

Exploring the Relationship Between the *Gakuran* and the Zhongshan Suit

Lingfang Liu

Introduction

Chinese men who were accustomed to wearing long gowns and mandarin jackets (长袍马褂) originally began to wear the uniforms of male Japanese students, known as the *gakuran* (学ラン),¹ after studying abroad in Japan. In the late Qing dynasty, distinguishing between Chinese men who wore the *gakuran* while living in Japan and Japanese men was difficult at first glance. However, once they returned to China, they had no choice but to buy fake braids and wear skullcaps (which look like a half watermelon) and change their clothes again (Zhu 2011: 98–99) because China’s traditional clothing culture persisted. Nevertheless, from the beginning of the Republic of China, the rules of the Qing dynasty costume that had been maintained until then gradually collapsed, and the clothing culture of Chinese people changed drastically. Therefore, in China, in addition to the long gown and mandarin jacket that Chinese men had long been accustomed to wearing, Western clothes, the *gakuran*, the Zhongshan suit, and various other clothing items began to coexist.

The history of Chinese clothing states that the attire of the Republic of China primarily comprised three types: the long gown and mandarin jacket, Western clothes, and the Zhongshan suit (Wang and Qi 1997: 23–27; Huang 2007: 198). However, there is reason to believe that this may not be true. In fact, there was a history of school uniforms from Japan appearing in Chinese clothing culture, meaning it is necessary to reconsider previous theories. One of the theories about the origin of the Zhongshan suit is that it was an adaptation of the Japanese “school uniform.” For example, one description suggests that the school uniform was an improved form of clothing that young people in the Republic of China cherished (Liao and Xu 2009: 90). Another theory posits that the school uniform was an improved form of clothing in Japan



(Yuan and Hu 2010: 83), although early Chinese school uniforms were a copy of Japanese school uniforms (Zhou 2014: 14). However, these theories are simplistic and ambiguous, and there is almost no evidence to prove that the Chinese “school uniform” and the Japanese “school uniform” were identical. How Japanese “school uniforms” were introduced to China remains unknown. Therefore, this chapter examines how the Japanese “school uniform” (*gakuran*) appeared in mainland China and how it became popular. Furthermore, based on the materials analyzed, this chapter discusses the relationship between the Japanese *gakuran* and the *Zhongshan suit* in the early period.

1. The Appearance of School Uniforms in Mainland China

1.1. New Clothes: Birth of the “School Uniform”

First, it is noteworthy that articles about the “school uniform” appeared before the Republic of China era, i.e., from the end of the Qing dynasty. For example, the newspaper *Shun Pao*² published articles on the following three topics:

- (1) Bi Laosi, formerly known as Bi Shidu, was always wearing Western clothes. In February, he and Wang Zihao from Xuzhou (who was wearing school uniform) went to the Department of Public Information to privately purchase mineral products, etc. (*Shun Pao* 1909a: 11)
- (2) A man in student's attire, a straw hat with leather boots, and a short coat for bald hair. A woman in a schoolgirl's outfit stood by him. They came upstairs together. (*Shun Pao* 1909b: 27)
- (3) The two men stopped outside the door of the building. One man was tall with a mustache, in the cap and leather boots of student's attire. Another was a short and thin man; fox fur was scattered on the ground in panic, his appearance was ridiculous. (*Shun Pao*, 1910: 27)

If these three articles were categorized according to their contents, they would be categorized as follows: (1) as a social incident, and (2) and (3) as novels. The first includes the words “school uniform,” while (2) and (3) feature the phrase “student's attire.” Although each includes different wording, all of them refer to school uniforms.

The context of (1) shows that the “school uniform” of a person named Wang Zihao was a completely different clothing type from the “Western clothes” of a person named Bi Laosi. In addition, the sentences in (2) and (3) reveal that the boys’ school uniforms were usually worn together with leather shoes and hats. Considering these texts as a whole, we can see that “school uniform” was a different type of clothing from “Western clothes” and was worn together with leather shoes and hats. Therefore, these examples demonstrate that before the 1910s, a new clothing type called “school uniform” appeared in Chinese men’s wardrobes, in addition to the long gown, mandarin jacket, and Western clothes. However, these three articles provide minimal information, meaning that the specific state of this “school uniform” cannot be fully clarified.

Fortunately, further information is available from a different source. Zhang Jingsheng’s³ *Beautiful Outlook on Life* (1925) includes the following description of “school uniform”: “We should use beautiful school uniforms (also known as sports clothes or military clothes, that is, button-up collar tops and pants, and when cold, jackets are required).” According to Zhang Jingsheng, another name for “school uniform” was “sports clothes,” which indicates that students wore these clothes when they undertook physical activity. This outfit was also known as “military clothing.” Specifically, men wore a jacket with a stand-up collar together with trousers and wore an additional jacket during the winter. Based on this description, we can see that “school uniform” and “sports clothes” took almost the same form and were closely related to military uniforms. This statement offers a key clue for the current investigation. In addition, this attire had various features, such as a stand-up collar, two pieces, and an additional jacket for use in winter. The characteristics of this “school uniform” are very similar to those of Japanese school uniforms.

