

# The Scholar's Robe : Material Culture and Political Power in Early Modern China

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# The Scholar's Robe: Material Culture and Political Power in Early Modern China

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**Abstract:** This essay explores the history of the scholar's robe as a nexus of material culture and political power. It focuses on the controversial fabric—called *ren* 衽—found pervasively in the Confucian canon and confirmed in archaeological findings. But for hundreds of years there have been disagreements and changes concerning which specific *term* is identified with which *part* of the robe, especially involving the use of *ren* in the scholar's robe. The bulk of my analysis deals with two prominent scholars' monographs on the robe: Huang Zongxi's *Investigation of the Robe* (Shenyi kao) and Jiang Yong's pointed rebuttal entitled *Mistakes in "Investigation of the Robe"* (Shenyi kao wu). The intellectual and political configurations of both works are analyzed in depth in order to contrast two options of cultural identity: Chinese superiority versus cosmopolitan universalism.

**Keywords:** Scholar's robe, long garment, Huang Zongxi, Jiang Yong, cultural identity

A simple Chinese robe called *shenyi* 深衣 (long garment), possessing an elegant style that dates earlier than the terracotta soldiers, has evolved for more than two millennia. Far from being forgotten today, the scholar's robe has become the prototype and cornerstone of the so-called "national clothing" (Hanfu 汉服) movement among contemporary Chinese youth both inside and outside China. Recent revival of the robe varies from a fashion icon for both men and women (left<sup>1</sup> and center<sup>2</sup> pictures) to a political statement of an eccentric man, who wears the robe and walks on a busy street (right<sup>3</sup> picture). Neither nationalisms nor imagined communities can adequately account for intense interest (in some cases frenzy) surrounding this traditional apparel. As I demonstrate in this article, the robe offers a subtle and nuanced revision of the research agenda dubbed as the invention of tradition. We should understand the robe as a symbol of essential tension between nationalist imagination and cosmopolitan yearning as well as a nexus of material culture and political power.<sup>4</sup>

This essay provides a historical account of the robe as well as its social and political implications. It is divided into five parts. The first part introduces the controversial fabric—called *ren* 衽—as found in a wide variety of ancient Chinese texts as well as in the recognizable shape (or the prototype) of the robe illustrated in the sixteenth century. The second part describes how the robe was reinvented as an antiquarian and eccentric symbol for the burgeoning of what later was dubbed the Neo-Confucian scholarly movement. During the Song dynasty's twelfth century,

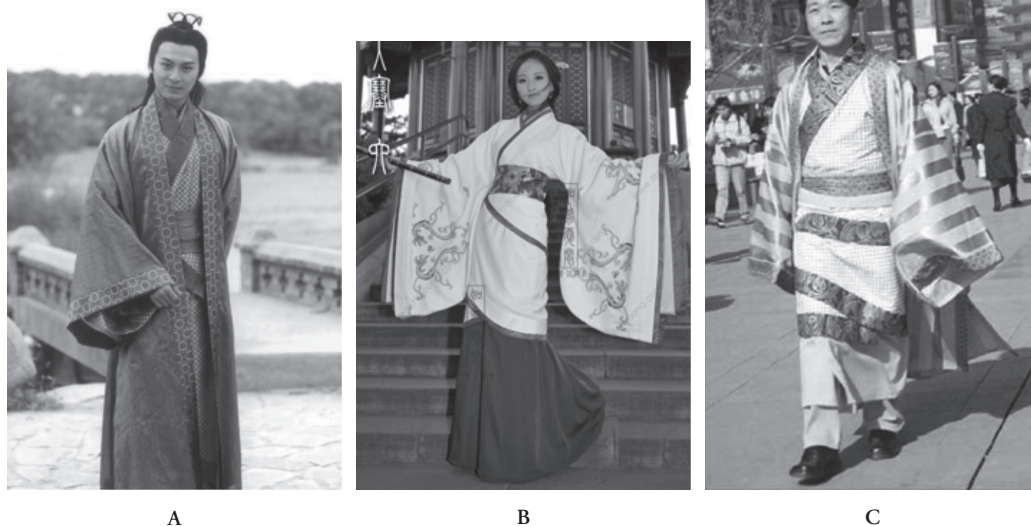
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1 <<http://i191.photobucket.com/albums/z287/wanderingapricot/Scifi/hanfu.jpg>>

2 <<http://p.mefond.com/600x800/073108535820133017/Women-s-Cotton-White-Curved-hem-dress-Wide-sleeves-Han-Dynasty-Hanfu-Clothing.jpg>>

3 <[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/d/d9/Wang\\_Letian.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/d/d9/Wang_Letian.jpg)>

4 The conceptual framework of understanding the scholar's robe should be set in the coordinates of three milestone books: Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's edited volume, *The Invention of Tradition*.



A

B

C

Neo-Confucians articulated a new political subjectivity and scholarly identity, and the scholar's robe serves as a thinly veiled attempt to distinguish themselves from other intellectual orientations. The third part describes how, after Neo-Confucianism became a basis of imperial orthodoxy during the Ming dynasty in the fifteenth century, the scholar's robe became both a status and ethnic symbol, involving Chinese intellectual pride and superiority. The fourth and fifth parts set up the contexts for understanding the Ming dynasty implosion in 1664, ending in the Manchu conquest of China. From the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, the interpretation of the scholar's robe bifurcated into two competing visions within the framework of Confucian civilization: (1) Huang Zongxi's work, which captured and crystallized the ethnocentric version of Chinese superiority; and (2) Jiang Yong's cosmopolitan vision of a universal Confucian civilization. During the eighteenth century, Jiang Yong's vision seemed to have triumphed over Huang's ethnocentrism. The "debate" between Huang Zongxi and Jiang Yong across different temporality and political space continues to resonate in contemporary China. The reinvention of the robe today as a "Chinese" symbol is the perfect moment for historical reflection on how the collective articulation of China's cultural identity has changed from a cosmopolitan territorial empire in the eighteenth century to a multi-ethnic nation-state in the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

### Tailor's Trick

The shift in meanings of the scholar's robe hinged historically on the peculiar identification and interpretation of a fabric called *ren* 衽, which was not only specific to the scholar's robe but also frequently appeared in a wide variety of ancient texts. The robe is defined as an item of ritual apparel in the eponymous thirty-ninth chapter of the *Ritual Records* (*Li ji* 禮記). Besides this short chapter, the robe is also mentioned in the "Crown Jade and Ornament" (Yu zao 玉藻) chapter of *Ritual Records*—a rather long chapter that describes the garb and rituals appropriate for a king.

<sup>5</sup> On this topic, see the collection of essays in *Cosmopolitanism in China, 1600–1950*, edited by Minghui Hu and Johan Elverskog.

The terse sketches found in *Ritual Records* were invoked in discussions—some quite casual—of a wide variety of ritual and private garments. The fabric *ren* is a crucial part of the above description of the robe. In the “Grand Record of Funerals” (Sang daji 喪大計) chapter of *Ritual Records*, *ren* also appears in various depiction of funeral clothes. As in other ancient texts, I searched the online database of an extensive collection of texts before 220 (marked as the fall of Han dynasty): The word *ren* has 125 entries, among which 24 are specifically registered as *zuoren* (left *ren*) —a quintessential reference to barbarian dress code in ancient China.<sup>6</sup> Other compounds, such as *renxi* 衽席, carried several ambiguous implications about scholars and teachers in imperial China. One intriguing reference of “right *ren*,” which was supposed to reference the Chinese dress, can be found in the Songs of Chu (Chuci 楚辭) —a location at the margin of the ancient Chinese civilization. Moreover, the fabric *ren* was explicitly defined in ancient dictionaries like *Explication of Simple and Compound Characters* (Shuowen jiezi 說文解字), compiled by Xu Shen (58–147), *Approaching Elegance* (Erya 爾雅), *Local Speeches* (Fangyan 方言), compiled by Yang Xiong (53 BCE–18), and *Explaining Names* (Shiming 釋名). These dictionaries, however, offer contradictory and inconsistent definitions of the fabric *ren*. Given the wide variety of the *loci classici* of *ren*, the identification and meaning of *ren* in the robe could therefore potentially alter the interpretation of the Confucian canon as a whole. The stake could not be higher for many classical scholars in early modern China.

The scholar's robe has always been identified with the classical referent “long garment” (*shenyi*) in *Ritual Records*. The identification was ambiguous and ambivalent at best and had been called into question many times in Chinese history. Because of this ambiguous association, the classical prescription of the robe, namely, the actual hat and dress regulations (*yiguan zhidu* 衣冠制度) implemented by the imperial state, and the actual robe donned by scholars and political elites, co-evolved over a long time, beginning actually in ancient times.<sup>7</sup> The evidence trail of the robe grew even longer and more convoluted over time. “The classical scriptures make the style and function of the robe (long garment) a puzzle,” noted the editors of *The Annotated Catalogue of “The Complete Works of the Four Treasuries”* (*Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao*); “many debates have arisen.”<sup>8</sup> As the list of commentaries grew longer and longer, it seemed that there would never be agreement over what the original might have looked like. One sometimes feels, as one reads the commentaries, that the search for the authentic and ancient robe had become moot. To begin understanding the fabric's critical importance, we must consider the overall shape of the robe, when it was first widely donned by scholars in the Ming dynasty.

For instance, in the middle of the sixteenth century, Wang Yingdian (fl. 1540) gave a detailed description (fig. 1) of the long garment in his *Illustration and Explanation of the “Rituals of Zhou”* (*Zhouli tushuo* 周禮圖說). The style in figure 1 was likely very popular in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and persists into the twenty-first century. Although the style of the robe may be similar among scholars, its materials (linen, cotton, silk etc.) varied significantly across social class and status in Ming China. A low-brow and less sophisticated illustration of the Ming robe can be

6 I use 中國哲學書電子化計畫 (<http://ctext.org/zh>) and search all texts under 先秦兩漢. The categories in which *ren* appears include Confucian texts (儒家), hybrid philosophies (雜家), historical writings (史書), classical scriptures (經典文獻), and dictionaries (字書).

7 See Michael Nylan's analysis of *yili* 儀禮 and sumptuary regulations in her “Toward an Archaeology of Writing: Text, Ritual, and the Culture of Public Display in the Classical Period (475 B.C.E.–270 C.E.),” *Text and Ritual in Early China*, 3–49. In addition to the classical prescription and the material form of the robe, the Ming state defined, and the Qing state dismissed, the details of the robe in their hat and dress regulations. Scholars have seen them as analogous to the sumptuary regulations of Elizabethan England. See Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China*, 91–115, 141–65.

