

# INTERNATIONAL TREASURES

## ASIA — China

### Peking Opera Flags from the Qing Dynasty



Image source—www.arts.cultural-china.com



Image source—www.china.org



Image source—www.wikipedia.com

The colorful flags used in the Peking Opera are almost always an integral part of the elaborate costumes worn by the performers, whose attire must enable the audience to distinguish, at first glance, a character's gender, demeanor, social hierarchy, nobility, and rank.

Flags on a character, especially a imperial or a military player have their origins in the small flags Chinese generals would use to signal their subordinates. During the Ming Dynasty (1368 to 1644), Peking Opera troupes enlarged these flags and made them more decorative, producing the trademark flags on the performers back. Curiously the use of symbolic flags in these performances predates the use of a national flag in Imperial China. The Chinese world-view precluded the need for a national flag as the living symbol of China was the Emperor.

Almost all of the Peking Opera flags in the Zaricor Flag Collection are from the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912) and were acquired in Beijing and date from prior to 1900. Presented here, in the sequence of the Chinese Zodiac, are silk embroidered flags from a Beijing Troupe of the Peking Opera.

The Rat was the first animal of the Chinese Zodiac. Rat Flags could be used for either a forthright or a very manipulative character.



ZFC1256— Peking Opera Rat Flag



ZFC1252—Peking Opera Rat Flag



Ox Flags were used to indicate either dependable or stubborn characters .



ZFC1278—Peking Opera Ox Flag

A Tiger Flag stood for an unpredictable rebel or a colorful adventurer.



ZFC1248— Peking Opera Tiger Flag

The Rabbit was symbolic of a gracious good friend or someone moody and detached .



ZFC1249— Peking Opera Rabbit Flag



ZFC1259— Peking Opera Rabbit Flag



The Dragon is by far the most popular type of flag seen onstage at Peking Opera performances and could stand for either magnanimous stately heroes or imperious tyrannical villains. The color of the flag was also an important attribute of the character being portrayed.



ZFC1250— Peking Opera—The red field of the Dragon Flag stands for majestic and noble characters.

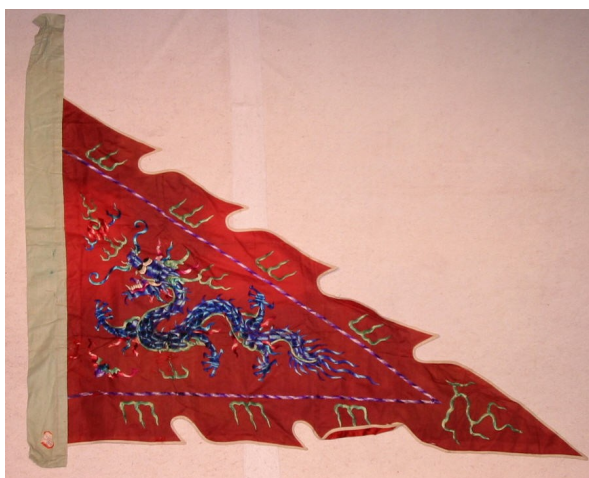


ZFC1251— Peking Opera—The white field of the Dragon Flag indicates a handsome and young character.



ZFC1261—Peking Opera—The green field of the Dragon Flag was used for mighty and bold characters.

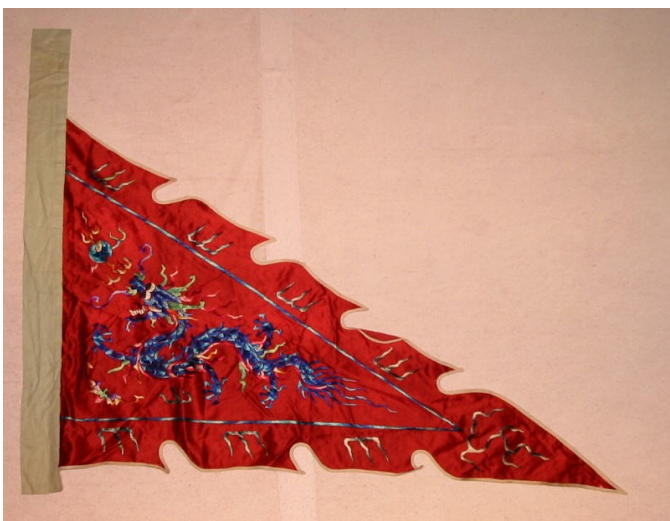
Presented here is a set of four red Dragon Flags from the Peking Opera



ZFC1283—Peking Opera Red Dragon Flag



ZFC1276— Peking Opera Red Dragon Flag



ZFC1282—Peking Opera Red Dragon Flag



ZFC1277—Peking Opera Red Dragon Flag



ZFC1281— Peking Opera—Blue Dragon on white flag



The Snake Flags were used to indicate a wise and mystical sage or an uncommunicative loner.



ZFC1258— Peking Opera Snake Flag

Horse Flags indicated either a popular quick-witted fellow or an arrogant fickle character.



ZFC1247— Peking Opera Horse Flag



ZFC1257— Peking Opera Horse Flag

Goat Flags indicated someone either sincere and righteous or indecisive and passive.



ZFC1254— Peking Opera Goat Flag



ZFC1279— Peking Opera Goat Flag



The Monkey flags stood for quick witted and inventive motivators or egotistical and vain characters, a monkey with a peach was symbolic of immortality.



ZFC1255— Peking Opera Monkey Flag



ZFC1253— Peking Opera Monkey with Peach Flag

The Rooster Flag stood for meticulous organized characters or over-zealous egotists.



ZFC1280— Peking Opera Rooster Flag

Modern Peking Opera Dragon Flags utilize the traditional styles and colors found in the Qing dynasty flags except that the dragons have only four toes on each foot. The five toed dragon was intimately associated with the Emperor and Imperial Family, and are an anathema in the Peoples Republic of China. The dragon flag survives, but in a slightly modified form.



ZFC1284—Peking Opera—The Golden Dragon on green flag.



ZFC1260—Peking Opera—Blue Dragon on white flag