

# Study on the Entwined Lotus Pattern Carved and Incised on the Blue and White Porcelain from Jingdezhen in Song Dynasty

Lantao Zhao<sup>1</sup> Xiaomeng Chi<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jingdezhen Ceramic University, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi 333403, China

\*Corresponding author. Email: 2027594892@qq.com

## ABSTRACT

Among the various and varied traditional Chinese decorative patterns, the entwined lotus pattern has been one of the most commonly used decorative patterns for thousands of years. In the Song Dynasty, Jingdezhen's blue and white porcelain carved with entwined lotus pattern was also one kind of the representative patterns in ceramic decoration at that time. Its rich expression and inner meaning represented the decorative level of the Jingdezhen kiln in the Song Dynasty. This article analyzes the artistic characteristics and decoration skills of Jingdezhen's blue and white porcelain carved with entwined lotus pattern in the Song Dynasty, and then explores the cultural connotation behind it.

**Keywords:** Entwined lotus pattern, Jingdezhen, Blue and white porcelain, Carved pattern.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Origin and Implication of Entwined Lotus Pattern

The entwined pattern is one of the decorative patterns of porcelain, which got its name for constantly intertwined patterns of flowers and branches. The entwined pattern is composed by a basic layout with a two-dimension series or four-dimension series ("Figure 1") formed by wavy and arc lines and the decorations of flowers and leaves in the tangential circle space and wavy line, thus producing an entwined flower pattern or entwined flower and fruit pattern with intertwined branches and exuberant floral leaves. This kind of pattern composed by lotus is called "entwined lotus pattern. As a traditional auspicious pattern, entwined lotus pattern is often used to decorate porcelain.

The entwined pattern originated from the honeysuckle pattern in Buddhist art. Honeysuckle is called "rendong" in Chinese, meaning to endure winter. Honeysuckle, also known as *Lonicera*

*japonica* and bicolor flower, is a perennial evergreen shrub with intertwined branches and leaves. It is named "rendong" for its ability to endure cold winter without withering. The pattern was introduced to China in the Han Dynasty with Buddhism, and was widely used in brocade and embroidery during the Six Dynasties. In the Northern and Southern Dynasties, it was decorated on porcelain, with a realistic expression style. In the Tang Dynasty, the honeysuckle pattern gradually evolved into the rolling branch pattern, and was gradually replaced by the rolling branch pattern with twine flowers and branches. In the Song Dynasty, the rolling branch pattern developed and evolved naturally into the entwined pattern with the combination of flowers, and the entwined lotus pattern has been widely used in the decoration of bronze wares and porcelain, such as the Bronze Mirror with Entwined Lotus Pattern and Double Phoenix in the Song Dynasty. The entwined lotus pattern was also very popular in the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. It can be seen from the utensils with this pattern in various dynasties in "Table 1" that as a decorative pattern, the entwined lotus pattern has been very popular among people and widely used in lacquer, enamel, jade, gold and silver ware and silk fabrics.

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Figure 1 Lotus patterns in two-dimension series and four-dimension series.

Table 1. Handicrafts with entwined lotus pattern in dynasties

					
(Song Dynasty) Bronze Mirror with Entwined Lotus Pattern and Double Phoenix Pattern, Collection of the Palace Museum	(Ming Dynasty) Cloisonné Enamel Wrapped Lotus Pattern Drum Smoker, Collection of the Palace Museum	(Late Ming Dynasty) Round Box with Red Longevity Character and Dragon-shaped Lotus, Collection of the Palace Museum	(Qing Dynasty) Round Wash with Green Jade and Lotus Pattern, Collection of the Palace Museum.	(Qing Dynasty) Engraved Gilt and Gilded Lotus Pattern Gourd-style Pot During the Reign of Qianlong, Collection of the Palace Museum	(Qing Dynasty) Green Tangled Lotus Pattern Woven Gold Forging, Collection of the Palace Museum

