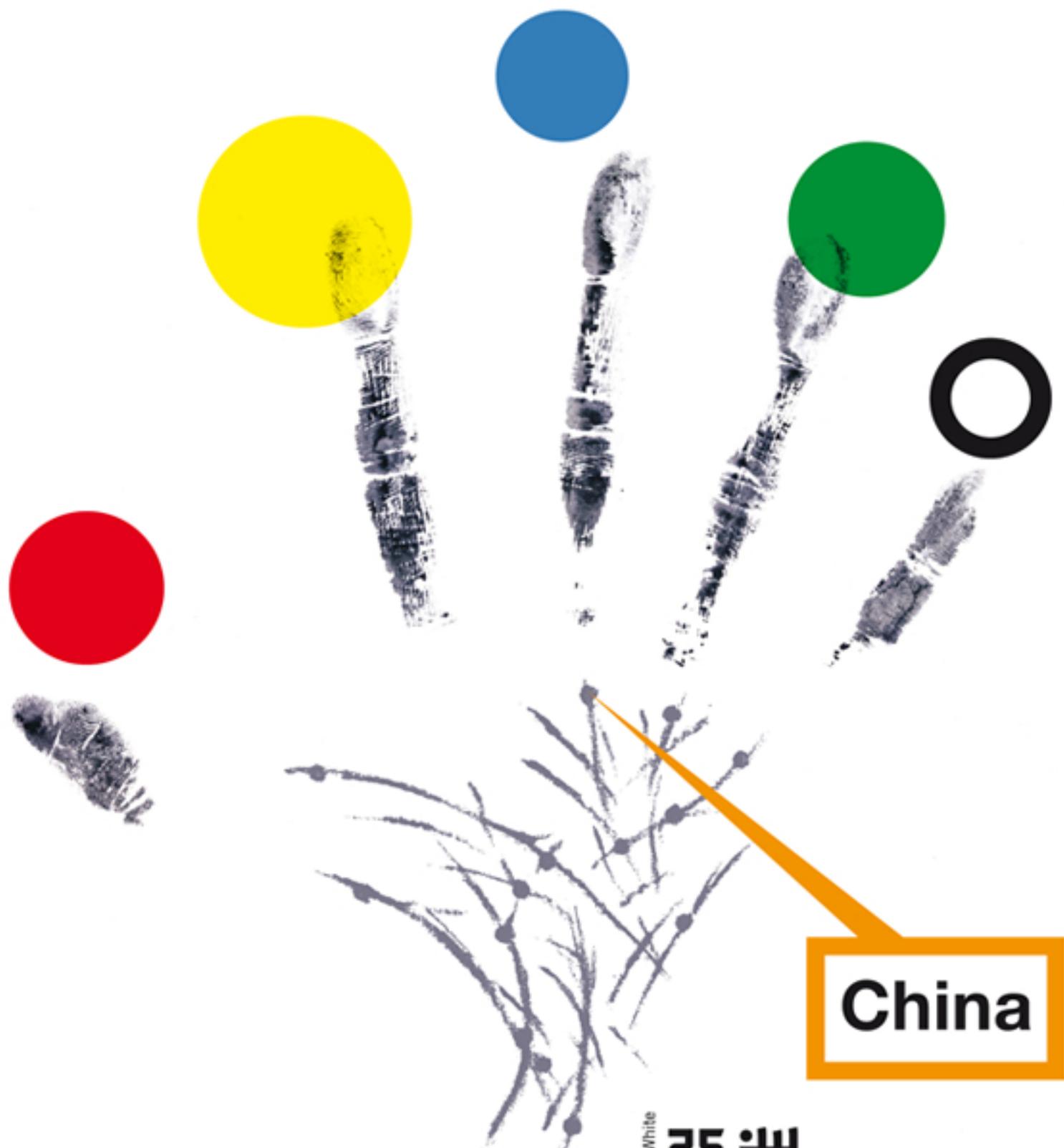


Research Report 2013



China

the
Colours
of Asia

Red Yellow Blue Green Black & White
紅黃藍綠黑與白

亞洲
色彩



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ABSTRACT

Color, is a concept which is realistic and also abstract. It has a huge space and possibility on the interpretation in China. This report is geographically based in Beijing. The meaning and value of color will be interpreted by several perspectives presented below. Following we're going to show the elemental meaning of symbols in China through in-depth research, the color-expression of china, the "chinese characteristics" on application of color and the "color impression" on the aspect of literature and philosophy. We hope to restructure the path of color in Beijing by divergent thinking.

Keywords:

color, Beijing, research in-depth, content, special use/ application, literature, Philosophy

RESEARCH IN-DEPTH

The Five elements and The Five colors

The Five elements (Wu Xing) is one of the core Ancient Chinese philosophic theories. It is also the scientific thought in Ancient China. "Wu" means the five natural elements: wood, fire, earth, metal, water; "Xing", extending in all directions, also means flowing and operating, the ancient definition on movement and actions, everlasting moving and change. "Wu Xing", is the everlasting movement and change of the five elements. It is absolutely in motion, instead of being still, which represents five objects, five attributes, five powers, and five moral, which are interactive in-between.

Analytical Dictionary of Characters: The five elements (metal, wood, water, fire and earth) also apply to the rule of Yin and Yang (for example, the earth is called Tu in Chinese, and it can also be divided to Yin Tu and Yang Tu.), which is filled between sky and land." "Xing" from "Wu Xing", and "Yun" from "Wu Yun" have the similar meaning of everlasting and generating movement. The Five Elements is not only meant by solid objects, but five natures and attributes. "...an endless on-going cycle of five strong powers, instead of negative non-mobile basic (main) material." (Britain. Joseph Li "China History of Science and Technology), It is an abstract attributes, concept belonged and important category innovated by the Yin-Yang movement in the innate natural. The "Yin-yang" theory in traditional China is a structure of spacial and time, while Yin-yang presents a state of space, the five elements presents structure of time; It is a view of world.

The five elements, direction and color

Five elements: wood, fire, earth, metal, water

Direction: west, east, north, south, central

Five colors: green, red, yellow, white, black

East: Element wood. representative color is Green. East is a direction generates wind, which helps the growth of wood. Represents liver, dark green in color.

South: Element fire. representative color is Red. South region generates heat, which helps the growth of fire. Represents heart, red in color.

Central: Element earth. representative color is Yelow. Central earth generates moisture, which helps the growth of earth. Represents spleen, yellow in color.

West: Element metal. representative color is white. west region generates dryness, which helps the creation of metal. Represents lung, white in color.

North: element water. representative color is black. north region generates coldness, which helps the growth of moisture. represents kidney, black in color.

Five elements and the Chinese understandings on colors

The Chinese traditional use of color emphasizes the symbolic meaning of color. Five elements, five virtues and five phrases are inter-constructed and integrated with the concepts of nature, ethics and philosophy. Emotional values are added into the speculation philosophy, which is the characteristic of Chinese culture.

Green: mixed by blue and yellow, visually mild, contains the functions on visual adjustment and recovery. Green spreads message of fresh, hope and growth,

and the feeling of silence. Green releases the pressure of eyes which helps reducing stress, clam, slowing down breathing, decreasing heart and blood pressure.

For the Chinese traditional use of color, green is the most common color in living environment, which contains the meaning of existing and hope. Green is the color of life, which is vital, harmony and calm and represents peace, spring, hope, youth, dream, safe and ecology.

Red:the longest wave length and highly eye-catching. It is a color strongly stimulates visual organs and emotions, which fastens blood circulation and breathing. Rad helps to relax depression and improve circulation and mental system.

Red is the most favorite color for the Eastern nations. Traditionally Chinese regards red as the symbol of celebration, happiness and luck. Red spreads warm feeling, and also feelings of energetic, enthusiast, active, on-going, sun, flame, hot, blood, life, intimate and love.

Yellow: The brightest color in all hue. It simulates the visual nerve and draws attentions. The happiest color which is the symbol of knowledge and light. Yellow stimulates mental nerve and improves brain function, mental refreshment and flexibility. Yellow represents centralization. The exclusive color of emperors and royal families. Yellow represents brightness, lively, splendid, prosperity, frank, rich, luxury, deluxe, harvest, warmth, happiness and energetic.

White: the color of highest brightness. the natural light of white is combined by different color of light from nature, so white is colorless. For the Chinese traditional use of color, white is bright and pure. It represents kindness and righteousness. In the Chinese traditions, white is also applied on funeral, mourning, and memorial. It is the symbol of bright, pure, sacred, noble and honesty. It expresses the feeling of happiness, innocent, lively, simple. clean and hygiene.

Black: the color with lowest brightness. The least simulation on visual sensation. The mainseparation and identification on colors. For the Chinese traditional use of color, black represents elegance, dignified, honesty, stability, and death. Black expresses the feeling ofdarkness, sin, scare, fear, the end of life, serious, solemn, respectful, deep, sad and silence.

