

# A Study of Chinese Passport Design from the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China

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**Abstract:** A passport is a travel document issued by the government of a country or region to its citizens or nationals to prove the identity and nationality of the holder for travel to and from the country and in foreign countries, and also to request the relevant foreign authorities to grant the holder access and protection. At present, there is a paucity of research literature on Chinese passports, and there is no systematic theoretical study of the development of passports in modern times. In this paper, we focus on the design ideas of modern Chinese passport documents and discuss the design concepts and trends of Chinese passports in different periods from the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China to the present, in order to fill the gaps in the academic research on modern Chinese passports.

**Keywords:** Passport Design, Passport, Chinese Passport

## 1. Introduction

The Chinese translators translated "passport" to mean "license to protect the peace." In his book "China Passport", scholar Fan Zhenshui, who was China's ambassador to the Congo, writes: "Those who translated this new term knew the world, were familiar with foreign affairs and captured the connotation of "passport" as a document of passage... ..the passport is also the license to travel safely."

The Passport has grown rapidly with the global movement of people and the development of transportation technology and has gained international recognition as an irreplaceable document of passage in international exchanges. For this reason, the term "passport" has changed from a synonym for all documents in China to a synonym for international documents in modern times.

This also makes the design of ancient Chinese passports fundamentally different from modern passport designs, i.e., creative designs with or without "national" attributes of politics and culture. From the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China, passport document design evolved from the original pass design to a passport design with national elements. Since then, passports have gradually become synonymous with international passes, while other passes have become additional passes (e.g., Exit-Entry Permit for Travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macao, Taiwan pass).

With the passage of time and the development of technology, international communication has become increasingly frequent. The modern international passport has become synonymous with the international passport and a symbol of a country's image due to its state-of-the-art design process and primary use, and its design concept has evolved to a combination of cultural and creative design and passport design at the national level. Other documents in China, such as Exit-Entry Permit for Travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macao, Taiwan pass, and China-North Korea/China-Vietnam border pass, are no longer considered as a simplified branch of passport design by Chinese officials. It is also worth mentioning that the use of the modern passport as a border pass is still retained in Taiwan, China.

Modern passport design can be broadly divided into several components: cover design, text design, typography, page design, and the processes and materials used. In the following, these segments will be analyzed as the content of the development of modern Chinese passport design.

## 2. Chinese Passport Design of the Qing Dynasty

The earliest appearance of the word "passport" in Chinese passport documents dates back to the

Qing Dynasty in 1689 when the Sino-Russian Treaty of Nibuchu(Treaty of Nerchinsk) mentioned that "all people of the two countries holding passports shall be allowed to cross the border and to trade with each other". In the same year, the government of the Qing Dynasty issued the "Letter-type Collective Passport". In the same year, the Qing government issued the "letter-type collective passport", which was a "letter of introduction" to prove the identity of the passport holder.

After the Opium War in 1840, the Qing government, subject to the unequal bilateral treaties of the Western powers, began to authorize consulates or customs offices outside of China to issue passports in various forms for Chinese, including Chinese nationals. From this period, the "single-person, single-paper" Chinese passport took shape and continued to be used in the People's Republic of China (including the "exit passport" of the Communist Party of China during the "Soviet Republic of China").

The "single-person, single-paper" Qing Dynasty passport is mainly designed with a combination of the upper trapezoidal border and the lower rectangular border, with the word "passport" written in traditional Chinese characters in the upper trapezoid, and the main text of the passport written from top to bottom in the lower rectangle from right to left. The main content of the passport is written from the top to the bottom of the rectangle, and the seal of a government department is used as a security measure. The size of the passport was 87cm\*56cm, which was the largest passport in the modern world. The Qing Dynasty passport font uses traditional handwritten Chinese traditional calligraphy. Due to technical constraints, Chinese passports in the late 19th and early 20th centuries did not have photographs. In order to correctly identify the bearer, Chinese passports were mostly written to describe the "physical features" of the bearer, such as height, physique, and so on. Although photo technology had been introduced in Chinese passports by the Republic of China, many of the textual descriptions of Qing Dynasty passports, including "physical features", were used until the 1953 edition of the PRC passport.

Since there was no unified passport issuing authority in the Qing Dynasty, passports issued by different authorities generally followed the main design described above but differed in detail. For example, some of the passports of the Qing Dynasty already had a decorative design with the national emblem in the Guangxu emperor's time - a frame of six five-clawed flying dragons on the outside of the original border of the passport, and these five-clawed flying dragons can be regarded as a variation of the "yellow dragon flag", the national flag of the Qing Dynasty (See Figure 1).



Figure. 1 Passport restoration design of Qing Dynasty Emperor Guangxu period

### 3. Passport Design of the Republic of China Period

The earliest Chinese passport with a photograph on it that can be verified is the one issued by the Shanghai office of the Beiyang government of the Republic of China in September 1919.

In the 1920s, the Beiyang government of the Republic of China introduced China's first truly modern passport, the black-covered "Passport of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China". The initial design concept continued until the second version of the new Chinese passport, the 1953 version when it was no longer used. "The "Passport of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China" inherited some of the text style and description format of the Qing Dynasty passports, and first used a two-color patterned background as a means of page security. (see Figure 2).



