

Reframing Children's Dress in Late Qing China: Historiographical Trends and an Image-Based Morphological Framework

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ABSTRACT

Children's clothing occupies only a minor place in studies of Chinese dress, despite marked changes in material and social life that accompanied warfare, foreign intervention, treaty-port growth and administrative reform during the late Qing (1840–1911). This study reviews how scholarship has represented children's dress, assesses recurring evidentiary problems and develops a morphological approach suited to published images. Searches covered the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), Wanfang Data, the Web of Science Core Collection and Scopus. After refining the results, removing repeated records, screening bibliographical information and examining full texts, 30 Chinese-language journal articles were retained. Four intersecting strands emerged: chronological, institutional and typological studies; work on vernacular and regional traditions; accounts of modernisation and social change; and research based on museum objects or collection documentation. Across these strands, adult dress categories are often transferred to children's garments, while motifs and symbolic meanings receive more attention than construction. Variable terminology, uncertain dating at the level of individual objects and incomplete visual or collection records further impede comparison. The proposed procedure responds by coding constructional details visible in an image and recording the legibility of each structural area. Visual description is kept separate from information supplied by catalogues or institutional records and from historically qualified interpretation. The findings support an understanding of late Qing children's dress as a material field related to age, bodily care, domestic practice and cultural expectation. Applied within the limits of each source, the framework enables more

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transparent comparison of dispersed visual evidence
without treating inference as observation.

1. Introduction

This article uses 1840 to 1911 as a working periodisation for the late Qing rather than as a claim that everyday life changed abruptly at either boundary. Its opening follows the treaty-port settlement that emerged from the First Opium War (1839–1842), including the Treaty of Nanjing. The end point is the 1911 Revolution, followed by the emperor's abdication in February 1912. Military conflict, foreign intervention, commercial development and administrative reform have all challenged Qing rule at different times. The Self-Strengthening Movement, the New Policies and the 1905 termination of the civil service examination system all constituted part of the state's uneven response to these pressures (Rowe, 2009).

As a result of these changes, the clothing also changed accordingly. Treaty-port trade and the expansion of urban markets increased the circulation of textiles, decorative practices and images of dress, and illustrated publications spread sartorial information more widely (Finnane, 2008; Silberstein, 2020). Established garment forms and household production continued to exist alongside new materials and styles. Therefore, this period is more suitable for studying the coexistence and selective adaptation of traditional and modern clothing than for assuming an all-new system.

Most research on Qing and early modern Chinese clothing has focused on adult clothes related to the court, official life, urban consumption and public reform. Dress often functions as an indicator of social status, gender and political ideas or changes (Finnane, 2008; Steele & Major, 1999) in this literature. Studies of Republican citizenship extend this account beyond 1911, but they illuminate subsequent continuity more readily than the late Qing conditions themselves (Harrison, 2000). Children's clothing appears in general histories and visual surveys, but it is usually included in the large-scale chronological division and not studied in depth as a subject. (Shen, 1981; Zhou & Gao, 1984; Bao, 2006).

Separate attention to children's dress is warranted because age may have influenced both the use and construction of clothing. Work on paediatric knowledge and childhood in late imperial China describes understandings of bodily vulnerability, illness, care and protection that differed according to age (Furth, 1987; Hsiung, 2005). Object and collection publications also record garments and ornament associated with familial aspirations for prosperity, long life and good health (Bao, 2006; Wang, 2017). Such evidence does not prove that children possessed an autonomous sartorial system. It does, however, make it necessary to ask whether growth, reliance on carers and domestic routines affected fit, layering, access, fastening and ease of dressing. These relationships require comparison of material features rather than inference from outward resemblance to adult clothing.

The formal corpus considered here comprises database-identified journal articles; books, dress histories, museum catalogues and methodological works are used only for historical or analytical context. The journal literature is read across four related areas: chronological and typological classification; vernacular and regional traditions; accounts of modernisation and social change; and studies based on museum or collection

material. Across these areas, comparison is hindered by variable terminology, imprecise object dating and uneven image documentation. Publications may describe textiles, colours and motifs in detail while giving little consistent information about openings, collars, fastenings, panel relationships, edges or visible reinforcement. Differences in viewpoint, resolution, object identifiers and collection records create further problems of verification. Material-culture and object-based approaches are useful here because they require visible garment properties to be examined as evidence rather than treated only as illustrations of a wider argument (Taylor, 2002; Kuchler & Miller, 2005; Riello, 2011).

The article therefore has three aims. It first reviews the ways in which late Qing children's dress has been framed in journal scholarship, then assesses the evidentiary conditions that limit comparison, and finally sets out an image-based morphological procedure for recording visible garment features. The procedure separates observation from documentary support and historically informed interpretation; it is presented as a proposal for future verification, not as an established type system. In this way, the review positions children's dress as an age-differentiated material field connected with the body, household care and cultural meaning, while keeping its claims within the limits of the visual and documentary sources.

2. Review Method

2.1. Review Design

This study employed a critical integrative review to examine how children's dress has been documented, classified and interpreted in scholarship relevant to Qing and late Qing China. An integrative review was appropriate because the literature draws upon heterogeneous forms of evidence, including surviving garments, museum objects, paintings, photographs, illustrated publications and historical documents (Torraco, 2005; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). The review combined descriptive mapping of the literature with a critical assessment of the relationship between scholarly claims and the visual, material or documentary evidence used to support them. Statistical aggregation was not attempted because the publications did not report comparable quantitative outcomes.

The numerical review corpus was restricted to journal articles. Scholarly monographs, museum and collection catalogues, historical surveys and methodological publications were consulted for contextual and analytical purposes but were recorded separately and were not counted as included studies.

2.2. Information Sources and Search Strategy

Journal literature was identified through four databases. Chinese-language publications were searched in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and Wanfang Data, while English-language publications were searched in Scopus and the Web of Science Core Collection. The search period extended from 1 January 2000 to 14 July 2026, and the final searches were conducted on 14 July 2026. Chinese- and English-language searches were undertaken separately because their terminology and indexing practices were not directly equivalent.

The search strategy combined three concept groups: a Qing-period term, a child-related term and a dress-related term. The principal Chinese-language search structure was (“清代” OR “晚清” OR “清末” OR “清末民初” OR “近代”) AND (“儿童” OR “婴幼儿” OR “童子”) AND (“服饰” OR “服装” OR “童装” OR “童衣” OR “童服”). Object-specific searches additionally used terms such as “坎肩”, “马甲”, “背心”, “肚兜”, “围涎”, “围兜”, “童帽”, “虎头帽”, “童鞋” and “虎头鞋”.

The corresponding English-language search structure was (“Late Qing” OR “late Qing dynasty” OR “Qing dynasty” OR “Qing China” OR “late imperial China”) AND (child* OR boy* OR girl* OR infant*) AND (dress OR clothing OR costume* OR garment* OR apparel OR “children’s wear”). Additional object terms included kanjian, waistcoat*, vest*, dudou, bellyband*, bib*, “tiger-head hat*” and “tiger-head shoe*”. Search syntax and truncation were adapted to the requirements of each database.

The original search log included both the primary search and extended exploration expressions. A query was kept in the core subset only if it contained the necessary historical, child-related and dress-related concepts, or if it combined a historical term with an explicitly child-specific garment. Broad searches without a dress component were excluded in the query refinement. All available search logs were retained, including the search expressions, databases, search dates and numbers of hits. Database field settings were reported only when they could be verified from the saved search history. The search log has 1,190 query-level hits, and some of them are repetitions of the same publication with different expressions. Query refinement eliminated 753 hits generated by exploratory or overly broad searches. The remaining 437 core-query hits were distributed as follows: 154 from CNKI, 213 from Wanfang Data, 6 from Scopus and 64 from the Web of Science Core Collection.