In the traditional society, hierarchy was strictly followed. It is shown on the color of architecture. According to the rules, the hierarchy of color from the top is yellow, red, green, blue, black, grey. Yellow is the most honored color. Buildings in Beijing have to follow this strict rule that Forbidden City is applied with golden, yellow and red; The roofs of governors house should use green, normal locals could only use black, grey and white for wall and roof. With the contrast of Beijing's grey tone, forbidden city is totally highlighted which emphasized the supreme authority.

Beijing, once the capital of several dynasties, known to the ancient atmosphere, in the palace Pavilion building leaves, walking in the alley and courtyard of the community, the heart to savor which diffuse thick flavour,Maybe, you can understand the meaning of Beijing tour.

The city of Beijing has a long and rich history that dates back over 3,000 years. Beijing was a provincial city in northern China.Beijing was for centuries the capital of the ancient states of Yuan, Ming and Qi.

RED

Red is the color of fresh blood, which is also one of the tertiary and mental colors. In general we can't see the infrared. Red represents luck, happiness, warmth, bold, enthusiasms, fighting spirit, revolution. For many countries and nations, red functions on expelling the evils. For examples, in the ancient China, walls of palaces and temples were painted in red, costumes of officials and governors were in red, which were named, "Red door" and "Red costume"; Red is the representative color of element fire and symbol of "li" in eight diagram "Ba Gua".

At the beginning, red was not used for happiness and celebrations, but yellow, black and white. In Han Dynasty, Emperor Han Gaozu named himself, "The son of Emperor Qi". "Qi" is red. From that moment on, red became the color worshiped by the mass and this tradition is succeeded after Han.

As red is easy to draw attentions, many alerting signage apply red text and images. For examples, red means stop on the traffic light; Bleeding, danger and horror are also presented with red; Politically red also represents revolution and left wing, communism; Red is also known as the simulation of male hormone, that's why athletes in red can usually get higher score; Red is used on showing happiness and celebrations, like decorations in wedding and spring festival; Red is a color of loving; Red is a common color of Christmas; Dropping of stock is presented in red in North American Stock Market, in the other way around, it means rising in the east Asia market;

Red lantern

The red lantern signifies the reunion of the family, prosperity of career, flourish of life, and also symbolizes happiness and brightness, completion and affluence.

Photo: www.huitu.com/20111204151623008200



FOLK CUSTOMS

Red implies propitious for Chinese. In festivals and new year, red antithetical couplets are hung; Chinese bride is in traditional red wedding dress; Gifting red-dyed eggs when baby born; Red wrapping paper for presents; Red ribbon-cutting in openings and laying foundation on construction site. In general, red is widely regarded as the color of luck, happiness, and propitious.

1. Wedding · Red blessing

Red blessing is a part of wedding ceremony which is in charge by bride's uncle (mother's brother). Uncle will buy a piece of red cloth which is 9 feet long. 9 is a number pronounces similar to everlasting. The piece of cloth is given to the bride with the blessing of everlasting relationship.

Wedding scene

Red is an auspicious colour used in wedding to symbolize joy and happiness whereas gold symbolizes prosperity and fortune.

Photo: www.huitu.com/20120217095836084200



2. Wedding · Cheongsam (phoenix coronet and robes of rank)

Widely used in wedding. Robes of rank: also called “Xia pi”, “Pi bai”, a kind of shawl of ancient Chinese women. It is as beautiful as the rosy clouds, and the red represents newly-married and celebrations.

3. Moving-in new apartment. Red hanger

Red hanger is the ceremony of moving-in new apartment. It is comparatively tedious which requires several pieces of red cloth. In the ceremony, friends and relatives would bring pieces of red cloth to the family, then the host spread the cloth to everybody according to the size. The family members hung the red cloth onto the front wall. Luck came to the family once the red hung, it's also the hype of the ceremony.

4. Red sticker

Beside spring festival and celebrations, Chinese likes to use red paper to bless, such as friends gatherings, visiting patient, even the lifter would stick a red paper on the load to hope everything goes well and smooth.

5.Lamma Temple · Tibetan Buddhist painting

According to the meaning on directions, west is presented in red in the paintings (Religious founder of Heaven in west, Amitahba, his face is red). Red is also a symbol of power in Buddhism. In Tibetan opera, performer in red mask plays the role of emperor, while light red plays governors and officials.

6.Beijing carved lacquerware · Picking-out of red

Craft of Beijing carved lacquerware is mainly picking-out of red and black, others like black pattern on red, red pattern on black, red pattern on yellow, red pattern on green. Carved lacquerware in yellow, green and red are also commonly seen.

7.Children birthday celebration-Wedding banquet. Red dish

Commonly known is red-dyed egg, which is blessing on newborn baby, birthdays. Red-dyed egg represents happiness, blessing, and to ward off evil spirits. Family members eat red-dyed when baby comes for blessing him has a life with red luck; Red-dyed egg in wedding banquet is a blessing on the couples going well and smooth on everything, being close and everlasting love.

8.Crispy Sugar-Coated Fruit

A traditional Chinese snack which is a bamboo string of haws coated with melted sugar. It becomes crispy after cooled down.



Peking opera · Red face

Photo: Wang Donglin, Zhang Chao

9.Peking opera · Red face

Four red roles:

- (1). Abstract, roles of loyalty, honesty, brevity. E.g. Guan Yu
- (2). Realistic, description on skin, e.g. Liu Jin in “Famen Temple”. He is a eunuch-in-chief, whose face is red that his life was extravagant and wasteful.
- (3). Realistic, drawing ophryon wrinkle on Li Kui is to show he is a brave good man.

10.Forbidden City · Red wall

In traditional culture, red is regarded as luck, implied dignified, happiness and luck. Fire is the element belonged. “li” is shown in red in the eight diagram; It also has the meaning of Breeding, growing. Forbidden City widely used red because of it’s succession on color aesthetics.

There are white architectures at the West of the big three palace and east of Ci Ning Garden. South belongs to fire, in red, so Meridian Gate is in red.

SPECIFIC USE

Red is a color of nature. Politically, red is used as a symbol of revolution and left wing and also communism. Red is a favorite color of Chinese politics. “Red political power” is the early power, “Red army” is the arm-force, “red and concentrated” is hardworking. Something like “red flag”, “red kid”, “red land”...



Cultural Revolution · Little red book

Photo: Wang Donglin, Zhang Chao

1.Cultural Revolution · Little red book

Full name is “The proletariat culture revolution”. The political movement started from May 1966 to October 1976. The plastic cover of Quotations from Chairman Mao is red and so it’s also called little red book.

2.Young pioneer · Red scarf

Red scarf is a corner of national flag, the blood of martyr. It’s a symbol is a generation which is the forerunner of young pioneer---Children labour force paid their full enthusiasm on the revolution, and experienced the test of blood and fire.



Young pioneer · Red scarf

Photo: Wang Donglin, Zhang Chao

3.Song · Red song

Communist songs, which is to praise revolution and the motherland. Red song reflects the execution of revolution awakening collective red memories.

4.Tourism · Red trip

A combination of communist landscape and natural landscape, a new way of tourist development and traditional education of revolution.

5.National flag of China, Flag of Chinese Communist

The symbol of Communist party of China. It’s in red and decorated with golden emblem. Red symbolizes revolution and the pioneer of communist industrial workers, and represents the basic rights of the industrial workers and the mass.

6.Calligraphy

Since ancient times

(1)Zhu Pi (remarks of the emperor in Qing Dynasty, written in red with a brush). Only the emperor can use red which is shown the supreme right of king.

(2)Remarks written in zhu pi, which is for proof-reading on paper.

LITERATURE

1.Red and white face

Red and white face: Red face performs with hitting, scolding, and judging; the white face performs with persuading, tickling and tolerance.

2.Star turn

Star turn: very popular, famous, being trusted extremely, whose career goes very well. Commonly used to describe actors and brilliant staff of boss.

3.Pinkeye

Pinkeye-jealousy: According to Chinese, people got pink eye when they are extremely angry because one of the symptoms of Conjunctivitis is eyes engorgement and turns red, which looks similar to be jealous. Also called hot eyes, which emotionally describes jealousy.

4.Deficit

In the economic dictionary, red means in debt or loss because people usually mark deficit with red pen.

5.Red in Stock

Red in stock: red means rise, while green means drop. While red is used on alert, stop and deficit, it is the symbol of happiness in China.

YELLOW

Yellow is one of the primary colors. It has the highest value on brightness, feeling sprightly, slight; It reduces the depression in mental nerve so it is also used for alert. The color of first sunlight in dawn, which represents the solar light and heat, full of energy and hope. It provides feeling of bright, splendid, full, mature, warm and transparent.

Chinese avocados yellow, which is regarded as the most elegant color.

Chinese worships the earth, which is presented in yellow. Chinese sentimentally attach and rely on earth which is very reliable and trustful.

