
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Viewing the Characteristics of Chinese Landscape Painting from Guo Xi's "San Yuan Method"

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| ABSTRACT

The Song and Yuan Dynasties are considered a period when art theory and practice reached a very high level. Among them, painting, as an important category, has great potential. Guo Xi, a painter and theorist of the Song Dynasty, proposed "The San Yuan Method" (means three artistic principles: high, far-reaching and flat), which was compiled into a collection by his son and included in *Lin Quan Gao Zhi* (the elegance of the bamboo and spring), becoming an important theoretical work in the history of Chinese painting. This article will start from the theoretical foundations of "high", "far-reaching", and "flat" and use specific text analysis and theoretical exposition methods to analyze the painting characteristics of Chinese landscape painting influenced by the "San Yuan Method". The aim is to analyze the creative purpose of landscape painting and appreciate Lin Quan's heart (Lin Quan's heart is the view put forward by Guoxi, a landscape painter in the Song Dynasty; that is, landscape painters should have an aesthetic mind when observing and painting).

| KEYWORDS

High, Far-reaching, Flat; Lin Quan's heart

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The Song Dynasty was the heyday of Chinese landscape painting. During this period, not only did Jing Hao and Guan Tong, who were skilled in depicting northern landscape paintings, but also Dong Yuan and Juran, who were skilled in depicting southern landscape paintings, as well as Li Cheng and Fan Kuan, were all famous painters in Song Dynasties. Drawing on their painting characteristics, Guo Xi became the culmination of various painting styles in the Song Dynasty. His son Guo Si compiled *Lin Quan Gao Zhi*, which recorded Guo Xi's advocated painting theory, which created a new era in the theory and practice of ancient Chinese landscape painting.

In the book, Guo Xi proposed the "The San Yuan Method" in painting. "There are three distant mountains: from the foot of the mountain to the top, it is high; from the front of the mountain to the back, it is far-reaching; from the near mountain to see the far, it is flat". [Guo et al. 2013] The proposal of the "Three Distances Method" breaks the limitation of traditional painting techniques from a theoretical perspective, observing the scenery from one viewpoint, that is, focus perspective. Based on the different visual positioning of the audience during viewing, it aims to evoke aesthetic induction in the artistic space. High is a state of looking up, a sense of sublimity when looking up at the mountain and only seeing its grandeur and grandeur; Far-reaching is a state of looking down, a sense of satisfaction in looking down at the endless streams and valleys of the scenery; Flat a state of looking at the distance with a sense of surprise and depth. The San Yuan Method not only enriches the theory of ancient Chinese art but also provides a solid foundation for the creative practice of Chinese landscape paintings.

2. The appropriate hues observe the appearance to seek the essence.

Guo Xi has specifically discussed the ink technique in painting, and the use of ink varies depending on the situation and needs. By adjusting the proportion of water to ink, the final image varies between light and dark, wet and dry, and thick and thin ink, thus producing varying degrees of color intensity. As for the viewers, they should "observe", that is, to ponder carefully the essence of paint with inner peace and purity, and they should also observe the principles and ways in the painting with curiosity and questions. To "examine", one must maintain curiosity about everything and, at the same time, maintain a spirit of questioning all seemingly reasonable phenomena. One must combine natural scenery with artistic works, immerse oneself in them, dare to ask questions and be brave enough to find answers. To "appreciate", Chinese landscape painting was very prosperous in the Song Dynasty. Although Guo Xi advocated the pursuit of "yi" (meaning and essence), the more important thing in the painting was the scenery that was beyond the scope of the eyes and the direction of the heart. However, under the influence of rational thinking, it never deviated from the real scene and preferred to be bizarre and varied. Therefore, the San Yuan Method emphasizes more on allowing the recipient to enter the picture and appreciate it as if they are traveling in real mountains and rivers and feeling free and comfortable.

2.1 Foreshortening

Chinese landscape painters pursue objective and realistic reproduction rather than adopt the traditional Western focus perspective painting technique. In traditional Chinese landscape painting, painters already have an aesthetic experience where nearby scenery is presented more visually than distant scenery. Therefore, when painting, the landscapes seem to be closer to people, making the viewer feel a sense of reality as they were in the painting. Thus, a spatial experience is naturally created through the layered mountains and water in the painting.

2.2 Clear in Near and Paste in Far

Based on the painting techniques of foreshortening, painters usually outline nearby objects very clearly, and the texture, contour, and positional relationship of mountains and stones can be clearly presented on the canvas. Ancient painters have also summarized the painting ideas of "distant mountains without cracks, distant waters without traces, distant forests without leaves, distant trees without branches, distant people without eyes, and distant pavilions without foundations." [Yu et al. 2011] Near, the ink is thick and delicately outlined, while far away, the ink is light and layered with cracks and stains. Viewers are provided with an intuitive feeling that is clearer up close and more blurry up far.