8 *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao*, 21: 29a. The exact wording is: “深衣之制，眾說糾紛。”

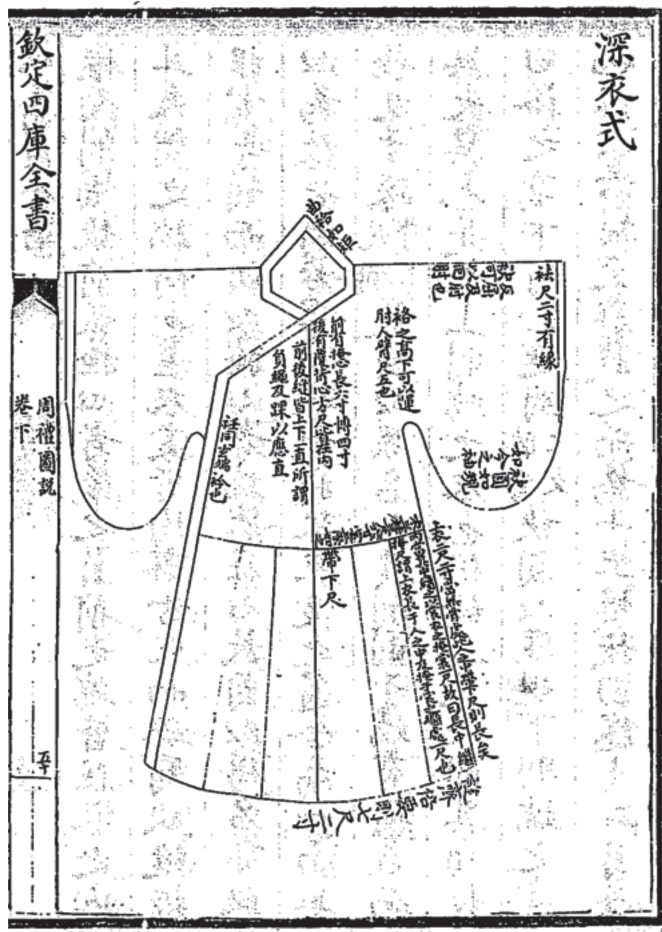


Fig. 1. Model of the scholar's robe (shenyi shi).

From Wang Yingdian, *Zhouli tushuo*, 2: 50a.

found in *The Collective Illustration of Three Life Forces* (*Sancai tuhui* 三才圖會), a popular reference Manuel compiled by Wang Qi (1530-1615) in the sixteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

Wang's prototype of the robe was probably based upon the scholar's robe of his day. It then happened to become a baseline by which all scholar's robes were later measured and compared. It also became the prototype of today's national clothing movement. Its general features include a collar decorated with a band of fabric that extends from the neck down both sides of the robe, large, wide sleeves, and decorative stitching extending down the lower half of the robe. Although Wang provided an illustration, he also stated that scholars were generally confused about what the long garment should look like, since the ancient texts were filled with contradictory depictions.<sup>10</sup> It should also be noted that Ming scholars wore many kinds of robes or gowns in their daily lives.

9 See the database of *Sancai tuhui* ([http://kande0.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/kande/oki/\\_t4-e8zy.html](http://kande0.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/kande/oki/_t4-e8zy.html)), which is based on the Qing version (槐蔭草堂藏板) in Tōyō Bunka Kenkyūjo, Tokyo University.

10 Wang Yingdian, *Zhouli tushuo*, 2: 50a–52a.

The classical ideal of “long garment” served as an inspiration, a symbol of taste and status, a sign of erudition but not necessarily the actual style.<sup>11</sup>

Wang’s illustration, however, produces a problem in its naming of certain parts of the robe. The band of decoration, mentioned above, extending from the neck down both sides, for example, was called “curved” (*jia* 袷 or *jin* 衿), both words can also mean collar. Along the collar (see fig. 1), Wang writes “the curved (collar) shapes like a square” (*qujia ruju* 曲袷如距). Down from there, a line of text, along the band of fabric that extends from the neck down to the bottom of the robe, reads “*ren* is shaped like the one in black ritual apparel. It is also called a collar.” (*ren tong xuanduan jin ye* 衿同玄端衿也). This identification of the classical term with a specific part of the robe raised eyebrows. It is fundamentally a circular definition, because *ren* is a classical referent that Wang could not find. As indicated before, the fabric *ren* appears in a wide variety of ancient texts. It is likely that Wang merely assumed that *ren* is identical with *xuanduan*. *Xuanduan* means black ritual apparel. Its counterpart *suduan* means white ritual apparel. Both appear in the *Rituals of Zhou*, which is precisely the classical text Wang is illustrating. In his illustration, Wang Yingdian elides the crucial definition of *ren* and remains sloppy in his interpretation of the key term in *Rituals of Zhou*.

Let us further examine the problem of the naming of various parts of the robe. At this point it would be reasonable to consult the experts who have professionally investigated the material object itself. Historians of fashion, museum curators, and archaeologists carefully examine traditional garments, jewelry, hair ornaments, hats, and shoes, all of which have changed over a long time. They study what we conventionally call material culture and often compare what they find with descriptions and illustrations in printed and manuscript sources.<sup>12</sup> For these scholars, the robe in question is generally seen as a generic ceremonial robe that served as an inner or outer garment for both men and women.<sup>13</sup> Such a garment differed from the other ancient style of clothing, the *yishang*, which has two separate parts: one for the upper body, called the *yi*, and one for the lower body, called the *shang*.<sup>14</sup>

From this vantagepoint, the curator, scholar, and novelist Shen Congwen (1902–88) provided an intriguing analysis of a certain tailor’s trick, as well as how the trick changes the correlation of *terms* with actual *parts*. Shen devoted thirty years to his *Study of Clothing in Traditional China* (*Zhongguo gudai fushi yanjiu*), published in 1980. This is a work enriched by the examination of countless artifacts—sculptures, fabrics, clothes, and paintings—in museums and archives. Like so many in this field, Shen prioritized material artifacts over written records, and he organized his magnum opus by clustering artifacts in chronological order.<sup>15</sup> As cotton and silk are quite perishable, few articles of clothing made from these materials have survived. But some have, including the extraordinary set of cotton robes discovered in Mashan’s tomb no. 1, dated between 300 and 400 BCE and associated with the state of Chu. The entombed woman likely belonged to the upper tier of the aristocracy. Buried with her, along with other clothes and accessories, were eight lavishly decorated ceremonial cotton robes whose sleeves are narrow at the shoulder and wide

11 For daily robes and gowns, see Azuma Jūji, “Shin’i ni tsuite: Kinsei Chūgoku, Chōsen oyobi Nihon ni okeru jufuku no mondai,” 185–86.

12 For Western methods, see Beverly Lemire, *The Force of Fashion in Politics and Society*, 2–15.

13 Zhou Xun and Gao Chunming, *Zhongguo lidai funü fushi*, 202–17; Wang Yuqing, “Bianfu yu shenyi”; Yuan Jianping, “Zhongguo gudai fushi zhong de shenyi yanjiu,” 115–16.

14 Ma Duanlin, *Wenxian tongkao*, 110: 25b. According to both Jiang Yong and Dai Zhen’s gloss, the long garment was so named as to distinguish it from the *yishang*. See Jiang Yong, *Shenyi kaowu*, 1a; Dai Zhen, *Shenyi jie*, 2: 89. This gloss was widely accepted by their contemporaries.

15 Shen Congwen, *Zhongguo gudai fushi yanjiu*, 1–4. My research is a long overdue homage to a literary hero of my youth.



Fig. 2. Robe N-15, tomb no. 1, Mashan.  
From Shen Congwen, *Zhongguo gudai fushi yanjiu*, 88.

at the wrist. An examination of paintings and sculptures contemporary with the tomb quickly convinced Shen that the robes were used during auspicious events such as weddings, not funerals. Among the ceremonial cotton robes, Shen focused on one labeled N-15 (fig. 2). This robe has notably different sleeves from scholar's robe illustrated by Wang. They start wider and get narrower toward wrists. Both it is the tailor's trick—a fabric insert under the arm at the shoulder to allow both arms to move freely—that prompts Shen to claim that he had identified the mysterious *ren* in classical scriptures as the inserted fabric commonly used by ancient tailors.

The archaeological object—identified by Shen as a *shenyi* (long garment) from the classical literature—gives us an important insight into the material form. Shen gives primacy to material evidence in settling textual disputes of antiquity. His proof comes from a technical detail that would have been familiar to craftsmen and tailors who stitched robes like that of tomb no. 1. For Shen, this exemplified how archaeological finds could sweep away centuries of obfuscating classical scholarship and unveil the reality of the ancient world—a view shared by virtually all China archaeologists today. On a different note, She also argues that ruling elites and scholars stopped donning the “long garment” in the Han dynasty. Therefore the classical commentators and their exegeses of the configuration of the robe were mere speculations and appeared in disarray. For this reason, Shen dismisses most classical commentaries of the robe.<sup>16</sup>

By his own illustration, Shen correlates the fabric inserts (shown as the small rectangles on the left and right in figure 3) as *ren* from various contradictory sources in ancient texts and praises it in his main text as a “convenient, mature, and intelligent design,” similar to the way fabric inserts, like the gores and gussets of Renaissance Europe, enlarge the area under the sleeves of the ceremonial

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 100.

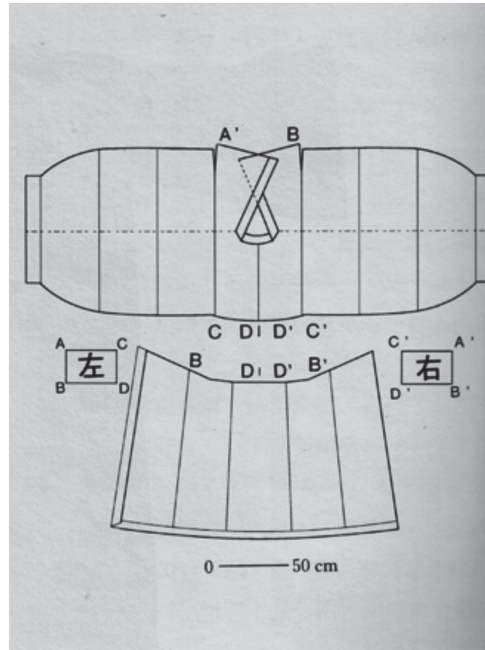


Fig. 3. The pattern for robe N-15.

