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Trad. attrib. to: Li Gonglin 李公麟 (ca. 1049–1106)  
 Title: *Knick-knack Peddler and Playing Boys*  
 《嬰戲貨郎圖》  
*Yingxi huolang tu*  
 Dynasty/Date: Yuan, early to mid-14th century  
 Format: Album leaf  
 Medium: Ink on silk  
 Dimensions: 21.8 x 29.4 cm (8-9/16 x 11-9/16 in)  
 Credit line: Gift of Charles Lang Freer  
 Accession no.: F1911.161e  
 Provenance: Lee Van Ching (Li Wenqing 李文卿), Shanghai

**Theme:** A knick-knack peddler and his wares, with potential customers.<sup>1</sup>

**Album:** Album of ten leaves: nine paintings and one woven *kesi* textile; attributed to various early artists. Wooden covers, no label.

**Album leaf:** Fifth painting in album. Single piece of cardboard folded in the middle. Small unsigned vertical label slip pasted at upper right. Ink painting on horizontal length of silk, mounted on right side of fold; same-size sheet of blank sutra paper mounted on left side of fold. No artist signature or seal; but many small legible inscriptions on ribbons, pendants, and other individual objects. Eleven (11) collector seals total: painting bears nine collector seals (including four half-seals), and the sutra-paper bears two half-seals.



**Label slip:** separately mounted on cardboard mounting, upper right of painting

Four characters, standard script

宋李龍眠

Li Longmian [Li Gonglin] of the Song dynasty<sup>2</sup>

**Painting:** No artist signature or seal. Eleven ribbons, pendants, and other items bear minute identifying inscriptions

**Artist Inscriptions:** (11) — All in standard script<sup>3</sup>

Left basket; hanging ribbons and pendants starting from the left:

1. 。 。 。 書
2. 薰衣笑蘭香
3. 應驗瘡藥
4. 膏藥
5. 日，月
6. 年，月，日，時。通僊
7. □聞修
8. 大運。小運

Left display case, lower left side:

9. 宜入新年



Left display case, third shelf, set of *xiangqi* game pieces:

10. 士，車，馬，將；將，卒，□，象

Pendant on peddler's belt:

11. 神相

**Collector seals:** (11)

1. Prince of Guangze, 16th century (?)<sup>4</sup> – (1)

*Guangze wangfu zhenwan* 『光澤王府珍玩』 (square relief) – upper left

2. Geng Zhaozhong 耿昭忠 (1640–1686)<sup>5</sup> – (9)

*Zhenshang* 『真賞』 (gourd relief) – painting, upper right

*Dancheng* 『丹誠』 (round intaglio, left half) – painting, upper right

*[Duwei Geng] Xin'gong shuhua zhi zhang* 『[都尉耿]信公書畫之章』 (square intaglio, left half) – painting, lower right

*Gong* 『公』 (square relief) – painting, bottom right

*Xin'gong zhenshang* 『信公珍賞』 (square relief) – painting, bottom left

*Yi'er [zisun]* 『宜爾[子孫]』 (square intaglio, right half) – painting, mid left

*Zhen[mi]* 『珍[祕]』 (square relief, right half) – painting, upper left

*Qinshu[tang]* 『琴書堂』 (square intaglio, right half) – facing sutra paper, left edge



*Qianshan Geng [Xin 'gong shuhua zhi zhang]* 『千山耿[信公書畫之章]』 (square relief, right half) – facing sutra paper, left edge

2. Geng Jiazuo 耿嘉祚 (late 17th–early 18th century) – (1)

*Huihou zhencang* 『會侯珍藏』 (square intaglio) – painting, bottom center

**Traditional Chinese catalogues:** none

**Selected Bibliography**

Cahill, James F. *Chinese Album Leaves in the Freer Gallery of Art*. Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1962. Cat. no. 22, p. 14 and p. 38.

Lawton, Thomas. *Chinese Figure Painting*. Washington, DC: David R. Godine, in association with Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1973. Pp. 212–13.