Understanding the nature of these “sports clothes” in more detail will help to reveal the true identity of the “school uniform.” However, in the history of Chinese clothing, there are few materials that describe “sports clothes.” Fortunately, some literary works from the time included descriptions of “sports clothes.” For example, Lu Xun’s essay, titled “Two thoughts in this spring,” was published in the educational column of the newspaper *Sekai Nippo* on November 30, 1932 (Lu 1985: 463). Therein, a sentence reads, “Returned student army. They used to practice exercises every day, but they didn’t do it for long. Only pictures of ‘sports clothes’ exist, and they have forgotten the ‘sports clothes’ that they left in their homes.” The underlying meaning of this text is that students wore sports clothes when they performed gymnastics;

however, students eventually ceased practicing gymnastics unnecessarily, and only pictures of military uniforms remained. Although students retained the sports clothes in their homes, over time, these outfits were forgotten.

Another relevant text is a novel called *Father and Son of Mr. Bao* (1934), written by Zhang Tianyi. The story follows a series of incidents involving the main character, the “father,” and is related to the cost of his son’s school uniform. One day, he receives a bill from the new junior high school that his son is attending, which includes tuition fees and miscellaneous expenses. The bill states that the school uniform would cost 20 yuan, which is nearly half of the total bill. “School uniform is sports clothes” was written in the novel, and the students’ uniform is described as sports clothes (Zhang: 1954). A reading of the above two literary works shows that sports clothes were related to military uniforms and that they were used as both students’ gym clothes and school uniforms.

Further investigation reveals another important clue. A book published by the Commercial Press in 1919 contains a figure of sports clothes (Figure 1).⁴ At first glance, they may seem like Western clothes; however, if we examine them closely, the collar and pockets are vastly different from those of Western clothes, such as suits. Based on Figure 1, the collar is a stand-up collar, and there are three pockets on the upper right, lower left, and right sides. These characteristics are notably similar to those of Japanese school uniforms. However, although the cut and shape of the sports clothes and school uniforms are quite similar, some differences are noted in the decorative elements. For example, there are different types of pockets: the pockets of sports clothes are simple patch pockets, whereas the Japanese school uniforms use the Barca pocket, which requires more extensive dressmaking skills. In addition, there are four buttons on the front of the sports clothes, which is one less than that of Japanese school uniforms. Moreover, although there are two sleeve-buttons on each sleeve of the Japanese school uniform, there are no buttons on either sleeve of the sports clothes. These differences



Figure 1. Chinese sports clothes.

were not only found between sports clothes and the Japanese school uniform: The *Modern Japanese School Uniform Book* notes that they also occurred between the uniforms of different Japanese schools at that time. Therefore, there is reasonable evidence to consider whether the sports clothes that appeared in China were a slightly modified version of Japanese school uniforms.

In addition, another influential text elucidates the relationship between Chinese and Japanese school uniforms. In a *Shun Pao* article titled “Answer Improvement Social Debate,” dated August 1, 1932, Cheng Peng wrote, “The school uniform was originally a military uniform. Since the Japanese restoration and the start of the military system, Japanese people like to wear military uniforms because they find them more convenient than the kimono; therefore, after being discharged from the army, they are still imitating military uniforms with other materials. For economic reasons, students also wear them more.” This implies that the word used by the Chinese to describe “the Japanese school uniform” and “the school uniform,” are identical, which in turn indicates that the Chinese and Japanese school uniforms were identical. In fact, the clothes worn by Chinese men were originally Japanese.

This idea was verified based on the history of Japanese men’s clothing. According to Masuda Yoshiko, the school uniforms of Japanese male students were inspired by Prussian military uniforms (Masuda 2010: 340). Furthermore, according to Namba Tomoko, the school uniforms of male students were derived from military uniforms, thus leading to the rapid adoption of Western clothes.⁵ The above materials reveal that the so-called “school uniforms” of the late Qing dynasty and early Republic of China were students’ sports clothes, which evolved from Japanese school uniforms. To summarize briefly, “Chinese school uniforms” were “sports clothes,” which were derived from “Japanese school uniforms” (*gakuran*). In Section 1.2, the link between Chinese school uniforms and the *gakuran* will be clarified.

1.2. Introduction of the *Gakuran* in China

The sports clothes of Chinese male students represent an important bridge in determining whether the “Chinese school uniform” and “Japanese school uniform” (*gakuran*) were identical. Therefore, when considering how the *gakuran* was introduced in China, the origin of these “sports clothes” must be clarified. As mentioned earlier, “sports clothes” were gym clothes that students wore when they did gymnastics.

In other words, it is believed that at the same time that gymnastics was originally introduced in China, “sports clothes” were also introduced. Therefore, let us observe the history of modern gymnastics in China.

After the Sino-Japanese War, the Qing dynasty government adopted two policies to rebuild the military. The first policy was to send international students studying military and political systems to Japan. The second policy was to shift from traditional academic education to a new modern education system. On January 13, 1904, the Qing government promulgated the “Student School System,” which imitated the Japanese school system almost identically. From then onward, gymnastics became a compulsory subject in elementary, junior high, and high schools (Geng, Yao, and Xu 2017: 161). In this way, gymnastics was introduced into the modern education system in China, and many gymnastics-related books were published in succession.