From Shen Congwen, *Zhongguo gudai fushi yanjiu*, 88.

robes.<sup>17</sup> Widely used throughout the Renaissance in the construction of underwear, gores and gussets were also found in outer garments throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia.<sup>18</sup> Gores are generally triangular pieces of fabric inserted into a slash or a seam to provide volume. Gussets are square- or diamond-shaped pieces of fabric sewn in under the sleeve or crotch of a garment to allow more range of motion. The N-15 cotton robe and its fabric inserts opened the way for Shen to settle the textual disputes over the long garment as presented in *Ritual Records*. Shen argued that the material evidence was so overwhelming that we should ignore the long commentary tradition and take our lead from the fabric inserts in the ancient cotton robe.<sup>19</sup>

The fabric insert certainly shows the ingenious craftsmanship in ancient China, and it also brilliantly points to exactly why the problem of the identification of which *term* with which *part* of the robe remained so disputable among many. Thus far the only form of the robe, or long garment, that Shen had discussed was the ritual garment worn by noble women. But most *Ritual Records* commentaries about the long garment addressed only male clothing—that of nobles, officials, and scholars. In the classical scriptures, that is the use that figured in official rituals and in the everyday domestic life of aristocratic families. The issue of gender and status as well as the materials of the

17 *Ibid.*, 89.

18 Dorothy Burnham, a curator in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, illustrates that a male's shirt from France, dated to the thirteenth century, shows the insertion of gores into the center front and center back, while a woman's shirt from Italy, dated to the seventeenth century, shows square gussets inserted under the arms. Even a small gusset can alleviate the construction of a tight sleeve. In Renaissance underwear, there is no reliable formula for the size of the gussets relative to the entire garment. For outer garments, however, where appearance was more important, gussets had to be large enough to permit the garment to hang and move well. I suspect that in the ancient world, especially in China, the size of the gusset resulted from the economic cut of the cotton fabric. See Dorothy Burnham, *Cut My Cote*, 12–13.

19 Shen Congwen, *Zhongguo gudai fushi yanjiu*, 89–90.



robe should all be reckoned with. Many classical scholars in early modern China discussed this technical detail and unraveled the scholar's robe in a direction entirely different from that taken by our modern gaze. It is to the controversy over the classical term *ren* that I will now unfold the rest of this essay.

### Becoming the Scholar's Robe

The scholars in the Song dynasty who were collectively referred to as Neo-Confucians gave the robe a new meaning already in the twelfth century. But problems of the scholar's robe remained quite marginal in comparison with struggles over key, philosophical concepts like heavenly principle, human nature, human desire, and similar ones. According to the well-known historian Ying-shih Yü, Song neo-Confucians like Zhu Xi formulated a new political subjectivity in a time of intense cultural crisis over scholarly identity compelled by confrontations with the pervasive and increasingly popular realm of Buddhist ideas and practices, as well as the deep political uncertainties concerning the applicability of Confucian-grounded statecraft.<sup>20</sup> Zhu Xi and his fellow Neo-Confucians invented a new cosmology, moral philosophy and political principles on the shared responsibility of scholars and elites in managing the dynasty. The Neo-Confucian language of political responsibility, self moral cultivation, and ontology of heavenly principle were all refreshing, perhaps even edgy when first articulated. We should keep in mind that the Neo-Confucian language of philosophy and morality changed its tone, meanings, and modes of articulation after it became an official ideology during the Ming dynasty.

The robe was certainly a side issue for Neo-Confucians. I searched the Siku electronic database of the complete writings of Zhu Xi (*Yuzuan zhuzi quanshu* 御纂朱子全書) and found only six occurrences of the scholar's robe (*shenyi*). Albeit with brevity and tact, Zhu Xi provided two striking interpretations. First, he claimed that it was some kind of funeral clothing. This claim, refuted later by Shen Congwen, was already disputed and discussed by classical scholars during the Ming and Qing. Second, Zhu gave a detailed description of the style of the long garment (*shenyi zhidu*) in his *Family Rituals* (Zhuzi jiali 朱子家禮).<sup>21</sup> Both accounts were seriously disputed by classical scholars in the Qing, from about 1683–1839, especially by Dai Zhen (1724–77) and Ren Dachun (1738–89).<sup>22</sup>

Did problems about the robe correspond in any way to the sense of shared responsibility that had emerged centuries before? Zhu Xi's answer was probably a resounding “no.” We must approach this by reading between the lines in other writings around Zhu Xi's times. The historian and encyclopedist Ma Duanlin (1254–1323), who was born in the Southern Song and served as a minister under the Mongol Yuan dynasty, gave a telling episode to support the conjecture. In *Comprehensive Studies of Documents* (*Wenxian tongkao*), published in 1319, Ma included a section on clothes and offered an anecdote about what it meant in his day when one put on the ancient robe (that is, the long garment). He began by citing the philosopher and classical scholar Lü Dalin (1044–91): “As for the long garment, superior and inferior [in ancient times] did not mind wearing the same

20 Yü Yingshi, *Zhu Xi de lishi shijie*, 1 : 287–387; Peter Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, 138–52.

21 *Yuzuan Zhuzi quanshu*. Siku quanshu electronic database. Wenyuange version. The standard references of *Family Rituals* in English are Patricia Ebrey's *Confucianism and Family Rituals in Imperial China* and her translation of *Family Rituals*.

22 On the High Qing period see Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*, 20; and Philip A. Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State*, 2–26. On how Dai Zhen repudiated Zhu Xi's scholarship on institutions and rituals, see my *China's Transition to Modernity: The New Classical Vision of Dai Zhen*, 152–84. Ren Dachun published a specialized monograph on the robe. Due to present limitations, I have not included an analysis of it.

kind; neither did they mind wearing it during auspicious or inauspicious rituals; men and women could also both use the long garment. The feudal princes (*zhuhou*) wore official clothes (*chaofu*) during the day and the long garment in the evening, while scholars (*shidaifu*) wore ritual clothing (*yuanduan*) during the day and the long garment in the evening. The long garment was the ritual garb of commoners.”<sup>23</sup>

Historians have shown that the formation of neo-Confucianism coalesced with the consolidation of patriarchal and lineage groups, who began to compete for access to political power and accumulation of high social status.<sup>24</sup> Lü Dalin’s testimony above was to show how these patriarchal and lineage groups struggled during the breaking of the previous aristocratic monopoly on political power. According to Lü, informality and convenience defined the use of the robe for noblemen and scholars, while commoners used it as formal dress. Court officials, noblemen and noblewomen, palace ladies, scholars and their wives, artisans, merchants, and farmers all wore it. It was the default casual apparel for members of the ancient elite. In a reversal of this logic, the robe became the formal attire of commoners in the ancient world.

By the Song, the robe had come to signify antiquarianism, unconventionality, and nonconformity; only a few members of the emergent literati society favored it. Ma Duanlin provided a nuanced description of the social implications of donning the old-fashioned robe.

The uniforms mandated by the imperial state are known as “ritual clothes” (*yuanduan*). The long garment, on the other hand, is the apparel that was designed by the ancient sages. Although ritual clothes were used as the uniforms of the imperial state, they did not convey rank or status. If the emperor donned them he did not appear humble, and if scholars put them on they did not appear to be overstepping their authority. The long garment was made according to universal principles and models. Therefore the worthless could put it on, and so could the respectable. One could wear it at the court or at home. The aged emperor could wear it while performing the ceremony held to honor the elders, noblemen could wear it to attend the sacrificial feast, scholars could wear it in the evening, and commoners could wear it to funerals. The long garment simply did not imply any sort of rank or status in the ancient world.<sup>25</sup>

The robe, in other words, represented for ancient China the very antithesis of hat and dress regulations later mandated by various regimes. It did not facilitate discrimination, but served, rather, as a sort of equalizing disguise. For the Song Neo-Confucians, the robe was not only admired for its elegance and simplicity but also embodied an important political function. “It was not until the Song dynasty that scholars began to restore the style and function of the long garment!” Huang Zhongxi (1610–95) proclaimed, “It was not until Zhu Xi that the corrective effort was made!”<sup>26</sup> The premise of Huang’s statement was shared by annotators of “The Complete Works of the Four Treasuries” in the eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup> This is why Huang Zongxi credited him with “rectifying” the style and function of the scholar’s robe.

23 Ma Duanlin, *Wenxian tongkao*, 110: 26a–b.

24 This issue is more complex as seen from perspectives of women’s history. See Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 261–71.

25 *Ibid.*, 110: 27a. For a similar analysis of this passage, see Azuma Jūji, “Shin’i ni tsuite: Kinsei Chūgoku, Chōsen oyobi Nihon ni okeru jufuku no mondai,” 173–75.

26 Huang Zongxi, *Shenyi kao*, 17a.

27 *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao*, 21: 29a.

More importantly, the scholar's robe was part of Zhu Xi's *Family Rituals*. According to Jūji Azuma, both Zhu Xi in his *Family Rituals* and Sima Guang (1019–86) in his *Explaining the Rules of Etiquette* (shuyi 書儀) had helped revive and reinvent the scholar's robe in their private, familial and patrilineal space.<sup>28</sup> Although Zhu was credited for rectifying the name of the robe as “long garment,” he hesitated to wear it in public—the social stigma was too great. In 1200, Zhu Xi's enemy Shi Shengzu (fl. 1241) attacked him as an eccentric who wore strange and baleful clothes (long garment *shenyi* was specifically called out) and accused his followers as a cult-like group who defied social conventions.<sup>29</sup> Anyone who dared to fashion such a robe, taking his lead from the description in the *Ritual Records*, and wear it in public, would invite derision. We know this because a leading early-Song scholar, Shao Yong (1011–77), earned just that reaction when he tried out the robe in public.<sup>30</sup> Those who believed that by discreetly adopting a practice of the ancients they would achieve a measure of inner tranquility and moral transcendence did better. Sima Guang, for instance, was wont to put on the long garment in the comfort of his private garden.<sup>31</sup> And Zhu Xi and his fellow Neo-Confucian master Lü Xizhe (1036–1114) both planned to wear the long garment in order to demonstrate their new moral philosophy.<sup>32</sup> But both believed that this private practice could only be taken up after they retired from office. So long as those three gentlemen—Sima, Zhu, and Lu—were in their government posts and pursuing their political agendas, Ma Duanlin believed, they could not put on the robe: the symbolic act would puzzle and anger those who regarded wearers of the long garment as misfits and lunatics.<sup>33</sup>

It would be fair to say that these sporadic and private behaviors of some Neo-Confucians, encapsulated in Ma Duanlin's documentary collection, were signals of their search for a collective type of morally advanced, politically engaged, and socially responsible scholar. It was precisely in this sense that the long garment became the scholar's robe. The private practice of a small group of intellectual elites did not catch on in their own times but later experienced a melodramatic success after the Mongols ruled China for nearly a century.

