

**Title:** *Early Spring*

**Culture:** Chinese, Song Dynasty

**Artist:** Guo Xi (formerly known as Kuo Hsi)

**Date:** 1072

**Dimensions:** 83 x 43 ½ inches

**Medium:** Hanging Scroll; ink and light color on silk

**Acquisition #:** 96.13

Additional works in the collection by the artist? Yes \_\_\_ No X

**Please Note:** This work is a facsimile (reproduction), the original is located in the National Palace Museum in Taipei, Taiwan.



**MoFA**  
Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts

### Historical Context

The Song Dynasty (960-1279) was the golden age of Chinese landscape painting. During this time the *shan shui* style of painting — “shan” meaning mountain and “shui” meaning river — became prominent. However, the way these mountainous landscapes were depicted shifted greatly from the Northern (or early) Song period (960-1127) to the Southern (or late) Song period (1127-1279). Paintings of the Northern Song period were influenced by political ideals of bringing order to the world and tackling the largest issues affecting society; thus, they often depict huge, sweeping landscapes.

### Artist's Biography

Guo Xi (lived 1020-1090) was one of the most famous artists of the Northern Song period. He served as a court painter under Emperor Shenzong (reigned 1068-1085) and produced many monumental landscape paintings. He specialized in painting large pine trees and scenery enveloped in mist and clouds, eventually developing a method of brushwork which became important for later painters. One of his most famous works is *Early Spring*, dated 1072. The work also demonstrates his innovative technique for producing multiple perspectives. This type of perspective is called “Floating Perspective,” because the eye of the viewer shifts with the perspective shifts. This method also highlights the differences between Chinese and Western representations of depth. Guo Xi was often referred to as a “Northern Song master.” His work inspired many later artists and he even had landscapes dedicated to him.

### What's In A Name?

Guo Xi (Chinese: 郭熙) was formerly known in the West as Kuo Hsi, using the Wade-Giles system of Romanization. Wade-Giles was the standard system of transcription in the English-speaking world for most of the 20th century, used in books published before 1979. Since 1979, it has been almost entirely replaced by the Pinyin system approved by the Chinese government in 1958. The best-known example of this change is demonstrated by the name of the capital of the People's Republic of China. Beijing is the Pinyin Romanization of the Mandarin pronunciation of the Chinese characters 北京. However, before the adoption of Pinyin, Peking was the English name of the city.

### Visual Description

The main elements of the monumental landscape are arranged along the central axis of this vertical scroll. Large hills and pine trees in the foreground connect with the curved shapes of the middle-ground. Following a break in the mist, the slope climbs up and continues into the winding central mountain in the back. Several structures are tucked deep into the mountains on the right. The flattened ground to the left creates a balancing horizontal that complements the vertical heights of the mountain.

### Sources

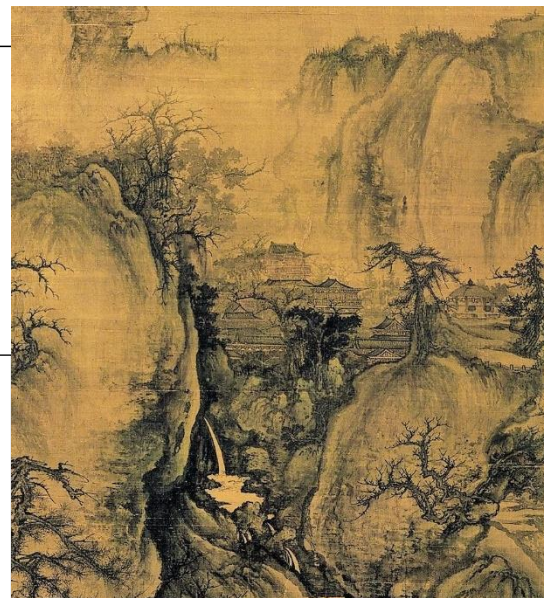
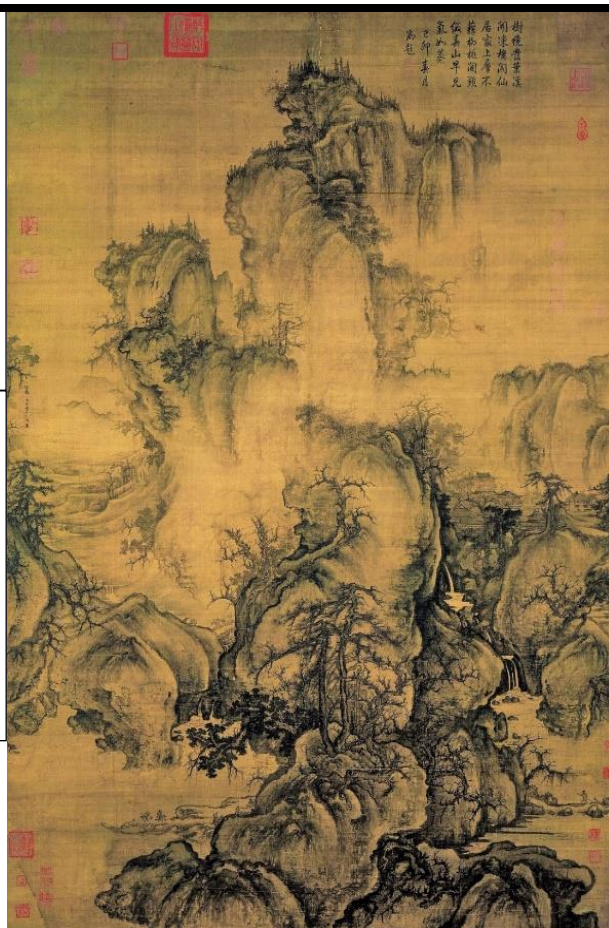
<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/east-asian-art/song-dynasty.htm>

