

CHINESE DRESS

FROM THE QING DYNASTY TO THE PRESENT



VALERY GARRETT

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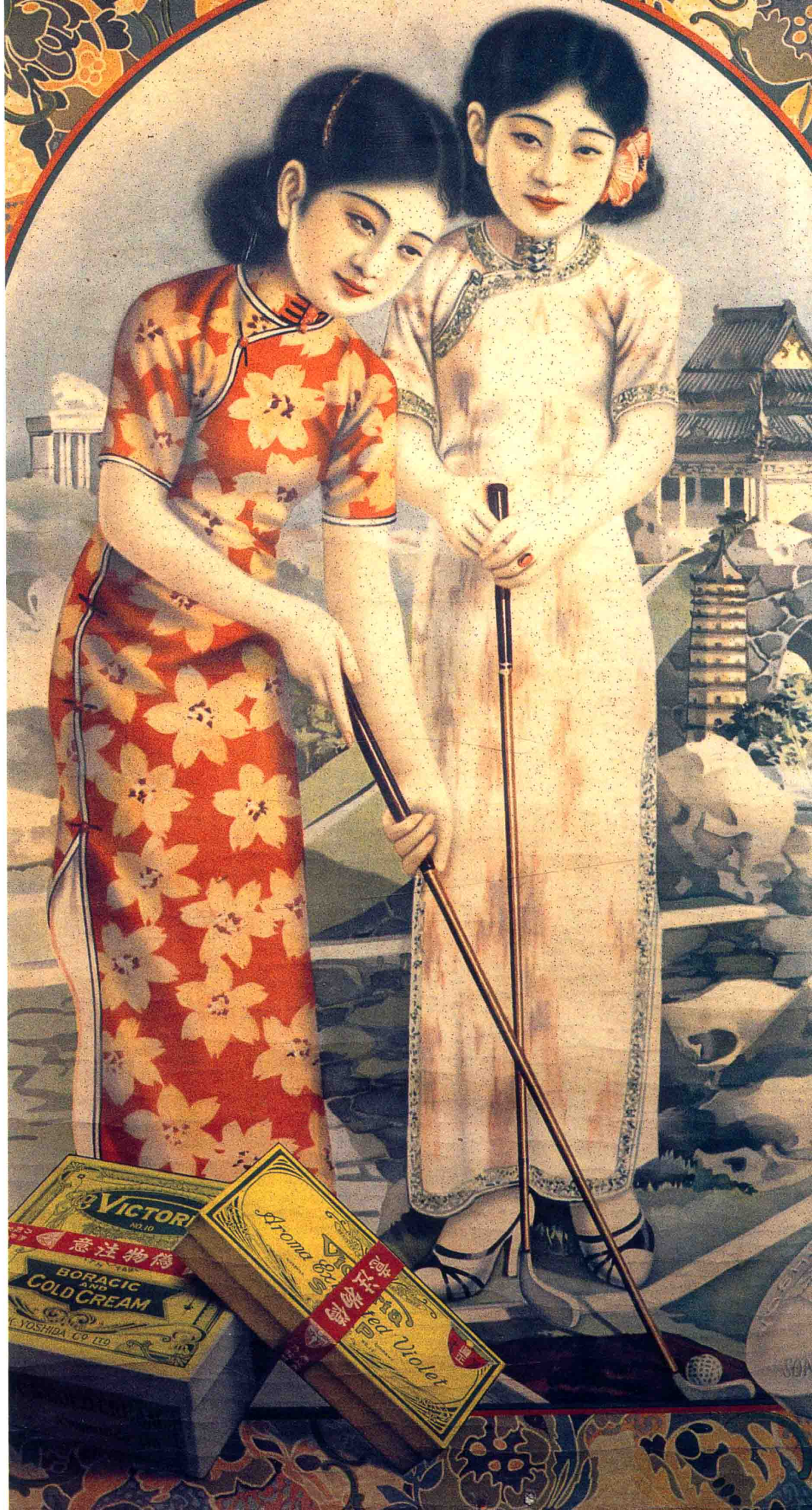
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Page 2 Painting of two wives of a mandarin, the bird on the rank badges on their stoles artfully concealed by the sleeves of their jackets to imply a higher rank, 19th c.

This page Detail of a poster advertising soap and cold cream showing two girls wearing the long cheongsam, Shanghai, ca. 1935.



