Guo Xi’s Intimate Landscapes and the Case of Old Trees, Level Distance

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In The Metropolitan Museum of Art is an enigmatic painting named Old Trees, Level Distance attributed to Guo Xi 郭熙 (b. after 1000, d. ca. 1090), who is unanimously considered to be one of the greatest painters in the history of China (Figure 1). The present article attempts to elucidate the historical context of this painting with textual documentation, which consists of a group of poems written by Guo’s contemporaries about his intimate landscape handscrolls. The poets found, as do we, that these small handscrolls differed from the large-format works that Guo, in his role as a court painter, designed to fit into an architectural, and therefore public, context. Of such monumental ink landscapes by Guo, only the spectacular Early Spring in the collection of the National Palace Museum of Taiwan survives today (Figure 2).

As the literature suggests, the intimate landscapes Guo Xi painted were considered new and original in his own time. In describing this facet of Guo’s production, and in identifying Old Trees, Level Distance as a painting in kind, we will begin by demonstrating the stylistic affinities between Old Trees, Level Distance and Early Spring, in order to establish the former as a work by Guo. In this connection, the second section will trace the provenance of Old Trees, Level Distance, based on an analysis of an important seal and some of its colophons. In order to characterize Guo’s intimate landscapes and to surmise a date for these paintings, the third, fourth, and fifth sections will then present the evidence from the written record of the eleventh century, namely, poems by Guo’s contemporaries. With the deeper understanding of the historical position and the private function of Guo’s intimate landscapes provided by these poems, a new interpretation of the subject matter of Old Trees, Level Distance becomes possible. This interpretation will be considered in the concluding sections.

OLD TREES, LEVEL DISTANCE AND EARLY SPRING:
Stylistic Affinities

Old Trees, Level Distance is a short handscroll executed in ink on silk and now considerably darkened with age. Two fishing boats appear in the still, low-tide waters of a chilly, autumnal river at the beginning of the painting, at right. Not far from the boats, along the river-
Figure 2. Guo Xi, *Early Spring*. Signed and dated 1072. Hanging scroll, ink and light color on silk, 158.3 x 108.1 cm. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China (photo: courtesy Taipei National Palace Museum)
bank, are two half-withered, fernlike trees with hanging vines (Figure 4). Almost disappearing into the light mist is a pair of tiny, forlorn birds flying across the river (Figure 5). Looking across a level plain delineated with layers of carefully gradated light ink wash, the viewer encounters a group of low-lying mountains beyond the river’s far shore (Figure 6). Traveling toward these mountains are two woodcutters with their pack donkey, themselves fading away into the misty mountains as they cross the bridge toward home (Figure 5).

The gray lowlands are accented here and there with wet, slightly darker dabs of ink, representing scrubby brushwood on the riverbank and scattered trees along the hilly terrain (Figure 6). If it were not for these indications of foliage, it would be hard to tell the difference between land and water, mountain and mist, solid and ephemeral. We read these amorphous shapes both as an atmospheric depiction of a misty autumn evening landscape and as a suggestion of spatial recession in a level distance view.

A distinct change occurs halfway along the hand-scroll, where the viewer encounters large, old, withered trees (Figure 7a). As with the first pair, the trunks curve toward each other as if in conversation, but, in contrast to their wan relatives by the riverbank at the beginning

Figure 3. Detail of Figure 1, Old Trees, Level Distance, Xuanhe zhongbi seal

Figure 4. Detail of Figure 1, Old Trees, Level Distance, fishermen and small trees
of the scroll, these are presented forcefully. They are outlined in jet-black ink, as is the bulbous rock in front (Figure 9a). A main motif, the two figures located at the end of the scroll, is also sharply rendered (Figure 8). The two old men walk slowly toward the rustic pavilion overlooking the river. Five servant boys attend them at their picnic: one has gone ahead to prepare the pavilion, two accompany their masters, and two more help carry boxes. One box is probably a multitudinous food carrier, and the other contains a qin (lute) for musical entertainment. These boldly delineated motifs (Figure 1, left) contrast with the delicate, silvery forms found at the beginning of the painting (Figure 1, right).

After having so quickly reached the end of the scroll, the viewer's eyes are drawn back along the plane of the painting, a diagonal initiated at the left by the bridge to the pavilion, continuing with the woodcutters’ path, and ending with the low-lying mountains (Figure 1). An adjacent diagonal, forming another side of the trapezoidal composition, is provided by the path sandwiched between the large pair of trees and the bulbous rock. The fishermen, the woodcutters, and the smaller pair of trees are located along the remaining two sides.

This method of organization not only gives the composition a sense of containment, but also enhances the distance between objects in the long but narrow handscroll format.

The contrast of light and dark ink in the main motifs in the earlier and later sections of the scroll alters the viewer's relative sense of distance from them, giving an impression of receding distance across the lowlands. By placing these motifs along diagonals, the artist leads the viewer's eyes into the landscape without actually presenting a painting organized by a unified ground plane. This treatment is consistent with our understanding of how an artist of this period might approach the problem of space and spatial recession.²

These features of Guo Xi's style in *Old Trees, Level Distance* are also found in *Early Spring*, a hanging scroll that is ascribed with certainty to his hand, reliably signed, sealed, and dated by the artist to 1072 (Figure 2). At first glance, the two paintings seem to be contrasting works, differing in format and subject matter: the former is a handscroll depicting the autumn season, the latter a hanging scroll of early spring. Upon closer inspection, they have much in common in terms
of composition and in employment of ink and line.

Although the massive central mountain formation in Early Spring almost moves like a living organism, as if along a random path, the underlying composition is lucidly planned. As in Old Trees, Level Distance, the main motifs are plotted along a trapezoidal framework. The foot of the mountain, beginning at the lower left corner of the hanging scroll, demarcates one side of the frame. Parallel to this is a wide band of glowing mist that reaches from the center of the scroll to the upper right, implying another edge. Leading our eyes in the opposite direction are similar structural devices, such as the tunnel-like recession of land in the level distance at the left edge of the scroll, the line of leafy shrubbery dotting the mountain ridge near its uppermost peak, or the multtiered waterfall, which cascades along the same axis. The alignment of the major features—the mountain ridges, the mist, the level distance, the waterfall—along this framework leads the viewer’s eyes in a zigzag, ascending path up the scroll. As in Old Trees, Level Distance, this composition creates the perception of a progressively remote landscape, without the need to ground the forms along any single baseline.

The impression of far distance in Early Spring is also enhanced by juxtaposing light and dark ink. Overall, the bottom half of the mountain is heavily inked in a roughly hewn manner. In contrast, the less distinct top half is painted with smaller, layered, rubbed brush strokes, done with relatively lighter ink. Following the changes in tonality along the winding spine of the mountain, the viewer also feels that this mass recedes backward, in the same way that an object that is farther away is less visible to the eye.

This careful deployment of ink is manifest in both paintings at a local level as well. For example, clearly differentiated tonalities of ink distinguish tree from shrub, front from back. The large deciduous trees in Old Trees, Level Distance are depicted with a bold, sure brush and thick, black ink (Figure 7a). The leafy shrubs growing underneath them are done with dark, watery, though solid strokes, creating a soft-edged foil to hoary trunks and spiky branches. Farther in the background are two other trees in lighter gray ink, again one soft and the other spiny. Such layered tree vignettes appear in a number of places in Early Spring, for instance in the center of the scroll (Figure 7b). Judiciously applied
wash, from the layers of which discrete forms and textures emerge, is evident in both paintings.

With apparent ease, the artist also utilizes tightly controlled ink gradations to build up a sense of plasticity in the rock formations of both paintings. Layers of restless line and fluid wash fuse to form bulging rocks. On top of the layered wash, a few selectively placed dabs of ink call attention to the pitted texture of the rock in *Old Trees, Level Distance* (Figure 9a), a technique applied with a slightly dryer brush in *Early Spring* (Figure 9b). Here and there, inky outlines are added to suggest rugged edges. In *Old Trees, Level Distance*, such dark highlights give substantial definition to the cloudlike rock. At the same time, the artist literally undercuts this solidity by allowing the base of the rock to fade away into the silk. The base of the rock in *Early Spring* also disappears (into water), and from afar it almost seems to float. A distinctive feature of Guo Xi’s landscapes is this delight in the contradiction presented by baseless mountains and weightless rock.

Guo Xi employs line masterfully. Here, we might point out three uses common to *Old Trees, Level Distance* and *Early Spring*. The first has already been mentioned—the way in which line is used to transform an area of layered wash into substantial rock. In addition, this line sometimes defines a place behind which figures can appear. In *Old Trees, Level Distance*, the rock, edged with a fluctuating, charcoal-black line, acts as a window through which we glimpse two servant boys with their loads approaching the pavilion (Figure 10a). This fea-

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Figure 7a. Detail of Figure 1, *Old Trees, Level Distance*, large trees
A second use of line occurs in the rendering of figures. While the relative sizes of the figures in the two works differ, the depiction is quite similar, in demeanor and arrangement. For instance, the hunched figures in both paintings are comparable: in *Old Trees, Level Distance*, he is curved with age (Figure 11a); in *Early Spring*, she is bent under her load (Figure 11c). Both seem to have the heel of the forward foot off the ground, as if stepping out toe first. Their respective companions turn their heads, as if to suggest they are courteously waiting for them (Figures 11b and 11d).

Travelers depicted in three-quarter view from the back have V-shaped feet (Figures 11f, 11h, and 11i) and carry packs that are practically indistinguishable from their bodies since they are meant to be moving away from the audience into the distance. Guo Xi depicts these human figures with the same quivering, rounded line as that found on the edges of his rocks. He favors outlines broken into plump dashes and dots, delineating both clothing and body, as in the uneven sleeves of the scholars in *Old Trees, Level Distance* (Figures 11a and 11b) and in the jagged arms of the fishermen in *Early Spring* (Figure 11e).