Element earth is the centre, so yellow becomes the centre among colors. The respect to yellow is shown in “yellow” applied in front of words like land, crops, skin, imperial robes, crowns, emperor, etc.

Before Han Dynasty, yellow was not the favorite color of Chinese. It's priority is following red and black. Modern archaeologist discovered Yin pottery in white is more fine and commonly used for worship by nobles. Black became welcomed in Qin dynasty. History showed yellow is not advocated before Han, even in the beginning stage. Red is the favorite until Han emperor Wu. He accepted the Dong Zong-xu's theory that yellow is the most beautiful color. It represents emperor. Then value of yellow became higher and higher, and more and more welcomed by the mass. At the end of Dong Han, the revolt of yellow turban insurrectionary army is renowned as the independence of yellow.

Yellow is especially advocated in Qing dynasty. Dragon robes of Qing emperors are all in yellow. National dragon flag is designed in yellow under the influence of national flag system founded in modern period. Royal relatives liked to wear yellow belt, which became the nickname of royal relatives.

Forbidden City

Since ancient times in China, yellow has been considered to be the most significant one in color grades. This color was exclusively for Chinese royalty, especially for the Emperor. Because of this, the Forbidden City, the palace of Chinese Emperor, also mainly use the yellow glazed tiles.

Photo: www.huitu.com/20120626223359576300



FOLK CUSTOMS



Peking opera · Red face
Photo: Wang Donglin, Zhang Chao

1.Peking opera · Yellow face

Yellow face represents brave and wild, cruel character.

2.Forbidden City · Glazed tile

Yellow is regarded as the standard, centered, supreme color specially for emperor. The roof of palace is constructed with yellow glazed tile.

3.Yellow pea cake

A traditional Beijing snack. It's used to celebrate the third of March, so it's sold in Spring until the end of spring.

4.Dragon robe · Bright yellow

Standard yellow is specially used by emperor. Yuan. Bi,"Shu Jian Pu (an introduction of paper in Sichuan, Guangzhou and Suzhou),"Mister Xie has ten colors and ten annotations, deep red, pink, almond red, bright yellow, deep green, light green, dark green, soft green, copper green, slight grey."



Imperial Robes
Photo: www.quanjing.com/ffpic0622

BELIEF

1.Taoism · Amulet

Yellow is the representative color of taoism, which is eye-catching; Taoist is also called yellow turbans,yellow crown.

2.Lamma temple · Buddha statue

Lama temple is a Tibetan Buddhist temple. Statues are made in copper and in copper-yellow. Yellow is commonly used in Buddhism. Buddha's physical is called "golden manifestation". Temples are in yellow, called "Jin Xa"; Frock is in yellow; Buddha statues are painted in golden, which is supreme and the color from heaven.

3.Lama cap

Qing, Fu Ge" volume seven of Ting Yu Cong Tan": "Based on the research of Ningmapa and Gelug-pa of Tibetan religion, we know that Po Luo Buddha wears a yellow hat while Li Buddha wears a red hat. However, at present, monks of Gelug-pa are only allowed to wear yellow clothes with official hats, yellow lining and red knots. There is no slit in the face and back of the gown." It is the reason of yellow Lama cap.

Lama cap

Photo: Wang Donglin, Zhang Chao



SPECIFIC USE

Special for the Royal

Ancient advocated yellow, which is regarded as the symbol of monarchical power. Bright yellow is specially used by emperor after Tang.

Forbidden City

Photo:www.huitu.com/20120720174125000200



LITERATURE

1.Pronoun of Porn

Prescriptively yellow is known as porn. It is mainly influenced by the West in end of 19 century. Yellow in the West is totally regarded as disgusting, caused by necessary and coincident factors. Yellow turned to be cheap and porn from the royal elegance. Nowadays, all porn matters is also called as yellow.

2.Beijing dialect

“It turns yellow” means something goes fail and fizzle out. Agreement is not made, goal is not achieved.

No matter how, Beijing locals always use “lama’s cap----turns yellow” to describe things go fail. If someone asked,“How’s your date?” and the answer is,“Forget it, lama’s cap----yellow!” That means the proposal failed.

BLUE

The history of Chinese Feudal society has lasted for several thousands years. Both standard of education and technology are comparatively low. The creation of color became a misery for the mass and it's development is deeply influenced by the social development. In ancient Qin, terms of color is linked to the ancestors' view of world and philosophy, and gradually linked to politics. Content and symbolic meaning of color then became very rich and variable. Blue prescriptively represents sky, water, nature and eternity. Because of the meaning of sky, Chinese believes soul is invited to the heaven by spirit. Heaven is a station before reincarnation. Passing away is also known as back to heaven. Blue is applied on funeral, worship ceremony. Blue is cold, which makes people feel calm and free. The concept, "Worship the blue" is executed on the architecture related to heaven and sky, like Temple of Heaven, which is widely constructed by blue glazed tile to present the width and depth of boundless sky, and the supreme of sky. To fit the centered Chinese theory, "Round sky and Square land", round top architecture is built in blue.

The advocation on nature is reflected by the worship to astronomical phenomena. On astronomy, "Zi" is the area of Zihui Star, the center, which is the reason of naming. The naming "Zi Jin Cheng"(Forbidden City) is also referenced from that. It means China is the center of the world. Folklore says the God of Heaven lives in Zihui star, so emperor has the divine right of king. Taoist regards purple as luck. Purple is the symbol of auspicious and elegance, widely used by emperors and taoist. "Zi Qi", "Zi Dian" means signs of luck, "Purple luck from the east". Purple robe was advanced officials by the emperor. "Purple suit" became the ultimate goal to achieve among scholars. Purple is also widely used in Taoism, like "purple book", the taoist book; "purple stage", the living place of god. Purple is always related to sacred and misery matters.

Prescriptively blue is used to express some emotional functions in the Chinese history. It is given in different meanings in different social background, from ancient to modern. When feudal society turned to socialism, ideologically, people fight for abandoning thinkings "old, out-of-fashion" , and at the same time, blue is also redefined. Blue is the coldest color.

Blue means something more on objects instead of it's physical expression, but also presents on the aspects of sophisticated, lifestyle and policy. It is not a royal color, so it can be used by the mass. It leads to the wide publicity in use. In modern time of China, labour uniform is in blue and it is also a daily common wear of the mass. Besides, because of the variety of nations, blue was applied on the eight banners system which shown on the zhenglan banner and blue banner. Jurchens divided colors in five: red, yellow, blue, white, black. Blue represents sky. Jurchens rely on nature on harvest, cultivation. Water and Sun became their source of life and growth. Yellow represents earth, black represents iron, which has higher priority than earth, so four colors left. Yellow, white, red and blue separately represent earth, water, sun and sky.

FOLK CUSTOMS

1. Blue and white porcelain.

The blue is created by the chemical reaction of dye, which is an oxidized cobalt. The color is chosen with Chinese thought.

Blue and white porcelain

Photo: www.huitu.com/20110908094800728200



2. Blue mandarin jacket

Men's wear, originally from horse-riding suit of Manzu. Color used is related to the Manzu color system, which blue represents sky.

3. Blue antique book cover

It is commonly in blue with different materials. Instead of the printing mineral color, blue is more like used to spread calm and silence.

4. Chinese tunic suit

Formal dressing, the Chinese style suit. It only appears in formal and grand occasions and became famous by political leaders. It requires to be stable, confident and grand therefore blue and grey are the most favorite colors.

5. Blue frock

National construction was in peak during 50s to 70s. Working was the pride and being plain was trendy. Industrial workers were in blue frock usually, which became a pride wearing in blue. Blue and grey were trend color in the mass. Nowadays, it represents freedom, casual and independence.

6. Water cube

Designed with the inspiration from water. Blue is the main color. The surface of the architecture is covered by hyrone-shaped geometry. Water cube is one of the landmarks of Beijing.



Peking opera · Blue face

Photo: Wang Donglin, Zhang Chao

7. Peking opera · Blue face

Blue mask presents character of honesty and wild.

Blue and white porcelain

Photo: www.huitu.com/20110908094800728200



LITERATURE

Han zu likes blue. Blue sky and ocean always gives simulations to people's passion on nature, dream on future. "I love blue sky." is a description on enthusiastic pilot, while "I love blue ocean." is to description on enthusiastic sailor.

1.Blue collar

Derived from "white collar", "blue collar" represents labour, and human force.

2.Blueprint (original version)

Similar to the sample print nowadays. Definitive edition then ink print. Blueprint is the earliest print after engraved block. It is also called "blueprint the original".

3.Blueprint

Originally from engineer blueprint graph for printing map, mechanical drawing, construction drawing. In literature, blueprint is commonly regarded as hope and future, building fortune.

GREEN

Green is an “elastic color”, represents life, youth, growth, health. It provides comfort but also jealous and greed, as common saying, “As greedy as green”.

