply creates a mirror image, refraction emphasizes both continuity and difference, and thus the refracted self remains connected to its ontological source, while assuming a distinct narrative position.

From this perspective, the pronouns 'I', 'You', 'He' and 'She' are understood as different modalities of self-perception rather than autonomous protagonists. Particularly, the pronoun 'You' functions as a refracted expression of the narrator's selfhood, enabling self-observation, self-interrogation and philosophical reflection while retaining a unified consciousness.

This interpretation of 'You' in *Soul Mountain* should not be understood solely as a conventional form of direct address aimed at the reader. At various points, the grammatical 'You' can momentarily extend to the reader, as second-person narration naturally creates a sense of reader involvement. However, the shared memories, desires and biographical experiences of 'I' and 'You' indicate that the pronoun primarily addresses a position inside the composite self. The apparent openness of 'You' thus operates on two levels: it creates intimacy with the reader while simultaneously marking a distance necessary for consciousness to turn inward and address itself. Refraction describes this dual movement more precisely than simple substitution. The experiential material remains the same, but is reorganised around a different deictic centre and consequently assumes a different emotional and cognitive significance.

More specifically, refraction can be identified in the text through four textual features. First, 'You' shares experiences or memories that are elsewhere associated with 'I'. Second, shifting from one pronoun to another modifies the degree of distance from those experiences, often allowing for judgement, instruction or interrogation. Third, the refracted voice performs a function that remains difficult for 'I' with the same clarity, such as narrating desire, confronting fear or constructing 'She'. Finally, the novel consistently demonstrates the potential convergence of these pronouns, which confirms that their differentiation does not produce entirely separate persons. These criteria situate the concept within the language and structure of the novel. The term 'Ontological Self' therefore does not refer to a literal metaphysical substance existing outside the text, but rather the underlying continuity revealed through the novel's shifts in grammatical person.

In this study, ontology is approached through four analytical categories: ontological source, refraction, multiplicity and self-reflection, which help to interpret the novel's pronoun system and its various manifestations of selfhood. The book primarily aims to demonstrate how the pronoun 'You' functions as a refraction of the 'Ontological Self', and how it contributes to the exploration of identity, consciousness and existence in the novel. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions: How is the pronoun 'You' constructed within the narrative structure of *Soul Mountain*? In what sense can it be interpreted as

a refraction of the 'Ontological Self'? How do the interactions among 'I', 'You', 'She', and 'He' contribute to the representation of multiple subjectivities? What philosophical implications emerge from Gao Xingjian's narrative approach to selfhood?

The methodological basis of this study is formed by a qualitative approach combining literary analysis with philosophical concepts derived from ontology, existentialism and theories of the self. The primary source is Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain*, while the adopted conceptual framework builds upon Aristotle's *Categories*, Aryeh Kosman's *The Activity of Being: An Essay on Aristotle's Ontology*, Jungian theories of the self, and Stephen Batchelor's *Alone with Others: An Existential Approach to Buddhism*. These works provide the ontological, existential, psychological, and philosophical foundations for the analysis, while additional support is provided by selected academic studies devoted to Gao Xingjian's literary and philosophical thought. Research material includes selected passages with pronoun shifts accompanied by self-reflection, identity negotiation, existential questioning or narrative self-objectification. The passages were thoroughly analyzed and interpreted on the basis of ontological concepts, particularly Aristotle's notion of substance and Heidegger's conception of being. The choice of analyzed excerpts did not aim at representing the entirety of *Soul Mountain*, but rather the sections in which pronoun shifts are deeply associated with self-observation, self-division, and existential inquiry.

This analysis extends the research on Gao Xingjian's literary output and sparks a broader discussion on narrative identity, ontology, and depiction of consciousness in literature. It examines the relationship between the 'Ontological Self' and its refracted manifestations, offering a fresh perspective on a significant aspect of *Soul Mountain*. It also shows that the literary form may serve as a space where philosophical reflections on the nature of selfhood and human existence are undertaken.

This book is divided into three chapters. The first one provides an overview of the biographical, literary and intellectual aspects of Gao Xingjian's life and work, with particular emphasis on philosophical experiences and influences that shaped *Soul Mountain*. Chapter Two contains a review of previous research devoted to the novel that provides a conceptual framework significant for ontology, subjectivity and theories of the self. Chapter Three is devoted to a detailed analysis of the pronoun 'You' understood as a refraction of the 'Ontological Self', with particular emphasis on its function in exploration of consciousness, identity, and ontological experience in the novel. The conclusion presents the main findings and suggests further research opportunities.

Chapter 1

BIOGRAPHICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT OF GAO XINGJIAN

Gao Xingjian has a special place in the world of contemporary literature, since his literary output cannot be pigeon-holed into simple national, generic or aesthetic categories. He is renowned as a novelist, drama writer, essayist, translator, director and painter whose writing developed at the intersection of Chinese tradition, European modernism, the experience of emigration, and reflection on individual autonomy. Scholars emphasize that he should not be viewed solely as a Chinese writer living in exile, but rather as a transnational author who explores deep human themes of memory, language, identity and artistic freedom (Quah 2004: 3, 13).

Xingjian's biography is closely tied to China's 20th-century political history. Born in 1940, he studied literature and completed a French language degree, which significantly shaped his subsequent creative journey. He also translated French literature, including works by Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, and Jacques Prévert. Despite being exposed to the European avant-garde, the Theatre of the Absurd, existentialism, and modern prose, he developed a style that was not a simple copy of the West. On the contrary, Gao's artistic idiom blended modern art methods with Chinese philosophical, religious, and literary traditions (Zhao 2000; Łabędzka 2008).

As a writer and critic, in the 1980s Gao became one of the most prominent figures in the Beijing literary and theatrical community. He created short stories, plays, essays, poems and novellas that broke with the traditions of orthodox and conventional styles of writing. His dramas, for instance *The Bus Stop* or *The Other Shore*, enacted a more fragmented, self-reflexive and absurdist theatricality and violated the codes representing the world through the lens of Social Realism. This provoked objections from state authorities, who strictly adhered to the guidelines of the Chinese Communist Party, especially during the period of intense ideological campaigns against experimental art. The clash with political coercion and censorship played a fundamental role in shaping Gao's views on literature, which he understood as a sphere independent of collective doctrines and the expectations of propaganda (Lee & Dutrait 2001; Zhao 2000). "When the Cultural Revolution began in 1966, Gao had to burn all his manuscripts, including ten plays, an unfinished novel, and numerous poems and notes, which weighed almost forty kilograms in total" (Quah 2004: 7). In the introductory chapter of *Soul Mountain*, Mabel Lee writes: "Gao Xingjian 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" (Xingjian 2000a: v).

A turning point in his life came in the early 1980s, when he was misdiagnosed with lung cancer. The experience of suddenly being faced with the prospect of death, only to learn from a subsequent X-ray that the diagnosis had been incorrect, prompted him to radically reevaluate his life. Shortly after, influenced once again by the political climate (rumours were circulated that he would be sent to a labour camp in Qinghai Province), he undertook a five-month journey across the southern and southwestern regions of China. From late 1983 to early 1984, he travelled approximately fifteen thousand kilometres across the Yangtze River basin, visiting eight provinces and seven nature reserves (Lee 2000). This expedition was closely linked to collecting materials for the novel *Lingshan* (*Soul Mountain*), planned since 1982. On his journey, Gao met anthropologists who were researching the primitive culture of ethnic minorities in China and developed an interest in their folklore, rituals, and spirituality. These experiences, together with a developing fascination with Taoism and Chan Buddhism, significantly broadened his thinking about Chinese identity, which had hitherto been understood primarily through the lens of the urban Confucian tradition. As a result, the journey became not only a significant personal experience but also a key artistic stimulus. Throughout this time, Gao took extensive notes, which he later used in his work on the novel; in 1987, he smuggled the manuscript out of China and completed it in Paris in 1989, completing the text over a period of seven years from summer 1982 to summer 1989. The book was eventually published in Taiwan in 1990 (Quah 2004: 10–12).

Emigration, followed by life in France, did not mean that Gao broke with his native language. On the contrary, he has continued to create the most important works in Chinese. Hence, his oeuvre is sometimes perceived as a literature of exile, but simultaneously as a literature consciously detached from all forms of collective identification. Researchers emphasize that in his case, exile is not only a biographical fact, but even more than that, an intellectual attitude: living outside the pressure of the state, ideology and nation, and at the same time, an attempt to preserve the sovereignty of his own voice (Huang 2011; Kong 2014). This approach was fully expressed in *Soul Mountain*, considered Gao Xingjian's masterpiece and one of the most innovative novels in modern Chinese-language literature. Recalling the novel's origins in his Nobel Lecture "The Case for Literature", delivered in 2000, Gao Xingjian (2000b: 595) stated:

> I began writing my novel *Soul Mountain* to dispel my inner loneliness at the very time when works I had written with rigorous self-censorship had been banned. *Soul Mountain* was written for myself and without the hope that it would be published.

To some degree, *Soul Mountain* is an autobiographical account of the writer's life. However, the novel should not be reduced to autobiography; it is rather, "both a fictionalized autobiography and a documentation" (Lee 1997: 137), combining elements of fiction, essay, travel diary, memories, quasi-ethnographic observation, philosophical reflection, folk legends and lyrical narrative. Instead of linear storytelling, the narrative uses a sequence of episodes, voices, memories and stories that create an open, dispersed and multilayered system (Gálik 2003; Lee 2000).

At times, Gao adopts the persona of a fictional character and addresses the readers directly, which is evident in such extracts as "He says he has told many stories, some with endings and others without" (Xingjian 2000a: 452). By doing so, he somehow breaks the barriers between the narrator and the readers. Besides, the novel encompasses modern narrative techniques; for example, at the end of chapter seventy-two, Gao Xingjian (2000a: 455) writes that "Reading this chapter is optional, but as you've read it you've read it". At the same time, these techniques are combined with elements of primitivism. In *Soul Mountain*, Gao draws on ancient Chinese folklore and traditional culture. As Jeffrey Kinkley (2002: 131) observes in his article "Gao Xingjian in the 'Chinese' Perspective of Qu Yuan and Shen Congwen":

> Gao is drawn to the primitive: the folk stories, songs, and religion, including the shamanism that inspired the ancient *Songs*. The modern authors voice antipathy to Confucian piety, and, as modernists, they mix and remake genres; experiment with literary technique; and explore literary exoticism, the self, and within the self, the soul – a soul so fragmented that they have it speak in different voices.

Critics also describe *Soul Mountain* as 'confessional consciousness' (Bei Ming) or, where the content of this novel is concerned, *xungen wenxue*, 'root-seeking literature' (Xiaoming), because it reflects a desire to find the cultural sources of subjectivity through references to tradition, myths, folk beliefs, local practices and collective memory, thus aligning with the principles of 'root-seeking' movement that began in the mid-1980s in China (1984–1987) and is usually associated with Han Shaogong's essay "The Roots of Literature", published in 1985.

However, although *Soul Mountain* places a great emphasis on paying heed to Chinese culture and religious values, Gao does not simply endorse these values. He also argues that wisdom can be achieved despite disappointment and suffering. A 'root-seeking fiction' reveals false notions about life. Gao states in "The Case for Literature":

> *Soul Mountain* does not simply make a replica of reality but penetrates the surface layers and reaches deep into the inner workings of reality; it removes false illusions,

> looks down from great heights at ordinary happenings, and with a broad perspective reveals happenings in their entirety. (Xingjian 2000b: 599)

Within this context, Kam Louie (2001: 148) in his review essay "In Search of the Chinese Soul in the Mountains of the South" also describes *Soul Mountain* as a 'root-seeking fiction', agreeing at the same time with Gao's opinion that traditionalism should not be raised above individualism. He claims:

> *Soul Mountain* has its roots in traditional but not necessarily official values: the escapist and spiritual elements that pervade the novel are fundamental to Daoism and Buddhism. Like the "root-seeking" fiction of the 1980s. The quest for *Soul Mountain* is not successful, but the narrator does gain a set of understandings. (Louie 2001: 148)

At the same time, *Soul Mountain* reflects Gao's broader ideas about literature, which, he argues, should be judged based on their aesthetic quality. As he says, "literature is neither an embellishment for authority nor a socially fashionable item; it has its own criterion of merit: its aesthetic quality" (Xingjian 2000b: 596). He further maintains that the 'aesthetic quality' of literature greatly depends on the sublimity of language, asserting:

> Language is the ultimate crystallization of human civilization. It is intricate, incisive and difficult to grasp and yet it is pervasive, penetrates human perceptions and links man, the perceiving subject, to his own understanding of the world. The written word is also magical for it allows communication between separate individuals, even if they are from different races and times. It is also in this way that the shared present time in the writing and reading of literature is connected to its eternal spiritual value. An aesthetic based on human emotions does not become outdated even with the perennial changing of fashions in literature and in art. (Xingjian 2000b: 596)

Moreover, *Soul Mountain* is the result of Gao's pursuit of individuality and freedom of creative manifestation in literature. These ideas are closely connected with his support for the Chinese avant-garde movement of the 1980s, which emerged after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the end of the Cultural Revolution. In his work, Gao supports individualism, as he makes clear in his Nobel Prize speech "The Case for Literature", in which he asserts:

> A writer is an ordinary person, perhaps he is more sensitive but people who are highly sensitive are often more frail. A writer does not speak as the spokesperson of the people or as the embodiment of righteousness. His voice is inevitably weak but it is precisely this voice of the individual that is more authentic. (Xingjian 2000b: 594)

For Gao, the sole purpose of writing literature is to highlight individualism. He says that "In the history of literature there are many great enduring works which were not published in the lifetimes of the authors. If the authors had not achieved self-affirmation while writing, how could they have continued to write?" (Xingjian 2000b: 595). He condemns the use of 'We' in literature, arguing in *Soul Mountain* that its use suggests that "I am not true to myself". 'We' is an artificial word, which gives a picture of false emotions. He advocates the use of the pronoun 'I' instead of 'We' to depict one's innermost frame of mind because it is a more realistic and genuine expression. Gao states:

> I began writing my novel *Soul Mountain* to dispel my inner loneliness at the very time when works I had written with rigorous self-censorship had been banned. *Soul Mountain* was written for myself and without the hope that it would be published. (Xingjian 2000b: 595)

> Borrowing from Descartes, it could be said of the writer: I say and therefore I am. (Xingjian 2000b: 600)

This emphasis on individualism is closely related to Gao's belief that literature should embrace permanence and universality. They are mystical and philosophical accounts of the self, which he portrays as a complex and incomprehensible phenomenon. *Soul Mountain* repeatedly refers to such themes as the 'loss of self', 'division and integration of self', 'timelessness', and 'transcendence'. Gao is deeply interested in human beings and their existence, claiming that "The human need for language is not simply for the transmission of meaning, it is at the same time listening to and affirming a person's existence" (Xingjian 2000b: 596). In this respect, his writing echoes the ideas expressed by the Greek tragedian Sophocles in his tragedy *Antigone*: "There are many strange and wonderful things, but nothing more strangely wonderful than man" (Sophocles 2007: 19).

Gao Xingjian wanted to unleash artistic creativity from the struggle for social acceptance, describing this kind of writing as 'cold literature' – a type of literature that preserves an inherent, spiritual character. In his view, 'cold literature' is non-utilitarian, free from both ideological pressure and social and market expectations. This idea is reflected in his Nobel Lecture, "The Case for Literature", where he emphasizes that literature has no duty to the 'masses', but rather remains the space for individual experience, self-reflection and spiritual communication between the writer and the reader. It requires accepting loneliness, social marginalisation and a lack of social recognition. In this sense, 'cold literature' represents artistic autonomy. For Gao, writing is a way of preserving individual freedom and spiritual integrity, rather than serving collective interests. He even characterizes 'cold literature' as literature that "will flee in order to survive", emphasizing its salvatory function against political and commercial pressures (Lee 2000). In his Nobel Lecture, he outlines the concept of 'cold literature' in the following way:

> Cold literature is literature that will flee 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 sort of non-utilitarian literature it is not merely a misfortune for the writer but a tragedy for the race. (Xingjian 2000b: 597)

'Cold literature' illustrates that Gao is not swayed by any political, nationalistic, or societal belief. In *No isms*, Gao talks about the university and the permanence of literature, saying that it is not limited by national borders, but instead speaks of humans' experiences and passions in general. Therefore, literature is not confined to any specific space or time. As he delineates:

> A fragile individual, a solitary writer confronted by society and voicing his opinions – I believe this is the nature of literature. From ancient times to the present, from China to foreign countries, from the East to the West, the nature of literature has not changed that much. (Xingjian 2000c: 11)

He also places literature above political concerns, declaring that "I should say that in both politics and literature, I belong to no group, nor am I bound to any ism, including nationalism and patriotism" (Xingjian, as cited in Dutrait 2010: 8).

The principle of 'cold literature' is also central to the formal organisation of the pronoun system. 'Coldness' does not mean the absence of emotion; rather, it indicates a disciplined distance from emotional experience and from the social identities imposed upon the writer. The passage from 'I' to 'You' creates this distance at the grammatical level. A first-person confession often presents experience as immediate and personal: the memory, fear or desire belongs to the speaker who says 'I'. The second person creates distance from that possession. Experience is still intimate, but it can now be examined as though it belonged to someone else. The narrative thus becomes both confessional and observational; it preserves affect while denying the speaking self complete control over the experience.

This grammatical distancing is closely related to Gao's rejection of the collective 'We'. Moving away from collective speech does not lead to a completely autonomous individual. Instead, the individual voice contains multiple internal perspectives and must negotiate between them. 'You' allows the writer to create a relation without sacrificing identity to the collective. Although this interlocutor arises from within, it is not fully controlled by the 'I' that brings it into being. Thus, the autonomy rooted in 'cold literature' lies not in isolation, but in maintaining critical distance from ideology, memory and even from one's self-image. The pronoun structure transforms Gao's aesthetic programme into a narrative strategy: freedom is depicted as the ability of consciousness to adopt different perspectives on itself.

Gao's understanding of literature as a medium for exploring universal human experience is also reflected in the ontological dimension of *Soul Mountain*. Since the novel is primarily concerned with the nature of existence, identity, and the search for the self, its narrative invites an ontological reading. Before examining how Gao constructs the fragmented self through multiple narrative voices, it is useful to outline the philosophical concept of ontology briefly.

Ontology, the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of being and existence, was explored by several ancient Greek philosophers and later developed systematically by Aristotle. It analyses the properties of beings and relationships between them. Maja Hadzic (2009: 1) explains the concept of ontology in her book *Ontology-Based Multi-Agent Systems,* saying that "Ontology is based on the truth; its nature being independent of one's background, present understanding, perspectives, and knowledge of the world". This way of understanding ontology is reflected in *Soul Mountain,* where secondary beings obtain all the knowledge from the primary being, viz, all other derivatives of a body are dependent for knowledge on the 'Ontological Self'.

The 'Ontological Self' in *Soul Mountain* is a creative 'Being'. It launches multitudinous personalities to get knowledge of the multifaceted and complex presence of the 'Self'. The pursuit to fathom the phenomenal existence of 'Being' or 'Self' is not a contemporary curiosity. It has a long tradition of philosophical inquiry, as many early philosophers tried to explain the nature of the Self. Likewise, in *Soul Mountain*, there is a prime 'Being' which generates several entities during different times and spaces. Each of them divorces themself from the absurd, bizarre, and tedious modern life to cognize the inbuilt existence of the 'Self'.

In this study, *Soul Mountain* is interpreted as a metaphorical representation of the self's elusive ontological ground, which can be approached only indirectly through its fragmented narrative manifestations. Therefore, it breaks itself up into 'You' and other entities in different time spans. For instance, the tiniest measure of the 'Ontological Self' is fabricated in the character of 'I'. Then, 'I' crafts 'You' when it needs someone else to carry on the mission. Though 'I' refracts 'You' to uplift its aloneness, the entire riddle is deciphered by 'You'. 'You' engenders 'She' and 'He' solely to apprehend its 'Ontological Self'. Thus, the 'Ontological Self' in *Soul Mountain* is a dynamic presence that remains in constant flux. 'You' is refracted when the 'Ontological Self' dwells in a deep psychological state, contemplates the reality of life, does an empirical study of its existence, and at last, emanates into a different persona to continue and complete the hunt to "know thyself" (A Greek proverb written on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi). Therefore, 'You' is the result of a profound and persistent psychosomatic procedure of the 'Ontological Self' termed refraction.

The very basic existence of 'Being' has undergone several stages of evolution since its birth. Aristotle put forward an opinion that a 'Being' which does not have any form of existence earlier, but comes into being, is a consequence of change.

Consequently, the pronoun 'You' is a product of the change. The prime existence is also defined as 'Substance' in the Aristotelian concept. The emergence of 'You' may be interpreted through Aristotle's concept of 'Contraries' because the pronoun constitutes a differentiated mode of existence while remaining dependent upon the same ontological source. The narrative separation does not abolish ontological unity but renders it observable from another perspective. These entities are 'Contraries' to their actual existence in terms of their individual characteristics and physiognomies. Aristotle (1984: 4a21–4b19) declares in *Categories*:

> For in the case of substances it is by themselves changing that they are able to receive contraries. It is because the actual thing changes that the contrary comes to belong to them. For the statement that somebody is sitting remains the same; it is because of a change in the actual thing.

Hence, 'You' is a transformation in the actual being or the 'Ontological Self'. And, in the realm of the 'Ontological Self', 'You' is a 'Contrary' which dares to look into the primitive, uncanny, animalistic and wild nature of man's existence on the earth.

Although 'You' appears as a distinct narrative voice, it never becomes ontologically independent from the original Self. This distinction between apparent autonomy and essential unity corresponds to Aristotle's metaphysical understanding of substance. His 'First Philosophy' therefore offers a useful framework for explaining how the various narrative pronouns in *Soul Mountain* remain grounded in a single ontological source. This concept of being constitutes a useful interpretational perspective to better understand the relationships between various narrative identities in *Soul Mountain*. In addition, it questions the cause of the existence of a being and other secondary beings. For instance, an attribute, chivalry, subsists because of a knight being there. From an Aristotelian perspective, 'You' is a trait of the 'Ontological Self' that comes into existence through refraction. The pronoun 'You' is broken and separated from its origin in the need to engender a conversation among all the projections of the 'Self'. Through this, 'You' inspects the nature of its existence and other phenomena of the 'Ontological Self'. As Marc S. Cohen (2008: 2) explains in his discussion of Aristotle's ontology:

> This fits in perfectly with what we learned in the *Categories*, where primary substances (individuals) were argued to be the ontologically basic things. Beings in other categories (e.g., qualities, etc.) owe their existence to the substances they inhere in. Qualities are beings, too, but not in the way that substances are.

Furthermore, Aristotle says that a horse is an original entity and whiteness is a feature of it. Thus, its colour, whiteness, is not an autonomous object. The whiteness of a horse is dependent on the existence of the horse itself. Hence,

a 'Substance' is an essential veracity, and all other entities are their branches. The target of this research is to focus precisely on the 'Ontological Self' in *Soul Mountain* as a 'Substance', a most fundamental reality, and 'You' is its refraction.

The Aristotelian vocabulary used in this study should therefore be understood analogically rather than literally. A grammatical pronoun is not a substance in the same literal sense as an individual human being, and the novel does not systematically develop or illustrate Aristotle's categories. The analogy enables differentiation between an ontological ground and the modes in which that ground is revealed. Although 'You' is dependent on the continuity of the composite protagonist, it acquires relative narrative autonomy: it travels, remembers, desires, tells stories and generates further interlocutors.

This qualification, in turn, strengthens the idea of refraction. If 'You' functioned only as an attribute without its own narrative function, the second-person chapters would add little to the first-person account. By contrast, if 'You' were a wholly separate entity, the latter claims that 'I' created 'You' and may ultimately merge with it. The novel maintains a position between these two extremes: the refracted voice is neither identical to its source nor detached from it. Aristotle's distinction offers a conceptual framework for that asymmetry, while the literary text demonstrates it through changes, address and return. In *Soul Mountain*, ontology is thus closely connected to narrative relation: the question about the self's nature cannot be separated from the question of who is permitted to say, observe and answer for its experiences.

In this context, it is essential that all the fragments of the 'Ontological Self' interrelate and communicate with each other as they are the parts of the same body. To know the 'Ontological Self', it is vital to keep a reciprocal conversation going among the agents. Likewise, 'You' interacts with 'She' and 'He' to complete an in-depth and systematic examination of the 'Ontological Self'. On the other hand, this is also important for the unification of all the pronouns as they belong to a single self.

In an article on "Epistemology and Ontology", Andrew Seth (1894: 568) proclaims that 'Ontological Self' is "a plurality of absolutely existing reals" and "ontological pluralism". Although 'You' is the refraction of an elementary existence, unlike other pronouns in *Soul Mountain*, he occupies an independent place. 'You' is the only pronoun with which the 'Ontological Self' is refracted directly, unlike other pronouns, which are indirect formations of the 'Ontological Self' since 'She' and 'He' are crafted by 'You' to be his companions on the journey. Hence, Seth (1894: 568) calls 'You' "absolutely independent monads". In addition, Seth (1894: 577) defines the 'Ontological Self' as the "One in the Many", "the Real" and "the Eternal". He says that "the One manifests itself in multiplicity, difference, and manifold appearances of time" (Seth 1894: 577). Thus, it portrays the 'Ontological Self' as embracing many yet different beings and executes them in different times. Similarly, in *Soul Mountain*, 'You' is

refracted by the 'Ontological Self' when his presence is needed. In this process, the 'Ontological Self' alters its presence to experience the 'Self' in entirety. The refraction of 'You' occurs through the transformation in the 'Ontological Self' while going through different levels of understanding of life and self.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Soul Mountain is one of the premium works in Chinese literature by Nobel Prize laureate Gao Xingjian; originally published in Chinese in 1990, it appeared in English translation in 2000. It was Gao's first fiction to appear in English, and is predominantly admired in the world of academia. Many researchers and scholars have explored dissimilar aspects of *Soul Mountain* which are: feminine sexuality and its treatment, individualism and manifold identities within one self also known as 'I', Gao's use of Aesthetics, Chinese cultural, political, and historical issues, philosophical and psychological intricacies of the text, Existential pursuit, investigation of Chinese myths and folklores, intertextuality and concoction of numerous literary genres for instance, folk songs and fables, Post-Modern structure of the text comprising metafiction, and other voluminous themes. However, in literature, there can be multifarious elucidations on a single literary work that still manage to retain the particularity of the subject.

