

38. Gu Jianlong [Ku Chien-lung] (1606-1694?)

“Portrait of a Manchu Prince”

Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk
120.9 x 212.5 cm. (47 1/2 x 83 5/8 in.)

“Respectfully painted by Gu Jianlong, called Yun-ch’en.”

Artist’s seals:

Gu Jianlung yin ; Yunchen



The imposing figure sits on a carved *guri* lacquer folding horseshoe-back chair draped with a silk brocade woven with floral roundels in green, red and gold in front of a highly carved dark wood altar table. He wears the blue silk Manchu formal court robe (*chaopao*) with a cape (*piling*). The robe is either brocaded or stitched in couched gold with a large four-claw dragon in profile on the chest grasping a pearl with further small dragons racing over waves through multicolor clouds in pursuit of flaming pearls on the horse-hoof cuffs and in two horizontal banks at the hips and above the hem. He wears a ruby necklace (*chaozhu*) adorned with large crystal (?) beads. His red hat (*chaoguan*) has a gold filigree ornament studded with pearls and a large ruby finial. Rather than a simple setting for the figure, as is quite common (fig. 1), the figure here is given the princely background of a six-fold screen decorated with ink-monochrome landscape paintings done in the style of the great painter-calligrapher Dong Qichang (1555-1636) from Huating, Jiangsu province.

The artist, Gu Jianlong (1606-1691 or later), was born in neighboring Taicang. A number of dated paintings give his age at the time of their execution, and from these it can be determined that he was born in 1606. The latest known work attributed to Ku is dated to 1694, but this in fact could have been painted a full cycle of sixty years earlier, in 1634, since Ku is known to have been devoted to painting and drawing even as a child. His teacher in painting is not known but very likely he studied portraiture with Zeng Qing (1564-1647) (fig. 2). The *Minghua lu*, in its biography of Zeng, lists a Gu Yunreng as a disciple of the master, and that probably refers to Gu Jianlong

Zeng Qing is often held to have been influenced by the Western style of painting known through the efforts of the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who settled in Nanjing in 1599 and opened a church displaying painted and sculpted images in 1605. Oil paintings were done with thickly applied, non-translucent pigments, and the Chinese use of *fencai* washes, to which color and lead-white had been added, were an approximation of that almost three-dimensional and certainly opaque effect. Zeng Qing’s major innovation was to apply the translucent washes of traditional Chinese portraiture in multiple graded overlays that acted to model faces in terms of light and shadow without obscuring the underlying brushwork that was held to convey character and personality. The present painting by Gu Jianlong is thus an excellent example of Zeng’s approach to portraiture.

Gu also learned by copying and sketching earlier paintings that were of interest to him; an extant album with preface by Wang Shimin (1592-1680), from Taicang as was Gu, suggests how the sketches could form the basis for more complex landscapes such as appear in the present work (figs. 3-4). During the early Kangxi reign-era (1662-1722), Gu's talent and fame earned him appointment as *zhibou*, "Painter-in-waiting," in the imperial painting academy in Beijing. The present "Portrait of a Manchu Prince" was thus surely painted during that period of service, and demonstrates the reasons for the high regard in which he was held. A contemporaneous biography of Gu, written about 1670, is given in the *Tubui baojian xuzuan*: "Gu Jianlong, *zi* Yunchen, was from Taicang and today lives in Huqiu (Suzhou). He excels in painting landscapes, figures, and birds. His ladies are delicately beautiful and pliantly formed but are stout in conception and profound in bearing. His studies and copies after bygone works are, even when viewed by an initiate, difficult for a time to distinguish from the real ones. Though he is not a reborn Hutou (Gu Kaizhi), he is worthy to share a mat with Shizhou (Qiu Ying)."¹

1. *Tubui baojian xuzuan*, *Huashi congshu* edition, chap. 2, p. 903.



Fig. 1. Gu Jianlong: "Portrait of Ma Shiqi," 1687, after Cleveland Museum of Art, *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting*, Cleveland, 1980, cat. 255, pp. 347-48.

Fig. 2. Zeng Qing: "Portrait of Huang Daozhou," 1644-45, after *Kaikodo Journal* II, Autumn, 1966, cat. 10, p. 29.





Fig. 3. Gu Jianlong: "Landscape Sketch," after Cleveland Museum of Art, *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting*, Cleveland, 1980, cat. 254-9, p. 343.



Fig. 4. Gu Jianlong: "Landscape Sketch," after Cleveland Museum of Art, *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting*, Cleveland, 1980, cat. 254-27, p. 345.