



Manchu Empress's Semi-formal Twelve Symbol Court Robe

Date

late 19th century

Medium

silk, dye, metallic thread and copper alloy

Description

The term k'o-ssu has been written with various characters, denoting "cross-threads," "weft woven threads," or "weft woven colors." The characters now

mean "cut threads," referring to the separations of weft threads of different colors that terminate at the margin of the colored areas instead of running through the width of the cloth. Archaeological evidence suggests that the k'o-ssu technique was in use by the late T'ang dynasty (618-906). The most elaborate k'o-ssu tapestries, brocades, and embroideries produced by the Chinese were executed during the Qing dynasty, particularly under the reign of Emperor Ch'ien-lung. During his reign the court robes of the emperors and empresses, court ladies and officials, were remodeled to suit the seasons of the year and different official occasions. These robes began to appear on the market soon after the abdication in 1912 of the last Qing emperor, Hsuan-t'ung. Most Western collections of the Chinese robes were established between 1924, the year Hsuan-t'ung left the Imperial Palace, and the late 1930s, when court robes flooded onto the market. The study of Ming and Ch'ing dynasty robes is a highly specialized subject.

Dimensions

Overall: 59 x 69 1/4 in. (149.9 x 175.9 cm)