According to the list of gymnastics documents published in China between 1890 and 1911 (immediately before the establishment of the Republic of China at the end of the Qing dynasty), which was compiled by Lang Jing, a total of 86 books were found. Among these books, there are 29 documents that are either translations of Japanese textbooks or books for which Japanese textbooks have been used as the basis, thereby accounting for more than 30% of the total. The influence of Japan in gymnastics textbooks far exceeded that of Europe and the US. Moreover, although the authors or editors of these gymnastics textbooks were Chinese, many of them had studied abroad in Japan. For example, Ding Jin, Li Chunnong, and Xu Fulin all studied in Japan and, after returning to China, became scholars involved in compiling influential gymnastics textbooks (Jiang 2014: 40).

Certain books were translations of Japanese gymnastics textbooks and had a significant influence in China, including the *Mengxue Gymnastics Textbook* (Ding 1903, hereinafter referred to as “*Mengxue*”) and the *Textbook of Game Law for Higher Primary Schools* (Ding 1903). Both books were translated by Ding Jin, who had studied in Japan. The books were used as gymnastics textbooks in many schools between 1903 and 1906. In particular, *Mengxue* was reprinted approximately nine times between 1903 and 1906, thereby demonstrating its influence on China at the time. *Mengxue* is considered a translation of Japan’s *Elementary School Ordinary Gymnastics* (edited by Tsuboi Gendo and Tanaka Seigyō) and was completed while Ding Jin served as a military politician in Baoding (currently in Hebei Province). However, is the Chinese version of *Mengxue*, identical to the original *Elementary School Ordinary Gymnastics*? Interestingly, based on

comparisons of only the first part of the two books, the content and composition of both are nearly identical, although the figures included are slightly different.⁶ When comparing both versions of the first figure (Figure 2), the Japanese students are wearing Western-style shirts and trousers, whereas the Chinese students are wearing hats and school uniforms that resemble military uniforms with stand-up collars.

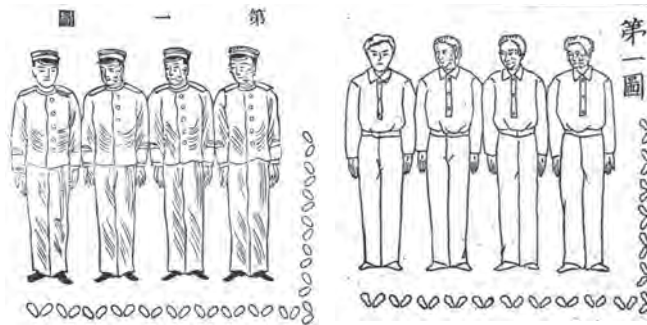


Figure 2. Illustrations of *Mengxue* (left) and Japan's elementary school ordinary gymnastics uniforms (right).

Did Japanese students at that time wear school clothes to do gymnastics? More Japanese gymnastics textbooks⁷ were examined, and the results show that some textbooks from around the 1900s were accompanied by illustrations depicting most students dressed in shirts and trousers. This led to the conclusion that Japanese students did not wear school uniforms when performing gymnastics. Consequently, there is doubt that illustrations of the students' clothes in *Mengxue* were intentionally changed at the time of translation. The specific reasons and circumstances behind Chinese officials' intentions to incorporate Japanese school uniforms into gymnastics textbooks remain unclear. However, the publication of *Mengxue* is presumed to have introduced Japanese gymnastics education to China and presented Japanese school clothes as sports clothes for the newly established elementary schools in China. In the early 1900s, school uniforms from Japan were worn by Chinese students only when performing gymnastics and had not yet become the daily school uniform.

Visual materials depicting the clothing of Chinese students in the early 1900s were also examined. After organizing and analyzing dozens of old photographs, it was noted that the clothes worn by these Chinese students followed two main patterns. In the first, students wore traditional Chinese clothes—that is, the long gown and mandarin jacket—which demonstrates that some schools did not have special uniforms

other than students' usual clothes. In the second pattern, the students were dressed in two-piece clothing that completely differed from the traditional Chinese attire.

Let us observe examples from photographic materials. This example depicts students from a high school in Wu'an (currently in Hebei Province) around 1904. They are dressed in a uniform and look neat. The students' outfits have five buttons and are in a two-piece style, comprising a tight-fitting jacket with a stand-up collar and trousers. They also wear hats featuring something that resembles a school emblem. The clothes worn by the students in this photo are quite similar to the clothes in *Mengxue*. Perhaps, after the Qing government promulgated the "Kuimao School System,"⁸ the Wu'an Prefectural High School followed suit and established sports clothes as the student uniform.

Next, let us consider an example of student outfits in south China. Around 1906, a commemorative photo of Yiwen High School (currently in Fujian Province) was taken. In the photo, students are lined up in the front row, and two gymnastics teachers stand next to them. At the back, a person who appears to be a teacher of another subject or a person related to the school is standing. Looking at the enlarged part on the right-hand side of the photo, in contrast to the teachers wearing traditional long gowns and mandarin jackets, the students are wearing two types of clothes. In addition to the aforementioned uniforms adapted from China's mandarin jacket, they are clearly wearing uniforms similar to the *gakuran* with a stand-up collar and five buttons.

