

## Lecture Notes, by James Cahill

*Note: The image numbers in these lecture notes do not exactly coincide with the images onscreen but are meant to be reference points in the lectures' progression.*

### Lecture 7B. Northern Song Landscape Painting, Part II

Now on to the last really major master within the Northern Song monumental landscape tradition: Guo Xi 郭熙.

But first, let me talk about Guo Xi's essay on landscape painting. Written down by his son Guo Si 郭思, from a manuscript left by his father? Two good translations: in Bush & Shih, scattered by subject; in Siren, together, in vol. II, pp. 220–228. Siren's was made by a class of students working in Leiden under Prof. Hulsewe; Bush & Shih made mainly by John Hay, as I remember. Both fine.

Main points:

- On purpose of painting landscape (read from Bush & Shih, p. 151, beginning: "But, are the longing for forests and streams..." and ending "...the honor which the world accords to landscape painting.>").
- On importance of looking at painting from distance. Some aspects of nature also best seen from distance.
- Some landscape paintings are fit to contemplate; some fit to ramble through; some fit to live in. Last finest.
- What we call local schools: "students from Shandong study Li Cheng 李成, those from Shanxi Fan Kuan 范寬／范寬..." So great men and scholars don't stick to a single school.
- Necessity of having a clear conception, concentrating on essential nature of thing represented. (Guo Si breaks in and tell about his father's method of working.)
- Different aspects of scenery in different seasons, times of day, weather conditions. Interest in light and shade. Technical advice on use of figures, roads, buildings, to lead viewer's eye through composition.
- Main mountain vs. subordinate mountains; pine stands out among trees. Parallel to social order: superior man, and small men who serve him.

—Effects of seasons: moods associated with them. Winter mountains covered by storm clouds; people depressed. Etc. Contemplation of such pictures evokes in men corresponding ideas/feelings. “It is as if one were really among the mountains; such is the idea beyond the depicted scenery.”

—Advice on aspects of mountains, water. Watercourses are arteries of mountain, grass and trees its hair; mist and clouds give them air of beauty (charm). Rocks form its bones.

—Advice on “three distances” 三遠／三远, i.e., three ways of achieving effect of distance in painting.

—Use of poems as themes for painting. This is first appearance of important new criterion for judgment, which will take over and push out other kinds.

—Artist travels to see famous mountains. “When I have stored up impressions of them in my mind, then with the eye unconscious of the silk and the hand unconscious of brush and ink, marvelous, mysterious, boundless becomes that picture of mine.”

—Criticism of “modern painters” who just wave the brush and splash the ink. Already some open to such criticism. Amateur school of painting was coming into being.

Now, to look at his painting. One generally recognized as genuine, great masterwork.

### 7.11. Guo Xi (ca. 1001–ca. 1090)

Image 7.11.1: *Early Spring* 早春圖／早春图. Signed, dated 1072. National Palace Museum (Skira 36; 3000, 109; T&V 7–20; Loehr 73; Siren 175). Not only signed; the artist has written title and date on it also. Artists’ writings on paintings expanding—first, only signature with title; then date (in slightly earlier bird-and-flower painting we’ll see, 1061 painting by Cui Bo 崔白); now also title.

(This painting is so familiar that one is tempted to slip into cliché observations—but then has to remember that these aren’t clichés at all for younger generation, still important truths.) Dick Barnhart’s brief passage on this painting in 3000 makes the important point that as a court artist, Guo Xi worked for an imperial patron, Emperor Shenzong 宋神宗 (reigned 1068–1085), who was broadly cultivated and ruled over a stable realm.

Composition: preserves much of the Fan Kuan and Yan Wengui 燕文貴／燕文贵 model, while moving into a more subjective, particular vision of world. Still tripartite in both ways (etc.).

But grand vision of world in flux, going through process of change—all the landscape masses undercut or overhanging, and the whole seems to have the inner energy of a vast organism. Landscape masses are shaded for effect of rotundity; not so much texture strokes as overlaid brushstrokes that make them appear earthy rather than rocky. Strong effect of light-and-shadow, although no consistent light source (never in Chinese painting). Has same basic underlying quasi-narrative: people at base engaged in real-world activities; then ascent to temple near top; then pure nature towering above that. Will see in details.

Images 7.11.2 through 7.11.9: details. Next to temple at middle right: pavilion, suggesting that people will sit there and gaze at scenery. Painting itself still not adapted to that purpose, as others we'll see will be; but introduces theme.

Mundane scenes at bottom; climbers ascending toward temple; temple roofs seen through ravine at top. Trees of all types. Old devices for drawing eye into distance: diminution of trees, lightening of ink tone.

(With temple showing:) So, still follows pattern that is more or less ubiquitous in Northern Song hanging-scroll landscape, which we saw first in a painting attributed to Guan Tong 關仝/关仝: secular, everyday-life area at base; climbing to central area where temple located; then only pure landscape above. So constant a theme that one wonders why writers of the time—and, for that matter, writers later—don't make note of it and discuss it. Bears out my often-made observation that many of the most interesting and important aspects of Chinese painting are somehow not reflected in the literature, voluminous as it is. Reason, I always said: what goes on in mind of painters when they work, what they have learned from past and transmit to later painters, is very different from what goes on in mind of someone writing a theoretical or critical essay. Two separate worlds, with only tenuous and problematic relationship. But back to the painting:

(Strange change-of-plan passage in mid-right. Conjecture about why artist made this strange last-minute decision. Guo Xi, unlike Fan Kuan and Yan Wengui, wasn't representing a stable, lasting world of solid, slow-changing geology; rather, erosion, transformation. Different vision.)

