The Landscape Realm in *Linquan Gaozhi*

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**Abstract.** Guo Xi was a famous landscape painter and painting theorist in the Northern Song Dynasty. His landscape painting work was called *Linquan Gaozhi*, which not only inherited the landscape spirits of literati paintings, summarized the skills of landscape paintings, but also opened a new era of landscape painting aesthetics. Hence, it guided the future landscape aesthetic culture and had high ideological and theoretical contributions. We could have a new understanding about the relationship between the landscape and society through reading this book. And on this basis, we were able to know the landscape realm well and realize the harmony of man and nature in the landscape paintings.

**Introduction**

Guo Xi was a famous landscape painter and painting theorist in the Northern Song Dynasty. His son Guo Si recorded his father’s statements and actions of painting and formed the book *Linquan Gaozhi*. It not only inherited the landscape spirits of literati paintings but also opened a new era of landscape painting aesthetics, which had high ideological and theoretical contributions. After reading the book and understanding the landscape realm thoroughly, people can not only reap the boundless joy from the limited length but also realize the social rules and return to the rational thinking in the process of commenting the landscape.

**The Realm of Landscape**

*Linquan Gaozhi* first proposed the word "realm" in Chinese painting history:

*When the realm has been acquainted with and the heart and hands have been interacted, we can be vertically and horizontally moderate and be able to achieve success one way or another. If common people can put up with it and touch the heart freely, they will have the painting skills hastily.*

In terms of modern aesthetics, the word “realm” permeated love into the scene and expressed the attitude to the world through the objective object. Natural landscape was not only a kind of independent existence for human beings, but also could be integrated into the consciousness of humans. The landscape had already been the aesthetic objects which could be observed, thought and appreciated. “The realm has been acquainted with” expressed the Tao contained in the landscape which had already been mastered by the painters. When the spirits had reached the painters’ mind, they could paint landscape with great facility. “Vertically and horizontally moderate” had the same meaning with the Confucianism Doctrine. Mastering the law mean impartiality and rightness. The craft of "have the skills hastily" demonstrated the creative realm of “skills coming into the Tao”, which showed that the skills became the instinct of the body. The realm stressed by Guo Xi
exhibited his ideal of mastering the rational world and pursuing the interests of detachment.

The reason why the landscape painting had this ideal pursuit was closely associated with the social function of landscape painting in the Northern Song Dynasty. Zhu Liangzhi once remarked that *Linquan Gaozhi* was the important turning point that made the landscape’s culture turn to school hierarchy from hermit in the history of Chinese landscape painting. The life principle “advance and retreat are the same Tao” was embodied in the book: People at that time were longing for relaxing themselves in the landscape, but they also were not willing to get rid of the social life. Hence, they need a thing to communicate two kinds of expectations. The landscape painting in *Linquan Gaozhi* was just born for this.

Landscape painting could only create a state of landscape, let people have a tour in the imagination. It was still only a spiritual product rather than a practical tool which could solve the problem. The authenticity and value system of this state is directly related to whether people can get the aesthetic experience they want. It contained the respect for the real world, the impact of human society, the guidance of moral life, and ultimately came into the extreme tourist in the state of "harmony of man and nature". The landscape, painting and human ideal were in a perfect fusion and like nature itself.

The Levels of the Realm

In *Linquan Gaozhi*, the author interpreted the different aspects of painting creation and aesthetic appreciation and made the landscape realm have rich levels which were from outside to inside and from shallow to deep.

Natural Landscape

*Linquan Gaozhi* stated that the textures for creation should origin from the true mountains and rivers in the real life and the landscape realm should first be the reflection of the natural mountains and rivers in the scroll painting. In Guo Xi’s opinion, the landscape should be selected and not all worthy of painting. He divided the landscape into four categories: the one can be tripped, the one can be looked on, the one can be traveled and the one can be lived. And what’s more, he put forward the landscape which could be tripped and looked on were not as good as the one that can be traveled and lived. Here he not only regarded the landscape as the reality and added in his personal value judgments. Consequently, the landscape had been divided into different grades by the painters.

Compared with the landscape that can be tripped or looked on, Guo Xi argued that the one that can be traveled and lived would give people more intimate feelings because the interactions between the landscape and humans. In the real nature, we could not experience all the risks of the mountains and rivers. In contrast, we could experience all kinds of these especial feelings in the landscape paintings. So the three ways proposed by Guo Xi was the best tips for creating landscape paintings.