2.3. Eligibility Criteria and Study Selection

Articles met the five conditions to be included. First, they had to be journal articles published in Chinese or English between 1 January 2000 and 14 July 2026. Second, children's clothes and accessories, representations of clothed children or closely related dress customs needed to be the research subjects. Third, they had to address Qing or late Qing style clothing, late Qing-Republican continuity, or a broader historical category, such as modern China (jindai), in which historical children's clothing, images or object groups formed a substantial and evaluable body of evidence. Fourth, sufficient full-text information had to be available to identify the research object, evidence base and principal arguments. Finally, the article had to contribute historical, visual, material or methodological evidence relevant to the review questions.

The principal historical scope was 1840–1911. Articles covering both the late Qing and Republican periods were eligible when their late Qing evidence could be identified or when the cross-period material was used to examine historical continuity or methodological comparison. The term “近代” was not automatically interpreted as referring to the late Qing; its chronological meaning was assessed from the full text. Design-application studies were retained only when historical children's garments, images or object groups constituted a substantive part of the analysis. Articles that only used historical motifs as generic inspiration for contemporary children's wear were excluded.

Master's theses, doctoral dissertations, monographs, book chapters, conference papers, newspaper articles, reviews and museum catalogues were not included in the numerical corpus. Studies only on Republican-era or contemporary clothing were also excluded. General studies of adult dress or decorative motifs were only eligible if they contained an identifiable and substantial analysis of children's clothing.

Bibliographic information was normalised the titles, author names, publication years and DOI data (if available) of the bibliographic information. Out of the 437 core-query hits, 219 duplicates were removed, and 218 unique records remained. Title, abstract and bibliography screening initially excluded 166 records. Publication-type verification then identified 15 master's or doctoral theses among the 52 remaining candidates. These were reclassified as bibliographical-stage exclusions, resulting in a corrected total of 181 exclusions and leaving 37 journal articles for full-text examination.

Full-text files of all 37 candidate records were obtained and evaluated and evaluate them with a standardised screening form. The same eligibility questions were applied to all the records, and for each excluded record, a single main exclusion reason was provided. The boundary cases were re-examined after the decision rules had been finalised.

After full-text review, seven articles were excluded: one because the evidence was limited to the Republican era, three because they mainly studied contemporary design or application without in-depth analysis of historical children's clothing, and three because no discernible link to Qing or late Qing children's clothing could be confirmed. Therefore, the final corpus contained 30 Chinese-language journal articles. No English-language articles met all the eligibility requirements. Figure 1 shows the process of article selection, and the reasons for excluding some full-text papers are listed in Table 1.

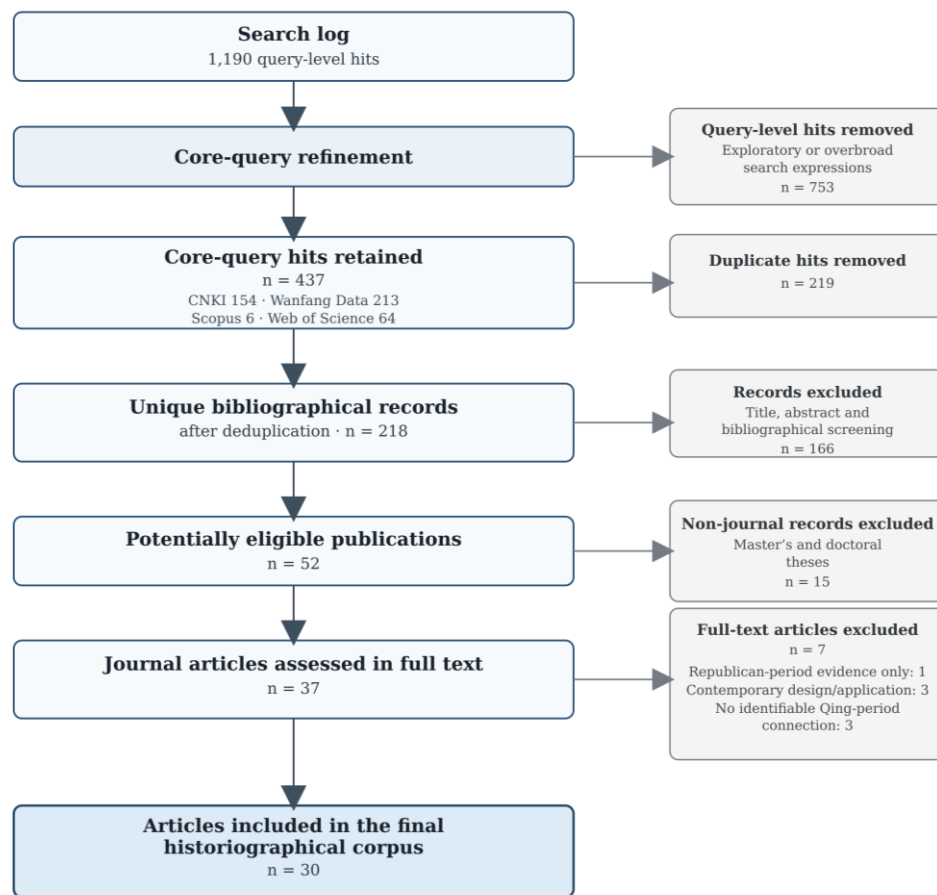
Table 1: Full-text Articles Excluded, with Primary Reasons

Study	Article title	Journal	Code	Primary reason for exclusion	Year
Feng Jingyu; Liang Hui'e	Design and application of modern Shanxi tiger-head hat elements in cultural and creative products	Shishang Sheji yu Gongcheng [Fashion Design and Engineering]	FT3	A late Qing photograph is used only as contextual illustration. The tiger-head hats subjected to formal analysis are not individually dated or otherwise identifiable as late Qing, and the principal outcome is contemporary cultural-product design.	2024
Wang Fang	Innovative application of traditional Chinese embroidery in modern and contemporary children's dress design	Meishu Jiaoyu Yanjiu [Art Education Research]	FT6	The article focuses on the application of traditional embroidery in contemporary children's dress design. Historical examples are used primarily as design inspiration rather than as a substantive Qing or late Qing corpus.	2022
Lu Jie	Forms and design concepts of modern Han	Jiangxi Fuzhuang Xueyuan	FT3	The article is an independent publication, but its historical discussion uses the broad	2018

Study	Article title	Journal	Code	Primary reason for exclusion	Year
	folk children's hats	Luncong [Jiangxi Institute of Fashion Technology Review]		category modern China (jindai) without establishing an identifiable Qing or late Qing evidentiary scope.	
He Beilu	Innovative design of modern Han folk children's dress	Yishu Keji [Art Science and Technology]	FT3	Historical examples are grouped under the broad term modern China (jindai), while the analysis relies mainly on author-generated contemporary designs. No identifiable Qing or late Qing evidentiary scope is established.	2017
Li Rong; Zhang Jingqiong	Styles and structure of Western-style children's clothing in modern China	Fuzhuang Xuebao [Journal of Clothing Research]	FT6	The garment evidence begins with the 1912 Republican dress regulations and concerns Western-style children's clothing in the Republican period. No pre-1912 case is analysed.	2017
Cao Shanshan; Xia Fan	A study of playful pattern design in modern children's clothing	Xiandai Zhuangshi (Lilun) [Modern Decoration (Theory)]	FT6	The article concerns contemporary children's brands, consumer preferences and pattern-design methods and contains no historical Qing or late Qing corpus.	2014
Li Xiaolu; Niu Tiantian	Application of plant motifs from modern Han folk dress in contemporary children's wear design	Mei yu Shidai: Chengshi [Beauty & Times: City]	FT6	The historical material concerns plant motifs in Han folk dress generally, whereas the children's-dress evidence is limited to contemporary design application. No historical children's garment is analysed.	2014

Note: One primary reason was assigned to each article. FT3 = no identifiable Qing or late Qing scope; FT6 = Republican-era or contemporary material only. Within FT6, one article concerned Republican-period evidence and three concerned contemporary design or application. English translations of article and journal titles are supplied for identification.

Figure 1: Flow of Database Searching and Article Selection



Note: The figures reported before deduplication represent query-level hits rather than unique publications.

2.4 Data Extraction and Evidence Classification

An organised extraction form was used for all the included papers. The recorded contents included bibliographic details, language, historical and geographical scope, garment category, research object, methodological approach, type of evidence, museum or collection information, relevant pages and figures, main arguments, garment terminology, evidentiary limitations and relevance to the proposed morphological framework.