### 1.2 Carved and Incised Designs on the Blue and White Porcelain from Jingdezhen in the Song Dynasty

In the Song Dynasty, porcelain industry developed rapidly. It features not only the five famous kilns (Ding Kiln, Ru Kiln, Guan Kiln, Ge Kiln and Jun Kiln), but also the successful firing of blue and white porcelain, which greatly exceeded the development landscape of "blue porcelain in the south and white porcelain in the north" in the Tang Dynasty. Jingdezhen kiln was the firing center of blue and white porcelain. The blue and white porcelain produced by Jingdezhen kiln was delicate in texture, thin as a paper, and glazed with jade-like luster, with warm and elegant color, which was greatly loved by the ruling class and civilians of the Song Dynasty. So it was hailed as "blue as the sky, bright as a mirror, thin as a paper and sounds like a chime stone". In particular, the bluish and white porcelain was subtle, light and elegant, which fit the aesthetic taste of people in the Song Dynasty.

The decoration of carved and incised designs mainly refers to the combination of the two billet adornment technique, namely "carved design" and "incised design". Because these two decorative techniques are often used together, their combination is called carved and incised designs. "Carved design" is to draw lines at almost vertical angles on a semi-dry porcelain blank to form a pattern by use of bamboo or iron needle-like tools first, in high speed and with delicate and smooth stroke, and cut along the outer contour of the ornamentation with the knife, to form a deep and shallow sloping ornamentation, which is commonly known as "Half-cut mud", literally meaning "half of the knife is coated with mud". "Incised design" is to draw single or parallel lines by use of bamboo needle or grate tool on the semi-dry porcelain blank pattern lightly and flexibly, with cursive, well-proportioned, smooth and lively lines. In the carved and incised designs on the blue and white porcelains of Jingdezhen kiln, the carved lines are of different shades, orderly widths and varying shapes. Its decorative patterns are mostly entwined

patterns with lotus, strings, lotus petal, honeysuckle and peony, etc., which make the utensils show a unique artistic style featuring blue and white colors, peace and elegance, and deeply loved and appreciated by the world.

**2. DECORATION TECHNIQUES OF CARVED AND INCISED ENTWINED LOTUS PATTERN ON BLUE AND WHITE PORCELAIN FROM JINGDEZHEN, SONG DYNASTY**

**2.1 Using the Knife as a Brush — Unique Decoration Techniques of Carved and Incised Entwined Lotus Pattern on Blue and White Porcelain**

The carving and incising techniques of blue and white porcelain from Jingdezhen kiln in Song Dynasty is carving and incising in the "Half-cut mud" technique by use of the knife as a brush. In its expression, lines are carved and drawn with a knife. Since the images displayed are different, the knife strokes vary in shades, width and shapes, to show the primary and secondary relationship and aesthetic feeling of the picture. In the misty blue porcelain with carved and incised designs made by Jingdezhen in Song Dynasty, the carved lines are

mostly wide ones, and lines are integrated with planes, mainly highlighting the changes of line in terms of width and shades, with lines moving freely and naturally. The use of the carving and incising technique to depict the entwined lotus pattern ("Table 2") can be said to be a "freehand" performance. Porcelain makers imagine, extract, conclude, simplify, redecorate and recompose the natural form of entwined lotus pattern, featuring the overall sense and planarization of the picture, the sense of rhythm and rhythm of lines, setting off a sense of comfort and softness. Through the change of the shades of the score, the dynamic state of the twig pattern and the differences between the obverse and reverse side and the various leaf sizes are shown, with a sense of rhythm and rhyme; and by carving the lotus with the technique of "Half-cut mud", the change of the anteroposterior and lateral view, the different states of the blooming and half open bud, etc. is shown through the change of shades, which has a three-dimensional sense and a sense of layers. After carving and incising, a layer of misty blue glaze is covered on it, so the patterns below the glaze looks light yet clear after firing, and the lines show more contrast and are clearer because of the different shades of glaze. At the same time, the glaze color also produces the gradual change of color with the change of the depth of the lines, which bring out the best in each other and complete each other.