Green is color of plant, also implied life and spring. Green represents the growth of life, spreads warmth to earth, and expels loneliness.

Sophisticated communication of green. Green natures wood in the theory of five elements. Green is themed animals and plants in nature, which is good for children on the aspects of eye protection, education on wildlife care, environmental protection, eco-friendly lifestyle, indoctrination on sacred virtue and civilized behavior.

Social influence of green. Hope appears where green is; Green is color of luck, symbolizes safe, fresh. In the social development, green lifestyle is welcomed and derived to olympics economics and design and innovative creations.

Green is the complementary colour of red, both brightness and color weight are similar. Mankind naturally balance specific color by creating complimentary colors, so that's why green is always used with red and commonly seen in the local costumes, fences in royal garden which is largely used in red.

FOLK CUSTOMS

1.Jadeite



Jadeite

Photo: Wang Donglin, Zhang Chao

Chinese advocates jade, which is regarded as a model of virtue. Empress Qi Xi loves jade and created tones of furnishings and jewelries. Jadeite then became the flavor among Chinese.

2.Glazed roof tile

Green An important construction material in ancient China, commonly used for roof building in Tang Dynasty. It was widely used on roof of palace, mansion of monarch, building for worship, temple in Ming and Qing Dynasty. Strict instruction on the use of glazed roof tile is a way of Qing government to build up the conservative hierarchy.



Glazed roof tile

Photo: www.huitu.com
20101208191120287617

3.Peking opera · Green face

Peking opera mask is rich in color which symbolize the role's nature, character and attitude.

Green mask represents brave, rude, impulse. e.g. heroes of the greenwood. It also represents stubborn and irascible.

4.Beijing Security uniform

Green is the main color tone of Beijing Security uniform.

5.Green pea cake

A popular seasonal dessert, which is in light green. It is made by green pea, sweet natured and slightly cold, non-poison, detoxification and avoid thirsty.



Peking opera · Green face

Photo: Wang Donglin, Zhang Chao

BELIEFS

Thangka. Green tara

Thangka is a special painting in tibet. In general 30 plus different colors are used on a good Thangka, sometimes over 50 colors, which white, yellow, blue are the most common basics. Green is used as base color by some painters. Green is a symbol of rich and wealthy.

BLACK & WHITE

The Chinese people love black and white color, and the accumulation of thousands of years has developed a unique aesthetic culture, which is unique in the history of human civilization.

1.Black

A idiom, “a clear distinction between black and white”, means righteousness and evil stand in sharp contrast. Black feels like evil. Black refers to prisoner in enigmatic language of police; Black is the pronoun of evil and bad.

Black is also related to death and darkness, which creates sadness, shadow, sick in heart and suppressed. Black is regarded as an independent color in some theoretical says, which answer is, “black is a color without light, and, there is no substitutes on the symbolic meanings of black.

Characteristics: horror, darkness, uneasy, sin.

2.White

In Chinese traditional culture, white is always related to fear and sadness because “at the very first beginning stage of mankind, our ancestors were such weak and powerless. They were unable to escape from the wildlife attack that they were totally exposed under the sun. They were always in danger of being attacked and eaten. White became a primitive fear. Besides, white is the color of moon, which is always related with autumn’s loneliness. White is gradually regarded as the color of taboo. At the same time, as the contrast color of red, white is such dry, pale and lifeless, symbolizes death and bad luck. Similar to western interpretation, white is also regarded as purity and innocent.

Characteristics: bright, pure, clean, honest, cold, serious

3.Grey

Grey Color with no character, a mixture of perfect white and destruction of black. Grey is always meant by average, normal. It also gives feeling of mild and elegant. It is a middle-tone color which is acceptable by both men and women that is always trendy. Most of the hi-tech products, especially metallic, are designed in grey to show it’s image of hi-end, hi-tech. Different layers matching of colors are applied on grey to enrich from the dull, bored and still feeling.

Characteristics: mild, elegant, silent, plain, loneliness

BLACK & WHITE

1. Funeral

Black and white are the absolute main colour in the funeral ceremony of the rituals of people's life. Which become Chinese people's mourning manifestations; Silverware has a symbolic significance for the provision of disaster to evil, it has also been widely used in newborns and the elderly decorative objects.

Wear Widow's Weeds. Since ancient times, if there is death of relatives, family members will be clothed with linen in mourning, mourning has also been decorated as white. In the funeral procession, it must be hanging a white flag, and even the funeral is also called "white matter(白事)".

Chinese Funeral

Photo:www.123rf.net,by Yuttasak Jannarong



2. Taiji

Taiji Diagram of black and white two-color two sides on behalf of the yin (阴) and yang (阳) , heaven and earth two parts; black and white boundaries of the two sides is divided into Yin and sector Ministry. Black spots in white means there is yin in yang, white spots in black means yin there is yang in yin.

3. Tortoise

A fetish mixed by turtle and snake. Tortoise is also known as "Xuan Ming" which ancient pronunciation of "Wu" and "Ming" are the same. "Xuan" means black; "Ming" means negative.

4. Wei chi

Wei chi in ancient China, is a strategic two board games, , it is a simple two-color, but contains a wealth of meaning, its philosophy is extensive, it is imagine rich, inspire the wisdom of the people.

There are many interpretations on the color, black and white, of Chinese chess. One of them is "Yin-yang" which black and white represents the two extremes; another one is sharp contrast makes result of war.



Peking opera · Black face

Photo: Wang Donglin, Zhang Chao



Peking opera · White face

Photo: Wang Donglin, Zhang Chao

5.The Great Wall

The winding down of the Great Wall and nestled in the green leaves of the courtyard houses of gray, is the important sign of Beijing's traditional architectural landscape color. Gray is the unique charm of the elements in the Beijing Olympics Color System.

6.Peking opera · Black and white face

Black mask in peking opera represents people with fair justice and straight character, it's the richest in content and the most colorful mask in peking opera.

Pastel white face, which is painted the face directly with white powder. It is generally applied on treacherous people.

White face (also called oily white face); Several interpretation included: hale and hearty old hero and captain; ferocious fighter or someone self-willed. White face of eunuch presents his fine skin and treacherous character; Strong monks with martial strength also applied white face.

7.Ink Painting · Chinese calligraphy

Calligraphy and painting art make black and white playing to the extreme, Chinese people's thoughts and emotions in the best of them.

Ink Painting: A form of painting, ink painting is regarded as a traditional Chinese painting, representative of Chinese painting . The basic ink painting, only use water and ink, and all in them.

Chinese calligraphy: Chinese calligraphy unique art of Chinese characters. Broadly speaking, calligraphy is refers to the the symbol written rules of the language. In other words, calligraphy refers characteristics and their meanings in accordance with the text, its chirography brushwork, structure and methodicalness of writing, to become rich beauty of the works of art. Chinese calligraphy, known as: which is the original art performance of Han nationality nwordless poetry, line dance; painting, silent music.



Calligraphy

Photo:www.123rf.net,by Li Xuejun

8.Black food

Black food is not only nutritious, but also most conducive to health, and can even cure diseases. "The most powerful black food is considered to be health food.

LITERATURE

Black and white face

General speaking, white face or collar represents labor force working in office, commercials. Boss, especially the mean one, is black face, golden collar.

Generally speaking, working with brain, text, and commercial activities, is white face, white collar. Boss, especially the strict one, is black face, golden collar.

PHILOSOPHY

Black and white themselves have a unity of opposites, the separation and integration of complementary philosophical meaning of positive and negative. On behalf of the Chinese philosophy thought of Taoism, the Taoist temple is decorated. Mainly with black and white colors. Black and white which have already been defined as a means of performance quality in China. Black and white contain rich meaning which philosophy is extensive, imaginative, inspiring people's wisdom.

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Research Report 2013



Hong Kong

the
Colours
of Asia

Red Yellow Blue Green Black & White

亞洲
色彩

紅黃藍綠黑與白



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INTRODUCTION

Having been a colonial city, Hong Kong is well known for its diverse culture of Western and Chinese influence. But Hong Kong is never being absorbed. Its uniqueness lies in its quick response and being inclusive to different cultures, while making necessary cultural transformation to suit its needs. The swinging city is so colourful that any definition given to a specific colour seems to be reasonable, yet insufficient.

Thus, this research intends to collect fragments of stories about the standard colours of Red, Yellow, Blue, Green, Black and White. Contents of the stories are varied, from the built environment to rituals, design, food, language and etc, depending on its significance to the corresponding colour.

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RED: THE AUSPICIOUS RED



Dried red melon seeds.

Photo: Kan and Lau Design Consultants



Windmill.

Photo: Kan and Lau Design Consultants



Long life tea set.

Photo: Kan and Lau Design Consultants



Pin An Bun.