Data extraction was undertaken by the first author using the structured form described above. Each included article was entered as a separate publication record. No independent duplicate extraction was conducted. Entries requiring clarification, particularly those concerning historical scope, object identification and primary historiographical orientation, were revisited by the first author during the thematic synthesis.

The journal publication served as the main unit for inclusion. When multiple articles examined the same garment, image or collection object, they were saved as separate publications if they addressed different research questions or methodological problems. If it could be determined that the same object or image had been used repeatedly, then

each instance would be counted as a separate scholarly interpretation of the same historical evidence rather than an additional piece of independent object evidence.

2.5 Analytical Procedure

The first author read the 30 included articles iteratively and conducted the qualitative thematic coding. The analysis was informed by approaches to content analysis, visual research, material culture and dress history (Krippendorff, 2018; Rose, 2022; Schreier, 2012; Taylor, 2002). Attention was paid to the following: chronological specificity, identification of children and clothes, traceability of objects and pictures, suitability of visual documentation, and correlation between the claims made and the evidence provided. Therefore, the degree and range of the conclusions in the above papers vary. They were not turned into a numerical quality score and were not added to the exclusion criteria.

Based on the main research questions of each article, one primary historiographical school was selected for reporting in Table 2. The four orientations were chronological, institutional and typological research; vernacular and regional dress traditions; modernisation and social change; and journal studies using museum or collection evidence. Although a single article could cover all of the above contents, it usually had a particular focus according to the main research objective and the main type of evidence.

Table 2: Characteristics of the 30 Included Journal Articles

Study	Article title	Historical scope	Research object	Evidence type	Principal research orientation
Zhang Jingqiong; Sun Ningning (2008)	The symbolism of embroidered motifs and the decorative use of colour in modern children's clothing	Modern China (jindai); late Qing and Republican objects are not separated consistently at item level	Embroidered motifs and colour in children's upper garments, dudou, bibs, hats and shoes	Garments in the Jiangnan University Folk Costume Museum and published object photographs; visual and motif analysis	Vernacular and regional traditions
Xu Wenning (2012)	Dress characteristics across dynasties in ceramic images of children at play	Tang to Qing dynasties; Qing examples are included within a multi-period account	Clothing, accessories and hairstyles represented in ceramic images of children at play	Ceramic objects and published images; iconographic comparison across dynasties	Chronological, institutional and typological research
Luo Rong (2013)	Motif subjects in late Qing children's dress fabrics and their application	Late Qing; contemporary application is also discussed	Textile motif subjects used in late Qing children's dress	Published garment and pattern images with documentary literature; motif and design analysis	Modernisation and social transformation

Study	Article title	Historical scope	Research object	Evidence type	Principal research orientation
Li Yan (2014)	A study of children's bibs in modern China	Modern China (jindai); item-level dates are uneven	Children's bibs (weixian), including their forms, functions and decoration	Surviving garment images and documentary literature; descriptive and typological analysis	Chronological, institutional and typological research
He Beilu; Cui Rongrong (2014)	Artistic characteristics of animal forms in modern Han folk children's dress and contemporary innovation	Late Qing to Republican period; the collection is described as cross-period	Two- and three-dimensional animal forms in Han folk children's garments and accessories	More than 190 collection garments from the Jiangnan University Folk Costume Museum; visual classification and design practice	Vernacular and regional traditions
Lu Jie; Cui Rongrong (2015)	Forms and design concepts of modern Han folk children's hats	Modern China (jindai), mainly late Qing to Republican folk material	Forms, components and design concepts of Han folk children's hats	Collection garments and published images; component and typological analysis	Chronological, institutional and typological research
Lu Jie; Niu Li; Cui Rongrong (2016)	Decorative elements of modern Han folk children's hats	Modern China (jindai), mainly late Qing to Republican folk material	Decorative components, motifs, colours and techniques in Han folk children's hats	Collection objects and images with documentary literature; decorative analysis	Vernacular and regional traditions
He Beilu (2016)	Practical functions and cultural meanings of modern Han folk children's dress	Modern China (jindai), mainly late Qing to Republican material	Practical functions and cultural meanings of Han folk children's garments and accessories	Published and collection-based garment examples with documentary literature; functional and cultural interpretation	Vernacular and regional traditions
He Beilu (2016)	Decorative techniques in modern children's dress and their use in the contemporary ready-to-wear market	Modern China (jindai) and contemporary design application	Decorative techniques in historical children's dress and their contemporary use	Historical garment images and literature together with contemporary market and design examples	Modernisation and social transformation
He Beilu	A survey and	Modern China	Historical	Historical dress	Modernisation

Study	Article title	Historical scope	Research object	Evidence type	Principal research orientation
(2017)	analysis of contemporary design based on modern Han children's dress	(jindai) and contemporary design	Han children's dress elements and their adaptation in modern design	examples and contemporary design cases	and social transformation
Yu Qihe (2017)	A Qing dynasty red embroidered tiger-head hat in the Worcester Art Museum	Qing dynasty; the museum dates the object to approximately 1875	One red-ground embroidered tiger-head hat	Named museum object, collection record and object photographs	Museum and collection evidence
Xu Chunmei (2018)	Artistic characteristics and folkloric meanings of children's bibs in modern China	Modern China (jindai); late Qing and Republican material is not separated consistently	Children's bib forms, colours, decorative techniques and folkloric meanings	Surviving bib samples and photographs with documentary literature	Vernacular and regional traditions
Lu Jie; Cui Rongrong; Niu Li (2018)	Practical functions and emotional language of modern Han folk children's hats	Modern China (jindai); item-level dates are not specified consistently	Protective, decorative, ritual and educational functions of Han folk children's hats	Surviving objects, textual sources, customary accounts and field interviews	Vernacular and regional traditions
Deng Haijuan (2019)	Forms and functions of modern folk children's dudou and their influence on contemporary childrenswear design	Modern China (jindai) and contemporary design	Forms, functions and cultural meanings of children's dudou	Published object images and literature; formal and functional analysis with design application	Modernisation and social transformation
He Qiaomei; He Yang (2019)	A study of the forms of children's bibs in the late Qing and Republican periods	Late Qing to Republican period	The morphology, component forms and decoration of children's bibs	Surviving bib images and documentary literature; formal and typological analysis	Chronological, institutional and typological research
Tang Yang; Zhang Yi (2020)	A semiotic interpretation of patterns on children's dudou in modern China	Modern China (jindai); item-level dates are not specified	Figurative, auspicious and protective patterns on	Historical garment images and documentary literature; semiotic analysis	Vernacular and regional traditions

Study	Article title	Historical scope	Research object	Evidence type	Principal research orientation
			children's dudou		
Liang Hui'e; Ren Bingbing (2020)	Aesthetic characteristics and folkloric interpretation of children's shoes and hats in modern northern Anhui	Modern northern Anhui; late Qing and Republican material	Children's tiger-head shoes, tiger-head hats and related regional accessories	Field investigation, local gazetteers and physical samples	Vernacular and regional traditions
Deng Haijuan (2020)	Design application of tiger motifs in modern northern Anhui children's dress accessories	Modern northern Anhui; historical material and contemporary application	Tiger motifs in children's hats, dudou, shoes and other accessories	Physical samples and photographs, regional literature and contemporary design cases	Modernisation and social transformation
Li Qian (2020)	An illustrated guide to traditional children's dress in the Central Plains (II)	Qing to Republican period; several examples are identified as Qing or late Qing	Central Plains children's waistcoats and related garments	Garments in the author's collection and commissioned photographs; descriptive documentation	Museum and collection evidence
Wang Yayue; Li Xinhua (2022)	Artistic study and contemporary innovative design of patterns on children's dudou in modern China	Broad historical overview with a focus on modern China and contemporary design	Pattern subjects, meanings and redesign of children's dudou	Historical images and documentary literature; motif analysis and author-generated design	Modernisation and social transformation
Wang Yi; Hou Dongyu; Zhao Bo (2023)	Technical identification and structural analysis of a museum-held modern children's garment	Late Qing to early Republican period; the object is dated through material and structural analysis	One red figured-silk child's padded jacket	Museum object examination; microscopy, spectroscopy, chromatography, weave analysis and pattern measurement	Museum and collection evidence
Liu Huan; Lü Guanyang; Wang Ke (2023)	Changes in the styles of children's jackets and waistcoats in modern China	Modern China (jindai); 181 cross-period object and image records	Children's jackets (tonggua) and waistcoats (tongkanjian), including openings, collars and	A set of 181 object and image records from an illustrated collection; comparative style analysis	Modernisation and social transformation