Weidner, Marsha Smith. *Painting and Patronage at the Mongol Court of China, 1260–1368*. Ph.D. dissertation. University of California, Berkeley, 1983. Pp. 138–39 and 329 (plate 86).

Suzuki Kei 鈴木敬 (1920–2007), ed. *Chūgoku kaiga sōgō zuroku* 中國繪畫總合圖錄 (Comprehensive Illustrated Catalogue of Chinese Paintings). 5 vols. Tokyo: University of Tokyo, 1982–83. Vol. 1, 233 (A21–107).

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**Notes**



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<sup>1</sup> Both the origin and full significance of the knick-knack peddler theme in Chinese painting are uncertain, and there is no known tradition with which to link the genre in either Chinese literature or other visual media that might provide a broader context in which to understand some of the specific details and stock characters that commonly populate such works. According to Chinese texts, the subject of the knick-knack peddler was first explored in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries by figure painters at the imperial court of the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), who employed this theme to display their skills as draftsmen. Street figures of various kinds, including knick-knack peddlers, were a common sight in the prosperous cosmopolitan centers of the Yangzi delta region, especially the imperial capital of Lin'an 臨安 (modern Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province) with its famous West Lake entertainment district. So both the basic subject and many specific details were undoubtedly inspired from real life.

The artist named in traditional sources as the first to paint this theme was Su Hanchen 蘇漢臣 (active early to mid-12th century)—especially famous for his depictions of children—who served in the imperial painting academy of Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (reigned 1101–25) of the Northern Song dynasty and was still active at the Southern Song court until around 1163. Unfortunately, none of his works on this subject survive. The earliest extant works on the knick-knack peddler theme are by the later Southern Song figure painter Li Song 李嵩 (active ca. 1190–1230), who is also celebrated for his mastery of the *jiehua* 界畫 (ruled-line drawing) technique. However, other than the fact that the current painting utilizes the *jiehua* technique in part and includes stock figures of children associated with the knick-knack peddler theme, neither of these artists exerted any direct influence on the style or content of this work.

Executed in monochrome ink, the leaf is a virtuoso performance of both small-scale painting and wordless storytelling. A knickknack peddler, flanked on either side by the elaborate portable frames on which he displays his wares, watches closely as two little boys attack a toy snake with sticks and rocks thinking it real (an unexplained motif appearing in several early paintings on this theme). At far left, a woman holding a child



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turns to gaze benignly at the children, completing the composition both emotionally and physically with her glance and posture. But while the actions of the children, the concern of the peddler, and the calm detachment of the woman are all subtly delineated, they are intentionally subordinated to the dazzling array of games and charms, toys and trinkets of every kind and description, being offered for sale. Figures and objects are rendered with extremely fine, even outlines, and the drapery folds are carefully, though tersely, drawn. Both the mood and brushwork relate this album leaf to other deliberately archaistic works executed during the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368).

<sup>2</sup> The Northern Song figure painter Li Gonglin 李公麟 (ca. 1049–1106) is credited with the invention of the *baimiao* 白描 (ink outline) style seen in the figures here. While this feature of the painting is in general accord with Li's known style, no historical source associates him with the knick-knack peddler theme. Moreover, the most striking stylistic aspect of this work—the expert use of the *jiehua* technique, employed to render the peddler's display cases and wares—was not practiced by Li Gonglin, and bespeaks a later date. Modern scholarly opinion has identified the particular use of *baimiao* and *jiehua* seen in this unsigned album leaf with the painting style of Li Gonglin's talented Yuan dynasty follower, Wang Zhenpeng 王振鹏 (ca. 1280–ca. 1329). For two works either by or attributed to Wang Zhenpeng that utilize both the *baimiao* and *jiehua* techniques, see: “Vimalakirti and the Doctrine of Nonduality” (1308) and “Dragon Boat Regatta on Jinming Lake,” in Wen C. Fong, *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy 8th–14th Century* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 1992), 332–33 and 396–97.