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-arthistory/chapter/the-song-dynasty>

<http://www.chinaonlinemuseum.com/painting-guo-xi-backup.php>

<https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/asset/0gEYL451TLg-OA>

Compiled by Abby Mann Fall 2017



**Shan shui** refers to a style of traditional Chinese landscape painting that involves using brush and ink rather than more conventional paints. Mountains, rivers, and waterfalls are prominent in this art form. Mountains had long been seen as sacred places in China, close to the heavens. The art of *shan shui*, like many other styles of Chinese painting was strongly influenced by Taoist imagery and motifs. Taoism stresses the minor human presence in the vastness of the cosmos, thus *shan shui* paintings depict huge, sweeping landscapes. When Chinese painters worked on *shan shui* paintings, they did not try to present a realistic image of nature, but rather a thought-provoking one. Whether the painted colors and shapes look like the real object or not did not matter. A certain movement in poetry, influenced by the *shan shui* style, came to be known as shanshui poetry. Sometimes, the poems were designed to be viewed with a particular work of art, others were intended to be "textual art" that invoked an image inside a reader's mind.

#### Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (K-5)

**Big Idea:** Historical and Global Connections

**Enduring Understanding 1:** Through study in the arts, we learn about and honor others and the worlds in which they live(d).

**VA.3.H.1.3** Identify and be respectful of ideas important to individuals, groups, or cultures that are reflected in their artworks.

#### Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (6-12)

**Big Idea:** Critical Thinking and Reflection

**Enduring Understanding 1:** Cognition and reflection are required to appreciate, interpret, and create with artistic intent.

**VA.912.C.1.2** Use critical-thinking skills for various contexts to develop, refine, and reflect on an artistic theme.

#### Write a ShanShui Poem (6-12)

**Activity Session & Procedure:** Let students independently research shan shui landscapes. Open the floor to discussion about the paintings, the feelings they evoke, and landscapes students have experienced which evoke similar feelings. Then students can create their own landscapes using brush and ink. Finally, have students describe their landscapes in poems.

#### Objectives:

1. Students will research *shan shui* landscapes.
2. Students will discuss landscapes they have experienced which make them feel insignificant, the way the shan shui painters felt among the towering mountains of China.
3. Students will create their own *shan shui* landscapes based on this discussion.
4. Students will then write *shan shui* poems based on the landscapes they created.
5. Students will insert their poems into their landscapes, keeping compositional balance in mind.

**Materials:** research materials, large sheets of paper, brushes and ink, writing materials

#### Paint a Shan Shui Landscape (K-5)

**Activity Session & Procedure:** Explain Taoism to students. Introduce *shan shui* landscapes, using examples such as *Early Spring*, and discuss the way Taoist ideas are shown in the artwork. Help connect the insignificance the artists' felt among the towering mountains of China to the way students may feel in alternative landscapes like the vastness of the ocean. Give students large pieces of paper and have them paint their own versions of *shan shui* landscapes, for example as seascapes or other alternatives.

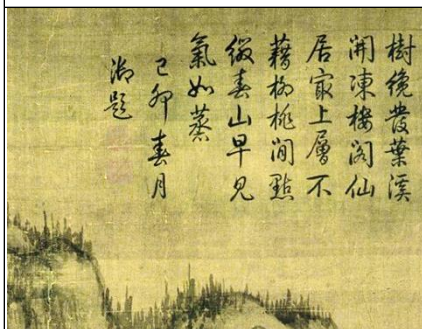
#### Objectives:

1. Students will be introduced to *shan shui* landscapes, including examples such as *Early Spring*.
2. Students will learn about Taoism and the way it influenced these artworks.
3. Students will create analogies between the towering mountains of China, and the alternative landscapes in which they live, for example the vastness of the ocean around Florida.
4. Students will then paint their own versions of a *shan shui* landscape, using alternate environments, such as the ocean.

**Materials:** Sample images of *shan shui* landscapes, photographs of the ocean surrounding Florida or other alternatives, large sheets of paper, brushes and ink or paint

<https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=Shan+Shui+Painting+Chinese+Landscape&FORM=RESTAB&ajf=100>

<https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=Taoism+Landscape+Paintings&FORM=RESTAB>



Top-right corner detail of *Early Spring*

An example of *shan shui* poetry (translation below)

The trees are just beginning to sprout leaves; the frozen brook begins to melt.  
A building is placed on the highest ground, where the immortals reside.  
There is nothing between the willow and peach trees to clutter up the scene.  
Steam-like mist can be seen early in the morning on the springtime mountain.

#### Sources

<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/east-asian-art/song-dynasty.htm>  
<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-arthistory/chapter/the-song-dynasty>  
 Completed by Abby Mann Spring 2018