In this context, the present study analyses the ontological aspects of the Self in *Soul Mountain*, drawing on various ontological theories of the Self. It examines 'You's' separation from the 'Ontological Self' through refraction. Here, the term refraction is employed as an analytical metaphor rather than as a literal physical process. Borrowed from optics, where refraction denotes the bending of light as it passes through different media, the concept is used here to describe the transformation of a unified 'Ontological Self' into multiple narrative subjectivities. Refraction therefore does not imply fragmentation into unrelated identities; rather, it signifies the emergence of distinct yet interconnected perspectives originating from the same 'Ontological Source'. The pronoun 'You' is understood as one such refracted manifestation of the self, enabling the narrator to observe, interrogate, and reconstruct aspects of his own existence from an altered perspective.

This study presents an ontological interpretation, which refers to different theories stemming from the tradition of metaphysical philosophy. It covers theories of Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, René Descartes, and Baruch Spinoza. First, Aristotle, in his Book IV *Metaphysics* called ontology of being 'first philosophy'. He designates the most prime or basic individual existence 'Substance' in his book *Categories*. He says, "If the primary substances did not exist it would be impossible for any of the other things to exist" (Aristotle 1984: 2a35–2b6). This suggests that primary substances constitute the ontological basis upon which other categories of being depend. Applied cautiously to the present analysis, Aristotle's distinction

provides an analogy for understanding the pronoun 'You' not as an autonomous entity independent of the 'Ontological Self', but as a distinct manifestation that remains dependent on and connected to the same ontological source.

While Aristotle focuses on the ontology of substance, Kant addresses the conditions that make the representation of the Self in consciousness possible. He says that many representations of the self are connected in a unified relation. In his essay "Kants Metaphysics of the Self", Colin Marshall (2010: 11, 13) says that "Appearances are representations" and 'I' is the object of consciousness. Marshall further examines Leibniz's and Descartes's perspectives on self. He states:

> Leibniz and Descartes hold that the self is a mental substance. Bound up with this conclusion is the claim that the self is immortal, for part of what distinguishes genuine substances from accidents is their strong ontological independence. (Marshall 2010: 10)

Respectively, Spinoza, in his book *Ethics*, holds the opinion that "Every substance is necessarily infinite" (Morgan 2002: 219). Colin Marshall (2010: 14) also refers to his proclamation: "If a number of individuals so concur in one action that together they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing".

Heidegger's concept of 'Da-sein' may provide a comparative framework for considering a mode of existence that relates interpretively to its own being. He proclaims:

> Da-sein is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather, it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned about its very being. Thus it is constitutive of the being of Da-sein to have, in its very being, a relation of being to this being. The ontic distinction of Da-sein lies in the fact that it is ontological. (Heidegger 1996: 10)

To summarise, all these philosophers perceive the self as an existence comprising manifold independent entities.

Numerous critics have examined the relationship between 'You' and 'She'. Some declare that 'She' is the suppressed desire of 'You', while others argue that 'She' is an alter ego of 'You', a subjugated disposition of 'You'. In this interpretation, 'She' makes it possible for 'You' to confront all his weaknesses and negativities of the 'Self'. Similarly, in his essay, "Gao Xingjian's Novel *Lingshan* (*Soul Mountain*): A Long Journey in Search of a Woman?", Marián Gálik (2003) asserts that during the course of the journey in search of a mysterious and quixotic place Lingshan, the pronoun 'You' yearns to have an intimate liaison with a woman. Gálik makes reference to Mabel Lee's essay "Gao Xingjian's *Lingshan / Soul Mountain*. Modernism and the Chinese Writer", which depicts why 'You' comes into existence. Lee (1997: 139) states that 'You' "is given immense freedom to explore his own past relationships, particularly with women and his own past".

On the basis of this interpretation Gálik explains how encounters between 'You' and various depictions of 'She' help in exploring the issues of identity, freedom and 'Self'. He affirms that in Chapter 63, 'You' comes across two adult girls who try to intrude on his striving to attain an ultimate goal, an exploration of the 'Self' and 'Freedom' (Gálik 2003: 616–617). Each representation of 'She' tries to persuade 'You' to remain with her until their mutual desire is satisfied. However, 'You' proves to be a potent protagonist. That is why he keeps on moving from one 'She' to another 'She' to complete his journey of exploration of the 'Self'. Gálik (2003: 626) substantiates his argument by citing a reference to the girl walking in the snowy wilderness. 'She' says to 'You':

> 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. (Xingjian 2000a: 489)

The critic avers that the female figure or 'She' is used to let 'You' dig out the multi-layered 'Self' and its intricate phenomena within. Gálik (2003) states that 'You' consecutively creates 'She' personifications to mount the 'Mountain' of the 'Self'. Although Gálik (2003) states that 'You' emerges from 'I' and 'She' from 'You', the present study interprets these narrative voices as ontological refractions originating from the 'Ontological Self'.

That is, Gálik (2003) argues that all the entities are entirely dissolved in coherence of the 'Self' yet absolutely detached to reflect on each part of the 'Self'. Gálik (2003: 621) demonstrates his perspective by quoting from *Soul Mountain*:

> In this lengthy soliloquy 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. (Xingjian 2000a: 312)

Gálik (2003) claims that only the 'Self' is born autonomously, whereas others are his fragmented parts. He also does not examine how these divisions of the 'Ontological Self' may possess dissimilar personal experiences and perceptions of the existence of phenomena in the universe.

'You' departs from the monastery in a frantic state to withdraw from the surrounding masses. Gálik (2003: 616) cites the quandary of 'You' from the text *Soul Mountain*:

> 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. (Xingjian 2000a: 400)

Gálik does not mention that the pronoun 'You' is pushed by the 'Ontological Self' to reveal answers to numerous existential questions that keep 'You' vigilant within.

As 'You' continues the search for a woman, it finds a nun in the monastery. She tries to persuade 'You' to stay here as long as he wants. Gálik (2003: 617) says that a nun, also known as 'She', lets 'You' examine the fluctuating projection of the 'She'. The nun utters her feeling quite implicitly. Gálik quotes the nun's proclamation, "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" (Xingjian 2000a: 401). Gálik (2003: 619) says that 'She' keeps on changing her persona throughout the novel. Sometimes, 'She' is a young librarian in chapter forty-five and sometimes, the 'Holy Mother' in chapter twenty-seven. Gálik (2003) states that 'You' extricates from 'I' to have a relationship with every 'She' to understand all the complexities of the 'Self'.

This interpretation leads to the question posed in his article (Gálik 2003), "Gao Xingjian's Novel *Lingshan* (*Soul Mountain*): A Long Journey in Search of a Woman?", whether this journey is aimed at finding a woman or an identity. Gálik (2003: 626–627) writes:

> 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.

Gálik argues that 'You' encounters many beautiful girls during the course of his expedition. Nonetheless, his foremost resolution of such an extensive exertion is to engage with and understand interculturalism in China; principally human attributes, both internal and external that regulate characteristics of the 'Ontological Self'. He further claims that finding a woman can also be a way to find the masculine psyche. In Chinese philosophy, 'Yin Yang' with various connotations is interpreted as male and female at war yet always interconnected and interdependent. Thus, he pronounces that 'You' and 'She' are dual entities but fabricated and integrated tangibly and compactly, however, he does not affirm that 'You' is a refraction of the 'Ontological Self', a perilous wild being nurtured to torment every flimsy division of 'I'.

A different perspective is offered by Mabel Lee (2012: 3), translator of *Soul Mountain*, who in her article "Aesthetics in Gao's *Soul Mountain*" claims:

> The experience of spiritual repression undoubtedly heightened Gao's impulse for autobiography and the writing of *Soul Mountain* to some extent satisfied that impulse while allowing him to implement his ingenious innovation of using pronouns to explore different levels of his own psychology.

Needless to say, during the Cultural Revolution under Mao Zedong, Gao found the business of articulating his personal experiences in an avant-garde fictional style terribly convoluted and he faced intense criticism for his rebellious writing style. He concentrated on individuality rather than collectivity. The use of various pronouns gives him liberty to express his metaphysical experience of the self. Kant elucidates that "The entities that contribute to synthesis generate the form of an experience that composes a self. These entities are responsible for processing data into experience" (Marshall 2010: 17). Lee (2012: 3) argues that Gao uses "pronouns to explore different levels of his own psychology", however, she does not discuss that the pronoun 'You' is created through the process of refraction from the 'Ontological Self'.

Moreover, Lee (2012: 4) states that language is the product of sound and comprises musicality in it. She says that Gao believes that the Chinese language is rhythmic. Consequently, as music engenders beats and notes correspondingly, language encompasses countless forms of speech, and pronouns are one of the ingredients of it. In addition, Lee (2012: 5) states that Gao asserts that all theorists constrain literature and creativity into a cocoon by establishing theories. For instance, the theory of *Death of the Author* by Roland Barthes excludes the role of the author. Lee (2012: 5) observes:

> He rejects theories of fiction, saying he does not know of any writers who have benefited from theorists, and he dismisses them as doing nothing more than formulating rigid models and creating fashions. For him even plot and characterization are generally agreed-upon concepts, and he argues that the form of fiction is spontaneous, the creation of the author.

Therefore, this journey towards 'Soul' takes place in the author's mind voluntarily to attain ecstasy and sanctity. Besides, Lee (2012: 6) says that Gao posits that "Writing, reading, and the actualization of language are psychological activities and mental images". This observation leads to the question of whether 'psychological activities' and 'mental images' can exist autonomously?

Building on this idea, Lee writes in her paper that Gao debates that the pronoun 'You' can be a peripheral and an extrinsic offshoot of the author's mind during the conversation with the internal or more personal part of the self; in other words, 'You' masquerades as an egoistic part of the writer's self. Lee (2012: 8) states:

> The second person pronoun can also be the external projection of the narrator's ego, in other words act as an adversary when the narrator engages in interior monologue. The second person pronoun facilitates this sort of interior monologue that is common in plays, and also is beginning to appear as a narrative method in fiction.

In short, the pronoun 'You' adjusts the perspective of his character to let the author enter into a dialogue with his inner self; in literary language known as a soliloquy. Lee does not embrace the concept that all splits of the 'Self' are alter egos of the author, not merely 'You'.

Similarly, in *Soul Mountain* the 'Ontological Self' invokes four entities, 'I', 'You', 'She', and 'He'. In his essay "Life's Unattainable Goal and Actualized Meaning: Existential Anxiety and Zen Tranquillity in Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain*", Ming Jian terms the 'Ontological Self' as a 'tripartite protagonist'. He accentuates:

> Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain* features a tripartite protagonist's life voyage that unfolds in two structurally parallel journeys; namely, the I-narrator's travel along the Yangtze River valley, and the you-narrator's highly symbolic spiritual journey in search of Lingshan. On their respective journeys, the I narrator endeavors to find an "authentic life" and ponders on life's meaning in the real world, while the you-narrator probes life's ultimate goal in an allegorical tale-his search for the fictitious, metaphoric Lingshan. (Jian 2009: 97)

Jian also compares 'I' and 'You's' methodology to reach the apportioned task during the entire journey. 'I' endeavours to discover an 'authentic life' which is one of the essential features of 'Existentialism'. Jian states that 'I' creates 'You' to have a genuine experience of the journey through the 'Soul', however, he does not discuss 'You' as a manifestation of the 'Ontological Self' through the process of refraction. Moran and Jian hold the same standpoint on the relationship of 'You' and 'She'. Jian says that 'You' encounters his femininity through a liaison with 'She'. 'She' is created for 'You' to lift his isolation and to help him understand the 'Self' through an illusory journey. And, their bond results in the production of imaginative creations. Jian (2009: 118) asserts:

> Throughout Gao Xingjian's creative writing, sex and desire always play a significant role and engender dynamic forces. In *Soul Mountain*, the you-narrator's sexual relationship with the "she" is also prominently depicted and runs through the whole novel.

Jian endorses that 'She' is 'You's' companion. Furthermore, he argues that 'You's' life is all about experiencing the difficult phenomena of life rather than understanding and conquering them. Subsequently, Jian comments on 'You's' finding that his search for the meaning of life and finding roots is futile. Jian (2009: 98–99) points towards the stockade story in chapter forty-two of *Soul Mountain*:

> After abandoning his effort to reach the stockade, the you-narrator remarks contemplatively: "Actually, there has never been a definite goal in your life. Life in fact doesn't have what may be called ultimate goals". The you-narrator further states that pursuing the goal of life is "just like pursuing this hornet's nest"-the stockade.

According to Jian, reality is a nonfigurative idea. 'You' is sent on an extensive venture only to realize that everything is uncertain.

Furthermore, Jian makes a distinction between an existential and tranquil Zen self. He argues that the existential self remains in a state of anguish because it assumes responsibility for confronting the problems and questions of life, whereas the tranquil Zen self attains peace through non-attachment, meditative insight and acceptance of impermanence. Jian (2009: 114) talks:

> The anxious existential self and the tranquil Zen self reveal much about the complexity of the self and the way in which the tripartite protagonist negotiates his multiple subjectivities. These multiple subjectivities and the complexity of the self are distinctly reflected in the narrative structure and form of the novel, in which first- and second-person narrative alternate chapter by chapter, producing a diverse point of view.

These multifarious individuals are not reflections; they are not identical to their first form of presence but rather, different beings into a being. Instead, 'You' is a refracted pronoun that constitutes 'She' and 'He'.

This process of refraction is closely connected to the role of nature in *Soul Mountain*, where six chapters provide a detailed account of the environment and its destruction by humans. It is an elegy on the loss of nature, which also has a therapeutic power to remedy the human soul; therefore, an individual can always return to it to renew their brawn and imagination. Gao lets 'I' roam in the primordial forests and craft another being, 'You'. Henceforth, nature is a prodigious cradle of creativity. Thomas Moran, in his paper "Lost in the Woods: Nature in *Soul Mountain*" (2002), writes that human beings and nature cannot be separated. He refers to Mabel Lee, the translator of *Soul Mountain*, and her observation on Gao's work. In her article "Without Politics: Gao Xingjian on Literary Creation", Lee (1995: 82) utters, "*Soul Mountain* is infused with Gao's perceptions of the individual's place within the totality of nature". Moran agrees that nature is a process of categorization and filtration of 'Self' and 'You' is a creation of this system although he does not claim that 'You' is a refraction of 'I', or the 'Ontological Self'.

Furthermore, the critic discusses the fluctuation in the narrator's viewpoints during the development of an elongated and convoluted flight of the 'Self', when multiple personas are taken on. Moran (2002: 209) affirms that 'You' takes birth during this journey and defines this pecking order of the 'Self' as follows:

> The narrator uses the first person in about half the chapters. "I should have left those polluted surroundings a long time ago to get back to nature" and the second person in the rest "You listened to the rain beating noisily on the leaves and to the wind in the gorge muttering from the tops of a grove of Cunninghamia" (Xingjian, 12, 221). […] S*oul Mountain* is a long monologue in which a single narrator's perspective on himself shifts continually; the narrator considers himself as "I", "You", and "He", and studies his interaction with "She".

In other words, all separations of the fractured narrator stimulate each other. Although Moran acknowledges that all beings, specifically 'You', are outcomes of a perpetual transferal in the narrator's outlook, he advocates that 'You' comes into existence when 'I' vanishes in Chinese primitivism to find certain realities of life.

Moran affirms that 'I' and 'You' are two narrators living in two different worlds and categorizes 'You's' narration of Chinese mythologies as 'literature of reflection' (2002: 211). He quotes from Gao's article "Literature and Metaphysics: On *Soul Mountain*":

> According to Gao, the I-narrator travels in the 'real world' while 'You' travels in the imagination. 'You' search for the mountain of the soul. 'You' and 'She' talk about their sexual histories and muse on differences between men and women. Their dialogue is interrupted by the many stories 'You' tells. Some are autobiographical and concern Gao Xingjian's childhood, some concern the more recent past, including the Cultural Revolution, while others are self-contained short stories in the 'scar', literature of 'reflection' and roots modes, or echoes of traditional Chinese literature and myth. (Moran 2002: 211)

On the contrary, 'You' epitomizes the literature of refraction as he is refracted from the 'I' narrator. Moran emphasizes that the conversation between 'You' and 'She' is frequently intruded upon by 'You's' stories.

Nature is a visualization of the human mind. Through the mind's eye, humans create a world occupied by uncanny and unusual beings. Humans enter the wilderness and produce mind-boggling occurrences. These phenomenal existences are the aftermath of the human mind's birth in the womb of nature. Moran also propagates a parallel concept of concord between nature and humans. To make this theory tangible, Moran (2002: 211) introduces two critics who hold a similar concept of the harmony between and nature. He cites:

> According to Judith Shapiro, "the unity of Heaven and human" remains a touchstone for Chinese with an interest in the environment. The book *Landscape Aesthetics* by Beijing University professor Xie Ninggao is an example of the use of this idea in the service of popular environmentalism. (4-5) He argues that historically the notion of "the unity of Heaven and human" propelled in China "harmony between natural landscape" and created "humanscape". For Xie (1–8, 70–79) a properly cultivated landscape is the external manifestation of eternal human qualities. (Moran 2002: 211)

Moran agrees that there is a unification between the 'natural landscape' and a 'humanscape'; between 'Heaven and human'. Nevertheless, he does not state explicitly that 'humanscape' is the pronoun 'You' refracted by the 'Ontological Self's' 'external manifestation'. Just as 'humanscape' cannot be detached from 'natural landscape', 'You' cannot be alienated from the 'Ontological Self'. Moran (2002: 213) further announces that:

> In the novel, the I-narrator meets a botanist who quotes the *Daode jing*: "Man models himself on earth, / Earth on heaven, / Heaven on the way, / And the way on that which is naturally so".

Hence, all entities are coherently linked with one another. 'I' says that "Man models himself on earth". Just as earth breeds further species and presences, correspondingly the 'Ontological Self' refracts 'You'. Although Moran points out this idea implicitly, he does not put forward this concept explicitly and uses the same terminologies and linguistic expressions.

Also, the 'Ontological Self' refracted 'You' for a higher motive. 'I' breathes life into 'You's' nostrils and removes him from his own metaphysical self. 'You' has a greater goal than 'I', searching for an elusive, transcendent, and lofty mountain concealed under countless and untold layers of the 'Self'. On the other hand, 'I' searches for an ostensible thing, a desire to return to primitive places. Moran (2002: 218) states:

> In the "I" chapters, forests loom. "You" looks for the allegorical mountain of the soul; "I" does not. The I-narrator collects folk songs and looks for reminders of his childhood; his roaming is "in fact aimless". The narrator aspires to become a "real traveller" as described by a Buddhist monk: "A real traveller doesn't have any goal in mind. Only if you have no goal can you be a real traveller".

Another critic, in his essay "My Writing, Your Pain, and Her Trauma: Pronouns and (Gendered) Subjectivity in Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain* and *One Man's Bible*", Gang Gary Xu (2002) shares a similar view. He believes that 'You' is hewn from 'I' for a sublime reason. He refers to a textual passage from *Soul Mountain:*

> His experience is sunken in the wrinkles of your memory. The separation of you from him is the only way to peel layer by layer, to screen in different levels, and to calmly observe the events he experienced. It is very difficult, of course, to go back to his feelings at that particular time. He has already become a stranger. Don't use your present smugness to change or erase him. You must remain at a distance and settle your heart down before you make any observation. Don't mix up your excitement with his vanity and his stupidity; don't disguise his fear and cowardice either. This is so difficult that you feel suffocated. You also cannot be drowned in his

> narcissism and masochism. You are only observing and listening, not to feel what he felt. (Xingjian, as cited in Xu 2002: 123)

To sum up, both critics allude to the 'Ontological Self' as 'I'. They make a clear distinction between the roles of 'I' and 'You'. They show that 'I' is controlled by self-conceit, whereas 'You' is not supposed to be dominated by the same feeling.

Furthermore, to accomplish a goal in the absence of a goal is an attribute of an allegorical self. Moran (2002) says that 'You' wanders from place to place without a definite revelation. He merely has a distorted vision to figure out the obscurities and mysteries of the 'Self'. However, he offers a prodigious amount of cognizance to the readers. Moran advances the idea that 'I' creates 'You' at the cost of his exodus. Moran (2002: 227) refers to *Soul Mountain*:

> In chapter 65, the I-narrator gets a little lost as he is coming down Wudang Mountain. The stone steps and railings look to the narrator like bones and skulls, the scars on tapped lacquer trees look like eyes (Gao uses this same image in *Wild Man*), and the narrator perceives himself to be rushing headlong toward "the abyss of death".

It is the phase and place where 'I' refracted 'You', and left him in an appalling place to carry on the journey of exploration of the 'Self' apportioned by the 'Ontological Self'. Rather than stating it explicitly, Moran only alludes to the refraction of 'You' from the 'Ontological Self' with the bereavement of 'I' in an embedded fashion. He quotes from chapter 66 of *Soul Mountain*:

> After initial panic, terror, struggle, and unease at the prospect of death had passed, what came on next was confusion. You were lost in a primeval jungle of deathly quiet, hesitating beneath dead, dry, bare trees waiting to topple. You circled for a long time around the weird fish-spear that pointed into the gray, misty sky, unwilling to leave the only recognizable landmark you had. This landmark was maybe just your hazy memory… You discovered that you were at the edge of the forest and a ravine, and you were facing your last decision: should you return to the boundless forest behind you, or go down into the ravine? (Xingjian, as cited in Moran 2002: 227).

In short, Moran emphasizes that 'I' constructs 'You' and places him in a state of limbo. Moran makes it clear that when 'You' starts travelling without any goal, the realities of the 'Self' and life comes into his way in a journey towards *Soul Mountain*.

Gang Gary Xu (2002: 102) asserts that *Soul Mountain* "deconstructs the male imagination". Although "the deconstruction of male imagination" transpires in *Soul Mountain*, the refraction of the 'Ontological Self' results in 'You' emerging as the result of this refraction. In his essay, Xu discusses Terry Siu-han Yip and Kwok-kan Tam's paper "Gender and Self in Gao Xingjian's Three Post-Exile Plays" thoroughly. Xu (2002: 103) states that "Yip and Tam believe Gao transcends constructed gender on his way to returning to the original and

non-gender-specific self". Besides, the "original and non-gender-specific self" is, in fact, 'You'. Xu agrees that the pronoun 'You' merges with women to explore the female part of male sexuality and to reach the state of the "non-gender-specific self". Xu further argues that 'You' and 'She' function as segments of the same self, with 'She' emerging from the imagination of 'You'. Xu discusses "the original human existence in non-gender-specific" 'chaos' through 'processes of detachment and objectification'. However, he does not mention that the existence of 'You' is the consequence of the process of refraction. And, through refraction 'You' attains the ungendering of the self.

In addition, 'You' is an embodiment of 'I', created in his image as a *doppelgänger* or splitting image of 'I'. Xu claims that all three pronouns 'You', 'She', and 'He' are dissections of a protagonist. These three pronouns are onlookers of different circumstances and truth bearers of changed spectacles of the self. According to Xu, each plays its role and goes back to its origin to register the reality of life with all its eccentricity. Xu (2002: 107) comments: "The use of pronouns in terms of Gao's concept of the 'tripartition of the actor', which requires the actor to keep a cool and detached observation of both the character he portrays and of his performance". The 'tripartition' is the 'Ontological Self' encompassing several pronouns within a single body. Xu brings in all three pronouns and gives them equivalent eminence. Moreover, 'You' is privileged above all, as he occupies most of the chapters of *Soul Mountain.* Xu does not underscore the prestigious position of 'You'.

Subsequently, the esteemed position of 'You' among the other pronouns can be perceived through the later lines of Xu's essay, which he seems to have overlooked previously. Xu considers 'You' a multi-talented entity composed of various characteristics, functioning as both an actor and an outlooker. In other words, 'You' observes and learns at the same time. Therefore, he is given greater prominence over other entities of the 'Self'. Xu (2002: 112) states:

> In early pronouncements on the subject, Gao Xingjian felt the function of the second-person pronoun was to enable direct communication with the reader. But in *Soul Mountain*, 'You' is both the addresser and the addressee. As the addresser, 'You' speaks mostly in patterns of indirect speech, indicating that he assumes a "disguised-I" form that functions as interior monologue. As the addressee, 'You' receives commands from 'I' on what to say and what to do. In either case, 'You' proves to be a split-off from 'I'. That 'You' is the result of 'My' interior monologue.

Xu regards 'You' as a 'split-off' from 'I', the result of his 'interior monologue', and a 'disguised-I'. However, he never highlights that 'You' is the result of the refraction of the 'Ontological Self'.

Describing 'You' as both addresser and addressee, Xu points to a feature that is fundamental to this analysis. The second person assumes the existence of two distinct positions: someone who speaks and someone who is addressed. That

is why its grammatical structure is unstable. In *Soul Mountain,* however, these positions can belong to the same consciousness. It results in an internal dialogue, which is not a simple division of one narration between two pronouns. The use of the second person creates a distance between 'I' speaking for itself and 'I' being addressed. Within this distance, experience may be repeated, contradicted or judged. Hence, 'You' is not only a hidden or transformed form of 'I'; but rather, the method through which 'I' may become an object while simultaneously remaining the subject.