Photo: Kan and Lau Design Consultants

RED is the most popular color for Chinese people while the red custom has already existed for thousand years. It is believed that Chinese people are the descendants of Fiery Emperor which representative colour is red (Kohn, 2008). The fact that Hong Kong had been influenced by English culture as a colonial city for hundred years hasn't eliminated this tradition. Almost all kinds of joyous or auspicious occasions are still associated with red:

- In Lunar New Year, Hong Kong people post red calligraphy couplets at home; give out red pocket to children; eat red melon seed and exchange presents wrapped with red paper. Some may even wear red underwear as a 'lucky' gesture when playing Mahjong, a common game for gathering. And on the third day of January every year (lunar calendar), which was the birthday of *Che Kung*, *Che Kung* temple would be packed like sardine. People visit the temple to rotate the sails of the copper windmill to pray for good luck and purchase smaller fortune windmills in red implied with the same fortune meaning.
- Red is central to the wedding theme. The bride's wedding gown is often in red, so do the wedding invitations and decorations (such as red candles) for the bride and groom's homes.



Wedding in Hong Kong.

Photo: Philip Tsang (Photographer), Dorothy Chau (Bride), Benny Cheung (Groom)

- A red "Flowers plaque" would be placed at the front gate to celebrate the opening of a store. A ceremony of cutting a red ribbon by founders would be held to signify the activation of a project or company.
- The concept of red being auspicious is also applied in everyday objects. For modern design, a significant example would be "Double happiness" products and "Long life cup" which could be seen in almost every family in 1960s.

EXPELLING EVIL SPIRITS

Red has multiple functions, like the earth god does. It is common to see residents, usually those living in tenement house or early public housing estate, place a spirit tablet of the earth god (as a household altar) outside their home at the front door. Incense sticks are burned at regular time to the spirit so that the whole family could be protected. These spirit tablets are in red because traditionally red has the function of expelling evil spirits. This belief explains why the wall of temples and imperial palace in China were usually painted in red. Nowadays, people have a more subtle way to “ensure” the safety of their family, such as placing a red carpet at the front door with a saying “May your coming and going be safe” on it.

Traditionally, different occupations worship different gods, for instance, pawnshop worships fire god which representative colour is also red (曲, 2001). This may explain why the signboard of a pawnshop is usually painted in red. While items of personal property used as collateral in the past were varied from watches to precious fur and silk goods, pawnshops need fire god to protect them from fire disaster.

THE INAUSPICIOUS RED

Does it mean that Red brings people luck all the time then? Not really. Every year in July (lunar calendar), during the Ghost Festival, it is inauspicious to wear a red string as it is considered an appeal to ghosts. Hence, whether red would expel or attract evils actually depends on time and occasions. Besides, a folktale about suicide dressing in red has been around for thousand years. It is believed that one could transform into a ferocious ghost after death and come back to the human realm for revenge if she (usually sad woman who has been betrayed by a man) ends up her life dressing in red. It seems rational when people die with a hatred heart have the greatest power for blinded vengeance but it has always been a mystery whether a red ferocious ghost or a red door with “supernatural power” would win. After all, a tale is just a tale. For modern people it is more like a story to laugh about or a subject for recreation. Indeed, most HK people get to know about the story via watching horror or fictional movies. If a lady dressing in red walks down the street during the Ghost festival, she would probably be regarded as a “Red person” (a term used to describe famous people in China) and asked to take pictures with.

Red letter is also considered inauspicious. Letter written in red is either a suicide note or a letter written to end or sever a relationship. The cultural background for this custom is very specific. In ancient times, emperors claimed that they were son of God and their destiny as a leader was proven by *The Book of Heaven* written in red. Therefore, when a prisoner was sentenced to death, his name would be written in red to indicate that his life had been deprived by the supreme power and the judgment was irretrievable (范，陳, 2007). This background explains why it is extremely disrespectful to write the name of a living person in red while names on gravestones would be painted in red.

Texts in red are also warning signals, alerting people to stay away from the dangerous zone. In Hong Kong, red is considered the severity level for rainstorm warning signal and fire danger warning signal. However, HK people would probably be more sensitive with the term “Red letter”(赤字) meaning “deficit”, while there was a tradition of marking losses in red (Xinhua Online Dictionary. Retrieved from: <http://xh.5156edu.com/html5/179369.html>).

'PLASTIC RED' – THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF 1960S

Plastic products have recorded the history of industrial development in HK and the daily life of general people in 1960s. Plastic products at that period of time were colorful but indeed those in red have played the most important role in the collective memory of HK people. In 1960s, the inexpensive and practical bucket produced by Brand A had achieved a great success in business due to the frequent suspension of water supply. Another product is watermelon ball. It symbolizes the simplicity of the childhood in 1960s. Also, the red plastic lamp, which is still commonly seen in old markets, has not only added a fresh colour to products or food but also recalled the fading memory of the warmth and kindness in neighbourhood.

Oil container.

Photo: Kan and Lau Design Consultants



Red-white plastic balls.

Photo: Kan and Lau Design Consultants



RED IN POLITICS



Logo of Legislative Council.

After the handover, the new regional flag carries a design of five bauhinia petals, each with a star in the middle, on a red background. As explained by the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Basic Law in the National People's Congress, 'The red flag represents the motherland (China) and the white bauhinia represents Hong Kong..... while the red and white colours embody the principle of "one country, two systems" ' (Lauterpacht, Greenwood, Oppenheimer, 2002).

Red represents the Chinese Communist (the dominant political power) and thus represents China. This is the political reality. As a result, the legislative council (LC) officially uses red and blue to indicate ProEstablishment camp (ProBeijing camp) and Pandemocracy camp respectively

(File:4th Legislative Council of Hong Kong seat composition.svg. Retrieved from http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:4th_Legislative_Council_of_Hong_Kong_seat_composition.svg).

For Pandemocracy camp, red is an evil colour while the Chinese Communist has been demonised. Referring to the comment by the famous left wing delegate *Wu Kang-min*, Hong Kong people generally have *Uncertainty about Red* (赤色疑惑) (<吳康民-我是香港左派> , 2012-05-06). The fundamental conflict is that universal values in Hong Kong, such as human rights and a government by law, are still being fought for in mainland China. Red is synonymous with autocracy and this may explain why most political parties in HK avoid using red in their logos.

As a side story, the current logo of Legislative Council is yellow in background. The official explanation for the choice is that yellow is associated with "harmony". This explanation is rather odd for us because other examples with the same kind of association could not be found (LegCo Civic Education Corner. Retrieved from http://www.legco.gov.hk/young/chinese/students/interesting_legco.html).

RED VS BLUE

Famous local brand in Hong Kong can be divided into two groups according to the colour of their logos: Red and Blue. Red corporations include bread producer Garden (since 1926), vitamin drinks producer Vitasoy (since 1940), fast food restaurant Maxim (since 1956), Cafe de Corel (1972) and etc. Blue corporations include Cathay Pacific (since 1946), Watson's stores of personal care, Hong Kong Jockey club (since 1884) and etc.

Neglecting the nature of industry that the corporations belong to, Red corporations are usually owned by Chinese while the Blue corporations are usually owned by British or Western investors. The speculation on the phenomenon is that, people in those days were not so aware of visual branding thus it was normal for them to choose the colour they were familiar with. Red is an auspicious color for Chinese people while royal blue is a representation of the Great Britain (Royal blue is the basic colour of the national flag of United Kingdom). The taste of different nations may have caused the Red VS Blue phenomenon in business.

These Chinese corporations founded before 1970s (before the economic boom) had an ambition of serving common people thus their products or services were usually offered at a cheaper price. Hence, HK people may unconsciously believe that Red, when compared with Blue, is cheaper and more localized. It is difficult to prove the hypothesis of Red being cheaper with statistics but some clues may be found in a folk saying.

Both founded by western investors, Parknshop (in blue) and Wellcome (in red) are two major supermarket brands in HK. The two companies have held price war for years and there was a misconception about Wellcome selling cheaper products before investigation on prices was taken. (This is only a folk saying) This perception was probably altered by the company's image while other red corporations founded by Chinese have indeed provided products mainly for the grass-roots level.

YELLOW: YELLOW IN HISTORY

Based on the theory of five elements, yellow corresponds to the earth element and has an implied meaning of the center of universe. Therefore, yellow was strictly limited to the emperor who was regarded the “Son of Heaven” (Bjaaland, 2008). An injunction of forbidding the common people to dress in yellow was first issued in *Tang* dynasty but it was not strictly enforced. Then in AD 960, *Zhao Kuangyin*, the first emperor of *Song* dynasty, was draped with the imperial yellow robe and acclaimed emperor by his supporters. Since then yellow has become a symbol of the imperial power. Except monks, it was a taboo for common people to wear in yellow as it was considered a gesture of conspiring against the authority. However, after the downfall of *Qing* dynasty, the taboo no longer exists.