### Becoming Chinese

The robe suddenly became both official and popular among scholars in 1368, upon the founding of the Ming dynasty. The founder, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–98), declared that the time had come to replace the foreign symbols used by the Mongols with those that were developed during the Tang dynasty (618–907). Members of the Chinese elite, who had supported the prolonged military campaign against the Mongols, applauded the founding emperor's initiative. According to the cosmological theory of the Five Phases (*wuxing*), with its eternal cycle of mutual generation and conflict, the Ming ruling house was obliged to apply to the rituals of state a new color scheme, new names, and new uniforms. Once these changes had been made, a new Mandate of Heaven would envelop the new dynasty.<sup>34</sup> The Ming imperial house, energized by ethnic pride, drew up a new set of rules for hat and dress regulations (*yiguan zhidu*), a demonstration that the Han people had reclaimed political power. A plethora of bulky and imperially sanctioned ritual texts were

28 Azuma Jūji, “Shin'i ni tsuite: Kinsei Chūgoku, Chōsen oyobi Nihon ni okeru jufuku no mondai,” 175–81.

29 Ibid., 181–82.

30 *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao*, 110: 27a–b.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Gu Jiegang, *Qin Han de fangshi yu rufeng*, 1–16. For a recent elaboration and revision of the ancient cosmological theory, see Li Ling, *Zhongguo fangshukao*, 174–76.

subsequently compiled and bestowed, many of them enshrined Neo-Confucianism as imperial orthodoxy, such as Zhu Xi's *Family Rituals*.<sup>35</sup> Restoring the Tang system would require careful study of a period that predated the foreign domination of North China by outsiders—Khitans, Jurchens, and Mongols. This turned out to be a much more complicated project than anticipated.<sup>36</sup> Despite the difficulty and uncertainty in figuring out the authentic form of the ancient robe, the political elites of the Ming dynasty proceeded to create what they considered as the scholar's robe.

In the latter part of the Ming (basically the sixteenth century), the lavish variety of the clothes worn by rich merchants and literati is evident in the vernacular paintings produced by studio artists and hung in elite households.<sup>37</sup> The scholarly and political elites alike had acknowledged the symbolic significance of the robe in order to distinguish themselves from other people. The robe was not only refashioned and reinvented in a different style but also served a number of functions. First, those who wore it were distinguished from farmers, craftsmen, peddlers, and, most significantly, merchants. This was a reaction to historical events. When the semiotics of rank and status functioned properly, the distinctions among officials, merchants, craftsmen, and farmers were correctly and unambiguously perceived. Should class markers fade, a sense of social dysfunction would prevail, as occurred with the extensive commercialization of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that led to a blurring of categories as wealth was quickly translated into cultural capital. As long as markers of rank remained apparent, individuals were able to negotiate social conventions.<sup>38</sup>

More important, the long garment was a style devoid of foreign influence: it was now seen as purely Chinese. Confucius had once praised an ancient statesman, declaring, "Were it not for Guan Zhong we might now be wearing our hair loose and folding our garments [*ren*] to the left."<sup>39</sup> In this passage, the key word *ren* was rendered as "garments" by Arthur Waley. The resonating symbol of Chineseness was explicitly stated and went directly to the heart of the question: to fold one's garment on top of the left was in itself the wearing of the long garment—the quintessential Chinese item of clothing; to fold it on top of the right was the act of a barbarian or foreigner. Consequently the long garment served as both a status marker and a cultural marker distinguishing domestic from foreign. Eventually, under the non-Han Manchu dynasty, the demarcation between the Chinese and foreign via clothing style could no longer be tolerated.

Hat and dress regulations, as recorded in detail in *Collected Statutes of the Great Ming Dynasty* (*Da Ming huidian*) and later set down in the *History of the Ming* (*Ming shi*), established the symbolic hierarchy of the ruling elites while announcing the ethnicity of the ruling dynasty. The subsequent Manchu-Qing dynasty (1644–1911) had no choice but to outlaw these regulations and institute a new system. The Manchu conquerors had arrived in the Ming capital looking drastically different from the newly deposed rulers. Still, it was not until 1759 that the Qing imperial house published the *Illustrated Compendium of Qing Rituals* (*Huangchao liqi tushi*), the formal inauguration of the Qing's hat and dress regulations. The *Compendium* presented detailed illustrations of sacrificial utensils (*ji qi*), ritual accessories (*yi qi*), hats and garments (*guan fu*), musical instruments (*yue qi*), banners and decorations used in imperial processions (*lu bu*), and martial equipment (*wu*

35 Azuma Jūji and Paku Wonje, *Shushi karei to higashi Ajia no bunka kōshō*, 96–110.

36 Lin Li-yueh, "Yishang yu fengjiao," 114–19; Wu Jen-shu, "Mingdai pingmin fushi de liuxing fengshang yu shidaifu de fanying," 57–65.

37 James Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure*, 97–148.

38 A sizable literature already touched upon this issue. See Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 141–65; Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure*, 219–33; Kishimoto Mio, "'Laoye' to 'xiangong': Koshō kara mita chihō shakai no kaisō kankaku," 54–76, and her *Chūgoku no mibunsei to shakai chitsujō*, 1–33. Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 260–317.

39 Waley, *The Analects of Confucius*, 185.

bei). All exhibited a distinctive and exotic character and served as striking reminders of Manchu domination.<sup>40</sup> There is no mention of the scholar's robe in the *Compendium*.

One must also keep in mind that the official clothing of both the Ming and Qing dynasties was only relevant to bureaucrats and state rituals. As Shen Congwen suggested, the vast majority of China's people would have barely noticed the symbolic changes mandated by the state.<sup>41</sup> When the Manchu conquest of China was complete, most literati, destined never to hold office, expressed subtle dissatisfaction. This was the group that led the extensive commercialization that marked several wealthy regions. That process had been blurring the gap between literati and merchants since the beginning of the sixteenth century. The members of these barely distinguishable groups became acutely aware of commercial trends as part of the endless struggle over status. Members of the gentry and merchants both learned to position themselves in the fluid dynamics of status formation. Not only official status markers but also symbols derived from the classical scriptures were creatively deployed to signify wealth, culture, and education, similar to conspicuous consumption.<sup>42</sup> Classical symbols or styles, such as the long garment, became a useful way to identify one's status.

A remarkable anecdote from the sixteenth century will show how charged the robe remained. In *Records of Ming Scholars (Ming ru xuean)*, Huang Zongxi told the following story:

One night, Wang Gen dreamed that the heavens were falling. As thousands of people ran, screaming for mercy, he raised his arms and lifted the heavens. Then, noting that the sun, moon, and other heavenly bodies had strayed from their orbits, he raised his hands again and restored all to their proper positions. When he woke, sweat pouring off him like rain, Wang was struck by a deep insight into his mind-in-itself (*xinti*). . . . Having carefully studied the *Ritual Records*, he now set about applying its prescriptions to fashioning a hat, a long garment, a sash, and tablets. Putting them on, he said, "How can I speak the words of [the sage] Yao and act as Yao did without also wearing his clothes?"<sup>43</sup>

In a comment on this passage, the historian Shimada Kenji praised the symbolic act as the culmination of both a radical commitment to a plebeian mentality and the promotion of individuality. Wang and his group, known as the Taizhou school and later labeled the "left-wing" of Wang Yangming's followers, emancipated themselves from the scholastic constraints of the tradition of endless commentaries on the Confucian canon and drew lessons instead from a daily involvement with the world.<sup>44</sup>

From the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, a rising interest in fashion had brought changes to men's clothes as commercial expansion gradually reached an unprecedented scale. Suzhou acquired a reputation for producing fine and novel garments, as designers and tailors competed to produce clothes and accessories for men and women. A sense of style became de rigueur among literati and wealthy merchants. Even as the imperial authority prescribed a set of wearable markers to signal one's place in the symbolic hierarchy, the wealthy succumbed to the lure of conspicuous consumption, undermining the hierarchies the imperium insisted on.<sup>45</sup>

40 *Huangchao liqi tushi*, 14–94.

41 Shen Congwen, *Zhongguo gudai fushi yanjiu*, 414–61.

42 Yü Yingshi, *Zhongguo jinshi zongjiao lunli yu shangren jingshen*, 97–166 ; Kishimoto Mio, "Meishi no kōyō: Min Shin jidai ni okeru shitaifu no kōsai," 243–76, and her "Min-Shin jidai no minbun kankaku," 403–27.

43 Huang Zongxi, *Ming Ru xuean*, 2: 709. The translation is based on Julia Ching's version in Huang Zongxi, *The Records of Ming Scholars*, 174.

44 Shimada Kenji, *Chūgoku ni okeru kindai shii no zassetsu*, 134–37.

45 For details, see Lin Li-yueh, "Yishang yu fengjiao," 119–27.

Historians Wu Jen-shu and Lin Li-yueh have described how unconventionality and nonconformity prevailed in clothing styles in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—dubbed by Confucian critics, however, as “pernicious clothing” (*fuyao* 服妖).<sup>46</sup> Among these trends, antiquarianism per se would mark one as sophisticated. Wealthy merchants, in particular, purchased rare books and antiques in order to claim some of the luster of literati-officials. When even the clothing of faraway times became commercialized, how might a scholar with a taste for antiquity set himself apart from philistines and merchants?

Commercialization seems not to have changed the fundamental political and social function of the scholar's robe. On the contrary, commercialization distinguished the robe as not only a sign of antiquarian taste but also a symbol in defending literati value against commercialization. This value carried by the robe, favorable toward scholarship, antiquarianism, and, in Neo-Confucian terms, the defending of the transmission of the original Confucian truth (*daotong*), would soon take on a new meaning when China was conquered and ruled by the Manchu-Qing, an alien people.

### From Ming to Qing

The robe's literati value assumed a different configuration when the Ming dynasty imploded in May of 1644. Later that year, a large Manchu army penetrated Beijing, driving away the peasant army who had overthrown the Ming. Loyalists in South China resisted the Manchu conquest for the next four decades. Huang Zongxi, a polymath and epigone of the Ming's famous—and infamously martyred—Donglin partisans, was a Ming loyalist. In his view, Confucian civilization faced an imminent existential threat, and he cast himself as its champion. His diagnosis and treatment plan appear in *Waiting for the Dawn: A Plan for the Prince* (*Ming yi dai fang lu*) and in the above-mentioned collection of critical biographies, *Records of Ming Scholars*.<sup>47</sup> Why did the author of these impressive political writings also devote a treatise to the style and function of the scholar's robe?

To be sure, the robe had been an important topic throughout the Ming, and it was mentioned in the titles of eleven monographs listed in *Book Catalog of the Thousand-qing Hall* (*Qian qing tang shumu*) by Huang Yuji (1629–91), one of the most important catalogues compiled in Ming times.<sup>48</sup> It was a record of Huang's private library, a collection inherited from his father, Huang Juzhong, then considerably expanded. It lists 14,907 works, many of which have since been lost. It circulated in manuscript for 250 years and was printed only after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912.<sup>49</sup> Not one of the titles that contained the term *shenyi* (long garment) can be found today.

