

## Book Reviews

***The Efficacious Landscape: On the Authorities of Painting at the Northern Song Court.*** By Foong Ping. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015. Pp. xxi + 295. \$79.95/£59.95.

Foong Ping's rewarding and ambitious *Efficacious Landscape* takes as its main concern the emergence of ink landscape painting in late eleventh-century China as a major vehicle for the projection both of imperial agendas and the social values of scholar officials. That dual focus is reflected in the division of the book into two parts, titled "Ruling Images" and "Intimate Scenes," respectively centred in the Northern Song imperial city and among the social networks of retired and exiled officials in Luoyang, Jiangnan, and elsewhere. Dr. Foong's study at the same time resists any implied class-based dichotomization of cultural values and taste, or of related art historical narratives.

The primary link between those courtly and relatively private arenas emerges in the extended career of the landscape painter Guo Xi 郭熙. The multifaceted account offered of Guo's life, projects, writings, patrons, and reception is distributed throughout the five chapters—for example, the provocative and fundamental issue "Who was Guo Xi?" doesn't emerge until two-thirds of the way through the book. (A summary chronology of what can be reconstructed of Guo's career and court commissions, topics referenced in scattered passages throughout the book, would be welcome.) Thus Guo Xi, though a continuing presence and point of reference does not receive a full or standard monographic treatment. Two of Guo Xi's surviving works, the canonical *Early Spring* 早春圖 and especially the short handscroll *Old Trees and Level Distance* 樹色平遠圖 in the Metropolitan Museum are extensively discussed and analysed, but other significant attributions are passed over, and Guo's famous landscape treatise, *Linquan gaozhi* 林泉高致 (Great Message of Forests and Streams), while quoted extensively, is not the subject of a comprehensive discussion. Rather, Guo appears as refracted through the spaces in which he worked, the patrons who sponsored and directed his court projects, and the viewers who requested paintings from him and composed poetic responses to their experiences of his paintings. The effect of this approach is not simply to present Guo Xi as the product of his environment but someone whose significance is embedded in the political, personal, and discursive fields in which he and his painting were deployed. The result in some ways parallels the process of viewing Guo's complex paintings, requiring a fair amount of work on the part of the viewer/reader, but yielding a correspondingly rich and nuanced understanding.

Dr. Foong's account begins, somewhat unexpectedly but very productively, not with the spaces of pictorial or physical landscapes but with the architectural and administrative spaces of the Northern Song Imperial City. In this context power hierarchies were measured by architectural contiguity and access to the Inner Court halls of the emperors and their families and attendants. A primary site of interface between the Inner and Outer (largely administrative) Court was the Hanlin Institute 翰林學士院, occupied by accomplished scholarly advisors to the emperor and awarded the distinctive favour of imperially commissioned screen painting decorations. Guo Xi makes an early appearance as the author of screen painted landscape scenes for the Hanlin Jade Hall 玉堂, in an account that draws upon the studies of Umehara Kaoru 梅原郁 and Ogawa Hiromitsu 小川裕充. Guo's commission was an insertion into an earlier Song history of imperially commissioned paintings for the Jade Hall, extending back to the founding years of the dynasty, that accomplished various cultural and political purposes, ranging from symbolizing state unification of formerly independent regions to cultivating favourable attitudes among scholar officials toward aristocratic initiatives. The latter is a reminder that the Inner and Outer Courts were also sites of differential class identities, group interests, and values.

Guo Xi's entry into court service and engagement in court pictorial projects coincided with the reign of Emperor Shenzong 神宗 (r. 1067–1085) and his promotion of the reformist New Policies 新政 of Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086). The favour shown Guo Xi by Shenzong, who awarded him a preferential appointment in the Imperial Calligraphy Academy 翰林御書院 and made him his favourite instrument of pictorial and ideological statement, along with the sheer number and prominence of court commissions Guo received to decorate major offices, halls, and temples in and around the Imperial city, meant that Guo Xi became the de facto artistic figurehead (or spokesperson, to reference the linguistic analogies of visual rhetoric and argument often employed by Dr. Foong) of the Shenzong reform policies, if only by association. Many of the buildings Guo decorated instantiated the administrative reorganizations that accompanied the New Policies, and others such as the expanded Temple of Spectacular Numina 景靈宮 housed altered ritual protocols of the sort that elicited remonstrance and dissent.

