

# Take “Forest and Spring Gao Zhi” as an example to analyze the influence of Guo Xi’s painting theory on landscape creation

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**Abstract:** Guo Xi is one of the representative figures of Chinese landscape painting creation and theoretical research in the middle and late Northern Song Dynasty. As a theoretical work, “Forest and Spring Gao Zhi” put forward opinions on the value exploration and observation of landscape painting as well as the way of space construction. This paper tries to analyze the influence of Guo Xi’s theory on the landscape creation of Song Dynasty and even the later generations from the perspective of “Forest and Spring Gao Zhi”, so as to inject new life into contemporary landscape creation.

**Key words:** Guo Xi; Lin Quan Gao Zhi; Landscape painting

## 1. Guo Xi and Forest and Spring Gao Zhi

The Song Dynasty was the period when Chinese landscape painting developed rapidly and reached its peak. Guo Xi, Zi Chunfu, one of the representatives of Chinese landscape painting creation and theoretical research in the middle and late Northern Song Dynasty, made great contributions to both practice and theory of landscape painting. At the level of artistic practice, Guo Xi was in a high position. He combined the grandeur of the north with the lyric beauty of the south, which promoted the generation of the mainstream style of the court painting Academy of the Northern Song Dynasty, which had certain innovative significance, and also influenced the formation of his theoretical thinking. On the theoretical level, Guo Si recorded and compiled his father Guo Xi’s experience and artistic opinions on landscape painting creation, which is divided into six sections, namely Preface, Landscape Instruction, Painting Meaning, Painting Jiji, Painting Pattern Collection and Painting Title. It is a very representative theory of landscape painting in the Northern Song Dynasty.

When *Forest and Spring Gao Zhi* was written, landscape painting was in its mature period, so many views had a profound impact on the generation and evolution of Chinese landscape painting. The book focuses on the section “Landscape Instruction”, which records Guo Xi’s views and experience in painting creation, explains how to integrate “the spirit of Forest and spring” into painting, and records his views on the value, creative spirit, landscape observation and space construction methods of landscape painting. It provides important reference value and guidance for the creation and development of landscape painting in the Song Dynasty and even later generations, as well as the generation and evolution of aesthetic thoughts.

## 2. The value and realm of landscape exploration

Landscape painting in Song Dynasty, as the favorite of the scholar-official group, sustains the spiritual ideal of the literati. From the macro level, the society at that time was naturally infiltrated by the thinking of “the world is worried and worried first, and the world is happy and happy after”, requiring people to constantly reflect on themselves when viewing mountains and waters, it is difficult to achieve both the literati and scholar-officials want to obtain natural purification, but it is also difficult to completely give up the two interests. As an imperial servant of the Academy of Painting, Guo Xi became an official by virtue of his first-class painting skills, and the way of living in society was also reflected in his painting theories. He believed that landscape painting could relieve the suffering in the hearts of literati and officials, and make those who entered the world gain the heart of being born. In the beginning of the book, Guo Xi explained the existence value of landscape painting, and believed that the real reason for loving landscape is to break away from the shackles of the world, return to nature, and take the feelings of retreat as the fundamental ideal of “the spirit of Forest and spring”. In this way, landscape painting, as a spiritual sustenance, balances the contradictory ideas of scholars and officials who want to be born in politics and retreat in the mountains and forests. Even if they are in the hustle and bustle of the world, they can also meet the ideal of “no more than the banquet, sitting in the poor spring”.

Based on the literati’s longing for mountains and rivers, Guo Xi put forward the concept of “the aspiration of forest and spring”. For the creation of landscape painting, we should keep the “heart of forest and spring”. He warned people that the creation of landscape painting should not only observe the landscape, but also abandon the utilitarian and practical secular thoughts, and get close to the landscape and describe the landscape with a state of mind without distractions and the unity of nature and man, so as to express the true inner feelings. Only lyrical and secluded landscape works can reflect the true aesthetic significance of landscape painting, which is a natural continuation of the charm of Chinese painting after Zong Bing’s Preface to Landscape Painting in the Southern Dynasty.

