

Chinese Sport During the Ming Dynasty

BETTY SPEARS

Amherst. Massachusetts

The Chinese scroll painting, Ch'ing Ming Shang Ho or Spring Festival on the River, offers a rare glimpse into daily Chinese life during an annual holiday. The thirty-three foot scroll depicts people in all walks of life, in rural, village, and city settings, enjoying the annual festival which honored the dead. The festival, in fact, has been called a Chinese version of our Memorial Day.

The painting is thought to be a variation of a famous scroll from the Sung dynasty. The painting begins at dawn in the country side with the river shrouded in mists and then moves into more active village and market scenes. As the day progresses the festival is observed in a bustling city. After the city comes a royal hunting party and the painting finishes with a simple country family enjoying their evening meal. Throughout the scroll the artist presents pastimes, amusement, and sport as an integral part of the holiday celebration. Twenty different scenes from kite flying, T'ou Hu or pitch pot, and football to a hunt and a gymkhana reveal that sport in Ming society was related to social class, sex, military need, and leisure time.