Before the 1910s, a uniform culture wherein male students in Chinese elementary schools primarily wore two-piece outfits and hats emerged. The uniforms were quite similar in shape; however, some differences were noted in the collar and buttons. Based on these differences, one was an upgraded mandarin jacket-style uniform, whereas the other was a *gakuran*-style uniform with a stand-up collar and five buttons (Figure 3). However, there were also high schools that unified their school uniforms with a stand-up collar and five buttons, and all elementary school uniforms included student caps with school emblems. This indicates that in the student uniforms of the new elementary schools at the end of the Qing dynasty, there was a movement to replace the traditional long gown and mandarin jacket with a new two-piece *gakuran*. Initially, this new uniform was worn when performing gymnastics and was designed by referring to or imitating Japanese school uniforms with a stand-up collar and five buttons. However, the *gakuran* was introduced as sports attire for gymnastics, and thus did not immediately become a student uniform.



Figure 3. Photograph of Longping Higher primary school, dated around the 1900s. Author's collection, reprint.

2. Promoting the *Gakuran*

Following the establishment of the new Republic of China, when the political situation became somewhat stable, there were calls starting from the early 1920s to improve men's clothing. Many articles recommended wearing school uniforms; for example, a *Shun Pao* article dated February 17, 1921, and titled "My View of Improved Clothing," read as follows:

Our country's customs hold that wearing long clothes is gentlemanly and wearing short clothes would degrade a man's dignity. The people of our country cannot be as lively and agile as the Europeans and Americans, which is also a major factor. So, we must do away with this habit and improve our clothes. Some people think we can change to a suit, but I don't think a suit is necessary because it takes too much time to put on. I think the current *gakuran* outfit is the most suitable.

In the text, the author stated that in China, it was customary to identify an individual's dignity based on their dress. Specifically, this old way of thinking claimed that those who wore the traditional Chinese "*changyi*" (another name for the long gown) were high-ranking individuals, and those who wore "short robes" (two-piece) belonged to

a low rank. However, the author pointed out the need to improve traditional Chinese clothing because wearing a long gown was a disadvantage for wearers as they could not exercise as easily as their Western counterparts. Some believed that Western suits were the best option for improving Chinese men's clothing; however, the author stated that such suits require time and effort and insisted that the school uniforms of the time were a better option. As the title suggests, this article presents the author's individual opinion, thus indicating that there was an interest among the Chinese people in the *gakuran* as an alternative to Western suits for improving their clothing at that time.

On the other hand, some people were in a position to recommend wearing the *gakuran*. Let us observe the following article titled "Improved Chinese Men's Clothing," dated December 16, 1926:

In my opinion, national clothing must be uniformly regulated. Nowadays, Western clothes are vulnerable to some opposition, and long gowns have all kinds of drawbacks. As a compromise, then, only the *gakuran* that Mr. Sun Yat-sen advocates is the most appropriate. At present, school uniforms are mostly in this style. They are made of woolen cloth in winter and of white tape or thread cloth in summer. After everyone popularizes [this look], we will become infinitely superior spiritually, economically, and formally.

Zhi Zheng believed that the clothes of Chinese men at that time should be unified. According to him, because some people opposed Western clothes and Chinese long gowns had various drawbacks, the *gakuran* would be the best compromise. The article points out that the *gakuran* was recommended by Mr. Sun Yat-sen.⁹ Moreover, according to Zhi Zheng's description, school uniforms at that time generally adopted the *gakuran* style and were created using woolen fabrics in winter and white fabrics in summer. The main proposition of this article is that if Chinese people wanted to improve Chinese clothing, they should choose the *gakuran* already worn by some Chinese people rather than adopting Western clothes.

3. Birth of a New Type of *Gakuran*: The *Zhongshan Suit*

3.1. Sun Yat-sen's *Gakuran*

Before considering the relationship between Sun Yat-sen's *gakuran* and the

Zhongshan suit in the early period, a description of this suit must be introduced. Sun Yat-sen loved the Zhongshan suit, and its moniker “Zhongshan” was taken from his name. Research has proposed the theory that the Zhongshan suit was adapted from the Japanese school uniform (*gakuran*), and based on photographic evidence, the shape of the Zhongshan suit is quite similar to that of the *gakuran*. However, the collar, pockets, and buttons were notably different. The collar of the Zhongshan suit is not a stand-up collar like that of the *gakuran*, but is instead a vertical folded collar, which is similar to the collar of Japanese army uniforms. Moreover, the suit features an additional pocket than the three pockets of the *gakuran*; all four pockets are flap pockets. In this section, we focus on Sun Yat-sen, who is considered the inventor of the Zhongshan suit, and examine the *gakuran* he wore from the 1910s to the 1930s. Thereafter, the relationship between the *gakuran* and Zhongshan suit in the early period will be discussed.

As mentioned earlier, the uniforms of Japanese male students—the *gakuran*—were originally worn by Chinese students studying in Japan and introduced into new Chinese schools, where they were widely worn by the students there. Furthermore, starting from the beginning of the 1920s, as a result of the trend for improving clothes for Chinese men, there were suggestions for the *gakuran* to be worn not only as a school uniform but also as daily clothes for ordinary Chinese men. The story of the link between the *gakuran* and Sun Yat-sen, who led the Xinhai Revolution, destroyed the Qing dynasty and founded the Republic of China, begins here.

