

**ART 112: Arts of the Eastern World**  
**Rank Badge of the Fourth Military Rank with Tiger**

Tigers are considered the kings of all beasts in Chinese culture. It is therefore fitting for them to be on the rank badge of a fourth rank military official. Crafted during the Ming Dynasty in the 16<sup>th</sup> – mid 17<sup>th</sup> century by an unknown artist, this highly decorated silk badge of a tiger is embroidered with metallic and silk thread and is roughly 1 foot tall and 1 foot wide. As a badge, this piece was meant to communicate a clear and concise message to the viewer, not only informing them of the rank of the individual wearing it but the beauty of order in Chinese culture.

This message is portrayed in a 12 1/4 by 12 5/8 inch square of silk. The badge is heavily embroidered with metallic and silk thread making the piece very vibrant and noticeable even today. There is a border roughly about an inch wide that surrounds the badge. Inside the border itself, there is a coordinating pattern of a white flower and light orange flower each separated by a light blue vine and blue leaf. This border forms a controlled and strict environment for the rest of the piece to exist in. This harkens to the use of the piece as a badge, which was part of the nine tier ranking system that was in control during the time of the Ming dynasty. The ranking system itself acts a border for Chinese culture, putting aside a space for culture to grow while separating it from the outside. Within the border itself however, there is beauty and life as shown by the flowers and vines.

Inside the border, we are provided with a vibrant and moving image full of life. Both the bottom and top of the piece are decorated with colorful, winding clouds. The winding, clouds which are formed by twists and curls are each topped with a near identical cloud form created with two curls. The clouds alternate colors, green, orange, and blue and each is inlaid with white, then a light shade of their respective color, and the color itself forming the body of the cloud. Coming in from the top and bottom, these clouds give a feeling of elevation to the image, as if the tiger and the rest of the image are in a heavenly state. This can enforce the elevated position of the person wearing the badge, and also the status of an ordered culture which is bordered by a clear structure of ranking.

Just above the layer of the lower clouds there is a layer of gentle, rolling waves of water. Each wave is formed by four shades of blue, each separated by a white border. Out of this life giving force, plants of various shapes rise out, employing the color scheme of green, blue, and orange. On the left, rising all the way to the top layer of clouds, is an orange and white fruit tree which is bountiful and blossoming. Just to the right of that is a beautiful orange pot that holds an orange and white flower with blue leaves. On the right side of the image a plant also rises to the top layer but instead of a fruit tree, it is rather a vine with blossoming flowers, five of which have blown off the tree as if from a gentle breeze to inhabit the top part of the image. It uses the same color pallet of white and orange as the tree on the left. To the left of this vine we see a flower which employs the same basic color scheme as seen on the pot, but instead emphasizing the blue. This provides an ordered symmetrical image for the viewer, but just as with the border life coexists. This elevated garden full of life which twists and moves as it wishes, as emphasized by the petals flying from the tree and the overlapping of flowers and

vines, is surrounded by a border and symmetrical. This suggests that from order, beauty and life can be fully expressed.

The culmination of this expression is of course the tiger which is featured in the center of the badge. The tiger sits on two green slopes which resemble the pattern of the water. These two green slopes seemed to be held up by a pillar of water, which is defined by a dark blue outline. Where this pillar touches the land, waves can be seen breaking against it. It seems as if nature itself, in this ordered world, is upholding the tiger and what it represents. The body of the tigers is a pale orange, with stripes represented by two black lines that cover the body. The tail of the great cat is upright with a slight bend in the tail. The tiger itself is roaring with teeth bared, with eyes wide and alert, to the point of exaggeration. Since this is a military badge, the features that emphasize alertness and deadliness are the most detailed.

This image of the tiger being upheld in an already elevated garden with a defined border is a powerful image. The nine tier ranking system which lasted the court of the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911) was the center of their way of life, just as the tiger is centered in the image. The badge bearing the tiger does more than just show the rank of the individual. It shows that the order that the wearer of this badge brings is the key to a thriving and elevated way of life.

