

Dragon Robe

About 200 years old.

Intricately embroidered in China.



Dragon robe | China. 15th century. Silk

Background information

The dragon is a composite creature, made up of the parts of different animals. Some of the parts are: head of a camel, neck of a snake, stomach of a cockle, scales of a carp, claws of an eagle, paws of a tiger and the ears of an ox. The Chinese emperor is signified by the five-clawed dragon, the most powerful of all animals in Chinese culture. Dragons were associated with the power of creation because they would emerge from hibernation in spring and bring rain with them to renew life.

This style of robe is known as *jifu* (auspicious attire) and was worn during festive ceremonies and festive occasions such as New Year's Day and Winter Solstice. The bright yellow textile features nine dragons amidst clouds, a pattern of waves and mountains, as well as other auspicious symbols.

The design of Qing court robes was carefully considered, as each element carries its own meaning and bears greater significance when perceived collectively. While the decorative scheme of the robe reveals Chinese views about the importance of the emperor within the cosmic universe, the tailoring of the robe reflects Manchu influence and their nomadic traditions. The tapered sleeves and horse-hoof cuffs (*mati xiu*), which covered the back of the hands, were probably derived from riding garments. This combination of the cultures of the conquered and conquerors encapsulated the Manchu's administrative approach. This strategy enabled the Manchus to consolidate their power and become the longest non-native power in China.

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Proposed Activities

STUDENTS WILL LEARN ABOUT

- The use of symbols in Chinese culture
- The design features of the dragon robe
- Traditional Chinese clothing and fabric design



LOOKING ACTIVITIES

1. Describe the colours, designs and textures of this robe.
2. There are many good luck symbols that cover the surface of the robe. Identify them and consider why these symbols are significant. Count the number of dragons.
3. What do you think of the design of this robe? What does it say about the person who wore this?
4. Imagine owning this robe. Where would you wear it to?



MAKING ACTIVITIES

1. Use paper to make your own robe.
2. Design your own good luck symbols with flowers, animals, or whatever else you can think of. Vary the size and colour to indicate the importance of your symbols. Use them to decorate the front and back of your robe.
3. Design a fantastic creature that represents you. Choose the body parts of different animals, as it is done for the dragon.



CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

English

For many centuries, textiles such as silks have been traded between countries. Research the origins of silk. Do you think the dragon robe would have been traded? Discuss.

Science Living and non-living things

Is the dragon a real animal? Think about what animals make the dragon. Consider the features of these animals and figure out the traits of the dragon.

Social Studies Field-based Learning

Why is the dragon robe considered a legacy for the Chinese?