

【Article】

Fashioning the Abbot: The Social Implications of Clerical Vestments in Early Modern Japanese Village Life

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Abstract

In the long history of Buddhist cultural development, the *kāṣāya* (Jpn. *kesa*) robes of the historical Buddha have symbolized the unique identity of adherents who have taken tonsure and entered one of the tradition's many schools. This was certainly true in Japan and it continues to this day, but the foregrounding of these specific garments alone in scholarly research can reduce our awareness and understanding of other vestments that were also integral to clerical practices and identities. This is particularly true in East Asian countries like Japan where the integration of Buddhist traditions and local clothing-ways resulted in an array of unique styles. What is more, while Buddhist clothing in each South Asian culture is limited to a range of yellow and/or red hues, East Asian Buddhist schools developed wider color palettes for their non-*kāṣāya* robes that came to play a role in the visual representation of clerical ranks. This study is one in a series that re-considers various facets of early modern (1600-1868) Japanese Buddhist temple practices, and in this case, I will look at the role of non-*kāṣāya* robes as mediums for social exchange that were important to clerical identity creation in the Shingi Shingon School. It will also consider the value the laity placed on clerical robes in their own efforts to construct and present their social identities in village life.

Key words: Buddhist vestments; colored robes; Shingi Shingon; early modern Japan; temple practices

Introduction

In present day parlance, the term “fashion” evokes the image of quickly changing modes of clothing that are informed by socio-cultural forces ranging from globalization, capitalism and bourgeois desires, to movements that stress minority identity or subcultural groups seeking alterity from the mass market. These influences produce a kaleidoscopic array goods that consumers can purchase and discard at their discretion, but as Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass note at the start of their study of Renaissance clothing, the fashioning process is actually an interaction between person and object in which the material culture can play an integral role in the creation of an

individual's identity or sense of self (2000, 1-11). In other words, clothing does not just consist shaped pieces of cloth, leather, etc., but it rather takes on social meanings that “leave a ‘print or character’” upon the wearer. Hence, in the Renaissance, clothing was not seen as a mere reflection of a person, but it could substantively invest the wearer with positive (godliness, moral probity, nobility, etc.) or negative qualities. Jones and Stallybrass' perspective on clothing's ability to fashion the wearer is shared in Malcolm Barnard survey of fashion theory in which he argues that “personal identity” does not exist *sui generis*, but rather it is created and negotiated through interactions with social/cultural perceptions. Fashion is none other than medium (a “prosthesis” in his wording) for these interactions. Clothing, therefore, is not merely an “enhancement” to a pre-established identity, but rather it is one element in the creation of that identity (2014, 38-39).

The following article is one in a series that reassesses the Buddhist clergy's place and practices in early modern (Edo period) Japan. Drawing upon the insights above, I will push this project further along by looking at some aspects of Japanese Buddhist clothing history in order to assay the role of vestments in the creation and display of the Buddhist clerical identity in this period. Given the Buddhist philosophical emphasis on non-attachment, clothing may seem to be incidental or even antithetical to an understanding of Buddhist social practices, and the anonymous author Buyō Inshi 武陽隱士 cited clerical interest in extravagant robes as sign of moral decline (Teeuwen and Nakai 2014, 146). Except for discussions of imperially granted purple robes that became a point of contention between the Tokugawa bakufu and the court in Kyoto, early modern social historians tend to mention Buddhist vestments only in passing. The best treatments are by art or clothing historians, but these do not fully assess the social ramifications of vestments. However, as we see in examples ranging from bakufu efforts to regulate samurai fashion (Ikegami 1989, Chap. 3) to descriptions of commoner in interest in cloth and clothing, Edo Japan was a highly fashion-conscious society, hence Buddhist interest in vestments was in keeping with the tenor of the times. As I will discuss in detail below, by the late 18th century, Buddhist vestment traditions had become quite complex and concerns with sacerdotal clothing were, for better or worse, an important element in a cleric's career. Furthermore, some members of the laity shared these interests; hence a better understanding of the socializing role of Buddhist vestments will provide new insights on temple-lay relations as well.

To start with some general observations, the phrase “Buddhist robe” usually evokes the image of the *kāṣāya* robe made by Siddhārtha Gautama at the start of this religious life. (For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to these garments by the Japanese reading of the Chinese transliteration of this Sanskrit word: *kesa* 袈裟).¹ In Japan and China, ordained members of Buddhist schools usually wear this particular vestment over the left shoulder, and it was imbued with multiple meanings. While it began as functional clothing that protected the Buddha's body,

the *kesa* came to represent monastic dedication to the ascetic path that would hopefully lead to awakening. Since ordained monks were expected cast aside worldly associations, the *kesa* simultaneously distinguishing these “home leavers” (*shukke* 出家) from the “in the home” laity (*zaike* 在家).² As Buddhism regionally and philosophically expanded, the *kesa* became a symbol of the historical Buddha and his teachings (Dharma 法). Thus, it could function as a “contact relic” that was: a “substitute body of the Buddha”; “... a maṇḍala, a symbol of the universe”; and a “*bodhimāṇḍa*, a ritual area of enlightenment” (Faure 1995, 357-359). Its meaning was also informed by the traditional creation method of sewing together strips of cloth. The resultant paneled garment was said to resemble the fecund rice paddies of ancient India, hence the *kesa* was esteemed as a “field of merit” (*fukuden* 福田) that would nurture the cleric’s training (Faure 1995, 355-356; Hume 2013, 107). (This benefit could apply to the laity as well in that gifts of cloth produced merit for overcoming negative karma—a belief that encouraged lay support for Buddhist vestment practices.) The *kesa* thus came embody the essence of Buddhism, such that cleric’s draped body became a human manifestation of those ideas. Furthermore, although the *kesa* changed form, it nonetheless suggested a direct link back to the historical Buddha. Any *kesa* was, therefore, a product of its time but was also “timeless.” This symbolic value thereby transformed a material garment into a means for venerating Buddhist teachings, which later stimulated the Chinese practice of creating increasingly elaborate and colorful vestments.

Concurrent with its role in shaping a cleric’s spiritual being, the *kesa* functioned as a vital mechanism for shaping his or her social identity. The donning of such a vestment signified the end of an ordinand’s lay existence. Post-ordination adherence to the precepts (*vinaya*; in Japanese *ritsu* 律) that governed monastic life, including those pertaining to monastic clothing, then re-fashioned the new member by instilling in them a new clerical identity. The robes of each monk thus became the means for controlling the uniformity of the growing monastic community (the *saṃgha*). Failure to live up to the ideal represented by the *kesa* resulted in literal and figurative disinvestment that stripped the aberrant cleric of this religious and social identities. Therefore, the bestowal of robes that demarcated a cleric’s distinct identity as a Buddhist simultaneously created a mechanism for enforcing communal conformity. While certainly not martial clothing, the *kesa* and its sartorial descendants nonetheless functioned as a kind of uniform, and Buddhism’s institutional expansion resulted in differentiations between Indian monastic communities that were reflected by variations in *kesa* colors.³ As we shall see in below, further transformations in Buddhist clothing styles and the adaption of an expanded color pallet for robe dyes factored into the use of vestments as mechanisms for instilling every member of East Asian Buddhist communities with unique intra- and inter-sectarian identities.

The vestments worn by Buddhist abbots in the Edo period were thus the product of 2500

years of sartorial evolution that was stimulated by transcultural exchanges between South and East Asia. During this process, Buddhism's unique clothing of was imbued with many meanings, and within the context of early modern Japanese temple life, robes were mediums for negotiating a number of polarities that informed Buddhist identity and practices: religious vs. secular; present practices vs. historical memories; temple vs. state authority; sectarian differences; Buddhist vs. non-Buddhist clerics; social group distinctions; clergy vs. laity. The study below will start with a survey of the origins of Buddhist vestments, and then trace processes of evolution that led to their appearance in village life. It will then examine some facets of these mediations-through-vestments within the context of Japanese village life.

On the Handling of Color Names

Robe coloring will have an important place in this discussion, and the first question that may come to mind is, "what does a particular hue look like?" In this day of systematic color definitions based upon spectral analyses and durable chemical dyes, it is possible to define and consistently represent subtle variations of tonality within a hue. However, such consistency across cultural spheres with different dyeing technologies and vegetable dyestuffs was highly problematic. In order to get a general sense of how "yellow (ochre)" would compare to "light yellow," "pale yellow" or the difference between "incense" and "magnolia," I have referenced printed color images in Yamazaki 1989, Izutsu 1989, Kyoto National Museum 2010 and the online Fūzoku hakubutsukan, but the main sources herein are textual rather than material. The authors of historical records clearly saw differences in hues and thus attempted to create a systematic lexicon to define them. Based upon the descriptions available to me and other scholarship on clothing, I have tried to impart a general sense of what a particular color might have looked like, but I will not attempt to provide exact definitions based on something like the Pantone® or hex triplet systems that are commonly used by print and web media companies.

