

# A Study on the System of Official Uniforms Established by Emperor Yong-le(永樂) of the Ming(明)Dynasty

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## I . Instruction

Under social hierarchism in the past, the system of costume was a substantial means of control by the ruling class by allowing apparent discrimination among different social classes.

Emperor Hong-wu(洪武), founder of Ming(明), abolished systems of the previous Mongolian dynasty of Won(元) and restored those of the Chinese Han(漢). As a part of strengthening his power, the king set fundamentals for official uniform system with reference to such clothes of Han(漢) and Tang(唐). The 3rd emperor of Ming, Yong-le(永樂) made more detailed specifications of official uniforms which were kept until the collapse of the Chinese nation.

The costume policy of Yong-le followed that of emperor Hong-wu, but had somewhat differences. Uniforms of officials were not different between the two policies. But those for the emperor and the imperial family were supplemented with new elements and partially modified. These moves may be attributed to political backgrounds of Yong-le.

Yong-le took the imperial power by force, though he was initially a feudal lord. He removed antagonists by using a variety of policies, among which the establishment of a new system of official uniforms aimed at justifying his inauguration as emperor and strengthening his highest power.

Thus the objectives of the study can be summarized as follows :

First, review in detail political backgrounds with which Yong-le captured the imperial power.

Second, analyze in detail the system of official uniforms newly established by emperor Yong-le.

Third, compare and analyze differences between official uniform systems in periods of Yong-le and Hong-wu.

Fourth, examine characteristics of the establishment by emperor Yong-le of the system of official uniforms.

For these objectives, these researcher reviewed and analyzed <Ming-Shi>(明史), <Da-Ming-Hui-Dian>(大明會典) and <Ming-Hui-Yao>(明會要).

## II. Contents of Study

Before the inauguration of Yong-le, emperor Hong-wu appointed 25 sons, except Huang-tai-zi(皇太子 the princess imperial), as feudal lords of critical posts around the country to make them protect the imperial household at the time of emergency. The lords expanded their military power more and more as they successfully subjugated the Mongolian region. Out of them, Yuan-wang(燕王) of Beijing, Zhu-i was most remarkable.

Jian-wen(建文) who succeeded the deceased Hong-wu was much concerned about the power expansion of the lords, and incited by persons close to him to remove the local heads from office and degraded them. This was strongly resisted by Yuan-wang of Beijing on the pretext of relieving the Ming dynasty. After civil wars for 4 years, he was throned to the third emperor of Ming, Cheng-zu(成祖) Yong-le.

Emperor Yong-le deprived strong feudal lords of military power. This weakened the defense of the northern border, so the emperor transferred the national capital to Beijing. And he made possible exchanges with the southern China by restoring and repairing canals initially made in the period of the Mongolian Won(元). The capital transfer contributed to firmly establishing political and military fundamentals of Ming and weakening powers of the southern China, ultimately stabilizing the Ming dynasty.

Strengthening imperial authority and defending the northern national border were main themes of the emperor's policies, maintaining and succeeding political purposes of the previous monarch, Hong-wu. The official uniform system newly established by Yong-le also has something to do with those themes.

The system of official uniforms established in the third year of Yong-le(1405) generally followed that in the period of emperor Hong-wu. But official clothes for imperial families were more diversified, specified in more detail or supplemented with new elements. Comparison between official uniform systems established in the 26th year of Hong-wu and in the 3rd year of Yong-le is described as follows.

Formal dresses for the emperor in the period of emperor Yong-le imitated those in that of emperor Hong-wu, but added with new elements or modified in terms of shape, color, pattern, pattern position, pattern color, crest number and crest name. Newly created, Pi-bian-fu(皮弁服) for Huang-tai-zi(皇太子), Qin-wang(親王) and Qin-wang-shi-zi(親王世子) and Chang-fu(常服) for the latter two did never exist under the system of official uniforms in the period of emperor Hong-wu. Additional creations were Mian-fu(冕服), Pi-bian-fu and Chang-fu for Jun-wang(郡王).

However, uniforms of officials were not different from those in the period of emperor Hong-wu.

More diversification of formal dresses for the emperor and the creation of Pi-bian-fu and Chang-fu of Qin-wang and Qin-wang-shi-zi may be related with political situations of that time.

This might be true to the period of emperor Hong-wu. But it is possible that in the same

period, the emperor wore official uniforms similar to those of his sons as Qin-wang because he did never imagined insurrection by those sons he appointed as feudal lords.

In contrast, Yong-le was once a feudal lord and usurped the throne by force, so princesses were always threats to him. For this reason, presumedly, Yong-le used a new system of official uniforms to clearly discriminate between the emperor and imperial families inferior to him.

The fact that official uniform systems of the two periods are similar, but somewhat different may be attributed to political situations in the period of emperor Yong-le.

### **III. Conclusion**

Results of the study about characteristics of the official uniform system established by the emperor can be summarized as follows ;

Yong-le early recognized that the feudal lord system was a great threat to the imperial power. He superficially supported the system, but actually abolished local states, fundamentally preventing such lords from challenging the emperor by force. Nevertheless, conflicts between the emperor and old subjects were inevitable, affecting the system of official uniforms. Formal clothes for imperial families were supplemented or modified, but those of officials were unchanged. This was probably because Yong-le tried avoiding conflicts with old subjects. Felt threatened by feudal lords, Yong-le got rid of them politically and at the same time tried to avoid conflicts with old subjects. These moves, whose aim was at strengthening imperial authority were also reflected in the system of official uniforms.

Superficially following the system of official uniform in the period of emperor Hong-wu, formal clothes for the emperor in the period of emperor Yong-le were supplemented with new elements, making a clear difference from those of the immediate families under the emperor. The other official uniforms were not changed probably because Yong-le wanted to show things left by Hong-wu and thereon justify his hold on the imperial power.

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