YELLOW IN RELIGIONS

Yellow has the highest symbolic quality for Chinese Buddhism because of the saffron colour of the monks' robes. In order to plant a good cause, worshippers burn yellow incense and golden joss paper to Buddha or spirits while they burn silver joss paper to ghosts or deceased ancestors (楊, 2007). (Ancestor died for more than 3 years can be regarded as Holy Spirit) Hence, local folk religions have probably absorbed this custom in their practice and this may explain why villain hitters in Hong Kong would use a yellow paper to represent *Bai Hu* (which means White tiger) and make sacrifice to it during the ceremony.

YELLOW AS FORTUNE

Indeed, the implied meaning of yellow or golden color as wealth and fortune is more popular. In Chinese wedding, gifts from the elderly to the new couples such as golden dragon & phoenix bracelets and golden pig necklace are regarded as a blessing for their unbreakable relationship as a gold. In Lunar New Year, Chinese eat food in yellow such as dried scallop and *Jin deui* (fried sesame balls) to imply the meaning of fortune.

Gaining profit is definitely the ultimate goal for businessmen. Traditional stores, especially high-class Chinese restaurants, had special requirements for their signage (usually a horizontal inscribed board). The letter would be written by famous calligrapher and painted in gold or even decorated with gold foil. It showed that the shop had a solid financial background and thus offered products with higher quality. Nowadays, it is common to see “golden signage” but this term is still used to describe stores or brands with good reputation.

Luk Yu Teahouse.

Photo: Kan and Lau Design Consultants



YELLOW AS A KUNGFU LEGEND

Bruce Li is an international Kungfu (Martial Arts) star who established his career in Hong Kong. In his last movie *Game of Death*, his image in the yellow suit with black strip on the two sides is significant. The sportswear was designed by the patriotic actor therefore some people guess that the colours chosen actually represent Chinese people who have yellow skin and black hair (Why did Bruce Lee wear the yellow sportswear? (2011, Jan24) Baidu. Retrieved from <http://zhidao.baidu.com/question/217802917.html>). It is hard for us to prove this speculation but his image in yellow sportswear, which is diverted from time to time by other movies such as "Kill bill" and "Shaolin Soccer", has indeed become an ever-lasting icon of the Kungfu legend.

YELLOW VS BLUE – PORNOGRAPHY IN HONG KONG

Yellow is synonymous with pornography and this is a modern perception from the Western Culture. But the story of colour in Hong Kong's underground sex industry is far more interesting than that.

Bars, nightclubs in Wanchai's Lockhart Road and Sauna centers in Kowloon's Shanghai Street are both considered as red light district in Hong Kong. Pictures of the two streets at their golden ages show that signboards in Wanchai were mainly in Blue (in 1960s) while those in Shanghai Street were mainly in Yellow (in 1980s). Although their "representation" (Bars VS Sauna) and golden ages (1960s VS 1980s) are different, the nature of their clients has remained the same. Wanchai was the gathering place for US army during the Vietnam War and it continues to serve foreign customers until now. (Probably attracted by the movie "The world of Susie Wong") Shanghai Street, on the other hand, mainly serves local clients.

The two streets are still famous for night-life but the yellow scene and the blue scene are fading gradually. Signboards of different industries in diverse colours are mixed together while "Yellow signboards" (which has the same meaning as "red-light district" in Hong Kong) are not only in yellow. Also, the fading of yellow in Shanghai Street after 1990s may also prove the trend of going north (to the mainland) for sex services after China's reform and opening-up policy has been introduced.

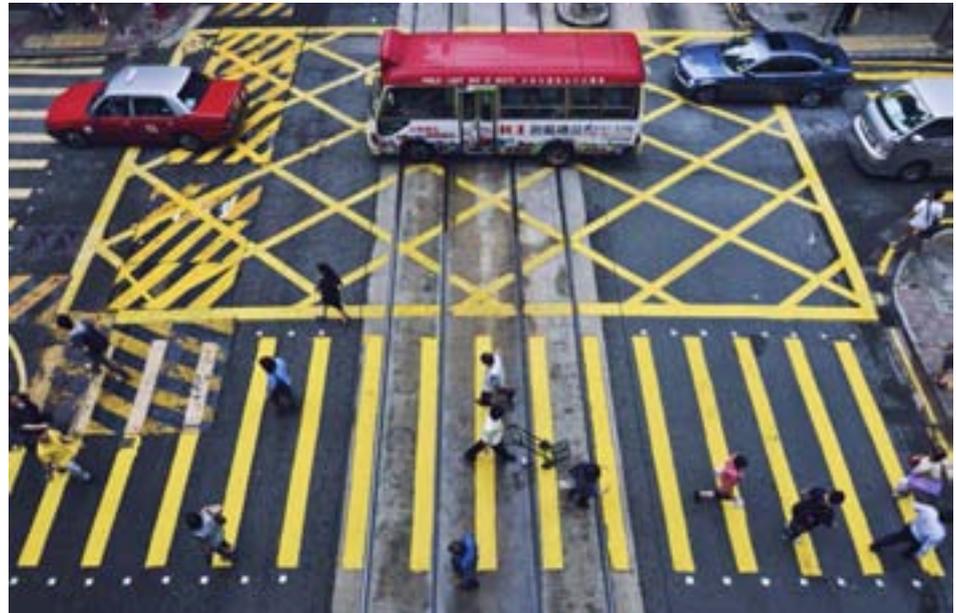
YELLOW AS A CAUTION SIGN

Yellow is often used in a caution sign but usually it has a less severe meaning than Red in most cases. When yellow means “Caution”, red means “Warning”.

- The Amber signal gives alert about potential heavy rain that may develop into Red or Black signal situations.
- On railway platform, passengers are reminded to stand behind the yellow line in the safety zone to get rid of the danger which may occur when the train comes. But at the border of the platform near the track, the “Danger” sign is in Red.
- At the center of a crossroad, the floor is usually painted with a yellow sign in cross-grid. It is used to remind drivers to be aware of cars coming from different directions. The sign is adopted from England. It remains the same after the handover.

Cross-road in Hong Kong.

Photo: Michal Konkolowicz



HK FOOD IN YELLOW

Talking about the food culture in HK, HK style cafe and street food emerged since the 60s must be on the list. Famous food in HK Style cafe such as egg tart, French toast, pineapple bun and milk tea are all yellow in colour. Egg puff, curry fish ball and fried stinky tofu on the street are also the same.

Is it just a coincidence? Is there any interesting story behind?

Egg tart, French toast, pineapple bun and egg puff are more or less made of ingredients like butter, eggs, sugar, flour and milk. These ingredients, especially butter and eggs, make the food yellow. And obviously the recipe of mixing these ingredients together is from the West.

Street food is another story. Famous street foods today were invented by hawkers in the 60s. The ingredients used were usually cheap and the mobile nature of hawkers had made it difficult to retain freshness of food. Thus, many street foods are fried and cooked with a strong favour. The fresh color is a result of the cooking method.

BLUE: THE HAKKAS COMMUNITIES IN BLUE

The *Hakkas* communities have settled in Hong Kong since 300 years old and are considered indigenous inhabitants of the city. They usually dressed in dark blue or black and wore a big bamboo hat which sheltered their forehead. It is said that their intention was to keep low-profile so that officers could not recognise their faces (我們的客家: 一條圍村圍着族群的文化, 2011-12-09). Therefore, to some extent, the blue shirt has recorded their history of being refugees. A more simple explanation for the dressing is that Hakkas was usually farmers who were not very wealthy. Black or blue was the most suitable color as it was practical and would not show soil.

ROYAL BLUE

Royal blue was a symbol of the governing class or the upper class since it is the basic colour of the British flag and Hong Kong flag (before the handover). Many famous British corporations such as Hong Kong Jockey Club also use royal blue as their visual identity. Due to the elegant manner of British people, royal blue has been dignified and this may explain why people prefer dressing in dark blue or black for important occasions.

BLUE AS FREEDOM



Taiwan national flag.

Photo: NDD design

Blue also symbolizes freedom. Apart from the universal association with the sky, the concept may probably be relevant to the flag of “Blue Sky with a White Sun” promoted by *Sun Yat-sen*, the founding father of Modern China. In 1895, the flag of “Blue Sky with a White Sun”, which represents freedom and equality, was approved to be the revolutionary flag for the Society for the Revival of China in the first conference held in Hong Kong. Later the design has been developed and became the national flag for the Republic period of China after the downfall of *Qing* dynasty. Although HK was already a British colonial city at that time, the communication between HK and the mainland had never stopped until 1949. The flag of “Blue sky, White Sun and Red ground” were everywhere in HK right after the war of resistance against Japan. And it was common to see old members of the nationalist party celebrate on Double Ten Day every year before the handover.

Although the new generation seems to be unfamiliar with this recent history in politics, the concepts of freedom and equality have long been the core values for HK citizens. Nevertheless, the current association of blue with freedom may probably be a byproduct of the advertising of America’s blue jeans in 1960s which emphasis on individuality. But obviously, the freedom of “being yourself” and the national freedom which *Sun Yat-sen* had fought for his whole life are definitely not in the same content.