Table 2. The carving and incising process of the lotus pattern.

				
1. Description	2. Engraving	3. Half-cut mud carving	4. Tick	5. Firing

**2.2 The Unique Firing Effect of Blue and White Porcelain Carved with Entwined Lotus Pattern — Just like Jade and Ice**

In traditional Chinese culture, people have always had the custom of "valuing jade", and this custom is formed on the basis of people's worship of jade. Due to the cultural thoughts of Neo-Confucianism in Song Dynasty, the concept of "Jade Virtues" was deeply rooted in the hearts of the people and the "Jade" culture was further

developed. At the same time, as jade materials were gradually in the decline, thus the development of porcelain and other articles were promoted. The blue and white porcelain from Jingdezhen is trying to approach the beauty of "jade bone" in both its glaze color and texture. Blue and white porcelain was accidentally fired by ceramic craftsmen from Jingdezhen due to the differences in local porcelain materials and firing methods when they were making white porcelain. The characteristics of the blue and white glaze's jade-like color, and its blue

and white alternate colors of the glaze turned it from an accident and to a fashion. So the blue and white porcelain is world famous for its features of "being white as jade, bright as a mirror, thin as a paper and sounds like a chime stone". With gentle and elegant glaze color, thin and clear body, and delicate texture, very similar to jade, so it has the reputation of "false jade". It can thus be seen that the Jade-like and ice-like blue and white porcelain of Jingdezhen was popular in the Song Dynasty, inseparable from the ideology of "valuing Jade".

The blue and white glaze of Jingdezhen in Song Dynasty is a monochromatic glaze, but this monochromatic glaze has rich changes in gradation, showing striking color implication. The grey-white glaze formula contains a large amount of calcium oxide, and the glazed surface after firing is as transparent and smooth as glass. When it is covered upon white blank, it appears to have a jade-and-ice-like texture. In terms of the glaze color, because there are Fe element in the glaze composition of the blue and white glaze, coupled with the fine body of Jingdezhen, which is white and flawless, so it can better line out the color and lustre of the blue and white glaze. After the glaze materials become glaze after firing, it turns blue amid white. Its glaze color is between blue and white, is an organic combination of blue and white. For example, the Blue and White Double Dragon-patterned Bowl from the Hutian Kiln in the Song Dynasty ("Figure 2") has a smooth and delicate glaze, which is equivalently beautiful to jade in both glaze and glaze color, with the beauty of glaze color fully displayed



Figure 2 A Blue and White Double Dragon-patterned Bowl from Hutian Kiln in Song Dynasty.



Figure 3 A Ruffle-edged Bowl Carved with Lotus Pattern, from Jingdezhen Kiln, Southern Song Dynasty.

From the perspective of visual effect, the single-color glaze of blue and white porcelain has rich changes in color gradation, which is the color effect formed by peroxidation of the glaze in the high-temperature firing process. The blue and white glaze has strong fluidity, so the glaze will flow with gravity to the place where the lines are deeper. The protruding decorative glaze layer is slightly covered, showing a light and bright white in the blue color, while at the sunken parts, due to the accumulation of the glaze layer, the color darkened, showing a clear cyan. After firing, because of the translucent texture of the blue and white glaze, the carved and incised patterns under the glaze layer can still be very clearly shown. The grain and glaze color are combined with each other and set off each other. For example, the Ruffle-edged Bowl Carved with Lotus Pattern from Jingdezhen Kiln in the Southern Song Dynasty ("Figure 3") has six short flower-shaped openings, deeply curved belly and shallow circular feet. The inner wall is engraved with lotus pattern by freehand technique, with a free and easy way of cutting, and clear grain. With a firm body, blue glaze color, and the jade-and-ice-like enamel as well as exquisite skills, the decoration is elegant and beautiful.