According to the Chinese clothing history research presented in *Centennial Clothes*, Sun Yat-sen primarily wore Western clothes before 1914. However, starting from then until the 1920s, in addition to his Western clothes (suits), he also wore the *gakuran* and a long gown and mandarin jacket (Yuan and Hu 2010: 116). Sun Yat-sen wore the *gakuran* between 1914 and 1920. Photographs of Sun Yat-sen wearing the *gakuran* before 1914 have yet to be found. As a result of examining Sun Yat-sen’s clothes after 1914, the following findings became clear. The oldest photo of Sun Yat-sen’s *gakuran* found during this research appeared on his Chinese Revolutionary Party membership card. The picture only shows half of Sun Yat-sen’s body, and thus his entire outfit is not visible. However, two details suggest that Sun Yat-sen is wearing a *gakuran*. The first detail is his stand-up collar, which is a common feature of the *gakuran* and differs significantly from the collars of Western suits. The second detail is the pocket on his chest, which does not have a rain cover and is quite similar to that of the *gakuran*. The Chinese Revolutionary Party, led by Sun Yat-sen, was established in

Tokyo on July 8, 1914; therefore, it is very likely that this photo was taken while Sun Yat-sen was wearing a *gakuran*. In a commemorative photo with Soong Ching-ling¹⁰ and party members that was taken when they returned from Shanghai to Guangdong in 1917, Sun Yat-sen is again seen wearing clothes similar to the *gakuran*. In addition, a photo accompanying a 1918 article in the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper (Tokyo morning edition: 5), titled “Mr. Sun Yat-sen, who returned to Japan for the first time in a long time,” clearly shows Sun Yat-sen in a light-colored *gakuran* and drinking tea (Figure 4). From these photographs, it can be inferred that Sun Yat-sen frequently wore the *gakuran* before the 1920s.



Figure 4. Sun Yat-sen in a light-colored *gakuran*.

So, did Sun Yat-sen really wear the *gakuran* after 1920, as claimed in Chinese research materials? This conclusion is inaccurate. According to the current research, Sun Yat-sen continued to wear the *gakuran* even after 1920, as supported by three pieces of evidence. The first evidence is a photo taken in 1921, just before Sun Yat-sen took office as President of Guangdong. The photo was published in the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper in Japan and shows Soong Ching-ling sitting on a chair on the right, with Sun Yat-sen standing on the left. At that time, Sun Yat-sen wore a black *gakuran*, which was almost identical to the Japanese school uniform, in terms of shape, although it featured six buttons, one more than the standard five buttons of the Japanese school uniform. In other words, at this point, there was a slight change in the *gakuran* worn by Sun Yat-sen. The second and third pieces of evidence are two photographs unearthed of Sun Yat-sen taken around 1923. The first photo was taken when he joined the Guangdong Military Consolation Party with his wife after becoming Generalissimo at Huangpu Military Academy. The second photo was taken in winter after Sun Yat-sen delivered a lecture at Lingnan University. In the first photo, Sun Yat-sen wears a

light-colored *gakuran* with a hat in his left hand, a stick in his right hand, and a pen in his upper left pocket. Meanwhile, in the second photo, we can see Sun Yat-sen also wearing a *gakuran*, except that the first light-colored *gakuran* has been replaced with one of a darker color. It is clearly stated that the second photo was taken in winter. Judging from his wife's parasol in the first photo of Sun Yat-sen, it can be inferred that the photo was taken around the summer of 1923. If this inference is correct, when Sun Yat-sen wore the *gakuran*, he followed the Japanese culture of school uniforms by wearing light-colored versions in summer and dark-colored versions in winter. Beyond these three pieces of evidence, there are other photographs of Sun Yat-sen wearing the *gakuran* from the 1920s onward, although most of these were light-colored.

Sun Yat-sen died on March 12, 1925. Material that clearly describes the relationship between Sun Yat-sen and the *gakuran* during his lifetime has yet to be found. However, some materials published after his death have mentioned this relationship. In November 1926, *The Young Companion* published a special issue on Sun Yat-sen to commemorate his life after he died in Beijing. This issue includes a very valuable photo. It is unknown when the photo was taken; however, Sun Yat-sen is shown in it wearing a light-colored *gakuran* and a hat and holding a stick in both hands (Figure 5). The accompanying text reads, "Mr. Sun Yat-sen liked to wear the *gakuran*, which is known as the 'Zhongshan suit.'" The text implies that Sun Yat-sen liked to wear the *gakuran*, and by that point, the *gakuran* was called the "Zhongshan suit." *The Young Companion* was a comprehensive magazine that was extremely popular in China, particularly in Shanghai, at the time. In the present-day, it is considered the



Figure 5. "Mr. Sun Yat-sen likes to wear the *gakuran*, which is called the Zhongshan Suit." This photo was published in *The Young Companion*, 1926.

most valuable Chinese magazine for studying the fashion of the Republic of China era. If this description is credible, this article represents the most compelling evidence that the Zhongshan suit is a variation of the *gakuran*. This is the most important information currently available.

In this section, the relationship between Sun Yat-sen and the *gakuran* is discussed, while focusing on the photographs collected for this research. In Section 3.2, various aspects of the Zhongshan suit reported in *the Shun Pao* newspaper articles will be introduced.