Figure. 2 The inner pages of Chinese passports of the Beiyang period in the collection of Meizhou overseas Hakka Museum

However, the cover of the passport of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China under the Beiyang government did not use the Twelve Symbols national emblem of the time, but rather a variation of the national emblem of Jiahe (rice ears).

It is worth mentioning that the "Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China Passport" of the Beiyang period used an advanced concept of separate information pages, i.e., the "Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs" information page next to the personal information page was designed as a separate page from the other pages (see Figure 3). The "Declaration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs" information page next to the personal information page is designed as a separate page from the other pages (see Figure 3), instead of directly setting the information page content on a duplicate page design. This more advanced information page design is a highlight for this passport; the People's Republic of China eliminated the separate information page design from the 1953 version of the passport and did not begin to reintroduce the separate information page design until the 1997 version of the passport.

After the Northern Expedition War, the National Government of the Republic of China (ROC.KMT), with the National Government Commission as the main body, set the direction of the ROC Nationality Law and the basic principles of passport issuance in 1929. The new "Republic of China Passport" has a dark blue back cover and National Emblem of the Republic of China (Blue Sky with a White Sun design), and the passport cover design follows the "Passport of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China" of the Beiyang period. The design of the passport cover follows the logo and typography of the "Passport of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China" of the Northern Oceanic period, but with some improvements: the two-color patterned anti-counterfeit backing design was removed from the duplicate page design and replaced with a dark yellow page and a single-color fine patterned anti-counterfeit backing. The regular passport font has been replaced with a larger vertical version of the ROC passport (see Figure 3), while the new MFA passport font is divided into four lines from right to left: "ROC, MFA, Pass, Port."



Figure. 3 The inner pages of Chinese passports during the Nationalist Government period in the collection of Meizhou overseas Hakka Museum

In November 1931, the Communist Party of China in the Agrarian Revolutionary War established the Provisional Central Government of the Soviet Republic of China and at the same time set up the State Political Security Bureau as a public security investigation and state security agency. In order to further regulate the movement of people and the management of social security order, the Central State Political Security Bureau implemented a passport system for entry and exit at the border between the ruling and enemy-occupied areas. The passport was a unified "single-person, single-paper" passport issued by the State Political Security Bureau, following the design of the Qing Dynasty "single-person, single-paper" passport, printed in lithographic italics on burlap paper, measuring 16.5\*23 cm, with the

following inscription outside the frame The unique political declaration of "Crushing the enemy's big attack and intensifying red martial law" was written outside the frame (see Figure 4). The passport management policy adopted by the Chinese Soviet Republic played an extremely important role in maintaining the stability of the ruling society, etc., for the revolutionary regime of the Chinese Communist Party.

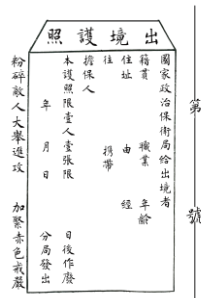


Figure. 4 Restoration of the "Exit Passport" of the Soviet Republic of China

In the 1940s, the Nationalist authorities of the Republic of China (ROC), then representing the Chinese government, worked to normalize the passport system in spite of the war against Japan and the Liberation War. During the Liberation War, the KMT authorities introduced the last passport of the KMT administration in mainland China, taking into account the design of the Japanese passport at the time. According to the "Passport of the 38th Year of the Republic of China" in the collection of the Chinese Hakka Museum in Guangdong (see Figure 5), we can see that this passport was designed with the same green background as the Japanese passport, eliminating the anti-counterfeiting pattern, and following the Japanese passport's example of Passport of the Republic of China, The Japanese passport has the four characters "Republic of China Passport" printed in traditional Chinese characters (but the Japanese passport is printed in seal script). At the same time, a white "National Emblem of the Republic of China" pattern was used in the center of the passport to cover the backing as a decorative pattern.



Figure. 5 "Passport of the 38th year of the Republic of China" in the collection of the Hakka Museum Of China in Meizhou

#### 4. Conclusion

Chinese passport design originated in the Qing Dynasty, and the prototype of modern passport design was laid down in the Republic of China, and gradually reached the forefront of global passport design in the exploration and growth after the Liberation War. Nowadays, the art of passport design is part of the cultural and creative design at the national level, and the passport design has both the aspect of promoting the national political philosophy and manifesting the national culture and the aspect that must be close to the people's daily life because of the demand of using it. The progress of passport design is a symbol of the progress of a country's civilization philosophy and comprehensive level of technology and economy, as well as the increasingly frequent communication in the international community.

Passport design is being updated mainly due to the need for anti-counterfeiting, technological advances, and other technological reasons, but the advancement of the concept of passport design art is

undoubtedly also an important element in the renewal of passport content. In today's international society, passports are used more frequently as communication between countries deepens, and the art of passport design, as a form of official communication certified by each country, transcends language and deepens the understanding between different countries. The political status, philosophy, history, and folklore of a country can be expressed and interpreted in the language of art in passport design, and this is the conceptual value of studying passport design.

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