Thus the horizon of factional politics that shadowed the Shenzong era and subsequent regency (1085–1093) of Empress Gao 高皇后 is appropriately very present throughout this study. While literary persecutions and policy disagreements figure most prominently in the abundant scholarly literature on the topic, Dr. Foong's second chapter focuses closely on the intricacies of ritual reform and resulting controversies. Although the importance of distinctions between such matters as joint versus separate sacrifices to Heaven and Earth may be elusive to many contemporary readers, the attentive discussion here is a salutary reminder of the central significance of ritual

to the imperial cult and to aristocratic culture more generally in terms of genealogical concerns, not only during the Song but at other times as with the bloody Great Rites Controversy 大禮議 of the middle Ming era. Ritual reforms also had artistic implications. Dr. Foong observes that the ritual change proposed by Wang Anshi to designate Xizu 僖祖, an ancestor of the Song dynasty founder Taizu 太祖, as a progenitor ancestor in the Ancestral Shrine 太廟 and to award Xizu the status of a supporting deity in spring sacrifices to the Life Giving God at the southern suburban altar had both indirect and direct relevance to landscape painting. More generally, earth forms were understood as animated by the transformative powers of the Life Giving God 感生帝, and specifically, Dr. Foong understands Guo Xi's canonical *Early Spring* of 1072 as directly connected to Wang Anshi's ritual reform proposals of the same year. Along with its analogical embodiment of political and social hierarchies as described in the *Great Message of Forests and Streams*, *Early Spring* served as a kind of announcement of the inauguration of the New Policies and a new political order.

This is a signal and illuminating proposal, that shapes our understanding of one of the most important surviving works from the great era of monumental landscape painting. It is based on the same kind of close reading of primary and secondary sources, and synthetic overview of multiple dimensions of early Song culture—political, ritual, social, literary, and artistic—that informs this study at large.

Ritual practices are also directly referenced and illustrated in Li Gonglin's 李公麟 (1049–1106) *Illustrated Classic of Filial Piety* 孝經圖 handscroll, the other major artistic focus of the second chapter of *Efficacious Landscape*. Ostensibly illustrating the ancient ritual practices referenced in the accompanying *Filial Piety Classic* text, Li's painting may include references to contemporary concerns and controversies, as suggested by Richard Barnhart and other scholars. Two scenes in particular evoke the Northern Song ritual landscape: the illustration of chapter nine of the *Filial Piety Classic* is a depiction of the Round Mound 圓丘, Southern Suburban Altar 南郊壇 and a sacrifice to Heaven alone, rather than joint sacrifices; and the illustration to chapter sixteen depicts sacrifices to the ancestral spirit tablets in the Ancestral Hall 太廟, conducted jointly by an Emperor and Empress, along with ritual musicians and officiants.

Since Li Gonglin's project was a product of the early aftermath of Shenzong's death in 1085 and the return of anti-reform adherents to power under the regency of Empress Gao in the Yuanyou 元祐 era (1086–1094), and given Li's status as a highly educated official and his relationships with leading cultural figures of the anti-reform factions such as Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), a pointed and deliberate political message might be expected in his pictorial statement. Indeed, Dr. Foong characterizes Li's painting in explicit terms of a visual argument or speech act, having the same

force and potential efficacy as remonstrating or critical memorials. She observes one particular point of commonality between painting and statement, in a capacity for revision or amendment that is rarely associated with ink paintings on silk. The scene of observance at the Ancestral Shrine is marked by a modest disruption of its bilateral symmetry of spirit tablets in the form of a smaller, eighth tablet off line to the viewer's left. Dr. Foong reads this as a possible amendment to the original design, meant to acknowledge the addition of an eighth tablet as part of the ritual reforms proposed by Wang Anshi and realized by Shenzong, and to avoid or modulate the critical implications of the original, classical arrangement of seven tablets. If so, the *Illustrated Classic of Filial Piety* became a more equivocal, restrained statement about current ritual controversies, open to claims by advocates of either camp.

Yet another artistic intervention in the field of ritual reform involved Guo Xi's composition of a large screen painting for the Temple of Spectacular Numina. As documented by Patricia Ebrey, the Temple was renovated and expanded under Shenzong in 1080 to accommodate eleven ancestral halls and accompanying sculptural and painted portraits as objects of worship, in direct competition with the more abstract spirit tablets inscribed with ancestral names as objects of sacrificial veneration in the Ancestral Temple. Guo's screen, as described in his *Notes on Painting* 畫記 account of projects for the imperial court, depicted eleven large boulders as metaphorical landscape counterparts to the imperial ancestors venerated in the Temple, with equal weight given to male and female ancestral lineages, and accompanied by numerous fragmentary stones indicating the proliferating prosperity of the imperial line.

