



Chinese gold and silver-thread embroidered rank badge, 19th century POA

Chinese gold and silver-thread embroidered rank badge, 19th century, with a design of a peacock in flight with its wings outstretched and plumage trailing behind, amongst cloud-scrolls, above foaming waves; the edge with half flowerheads and further curling scrollwork.

Notes: This is a badge indicating that the wearer is a third rank civil official. The use of badges to denote rank dates back at least to the Ming, and was continued by the Manchu rulers of China throughout the Qing, during which society was organised along a hierarchical structure based on the traditional examination system. Worn prominently on outer clothing, these badges allowed rank to be quickly identified and were divided into civil and military groupings. There were nine civil ranks, identifiable by a range of bird types: crane (first rank), golden pheasant (second rank), peacock (third rank), wild goose (fourth rank), silver pheasant (fifth rank), egret (sixth rank), mandarin duck (seventh rank), quail (eighth rank) and paradise flycatcher (ninth rank). In theory, the initial examination was open to boys from a wide range of backgrounds, and thus rank largely depended on merit, with candidates who performed exceptionally well in the series of increasingly challenging tests being awarded positions of a higher rank of official appointment. For bearers of civil rank badges, certain rules and behavioural codes had to be adhered to: instead of walking they were required to travel by palanquin, with the number of attendants increasing with rank. For officials bearing status of the fourth rank and higher, all civilians were required to stop in the street to allow the retinue past, and gongs were beaten whenever they left or entered a building.

Material and Technique	Embroidered fabric
Origin	Chinese
Period	19th Century
Dimensions	Approximately 29.2cm. x 30.5cm. (11 1/2in. x 12 in.)

Antique ref: Y170