A Brief Survey of the Buddhist Clothing Heritage that Came into Japan⁴

According to Indian traditions, there were three kinds of *kesa* (the *tricīvara*; *san'e* or *sanne* 三衣)⁵ :

saṃghāṭī (*sōgyari* 僧伽梨; *daie* 大衣): made from nine to twenty-five strips of cloth, this could cover the whole body for protection. It was also the most formal robe, hence monks wore these for rituals and when teaching the laity.

uttarāsaṃga (*utarasō* 鬱多羅僧; *chūe* 中衣): Made from seven strips of cloth; for daily wear

while eating or reciting texts, etc.

antarvāsas (*andae* 安陀會; *shōe* 小衣): Made from five strips of cloth; worn around the waist.

A cleric combined these garments depending upon his activities. The Buddha is said to have used scraps and soiled rags, hence in East Asia one term for Buddhist vestments was *funzōe* 糞掃衣 (literally “excrement cleaning robe”; Riggs 2007, 1161). In practice, monks were permitted to use gifted strips of silk, cotton, hemp and even wool, but extravagantly decorated cloth or items made from animal hair were not permitted (Izutsu 1974, 28).

These clothing traditions have been largely maintained by south Asian Buddhist communities, but the transmission of Buddhist practices into Central Asian and Chinese cultures stimulated clothing transformations. The three primary outer robes evolved into ritual vestments, and the word *kāṣāya* (*kesa*), which was the name for the muddy reddish-yellow or brownish-yellow color of the Buddha’s clothes, came to denote the robes themselves. In their place, East Asian clerics integrated created an array of new vestments. (In order to avoid confusion regarding the possible meanings of “robe,” from this point onwards I will further refine the use the word *kesa* to specifically reference the ritual garments that derived from the original three Indian outer garments, and I will use “robe” when discussing non-*kesa* outer wear that evolved in East Asian cultures.⁶)

Perhaps the closest approximation of the Indian tradition came in the form of a two-part robe combination that emerged along with Buddhism’s growth in the Chinese Wei era (4th–5th centuries). This consisted of the *kun* 裙 (*kunsu* 裙子) skirt and the *henzan* 褊衫 that covered both shoulders and the arms (Izutsu 1974, 46-47). These were dyed in muted colors and worn with a seven-panel *kesa* that covered only the left shoulder. This ensemble became the *nyohōe* 如法衣 (“robes in keeping with the Dharma”) (Izutsu 1974, 40). In Japan, these vestments came into use by the Nara era (710-790). During the contemporaneous Tang period (7th–9th centuries), Chinese clerics simplified this ensemble by sewing the *henzan* and *kun* into a single garment called the *jikitotsu* 直綴 (also 直褌; Izutsu 1974, 51-52; 169-173). The earliest Japanese adopters may have been Heian period Tendai clerics who used them as “daily wear” in lieu of the more formal robes worn for rituals. In China, however, the *jikitotsu* became the main robe for Song period Chan/Zen 禪 clerics, hence the emergence of Zen temples in Kamakura and Kyoto stimulated their broader acceptance in Japan. By the Edo era, the *jikitotsu* was common to many schools.

According to Izutsu Gafū’s research, the development of state oversight and patronage of Buddhism in China’s pre-Tang era fostered official support for rituals performed by Buddhist clerics (Izutsu 1974, 36-37). This in turn promoted interest in visually beautiful rites that functioned as expressions of elite faith, dynastic prestige, and cultural authority. This shift was materially reflected in the development of another robe ensemble that was later transmitted to

Japan in the 7th~8th centuries. Whereas the *henzan/kun* combination continued as suitable training garments, the *hō* 袍 (a sleeved upper torso garment) and the lower body skirt *mo* 裳 were made from finer cloth that was often brightly colored (Izutsu 1974, 84-87; 1014-1015). This set was collectively referred to as “Dharma robes” (*hōfuku* 法服). On top of them over the left shoulder clerics generally wore a seven-panel *kesa*. This was complemented with another Heian era importation from China: a right shoulder covering (*ōbi* 横被) made from the same cloth as the *kesa* (Izutsu 1974, 90). A long set of decorative cords (*sutra* 修多羅) hung down the back.

Elite interest in Buddhism, including the system of abbots appointed from the sovereign and aristocratic houses, spurred the development of other kinds of robes. One example of this trend was the *soken* 素絹 (a single outer robe for the whole body that had an extra horizontal skirt [*ran* 欄]; Izutsu 1974, 131).⁷ Since Buddhist clerics of the Tendai and Shingon schools performed rituals to venerate *kami* deities that were seen as avatars of buddhas and bodhisattvas, the Japanese court-Buddhist cultural sphere also produced the *donjiki* 鈍色, a robe that was often white to reflect the ideal of purity (Izutsu 1974, 115; highly ranked clerics could wear *donjiki* in other colors.) Clerics complemented these robes with a smaller, five-strip *kesa* that was unique to Japanese Buddhism (the *yoko gojō kesa* 横五条袈裟). Later, the influx of Song period Chan/Zen traditions during the Kamakura era increased the diffusion of the *jikitotsu* and robes with similar styling. Jōdo school clerics came to wear this vestment along with the older *nyohōe*, while of the Ji school 時宗 adherents developed “skirt-less” (*monashi* 裳なし) robes with shortened bottom hems that suited their mendicant lifestyle (Izutsu 1974, 134). Beyond the confines of Buddhist temple grounds, from the Heian period onwards followers of Shugendō 修験道 (the syncretic mountain-based ascetic traditions that combined Buddhist teachings, local *kami* worship, and elements of Chinese/Asian folk religion) drew upon esoteric Buddhist practices to create unique vestments such as the *yūigesā* 結袈裟 (a simple ring of cloth worn around the neck) that clearly distinguished them from Buddhists.

The evolution of vestment forms was paralleled by the evolution of color schemes for dyeing. As noted earlier, the word *kāṣāya* referred to a muddied yellowish-hue with muted brown or red tones that the historical Buddha purportedly used to dye his own robes (Yoshimura 2009, 47. Buswell and Lopez 2014, 423; Kyoto National Museum 2010, iv). In the Chinese/Japanese Buddhist lexicon this color was identified as *ejiki* 壊色 or *kasshoku* 褐色, and “saffron” and “yellow ochre” are common English translations. According to the Buddhist monastic tradition this color was an optimal chromatic expression of world renunciation, because the hue was counter to Indian cultural practices that valued five “pure” primary colors and five intermediary ones (Izutsu 1974, 15). Hence the muted *kaṣāya* distinguished Buddhist mendicants from the laity and other religious communities. Other colors were later used and the *Dharmaguptaka vinaya*

(*Shibunritsu* 四分律) included muted blue, black, or a yellowish light brown “magnolia” (*mokuren* 木蘭) hue. Accounts of Indian temples and practices indicate different clerical communities used such colors to establish their unique identity (Deegalle 2004, 55-56).

As with robe styles, in the process of integrating Buddhism into Chinese culture, the color pallet expanded beyond the muted hues prescribed by Indian precedents. Imperial and aristocratic support strongly influenced this trend, and by the Tang period, emperors had begun to bestow purple (*shi/murasaki* 紫 the highest valued color in the Tang color ranking scheme) and scarlet (*ake* or *hi* 緋, the next highest rank) vestments upon esteemed clerics as markers of imperial patronage (Izutsu 1974, 56; Kieschnick 2003, 100-103). Yellow (one of the five primary colors in traditional Chinese color schemes and viable variant of the magnolia hue) was also added, and perhaps most importantly for daily wear, Chinese Buddhists adopted black as a fundamental color for non-elite clerics. It was a choice that may have been influenced by the legacy of Confucian culture (Izutsu 1974, 56).