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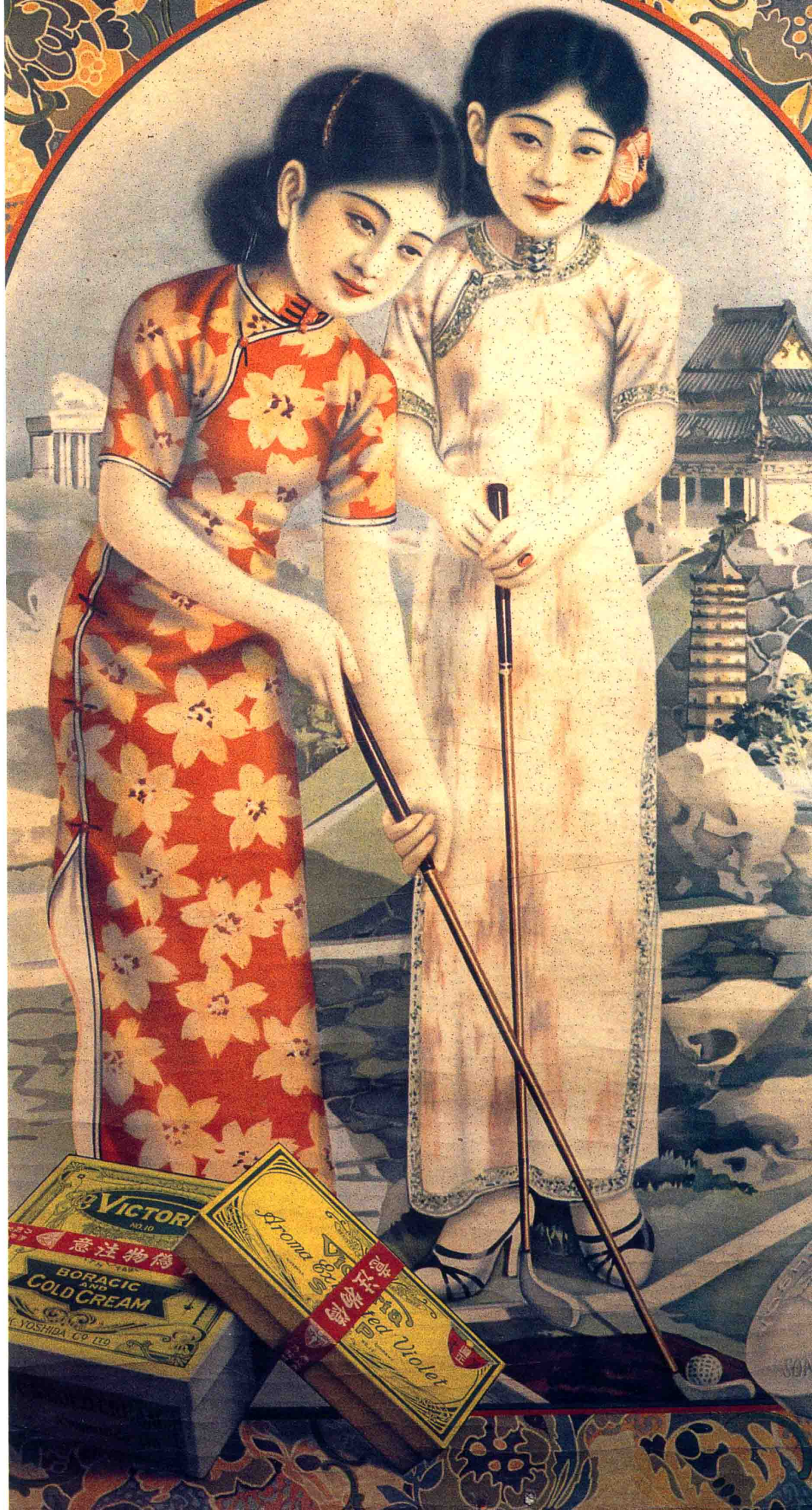
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Chapter One

THE DRESS OF THE QING MANCHU RULERS 1644–1911

The Imperial Court

For almost 300 years, the Chinese emperors of the Ming dynasty (CE 1368–1644), cloistered inside the Forbidden City in Beijing, enjoyed a leisurely and scholarly lifestyle. After the overthrow of the Mongol-ruled Yuan dynasty, the court re-established the culture and traditions of their ancient and great civilization. Art and literature flourished, reaching a height seldom attained before or since.

But in 1644 all this would change. Despite the presence of the Great Wall, constructed in the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) to protect the fertile regions of central China from barbaric nomads who lived outside the wall's perimeters, invasion from the north was a constant fear during the Ming era. The greatest threat was from the Manchu, a group of settled tribesmen of Tungusic descent, as well as some Eastern Mongolian herdsmen from the region now called Manchuria. The Manchu raised reindeer, hunted, and traded sable furs and ginseng with the Ming army along the Liaodong peninsula. As a means of control, the Ming bribed the Manchu with dragon robes and silks as well as titles and favors (Fig. 1).