3.2. Aspects of the Zhongshan Suit Seen in *Shun Pao*

An article titled “Sanyou Business Company staff’s change of clothes” was published in *Shun Pao* on May 5, 1926:

At a meeting in the company’s manager’s room before April, it was decided that March 15th of the summer calendar of this year would be the deadline for changing all staff’s clothes. The allowed clothing is divided into two types: A is the Zhongshan suit, that is, a school uniform, and B is world dress. On the one hand, to promote the use of the Zhongshan suit, we should process and manufacture the woolen cloth that is named “freedom” in the main factory. At the same time, we must manufacture a lot to allow students from various schools to customize their school uniforms and prepare the materials needed for students’ outfits.

The article describes attempts in May 1926 to improve the clothing of staff at Sanyou Business Company by changing their traditional Chinese long gowns to new clothes. Two types of clothes were involved in this change: A and B, which are described in the original text as a “Zhongshan suit” and “world dress,” respectively. This presents an important insight: the Zhongshan suit and *gakuran* were almost identical in the two outfits advocated by the Sanyou Business Company. When investigating the nature of Sanyou Business Company with reference to other advertisements posted in *Shun Pao*, the findings show that it dealt with clothing fabrics, ready-made clothes, and clothing sales. A company that manufactured and managed clothing stated that the Zhongshan suit and the *gakuran* were similar; thus, this description may have some credibility. In

addition, examining photos that accompanied the article reveals that the employees who changed their clothes were wearing two types of clothing. One is the suit—that is, the “world dress” referred to in the original text. Judging from its shape, the other is notably similar to the *gakuran*; therefore, it was likely called the Zhongshan suit at that time. Based on this evidence, even in the mid-1920s, the Zhongshan suit and the *gakuran* were almost indistinguishable.

Furthermore, at this point, although the name “Zhongshan suit” was coined to describe the clothes that Sun Yat-sen was fond of, it was less well-known than the *gakuran*; therefore, when introducing the Zhongshan suit, the article may have intentionally borrowed the name “*gakuran*.” The Sanyou Business Company, which manufactured and managed clothing, may have also intentionally changed its employees’ clothes to try to attract attention. By doing so, Sanyou Business Company may have been hoping to promote its products. Furthermore, the latter half of the article states that the “freedom” (a thick woolen fabric) manufactured by Sanyou Business Company was used to make the Zhongshan suit or *gakuran* for each school, in order to support the national currency. This highlights that the Zhongshan suit and *gakuran* were not only similar in shape and design but were also made using the same fabric.

Other articles also indicated a relationship between the Zhongshan suit and the *gakuran*. The June 10, 1926 edition of *Shun Pao* included an article that reported on a summer clothing fabric convention. The article reads, “Recently, a kind of summer cloth was invented to manufacture the Zhongshan suit. It is light and cheap. It is very suitable for academics in summer. Because this summer cloth is exclusively made in China, it was named Zhongshan, showing Chinese respect for Sun Yat-sen. Therefore, there are quite a lot of people from various universities and colleges who buy or customize products.” Producers sought to sell clothing made from the newly invented summer fabrics to fulfill the needs of schools. Furthermore, to expand sales, the fabric was artificially named “Zhongshan.” Therefore, students were attracted to clothes made using the Zhongshan cloth, and thus became their primary consumers. This article reveals that the clothes worn by students at that time imitated Japanese school uniforms, although it is possible that they were called Zhongshan because they were made using Zhongshan fabric.

Another article in the *Shun Pao*, dated July 19, 1928, reported, “At half-past nine today, Chiang [Kai-Shek],¹¹ wearing a *gakuran* at Peking University, gave a speech to

representatives from various fields, and more than 1,000 people attended." Two years after Sun Yat-sen died, various parts of the country were mourning the loss. Considering this carefully, there is a possibility that Chiang Kai-shek, who became the leader of the *Kuomintang* (Chinese Nationalist Party) as Sun Yat-sen's successor, wore a *Zhongshan suit* to pay homage to Sun Yat-sen. However, the newspaper article reported that Chiang Kai-shek was wearing a *gakuran*. There are two potential reasons for this. First, although the name "Zhongshan suit" emerged in 1928, it was not as well-known as the name "*gakuran*." Therefore, instead of using the term "Zhongshan suit," the article used "*gakuran*," which was familiar to the public and notably similar in style to the *Zhongshan suit*. The second reason is a simpler idea: for the average person at the time, the *Zhongshan suit* and *gakuran* were very similar clothes and were not clearly distinguishable. In other words, the interchanging of the terms "Zhongshan suit" and "*gakuran*" was natural for many people, including the author of this article.