This expanded color pallet was imported into Japan along with other elements of Tang Buddhism, and the 7th century *Regulations for Monks and Nuns* (*Sōniryō* 僧尼令) states the accepted colors for clerical vestments were magnolia, blue-green, black, yellow, and the reddish-yellow *ejiki* (Izutsu 1974, 68; Inoue 1976, 218). This codification of early clerical vestments was contemporaneous with the adoption of the Tang color-code system for court ranks (Dusenbury 2015a, 123-128, Masuda 2010, 67-70). Along with the later Nara formulation of a state-system for clerical ranking (*sōkan* 僧官), purple and scarlet (the two prominent colors that signified imperial patronage in China) were added to Japanese vestment color schemes (Izutsu 1974, 78, 85).⁸ Given the Heian period aristocracy’s continuing interest in colors (Dusenbury 2015b), elite Buddhist clerics wore elaborately constructed and dyed robes that suited well the cultural milieu. With the later development of techniques for making metaled threads and the Muromachi-era incorporation of brocades (*kinran* 金襴) made from such expensive materials into *kesa*, the glitter of gold and silver had entered into the Buddhist sartorial color pallet (Izutsu 1974, 215-217).⁹

The Systemization of Vestment Practices in Early Modern Buddhism

The usage of colored robes in the early modern era firmly rested on this long history of development. While most clerics who lived in the Kantō countryside might only see the elaborate, multihued vestments of their superiors when they participated in services at prominent temples, the sensitization to color rankings and an awareness of a specific robing tradition informed their sectarian identities. In the Zen schools, the link between clothing and identity was further enhanced by stories of “Dharma transmission robes” (*denbōe* 伝法衣) in which masters bestowed upon

specific disciples who had completed their spiritual quest for enlightenment (Faure 1995; Yamakawa 2016).¹⁰

The Tokugawa bakufu was also attuned to the cultural and political symbolic significance of vestments, particularly in regard to their role as mediums of patronage between the court/aristocracy and prominent Buddhist temples with longstanding cultural-religious legacies. In particular, the emperor exercised his authority via aristocratic liaison houses (*densō* 伝奏) to grant purple robes and ranks upon the abbots of certain Rinzai, Sōtō, and Jōdo temples. In 1627, the regime of the third shogun Iemitsu 家光 invoked a Tokugawa code that required pre-bestowal consultation with the bakufu to interject samurai authority into this older court-temple relationship that was mediated through vestments. The infamous “Purple Robe” incident resulted in emperor Gomizunoo 後水尾 abdicating in protest of such interference (Williams 2009), but once tempers settled and the court accepted the nod to Tokugawa authority, the system for court conferrals of ranks and colored robes continued until the end of regime in 1868, and several clerics who had been punished for resisting the Tokugawa denial of robes were later pardoned and allowed to return to their temples (Butler 2002, 234).

Scholars from the Meiji period onwards cite this event as a clear example of Tokugawa efforts to break Buddhist institutions and the court to its will, yet the continuity of the bestowal tradition indicates the bakufu’s acceptance of such precedents and its respect for systems of religious signification. In the Tokugawa social system, the Buddhist clergy was accorded a relatively high position in the status (*mibun* 身分) order that ostensibly defined every kind of social group’s duties to the Tokugawa house and other samurai daimyo who ruled some 260 domains across Japan. This standing allowed the abbots of some temples (*dokureiji* 独礼寺) to pay their New Year’s respects in person to the shogun at Edo castle, and it gave them a advantageous position in their relationships with other communities of bakufu-recognized ritualists (e.g. Shugendō and Shinto clerics), and of course with commoner lay families.

This recognition was ironically reflected in bakufu methods for handling clerics suspected of criminal activity. A Buddhist cleric found guilty of a serious offence faced banishment or execution, but disrobement was imposed for lesser transgressions. In effect, stripping of the robes stripped the offending cleric of their status and religious identity. Samurai officials in smaller domains were often not sure about accepted procedures for handing such cases, and they submitted questions to the bakufu’s temple and shrine magistracy (*jisha bugyō* 寺社奉行) and other bakufu officials seeking clarification. The bakufu responses to these queries indicate the robes (often cited as the “three robes” 三衣, a nod towards Buddhism’s sartorial legacy) were to be handed over to the domain lord for later return to clerical authorities. Also, if a cleric was incarcerated, samurai officials were ordered to disrobe him *before* binding him with ropes.¹¹ In other words, the jailers

might not respect the individual cleric, but the penal process should not denigrate the vestments that signified his social position and his religious vocation. However, at the level of just questioning, samurai were not allowed to disrobe a Buddhist or Shinto cleric (Ishii and Harafuji 1998, 191 [item 177]). Even social interactions between clerics and samurai generated could generate questions over proper cleric attire when meeting a daimyo.¹²

The topic of clerical robing is also intertwined with another, larger analytic thread in modern scholarship that has stressed samurai efforts to dominate Buddhist institutions by stripping them of their economic and political agency, and thereby subordinate them to the Tokugawa and other daimyo houses. As many histories of early modern Japan note, due to samurai pressure, Buddhist temples were encouraged/forced to coalesce into hierarchies overseen by a venerated headquarter temple (these were often called *honzan* 本山). Depending on the school, headquarter abbots might hail from the imperial or an aristocratic family; these specific temples were called *monzeki* 門跡. In other schools, abbots rose from the ranks. As noted above, the imperial court exercised the authority for granting official ranks, but imperial *monzeki* abbots also had this prerogative. If a school had no such abbot, then the headquarters relied upon an aristocratic house to liaise with the court (Takano 1989, 145-156; Kushida 1964, 1076-1078). As indicated by the 1627 incident, the Tokugawa regime acknowledged ritual precedents, but in order to limit the personnel authority of elite headquarters, it created a system of liaison (*firegashira* 触頭) temples, most of which were in the Kantō, to oversee administrative processes like the rank petitions that were exchanged between regional clerical groups and their superiors.

This scholarly assessment of the Tokugawa-temple relationship is certainly correct in a general sense, but as long as a Buddhist community obeyed bakufu and domain laws, then the samurai generally left temples to manage their own affairs (Vesey 2020). This hands-off stance applied to the usage of clerical vestments, and each school actively enhanced its sectarian identity by establishing uniform clothing/color ranking standards for their members. One well documented example is the Shingi Shingon School 新義真言宗. This branch of the Shingon tradition traces its origins to the 12th century Kakuban 覚鑊 (1095-1143), a reformer who founded the temple of Negoroji 根来寺 (Bowring 2005, 232-237). Following the 1585 destruction of Negoroji by the emerging hegemon Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉, the Shingi Shingon administration shifted to Chishakuin 智積院 in Kyoto and Hasedera 長谷寺 to the east of Nara. At the same time, the right to certify the Dharma lineage of Shingi clerics was exercised by two Kyoto-area imperial *monzeki* temples of the Kogi Shingon School 古義真言宗: Ninnaji 仁和寺 and Daikakuji 大覚寺.

Within this structure, Chishakuin and Hasedera set clerical educational standards, and Shingi clerics were expected to spend at least several years at their training halls in order to receive

certification. These training requirements constituted a major criterion for the bestowal of colored robes and ranks that shaped a Shingi cleric's identity. However, official court authorization of these honors required a petition to the *monzeki*. This managerial network was augmented by the establishment of four Shingi liaison temples in Edo (Udaka 1999, 691-717; Kushida 1964, 879-888).¹³ The liaisons were ostensibly ranked under the headquarters and *monzeki*, but in fact they increasingly handled the flow of paper work and personnel supervision, hence their authority grew from the mid-17th century onwards. Operating under these centers of power were networks of regional head temples (*inaka honji* 田舎本寺) and their subordinate branches (*matsuji* 末寺).¹⁴ Adding to the systemic complexity, some of these mid-level institutions operated regional training halls (*danrin* 談林), while many *monto* 門徒 temples occupied the very bottom of every “head-branch” 本末 hierarchy. Unlike their superiors, *monto* abbots were not allowed to train disciples or perform important rites such as funeral services. Theirs was a lowly and often rather impoverished existence, because these temples might not have enough affiliated lay families (*danka* 檀家) to provide sufficient economic support (Vesey 2021).

While none of these institutional elements were particularly new to early modern Buddhism, the transregional structuring of once independent temples into more cohesive hierarchies was a hallmark of the era. This systemization was paralleled by a similar process for adapting earlier vestment legacies and practices to create standards (i.e. codes of uniformity) for visualizing hierarchies by color. Vestment regulation during the Negoroji era is uncertain, and there are few records prior to the 17th century regarding colored robes, but during the 16th to the early 17th centuries, many temple apparently abbots wore robes dyed with a hue called “incense” 香色.¹⁵ Shingon authorities believed the widespread use of this color was inappropriate, and a code issued to the Kogi Shingon temple of Daigoji 醍醐寺 stated that clerics with insufficient training should not wear it, but the application of such restrictions was uneven. In 1658 (Kanbun 寛文 8), the four-liaison temple began to assert control over the granting of colored robe privileges, but first real systemization began in during the Genroku era (1688-1704), when the Shingi cleric Ryūkō 隆光 (1649-1724) gained the favor of the 5th shogun Tsunayoshi 綱吉 and his mother Keishōin 桂昌院. Taking advantage of shogunal patronage, Ryūkō received the highest court rank of “great preceptor” (*daisōjō* 大僧正), while his former temple was renamed Gojiin 護持院 and moved to a location near the Tokugawa castle in Edo. Ryūkō also assumed the title of clerical registrar (*sōroku* 僧録), and from this position of authority, he assumed a supernumerary position over the four Shingi liaisons that previously oversaw personnel matters (Kushida 1964, 889-894).