Study	Article title	Historical scope	Research object	Evidence type	Principal research orientation
			sleeves		
Liu Chang (2024)	Historical and cultural foundations of the “dragon” motif in traditional children’s hats	Ming to Qing development, with a focus on the mid- and late Qing	Dragon motifs and three-dimensional dragon-head children’s hats	Historical texts and published object images; iconographic and cultural analysis	Chronological, institutional and typological research
Kong Lingqi; Wang Lin; Li Fangge (2024)	Educational motifs and innovative design in modern Central Plains folk children’s dress patterns	Modern Central Plains; item-level dates vary or are not supplied consistently	Children’s dress patterns associated with protection, upbringing and moral education	Documentary literature, object and image cross-checking, and contemporary design practice	Vernacular and regional traditions
Wang Yunfei; Li Yufei (2024)	A study of the forms of Jin-style children’s hats in the Qing dynasty	Qing dynasty; item-level dates are not supplied consistently	Jin-style children’s hats classified by form, structure and decorative arrangement	Object photographs and line drawings; formal, structural and decorative classification	Chronological, institutional and typological research
Cui Lingyun; Chen Lei (2025)	Dress symbols and visual narrative: Children’s imagery in Ding Guanpeng’s Qing dynasty Da Nuo Tu	Qing dynasty painting after a Southern Song model	Dress, masks and props worn by child performers represented in Da Nuo Tu	A named Palace Museum painting and comparison with its Southern Song model; iconographic and narrative analysis	Chronological, institutional and typological research
Wang Fuwei (2025)	Digital reconstruction of a Qing dynasty tiger-head hat through pattern-piece analysis and process parameterisation	Qing dynasty; one tiger-head hat object	Pattern pieces, component arrangement and craft process of a tiger-head hat	On-site measurement, photogrammetry, three-dimensional modelling, panel analysis and simulated sewing	Museum and collection evidence
Wang Fuwei (2025)	A low-cost, high-precision method for digitally modelling a Qing dynasty tiger-head hat	Qing dynasty; one tiger-head hat object	External geometry and digital model of a tiger-head hat	Multi-angle image capture, photogrammetry, three-dimensional modelling and digital measurement	Museum and collection evidence
Wu Zhiyu;	Children’s dress	Qing dynasty	Children’s	A named	Chronological,

Study	Article title	Historical scope	Research object	Evidence type	Principal research orientation
Hou Dongyu (2025)	in the Qing dynasty painting Shengping Leshi Tu	painting; pictorial evidence is treated separately from everyday dress practice	garments, accessories, colours and motifs represented in Shengping Leshi Tu	historical painting, documentary literature and image analysis	institutional and typological research
Wang Fuwei (2026)	Digital dynamic reconstruction of a Qing dynasty tiger-head hat	Qing dynasty; the same reconstructed tiger-head hat forms the technical case	Dynamic wearing and digital display of a tiger-head hat	Photogrammetry, three-dimensional garment simulation, digital character binding and motion display	Museum and collection evidence

Note: English translations of article titles are supplied for identification. “Modern China (jindai)” reproduces the broad chronological term used in the source article and should not be read automatically as late Qing. Historical scope records the period claimed or evidenced by each article; it does not convert undated or cross-period examples into direct evidence for 1840–1911. The principal research orientation identifies the dominant research question only; several articles also contribute to secondary orientations.

Among the above, some are directly visible features of clothing or pictures; others are supported by records from documentaries and collections; and the rest are interpretations made by the authors. Where visual, material or documentary evidence could not be identified with sufficient clarity, the relevant claims were treated as interpretative tendencies in the literature rather than as confirmed results for the clothing of children in the late Qing dynasty.

The synthesis also identified some repeated problems in the method, such as an inconsistency in clothing terms, a lack of dating at the level of individual items, uneven visual documentation and insufficient description of constructional features. The above results provided the foundation for the method of the image-based morphological framework in Section 5. The framework serves as an evidence-sensitive analytical proposal and is not to be regarded as a validated classification system.

Because screening, data extraction and thematic coding were undertaken by one reviewer, reviewer agreement could not be assessed. The use of explicit eligibility criteria, a standardised screening form and documented reasons for exclusion supported procedural consistency and transparency. Nevertheless, the absence of independent duplicate screening and data extraction remains a limitation of the review.

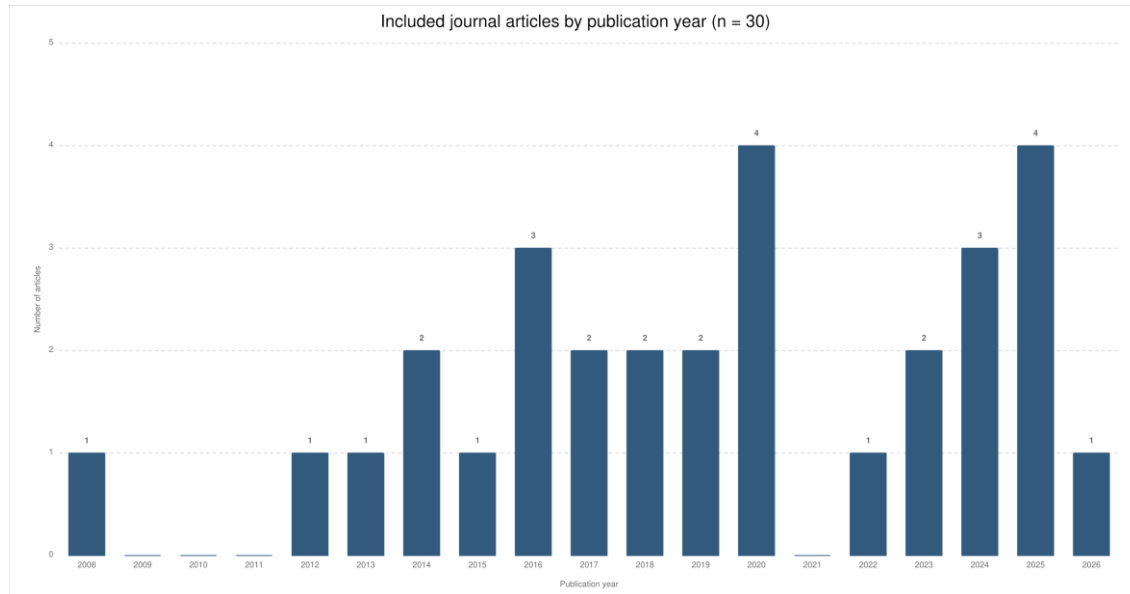
4. Results

4.1 Characteristics of the Included Journal Corpus

After full-text screening, 30 journal articles were included in the final set (Figure 1). All were published in Chinese between 2008 and 2026, and can be obtained from CNKI or

Wanfang Data. None of the English-language articles identified by Scopus or Web of Science Core Collection met all the eligibility requirements. Therefore, the results mainly show Chinese scholarship indexed in the selected databases. Consider the above deficiency in light of the results.

Figure 2: Distribution of the Included Journal Articles by Publication Year



The Articles had different degrees of temporality. Some of the examined objects, pictures or documents explicitly dated to the late Qing period, while others used broader terms such as "Qing dynasty", "late Qing and Republican periods", "modern China" (jindai) or "traditional children's dress". In several studies covering more than one historical period, individual late Qing examples could not be clearly distinguished from later materials. The review therefore used securely dated evidence to support observations concerning 1840 to 1911. Where the date of an individual example could not be established, the article informed the analysis of historiographical tendencies, terminology, research methods and evidentiary limitations, but was not cited as direct evidence of late Qing dress practices.

