

ACM WONDERS

Suitable for ages 13 and up

ACM

BLOUSE AND SKIRT – “NEW CIVILISED DRESS”

Embroidered in China
during the 1920s

Background Information

Popular during the early Republican period (1911–49), ensembles like this were part of a style that came to be called “New Civilised Dress”. Worn by urban “new women”, they signaled an embrace of Western ideas of democracy, women’s equality, and individual freedom.

Republican fashion featured drastic changes in silhouette, design, and materials from Qing styles. Translucent fabrics, like on this blouse, were first used in China in the mid-1920s. A white slip would be worn underneath. The decoration of floral patterns in roundels is an example of early machine embroidery. Like Han skirts of the Qing period, the panels of this one feature auspicious flowers.

A woman wearing this outfit would have been admired by some people for being liberated, while the sheer fabric of the blouse would have been considered controversial by traditionalists.



Blouse

Cotton (voile, with machine embroidery)
50.5 x 89 cm

Skirt

Silk (satin embroidery), silk floss, gold-wrapped threads
98 x 68 cm

On loan from the Chris Hall Collection.

LET'S DISCOVER

Learn more about changing women's fashions during the early Republican era in China.

FUN FACT

A trend associated with educated female students and career women, "New Civilised Dress" developed in urban China in the 1910s, and became a symbol of a new era. This style typically combined elements of the older Qing-Han Chinese style with Western materials, a tighter silhouette, and modern designs.

GLOSSARY

New Woman (*xin nuxing*, 新女性) was a term popularised in China after the May Fourth Cultural Movement of 1919. It was used to contrast modern femininity against traditional, Confucian norms of Chinese society.

Embroidery is the art of sewing decorative designs by hand or machine onto a base fabric.

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LET'S LOOK CLOSELY

Use these guidelines to discover details about this object.

1. **LOOK** closely at this outfit. **DESCRIBE** the patterns, colours, and shapes that you see. Pick out one thing that you like most about it.
2. **COMPARE AND CONTRAST** this outfit with an example of a traditional Chinese dress from the late Qing period found in the same gallery. How are they similar and how are they different?
3. Cosmopolitan Shanghai in the 1920s was characterised by modern architecture, urban venues, and a thriving fashion industry. Travel back in time and **IMAGINE** yourself as a visitor to 1920s Shanghai. You see a woman walk by wearing this outfit. What does it say about the person wearing this?

CREATE AT HOME

Continue the experience at home by doing this activity. Don't forget to tag us @ACM_SG and we may feature your creation.

4. As women became more active and visible in China, their fashions reflected their views on national progress, modernity, and personal expression of creativity. **DESIGN** an outfit that expresses your views of the world around you. Explore designing this outfit using different media, such as drawing, painting, and collage.