Rather than deferring to *monzeki* prerogatives over robes and rankings, Ryūkō enacted his own systematization of the relationship between colors and clerical ranks. The abbots of Chishakuin and Hasedera could wear scarlet and purple (Ryūkō, too, wore scarlet), and the four

liaison abbots were permitted robes in light yellowish green (*moegi* 萌黄) and a deep red-brown color named after the kite bird of prey (*tobi* 鷹色). Temples underneath them could petition their way up from black to robes to saffron yellow.¹⁶ After Ryūkō's fall from power following Tsunayoshi's death, the four temples re-gained control over the passage of petitions for color elevations to the *monzeki*, but his basic color-coding system was not fundamentally altered. The regulations for colored robes (*Shikie shikimoku* 色衣式目) that Ryūkō and his immediate successor Kakugan 覺眼 promulgated in 1695 (Genroku 元禄 8) and 1709 (Hōei 宝永 6) respectively (Udaka and Tokunaga 1983, 38-40, 78-79) specified the accepted hues and criteria for abbots of regional temples. According to Article 1:

Clerics with over 20 years of training experience at either of the two headquarter seminaries and are abbots of a temple with one of the following qualifications: a Tokugawa house vermilion-seal land grant; *dokureiji* rights; a full-time training hall; a regional head with branch temples.

They may wear robes of yellow (*ukoniro* 鬱金色, with no tint of *beni* 紅 red), light yellow (*asaki* 浅黄 [a lighter shade of *ukon*]), and incense (*kō* 香).

However, for clerics with nineteen years or less at a headquarter seminary, the permitted colors are: pale yellow (*usuki* 薄黄色, commonly called light persimmon *usugaki* 薄柿), light yellow (*asaki* 浅黄 [a lighter shade of *ukon*]), and incense (*kō* 香). (Udaka and Tokunaga 1983, 38)¹⁷

Further rules defined conditions for granting specific kinds of colored robes, but in general terms, the determination of eligibility centered on two factors. As suggested by the first article, a temple's pedigree and ranking in the Shingi order was of paramount importance. A highly placed temple that had many branch temple subordinates was in a much stronger position of authority, and thus its abbot could claim the right to colors in order to distinguish his temple's higher rank. Depending upon his temple's combination of qualifications, an abbot could wear three colors, but lesser levels resulted in the limitation to light yellow and incense, or to just incense alone. (From this we can see that incense was the baseline for subsequent upgrades.) On the other hand, if the temple did not meet any of the qualifications, the abbot could only wear black robes. This was the case with all *monto*, because they were not recognized as having a formal "branch" ranking within a regional network.

The secondary factor was the applicant's personal record within the Shingi order. In this context, as noted in the article, the length of a cleric's time in training at one of the headquarters

and his performance of certain teaching functions at a regional training hall were taken into consideration by the Shingi administrators. This focus on temple rank first could lead to awkward situations if a black-only abbot with extensive training experience and a color-bedecked cleric with weaker personal credentials were to be hierarchically seated during a ritual or gathering. According to a ruling for a 1762 (Hōreki 宝暦 12) dispute, personal training years did take precedence over robe color prerogatives at such gatherings, but no black-robed cleric could ever assume the lead seat on such occasions (Kushida 1964, 1070-1071).

While every school had its own trajectory in the development of qualifying rules for vestment styles/colors and the use of such garments as markers of distinct clerical identities, by the late 18th century the systemization processes had reached a level of general maturation and acceptance. The shared usage of robing and coloring is reflected in a series of documents submitted by the liaison temples of each school to the Tokugawa bakufu between 1801-1802.¹⁸ While little is said of doctrinal stances, the liaisons offered detailed explanations of personnel management practices that would have affected the lives of clerics under their supervision. The contents vary from one school to another, hence there does not appear to have been a shared template for their creation, but the explanations reflect the structures and qualifications for advancement in each school. These compendia defined the vestments (*kesa*, *henzan*, *hōfuku*, *jikitotsu*, etc.), their coloration, and who was permitted to wear specific combinations of colored clothing. In short, they were uniform guides in which it becomes evident that while *kesa* (the outermost symbols Buddhism's Indian origins) were the primary markers of Buddhist identity, while the robes that had evolved during Buddhism's passage through Asia were in fact important for signifying a cleric's stature within a particular school.

Table 1 reflects the range of colors used by the Shingi Shingon School as it was described in the “Shingi ippa itai no koto” 真義一派衣鉢之事 section of the 1801 *Shingi Shingonshū shukke seiritsu saisho yori ryōhonzan e tenshōushin made no shidai* 新義真言宗出家成立最初と両本山江轉昇進迄の次第 (Ichishima 1907, 380-386). The main focus is on clothing practices at the two headquarters, and starting with the *hōfuku* for the abbots of the headquarters and Gojiin,¹⁹ the account proceeds through the Shingi ranks to define color and vestment prerogatives. The colors listed generally match the standards set by Ryūkō, with several exceptions: the 1801 account includes pale blue (*sensei* or *asaaō* 浅青) as one of the colors worn by clerics in other regions, but it omits any mention of “thin”- or light yellows. This would suggest these latter colors had fallen out of the pallet, but an 1858 case study that I will introduce below shows the usage of both light blue and the pale yellow for indicating *danrin* temple abbots. (There is no indication why the 1801 explanation left out these tints of yellow, but it may be due to the focus on headquarter practices.)

Table I Robe Colors Used in by Shingi Shingon School as reported in 1801 (Ichishima 1907, 383-389). The five panel *kesa* could have *kinran* and brocade, and the color was freely chosen.

*Additional information from the *Shikie jōmoku* 色衣条目 (1695 Genroku 元禄 8; Udaka and Tokunaga 1983, 38, item 60.) I have omitted descriptions of the undergarment colors.

Color	Certified User
Scarlet <i>hi</i> 緋	<i>Hō/mo, soken, donjiki, jikitotsu</i> of “preceptor” rank clerics at Hasedera & Chishakuin, and the Gojiin abbot
Purple <i>shi</i> 紫	<i>Soken, donjiki, jikitotsu</i> of “preceptor” rank clerics at Hasedera & Chishakuin, and the Gojiin abbot (purple <i>hō/mo</i> not used)
Light yellow green <i>moegi</i> 萌黄	All robes for liaison temple abbots
Red-brown <i>tobiuro</i> 蔦色	All robes for liaison temple abbots
Yellow <i>kiuro</i> 黄色 (<i>ukon</i> , w/o red tint)	All robes for regional temple abbots (rank dependent) and head clerics at honzan seminaries. *(1695 <i>Shikie jōmoku</i> : 20 yrs. honzan training & temples with privileges)
Light blue <i>sensei</i> 浅青	All robes for regional temple abbots (rank dependent) (1801)
Light brown “incense” <i>kōiro</i> 香色	All robes for regional temple abbots (rank dependent) (1801)
Black <i>kuro/koku</i> 黒	All robes for regional temple abbots (of low rank). Text notes that black is common for <i>jikitotsu</i> . *Only color for <i>monto</i> abbots
*Pale yellow <i>usukiuro</i> 薄黄色	Regional temple abbot with less than 20 yrs. training (1695)
*Light <i>ukon</i> yellow <i>asaki</i> 浅黄	Regional temple abbot with less than 20 yrs. training (1695)

In addition to the robes, the liaisons also discussed the kinds of *kesa* (five-, seven-panels) worn with each robe, and the use gold and silver thread for elaborate *kinran* brocade work that would have adorned them. There are further notes regarding undergarments, including the colors and design patterns various kinds of *hakama* 袴 (divided skirts) that were worn from the waist. The section concludes with a short discussion of *shuji kesa* 種子袈裟, which were single strips of colored cloth that a cleric could wear around neck when going out of his temple or engaging visitors. The liaisons noted that this highly simplified form of *kesa* was more popularly called a “ring *kesa*” (*ringesa* 輪袈裟), and they expressed their regret that many Shingi clerics, too, adopted this particular terminology because it indicated a loss of sectarian identity. The conclusion of the vestment section ends with a poke at other schools: the *shuji kesa* was first created by Rigen daiji 理源大師, a Shingon cleric who undertook a form of mountain-centered training in Ōmine 大峰 that would later form the basis of Shingon-style Shugendō (*Tōzan shugendō* 当山修験道). Hence, its use by clerics in other schools was risible. This simple comment alone suggests the strong links between identities and vestment styles that informed early

modern clerical life.

