

Smile Please! Ancestor Portraits

China,
Room 44



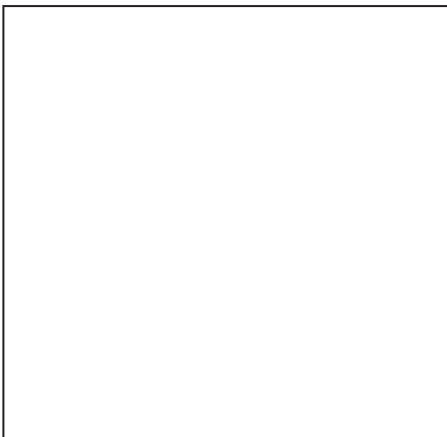
Find a pair of full-length portraits at the back of the Temple and Worship section.

These portraits were painted on silk around 250 years ago. They were displayed on special occasions such as birthdays and New Year when living members of the family would make offerings to the spirits of their dead relatives at altars inside their own home.

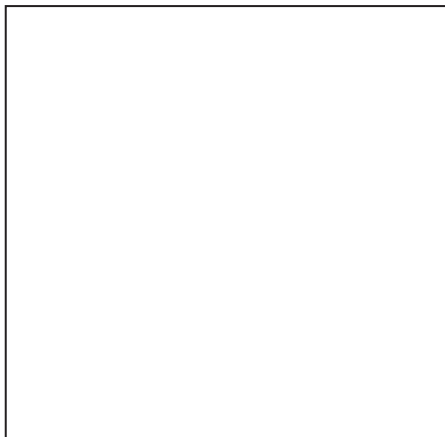
Symbols are important in Chinese art.



Find these symbols on the robes and draw them.



Fire (Red)



Dragon



Cloud (White)

How many claws do these dragons have? _____

The dragon is an important status symbol in China, rated by the number of claws shown. Only the emperor was allowed dragons with the maximum of five claws on his robes. Elsewhere in the gallery look out for 'Five Claw' dragon decorations on clothes made for the Emperor and his family.

What other messages do the portraits give us about this couple?



Spot the difference!

Can you list 5 differences between the male and female portrait?

1.

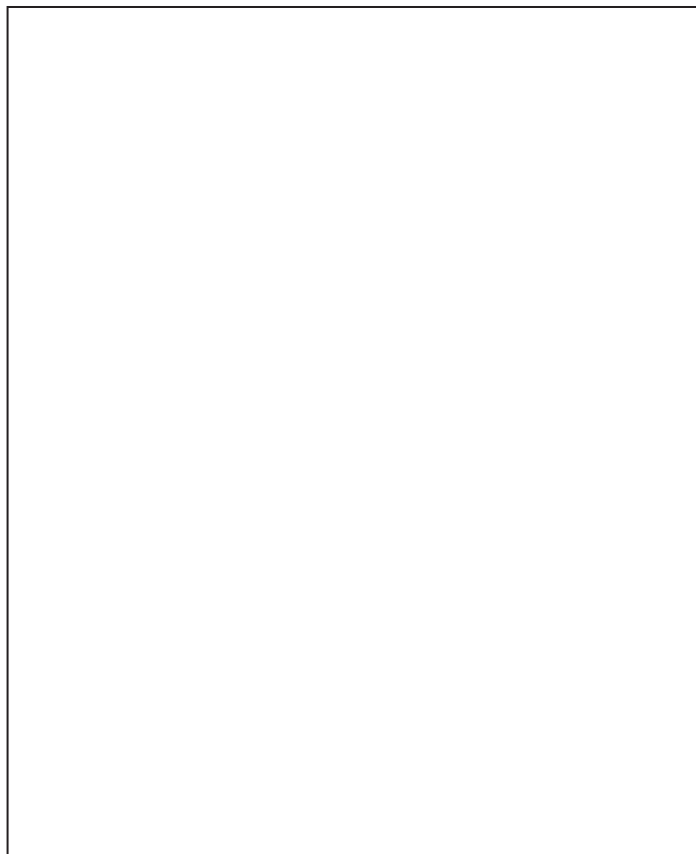
2.

3.

4.

5.

Did you know? The Chinese considered it most improper for women to show their feet. Ancestor portraits had to be unsmiling but great care was taken to capture a true likeness. It was said that if even one hair in the depiction were 'wrong', all future prayers would go to someone else's ancestor, resulting in family tragedy.



Imagine you are commissioning a portrait to be left to your grandchildren and their children.

How would you like to look in your portrait? What things would you include to show what had been important to you in your life?



Make a quick sketch plan of your portrait here to show what you would include