



## Daoist Priest's Robe

c. 1850–1900

China

(Qing Dynasty, 1644–1911)

*Embroidered silk satin*

Center back length 53 inches (134.6 cm)

This image card shows the back of a beautifully embroidered robe of the type worn by Daoist (DOW-ist) high priests when officiating at religious rites and ceremonies. The robe is filled with images of **auspicious** symbols of the Daoist religion. Along the bottom edge, dragons frolic in ocean waves, chasing flaming pearls. On the sleeve borders, sets of three lines, known as trigrams, represent the changing forces of nature. Between them are emblems of Daoist Immortals, beings who attained immortality through their Daoist practice. These emblems include: a flower basket for a female immortal who became a fairy after eating a magical peach; a sword for a scholar who had supernatural powers over evil and sickness; musical clappers for the patron saint of theater; and a pair of gourds for a beggar who was able to make his spirit leave his body.

Six large medallions in the center of the robe contain elaborately embroidered decorations of animals, plants, and celestial formations. A tower and three small palaces, home to Daoist gods, are depicted in the top central circle. These decorative elements and the twenty-four multicolored dots represent the twenty-eight Lunar Mansions (or constellations), where the moon rests as it journeys around the Earth each month. The moon (right) and sun (left) can be seen just above the center circle. Inside the moon, a rabbit mixes the **elixir** of immortality; the crow, another deity, lives in the sun. White cranes, like the ones flanking the tower, are closely associated with Daoist priests, who were said to ride the tall birds to the heavens and speak with the gods.

Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased with the George W. B. Taylor Fund, 1967-144-1