



Clothing Ornament

Date

20th Century

Primary Maker

Zhuang

Medium

Silver

Description

This object is a silver clothing ornament from the Zhuang people residing primarily in China’s Yunnan Province. Most silver would have been reserved for festival or celebratory wear, most often by unmarried women. This item in particular would have been sewn on to an elaborately embroidered jacket to add even more embellishment. The butterfly and bird pattern it depicts is a common design among the Zhuang people. Traditionally, silver was worn to ward off evil, with silver’s bright sheen symbolizing light. Over time as it became more culturally pervasive it came to be used as a show of wealth and health for families who could afford to wear the precious metal. Adolescent girls could wear as much as 10 kilograms of silver. When women marry the silver serves as a dowry and is eventually redistributed to their own children. Silversmithing on the other hand is exclusively performed by men and taught from father to son.

Dimensions

5 1/8 × 3 7/8 in., 39.8g (13 × 9.8 cm, 0.04 kg)