The supreme chieftain of all the Tungusic tribes in Manchuria was Nurhachi, who came from the Aisin Gioro clan. The first Manchurian chieftain of his time strong enough to be a great military leader, he was able to forge a new nation from people of differing origins and capabilities. By 1601 Nurhachi had organized the tribes into companies of 300 soldiers, with five companies forming a battalion, and had established a military organization known as the Eight Banners. The tribes moved around in battalions while

hunting, and the system served both as a defense and a means of organizing taxes and land distribution for the whole Manchu population. On Nurhachi's death in 1626, his successor Abahai formally adopted the name Manchu for the collective tribes, and recruited Chinese border troops for the Manchu army.

By 1644 a Chinese rebel army had captured Beijing, an event that resulted in the Chongzhen Emperor (r. 1628–43) committing suicide in the palace gardens on Coal Hill behind the Forbidden City in Beijing. Ming border troops stationed on the Great Wall rushed back to defend the city. Abahai's younger brother Dorgon, who was appointed leader after Abahai's death in 1643, bribed the defending general Wu Sangui with a princely title and the promise of punishment for the rebels. General Wu allowed the Manchu through the Great Wall, and Dorgon and his army entered Beijing in June 1644, appointing his nephew, Abahai's seven-year-old son, as the first Manchu emperor, Shunzhi.

The Manchu renamed their new empire Qing, meaning "pure." Their intention was to remove the threat of invasion by taking control of the northern and western borders and to improve the quality of life by injecting better standards into an inefficient and corrupt government. During this dynasty, which would last for the next 267 years, China reached its greatest size with the inclusion of Tibet, Inner and Outer Mongolia, and Taiwan.

Once settled in the capital, the Manchu rulers divided Beijing into two cities (Fig. 3). The Chinese population was moved to the southern part or Chinese City, separated by a dividing wall, which then became the commercial hub of the capital. The larger