A final use of line to be noted seems to be a habit born of a nimble brush. In *Early Spring*, we find a number of instances where a single stroke depicts multiple...
parts of the tree. In one example, the line begins as the hollow in a tree branch, is transformed into an edge, and ends as a flicking twig (Figure 12b). The fernlike stump in Old Trees, Level Distance is an abbreviated manifestation of this mannerism (Figure 12a). Also in a kind of shorthand is the way the taller tree next to the stump is outlined. The same witty technique is used in Early Spring to describe the bumpy edge of a gnarled tree trunk (Figure 12c). In Early Spring, the brushwork is still relatively naturalistic; in Old Trees, Level Distance, it has been distilled into a whimsically curling outline, executed with speed that might come from years of repetition and practice of the same brush idiom.

This comparison of composition, ink, and line in Old Trees, Level Distance and Early Spring has sought to establish the similarity of the two works in these three respects. The variations described above may be accounted for by their different dates of execution. It will be shown that Old Trees, Level Distance was painted about a decade after Early Spring. The two paintings were created for different purposes and at two separate stages in Guo Xi’s career at court, which lasted from 1068 to the time of his death around the 1090s.

A SEAL AND SOME COLOPHONS

Seals and colophons are important aids in authenticating a painting by provenance. The earliest identifiable seal found on Old Trees, Level Distance, impressed at the top edge, midway along the scroll, is important physical evidence of the early date of the painting. It is the rare and important Xuanhe zhongbi 宣和中秘, or seal of “The Xuanhe Era Imperial Archives of the Inner
Figure 9a. Detail of Figure 1, *Old Trees, Level Distance*, rock and path

Figure 9b. Detail of Figure 2, *Early Spring*, rock in left mid-ground (photo: from *Guo Xi Zaochun tu*, p. 45)
Palace Library” (Figure 3). The four characters done in relief (yangwen 阳文), that is, with a red outline on white ground, are composed in a vertical oblong shape. The presence of this seal indicates that Old Trees, Level Distance was part of Emperor Huizong’s 朱徽宗 (1082–1135, r. 1101–25) imperial collection of painting, during the Xuanhe era (1119–25) of his reign, and that it was once kept in the Imperial Archives (Bige 秘閣), a known repository of art in the palace precincts.

Emperor Huizong’s famous cataloguing method, known as the “seven-seal” system, is thought to have been systematically used to document the imperial collection during the Xuanhe era. The Xuanhe zhongbi seal here is possibly a remnant of a pattern of mounting used before the Xuanhe seven-seal suite was standardized. Since Old Trees, Level Distance was not catalogued with the seven-seal system, the painting may have left the imperial collection before the standard was implemented, sometime during the first quarter of the twelfth century.

The colophons on paper mounted following the image give us a picture of who owned and viewed Old Trees, Level Distance during the following decades. In
Figures 11a, 11b. Details of Figure 1, *Old Trees, Level Distance*, old men and servant boys

Figures 11c, 11d. Details of Figure 2, *Early Spring*, fisherwomen (photos: from *Guo Xi Zaochun tu*, p. 71)

Figure 11e. Detail of Figure 2, *Early Spring*, fishermen (photo: from *Guo Xi Zaochun tu*, p. 63)
the Yuan dynasty (1260–1368), the poet-official Feng Zizhen 颜子振 (1257–after 1327) inscribed a poem, important in its own right as a calligraphic masterwork (Figure 13, right). The great painter and calligrapher Zhao Mengfu 赵孟頫 (1254–1322) also wrote a few lines to the left of Feng’s colophon after he saw Old Trees, Level Distance (Figure 13, left). These are the earliest colophons still attached to the handscroll.4 Zhao Mengfu’s possibly dates to the late thirteenth century or the first decade of the fourteenth, when he was at the Mongol capital at Dadu 大都 (modern-day Beijing), during which time he gained access to paintings from collections in north China.

By the early fourteenth century, the scroll was acquired by the private collector Shi Donggao (unidentified, active 14th century). Little is known of Shi, but his name appears in the colophon added to the scroll by the scholar-official Yu Ji 窦集 (1271–1348). Yu Ji, an intimate of the Mongol ruler Tugh Temür (Wenzong 文宗, r. 1328–29/2, 1329/9–1332) and a

Figures 11f, 11g. Details of Figure 1, Old Trees, Level Distance, travelers

Figures 11h, 11i. Details of Figure 2, Early Spring, travelers (photos: from Guo Xi Zaochun tu, p. 49)
trusted appraiser of the imperial art collection held at the Star of Literature Pavilion (Kuizhang ge 奎章閣), probably wrote his colophon while serving at the capital, since the inscriptions following his were made by two officers of the Pavilion, the well-known connoisseur Ke Jiusi 柯九思 (1290–1343) and the Hanlin Academician Liu Guan 柳貫 (1270–1342). Therefore, Yu Ji’s colophon dates to before 1333, when he left the capital of Dadu and retired.

Shi Donggao, a Route Commander (zongguan 總管), possibly near Dadu in north China, also showed his scroll to another Yuan-period man, one Yan Yaohuan 顏堯煥
(unidentified, active 14th century). Yan described the viewing session in an inscription (Figure 14), in which he commented in jest that this rare scroll had now encountered a person as rare as itself, its current owner, Shi Donggao. His comments and poem on the precious work, written to remember this special occasion and to preserve his opinion that the handscroll he inscribed was a genuine Guo Xi, may be translated as follows:5

Su Shi once wrote the poem:

In Jade Hall, dawn is shaded even on an idle spring day,
within there is Guo Xi's painting of spring mountains.

Now Wen Yanbo, the Duke of Lu, had written a colophon on a painting by Guo Xi, and then Old Su Shi had composed a poem after this colophon. These two gentlemen were brilliant and famous officials of their time, but to be able to see such inscriptions nowadays—it is no longer possible! More than one painting by Guo Xi exists, however: take time to examine this Autumn Trees in a Level Distance [as he called Old Trees, Level Distance]. Its materials are from between the Baoyuan (1038–39) and the Yuanyou (1086–93) eras, now returned to the Route Commander Old Shi Donggao's writing table after three hundred years. Old Dong has obtained that which is rarely obtained; this painting has also encountered that which is rarely encountered; I too am able to see that which is rarely seen. For this reason I write him this poem in remembrance:

The fascination of Guo Xi's painting lies not in its colors, white rocks, withered rafts pillowed by the currents.
This level distance contains sentiments in its illusory lands, its inscriptions enhance our distance from the past.

On a single layer of white silk, clouds astir and flowing, for three hundred years and more, the stars have made several revolutions.
Holding [the scroll] with Donggao, we often spread it out in appreciation, together with our lutes and books, we happily roam.

[Signed] Yan Yaohuan.

According to Yan Yaohuan's connoisseurship of the "materials" of the scroll—presumably including the silk, the brushwork, and so on—the painting in his opinion could be dated to “between the Baoyuan and the Yuanyou eras,” or about the 1040s to the 1090s. Since Yan also tells us that the scroll reappeared after three hundred years, his inscription on Old Trees, Level Distance dates to sometime around the 1340s to the 1390s. The colophon immediately following, by the Buddhist monk Zuming 楊銘 (active mid-14th century), is dated 1350, which makes it likely that Yan’s colophon dates closer to that time. In addition, Zuming signed his colophon with the sobriquet “Old Man Ding of Mount Jing” (Jingshan dingweng 江山鼎翁), a name he first took when he went south to Mount Jing (Lin'an 临安, Zhejiang Province) in the Zhizheng 正等 era (1341–67). Thus, Zuming, and maybe Yan Yaohuan as well, saw and inscribed Old Trees, Level Distance while in the south.

From the above evidence, the early provenance of Old Trees, Level Distance can be surmised to be as follows: after the handscroll left the Northern Song (960–1127) imperial collection in the early twelfth century, it disappeared into private hands for over a century and a half. It resurfaced in the late thirteenth century and was seen by men who served the Mongol court at Dadu. The painting remained in
north China at least up to the early fourteenth century, which was the time when Shi Donggao owned it. However, the painting traveled south (possibly still with Shi) sometime in the mid-fourteenth century, since Zuming saw it after he reached Mount Jing. Thereafter, Old Trees, Level Distance remained in southern collections until it entered the Qing dynasty imperial collection from the eighteenth to the early nineteenth century.

Yan Yaohuan’s inscription is also significant because it preserves a clue to the origins of Old Trees, Level Distance. It begins with a couplet from a well-known poem by the literary giant Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), in praise of a painting by Guo Xi that decorated the Jade Hall 玉堂 of the Hanlin Academy 翰林學士院. Yan goes on to say that the conservative statesman and powerful former Grand Councilor Wen Yanbo 文彦博, the Duke of Lu 郭公 (1006–1097), had once written a colophon on another painting by Guo Xi, about which Su Shi also wrote a poem. By the time Yan Yaohuan saw Old Trees, Level Distance, no poems or colophons by Su Shi or Wen Yanbo were attached to this scroll. However, Yan was clearly aware that, three hundred years earlier, Wen Yanbo, Su Shi, and their friends also gathered around a handscroll by Guo Xi, an occasion they had recorded in the colophons and poems Yan mentions. By drawing a parallel between his rendezvous with Shi Donggao and the get-together three centuries earlier of Wen Yanbo, Su Shi, and friends, Yan Yaohuan places Shi Donggao and himself in a lineage of erudite connoisseurs commenting on Guo Xi’s handscrolls.

The two Su Shi poems mentioned by Yan Yaohuan survive in Su’s collected works. Following social and poetic convention, a number of men from Su’s circle composed matching poems for both. The first poem by Su Shi was matched by his friend the official and great calligrapher Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105). The second poem was matched by Su Shi’s brother Su Che 蘇轍 (1039–1112), by Su’s disciple, the statesman
Chao Buzhi 鄭補之 (1053–1110), and by a new acquaintance Bi Zhongyou 畢仲游 (1047–1121). These follow the rhyme words initiated by Su and therefore can be grouped together with his poems to form two sets. The first set of poems was composed during the Yuanyou 元祐 era (1086–93) and the second set sometime between the Yuanyou to the mid-Shaocheng 紹聖 eras (1094–97). Both sets describe a Guo Xi handscroll depicting the autumn season in a level distance view. The poems make clear that, besides monumental works under imperial commission, Guo also privately created small, intimate paintings for his literati patrons. The poems of Su Shi and his friends are of great importance for what they can tell us about Guo Xi’s private handscrolls, and are thus invaluable for the light they shed upon *Old Trees, Level Distance*.

