

Study on Decorative Art of Ink Color Painting Gold in Jingdezhen

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Abstract: Ink and Gold Tracing represents a unique and distinctive approach within the realm of ceramic decorative art. Building upon the foundation of ink tones, the artwork's colors are harmonized through the incorporation of red and gold, resulting in a more vibrant and rich palette. The three colors strike a balance that avoids excessive saturation and heaviness, while exuding elegance and sophistication, captivating the observer. The restrained use of color prevents the artwork from appearing overly gaudy, and creates a striking overall decorative impact. The intricate craftsmanship and the two-step firing process require significant time and effort, but the unwavering dedication of generations of artisans has left us with a multitude of exquisite and unparalleled ceramic masterpieces.

Keywords: Ink tones, Gold tracing, Decorative art.

1. Exploring the Origins of Jingdezhen's Ink and Gold-Outlined Porcelain Art

The roots of ink-colored porcelain date back to the mid-Kangxi period of the Qing Dynasty, thriving during the Yongzheng and Qianlong eras. Ink-colored porcelain emerged as a new form of over-glaze painted decoration, evolving from enamel colors. Its techniques are heavily influenced by traditional Chinese painting, featuring predominantly black hues, skillful use of shading, and accents of red. The elaborate gilded lines and sumptuous color decorations give it a luxurious and profound aesthetic. This style of ink painting is characterized by its simplicity, dynamism, ethereal composition, and elegant colors. The art of gold-outlined ink decoration was almost lost by the end of the Qing Dynasty. However, it is said that a fragment of broken porcelain from that period was discovered with the gold-outlined ink pattern, crafted by Mr. Zhou Xiangfu, an ink artist from the early Republic of China era. After numerous attempts and verifications, this technique was revived. Since the early 1960s, Jingdezhen Art Porcelain Factory has consciously nurtured this skill by having artists learn from experienced masters and continuously researching and developing ink techniques, thereby preserving this once-lost art. Today, artists like Liao Ruoxingchen practice the gold-outlined ink porcelain craft, which is seldom seen in the market due to high skill requirements, complexity, lengthy production time, and elevated costs.

Gold-outlined ink decoration is a significant type of ceramic over-glaze decoration, traceable to the earlier ink-colored porcelain period. From the mid-Kangxi era through the Yongzheng period, ink-colored porcelain was widespread. During the Kangxi period, ink colors were rich and vibrant, with stark contrasts enhanced by pure color glazes and a layer of lustrous white. After firing, the ink colors became glossy and flawless. Some ink-colored pieces have a green base, making the colors more vivid and intense. In the Yongzheng period, most ink-colored porcelain used domestically-produced materials to imitate the effects of ink wash paintings,

resembling a painting on white paper, boasting a clean, elegant appearance, and a naturally harmonious balance of shades.

Emperor Yongzheng himself had a penchant for ink wash paintings and blue landscapes, leading to the zenith of ink-colored porcelain during his reign and that of Emperor Qianlong. Gold-outlined ink decoration involves applying gold to ink-colored porcelain, but the actual process is far from simple. The "gold" in gold-outlining refers to gold powder or gold liquid, and the porcelain often undergoes two firings to prevent the "gold" and "ink" from affecting each other's colors. The process entails first firing the black pattern, then outlining with gold, and finally firing in the kiln to complete the piece. The entire process is time-consuming, challenging, and costly, with few people willing to explore the technique. By the time of the Republic of China, the craft was nearly extinct. Fortunately, an elderly artist named Zhou Xiangfu rediscovered the technique's subtlety from a broken ink-colored porcelain fragment. After dedicated exploration, organization, research, and innovation, he became a master of gold-outlined ink art. Other artists, such as Lei Huolian and Wang Yeting, emerged around the same time and made significant contributions to the development of ink and gold outlining. The art has since been passed down and continues to evolve, with contemporary masters like Xia Zhongyong (a disciple of Zhou Xiangfu) and Li Wenyue (a disciple of Lei Huolian) becoming leading figures in the field.