We can see that the style and function of the scholar's robe were not obscure topics at the time. In *Investigation of the Robe* (*Shenyi kao*), Huang Zongxi engaged many of the works just cited—and others besides—offering a remarkable interpretation of what the long garment meant to his contemporaries. Huang had spent a year living under the roof of Huang Juzhong and had made daily use of his library, thus it seems likely that he began studying the long garment then.<sup>50</sup> After the fall of the Ming, Huang refused to serve the Qing dynasty, a position that changed his life and his thinking. His scholarship was marked by deep reflections on the twilight of the Ming. Haunted by this heartbreaking dynastic failure, Huang was determined to study something concrete and

46 Lin Li-yueh, “Yishang yu fengjiao,” 119–27; Wu Jen-shu, “Mingdai pingmin fushi de liuxing fengshang yu shidaifu de fanying,” 67–73.

47 Lynn Struve, “Huang Zongxi in Context: A Reappraisal of His Major Writings,” 475–84.

48 Huang Yuji, *Qian qing tang shumu*, 41–42.

49 Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 804.

50 Huang Binghou, *Huang Zongxi nianpu*, 19.

[Table 1]

Author	Life dates	Degree date	Monograph title*
Zhu You 朱右	1314–1376		深衣考 Shenyi kao
Huang Rungyu 黃潤玉	1389–1477	1420 juren	考定深衣古制 Kaoding shenyi gu zhi
Yue Zheng 岳正	1418–1472	1448 jinshi	深衣纂疏 Shenyi zuan shu
Xia Shizheng 夏時正	1412–1499	1445 jinshi	深衣考 Shenyi kao
Yang Lian 楊廉	1452–1525	1487 jinshi	深衣纂要 Shenyi zuan yao
Gao Jun 高均			深衣考 Shenyi kao
Zuo Zan 左贊		1457 jinshi	深衣考正 Shenyi kaozheng
Wang Tingxiang 王廷相	1474–1544	1508 jinshi	深衣圖論 Shenyi tu lun
Xu Pan 許泮			古深衣訂 Gu shenyi ding
Huang Daozhou 黃道周	1585–1646	1622 jinshi	緇衣集傳 Ziyi ji zhuan
Zheng Guan 鄭瓘		1490 jinshi	深衣圖說 Shenyi tu shuo

\* Nearly all the titles imply the same scholarly activity: the “Investigation of the Robe” (or, *shenyi kao*).

useful—a decision shared by many other Ming loyalists. If, as he hoped, against all odds, the remnant Southern Ming state (1644–62) could manage to drive the Manchus out of China, he would apply his practical knowledge to serving the rejuvenated Ming. And so he worked and waited.

Huang often claimed that he conducted his scholarly labors in melancholy and solitude. Here is what he wrote in 1647 about the conditions under which he completed his treatise on mathematical astronomy: “I used to reside alone near a deep valley with a pair of waterfalls outside of my window. At midnight, when outside my house apes wailed and the ghosts of those devoured by tigers shrieked wildly, I studied trigonometry with counting rods and told myself that I was truly a silly man. After I completed my study of trigonometry, I discovered that my mathematical knowledge—like the extraordinary skills of dragon slayers—was entirely useless and I could discuss it with no one.”<sup>51</sup>

In addition to his search for something concrete, useful, perhaps even therapeutic, Huang scrutinized the work of his Ming predecessors. Refusing to speak of the dynastic failure in terms of conscience, principles, meanings, or human nature, he turned to academic disciplines like historical geography, hydraulic engineering, and mathematical astronomy. The study of the scholar’s robe belongs to this impressive foray, part of what was called “substantive learning” (*shixue*), an intellectual trend of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that Huang largely initiated. But, the hope of one day passing his useful knowledge along to a revived Ming turned out to be in vain.

After the collapse of armed resistance in the south, Huang projected a new despair onto his study of the robe. He concentrated on what it meant for literati values. It is likely he began his research in 1641 and continued it until 1677. His conclusions differed from those of both Huang Runyu (1389–1477), a leading intellectual of eastern Zhejiang who lectured at the prestigious Nanshan Academy, and Wang Tingxiang (1474–1544), a political philosopher who had engaged in

51 Huang Zongxi, *Huang Zongxi quanji*, 10: 36. This statement is also cited in Zhao Yuan, *Ming Qing zhi ji shidaifu yanjiu*, 406. Zhao provides an interesting characterization of “Ming loyalist” scholarship in *ibid.*, 402–67. For dating this event, see Huang Binghou, *Huang Zongxi nianpu*, 26.

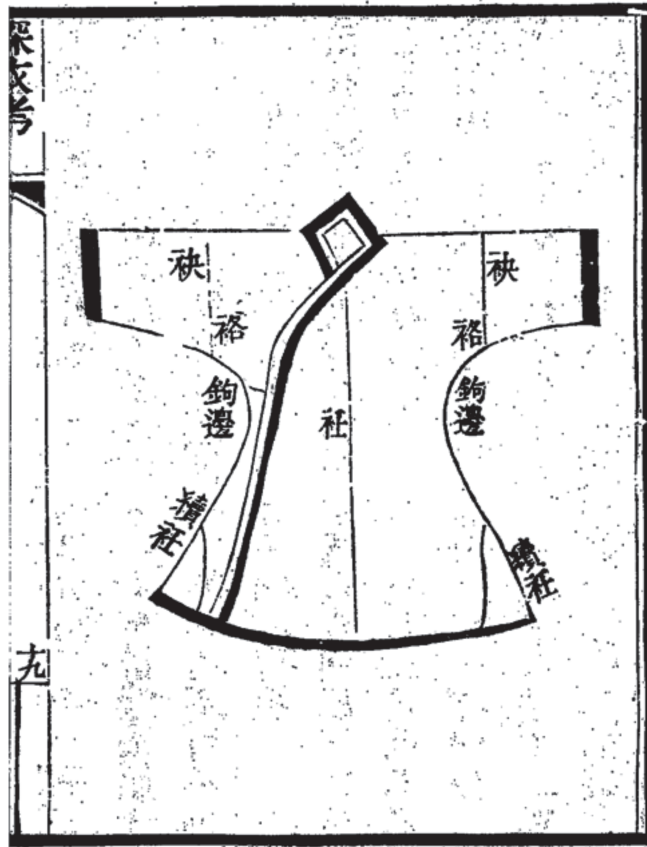


Fig. 4. Huang Runyu's anatomy of the long garment.

From Huang Zongxi, *Shenyi kao*, 19a.

sharp debates with Wang Yangming. Neither Wang Tingxiang's nor Huang Runyu's treatises of the robe survived in full, but Huang Zongxi's synthesis of their accounts does give us a reliable, partial retrieval of their ideas about the robe.

Huang Zongxi decided to use Huang Runyu's robe as his foil. When we compare the versions of Huang Runyu (fig. 4) and Huang Zongxi (fig. 5), many formal differences stand out. For Huang Zongxi, the scholar's robe symbolized the transmission of literati political values, something distinct from dynastic politics and imperial orthodoxy. The style and function of the scholar's robe directly corresponded, he said, to the "grand implication" (*da yi*) of literati values.<sup>52</sup> The key difference between these two versions is the identification of the specific part called *ren*. In Huang Runyu's version (fig. 4), *ren* was casually marked in the center of the robe, which refers to the entire piece of front robe, folding over the other side. The enlarged bottom of the robe, called *xuren*, was fashionable in Ming China and evident in many Ming paintings. As indicated before, *xuren* is a key term in *Ritual Records* but not taken seriously in Huang Renyu's configuration of the robe. Huang Runyu, who lived in the early Ming, probably worked from an already assumed basis of the ruling native-Chinese dynasty and felt no urgent need to register "Chineseness" to the commonplace, officially-sanctioned robe. Huang Zongxi, on the contrary, felt compelled to designate the collar

<sup>52</sup> Huang Zongxi, *Shenyi kao*, 17b.



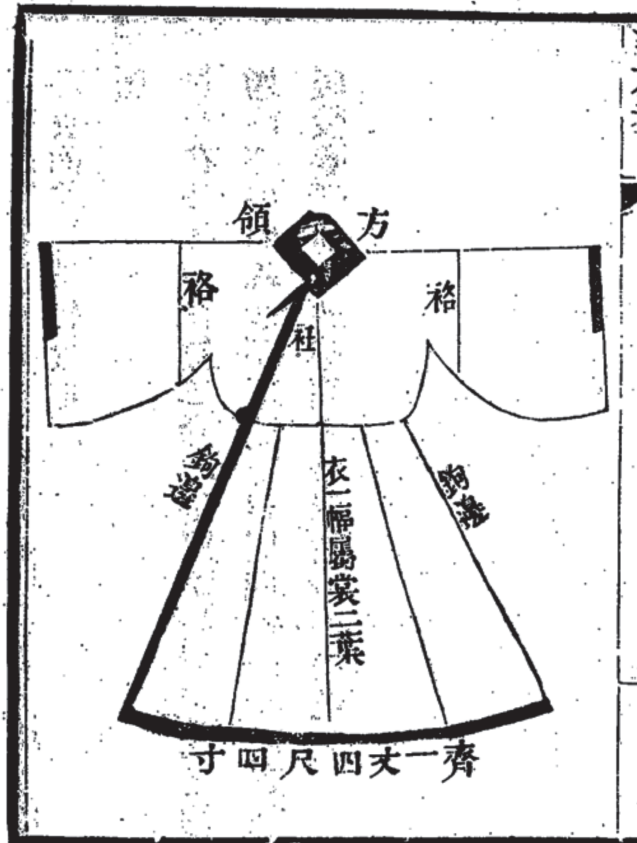


Fig. 5. Huang Zongxi's anatomy of the long garment.

From Huang Zongxi, *Shenyi kao*, 5b.

on the right folding to the left as *ren* (fig. 5). This definition of *ren* is narrow and specific and refers only to the collar that extends continuously from neck to bottom. It is the continuation of the collar that warrants the phrase *xuren* (continuing *ren*) in *Ritual Records*. According to Huang Zongxi, *xuren* is no longer a term for a part in the robe but rather a description of how *ren* is tailored. Thus, for Huang it is absolutely necessary to account for every occurrence of *ren* consistently in the classical scripture, so the grand implication was the embodiment of the robe as a Chinese symbol.

Huang Zongxi provided painstaking exegesis to show why his configuration of the robe is closer to the authentic one in ancient China than Huang Renyu's version. Commenting on Huang Runyu's version, Huang Zongxi insisted on the distinction between his historical reconstruction of the ancient robe and Huang Renyu's contemporaneous fashion.<sup>53</sup> Looking back at Huang Runyu's version through all of the events of a dynastic transition, Huang Zongxi faulted his predecessor for failing to appreciate the changes wrought by time, failing to see that the garment he presented was not at all ancient.<sup>54</sup> Huang was making a huge political point on a trivial detail: the scholar's robe, if properly revived, could restore the principles of a vanishing Confucian civilization.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 18a.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 18b.