The following discussion attempts, by dating the poems themselves, to provide a terminus ante quem for the two handscrolls described in the poems. The surprise expressed by Guo Xi’s viewers at how different these scrolls were from his “typical” paintings—that is, his imperially commissioned works—indicates that Guo began making such paintings, seen by this group of literati friends, during the same period their poems were composed. We will suggest a time frame during which Guo was actively making these works, specifically the last ten years of his life.

Reading the poems as sets will also allow us to characterize their contextual and thematic variations. While the two poem sets contain similar autumnal imagery to describe two Guo Xi handscrolls of like subject matter, their underlying themes differ, one concerning farewell offered on retirement, the other being a protest against exile. The author will suggest that *Old Trees, Level Distance* may be the handscroll described in the former poem set, for its theme is also one of retirement and farewell.

The wider goal of examining the literary evidence in depth is to characterize the nature of Guo Xi’s level distance landscape handscrolls. It will be shown that—in contrast to his large, public works—Guo intended them for his personal patrons, who appreciated the handscrolls on private occasions with friends. This intimate function of Guo’s paintings can be seen to be an important aspect of his late career.

**The First Poem Set: Su Shi and Huang Tingjian**

After the death of Emperor Shenzong 神宗 (r. 1068–85), Su Shi and his coterie were reunited in the capital of Kaifeng for the first time in many years. They frequently visited each other or exchanged poems by courier in a friendly competition of wit and erudition. Often, they wrote their opinions and evaluations of various paintings that they saw, ancient and contemporary, in the form of poetry. On one occasion, the topic was a landscape painting in handscroll format by the favorite painter of Emperor Shenzong, Guo Xi. The handscroll belonged to Wen Yanbo, who had written a colophon to the painting. This is the colophon mentioned by Yan Yaohuan, which unfortunately is not preserved in Wen’s collected works and is lost to us today. Wen showed Su Shi the painting, and, in the expected gesture of thanks for that honor, Su composed a poem in praise of the painting. Responding to Su’s poem, Huang Tingjian composed one with a matching rhyme pattern.

The title of Su Shi’s poem is “Guo Xi’s Painting *Autumn Mountains, Level Distance*, to Which Wen Yanbo Added a Colophon” 郭熙畫秋山平遠圖公為尾題. The first two couplets of this eight-couplet poem can be translated as follows:

In Jade Hall, dawn is shaded even on an idle spring day,
within there is Guo Xi’s painting of spring mountains.
Cooing pigeons and nestling swallows just awakened,
its white breakers and verdant ranges are not of this world.

These couplets are quoted by Guo Xi’s son, Guo Si 郭思 (ca. 1050–after 1130), in a supplement to his edition of *Linquan gaozhì* 林泉高致 (The lofty message of forests and streams), his father’s art theoretical treatise and painting manual. Though they describe a multi-paneled screen painting of springtime by Guo Xi in the Jade Hall, the central building of the Hanlin Academy, the rest of Su Shi’s poem concerns a painting quite unlike the monumental Jade Hall screen by which Guo Si wanted posterity to remember his father:

So far away, a level distance unfolds in this short scroll,
sowast, an autumn evening is lodged within its sparse grove.

Just as when I bid my guest farewell in Jiangnan,
in mid-stream, he turned his head to gaze at the cloudy peaks.

Old recluse of River Yi, his graying temples like the frost,
leisurely viewing these autumn mountains, he thinks of Luoyang.

I inscribe this for you at the end in running cursive script,
as clearly as [this vision of] Mount Song and River Luo, adrift in an autumn glow.

Only a day has passed, it seems, since I roamed the world with you,
not realizing our yellowed hair now reflects dark mountains.
Paint me a picture of Longmen’s Eight-Armed Shoals,
while I wait to purchase springs and stones from River Yi.
Su Shi’s evocation of the large Jade Hall screen in the opening couplets serves as a foil to introduce another work by Guo Xi, a short handscroll, which Su characterizes as an “autumn evening” landscape in a level distance view. He tells us about his immediate response to the painting: it reminded him of a scene in which he said farewell to a friend in Jiangnan. He then describes the reaction of the “Old recluse of River Yi,” that is, Wen Yanbo. Su informs us that Wen is reminded of Luoyang upon viewing the handscroll, presumably referring to the content of Wen’s lost colophon. Perhaps Su is likening the blurry visual effects he sees depicted in Guo Xi’s painting to Wen’s own nostalgic memory of Luoyang and its famous sites, River Yi, Mount Song, and River Luo.11 Finally, Su expresses a wish that someone paint him a picture of Longmen’s “Eight-Armed Shoals,” a scenic spot on River Yi, south of the city of Luoyang. This is a request to Guo Xi for a painting: Su says it will sustain him until he can buy a plot of land there for retirement, close to Wen.12

Su Shi’s composition is an appropriate if conventional response to a request from an important acquaintance for a poem and a piece of his calligraphy. Even though the topic at hand is ostensibly Guo Xi’s handscroll, the real subject of Su’s melancholy poem is actually Wen Yanbo and his memories of Luoyang. In essence, Su is saying farewell to Wen upon Wen’s imminent journey to retirement, in the context of commenting upon a work of art belonging to him. We can guess from Su’s response that Wen’s own colophon to his Guo Xi handscroll also featured his longing for retirement to Luoyang.

Wen Yanbo’s active career spanned over fifty years. He served a total of four different emperors during his lifetime and was one of the most senior and revered officials of his time.13 Wen formally retired to Luoyang twice. The first time was at age seventy-seven, in the eleventh month of 1083.14 However, after the death of Emperor Shenzong in the third month of 1085, he was persuaded by Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) to return to the capital in mid-1086. As a prominent member of the Conservative party who had been sent away from the capital by Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086) during the 1070s, Wen’s presence added great prestige to the new government organized by the regent, Empress Dowager Gao 高, whose husband (Shenzong’s father, Emperor Yingzong 英宗, r. 1063–67) had opposed Wang Anshi’s reform-minded New Policies. We know from the numerous requests Wen Yanbo submitted for permission to re-retain that he no longer had any desire to participate actively in government. However, it was not until 1090, at age eighty-four, that he was finally granted his second retirement.15 Considering these circumstances, Wen’s strong sense of longing for Luoyang and Su Shi’s sympathetic response are perfectly understandable.

At this point, it is possible to suggest that Guo Xi painted the handscroll owned by Wen Yanbo, Autumn Mountains, Level Distance, in order to wish Wen farewell while he was still at the capital of Kaifeng waiting for permission to retire. Since Wen was in Kaifeng and longed to retire to Luoyang during two periods, about 1080, and between mid-1086 and 1090, Guo could have presented the handscroll to Wen during either of these two periods. The earliest possible date for the handscroll, however, is about 1086, after which Wen added his colophon.

When Wen Yanbo showed Su Shi the handscroll, Huang Tingjian was probably present, since he provided a poem matching Su’s. The time of this get-together, and thus the terminus ante quem for Autumn Mountains, Level Distance, can be inferred from a dating of Su’s and Huang’s poems. Here, we will present internal evidence in Huang’s poem that allows us to estimate when the gathering occurred.

Huang Tingjian titled his poem for the occasion “Matching the Rhyme of Su Shi Inscribing Guo Xi’s Painting, Autumn Mountains” 次韋應物韋應物詩畫秋山.16

Before the banished one of Huangzhou received his pardon, he had his fill of mountain viewing in Jiangnan and Jiangbei.

In Jade Hall as we leisurely face Guo Xi’s painting, with swelling joy, [he is] now within its Green Grove.

Guo Xi’s official paintings are only of barren and distant views, but on this short scroll, twists and turns open a vista of an autumn evening.

A river village beyond the mist, rain drops glistening, returning geese travel side by side, beyond are layered peaks.

Seated thinking of yellow oranges and frost over Lake Dongting, I regret I am not like the geese who follow the sun.

Guo Xi now has a head of white hair but still has good eyes, still able to wield his brush in the reflected window light.

Perhaps a painting of Jiangnan on a fine, windy day, to comfort this old man, my [white] hair reflected in the mirror.

If only Guo Xi is willing to paint—take time in your “journey,” spend five days on each stream, ten days on each rock.17

This poem, closely based on Su Shi’s, borrows much of its structure and imagery. Shaping his poem like Su’s, Huang first mentions viewing Guo Xi’s Spring Mountains screen in the Jade Hall of the Hanlin
Academy. In the couplets that follow, he contrasts the fresh, new vision of the handscroll before him with Guo’s imperially commissioned works, which he dismisses as all depicting “barren and distant views.” One has the sense that Huang composed his matching poem while looking back and forth between the Jade Hall screen and Wen Yanbo’s handscroll. In taking up Su’s juxtaposition of the screen with the handscroll, Huang further emphasizes the contrast by stressing that Autumn Mountains, Level Distance is entirely different in flavor from Guo’s public paintings.

Like Su Shi, who thought of saying farewell to a departing friend in Jiangnan, Huang Tingjian is reminded by the handscroll of his memories of the south. Huang mentions frosty Lake Dongting, his answer to Su’s Eight-Armed Shoals and Wen Yanbo’s Luoyang. Thinking of Dongting, Huang wishes to be like geese flying home toward the sun, invoking a well-known analogy for retirement.18 Like Su, Huang also ends his poem by coyly asking a white-haired Guo Xi to make him a painting, maybe a scene of Jiangnan on a windy day to comfort him in his old age. What is new in Huang’s poem is the addition of Guo Xi himself. Indeed, the portrayal of the painter as having a “head of white hair” is one of the few indications we have of Guo’s age at this time.