THE INTELLECTUAL BLUE

The association of blue with intelligence has a long history in Western culture. In ancient Rome, philosophers dressed in blue to show that they were intellectual and extraordinary. In America, blue is still the representative colour of the department of philosophy in universities.

In China, a specific object in blue has the implied meaning of intelligence: Blue cheongsam. In early 20th century, indanthrene blue cloth got popular first in Shanghai and then spread over the whole country. It was inexpensive and wear-resisting while its colour was brighter than the traditional clothes. Cheongsam made of indanthrene blue was especially popular among female teachers and students because it gave the wearers a neat and decent look. Compared to the fashion trend of luxuriant cheongsam driven by prostitutes at that time, the plain blue cheongsam appeared to be intellectual and low-profile.

In Hong Kong, girl schools with a long history, for instance *Heep Yunn*, *Ying Wa* and Kowloon True Light, have continued the tradition of blue cheongsam. These schools have kept a good reputation therefore their uniform still gives people an impression of intelligence and decency.



Blue cheongsam.

Photo: Kan and Lau Design Consultants

BLUE REPRESENTING HYGIENE

The association of blue with water and sky runs through almost every culture, signifying life and purity. This meaning can also be applied in Hong Kong while many famous brands in Hong Kong which emphasis on health and hygiene are in blue.

These are the examples of brands with a visual identity in blue:

- Manning, a famous brand in HK which sells personal care items, pharmacies, health & beauty products.
- Hoe Hin White Flower Analgesic, which is made from a traditional blend of aromatic herbs such as lavender and mint, is used to heal headaches and minor pains.
- Life bread, a product by a local brand Garden which aims at making tasty bread with nutrition at an affordable price.
- Tempo, a synonym of tissue paper from Germany which was introduced to HK in mid-1980s.

These brands have things in common. They provide relatively high quality products at a fair price and have a long history in Hong Kong. Their products are generally accepted by different generations while it can be shared by all family members. It may be hard to measure how blue has been beneficial to their brand promotion but at least the message driven by blue is consistent with the brand's image: clean, decent and trustworthy.

GREEN: THE GREEN PHENOMENON IN BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Tenant house, which has a mixture of Chinese and Western style, is unique among the architectures built in early 20th century. It usually has a wooden structure with walls built with blue bricks and roof covered with green glazed bricks. These materials are actually the same as Chinese traditional architecture while the unadorned color combination of grey, white and jade was very common in southern China. Concerning the hot and humid weather of the region, this aesthetic choice of colours may be a natural response. Green, particularly, is like a soft drink and psychologically its cool us down in the summer.

Upper Ngau Tau Kwok Estate.

Photo: John Choy



After the Second World War, people turn to use armored concrete to build new tenant houses which roof is flat and no longer covered with green tiles. Probably out of security concerns, iron window frames in green are installed and this new architectural detail has been outstanding. Apart from that, HK style cafe and food booth, which are regarded as the collective memory for the local citizens since 1960s, also share a common colour theme: Green. The terrazzo armrest, mosaic tiles floor and iron window frames in HK style cafe and the sheet iron of food booth are all in green.

A HK scholar Oscar Ho has expressed his view in an article that the green phenomenon might be relevant to the popularity of British Racing Green in early 20th century. As he said, 'It is pretty much an upper-class colour.....Who else could afford the cost of participating the international racing competition? If you agree so, dark green could be regarded as the byproduct of British colonisation.' (Christopher DeWolf (2011, July 7). Why is Hong Kong so literally green? CNN GO. Retrieved from <http://www.cnngo.com/hong-kong/life/hong-kong-color-green-808155>). However, this conclusion may not be convincing enough. HK style cafes and food booths are designed for lower-class people so there is no reason for them to build up an upper-class image. Another possible reason for the green phenomenon is that there were limited choices of colour due to the lack of materials after the Second World War. As explained by a hardware shop owner in Shanghai Street, 'White, yellow, black and green were the only choices provided.' (上海街再發現: 細賞多層次老香港, 2012-09-09). Black and white concerns about funeral therefore people might have avoided using them for decoration. And at the time when air-conditioning was not so popular, it is hard to imagine that the customers, usually labors who earned money from physical works, could stay calm in a yellow restaurant. Therefore, green appeared to be the most natural choice for them in 1960s.

GREEN AS A RECORD OF HK'S URBANIZATION

But it is not completely irrational for Prof Oscar Ho to say that “Dark green could be regarded as the side product of British colonization.” Public transportation established in the early 20th century, for instance the tram in HK Island, the off-stream Kowloon train and the ferry, are all in dark green. Apart from the ferry, their design was the same as those in England at that period of time. (The oldest tram and ferry which still function today were produced after the Second World War but they are meant to resemble the design in early 20th century) (Official website of The “Star” Ferry Company, Retrieved from <http://www.starferry.com.hk/tour.html>). These “Dark green” has transited people from new territories to the downtown, across the mountain and over the sea. It may be better to say that the colour has recorded the urbanisation of Hong Kong rather than regarding them as the byproduct of British colonisation. Comparatively, the illustration of white and green of the ferry as the sky and the sea respectively (as claimed by Star Ferry’s representative) has become an interlude (<天船地車>, 2012-02-20).

TENSION OF SPACE: CAGE HOUSE AND ILLEGAL STRUCTURES

Hong Kong is one of the most densely-populated urban districts in the world and this has caused a strange phenomenon: People live in cage house and uncountable illegal structures are added outside buildings. Cage house is the living space of poor people which one could barely sit upright in them. Illegal structures are variables; some appears as extended cubes made of iron frames outside buildings. Coincidentally, many of these cubes (no matter the interior or the exterior ones) are in green. These green cubes keep reminding us about the tension of space in Hong Kong.

Cage house.

Photo: Amy Katherine Vonk



GREEN FOOD, THE HEALTHY FOOD

Many popular brands which offer healthy food in Hong Kong have their image in green:

- *Hung Fook Tong*, a trendy herbal tea company, has opened *Health Express* in many MTR stations. Herbal tea and “home-made” soup are offered in bottles or other convenient packages. *Health Express* furnished in green has successfully become a resting square for the busy HK citizens.
- Brand's from England has a long history in Hong Kong. Students preparing for public examination have been accompanied by its famous product “Essence of Chicken” for many generations.
- Water bottles are usually in blue. The international award winning bottle of Watsons Water in green has been a fresh air in the market. Its product is considered one of the purest and most sought-after drinking water in Asia.

Watsons water bottle.

Designed by Freeman Lau



BLACK & WHITE: B&W IN FUNERAL

Chinese traditional funerals vary slightly depending on the religion and family origin of the deceased but some basic traditions still apply. The ceremony nowadays is simplified but black and white is still central to funerals.

Mourning hall is usually decorated with black and white curtains to create a miserable but solemn atmosphere. In the middle placed the portrait of the deceased with a white background and funerals flowers (usually white Irises) in the surroundings. Underneath the portrait is the word “Libation” or “Mourn over” written in black on a white background, so do the elegiac couplets on the two sides which conclude the achievement of the deceased in his or her life. In front of the portrait is the altar, with immolations (usually favourite foods and drinks of the deceased) and a pair of white candles on it. The white candles must keep lightened during the whole ceremony.

One’s relationship with the deceased can be identified through the dressing code. The sons and daughters wear black and white mourning clothes, usually in the front row of the procession. Daughters-in-law come next and also wear black and white clothes. Grandsons and granddaughters wear blue mourning clothes (Fu, 2003).

In the ceremony, mourners would burn silver joss paper to ensure that the deceased has a safe journey to the netherworld. Silver joss paper is dedicated for ancestors died for less than 3 years while golden joss paper is dedicated for holy spirits. But the faux money may also be in a form of joss paper printed to resemble legal tender bank notes. It is called “Hell bank notes”. Like other miniature items such as cars, houses or even i phone and i pad to be burnt, the colour of Hell bank notes resemble the real objects.

Announcements of the funeral are sent in the form of invitations. For most Chinese funerals, the invitations are white. It would be in pink if the deceased was aged 80 or older because living until 80 or beyond is considered a feat worth celebrating. The mourners should celebrate the person’s longevity rather than mourn.

Guests attending the funeral should wear in black to express their sorrow for the deceased. Bright and colorful clothing, especially red must be avoided because these colors are associated with happiness. If a guest cannot attend the funeral, a white flowers plaque or a white envelope with money inside should still be sent.

YIN & YANG



Yin & Yang.

Photo: Kan and Lau Design Consultants

In the *Book of Changes*, also known as the *Yi Jing*, black and white represents *Yin* (The negative) and *Yang* (The positive) respectively. *Yin & Yang* exists in a state of ever changing interplay of opposites. It explains the Chinese perceptive of balance and continual change of the universe through observing the nature. As in Taijitu, the diagram of ultimate power, there is a white dot upon the black background and a black dot upon the white background, meaning that there is *Yang* within *Yin* and *Yin* within *Yang* (Kuo, 2004).