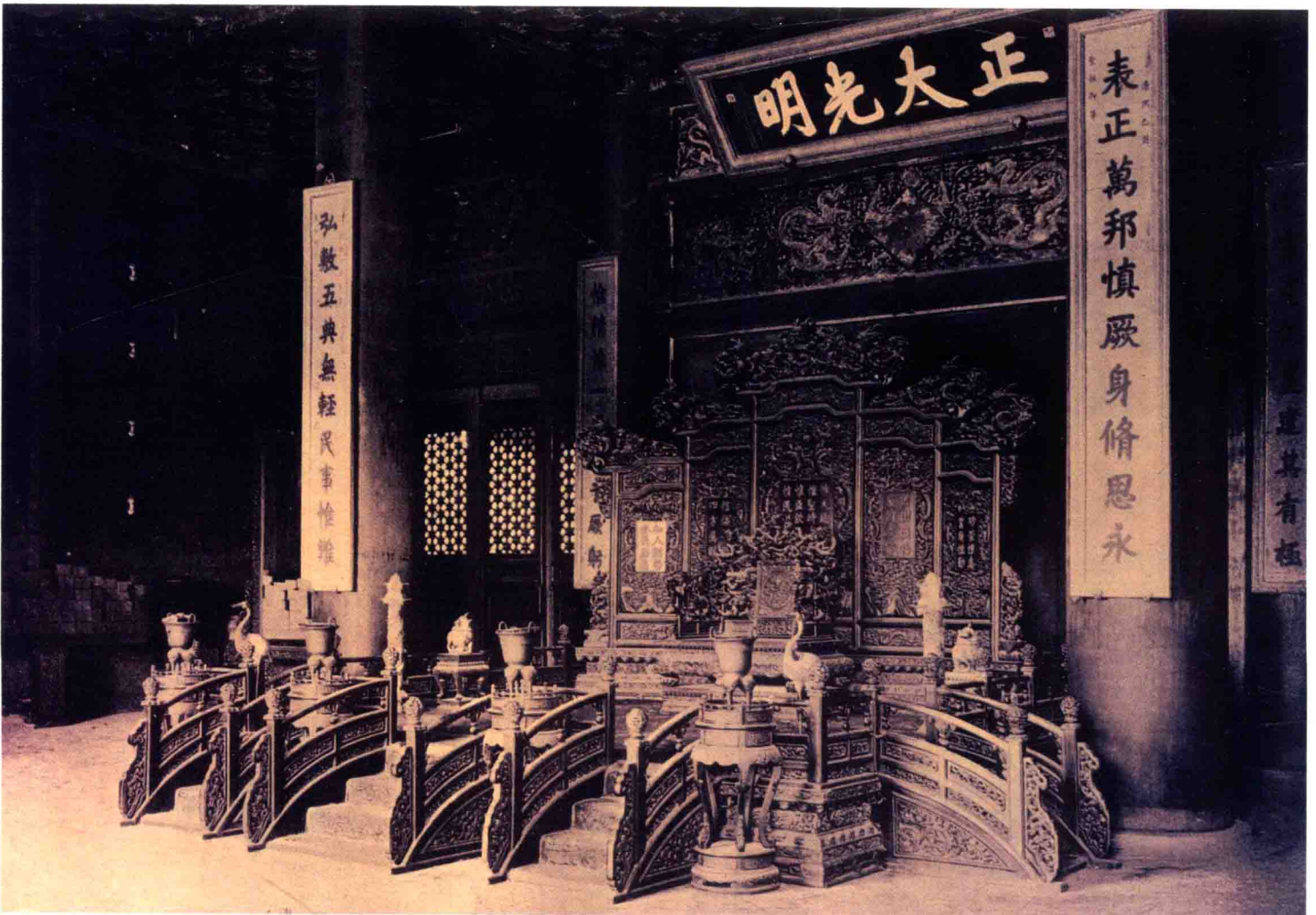


Fig. 2

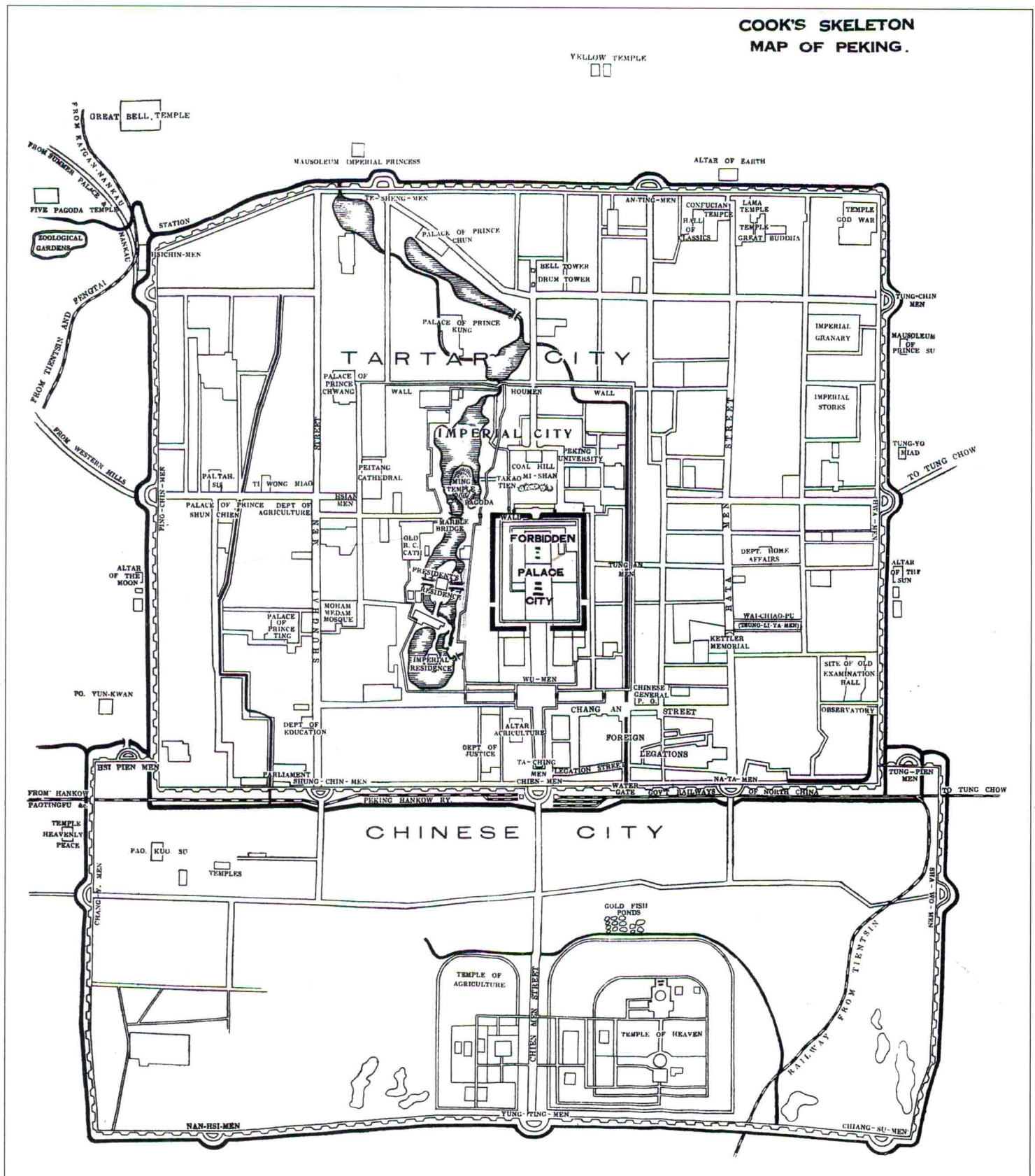


Fig. 3

(Page 6) Fig. 1 Portrait of Wang Ao (1450-1524), a high-ranking Ming official, wearing a presentation robe

with four-clawed dragons on the chest, back, down the sleeves, and around the skirt.

Fig. 2 Imperial throne in the Palace of Heavenly Purity (Qianqinggong), one of the main palaces used by the emperors during the Qing dynasty, ca. 1910.

Fig. 3 Map of Beijing showing the Tartar City and the Forbidden City in the center, and the Chinese City to the south of it, 1917.