Su Shi had been banished from 1079 to 1084 to Huangzhou, an obscure mid-Yangzi prefecture, where he held the unpaid office of assistant militia commander. Huang Tingjian’s angry reference to Su’s predicament in the first line of this poem seems at first to indicate that he was writing during Su’s exile. However, there are two reasons why this is not possible. First, Guo Xi finished his enormous paneled screen for the Jade Hall of the Hanlin Academy by 1083, in time to furnish the new offices of the recently formed central bureaucracy.19 According to Guo Xi’s son Guo Si, Emperor Shenzong himself had sent a high official, Palace Messenger Zhang Shiliang, to transmit his imperial commission for the Jade Hall screen:

“The Hanlin Academy is a place of literary brilliance. You, sir, have a son who is studying books. You should both put your ideas into a painting.” My father retired to his study for several days, and then in one sweep completed [the screen]: its scenery was of spring mountains. Infused with the feelings of spring, the attitudes of all beings were joyful, and onlookers were as pleased as if in the realm of the Sining and Tianmu [mountains of Zhejiang].”20

Huang Tingjian could not have seen Guo Xi’s new Jade Hall screen until the sixth month of 1085, when he arrived at the capital after some years “in the field” in Jiangxi and Shandong. Similarly, Su Shi also could not have seen the Jade Hall painting, which he refers to as Spring Mountains in his poem, until his arrival at the capital in the twelfth month of 1085, in other words, after exile.

Second, Huang’s description of the viewers—that is, Su Shi and himself—as being “within the Green Grove” 青林間 of the Jade Hall screen echoes Guo Xi’s words: the purpose of viewing landscape was so that “without leaving your room, you may sit to your heart’s content among streams and valleys.” The screen may have pictured a green grove of trees, either with figures literally painted within it, or with viewers figuratively absorbed in the scene, but “Green Grove” is a classical allusion to the Imperial Park, a place where the emperor hunts. To be within the park is to serve him and be within his sphere of influence, a certain reference to Su’s current tenure in office. “Green Grove” is also a pun referring to the Hanlin Academy, literally the “Grove of Brushes” 翰林 Academy, undoubtedly Huang’s way of referring to Su’s appointment to the Hanlin Academy in the ninth month of 1086.21 From this we infer that the earliest possible dating for Su Shi’s and Huang Tingjian’s eight-couplet poems, written when they were gathered at the Jade Hall, was late 1086 or (early) 1087, as given in traditional sources.22 This is therefore also the latest possible date for the Autumn Mountains, Level Distance by Guo Xi described in their poems.

The poems suggest that Su Shi and Huang Tingjian went together to the Jade Hall during this time. Wen Yanbo, who had arrived at Kaifeng in the fourth month of 1086, recalled from Luoyang and retirement after the death of Emperor Shenzong, may have been present as well. One might imagine Wen bringing along his Guo Xi handscroll to join these other men at the Jade Hall in viewing Guo’s screen painting. This multi-paneled screen, ten feet tall and sixty feet wide, was probably installed in front of the four columns behind the emperor’s throne area.23 It was monumental in size, as befitting the grander and larger office spaces of the new central bureaucracy. Huang’s poem notes that Wen’s “short scroll” starkly contrasted with the enormous screen, which must have practically immersed its audience in its landscape. Though Su and Huang wrote about Wen’s handscroll, their poems really referred to their friendship and to this bittersweet occasion of awaiting Wen’s retirement. After ten years of separation, the reunion of the friends was truly joyous; however, they were also together to commiserate with their friend Wen, who, at age eighty, was longing to return to his retirement at Luoyang.

The above reading of Su Shi’s and Huang Tingjian’s
eight-couplet poems also makes clear that the men distinguished Autumn Mountains, Level Distance from the imperially commissioned paintings that formed the majority of Guo Xi’s oeuvre. Su juxtaposed Guo’s awe-inspiring spring screen with the moving autumn handscroll and contrasted their subject matters and their formats. Huang made the contrast explicit, both dismissing Guo’s public works and implying that this handscroll altered his expectations of Guo. Guo’s lonely autumn mountains clearly struck a chord in his audience, evoking nostalgic longing in Wen Yanbo, Su Shi, and Huang Tingjian, who all wrote about their wish to retire to such a place as was depicted in the painting. However, it seems to have been the small handscroll format and the shared intimacy it allowed a group of like-minded friends that also elicited their praise. It appealed because it was a work accessible only under private circumstances, while its choice of subject matter resonated with the preoccupations of its viewers.

The Second Set of Poems: Su Shi and Su Che

It is possible that Guo Xi painted intimate landscape handscrolls like the one described by Su Shi and Huang Tingjian throughout his career, but the surviving evidence indicates only a limited number of such paintings in the 1080s, during the last decade of his life. Besides Autumn Mountains, Level Distance from the period of about 1080 to late 1086 or early 1087, a second handscroll is referred to in a twelve-couplet poem by Su Shi’s younger brother, Su Che, with whom he was very close. This poem, datable to about mid-1086, is entitled “Writing about Guo Xi’s Handscroll” 郭熙橫卷. In it, Su Che describes the precipitous cliffs and splashing waterfalls of two twelve-panel Guo Xi screens in buildings neighboring the Hanlin Academy. Just as Su Shi and Huang Tingjian juxtaposed the Jade Hall screen with Wen Yanbo’s handscroll, so Su Che contrasts Guo Xi’s large-scale screens with a handscroll he describes as small enough to keep within his sleeve, one that depicts a “hundred miles of calm and melancholy, level mountains and rivers.” Just as in Su Shi’s and Huang Tingjian’s poems, Su Che asks Guo Xi for a painting at the end of his poem: he wants it to depict a place of which he dreamed, one in which he is free from his official duties and is no longer “enwrapped by temples and towers, encircled by layers of walls.” Guo may have obliged the requests of Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, and Su Che with more intimate handscrolls.24

Another poem by Su Shi, written about 1087, responds to a third Guo Xi handscroll. Su Che matched this poem, as did their friends Chao Buzhi and Bi Zhongyou. Su Shi’s poem is titled, “Two Quatrains on Guo Xi’s Autumn Mountains, Level Distance” 郭熙秋山平遠二首.25 This painting must have been rather similar to the one belonging to Wen Yanbo, since Su gives it the same title. The two quatrains may be translated as follows:

At vision’s end, the lone goose descends beside setting light, from afar I know the wind and rain [fall on] different rivers. Herein are verses none recognize, present it to Meng Haoran of Xiangyang.

When trees shed leaves, the poet already regrets autumn, and cannot bear the level distance emanating poetic sorrow. If he wants to see where “torrents vie in myriad ravines,” he’ll have to impose on Tiger-head Gu another day.

The quatrains express an interesting conceit, namely, that the Tang dynasty poet Meng Haoran 孟浩然 (ca. 689–740) and the Eastern Jin dynasty painter (Tiger-head) Gu Kaizhi 畢轍之 (b. ca. 344, d. ca. 406) can be resurrected to create works to accompany Guo Xi’s painting. In the first quatrain, Su Shi playfully recommends that the unspoken words expressed in the painting be articulated by Meng Haoran. Here, Su Shi intimates that only a poet of Meng’s stature would understand the meaning of Guo’s painted image and be able to bring out the words from within it.

Su Shi extends this observation in the following quatrain. He writes that “poetic sorrow” is evoked by the level distance landscape, compounding the poet’s (Su’s) melancholic mood upon seeing an image of the onset of autumn. For an uplifting scene of precipitous mountains with splashing waterfalls to counter this overwhelming sorrow, one had better ask Gu Kaizhi, an artist known for his portraits, figures, and landscapes. Su Shi borrowed the phrase “torrents vie in myriad ravines” from a quatrain by Gu, describing the landscape of the Kuaiji 會稽 area near Gu’s home in the mountainous area of Wuxi (Jinling, Jiangsu Province).26 However, Su will ask this of Gu another time: for now, there is no antidote to Su’s sadness.

This amusing poetic construction is the main theme of Su Shi’s social poem. However, he also hints at what provokes his “poetic sorrow.” The imagery Su presents in the first lines of each quatrain—a lone goose descending at sunset, tree leaves falling in autumn—seem to be specific descriptions of this Guo Xi handscroll. However, the image of the lone goose separated from its flock also refers to a wild creature’s loss of companionship in a hostile world, which puts its survival at
risk. It is a metaphor for the poet who has to exist in
dejected isolation, disassociated from society and
striped of the status conferred upon him by his peers.
Du Fu’s (712–770) ominous poem “Lone Wild
Goose” presents the single silhouette of a goose
lost in clouds, “not drinking or pecking for food, / it
cries out in flight, voice yearns for the flock. / . . . The
crows on the moors pay it no heed, / cawing and
squawking in chaotic multitudes.”27 Even the lowly
crows do not pity the goose; only poets like Du Fu and
Su Shi, finding themselves in the same predicament,
empathize with it.

Su Shi’s bitterness at his recent exclusion from
the court hierarchy is made even clearer in the next image,
that of autumn trees: Su writes that he cannot bear
looking at the level distance painting that depicts the
leafless trees of the autumn season. He identifies with
the helpless leaves that are blown in all directions by
chilly winds, utilizing another metaphor for the vicissi-
tudes of exiled officials. Those fallen leaves symbolize
scholars who were cast away and whose talents were
unappreciated even as they grew old with grief.28

These quatrain pairs deepen our understanding of
what Su Shi approved of in Guo Xi’s autumn level dis-
tance scrolls and found to be so different from his
monumental works: they lent themselves to private
and poetic readings. For Su, the innocuous activity
of viewing Guo’s autumn landscape presented an occa-
sion to lodge a complaint concerning his banishment.
Thus this poem is very different in flavor compared to
the eight-couplet poem discussed previously. That
poem links Guo’s level distance landscape with
thoughts of bittersweet retirement, while the theme of
this poem is exile. It is an important distinction with
regard to an analysis of Old Trees, Level Distance that
will be presented in the final section of this article, since
the subject matter of the Metropolitan painting corre-
sponds more closely to the former theme.

