



No. 9

A highly important Handscroll with Sixteen *Lohans* by *Wang Jian*

Qing Dynasty, Qianlong period (1736-95)

The horizontal *handscroll* with inscription in vertical script ‘*bing yen chun zhong hua yu li go uo zhong*’ and ‘*di zhi wang jian*’ and three seal marks in red. The sixteen *lohans* very finely painted in different groups.

In Buddhism, the *Arhat*, translated into Chinese as *Lohan*, is one who has followed the Eightfold Path and has achieved deliverance of this earthly existence. He has reached "the other shore" and is saved for all eternity.

Lohans are well-known for their great wisdom, courage and supernatural power. Due to their abilities to ward off evil, *Lohans* became guardian angels of the Buddhist temple and there in the main hall standing guard are the ever-present, indomitable-looking 18 *Lohan* figures, sometimes accompanied by 500 or more lesser *Lohans*. According to tradition, there were originally only 16 *Lohans*. Two were added on the list by the Chinese in the Tang Dynasty.

Legend has it that the first portraits of the 18 *Lohans* were painted by a Buddhist monk Guan Xiu, in 891 A.D. Guan Xiu lived in Chengdu, the capital of a small kingdom, the Former Shu, formed at the decline of the Tang Dynasty in what is today's Sichuan Province. He was adept at the scholarly pursuits of painting, calligraphy and poetry.

The traditional order of the 18 *Lohans* is based on the order in which they appeared in Guan Xiu's dreams, not on the strength of their power. The order is:

Deer Sitting, Happy, Raised Bowl, Raised Pagoda, Meditating, Oversea, Elephant Riding, Laughing Lion, Open Heart, Raised Hand, Thinking, Scratched Ear, Calico Bag, Plantain, Long Eyebrow, Doorman, Taming Dragon and Taming Tiger *Lohans*.

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