

## Section 1. Dragons and Phoenixes: Badges for the Imperial Family

### Introduction

The emperor, or Son of Heaven, reigned at the top of China's ruling hierarchy. Below the emperor were the members of the imperial family. These family members outranked civil officials and military officers.

The emperor's emblem was the **dragon**, a benevolent being that brought rain and symbolized goodness, blessings, and strength, long associated with the ruler in China. By the Ming dynasty, the emperor was identified with a five-clawed dragon on his robes. Known as the *long*, this dragon was the exclusive prerogative of the emperor, empress, and their sons. The empress was also identified by the **phoenix**, another mythical creature and an emblem of beauty. Together, the dragon and phoenix represented the emperor and empress ruling at the center of a harmonious universe.

In the **Ming** dynasty the emperor awarded badges with creatures such as the *feiyu* ("flying fish"), the *douniu* (a dragon with a fish's tail and two horns), and the *qilin* (a deer-like animal with a single horn) to court officials as signs of imperial favor. In the **Qing** dynasty these first two badges were no longer used; the *qilin*, became the emblem of the first rank military official.

Other badges were the emblem of special positions at court. For example, in both the Ming and Qing dynasties, the *xiezhi*, a lion-like creature with a single horn and a spiky back, was the insignia of the censors who sought out corruption and maintained discipline among other court officials.

During the Ming dynasty rank badges were woven into the chest and back of silk robes. Under the Qing, badges became small squares sewn on to the court robe. In 1759 the emperor decreed that all members of the imperial hierarchy must wear a dark, front-opening **surcoat** over their official court robes—the appropriate rank badge was to be worn on the chest and back. This meant that the badge on the front had to be split down the center to accommodate the opening of the surcoat. The emperor's surcoat was called a *gunfu* ("royal robe"), while those for imperial princes, nobles, and officials were designated *bufu* ("robe with a patch") although they were virtually identical in cut.

The upper ranks of the imperial nobility wore surcoats with dragon roundels—combining the circular symbol of heaven and the dragon of imperial power. Lower ranking nobles wore square badges with dragons while civil and military officials' square badges displayed their appropriate rank emblem.

Badges were not the only symbols of rank. Hats and their **finials**, belts, robes and court necklaces were all indicators of the rank of the wearer.

The hat was an important component of court dress, worn for all court activities and official duties. Hats for both men and women were strictly regulated. Hats were of two general types, for winter and summer. Winter hats were trimmed with fur; however, only the emperor could wear sable unless he granted the wearer the right to do so. Summer hats were conical, of bamboo covered in thin silk.

Additional insignia of rank included hat finials (sometimes called knobs or spikes), which were also rank-specific. The emperor and empress wore the most elaborate

versions with pearls and precious stones. For civil and military officials, the color and material of the finial varied with the wearer's rank; most were of semi-precious stones or **Peking glass**. The same finial was worn on the summer and winter hat.

Those who achieved special distinction at court were granted the right to wear a peacock feather plume (*lingzhi*) in their hat with one, two, or three "eyes" showing, depending on the recipient's rank—only princes, for example, were given plumes with three eyes. The *lingzhi* was attached to the hat by a jade tube or a glass imitation.

Long necklaces (*chaozhu*) based on Buddhist prayer beads were another indicator of status whose materials were carefully regulated. Individuals of the upper ranks wore necklaces of semi-precious materials such as jade and amber while those of the lower ranks wore necklaces of appropriately colored Peking glass.

Perhaps the most well-known emblem of rank is the dragon robe, actually semi-formal court dress. The color of the robe, number of dragons, whether the dragon had five or four claws, and if it was front-facing or in profile were all indicators of rank.

	Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)	Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)
<b>CIRCULAR BADGE</b>		
Emperor	5-clawed dragon	5-clawed dragon
Empress	Phoenix and/or 5-clawed dragon	Phoenix and/or 5-clawed dragon
Imperial princess		
Heir apparent (by empress)	4-clawed dragon	5-clawed dragon
Imperial sons	4-clawed dragon	5-clawed dragon
Princes of the blood (1 <sup>st</sup> -2 <sup>nd</sup> rank)	4-clawed dragon	5-clawed dragon
<b>SQUARE BADGE</b>		
Princes of the blood (3 <sup>rd</sup> rank and below)	4-clawed dragon	4-clawed dragon
Dukes/marquises	<i>Qilin</i> or <i>baize</i>	4-clawed dragon or <i>qilin</i>



1. *Women Embroidering Rank Badges*

China, Qing dynasty, 19<sup>th</sup> century

Ink and color on paper

Lent by Chris Hall, Hong Kong

Because most rank badges were made in professional workshops, this scene of upper class women embroidering badges is somewhat fanciful. However, many wives and daughters of mandarins were highly skilled with the needle and did embroider clothing and other textiles for home use, sometimes even rank badges.



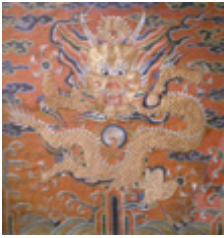
2. *Manchu Nobleman*

China, early 18<sup>th</sup> century

Ink, gold and colors on silk

Pacific Asia Museum, Gift of Mrs. Sunny Stevenson, 1995.8.1

Posthumous portrait of an early Qing nobleman wearing formal summer attire (*chaofu*) consisting of a court robe with pleated skirt and dragon imagery (*chaopao*), a hat with a ruby finial (*chaoguan*) and a court necklace (*chaozhu*), all symbols of a first rank noble.



3. Badge (*buzi*) with Frontal Dragon for an Emperor or Empress

China, Ming dynasty, Wanli period, 1573-1620

Silk and metallic thread embroidery

Lent by Ninel Dubrovich and David Woodruff

A five-clawed, frontal **dragon** finely embroidered in gold thread on silk gauze indicates that this badge was once on an imperial summer robe. Similarities between this badge and those found on front-opening robes belonging to the Empress Xiaoduan in the imperial tombs of the Ming Emperor Wanli and his consorts suggest that it could have been made for the back of a robe for the empress.



4. Badge (*buzi*) with Frontal Dragon for an Imperial Family Member

China, Qing dynasty, early 19<sup>th</sup> century

Silk tapestry (*kesi*)

Pacific Asia Museum, Gift of Beverly Boatwright, 1986.29.3

The decree of 1759 stated that a circular badge (symbol of heaven) with a five-clawed, frontal **dragon** could only be worn by the emperor, empress, or a first-rank imperial prince (son of the empress). The three linked **clouds** above the dragon's head suggest a **constellation**, one of the twelve **Symbols of Imperial Authority**. Therefore, this badge could have been made for the emperor or empress. The constellation, however, might indicate a first-rank prince of the blood, subtly asserting his right of succession.



5. Badge (*buzi*) for an Imperial Duke

China, late Qing dynasty, 1850-70

Silk tapestry (*kesi*)

Lent by the Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery, Scripps College

Officially, a four-clawed, front-facing **dragon** on a square badge was the emblem of an imperial duke. In practice, most nobles used the five-clawed dragon despite its restriction to the emperor, empress and higher-ranking princes. This example would have been displayed on the back of a dark **surcoat**, called a **bufu**, required to be worn over the semi-official court robe (popularly, “dragon robe”) on all official occasions.



6. Badge (*buzi*) with Dragons above Phoenixes for an Empress  
China, Ming dynasty, Wanli period, 1573-1620  
Silk and metallic thread embroidery  
Lent by Chris Hall, Hong Kong

In China, the dragon represented the emperor, and the phoenix, the empress. The ground fabric is silk gauze. A seam down the center indicates this badge was once on the front of a summer robe with a center front opening, probably for an empress as similar garments have been found in the tomb of the Empress Xiaoduan, one of Wanli's consorts.



