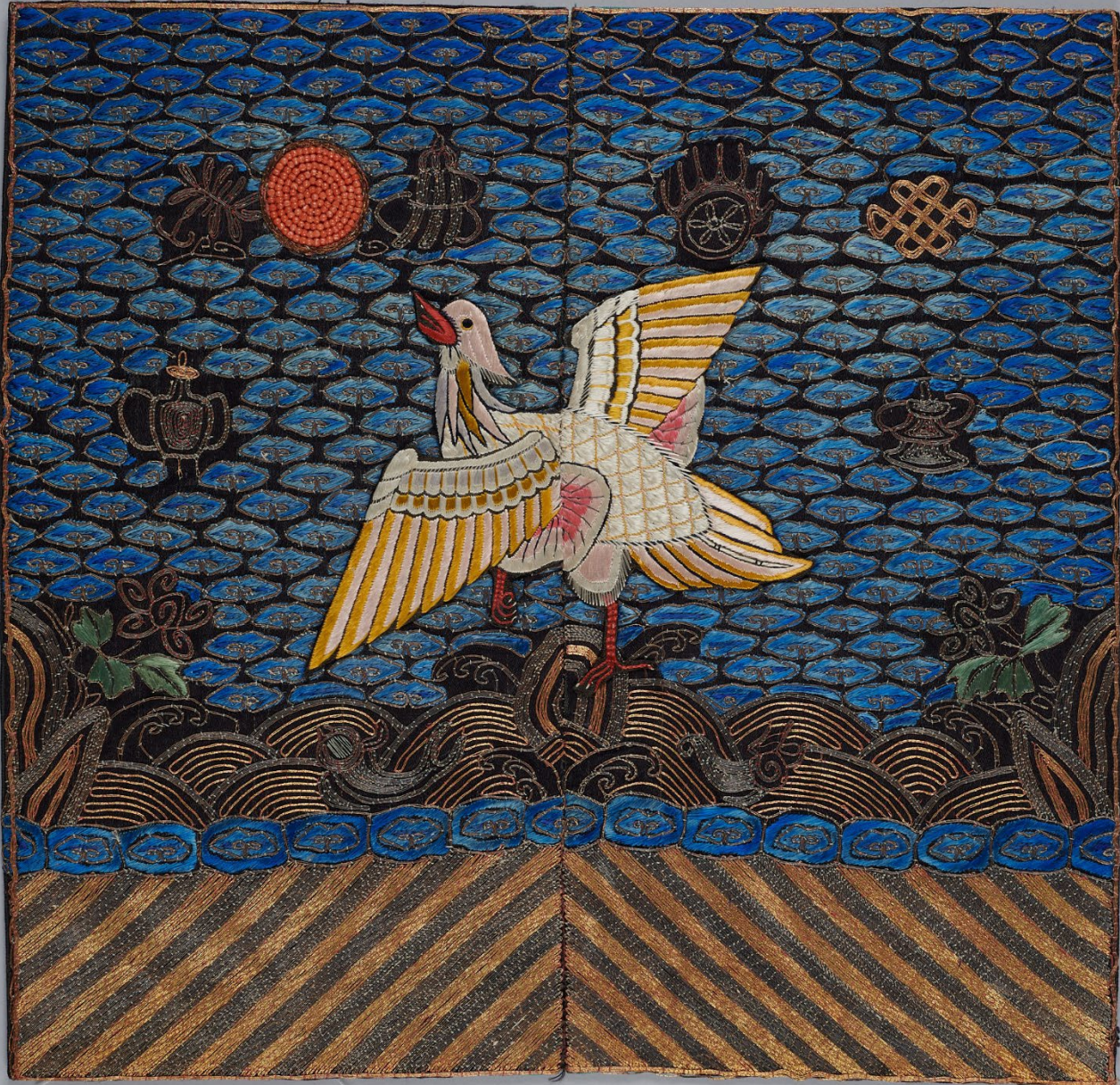


SPOTLIGHT: Mandarin Squares/Rank Badges



El Presenter: Dee Carlson

Date: April 7, 2009

Year created: Ming Qing Dynasty

Six essential aspects of this work of art:

1. Mandarin squares or rank badges were made of embroidered silk and worn by civil and military officials as signs of rank and status. There are nine ranks each.
2. Civil badges were products of extensive study and memorization, children starting as early as 3 years of age.
3. Civil badges had 9 ranks of birds; these men were responsible for the day-to-day affairs of state.

The highest level was the crane.

4. Military badges were 9 ranks of animals; these men were responsible for internal and external security. The exams were physical tests (not mental) of swordsmanship, archery and handling horses.
5. Women wore the same badges as their husband, or fathers if unmarried. At first, they were identical and later the birds/animals faced in opposite directions so that if seated together, the birds/animals faced each other.
6. When the Manchu took over, badges were more lavish, had more natural backgrounds and included lucky symbols. The sun was put in the upper corner with the birds and animals looking at the sun (symbol of the emperor). Civil in upper left and military in the upper right.

Possible questions to use when discussing this piece with museum visitors:

1. These are called Chinese Mandarin Square or Rank Badges. Can someone tell us what rank means?
2. Why would someone want to know what someone else's rank or status is?
3. The civil official had birds on their badges, the military had animals. Why do you think this is? Point to some badges and ask if they are for civil or military officials.
4. There is the sun on these badges. Does anyone know who the sun represents in China? Why would the animals or bird be facing the sun?
5. Can anyone find some lucky symbols on the square?
6. Do you wear anything that might tell someone about you?
7. What animal or bird would you have on your badge and why?

Tour Type: Learning to Look, Explore Asia, Animals in Art