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Trad. attrib. to: Xia Gui 夏珪 (active ca. 1195–1230)
Title: *Water Buffalo and Herdboy under Willows*
《柳蔭牧牛圖》
Liuyin muniu tu
Dynasty/Date: Southern Song, 13th century
Format: Fan mounted as album leaf
Medium: Ink and color on silk
Dimensions: 24.2 x 24.7 cm (9-1/2 x 9-3/4 in)
Credit line: Gift of Charles Lang Freer
Accession no.: F1915.8
Provenance: A.W. Bahr (1877–1959), London

Description: Oval silk fan, separately mounted as album leaf. No artist signature or seal. One (1) half collector seal. Vertical crease indicating prior mounting and use as hand fan. The painting depicts a sleeping herdboy and his water buffalo beneath a willow tree.¹

Collector seals: (1) – Unidentified

x-dan 『澹』 (octagonal? relief; left half) – painting, upper right

Traditional Chinese catalogues: none

Selected Bibliography:

Cahill, James F. *Chinese Album Leaves in the Freer Gallery of Art*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1961. Pp. 10 and 22 (plate 6).

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, 238 (A21–121).

Notes

¹ A ubiquitous sight in the Chinese countryside, herdboys and water buffalo appear frequently in paintings from the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), especially fans and album leaves produced by artists working at, or associated with, the imperial court in the capital of Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. Symbolizing childhood innocence and spontaneity, and the cherished ideal of a quiet life spent apart from the cares and obligations of public service, this pastoral motif seems to have enjoyed a special place among the urban elite owing perhaps in part to the nostalgic associations of carefree youth that many officials from rural parts of the country felt in looking back on their adolescence.

The herdboy-and-buffalo motif also gained popularity during the Song dynasty through the well-known Chan Buddhist parable of enlightenment, in which the buffalo—representing the undisciplined human mind—strays away; is pursued, caught, and mounted; and in the end vanishes completely. Among the earliest surviving illustrations of this allegory is a series of ten images with short poems by the monk Puming 普明 (mid-12th century), known as the *Oxherding Pictures* (*Muniu tu* 牧牛圖). The seventh of these describes a young oxherd falling asleep while his untended buffalo wanders off:

柳岸春波夕照中，淡煙芳草綠茸茸；



饑餐渴飲隨時過，石上山童睡正濃。

Spring stream at evening flows past banks of willow
In the hazy atmosphere, meadow grass grows thick
When hungry, he grazes, and when thirsty, he drinks
While the herd boy dozes off, oblivious to all

As this oval fan shows a herdboy snoozing with his back against a willow tree while his grazing water buffalo drifts away, trailing its tether, the design of this fan may owe its inspiration to Puming's earlier series. For a full discussion of the larger theme, see Scarlett Jang, "Ox-herding Painting in the Sung Dynasty," in *Artibus Asiae* 52 (1992): 54–93.