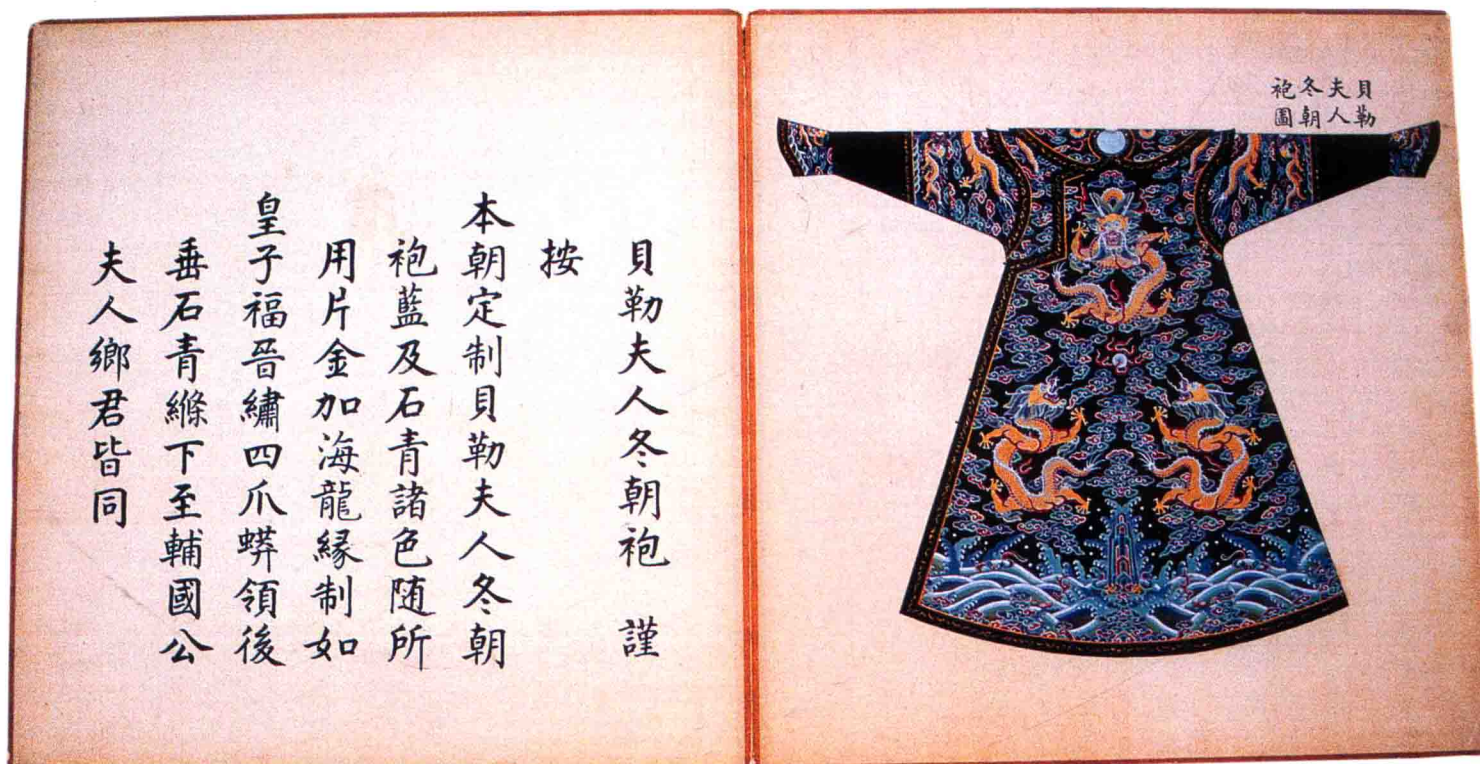


Fig. 4

northern section, known as the Tartar City, became the quarters of the banner troops, the princes' palaces, government buildings, foreign legations, temples and libraries. In the middle of the Tartar City was the walled Imperial City, with its great lakes, and at the heart of this was the Forbidden City (the "Great Within"), home to the Qing emperors.

The Forbidden City had been built during the Ming dynasty and was completed by 1420. Measuring some 3000 feet (900 meters) from north to south, and over 2300 feet (700 meters) from east to west, the high crimson-painted walls were surrounded by a moat. Entry was limited to four gates. Three of the gates led into the southern section where the main official buildings were sited. The fourth gate was situated in the rear to the north where the residential section consisted of many palaces separated by courtyards. Here were the private quarters of the emperor, his consorts, concubines, eunuchs, and children.

The southern section of the Forbidden City was the center of Qing government where matters of court and state were handled. Here were the government departments, the offices of the Imperial Household, the storehouses, workshops and stables, and the huge public halls and courtyards where government officials assembled for an audience with the emperor.

Within this section were three great ceremonial halls, set one behind the other. The largest and most notable was the Hall of the Supreme Harmony (Taihedian). This was the setting for important state events, such as the festivities at the Lunar New Year, the emperor's birthday, and most momentous of all, the emperor's enthronement, an occasion so sacred that his ascent of the throne was veiled from the gaze of such mere mortals as the nobles and officials waiting outside.

Many of the day-to-day affairs of state were dealt with in the halls and palaces to the rear of the ceremonial halls (Fig. 2). Within this compound was the emperor's office where he attended to routine matters and gave daily audience to officials. Here, too, were

the emperor's private quarters, including his bedchamber. The emperor was the only male to spend the night in the Forbidden City, attended by female servants and eunuchs chosen for their inability to sire children and thus ensure the purity of the progenitor. Recruited from poor Chinese families, the 3000 eunuchs came to hold great power: they were the emperor's immediate attendants and were responsible for controlling household affairs.

Manchu Dress Regulations

By 1759, the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1736–95), concerned that Manchu customs were being subsumed and diluted by Chinese ways, commissioned a massive work entitled *Huangchao liqi tushi* (Illustrated Precedents for the Ritual Paraphernalia of the Imperial Court), which was published and enforced by 1766. Its eighteen chapters laid out regulations covering such subjects as ritual vessels, astronomical instruments, and the regalia used in governing and on state occasions. In particular, there was a long section on the dress of the emperors, princes, noblemen and their consorts, as well as Manchu officials and their wives and daughters (Fig. 4). It also included dress codes for those Han Chinese men who had attained the rank of mandarin and were employed in the service of the Manchu government, and their wives, as well as those waiting for an appointment.

Clothing was divided into official and non-official wear, and then subdivided into formal, semiformal, and informal. Official formal and semiformal clothing would be worn at court, while official informal dress was intended when traveling on official business, when attending some court entertainment, and during important domestic events. Non-official formal dress was worn for family occasions.

There were also rules indicating what to wear in each season, and when to change clothing for the next season. Changes were made from fine silks in summer through to padded or fur-lined

satin for winter, and from one season to another on a set day, the timing being dictated by the Official Gazette from Beijing. This stated the month, day, and hour that the emperor would change his clothing from winter to summer and vice versa. At this time, all those wearing official dress had to follow suit and penalties were imposed on those who failed to comply.

Ritual worship was one of the most important obligations of the emperor and his governing officials. A strict dress code was observed in elaborate ceremonial sacrifices performed by emperors to Heaven and Earth and to the ancestors of the dynasty, as well as those rituals carried out by local government officials and senior family members. The emperor's responsibilities for ensuring the well-being of his people were tied to the performance of these ceremonies. If an emperor ruled well, Heaven, which cared about the welfare of the people, would smile on Earth, and send good weather and abundant crops. If he were incompetent or corrupt, drought, famines, and floods would devastate the land. This gave the people the right to rebel and overthrow the emperor, with the "mandate of Heaven" passing to his successor.

