



Height: 297.000 mm Width: 756.000 mm

Gift of P.T. Brooke Sewell

Asia OA 1954.12-11.05 (Chinese Painting
Add. 286)

Asia

Qian Xuan, *Young nobleman on horseback*, a handscroll painting

From China Yuan dynasty, dated the 27th year of Zhiyuan (AD 1290)

Qian Xuan (about 1235-1300) was a scholar-official from Wuxing, Zhejiang Province. After the Mongol conquest of China in 1279, he became a *yimin* ('leftover subject'). *Yimin* were officials who preferred retirement from public life to serving the alien Yuan dynasty (1279-1368). Like many of his compatriots, he turned to artistic pursuits to support himself. A literati painter, Qian painted landscapes, historical figures and flowers.

Yimin painters revived past styles of painting to remind them of China's glorious past (*fugu* - 'return to the past'). The nobleman's costume is painted in the fine linear style reminiscent of Gu Kaizhi (about 345-406). The flat use of colour and bare background add to the sense of restraint and detachment typical of Yuan painting.

The accompanying poem was copied from a painting by Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), the leading artistic and literary talent of the Yuan period. Zhao, who briefly served the Mongols, painted men and horses to reflect his ambivalence towards public service. The sad tone of the poem must have echoed Qian's feelings:

'Wuling is in the prime of youth, Energetic and restless, with white steed and golden saddle,

Source URL: http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/asia/q/qian_xuan,_young_nobleman_on_h.aspx
Saylor URL: <http://www.saylor.org/courses/arth305/#2.4.2>

He is in high spirits, Holding his bow he calls
the oriole, but no oriole comes. Ancient catalpa
and setting sun: what can be done about
age?' (translated by R. Whitfield)

A. Farrer, *The brush dances and the ink s*
(Hayward Gallery, London, 1990)

J. Rawson (ed.), *The British Museum book of
Chi* (London, The British Museum Press, 1992)

K. Suzuki (ed.), *Comprehensive illustrated cata*
(University of Tokyo Press, 1982)