The concept of refraction emphasises the significance of the distance that emerges between 'I' and 'You'. Previous interpretations accurately indicate the processes of detachment, projection and objectification, but the important question, then, is what becomes possible through this separation. In second-person chapters, memories are not simply transferred from one pronoun to another. Thanks to the shift in perspective, they can be re-examined, questioned and evaluated. 'You' does not possess distinct knowledge, but the change in narration alters the relation of 'Self' to its own experiences and memories. This is why pronoun choice is not simply a stylistic device, but rather an epistemological mechanism: a change from 'I' to 'You' allows 'Self' to gain distance from its own experiences, reconsider them and understand them better.

Gao builds the Chinese past through the art of storytelling. The pronoun 'You' is used as a mouthpiece to narrate most of the Chinese fables. In her essay, "The Remains of History: Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain* and Wuhe's *The Remains of Life*", critic Andrea Bachner discusses the unreliability of 'You's' narration of Chinese history. She states that "Gao constructs history as cryptohistory as it is dependent on an individual's perception and interpretation and thus, ultimately, unknowable" (Bachner 2011: 103). Conversely, Chinese history and its legends come to life and are rejuvenated because of 'You's' presence through refraction from the 'Ontological Self'. Bachner treats 'You' as an individual and does not maintain the view that this individual 'You' is a fragment of another individual who is made of composite individualities known as the 'Ontological Self'. Therefore, it is not solely an individual's discernment of the Chinese past; quite the opposite; it is the voice of a wanderer, the 'Ontological Self'.

Moreover, these stories are peculiar expressions of every pronoun. These stories give life to all anonymous, mysterious, and obscured tales of the Chinese ethos. Among all the pronouns, 'You' is the most significant voice that conjures the elapsed Chinese tales and every emaciated, discarded, and unexplored section of the Chinese world. Bachner says that these stories are echoes of the protagonist. However, she does not acknowledge that these stories are echoes of every segment's observations, chiefly those of 'You'. She expresses:

> The stories are not restricted to the protagonist's reflections, but govern the novel as a whole to a large extent; after all, the text consists in large part of the stories 'You'

> imagines for and tells to the female protagonist 'She' who accompanies him on part of his journey. It also reverberates with the incessant search for alternative voices. (Bachner 2011: 106)

Precisely, Bachner does not declare that the 'Ontological Self' is the bearer of 'You' and that 'You' is its refraction.

Additionally, man is a unification of infinite personalities and thus a projection of himself. Bachner holds the view that these partitions of the 'Self' are manoeuvred by the first person 'I'. To substantiate her argument, she refers to *Soul Mountain*:

> Man cannot cast off this mask; it is a projection of his own flesh and spirit. He can no longer remove from his own face this mask which had already grown like skin and flesh, so he is always startled as if disbelieving this is himself, but this is in fact himself. He cannot remove this mask, and this is agony. But having manifested itself as his mask, it cannot be obliterated, because the mask is a replica of himself. It has no will of its own, or one could say it has a will but not means of expression and so prefers not to have a will. Therefore it has left man with an eternal face with which he can examine himself in amazement. (Xingjian, as cited in Bachner 2011: 141)

Although she maintains that "Man cannot cast off this mask", the 'Ontological Self' peels off its mask through refraction and breeds 'You', which is completely different from other beings under a façade. In short, she advocates that the 'Self' has many identities, but she does not refer to it as an 'Ontological Self' or identify 'You' as an alternative guise.

In conclusion, in his essay "Gao Xingjian's Novel *Lingshan* (*Soul Mountain*): A Long Journey in Search of a Woman?", Marián Gálik (2003) argues that 'You' is a shadow of 'I', but he does not say that the pronoun 'You' is a refraction of the 'Ontological Self'. A shadow is merely a replication or parallel representation of the 'Self'. As a result, it cannot be alienated or disconnected from one's own identity. Conversely, the pronoun 'You' is given an altered attribute that distinguishes it completely from the basic 'Self'. On the other hand, Mabel Lee (2012) adopts a different standpoint. In her article, "Aesthetics in Gao's *Soul Mountain*", she says that the pronoun 'You' is an exterior portrayal of the author's mind. She identifies a psychological structure of the divided 'Self' in *Soul Mountain*. She says that 'You' is the alter ego of the writer who converses in isolation. However, she does not interpret 'You' as an independent subdivision of the 'Ontological Self', but rather as an alter ego that nevertheless sustains its own individuality. 'You' sustains its own individuality, distant from an elementary unit of the 'Self'.

In his essay, "Life's Unattainable Goal and Actualized Meaning: Existential Anxiety and Zen Tranquillity in Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain*", Ming Jian (2009) upholds a rather different view on the 'Self' in *Soul Mountain*. He describes the

'Ontological Self' as a 'tripartite protagonist'. However, he does not argue that the 'Self' in *Soul Mountain* is merely a 'tripartite protagonist' but rather a foundation for all entities, especially 'You'. And it is an intermediary from which 'You' is refracted to solve a gigantic phenomenon of the 'Ontological Self'. In contrast, Thomas Moran (2002), in his paper, "Lost in the Woods: Nature in *Soul Mountain*", advocates that 'You' comes into being when 'I' becomes lost in Chinese primitive soil and forests in search of certain realities of life. He regards the journey of 'You' as a 'humanscape' emerging from the modern and mechanical world .

In his essay, "My Writing, Your Pain, and Her Trauma: Pronouns and (Gendered) Subjectivity in Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain* and *One Man's Bible*", Gang Gary Xu (2002) declares that in *Soul Mountain*, Gao "deconstructs the male imagination". In addition, he espouses a view similar to that of Gálik (2003) that 'You' is created in the image of 'I'. On the contrary, it is a deconstruction of the 'Ontological Self', the fundamental constituent of the 'Self'. The 'Ontological Self' refracts and contours 'You' as a divergent and discrete entity, relatively different from the smallest unit ('I') of the 'Ontological Self'. Moreover, Andrea Bachner (2011) in her essay, proclaims that 'You' is an individual, but does not mention that it is an independent individual refracted from the 'Ontological Self'. She also says that "Man cannot cast off this mask", whereas the 'Being', the 'Ontological Self' not only disperses its mask but also disperses it into different personalities. Precisely, all critics claim that 'You' is an alter ego, a shadow, an image of 'I', a deconstruction of male imagination or an external portrayal of the 'Self' but no one emphasizes that 'You' is a refraction of the 'Ontological Self', the primary existence of the 'Self'.

When summarising the research reviewed so far, three main lines of interpretation can be distinguished. Lee and Xu concentrate on the formal and psychological function of the pronouns; Gálik and Jian analyze the issues related to desire, gender and existential searching; Moran and Bachner situate the narrator's divided voice within the context of landscape, cultural memory, and history. The present study does not reject any of these approaches, since each portrays a true aspect of second-person narration. The term 'shadow' emphasizes continuity between 'I' and 'You', 'external projection' indicates the distance between them, and the 'tripartite protagonist' draws attention to the multilayered structure of the 'Self'. The limitation of these interpretations appears only when one of the aspects is regarded as an exhaustive explanation of the nature of 'You'.

The concept of refraction makes it possible to bring together three interpretive dimensions without reducing any of them. An image resulting from refraction has its source, changes direction under the influence of a medium and, at the same time, remains recognisably related to what produced it. From a narrative perspective, the source is the composite 'Self', the medium is the shift of the grammatical person, while the altered direction is determined by the distinct

path of 'You' associated with an imagined journey, desire and the search for answers concerning its own identity. This model also leads to an important methodological consequence: the thesis should be demonstrated through the analysis of specific devices present in the text rather than through philosophical analogy alone. Repeated words, changes of tense, forms of address, sensory images and transitions among 'I', 'You', 'She' and 'He' reveal how continuity and difference of 'Self' are constructed at the level of successive sentences. Thus, further analysis treats philosophical concepts as interpretative instruments, simultaneously treating the language of *Soul Mountain* as the primary evidence.

Chapter 3

DISCUSSION

Man's foremost obligation is to 'know thyself'. Thus, the author's novel *Soul Mountain* is inspired by the same idea. This idea further leads to a concept of individualism. Therefore, the basic self strives for self-knowledge to nurture and protect his individuality. The authorial self says that he can write on humankind, culture, and civilization as much as he wants, but for him the exploration of his 'Self' is more significant. He proclaims:

> I am perpetually searching for meaning, but what in fact is meaning? Can I stop people from constructing this big dam as an epitaph for the annihilation of their selves? I can only search for the self of the I who is small and insignificant like a grain of sand. I may as well write a book on the human self without worrying whether it will be published. But then of what consequence is it whether one book more, or one book less, is written? Hasn't enough culture been destroyed? Does humankind need so much culture? (Xingjian 2000a: 308)

Human beings have searched and researched a lot on culture, but the transformation in time makes it a forgotten phenomenon. Culture in each epoch faces destruction and eradication because humans fail to preserve it. The presence of iniquities eradicates cultures because human beings do not pay heed to the purification of the soul and self. And the purity of the soul can only be achieved through its exploration. Therefore, in *Soul Mountain*, the writer says that he can only find the meaning of 'I', the very basic existence of the 'Self'. Human society and the self both are decaying, but to die without gaining self-knowledge is a crime. A society or culture is built by individuals collectively; therefore, it is more essential to know what shapes an individual, who is the builder of the culture and its values.

The passage above demonstrates this relationship through a clear juxtaposition of two different scales: a monumental public dam intended to endure as an 'epitaph' and 'I' presented as "small and insignificant like a grain of sand". The comparison does not refer solely to modesty; rather, it shifts the focus from large-scale collective projects to the consciousness of the individual who experiences their consequences. An epitaph is traditionally associated with the preservation of memory, but in this case, the dam commemorates the 'erasure' of individual selves, meaning that culture can create monumental symbols to commemorate the very loss of human individuality it should prevent. Against this background, the grain of sand represents

a self that is too small and powerless to influence the vastness of the world around; it must instead attend to small perceptions.

The sequence of questions is equally significant. "What in fact is the meaning?", "Does humankind need so much culture?" and the question about the sense of writing another book are left without conclusive answers. They aim to challenge the authority of the speaking 'I'. 'I' attempts to find itself, yet it is not presented as a philosopher certain of his own understanding and already possesses the categories required for explanation. It is a voice confronted with its own doubts. This uncertainty gives rise to the emergence of 'You', since the first person cannot at once ask the question, undergo the experience, and recognise the limitations of its own questioning. The second person allows for separation of these functions. Refraction emerges from a deliberate act of self-creation; however, 'I' is not able to fully understand and give meaning to its experience from a single position.

The search for the self requires multiple perspectives. Individualism can only be accomplished through looking at the self in fragments, layer by layer. Therefore, in *Soul Mountain*, the authorial self, 'I', urges to beget an entity (a medium) through which he can search for the 'Self'. This journey of 'I' is without tangible conclusions about the 'Self'; it is more of a continuous struggle and progression to know the 'Self' through the pronoun 'You' refracted by the 'Ontological Self'. In her book, *Identity in Asian Literature*, Lisbeth Littrup (1996: 28) says that "A singular person cannot be a 'man' when he is not related to an 'Other'". Man is a configuration of its totality; therefore, it cannot be defined outside its manifold and multicoloured self. In *Soul Mountain*, the self is the working of an inner consciousness gaining self-awareness by safeguarding itself. The self becomes oppressive without its thorough examination; therefore, there should be a safeguard to protect it from inner devastation. Therefore, the 'Ontological Self' that is the unity of multiple selves into a basic or fundamental entity, refracts 'You'. The 'Ontological Self' brings forth 'You' to protect the 'Self'.

Furthermore, man cannot be the same at different phases of life. Therefore, in *Soul Mountain*, the 'Ontological Self' alters its primary existence and creates an 'Other'. The 'Ontological Self' takes leave of traditional life and dwells outside of it to experience an "individual place in nature" (Lee 2000: viii). It is also a way to attain wholeness of the 'Self'. The 'Ontological Self' gives birth to the pronoun 'You' who pursues an imaginary and non-existent place called 'Lingshan'. Through 'You', the 'Ontological Self' travels beyond the physical realm; therefore, 'You' is the seeker of the metaphysical and abstract world. Gao Xingjian (2000a: 2) mentions that "*Ling* means spirit or soul and *shan* means mountain". It represents that 'You' comes into action to find an incomprehensible and obscure path (an unknown 'Mountain'). In the introduction of *Soul Mountain,* the translator, Mabel Lee (2000), expresses the purpose of 'You's' existence. She says: "*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 another's words in social

life. The existence of another solves the problem of loneliness" (Lee 2000: vi). The chaotic self in *Soul Mountain* detours 'You' to be an earnest acquaintance of him. She describes the progression of the splitting up of the basic self or the 'Ontological Self' into diverse discrete bodies. She claims:

> A rigorous and critical analysis of the self of one man is achieved by dissecting the authorial self into the singular pronouns, 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. (Lee 2000: ix)

In chapter two of his book *Categories*, Aristotle (1984) classified an individual entity and recognized that there are two kinds of existences: "some that are not in a subject" and "some that are in a subject". Aristotle (1984: 1a20–1b9) states:

> Among things that are: (a) some are *said of* a subject but are not *in* any subject. For example, man is said of a subject, the individual man, but is not in any subject. (b) Some are in a subject but are not said of any subject . . . For example, the individual knowledge of- grammar is in a subject, the soul, but is not said of any subject; and the individual white is in a subject, the body (for all color is in a body), but is not said of any subject. (c) Some are both said of a subject and in a subject. For example, knowledge is in a subject, the soul, and is also said of a subject, knowledge-of-grammar. (d) Some are neither in a subject nor said of a subject, for example, the individual man or individual horse – for nothing of this sort is either in a subject or said of a subject. Things that are individual and numerically one are, without exception, not said of any subject, but there is nothing to prevent some of them from being in a subject – the individual knowledge-of-grammar is one of the things in a subject.

As the 'Ontological Self' is 'not in a subject', therefore, he can act independently. Through this liberty, the 'Ontological Self' refracts 'You'. However, while refraction is a scientific theory which means a change in the direction of light while passing through one medium and into another, in *Soul Mountain,* it is taken as the breaking up of the 'Self' into an independent being, 'You', after going through different experiences. Thus, it interprets that in *Soul Mountain*, the 'Self' is a transcendental manifestation that changes and goes beyond its 'prior' existence through refraction. It also proves that 'You' qualifies Aristotle's definition of secondary being as the 'Ontological Self' disengages a separate personality 'You' after experiencing the chaotic world. 'You' is 'not present in a subject' because he can exist apart from his basic subject or mode of existence. For instance, the 'Ontological Self' breaks up 'You', who goes on a journey during which he creates new beings 'She' and 'He' and crafts stories, mythical beings, and a mystical aura with his companion 'She' on his journey to explore life and its manifestations.

In chapter thirty-one of *Soul Mountain*, 'You' narrates stories to 'She' and explains that this is a hostile world and to exist in it is to undergo sufferings. 'You' says:

> You say of course it's a story with men in it but it's a story which men tell women and a man's story which women like to listen to. You ask her which type she likes listening to. She says your stories are becoming wicked and crude. You say this is what a man's world is. (Xingjian 2000a: 178)

This dialogue is more complex than the suggestion that 'You' simply forms an independent story. Its rhythm is shaped by the repeating narrative conventions 'You say', 'You ask' and 'She says'. These structures situate both voices inside a single narration: neither speaker stands entirely on its own; its words are always situated within the narrative structure, which assigns it a position. At the same time, the alternation between these voices means that the discourse does not take the form of a monologue. 'She' judges the stories as 'wicked and crude', and her judgement undermines 'You's' authority. The second person can therefore initiate the narrative, but cannot determine the meaning of that narration on its own. At this point, the mechanism of refraction becomes clearly apparent – it is understood as a redistribution of agency between different speakers within one textual field: 'You' creates the story, 'She' receives and challenges it, while the impersonal narrator's voice registers their disagreement. The final statement, "this is what a man's world is", also reveals the limitations of 'You's' perspective. On the surface, it appears to be an explanation; in fact, it is defensive: rather than responding to the criticism, 'You' presents gender as a universal principle for explaining reality. The passage presents the male perspective as one possible view, not as a neutral or objective truth. This is significant for the manuscript's argument because the relative autonomy of 'You' lies not in complete freedom, but in its ability to speak, to be challenged, and to reveal the assumptions underlying its speech. The dialogue shows that 'I' becomes refracted into multiple voices. 'You' functions as a distinct perspective from 'I'; however, it is not completely independent: its point of view can be challenged and corrected by another position that also emerges from the same complex consciousness.

In other words, 'You' tells stories and forms an opinion that does not depend on others' experiences and perspectives. Therefore, it describes that 'You' is a secondary 'substance', while the 'Ontological Self', also known as a 'primary substance' in *Soul Mountain,* is an autonomous body which further refracts a self-governing and separate entity, 'You'. Aristotle (1984: 3a8–3a21) claims in *Categories*:

> It is a characteristic common to every substance not to be in a subject. For a primary substance is neither said of a subject nor in a subject. And as for secondary substances, it is obvious at once that they are not in a subject. For man is said of the

> individual man as subject but is not in a subject: man is not in the individual man. Similarly, animal also is said of the individual man as subject, but animal is not in the individual man. Further, while there is nothing to prevent the name of what is in a subject from being sometimes predicated of the subject, it is impossible for the definition to be predicated. But the definition of the secondary substances, as well as the name, is predicated of the subject: you will predicate the definition of man of the individual man, and also that of animal. No substance, therefore, is in a subject.

The 'primary substance', the 'Ontological Self', and the 'secondary substance', 'You', both are 'not in a subject', and therefore, independent. It is a birth of an 'Other' self-sufficient being from an independent primal origin, the 'Ontological Self'. For example, in chapter seventy-two, the narrator says that "It's just like in the book where you is the reflection of I, and he is behind you, the shadow of a shadow" (Xingjian 2000a: 454). In his book, *Metaphysics*, Aristotle (1984: 1003b6-1003b10) says, "For some, things are called beings because they are substances, for others, because they are attributes of substance". Hence, in *Soul Mountain*, the entire domain of existence within the 'Ontological Self', the pronoun 'You' is a refracted attribute of the basic substance.

The relative independence of 'You' becomes most apparent in the way the second-person chapters are written. 'You' is depicted as a subject moving and experiencing the world around, yet it remains the addressee of commands and judgments expressed by another, indirectly present voice. This dual status creates an intriguing tension: 'You' can act and undertake its own journey, but its perspective still may be questioned and corrected by the voice that addresses it. Its independence is therefore neither complete nor absolute, but rather practical. 'You' can act within the fictional world, while the way it is defined still shows its connection to another position of consciousness.

From this perspective, the Aristotelian distinction does not prove that 'You' is a completely independent being. It is rather a different perspective helping to explain the hierarchy created and questioned by the narrative. The 'Ontological Self' is the source of continuity, but it can only be understood by examining its various manifestations and how they function. The source needs refraction to know itself, yet at the same time, refraction would not be possible without the source. This mutual interdependence becomes evident when 'I' assigns a task to 'You' and then receives an experience that could not have been expressed from the first-person perspective. Consequently, the novel moves beyond a simple model of origin and copy, it is rather a circular process in which the self creates another perspective that, in turn, reshapes the self from which it emerged.

The 'Ontological Self' refracts 'You' as an attribute of him to live in a time and space beyond past memories, mortal relations that breed anxiety, and the incongruity of the human world. The 'Ontological Self' cannot experience such freedom as a primary substance. The narrator says:

> Body odour is a disgusting condition with an awful, nauseating smell. It often affects social relationships and can delay life's major event: marriage. It disadvantages young men and women at job interviews or when they try to enlist, therefore inflicting much suffering and anguish. By using a new total treatment, we can instantly eradicate the odour with a rate of up to 97.53% success. For joy in life and future happiness, we welcome you to come and rid yourself of it… (Xingjian 2000a: 6)

When 'You's' refraction takes place, he goes to the 'Mountain' and dwells in seclusion for peace of mind, a thorough and thoughtful look at life. The 'primary substance' or the 'Ontological Self' says farewell to the fretful life that only inflicts pain and disappointment. Therefore, the 'Ontological Self' becomes able to understand that his contentment lies in the total rejection of a conventional life and acceptance of an unusual life. The narrator claims that "That's just the way it is, life is monotonous and lonely on the mountain and one needs this bit of comfort" (Xingjian 2000a: 39). The author narrates the mental state of 'You'. He declares:

> 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. To start with, you came fearlessly shouting and yelling into the world, then you were stifled by all sorts of customs, instructions, rituals and teachings. Now finally you have regained the joy of shouting with total freedom. (Xingjian 2000a: 418–419)

The 'River of Forgetting' episode makes the apparent desire to escape the human world more complicated. The movement has a physical dimension: 'You' cries out, moves forward and feels joy that comes from inside. At the same time, the repeated second-person form narration observes these actions from a distance. Freedom appears both as an immediate bodily liberation and a self-witnessed experience. 'I' cannot simply lose itself in the sensation, because a grammatical form preserves a position in which this sensation was named and interpreted. Forgetting also seems incomplete. The memories which are perceived as tiresome remain vivid enough to be rejected. The river does not magically erase the past, but constitutes an imaginary border where 'You' tries to prove whether it is possible to preserve its own identity after freeing itself from social and historical burdens. The answer remains ambiguous. The shout is primordial and provides a sense of liberation, yet it comes from a consciousness still shaped by the language and memories of the world from which it wishes to escape. This is why the passage is a particularly notable example of the model of refraction. 'You' changes the perspective from which the past is experienced, but cannot break the continuity thanks to which the past can be recognized.

The 'Ontological Self' finds the world a hostile place to live in; therefore, through the refraction of 'You' it undergoes a transformation into a state of serenity. The author claims:

> 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. (Xingjian 2000a: 49)

It is a mockery of the contradictory condition of modern man. The modern and the so-called cultured man have reached such heights of intellect and scientific evolution that they can produce human beings through an artificial procedures. On the other hand, humans slaughter thousands of their fellows in wars, sea creatures by polluting the water, and cage birds and animals to let them die on their own. Man lives by consuming other living beings. This is the absurdity of man that makes it necessary for 'You' to separate from the 'Ontological Self', to end this shattering of moral values so prevalent in the modern world, and to understand the roots of the human self.

In his essay "Martin Heidegger and Ontology", Emmanuel Levinas (1996: 16) states:

> For Heidegger, the understanding of being is not a purely theoretical act but, as we will see, a fundamental event where one's entire destiny is at issue; and, consequently, the difference between these modes of explicit and implicit understanding is not simply that between clear and obscure knowledge, but is a difference which reaches unto the very being of man. The passage from implicit and inauthentic understanding to explicit and authentic understanding comprises the fundamental drama of human existence.

For that reason, it refracts 'You', who is an authentic and explicit phase of the 'Ontological Self'. Also, 'She' wants 'You' to apprehend an authentic self. 'She' says:

> She says she wants to help you go deep into your soul. You say she wants to possess your soul. She says, yes, not just your body. She says, yes, she wants to become the ends of your nerves; she wants you to touch with her fingers, to see with her eyes, to create images with her, to climb with her up Lingshan; she wants to look down on the whole of your soul from the peak of Lingshan, including secrets of which you are ashamed, hidden in the darkest corners. She savagely says that even your wrongdoings mustn't be concealed; she wants to see everything with absolute clarity. (Xingjian 2000a: 180)

The language of this passage demonstrates a shift from providing assistance to the desire for possession. 'She' first offers to help 'You' go 'deep into your soul', but

'You' immediately reframes this offer as a desire to 'possess' that soul. The change of verb marks a tension associated with intimacy: helping assumes that 'I' and 'You' remain distinct positions, while possessing threatens to erase this distinction. The successive references to body parts increases this pressure. 'She' would like to become the end of 'your nerves', to touch with 'her fingers' and see with 'her eyes'. Possessive pronouns are repeatedly contrasted and exchanged, but they do not lose their distinctiveness. Although her senses would mediate his experience, the language still distinguishes 'She' from 'You'. The scene therefore depicts unity while simultaneously preserving their distinctness, which allows them to perceive each other and engage in a dialogue. During the climb to Lingshan, this sensory merger becomes an analytical meaning. From the peak, 'She' desires to see the soul in its entirety, together with shame and faults hidden in its 'darkest corners'. Climbing upwards does not merely mean spiritual elevation; it offers a perspective from which concealed aspects of 'Self' can be identified and evaluated. Moreover, the way in which 'She' speaks and acts – she speaks 'savagely' and insists that nothing 'must be concealed'– shows that she is not just a passive product of the imagination. The analysed passage supports the main assumption of the present study by showing that multiplicity does not consist in passive accumulation of distinct symbolic fragments. Each pronoun has a specific cognitive function. 'You' expresses desire and resistance; 'She' transforms intimacy into scrutiny; and the 'Ontological Self' can only be known through the tension between them. Refraction thus brings knowledge not through the complete unification of different voices, but through deliberate preservation of differences between individual pronouns. Precisely, with the refraction of 'You', the 'Ontological Self' attempts to fathom itself in an exclusive manner.

In his book, *The Activity of Being: An Essay on Aristotle's Ontology,* Aryeh Kosman (2013: 3) refers to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*:

> There is a science that considers being qua being that is what belongs to it by virtue of itself. This is the same as none, of what are called the divisional sciences, for none of these others deals in general with being qua being, but they separate off some division of being and consider what happens to belong to it-as for example the mathematical sciences do.