### 3. THE ARTISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CARVED AND INCISED ENTWINED LOTUS PATTERN ON BLUE AND WHITE PORCELAIN FROM JINGDEZHEN IN SONG DYNASTY

### 3.1 The Ever-stretching Carved and Incised Entwined Lotus Pattern

The ceramic decoration of Song Dynasty fully adopted the method of twig composition, which made the picture more abundant. It connects the flower head and leaf with an arc curve, forming a continuous trend. The arc itself gives people a kind of dynamic and pulsing feeling. Then coupled with the graceful flowers and leaves, which are connected in series on a main line, the growth relationship is clear, and colorful, full of vitality. It is really a great success in the art of ceramic decoration.

The entwined lotus pattern shows a strong beauty in terms of pattern and design. It usually stretches itself in two-dimension series or four-dimension series in a parallel, vertical manner or extending in all directions. The twigs spread out around the flower, and the leaves change with the change of the positions, displaying a clear picture without surplus, full of rhythm and decorativeness. When the entwined lotus pattern is used as the main decoration, the image of the lotus is prominent, clear and complete. All the branches and leaves are interspersed with curves, which conforms to the natural reason yet is not bound by the form. The composition is flexible and complete. The pattern of twigs usually adopts the composition of a round flower or a full vessel, forming a wavy and continuous form, to express the Chinese people's pursuit of completeness and perfection.

Taking the Large Porcelain Vase with Blue and White Glaze Carved with Entwined Plum Pattern from Jingdezhen Kiln, Southern Song Dynasty in the collection of the Song Dynasty Porcelain Museum in Sichuan ("Figure 4") is carved with flower patterns from the shoulder to the feet. The ground pattern is the pattern of grates, and the decorative patterns are mainly peony and lotus with entwined branches. The entwined branches are connected at the first place and continuous. The entwined peony design is usually on the upper part of the vase, while the entwined lotus patterns mostly on the lower part. The carved and incised design is adopted for the whole grain, with floral leaves and stalks slightly bulging, and the upper and lower ends of the twigs are decorated with two shallow string lines. With its dignified and generous shape, glittering and translucent warm glaze color, and clear grains, it is rare in the collection at home and abroad.



Figure 4 The Large Porcelain Vase with Blue and White Glaze Carved with Entwined Plum Pattern from Jingdezhen Kiln, Southern Song Dynasty, 33.3cm in Height, Collection of Sichuan Song Porcelain Museum.



Figure 5 The Blue and White Plum Vase with Carved Design and Double Strings, Southern Song Dynasty, 32.5cm in Height, Guangdong Provincial Museum Collection.

Taking the Blue and White Plum Vase with Carved Design and Double Strings, Southern Song Dynasty ("Figure 5") for another instance, its shoulder is carved with a circle of lotus pattern, and the image of the lotus is full and round. The beginning and end of each branch are clear, with intertwined branches continuous curves. The branches and leaves are closely connected, keeping each other's accompany, which is very natural and vivid. The grate pattern is used as the ground, and double strings are carved from the shoulders down to the feet. The overall composition is of distinct priority with orderly rhythm, presenting a unified picture.

### 3.2 *Complicated and Changeful Combination of Carved and Incised Entwined Lotus and Other Decorative Elements*

The pattern of entwined lotus is decorative and the branches are twined, setting off a sense of rhythm. Therefore, in addition to being used as the main decoration, entwined lotus pattern is often combined with other elements (such as peony, baby, fish and mandarin duck, etc.) to form a new pattern and appear in the main decorative parts of utensils. This new form is usually popular with the common people, filled with delight of life and auspicious meaning, which also carries people's pursuit of a better life.

Taking the entwined lotus peony pattern on the Large Porcelain Vase with Blue and White Glaze Carved with Entwined Plum Pattern from Jingdezhen Kiln, Southern Song Dynasty, as an



Figure 6 The Blue and White Glaze Bowl with Carved Baby Pattern from Jingdezhen Kiln, 6.7cm in Height, Collection of the Palace Museum.