Guo Xi also put forward the “four possible” landscape realm: “called landscape, there are feasible people, people who are hopeful, people who can travel, people who can live”. “Feasible”, “hope” is the first state of landscape, can only let people stop to appreciate, and “can swim”, “can live” is the second state of landscape, can personally feel the landscape sound, let people intoxicated. Reach the realm of subject and object emotion blending. This theory also makes Zong Bing’s concept of mountains and rivers further perfect. Looking at the whole picture of “Early Spring”, it can be seen that the mountains and stones in the painting are “promising”, the mountains and wild paths

are “feasible”, the pavilions and pavilions give people “livable”, and the scenic figures “can travel”, successfully creating multiple realms, giving viewers the satisfaction of “satisfying their expectations” and “winning my heart”, and naturally meeting the requirements of the scholarist “not to have a hall banquet, but to sit at the fountain”.

### 3. The observation method of mountains and rivers

In the process of landscape creation, Guo Xi put forward the artistic concept of “taking from mountains and rivers”. Get close to nature, draw inspiration of landscape creation from real nature, and understand the vitality of landscape. “Mountains, close to see so, far miles to see so, each far each different, the so-called mountain move step by step; Mountains, front so, side so, back so, each look at each different, the so-called mountain line to see; Can you notice that it is in the shape of one mountain and dozens of mountains at the same time?” The observation method of mountains and rivers is to form personal experience through field viewing. The scenery of mountains and rivers will present different scenes with different angles of viewing mountains and rivers. Guo Xi believes that in the mountains and rivers, we should “look at them from afar to take their potential, look at them from close to take their quality”, grasp their overall impression and trend from a distance, and understand the specific details and textures of mountains and rivers from a close perspective. Because the face of the mountain will change continuously according to the change of the observation Angle and distance, dynamic “step by step” should be adopted; And “view from all sides” is to take into account the observation of a single point of view is difficult to fully grasp the image of the landscape, the landscape on the picture made a comprehensive and unified arrangement, so as to experience the landscape aesthetic images of various forms. He used the above concept in the painting of *Early Spring*. The rocks in the painting are different in Angle, distance and form. Each mountain in the picture has its own form, truly reaching the realm of “the shape of one mountain and a hundred mountains”.

Guo Xi not only mentioned the observation distance and Angle of view of the mountain, but also mentioned the season and climate of observation. When the four seasons change and the morning and evening are different, the overall impression of the landscape is also different, which also gives the painter endless feelings and the possibility of artistic conception. Guo Xi listed the different manifestations of rain, snow and clouds, from the artistic conception that can better grasp the scenery under different weather characteristics, and believed that only through different angles and different distances to observe and appreciate, the painter can see the various forms of the landscape and have a comprehensive understanding of the landscape. “*Early Spring Picture*” is the focus on depicting the fog covering the mountains and rocks, so as to reflect the early spring scene.

### 4. The spatial construction method of mountains and rivers

Chinese landscape painting gives people a sense of “far” because landscape painting breaks through the limitations of time and space. The contradiction between the large landscape and the small picture prompts the painter to think and try to display his skills under the square inch. The depiction of “far” is the pursuit of the landscape painter, especially in the creation of panoramic landscape, the space arrangement is particularly important. Guo Xi put forward the “three-distance method” about the spatial expression of landscape painting. For the picture construction of landscape painting, it is a kind of painting concept about position composition. In fact, while constructing space, the “three-distance method” also pays attention to the expression of artistic conception, which is the painter’s application of nature in painting.

