

Section 3. Lions and Tigers: Rank Badges for Military Officers

Introduction

Because the examinations for the military ranks were based on physical prowess, and not classical learning, they were never considered as prestigious as their civil counterparts. A military degree was not essential to appointment to military office, which was often based instead on family connections or financial considerations.

The **Board of War** tested military government students with short essays on classic texts on the art of war. To pass the first degree, a candidate was tested on his archery skills—both standing and riding—and swordsmanship. This emphasis on archery continued throughout the **Qing** dynasty despite the introduction of modern firearms in the nineteenth century. The provincial governor tested second-degree candidates. If the candidate was successful, he could go to Beijing to take the third-degree examinations. Success meant an immediate position in the army or navy and deployment anywhere in China.

There were nine military ranks, each represented by an animal, real or mythical, with minor variations between the **Ming** and Qing dynasties.

Rank	Emblem	Symbolic Meaning
First	<i>Qilin</i>	Happiness and good fortune
Second	Lion	Strength, courage, and fortitude
Third	Leopard	Power
Fourth	Tiger	Courage and military prowess
Fifth	Bear	Bravery and strength
Sixth	Panther	Ferocity
Seventh	Rhinoceros	Ferocity
Eighth	Rhinoceros	Ferocity
Ninth	Sea Horse (a horse that bounds over waves)	Courage

Section 3.2 Object Descriptions



1. Badge (*buzi*) With *Qilin* for a First-Rank Military Official
China, Qing dynasty, c.1850
Silk and metallic thread tapestry (*kesi*)
Lent by Dodi Fromson

The *qilin* is a composite creature with a deer's body, a wolf's forehead, two horns, an ox's tail, horse's hooves, and five-colored skin. Diagonal lines for the ocean (*lishui*) were introduced on badges in the 1850s and soon replaced rounded seas and high waves. Here, the combination of both interpretations of water point to a date of manufacture close to 1850.



2. Badge (*buzi*) With *Qilin* for a First-Rank Military Officer
China, Qing dynasty, c. 1830
Silk and metallic thread tapestry (*kesi*), ink
Lent by the Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery, Scripps College

The *qilin* is a good omen because it only appears during the reign of a benevolent ruler. Other auspicious characteristics attributed to the creature are longevity, grandeur, happiness, famous sons, and wise administration.



3. Badge (*buzi*) With Lion for a Second-Rank Military Officer
China, Qing dynasty, 1850-70
Silk and metallic thread, peacock feather filament embroidery
Pacific Asia Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry N. Foster,
1979.17.1

The lion symbolizes protection, harmony, blessings, and high rank.



4. Badge (*buzi*) With Lion for a Second-Rank Military Officer
China, Qing dynasty, c.1830
Silk and metallic thread tapestry (*kesi*), ink
Lent by the Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery, Scripps College

Animals on military badges were always depicted with their mouths open, perhaps to emphasize their ferocity. Lions were conventionally shown with curled tails, manes, and back hair, which distinguish them from the representations of bears.



5. Badge (*buzi*) With Leopard for a Third-Rank Military Officer
China, Qing dynasty, 1850-70
Silk and metallic thread tapestry (*kesi*), ink
Pacific Asia Museum, Museum Purchase, 1997.65.4

In the Ming dynasty, the leopard and tiger both designated the third and fourth ranks. As a result of the first dress regulations of the new Qing dynasty in 1662, the leopard was assigned permanently to the third rank and the tiger to the fourth.



6. Badge (*buzi*) With Tiger for a Fourth-Rank Military Officer
China, early Qing dynasty, 1644-1652
Silk, metallic and peacock feather filament thread brocade
Lent by Chris Hall, Hong Kong

During the Ming dynasty, either the tiger or leopard represented the fourth military rank. The Qing continued the Ming system from 1644 to 1652. Then from 1652 until 1664, the leopard was assigned the fourth rank and the tiger the third. From 1664 to the end of the dynasty the emblems were reversed: the leopard signifying the third rank and the tiger established as the fourth-rank emblem.



7. Badge (*buzi*) With Tiger for a Fourth-Rank Military Officer
China, Qing dynasty, c.1850
Silk and metallic thread tapestry (*kesi*), ink
Lent by the Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery, Scripps College

Two conventional marks frequently appear on representations of the tiger in Chinese art: the character 王 (“*wang*,” meaning “king”) on its forehead (slightly distorted here) and a swirl of fur on its hind leg.



8. Badge (*buzi*) With Tiger for a Fourth-Rank Military Officer
China, Qing dynasty, 1850-70
Silk and metallic thread tapestry (*kesi*), ink
Pacific Asia Museum, Gift of Miss Mabel Kay, 1969.1.109

The tiger was believed to show courage and ferocity, two characteristics valued in a military officer. In addition, the tiger was considered a superior being able to protect against evil forces. As such it was often depicted on dress and accessories for young children.



9. Badge (*buzi*) With Bear for a Fifth-Rank Military Officer
China, Ming dynasty, c.1500
Silk and metallic thread tapestry (*kesi*)
Lent by Chris Hall, Hong Kong

Throughout the **Ming** and **Qing** dynasties the bear remained the emblem of the fifth-rank military officer, although its representation was rather fanciful, more mythical than real. Here the bear looks backward, a Chinese artistic convention begun in the **Tang** dynasty (618-906) that imparts a sense of movement to the animal. Note that there is no sun, as this was not added to badges until the seventeenth century.



10. Badge (*buzi*) With Bear for a Fifth-Rank Military Officer
China, Qing dynasty, 1840-50
Silk and metallic thread embroidery
Pacific Asia Museum, Gift of Mrs. Russell Dod, 1977.24.14

The bear stood for ferocity, strength and courage. Bears can be distinguished from lions on rank badges by their straight tails and manes—sometimes shown with tight curls near their bases.



11. Badge (*buzi*) With Panther for a Sixth-Rank Military Officer
China, Qing dynasty, 1820-50
Silk and metallic thread embroidery
Lent by Dodi Fromson

Until 1652 the panther was the emblem of the sixth and seventh military ranks, but in the laws of 1652 the panther was given to the sixth rank and the seventh rank shared the rhinoceros with the eighth rank. The canopy over the panther is one of the **Eight Buddhist Symbols** that represent the Buddha's teachings and bring good fortune.



12. Seventh-Rank Military Official
China, Qing dynasty, 19th century
Original: ink and color on paper
Chris Hall Collection Trust, Hong Kong
Photo courtesy of Asian Civilisations Museum, National Heritage Board, Singapore

The emblem for seventh- and eighth-rank military officials was the rhinoceros. Few of these badges survive, probably because their owners destroyed them when the empire fell in 1911. The convention for representing the rhinoceros, long extinct in China, was a slender, cow-like animal, pale brown with large dark spots and flames shooting from flanks and withers.



13. Ninth-Rank Military Official
China, Qing dynasty, 19th century
Original: ink and color on paper
Chris Hall Collection Trust, Hong Kong
Photo courtesy of Asian Civilisations Museum, National Heritage Board, Singapore

Throughout the **Ming** and **Qing** dynasties the emblem for the ninth rank military official was the sea horse, a mythical creature that looked like a white horse with flames emanating from its withers and flanks, shown bounding over waves. Most of these lower ranking badges were destroyed at the end of the Qing dynasty to avoid punishment for their owners as soldiers of the emperor.