There are equally detailed descriptions for colorful robes worn by other schools such as Tendai, Jōdo, Kogi Shingon, the various Zen schools, and the many branches of the Nichiren and Shinshū traditions, but I will briefly note that there are also descriptions of more somber pallets within the 1801-1802 accounts. From the late 16th century onwards the headquarter and head-branch approach to clerical reform among these schools was paralleled and philosophically countered by a movement that advocated continued adherence to Mahayana teachings with a renewed observation of the Indian monastic rules (*vinaya*).²⁰ In the Tendai school, this movement took root at Anrakuritsu-in 安楽律院 on Mt. Hiei (Bodiford 2005, Bodiford 2006), and the Jōdo cleric Reitan 靈潭 (1676-1734; the abbot of Shōrinan 聖臨庵 in Kyoto) pushed for the creation of a Jōdoritsu 浄土律 community (Dobbins 2005, 248-250). In the case of Shingon, the heritage of Shingonritsu 真言律 began in the 13th century with Eison 叡尊 (1201-1290) at Saidaiji 西大寺 in Nara (Groner 2005), which was revived by clerics such as Myōnin 明忍 (1576-1610) and Jōgon 浄嚴 (Ueda 1976). Nestled amidst the 1801-1802 documents are descriptions of vestments worn by these *ritsu* movements, which indicate these clerics saw clothing and color as an important medium for expressing the principles of their practices. Drawing upon views of the 7th century Chinese cleric Daoxuan 道宣 who argued against using silk for Buddhist vestments because it necessitated the taking of life, early modern *ritsu* practitioners affirmed their rejection of such cloth. Furthermore, they adopted restrained color that centered on black/grey and magnolia. These movements and their sartorial decisions centered mainly in Kansai area temples, and only the Shingonritsu movement grew to the point of becoming an independent organization,²¹ but their clothing and coloring practices also reflected the value of such material items for delineating unique identities that separated these particular clerics from other ordained Buddhist (Nishimura 2003, 68-69).

To close this section with a final observation, aside from the institutional value of robe usage, the importance of vestment history and robes to clerical identity was evinced by a growth in early modern Buddhist research on this topic. Driven by reformist ideals as well as a renewed desire to explore (and remember) heritages and origins (*yuisho* 由緒) through archival studies, academically inclined monks compiled studies of *kesa* and the meaning of vestments. Examples of these texts are in Bussho kankōkai 1980, and much of this literature remains to be studied in English. However, Diane Riggs's work on the Sōtō cleric Menzan Zuihō 面山瑞方 (1683-1769) who studied the ideals of *funzōe* and vestments that had been handed down in that school (2007, 2015), and the analyses of *kesa* by the Shingonritsu cleric Jiun Onkō 慈雲飲光 (1718-1804; Watts 1982; Riggs 2004, 318-319) indicate the strong interest was transsectarian in nature. (Also see Izutsu 1974, 225-226, for a list of such texts.)

The Implications of Buddhist Vestments and Ranking in Early Modern Villages

While the primary purpose of clerical training was to foster insights into Buddhist principles and practices that hopefully would guide the cleric to an awakened life, these educational systems were also fundamental enculturation processes that transformed a layperson into an accepted member of a clerical community. In the case of Shingi Shingon, many future abbots began this transition in their teens when they took the basic ordinand precepts (*shamikai* 沙弥戒) under the guidance of a regional branch temple abbot. At this temple and later at a regional *danrin* hall, they underwent the *shido kegyō* 四度加行 that began with the practice of fundamental ritual processes in the “eighteen paths” (*juhachidō* 十八道) and cumulated in the *goma* 護摩 fire ritual. They would also engage in textual studies and participate in summer and winter *hōonkō* 報恩講 gatherings that celebrated the memory of Kakuban with lectures and formalized debates. After training for several years in these rural facilities, a Shingi cleric moved to the Kansai in order to reside in one of the headquarter training halls. During this sojourn, Kantō clerics met contemporaries from other parts of Japan while studying under their schools’ highest prelates. This experience also included participation in large ritual events in which the assembled clerics of every rank were arrayed in the colored robes and elaborately decorated *kesa* that demarcated their position in the Shingi hierarchy.

Aside from ambitious clerics who aspired to one of the headquarter abbacies, many trainees eventually returned to their home province or they were introduced to temples in another region. They would then seek an abbatial appointment and begin the process of socially integrating into a localized clerical community that either centered on a particular head-branch network or shared a “dharma” identity (*hōru* 法類). Unlike many modern temple residents who are literally born into the Buddhist order and do not leave their temple/homes, early modern clerics could and did move from one abbacy to another, but most stayed within the same region. Once situated, these connections would define the cleric’s social place and ritual functions for the remainder of their lives.²² Since most temples relied upon lay support for their economic survival, post-monastic training included the development of good social sense (Vesey 2021), and village-level ritual matters and spiritual needs (for example, communal rights to pray for rain [*amagoi* 雨乞]) might require trans-sectarian interactions with neighboring Shugendō clerics, or shrine priests who were certified by a Shinto sacerdotal lineage.

Even if the grandeur of village level rites and social interactions did not reach the levels displayed in elite clerical circles, sensitivity to colored robes and their significations remained high. This issue was particularly pressing for the abbots of *monto* temples that were, as noted above, at the bottom of every head-branch network. A *monto* was an independent entity (not a cloister or sub-temple a larger temple), but unlike a branch it was not recognized by the Shingi Shingon

School as a site for an abbot who was a fully accepted member of a head temple's "Dharma lineage" (*hōryū* 法流).²³ As result, even if the *monto* abbot had personally met the level of training and experience required for a branch abbacy, the lowly rank of his temple prevented his initiation of ordinands, the teaching of the *shido kegyō*, and the performance of the "spiritual guide" (*indō* 引導) role that was crucial to Buddhist funeral rituals. In the language of Buddhist vestments, this low stature was reflected by restrictions against wearing colored robes. Hence, black was his only option.

In addition to these socio-religious implications, there were economic ramifications as well, because *monto* temples often had small land holdings (a source of rent income) and insufficient lay patronage. A *monto* abbot's life was often austere, and over the passage of time, poverty led to many unstaffed *monto* (Tanaka 2019, 68-93). Given these circumstances, advancement to branch status was of great importance, because the elevation in rank not only stabilized the institutional identity of the temple and its abbot, it also allowed him to perform key rituals expected by the laity. The process for advancement required filing petitions with the *monto*'s head temple and the Shingi liaisons. Financial support from the laity was vital in order to offer donations (usually in gold *ryō* 両 coins) to the head temple, the liaisons, and other clerical authorities, but if the petition was successful, the head issued its permission of acceptance (*inka* 印可) into its dharma lineage. At that point, the newly made branch abbot could file another petition requesting permission to wear a colored robe. This, too, would involve another long process in which the petition went from the head temple to the *monzeki* Ninnaji and Daigakuji via the four liaisons (Kushida 1964, 1015). The conferral of color thus carried the imprimatur of imperial recognition that ritually connected branch temple abbots in the countryside to the socially and religiously clerical elite in the capital.

The interest in branch ranking among *monto* is reflected in Udaka Yoshiaki's study of the temple network at Sokushōin 息障院, a Shingi Temple in the Yoshimi 吉見 area of upper Musashi 武蔵 Province (modern Saitama Prefecture) (Udaka 1999, 559-590). According to a 1675 (Enpō 延宝 3) register, Sokushōin's extended network had over ninety *monto*. Starting in the early 1700s, twenty-four of them ascended to branch stature (see the chart on pp. 585-590). One example of a subsequent colored robe petition was filed by the abbot of Kannonji 観音寺. This was a branch of one Kongōin 金剛院, and in 1772 (Meiwa 明和 9) he along with four other abbots asked Kongōin to support their respective colored robe petitions to Sokushōin, the head temple of them all.²⁴ Sokushōin in turn forwarded the petitions to the Shingi liaison Shinpukuji in Edo, and in the tenth month of the same year, the liaison acknowledged Kannonji abbot's right to wear one kind of colored robe: incense.²⁵ (The records do not indicate the form of robe, but given the general use of the *jikitotsu*, that may have been the style.)