Following Su Shi’s lead, other members of his circle
also associated this second Autumn Mountains, Level
Distance with the theme of disaffection and exile,
while uttering unanimous praise for its moving
autumn melancholia. Su Che’s poem is entitled “Two
Stanzas Matching the Rhyme of Su Shi Inscribing
Guo Xi’s Level Distance” 史處士詩贈蘇軾平遠二絶. 29 While a
matching poem does not necessarily have to be written
in the presence of the originating author, in this case
it is probable that Su Che wrote it in the company
of his brother, since he uses “we” in the second couplet of
the first quatrain:

> Scattered mountains without limit, rivers without end,
> farm houses, fishing families share a single stream.

Su Che writes that Guo Xi has achieved something in
his painting that is comparable to “Heaven’s feats,” or
nature itself. The images of “scattered mountains” and
“dispersed clouds” describing Guo’s plaintive autumn scene, ring with poignancy given Su Shi’s
above expression of banishment. However, Su Che
counters his brother’s assertion that “wind and rain
[fall on] different rivers,” by saying that they had the
good company of farmers and fishermen, who share
the same stream with those in exile. He ends this poem
optimistically, by pointing out that the old gentlemen
fishermen in the painting “retain their abilities,” even
as they brave the elements in grass raincoats.

Su Che’s literary interpretation of the fishermen
in the painting introduces the age-old affectation of
the gentleman as angler, engaging in the vocation
most removed from his official duties at court. In
general, the imagery expresses a gentleman’s desire
for an eremitic existence, which sometimes justifies a
retreat from society after dismissal from office or
during times of political chaos.30 Su Che is saying
that, like the fishermen depicted in Guo Xi’s painting,
he and his brother would always survive political
adversity with dignity; out of favor and banished from
the court hierarchy, they would retreat from society
and enjoy a simple life in the company of fishermen.
Su Che thus attempts to turn Su Shi’s theme of exile
back into a more hopeful discussion of retirement.
In contrast, the poems matching Su Shi’s quatrain
pairs by two other members of his circle, by the scholar
and renowned poet Chao Buzhi and by Su’s new
acquaintance Bi Zhongyou, adhere to the theme of
unjust banishment.

The Second Generation

Bi Zhongyou and Chao Buzhi wrote their poems some
years after Su Shi and Su Che composed theirs, dedicat-
ing them to Wen Yanbo’s sixth son, Wen Jifu (d. after 1099). These poems may refer to the same
Guo Xi painting that Su Shi and Su Che saw and of
which Wen Jifu was presumably the owner, although it
is possible that Bi and Chao merely borrowed the rhyme to refer to yet another autumn handscroll by Guo that eventually turned up in the hands of the Wen family.\(^3^1\)

When Wen Yanbo retired in 1090, Wen Jifu went to Heyang (a city not far from Luoyang, probably to accompany his father) bearing the title “Chamberlain for the Imperial Stud” 太僕卿, with the power of an “Attending Officer of the Ministry of Works” 工部侍郎. Since Chao Buzhi’s poem refers to Wen Jifu by that title, it was composed, at the earliest, after 1090. In any case, the poems likely were written sometime after Su Shi was forced from the capital in 1093 but before Wen Jifu was implicated in a factionally motivated scandal in the eighth month of 1097, during which he was incarcerated and almost executed.\(^3^2\) Wen Jifu may have thought it fitting to gather Su Shi’s younger associates around his painting, reproducing the gathering at Jade Hall with members of their generation. Just as Wen Yanbo had invited Su Shi and Huang Tingjian to write about his Guo Xi handscroll, Wen Jifu called upon Bi Zhongyou and Chao Buzhi to do the same.

The title of Bi Zhongyou’s poem is “Matching the Rhyme of Su Shi Inscribing Guo Xi’s Autumn Mountains Painting, [owned by] Wen Jifu, Two Poems” 次韻子瞻題文周翰熙平遠圖二首;\(^3^3\)

> In a distance small as a window, it resembles heaven’s edge, if you knew not this place, you would say it is Small Wangchuan.

> I’ve heard it said customarily, when your heart and eyes are weary, in the short time to unroll this yellow scroll, you will be revived.

> Falling leaves and peaceful mountains, the ninth month of autumn, painting the season, one hopes to depict the banished man’s sorrow.

> It brings thoughts of the Meng Marsh, and places passed through, the last twenty years have gone as quickly as I turn my head.

Bi Zhongyou imagines the pavilion in the painting to be a miniature version of a famous villa where the Tang period poet and painter Wang Wei 王維 (ca. 699–761) held literary gatherings, on his Wangchuan estate in Shaanxi Province. Bi claims that the “yellow scroll” has a reviving effect, comparing the experience to a state induced by reading a Buddhist sutra, sometimes referred to as a “Yellow Scroll with Crimson Knobs” 黃卷赤軸. As did Su Shi, Bi Zhongyou evokes the image of falling leaves in autumn twilight. Even though Bi describes the mountains as “peaceful,” rather than deluged by wind and rain, as portrayed in his predecessors’ poetry, he explicitly associates the leaves and the autumn season with the “banished man’s sorrow.”

Indeed, the mere mention of falling leaves induces the same feeling in Chao Buzhi and his fellow “southerners.” In his poem titled “Inscribing Guo Xi’s Level Distance [owned by] the Attending Officer of the Ministry of Works, Wen Jifu, Two Poems” 題工部文侍郎周翰熙平遠圖二首, Chao writes: \(^3^5\)

> Fishing village half concealed, beside River Chu, beyond the grove an autumn wilderness, beyond rain the heavens.

> Who leans against the bamboo pavilion, to meet the large ship, glistening twilight at the horizon, already turned ashen.

> Falling leaves on Dongting Lake, its countless waves in autumn, speaking of this with other southerners, I too feel sorrow.

> I wish to point out the place River Wusong flows, where there is a row of traveling geese, above the ocean.

Chao Buzhi mentions the names of two southern rivers, the Chu and the Wusong. River Chu begins at the western tip of Sichuan Province and feeds into the Yangzi as one of its major tributaries. The fishing village beside River Chu refers to the view looking in a westerly direction from Dongting Lake, toward Sichuan. River Wusong is in the Suzhou area, the source of which is Taihu Lake. It flows in an easterly direction toward Shanghai, where it meets the ocean. Referring to the Wusong encourages the reader to look east from Taihu Lake, toward the ocean. In Chao’s imagination, an area stretching a thousand miles from Sichuan to the ocean is contained within this short handscroll.

Chao Buzhi explains the allusion to falling leaves in his “Preface to Picture of Catching Fish” 捕魚圖序, composed in 1086.\(^3^6\) It reads:

> Wang Wei was a superbly subtle poet, so his paintings have an abundance of ideas. People today who try and emulate him in writing or in painting do not succeed. This [painting] leads me to think of the words of the man of Chu:

> The daughters of emperor [Yao] descend the northern bank, Their eyes turn on me dark with anxiety. Wavering, ah, the autumn wind; Dongting’s waves, ah! Tree leaves fall.

Thinking of this, like the painting, its words seem to bring Dongting and the Xiang River before my eyes.
Chao Buzhi’s preface on the painting called *Catching Fish*, attributed to Wang Wei, associates the depiction of fishermen to the theme of exile. Specifically, the picture makes Chao recall an ancient poem by “the man of Chu,” or the most famous of scholars unfairly banished, Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 340–278 B.C.E.). Chao quotes four lines from that poem called “Ladies of the Xiang” 湘夫人，one of the famous *Nine Songs* 九歌. It expressed Qu Yuan’s grief upon seeing the autumn wind cause trees to shed their leaves and waves to appear on Dongting Lake, for these were reminders that the year was at its end, just as he was getting old. For Chao, autumn leaves stood for talented men like Qu Yuan or his mentor Su Shi, who were cast aside by unappreciative rulers.

**Political Context of Writing Poems on Guo Xi**

A close reading of the two sets of poems—the eight-couplet poems by Su Shi and Huang Tingjian of late 1086 or early 1087 and the quatrains by Su Shi, Su Che, Bi Zhongyou, and Chao Buzhi of about 1087 to the 1090s—makes clear that Guo Xi’s level distance autumn landscapes elicited two kinds of responses that in turn reflected changed political circumstances. In their eight-couplet poems, Su Shi and Huang Tingjian empathize with Wen Yanbo about waiting for retirement. Written upon seeing Wen’s Guo Xi handscroll, the poems voice the collective desire to retire from officialdom.

While Huang Tingjian explicitly refers to Su Shi’s Huangzhou exile with unveiled indignation, his comment serves further to augment the optimism of Su’s current situation, as a newly appointed officer of the Hanlin Academy. Huang’s poem concentrates on the joy of Su’s return to the capital, where he has the leisure to view Guo Xi’s painted landscapes. The tone of Su’s and Huang’s eight-couplet poems reflects the optimism of the early Yuanyou period, when Su and his friends enjoyed rapid promotion and unprecedented political power. They were the returning heroes of the Conservative party (known as the Yuanyou faction 元祐黨) who had opposed Wang Anshi’s radical reforms during Emperor Shenzong’s rule. While Su’s recent exile would have been on their minds, they could now talk of retirement with honor in this genteel poetry-writing session at the Jade Hall.