The corpus addressed several categories of children's clothing, including hats, bibs, *dudou*, jackets, waistcoats and shoes, together with embroidery and textile patterns. Some articles also examined representations of children's clothing in paintings, ceramic decoration and other visual sources. The evidence included surviving garments in museum collections, collection photographs reproduced in journal articles, historical paintings, ceramic imagery, technical analyses of fibres, dyes and weaving structures, pattern studies, and digital modelling and reconstruction. Museum and collection catalogues were excluded from the formal corpus, although journal articles using identifiable museum objects or collection records remained eligible. When the same garment or image appeared in more than one article, it was treated as the same item of historical evidence rather than counted as a separate case.

Across the corpus, decorative motifs, symbolic meanings, folk beliefs and contemporary design applications generally received closer attention than garment construction. Structural features such as Opening position, collar form, fastening position, panel arrangement, edge treatment and visible reinforcement were not documented through a

consistent set of criteria. The reporting of object dates, accession numbers, image viewpoints and object condition also varied considerably. These differences limited direct comparison across publications and collections.

Based on their research questions and main forms of evidence, the articles were organised into four overlapping historiographical orientations: chronological, institutional and typological research; vernacular and regional dress traditions; modernisation and social transformation; and journal studies using museum or collection evidence. These Orientations offer an analytical system for the review and do not mean that each article belongs exclusively to one category.

4.2 Chronological, Institutional and Typological Research

The articles grouped under this heading are concerned chiefly with chronology and garment type; sustained discussion of dress institutions is comparatively rare. Their classifications draw on such features as object category, outline, component arrangement, period attribution, decoration and context of use. Collectively, they bring hats, bibs, *dudou*, jackets, waistcoats and shoes into view as research objects in their own right, rather than as incidental illustrations in general accounts of Chinese clothing. The Hat has drawn some attention. Lu and Cui (2015) have associated the form of modern Han children's hats with the underlying design concept, and Wang and Li (2024) have studied the shape and ornaments of Jin-style hats from the Qing Dynasty. Analysis by Q. He and Y. He (2019) widened this typological concern to children's bibs from the late Qing and Republican periods. Further studies addressed bibs and their uses, waistcoats in regional collections, and clothing represented on ceramics (Li, 2014; Li, 2020; Xu, 2012). Liu (2024), working from a motif rather than a garment category, followed changes in the meanings attached to the dragon image on traditional children's hats. The resulting literature covers a broad range of objects and representations, even though its descriptive categories and chronological scales are not fully aligned. Some authors classify a complete garment, whereas others organise the material by component, motif or represented image. These approaches are all typological, but they do not necessarily produce equivalent units for comparison.

Two studies illustrate the additional value of structural and technical evidence. From 181 images, Liu et al. (2023) identified stylistic changes in children's jackets and waistcoats, while Wang et al. (2023) combined garment identification with the examination of fibre, dye, weave and structure in a museum-held padded jacket. Together, they show how typology can move beyond external appearance when material evidence is available. Material testing identifies properties that photographs cannot disclose, while a sufficiently clear image can still support comparison of visible construction. Such depth is not yet typical of the corpus, however, particularly in the treatment of openings, collars, fastenings and panel relationships.

Paintings supply another basis for identifying garment forms. Wu and Hou (2025) studied the children depicted in *Shengping Leshi Tu*. In a separate analysis of Ding Guanpeng's *Da Nuo Tu*, Cui and Chen (2025) investigated how clothing contributes to visual narrative. These works extend the source base beyond extant garments, but the forms shown in a painting remain mediated by artistic convention, narrative setting and the social identity assigned to the figures. They are consequently most useful when read as historically located representations rather than as unqualified records of everyday construction. Their evidence is particularly relevant to combinations of garments, bodily

presentation and context, whereas technical details visible only on an extant object usually remain beyond reach.

Historical surveys of Chinese clothing, together with scholarship on Qing court dress, supply the chronological vocabulary and institutional setting for this field (Shen, 1981; Zhou & Gao, 1984; Vollmer, 2002; Wilson, 2005). As these contextual works fall outside the 30-article corpus, their role here is interpretative. The included articles themselves offer little sustained analysis of regulations or court production specifically related to children. Overall, this body of work is strongest in object identification, initial classification and the retention of specialised terms. Its uneven structural description and differing chronological categories, however, make comparison between studies difficult and provide a clear rationale for a common set of morphological descriptors.

4.3 Vernacular and Regional Dress Traditions

The second group turns from formal regulation to dress associated with households, local craft traditions and regional collections. The areas that are frequently mentioned include Shanxi, Jiangnan, northern Anhui and the Central Plains, and the objects cover hats and bibs, *dudou*, shoes and embroidered garments. In this study, children's clothes are often understood through practical application; therefore, practices, decorations and culturally specific ideas about childhood are frequently encountered. The scale has changed; therefore, the clothing for daily life at home is not shown in the same level of detail in the documentaries on court dress. Therefore, the surviving objects and collection histories, as well as knowledge of local crafts, are used by researchers.

Research on headwear shows that it has a formal system and an interpretive function for family life. Lu and Cui (2015) collaborated with objects in the Folk Costume Museum at Jiangnan University to connect the components of Han children's hats with seasons, uses and popular beliefs. Lu et al. (2016) focused on the interaction of hat shape, embroidery and added ornaments, and later work considered protection, comfort and family atmosphere (Lu et al., 2018). Wang and Li (2024) have categorised the Jin-style hats of Shanxi based on the organisation of the crown, band and rear section. These accounts retain a useful vocabulary for regional headwear while showing that local designation may refer variously to form, collection history or craft association.

Bibs and *dudou* are discussed more directly in relation to dressing and care. Li (2014), Q. He and Y. He (2019), and Xu (2018) considered their forms, uses, ornament and folk meanings, whereas Deng (2019) linked the shape and practical role of the *dudou* to later design. He (2016a) similarly brought together utilitarian features and cultural associations in Han children's clothing. This literature places the dressed child within everyday household practice and directs attention to contact with the body, repeated laundering and assistance from carers. Yet claims about protection, growth or convenience are more persuasive when the article also explains how an individual garment was fastened, adjusted or worn.

Much of the remaining discussion centres on ornament. Zhang and Sun (2008) related embroidery and colour to particular areas of jackets, *dudou*, hats and shoes. Semiotic and regional approaches have subsequently been applied to *dudou* patterns, children's footwear and headwear from northern Anhui, and tiger imagery used in design (Tang & Zhang, 2020; Liang & Ren, 2020; Deng, 2020). Kong et al. (2024) studied the Central Plains pattern in the context of early education and moral education for adults. These

studies present a domestic language of health, prosperity, protection and moral education that is not easy to derive from dress codes. At the same time, a motif does not have to have a single meaning. Collect historical records, provenance and evidence of use to distinguish between contemporary interpretations and associations based on the object's own context.

Regional attribution also presents a problem. Labels such as Jiangnan, Jin style, Central Plains and northern Anhui may have originated from the present collection, stylistic similarity or an established craft lineage; however, none of these individually indicate where a garment was produced or worn. Movement in the market, inheritance and later collection may also take objects away from their places of use. Broad-period expressions such as "modern China", "traditional" and "folk" are also subject to the same restrictions. Rather than making the same qualification for all types of objects, the current review only considers regional and late Qing claims to be valid if chronology and provenance can be verified. Based on this, vernacular studies have expanded the history of children's clothing significantly, but more rigorous comparisons require more detailed information on the origins, forms and other attributes of the objects being studied.

4.4 Modernisation and Social Transformation

The third group is about change, but in practice, it has only altered the shape and colour of clothes and has not directly addressed political reform or urban consumption. The development of Chinese clothing history also includes changes in the market, public identity and new materials and styles (Finnane, 2008). The processes in the above articles occur less frequently, either as partial modifications of traditional clothing or as modern adaptations of historical styles.