7. One of a Pair of Double Phoenix Badges (*buzi*) for an Empress or Princess  
China, Ming dynasty, Wanli period, 1573-1620  
Silk and metallic thread embroidery  
Lent by Chris Hall, Hong Kong

A pair of **phoenixes**, the male with five serrated tail feathers and the female with two curled tail feathers, appears on these badges for the front and back of a robe for an empress or princess. They are surrounded by flowers of the four seasons: **peony** (spring), **lotus** (summer), **chrysanthemum** (autumn) and **plum blossom** (winter) making them appropriate for wear throughout the year.



8. Badge (*buzi*) with Profile Dragon for a Prince  
China, Qing dynasty, late 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Silk tapestry (*kesi*), metallic thread  
Lent by Dodi Fromson

Second-rank princes were permitted roundels with profile, five-clawed **dragons**. "Walking dragons" (*xinlong*) were considered inferior to front-facing dragons; thus princes of the second degree and below were forbidden to use frontal dragons. The seam through the center of this badge indicates it was worn on the chest area of the **surcoat**, which opened down the front.



9. One of a Pair of Badges (*buzi*) with Dragon for an Empress or Imperial Concubine  
China, Qing dynasty, c. 1860  
Silk and metallic thread embroidery, coral beads  
Lent by the Petterson Museum of Intercultural Art, Pilgrim Place

The use of coral beads and, on occasion, seed pearls are not unknown on dragon robes and rank badges from the nineteenth century. But this lavish use of coral and pearls (now removed) on a five-clawed, front-facing dragon could only be from the surcoat (*longgua*) of an empress or possibly a high-ranking imperial concubine.



10. Badge (*buzi*) with *Feiyu*  
China, Ming dynasty, 15<sup>th</sup> century  
Silk tapestry (*kesi*)  
Lent by Chris Hall, Hong Kong

In the Ming dynasty (1364-1644) a red silk robe with a *feiyu* (“flying fish”) badge was granted to eunuchs and court officials by the emperor for meritorious service. The mythical *feiyu* had a dragon’s head, horns, and wings, and the fins and tail of a carp. Although of ancient origin, it was abandoned as an emblem in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911).



11. Badge (*buzi*) with *Douniu*  
China, Ming dynasty, late 16<sup>th</sup> – early 17<sup>th</sup> century  
Silk brocade  
Lent by Chris Hall, Hong Kong

Another coveted emblem, the mythical *douniu* had a fish’s tail and the body and head of a dragon with two curling horns. Robes with *douniu* badges were also items of imperial favor at the Ming court. As in the case of the *feiyu*, the *douniu* was not used in the Qing dynasty.



12. Pair of Badges (*buzi*) with *Qilin*  
China, Ming dynasty, 16<sup>th</sup> century  
Silk thread tent stitch embroidery  
Lent by Chris Hall

During the Ming dynasty, nobles and sons-in-law of the emperor wore badges depicting mythical creatures including the *qilin*. They were also awarded by the ruler for meritorious or special service, which is probably the case with this pair of badges. In the Qing dynasty, after 1664, the *qilin* became the emblem of first-rank military officers.



13. Badge (*buzi*) with Single-Horned Animal  
China, Ming dynasty, Wanli period (1573-1620)  
Silk and metallic thread embroidery  
Lent by Chris Hall, Hong Kong

A horse-like creature with a scaly body and a single horn stands above a variety of auspicious motifs and emblems of success, status and wealth. It is unclear which animal this is: a mythical horse that can extinguish fire, a “celestial deer,” or a *tianlu*, literally “celestial fortune,” said to be on the highest rank badge of the Chongzhen period (1628-1644), although no examples survive to confirm this. Stylistically, however, this badge was made in the earlier reign of Wanli and thus is probably a sign of imperial favor and not associated with a specific rank.