Mountains are high, far-reaching and even. The so-called “high and far” is a relationship between the upper and lower space, creating a lofty and lofty trend, making the picture appear sublime feeling. Li Tang’s “*Endless Gully and Pine Wind Map*” belongs to the “lofty” composition. The steep mountains and the depiction of waterfalls enhance the sense of lofty. “Far-reaching” means “looking behind the mountains from the front”. Because the mountain is tall, people can not see the scene behind the mountain, so it is necessary to raise the viewer’s perspective to see the scene behind the mountain, which can reflect the infinite “far-reaching meaning” in the limited space. Wang Ximeng was obviously influenced by the concept of “three distances” when he created “*A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*”. He depicted the panoramic mountains with a long roll composition, and used “far-reaching” to express the height of mountains and rivers in local processing. Pavilions and pavilions were connected to the mountains, and villages were interspersed among them, reflecting the elegance and wealth of the scenery of rivers and mountains. And “Pingyuan” refers to “near the mountains and looking at the distant mountains”, which is the most able to reflect the boundary of landscape painting and the most common composition method of southern landscape painting. The “Pingyuan method” is mostly used for plain and low mountains. It enhances the perspective of Pingyuan with the horizontal and horizontal of rivers, reflecting the gentle and leisurely harmonious interest, as if it can have an equal dialogue with nature. Guo Xi’s “*Pingyuan Map of Nest Stone*” adopts the composition rule of Pingyuan to create the artistic conception of the crisp autumn in the north and the open and distant region. “*Early Spring Picture*” is a combination of the three, the “*Gao Yuan*” above the mountain appears to be high, producing sublime and awe; The middle is “far-reaching” to the right, and the rocks constitute a deep sense of vertical and horizontal; The left “Pingyuan” gives people a sense of ethereal openness.

“Three Yuan Method” is the understanding and summary of landscape visual space, which had a profound influence on the creation of landscape painting in Song Dynasty and even later generations. Yuan Dynasty painters prefer the landscape schema expressed in the pingyuan space to depict the quiet mountains and rivers and the indifferent lake. Wang Meng, one of the four families of Yuan Dynasty, not only used “Pingyuan” to express the empty and plain rivers and lakes in the south of the Yangtze River, but also preferred to use “far-reaching” to express the deep landscape. “*The Picture of Seclusion in the Qing Bian*” is to show the space of “looking from the front of the mountains and behind the mountains” by raising the viewpoint. The waterfalls in the mountains hang high, and a hermit walks along the

mountain road, showing the quiet and light Jiangnan atmosphere of the thick mountains and abundant vegetation. However, in the Ming Dynasty, although there were many different painting styles, the influence of the “three Far Method” could still be seen. Shen Zhou’s “Lushan Mountain High Map” can be seen lofty and far-reaching artistic conception, Wen Zhengming’s “Orchid Ting Collection Sequence Map” is slightly deformed, but still can see the concept of space and distant environment. In the Qing Dynasty, copying the ancient style prevailed, and the painter not only greatly enriched the space formula, but also tended to express the “three far method” in the brushwork techniques and methods. Today’s landscape painters still learn the composition of the “three far Method”, learn from the ancient, but do not copy the ancient, through the creation of nature to nourish their own landscape creative cultivation, so that landscape painting in the evolution of history constantly inject new life.

## 5. Epilogue

As a theoretical work of landscape painting, “Forest and Spring Gao Zhi” covers Guo Xi’s unique views on the value of landscape painting, creative spirit, landscape observation and space construction methods. He believed that in order to create excellent landscape painting, we must study nature extensively and “enjoy sightseeing” in the process of learning from nature. In order to better depict landscape, he put forward the principle of landscape space construction “three Far Method”. More importantly, he explained how to integrate “the heart of forest and spring” into the creation, so as to reflect the infinite landscape implication in the limited scroll, which also became the theoretical basis of landscape space construction of painters in the Song Dynasty and even after the Song Dynasty.

Therefore, “Forest and Spring Gao Zhi” not only summed up Guo Xi’s techniques of landscape painting creation, but also combined the painting with the artistic conception of “forest and spring”, which had a profound impact on the later generations of landscape painting creation. For the history of art, “Forest and Spring Gao Zhi” is also of great significance. It has the function of inheriting the landscape theory of Gu Kaizhi and Zong Bing before, starting the landscape painting of Song Dynasty and Song Yuan Dynasty, and also has the function of integrating the northern and southern painting styles, so it has extremely high artistic practice value and theoretical value. A series of aesthetic thoughts and creative theories can not be ignored on the later generations.

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