Some entities are perceived in a better way when they stand in relation to others. For instance, in mathematics, a formula can consist of a simultaneous equation. However, to solve this formula, an equation needs to be intact with others. Nevertheless, their values remain as separate individualities. Similarly, though 'You' is part of a formula called the 'Ontological Self', it gains an individual and independent entity in the process of refraction. And whatever 'You' experience not only belongs to him but to the very basic being as well, just like a simultaneous equation mathematical formula. For example, 'You' states:

> A cuckoo which I can't see is calling – it's further up then down below, to the left then to the right. It somehow keeps circling around me, as if it's trying to make me lose my bearings, and seems to be calling out. (Xingjian 2000a: 59–60)

Here the cuckoo personifies an unseen being who is the core self ('Ontological Self') of 'You'. It is the unconscious working of 'You's' consciousness that listens to its root. The 'Ontological Self' persuades 'You' to fulfil its purpose of existence. When 'You' goes deep into the forests, he is bursting with renewed spirit. 'You' says:

> The tireless hidden cuckoo which captivates one's soul and keeps leading one towards it. 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. (Xingjian 2000a: 61)

Hence, it is the 'Ontological Self' which refracts 'You' to gain a sense of relief and freedom away from the mechanical and robotic life. The 'Ontological Self' descends 'You' to 'Mother Nature' to reconcile its soul.

To become one with nature, the 'Ontological Self' in *Soul Mountain* also broods over the fluctuating self of him. The 'Ontological Self' discovers correspondences between him and the natural occurrences. The 'Ontological Self' compares the changing shapes of clouds to him. The narrator announces in chapter twenty-six:

> 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. It's just like when one is lying on the grass and staring at a cloud – at first it's like a camel, then like a woman, and when you look again it becomes an old man with a long beard, but this doesn't last because clouds are transforming every instant. (Xingjian 2000a: 150)

The author says that the self is a multi-masked marvel. The self is also a deceptive and slippery phenomenon. For example, the moment you start feeling that this is exactly you, but in the very next minute, the self takes on another form with the change in the mind's eye's perception. In the same way, the 'Ontological Self' changes shape by refracting 'You'. The word 'instant' is related to a particular span of time in which the act of self-transformation takes place. Similarly, Emmanuel Levinas (1996: 12) says that "existence is for us essentially linked to time". Levinas (1996: 14) says that:

> The duality within man between what we have called his ontological dimension-his existence, or time. And then the more general problem of the very meaning of existence; that is, the calling again into question of the notion of existence and of its relation with time.

'I' declares that:

> If you concentrate on looking at yourself, you will find that your self will gradually separate from the self you are familiar with and multiply into many startling forms. So if I have to make a summary of myself, it terrifies me. I don't know which of the many faces represents me more, and the more closely I look, the clearer the transformations become. (Xingjian 2000a: 150)

Levinas (1996: 14) asserts that "Spirit does not fall into time, but effective existence, in its fall, is thrown out of originary and authentic time". Thus, 'You' is separated at an appropriate time and given an effective form and part to perform in the search for 'Soul Mountain'.

In *Soul Mountain*, the 'Ontological Self' takes care of his existence by refracting 'You' in time. Heidegger coined the term 'Dasein' for self, and the understanding of the self is called 'Dasein's' ontology. He declares that "To understand being is to exist in such a way that one takes care of one's own existence" (Heidegger 1996: 18). To look at the self, 'You' disengages from the body, which is an outer layer, and merges into cognizant, which is an inner layer. At this point in the narrative, 'You' undertakes the process of refraction:

> You are wholly fused with the conscious only that you once possessed the outline of a body, but that this outline in your consciousness is rapidly vanishing; a light emanates from your body, dim like a candle in the darkness, a flame with light but no warmth, a cold light which fills your body, transcending the outline of your body and the outline of your body in your mind; you draw it into your arms, strive to guard this ball of light, this icy transparent consciousness; you need this sensitivity, you strive to protect it; a tranquil lake appears before you. (Xingjian 2000a: 113)

A complicated sentence structure that describes the "icy transparent consciousness" reflects its insatiable character. Particular parts of the sentence are linked with semicolons and with repeated references to the 'outline' of the body, thereby moving the syntax forward without capturing its ultimate, stable image. Initially, the outline is associated with the body; then it exists only as an image "in your consciousness", to eventually give way to light. However, it is not a simple separation of mind from body. The body remains a point of reference for crossing its boundaries; its disappearance must be presented twice before it can be imagined. The light itself is also ambivalent. It is "dim like a candle", but it gives "no warmth"; it takes the form of both a flame and an 'icy' sphere. Juxtaposing these contrasting qualities allows consciousness to be portrayed as something perceptible but not reduced to a permanent form. Particular attention is drawn to the verbs associated with 'You': 'draw', 'strive', 'guard', 'need' and 'protect'. The position resulting from refraction is not an automatic source of cognitive clarity; it requires preserving a fragile sensitivity that protects it from extinction. This evidence corrects the previous

tendency visible in the manuscript to equate distance with tranquillity. Distance introduced by grammatical structures allows for observation, but it also reveals that consciousness is impermanent and requires continuous effort. The image of cold light provides a better understanding of the linguistic dimension of Gao's aesthetics of detachment: coldness does not mean the lack of affect. The need to protect the light remains associated with a strong sense of tension. The refraction model is original; it can capture the simultaneous presence of distance and vulnerability, not explainable by a model of reflection or simple psychological projection.

The "icy transparent consciousness" of 'You' helps him to comprehend the existence of self in depth. It makes 'You' a sensitive being and lets 'You' take a clear and close look at the world, an abode of the 'Self'. 'You' understands the traumas and complexities of life via its personal experience. The narrator says that "You've learnt through experience everything you need to know" (Xingjian 2000a: 9). Heidegger (1996: 17) states:

> All consciousness is consciousness of something but that this striving toward something else constitutes the entire nature of consciousness; that we must not imagine consciousness as something that first is and that then transcends itself, but that consciousness transcends itself throughout its existence.

Hence, the 'Ontological Self' transfers its knowledge or consciousness into the refracted body, 'You'. Therefore, 'You' carries on the mission of the 'Ontological Self' to the mystic world of the 'Soul Mountain'. The narrator says in *Soul Mountain*:

> Man cannot cast off this mask ; it is a projection of his own flesh and spirit. He can no longer remove from his own face this mask which has already grown like skin and flesh so he is always startled as if disbelieving this is himself, but this is in fact himself. He cannot remove this mask, and this is agony. But having manifested itself as his mask, it cannot be obliterated, because the mask is a replica of himself. (Xingjian 2000a: 141)

Therefore, it reveals that 'You' is just another face of the 'Ontological Self'. 'You', 'I', and the 'Ontological Self' are fused through their similar agenda to figure out the convolutions of the 'Self'.

In *Soul Mountain,* the desire to get rid of isolation and exploration of self are catalysts that give birth to 'You'. However, refraction takes place over a specific time period. When the 'Ontological Self' triumphs over the bottomless abyss, it refracts 'You' to experience "all virgin wildernesses" in order to "find out more about him" (Xingjian 2000a: 3). The downfall of death and the victory of life is the point when the 'Ontological Self' refracts 'You'. The 'Ontological Self' professes:

> Death was playing a joke on me but now that I've escaped the demon wall, I am secretly rejoicing. Life for me once again has a wonderful freshness. I should have

> left those contaminated surroundings long ago and returned to nature to look for this authentic life. (Xingjian 2000a: 12)

Hence, whatever 'You' experiences about the 'Self' during his journey is framed within a particular time period. Martin Heidegger (1996: 18) says:

> The understanding of being is an ontology of Dasein, a study of Dasein's existence in all its concrete plenitude, and only of an isolated act of this existence-like a sort of door by which an existence, unfolding in time, would have to leave this existential plane in order to understand. Transcendence is an event of existence.

This act of 'transcendence' caused the existence of 'You', as the 'Ontological Self' articulates that "In my imagination, I travel into my inner mind with you" (Xingjian 2000a: 312). The 'Ontological Self' claims that "You know that I am just talking to myself to alleviate my loneliness. In this lengthy soliloquy, you are the object of what I relate, a myself who listens intently to me – you are simply my shadow" (Xingjian 2000a: 312). Heidegger (1996: 26) points out that "To exit towards the timeless and eternal is not to be detached from time, for, by virtue of the inner possibility of existence, this exit is a mode of time". For instance, the narrator says "Goals keep changing as time passes and as location changes" (Xingjian 2000a: 245). Thus, the mode of finding self-changes from the 'Ontological Self' to the pronoun 'You'.

Describing 'You' as a 'shadow' should not be interpreted independently of the rest of the sentence, in which the narrator speaks about "a myself who listens intently to me". Listening does not consist in passively reproducing what has been said. It reveals the self as a result of exchanges between what is said and how it is understood. The speaker is not capable of controlling the way his words will be understood even if the listener derives from the same consciousness. 'You' becomes the point where the statement returns to its source, similarly to the shadow, which is not a direct representation of the body. Despite being attached to the body, it appears on another surface and changes with distance, light and angle. This metaphor points to something more than a simple reflection of an ordinary mirror image. In the novel, time and space allow the same experiences to be viewed from a different perspective. Memories, which are difficult and overwhelming from 'I's' perspective, may be described with a greater distance after moving to 'You'. Similarly, desires that 'I' perceives as justified may, in relation to 'You', be subjected to reflection and challenged. The ability to merge does not mean the disappearance of this distance. On the contrary, the need to 'step back and create space' shows that self-knowledge requires distance from one's own experiences. Consequently, refraction is a process which requires time: the self does not immediately identify with what it experiences, but rather observes the experience from a certain distance, attempts to understand and interpret it, and then reintegrates it into their identity.

Furthermore, 'You' creates 'She' to explore the 'Self' more comprehensively. The narrator gives an account of the 'You's' desire to create 'She'. This is the time when 'You' enters the women's world to alleviate its solitude. In the introductory chapter of *Soul Mountain*, the translator, Mabel Lee (2000: ix) says that "The creation of an unnamed 'she' allows the author to project himself with immense freedom into the psyche of women". In *Soul Mountain*, the authorial self is the 'Ontological Self'. The 'Ontological Self' asserts:

> As I listen to myself and you, I let you create a she, because you are like me and also cannot bear the loneliness and have to find a partner for your conversation. So you talk with her, just like I talk with you. She was born of you, yet is an affirmation of myself. (Xingjian 2000a: 312)

The structure of this sentence shows that 'I', 'You' and 'She' are not three equivalent designations of the same person – they are a process in which one perspective leads to another one. 'I' gives birth to 'You' and 'You' enables the emergence of 'She'. At the same time, 'You' remains similar to 'I', since it originates from the same consciousness. The subject moves outward through different perspectives, and ultimately recognizes itself in them once again. The further manifestation is valuable not because it becomes separate from its source but because it provides the source with the information from the perspective that the source would not be able to assume. The difference between being 'born of' and being an 'affirmation of' also makes it possible to explain the status of 'She'. She is neither a completely autonomous figure, nor a passive manifestation of 'You'. Her words often challenge the perspective of the second person, confront it or direct it toward alternative meanings. In this way, they reveal a dimension of vulnerability that 'You' alone could not express. At the same time, the narrator consciously reveals that 'She' is created by him. In this way, the novel shows that the male subject is not able to fully and directly get access to the female voice. Therefore, 'She' is a structure that enables the subject to see itself from a different perspective, but at the same time, she remains an unstable figure through which the subject can recognize the boundaries and limitations of its own 'I'. This lack of stability leads to an ontological consequence. The complex identity is not a mere accumulation of distinct parts. 'I', 'You' and 'She' do not form a closed totality. Every new relation offers a new approach and another possibility of misidentification. Affirmation does not consist in finding a pre-existing, fixed entity; it is rather a moment when the source realizes that he may be affected by what he himself has previously created. From this perspective, she becomes another stage of the refraction process. Her presence redirects 'You' and shows that the 'Ontological Self' is shaped through relationships with others, not through solitary self-reflection.

'You' examines the feminine consciousness of male personality. For this, the term 'Anima' was coined by a Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist, Carl Gustav

Jung. He stated that every male has streaks of femininity in him. In his book, *Carl Jung: Darwin of the Mind*, Thomas Lawson (2008: 115) emphasized that "The soul of a man is personified by a female figure; correspondingly, the Animus has a masculine character in a woman". In *Soul Mountain*, 'Anima' is projected through 'You' and 'She's' liaison. For instance, whenever 'She' disappears, 'You' becomes agitated and rushes to catch her sight, which makes it evident that 'You' searches for the other part of itself. 'Anima' and 'Animus' are counterparts and form a complete self. The narrator claims that "You say you got up and started to walk away but couldn't resist taking another look and saw the other side of her face" (Xingjian 2000a: 78). Hence, the desire to have a full look of 'She' is necessary to know the 'Self' utterly.

A man cannot be complete without a compressed presence of all parts of consciousness. Marshall (2010: 20) states that according to Heidegger "totality is the ontological condition". Therefore, 'You' needs to be studied from his root to the recent development. The 'Ontological Self' or 'Dasein' is 'You's' root that refracts him. In addition, 'Anima' is 'You's' feminine consciousness which causes the birth of 'She'. It is also significant to explore one of the important elements of this totality, 'I' along with 'She' to understand self. In *Soul Mountain*, the pronoun 'I' is synonymous to the 'Ontological Self'. Lisbeth Littrup (1996: 31) says:

> The 'self' is not a thing in itself but a product of the mind. When a 'man' experiences his existence in the world, consciousness of the 'self' appears in his mind in opposition to the consciousness of the external world. 'Self' for a person means 'I' as a 'man' in his relation to the world. Then, different representations of 'man' will lead to different approaches to the 'self', and determine how the 'self' is identified.

Hence, the 'self' of the rudimentary occurrence is identified with the refracted 'You'. Therefore, in the last chapter, 'You' does not appear to give an account of his whole experience; rather, he retreats to his prime origin, where 'I' appears to articulate and register a complete understanding of 'You', of 'Self'. 'I' calls him an 'Omniscient Self'. Thus, the author concludes *Soul Mountain* by giving an account of 'I's' perspective on the 'Self'. Littrup (1996: 31) states:

> 'I' describes the self-identification as an associative identification. This means that the self-identification involves at least two things: 'I' and an associated object. And, without the associated object, the self-identification will not be fulfilled, and the ontological self can only identify as a part of 'self', not the whole.

In *Soul Mountain*, the associate of 'I', the 'Ontological Self', is 'You'. This refracted part of 'I' completes it. From the beginning of human existence, man was curious about his existence. Man questions his existence and the purpose of existence with questions like 'Who am I?' and 'Why am I'? Similarly, the existential quest is commenced by 'I', the 'Ontological Self', and carried out by 'You' and

its companions 'She' and 'He'. 'I' proclaims that "I realized that I had not lived properly. If I did have another lifetime, I would definitely live it differently" (Xingjian 2000a: 70). As a consequence, the 'Ontological Self' refracts 'You' to live a distinctive life in a new realm to gain an insightful understanding of the 'Self'. The 'Ontological Self' says:

> I would rather drift here and there without leaving traces. There are so many people in this big wide world and so many places to visit but there is nowhere for me to put down 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. (Xingjian 2000a: 400)

Therefore, the 'Ontological Self' refracts 'You'. The refracted pronoun 'You' urges to possess a world of its own. The narrator states:

> 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. (Xingjian 2000a: 328)

The recurring phrase "in a particular" gradually narrows the space with which the subject can identify – from metropolis to place, corner, room and finally to a single moment. This gradual narrowing should not be understood merely as criticizing urban life. The identity is presented here as something that takes shape by focusing on a specific place and moment. The city is too large and anonymous to become the "hometown of the heart", but a small fragment of space and time may preserve an experience which is entirely personal and connected exclusively to 'I'. Memory acts as another medium of refraction – it selects a particular point of view from the surrounding environment and lends an otherwise anonymous space a personal character. The passage also shows that the journey is not only about escaping society and distancing oneself from it. 'You' still remembers small, enclosed spaces and significant moments, even if they are situated within a large space. Even in the mountains, consciousness still remembers urban spaces. The city and wilderness should not be regarded as complete opposites, since they both coexist within individual consciousness. Each place acquires meaning depending on how it is perceived through the self's evolving relationship to it. 'You' shows this process, because at the same time, it is situated both in the present journey and in its memories which help him understand what he is experiencing now. To "preserve yourself fully" does not imply a return to an original identity; it means creating a temporary coherence on the basis of selected places and moments. This way of thinking about space supports the concept of refraction: one life

is connected to multiple places and each of them reveals a different aspect or perspective of the 'Ontological Self'.

The act of leaving worldly pleasures to search for the 'Self' and inner peace is a Buddhist philosophy. As 'Dasein' meanders to and fro in his quest to understand the self and enjoy an inner peace of mind, a follower of the Buddha also goes into abandoned lands to search for the self and achieve inner satisfaction. 'You' suffers from hunger and pain like Buddha. The narrator pictures the Buddha-like essential quest. He says that "You are in the midst of these ice crystal ruins and even while not moving you are gasping for air. There is a tearing pain in your lungs, and your brain has already frozen so that you can't think; everything is almost blank; isn't this precisely the state you have been aspiring to reach?" (Xingjian 2000a: 501). As Buddha fasted for a long time to reach the mystery of self and accomplish wisdom called 'Nirvana', similarly, 'You' is stricken with physical pain by climbing the 'Soul Mountain'. Moreover, the narrator claims that "It was also at Lingshan that Buddha enlightened the Venerable Mahakashyapa" (Xingjian 2000a: 5). In his book *Alone with Others: An Existential Approach to Buddhism* Stephen Batchelor (1983: 27–28) states:

> A vague hunger echoes from deep within us; perhaps through acquiring material objects, friends, and knowledge, this void could be filled. So we set out into the world and start to consume whatever commodities it has to offer. We eat and for a while feel satisfied, but the pangs of hunger always return. Ironically, the more we crave to possess and dominate the world, the deeper and more unbearable becomes the chasm of our own emptiness. In order to conceal this rapidly widening gulf, our compulsion develops into a frenzy. But, however hard we try, we will never succeed in filling an inner emptiness from the outside; it can only be filled from within.

Hence, the 'Ontological Self' deems it necessary to refract 'You' to fill its inward hollowness, which cannot be attained while living in the world occupied by societal conventionality. When 'You' reaches the 'Mountain', the narrator declares that "Buddha is in your heart. His face is serene, and I believe he has achieved liberation from the worries of the inner heart. He is setting out on a distant journey, and he is very happy" (Xingjian 2000a: 280). The 'Ontological Self' encompasses the attributes of Buddha since he was a child. He admits:

> When my mother was alive she said she gave birth to me while planes were dropping bombs. The windows of the delivery room in the hospital had strips of paper pasted on them to stop them shattering when there were explosions. Luckily, she escaped the bombs, and I was born safely. However, I couldn't cry, and it was only with the doctor slapping my bottom that I could cry. My birth probably predetermined my habit of being perpetually on the run in life, and I have grown accustomed to upheavals and learnt to find a little pleasure in the intervals between. So while the others of our group of evacuees at the time were sitting in a daze on

> their bedrolls and waiting on the platform, I left my bedroll with someone and, like a stray dog, wandered around the streets and alleys of the city. (Xingjian 2000a: 381–382)

This depicts the 'Ontological Self' as not belonging to the catastrophic world but instead taking refuge in unusual circumstances and places. The destructive sound of warfare during his birth offers him a reason to escape from the wild world. The 'Ontological Self' claims that "while I was staring out of the window at the sunshine, I heard myself silently intoning, take refuge in Namo Amitofu, Buddha" (Xingjian 2000a: 71). Furthermore, the narrator says that "You should know that there is little you can seek in this world" (Xingjian 2000a: 329). The narrator says that one has to break away from the physical aspect of the universe. He refers to Buddha's teachings on this concept. He says that "Buddha tells those awaiting enlightenment that Buddha cannot be perceived through manifestations of the physical body. Buddha says all existing phenomena are illusions, manifestations of the physical body" (Xingjian 2000a: 206). Therefore, the 'Ontological Self' refracts 'You' and sends him into a remote world; the 'Ontological Self' says that "I had won a new lease of life; I was younger than a newborn baby" (Xingjian 2000a: 73). Like its basic self, 'You' also accepts that the human world casts panic, terror, and traumas. The narrator declares that "You realize you will never return to the human world with its anxieties and warmth. Those distant memories are tiresome" (Xingjian 2000a: 418). Through this intermediate, 'You', the 'Ontological Self' acquaints him with the existing spectacles around him. In reference to this, 'I' states:

> I went about 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. I search for faces I like, or expressions I can tolerate, so I can't get rid of myself. When I am observing others, I always treat the other person as a mirror for looking inwardly at myself. The observations are inevitably affected by my state of mind at a particular time. Even when I am observing a woman, my senses react to her, and my experiences and imaginations are activated in making a judgment. (Xingjian 2000a: 151)

Levinas (1996: 18) states that "the 'leave-taking of oneself' [*sortie de soi-même*] in order to reach the world would be integrated into *Dasein's* existence", thereby referring to Martin Heidegger's ontology. Therefore, the other entities within the 'Ontological Self' serve as a mirror for him. Besides, the 'Ontological Self' is a combination of vast beings. Therefore, Levinas (1996: 18) says that 'Self' is "a thought, but a finite thought". The 'Ontological Self' builds façades and images which are pleasing for him. From the paragraph mentioned above, it can also be said that the 'Ontological Self' is a dynamic personality. The 'Ontological Self' synthesizes with the ambiances

around him and transcends itself. Therefore, Levinas (1996: 22) claims that "Being-in-the-world is to transcend oneself", and "'Being-in-the-world' is an essentially dynamic way of existing-dynamic in a very precise sense".

The image in the mirror is not presented in this passage as a faithful reflection of reality. The 'omniscient self' affects the perception of every face and this act of observation depends on mood, memory, sensory experience and imagination. Other people are not like mirrors that show an objective and true image of the person looking into them. The observer's perception is always partly shaped by expectations, beliefs, and prejudices. The text shows that the pursuit of self-knowledge can pose an ethical problem. Looking at oneself through another person can help one better understand the self, but it can also reduce that person to one's own interpretations. In this case, he or she is no longer seen as an independent subject but becomes simply a means of private interpretation. The use of the pronoun 'You' partially helps to escape that problem. Through its ability to be both the person observed and the observer, 'You' shows that perception is shaped, to some extent, by the observer's perception. The narrator can demonstrate that the assumption of omniscience is illusory. At the same time, he acknowledges that every observation depends on the observer's point of view. This is particularly important in the scenes where 'She' appears. The feminine figure cannot be understood merely as an independent woman or a simple symbol of male consciousness. Her identity is more complex and cannot be clearly explained. The text repeatedly reveals how 'You' creates, desires and judges her. Refraction thus results in self-knowledge through an awareness of distortion. The goal is not to gain a fully objective view, but to more consciously and responsibly understand that the self always affects every account of the world and of other people.

Consequently, Heidegger states that the 'mode of understanding' of ontological being generates anguish. The instant 'You' refracts from the 'Ontological Self' and encounters the world, 'You' senses an 'Existential Angst'. The narrator articulates 'You's' fretfulness of the human world. Lee (2000: vi) says:

> 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.

At another place, the narrator presents 'You's' state of mind after refraction. He says:

> The shouting of the children is still coming from the threshing lot; they are laughing and yelling as they chase one another about. But your childhood no longer exists, and all that confronts you are the dark shadows of the mountain. (Xingjian 2000a: 104)

Although 'You' goes to places, meets people and produces companions to surpass lonesomeness, these relations and murky places breed anxiety for 'You', who learns from his experience that to exist in the human world is to suffer. 'You' pronounces:

> Today, you can't know what traumas tomorrow will bring. You've learnt through experience everything you need to know. What else are you looking for? When a man gets to middle age, shouldn't he look for a peaceful and stable existence? (Xingjian 2000a: 9)

Levinas (1996: 30) says that "Anguish presents a way of being in which the nonimportance, the insignificance, the nothingness of all innerworldly [*intra-mondains*] (*innerweltlich*) objects becomes accessible to *Dasein*". In *Soul Mountain*, the 'innerworldly object' of the 'Ontological Self' is 'You'. Henceforth, the agony within the 'Ontological Self' causes 'You' to take on a physical form in order to be antagonized and grasped by all the suspicions of the world. Heidegger posits the condition of an ontological being in a pertinent manner. Levinas (1996: 30) proclaims:

> The one "for whom" we are frightened is "ourselves"; it is *Dasein* attained and threatened in its "being-in-the-world". On the other hand, we encounter the object of fear *in* the world by virtue of a determined being [*être*].

In *Soul Mountain*, the 'Ontological Self' is threatened by the similar panic of 'being-in-the-world'. The narrator announces:

> The darkness is so palpable that it is a wall, and I'm sure if I take another step I'll crash into it. Instinctively, I turn around. Behind, between the shadows of the trees, is the faint glow of the electric lights – a haziness, like a tangled mass of consciousness, like elusive far-away memories. It is as if I am somewhere observing the destination from which I have come. There is no road; the tangled mass of unerased consciousness floats around before my eyes. (Xingjian 2000a: 99)

Therefore, Levinas (1996: 30) emphasizes that "It is in anguish that *Dasein* is in the world and, consequently, that it authentically understands itself led back to the bare possibility of its existence […]". Hence, one has to inflame anguish within oneself in order to embrace wisdom. That's why, 'I' says that "Anxiety breeds genius" (Xingjian 2000a: 223). In other words, anguish yields a genuine self. Therefore, in *Soul Mountain*, the 'Ontological Self' seeks an environment free of conformism. The author's use of the pronoun 'I' for the 'Ontological Self' also indicates the authenticity of the 'Self'. The author says that "Any time I use the word 'we', it is when I am being extremely hypocritical and cowardly" (Xingjian 2000a: 314). Thus, 'We' indicates the world and its manifestations, whereas

'I' indicates the desire to scrutinize the 'Self'. Moreover, the 'Ontological Self' says that "The world is a false illusion created by others; what is original and authentic is what 'I' propose" (Xingjian 2000a: 448). In his lecture, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, Jean-Paul Sartre (1956: 3) proclaims that "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself". The 'Ontological Self' claims:

> I have established for myself this way of sequencing which can be thought of as a sort of logic or karma. Ways of sequencing, logic or karma, have been established by people in this vast unordered world in order to affirm oneself, so why shouldn't I invent my own sequencing, logic or karma? I can then take refuge in this way of sequencing, logic or karma, and be secure in my own actions and have peace of mind. (Xingjian 2000a: 314)

Hence, the 'Onological Self' does not allow the world to be an architect of its life by following its traditionalism but rebels against worldly norms to search for the 'Self'.

