

A Peek at Guo Xi’s “The Way of the Body” in the Northern Song Dynasty--Taking “Linquan Gaozhi” as an Example

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Abstract: Landscape painting is deeply influenced by traditional Chinese Taoism, and traditional culture gives it an inner spirit. The ancient saying: “Looking at a mountain is a mountain, looking at a mountain is not a mountain, looking at a mountain is still a mountain” reflects the ancient people’s deep thoughts about nature. Reveal the connection between the traditional body Tao and the aesthetic connotation of landscape painting, express the “Tao” of nature and the “Tao” of the painter’s creation through landscape painting, and summarise the relationship between the “body Tao” and landscape painting with physical experience. The relationship between “body Tao” and landscape painting is summarised by physical experience. Taking Guo Xi’s landscape paintings of the Northern Song Dynasty as an example, we analyse in depth the traditional Taoist theory of “the Way of the Body”, whose creative techniques and theories are recorded in “Linquan Gaozhi”, which originated from real landscape experiences and had a profound impact on ancient Chinese landscape paintings. By studying the idea of “Body Tao”, we can better understand and pass on the excellent traditional Chinese culture.

Keywords: Guo Xi; Taoism; Body Tao; Linquan Gaozhi; Landscape Painting

1.1 The Origin and Development of “Body and Way

Since its birth, landscape painting has been profoundly influenced by traditional Chinese Taoism, and traditional culture has given it an inner spirit. Mr Chen Chuanxi pointed out the potential influence of Laozhuang on the development of Chinese art, especially in the field of landscape painting. Since the Wei and Jin dynasties, Zong Bing’s “Preface to Painting Landscapes” embodies the philosophical guidance of Taoist thought on landscape painting, and “landscape flatters the Tao with its form” has become a way of embodied Taoism. Chinese-style Taoist thought has profoundly influenced the development of landscape painting, emphasising the Tao through natural landscapes, manifesting itself in “calmness”, “emptiness and quietness”, and “unity of heaven and man”. Guo Xi’s view of the “Body of Tao” inherited ancient Chinese philosophical thought, especially Taoism, which emphasises the harmony between man and nature. He advocated that painters should understand and depict nature by observing and experiencing it, which is closely related to the Taoist idea of following nature. Among the spiritual connotations of traditional Chinese culture, the concept of emphasising cultivation of the body and pro-nature is highly esteemed, embodying the idea of escapism in Zhuangzi’s thought. The Tao of Body emphasises the freedom of the mind and daily observation, reflecting Zhuangzi’s idea of seeking spiritual liberation and transcendence in life. Through the process of knowing one’s own “Tao”, the highest achievement of Chinese painting art is the “writing of meaning”, which embodies the spirit of Taoism.

1.2 The “Body of Taoism” at the heart of Linquan Gaozhi (High Spirits in the Forest)

Guo Xi’s paintings were deeply inspired by Taoist thought, and as a landscape painter and theorist, he was known for his independent personality and innovative spirit. Guo Xi’s Gaozhi Linquan (Glorious Remarks on Forest Springs) is a detailed record of Guo Xi’s ideas on painting, many of which are found to be compatible with the ideas of Laozhuang. In his landscape paintings, he directly incorporated the Taoist ideas of “body” and “way” into his works, forming an art form that “embodies the Tao through art”.

The influence of Zhuang Studies on Guo Xi’s thought mainly stems from the concepts of “materialisation” and “the same thing” in Lao Zhuang’s thought, which explores the relationship between human beings and the Tao, and regards the Tao as a way of life and a way of life. “The relationship between human beings and the Tao is explored, and the Tao is regarded as the highest state to be pursued. In Linquan Gaozhi, Guo Xi’s inner activities before the creation of his paintings can be perceived through keywords such as “full of travelling and living

off the land”, “the heart of Linquan”, and “the body is the mountains and rivers and takes them”. These keywords reflect his deep understanding of nature and the profound influence of Taoist thought on the connotation of his paintings.

The phrase “full of travelling and living off the land” stresses the importance of experiencing nature through actual experience and feeling its “true nature”; “the heart of the forest and the spring” is a unique understanding of the beauty of nature; “the body is the mountains and the rivers and takes them”. The “heart of the forest and spring” is a unique understanding of the beauty of nature; “the body is the mountains and rivers and take them” highlights the key role of physical experience in artistic creation. These ideas reflect the centrality of “the body of the Tao” in Guo Xi’s creative work, which is derived from Taoist philosophy and emphasises the harmonious coexistence of man and nature.