Su Shi’s and Su Che’s quatrain pairs of a few months later continue this bittersweet banter. However, there appear more pessimistic signs, Su’s playful invocations to Meng Haoran and Gu Kaizhi notwithstanding. Here, the close friends of wind and rain are separated and fall on different rivers; the solitary goose is deserted and alone; the falling leaves cause resentment and the level distance view elicits sorrow. Similarly, Guo Xi’s mountains and clouds are described as “scattered” and “dispersed” in Su Che’s quatrains. Su Che comforts his brother with assurances that, even as old men, they still retain their abilities and that, even in exile, they will share a single stream with other worthy men. Their preoccupations became reality in the following years, as Su Shi applied by early 1088 to step down as Hanlin Academician and was granted his wish the next year with an assignment to Hangzhou 杭州. He was exiled again, this time to Dingzhou 定州 at the end of 1093.

Bi Zhongyou and Chao Buzhi chose to match Su Shi’s rhyme during the height of Emperor Zhezong’s 贞宗 (r. 1086–1100) purge of the Conservatives and dedicated their poems to Wen Jifu’s 溫甫 painting for them in a time of increasing pressure from their enemies. In this political climate, even the most innocuous words, interpreted as criticism, warranted exile; in fact, many men of Su Shi’s circle were, like him, sent far south. In this context, Bi’s and Chao’s allusions to falling leaves, to sorrowful southerners, and to symbolic destinations in the south, such as Dongting Lake, veil their criticism of contemporary events in the innocent activity of admiring Wen Jifu’s Guo Xi painting, while expressing their desire to follow their mentor to exile in the south. Bi’s association of the autumn season depicted in the painting with the “banished man’s sorrow” directly refers to the plight of many Conservatives. Chao’s “glimmering twilight” that has now “turned ashen” refers to their extinguished hope. Just as the retirement of Wen Yanbo is the focus of the eight-couplet poems about Guo Xi’s landscape, this atmosphere of persecution is the shared sorrow of the later quatrains.

At the center of these poetic responses were the level distance landscapes painted by Guo Xi, who was also the favorite painter of the source of their troubles, Emperor Shenzong. Sometime after 1080, and certainly after the death of his imperial patron in 1085, Guo Xi must have made quite a few paintings that featured autumnal level distance landscapes in the intimate handscroll format. Wen Yanbo and his son Wen Jifu both owned one. Su Che wrote about another in his twelve-couplet poem. Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, and Su Che all requested one of their own, and Guo Xi may have answered these requests with more handscrolls. The paintings clearly appealed to the “literary” tastes of these important scholar-officials: Su Shi found unspoken words in Guo Xi’s autumn scene and called upon Meng Haoran to articulate them even as he did so himself; Su Che saw his brother and himself depict-
ed in the painting as old and tenacious gentlemen anglers of the poetic tradition; Bi Zhongyou imagined the scene to be a literary gathering at Wang Wei’s Wangchuan Villa.

The melancholy subject matter of the handscrolls also lent itself to personal interpretation: Su Shi’s and Huang Tingjian’s poems, with their empathetic wish for retirement to a place like that depicted in Wen Yanbo’s handscroll, also served to bid farewell to Wen; Su Che’s request for a dream landscape into which he could retreat likewise expressed his desire for freedom from his responsibilities, a freedom, he notes ironically, that he and his brother enjoyed when they were sent away from court. The size and format of the handscrolls, merely the width of a window, or small enough to hide in a sleeve, added to their sense of privacy. Guo Xi’s level distance landscapes enabled private communication between friends and elicited from viewers the expression of their intimate preoccupations.

The capacity to inspire such intimate and private associations was initially what Guo Xi’s contemporaries admired in these small works, so different from his usual grand and uplifting paintings, public works produced to decorate imperial building walls, and which were by definition representative of state rather than individual interests. As the political climate worsened, however, Guo’s intimate handscrolls came to mean much more to viewers like Su Shi, Su Che, and his friends Bi Zhongyou and Chao Buzhi. Conducive to interpretations of retirement and exile, Guo’s autumn level distance paintings may have been from then on linked to the Conservative point of view.

AGAIN OLD TREES. LEVEL DISTANCE

The poems of Su Shi, Su Che, Huang Tingjian, Bi Zhongyou, and Chao Buzhi are a response to the issues of retirement and exile evoked by the paintings of Guo Xi. In displays of discriminating taste and knowledge, and in individual and elegant interpretations of Guo’s handscrolls, these highly literate men thereby imbued the level distance autumn landscapes with poetic, personal, and even political meaning. With the above characterization of Guo Xi’s intimate handscrolls that these poems provide us, we are now in a position to interpret Old Trees, Level Distance in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figure 1).

It has been shown that Autumn Mountains, Level Distance in the eight-couplet poems of Su Shi and Huang Tingjian is datable to between 1080 and late 1086 or early 1087. The terminus ante quem of the handscroll described in Su Che’s twelve-couplet poem is mid-1086. The latest possible date of another handscroll also named Autumn Mountains, Level Distance in the quatrains of Su Shi and Su Che is 1087. From this, we can suggest that Guo Xi made quite a few such paintings in the 1080s, conceivably among them Old Trees, Level Distance, a handscroll also depicting a level distance view of the autumn season. Guo may have painted Old Trees, Level Distance about a decade after the monumental work Early Spring, of 1072.

Furthermore, it was posited that one of these poems sets refers to Old Trees, Level Distance. Certainly it is not possible to make an explicit connection between the generic poetic imagery employed in both the eight-couplet poems and the quatrains—autumn evening, autumn mountains, autumn glow, ninth month of autumn, etc.—and the present handscroll. All these poems describe the level distance as vast and faraway, as a twisting and turning vista. It is difficult to link word to image in terms of specific motifs. For instance, Su Shi’s eight-couplet poem mentions a sparsely wooded grove and cloudy peaks; Huang Tingjian’s adds a river village, layered peaks, and returning geese traveling side by side. Su Shi’s quatrains mention a lone goose and leafless trees; Su Che’s matching quatrains describe gentlemen fishing on rafts, and add farm houses and fishing families (maybe a reference to the returning travelers and fishermen in Figures 5 and 47); Chao Buzhi points out a bamboo pavilion and asks about the person inside it. All of these motifs are found in Old Trees, Level Distance, or at least might be imagined by poets to exist within its blurry forms.

How then can we compare the literary evidence of the two sets of poems with the visual? First, we notice that the main difference between the eight-couplet poems and the quatrains lies in the description of weather. The quality of light described in the poems of Su Shi and Huang Tingjian is consistent with the season and the time of day. The poets write that the woods and hills are enveloped in a humid blanket of clouds and mist of the early evening, glistening with rain drops. To Su, this landscape looks like Mount Song and River Luo, “adrift in an autumn glow.” Su Shi’s and Su Che’s quatrains, though referring to a similar time of day, describe the landscape as inundated by wind and rain against which fishermen protect themselves with “grass raincoats.” In the Su brothers’ estimation, the inclement weather caused not only the trees to shed leaves, but also the clouds to disperse and even the mountains to scatter. Their quatrains thus describe a landscape in the grip of unpredictable autumn weather.

With only this comparative evidence, surely the eight-couplet poems are a closer match to the still, quiet landscape of Old Trees, Level Distance. In addition,
one particular image in the fourth couplet of Su Shi’s poem is worth further consideration. Su states that Guo Xi’s landscape reminded him of a time when he bid farewell to a guest because his departing friend turned his head in order to view the cloudy mountain peaks of the retreating landscape. The image of turning back one’s head to view the scenery, oftentimes far-off mountains or clouds, is very common in Chinese poetry. Suggesting distance, in both time and space, the image is expressive of the poignant parting of friends, past and present.37

The gesture is performed by two figures in Old Trees, Level Distance. The old but sprightly man with a staff (Figure 11b) turns backward as if to encourage his friend who is bent over (Figure 11a), both with age and with the exhaustion of making it up the rise to their rest stop (Figure 8). The servant boy carrying the lute echoes this action, looking back toward his friend with a double-chignon hairstyle (Figure 10a). While it is certainly possible that the artist simply intended to depict a courteous gesture toward a friend who has fallen a step behind, it is also indicative of the subject matter of this painting. More than celebrating a picnic, Old Trees, Level Distance is a picture of parting and farewell. The joyful mood evident in the outing is tempered by the misty, melancholic view from the bamboo pavilion. Perhaps the old men, in the autumn of their careers, are meeting for a final time to say good-bye. Such a mood of farewell is quite similar to the bittersweet air found in the eight-couplets poems of Su Shi and Huang Tingjian, the theme of which is also retirement and farewell.

With this understanding of Old Trees, Level Distance, the further significance of its iconographic program can be examined, a key to which lies in the distinctive image of a pair of barely visible birds, flying low above the riverbank. While the motif of returning birds is commonplace in paintings of cold, autumn landscapes, the birds are, following observable nature, always depicted in a flock. The restriction in this picture to two birds is more readily comprehended when considered in sum with similar elements in the painting (Figure 5).38

The two fishermen in Old Trees, Level Distance, each in his own boat, are also a pair (Figure 4). These anglers are differentiated from the fishing folk in the lower left (Figures 11c and 11d) and right of Early Spring (Figure 11e) by the absence of fishing nets or poles. In Su Che’s quatrains on Autumn Mountains, Level Distance, they are really recluse gentlemen having a scholarly chat on the river. The two woodcutters half hidden in the mist are also a pair (Figure 5). The small, withered trees along the bank are a duo (Figure 4), as are the larger trees farther along the scroll (Figure 7a). Even the rocks, one in front of the large trees, and the other partly obscuring the pavilion, are a pair. Last, the now familiar old men at the end of the scroll are a pair (Figures 8, 11a, and 11b). The old man leading the way wears a scholar-official hat, while the second man, who seems almost doubled over with exertion, wears a hat with two stiff flaps on either side of the head, probably indicating his different station in life.

The birds, the old trees, the recluse fishermen, and the woodcutters in pairs are not merely inhabitants of the landscape. Two by two, they are active accessories to the artist’s clever flattery: one bird flies behind, the other leads; one withered tree is smaller and looks up, literally and figuratively, to its taller friend; one fisherman punts toward his friend, while the other sits in calm repose; one woodcutter packs the heavier load on his back, while the other walks ahead. Thus the program of pairs found in Old Trees, Level Distance is also a depiction of hierarchical position, according to which one element assumes the role of leader, the other that of follower.