It should be noted, however, that although paintings of knick-knack peddlers attributed to Wang exist, traditional sources do not record the theme among the known titles of his works, and neither of the extant attributions either resembles the current leaf, or is stylistically credible as a genuine painting by Wang Zhenpeng. Accordingly, the Freer album leaf can perhaps best be understood as an original composition on an



established theme by an unknown, but technically proficient, minor artist of the early to mid-fourteenth century, who was working in a contemporary stylistic idiom closely associated with, or derived from, the works of Wang Zhenpeng.

There are at least two published works on the knick-knack peddler theme attributed to Wang Zhenpeng. The first shows a peddler with many labeled knick-knacks, as in the Freer leaf; however, the painting is apparently a hanging scroll executed in color, and features a man holding his infant son while his wife stands nearby, with two dogs in the foreground; see Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles*, 7 vols. (New York: The Ronald Press, 1956–58), vol. 6, plate 47. (Note: the same composition also exists in a virtually identical version attributed to an anonymous Yuan dynasty artist; see *Tang Song Yuan Ming Qing huaxuan* 唐宋元明清畫選 [Guangzhou: Yishu huabaoshe, 1963], plate 29.) The second knick-knack peddler painting attributed to Wang Zhenpeng is executed in a style consonant with works on this theme by the late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Ming dynasty court artist Lü Wenying 呂文英 (1421–1505); see images and discussion in Lothar Ledderose, *Orchideen und Felsen: Chinesische Bilder im Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst Berlin* (Berlin: G + H Verlag, 1998), 135–42.

<sup>3</sup> Translation and discussion of these texts, the objects on which they appear, and other items among the knick-knack peddler's wares, are forthcoming.

<sup>4</sup> The earliest seal on the painting—a square-relief collector seal reading *Guangzewang-fu zhenwan* 『光澤王府珍玩』 (Precious ornament [belonging to] the Household of the Prince of Guangze)—appears near the upper left edge. Guangze 光澤 was a minor hereditary principedom during the Ming dynasty, existing for a little over 120 years, from 1487 until 1610, and subordinate to the Prince of Liao 遼王. The actual appanage was located in the prefecture of Jingzhou fu 荊州府, on the Yangtze River in modern Hubei



Province, and had its seat at the city of Jiangling 江陵 on the river's north shore. The first prince of Guangze was Zhu Chongrang 朱寵灋 (reigned 1487–1546), who was also the longest holder of the title. Three of Zhu Chongrang's descendants also held the title—his second son Zhiyuan 致標 (reigned 1550–52); Zhiyuan's first son Xianjin 憲□\* (reigned 1571–1603); and Xianjin's first son Shuyu 術堦 (reigned 1606–10?)—but nothing concerning them, other than their names and the dates that each held the title, is recorded in standard sources. Given the length of Zhu Chongrang's tenure as Prince of Guangze and what is recorded of his cultural interests, he seems the most likely individual to associate with the seal on the Freer painting. On the principedom of Guangze, see Li Xian 李賢 (1408–1466) et al., comps., *Ming yitong zhi* 明一統志 (1461), 62:10a, in *WSKQS*. On Zhu Chongrang and his successors as Prince of Guangze, see Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 (1672–1755) et al., comps., *Ming shi* 明史, 28 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), vol. 9, 101:2711. (\*Note: Available character sets do not include the last character of Zhu Xianjin's name, which consists of the 火 radical on the left, with a 堦 element on the right).

<sup>5</sup> Ten seals and half-seals preserved on both the painting and facing leaf of sutra paper belonged to the important early Qing-dynasty collector Geng Zhaozhong (9 seals)—who probably acquired the leaf sometime between the 1660s and 1680s—and his son Geng Jiazuo (1 seal). The fact that four of the seals on the painting and both seals on the sutra leaf survive only as half-seals clearly shows that the painting and accompanying sheet of sutra paper have been remounted at least once following ownership by the Gengs. However, judging from the dimensions of the remaining halves of Geng Zhaozhong's seals, the painting—which may have originated as a short handscroll and was later cut down—could not have been much wider at the time these impressions were made than it is now, and the current post-Geng mounting was skillfully executed to avoid any but the most minimal additional loss.