



Anonymous, Chinese (late 19th century)

無款中國

“Female Ancestor Portrait”

女宗画像圖

Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk
146.0 x 89.0 cm. (57 1/2 x 35 in.)

The composition is rigidly symmetrical, save for the slight overlapping of the woman's hands, with the subject placed in a yoke-backed chair set on a round rug placed in turn on a rectangular carpet. Although the figure is seen in frontal orientation, there is virtually no pictorial recession so the lower elements are viewed from almost a bird's eye perspective, which allows the various motives and designs to appear with little distortion.

The subject of the portrait wears a red gauze dragon robe, her hands clasped beneath the voluminous sleeves, and a heavily embroidered vest with cloud collar and eight emblems pendant on the hem. Her elaborate crown is decorated with pearl

chains embellished with pendant chimes and jeweled butterflies. She is seated on a carved chair with ornate marble insets below the arm rests, with a green diaper brocade draped over the back of the chair; a low foot-stool is situated below.

Most telling is a rank badge with centered bird, suggesting that the subject was the wife of a civil official, perhaps with purchased degree but yet one that elevated him, and her, above their peers and privileged to have such a portrait executed for her and her family. The lavish display, including very original earrings, marks the end of a long tradition of such images at the end of the Qing dynasty.