The main evidence of the formal change relates to jackets and waistcoats. Liu et al. (2023) used a combined body of existing garments and pictures to find variations in openings, collars, sleeves and general styles, as well as the presence of features associated with Western clothing alongside traditional Chinese forms. The two exist simultaneously; one is an adjustment of the old work, but it does not indicate continuous change across 1840-1911. Therefore, the evidence is more suitable for identifying existing forms than for asserting an all-new shift in Chinese-Western children's clothing. Design application accounts for a relatively large portion of this literature. Luo (2013) studied the subjects of late Qing textile patterns and their later applications. Deng (2019) has investigated how the form and function of folk dudou can be applied in modern design, and He (2017) has studied modifications to traditional children's clothing for present-day practical and aesthetic needs. He and Cui (2014) and He (2016b) have handled animal imagery and decorative techniques in the same way. Regional studies have been inspired by the tiger motif and, by adding Dudou imagery and Central Plains patterns, new products or clothing designs have been created (Deng, 2020; Wang & Li, 2022; Kong et al., 2024). They generally concentrate on transferable visual elements rather than reconstructing a historical sequence; therefore, motif selection and design transformation have received more attention than dating or object biography.

These articles are less direct accounts of the late Qing transformation and more indicative of how the past is selected for design in the present. A motif may be altered in scale, colour, position and cultural connotation, and the original clothing is often identified only generally without an item number or place of production. Therefore, the

historical discussion and the current Design result should be considered separate layers of analysis. After separation, both are still useful: the first records the evidence selected to represent the past, and the second shows the values associated with that evidence in current design practice.

Together, the corpora suggest that history has been one of coexistence rather than simple replacement. Structural variation in jackets and waistcoats appears alongside the continuous use and later adaptation of vernacular silhouettes and ornaments (He, 2016b; Liu et al., 2023; Luo, 2013). The materials do not show that children's clothes changed in line with the public attire of adults, nor do they support a continuous chronology of structural development throughout the late Qing. Its first achievement is to identify particular places of adaptation and reinterpretation; claims about pace, distribution and reasons require a more reliable dated comparative corpus.

4.5 Journal Studies Using Museum and Collection Evidence

The fourth group is identified by its source basis: recognisable museum objects, institutional holdings and published collection records. Catalogues were not considered as independent works in the formal review, and only journal articles analysing collection materials qualified. Thus, the unit of inclusion is the publication rather than the object itself, and museum documentation is regarded as evidence.

Object-oriented articles provide the closest access to the existing children's clothing. Yu (2017) has studied a red embroidered tiger-head hat at the Worcester Art Museum, including its institution date, material, colour, embroidery and three-dimensional features. The museum dates the hat to around 1875, and its recognisable location helps readers connect the interpretation with a specific late Qing item. Other researchers have used university and regional collections to study embroidered clothing and Han children's hats and garments associated with the Central Plains (Zhang & Sun, 2008; Lu & Cui, 2015; Lu et al., 2016; Li, 2020). These publications make the otherwise dispersed objects available and sometimes keep terminology that is absent from general surveys. A collection name alone cannot provide the origin or initial circumstances of an item; the supporting record serves as the basis for the evidence.

The Technical Examination is also evidence. Wang et al. (2023) Used microscopy, spectroscopy and textile analysis on a padded jacket in the Yongqing Clothing Museum to connect fibre, dye and weave data with its structure. Measurements and material tests provide specific support for identification that general visual descriptions cannot. Research has shown how to conduct collaborations between textile science and dress history, but no single item can represent all types of clothing without parallel cases.

Digital work has also drawn attention to components and assembly. Wang (2025a) reconstructed a Qing tiger-head hat by pattern-piece analysis and process parameters; Wang (2025b) proposed a low-cost method for producing a high-precision digital model; and Wang (2026) extended the model to simulate movement and fabric behaviour. The above operations uncover connections that are not visible in a single published photograph and present reconstruction choices for debate. Nevertheless, the model is an analytical result rather than a replacement for the source object, and its form is determined by measurement, visibility and modelling decisions. The Digital Reconstruction will be more convincing if all parts of the reconstruction can be traced back to actual observations or stated technical assumptions.

Collection-based works are available in a different way. Analyses of Shengping Leshi Tu and Da Nuo Tu have placed children's clothing in represented bodies, activities and social environments (Wu & Hou, 2025; Cui & Chen, 2025). Technical studies of the surviving garments cannot verify fibres, seams or hidden constructions through paintings. Although these are visual environments, the interpretation of the paintings still needs to take into account pictorial conventions and storytelling purposes.

This difference also clarifies the various historical claims that each source can support, and documentation is strongest for material, colour, embroidery and symbolic content across these studies. (Lu et al., 2016; Yu, 2017; Zhang & Sun, 2008). Comparable information about overlap direction, collar shape, fastenings, panel joins, edges and reinforcement appears less regularly. Access to the object is also mediated by what an article reproduces: a front view may clarify the collar but leave the reverse, interior and joins unknown. Technical analysis and digital reconstruction answer different questions, and neither removes the need to identify whether a statement comes from observation, institutional documentation or inference.

Traceability therefore remains central to the value of collection evidence. Museum name, accession number, institutional date and a stable object reference allow later researchers to locate an item and recognise its reuse in other publications. When such identifiers are absent, provenance and duplication become harder to assess. Articles based on the same source object remain distinct contributions to the journal corpus, but they do not supply separate historical specimens. Museum-based research has thus made children's garments considerably more visible and, in its strongest examples, links interpretation to verifiable material evidence. More consistent source registration and structural description would make that evidence easier to compare and provide the immediate methodological basis for the framework developed in Section 5.

Table 3: Historiographical Orientations, Evidentiary Priorities and Methodological Implications

Historiographical orientation	Principal contribution and evidentiary focus	Limitation for the study of children's dress	Methodological implications
Chronological, institutional and typological research	Establishes chronological frameworks, garment terminology and classifications through dress regulations, historical texts, visual representations and surviving objects	Children's domestically used garments receive limited sustained attention, while classifications developed for adult or institutional dress may not fully account for age-specific forms	Examine children's garments as age-differentiated material objects while retaining established chronological and typological controls

Historiographic orientation	Principal contribution and evidentiary focus	Limitation for the study of children's dress	Methodological implications
Vernacular and regional dress traditions	Documents regional garment forms, materials, decorative techniques, folk beliefs and household meanings	Decorative and symbolic interpretation often receives greater attention than construction, while broad geographical or chronological labels can limit comparison	Record provenance, date, garment form and constructional features separately from interpretations of regional identity and cultural meaning
Modernisation and social transformation	Relates dress to changing production, markets, material circulation, Western influence and contemporary design adaptation	Historical evidence is sometimes used mainly to support modern design applications, and children's dress may be incorporated into general narratives of linear modernisation	Distinguish securely dated historical evidence from later adaptation and test claims of structural change through controlled comparison
Journal studies using museum and collection evidence	Provides access to identifiable garments, collection photographs, historical images, technical examination and digital reconstruction	Object identifiers, dates, viewpoints and constructional descriptions are unevenly reported, limiting verification and comparison	Record source details, object identifiers, feature visibility and common morphological variables, and distinguish observation from corroboration and interpretation

Taken together, the four orientations show that the principal difficulty lies not in the absence of relevant garments or visual materials, but in the uneven procedures used to describe, identify and compare them. Chronological specificity, object provenance, image quality and constructional terminology vary across the included literature. These findings provide the methodological basis for the image-based morphological framework introduced in the following section.

4. Discussion

The four strands of scholarship reviewed above have established a substantial record of Qing dress through regulations, regional practices, accounts of social change and surviving objects. Their limitations stem less from a lack of useful evidence than from the questions for which that evidence was assembled. For the study of children's clothing, three issues require closer consideration: the use of categories developed around adult dress, the relationship between material description and symbolic interpretation, and the different claims supported by objects, documentary records and images.

4.1 The Predominance of Adult Analytical Categories

Much of the literature on Qing clothing begins with adult garments used in official, public or market settings. Institutional research explains rank and ritual, while studies

of social transformation connect dress with gender, political identity, consumption and public appearance (Finnane, 2008). This work supplies an indispensable historical setting. Its units of analysis, however, do not fully address garments worn by children in domestic routines.