The case of Li Gonglin may have some bearing on the question of whether Guo Xi was a determined or deliberate advocate of the New Policies regime. His paintings in official contexts and spaces certainly functioned in that way, as visually powerful ornaments of projects of governmental reorganization and ritual reform. Guo also had good reason to be grateful to Shenzong's regime, for the favours and appreciation showed him and for the success of his son Guo Si 郭思 in the examinations and bureaucracy. The values manifested in the *Great Message* landscape treatise, however much impacted by his son's editing, are fully supportive of imperial aristocratic ideologies of hierarchy and command. However, as the case of Li Gonglin indicates, moderate, equivocal, or ambiguous positions may have been strategically preferable within the contentious political atmosphere of the late Northern Song court. As the later chapters of *Efficacious Landscape* demonstrate, even Guo Xi's monumental and official paintings were admired and appreciated by anti-reform faction leaders such as Su Shi, while his intimate landscapes were even more congenial to sympathetic interpretations by scholar-officials and literary men out of power.

The concluding chapter of *Efficacious Landscape's* Part I returns to more familiar

art historical ground in a discussion of the Li-Guo 李郭 (Li Cheng 李成-Guo Xi) lineage of painting and the values projected on or into it by collectors and critics centred at the imperial court. The Li-Guo School 李郭畫派 is a well-established art historical formation, discussed in numerous studies, books, and exhibitions by scholars such as Richard Barnhart and Suzuki Kei 鈴木敬. Its impact has been recognized as extending into Yuan and Ming painting and even into Korea—that diplomatic dissemination of Guo Xi's artistic achievement adds a fascinating international dimension to this study. Dr. Foong treats the Li-Guo style very much as a construct, but one with contemporary, Northern Song sources and not just a retrospective formation. She traces appearances of the binomial locution in early Song references to literary paragons and military heroes from earlier times, and more specifically and relevantly in the writings of Wen Yanbo 文彥博 (1006–1097) a Luoyang-based high official and collector and patron of Guo Xi's work.

Guo Xi's linkage to Li Cheng implied a massive elevation of Guo's stature, based on a precedent cultural project involving Li Cheng. Li was widely recognized by Northern Song art writers as a founding patriarch of the post-Tang florescence of landscape painting, but his particular elevation to the status of paragon of Song court taste and values involved a long-term effort of collecting, connoisseurial, and critical culture-work, traced lucidly by Dr. Foong. Of particular interest is the role played by Li Cheng's descendants, both as collectors by inheritance of Li's popular but rare paintings and as expert authenticators, recruited to evaluate the growing court collection of his work. Wu Chong 吳充 (1021–1080), the husband of one of Li Cheng's female descendants, served as an important intermediary between the Li Cheng legacy and Guo Xi, using his high official position to recommend Guo Xi for court service. The author observes the important role played by female members of the imperial court, especially the Dowager Empresses Liu 劉 and Cao 曹, in bringing Li Cheng to a leading position within the court collections, and the seeming paradox of Li's popularity in Northern Song art markets and the rarity of his authentic work claimed by Mi Fu 米芾 (1051–1107). The broader agenda in the elevation of Li Cheng's stature at court, beyond the appeal of his painting, seems to have involved court claims of patronage of persons of elevated character, and thereby some of the values of scholar-official taste, as corroborated by the outspoken admiration of Li Cheng by such as Mi Fu and Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105). The Li-Guo formation thus becomes yet another site of interface between inner court/aristocratic and scholar-official realms, and a bridge to the consideration of intimate and poetic landscapes in the second part of the book.

*Efficacious Landscape* Part II focuses on short handscroll paintings, first those by Guo Xi and then examples painted by aristocratic amateurs of the Northern Song court. The materiality and size of the format matter in this context, since the brevity

of the scrolls encouraged compositional abbreviation and what might be characterized as the glimpse rather than the panorama. Some examples were physically small enough to be carried around in the sleeve of a robe, and that bodily intimacy might have facilitated a projected affective connection to the scenes and figures represented pictorially within the scroll. Thus the author's rendering of the *xiao jing* 小景 genre as "intimate landscapes" rather than "small" or "minor" scenes and emphasis on its social dimensions seems especially appropriate.

