Imperial Robe

Date
c. 1821

Medium
Silk and gold thread

Description
The Qing dynasty (1644–1912) was the final Manchu-led dynasty in the history of imperial China. Beginning in 1759 court law mandated that the Chinese emperor must wear robes that feature the twelve symbols of authority: the sun, moon, constellations, mountains, dragons, birds, ritual cups, water weeds, grain, fire, an ax, and the character fu (福). The law also dictated what kinds of garments were permitted to be worn by members of the royal court. This blue imperial robe features nine five-clawed dragons and would likely have been worn by a high-ranking official or imperial prince at the height of the Qing dynasty. Although minor princes and noblemen were permitted to wear blue robes—and medium-ranking officials were allowed to wear robes with eight four-clawed dragons—only high-ranking officials and princes were permitted to wear blue robes with nine five-clawed dragons. This robe also features a hidden dragon, revealed on a panel of fabric visible only when the garment is unfastened.

Dimensions
Overall: 139.7 x 233.7 cm (55 x 92 in.)