Robes decorated with dragons were first recorded in the Tang dynasty (618–906) and again in the Song (960–1279). Because the Mongols who ruled China during the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) had formally sanctioned the use of dragon robes, the Ming deliberately did not adopt the robe officially. Despite this, dragon robes were worn, especially as informal wear. Dragon robes became very fashionable in the early years of the sixteenth century with many officials ordering them freely, and ignoring the laws of 1459 which forbade anyone from having dragon robes made for himself, and regulations were eventually codified for lower-ranking noblemen and officials.

The Manchu were already familiar with robes decorated with dragons, as these had been presented to them both as gifts and bribes by the Ming court. Thus, despite their determination to impose their own culture and customs on the conquered Chinese, they did adopt the decorative patterns of the dragon robe, if not its shape. The Manchu, having been hunters, had developed their own style of clothing from the skins of the animals they caught. The sedentary lifestyle dictated by the ample Ming robes was abhorrent to the Manchu, and they reworked the cumbersome and impractical robe into a slimmer Manchu style to suit their more active way of life.

The symbolic properties of the five colors favored by the Ming continued to have much the same significance for the Manchu. Yellow denoted center and the earth. Blue represented spring and the east, and the Manchu adopted this as their dynastic color. White represented autumn and the west, but this was considered an unlucky color to wear, as it was associated with death. Black stood for winter and the north. Red symbolized summer and the south, but this color was generally avoided as it had been the dynastic color of the Ming, and so was only worn occasionally by the



Fig. 5

emperor for the annual sacrifice at the Altar of the Sun. However, the Han Chinese considered it a lucky color because of its connections with the Ming rulers, and it was used extensively at weddings and other celebrations.

The colors of the robes were carefully controlled and certain ones were restricted for use by the emperor and his immediate family (Fig. 5). Bright yellow, representing central authority, was reserved for the emperor, although he could wear other colors if he wished or as occasion demanded, such as when worshipping at the ceremony at the Altar of Heaven when he wore blue robes. The heir apparent wore "apricot yellow," while sons of the emperor wore "golden yellow," *jin huang*, which was, in fact, more of an orange. First to fourth degree princes and imperial dukes wore blue, brown, or any colour unless "golden yellow" was conferred by the emperor. Lower-ranking princes, noblemen, and high-ranking officials wore blue-black.

Fig. 4 Painting on silk from the Regulations showing the second style of summer court robe and flared collar for the wife of an imperial duke.

Fig. 5 Portrait of the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1662–1722) in full summer court attire, his yellow satin robe (with matching collar) edged with brocade and decorated with dragons over the

chest and back, and with a row of roundels above the band on the skirt. A yellow silk girdle, from which hang purses and kerchiefs, is tied around the waist. A court necklace and a conical-

shaped hat with thick red floss fringing and a tall gold finial studded with sixteen Manchurian pearls, completes his outfit.

Court Attire

The *chao pao* or court robe was the most important of all robes and was worn for momentous ceremonies and rituals at court. Its use was restricted to the highest in the land: members of the imperial family, princes, nobles, dukes, and high-ranking mandarins at court. Together with the collar, hat, girdle, necklace, and boots, the *chao pao* formed the *chao fu*, literally “court dress,” and was designated official formal attire.

Ming robes were already familiar to the Manchu as gifts in exchange for tribute to the Ming court. Despite their determination to establish their own culture and customs, they did adopt the pattern of the Han Chinese dragon robes, if not the style of them. To form the *chao pao*, the Manchu, for example, imposed some of their nomadic features on the Ming robes, reducing their bulk. The garment was cut across the middle just below the waist. The upper part was made narrower below the arms and became a short side-fastening jacket with a curved overlapping right front, which could have derived from animal skins added for extra covering and protection. It was fastened with loops and buttons, another nomadic practice. The lower skirt was reduced in width to fit the upper part by folding it into a pair of pleated aprons joined to a narrow waistband which attached to the jacket. This modified form continued to give the necessary impression of bulk traditionally associated with festival dress, but resulted in a less cumbersome garment. At the side of the waistband was a small square flap called a *ren*, whose original function, it is thought, was to disguise the fastening.

Like Ming court robes, early Qing robes were decorated with a large dragon on the front curling over one shoulder, with another on the back curling over the opposite shoulder. A band of dragons above mountain and wave motifs encircled the pleated skirt. According to the Regulations, court robes for the emperor and crown prince should have a row of nine or seven roundels, respectively, containing coiled dragons above the band of dragons on the front and back of the skirt. No one else was allowed to wear roundels on the skirt, although they did make an appearance on robes belonging to the lower ranks towards the end of the dynasty.