The three ways were "far-away", “far-reaching” and “pingyuan". “Far-away” made the mountains towering and magnificent. “Far-reaching” made the mountains vigorous. “Pingyuan” made the realm quiet and fascinating, which was the most significant theory in Guo Xi’s painting theory. Although it just took a corner of the performance in the specific picture, it had an essential effect.
In the "pingyuan" painting, people seemed to be in a very high point of view. When they looked to the distance, they could see the scene disappeared with the line of sight at the end of the horizon. Only in this way could people not only see a real landscape copy, but also have an immersive experience. And in such circumstances, the state of the landscape had risen to another level.

Guo Xi advocated that in order to understand the landscape realm deeply, one must take the true mountains and rivers as the origins. The creation of landscape realm could not be separated from the understanding and grasp of the real world. That was to say, personal aesthetic could not be completely separated from the real things. Natural landscape was the most realistic part of landscape realm and constituted the main cornerstone.

**Ethics Education**

Guo Xi metaphored landscape about person, personnel and social relationship in *Linquan Gaozhi*, which revealed a strong social ethics:

*The mountains and rivers:* You must firstly paint the big mountain which is called the main peak. Secondly you paint the near mountain, the far-away one, the big one and then the small one, because the main peak is the most important. The order of the painting is just like the relationship between the monarch and his subjects.

*The forests and stones:* You must firstly paint the big pine which is called the old. Secondly you paint the big plants, small plants, Bonnie flowers and then small stones because the big pine is the most important. The order of the painting is just like the relationship between the Gentlemen and villains.

This paragraph conspicuously showed Guo Xi’s appreciation for the orthodox Confucianism." The upper monarch and lower subjects" and the discernment of the "gentlemen and villains" were the two important areas in Confucianism. The big mountain and big pine were on the screen's main position, which just symbolized the political leaders and moral models who were in the authoritative positions in the ancient society. That humanity concept projected to the landscape painting was just like "the stars of the month" trend, which had the arrangement of order and had the primary and secondary distinction.

The reason why Guo Xi made such arrangement was that he regarded such order as a composition principle. What’s more, it was closely related with his Confucianism thought. It showed that the painting theory integrated closely with Confucianism thought in Song Dynasty. In addition, we should realize that Guo Xi endowed characters to the landscape in order to make the landscape painting play a important role in moral rules instead of just telling truth wearily. The moral state said in the above texture was full of virtues which Confucianism always advocated. That was what we called as drawing a straight furrow and awe-inspiring righteousness. Personating the landscape was not deviated from human’s nature and in accordance with Confucian traditional principles. Through this we could draw a conclusion that the book of *Linquan Gaozhi* was intended to making people realize the function of ethics education.

**The Moral Realm**

The comparisons of the natural landscape, mountains and rivers and the moral society were thought in the beginning of the mountains and rivers. According to the features of aesthetic object, it
produced requirement for the creation and the aesthetic subject. These rules for people were the continuing of the level of aesthetic subject. That is to say, it was the landscape’s requirement for people. In addition, the landscape had human’s characteristics and moral order at the same time. To some extent, we could say that the painters must have moral virtues if they wanted to seek peace and quiet in the landscape.

Guo Xi thought human’s moralities were not born with but should result from human’s spontaneity, consciousness and practice. He also advocated that human’s moralities should be cultivated in people’s real life. These two views seemed to be paradoxical, but it was not contradictory indeed. The creation of landscape paintings was a cultivation process of hearts and characters.

*People only know that I paint, but don’t know it is not easy.* Zhuangzi once said the history of painting is taking off the bonds and relax the hearts. I can’t agree it more. People should make their heart free and make the mind open. Only in this way can they do well in painting.

We could see a tendency of comprehensive Confucianism from the above text. In Guo Xi’s mind, if the painter wanted to achieve a sublime and ingenious realm, he must reach the state of loving the nature itself and learning after the artist in the Taoist ideal. The words “open the mind” came from the book of Rites. When you reached that realm, the expressions you wanted to show was belonging to the Confucianism. Guo Xi was not intended to making an explicit choice between the Confucianism ideal and Taoism ideal. He combined different ideologies and used them for his own purpose according to his own ideal. These mixed moral ideals were the conservative and secluded state stated by “Linquan” and the lofty morals stated by “Gaozhi”.