The process just described reflects an amalgamation of personal and institutional processes for fashioning identity through the medium of vestments. Given the sensitivity to hierarchy that inflected publicly displayed relationships in early modern society, it is perhaps not surprising that the expansion of rural Shingi networks generated other mechanisms for enhancing temple/clerical stature that often resulted in access to a larger assortment of robe colors. One option was elevation to *danrin* training hall status (Kushida 1964, 1030-1031), and a temple's successful transformation was marked by permission for these abbots to wear more than one colored robe. Another option for advancement was the distinct "status of temple with a direct [link to the] liaisons" (*jikiburekakuin* 直触格院) designation that allowed these abbots to wear two kinds of colored vestments, with the provisos that both their years of training at a headquarter and their temple's holdings (as measured by *shuin* 朱印 land grants and subordinate branch networks) met specific minimum standards (Kushida 1964, 1031-1034).²⁶

The importance of such sartorial distinctions is evident in petitions for increased stature and enhanced coloration that were submitted to clerical authorities. While the circumstances varied, the statements offered in support of greater recognition indicate a strong consciousness of the implications of color in rural society. A case in point centers on a 1858 petition by the Shingi temple of Kōshōin Jingūji 迎撰院神宮寺 in the Shichōno village 四丁野 (modern Koshigaya-shi 越谷市, Saitama Pref.).²⁷ A branch temple of a Kongōin 金剛院 in Nakajima 中島 (modern Miyashiro-machi 宮代町, Saitama Pref.), Kōshōin had a vermilion seal land grant from the Tokugawa valued at five *koku* 石,²⁸ and it was the administrator of the Hisaizu shrine 久伊豆神社 (the tutelary shrine 鎮守 for seven villages in the area) and the nearby Sengensha 淺間社 (KSS, 442). Its precincts had two gates, a main hall, an abbot's residence, a *shoin* 書院 and a belfry. It supervised five branch temples of its own, and it provided ritual services to 450 households in the area (300 "funerary" lay families, and 150 "prayer" lay families).²⁹ Its abbot in 1858, Jōsan Shūgen 貞算秀玄 (43 years old), had been a Shingi cleric for twenty-nine years, twenty-three of which he spent at Hasedera in training (p. 442). In all respects, Kōshōin had a firm lay support base and its abbot was an important figure in the village's ritual life.

Kōshōin was the senior branch in the Kongōin network, and based upon a desire to affirm its standing, in 1774 (An'ei 安永 3) Kōshōin's abbot successfully petitioned for "direct liaison" stature, hence he and his successors could wear robes of incense and light blue (p. 448). However, in subsequent years five other Kongōin branch temples had enhanced their ranks, and thus Kōshōin's distinctive standing within the Kongōin network had slipped.

An even greater challenge to its identity was posed by the Jōdo School temple of Tengakuji 天嶽寺 in the Koshigaya post-station 越谷宿. A large institution with 1500 *danka* families, its abbot was permitted to wear two kinds of colored robes during village rituals. Even

though Kōshōin was the local tutelary shrine administrator and it had a secure lay support base, Shūgen, the abbots of his own branches and the leaders of his lay families petitioned Kongōin for an upgrade to *danrin* stature and the right to wear the pale yellow color robe. According to their reasoning, since prayer rituals depended on the extent of lay fervor and the rituals reflected the dignity of the deity, the petitioners wanted to raise the stature of Kōshōin and bolster the dignity of his ritual presence by adding to the color range of his abbatial vestments. This petition was signed and sealed in the fifth month of 1858 by not only Shūgen and a representative of Kōshōin's branches, but also by one Yabei 弥兵衛 (representative of the Hisaizu shrine supporters; *ujiko sōdai* 氏子総代) and Kakutarō 角太郎, the *danka* representative (*danka sōdai* 檀家総代) and the headman (*nanushi* 名主) of Shichōno village (p. 441). In short, village leaders were strongly supportive of the campaign to acquire the additional color ranking.

From the petitioners' point of view, acquisition of *danrin* stature and a third robe color that distinguished this honor was an effective counter to the challenges posed by the neighboring Jōdo temple, and it would allow Kōshōin to reassert its *primus inter pares* position over fellow Kongōin branches. However, it also posed a challenge to Kongōin's authority as a regional head. The request thus necessitated negotiations between Kongōin and its branch that resulted in Kōshōin's promise that its abbots and younger clerics would still join Kongōin's own training activities and other rituals. At that time, Kōshōin's abbot would NOT be allowed to wear the pale yellow robe of a *danrin* abbot. In other words, Kōshōin's abbot was expected to maintain the level of deportment and decorum that kept him in his place as a Kongōin branch. Furthermore, Shūgen's twenty-three-year tenure at Hasedera met the training criteria for a *danrin* temple abbot. If his successors did not have the minimum of twenty years mandated by Shingi temple codes, however, then regardless of Kōshōin's rise in stature, Kongōin would not allow an unqualified Kōshōin abbot to petition for his own use of the pale yellow vestments (p. 422).³⁰ Finally, Kōshōin needed to obtain the acquiescence of other Kongōin network temples for the petition.

In addition to the investment of time and energy for such negotiations, the rank and robe petition was a financially costly venture. Not only was Kōshōin expected to continue its annual contributions to Kongōin (in fact, expectations for Kōshōin's level of support rose [p. 444]), the petition process itself required extensive outlays of money and non-monetary gifts to Kongōin, Sokushōin, the four Shingi liaisons, and to the two headquarters. Costs for travel to Edo also added up, as did gratuities to lay people who facilitated the process. In the end, the quest for the pale yellow colored robe cost a total of over 154 *ryō* in gold (p. 451).

One question that is not answered in the Kōshōin records is, "Who actually made the robe?" Shūgen or one of his lay supporters could have sewed his vestments, but the need for consistent dyeing and the handling of materials like gold thread required specialized knowledge.

By the Edo period there were shops run by lay families who specialized in Buddhist robes. Indeed, Izutsu Gafū, the author of several sources cited herein, was the eighth-generation manager of such a family-run enterprise that opened in 1705 (Izutsu 1989, 454). There is no indication of local manufacture in the documents, and Kōshōin might have been purchased the robe from a specialized shop.

Simultaneous Fashioning of Lay Identities through Clerical Vestments.

The end of the Kōshōin documents notes the support for the robe campaign provided by the *danka* leader and village headman Kakutarō. In recognition of his efforts, Shūgen granted him and his wife the highly ranked *ingō* 院号 prefix to grace the first part of their Buddhist death names; these titles were complemented by the bestowal of the *koji* 居士 and *daishi* 大師 suffixes to Kakutarō and his wife respectively. Furthermore, their descendants would be granted the same honors in perpetuity. Given the time, effort, and perhaps the money that Kakutarō contributed while very much alive, Shūgen's choice of postmortem recognition may seem ironic, but death names were in fact highly valued by some peasant families. Not only did the titles suggest a better rebirth for the deceased, they also served as ritually validated means for publicly displaying the family's pretensions to higher stature among other members of their village community. These Buddhist naming conventions and other memorial formats were derived from samurai and aristocratic precedents, and thus their usage reflects the cultural diffusion of elite modes for expressing the socio-cultural capital of patronage among the peasant and townsmen communities in early modern society (Vesey 2021).