Children's clothing shared fabrics, forms and ornament with adult dress and was also marked by status, gender and locality. Studies of hats, bibs, jackets and waistcoats nevertheless show that age-specific garments were shaped by particular forms of use and construction (Lu & Cui, 2015; He & He, 2019; Liu et al., 2023; Wang & Li, 2024). Research on childhood in late imperial China further draws attention to bodily care, upbringing and protection (Hsiung, 2005). Dependence on carers, physical growth and household expectations may therefore have affected proportion, access, fastening and reinforcement, as suggested in studies of bibs, *dudou* and the practical functions of children's clothing (Li, 2014; He, 2016a; He & He, 2019). These relationships must still be tested through securely identified objects rather than inferred from the wearer's age. The relevant question is thus how common sartorial forms were adjusted for children, not whether childhood produced an entirely separate dress system. Similarity in appearance cannot establish structural equivalence, and the persistence of familiar motifs does not prove that the children's clothes remained the same. Similarly, the developments documented for adult public clothing cannot be directly applied to home clothes. Any claim that the children's clothes changed at a different time needs to be verified by comparing them with securely dated clothes under the same conditions.

4.2 Symbolic Interpretation and Constructional Description

Motif studies have uncovered a typical feature of children's clothing. Animals, flowers, mythical creatures and auspicious characters have been associated with protection, longevity, prosperity and other wishes for the family. Work on hats, bibs, *dudou* and embroidered garments shows how ornament has been situated within the emotional, pedagogical and cultural life of the household (Zhang & Sun, 2008; Lu et al., 2016, 2018; Deng, 2019; Tang & Zhang, 2020; Kong et al., 2024).

Meaning, however, is attached to a material object. A motif placed beside an opening may operate differently from one positioned on a collar, bib centre or outer border. Its scale and visibility are also affected by seams, fastenings and the way the garment sits on the body. Interpretation is therefore more securely grounded when the garment type, decorative location and adjacent structural features have first been identified.

Morphological description and cultural interpretation should be treated as connected stages rather than competing approaches. A common vocabulary for openings, collars, fastenings, panels, edges and visible reinforcement enables observations from different publications to be compared (Schreier, 2012; Krippendorff, 2018). It does not reveal a maker's intention or fix the meaning of an image. Instead, it states the material basis of the argument, after which historical and cultural evidence can be used to consider possible significance. Separating these analytical moves allows the reader to see where description ends and interpretation begins.

4.3 Differences in Visual and Material Evidence

The corpus draws on several distinct forms of visual and material evidence. Object-centred studies examine museum garments and institutional collection records (Yu,

2017; Wang et al., 2023), while other articles analyse paintings and ceramic imagery (Xu, 2012; Cui & Chen, 2025; Wu & Hou, 2025). Each source makes certain features accessible while withholding others. An object photograph may disclose an opening or fastening; a museum record may supply dimensions, date and provenance; an image of a clothed child may show proportion, layering and use. The evidentiary force of a source consequently depends on both its content and the conditions of its production and reproduction (Taylor, 2002; Rose, 2022).

Digital reconstruction can clarify the relationship among pattern pieces, component arrangement and assembly procedures. The resulting model, however, remains dependent on the measurements, image coverage and modelling decisions on which it is based (Wang, 2025a, 2025b, 2026). It should therefore be treated as an analytical reconstruction rather than as a direct equivalent of the surviving object.

Published images offer only partial access to a garment. Without reverse, interior and detail views, linings, internal seams, interlinings and concealed reinforcement remain beyond reliable identification. Folds, borders or overlapping layers can also create uncertain outlines. Such gaps should not be completed by analogy with a similar object. Absence can be assigned only if the image shows the pertinent area clearly; in every other case, the feature remains undetermined.

Source type should also be separated from the level of inference. Features in an image are directly observable features. Museum descriptions offer documentary information and clarify visual identification at the same time. Explanations of bodily growth, regional identity, protective purposes or social changes are interpretative claims that require further support. These forms of evidence may converge, but they do not have the same weight.

Finally, an observation is open to verification only if its source can be traced. Collection names, accession numbers, publication references, image viewpoints and resolutions help later researchers find an object, determine its visibility and recognise whether the same item has been reused. Recording the above details cannot compensate for missing views, but it sets the evidence scope of the analysis. The framework introduced in the next section will convert the above ideas into an operational procedure that distinguishes among visual observation, documentary support, reasoned inference, and matters that cannot be ascertained by means of the available source.

4.4 A Proposed Image-Based Morphological Framework

Based on the above discussion, a problem has emerged in practice: many published studies present children's clothing without indicating which attributes in the picture can be observed. Dress history focuses on construction and material form; visual-methods scholarship, however, emphasises the selective character of images and the circumstances of their production and dissemination (Taylor, 2002; Riello, 2011; Rose, 2022). The framework above will address these issues by recording visible features of the clothing and identifying the basis for each statement.

The proposal has a deliberately restricted objective. It does not disclose the concealed construction nor put forward an all-encompassing typology of late Qing children's clothing. It will keep the visual descriptions and information from documentary records in a separate but related section. It is 1840-1911 in history. Republican-era materials

can be used for comparison, but they only enter the late Qing dataset if the date of the garment can be confirmed.

4.6 Unit of Analysis and Source Registration

One record corresponds to one garment, whether an extant object or a visually discrete item shown in a historical image. If a photograph or painting depicts several children, separate records are created only for garments whose outlines and components can be distinguished. Layered, obstructed or poorly resolved clothing is not divided into speculative instances. A stable identifier connects every accepted record to its source. Different views of the same museum object are grouped under that object's record. Likewise, when several publications reproduce an identical garment or image, the later appearances are entered as additional references rather than counted as further historical cases. This object-level rule prevents the publication history of an item from inflating the corpus.

Source registration records the format of the evidence, holding institution, accession or catalogue number where available, stated date, provenance, garment category, publication and image references, and available viewpoints. Chronological wording is transcribed as supplied. Broad descriptions such as "modern China", "Qing dynasty" and cross-period labels encompassing both the late Qing and Republic are not narrowed unless corroborating information warrants that decision.

Different source forms permit different kinds of observation. Several views of a surviving garment may expose fastenings, edges and panel relationships; a collection entry can add dimensions, materials, provenance and institutional terminology. Photographs and paintings of dressed children may reveal proportion, layering and use, although pose, folds, overlap and resolution can obscure construction. Metadata therefore occupy fields distinct from visual description. If an observable feature conflicts with the catalogue account, both versions remain in the record and the discrepancy is flagged for checking.

4.7 Evidentiary Categories and Coding Sequence

The record uses three evidentiary categories: documentary corroboration, qualified interpretation and direct visual observation. They are not ranked from stronger to weaker. Rather, each names the basis on which a statement is made and allows the reader to follow how an interpretation was reached.

Direct observation is confined to what the available view discloses, such as the position of an opening, collar form, visible fastenings, panel relationships, edge treatment or external reinforcement. Descriptions refer only to the area shown, and left or right opening is determined from the wearer's perspective. A visible standing collar, for example, is an observation; associating it with a cultural tradition requires a separate historical argument.

Documentary corroboration covers information supplied by an identifiable collection record, catalogue entry, conservation report or scholarly object description. Dates, provenance, dimensions, materials, collection history and institutional garment names fall within this category. Agreement between documentary and visual information may

be recorded as corroboration. When they conflict, neither entry is silently discarded, and the nature of the disagreement is noted.

Qualified interpretation brings visual and documentary material into a historically informed explanation. It may address protective associations, domestic use, local practice, bodily growth or social change. The record must identify the evidence supporting the interpretation, and alternative explanations remain open when the sources do not permit a firm conclusion.