Furthermore, the 'Ontological Self' named as 'Dasein' by Heidegger assimilates the streaks of anguish in his refracted self, 'You' as well. For instance, the narrator states that "You cannot help being anxious because it is too strangely tranquil" (Xingjian 2000a: 114). Therefore, it illustrates that the 'Ontological Self' and his refraction 'You' understand their existence in a state of anguish. Besides, Levinas (1996: 30) announces that anguish "leads *Dasein* to self-understanding from its own point of view; it brings *Dasein* back to itself". In *Soul Mountain,* the 'Ontological Self' moves back and forth to reach 'Soul Mountain'. The 'Ontological Self' stresses that "My predicament lies in my always seeking to be self-activated and wanting to search for my soul" (Xingjian 2000a: 102). However, the 'Ontological Self' exhibits itself through refraction of 'You' and comprehends that:

> I don't know that I don't understand anything and still think I know everything. Things just happen behind me, and there is always a mysterious eye, so it is best for me just to pretend that I understand even if I don't. While pretending to understand, I still don't understand. The fact of the matter is I comprehend nothing, I understand nothing. This is how it is. (Xingjian 2000a: 506)

Thus, it shows that the understanding of the human world is unattainable. The search for absolute truth puts a person in a state of limbo. As 'I' states that "Life is without goals, and is simply travelling along like this" (Xingjian 2000a: 342). Hence, the true understanding of oneself leads towards real existence. Levinas (1996: 30) says that "It is important to emphasize that this being-ahead-of-oneself signifies a relation not to an external object but to its own possibility of existing". In other words, in *Soul Mountain*, the 'Ontological Self' refracts 'You' to 'being-ahead-of-oneself' to become inwardly whole. And, it is the instant when "I perceives that I too am real" (Xingjian 2000a: 10). Therefore, the inward

relation to oneself makes existence real. The 'Ontological Self' claims that the entire quest for identity culminates in an authentic 'Self'. The authenticity of the self comes with the realization that we are responsible for our actions. The narrator declares that "When you fall in, you must crawl out yourself because saviors aren't concerned with such trifling matters" (Xingjian 2000a: 351). Therefore, the 'authentic self' is the one who makes life significant. The narrator states that "To exist and yet not to be perceived is the same as not to exist" (Xingjian 2000a: 481). Sometimes, one has to take the long path to perceive the 'Self' without considering the consequences. In *The Zoo Story* by Edward Albee (1998: 12), Jerry states that "Sometimes it's necessary to go a long distance out of your way in order to come back a short distance correctly". Hence, to "come back a short distance correctly" the 'Ontological Self' refracts 'You'. In addition, the refraction of 'You' is an outcome of an intimate relationship with the 'Ontological Self', and with its own existence. 'You' is the possible inward existence of the 'Ontological Self'.

However, Immanuel Kant had a distinct perspective on the 'Ontological Self'. In his essay, "Kant's Metaphysics of the Self", Colin Marshall (2010: 2) says, Kant avows that "Selves are individuated by experiences, so that whatever entities are jointly responsible for unifying sensations into a single experience thereby constitute a single self". His personal experience leads him into an ambience where he encounters an unknown part of himself. 'You' is refracted to accomplish this vital task. For example, for the first time, 'You' finds another part of his self, 'She', in a crowd. 'You' notices that "She doesn't seem to be among them, and didn't seem to be as cheerful as this crowd. You leave the pavilion and walk straight down along the river-bank. You no longer need to think about finding your way" (Xingjian 2000a: 29). At this instant, 'You' seems to be more concerned with 'She', the abandoned and substandard fragment of his existence. 'You' tries his utmost to possess 'She'. The narrator claims that "You catch up to her and instantly relax and keep pace with her. You must keep up with her quick steps" (Xingjian 2000a: 31). The 'Ontological Self' via his refracted part, 'You', makes it possible to wrench and position all his existences into a unified solitary self. Marshall (2010: 2) mentions that "Kant recognizes a broad use of 'I' that refers to the 'whole man', involving body and soul". However, in *Soul Mountain*, within the hierarchy of the 'whole man', the 'Ontological Self' provides a base and refracts 'You' to apprehend unabridged self-including 'She' and 'He'.

During the nomadic state, 'You' desires a foothold to contemplate and discern the conduct of his refracted self with his feeble (feminine) side. The author remarks that "You feel wonderful talking to her like this. She's holding your hand, docile and compliant" (Xingjian 2000a: 87). Further on, the narrator narrates the firm grip of 'You' on 'She'. 'She' follows the path of 'You'. The narrator utters that "She's no longer afraid of high cliffs, she no longer controls her own body" (Xingjian 2000a: 257). It is 'You' who is the maker of 'She', thus

exerting his influence on her. On the contrary, 'You' ascertains that the fragile feminine part of him is luring, lusty, and all the same influential. 'You' states:

> Her bright red lips are like the camellias 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. (Xingjian 2000a: 230)

> She was looking back at you and smiling; enticing you to fall into an icy ravine. At the time you couldn't help walking towards her. (Xingjian 2000a: 502)

Simultaneously, this expresses that 'She' is a voluptuous and frantic creature. Yet, 'You' ties him to 'She' by self-identification. The speaker claims "That is entirely up to you; she will be what you want her to be; if you think she is beautiful, she will be beautiful; if there is evil in your heart, you will only see demons" (Xingjian 2000a: 93). Likewise, the narrator claims that "She seems to be your echo" (Xingjian 2000a: 33) and "You lean against her arm and she leans towards you, you look down to her, you can't see her features but you sense her small nose and you again smell that familiar warmth" (Xingjian 2000a: 35). Therefore, the unification of 'You' and 'She' is an act of self-familiarization and self-individuation resulting from 'You's' refraction from the 'Ontological Self'. 'You' comes into contact with 'She' through his physical body.

The 'Ontological Self' enables 'You' to construct a mode to locate 'Lingshan'. As 'You' is the refraction of the 'Ontological Self ', so is 'She' a refraction of 'You'. Nonetheless, it exemplifies that there is no escaping an elementary existence. Therefore, Kant (1996: 383) says that "'I', as thinking, am an object of inner sense, and am called 'soul'". "Kant maintains that having a self requires more than merely possessing representations – it requires having certain faculties" (Moghadas & Taheri 2024: 94). Hence, 'You', an object of the inner self, has the faculty to produce 'She'.

'She' also serves as a 'Mountain' for 'You' to search its unknown destination. As 'You' refers to "She gets me to sit on the narrow bench. There is nowhere to move in the small room" (Xingjian 2000a: 81). All peculiar and distinguishing women are not hypocritical, but rather quite cooperative in their own ways to let 'You' mount the 'Mountain' of the 'Self'. For instance, the writer says:

> You come to her door and beg her to open it. She tells you to stop making a fuss, leave things as they are. She needs peace, to be free of desire, she needs time, she needs to forget, she needs to find someone she can pour out her heart to. She hopes you won't ruin this good relationship; she's just starting to trust you, she says she wants to keep travelling with you to go right to Lingshan. (Xingjian 2000a: 104)

Hence, whenever 'You' seems to deviate from his goal, 'She' puts him on the right track. In the beginning of the novel, 'You' gives her strength, but as the narrative

proceeds, 'She' comes forward with a greater energy, which then dominates and directs 'You'. For instance, in chapter twenty-three, the author paints the whole picture of 'You' and 'She's' liaison. He avers:

> You say you had a dream, just now, while you were asleep on her. She says yes, you didn't seem to be fully asleep. She says she touched you while you were dreaming; she could feel you pulsating, for just a minute. You feel the warmth of her breasts, the heaving of her abdomen. She says she held you and felt you pulsating. She says you were nestled in my arms, like a sweet child, but you began to fiercely pulsate. You were in my arms, she says, it was me embracing you with my warmth, you know it was my breasts, my breasts swelling. You say, in the surging black tide, there was a silver eel, moist, smooth, swimming like a flash of lightning; it too was totally swallowed by the black tide. She says she saw it, felt it. You say you saw black, sleek bodies of human-like sea animals or animal-like humans. Cradled in her arms, the physical contact makes you recall all these minute details but you cannot go through it all again. (Xingjian 2000a: 138–139)

Hence, the 'surging tides', 'heaving abdomen', and 'swelling breasts' are images which show that 'She' is a 'Mountain' where 'You' encounters the "black, sleek bodies of human-like sea animals". The 'flash of lightning' exposes 'You's' encounters with the reality that humans have an animalistic nature. Moreover, 'You' treads on the land of 'She' in order to associate himself with her. Hence, 'She' plays an appropriate character to hark back to 'You' in every single facet of their intimacy. 'You' is also threatened by the animalistic side of humans. Though every 'She' is in a perpetual conflict with 'You', still, each of them epitomizes an accurate mirror to 'You'. 'She' says:

> She will give you freedom as long as you love her and don't leave, as long as you stay with her, as long as you satisfy her, as long as you want her. 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. (Xingjian 2000a: 274)

Therefore, during the process of 'You's' exploration of his fragile part of the 'Self', 'She' becomes a 'wanton woman'. 'She' (feminine self of 'You') merges as a strong entity. The narrator illustrates:

> She wanted to be carried away by a storm in the wilds, to be stripped naked by it, to be flailed with a branch until her flesh was torn apart, to succumb to the pain, to be ripped apart by wild animals! She says she saw her, that wanton woman dressed in black, fondling her own breasts, that smile on her face, the way she walked swinging her hips, a licentious woman. (Xingjian 2000a: 130)

Another important instance is where 'You' loses his 'key'. Even though the key is placed on the table in front of 'You', 'You' is unable to find it. 'She' is holding the key in her hand and standing in his room (Xingjian 2000a: 378), which can symbolize that although the feminine consciousness is present inside him, he is unfortunate enough not to sense it. Then, to make 'You' understand his dilemma, 'She' says to 'You' that "A woman: you need a woman" (Xingjian 2000a: 405). As the authorial self says, "Her inventions and your fabrications merge and are indistinguishable" (Xingjian 2000a: 303). Kant defines the 'Ontological Self'. Marshall refers to Kant's statement. He alludes:

> Even this representation – that all these appearances and thus all objects with which we can occupy ourselves are all in me, i.e., determinations of my identical self – expresses a thoroughgoing unity of them in one. I am therefore conscious of the identical self in regard to the manifold of the representations that are given to me in an intuition because I call them all together my representations. (Marshall 2010: 9)

All these direct and indirect representations of the 'Ontological Self' take on physical forms by embarking on an inward journey through the mind. Hence, Marshall (2010: 10) argues that "Kantian I or self is a contentually interconnected system of mental state and a bundle or collection of different perceptions". In *Soul Mountain*, 'You' is a refracted self from the 'contentually interconnected system' controlled by the 'Ontological Self'. The 'Ontological Self' claims:

> Like me, you wander wherever you like. As the distance increases there is a converging of the two until unavoidably you and I merge and are inseparable. At this point there is a need to step back and to create space. That space is he. He is the back of you after you have turned around and left me. Neither I nor my image can see his face, it is enough to know that he is someone's back… You who are my creation, created her and her face naturally would have to be imagined, but why must one insist on describing the face? She is a hazy image of associations induced by memories and is therefore indefinite, so let her remain indistinct. Moreover, her image is forever changing. (Xingjian 2000a: 313)

Hence, it reveals that the 'Ontological Self' has a 'multicolored' personality.

'She' also makes 'You's' encounter with 'You' possible. First, 'She' lets 'You' recollect his childhood reminiscences so that 'You' can make contact with his roots anew. The narrator says:

> She lights the oil lamp in the hall and brings it along. You follow behind, the floorboards creaking beneath your feet… deep in the mountain shadows, you hear children laughing on the other side of the creek. Paddy fields are over there. You seem to see a threshing lot in the mountain shadows, and the children are probably playing hide and seek. In the thick dark mountain shadows, separated by paddy fields, a big

> girl is laughing on the threshing lot. It's her; she's in the darkness opposite: a forgotten past is re-lived as one of that crowd of children one day recalls his childhood. One day the squeaky voice of the boy screaming cheeky nonsense thickened, became throaty and deep, and his bare feet pattering on the stones of the threshing lot left wet footprints as he departed from childhood to enter the big wide world. You hear the patter of bare feet on black cobblestones. A child by a pond is using his grandmother's embroidery frame for a tugboat. At a shout from his grandmother, he turns and runs off, the patter of his bare feet resounding on the cobblestones. (Xingjian 2000a: 102)

The above lines show 'You' leaving childhood behind and entering the 'big world', with his footprints on the stones marking this transition. In chapter forty-two, 'She' lets 'You' encounter 'You'. When 'You' walks with 'She', 'You' tries to avoid the crowd of old people and bumps into his self. The narrator claims that "The crowd charges at you, attacking you with sounds muffled in their throats. You are forced to push them aside, and one by one, they instantly fall as if made of paper, silently. A deathly loneliness prevails. You suddenly realize that behind the curtained doorway, the person lying on the planks is you" (Xingjian 2000a: 248–249). Thus, it illustrates that in the company of 'She', 'You' cannot get rid of him. Therefore, the presence of 'She' is necessary for 'You' to apprehend his self.

In the childhood scene, 'She' is not merely associated with a gender-related desire, but rather is responsible for recalling memories. Her oil lamp does not illuminate the whole past, only certain fragments, a small part of the space – the rest remains hidden in mountain shadows. In the dim light, sounds and images emerge: children's laughter, the threshing lot, wet footprints and bare feet on cobblestones. Memory is not an organised autobiography. Instead, it is produced from simple images, sounds and other sensory fragments. Following the lamp suggests that 'You' does not control memories, nor does it recall them consciously – instead, memories guide 'You' and allow it to gradually uncover the past.

Shifting the use of pronouns and tenses within the scene reinforces this structure. First, the child is a part of a crowd seen in the distance, then it is named 'the boy', and ultimately it appears to be a younger version of the consciousness described as 'You'. The change in referring to the child allows 'You' to recognise that the child is its former self, but cannot become that child again. The subsequent image of the body behind the curtain deepens this sense of separation: 'You' sees its own body as something both familiar and strange at the same time. 'She' makes this encounter possible, combining a sense of familiarity with a sense of estrangement. Therefore, her role cannot be limited to the Jungian category of 'Anima'. This notion helps to explain the encounter of 'You' with femininity, however, 'She' plays a more prominent role in the narrative: she shows different aspects of 'You' through gender, memory, and mortality, forcing 'You' to confront those aspects of its identity that cannot be explained through desire.

The 'Ontological Self' twists itself internally to refract 'You'. The refraction of 'You' ensues when the 'Ontological Self' turns away from the frenzied world. The 'Ontological Self' claims:

> The huge form sways along with me and I immediately realize that this is my shadow. I swing the lamp, and it also moves: it is in fact my own shadow in the night. Traumatized, I can't talk but just keep yelping, swaying the hurricane lamp and pointing. It is really strange to be terrified and then to discover that one has in fact been terrified by one's own shadow. (Xingjian 2000a: 199–200)

It reveal that the 'Ontological Self' refracts 'You' at night. Lisbeth Littrup (1996: 2) states:

> 'Man' defines his 'self' in relation to Other, which unites them. This is constructed from the web of reciprocal obligations or moral relations in which man finds himself, defines himself. Apart from it he can have no identity. And yet these relations alone, it is equally important to recognize, do not define a man totally. His interior self exists at the center of this web, and there enjoys its own freedom.

Correspondingly, in *Soul Mountain*, the 'Ontological Self' has to refract 'You' to recognize its existence thoroughly. On the mountainous journey, 'You' senses an aura of immortality bestowed by the 'Ontological Self' until the completion of the task. The 'Ontological Self' converses to 'You':

> You are really living the life of an immortal, I say. I don't know about it being an immortal's life but it's peaceful and I'm not troubled by many anxieties. My work is simple; there's only the one path up the mountain, it's right under my eyes, and I have only to fulfil my duty of keeping watch over this mountain. (Xingjian 2000a: 188)

The anxieties of the world kill 'You' each moment. Hence, the 'Ontological Self' breaks away from the worldly distresses and angst by refracting 'You'. 'You' questions:

> Why have I come to this mountain? Is it to experience life in a scientific research camp such as this? What does this sort of experience mean to me? If it's just to get away from the problems I was experiencing, there are easier ways. Then maybe it's to find another sort of life. To leave far behind the unbearably perplexing world of human beings. If I'm trying to be a recluse, why do I need to interact with other people? Not knowing what one is looking for is pure agony. Too much analytical thinking, too much logic, too many meanings! Life has no logic, so why does there have to be logic to explain what it means? Also, what is logic? I think I need to break away from analytical thinking; this is the cause of all my anxieties. (Xingjian 2000a: 50)

'You' selects not to live a calculated life by residing in a mechanical world. Hence, the 'Ontological Self' refracts 'You' because it is the absence of worldly fear which generates the desire to 'know thyself'. 'You' says that on the mountain "Ah . . . no sky no ground, no space, no time, no existence, no non-existence, no existence and no non-existence; non- existence exists so there is non-existence of existence" (Xingjian 2000a: 114–115). Therefore, 'You' is refracted in a state of serenity to pursue his mission and get his bearings.

'She' assists 'You' on the journey to 'Soul Mountain'. 'She' pays gratitude to 'You' for bearing her presence. 'She' says that "If finally there's something she should say, it would be that she's grateful to you, grateful to you for the part of the journey you have taken her on and grateful for saving her from loneliness" (Xingjian 2000a: 302). It renders that 'She' is an external appearance of 'You', as the pronoun 'You' is an external presence of the 'Ontological Self'.

The 'Ontological Self' in *Soul Mountain* is not a part of the mainstream Chinese culture. Littrup (1996: 8) affirms that "Traditional culture is often called 'man eating' and 'I' in modern Chinese is not related to external world but to themselves". Kant (as cited in Marshall 2010: 7) asserts that "we have cognition of our selves only through inner sense". The 'Ontological Self' agrees that its existence becomes apparent only through the inner realization of the 'Self', and it is also the reason for 'You's' refraction. The 'Ontological Self' comments:

> At that time the individual did not exist. There was not an awareness of a distinction between 'I' and 'you'. At that time people did not have an awareness of fearing oneself, knowledge of the self came from an other and was affirmed by possessing and being possessed, and by conquering and being conquered. After this, the 'I' also discovered that he was to be found in large numbers everywhere [. . .] (Xingjian 2000a: 307–308)

The knowledge of 'You' as a separate entity comes through the alteration in the 'Ontological Self'. The ache of decay without self-exploration forms an 'Other'. Since the refracted pronoun 'You' is given the power by the 'Ontological Self' to create 'She' and 'He' as auxiliary individuals. Marshall (2010: 16) mentions that according to Kant, "For any particular unified experience, whatever thing or things are immediately causally responsible for the unity of that experience compose a self". It demonstrates that the 'Ontological Self' depends on its refraction 'You' and 'You's' creations, 'She' and 'He' (Marshall 2010: 13). Marshall (2010: 15), quoting Kant, states that:

> "the [single] movement of a body is the composite movement of its parts", and the continuity of representations might be based in a series of substances that pass their states from one to another, just as "[a]n elastic ball that strikes another one in a straight line communicates to the latter its whole motion".

Nonetheless, the movement of the 'Ontological Self' results in the refraction of 'You', and 'You's' move towards 'Soul Mountain' causes the birth of 'She' and 'He'. As a result, the 'Ontological Self' also cannot exist without the 'Others', its composite parts of the 'Self'. That's why the 'Ontological Self' says that "We all are linked in destiny" (Xingjian 2000a: 280) and "She was born of you, yet is an affirmation of myself. You who are the partner of my conversation transform my experiences and imagination into your relationship with her" (Xingjian 2000a: 312). However, 'You' is the soul of the 'Ontological Self'. The 'Ontological Self' asserts that "I is the body and You is the spirit" (Xingjian 2000a: 294). Therefore, it refracts 'You' because the soul is free of conformity and does not dwell in a cocoon.

For instance, 'You' is extremely distressed when his guide 'He' departs. 'You' cries out:

> "Hey – Hello – Hey", I yell out. I did not ask the name of the person who brought me into the mountains so I can only hysterically shout out like this, like a wild animal, and the sound makes my hair stand on end. I used to think there were echoes in mountain forests; even the most wretched and lonely of echoes wouldn't be as terrifying as this absence of echoes. Echoes here are absorbed by the heavy mists and the humidity-laden atmosphere. I realize that my shouting probably doesn't transmit, and I sink into utter despair. I have become separated from my guide just like that, lost in the three thousand meters of ancient forest in the 12M band of the aviation chart. (Xingjian 2000a: 63)

Kant (as cited in Marshall 2010: 15) states that a concept is a "single consciousness that unifies the manifold that has been successively intuited, and then also reproduced, into one representation". It reveals that the 'Ontological Self' is a 'single consciousness'. The 'Ontological Self' confesses that "I am never able to experience the warm intimacy of just being myself" (Xingjian 2000a: 203). At another point, the 'Ontological Self' says that "In the boundless world, there are all sorts of mysteries external to you and me. In other words, they are all projections of my back which I can't get rid of. If I can't get rid of them, why try?" (Xingjian 2000a: 313).

The scene depicting the unanswered call in the mountains shows the acoustic dimension of the pronoun structure. The speaker tries to establish contact with someone by shouting "Hey" and "Hello", however the silence of the mountains does not bring any answer. The absence of any reply reveals why 'You' must appear: speaking always assumes the existence of someone else to whom the words are directed, even if no real listener exists. The voice assumes an almost primordial form, yet it preserves the function of a message – it is situated somewhere between a human attempt to establish a dialogue and solitary sound.

In the novel, 'You' reacts to the lack of an external listener, adopting the role of an internal listener. The 'single consciousness' analysed in reference to Kant is

not a voiceless unity, but assumes an internal division: one voice sends a message and another receives it. This acoustic multiplicity shows that 'You', created as a result of refraction, is neither an imagined stranger nor an empty stylistic device. It is a reaction to the experience of loneliness expressed within the narration. At the same time, this reaction does not eliminate loneliness: the recipient created within consciousness cannot replace the unpredictability of another human being. Therefore, in the echo scene, 'You' is necessary, yet insufficient. Refraction sustains the internal dialogue, which helps the consciousness search for the answer, but at the same time, it reminds the reader that the self cannot fully satisfy its own demand for relation.

Moreover, as 'You' is the refraction of the 'Ontological Self', they both have similar qualities. The 'Ontological Self' and 'You' are 'Shamans'. A 'Shaman' gains knowledge of life, death, and also goes through transmutation of the 'Self'. The 'Ontological Self' acknowledges the presence of 'You' in him. The 'Ontological Self' says "I didn't like showing my emotions to people close to me. If I were on my own, it would be easier to control myself" (Xingjian 2000a: 71). Hence, the pronoun 'You' is a transfiguration of the 'Ontological Self'. It is the point when the 'Ontological Self' desires to resuscitate its spirituality. It is the journey to find out its mystical self through 'You'. The narrator describes the life of 'You' as a shaman with his companion 'She' on the 'Mountain'. He states:

> They've been deep in the mountains all year and have said all they have to say […] For them this is the way to live. They don't have newspapers and don't listen to radio broadcasts. Ronald Reagan, the economic reforms, inflation, the eradication of spiritual pollution, the Hundred Flowers Movie Award, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera – that noisy world is left to the cities; for them it's all too far away. (Xingjian 2000a: 36–37)

The mountain episode shows a distance from social life through limiting the language used to describe public situations. The list – "Ronald Reagan, the economic reforms, inflation, the eradication of spiritual pollution, the Hundred Flowers Movie Award" – combines international politics with economic policy, ideological campaigns and popular culture, presenting them in a similar way. The repeating world, 'etcetera', makes all these themes lose their distinct meaning and become interchangeable signals of a 'noisy world'. It does not suggest that the world does not exist any more; conversely, precise names indicate that it still exists in the memory, but it is available from a different perspective of evaluation. The phrases 'left to the cities' and 'too far away' show that the refraction has both spatial and grammatical dimensions. The journey described in the second person influences how collective memories and information are perceived and transfers consciousness outside the usual channels of newspapers and broadcasts. This way of filtering reality better shows the manuscript's contribution than simple juxtaposition of true nature and a spoilt society. 'You' does not find a pure self

that exists beyond culture. The pronoun creates a temporary distance, where inherited priorities can be reduced, rearranged and tested. It proves that the mountain is firmly linked to narrative form; it directs attention in a particular way. At the same time, continuity is maintained through the social names from which the text tries to distance itself.