We might borrow Su Shi’s eight-couplet poem to add support to this interpretation of the iconography. Just as Su’s poem was shown to refer to the life and character of Wen Yanbo, Guo Xi’s painting can also be read as such. Thus, the old man with his official’s hat in Old Trees, Level Distance may be considered to be Guo’s portrait of his patron, and a very flattering picture at that: although eighty years of age, Wen Yanbo walks without the aid of his servant. He vigorously uses his staff and entirely outpaces his companion.

The artist augments his portrait by association with four motifs—the leading bird, the taller tree, the peaceful angler, and the first woodcutter. Like the fisherman and woodcutter, Wen Yanbo holds to the gentleman’s desire for an eremitic existence; like the battered, old tree that refuses to die, surviving under the most difficult conditions, so too do Wen’s high moral principles remain constant throughout his life; like the bird that seeks to return home, he too longs for retirement. Conversely, the second bird, the smaller tree, the exerting fisherman, and the heavily laden woodcutter correspond to the second old man. The second man is an image embodying deference, and thus can be read as an equivalent of Guo Xi himself. He is not only curved over in old age and exhaustion, but also bowing deeply in respect to Wen Yanbo, with his hands clasped in front.

While Guo Xi might seem presumptuous in depicting himself in an intimate portrait of his patron, here taken to be the great statesman Wen Yanbo, there are reasons for suggesting a close relationship between
the two men. Wen, after all, had more than passing contact with the artist—he was quite an admirer of Guo Xi’s paintings, viewed Guo’s works while living in Luoyang, and collected them with some regularity. Other than the two handscrolls belonging to Wen Yanbo and his son Wen Jifu described above, the elder Wen also owned or inscribed at least two other Guo Xi paintings.

The first of these is a painting on which Wen Yanbo wrote the poem “Inscribing Guo Xi’s Woodcutter Crossing the River Screen” (題郭熙樵夫渡水圖), which might have belonged to him or was in a friend’s collection. Wen may have been living in Luoyang at this time, which would put the inscription to around the first few years of the 1080s:

Shallow waters, deep mountains, a single path passes through,
woodcutter crossing the river, emerges within a grove.
Sorrowful for this painting brush, so full of emotion,
I write upon this single leaf screen, its frosty white silk.

Guo Xi could have painted this single-leaved screen (yi shan feng 一扇風) for a patron in Luoyang before he was recruited to court. However, it seems more likely that Woodcutter Crossing the River was done while he was on a leave of absence from the Imperial City to about 1082, during which time he visited his hometown of WXenxian and maybe nearby Luoyang as well, when he could have met Wen Yanbo.

Guo Xi also gave Wen Yanbo a painting for his eightieth birthday in 1086. His son Guo Si recorded its title as Pines in a Single View 一望松 and described it as a work on a small piece of silk, only two feet and a few inches wide. It depicted an old man leaning on a staff—maybe similar to the figure in Old Trees, Level Distance (Figure 11b)—in front of a cliff and under a large pine tree, behind which were innumerable pines large and small, and in a gorge were yet more in “a single, uninterrupted view.” Pine trees, a symbol of longevity, are a subject appropriate for a birthday. However, according to Guo Si, Guo Xi’s idea was to present Wen Yanbo with a wish that his sons and grandsons be like the pines in this painting, and become dukes and ministers in unbroken succession.

Wen Yanbo inscribed (possibly owned) Guo Xi’s Woodcutter Crossing the River screen in the early 1080s, when he was in Luoyang; he wrote a colophon on the handscroll Autumn Mountains, Level Distance after 1080 while in Kaifeng, which he later showed to Su Shi and Huang Tingjian; he may even have originally owned the other Guo Xi handscroll of the same name about which Su Shi and Su Che wrote poems in 1087 and which eventually belonged to his son Wen Jifu in the 1090s; he received Guo Xi’s gift of Pines in a Single View for his birthday in 1086. Wen Yanbo seems to have become an enthusiast of Guo Xi’s paintings upon meeting Guo sometime in the early 1080s, often viewing and collecting them during his first retirement in Luoyang from late 1083, and after his return to the capital upon Emperor Shenzong’s death in mid-1086.

In fact, Wen Yanbo not only was Guo Xi’s patron, but also shared common ground with the court painter. At about eighty years of age in the 1080s, he and Guo Xi were approximately the same age. They had common friends of the same generation, for example, Fu Bi 福bitmap (1004–1083), who, when he was a magistrate in Heyang 河陽 (Henan), had recruited Guo Xi to serve at the capital, and Wu Chong 吳充 (1021–1080), who was one of Guo Xi’s most influential patrons in his first few years at Kaifeng. Both Wen and Guo had connections to Luoyang, since Guo’s hometown was in WXenxian, just northeast of the city. Reading the two old men depicted in the Metropolitan’s Old Trees, Level Distance as an image of Wen Yanbo and Guo Xi is further persuasive given that both men had been brought close together by common acquaintances and similar concerns of retirement to Luoyang in their old age.

On one level, we can interpret Old Trees, Level Distance to be a picture of Wen Yanbo at leisure. On another level, the succinct choice of motifs hints at more than representations of forms in nature. They might signify Wen as poised angler and intrepid woodcutter, as tenacious old tree, as patient returning bird, and as himself, a moral statesman and stalwart leader. Orchestrating a range of formal and conceptual tools with precision and economy, the old master painter was not only able to present a thoughtful and scholarly farewell painting to his patron, appropriate to the occasion of retirement, but also to record their friendship by evoking a real or imagined time when they picnicked together in Luoyang. While the litany of literary tropes presented here may be rather too obvious for those familiar with the poetic tradition from which the imagery is drawn, the clever deployment of these verbal devices in a visual medium certainly deepens our understanding of Guo’s endeavor and endows the painting with a gratifying freshness.

Art historians have long suspected that something of great significance happened to the Chinese landscape at the end of the Northern Song period. Monumental landscape painting of this time, having reached its greatest height and pervasiveness, was soon to decline. This period marked the emergence of a contrasting mode of landscape, one that was to establish the intimate scene (xiaojing 小景) as a new category. Level
distance landscapes, executed primarily in the handscroll format, formed a part of this new group. For members of the imperial family, such as Wang Shen 王（ca. 1048–after 1104) or Zhao Lingrang 趙令穰 (active ca. 1080–1100), officials at court, such as Song Di 宋迪 (ca. 1015–ca. 1080), or professional painters, such as Guo Xi or Li Gongnian 李公年 (late 11th century), the intimate level distance landscape came to have great appeal.

In conclusion, the handscrolls executed late in Guo Xi’s career in this landscape mode can be understood as a prominent part of a greater movement that had gained momentum by the end of the eleventh century. *Old Trees, Level Distance* in The Metropolitan Museum of Art is the only known surviving example of Guo Xi’s intimate mode. Besides taking its place next to *Early Spring* as representing an important aspect of Guo’s oeuvre, it is also a monument of late Northern Song landscape painting at a crucial juncture in its development.

**APPENDIX: COLOPHON AND POEMS**

顏境煥跋

昔東坡有詩，玉堂書捲春日開，中有郭熙畫春山，蓋文公公會書其詩，而坡老則詩其跋也。二公昭代名臣，重疊其品題，豈得哉。郭熙在人間不一，今此樹色奇遠圖，以時考之，科亦寶元元祐間所作，於今三百載而歸於終始春華 Knights 施新書凡。早喜得所罕遇，圖亦適所罕遇。余亦見所罕見，故為之書而跋之詩。郭熙所畫不
在色，白石枯松枝狀長，平遠有情趣含幻境，品題增重自前時，一重素稿飛雲，三百年後
幾周持向東晉時展玩，琴書相伴樂清淡。顏境煥。  

蘇軾〈郭熙畫題秋山平遠圖公看跋尾〉

玉堂書捲春日開，中有郭熙畫春山；
鳴鳴乳燕初鳴起，白波青嶂非人間。
離離短楓開平遠，漫漫疏林移秋晚；
恰似江南送客時，惆悵望望雲嵐。
伊川佚老鬢如霜，洲渚秋山思洛陽；
為君紙尾作行草，簡書脈脈浮秋光。
我從公府如一日，不覺青山映黃髮；
為畫罷門八節灑，時向伊川買泉石。  

黃庭堅〈次韻子瞻題郭熙畫秋山〉

黃州逕客未歸時，江南江北館看山；
玉堂壁對郭熙畫，發興已在青林間。
郭熙官宦但荒遠，短紙奇嵐開秋漧。
江村煙外雨腳明，歸運行邊餘夢蝶。
坐思南柯夢庭畝，潑身不如醉賦詩。
熙今頭白有眼力，尚能弄筆映窗影。
畫取江南好風日，杖此筆老箋中髮。
但熙畫畫作長，五日十日一水石。  

蘇軾〈郭熙秋山平遠二首〉

目盡孤鷺落照邊，遙知風雨不同州。
此問有句無人識，遮與襄陽孟浩然。

木落騷人已怨秋，不堪平遠發詩愁。
要看萬壑爭流處，他日終相觀虎頭。
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NOTES

