

# The Ceramic Creation to Express the Image of Ladies in the Republic of China Era

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## Abstract

The objectives of this research were to: (1) explore the cultural characteristics of the Republican era in China and the image and new thoughts of women during that period, and how they integrate with Jingdezhen's traditional crafts, specifically ink-colored gold tracing and blue-and-white water separation; (2) analyze the innovative combination and change of these traditional crafts characterized by the Republican era; (3) create Jingdezhen ceramic decorative plates that combine ink-colored gold tracing with blue-and-white water separation to express the image of Republican-era women.

This study utilizes various methods including literature review, field investigation, artist interviews, and artwork analysis. The findings indicate that: (1) the combination of ink-colored gold-traced porcelain and blue-and-white water-separated porcelain can effectively reproduce the attire and elegance of Republican-era women; (2) this combination presents a unique artistic effect visually and tactilely; (3) a series of ceramic art pieces themed around the image of Republican-era women have been created, reflecting the image and new thoughts of women from that era and blending with contemporary artistic aesthetics.

**Keywords:** Republican-era women; ceramic art; Jingdezhen; ink-colored gold tracing; blue-and-white water separation

## Introduction

Ceramic art, as a millennial cultural treasure of the Chinese nation, is not merely the production of handicrafts but represents a profound integration of culture, history, art, and aesthetics (Ye Hongming, 2011: 43-48). Jingdezhen, known as the "Porcelain Capital of the World," has seen its unique underglaze blue and gilded painting techniques passed down through hundreds of years, still shining with an enchanting luster. The core issue around which this research revolves is how to express the image of ladies from the Republic of China era through the medium of ceramic art. This study not only carries the mission of cultural heritage but also poses a challenge and exploration for modern artistic creation.

Within the traditional cultural context, the image of ladies during the Republic of China period represented the feminine appearance and spiritual pursuits of that era. Their images, as seen today, hold not only historical research value but also reflect the gradually awakening self-consciousness and independent personality of women amid social changes (Zheng Yongfu & Lv Meiyi, 2007: 162-167). Combining this image with ceramic art aims to convey and reproduce the cultural characteristics and aesthetic tastes of that era through the material medium, while also intensifying modern society's focus and contemplation on gender equality and the recognition of women's self-worth.

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Underglaze blue and gilded painting, as well as the blue and white segmentation, are traditional porcelain-making techniques of Jingdezhen, with a strong contrast of warm and cool tones in color and distinct differences in craftsmanship. Underglaze blue and gilded painting, which began in the late Qing dynasty and rapidly developed during the Republic of China period, is now highly sought after for its radiance (Li Wenyue, 2018: 76-85). The technique features delicate lines in black, red, and gold, with patterns and motifs rich in traditional Chinese significance, resulting in a product that is both elegant and magnificent (Hu Weijun, 2012: 46-47). Blue and white segmentation achieves a gradient effect reminiscent of traditional Chinese ink paintings, displaying varying shades of blue with a bright luster, and the finished product has a distinct ink-wash flavor. The combination of these two techniques presents a fusion of different crafts, the harmonious handling of the relationship between warm and cool colors, and the expression of themes characteristic of the era, making it worthy of study.

However, in contemporary ceramic art creation, despite the innovative development of technology and materials, effectively integrating traditional underglaze blue and gilded painting techniques, blue and white segmentation techniques with modern design concepts, and accurately expressing the unique charm and spiritual temperament of ladies from the Republic of China period remain challenges. Current creative practice still lacks deep exploration and artistic expression of the image of ladies from the Republic of China period, which limits the further development of ceramic art in terms of cultural heritage and artistic innovation.

Summarizing the above background, we can see that the importance of this research lies not only in the inheritance and innovation of traditional crafts but also in reflecting the social and cultural changes through artistic creation, thereby advancing the development of contemporary design art. The anticipated benefits of this research include enhancing the modern perception of traditional cultural arts, promoting and renewing the artistic expression of the Republic of China culture, and providing new creative ideas and sources of inspiration for modern ceramic artists, ultimately enriching the cultural and artistic landscape of China and the world.