Guo Xi's *Painting of Early Spring* also has these characteristics. It contains various images of nature, such as mountains and rocks, trees, running water, clouds and fog. With reasonable hues and ink, it depicts the real physical characteristics of beautiful mountains and rivers. With the beauty of "barren mountains and rivers leave, everything is light green." [Wang 2017] At the close range of the picture, the viewer can clearly see the texture of the rocks and the gurgling water. In the distance, on the top of the mountain, there are many swaying trees, which is the way of high; looking from a distance, there is a thin horse on an ancient road. From the front of the mountain to the back of the mountain, there are small bridges and flowing water houses, displaying their flat and far-reaching charm.

"The ink is light in distance and thick in near". [Pan 2007] Such a creative principle also affects the artists, including Han Zhuo. Han Zhuo then put forward the "San Yuan" theory, "broad", "mysterious" and "secluded". Such a theory has its natural scientific basis. The air is filled with substances with different densities, so when people look at the distance, they will be affected by these tiny substances and then produce a blurred visual experience. From the perspective of people's heart appreciation, "broad" shows an open and broad-minded mood, "mysterious" shows a vague feeling, and "secluded" shows a state of extension without a trace. This is not only a strict requirement for the artist's techniques but also a concern for human nature, which also pays more attention to humans themselves.

3. Identify forms with feelings.

Influenced by Guo Xi's the San Yuan Method, Chinese landscape painting focuses more on the construction of the sense of space of natural scenery in the picture. Combined with the scattered perspective method that ancient Chinese painters are good at, it strives to make the viewers feel like they are walking in the picture when watching. Therefore, when painting, painters usually connect the picture with ink. Through the change of hues, they can achieve the connection between the scenes. They can use the brushes to show the overall texture of the picture.

3.1 Peaks rising one higher than another mountain

In the process of painting, Chinese landscape painting follows the creative principles of "high", "far-reaching", and "flat" so that the viewer can appreciate the landscape scenery of "feasible", "promising", "tourable", and "habitable". The work is vivid, exquisite, skillful and handy. The works of "tourable" and "habitable" depict the spiritual essence of things, which is a kind of state that Zheng Banqiao said in *Painting Bamboo* that "painting is perfect when it is vivid", which can be described as divine and elegant. In terms

of the image description of the scene, it emphasizes shade and does not need to be too rigid in details so as to realize the overall grasp of the work. More attention is paid to the "potential" in the composition. The picture is full of rhythm, and the opening and closing fluctuations are just right. A variety of texturing methods and moss spotting methods are used to make the peaks rise one higher than another mountain, making the viewer feel like he is in the picture.

Xiehe, a painter between the Qi and Liang dynasties in the Southern Dynasty, mentioned the "six methods" of painting in his *Ancient Painting Records*, and Jing Hao, a painter of the Later Liang Dynasty in the Five Dynasties, inherited and developed the ancient painting theory in his "strokes". Among them, they all emphasize that vivid charm is the highest requirement of painting aesthetics, reflecting the characteristics of Chinese classical aesthetics. The "Yuan" in the "San Yuan" is not only a concept of distance but also a leisurely, affectionate and detached state of mind, which not only realizes the comprehensive transfer from objective space to subjective feeling but also constructs a new concept of time and space.

3.2 Changing the concept of time and space

Throughout history, people began to pursue the circular space-time view of happiness in the next life with the progress of society and the development of science and pay more attention to their inner feelings, full of caring thinking for the present world, which is a kind of continuous space-time view. With the continuous development of the concept of time and space, people have formed different world views, and the practice under the guidance of different world views is correspondingly different. People under the concept of circular time and space lack the spirit of scientific rationality. Based on agricultural civilization, they pay attention to accumulating happiness in this world and pursuing enjoyment in the afterlife. People who follow the linear idea of time and space pay attention to scientific rationality based on industrial civilization and pay attention to efficiency. The continuous view of time and space is people's concern for their inner world and the mixture and intersection of the past, the present and the future.

The spirit of Chinese landscape painting coincides with the third view of time and space. Although Chinese landscape painting pursues truth, it is different from maps, and it is not strictly scaled down as a tool. Also different from Western landscape painting, it is not a work of art that deliberately pursues the proportion and color of light and shadow. Chinese landscape painting is more like a subjective portrayal of the artist's inner world. The author's feelings about the real world, his understanding of time and his expression of space can be vividly displayed on the paper through pictures. Here, the scenery throughout the year is presented to the viewer through the author's inner senses. "Spring mountains are as light as laughter, summer mountains are as green as drops, autumn mountains are as bright and clean as makeup, and winter mountains are as bleak as sleep." [Guo et al. 2013] The picture shows the great "yi", not deliberately, but "the meaning of the painting outside the scene".

4. Combination of virtuality and reality to create an elegant conception

Chinese landscape painting pays attention to "white and black", and the density of black and white reflects each other. Replace reality with emptiness so that the viewer can get the imagination of the recreation of beauty and obtain interest and endless meaning. Just like the creative principle of the San Yuan Method, the "far" situation is constructed by way of negative space.