What were these principles? Huang Zongxi's argument depended on the meaning of a few crucial passages in *The Ritual Records*. Once again, the issue revolves around the identification of *ren*, which appears directly under the collar of the garment shown in fig. 5; it refers to the front portion of the robe, where the left side overlaps the right. Huang Runyu, in fig. 4, also identified a separate element from the *ren*, calling it *xuren*—these appear to be the fabric inserts added at the end of the robe to widen it, allowing the legs more movement. This identification was, according to Huang Zongxi, a misreading of the *Ritual Records*.<sup>55</sup>

Instead, Huang Zongxi proposed the following reading.

In times of old, the long garment had a set size and form that was regulated by measuring tools. The garment was to be neither so short as to reveal any skin nor so long as to brush the ground. The latter part of the front portion of the robe (*xuren*) is edged with a welt (*goubian*) that should be stitched half below. So that the elbow can move freely, the sleeve is stitched from top to bottom.<sup>56</sup>

Huang Zongxi paid special attention to the controversial phrase—*xuren goubian* (續衽鉤邊). What exactly does this mean?<sup>57</sup> As his diagram showed, Huang Runyu believed that *ren* and *xuren* referred to two different parts of the robe. Huang Zongxi, on the contrary, argued that since *xu* literally means “to continue,” *xuren* was nothing but the lower (or continued) part of the *ren*.

In Huang's new conception, the robe is a composite of an upper garment (*yi*) and a lower garment (*shang*), united by stitching horizontally along the hems. The *ren* is sewn together as a straight line.<sup>58</sup> In Huang Runyu's reading, the phrase *goubian* shows that the *xuren* was separate from the *ren*. In Huang Zongxi's explanation, *goubian* does not stand as predicate of the subject *xuren*. It opens the next sentence and simply directs the would-be tailor to hook (*gou*) or attach the upper and lower garments side by side (*bian*).<sup>59</sup>

More interestingly, the second controversial passage occurs in the “Crown Jade and Ornament” chapter of *Ritual Records*:

The *ren* should be on the side. (衽當旁 *ren dang pang*)

How did Huang Zongxi square this with his interpretation of the passage just discussed? He argued that this *ren* referred again to the front of a garment, while *pang*, “on the side,” merely described how the left side overlapped with the right (or vice versa). This was a minute difference that separated the Chinese from barbarians.<sup>60</sup>

Alongside the syntax of the word *dang* and the locution of *ren*, Huang Zongxi was trying to bring home his point. Besides its appearance in the *Ritual Record* and in the *Analects*, the word *ren* occurs frequently in the mourning charts and funeral clothes (*sangfu*) that occur in the regulations that were written up by many major Chinese lineages. Such charts detailed what to wear, how to perform funerary rites, where and how long one should mourn, how to behave throughout the

55 Ibid.

56 *Qinding Liji yishu*, 3a. The original text reads: 古者深衣，蓋有制度，以應規矩繩權衡。短毋見膚，長毋被土。續衽鉤邊，要縫半下，袼之高下，可以運肘。

57 According to Jiang Yong, Zhu Xi came up with three different explanations of this sentence. It has been debated ever since. See Jiang Yong, *Shenyi kaowu*, 9b–12a.

58 Huang Zongxi, *Shenyi kao*, 2a–2b; 6a–6b.

59 Ibid., 3a.

60 Ibid., 10a–10b.

mourning period, and far more. For Huang, these texts are so crucial to the essence of Chineseness that an alteration in the meaning of a word would change the “grand implication” of the sacred texts laying out how the individual found a meaningful place within his lineage—a microcosm of the state.

The stakes were high. A death in the family prompted a range of possible responses to the elaborate prescriptions in early modern China; only an erudite and exceedingly filial and punctilious individual, for instance, would think of performing the rites listed in *The Ritual Records*. Like conspicuous consumption, it was a way to display one’s class, taste, and knowledge as they functioned in a patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal system. A commoner in peasant society would be far more likely to carry out the combination of ritual details from Buddhism, Daoism, and certain local traditions, depending on their locations in China.

In 1677 Huang contributed a preface to a new book entitled *Doubts Raised in Studying the Rites* (*Xueli zhiyi*) by his friend and disciple Wan Sida (1633–1683).<sup>61</sup> There he argued for including ritual studies in the newly fashionable category of practical, or substantive, learning. Huang’s apologia was based upon two premises: maintenance of the ritual order benefited everybody, not just a few sages; and the ritual order aligned with the grand pattern of the cosmos and was therefore natural, humane, and applicable to all human societies. As he explained, “In ancient times, every ritual had a corresponding rules of etiquette (*yi*). All rituals were passed down by officials and universally practiced. Everyone could learn the rituals; they were not monopolized by the sages. The grand rituals, such as the imperial sacrifices and travel, serve as substantive politics. The minor rituals, such as properly greeting a superior or a host, serve as substantive actions.”<sup>62</sup>

The ritual order, as Huang envisioned it, was fundamentally a ritualistic utopia with a strong antimercantile streak. By addressing the vanishing principles of a Confucian civilization embodied in the scholar’s robe, he offered a concise rationale for limiting monarchical power, simultaneously rejecting the coercive hat and dress regulations and the wave of commercial expansion, represented by the fashions that threatened to disrupt the symbolic order and class hierarchy.<sup>63</sup> Through a focus on this specific fabric of the scholar’s robe, I unravel the political difference between two bifurcated readings of the robe from Huang Zongxi to his counterparts in High Qing. The goal is to demonstrate the fluid nature of Chineseness as represented in specific political contexts.

This intellectual exercise is particularly interesting because of the new role the scholar’s robe had assumed in the early Qing. The Manchu conquerors had declared that the robe was unfit for the all-important horse-riding and was merely a residual self-image of scholars from the previous dynasty. Continuing to wear the robe would indicate a feeble mindset of scholars disloyal to the new Qing emperor. Every man residing in the expanding territory of the Qing had to shave his forehead and grow a long braid on the back. Huang Zongxi’s promotion of the robe was openly subversive to the Qing regime but also it seemed to undermine the colorful, unconventional, and symbolically subversive designs of all kinds of robes increasingly common in markets and wardrobes. Was Huang’s antiquarian idea of the robe a subversive character in the market? The antiquarian fashion was bound to take on a new meaning and dangerous consequence. Even in the nineteenth century,

61 According to Wang Fansen, Wan Sida’s *Xueli zhiyi* resulted directly from his discussion with Huang Zongxi in the lectures on classics (*jiangjinghui* 講經會) in early Qing. Wang argues that Huang Zongxi was part of new discussion of the classical scriptures under the new Manchu regime to understand the actual meanings of ancient texts, how ancient institutions actually operated, and the specific details of cultural and ritual practices. Wang Fansen. *Quanli de maoxiguan zuoyong: Qingdai de xixiang, xueshu yu xintai*, 135–73. For *Xueli zhiyi*, see p. 172.

62 Huang Zongxi, *Huang Zongxi quanji*, 10: 24.

63 Lynn Struve has a different reading on how Huang proposed to “limit the monarchical power.” Cf. Lynn Struve, “Huang Zongxi in Context: A Reappraisal of His Major Writings,” 475–84.



Fig. 6. A mandarin jacket (*magua*) worn over a gown.

On the right is Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), who earned his B.A. from Cornell University in 1914 and his Ph.D. in philosophy from Columbia University under John Dewey in 1917, and on the left is Hu Xianxiao 胡先驕 (1894–1968), who earned his Ph.D. in botany from Harvard University in 1928 and became a professor of biology at Peking University in 1932.

a certain sector of the Chinese gentry population still considered the scholar's robe as a proper status and a Chinese symbol.<sup>64</sup> Items of distinctively Manchu dress, such as the mandarin jacket (*magua*, fig. 6),<sup>65</sup> had become popular. The irony is that, by the 1920s (after the fall of the Qing dynasty), Americans and Europeans usually associated distinguished scholars with the mandarin jacket rather than the scholar's robe. It is also a paradox,<sup>66</sup> as historian Henrietta Harrison points out, that “much of what outsiders tend to think as definitely ‘Chinese’ has been rejected by a great many Chinese people over the course of the twentieth century.”<sup>67</sup>

### After Chineseness?

The eighteenth century's new scholarly approach on the robe provide important clues for us to unravel Huang Zongxi's effort to infuse the robe with ethnocentrism and Chinese superiority. Were

64 Wang Fansen, *Zhongguo jindaisixiang yu xueshudexipu*, 104–6.

65 “马褂\_百度百科.” 2006. 4 Feb. 2015 <<http://baike.baidu.com/view/123789.htm>>

66 For further discussion, see Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation*, 1–2.

67 Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen*, 1.

there any alternatives offered at that time? In fact, classical scholars in the eighteenth century were subtly arguing against ethnocentrism and notions of Chinese superiority, and this is seen in their decipherments of the scholar's robe.

The most important, large intellectual and cultural project was the creation of the imperial manuscript library known as the *Complete Works of the Four Treasuries* (*Siku quanshu*). The editors of the *Annotated Catalogue of "Complete Works of the Four Treasuries"* explained why they included Huang Zongxi's *Investigation of the Robe*, but they viciously attacked Huang's description of the robe. The *Annotated Catalogue* has been required scholarly reading since the 1790s; even today it influences scholars' assessments of numerous works.<sup>68</sup> Huang's writing, it was explained, was included only because his mistakes ("sloppiness" and "speculation" were his main offense) had to be exposed and identified.<sup>69</sup>

The editors went directly to the exegesis of *xuren goubian* and *ren dang pang*, which were by now considered the most obfuscating language regarding the robe.<sup>70</sup> They argued that Huang's readings were farfetched. They seem to have imputed to Huang an ulterior motive, but they say nothing about his political convictions. Instead they simply caution their readers: "We were concerned that Huang Zongxi's reputation as a classical scholar might mislead later scholars. [Thus], we decided to identify his mistakes and include it [i.e., *Investigation of the Robe*] in the imperial library, so that future readers would be able to judge for themselves."<sup>71</sup>

For the editors of the *Annotated Catalogue*, "identifying his mistakes" meant little else but to take up Jiang Yong's pointed rebuttal—*Mistakes in the Investigation of the Robe* (*Shenyi kaowu*)—because their comments are taken straight from that work. To understand how Jiang ended up with an interpretation so inimical to Huang's, we must briefly survey the vicissitudes of imperially sponsored scholarship from the 1710s to the 1750s.