The acceleration, horrendous, jolted, exhausted, choked, and bleak life of the cities is no more harmful for 'You'. By following the path of a 'Shamanistic' life, 'You' closes the doors of a spiritually demoralizing life on him. The 'Ontological Self' says:

> I am suddenly surrounded by an expanse of passions and think that the human search for love must originally have been like this. So-called civilization in later ages separated sexual impulse from love and created the concepts of status, wealth, religion, ethics and cultural responsibility. Such is the stupidity of human beings. (Xingjian 2000a: 228)

A shaman's journey transcends both time and culture as is evident from the narrative account of the 'Ontological Self'. In his book *The World of Shamanism: New Views of an Ancient Tradition,* Roger Walsh (2007: 127) writes that "The shamans did not create the cosmology, the mythology, and the theology of their respective tribes; they only interiorized it, experienced it, and used it as the itinerary for their ecstatic journeys". The 'Ontological Self' reaches the state where the shattered ideas of city life do not matter to him anymore. When the 'Ontological Self' faces the sheer darkness of the 'Mountain' via the refracted pronoun 'You', he prospers to vanquish the "inner fear of darkness". The 'Ontological Self' avers:

> I put out my hand to verify my existence, but I can't see it. It is only when I flick my lighter that I see my arm is raised too high, as if I were holding a flame torch. The lighter goes out even though there's no wind. The surrounding darkness becomes even thicker, boundless. Even the intermittent chirping of the autumn insects becomes mute. My ears fill with darkness, primitive darkness. So it was that man came to worship the power of fire, and thus overcame his inner fear of darkness. (Xingjian 2000a: 98)

It is hard to feel oneself in the middle of the crowd. It only seems a burden which can be released by raising one's arm 'too high' like 'You'. It also shows that the 'Ontological Self' has mystical power to exert an influence over the darker aspects of the human world and the facility to induce vigor from within to discard the primitive darkness. The image of 'a flame torch' demonstrates the presence of wisdom and the elimination of darker aspects of worldly life.

The 'Ontological Self' becomes able to refract 'You' because of his imaginative power. In his book *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections*

from the Objections and Replies René Descartes (2008) describes the power to create an 'Other' by an 'Ontological Self'. He asserts:

> I imagined myself to be anything, since imagining is nothing other than contemplating the shape or image of a bodily thing. Now, however, I know for certain that I exist… 'I shall use my imagination, in order to recognize more clearly what I am', as it would be to say: 'Now I am awake, and I see something true; but because I cannot yet see it clearly enough, I shall do my best to get back to sleep again so that my dreams can show it to me more truly and more clearly'. (Descartes 2008: 20)

Descartes (2008: 37) states that "When I turn the eye of my mind on myself, I do not only understand myself to be an entity that is incomplete and that depends on another". In *Soul Mountain*, the 'Ontological Self' confesses the presence of another entity within him, which is refracted 'You'. In *Soul Mountain*, the 'Ontological Self' says "I who am engrossed in my journey or you who are on your spiritual journey" (Xingjian 2000a: 313). It confirms that 'You' is an 'Other' entity on whom the 'Ontological Self' depends.

At another point, the 'Ontological Self' claims:

> I've thought of an idea. What would happen if you and I were to change places? In other words I would be your image and you instead would be the concrete form of me – this would be an interesting game. If you listen carefully to me from my position, I would then become the concrete expression of your desires, it would be a lot of fun. (Xingjian 2000a: 314)

'You' is a concrete form of the 'Ontological Self's' profound introspection. In addition, the 'Ontological Self' declares that "From now on the spirit will protect the body" (Xingjian 2000a: 293). Further in his article, "Cartesian Dualism: An Evaluation of Wireduan and Gilbert Ryle's Refutations", Samuel Olusegun Steven (2011: 157) alludes to René Descartes's philosophy of the self that "cogito ergo sum" means "I think therefore I am". It is the pursuit of knowledge that propels the 'Ontological Self' to alter itself into 'You'. For that reason, the 'Ontological Self' declares that "I have my own will, which is precisely why I have come to this place where even ghosts wouldn't come" (Xingjian 2000a: 201). Respectively, in *Soul Mountain*, the 'Ontological Self' transfers itself and refracts 'You'. Walsh (2007: 165) claims that "Shamans learn to induce and direct the journeys that are their hallmarks. Yet people who have never even heard of shamanism may have journey-like experiences. Spontaneous journeys include out-of-body experiences, lucid dreams, near-death experiences". For instance, in *Soul Mountain*, the narrator narrates the 'near-death experience' of the 'Ontological Self'. He says that "He resigned himself to imminent death until a later X-ray revealed that a wrong diagnosis had been made" (Lee 2000:

viii). In addition, the 'Ontological Self' embraces an 'out-of-body' journey in the silhouette of 'You'. Walsh (2007: 158) refers to Descartes' comment:

> By body, I understood all that which can be defined by a certain figure. Something which can be confined in a certain place, and which can fill a given space in such a way that every other body will be excluded from it; which can be perceived either by touch, or sight, or by hearing or taste.

Further, Walsh (2007: 159) says for Descartes, "The self is the conjunction of a mind and a body. He also grants that the mind or soul can outlive the body. This appears to be an argument for the immortality of the soul". In *Soul Mountain*, the narrator discloses the compact connection between mind (the 'Ontological Self') and body ('You'). He says:

> However, the totality of my misfortunes also exists within you, the unlucky demon I have invoked. Actually, you are not unlucky for all your misfortunes have been conferred upon you by me; they are all derived from my self-love – this damned I loves only himself! I don't know if God and the Devil in fact exist but both were invoked by you who are the embodiment of both my good fortune and my misfortune. When you vanish, God and the Devil will in the same instant disappear. (Xingjian 2000a: 314)

The 'Ontological Self' experiences the cold realities of life through 'You' which inflict both fortune (God) and misfortune (Devil) on it. However, life is a muddle of glee and gloom. The 'Ontological Self' also asserts that the refraction of 'You' is generated from the 'Self's' love, the love to explore mind and body.

The passage where 'I' transfers its suffering to 'You' shows the ethical cost of refraction. Creating 'You' does not allow the source to escape responsibility for what has been created. On the contrary, 'I' recognises that 'You's' suffering originates from its selfishness. 'You' is called a demon, an embodiment of good fortune and misfortune, but ultimately the accusation quickly turns back on 'I'. The refracted self becomes a reflection in which 'I' can see consequences of its own actions, which it might try to reject.

The statement that the disappearance of 'You' will cause the vanishing of God and the Devil shows that the differences between them depend on the existence of 'You'. They do not exist as independent beings but acquire their meaning only inside the relation between 'I' and 'You'. This relation functions in both ways: 'I' creates 'You', but it is 'You' that gives concrete form to 'I's' experiences, fate, guilt, and fears. The suggested exchange of places shows that 'I' and 'You' can switch roles. 'You' may take the form of a specific experience with 'I' becoming the image. Refraction does not mean a permanent relation with a single original and an inferior copy. It is a configuration of positions that aim to make it impossible for 'I' to recognise its own suffering or desire as something obvious.

At another point, Walsh (2007: 151) pronounces that "The shaman is a cosmic traveller because he commands the techniques of 'ecstasy-that is' because his soul can safely abandon his body and roam at vast distances, can penetrate the underworld and rise to the sky". In the same way, in *Soul Mountain*, the 'Ontological Self' closes its outer eye to open its inner eye. When the 'Ontological Self' refracts 'You' on an aloof 'Mountain' far away from mortal affairs of the human world, the narrator articulates:

> These are all memories; this tinkling which sticks in your mind seems to be a sound in your brain. There is an agonizing, searing pain in your lungs and stomach; your heart pulsates wildly, chaotically, and your brain is about to explode. When it explodes, the blood will clot; it will be a soundless explosion. Life is fragile, yet to obstinately struggle is natural. You open your eyes; the light hurts; you can't see anything but you are aware that you are still crawling; the tinkling bells have become distant memories, indistinct longings, like sparkling ice flowers, fragmented, ephemeral, glistening on the retina of your eyes. You strive to discern the colors of the rainbow; you swirl around upside-down, float backwards; lose the ability to control yourself. It is all futile striving, vague hope, refusal to be extinguished, pitch-black cavern, skeleton's eye-sockets seeming to go deep inside, nothing there at all, a cacophony splits asunder with a blast!... a never before experienced limpidity, a totality of purity and freshness. You perceive a barely discernible subtle, almost soundless sound, it turns transparent, is carded, filtered, clarified. You are falling and while falling you float up, so gently, and there is no wind, no physical burdens and no rashness in your emotions. Your whole body is cool; your body and mind listen intently; your whole body and mind hear this soundless, billowing music. In your conscious mind, this thread of gossamer becomes smaller but increasingly clear, appearing right before your eyes, delicate like a strand of hair and also like a crack of light. The extremity of the crack fuses with the darkness, loses its form, expands, and transforms into faint, minute points of light, then boundless countless particles, enveloping you in this cloud blanket of distinct particles. Minute points of light form clusters, drift into motion, turn into a mist-like nebula, keep slowly transforming, gradually solidifying into a dark moon tinged with blue. The moon within the sun turns grey-purple instantly and spreads out, but the center further condenses, turns dark red, and gives off bright purple rays. Hope rises from the depths of your heart, at the edge of the darkness, you hear music, this solidified sound gradually expands, spreads and sparkling crystals of sound penetrate your body. You can't work out where you are. The particles of bright crystals of sound permeate your body and mind from all directions. As a mass of long notes takes shape, there is a vigorous middle note; you can't catch the melody but can perceive the richness of the sounds. A dark blue sun circles within an even darker moon; you hold your breath enraptured, stop breathing, reach the extremity of life. The fear of death of the living body is concrete like this; the physical body you failed to abandon recovers its sensitivity. (Xingjian 2000a: 502–504)

A long near-death scene is a clear example that 'You' helps maintain continuity of consciousness, even when the body seems to disappear. The syntax brings together many different sensations, almost seamlessly: pain gives way to darkness, memories, coloured light, sound and movement. This rapid sequence of images reflects a mind deprived of its usual points of reference. Nevertheless, the repeated use of 'you' connects the successive stages of transformation. Even when location, bodily control and visual form disappear, 'You' remains a point of reference, which is the source of continuous experience. The images closely connect different sensory experiences. Sounds take the form of crystals, light becomes a crack, particles come together as music, and the body is both heavy and weightless. This synaesthesia is not mere decoration of the mystical experience. It shows how perception changes when the usual distinction between the internal and the external breaks down. The narrative does not lead this experience to a complete detachment from the body. At the moment of greatest tension, the fear of death once again directs attention to the physical experience of the body. 'You' is a mediator between disintegration and a return to the previous state. 'I' moves toward the boundary behind which it can completely lose its identity. However, the use of the second person maintains enough distance for the experience to be observed and described. It means that refraction preserves consciousness and makes it possible to undergo a profound transformation without complete disappearance.

The memories of the past follow 'You' and are tightly attached to him. All the modernization of the world is "glistening on the retina of your eyes". It means 'You's' senses are wounded by the bright images of the world stored in his mind. However, these weighty recollections blast without making a sound, and suddenly, 'You' is filled with a calm feeling of being outside the human world. He dangles between 'distant memories' and a newly ventured shamanistic journey. Despite everything, he manages to dull its 'physical sensitivity'.

A shaman attempts to figure out the reality of self according to his or her own understanding of the situation in which they dwell. Walsh (2007: 127) says:

> Shamanism ultimately is only a method, not a religion with a fixed set of dogmas. Therefore, people arrive at their own experience-derived conclusions about what is going on in the universe, and about what term, if any, is most useful to describe ultimate reality.

In *Soul Mountain*, the narrator describes the observation of the 'Ontological Self' about reality. He enunciates:

> Reality can't be verified and doesn't need to be; that can be left for the "reality-of-life" experts to debate. What is important is life. Reality is simply that I am sitting by the fire in this room, which is black with grime and smoke, and that I see the light of the fire dancing in his eyes. Reality is myself, reality is only the perception of this instant, and it can't be related to another person. (Xingjian 2000a: 15)

The 'Ontological Self' conceives that reality is a relative phenomenon. Our realities are unique from others because of the personal experiences that distinguish us. The same attitude is preserved by the refraction of the 'Ontological Self', 'You'. 'You' claims:

> The observations are inevitably affected by my state of mind at a particular time… 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 inevitably fail. On the other hand, if I were a woman and living with a man, this would also be a worry. The problem is the awakened self in the inner mind; this is the monster which torments me no end. People love the self yet mutilate the self. Arrogance, pride, complacency or anxiety, jealousy and hatred, all spring from this. The self is in fact the source of mankind's misery. So, does this unhappy conclusion mean that the awakened self should therefore be killed? (Xingjian 2000a: 151–152)

In *Soul Mountain*, the 'Ontological Self' perceives reality according to its own experiences. Thus, they both agree that reality is a "perception of an instant" or personal "state of mind at a particular time". In his essay, *Essence and Existence in Leibniz's Ontology*, Lorenzo Peña (1997: 415) says that "Leibniz's main ontological claim is that essences are possible-entities striving to exist, on each of which existence devolves in accordance with its own essential perfection". Hence, it expresses that the 'Ontological Self' converts its shamanistic characteristics into its refraction 'You'. The 'Ontological Self' transfers his attributes to 'You' whilst also preserving his originality, which Leibniz dubbed 'perfection'. For instance, the narrator says that "The self within you is a mirror image, the reflection of flowers in water. You can neither enter the mirror nor can you scoop up anything, but looking at the image and becoming enamoured of it, you no longer pity yourself" (Xingjian 2000a: 350). It shows that through this 'mirror image', 'You' can identify him to its basic existence, which is the 'Ontological Self'. On the other hand, 'You' is infatuated by the image of the 'Ontological Self' and has no regrets about being his refraction.

The statements about reality do not simply mean that the truth depends on the point of view. When 'I' says that reality means sitting by the fire and looking into the flames, the most important thing is a direct experience rather than trying to prove the objective reality. Reality is what an individual experiences through their body at a particular moment. At the same time, 'You' stresses that perception may be influenced by mood, desire and imagination. The passages, taken as a whole, introduce two basic requirements: experience must begin with direct contact with reality, but interpretation of this experience must consider the limitations imposed by an individual perspective. The shift between 'I' and 'You' shows that cognition has its limitations: 'I' focuses on direct experience, while 'You' questions what may be merely a product of imagination or personal beliefs.

If treated separately, neither of these perspectives is sufficient. Focusing solely on 'I' may lead to acknowledging strong experience as reality, while a considerable distance may result in forgetting that knowledge is always linked to a particular experience. The structure of refraction permits avoidance of both errors. It does not offer a fully objective view that is independent of any perspective. Instead, it enables movements between multiple points of view that present reality in a specific, independent way. In this sense, the ontological search in *Soul Mountain* does not provide one ultimate answer to what the self is. Instead, 'I' learns to carefully observe its own experience and verify the aptness of its own perception by changing its grammatical position.

Otto Rank (1996: 125) argues that human beings may possess "the biological tendency to go back to the womb". Without treating this psychoanalytic concept as a literal explanation of the novel, the 'Ontological Self's' longing for lost relatives, childhood and primitive roots may be read as analogous to a desire to return to an imagined state of origin, security and belonging. A similar tendency can be identified in the narrative perspective of 'You'. The 'Ontological Self' admits:

> I am aware that at this moment I am surrounded by a world of dead people and that behind this wall are my dead relatives. I want to be with them again, to sit at the table with them and to listen to them chatting about trifling things. I want to hear their voices, to see their eyes, to actually sit at the same table with them, even if we don't have a meal. I know that eating and drinking in the world of ghosts is symbolic; a ritual, and that living people cannot partake of it, but it suddenly occurs to me that just to be able to sit at the table and to listen would be a blessing. (Xingjian 2000a: 211–212)

At another point, the 'Ontological Self' says "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" (Xingjian 2000a: 222). Similarly, 'You' yearns to return to worldly relations before he dies in isolation. In *Spinoza Complete Works,* translated by Samuel Shirley, Baruch Spinoza (1985: 151) says that "Body and extension do not differ". 'You' fears dying in the lonely mountains; therefore, 'You' chooses to return to the human world. The narrator states "You suddenly realize that behind the curtained doorway, the person lying on the floorboards is you. You refuse to die just like this; you must quickly, and right away, return to the world of human beings" (Xingjian 2000a: 249). Elsewhere, 'You' becomes nostalgic. The narrator says:

> 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. (Xingjian 2000a: 325)

> The campfires and the mud-sealed woodpail beehives hanging on the walls of the houses of mountain people, all evoke this homesickness of yours (Xingjian 2000a: 328).

The worldly things and people present on the mountain evoke a desire in the refracted pronoun 'You' to reappear in the human world after his basic self had rejected living in it. However, this also depicts the 'Ontological Self' and its refraction 'You' as independent individuals. For instance, Spinoza (1985: 356) says that "the free man chooses flight by the same courage or spiritedness as he chooses battle". The 'Ontological Self' takes on the guise of 'You' during refraction and, after exploring the 'Self', eventually returns to the mundane human world along with its refraction, 'You'. It also proves that 'You' is a refraction of the 'Ontological Self'.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the 'Ontological Self' undergoes the rotting of the 'Self' in an orthodox and conventional society. The 'Ontological Self' realizes that he cannot alter an entire society obsessed with its conformity. They are unable to rise above their customary mindsets; therefore, the 'Ontological Self' perseveres and explores the 'Self' by breaking his self after going through different experiences. This process is an outcome of the 'Ontological Self' drifting in a far-off and aloof place. The 'Ontological Self' refracts a portion of his existence into the pronoun 'You' on the mountainous land. In *Soul Mountain*, this mountainous land is called 'Lingshan' which means 'Soul Mountain'. The entire journey of the 'Ontological Self' via 'You' on 'Soul Mountain' is a quest for self-identity that cannot be found in an unrestful human world.

The 'Ontological Self's' existential quest is like Buddha's. It is the absence of worldly things and distresses that enable a man to pursue inner freedom. Fellowship with the world is like enmity with one's self. Moreover, according to the theory of 'Ontology', the 'Ontological Self' exercises its ability to find self in utter loneliness. It also shows that the primary or basic self is capable of giving birth to diverse individual entities. Aristotle (1984) said that "the entity which is 'not in the subject' is an independent object and can create further individual bodies". Hence, in *Soul Mountain*, the 'Ontological Self' is 'not in the subject'; therefore, it is an independent being and refracts a secondary being in the shape of 'You'. 'You' is also given the power to create and explore the 'Self' in depth. Hence, 'You' crafts 'She' and 'He' as his comrades on a long and lonely journey over 'Soul Mountain'.

'She' is a feminine consciousness of 'You' which is known as 'Anima', a term introduced by Carl Jung. The 'Ontological Self' has many representations of the 'Self'; therefore, the scrutiny of the feminine consciousness of 'You', which is 'She', is also an indispensable action. Martin Heidegger (1996) asserted that ontology is the "duality within man"; therefore, this 'duality' is observed first in the 'Ontological Self' and then in his refraction 'You'. In the theory of ontology, man is examined within his 'totality' of being. Hence, the role of 'She' in the journey towards 'Lingshan' is important. 'She' helps 'You' to understand the 'Self' as a whole. 'She' never lets 'You' go without having a full view of his weak feminine part. In addition, through the encounter of his feeble feminine side, 'You' becomes able to strengthen the entire self, including the 'Ontological Self' or 'Dasein' in Heidegger's term. The profound study of the self is similar to gaining power like a 'Shaman'.

In his book, *The World of Shamanism: New Views of an Ancient Tradition*, Roger Walsh (2007) describes shamanic journeys as experiences in which consciousness appears to move beyond the ordinary limitations of the body. This

description may serve as an analogy for the narrative relationship between the 'Ontological Self' and 'You', since the second-person perspective allows the self to imagine and examine its experience from a position beyond the immediate first-person viewpoint. In his essay, *Essence and Existence in Leibniz's Ontology*, Lorenzo Peña (1997: 415) says that "Leibniz's main ontological claim is that essences are possible-entities striving to exist, on each of which existence devolves in accordance with its own essential perfection". In addition, in *Spinoza Complete Works* translated by Samuel Shirley, Baruch Spinoza (1985: 151) says that "Body and extension do not differ". The pronoun 'You' is the extension of the 'Ontological Self'; therefore they are alike. At the end of their shamanistic journey and exploring the 'Self', they both desire to go back to their roots; therefore, it depicts that the pronoun 'You' is a refraction of the 'Ontological Self'.

Moreover, in his essay, "Kant's Metaphysics of the Self", Colin Marshall (2010: 1–2) says that according to Kant "selves are individuated by experiences, so that whatever entities are jointly responsible for unifying sensations into a single experience thereby constitute a single self". Marshall (2010: 2) also mentions that "Kant recognizes a broad use of 'I' that refers to the 'whole man', involving body and soul". However, in *Soul Mountain*, within the hierarchy of the 'whole man' the 'Ontological Self' provides a base and refracts 'You' to apprehend the complete self, including 'She' and 'He'. Hence, the entire domain of the 'Ontological Self' stays harmoniously in order to transfer knowledge about the 'Self'. Moreover, Descartes (2008: 37) states that "When I turn the eye of my mind on myself, I do not only understand myself to be an entity that is incomplete and that depends on another".

Furthermore, according to Heidegger (1996), the understanding of being is the ontology of the 'Dasein'. Actually, the variation of the 'Ontological Self' into 'You' is an act of transcendence. In *Soul Mountain*, the 'Ontological Self' articulates that "In my imagination, I travel into my inner mind with you" (Xingjian 2000a: 312). Nevertheless, the 'Ontological Self' refracts 'You' in a time of isolation. The refraction of 'You' is the changing in time and place. For instance, the narrator says "goals keep changing as time passes and as locations change" (Xingjian 2000a: 245). Thus, the mode of finding self changes from the 'Ontological Self' to the pronoun 'You'. In *Soul Mountain*, the primary self or the 'Ontological Self' bears an 'Other' or secondary individual entity to achieve self-knowledge and scale the 'Soul Mountain'. Hence, it expresses that the pronoun 'You' is a refraction of the 'Ontological Self'.

The findings indicate that four categories presented in the introduction are closely connected and complement each other. The ontological source preserves a sense of continuity between 'I' and 'You'; refraction creates a necessary distance between them, multiplicity reveals various perspectives associated with gender, time and imagination, and self-reflection explains why these various positions interact with one another. None of these categories is sufficient when placed in isolation from the others. If continuity were not accompanied by difference, 'You'

would simply be another version of 'I' without serving any additional function, and similarly difference without continuity would make figures and perspectives independent of one another. What makes Gao's novel powerful is its preserving of the link between these positions, while emphasising differences between them.

Most importantly, text analysis shows that this balance originates from the use of narrative devices, not philosophical references. The questions undermine 'I's' certainty about its point of view; using 'You' weakens a dominating position of 'I'. Using the second person separates action from observation, sensory images transform the representation of memory, while shadow, cloud, lamp, echo and river give concrete form to the changes taking place in consciousness. Aristotle, Kant, Heidegger, Jung and Buddhist thought clarify aspects of this movement, however, the narrative is not based on one philosophical theory. 'You' remains a literary device whose significance lies in the fact that it allows 'I' to look at itself from another perspective and maintain a distance.

The study therefore shows that 'You' should be understood as a relatively autonomous position, which performs a different function than 'I', but can ultimately merge with it and exchange roles. Thanks to this perspective, the novel transforms solitude into an internal dialogue, memory into something that can be examined, desire into a subject fit for interpretation, and mortality into an experience that can be both lived and observed from within. Further research may examine how this use of second-person narration in Gao's work differs from its function in his plays and in other experimental works written in the second person. This comparative analysis helps distinguish which effects are specific to *Soul Mountain* and which show greater capacity of narrative grammar to present consciousness as both continuity and difference.

The selected passages analysed together create a coherent body of evidence. The questioning voice comparing the public dam with the 'grain of sand' reveals that a separate 'I' is not enough for self-knowledge. The repeated expressions 'You say' and 'She says' reveal that opinions and judgements do not belong to a single figure but are divided into multiple perspectives. The images of the cloud, mask and cold light show that the identity may change without losing continuity. The 'River of Forgetting' and the scene near death demonstrate that bodily sensations remain present even at the moment of apparent transcendence. Finally, the return of childhood memories reconnects this separated perspective with the personal history of 'I's' experience. The conclusion that 'You' belongs to the 'Ontological Self' results not only from their similarity but also from repeated textual connections concerning memories, sensations and desires, as well as the persistent differences in linguistic perspective and narrative function.

Therefore, the manuscript's main contribution can be described more precisely. The proposed refraction is a model of action based on four qualities of text: a shared source of experience, changed linguistic perspective, new meaning of this shift and the possibility of reconciliation.

The first condition shows that 'You' is not an independent protagonist. The second one explains that 'You' is not a mere repetition of 'I'. The third one shows why Gao's experiment with the use of multiple pronouns helps one to gain self-knowledge, and the fourth prevents the diversity of perspectives from leading to their complete separation. Previously used notions, such as alter ego, shadow, projection and tripartite protagonist, describe important features of this narrative; however, the concept of refraction brings them together by showing that narration simultaneously serves to preserve the unity of the subject and creates a necessary distance between its multiple perspectives.

Accumulated evidence demonstrates a more precise conclusion. 'You' should not be treated as a completely autonomous entity in a metaphysical sense: its independence is relative and results from the structure of the text: 'You' can travel, remember, desire, receive commands, answer 'She' and experience events that 'I' would not be able to describe from the same distance. However, the novel repeatedly demonstrates that these actions depend on shared consciousness. The main conclusion is therefore that *Soul Mountain* transforms a category of a grammatical person into a device used for ontological inquiry. Thanks to 'You', the self becomes both the one who goes through an experience and the one to whom it is addressed and by whom it can be questioned. The innovative form employed by Gao does not assume that the identity problem may be solved by discovering a single, unchanging truth about a human being. The text shows that following a path to self-knowledge means looking at self from various, interchangeable perspectives, and that the 'Ontological Self' persists not in spite of these transformations, but rather through them.