## Research Objectives

1. To study the cultural characteristics of the Republic of China period and the image of women during that era, as well as the integration of new ideas with Jingdezhen's traditional ceramic arts, specifically the ink color outlining gold and blue-and-white segmented decoration techniques.

2. To analyze the innovation and changes in combining the features of the Republic of China era with Jingdezhen's traditional ink color outlining gold and blue-and-white segmented decoration crafts.

3. To create ceramic decorative porcelain panel paintings that combine Jingdezhen's ink color outlining gold and blue-and-white segmented decoration, expressing the image of women from the Republic of China era.

## Literature Review

Scholars have conducted numerous studies on the image of the Republican-era ladies, yet research combining this image with traditional ceramic techniques is scarce. According to the literature reviewed, researchers have studied relevant materials, which have offered ideas and assistance for the initiation of this study, playing a significant auxiliary role.

"Inheritance and Development of Ink-Color Porcelain Painting in Jingdezhen" (Huan Wang, 2018: 74-78) discusses the development of ink-color porcelain from the perspectives of its historical origins, craft characteristics, the status of modern ink-color porcelain art decoration, and talent cultivation in Jingdezhen ink-color porcelain art. This paper provides guidance for the initiation of this research and has been particularly helpful in the analysis of ink-color and gilding.

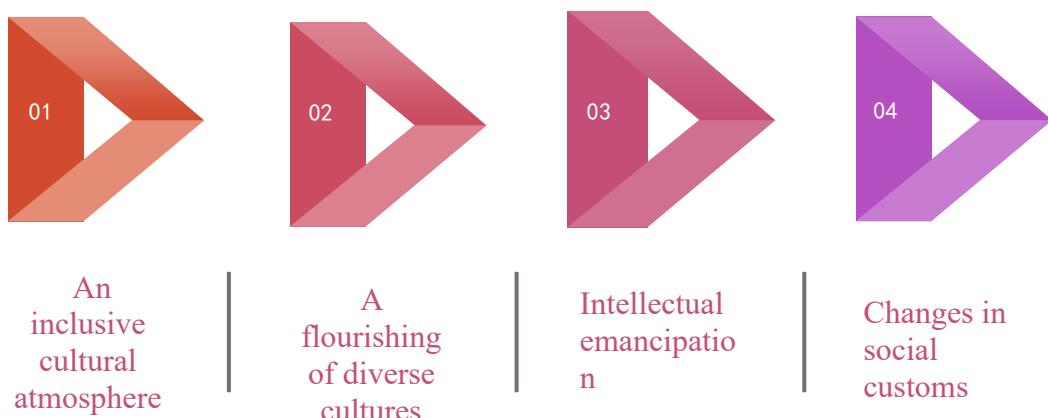
"Discussion on the Application of Blue-and-White Doucai in Comprehensive Ceramic Decoration" (Chang Le Zhou, 2020: 113-114) introduces the concept and expression forms of blue-and-white Doucai, a method of comprehensive ceramic decoration. During the Xuande period, a technique emerged that combined underglaze blue with overglaze polychrome enamels, referred to as "blue-and-white Doucai."

"Exploring the 'Beauty' of Qipao to Understand the Mass Aesthetic Psychology and Female Dress Aesthetic Trends During the Republican Period" (Yan Zhu, 2017: 92-95) The Republican era was a time of social turmoil, with the influence of Western culture impacting native Chinese culture, leading to a significant elevation in national thought, especially as a large number of women stepped into society and revolutionized fashion, sweeping China with a wave of clothing reform. This paper follows the transformation of women's clothing through the works of literary figures from the Republican period, examining the political, economic, moral, and lifestyle aspects of clothing culture, pondering the future development direction of Chinese clothing.