14. Badge (*buzi*) with *Xiezhong* for a Court Censor  
China, Ming dynasty, **mid-16th** century  
Silk brocade  
Lent by Chris Hall, Hong Kong

Under **Ming**, and later **Qing**, rule the mythical *xiezhong*, a lion-like creature with a single horn and a spiky back, was the insignia of the censors who sought out corruption and maintained discipline among other court officials.



15. Badge (*buzi*) with *Xiezhong* for a Court Censor  
China, Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736-1795)  
Silk, metallic thread and peacock feather embroidery  
Lent by the Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery, Scripps College

The *xiezhong* was believed to be able to distinguish good from evil and to use its horn to admonish the dishonest. Typical of badges from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the animal is surrounded by an elaborate and naturalistic landscape.



16. Badge (*buzi*) with Oriole for a Court Musician  
China, Qing dynasty, Yongzheng period (1723-35)  
Silk brocade  
Lent by Chris Hall, Hong Kong

During the Ming dynasty, the oriole was associated with the eighth and ninth civil ranks, as was the quail. From 1644 to 1652 under the Qing the oriole continued to mark official rank. It has been believed that this insignia was not worn again until 1766 when the Qianlong emperor decreed its use exclusively for court musicians. But the survival of this rare badge from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century suggests either its wear never ceased or was revived under the reign of the emperor Yongzheng and not Qianlong.



17. Emperor's Surcoat (*gunfu*)  
China, Qing dynasty, Qianlong period (1736-1795)  
Silk and metallic thread tapestry (*kesi*)  
Lent by the Petterson Museum of Intercultural Art, Pilgrim Place

The dark **surcoat** (*bufu*) with rank badges had been a part of official court dress since the second half of the seventeenth century. It was during Qianlong's reign, however, that all members of the court hierarchy were required to wear the *bufu* over their formal dragon robes. The emperor's surcoat was called a *gunfu* ("royal robes") and displayed four front-facing, five-clawed (*mang*) dragons in roundels: on the upper chest, back and on each shoulder.



18. Surcoat (*bufu*) for a Second-Rank Civil Official  
China, Qing dynasty, mid-19<sup>th</sup> century  
Silk and metallic thread embroidery on silk gauze  
Pacific Asia Museum, Museum Purchase, 1991.32.1

A detailed set of dress regulations, known as the *Huangchao liqi tushi* (Illustrated Precedents for the Royal Paraphernalia of the Imperial Court), issued in 1759 during the emperor Qianlong's reign, made the wearing of a dark surcoat with rank badges on front and back mandatory for all officials. Shown here is a **surcoat** of silk gauze with the Golden Pheasant of a second-rank court official.



19. Semi-formal Court Robe (*jifu*) for an Official  
China, Qing dynasty, c. 1860  
Silk and metallic thread embroidery on silk gauze  
Pacific Asia Museum, Gift of Carl and Betsey Whitman, in memory of Prof. Walter and Grace Whitman, 1998.55.1

A second-rank court official wore this summer dragon robe (*jifu*). Over the coat he wore a **surcoat** of silk gauze with the insignia of the Golden Pheasant.



20. Portrait of a Sixth-Rank Civil Official and His Wives  
China, Qing dynasty, 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Ink and color on paper  
Pacific Asia Museum, Gift of Miss Ruth P. Eames, 1981.21.2



21. Informal Winter Hat (*jiguan*) for a Noblewoman  
China, Qing dynasty, 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Silk satin, appliqué, quilting sable, gilt metal, Peking glass  
Lent by Beverley Jackson

The *jiguan* or festive hat was worn by noblewomen year-round. In summer the hat had a black satin brim, which was replaced by fur for winter. Only members of the nobility were allowed to wear sable although the emperor often granted this privilege to others. The *jiguan* usually had two embroidered silk streamers hanging down the wearer's back, but they are missing in this example. The clear glass finial is that of a fifth-rank official, however it is not original to the hat.