Chapter 4 begins with an extended analysis of the short *Old Trees, Level Distance* handscroll in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, also the subject of an excellent journal article by the author. Evidence of seals, colophons, stylistic and technical comparisons with *Early Spring* as the standard, and poetic accounts of related subjects are marshalled to make a strong primary case for *Old Trees, Level Distance* as an authentic work by Guo Xi. The Metropolitan scroll is further identified with a work recorded under the title *Autumn Mountains, Level Distance* 秋山平遠, which carried a colophon by Wen Yanbo and elicited poetic responses from Su Shi and Huang Tingjian that indicate Wen as the recipient of the painting, identify Guo Xi as the painter and go on to add poetic requests for additional paintings from Guo's hand. One or more paintings of similar subjects by Guo Xi elicited further poem cycles by Su Shi and/or his brother Su Che 蘇轍 (1039–1112) from the same period of the mid-1080s, augmented by later poetic responses in the mid-1090s from younger associates in their circles. Finally, the author identifies the two figures making their way in the company of servants to a pavilion framed by trees and rocks in *Old Trees, Level Distance* as none other than images of Wen Yanbo and the painter Guo Xi.

This brief summary does not do justice to the elegance and subtlety of the author's deployment of poetic, documentary, and visual evidence to reconstruct the personal, social, and historical circumstances of these linked poetic and pictorial creations. Dr. Foong adds interpretive readings of the Metropolitan Museum scroll and associated poems that identify their further implications: variously wistful ruminations on quiet retirement, melancholy reflections on passing time and separation, and the bitterness of politically motivated exile. She illuminates Guo Xi's social identity and status, of the sort that would make him a fitting pictorial companion for an eminent scholar-official such as Wen Yanbo, through an examination of genealogical data and reconstruction of Guo's familial ties to officials. The author identifies the relatively informal sociality and cultural recreations of retired scholar-officials in Luoyang as a congenial context for the acceptance of a talented and literate painter, and father of a *jinshi* 進士 examination graduate, as a peer. Repeated patterns of paired figures, birds, and trees are read as figures of social companionability.

One need not follow in full agreement every implication of this extended chain of evidence, argument, and conclusion to appreciate the value and interest of the

overall structure. The author is both ambitious in her proposals and judicious in her claims for them, aware that some motifs and configurations such as the paired traveller figures in *Old Trees, Level Distance* could accommodate multiple identifications, and that some of her readings may remain in the realm of plausibly possible scenarios. More important, even if the Metropolitan handscroll were judged to be only a closely related version of a Guo Xi template rather than an autograph work, the network of poetic, political, social, and affective relationships such images illustrated and engendered remains largely intact and operative.

The final chapter of *Efficacious Landscape* turns to the well-travelled territory of poetic painting in the early Song, but with a particular emphasis on the role of intimate landscapes in shaping the tone and techniques of that mode. Dr. Foong emphasizes especially the pictorial techniques of contraction and economy that might evoke poetic response, citing passages from the *Xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫譜 imperial painting catalogue of 1120 and from Guo Xi's *Great Message* treatise to identify a late Northern Song era understanding of reduced imagistic or scenic content and abbreviated contrasts of distance and solidity as devices evocative of poetic reference and intimacy. Further discussions of poetic/pictorial thematics of farewell scenes and the politically tinged escapist realms of Wang Shen's 王詵 *Misty Rivers and Layered Peaks* 煙江疊嶂圖 reference a broad and multigenerational spectrum of scholarly writers on this fundamental problematic, including Lin Boting 林柏亭, Yonezawa Yoshiho 米澤嘉圃, Robert Maeda, Munakata Kiyohiko 宗像清彦, James Cahill, Robert Harrist, Alfreda Murck, and Richard Barnhart among many others. This range of citation is a reminder how central the concerns of eleventh-century painting history were and remain to the field of Chinese art history at large.

Even placed within such a remarkable company of scholars, *The Efficacious Landscape* stands as a highly accomplished, even formidable study. Most of all, in an arena of canonical artists, monuments and texts that might encourage a merely dutiful scholarly acumen, this book pursues and accomplishes a clear purpose—we might even say it is an efficacious project. It illuminates the central role of imperial architectural, administrative, and ritual reform agendas in defining the significance of late eleventh-century ink landscape painting. Further, it presents Guo Xi in a multifaceted light, as an exemplary figure of the late Northern Song world, both a product of and a participating shaper of the official court and private or marginal social fields in which he and his work operated.

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