Coding begins with visible morphology and the condition of each structural area. A value remains undetermined if cropping, folds, obstruction, blur or inadequate resolution prevents a decision; absence is entered only when the relevant area is exposed clearly enough to show that the feature is not present. Catalogue and collection information are then added without overwriting the observation. Interpretive notes form the final stage and are linked to the evidence on which they rely. This order makes the analytical path auditable while retaining the role of cultural interpretation. Explicit variables and stated decision rules also follow established guidance for qualitative coding (Schreier, 2012; Krippendorff, 2018).

4.8 Morphological Variables and Visibility Controls

The variable set provides a shared descriptive level across garment categories without implying that jackets, waistcoats, bibs, trousers and skirts were made alike. A variable is completed only when its relevant area can be examined; where a feature has no relevance to the garment category, the record carries a not-applicable code.

Morphological form and evidentiary visibility are stored separately. Nominal codes describe alternative forms, counts register visible components, and presence codes record specified features. More than one response is permitted for fastenings or edge treatments when several forms appear on the same garment.

Four non-substantive outcomes prevent missing evidence from being converted into morphology. "Other" identifies a visible form outside the codebook and requires a short description. "Undetermined" denotes inadequate visual evidence, while "not applicable" indicates that the variable does not pertain to the item. "Absent" is reserved for a clearly exposed area in which the feature can be shown not to occur. Opening position and overlap direction are coded independently, as are collar form and neckline shape. Table 4 sets out the variables and their evidentiary controls.

Table 4: Proposed Morphological Variables and Evidentiary Controls

Variable	Operational definition	Coding format	Primary evidentiary basis
Opening position	Visible position of the principal garment opening: centre front, left front or side, right front or side, shoulder, partial opening, no visible opening, other or undetermined	Single response nominal	Direct visual observation

Variable	Operational definition	Coding format	Primary evidentiary basis
Overlap direction	Relationship between the left and right front sections, recorded from the wearer's perspective: right over left, left over right, symmetrical or non-overlapping, not applicable or undetermined	Single response nominal	Direct visual observation
Collar form	Visible construction of the collar: standing, flat or turned down, no attached collar, other or undetermined	Single response nominal	Direct visual observation
Neckline shape	Visible outline of the neckline: round, V-shaped, heart-shaped, straight, other or undetermined	Single response nominal	Direct visual observation
Fastening type	Visible fastening form, such as knotted button, plain button, toggle, tie, loop, hook or other identifiable type; multiple types may be recorded	Multiple response nominal	Direct visual observation; documentary information recorded separately
Fastening placement	Position of visible fastenings: centre front, shoulder, side, diagonal line, multiple locations, other or undetermined	Multiple response nominal	Direct visual observation
Visible panel joins	Number and position of joins distinguishable through visible seams, edges or changes in panel direction; this variable records visible joins rather than inferring the total number of pattern pieces	Count with descriptive note	Direct visual observation
Visible adjustment feature	Presence of visible ties, alternative fastening positions, extended overlaps or another observable feature that may permit adjustment; functional interpretation requires documentary support	Present, absent, not applicable or undetermined, with subtype	Direct visual observation
Edge treatment	Visible treatment of garment edges, such as binding, piping, facing, applied trimming or another identifiable treatment	Multiple response nominal	Direct visual observation
Visible reinforcement	Externally observable strengthening at an edge, join, fastening area or other apparent stress point	Present, absent, not applicable or undetermined	Direct visual observation, with technical documentation where available

Variable	Operational definition	Coding format	Primary evidentiary basis
Structural area visibility	Degree to which each relevant area can be examined: clearly visible, partially visible or not visible	Ordinal evidentiary control	Assessment of the available image

Note: The entries are working codes for comparative recording, not fixed historical types. An “other” value requires descriptive clarification; “undetermined” represents missing visual evidence; and “not applicable” is used when a variable has no relevance to the garment category. “Absent” may be entered only after the pertinent area has been seen clearly.

Visibility is judged independently for the opening, neckline, collar, fastening zones, edges, reinforcement points and the front and rear sections. A frontal view may support coding of the opening and fastenings while leaving the back unresolved, so partial visibility need not disqualify the entire record. “Not visible” describes the source image; “undetermined” is the coding outcome produced by that limitation. Neither term is equivalent to absence.

5. Limitations and Future Applications

The framework is designed for research based on museum photographs, published object views and historical images. Such sources make dispersed collections more accessible, but they cannot replace handling the garment or examining its physical structure, fabric and state of preservation (Taylor, 2002; Riello, 2011).

Exterior images rarely establish internal seams, linings, interlinings, fibre composition, concealed strengthening or hidden fastenings. Camera angle, folds, overlapping layers and low resolution may also withhold features that exist on the garment. The appropriate response is an undetermined value, not completion by analogy with a similar item. Images also have limits of interpretation: a collar or fastening may be described visually, but claims about protective purpose, regional identity, bodily adjustment or social change require evidence from dating, provenance, documentary sources and historical scholarship.

The codebook is not yet a validated empirical instrument. Its definitions should first be reviewed by dress historians, textile conservators and specialists in garment construction, then tested against garments photographed under varied conditions. Panel relationships, reinforcement and adjustment devices are likely to require more calibration than opening position or visible fastening placement.

After expert review, two researchers could code a pilot sample independently. Agreement should be examined variable by variable, because a single overall figure could conceal poorly defined categories or weaknesses in particular images. Disputed cases would inform revision of the codebook before use with a larger corpus. Until calibration and reliability testing are complete, the framework remains a methodological proposal.

Subsequent studies should begin within a defined garment class, such as bibs and *dudou*, waistcoats (*kanjian*), jackets (*ao*), skirts (*qun*), overcoats (*gua*) or trousers (*ku*). Comparison among like objects offers a firmer basis for identifying recurring

arrangements before relationships across categories are considered. Securely dated records may then be examined by use context or historical period. Similar forms do not in themselves establish a unified constructional system, and differences cannot be assigned to chronology, age or locality without supporting evidence. The framework's value will ultimately depend on image quality, workable decision rules and interpretations that remain commensurate with the sources.

6. Conclusion

This review reassessed how children's dress has been represented in scholarship on late Qing clothing. Full-text screening produced a corpus of 30 Chinese-language journal articles issued from 2008 to 2026. Collectively, these studies show that children's garments are present in museum collections, visual records and design research, yet the literature does not form a fully coherent field. Differences in dating, object traceability, garment terminology and image coverage often prevent evidence from being compared on equivalent terms. The marginal position of children's dress is therefore partly methodological: relevant sources exist, but they have seldom been described through a shared analytical vocabulary.

The synthesis identified four connected strands of research: chronological, institutional and typological studies; vernacular and regional traditions; modernisation and social transformation; and journal research based on museum or collection evidence. Collect clothing, learn about local customs, study historical changes, and preserve data related to the preservation of cultural relics. The Distribution of Attention is also uneven. Motifs, auspicious associations and contemporary adaptations are more frequently and in greater detail studied than openings, collar forms, fastening systems, panel relationships, edge finishes or reinforcement. There is still an asymmetry; thus, symbolic interpretation is required to link the culture with the specific material features.

Therefore, the proposed framework separates features in an image from information provided by collection records and from historically informed inference. Record observable morphology and assess visibility for each structural area; an obscured feature will be marked as 'undetermined' without invalidating the entire garment record. The purpose of the above operations is to enhance the comparability of published visual data, not to uncover hidden seams, linings, underlayers, fibres or internal reinforcements. Before widespread application, the variables and decision rules must be verified by experts, and pilot coding and testing for coding consistency are required.

The scope of the review is still limited by publication and databases. Museum catalogues, specialist books and other forms were used for context but were not included in the formal corpus; the included studies were Chinese-language articles obtained from CNKI and Wanfang Data. Therefore, the results only present indexed Chinese journal research and not the full international literature on late Qing children's clothing. In the future, this framework will be used to safely date and clearly identify groups of garments, and a comparison study based on different types and situations of these garments will be organised. This work may help us understand how construction, bodily needs, domestic care and cultural expectations were interconnected while maintaining historical claims in line with the available evidence.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Not applicable. This study is a critical integrative review based exclusively on published literature, museum catalogues and documented visual materials. It involved no human participants or identifiable personal data; therefore, institutional ethics approval and participant consent were not required.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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