Neo-confucianism in Northern Song Dynasty was a new philosophical system which included the convergence of three religions. It was called new Confucianism, but it also kept the three religions’ origins. They were united in the heavenly principle which was the highest scope in the Neo-confucianism. And the social mores guided by the heavenly principle were also contained in Linquan Gaozhi, which opened a new realm called heaven-human realm. This realm was the highest realm.

**The Heaven-human Realm**

Neo-confucianism in the Northern Song Dynasty was a famous theory and permeated deeply in every aspects of social life. Its highest scope “heavenly principle” paid attention to human’s social survival. But even Neo-confucianists all emphasized heavenly principle, and their interpretations of it were variable. Guo Xi also had a unique interpretation of heavenly principle. Linquan Gaozhi once had mentioned that painting had the particular methods.

*Painting also has the method. Li Cheng’s offspring’s prosperity is because the foot of the mountain which he paints is all large and graceful. But he is not intended to emphasize it because the mountain should be large and graceful as it originally was.*

If the painter believed Guo Xi’s opinions and so painted a large foot of the mountain in order to flourish his offspring. Of course, we regarded it as superstition at present days. But Guo Xi emphasized “Li Cheng is not intended to”, which showed that he was not willing to make others full of superstition. It could be inferred that the reason why Guo Xi appreciated Li Cheng’s landscape painting was not only because Li Cheng’s painting style but also his heart state. There was on old
saying that face came from heart. Li Cheng’s life realm projected to his landscape paintings and according to it we could speculate his life direction.

China’s ancient physiognomy and the theory of Yin and Yang five elements were always combined with theory of harmony of nature and man. And the five elements and facial features had a one-to-one relationship. From the perspective of painting methods, people chose what to paint in the painting was just reflecting his own characteristics, which made the principles of painting, humans and heavenly unity as just one.

In *Linquan Gaozhi*, Guo Xi indicated that people should master the landscape realm extremely. When people lost themselves in the mountains and rivers, they could see the scene from their heart. Therefore, we could say that the truth of mountain was also the same with the truth of people. Human’s principle and mountain’s principle were united as heavenly principle. Guo Xi said that if you saw one mountain, then this one mountain was just standing for hundreds of mountains. That was to say, the circumstance of seeing one mountain was just like seeing hundreds of mountains. Here what Guo Xi wanted to express was that the principle of all kinds of mountain was just the same. It could be concluded by us that human’s realm and landscape’s realm were in a harmony relationship through the function of heavenly principle in the aesthetics realm in the landscape paintings. And due to this condition, people could step into the highest realm which was called heaven-human realm. In this realm, everything in the world could be in a integrate harmony in the same level.

If people wanted to abandon the secular thoughts and resort to the landscape, they must unify their hearts with heavenly principle. And therefore what they could see was not just a painting but an approach to landscape realm. The heaven-human realm showed in *Linquan Gaozhi* was not only belonging to Neo-Confucianism but also belonging to the philosophy of the mind. In such circumstance, people’s aesthetic emotion was of great significance without doubt. No matter the real mountains and rivers, landscape in the paintings, the painters or the appreciators, they all became the harmony state in such heaven-human realm. That was to say, in such realm, the heaven and earth, human relations and the country were all highly consistent. In Guo Xi’s opinion, people would feel full of interests and realize their life value in this realm.

**Conclusion**

To sum up, this article explored the aesthetic value mainly from the perspective of the interpretation of the realm in Linyuan Gaozhi. But we could say that we also studied the Neo-Confucianism in the Northern Song Dynasty from another more microscopic point of view. It permeated in all aspects of social life, including aesthetic art. The thought of the harmony of man the nature made the human, natural landscape and landscape painting unity into one system, together constituting a smooth landscape realm.

Guo Xi made a close relationship between the landscape and the Neo-Confucianism. It was innovative that he absorbed the heavenly principle and human’s subtle emotions into the landscape paintings. So the landscape realm in *Linquan Gaozhi* was in a high ideological state and full of secular principles. There was no doubt that *Linquan Gaozhi* opened a new aesthetic culture in landscape paintings and had an immense influence on the painting history.
References


