Nakayama Koyo (1717-1780) 中山高陽

"Kuan Yu (J: Kan-u) on Horseback" 1769

Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk
127 x 56 cm.

Inscription:

"This picture was created on the basis of an (illustration to a) novel, from which I borrowed its brush-movement and outstanding virility. When Ganta first looked at my painting he believed me to be good at portraying military men. I thus did this to give to him so as to encourage that idea. During spring of the year 1769, the Recluse Koyo, called Teichu."

Artist's seals:

Yua; Chu Teichu in; Shiwa

Nakayama Kiyoshi, *azana* Jogen, Shitatsu, Shiwa, and Teichu, familiar name Seiemon, and *go* Gansei Donjin, Koyo (from the age of 40 onward), Shosekisai, and Suiboku Sanjin, was born in Sakai-machi in Tosa, Kochi prefecture, the son of a dealer in antiques and Chinese objects. Koyo sometimes claimed descent from the Minamoto family, using that as his surname, and he also called himself by a Chinese name, Chung-shih (Japanese Chu Teki). One of his ancestors had owned a small castle but had lost it, leaving the next generation, Koyo's grandfather, with the impossible task of regaining the family's lost position. Koyo's father opened a shop, named Awaya, and was very successful until major fires in 1722 and 1727 caused another decline in their fortunes. It was about that time too that the government prohibited merchants from joining the lower samurai ranks, so Koyo's father became a monk, leaving the business to Koyo's brother, who was educated in Shinto and apparently very intelligent.

At the age of 16 Koyo began studying Confucianism with the scholar Tominage Koreyasu and, in Kyoto, is said to have learned painting with Sakaki Hyakusen (1698-1753). Much of Koyo's knowledge of Chinese styles seems to have come, however, from his own copies of more than 500 old paintings and from his study of various block-printed books then coming into Japan. When his literature teacher died in 1752, Koyo seems to have assumed leadership of the literati circle gathered around Tominage and to have begun advising the younger students who then came to him for advice.

Late in the year 1758, Koyo journeyed to Edo to study calligraphy with Seki Hoo. Although Koyo was expelled for some reason from Hoo's home, where he had been living, in April of 1761 he became a *goyo eshi* and was awarded salary of *san-ninbuchi* from the Tosa clan and was permitted to carry a sword. By the year 1769 he had become so famous, and his paintings of landscapes and illus-

Fig. 1: Koyo: "Kuan Yu on Horseback" 1769, after Hosono Masanobu: "Nakayama Koyo," *Tokyo Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan Kiyo*, no. 5, 1989, fig. 47.

Fig. 2: Koyo: "Kuan Yu on Horseback" 1769, after *ibid*, fig. 46.

trations to Chinese stories and legends so sought after by visitors to Edo, that he began distributing a price list. His style, and rate of production, were influenced by a fire that destroyed his Edo house in 1772, and in 1775 he published his excellent *Gadan Keiroku*, which advocated less reliance by students on copying. In 1780 Koyo left Edo, intending to return to his native Tosa by boat, but before arriving home again, he died on board, one of the pioneer Nanga artists, still growing and still in transit.

The subject "Kuan Yu on Horseback" was painted at least three times by Koyo during spring of the year 1769 and the sequence provides valuable insight into his method of working. What is probably the earliest of the series is a sketch on paper taken from some Chinese illustrated book, as mentioned in his inscription on the present work (fig. 1). This sketch was then enlarged into a painting done in ink only and measuring 83.4 cm. in height (fig. 2). That inscription, dated to spring of the year 1769, mentions the occasion on which Ts'ao Ts'ao (155-220), hoping to secure the allegiance of the military hero Kuan Yu (d. 219), presented him with an elaborate silk robe. Kuan Yu, however, did not deign even to dismount and rather received the robe on the end of his dragon-bladed lance. That painting was seen by Koyo's friend Ganta, mentioned in the inscription here and elsewhere by Koyo, and his praise for that work elicited from the artist the present painting, 127 cm. in height and done in color as well as ink. The figure of Kuan Yu is remarkably similar in all three paintings, while the present painting, the latest and largest of them, is also the most complex, with a landscape providing a far more spacious setting for the figure.