### Study on the Cultural Characteristics and Female Image of the Republican Era

#### 1. Cultural Characteristics of the Republican Era

During the Republican era (1912 to 1949), Chinese society went through upheavals and transformations, leading to unique cultural traits:



**Figure 2** Cultural Characteristics of the Republican Era (Xun Li, 2023)

(1) An inclusive cultural atmosphere: The Republican era was a time of cultural diversity, with traditional, Western, and ethnic cultures blending together to create a pluralistic cultural environment.

(2) A flourishing of diverse cultures: This period saw a boom in literature, art, film, music, and other fields, producing a plethora of excellent works and cultural figures.

(3) Intellectual emancipation and enlightenment: Some thinkers and intellectuals began advocating for modern thoughts, promoting social progress and national rejuvenation.

(4) Changes in social customs: With societal changes, women's status improved, educational opportunities increased, and social customs evolved.

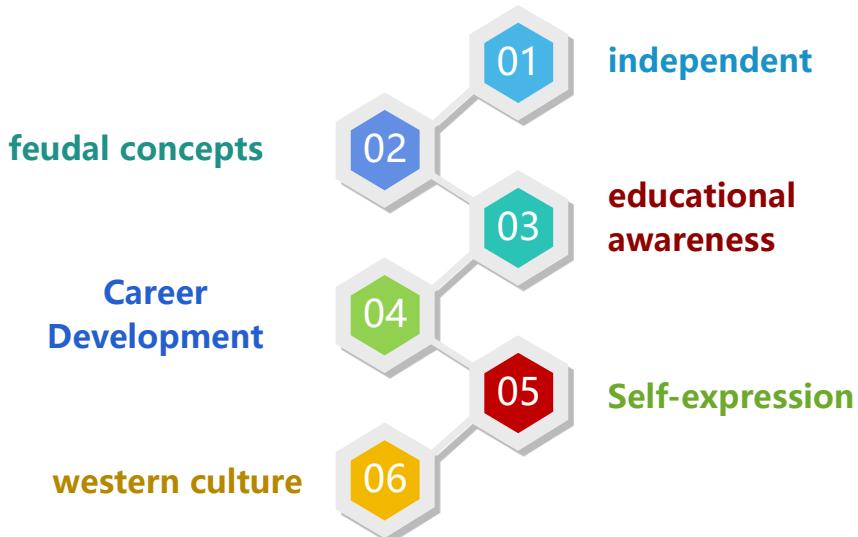
## 2. Female Figures in the Republic of China

Following the establishment of the Republic of China, the subsequent May Fourth New Culture Movement deeply embedded democratic and scientific ideas into people's hearts, slowly enlightening some entrenched feudal thoughts. During the Republican era, a large number of outstanding women emerged in the literary world. They stood out with their distinctive aesthetic tendencies and creative styles. In particular, they boldly infused their pursuit of love and the spirit of new-era women into their literary works, becoming a strong and refreshing current in the period of the Republic of China (Wu Xueqin, 2011: 56-58). Some were pure as a spring; others were passionate as a raging fire; they were the talented women of that era.



**Image 3** Lin Huiyin, Lu Xiaoman, Eileen Chang (Image source: Baidu Baike)

In the Republican era, women's new thoughts and aesthetic trends reflected the social transformation and the gradual elevation of women's status, mainly manifested in:



**Image 4** New thoughts and aesthetic trends of women in the Republican era (Xun Li, 2023)

(1) Women began to pursue independent and autonomous lifestyles, eager to participate in social, educational, and political activities, advocating for equal rights and opportunities. Women gradually started to abandon traditional feudal notions, advocating for freedom in marriage, equality in the family, and insisting on personal rights and dignity.

(2) Women gradually recognized the importance of education, began to actively receive education, and improved their own literacy and knowledge level. Women started to venture into various professions, pursuing career success and personal achievements, breaking the traditional notion that women were only supposed to play roles within the family.

