

# Horse

Ladies Outing in the Style of Li Gonglin.  
Carefully painted by Pu Ru in China.



Spring outing of Lady Guoguo | Pu Ru (1896-1963), China, 1950s, Ink and colour on silk (horse)

## Background information

China's very survival relied on its equestrian prowess. From the 4th century BC, the empire's greatest threat came from its nomadic neighbours; the Xiongnu and the Mongols, who had some of the finest cavalry in the world. The use of horses in Chinese culture expanded beyond military purposes. As early as the Han dynasty, "dancing" horses provided entertainment in the royal court. Both polo and hunting on horseback became popular during the Tang dynasty.

The style of this painting was inspired by the Song dynasty painter Li Gonglin (around 1041–1106). Facial expression and fabrics are vividly depicted in refined strokes. Lady Guoguo, the leader of the group in this painting, was the younger sister of a famous Tang dynasty concubine, Yang Guifei. The artist Pu Ru was a first cousin of China's last emperor, Puyi (1906–1967).

The traditional Chinese painter aims to capture both the outer appearance of an object and its essence. To achieve this, the painter used only a few colours, so as not distract too much from contemplation of the subject. When painting on silk or paper, the ink binds permanently, which meant that the artist had to be disciplined and think through the whole process before making the first stroke.

"Colophons" are inscriptions on paintings, and often take the form of passages of poetry. Their presence reminds us of the close association of calligraphy and ink painting. Seals are often stamped with red paste onto Chinese paintings and calligraphy. The seal might give the name of the artist, or a collector who owned the painting, and sometimes includes a few other words.

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## Proposed Activities

### STUDENTS WILL LEARN ABOUT

- Looking at Chinese paintings
- Horses and their relevance in Chinese culture and art
- The history of this painting

### GLOSSARY

**Colophon** refers to Chinese art, any inscription on a painting.

**Cavalry** are soldiers who fight on horseback, or in the present, in armoured vehicles.

The **Silk Road** is an ancient network of trade routes between China and the Mediterranean Sea.



### LOOKING ACTIVITIES

1. Look closely at the painting and describe everything you see.
2. Who do you think these people are? Where are they going?
3. Imagine you are part of the group. Where do you think they are going? What do you think they might be talking about?
4. This painting was drawn in the 1900s based on a painting by a famous Song-dynasty painter Li Gonglin (104–1106). Why do you think the artist copied the older painting?



### MAKING ACTIVITIES

1. Imagine the destination for the outing. Draw it.
2. Create a collage of horses and riders using coloured paper.
3. Enlarge one of the pairs of horse and rider by sketching.



### CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

#### English

What is the term for a female horse and a baby horse?

What words would you use to describe the different movements of a horse?

#### Chinese Literature

Colophons are inscriptions on paintings, often favourite sayings or poetry. Find a Tang poem that you like and draw imagery to accompany it.

#### History / Social Studies

Polo was popular in the Tang dynasty. The sport is believed to have originated in Iran and arrived in China via Tibet in the seventh century. As an international metropolis, Chang'an attracted professional and amateur polo players from around the world, and the game sometimes served as a point of mutual understanding in diplomatic negotiations.

Find the location of modern-day Chang'an. It is located along an important trade route referred to as the Silk Road. What is the significance of the Silk Road?