22. Formal Winter Hat (*chaoguan*)  
China, Qing dynasty, 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Velvet, untwisted silk floss, brocade, pierced gilt metal, rock crystal  
Pacific Asia Museum, Museum Purchase, 1980.36.3

Worn by men and women, *chaoguan* were formal court hats, of which this is one style. The hat was considered an essential component of court dress, with strict regulations regarding the material and color of the finial based on rank. Winter hats, with velvet or fur, were worn during the cold weather months from the ninth moon to the following third moon (on the lunar calendar used in China), when they were replaced with summer hats of reed or bamboo, an example of which is in the exhibition. The finial is not original to the hat.



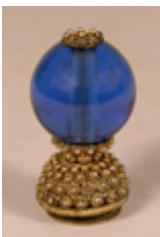
23. Summer Hat (*jiguan*) for a Court Official  
China, Qing dynasty, second half 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Split bamboo, silk gauze, silk brocade, twisted silk fringe, pierced gilt metal, Peking glass Pacific Asia Museum, Museum Purchase, 1980.36.2

A transparent blue glass knob tops this summer *jiguan* (festive hat) for a third-rank official, although it is a later replacement. The hat's conical shape reflects the influence of woven bamboo hats of Chinese farmers (*li*) and has the same inner sweatband that raises the hat off the head for additional cooling. The looped cord at the top can first be seen in a portrait of the Qianlong emperor dating from 1736. Made of split bamboo, these hats were usually covered and lined with fine silk gauze.



24. Feather Hat Decoration (*lingzhi*) for a Third-Rank Court Official  
China, Qing dynasty, late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Peacock and egret feathers, jade  
Lent by the Petterson Museum of Intercultural Art, Pilgrim Place

Meritorious public service was rewarded with the right to wear a peacock feather hat ornament. Three “eyes” were for imperial princes and nobles of the higher degrees, two for intermediate ranks and one “eye” for officials from the first to sixth rank. From about 1840 on, however, it was very easy to purchase the single-eyed peacock feather decoration. The jade holder attached to the hat finial just below the knob.



25. Hat Finial for Third-Rank Civil Officials  
China, Qing dynasty, 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Gilt metal, Peking glass  
Pacific Asia Museum, Gift of Alyce and T.J. Smith, 1996.37.15

This blue glass knob topped a summer festive hat for a third-rank official. Peking glass was manufactured using techniques originally developed in Europe but refined in China.





26. Court Necklace and Box  
China, Qing dynasty, 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Necklace: Peking glass, jade, ceramic (?), gilt metal and silk braid; Box:  
incised lacquered bamboo, gold paint  
Lent by the Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery, Scripps College

An official frequently traveled in the course of his duties. He would protect his court necklace, an important indicator of rank, in a doughnut-shaped box like this one when not wearing it. The lacquer box has a design of dragons among clouds on the lid.



27. Box for Court Official's Summer Hat  
China, Qing dynasty, 19<sup>th</sup> century  
Painted leather  
Lent by the Petterson Museum of Intercultural Art, Pilgrim Place

The wardrobe requirements for an official were complex and expensive to obtain. Dragon robes, surcoats, rank badges, necklaces, belts, hats, finials and so on all represented a substantial investment of resources. Hats were therefore carefully protected when not being worn and when traveling to assignments or to court. Because many leather hat boxes are undecorated, the painting on this example would have been an added expense intended to emphasize the owner's wealth and status.



28. Imperial Nobleman's Semi-Formal Court Robe (*jifu*)  
China, Qing dynasty, 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Silk and metallic thread embroidery on silk gauze  
Pacific Asia Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Pemberthy, Jr.,  
1985.31.1

The illustrated court regulations of 1759 gave detailed descriptions of court dress for every occasion and every position from the emperor to the lowest standard bearer. Bright yellow robes were the prerogative of the emperor and empress, while other members of the imperial family could choose either blue or brown robes. Brown was considered an off-shade of yellow, and thus was appropriate for an imperial noble.