(3) Women began to focus on individualized expression and aesthetic pursuits, demonstrating their personal style through clothing, makeup, and artistic creation, emphasizing individual uniqueness and creativity.

(4) The Republican era was deeply influenced by Western culture; women began to embrace new ideas and aesthetic standards, paying attention to body shape, fashion trends, and the quality of life.

Overall, the new thoughts and aesthetic trends of women in the Republican era represented a spirit of pursuing freedom, equality, and individuality, reflecting the transformation of women's social roles and perceptions, and made significant contributions to the openness and progress of the social ethos at the time.

#### **Innovation Analysis of Ink-and-Wash Gilding and Blue-and-White Separation Techniques in Jingdezhen Ceramics**

Jingdezhen has been producing porcelain since the Tang Dynasty and gradually became one of the major porcelain-producing areas in China during the Song Dynasty. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Imperial Kiln Factory was established in Zhushan, making Jingdezhen the center of porcelain production in the country (Zhan Mingrong, 2012:54-56). Jingdezhen's traditional ceramic handcrafting skills have been perfected over more than a thousand years of development, eventually becoming the culmination of handmade ceramic skills in China and the world (Chen Liangyu, 2015:16-18). Traditional Jingdezhen porcelain

handcrafting techniques include underglaze blue, famille rose, high-temperature color glaze, reticulated, ink-and-wash gilding, new color, and ancient color, among others.

Blue-and-white ink-and-wash is a modern innovative decorative painting technique that combines traditional Jingdezhen ink colors with underglaze blue. It has a strong color expression and tension. The interplay of blue-and-white underglaze with the ink, red, and gold colors of the ink-and-wash creates a harmonious and complementary effect. It is neither gaudy nor monotonous, exuding a decorative beauty in its low-key luxury that fully expresses the painting's ambiance (Li Wenyue, 2018:13-15).

Ink-and-wash gilding and blue-and-white separation are traditional Jingdezhen porcelain crafting techniques, each with a strong contrast in color temperature and distinct crafting processes. Ink-and-wash gilding, which began in the late Qing Dynasty and rapidly developed during the Republic of China period, has now become highly sought after. Its lines are delicate, featuring black, red, and gold painting, and its patterns have a traditional Chinese significance, resulting in elegant and luxurious finished products (Li Wenyue et al., 2018:74-75). Blue-and-white separation has the gradient effect of traditional Chinese painting, with different shades of blue and a bright luster, giving the finished work a water-ink quality. The combination of these two techniques presents an integration of different crafts, the coordination of color temperature relationships, and the expression of contemporary themes, making it worthy of study.

## Artistic Creation Practice



**Figure 5** Process Flowchart of Ink-and-Wash Gilding and Blue-and-White Separation Techniques (Xun Li,2023)

Through literature research on ink-and-wash, blue-and-white separation, and the cultural characteristics of the Republic of China, visits to workshops and museums, interviews with representative artists, and analysis of the characteristics of artworks, I have concluded that innovative combinations in contemporary ink-and-wash painting involve "opening a window" to express the main figures or the background objects in the painting. In terms of color, it breaks the traditional concept of ink-and-wash color proportions, such as the traditional dominance of ink color, supplemented by hemp and red colors, with gold as an embellishment, creating a piece that expresses the image of a Republic of China lady in a ceramic decorative porcelain panel painting that merges Jingdezhen ink-and-wash gilding with blue-and-white separation.

### 1. Concept of the Work

Title of the Work: Blue-and-White Ink-and-Wash Gilding "Spanning a Century of Storms, Narrating Their Talent and Elegance" Porcelain Panel Painting

Form of the Work: Porcelain panel painting, vertical composition, the size is 56 \* 112 centimeters.