2. A Study on the Decorative Techniques of Jingdezhen Ink-Color and Gilt Outlining

The art of ink-color and gilt outlining on porcelain stands as a unique form, defined by its distinctive techniques and features. Primarily focused on fine brushwork, this style inherits the expressive methods of elaborate-style painting, emphasizing a delightful blend of poetic and picturesque charm. White porcelain is adorned with ink-colored patterns, while the space, light, shade, levels, and artistic conception within the composition are conveyed through varying shades of ink according to the needs of the artwork. Ink-color and gilt

outlining predominantly utilize black, red, and gold hues. The application of red is of utmost importance; its suitability directly influences the overall harmony of the painting. An excess of red can render the piece vulgar, while insufficient red may result in a lack of luxury. Therefore, the precise use of red pigment serves as a key indicator of an artisan's expertise. Outlining in gold demands a high level of skill, with powerful, uniform, and delicate lines, emphasizing the importance of executing the strokes in one fluid motion.

The ink-color and gilt outlining decorative technique exhibits several distinguishing features: First, the process is multifaceted, beginning with ink-color painting on white porcelain, followed by firing. Subsequently, gold is employed to trace patterns and ornaments, and the piece undergoes a second firing at a temperature of around 800°C. Second, despite the simplicity of the color palette, the resulting color display is no less impressive than painted works, accentuating the art form's elegant and graceful qualities. Third, Chinese painting often incorporates both elaborate-style and ink-wash techniques, stressing the importance of line while also skillfully employing layering and varying shades of ink.

3. Unique Artistic Characteristics of Jingdezhen Ink-Color Gilded Porcelain

Ink-color gilding sets itself apart from the previous two styles through its distinct decorative patterns. Primarily employing black, red, and gold, the "ink-color" painting is adorned with pure gold or gold powder before undergoing a second firing in the kiln. The completed piece showcases a harmony of black (glossy black), white (porcelain base), red (alum red), and gold (bright gold powder). These colors complement one another, generating a cohesive and aesthetically pleasing overall effect. Alum red, the base red pigment, pioneered low-temperature iron-red glazes and has origins in Northern Song dynasty Ding kiln objects. Alum red emerged during the Jiajing period of the Ming dynasty and was utilized in various ceramic art periods such as Doucai, Gucai, and Fencai. Additionally, it remains a crucial technique in traditional Japanese ceramic decoration, continuing to be passed down in Kutani ware and Arita ware. Today, other red glaze materials like western red or azuki tea often replace alum red in ink-color gilding, in addition to traditional techniques.

Regarding the gilding process, Southern Song dynasty writer Zhou Mi documented in "Zhiyatang Miscellaneous Notes": "Gold flower bowls are painted with gold mixed with garlic juice before being fired in the kiln, and the gold never fades." This is the earliest known example from Ding kiln, dating back to the Northern Song dynasty. Due to gilded decorations' connections with religion and imperial power, gilding was extensively used in Ming and Qing Jingdezhen imperial kiln products, including Xuande red-glazed gilded wares, Hongzhi yellow-glazed gilded wares, and Qianlong kiln-changed glazed gilded wares. Analyzing benchmark objects of ink-color gilding reveals that, in addition to color development, a tactile feel similar to cloisonné enamel is required. This necessitates gilders to be acquainted with the material properties and brush speed (fast for thin, slow for thick). Moreover, the distinctiveness of Jingdezhen porcelain brushwork leaves Japan's gilding craftsmanship lagging far behind China's. Using "foreign gold" for decoration, whether domestically or internationally, struggles to achieve the tactile

and visual effects of pure gold gilding. Ink-color gilding boasts a richer color scheme than ink or black, yet it is more subdued than Gucai, Fencai, or enamel colors, resulting in a one-of-a-kind style. Its color range spans from black to white, with red adding brightness and contrast, and gold for opulence and eye-catching appeal. The decoration is highly engaging, and gold on the porcelain body exhibits a strong reflective effect, changing with the light, sometimes appearing dark and black, sometimes bright and white. Thus, ink-color gilding is described as "looking like gold from afar, like lines up close." Although ink-color gilding employs simple colors, the resulting artworks are far from monotonous, as skilled ceramic artists use diverse shades and techniques to create elegant, composed, and vibrant artistic effects.