The final conclusions point to the fact that three earlier assumptions must be revised or looked at from a different perspective. First, retreating to the mountains does not mean escape from society: there are references to political and cultural names, even if distanced and condensed in the formula of 'etcetera'. Longing for childhood eventually pulls 'You' back into the human world. Second, transcendence is not equivalent to detachment from the body: by referring to the cold light and the near-death sequence, the passage repeatedly directs attention to the lungs, eyes, nerves, pain and effort. Third, different aspects of 'I' do not merge into a single whole. The relationship with 'She' requires the preservation of differences, thanks to which one perspective is capable of asking questions and questioning another. These corrections reinforce the main thesis because they result directly from formal features of the text such as the use of pronouns, syntax, images and pronoun shifts. The aim of the study is not to abandon narrative analysis in favor of metaphysics, but to show how ontological questions result from the way Gao constructs his narration. The evidence leads to the final conclusion that continuity is based on the shared experiences, yet its different forms are created by grammar. Self-knowledge is therefore an effect of the continuous interaction between these elements.

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SUMMARY

The research paper focuses on the topic of 'Ontological Self' presented by Gao Xingjian in *Soul Mountain*, one of the major works that contributed to his international recognition before he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2000. The book is divided into three chapters: the first one presents the writer and his oeuvre with particular emphasis on *Soul Mountain*; the second chapter contains a review of previous research on *Soul Mountain* and establishes the ontological framework for interpreting the pronoun 'You'; the third chapter presents a new ontology-based interpretational concept that integrates former psychological, existential and cultural interpretations. The study applies a qualitative research method, drawing from the content of the novel, as well as a broad philosophical and literary context. The paper emphasizes the separation of 'You' from the 'Ontological Self' through a process called 'refraction', which is not a physical phenomenon, but a metaphorical splitting of 'Self' influenced by the diversity of one's life experiences.

Gao Xingjian is presented as an experimental writer who breaks away from traditional and conventional writing styles. His works stem from his personal background, support for the avant-garde movement in China, and past experience with censorship and ideological suppression of Chinese literature. He emphasizes the autonomy of art, its aesthetic quality, and the universality of language in human awareness and communication. According to Gao, literature should not serve ideology or politics; instead, it should express human experience and existential considerations.

Soul Mountain pivots around division and multiplicity of 'Self' by using metaphysics, shifting perspectives, and uses different pronouns ('I', 'You', 'He', 'She') to symbolize fragmentation. 'Ontological Self' appears as a primordial being that is refracted into various forms of awareness to get to know itself. The process is associated with questions of inner loneliness, division and integration of self, searching for the sense of existence and crossing the borders of identity.

An important aspect is the combination of modernity with elements of primitivism – Chinese folklore, shamanism and tradition, which aligns with the concept of literature seeking the roots (*xungen wenxue*). At the same time, Gao rejects nationalism and ideologies, promoting 'cold literature', free from utility and political function.

The first chapter presents the biographical and literary background of Gao Xingjian (1940), one of the most significant Chinese-language writers. Having studied literature and French, he went on to translate i.e. Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco and Jacques Prévert. A combination of interest in European modernism and Chinese philosophical and literary tradition allowed him to develop his original style.

In the 1980s, Gao gained recognition for his experimental drama and prose that rejected the rules of Socialist Realism, but which led to censorship of his work and political persecution. A turning point in his life was a five-month journey across the southern and southwestern regions of China (1983–1984), which became an inspiration for the novel *Lingshan* (*Soul Mountain*). He completed it in France, where he lived in exile. Despite physical distance from his homeland, Gao continued to write mainly in Chinese, consistently defending the independence of literature from ideology and political power.

Soul Mountain is partially an autobiographical novel, yet it cannot be limited solely to the account of author's life. It combines various genres: fiction, essay, travel writing, memoir, philosophical reflection and quasi-ethnographic observations. Instead of traditional, linear narration, Gao creates a multi-layer structure based on separate passages, voices and memories, often breaking the boundary between the narrator and the reader. At the same time, it combines experimental form with elements of tradition, folklore and old beliefs.

Soul Mountain refers to the trend in contemporary Chinese literature known as *xungen wenxue* ('root-seeking literature'), which emerged in the 1980s. However, Gao does not idealise tradition or religious values – the author shows that true wisdom emerges from a confrontation with suffering and disappointment. Additionally, *Soul Mountain* reflects Gao's conviction that literature should be evaluated independently of social and political functions, primarily on the basis of its esthetical value originating from the sublimity of language.

The writer believes that the primary purpose of literature is to express individual experience; consequently, he rejects an artificial form of collective 'We' for the sake of the authentic 'I'. This emphasis on individualism is closely related to Gao's belief that literature should embrace permanence and universality. For him, literature creates space to explore human existence, universal experiences and the relationship between language and individual consciousness.

In his desire to unleash artistic creativity from the struggle for social acceptance, Gao Xingjian coined the term 'cold literature', which meant literature completely independent of ideology, politics, social expectations or the market. Its aim is to preserve artistic freedom outside national borders, individual experience and spiritual communication between an author and a reader. Instead of serving national ideology, 'cold literature' focuses on universal experiences that go beyond the boundaries of time and space.

Another aspect discussed in the first chapter is ontology understood as a field of philosophy concerned with the nature of being, which assumes the existence of truth independent of individual perspective and knowledge. In *Soul Mountain,* this idea is reflected in the concept of 'Ontological Self', which is the source of different personalities seeking knowledge of the multifaceted and complex presence of the 'Self'. 'Ontological Self' is portrayed as a dynamic being which, through refraction, splits into various narrative forms: 'I', 'You', 'He' and

'She' to acquire self-knowledge. The emergence of 'You' may be interpreted in the light of Aristotelian concept of change and contraries, since despite differences between modes of existence, they share the same ontological source.

'You' in *Soul Mountain* appears as an individual narrative voice, but it remains ontologically unified with the 'Self' – this distinction and unity correspond to Aristotle's understanding of 'substance' and a relationship between being and other secondary beings. 'You', separated from its origin through refraction, acquires an independent position that allows it to examine the nature of its existence and other existing phenomena of the 'Ontological Self'.

The Aristotelian vocabulary is analogously used to explain the relationship between the ontological ground and the modes in which it is revealed in the narration. In *Soul Mountain*, the voice of 'You' is neither completely identical with 'I' nor entirely separate from it, acquiring narrative autonomy – it travels, recalls in memory, desires and tells stories. It reveals the complexity of identity and the relationship between the subject and the line of narration.

Chapter Two discusses previous research on *Soul Mountain* and presents theoretical assumptions forming the basis of ontological interpretation of the pronoun 'You'. The concept of 'refraction' is understood as a metaphor used for text analysis, not as a reference to an actual physical phenomenon. It describes the process by which the unified 'Ontological Self' splits into several distinct and simultaneously closely interconnected narrative perspectives that originate from the same ontological source. From this perspective, the pronoun 'You' does not function as an autonomous entity separated from the 'Ontological Self'. It is one of its manifestations, resulting from refraction. Thanks to that, the narrator can look at his own experience, and analyse and recreate it from a different point of view.

The ontological interpretation draws on Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, René Descartes and Baruch Spinoza. Aristotle's distinction between primary substance and other dependent categories provides an analogy for understanding the relationship between the 'Ontological Self' and 'You'. Although 'You' assumes a distinct narrative position, it remains dependent on and connected to the same ontological source. Kant, by contrast, considers the conditions that make the representation of the 'Self' in consciousness possible and the way in which multiple representations are united within a single relation. Leibniz and Descartes understand the self as a mental substance characterised by ontological independence, while Spinoza describes substance as necessarily infinite and argues that several individuals acting together may be regarded as one singular thing. Heidegger's concept of 'Dasein' provides a comparative framework for understanding a being that is concerned with and relates interpretively to its own existence.

The critical discussion begins with Marián Gálik's analysis of the relationship between 'You' and the various representations of 'She'. Gálik examines whether the journey to 'Lingshan' is primarily a search for a woman or a search for

identity. He concludes that the woman is not the main objective of the journey, which is also connected with freedom, cultural roots, identity and intercultural communication. He describes 'You' as the shadow of 'I' and shows that 'You' creates 'She' as a companion in an internal dialogue. Although Gálik recognises that 'You' emerges from 'I' and that 'She' emerges from 'You', he does not explain these narrative voices as refracted manifestations of the 'Ontological Self' or examine how they acquire different experiential perspectives.

Mabel Lee interprets Gao's use of pronouns primarily in psychological and aesthetic terms. She argues that the experience of spiritual repression intensified Gao's autobiographical impulse and encouraged him to use pronouns to explore different levels of his psychology. In her interpretation, the second-person pronoun functions as an external projection of the narrator's ego and facilitates an interior monologue in which the narrator enters into dialogue with himself. However, Lee does not conceptualise 'You' as a refraction of the 'Ontological Self' or explain the relationship between 'You' and the other pronoun-based perspectives within a unified ontological structure.

Ming Jian describes the novel as presenting a tripartite protagonist whose life unfolds through two structurally parallel journeys. The 'I'-narrator travels through the real world, seeking an authentic life and reflecting on its meaning, while the 'You'-narrator undertakes a symbolic and spiritual journey in search of the fictitious and metaphorical 'Lingshan'. Jian also distinguishes between the anxious existential self and the tranquil Zen self, showing how the alternation between first- and second-person narration represents multiple subjectivities. He discusses the role of desire and the relationship between 'You' and 'She', as well as the recognition that life has no definitive ultimate goal. Nevertheless, he does not interpret 'You' as a refracted manifestation of the 'Ontological Self'.

Thomas Moran examines the novel as a long monologue in which a single narrator continually shifts his perspective, regarding himself as 'I', 'You' and 'He' and examining his relationship with 'She'. Moran distinguishes between the 'I'-narrator's journey through the real world and the 'You'-narrator's journey through imagination, stories, myths and the metaphorical search for the mountain of the soul. He also emphasises the relationship between human beings and nature, presenting the individual as part of the totality of the natural world. Although Moran recognizes the continuous movement between the narrator's perspectives and the connection between landscape and the construction of the Self, he does not explicitly formulate this relationship as the refraction of the 'Ontological Self'.

Gang Gary Xu analyses the pronouns in relation to gendered subjectivity, detachment, objectification and Gao's concept of the tripartition of the actor. He argues that 'You', 'She' and 'He' constitute different segments of the same protagonist and that the use of pronouns allows the narrator to move beyond conventional gender distinctions. Xu also describes 'You' as both the addresser and the addressee, a disguised form of 'I', a split-off from 'I' and the result of an interior monologue.

Xu's interpretation draws attention to the distance created by the second-person pronoun. In *Soul Mountain*, the person who speaks and the person who is addressed may belong to the same consciousness. This allows 'I' to become an object of observation while remaining the subject of experience. Memories may consequently be reconsidered, questioned and evaluated from another position. The shift from 'I' to 'You' is therefore not merely a stylistic device but an epistemological mechanism through which the 'Self' gains distance from its experiences and understands them differently. Xu identifies the processes of detachment and objectification but does not describe them as the refraction of the 'Ontological Self'.

Andrea Bachner focuses on storytelling, cultural memory, history and the novel's search for alternative voices. She shows that the stories imagined and narrated by 'You' are not limited to the protagonist's reflections but shape the structure of the novel as a whole. She also discusses the mask as a projection through which a person may examine himself. Bachner treats 'You' as an individual narrative voice or projection, but she does not connect this voice with the larger structure of the 'Ontological Self' or identify it as a product of refraction.

Three principal lines of interpretation emerge from the literature reviewed in the chapter. Lee and Xu concentrate on the formal and psychological functions of the pronouns; Gálik and Jian examine desire, gender and existential searching; and Moran and Bachner situate the divided narrative voice within the contexts of landscape, cultural memory and history. The study does not reject these approaches, since each identifies a significant aspect of second-person narration. The concept of a shadow emphasises the continuity between 'I' and 'You', external projection indicates the distance between them, and the tripartite protagonist draws attention to the multilayered structure of the 'Self'. Their limitation arises only when one of these aspects is treated as a complete explanation of the nature of 'You'.

The concept of refraction brings these interpretative dimensions together. The composite 'Self' constitutes the source, the shift in grammatical person functions as the medium, and the altered narrative direction is represented by 'You's' imagined journey, desires and search for answers concerning identity. The chapter therefore concludes that this interpretation must be demonstrated through specific textual devices rather than through philosophical analogy alone. Repetitions, changes of tense, forms of address, sensory images and transitions among 'I', 'You', 'She' and 'He' reveal how the continuity and differentiation of the 'Self' are constructed in the language of the novel. Philosophical concepts consequently serve as interpretative instruments, while the text of *Soul Mountain* remains the primary evidence.

The third chapter focuses on the analysis of the pronoun 'You' as one of the manifestations of the 'Ontological Self'. The discussion begins with the assumption that the core obligation of the individual is to 'know thyself'. In *Soul*

Mountain, Gao shows that searching for identity and self-knowledge is more important than large-scale social, cultural or civilisational projects. The author compares the massive construction of a dam with a single human being – 'I', which seems small and insignificant like a grain of sand. In this way, he emphasizes that individual consciousness and experience are what matter the most. He also shows that a culture loses its value if an individual loses their individuality and ability of gaining self-knowledge.

The 'I' narrator constantly attempts to find the meaning of human existence; however, a single narrative perspective makes it impossible to find definite answers. This limitation gives rise to the appearance of 'You', thanks to which the 'Ontological Self' can look at its own experience from a different perspective, ask questions and give them new meanings. As a result, 'You' is not a completely independent figure, but rather a different perspective resulting from the refraction process. The second-person narration allows one to separate the individual who goes through a certain experience from the consciousness that analyses and assesses it. Consequently, self-knowledge is not presented as a conclusion, but as an ongoing process that requires switching between various perspectives.

The relationship between the 'Ontological Self' and 'You' is analysed from the perspective of Aristotelian differentiation between primary and secondary substance. The 'Ontological Self' is here the primary source of existence, which guarantees continuity, while 'You' gains a certain degree of narrative independence and functions in the imaginary world. It travels, tells stories, expresses desires and creates additional figures. However, its independence is limited, because it is still influenced by another voice through commands, observations and judgements. The chapter does not show 'You' as simply a copy or reflection of 'I'. Instead, refraction establishes a relationship of interdependence: the 'Ontological Self' gives rise to 'You', but it also needs the experiences of 'You' to gain broader self-knowledge and undergo personal transformation.

An important part of this process is rejecting traditional forms of social life. The human world is shown as space filled with fear, imposed norms and internal contradictions. Through 'You', the 'Ontological Self' becomes closer to nature and mountains. It searches for freedom from routine and limitations of modern life. The scene with the 'River of Forgetting' shows the desire to escape social rules and return to natural, primordial freedom, which is presented by shouting like a wild animal. However, a person cannot completely get detached from their past. Memories remain within 'You', which means that refraction changes the experience, but does not disrupt the continuity of identity.

The chapter also suggests that 'I' is not permanent – it is unstable and undergoes transformations. Gao compares it to clouds constantly assuming distinct forms or to a mask that becomes a part of a face. These images show the changing nature of the human self. As a result of close observation, the narrator discovers a growing number of new and unknown aspects of his

identity. This instability can be compared to Heidegger's concept of 'Dasein', according to which human existence is connected with the question of its own being. Representing another mode of existence, 'You' gives 'Ontological Self' a new perspective. It allows the self to understand its experiences from different moments in time. The metaphor of an 'icy transparent consciousness' shows a transformation taking place in an individual: the body becomes less important, while the consciousness becomes fragile and needs protection. Distance in the narration does not mean a lack of emotions. It combines external observation with inner sensitivity and reflection on existence.

The appearance of 'You' is also associated with overcoming loneliness. The 'Ontological Self' wants to be listened to and, therefore, it treats 'You' as a shadow and 'a myself who listens intently'. However, 'You' is not simply a copy of 'I'. 'You' does not only passively listens to 'I's' words, but interprets and challenges them. The metaphor of a shadow shows both the connection with the source and a difference resulting from the passage of time, distance or a different perspective. The chapter shows that self-knowledge requires distance. Direct experience of the self does not always allow for an objective evaluation. Memories, fears or desires become clearer when observed from the perspective of 'You'.

At the next stage, 'You' creates 'She', and 'I' together with 'You' creates 'He'. However, these pronouns do not describe the same person. Each of them is a different way of understanding self and plays a different role in the novel. She helps 'You' to communicate, deal with loneliness and discover feelings, desires and relations with others. According to Jung's theory of the anima, 'She' is a female aspect of male consciousness. It is not simply 'You's' creation or its passive reflection. 'She' frequently challenges and alters 'You's' way of thinking. Their relationship becomes an opportunity for self-reflection and helps to discover hidden desires, shame, weaknesses or mistakes.

The relationship between 'You' and 'She' also shows that gaining self-knowledge is exposed to ethical limitations. 'I' creates, desires and evaluates a female figure, which is why it is not able to look at her objectively. The narrator understands that observation cannot be impartial, because it is influenced by memories, emotions and past experiences. Another person may become a mirror, in which the individual may look to gain self-knowledge. However, through such a process they may be transformed to the products of the observer's consciousness. Refraction does not remove this distortion. Conversely, it helps an individual to become aware of it. The goal is not creating a fully objective image of self or another person, but understanding that each perspective can be limited.

The journey of 'You' is also analysed in the context of existentialism, Buddhism and shamanism. Existential anxiety leads the individual to face uncertainty and the fragility of human existence, which is why it is a prerequisite for self-understanding. The journey to 'Lingshan' is similar to the Buddhist attempt to escape desires and social rules. However, the novel does not present

enlightenment as something fully achievable. The shamanic dimension of the journey can be noticed in the experience of loneliness, different consciousness and closeness to death. In the near-death scene, sensory impressions, memories, light and motion mix. However, the presence of 'You' preserves continuity even when the body and space boundaries become blurred. The second-person narration shows the connection between disintegration and survival.

In the final part, the chapter raises the issue of the relationship between human consciousness and reality. 'I' sees reality as the direct experience of a specific moment, but 'You' understands that each observation depends on the individual way of thinking. Changing these two perspectives makes it possible to avoid both complete subjectivism and the illusion that the world may be perceived objectively. The ontological search in *Soul Mountain* does not give us a single, certain answer about humanity and identity. It rather shows a method for observing personal experience, questioning it and adopting different grammatical positions.

Although at first 'You' tries to escape from other people, childhood memories, relatives, cities and personal relationships make him want to return. The journey to the mountains does not cause complete separation from other people. It allows for a better understanding of the relationship between loneliness and social life. The 'Ontological Self' returns to the world with experiences gained from various refracted manifestations. The chapter shows that 'You' is an indirect manifestation of the 'Ontological Self', while 'She' and 'He' are further, more direct ways of expressing consciousness. Through these various perspectives, an individual can cope with loneliness, face memories, fears and death. However, instead of discovering a single identity, they gain a deeper and more responsible form of self-knowledge.

The conclusion states that the 'Ontological Self' in *Soul Mountain* functions in opposition to orthodox and conventional society, which causes the rotting of the 'Self'. As the 'Ontological Self' deteriorates, it breaks his self and creates 'You' in the process of refraction. The 'Ontological Self' refracts a portion of his existence into 'You' in the mountainous land. The journey of the 'Ontological Self' through 'You' is understood as a quest for self-identity that is unattainable in a turbulent human world. The existential quest of the 'Ontological Self' is compared to the Buddhist path of liberation, where loneliness and detachment from the world enable the pursuit of inner freedom. Following Aristotle, the 'Ontological Self' is an independent that can refract secondary beings, creating 'You'. Since 'You' shares the characteristics of the 'Ontological Self', it can also create further forms like 'She' and 'He' that represent different aspects of consciousness, including emotional and relational aspects. 'She' functions as a guide and complements the overall experience, helping 'You' integrate different aspects of the self.

The conclusion contains philosophical references to Kant, Heidegger, Descartes or Spinoza. They support the idea that identity is the relationship

between consciousness and experience. The authors emphasize that 'I' and 'You' are both separate and alike – they desire to go back to their roots to transfer knowledge about the 'Self'.

The journey to the mountain has a shamanic and transcendental character: it is a process of moving beyond conventional thinking, leading to deeper self-insight. Ultimately, 'You' is not an independent entity but an emanation of the 'Ontological Self', which, through fragmentation and the experience of different perspectives, achieves fuller self-knowledge.

The paper proves that in *Soul Mountain*, 'You' is the refraction of the 'Ontological Self'. It emphasizes that the refraction of 'You' involves the breaking up of the basic self into an independent being, 'You', through different experiences. This study incorporates the theories on ontology by different ontologists. These ontologists are: Aristotle, Martin Heidegger, Immanuel Kant, Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, René Descartes, and Baruch Spinoza. The theory of 'Ontology' shows that there is a primary existence, 'I' in *Soul Mountain*, which further gives birth to an 'Other' entity, 'You'. It means that the basic self in *Soul Mountain* is manifold and has diverse representations. 'She' and 'He' are the creations of 'You'; therefore, they are indirect representations of the 'Ontological Self'. This research also emphasizes that 'She' and 'He' help 'You' to find 'Lingshan' in order to discover the meaning of the existence of the 'Ontological Self'. However, this paper asserts that only 'You' is a direct representation of the 'Ontological Self'. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that the 'Ontological Self' refracts 'You' to explore the mysterious phenomenon of the 'Self'. In short, this study shows that 'You' is the refraction of the 'Ontological Self' and through 'You' the 'Ontological Self' attains freedom, self-knowledge, and inner peace of mind which cannot be found in the human world.

STRESZCZENIE

Niniejsza książka skupia się na koncepcji „Ja" ontologicznego przedstawionej w powieści *Góra duszy* Gao Xingjiana, jednym z najważniejszych dzieł, które przyczyniły się do międzynarodowego uznania pisarza jeszcze przed przyznaniem mu Literackiej Nagrody Nobla w 2000 roku. Książka składa się z trzech rozdziałów. W pierwszym przedstawiono pisarza i jego twórczość, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem *Góry duszy*. Rozdział drugi zawiera przegląd dotychczasowych badań nad *Górą duszy* oraz ustanawia ontologiczne ramy interpretacji zaimka „ty". W rozdziale trzecim zaprezentowano nową koncepcję interpretacyjną opartą na ontologii, która integruje wcześniejsze interpretacje psychologiczne, egzystencjalne i kulturowe. W analizie zastosowana została metoda jakościowa oparta na interpretacji treści powieści w szerokim kontekście filozoficznym i literackim. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono oddzieleniu „ty" od „Ja" ontologicznego poprzez proces określany jako „refrakcja", rozumiany nie jako zjawisko fizyczne, lecz metaforyczne rozszczepienie „Ja" pod wpływem różnorodnych doświadczeń życiowych.

Gao Xingjian został przedstawiony jako pisarz eksperymentalny, odchodzący od tradycyjnych i konwencjonalnych form pisarskich. Jego twórczość wyrasta z osobistych przeżyć, zaangażowania w chińską awangardę oraz doświadczeń cenzury i ideologicznego tłumienia wolności literatury. Gao podkreśla autonomię sztuki, jej estetyczny wymiar oraz uniwersalność języka w ludzkiej świadomości i komunikacji. Według pisarza literatura nie powinna służyć ideologii ani polityce – jej zadaniem jest wyrażanie ludzkich doświadczeń i refleksji egzystencjalnej.

Podstawą narracji w *Górze duszy* jest podział i wielość „Ja" pokazana przez metafizykę, zmienne perspektywy oraz różne zaimki („ja", „ty", „on", „ona"), które symbolizują rozszczepienie. „Ja" ontologiczne to istota pierwotna, która ulega podziałowi na różne formy świadomości w dążeniu do poznania samej siebie. Proces ten wiąże się z pytaniami o wewnętrzną samotność, podział i jedność „Ja", poszukiwanie sensu istnienia oraz przekraczanie granic tożsamości.

Ważnym aspektem jest połączenie nowoczesności z elementami prymitywizmu – chińskim folklorem, szamanizmem i tradycją, co nawiązuje do idei literatury poszukiwania korzeni (*xungen wenxue*). Jednocześnie jednak Gao odrzuca nacjonalizm i ideologie, promując „zimną literaturę" (*cold literature*), wolną od funkcji użytkowej i politycznej.

Pierwszy rozdział zawiera informacje biograficzne dotyczące Gao Xingjiana (ur. 1940) – jednego z najwybitniejszych współczesnych pisarzy chińskich – oraz przedstawia kontekst jego twórczości. Po ukończeniu studiów w zakresie literatury i języka francuskiego Gao rozpoczął pracę jako tłumacz, dokonując przekładu dzieł m.in. Samuela Becketta, Eugène'a Ionesco i Jacques'a Préverta. Połączenie

zainteresowania europejskim modernizmem z odwołaniami do chińskiej tradycji filozoficznej i literackiej pozwoliło mu rozwinąć oryginalny styl twórczy.

W roku 1980 Gao zdobył uznanie dzięki eksperymentalnej twórczości dramatycznej i prozatorskiej, w której odrzucał zasady realizmu socjalistycznego. Doprowadziło to do objęcia go cenzurą i naraziło na prześladowania polityczne. Punktem zwrotnym w jego życiu była pięciomiesięczna podróż przez południowe i południowo-zachodnie regiony Chin (1983–1984), która zainspirowała go do napisania powieści *Lingshan* (*Góra duszy*). Ukończył ją we Francji, gdzie przebywał na emigracji. Mimo fizycznej odległości od ojczyzny Gao tworzył głównie w języku chińskim, konsekwentnie broniąc niezależności literatury od ideologii i władzy politycznej.

Góra duszy to powieść częściowo autobiograficzna, która jednakże nie stanowi prostego zapisu życia autora. To połączenie różnych gatunków: fikcji, eseju, literatury podróżniczej, wspomnień, refleksji filozoficznej oraz obserwacji quasi-etnograficznych. Zamiast tradycyjnej, linearnej narracji Gao tworzy wielowarstwową strukturę opartą na odrębnych fragmentach, różnych głosach narracyjnych i urywkach wspomnień, często zacierając granice między narratorem i czytelnikiem. Jednocześnie łączy eksperymentalną formę z elementami tradycji, folkloru i dawnych wierzeń.