However, as the times changed, the relationship between the *Zhongshan suit* and the *gakuran* also gradually transformed. An interesting advertisement appeared in *Shun Pao* on April 11, 1928, posted by a national clothing company located on Changjiang Road, North Sichuan, Shanghai. The advertisement reads, "...we all follow Chiang's words, advocating domestic products, improving clothing as the first priority. In military and political circles and academia, it is especially advisable to wear the *Zhongshan suit* or *gakuran*." The main idea was that because Chiang Kai-shek had issued an order advocating the use of the national currency, those under the control of the *Kuomintang* had to obey this order. This policy of increasing the use of national currency began by changing the country's fashion. In particular, the article encouraged military, political, and educational personnel to wear the *Zhongshan suit* and *gakuran* because many clothes were imported from the West, and most of the materials and fabrics used in their manufacture were from Western countries. On the other hand, the *Zhongshan suit* and the *gakuran* could be made using domestically produced fabrics. Therefore, the key method for supporting the national currency would be to wear domestically manufactured *Zhongshan suits* and *gakuran*. From here, we can read the signs of the intentional promotion of the *Zhongshan suit* and *gakuran*. In other words, if the fabrics were made in China, the *Zhongshan suit* and *gakuran* would come to be perceived as "Chinese clothing." Furthermore, because the *Zhongshan suit* and *gakuran*, which were recommended to those in the military, political, and educational circles, were used as parallel terms, they were included within the same clothing

concept at this point, although it is possible that there were some differences.

As shown in the aforementioned articles, at least from 1925 to 1928 (after Sun Yat-sen's death), the *gakuran*, which had become established in China, and the newly introduced Zhongshan suit were notably similar and were sometimes considered the same items of clothing. The Zhongshan suit was confused with the *gakuran* that had been introduced from Japan for a certain period before it became an independent type of clothing, such as long gowns, mandarin jackets, and Western clothes. Meanwhile, the *gakuran*, which was introduced to distinguish students from ordinary members of society and maintain their honor, gradually came to be worn by men in China's military and political circles. During this process, the shape and design of the *gakuran* gradually changed and evolved into the Zhongshan suit worn by Chinese men involved in politics.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the process of transition from the *gakuran* to the Zhongshan suit in the early period is examined. Various vague ideas presented in the literature are first clarified to highlight that the Chinese "school uniform" was actually the Japanese *gakuran*. Thereafter, how the *gakuran* was introduced into mainland China and its impact was examined. The background of the introduction of the *gakuran* in China is likely to be an influencing factor for male international students as the elites of the time, as well as their deep connection with the educational community in China. Japanese educational principles and systems have been widely accepted in the Chinese educational world; thus, the *gakuran* was also introduced in the educational system. In addition, starting from the 1920s onward, social changes to improve men's clothing were enacted. The *gakuran* had the advantages of functionality and supporting the economy, and these advantages attracted the attention of the Chinese people and were considered to offer a better option than Western clothes. Consequently, there were calls for all men to wear the *gakuran*, not just those involved in education. In fact, the *gakuran* was popular among ordinary men.

Finally, by examining newspapers, magazine articles, and many photographs, the relationship between the *gakuran* and the Zhongshan suit in the early period is shown in this chapter. First, from 1914 to 1923, two years before Sun Yat-sen's death, he was confirmed to have worn the *gakuran* in both summer and winter. For a certain

period, the Zhongshan suit was confused with the *gakuran* that was introduced from Japan before it became an independent clothing type, such as the long gown, mandarin jacket, and Western clothes. However, to commemorate Sun Yat-sen and promote the spirit of the revolution, a movement was initiated to intentionally separate the Zhongshan suit from the *gakuran* style. Furthermore, due to commercial and political influences, the Zhongshan suit gradually changed from the *gakuran* shape and was reborn as a new type of *gakuran*.

Notes

- * This chapter is a translation of Chapter 6 of *Kindai nihon to chugoku no yosooi no kouryushi* (*History of Exchange between Modern Japanese and Chinese Clothing*), Osaka University Press, 2020, and has been translated and republished with permission from Osaka University Press.
- 1 *Gakuran* is a jacket with a stand-up collar and is worn by Japanese male school students.
- 2 In 1872, *Shun Pao* was originally created by the British people in mainland China. Later, with the efforts of many Chinese writers, it developed rapidly and became one of the most influential newspapers in China before the Sino-Japanese War.
- 3 Zhang Jingsheng was a professor at Peking University and known as China's "sexologist." He is famous for being one of the first academics in Chinese history to openly discuss the topic of sex.
- 4 "36th Clothing." In *Daily Encyclopedia Series* (Commercial Press, 1919).
- 5 Namba 2016: 3. Sogensha. According to Namba, the earliest Western clothes introduced into Japan were military uniforms (1870), which used British and French military uniform styles to dress the modern army.
- 6 The *Mengxue Gymnastics Textbook* was based on the first volume of the 1884 edition of *Elementary School Gymnastics*.
- 7 The author examined whether the students in the illustrations were wearing school uniforms. The physical education textbooks mentioned are available in the database of the National Diet Library, Japan.
- 8 Kuimao School System (also known as The Presented School Regulation), which was formulated on the basis of the Renyin school system, was the first school system implemented in modern history.
- 9 Mr. Sun Yat-sen (original name: Sun Wen, also called Sun Zhongshan, 1866.12-1925.3) was the leader of the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang) and is known as the father of modern China. He was a great forerunner of the modern Chinese democratic revolution.
- 10 Soong Ching-ling (Song Qingling) was a secretary of Mr. Sun Yat-sen, and married him in October, 1915, in Tokyo. She became an influential political figure in China after her

husband's death.