The Twelve Symbols of Imperial Authority, explained in more detail below, were avoided at first by the Manchu as being associated with the Ming and preceding Chinese dynasties. The Qianlong Emperor reintroduced them in 1759, when they first appeared on court robes and were later extended to the less formal dragon robes.

Another standard feature of Manchu robes was the alteration made to the long, wide sleeves of the Ming robes. The sleeves were cut above the elbow and the lower portion replaced with plain or ribbed silk, thought to have evolved so that the wearer could bend his arms more easily when hunting. The ribbed silk indicated the folds that occurred when the sleeves were pushed up the arms. Cuffs resembling horses’ hooves, originally made to protect the hands when riding in bad weather, continued to cover the hands on formal occasions during the Qing dynasty, when it was considered impolite to expose them.

There were three styles of men’s court robe: two for winter wear and one for summer. The first style of winter *chao pao* was lined and



Fig. 6

Fig. 6 Painting on silk from the Regulations showing the emperor’s first style of winter court robe, with the Twelve Symbols of Imperial Authority on the upper part. The robe is faced with sable on the cuffs, collar, and side opening and forms a deep band of the fur on the hem.



Fig. 7

Fig. 7 Second style of winter court robe, in red satin trimmed with otter, worn for the sacrifice at the Altar of the Sun, early 18th c.

Fig. 8 Woodblock printed page from the Regulations showing the emperor’s summer court robe and flared collar.

Fig. 9 Summer court hat of a prince, with a gold and pearl finial.

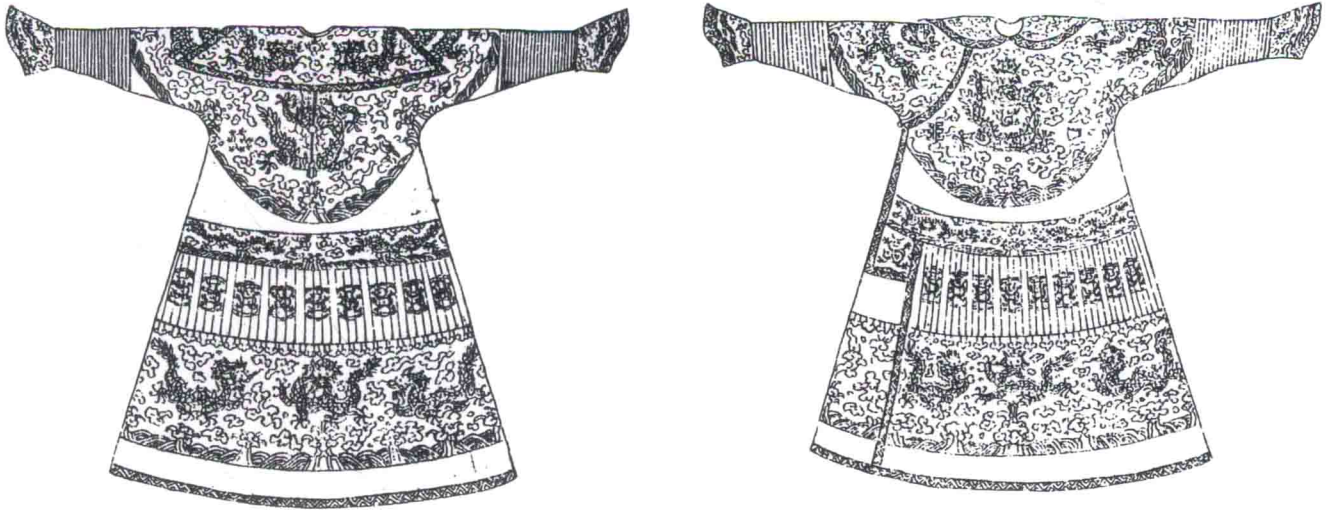


Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Fig. 10



Fig. 11

Fig. 10 Emperor's summer court robe in yellow silk brocade with a front-facing dragon on the chest grasping the pearl of wisdom, nine small roundels on the front and back of the skirt

above the panel of two profile dragons and one front-facing dragon, and a flared collar attached to the robe, early Qianlong, mid-18th c. The Twelve

Symbols, missing on this robe, did not make an appearance until after 1759 when they were prescribed for use on the emperor's court robes.

Fig. 11 Winter court hat of a high-ranking official, with a finial and "double-eyed" peacock feather plume, the latter awarded on merit by the emperor, 19th c.