Góra duszy nawiązuje do nurtu współczesnej literatury chińskiej zwanego *xungen wenxue* („poszukiwanie korzeni"), który rozwinął się w latach 80. XX wieku. Gao nie idealizuje jednak tradycji ani związanych z nią wartości. Wskazuje, że prawdziwa mądrość rodzi się poprzez konfrontację z cierpieniem i rozczarowaniem. Ponadto powieść odzwierciedla przekonanie autora, że literaturę należy oceniać niezależnie od funkcji społecznych i politycznych, przede wszystkim przez pryzmat wartości estetycznej, która jest zakorzeniona we wzniosłości języka.

Gao uważa, że podstawowym zadaniem literatury jest wyrażanie indywidualnego doświadczenia, dlatego odrzuca sztuczną formę zbiorową „my" na rzecz autentycznego „ja". Nacisk na indywidualizm jest ściśle związany z przekonaniem, że literatura powinna zachowywać trwałość i uniwersalny charakter. Według Gao stanowi ona przestrzeń do badania ludzkiej egzystencji, uniwersalnych doświadczeń oraz relacji między językiem a indywidualną świadomością.

W dążeniu do uwolnienia twórczości artystycznej od konieczności zdobywania społecznej akceptacji Gao Xingjian sformułował koncepcję „zimnej literatury", rozumianej jako literatura całkowicie wolna od ideologii, wpływów politycznych i uwarunkowań rynkowych. Jej celem jest zachowanie wolności artystycznej ponad granicami państwowymi, wyrażanie indywidualnego doświadczenia oraz budowanie duchowej więzi między autorem a czytelnikiem. Zamiast służyć narodowej ideologii, „zimna literatura" skupia się na uniwersalnym doświadczeniu, przekraczającym granice czasu i przestrzeni.

Kolejnym aspektem poruszonym w pierwszym rozdziale jest ontologia rozumiana jako dziedzina filozofii zajmująca się naturą bytu. Zakłada ona istnienie prawdy niezależnej od indywidualnej perspektywy i ludzkiego poznania. W *Górze duszy* idea ta została odzwierciedlona w koncepcji „Ja" ontologicznego, które jest źródłem różnych osobowości dążących do poznania wielowymiarowej i złożonej natury „Ja". „Ja" ontologiczne jest przedstawione jako byt dynamiczny, który w procesie refrakcji zostaje rozszczepiony na różne formy narracyjne – „ja", „ty", „on" i „ona" – aby osiągnąć samopoznanie. Powstanie „ty" można interpretować w perspektywie arystotelesowskiej koncepcji zmiany i przeciwieństw, ponieważ mimo różnic między sposobami istnienia, dzielą one to samo ontologiczne źródło.

„Ty" w *Górze Duszy* funkcjonuje jako odrębny głos narracyjny, jednak pozostaje ontologicznie związane z „ja". To połączenie odrębności i jedności odpowiada arystotelesowskiemu rozumieniu substancji oraz relacji między substancją pierwszą a substancjami wtórnymi. „Ty" oddzielone poprzez proces refrakcji od swojego źródła staje się niezależne, dzięki czemu może badać naturę własnego istnienia oraz inne przejawy „Ja" ontologicznego.

Terminologia stosowana przez Arystotelesa służy również wyjaśnieniu relacji między podstawą bytu a sposobami jego ujawniania się. W *Górze duszy* głos „ty" nie jest tożsamy z głosem „ja" ani całkowicie od niego oddzielony. Zyskuje jednak pewną autonomię narracyjną – podróżuje, wspomina przeszłość, odczuwa pragnienia i opowiada historie. W ten sposób ukazuje złożoność tożsamości oraz relację między podmiotem a narracją.

Rozdział drugi omawia najważniejsze dotychczasowe badania nad *Górą Duszy* oraz przedstawia założenia teoretyczne, na których opiera się rozwijana w niniejszym studium ontologiczna interpretacja zaimka „ty". Koncepcja „refrakcji" jest rozumiana jako metafora stosowana w analizie tekstu, nie zaś jako odniesienie do rzeczywistego zjawiska fizycznego. Opisuje ona proces, w którym „Ja" ontologiczne rozdziela się na kilka odrębnych – ale jednocześnie ściśle powiązanych – perspektyw narracyjnych wywodzących się z tego samego źródła. Z tego punktu widzenia zaimek „ty" funkcjonuje nie jako autonomiczna jednostka oddzielona od „Ja" ontologicznego, lecz jako jeden z przejawów powstałych w wyniku refrakcji. Dzięki temu narrator może spojrzeć na własne doświadczenia, poddać je analizie oraz dokonać ich rekonstrukcji z innej perspektywy.

Interpretacja ontologiczna opiera się na koncepcjach Arystotelesa, Immanuela Kanta, Martina Heideggera, Gottfrieda Wilhelma Leibniza, Kartezjusza oraz Barucha Spinozy. Arystotelesowskie rozróżnienie między substancją pierwotną i innymi zależnymi kategoriami stanowi analogię dla relacji między „Ja" ontologicznym a „ty". Chociaż „ty" przyjmuje odrębną pozycję narracyjną, pozostaje powiązane z tym samym ontologicznym źródłem i od niego zależne. Kant z kolei analizuje warunki, umożliwiające przedstawienie „Ja" w świadomości oraz sposób, w jaki wielość przedstawień zostaje scalona w jedną całość. Leibniz

i Kartezjusz rozumieją „Ja" jako ontologicznie niezależną substancję myślącą, natomiast według Spinozy substancja jest z natury nieskończona; kilka odrębnych jednostek współdziałających ze sobą można uznać za jeden byt. Z kolei Heideggerowska koncepcja „Dasein" stanowi ramę porównawczą pozwalającą zrozumieć byt świadomy własnego istnienia i zdolny do jego interpretowania.

Dyskusję krytyczną otwiera analiza Mariána Gálika dotycząca relacji między „ty" a różnymi przedstawieniami „ona". Gálik rozważa, czy podróż do „Lingshan" jest przede wszystkim poszukiwaniem kobiety czy poszukiwaniem tożsamości. Dochodzi do wniosku, że kobieta nie jest głównym celem tej podróży, która wiąże się przede wszystkim z poszukiwaniem wolności, korzeni kulturowych i własnej tożsamości oraz z dążeniem do porozumienia międzykulturowego. Badacz opisuje „ty" jako cień „ja" i wskazuje, że wyłania się z niego postać określana zaimkiem „ona", pełniąca funkcję towarzyszki wewnętrznego dialogu. Chociaż Gálik zgadza się z tym, że „ty" wyłania się z „ja", a „ona" z „ty", nie interpretuje tych głosów narracyjnych jako przejawów „Ja" ontologicznego powstałych w wyniku refrakcji ani nie analizuje, w jaki sposób uzyskują one różne punkty widzenia wynikające z indywidualnych doświadczeń.

Mabel Lee interpretuje użycie zaimków przez Gao przede wszystkim w kategoriach psychologicznych i estetycznych. Argumentuje, że doświadczenie represji duchowych i politycznych stało się dla Gao impulsem do twórczości autobiograficznej oraz skłoniło go do wykorzystania zaimków osobowych jako narzędzia zgłębiania różnych warstw własnej psychiki. W interpretacji badaczki zaimek „ty" funkcjonuje jako zewnętrzna projekcja ego narratora, umożliwiając prowadzenie wewnętrznej rozmowy z samym sobą. Jednak Lee nie interpretuje „ty" jako refrakcji „Ja" ontologicznego ani nie wyjaśnia relacji między innymi perspektywami opartymi na zaimkach w ramach jednolitej struktury ontologicznej.

Thomas Moran interpretuje powieść jako rozbudowany monolog, w którym jeden narrator nieustannie zmienia perspektywę narracyjną, ujmując siebie kolejno jako „ja", „ty" i „on" oraz analizując relację z postacią określaną zaimkiem „ona". Moran odróżnia podróż narratora „ja" przez świat rzeczywisty od podróży narratora „ty" przez rzeczywistość wyobrażoną, opowieści, mity i metaforyczne poszukiwania „Góry Duszy". Podkreśla również relację pomiędzy ludzką istotą i przyrodą, przedstawiając jednostkę jako część świata naturalnego. Chociaż Moran zgadza się, że istnieje ciągły ruch między perspektywami narratora oraz związek między krajobrazem a kształtowaniem się „ja", nie określa tej relacji wprost jako refrakcji „Ja" ontologicznego.

Gang Gary Xu analizuje użycie zaimków w odniesieniu do podmiotowości związanej z płcią, dystansu, uprzedmiotowienia oraz sformułowanej przez Gao koncepcji trójpodziału aktora. Xu twierdzi, że „ty", „ona" i „on" stanowią odrębne fragmenty tego samego bohatera, a użycie zaimków pozwala narratorowi przekraczać tradycyjne podziały płciowe. Opisuje również „ty" jako jednocześnie nadawcę i odbiorcę wypowiedzi, część oddzieloną od „ja" w wyniku monologu wewnętrznego.

Interpretacja Xu zwraca uwagę na dystans tworzony przez drugą osobę. W *Górze duszy* osoba mówiąca i osoba, do której kierowane są słowa, mogą należeć do tej samej świadomości. Dzięki temu „ja" może stać się przedmiotem obserwacji, pozostając jednocześnie podmiotem doświadczenia. W konsekwencji możliwe staje się ponowne przeanalizowanie, zakwestionowanie i ocena wspomnień z innej perspektywy. Przejście od „ja" do „ty" nie jest zatem wyłącznie narzędziem stylistycznym, ale mechanizmem poznawczym, dzięki któremu „ja" zyskuje dystans wobec własnych doświadczeń i zaczyna pojmować je w odmienny sposób. Xu rozpoznaje procesy odłączenia i uprzedmiotowienia, ale ich nie opisuje jako refrakcji „Ja" ontologicznego.

Andrea Bachner koncentruje się na opowiadaniu historii, pamięci kulturowej oraz poszukiwaniu w powieści alternatywnych głosów. Pokazuje, że historie wymyślone i opowiedziane przez „ty" nie ograniczają się do refleksji bohatera, ale kształtują strukturę powieści jako całości. Omawia również problematykę maski jako formy projekcji umożliwiającej jednostce przyglądanie się samej sobie. Bachner traktuje „ty" jako odrębnego narratora lub projekcję, ale nie łączy tego głosu z szerszą strukturą „Ja" ontologicznego ani nie nazywa go efektem refrakcji.

W literaturze przedmiotu omawianej w ramach rozdziału pojawiają się trzy główne linie interpretacyjne. Lee i Xu koncentrują się na funkcjach formalnych i psychologicznych zaimków, Gálik i Jian analizują zagadnienia związane z pragnieniami, płcią i poszukiwaniami egzystencjalnymi, natomiast Moran i Bachner umieszczają podzielony głos narracyjny w kontekście krajobrazu, pamięci kulturowej i historii. Niniejsza praca nie odrzuca tych podejść, ponieważ każde z nich ukazuje istotny aspekt narracji prowadzonej w drugiej osobie. Koncepcja cienia podkreśla ciągłość między „ja" i „ty", eksternalizacja wskazuje na dystans między nimi, a trójpodział bohatera zwraca uwagę na wielowarstwową strukturę „ja". Ich ograniczenie pojawia się jedynie wtedy, gdy jeden z tych aspektów zostaje potraktowany jako wyczerpujące wyjaśnienie natury „ty".

Koncepcja refrakcji łączy te trzy wymiary interpretacyjne w jedną całość. Złożone „ja" stanowi źródło; przechodzenie między osobami gramatycznymi pełni funkcję medium, natomiast zmienny kierunek narracji ujawnia się w wyobrażonej podróży „ty", jego pragnieniach oraz poszukiwaniu odpowiedzi na pytanie o tożsamość. Rozdział można zatem podsumować wnioskiem, że interpretacja ta musi być ukazana za pomocą konkretnych środków tekstowych, a nie wyłącznie poprzez filozoficzne analogie. Powtórzenia, zmiany czasu gramatycznego, formy zwrotów, obrazy zmysłowe oraz przejścia między „ja", „ty", „ona" i „on" pokazują, w jaki sposób w języku powieści konstruowane są ciągłość i zróżnicowanie „ja". Koncepcje filozoficzne są konsekwentnie wykorzystywane jako narzędzia interpretacyjne, natomiast podstawowym źródłem argumentacji pozostaje tekst *Góry duszy*.

Trzeci rozdział skupia się na analizie zaimka „ty" jako jednej z manifestacji „Ja" ontologicznego. U podstaw dyskusji leży założenie, że podstawowym

obowiązkiem jednostki jest samopoznanie. W *Górze duszy* Gao pokazuje, że poszukiwanie tożsamości i poznawanie siebie są ważniejsze niż wielkie projekty społeczne, kulturowe czy cywilizacyjne. Autor porównuje ogromną budowę tamy do pojedynczej istoty ludzkiej – „ja", które wydaje się małe i pozbawione znaczenia niczym ziarnko piasku. W ten sposób podkreśla nadrzędną rolę indywidualnej świadomości i doświadczenia. Twierdzi również, że kultura traci swoją wartość, jeżeli jednostka zatraca indywidualność oraz zdolność do samopoznania.

Narrator „ja" nieustannie próbuje odnaleźć sens ludzkiego istnienia, jednak pojedyncza perspektywa narracyjna uniemożliwia znalezienie ostatecznych odpowiedzi. To ograniczenie prowadzi do pojawienia się „ty", dzięki któremu „Ja" ontologiczne może przyglądać się własnym doświadczeniom z innej perspektywy, zadawać pytania oraz nadawać im nowe znaczenia. W rezultacie „ty" nie jest całkowicie odrębną postacią, ale raczej odmienną perspektywą, która wyłoniła się w procesie refrakcji. Narracja w drugiej osobie umożliwia wyodrębnienie jednostki przeżywającej różne doświadczenia od świadomości, która je analizuje i ocenia. W konsekwencji samopoznanie nie jest przedstawione jako ostateczny wniosek, lecz jako ciągły proces wymagający przyjmowania odmiennych perspektyw.

Relacja między „ja" a „ty" jest analizowana z perspektywy arystotelesowskiego rozróżnienia między substancją pierwszą a substancją wtórną. „Ja" ontologiczne stanowi pierwotne źródło istnienia, natomiast „ty" osiąga pewien stopień narracyjnej niezależności i funkcjonuje w świecie nierzeczywistym: podróżuje, opowiada historie, wyraża pragnienia oraz tworzy kolejne postacie. Jednak jego niezależność jest ograniczona, ponieważ nadal znajduje się pod wpływem innego głosu, który wydaje polecenia, prowadzi obserwacje i dokonuje osądów. Rozdział nie przedstawia „ty" jako kopii ani odbicia „ja", ale ukazuje, że refrakcja tworzy relację wzajemnej zależności. „Ja" ontologiczne daje początek „ty", ale jednocześnie potrzebuje jego doświadczeń, aby zdobyć szerszą wiedzę na własny temat i przejść wewnętrzną przemianę.

Ważną częścią tego procesu jest odrzucenie tradycyjnych form życia społecznego. Świat ludzki jest przedstawiony jako przestrzeń pełna lęków, narzuconych norm i wewnętrznych sprzeczności. Dzięki „ty" „Ja" ontologiczne nawiązuje bliższy kontakt z naturą i górami. Pragnie wyzwolić się z rutyny i ograniczeń współczesnego życia. Scena z „Rzeką Zapomnienia" ukazuje pragnienie ucieczki od ograniczeń społecznych i powrotu do naturalnej, pierwotnej wolności, którą symbolizuje krzyk przypominający ryk dzikiego zwierzęcia. Człowiek nie może jednak całkowicie oderwać się od własnej przeszłości: wspomnienia pozostają obecne w „ty", co oznacza, że refrakcja przekształca doświadczenie, nie naruszając ciągłości tożsamości.

Rozdział pokazuje również, że „ja" nie jest trwałe – nie posiada stałej formy i podlega przemianom. Gao porównuje je do chmur, które nieustannie przyjmują różne formy, lub do maski, która staje się częścią twarzy. Obrazy te ukazują

zmienność ludzkiej natury. W wyniku uważnej obserwacji narrator odkrywa coraz większą liczbę nowych i nieznanych aspektów własnej tożsamości. Niestabilność tę można porównać do koncepcji „Dasein" Heideggera, zgodnie z którą ludzkie istnienie wiąże się z pytaniem o własny byt. Reprezentując inną formę istnienia, „ty" zapewnia „Ja" ontologicznemu nową perspektywę. Pozwala mu zrozumieć własne doświadczenia z różnych okresów życia. Metafora „lodowatej i przejrzystej świadomości" ukazuje przemiany zachodzące w człowieku – ciało traci na znaczeniu, a świadomość staje się krucha i wymaga ochrony. Dystans w narracji nie oznacza braku emocji – łączy zewnętrzną obserwację z wewnętrzną wrażliwością i refleksją dotyczącą istnienia.

Pojawienie się „ty" wiąże się również z przezwyciężeniem samotności. „Ja" ontologiczne pragnie być wysłuchane, dlatego traktuje „ty" jako własny cień i stwierdza: „jesteś mną, który bacznie mnie słucha". Jednak „ty" nie jest jedynie kopią „ja" ani biernym odbiorcą jego doświadczeń. Aktywnie interpretuje usłyszane słowa i czasami je podważa. Metafora cienia oznacza zarówno związek ze źródłem jak i różnicę wynikającą z upływu czasu, odległości i odmiennej perspektywy. Rozdział pokazuje, że poznanie siebie wymaga dystansu. Bezpośrednie doświadczenie własnego „ja" nie zawsze pozwala na obiektywną ocenę. Wspomnienia, obawy i pragnienia stają się wyraźniejsze, gdy są obserwowane z perspektywy „ty".

Na kolejnym etapie „ty" tworzy „ona", a „ja" wraz z „ty" tworzą „on". Jednak te zaimki nie opisują tej samej osoby. Każda z nich stanowi odmienny sposób rozumienia siebie i odgrywa inną rolę w powieści. „Ona" pomaga „ty" w porozumiewaniu się, radzeniu sobie z samotnością i odkrywaniu uczuć, pragnień i relacji z innymi. Zgodnie z teorią animy Junga „ona" jest kobiecym aspektem męskiej świadomości. Nie jest jedynie tworem „ty" ani jego biernym odbiciem. Często podważa i zmienia sposób jego myślenia. Ich relacja staje się okazją do autorefleksji i pomaga odkrywać ukryte pragnienia, wstyd, słabości lub błędy.

Relacja pomiędzy „ty" i „ona" ukazuje również, że poznawanie siebie podlega ograniczeniom etycznym. „Ja" tworzy postać kobiecą, pragnie jej i ją ocenia, dlatego nie potrafi spojrzeć na nią obiektywnie. Narrator rozumie, że obserwacja nie może być bezstronna, ponieważ wpływają na nią wspomnienia, emocje i doświadczenia z przeszłości. Druga osoba może stać się lustrem, w którym człowiek się przegląda, aby zdobyć wiedzę na swój temat. Jednakże w takim procesie może ona stać się jedynie wytworem świadomości obserwatora. Refrakcja nie usuwa tej deformacji – przeciwnie, pomaga jednostce uświadomić sobie jej istnienie. Celem nie jest stworzenie w pełni obiektywnego obrazu siebie ani innej osoby, lecz zrozumienie, że każda perspektywa podlega ograniczeniom.

Podróż „ty" jest również analizowana w kontekście egzystencjalizmu, buddyzmu i szamanizmu. Lęk egzystencjalny prowadzi do konfrontacji z niepewnością i kruchością ludzkiego istnienia – dlatego staje się nadrzędnym warunkiem samopoznania. Podróż do „Lingshan" przypomina buddyjskie dążenie do uwolnienia się od pragnień i reguł społecznych. Jednak w powieści oświecenie nie jest

stanem, który można w pełni osiągnąć. W doświadczeniu samotności, w różnych stanach świadomości i bliskości śmierci dostrzec można szamański wymiar podróży. W scenie bliskiej śmierci wrażenia zmysłowe, wspomnienia, światło i ruch mieszają się ze sobą. Jednak obecność „ty" pozostaje nieprzerwana, nawet gdy granice między ciałem a przestrzenią zaczynają się zacierać. Narracja w drugiej osobie pozwala ukazać związek między rozpadem a przetrwaniem.

W końcowej części rozdziału poruszona zostaje kwestia związku między ludzką świadomością a rzeczywistością. „Ja" postrzega rzeczywistość jako bezpośrednie doświadczenie konkretnego momentu, natomiast „ty" rozumie, że każda obserwacja zależy od indywidualnego sposobu myślenia. Naprzemienne stosowanie tych dwóch perspektyw pozwala uniknąć zarówno skrajnego subiektywizmu, jak i złudnego przekonania o możliwości obiektywnego postrzegania świata. Poszukiwania ontologiczne w *Górze duszy* nie prowadzą do jednej, jednoznacznej odpowiedzi na pytania o człowieczeństwo i tożsamość, lecz ukazują sposób obserwowania własnych doświadczeń, poddawania ich refleksji oraz przyjmowania różnych perspektyw gramatycznych.

Chociaż na początku „ty" pragnie uciec od ludzi, wspomnienia z dzieciństwa, członkowie rodziny, miasta i osobiste relacje budzą w nim pragnienie powrotu. Wyprawa w góry nie prowadzi do całkowitego odseparowania się od innych, lecz pozwala lepiej zrozumieć związek między samotnością a życiem społecznym. „Ja" ontologiczne powraca do świata z doświadczeniami zdobytymi dzięki różnym manifestacjom powstałym w wyniku refrakcji. Rozdział pokazuje, że „ty" jest pośrednim przejawem „Ja" ontologicznego, podczas gdy „ona" i „on" stanowią kolejne, bardziej bezpośrednie sposoby wyrażania świadomości. Dzięki tej różnorodności perspektyw jednostka jest w stanie poradzić sobie z samotnością oraz stawić czoła wspomnieniom, lękowi i śmierci. Nie odkrywa jednak jednej, ostatecznej tożsamości, lecz osiąga głębszy poziom samopoznania, któremu towarzyszy większa świadomość własnej odpowiedzialności.

W podsumowaniu ponownie pojawiają się odniesienia do filozofii Kanta, Heideggera, Kartezjusza i Spinozy. Wzmacniają one tezę, że tożsamość jest relacją między świadomością a doświadczeniem. „Ja" i „ty" są zarazem odrębne i podobne – obie formy dążą do powrotu do swoich źródeł, aby lepiej poznać naturę „ja".

Podróż ku górze ma charakter szamański i transcendentalny; stanowi proces przekraczania konwencjonalnych sposobów myślenia, prowadzący do głębszego samopoznania. Ostatecznie „ty" nie jest niezależnym bytem, lecz emanacją „Ja" ontologicznego, które poprzez fragmentację i doświadczenie różnych perspektyw osiąga pełniejszą samoświadomość.

Praca dowodzi, że w *Górze duszy* „ty" stanowi „refrakcję" „Ja" ontologicznego, a proces jego wyłaniania się z podstawowego „ja" oznacza przejście ku odrębnej formie istnienia pod wpływem różnorodnych doświadczeń. W analizie wykorzystano koncepcje ontologiczne wielu filozofów, m.in. Arystotelesa, Martina Heideggera, Immanuela Kanta, Gottfrieda Wilhelma Leibniza, Kartezjusza oraz

Barucha Spinozy. Teoria ontologii wskazuje, że w *Górze duszy* istnieje pierwotne „Ja", które tworzy „Innego" – „ty". Oznacza to, że podstawowe „ja" ma wielowymiarowy charakter i przejawia się w różnych formach. „Ona" i „on" są wytworem „ty", dlatego stanowią pośrednie reprezentacje „Ja" ontologicznego. Pomagają one „ty" odnaleźć „Lingshan" („Górę duszy") i tym samym odkryć sens istnienia „Ja" ontologicznego. Jednakże tylko „ty" jest bezpośrednią reprezentacją „Ja" ontologicznego wyłonioną, aby zgłębiać tajemnicę własnego istnienia i lepiej poznać samego siebie. Podsumowując, „ty" zostaje ukazane jako refrakcja „Ja" ontologicznego, a poprzez doświadczenia przeżywane przez „ty" „Ja" ontologiczne osiąga wolność, samowiedzę i wewnętrzny spokój, których nie można odnaleźć w zwykłym ludzkim świecie.

The subject of the study is intellectually compelling and represents an attempt to make an original contribution to the existing scholarship on the work of Nobel Prize laureate Gao Xingjian. The study is distinguished by a high degree of originality, primarily owing to the consistent development of the authors' concept of the "Ontological Self" and the process of "refraction" that is central to it. The authors do not merely reproduce existing interpretations of *Soul Mountain*, but propose their own coherent theoretical approach, in which "you" is interpreted not as the narrator's conventional alter ego, but as the result of the ontological "refraction" of the subject. This approach marks a significant shift in emphasis from the psychological and narrative level to the philosophical and ontological.

From the review by Professor Carlos Dimeo

The study addresses an interesting and relevant topic within Gao Xingjian scholarship. The central thesis: that the pronoun "you" functions as a refraction of an "Ontological Self" is original and distinguishes the manuscript from much of the existing criticism, which tends to discuss "you" as shadow, alter ego, projection, or narrative device. This approach offers an original perspective on Gao Xingjian's narrative technique and furthers existing discussions on identity, subjectivity, and pronoun usage by the interpretation of the "you" in *Soul Mountain*. It has a strong engagement with scholarship and constitutes a clearly identifiable contribution. This manuscript presents a thoughtful and original interpretation of Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain*.

From the review by Professor Marie-Christine Seguin

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