While impoverished or less-than fervent *danka* families probably resisted such high expenditures for vestments, colored robes constituted another medium for some peasants to publically display their prominence as cultural patrons. The fashionscape of many rural villages centered on simpler cloths and muted hues (often indigo and browns) (Harada 1990, 129), but peasants, too, certainly could appreciate the value of finer materials and more lustrous colors obtained from finer dyes. As the market economy grew in from mid-period onwards, peasant families with the economic wherewithal sought such clothing in order to enhance their cultural capital. Among the leading village families, sensitivities to the social nuances of sartorial distinctions was reflected by headmen and other administrators who heightened their stature by using some kinds of silk cloth (Harada 1990, 127) and wearing the *kamishimo* (衤袴; a two-part ensemble consisting a sleeveless top with stiffened shoulders and hakama) during communal rituals.³¹ Interactions with samurai practices also stimulated interest in finer clothing, and children who entered service in samurai homes later brought back examples of samurai fashions into

commoner culture (Ikegami 1989, 137). With respect to colors, from the period of the 8th shogun Yoshimune onwards, an emphasis on samurai frugality encouraged restrained color schemes, while the rising influence of urban sophisticates who favored subtle hues further contributed to a general society-wide preference for darker clothing (Ikegami 1989, 152). Samurai restrictions played a role as well in the formulation of village fashionscapes. Intent on maintaining their theoretical dominance over the social order, samurai administrators were wary of commoners who “dressed above their status.” Since clothing can be a technology of control (a factor reflected into the power of uniforms), they issued sumptuary codes against the use of silk and similar cloth, gold embroidery and certain dyes that they deemed too extravagant for peasants and townsmen in non-leadership roles.³² To similar effect, rules for hairstyles and fashion were imposed in order to demarcate membership in one of the outcaste groups (Ikegami 1989, 145-146). In order to pursue their desired fashions, inventive commoners strove to circumvent these restrictions through tactics such as using finer materials for the interior lining of clothing, or by purchasing expensive cloth with somber tones but striking patterns (Dalby 1993, 52-53, 271; Ikegami 1989, 143). In a society in which visual display reflected family stature and status identity, such subtlety was an effective method for personal expression and implied resistance to the samurai mandated social order.

In contrast, the regulation of Buddhist clothing was left to each school, and thus the definition and regulation of distinctive vestments was integral to Buddhism’s religious and social identity. Within the context of village life, the brighter colors and vestment traditions of the clergy thus occupied a sartorially unique sphere within the fashionscape of these communities. In addition, as Jones and Stallybrass note, clothing is a physical medium for wearing memories in the sense that such objects reflected the process of their creation and the values attributed into them by the creators (2003, 3). When applied to the context of village life, this insight suggests that the rural cleric’s vestments functioned as a mnemonic device that evoked the inherited legacy of Buddhism as a whole and put it on public display for the laity. (The robes also manifested sectarian identities when worn in the presence of clerics from other Buddhist schools.) As a bearer of a particular religious heritage, the robes thus visually reinforced the clergy’s claim of elevated spiritual stature above the secularity of mundane lay existence, and they were thereby integral to the physical fashioning of the cleric’s identity. Socially speaking, like the gates and walls that separated temple precincts from lay homes, these robes demarcated the social and religious boundaries between the cleric and the layperson. This creation of boundaries applied to other religious officiants like Shugendō and Yoshida Shinto clerics who might also dwell in the same village. They, too, were of course keenly aware of the meanings and legacies born by their own vestments, and they sought similar forms of certification within their traditions.³³

And yet, even while the robes fostered separation and distinction, the story of

Kakutarō's strong support for the campaign to invest Shūgen with more colors reminds us that as patrons, faithful lay families exerted an important influence in early modern clerical life. This was more commonly seen in their control over some aspects of temple management, but in this case Kakutarō and the shrine *ujiko* representative Yabei were directly involved in intra-school clerical procedures for fashioning the very body of their temple abbot. Therefore, the robes were not just a means for reconfiguring Shūgen's identity within Shingi, but in an age when commoners had learned to use clothing choices as a means for self-expression, they also gave his patrons an opportunity to refashion their own place in Shichōno village society.³⁴ By physically dressing Shūgen in a new color, Kakutarō, Yabei and their families figuratively dressed themselves with the symbolic value borne by those same vestments. Since robes were venerated, their participation in the process allowed them to engage in the production of a sacred object even though they would never be able to wear it themselves. Finally, the right to the color was certified by clerical authorities, hence the robe itself and the documents bearing their seals provided these Kantō villagers with an indirect yet prestigious link to the world of clerical and social elites in Edo and Kyoto.

The physical cloth of the robe thus interwove the lives of Shūgen and his lay patrons, and its hues colored the identity of the laity who helped to pay for it. In that sense, the vestment for signifying difference became a physical and ritual medium for bridging the very clerical/lay, sacred/secular divides that it formally represented. Furthermore, following the successful outcome of the process, Shūgen, his successors and his lay supporters could then display the new color robe as a symbol of their communal identity, their faith and their aspirations to other villagers and ritual leaders such as the abbot of the Jōdo School temple Tengakuji. Perhaps the *kami* of the temple's two shrines were pleased as well.

Concluding Observations

Thousands of kilometers and thousands of years separated the origins of Buddhist vestments on the Gangetic plain and the 19th century events at Kōshōin. Strictly speaking, colored vestments such as the one sought by Jōsan Shūgen and Kakutarō were a far cry from the self-sewn robes made from scraps of befouled cloth in "impure" colors that ancient Indian Buddhists supposedly wore to signify their separation from society and adherence to a path of ascetic practice. If we listen once more to Buyō Inshi, the polychromatic nature of early modern Buddhist vestments signified a fall from this pure ideal of early Buddhism.³⁵ When viewed as a practice that facilitated Buddhism's integration into different Asian cultures, however, the long-term adoption of colors reflects the potential of religious clothing as means for fostering the adaptation of Indian Buddhist

principles into different cultural milieus. In his introduction to fashion theory, Bernard notes that, “meaning is constructed and, therefore, subjected to endless change and revision, as cultures change and as members of those cultures change.” Meaning is thus a product of constant negotiation, and within this framework, “negotiation or interaction between values and objects is one of the ways in which an individual is (or is not) constructed as (or as not) a member of a cultural group” (79-80).

There are many examples cited above of Buddhist clothing being used as a mechanism for creating and expressing distance between clerics of different traditions and the clergy as a whole from the laity, but the employment of familiar clothing practices can become the means for negotiating the reduction or elimination of perceptions of otherness, too. This facility is illustrated in Elisha Renne’s study of the Roman Catholic Church in the Yoruba region of Nigeria. In this case, Catholic missionaries and believers used traditional cloth from the region for their clothing. By doing so, they were able integrate the Catholic faith and local ethnic identity and thereby create a sense of unity between the church and Yoruba society that assuaged local concerns and potential resistance to the church’s presence (2000, 20-21). The same function as a medium is evident in the historical transmission of Buddhist vestment forms, examples of which in this article are the *henzan/kun*, *hō/mo*, and *jikitotsu* developed by Chinese Buddhists and the *soken* and *donjiki* that emerged from the interplay between Buddhism and the Heian court. The same may be said of the Chinese expansion of the original Indian Buddhist color pallet that centered on muddied *kāṣāya* to include colors more vibrant hues such as scarlet, purple and yellow, and the subsequent Japanese creation of distinct color schemes for each school. Indeed, Japanese systemization of vestment hues—one of the most colorful of Buddhist traditions—was created over many centuries by the simultaneous Buddhist enculturation of Japan and the Japanization of Buddhism.

Lastly, even though the laity did not actually wear these robes and were generally seen as the spiritual subordinates of the home-renouncing cleric, the evolution of Buddhist vestments suggests their strong, if not always overt, influence over the entire course of East Asian Buddhist history. Whether the patron was a 7th century Chinese emperor who initiated the practice bestowing purple vestments to elite clerics (a practice that Japanese rulers adopted), or a Japanese peasant one thousand years later who signed his name to a petition for his abbot’s advancement to a rank demarcated with yellow, these supporters have been integral to the processes for creating Buddhist clerical identity. For these lay supporters, the robes of clerical distinction were an expression of their own social, religious, and cultural capital. This combination of separation and integration via vestments is a facet of Buddhist culture that continues to this day.

