

THE MEANING OF COLOR II

The philosophical beliefs of Zhou Yan also connected the five color of green, red, white, black and yellow, with the five directions of east, west, south, north and center. It also linked them with the four seasons. According to several classics, including The Book of Rites and Huai Nan Zi, the King of Heaven in the east, Taihao, was connected with the nature of wood, and in charge of spring. He was also known as the Green King, because green is connected with spring.

The King of Heaven in the south, Yandi, was lord of summer and fire, and known as the Red King, because red is the color of fire. The King of Heaven in the west, Shaohao, was lord of gold and in charge of autumn. He was known as the White King, because the color of gold was thought to be white. The King of Heaven in the north was named Zhuanxu. He held power over water and winter, and known as the Black King, because black was the color of water.

The King of Heaven in the middle was named Huangdi, the Yellow Emperor. His nature was of the virtue of the soil, represented by yellow. Zhu Xi, a Song Dynasty philosopher who perfected the doctrines of the Neo-Confucianism, remarked, "Yellow is the pure color of the soil in the middle." Legend had it that the Yellow Emperor who was born at Xuan Yuan Hill gained the virtue of the soil.

His fate, therefore, was to be clothed in a yellow gown and a yellow crown. As a result yellow became the color that symbolized imperial power, nobility, stateliness and supremacy. Yellow is everywhere in the

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Imperial Palace in Beijing, known as the Palace Museum.

Most of the roofs are laid with yellow-glazed tiles. The flags, the dragon carriage, clothing and bedding of the emperor were all yellow, and the emperor's scripts were written on yellow damask silk.

The use of yellow was reserved exclusively for the emperor. Anyone else who dared to use it was deemed a dangerous rebel, possibly trying to overthrow the emperor. As a result they would put lives at risk by this mere act. Huang Chao, who led peasant revolt in the Tang Dynasty, wrote a poem called Ode to Chrysanthemum:

On the eighth of September when autumn comes,

All other flowers are dead but chrysanthemums are flourishing in the cold weather.

The vigorous fragrance of the yellow flowers penetrates the entire city of Chang'an,

And like yellow armor the of flowers are seen everywhere.

This poem was actually using yellow chrysanthemum as a metaphor to express the wish of the uprising force to seize imperial power. Incidentally, Huang Chao's surname, Huang, also means yellow.

More recently, the Chinese culture of colors has incorporated some elements of western culture. One such color is yellow, which now carries the connotation of being pornographic or obscene, as in yellow books, yellow novels, yellow movies, or even yellow bars. Crackdowns on materials seen as pornographic or obscene are known as sweeping the yellow.

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