I could spend another hour showing landscapes in Guo Xi manner by followers, some old and fine. School of landscape founded by Li Cheng and continued (transformed) by Guo Xi is established as local school but more than that, a mode of landscape that artists of later times could take up.

Images 7.12.1 and 7.12.2: strong contender for earliness is *Snowy River Gorge* 幽谷圖 in Shanghai Museum. Flatter forms, more emphasis on silhouettes than on volume. Probably a section of screen or series, like others we've seen. No indication of human presence, not even paths.

Impressive survivor from what must have been powerful composition.

Images 7.12.3 through 7.12.5: fine early work in Guo Xi style: *Clearing after Snow in the Min Mountains* 岷山晴雪. (CAT 47)

(Various later imitations.)

Image 7.12.6: *Village among Lofty Mountains* 山莊高逸 / 山庄高逸. (Siren 176) Ming painting. In London exhibition?

So much for hanging scrolls in the Guo Xi tradition. Now on to look at two fine, earlier handscrolls attributed to him.

Image 7.13.1: *Autumn in the River Valley* 溪山秋霽圖 / 溪山秋霽图, in the Freer Gallery (Skira 37; Loehr 74 A–D; Siren 172–173). In Skira book I accepted it as probably by same artist as *Early Spring*; I wouldn't do that now. Probably a generation or so later? Forms softened, less compelling as features of real landscape. View over broad valley, like the Kansas City Xu Daoning 許道寧 / 许道宁, but less real sense of space and distance. Travelers seen at bottom.

Image 7.13.2: next section. View back to tall building (gate?) in distance.

Image 7.13.3: detail of that. Strong, effective use of atmospheric perspective, etc. All these means thoroughly mastered by now.

Image 7.13.4: next section: traveler with servant approaches hostel, or wineshop, where he will rest or buy something to eat and drink before continuing. Pavilion in lower left where he will sit and contemplate remaining scenery. Buddhist temple in misty hollow, middle distance; then...

Image 7.13.5: flat view over eroded terrain. Crossed pines in foreground a bit arty. Not quite the naturalness in detail that real Guo Xi achieves.

Image 7.13.6: End of scroll. Flat terrain continues to distant hills. Landscape to be gazed at from fixed vantage point, not to be entered, explored. Great change going on. Seen already in scroll attributed to Xu Daoning in Yurinkan, Kyoto, with two figures at far end gazing out over

scenery. And “scenery” is the right word for this—and a word one would never use of real Guo Xi.

Image 7.14.1: opening section of another handscroll attributed to Guo Xi, *Lowlands with Trees* 樹色平遠圖 / 樹色平遠圖 (*Old Trees, Level Distance?*) In the Metropolitan Museum, former Crawford collection. Someone recently, I’ve been told, has done a study of this intended to establish its authenticity as a genuine work of Guo Xi. I admire the painting, which I’ve seen many times since the days we were compiling the Crawford Catalog in 1960 and 1961. But I think it’s a little later than Guo Xi, like the Freer scroll, and somewhat different, partaking more of the new mode of landscape.

Images 7.14.2 through 7.14.6: five more sections or details, show successively.

Both the Freer and Crawford scrolls have as their theme people gazing at landscape (or gathering to do so). Pictures composed, as Yurinkan “Xu Dapning” is composed, to encourage that kind of reading. Very different from real Guo Xi, etc.

Image 7.15.1: large horizontal painting in Palace Museum, Beijing, *Eroded Rocks on a Plain* 窠石平遠圖 / 窠石平遠圖. According to my Index, signed and dated 1078. I list it there as probably a school work of the Yuan dynasty; that still seems right.

Images 7.15.2 through 7.15.6: details. Show why not time of Guo Xi.

Image 17.16.1: *Snowy Hills*, in the Toledo Museum of Art (Loehr 75 A–D). Fine school work. Yuan dynasty?

Image 7.17.1: this is the right place to bring back the landscape hanging scroll attributed to Li Cheng in the Nelson Gallery, shown but then set aside in lecture 6 as not belonging to the period of Li Cheng. Now we can see why, I think...

Images 7.17.5 through 7.17.7.

I will show here, then bring back in the next lecture, a landscape signed by an artist active at end of Northern Song, under reign of Emperor Huizong, named Li Gongnian 李公年.

Image 7.18.1: Li Gongnian, late Northern Song. *A Mountain Valley* 山水圖／山水圖. Signed. In the Princeton Art Museum.

Images 7.18.2 through 7.18.4: three details.

Talk of this as beginnings of what might be called a subjective kind of landscape, as opposed to objective landscape of great period: nature presented as complete world, to be explored visually by viewer, as visual metaphor for moving through the world, understanding more and more of it: coincides, not coincidentally, with early stages of proto-science, which goes through great development in the 10th, 11th, and 12th centuries. Great neo-Confucian philosopher Shao Yong 邵雍, in 11th century, had argued that (I quote Benjamin Elman): “human beings should not pick out things, phenomena, and affairs from a human standpoint.... A sage could internalize perception so that ‘things were perceived as things.’ In this way, one could exhaustively fathom the principles of all things (*wanwu zhi li*) [萬物之理／万物之理]...” Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) moved away from this belief; although he continued to see “the investigation of things” as basic to self-cultivation, he argued that this should be done as a means of cultivating moral principles—things perceived should be absorbed and harmonized with human feelings. We are moving into a period when the School of Mind rules Chinese thought. The principles of things lie in the mind, not outside it, in the things themselves.

Somewhere: on Shen Gua 沈括, etc., from this time to the 15th century? Proto-science, in the Needham sense. Needham problem: why (etc.) Chinese never completely adopted the empirical approach....