In addition to the above patterns, there are also combinations of lotus pattern and fish pattern ("Figure 7"). As an auspicious pattern, the "fish playing with lotus" was originally a symbol of fertility worship, which showed people's long-cherished wish to have more children and grandchildren for procreation and prosperity. The pattern of "fish playing with lotus" expresses the connotation of "lian nian you yu" (literarily meaning making surplus year after year; here lian can represent a successive year as well as lotus in Chinese and yu can represent both surplus and fish). Fish is an animal with strong fertility, so "lian nian you yu" is also a blessing for reproduction. Besides, there was also the pattern "Yuanyang playing with lotus" ("Figure 8"). Yuanyang (mandarin duck) is a symbol of love in traditional Chinese culture, which is used to express people's beautiful yearning for love. On the blue and white porcelain, the summer lotus pond is depicted with the carving technique. The whole picture is decorated with lotus branches and lotus leaves,

example ("Figure 4"), it combines the fullness and roundness of peony and lotus in two-dimension series. Peony represents wealth and prosperity in Chinese culture, so people combine lotus and peony to express the happiness of life and good mood.

The Blue and White Glaze Bowl with Carved Baby Pattern from Jingdezhen Kiln, Collection of the Palace Museum ("Figure 6") is another example. The bowl is engraved with the pattern "a pair of babies play with the lotus", with two babies as the center of the pattern, and the lotus pattern as auxiliary decoration to show the fun of children's life. The image is rich in content, lively and interesting, and combining activity and inertia, with a strong breath of life. The craftsmen made the paintings according to the different forms of the lotus pattern and the children, using free and lively lines. It shows the childlike and lifelike state of children, symbolizing the good connotation of "the more sons, the more blessings".

which is full of vitality. Several mandarin ducks play in it, making the picture more vivid and interesting.



Figure 7 The Celadon-glazed Bamboo-hat-shaped Bowl Engraved with Fish-Lotus Pattern from Yaozhou Kiln.



Figure 8 A Powder Box Carved with a "Yuanyang Playing with Lotus" Pattern from the Yue kiln in the Northern Song Dynasty.

#### 4. CULTURAL CONNOTATIONS OF THE CARVED AND INCISED ENTWINED LOTUS PATTERN ON THE BLUE AND WHITE PORCELAIN OF JINGDEZHEN IN SONG DYNASTY

##### 4.1 Reflection of "Cheng Zhu Neo-Confucianism"

The ruling thought in the Song Dynasty was "Cheng Zhu Neo-Confucianism"<sup>1</sup>. It affected not only the politics and economy, but also the aesthetic theory and people's aesthetic perception at that time, thus affecting the ceramic art then. Therefore, the decorative art of carved blue and white porcelain from Jingdezhen in the Song Dynasty fully embodies the characteristics of arts and crafts emphasizing "principle" in the Song Dynasty. Its translucent blue and white glaze color is translucent and glittering, gentle and elegant, and the carved and incised pattern under the glaze is concisely combined with each other. The organic union of mark grain and glaze color doesn't harm the smooth and harmonious glaze or affect the function, both complementing each other perfectly. This kind of introverted and implicit aesthetic

1. Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, also known as "Cheng-Zhu Doctrine", is one of the main schools of Neo-Confucianism in the Song and Ming Dynasties, as well as one of the schools that had the greatest influence on later generations of Chinese people. The natural principle of Neo-Confucianism was moral theology, and it was also became the legal basis of Confucian theocracy and kingship. It was founded by the Cheng brothers (Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi) from Henan (today's Luoyang, Henan) in the Northern Song Dynasty. During its development, it was passed down to disciple Yang Shi, to Luo Congyan and to Li Dong. In the Southern Song Dynasty, Zhu Xi became an epitome.