4.1 Negative space in paintings

"When painting a mountain, the whole mountain will not show its height. If the smoke and haze lock the hillside, it will show the height of the mountain. If you want to draw a river long, you can't show it on the whole river. You must draw it implicitly or intermittently to show it." [Guo et al. 2013] It is not wise to paint mountains, rivers, trees, flowers, grass, birds and animals on a piece of paper. Making the mountain stand tall and upright and span the paper from beginning to end does not reflect its continuous style. On the contrary, smoke and clouds cage its waist, leaving a space for people to imagine. The real "big" person is the invisible elephant. Great music has the faintest notes; great form is beyond shape. Where there is a blank space, it seems that there is not a single stroke, but in fact, it is full of ingenuity. The combination of emptiness and reality shows a wonderful realm.

The technique of negative space is often used in Chinese landscape painting, which makes the painting full of artistic conception. Qi Baishi is good at drawing shrimp, but he never draws water. He uses light ink and a few strokes of the outline, not drawing water but clearly letting people see water. Ma Yuan's painting of fishing alone in the cold river comes from Liu Zongyuan's poem, a leaf boat, a fisherman, a coir raincoat and a round of microwave. In addition, there is nothing else which makes people look bleak; Guo Xi's *Painting of Early Spring* runs through the principle of the San Yuan Method. With it, huge stones are stacked, smoke in the mountains is light, and light ink is light to show the scenery of early spring in the mountains. It's not a word, but romantic.

In addition to painting, many art categories use the artistic technique of negative space. On the opera stage, the actors replace horses with whips and boats with oars. The combination of reality and fiction makes the audience focus on the content of the performance. In literary works, the language is implicit and refined, the words are concise and rich, and the writers often express their feelings directly in one go, and the antelope hangs its horn without a trace. In the music repertoire, one sings three sighs, the breath is ingenious, and the simple blank is all silent at this time.

Negative space brings endless imagination to the viewer, which leads to endless fun in art. The negative space can be imagined as a description of history, an expression of emotion, or a close-up of a character, which makes "the combination of reality and fiction, and a wonderful place without painting". [Da et al. 1987]

4.2 Negative space in emotion

Lin Quan's heart is loyal to the monarch and patriotic, broad-minded in expressing affection for the mountains and rivers, nostalgic in respecting nature, carefree in tasting life, tolerant in being friendly to others, and introspective in insight into the world. In the Song Dynasty, the society was troubled by internal and external problems. The scholar bureaucrats lived high in the temple due to the "strong heart between the monarch and the family", which made them feel that "These are all caused by natural mountains, forests and springs, accompanied by clouds, smoke and rosy clouds. In sleep, even if the ears can not hear and the eyes can not see, the pulse of nature can be understood." [Guo et al. 3013]. However, it is also a beautiful thing to have painters depict landscapes so that the scholar bureaucrats could not leave the temple and have their feelings here. It is also a beautiful thing to wander and enjoy the nature of mountain light and birds.

The feeling of mountains and waters lies in people's hearts. The mountains and waters that bear the painter's feelings become vivid and lifelike. It is a landscape painting that can make people relax and people. The negative space of the picture brings the blank of people's emotions, which is a major contribution. Where negative space was left because of the understanding that everyone has filled in, the landscape was vivid, undertook all the prosperity of the world, returned to all the personalized charm, and finally integrated the landscape, heaven, and man.

This is the highest characteristic that landscape painting has artistic value as a work of art. In today's society, many people, in order to cater to the public and the trend, rigidly add inappropriate commercial elements to works of art, which greatly reduces the artistic value of the works under the premise of low commercial value. It not only fails to satisfy the audience but also undermines the original intention of the works. We do not resist the commercial elements in the works of art, but the integration of commercial elements should not only be for "catering" and "profit" but should complement each other and promote each other so that the artistic value and commercial value of the works can be skillfully combined and live up to the Lin Quan's heart" at the beginning of creation.

One doesn't know when it began, and it's getting deeper and deeper; one doesn't know when it's over, and it's getting weaker and weaker. No matter when and where, you should give yourself a fresh and clear place, hold a quiet state of mind, and appreciate the laws of nature. Landscape painting should show such a land of peach blossoms for art, not utilitarian, for charm. The unity of man and nature can be achieved if we pursue paintings of the integration of mountains and rivers with people-orientation.

5. Conclusion

In *Lin Quan Gao Zhi*, we can see that Guo Xi's creative principles of "high, far-reaching and flat" have become major rules in the creation of Chinese landscape painting. Although it only imitates mountains and waters, these works of art are full of emotions. Through the analysis and research of specific works, it is easy to see the author's creative mood, which reflects the background of the times and society. Therefore, today, the research on the role of "The Lin Quan's heart" in landscape painting still has important aesthetic significance. We should pay more attention to the humanistic spirit, continue the aesthetic tradition, combine theory and practice shoulder to shoulder, as well as let the works and spirit.

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