Concept of the Work: "Spanning a Century of Storms, Narrating Their Talent and Elegance" is a porcelain panel painting that combines the techniques of underglaze blue and ink-and-wash. This work aims to artistically reenact the image of ladies from the Republic of China period and to explore and display the unique status and spirit of women during China's historical transition. In the design and creation process, the work employs the technique of "opening a window" in the picture, cleverly setting a "view window" that allows viewers to transcend time and space and touch the inner world and ambiance of women from that era. Through this work, viewers can experience the cultural awareness and individuality of women during the Republic of China period, as well as appreciate the infinite possibilities of ceramic art in heritage and innovation.

Techniques of the Work: Combination of underglaze blue and ink-and-wash techniques

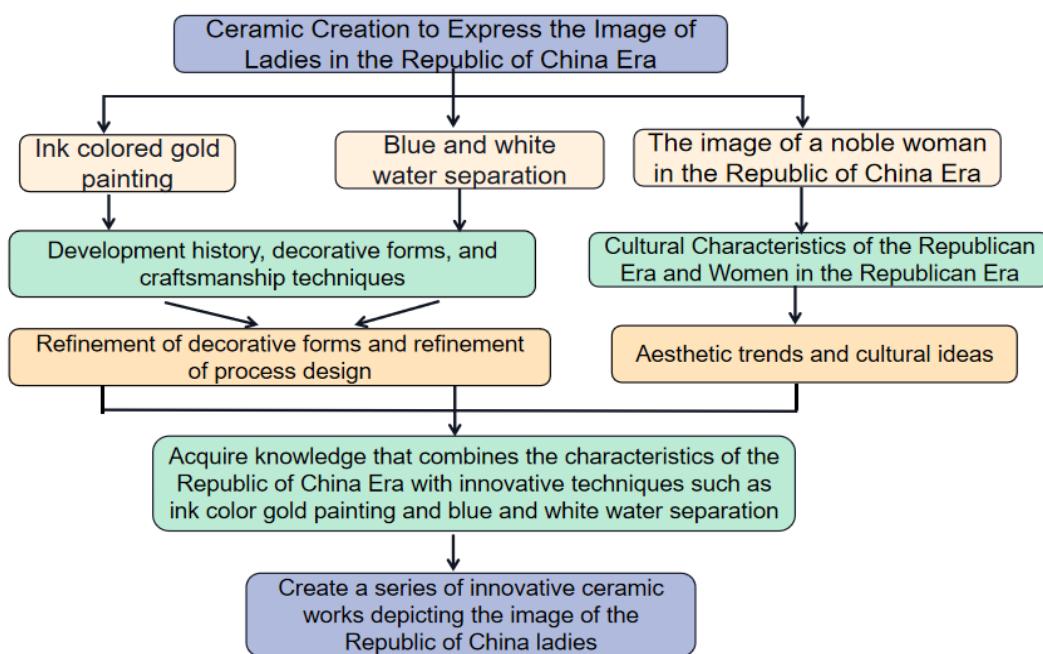
## 2. Physical Display of the Work



**Figure 6** Physical Display of the Work (Xun Li,2023)

## Research Conceptual framework

This paper conducts research into the historical development, decorative forms during different periods, and craft techniques of traditional ink color outlining gold and blue-and-white segmented decoration. It explores the cultural background, characteristics of the era, home decor structure, aesthetic trends of women, and cultural thoughts during the Republic of China. By applying the latest combined research findings to practical creation, the paper aims to explore innovative combinations of ink color outlining gold porcelain and blue-and-white segmented decoration forms. This will further promote the development and innovative changes of ink color outlining gold porcelain, leading to the creation of new ceramic works that feature women from the Republic of China era, blending traditional Jingdezhen crafts of ink color outlining gold and blue-and-white segmented decoration.