After the Kangxi court (1661–1722) published *The Complete Works of Master Zhu Xi* (*Zhubi quanshu*) and *Essential Ideas of Nature and Principle* (*Xingli jingyi*) in 1713 and 1715—works of devout Neo-Confucianism that became essential for those who sat for the civil service examination—the Qing state continued to sponsor large cultural projects. Most were the work of the Institute of the Three Ritual Classics (*San li guan*), the Institute of History (*Guo shi guan*), and the Institute of Ming History (*Ming shi guan*), all going full throttle by the beginning of the Qianlong emperor's reign (1735–96). The staff of these institutes, compilers of the big imperial projects and by reasonable measures the most successful classical scholars of their time, were expected to adopt a "balanced" approach in their work, dipping eclectically into the various landmarks without succumbing to favoritism. And these scholars had to manage a delicate political dance, never so much as alluding to potentially inflammatory doctrines. The chapter in the *Ritual Records* devoted to the scholar's robe was treated in exactly this manner.

Into this intellectual milieu strode an aging, rather eccentric classical scholar from Wuyuan County in Huizhou prefecture—Jiang Yong (1681–1762). Until then he had spent his entire career as an itinerant scholar who, never having passed the provincial examination, moved from patron to patron. In 1742, at the age of sixty-one, he received an invitation to visit the capital for a job interview at the Institute of the Three Ritual Classics. But he did not make the cut, and the polemical treatise he subsequently wrote on the scholar's robe should be read with this disappointment in mind.

68 On scholarly partisanship, see R. Kent Guy, *The Emperor's Four Treasuries*, 121–56.

69 *Si ku quan shu zongmu tiyao*, 21: 19a–20a.

70 Jiang Yong cites Yang Fu's (active 1228) claim that *xuren goubian* passage is the most difficult one to decipher. See Jiang Yong, *Shenyi kaowu*, 10b.

71 *Si ku quan shu zongmu tiyao*, 21: 20b.

Despite his disappointment in advancing his career and ideas, Jiang could not have been more hopeful about the expansion and progression of Confucian civilization. From the reign of the Kangxi emperor (1661–1722) to that of the Qianlong emperor, decades of imperial sponsorship had significantly improved the communications among classical scholars and made available many rare editions. Whereas Huang Zongxi had been beset by anxiety over the existential threat to Confucian civilization, Jiang Yong was confident that soon all the mysteries of the ancient world would be solved.

After Jiang's death in 1762, Liu Dakui (1698–1779) penned an acute and sentimental reflection on his friend's life and work. He began by listing Jiang's works—an extraordinarily varied collection including studies of mathematical astronomy, music theory, historical phonology, state rituals, historical geography, family rituals, cosmology, and ancient institutions. All of these grew out of a remarkable attention to the details of the classical scriptures, reading habits so painstaking that Jiang had always impressed his rather erudite friends. Morosely recounting Jiang's visit to the Institute of the Three Ritual Classics, Liu mourned the old gentleman's failure to impress the presiding officials. Twenty years after a disheartened return to Huizhou, Jiang had died on 6 April 1762. No doubt written shortly after he had heard the news, Liu's short essay lamented the failure of a great scholar to achieve the prominence he deserved—few of his writings had even been published.<sup>72</sup>

Liu wrote biographies of a wide variety of eccentric and intriguing figures, endowing his writings with the marks of serious literature. He was later praised and classified, with Fang Bao (1668–1749) and Yao Nai (1731–1815), as one of the creators of a distinctive Tongcheng style of archaic prose. Among others, Jiang Yong's *Mistakes in Investigations of the Robe* impressed Liu. Fang, Yao, and Lui represented a wide spectrum of imperial officials and classical scholars from high to low social status. All of them were by now supporters of the Qing dynasty. Half a century after the completion of the Manchu conquest of China, however, many *yangban* aristocrats in Choson Korea and samurai elites in Tokugawa Japan still considered “Qing dynasty,” like the previous Mongol conquest of China, as an abnormal stage of Chinese history and a reversal of civilizational hierarchy. For them, the appearance of Qing scholars, who wore barbarian clothes (hufu 胡服) rather than the scholar's robe, were particularly irritating when they continued to hold Zhu Xi's *Family Rituals* as the zenith of Confucian civilization.<sup>73</sup>

For instance, Korean scholars valued the robe more than their Chinese counterparts and had continued to publish treatises on the robe from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Most of them embraced the robe as the symbol of Confucian civilization. In their treatises, Korean scholars also found the passage concerning *xuren goubian* obfuscating and controversial in their efforts to make authentic robes.<sup>74</sup> Unlike Korean scholars, Samurai elites in Tokugawa Japan rarely wore the robe and paid little attention to it. There were, however, some special cases. As both Ge Zhaoguang and Jūji Azuma note, when some Japanese scholars had a chance to converse with their counterparts from Qing China or Choson Korea, inquisitive prodding on Qing clothes was deployed to veil their surprise, mockery and contempt. For instance, Seika Fujiwara (1561–1619) and his disciple Hayashi Razan (1583–1657) were the self-proclaimed followers of Zhu Xi in early Tokugawa period. They donned the robe while giving lectures. In 1636, when Hayashi Razan conducted brush talk with the Korean emissaries, he asked: The configuration of the robe is detailed in [Zhu Xi's] *Family Rituals*.

72 Liu Dakui, *Liu Dakui ji*, 165–67.

73 Ge Zhaoguang, *Zhaizi zhongguo: chongjian youguan zhongguo de lishi lunshu*, 159–167; Ito Takayuki, “Min-Shin kōtai to ōkenron: Higashi Ajia no shikaku kara,” 12–24.

74 Azuma Jūji, “Shin'i ni tsuite: Kinsei Chūgoku, Chōsen oyobi Nihon ni okeru jufuku no mondai,” 187–91.

Do you have tailors in your entourage who may know it?” The reply: “Our dynasty used to have someone named Yu Heui-gyeong (1545–1636) who was knowledgeable about the robe. Now he already died. But if you investigate *Family Rituals*, you should find clear evidence on how to make it.” Hayashi knew his question was dodged and he further inquired: “Although no tailors came with you, did any one bring a actual robe?” The reply was equally disappointing for Hayashi.<sup>75</sup> Hayashi was certainly not interested in the robe itself. He was rather more concerned with how to present himself as an authentic Confucian foreigner to the majority of the samurai elites.

The conversation about the robe apparently belonged to all East Asian elites. From the Korean perception that hierarchy of Confucian civilization was reversed to the Japanese reception of neo-Confucianism, Jiang Yong’s rebuttal of Huang Zongxi should be read in this broader context in East Asia. It was a pointed refusal to Huang’s ethnocentrism but could also be read as clarification of Zhu Xi’s *Family Rituals* in China proper, Choson Korea and Tokugawa Japan. It was consistent with the cosmopolitan universalism Jiang and later Dai Zhen initiated. From the very beginning of his piece, Jiang argued that the meanings and configuration of the robe were already deciphered by the ancient commentators Zheng Xuan and Kong Yinda. The later scholars, Huang Zongxi in particular, misconceived three specific parts of the ancient commentators: (1) configuration of lower garment with *ren*, (2) ways of cutting fabrics, and (3) the passage concerning *xuren goubian*, exactly the same one to which Huang Zongxi had devoted his treatise.<sup>76</sup> It is also significant to note that Jiang still paid lip service to the grand master Zhu Xi but actually attributed the authentic and ancient configuration of the robe to the ancient thinker Zheng Xuan rather than Zhu Xi’s *Family Rituals*.

More importantly, Jiang provided a groundbreaking interpretation of the robe. Unlike Huang Zongxi, Jiang argued that all of the confusion regarding this phrase *xuren goubian* derived from how the special piece of fabric *ren* was cut and how various fabrics were stitched together to form the lower garment (fig. 7). Given a piece of woven fabric, the length is 7 *chi* 2 *chun* and width is 2 *chi* 2 *chun*. On the upper half of right side of fig. 7, the fabric is cut perfectly straight. Repeat it four times and get eight equal rectangular pieces, each one *chi* and one *chun* in width. They will be assembled as the front and back of the lower garment, as shown in fig. 8 and 9. The four pieces in the front are called *jin* 襟 and the those four in the back are *ju* 裾. On each side of both the front and back of the lower garment, Jiang identified a piece of fabric cut diagonally from top to bottom, shown on the upper half of the left-hand page. This piece of bias-cut (*xiecai* 斜裁) fabric is identified by Jiang as *ren*, the essential piece in Huang Zongxi’s demarcation between Chinese and foreign style. On the lower half of the right-hand page, Jiang calls another bias-cut fabric *goubian*, which had caused so much confusion in the past and demanded serious clarification in Huang Zongxi’s text, and notes that there is no specific description of it in the classical scriptures.<sup>77</sup>

The lower garment was composed of twelve pieces of fabric: four pieces of *jin* on the front, four pieces of *ju* on the back, and each side has two pieces of *ren*. To sew them together, a certain degree of precision was required. This is not easily done. The upper portion of the long garment was relatively small, while the lower portion expanded into its skirts like a cone. Jiang’s most striking innovation is to devise a pair of *ren*, left and right. For Huang, there was only one continuous *ren* sewn continuously from the upper to the lower garment. Therefore, overlapping the left side of this essential part of the scholar’s robe, *ren*, with the right side was to signal Chineseness. For Jiang Yong, on the contrary, there were two: the right *ren* and left *ren*. The four pieces of rectangular

75 Ibid., 195–96.

76 Jiang Yong, *Shenyi kaowu*, 1a–1b.

77 Ibid., 2a–3a.

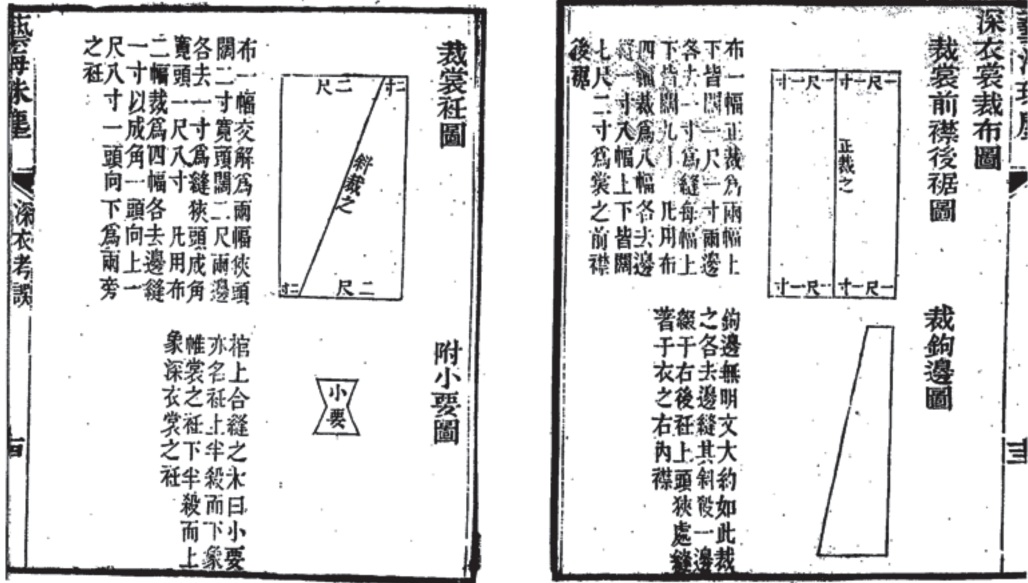


Fig. 7. Cutting the lower garment. From Jiang Yong, *Shenyi kaowu*, 13b–14a.