In Guo Xi’s *Linquan Gaozhi*, Guo Xi demonstrates his unique understanding of the beauty of nature through his practice of landscape painting. He emphasises that artists should deeply comprehend the way of nature through observation, experience and contemplation, and incorporate it into their artistic creations. This reflects Guo Xi’s view of a deep understanding of artistic creation, emphasising the importance of perception and experience in art.

The concept of “materialisation” in “full travel and full view” makes the natural landscape “transform” into a mood in the painter’s mind, perfectly reflecting the artistic realm of subject-object unity. Through his study of landscape painting techniques and mood, Guo Xi demonstrated a deep understanding and unique insight into the way of nature. Guo Xi’s “Body Tao” is the core of his artistic creation and theoretical system, emphasising the harmonious coexistence of man and nature, as well as the artist’s perception and experience of the way of nature during the creative process.

1.3 The aesthetics of “Body of the Way” in “The Heart of the Forest”

Guo Xi’s concept of “Body Tao” is closely related to other artistic concepts in ancient Chinese art theory. This concept is deeply influenced by Taoist thought, which emphasises conformity to nature, doing nothing, and achieving harmony between man and nature. In Taoist culture, the “Tao” emphasises the enhancement of mental clarity and the achievement of transcendent values beyond materialism and utilitarianism, that is, the so-called state of “emptiness” and “nothingness”, which is achieved through the practice of “emptiness and quietness”. The so-called state of “emptiness” and “nothingness” needs to be realised through the mind of “emptiness and quietness”. Zhuang Zi’s “Void Silence” and “Heart Lodge” express the pursuit of a state of tranquility and nothingness to transcend oneself and perceive nature.

The pictorial consciousness of Chinese landscape painting is based on philosophical concepts, especially the pursuit of the “purging of the metaphysical view” and “clarifying the mind and flavouring the image” style of the space of the mood. In this process, Guo Xi emphasised a “quiet and empty” mind as the basic requirement for realising the Tao. This clean and quiet space is used to cleanse the mind and purify the heart, reflecting the philosophical idea that Lao Zhuang’s “quietness” and Zong Bing’s “clarity of mind and flavour of image” are consistent with each other.

Zong Bing refers to the “clarity of mind” as the need to maintain an inner state of purity and tranquillity in the pursuit of the Tao, similar to Lao Zhuang’s view of “virtual tranquillity”. He stresses the importance of getting rid of personal gains and losses and egoism, and realising inner clarity and transparency, so as to provide clear internal support for artistic creation. This “clarity of mind” provides the viewer with the possibility of experiencing nature and landscape in a tranquil state of mind.

In *Linquan Gaozhi - Mountain and Water Discipline*, Guo Xi emphasises the importance of the “heart of Linquan” in artistic creation and aesthetic illumination through the expression of his aesthetic pursuits. He believed that painters should have the cultivation of quiet contemplation and book-reading in their creations, and that they should treat landscapes with the “heart of the forest and the spring”, removing arrogant and disdainful eyes and exploring the reasoning of nature. Such a state of mind has a long-term inspirational significance for the future development of art.

Overall, Guo Xi’s idea of the “Body of the Way” is a fusion of Taoist and Confucian concepts, emphasising the key role of a “tranquil” mind in artistic creation and aesthetic illumination. He experienced nature with a clear state of mind, and realised the pursuit of the ideas of “the object and the self as one” and “the unity of heaven and man” through the “heart of the forest and the spring”.

Conclusion

In his book *Linquan Gaozhi*, Guo Xi clearly stated that the purpose of painting is not only to pursue formal beauty, but more importantly to convey a moral sentiment and philosophy of life. Therefore, his paintings often have profound connotations and rich symbolism. Guo Xi's "Body of Tao" was mainly influenced by Taoism. He emphasised inner enlightenment and insight into the world, and advocated meditation to achieve spiritual liberation. In his paintings, Guo Xi borrowed some concepts from Zen Buddhism, such as focusing on the expression of mood and emphasising the beauty of ethereality. This makes his landscape paintings have a transcendent mood, giving people a sense of tranquility and distance. Guo Xi's "Body Tao" has a unique position in ancient Chinese art theory, which inherits the ideological traditions of Taoism, Confucianism, and Zen Buddhism, but also forms his own unique artistic style on this basis. This diversity of artistic concepts has made Guo Xi's landscape paintings a monument in the history of Chinese painting, and has had a profound impact on future generations.

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