orientation is consistent with the spiritual pursuit of "preserving the principle of nature and destroying human desires" of the Song Dynasty people. People in the Song Dynasty advocated "Cheng Zhu Neo-Confucianism" in spirit, so they were more conservative and rational, and preferred the style of simplicity, connotation and implicit, which was also the reason why the shapes and decorations of various arts and crafts in the Song Dynasty were plain and unadorned. Because of the worship of nature, people in the Song Dynasty advocated frugality, simplicity, and the pursuit of standard and orderly life style. When reflected the blue and white porcelain, these present the characteristics of regular and rigorous modeling and warm and elegant glaze color, giving people a kind of introverted and low-key beauty.

##### 4.2 Reflection of the Spirit of "Eternal Life" in Buddhism

In the decorative art of carved and incised designs on blue and white porcelain from Jingdezhen in the Song Dynasty, entwined lotus pattern with twined branches was a unique kind of decorative pattern, which must have its reason and inevitability of existence. Lotus pattern was introduced into China along with Buddhism during the Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties. In the process of integrating Buddhism with local culture, it was endowed with rich cultural connotation and then applied in various fields of social life. In Song society, Buddhism was widely influenced from royal officials to common people. In Buddhist culture, the lotus represents the eternal life of the Buddhist realm. Its fruit is born from the mud, and as long as the fruit is there, the lotus flower will continue all summer long. In addition, lotus root has a natural feature, that is, "the lotus root snaps but its fibres stay joined — apparently severed, actually still connected". These characteristics give the lotus symbolic meaning of immortality. Therefore, in the Song Dynasty, lotus, as a symbol of Buddhism, was applied to the decoration of blue and white porcelain, which not only represents the worship of religious belief, but also serves as an auspicious decorative pattern applied to ceramics, with the meaning of having many children and blessings, being noble and clean, and being incorporeal. And the entwined lotus pattern shows branches curling around and around, thus carrying the meaning of "continuous reproduction breed in an endless succession", which shows the "immortality" in the Buddhist realm.

### **4.3 Reflection of the Painting Idea of "Displaying the Spirit Through form"**

The blue and white porcelain from Jingdezhen really gives full play of the carving and incising techniques. The knives were used as a brush to depict the required images and show their beauty. It is the result of the collision between culture and materials. As the literati paintings of the Song Dynasty against the same cultural background, their aesthetic orientation and characteristics also had a great impact on the craft of carving and incising patterns on the blue and white porcelain of the Song Dynasty. The literati painting, also known as the painting of man-of-letters is a comprehensive cultural art integrating poetry, calligraphy, painting and sealing. Enjoying unprecedented development under the influence of Neo-Confucianism and humanism in the Song Dynasty, it has profound cultural connotation. The literati painting paints spirit by form and pursues verve instead of similarity in form. It has the aesthetic characteristics of displaying spirit through form and can show the clever verve of the painted objects. Therefore, the carving and incising technique of blue and white porcelain is to capture the verve of the image with a carving knife.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

In the Song Dynasty, the carved and incised patterns of blue and white porcelain from Jingdezhen were varied in theme and form. The lines of the entwined lotus pattern are smooth and flexible, the glaze color is quiet and elegant, the artistic conception is far-reaching and broad, and the style is elegant and holy, which is the perfect combination of form and content. In the combination of the carving and incising technique and the entwined lotus pattern, the engraving technique of the blue and white porcelain from Jingdezhen in the Song Dynasty not only shows the blue and bright color of the blue and white glaze, but also embodies the implication of "incorruptibility", carrying people's aspiration for honesty and integrity. Its artistic features also fully reflect the "Cheng Zhu Neo-Confucianism" of the Song Dynasty, the "eternal life" spirit of Buddhism and the idea of "displaying spirit through form" in literati painting, which is worthy of further study.

## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

Zhao Lantao guided and revised the paper, and Chi Xiaomeng wrote and edited the paper.

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