**Figure 1** Research Conceptual Framework Diagram (Xun Li, 2023)

## Research Results

This study analyzed the presentation methods of female figures during the Republic of China era in ceramic art and how this image was integrated with Jingdezhen's traditional crafts of ink color outlining in gold and blue-and-white separation technique, resulting in new artistic expressions. Through this exploration, the study achieved the following three objectives:

### 1. Cultural Characteristics and Female Imagery Research of the Republic of China

The study examined the cultural characteristics of the Republic of China era, particularly the female images and new thoughts, and how these elements were combined with Jingdezhen's traditional crafts. This fusion reflected the changes of the times and the inheritance of culture, giving traditional art a renewed vitality.

## **2. Innovation Analysis of Ink Color Outlining in Gold and Blue-and-White Separation Technique**

Through an in-depth analysis of Jingdezhen's traditional ink color outlining in gold and blue-and-white separation technique, the study explored the innovative changes of these crafts under the influence of the characteristics of the Republic of China era. The research showed that this combination not only retained the essence of traditional techniques but also injected new artistic inspiration, enhancing the sense of the times and the aesthetic value of the artworks.

### **3. Artistic Creation Practice**

By creating a series of ceramic decorative porcelain plate paintings themed on the female figures of the Republic of China, the study combined theory with practice, presenting the unique charm of women of that period. These works not only showed the artists' understanding of the spirit of women in the Republic of China but also demonstrated the new possibilities of ceramic art in contemporary times.

## **Discussion**

The study of the expression methods of female figures in ceramic art creation during the Republic of China era yielded the following results and conclusions:

### **1. The Cultural Characteristics and Reproduction of Female Images in the Republican Era**

Through the integration of traditional craftsmanship such as ink painting, gold painting, and blue and white water separation in Jingdezhen, the image and cultural characteristics of women in the Republic of China era have been successfully reproduced. Through ceramic creation, this diverse image is presented in a unique way, not only to reproduce history, but also to reflect the social status and cultural value of women at that time.

### **2. Innovative combination of ink color gold painting and blue and white water separation technology**

This study combines the traditional ink color gold painting and blue and white water separation techniques in Jingdezhen, and carries out innovative practices. The combination of the delicacy of ink colored gold and the freshness of blue and white water separation creates a new visual and tactile artistic effect, providing a richer means of expression for the image of the Republic of China ladies.

### **3. The creation and aesthetic integration of ceramic art works**

Through a series of ceramic art works created in this study with the theme of the image of the Republic of China ladies, we have successfully integrated the image of women in the Republic of China era with contemporary art aesthetics. This fusion not only continues the essence of traditional craftsmanship, but also endows it with the atmosphere of the times and contemporary aesthetic characteristics, making these works not only have historical and cultural value, but also have the pleasure of modern viewing.

### **4. Future development and prospects**

The successful practice of this study provides new ideas and directions for the development of ceramic art. In the future, we can conduct in-depth research on the impact of contemporary art aesthetics on traditional crafts, promote the deeper integration of traditional crafts and contemporary art, and inject new vitality and momentum into the development of ceramic art.

## Recommendations

### 1. Theoretical Recommendation

Continue in-depth research on the relationship between the female figure of the Republic of China era and Jingdezhen ceramic art, and uncover more underutilized historical documents and artworks to understand the cultural characteristics of this period more comprehensively. Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, combining ceramic art with history, cultural studies, aesthetics, and other disciplines to promote academic exchange and cooperation.

### 2. Policy Recommendations

Develop relevant policies to support and encourage the protection and inheritance of ceramic art and cultural traditions, providing more support and protection for ceramic artists and traditional craftsmen. Carry out ceramic art education and promotion, incorporating the training of ceramic art knowledge and skills into vocational education and continuing education systems.

### 3. Practical Recommendations

Encourage artists and craftsmen to innovate in practice, not limited to traditional techniques but also including modern design concepts and the application of new materials. Promote the linkage between ceramic art and other industries such as tourism and cultural products, increasing the social influence and economic value of ceramic art through cultural experience workshops, themed exhibitions, etc.

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