Abstract  This talk explores the history of the scholar’s robe as a nexus of material culture and political power. It focuses on the controversial fabric—called ren衽—found pervasively in the Confucian canon and confirmed in archaeological findings. But for hundreds of years there have been disagreements and changes concerning which specific term is identified with which part of the robe, especially involving the use of ren in the scholar’s robe. The bulk of my analysis deals with two prominent scholars’ monographs on the robe: Huang Zongxi’s Investigation of the Robe (Shenyi kao) and Jiang Yong’s pointed rebuttal entitled Mistakes in “Investigation of the Robe” (Shenyi kao wu). The intellectual and political configurations of both works are analyzed in depth in order to contrast two options of cultural identity: Chinese superiority versus cosmopolitan universalism.