As for painting techniques, ink-color gilding adopts the line drawing method (consistent with Fencai and Gucai) and the dry color method (akin to oil painting techniques) to handle shading and the relationship between light and dark. In pattern decoration, it employs traditional patterns from fine-brushwork Chinese painting (consistent with Fencai and Gucai). Overall, the ceramic-making process is relatively simple and standardized. Ink-color gilding shares numerous similarities with alum-red gilding, with each alum-red gilded piece easily transformed into an ink-color gilded work. From painting techniques, composition, and color control perspectives, ink-color gilding is "easy to learn, hard to master," which leads to many practitioners, but very few experts in the field. In the author's opinion, a high-quality gilded and ink-colored piece should exhibit the following characteristics: diverse shades of ink, clearly defined layers, and strokes with depth; pure red color without black (too thick) or watery (too thin) parts; appropriate use of auxiliary hemp color (red and black adjusted as needed) without over-firing (leaning towards scorched red) or under-firing; neat patterns; and evenly gilded with a delicate feel when touched.

4. The Legacy and Evolution of Ink-Color and Gold Embellishment Techniques

The ink-color and gold embellishment art form is a radiant jewel in the vast treasury of Chinese cultural arts. Its techniques boast ingenious design, brilliant intricacy, unparalleled elegance, and unadorned beauty, captivating a multitude of enthusiasts from around the globe. Contemporary masters like Xia Zhongyong and Li WenYue have been invited to hold solo ceramic art exhibitions worldwide. Despite the advocacy and promotion from artists dedicated to this noble art and its unique allure, many craftsmen can only admire it from afar due to the time-consuming, challenging, and costly nature of the craft. To address this, Jingdezhen Art Porcelain Factory established a specialized team to organize mass production of ink-color works. However, the resulting ink-color and gold-embellished ceramics often fail to capture the true spirit of the art, and practitioners still have a long way to go in order to truly comprehend its essence. In the early years of the Republic of China, the imperial kiln firing system disintegrated, and the ink-color and gold embellishment craft nearly vanished due to high technical demands, low economic benefits, and societal development needs. Fortunately, during the late Republic era, Mr. Zhou Xiangpu diligently researched and restored the essence of the ink-color and gold embellishment technique, infusing his works with his own

ancient color charm and reviving the art form for future generations. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Jingdezhen Art Porcelain Factory, grounded in its role as the official kiln of the new China, responded to the central government's call for "restoration, development, and improvement" by classifying ink-color and gold embellishment as a subcategory of famille rose and reinvigorating its creation. In addition to the mentorship and artistic contributions of Zhou Xiangpu and Xia Zhongyong, the factory also established a dedicated "ink-color and gold embellishment" production line for creating artistic pieces. In recognition of Mr. Zhou Xiangpu's unwavering commitment and contributions to the ink-color and gold embellishment craft, the Jingdezhen Municipal Committee and Municipal Government bestowed upon him the prestigious title of "First Batch of Ceramic Artists."

5. Conclusion

As of today, ink-color and gold embellishment remains a niche discipline. Setting aside cultural sentiment and market factors, the origins, historical significance, and related concepts of this art form are still subjects of ongoing debate. Regardless of whether its roots lie in ink-color or cloisonné, the artistic value, aesthetic appeal, and practical implications of this craft within the realm of ceramic art are undeniably influential. As inheritors of the ink-color and gold embellishment tradition, practitioners should focus on honing

their creative skills and conducting cultural research in the field, with the hope of preserving and perpetuating this art form through their works.

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