* The format for all dates is year/lunar month.
1. Guo Xi’s exact birth and death dates are unknown. For the approximate dates given here, see Suzuki Kei 鈴木敬, “Rinsen kō chi shu no Gaki to Kakui Ki ni suite” 林森高致の畫記と 彼のについて [Kuo Hsi and the Huaiji in Linsen gaoshi], Bijutsushi 美術史 30 (1981), pt. 5, p. 8. This article is translated into Chinese by Wang Weiming 王維明, Masu shanyu 美術研究 4 (1982), pp. 70–76. Also see Weng Tungwen 王同文, “Huaren shengyu nian kao”華人生卒考 [Study of birth and death dates of painters], Gugong jikan 故宮季刊 4/3 (January 1970), pt. 2, pp. 48–51.
3. Richard M. Barnhart credits the late Jiang Zhaoshen, former Curator of Calligraphy and Painting and Deputy Director of the National Palace Museum, for the initial idea. See Barnhart, “Three Song Landscape Paintings,” Orientations 29 (February 1998), pp. 54–61, which lists three other paintings that carry the Xuanhe zhongbi seal. Wang Shen’s A7 (b. ca. 1048, d. after 1104) Misty River and Layered Hills, in the collection of the Shanghai Museum, has both the Xuanhe zhongbi and all seven seals of the Xuanhe suite.
5. Chinese for this colophon and poems translated by the author in this article are in the Appendix.
6. The poems are found in Chen Gaohua, Song Liao jin huaqia shiliao 宋淵詩畫家史料 [Historical materials for painters of the Song, Liao, and Jin dynasties] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984), pp. 541–57.
7. Not found in Lugong wenji 蘆公文集 [Collected works of Wen Yanbo], Wenwu yu Shui quanshu 文物與山水全書 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), vol. 1100.
10. Zhao Cigong 趙從公 (12th century) gives “Old recluse of River Yi” as Wen Yanbo; see SSSJ, juan 28, vol. 5, p. 1510.
11. Wen Yanbo wrote many poems about the area, which he visited while living in Luoyang. For a selection, see Li Xiangian 李翔遠, Luoyang mingshi luoyang [Complete poems on Luoyang and Longmen] (Beijing: Zhongguo luyou chubanshe, 1986), pp. 70–78.
15. See Lugong wenji, juan 34, vol. 1100, pp. 768–72, for Wen Yanbo’s many petitions to retire after being recalled to Kaifeng.
16. Shangyou shijihua 山谷詩集 [An annotated collection of Huang Tingjian’s poems], juan 7, commentaries by Ren Yuan 任園 (†after 1114), Shi Rong 史容 (†after 1201), and Shi Jiwen 史季文 (†after 1254) (Shanghai: Ywen yinshuguan, 1919), vol. 1, p. 45 for title and comment, pp. 466–69 for poem and annotation. Hereafter SGSJ.
17. A reference to Guo Xi’s quotation of a poem by the great Tang poet Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) titled “Playfully Inscribing Wang Zai’s Painting Landscapes” 蘆公賛王宰畫山水圖詩, in Linsen gaoshi, sec. 3, Huaiji, 館記 [The secrets of painting], Zhongguo shuahua quanjji, vol. 1, p. 501, translated in Bush and Shih, Early Chinese Texts, p. 180. Du Fu described the laborious nature of Wang Zai’s (late 8th–early 9th century) skill: “Ten days to paint a rock, five days to paint a stone.” Wang was from western Shu (Sichuan) and made landscape paintings of trees and rocks.
18. Ren Yuan notes the analogy as employed by Du Fu, who wrote, “When you look at geese heading for the sun, / you too will plan to return to the rice paddies and miller fields,” SGSJ, vol. 1, p. 496.


21. SGSJ, vol. 1, p. 466, also links this to Su Shi’s 1086 appointment to the Hanlin Academy and refers to Ouyang Xiu’s 歐陽修 (1007–1072) use of the term in a similar context: “Singing and I beckon the rusted old man, / together we stroll within the Green Grove.”

22. Zengfu zuhen Shi Gu zhu Shi shi 增補史柱畫史 畫柱是本精校注蘇詩 [The revised and complete edition of the Shi Yuanzhi and Gu Jingtian commentaries on Su Shi’s poetry], edited and collated by Zheng Qian 鄭堅 and Yan Yingping 楊一平 (Shanghai: Ywen yinshu, 1989), vol. 1, p. 67, lists Su Shi’s poem as datable to 1087. Ren Yuan comments that Huang Tingjian wrote this poem after those titled “Su Shi and Su Che Following Each Other Entering Service to Proximate the Emperor,” which he composed when Su Shi and his brother Su Che 蘇軾 (1039–1112) received appointments to the same official positions in 1086/9 and 1086/11. Huang’s poem discussed here is thus datable to after 1086/11. See SGSJ, vol. 1, p. 45. This collection is chronological where possible.


24. In Luancheng jì 魯城記 [The collected works of Su Che], juan 15, Zeng Zaozhuang 曾肇莊 and Ma Defu 马德富, comps., Classical Literary Series 典籍文學叢書 [Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987], vol. 1, p. 364. See the author’s dissertation for an annotated translation of the poem, dating and interpretation of this important poem. Chen Zongmin 陳宗敏 considers both this and Su Che’s quatrain pair to be from 1087, in Su Ziyin suanpu 蘇子由年譜 [Chronological biography of Su Che] (Taiwan: s.n., 1978), p. 124.

25. SSSJ, juan 29, vol. 5, p. 1540. Since SSSJ arranges poems in chronological sequence where possible, this poem (listed in juan 29) probably postdates Su Shi’s eight-couplet poem (listed in juan 28). It may date to mid-1087, since the poems listed before and after in juan 29 date to early and late 1087, respectively. Also translated in Stuart Sargent, “Colophons in Countermotion: Poems by Su Shih and Huang Ting-chien on Paintings,” Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 52, no. 1 (June 1992), pp. 274–76.


28. This analysis of the “tree leaves fall” 木葉下 image is Alfreda Murck’s; see Painting and Poetry in Song China: The Subtle Art of Dissent (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming), chap. 5. The allusion is taken up by Chao Buzhi in his poem matching Su Shi’s quatrains.


31. Also see the matching poem by the poet and essayist Zhang Lei 張耒 (1054–1114 or 1052–1112), entitled “Inscribing Guo Xi’s Landscape [owned by] Zhou Wenhuan, Two Poems” 湖西文翰園山水二首 In Zhang Youshi wenji 張youshi文集 [Collected works of Zhang Lei], juan 31, Sibuxiong chubian suoben 四部丛刊初编本 (Shanghai: Shangwuyinshuguan, 1967), pp. 55, p. 243. This poem is essentially the same as Chao Buzhi’s. It is not clear which version is corrupted, but Zhang Lei’s title spells Wen Jifu’s sobriquet incorrectly. No relevant poetry is listed in the lyric poet Qin Guan’s 倪館 (1049–1100) collected works.


34. Probably referring to the Yunneng Marsh 譯留遺 in Hubei Province, southern part of Anhui county 寧國縣, Yunneng county is just northwest of present-day Wuhan city. This is a way to refer to the south, to places where Bi Zhongyou had traveled as a young man.

35. Jieji 麥集 [Records of chicken ribs], juan 20, Sibuxiong chubian suoben, vol. 56, p. 121.


37. An example of another Song-period farewell poem 行行詩 that employs this poetic image is one by Cai Jing 祖京 (1045–1126), entitled “For the Guest Circuit General” 送胡侍郎. The poem is dated 1089, and the last line reads, “... sadly I gazed at Wolf Mountain, repeatedly turning my head.” See Kang Dewu 康德武, “Cai Jing songxing shi bei jieji” 蔡京送行詩碑解 [An analysis of Cai Jing’s farewell poem on a stone], Wenwu chubao 文物雜報 3 (1996), pp. 54–57. Kang Dewu interprets the line to mean Cai Jing turns his head, rather than the recipient of the poem. The author is grateful to Elizabeth Brotherton for sharing this reference.

38. For example, flocks of returning birds are found in renditions of the distinctive “Wild Geese Descending to Sandbar” view of the
Eight Views of Xiao-Xiang theme; see Murck, *Painting and Poetry in Song China*. Assuming the obvious, namely, that paintings of mandarin ducks or other auspicious animal pairs are not relevant to a study of this handscroll, this author has so far located few other paintings with only two returning birds of the sort appropriate to the type, e.g., wild geese, crows, jackdaws, swallows, etc. The closest comparison is in a painting attributed to Li Gonglin, *Mountain Villa*, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, illustrated in Robert E. Harrist, Jr., *Painting and Private Life in Eleventh-Century China: Mountain Villa by Li Gonglin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), fig. 1.1. In contrast, the imagery of a pair of birds is very common in poetry.

39. Wen Yanbo's use of the phrase Li-Guo in poems from Luoyang may be in reference to the paintings of Li Cheng 李成 (919–967) and Guo Xi, *Lugong wenji*, juan 7, vol. 1100, pp. 638 and 636; see Foong, "Landscape by Guo Xi in Transition."

40. *Lugong wenji*, juan 7, vol. 1100, p. 636. The poem might also be from when Wen Yanbo was still in residence at Damingfu in the late Xining era (1068–77). If this is the case, then Wen was reviewing a work by Guo Xi that he painted for a patron in Damingfu before recruited to court. Guo Si's note indicates that Guo Xi was once in Xingzhou 慕州 (Hebei)—just one hundred kilometers northwest of Damingfu—where he gave his son a painting titled *Riders in West Mountain* 西山走馬圖. From Linquan gaozhi, sec. 5, *Huage shi Ji* 畫格拾零 [Additional notes on exemplar paintings], in *Zhongguo shuhua quanji*, vol. 1, p. 502, translated in Bush and Shih, *Early Chinese Texts*, p. 154.

41. For Guo Xi's leave of absence, see Foong, "Landscape by Guo Xi in Transition," chap. 2.

42. In *Linquan gaozhi*, sec. 5, *Huage shi Ji, Zhongguo shuhua quanji*, vol. 1, p. 502, translated in Bush and Shih, *Early Chinese Texts*, pp. 154–55. Guo Si does not specify which of Wen Yanbo's major birthdays this painting was for. Bush and Shih give either his sixtieth or eightieth birthday, dating it to 1066 or 1086. Suzuki Kei proposes the sixtieth or seventieth birthday but suggests the former is more likely because Guo Xi would have had less freedom after entering court to paint a work displaying such literati flavor; see "Rinsen kōchi shu no Gaki," pp. 7–8. However, since Guo Xi probably did not meet Wen Yanbo until the early 1080s, this author believes the date of 1086 is most likely.