- 11 Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi), was a head of the nationalist government in China (1928–1949). In 1918, he joined Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the Nationalist Party.

References

- Asahi Shimbun*. 1918. "Mr. Sun Yat-sen, who returned to Japan for the first time in a long time." Tokyo Morning Edition, June 12, p. 5 (『朝日新聞』6月12日, 東京版, 朝刊第5面).
- Ding, Jin. 1903. *Mengxue Gymnastics Textbook*. Shanghai: Shanghai Civilization Book Company (丁锦 1903《蒙学体操教科书》上海文明书局).
- Geng, Jiamei, Yao Mingyan, and Xu Helin. 2017. "Late Qing Dynasty Middle School Gymnastics Textbook Content Performance Change Revelation." *Physical Education Culture Guide*. Beijing: Sports Culture Development Center of the National Sports Administration (耿嘉梅·姚明焰·许鹤琳 2017〈清朝末期中小学体操教科书内容的演变与启示〉《体育文化导刊》国家体育总局体育文化发展中心).
- Huang, Shilong. 2007. *A Brief History of Chinese Clothing*. Shanghai: Shanghai Culture Publishing House (黄士龙 2007《中国服饰史略》上海文化出版社).
- Jiang, Hongyu. 2014. "Research on the History of Physical Education Textbooks in Middle and Primary Schools in Modern China" (Ph.D. Dissertation). Beijing Sport University (蒋宏宇 2014《我国近现代中小学体育教科书历史变迁研究》博士论文, 北京体育大学).
- Liao, Jun, and Xu Xing. 2009. *A Century of Chinese Apparel*. Shanghai: Shanghai Culture Publishing House (廖军·许星 2009《中国服饰百年》上海文化出版社).
- Liu, Lingfang. 2020. *Kindai Nihon to Chugoku no yosooi no koryushi (History of Exchange Between Modern Japanese and Chinese Clothing)*. Osaka: Osaka University Press (刘玲芳 2020『近代日本と中国の装いの交流史——身装文化の相互認識から相互撰取まで』大阪大学出版会).
- Lu, Xun. 1985. *Shugai shu, shugai shushui (Rojin zenshu 9) (Collections and Collection (Lu Xun's Complete Works 9))* (T. Aiura, ed. and trans.), Tokyo: Gakken (鲁迅著, 相浦杲責任編集·翻訳 1985『鲁迅全集第9卷 集外集·集外集拾遺』学习研究社).
- Masuda, Yoshiko. 2010. *Nihon ifuku shi (History of Japanese Clothing)*. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan (増田美子編 2010『日本衣服史』吉川弘文館).

- Meilu, Zhu. 2011. *The Image of an International Student in the Mirror*. Sichuan: Bashu Publishing House (朱美禄 2011《域外之镜中的留学生形象》巴蜀书社).
- Namba, Tomoko. 2016. *Kindai Nihon gakkou seihuku zuroku (The Modern Japanese School Uniform Book)*. Osaka: Sogensha (难波知子 2016『近代日本学校制服図録』創元社).
- Shun Pao (《申报》). 1909a. "Survey Privately Purchased Minerals from the West in Anhui Province," June 8, p. 11(〈查复勾串西私购矿产之安徽〉6月8日,第11页).
- . 1909b. "Social Fiction Free Woman (16)," December 1, p. 27 (〈社会小说自由女(十六)〉12月1日,第27页).
- . 1910. "Short Story About Hate," April 3, p. 27 (〈短篇小说博徒恨〉4月3日,第27页).
- . 1921. "My View of Improved Clothing," February 17, p. 17 (斯亦为〈我的改良衣制观〉2月17日,第17页).
- . 1926a. "Sanyou Business Company Staff's Change of Clothes," May 5, p. 21 (〈三友实业社职员改装〉5月5日,第21页).
- . 1926b. "Yesterday's News of The Summer Fabric Conference," June 10, p. 19 (〈夏布大会之昨讯〉6月10日,第19页).
- . 1928. "Jiang Continued His Speech at Peking University Yesterday," July 19, p. 8 (〈蒋昨续在北大演讲〉7月19日,第8页).
- . 1932. "Answer Improvement Social Debate," August 1, p. 19 (〈答改良社会讨论会〉8月1日,第19页).
- Wang, Yuenian, and Qi Rugao. 1997. *Old Photographs of Fashion*. Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House (王跃年·戚如高 1997《老照片服饰时尚》江苏美术出版社).
- Yuan, Ze, and Hu Yue. 2011. *Centennial Clothes*. Shanghai: SDX Joint Publishing Company (袁仄·胡月 2011《百年衣裳》三联书店).
- Zhang, Jingsheng. 1925. *Beautiful Outlook on Life*. Beijing: Peking University Printing Department (张竞生 1925《美的人生观》北京大学印刷课).
- Zhang, Tianyi. 1986. *Father and Son of Mr. Bao*. Tianjin: Baihua Literature and Art Publishing House. First edition: 1934. *Literature*, 2 (4) (张天翼 1986《包氏父子》百花文艺出版社. 初版: 1934年《文学》第2卷4号).
- Zhou, Songfang. 2014. *Clothing of the Republic of China*. Guangzhou: Nanfang Daily Press (周松芳 2014《民国衣裳》南方日报出版社).