fabric on the front side were sewn together. One pair of *ren* (a right *ren* and a left *ren*) was stitched to the right and left sides of the front part of the lower garment. All four rectangular pieces of fabric, the *ju*, were stitched together on the back side. Another pair of *ren* (a right *ren* and a left *ren*) was stitched to the right and left sides of the back part of the lower garment (fig. 8 and 9).<sup>78</sup>

The problematic term *xuren* described how the left *ren* of the front part and the left *ren* of the back part were sewn together. In this case, *xu* simply meant “to sew.” The trick lay in how the right *ren* were to connect: they were not to be stitched together! Instead, they were linked by yet another piece of fabric, the *quju*, which was stitched inside the garment. The different way of connecting the right *ren* together was called *goubian*, which meant “hooking the edges together.” Now the classical phrase *ren dang pang* (the *ren* should be on the side) makes perfect sense. More importantly, the left *ren* and right *ren* are both present, dissolving the tension over Chinese versus barbarian customs. According to Jiang, the way the lower garment was tailored is the true meaning of *xuren goubian*.<sup>79</sup>

For Huang Zongxi, the one and only piece of *ren* is the indicator of ethnocentrism and Chinese superiority. For Jiang, that is precisely the source of confusion. There should be two of them in the same robe. Therefore both the right *ren* and left *ren* coexisted in the same robe and in the classical scriptures. According to Jiang Yong, neither should be deployed as a sign of Chineseness or even Chinese superiority. The robe for Jiang Yong has become a model apparel for sages and virtuous men (*shengxian fafu* 聖賢法服), as originally claimed in Zhu Xu’s *Family Rituals*, rather than any indication of Chineseness. At this point, Jiang had no choice but to address how Zhu Xi came up with three different interpretations of the obfuscating passage of *xuren goubian* in his lifetime. The evolution of Zhu’s thinking reflected three sources of confusion of *ren*: (1) Was it in upper or lower garments? (2) Was it on one side or both sides of the lower garment? (3) Was it different from the *ren* in official, funeral, and sacrificial gowns? For two thousand years, Jiang argued, these confusions

78 Ibid., 6a–7a.

79 Ibid., 5b–6a.



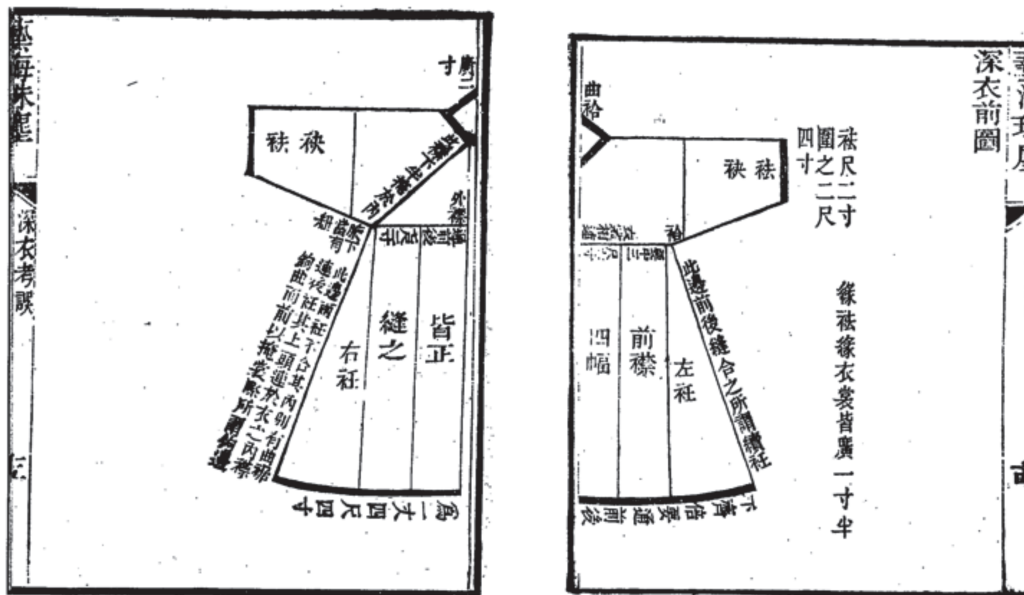


Fig. 8. Illustration of the front side of the long garment. From Jiang Yong, *Shenyi kaowu*, 14b–15a.

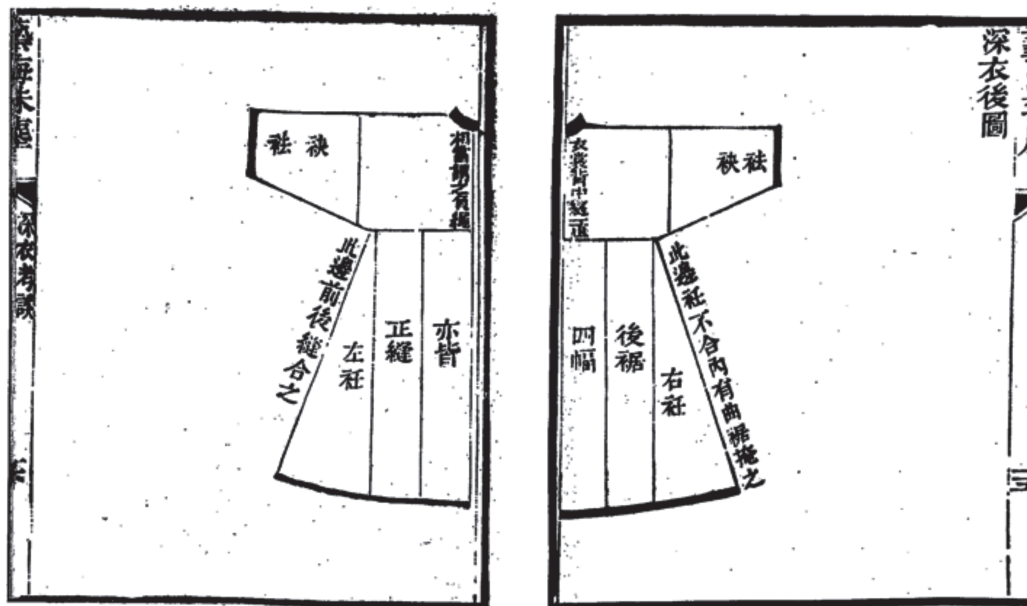


Fig. 9. Illustration of the back side of the long garment. From Jiang Yong, *Shenyi kaowu*, 14b–15a.

centered on the statement *ren dang pang* (The ren should be on the side) in *Ritual Records*.<sup>80</sup> On this particular point, Jiang did not ignore the outstanding passage in *Analects* highlighted by

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 9b–12a.

Huang Zongxi. On the contrary, Jiang acknowledged, in passing, the “left *ren*” indicated barbarian customs. And he continued to argue that “left *ren*” meant the fabric *ren* was covered in the left and stitched to the right. In other words, it was a shorthand of how the *ren* should be tailored on the side—precisely the evidence of *ren dang pang*.<sup>81</sup>

It may appear that Huang and Jiang were fighting over a seemingly minor discovery of an ancient tailor's trick. But all of them, including the editors of *The Annotated Catalogue of “The Complete Works of the Four Treasuries,”* were acutely aware of what they were fighting for: A critical distinction between an ethnocentric order centered on Chinese superiority versus a cosmopolitan order of universal Confucian civilization. It is also significant that Jiang Yong followed the evidentiary trails to Zhu Xi's *Family Rituals* at the end of his *Mistakes in the Investigation of the Robe*. Jiang demonstrated five specific mistakes in Zhu Xi's illustration of the robe that would make it impossible to tailor the robe adequately.<sup>82</sup> By arguing that the invention of Zhu Xi's scholar's robe in the twelfth century and Huang Zongxi's existential anxiety for the extinction of a Chinese dynasty in the seventeenth century were both merely wrong, Jiang Yong's reconstruction of the robe was praised by the editors of *The Annotated Catalogue* as drastically transcending his predecessors (Zhu Xi and Huang Zongxi) in his methodology.

Among the next few generations of Qing scholars, Huang Zongxi's study of the robe was utterly ignored.<sup>83</sup> Jiang Yong's work set a new standard and initiated a new paradigm. Here let us recall that Shen Congwen, responding to the discovery of the robes in Mashan's tomb no. 1, identified the *ren* as the fabric insert, or gusset, under the sleeve. Shen cited Jiang Yong, who included the fabric insert, called *xiaoyao*, on the lower half of the left-hand page in fig. 7. This piece played no role in the debates that stretched from Huang Zongxi to Jiang Yong. Shen also disagreed with Jiang about what those fabric inserts are. What they shared, however, is they both called out the fact that *ren* were fabrics located on both sides of the robe. As Shen immediately saw, Jiang Yong got it right, and Huang Zongxi's explanation of the scholar's robe now seems even more wrongheaded than the editors of *The Annotated Catalogue* made out. Both Jiang and Shen implicitly suggested that the idea of Chinese cultural superiority was a later invention, not the authentic way as exhibited in ancient China. Shen's devotion to study of clothes in traditional China since 1978 was itself a political decision, and he was unaware of the differences between Huang Zongxi and Jiang Yong because most historians and scholars of Shen's generation considered them trivial and scholastic. As for the Chinese youth's new passion for the robe, we shall wait and see.

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81 Ibid., 4b.

82 Ibid., 17b–20a.

83 Dai Zhen composed a manuscript called “Explanation of the Long Garment” (*Shenyi jie*), which was never printed during his life time. Ren Dachun (1738–89) argued that the oldest version of the long garment was a special kind of ritual clothing worn by elderly men to feasts. Sun Xidan (1736–84), like Ren Dachun, also worked on the *Four Treasuries* project. Ling Tingkan (1757–1809) and Zhu Bin (1753–1843) both adopted Jiang Yong's paradigm.

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