Notes

- 1 The history of East Asian Buddhist garments is told in many languages. Since this is a study of Japanese practices and space is limited, I will mainly rely upon Japanese pronunciations, but depending upon the content, I may provide one or more of the following: original Sanskrit terms; Chinese transliterations for Sanskrit and the pronunciation of that transliteration in Japanese; a representative translation of the term in Chinese with its Japanese reading. Some Sanskrit terms have more than one Chinese transliteration; again, due to space, I provide only one transliteration.
- 2 The begging bowl and shaving of the head are also important signifiers of clerical identity, but I will only focus on robes in this article. The following discussion is based on Faure 1995; Kieschinck 2003, 86-107; Hume 2013.
- 3 Joseph 1986 discusses the implications of uniforms. In particular see Chapter 5.
- 4 There are too many varieties of robes and colors to represent with photographs in this article, but I have included at the end of the Bibliography a link to the website of the Füzoku hakubutsukan 風俗博物館 which displays many of the items mentioned below.
- 5 Buswell and Lopez 2014, 424, 752,922; Izutsu 1974, 14-20; Yoshimura 2009; Kieschnick, 2003, 87-93.
- 6 The Korean and Tibetan traditions are also important spheres of East Asian Buddhist clothing history, but herein I will focus on Chinese precedents and Japanese adaptations.
- 7 A shorted version of the *soken* called an *utsuho/utsuo* 空衣 appeared later. The name (literally “empty robe”) indicated the wearer had not received an official rank from the court. The color was normally black, but white was worn for state-oriented rituals. Another variant became the “pure robe” (*jōe* 淨衣) worn by Tendai practitioners of the 1000 day training regimen on Mt. Hiei (Izutsu 1974, 134-136). Another example was the *kyūtai* 褻代, a robe for reserved for retired emperors who took tonsure and for clerics from the imperial family or aristocratic houses (Izutsu 1974, 115).
- 8 The three main ranks of the state system were “prefect” (*sōjō* 僧正), “administrator” (*sōzu* 僧都), and “preceptor” (*risshi* 律師). The highest rank was “great preceptor” *daisōjō* 大僧正 (Shioiri 1979, 103-104). Takano 1989, 145-156, discusses these ranks and the appointment process in early modern Buddhism and Shugendō.
- 9 Izutsu 1993 has many photos depicting the evolution of *kesa*. Alas, these are black and white only.
- 10 Kyoto National Museum 2010 extensively studies Zen *kesa* and the traditional accounts of their use.
- 11 See examples in Ishii and Harafuji 1998. See pages 94 (item 46), 379 (item 2), 393 (item 17). A daimyo could also expel a cleric from a temple within his domain (*taimin* 退院), but that alone did not give him the right to disrobe the cleric; Ishii and Harafuji 1998, 383 (item 5).
- 12 One example arose in regards to the clerical usage of a neck scarf that could be pulled over the head (*mōsu* 帽子). According to a Kansei 寛政 9 (1797) bakufu response to such a query, if the cleric was an abbot of a temple of appropriate rank to use the *mōsu*, then it was acceptable to wear it even when meeting a domain lord. See Ishii and Harafuji 1998, 133 (item 106).
- 13 *Fure* were bakufu codes and orders, and the term *furegashira* literally means “the one in charge of *fure*.” Since the abbot and clerical staff of these temples functioned as intermediaries between the bakufu and bakufu-recognized religious organizations, I will refer to them as liaisons. (In this respect they were similar to the *densō* aristocratic houses that linked the bakufu and the court in Kyoto.) The four Shingi Shingon liaisons were Mirokuji 弥勒寺, Enpukuji 圓福寺, Shinpukuji 真福寺, and Konshōin 根生院. Udaka 1999, 649-695, surveys the liaison system.
- 14 The establishment of the “head-branch” system is perhaps the most highly discussed topic in studies of early modern Buddhism. See Udaka 1999, 408-646, for a detailed discussion of how these systems emerged in the Kantō.
- 15 The following summarizes the discussion of robe colors in Kushida 1964, 1040-1042, 1068-1072. The Daigoji code dating from 1615 (Genna 元和 1) is in Date 1930, 336.
- 16 There are some discrepancies in Kushida’s description of these lower ranked colors. On p. 1040, he has yellow (黄色), light incense (浅香色), incense (香色), and black (黒), but on p.1068 the four colors are yellow (saffron),

pale yellow (薄黄色), light *ukon* yellow (浅黄色), and incense. I am unable to further refine these lists with the material available to me, and it since the shifts in hues between the middle colors is subtle, there may be more overlap between the lists than is apparent by the names alone.

- 17 In this passage, I have given an English translation, followed by the original Japanese term and other notes in the original regarding tint descriptions. I have added my comments in brackets to clarify the relationship between yellow and light *ukon* yellow.
- 18 These compendia of clerical practices are in Ichishima 1907.
- 19 The inclusion of Gojiin here indicates the legacy of Ryūkō's institution remained long after his temple had lost its unique standing as a "super liaison."
- 20 Among the various codes translated into Chinese, the *Four Part Vinaya* (四分律) from the Dharmagupta tradition was an important source for Japanese precept revival efforts (Bodiford 2005, 7).
- 21 The headquarters was Saidaiji and the liaison temple was Jōgon's Reiunji 靈雲時. This was also the head of Shingonritsu in the Kantō, and it filed the 1802 account on behalf of the whole school. In contrast, the 1801 Jōdoritsu description was filed by Zōjōji officials, while the Tendai liaison offices at Kan'eiji filed the 1802 account of Anrakuritsu-in practices. Both Zōjōji and Kan'eiji had deep ties with the Tokugawa house and thus they epitomized the position of state-recognized *kanji* temples 官寺 during the Tokugawa shogunate.
- 22 Hōzawa (2004, 71-135; 2015, 12-44) draws upon data from Shingi temples in what is now modern Chiba Prefecture to examine the dynamics of temple life within a regional head-branch network. The 2015 article surveys ranking practices in Shingi (16-18). A much older article by Sakamoto (1974) also discusses the influence of local temple associations (*kumiai* 組合) and sectarian links on the social ties that bound together village level abbots.
- 23 Kushida 1964, 101; Udaka 1999, 639-646, illustrates the importance of Dharma lineages to temple identity. Other schools, too, had low ranked temples that were faced with the challenges posed by limited means.
- 24 In other words, the hierarchy was Sokushōin (regional head)→Kongōin (Sokushōin branch)→Kannonji (Kongōin branch).
- 25 Udaka and Tokugana 1983, 159, items no. 228 and 229.
- 26 Still another marker of distinction was the "dual abbacy of a cloister" (*inshitsu kentai* 院室兼帯) system that linked regional temples with cloisters at Ninnaji, Daigoji or Daikakuji that had been founded by imperial princes who took Buddhist ordination (Kushida 1964, 1034-1037). These gradually became empty, but officials of these elite institutions allowed rural abbots to assume the honor of simultaneously holding the cloister abbacy. Unlike the elevation to *danrin* stature or the special treatment for liaison branches, this was a private honor, but there are indications that abbots used it to wear robes when they did not meet other standards required for such vestments.
- 27 The data for this case is from a compendia of documents entitled "Danrinkaku usukiuro jikaku ryūki" 檀林格薄黄色寺格留記 in *KSS*, 440-452. According the *SMF* (vol. 10, p. 152) Kōshōin was re-established in 1534 (Tenbun 天文 4) by a cleric named Ken'ei or Ken'yō 賢榮, and the Tokugawa bestowed the land grant in 1591 (Tenshō 天正 19). In the *SMF*, the village is written as 四町野。
- 28 One *koku* equals 180.4 liters of rice; therefore, the land grant's purported value was 902 liters of rice per annum. In theory one *koku* was sufficient to feed a person for a year. This grant was untaxed, so while not a large amount, it was an important factor in Kōshōin's fiscal base.
- 29 To briefly explain the lay family support structure in early modern Japan, the Tokugawa bakufu mandated Buddhist clerical affirmation of lay compliance with its prohibitions against Christianity and certain Buddhist movements. Families registered with a temple, and in exchange the certification and Buddhist funeral and memorial rituals, the lay families provided financial support. These families were called *metuzai danka* 滅罪檀家. Other families might support a temple in exchange for non-death related prayer rituals. These families were *kitō danka* 祈祷檀家. See Vesey 2021 for a fuller discussion of how these families interacted in the management of temple affairs.
- 30 Note that Shūgen was not asking for the yellow robe level, even though he had met the personal criteria. This

is not explained in the text, but the choice of pale yellow over yellow was probably due to his temple's lower position under Kongōin and perhaps a lack of other needed qualifications.

- 31 For example, the Saitō family (headmen of a village in Musashi Province) notes that they had acquired the right to wear the *kamishimo* at public events as a marker of their stature within their village. See Hōzawa 2004.
- 32 Nishimura 1980 provides a summary of such codes promulgated by the bakufu and six daimyo domains. With respect to the bakufu, it issued more restrictions for urban dwellers than for peasants, but in other domains with smaller urban populations, the opposite was true.
- 33 To cite but one example, the possibility of acquiring aristocratic-style vestments was one factor that motivated rural shrine officiants to seek certification from the Yoshida lineage of Shinto clerics. See Maeda 2003, 68-70.
- 34 Although kabuki theaters and districts like the Yoshiwara were very different spaces from village temples, their cultures were marked by the use of brightly colored fashion. As such, they shared with Buddhist temples the quality of being distinct yet accessible venues for affluent displays of commoner patronage.
- 35 The early modern advocates of the *ritsu* movement signaled a similar stance through their adoption of robes in only muted colors such as grey.

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Abbreviations

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(This is part of the Izutsu Group, which began with the Izutsu hōeten 井筒法衣店 in Kyoto.)