The *Yin Yang* philosophy has been inspiration for Chinese Art, including martial arts such as *Wing Chun*. *Wing Chun* is one of the most well-known schools of southern Chinese martial arts in Hong Kong due to the promotion of Ip Man, Bruce Li and numerous Kungfu movies. It emphasises on conquering the unyielding with the yielding while the ultimate state of the practice is not to adhere to a style (Ip, Tse, 1998).

Martial art.

Photo: John Choy



The interrelationship between the *Ying Yang* philosophy and the martial arts practice may explain why Kungfu costume and signs of martial clubs are mainly in black and white. Interestingly, this assumption could also be made to the bonesetter stores hidden in Hong Kong downtown while it had a concurrent role as a martial club in the 50s.

BLACK AND BADNESS

Black is associated with badness:

- Underground society is called “Black society” while the image has been promoted by numerous HK movies such as *Election* by Johnnie To.
- The term meaning “smearing” is literally translated as “applying black”. This may be relevant to a corporal punishment called ‘Ink torture’ in ancient China. Face or forehead of the guilty was carved with letter or picture and then painted with ink as a mark of being an offender. The punishment was meant to deprive a man of his dignity.
- When people use ‘black’ to describe a day, it means unlucky.
- Black hearted is used to describe a person with a wicked, malignant disposition. In recent years, the term is also used to describe Chinese food or products with safety problems.

FOOD IN BLACK

In the theory of Chinese medicine, foods in different colours are considered beneficial to different organs of the body. Food in black, such as sesame, black fungus, seaweed and black bean, is beneficial to the kidney and has the function of anti-aging and preventing cardiovascular disease. People are recommended to eat more food in black in winter as the kidney would be in the weakest state in winter.

In regions like Guangdong, HK and Macau, there are famous foods in black especially for the summer. These regions are sub-tropical with a primarily hot and humid climate. In order to relieve the heat and humidity in the body, there are some traditional solutions such as drinking Chinese herbal tea, eating black grass jelly and chilled herbal jelly served with honey.

These drinks and foods are typically in black, dark green or dark brown, depending on what kinds of cooling herbs are used. It is wrong to think that the healing effect would be better if the food or drink is darker in colour.

IMAGE OF THE WORKING CLASS

- White Tang suit with black trousers was the typical “uniform” of maidservants from 1930s to 1960s in HK. Many of the ladies spent almost their whole life with the master and kept lifelong celibate. In 1970s, HK people started to accept foreign servants from south East Asia therefore black and white image of the maidservant has become history.
- Cheap white canvas sneakers are usually produced in the Mainland. It was a common choice for members of a low-income family especially before 1960s. Construction workers and their children wear the same shoes, only in different sizes.
- Blessing towel: Waiters working in *Dai Pai Dong*, a type of open-air food stall once very popular in Hong Kong, usually wear a plain white T-shirt with a blessing towel on their shoulder.
- Industrial cotton gloves were very popular due to its cheap price. It reminds people of HK’s early development in the 1960’s while ladies workers used to wear the cotton gloves when making plastic flowers.

OTHER: COLOURS' REPRESENTATION IN CANTONESE OPERA

There are five major colors for the makeup in Cantonese opera: red, black, white, blue and yellow. Each colour symbolises a unique character (The Costume Design and Make-up of Cantonese Opera. Retrieved from http://www.cityu.edu.hk/lib/about/event/cantonese_opera/costume.htm):

- Red symbolises bravery; the representative character is *Guan Gong* who is respected as an epitome of loyalty and righteousness.
- Black symbolises loyalty; the representative character is Justice *Bao*, a historical figure and government official in *Song* Dynasty (960-1127) who is famous for his unparalleled honesty, fairness, integrity, inexorability and wisdom.
- White symbolises evil; the representative character is *Cao Cao* who is often portrayed as a cruel and merciless tyrant.
- Blue symbolises cruelty and outrageous arrogance
- Yellow symbolises competency and valiancy.

COLOURS' REPRESENTATION IN SOUTHERN LION DANCE

Lion Dance is a form of traditional dance in Chinese Culture, in which performers mimic a lion's movements in a lion costume. There are mainly two types of Lion Dance: Northern and Southern Lion. In HK, Southern Lion is more common.

Different colours of lion represent different characters. These historic characters in China were recorded in the classic, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. These three were blood brothers that swore to restore the *Han* dynasty (<舞動傳承>, 2012-01-17).

The lion in imperial yellow, which represents *Liu Bei* (the first emperor of the *Shu-Han* Kingdom), is considered the auspicious lion because it is believed that the emperor had the blessings of the heavens. The red lion, which represents *Guan Gong* (Cantonese: *Kwan Kung*), is regarded as the awakened lion and has an implied meaning of loyalty and victory. The black lion, which represents *Zhang Fei*, is known as the Fighting Lion because *Zhang Fei* had a quick temper and loved to fight.

Therefore, black lion is usually used in competition or by those wishing to make a challenge. Red and yellow lions are more commonly seen in auspicious occasions.

(Left) Black lion,
(Right) Yellow lion.

Photo: Kan and Lau Design Consultants



CHANGE OF COLOURS AFTER THE HANDOVER

The official colour of civil service in Hong Kong is different during the colonial period and after the handover. Here we would like to mark some of those changes:

HK Flag – From Blue to Red



Hong Kong flag before handover.

Credit: authorized by Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Hong Kong

The Blue English colonial flag and coat of arms of Hong Kong were used by British Hong Kong during 1959–1997. After the handover, the new regional flag carries a design of five bauhinia petals, each with a star in the middle, on a red background. As explained by the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Basic Law in the National People's Congress, 'The red flag represents the motherland (China) and the white bauhinia represents Hong Kong..... while the red and white colours embody the principle of "one country, two systems"' (Lauterpacht, Greenwood, Oppenheimer, 2002)

The reason why the designer has chosen White for bauhinia is uncertain, probably because of the neutral meaning of White. But it is believed that yellow has been avoided because it represents the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party in the design of China flag which might lead to HK people's antipathy.



Hong Kong flag after handover.

HK Passport – From Red to Blue

The colour of HK passport cover has changed from red to blue after the handover, probably to distinguish from the British passport which is red in colour. However, blue is neither the color of China passport nor the color of Macau passport. The only explanation we could guess is to avoid confusion for the immigration officials.

Postbox – From Red to Green

Before the handover, postbox in HK was the same as in England. The body was red and the stand was black. After the handover, postbox in HK is united with the Chinese design. Now it has a green body with a purple stand.

But actually in ancient times, official postal service was mainly in red. The courier on a running horse would wear a red headband so that people could recognize from a distance and gave way to him. Then, in 1905, the executive of official postal service from France decided that the representative colour should be changed to green but the reason is unknown.

Then in 1949, in the first national conference for postal service, a discussion on the dedicated colour for official postal service had been held. The committee finally decided to use green as it has an implied meaning of peace, youth and prosperous. The new tradition has continued until now (中國郵政標志為啥用綠色, 2012-04-26).

HK Police – From Green to Blue

In 1829, London established the first modern police force, including a uniform dress code. They chose dark blue for the police to distinguish from the military uniform which is red and white (Johnson, 2001). Therefore, the reason why the colonial government would have chosen green for Hong Kong police force in 1844 is unknown.

HK police's uniform is now in blue, starting from 2005. Some says that the reason for the change is to unify with Chinese police force. But actually blue and black are most common around the world, while in environments known more for trees than skyscrapers, dark brown or green are popular. The practical reason for choosing blue is that it allows officers to camouflage themselves in urban or dark situations.

COLOURS IN CANTONESE

- 「俾D顏色你睇」：Literally translated as “let you see some colours”. It is very common in the dialogues of a movie about triad society, usually said to threaten the enemy.
- 「紅到發紫」：Literally translated as “Too red to purple”. It is used to describe a famous person who gets too much attention.
- 「黃臉婆」：Literally translated as “Yellow-face woman”. It is used to describe married women who spend too much time on ordinary life affairs and neglect their appearance. This term is usually used to insult women but sometimes when a man describes his wife as his “Yellow-face woman”; it shows the intimacy between the couples.
- 「金手指」：“Goldfinger” has the same meaning as whistle-blower. It is believed that the term comes from a Hollywood movie entitled “Goldfinger” in 1964 and it becomes popular due to the publicity of HK’s movies concerning triad society.
- 「戴綠帽」：Literally translated as “Wearing green hat”. In ancient times, there was an injunction issued by the authority to force actors, actress and relatives of the prostitutes to dress in green as identification marking. Gradually, “Wearing green hat” has become a term used to describe man who has been betrayed by his wife. In general condition, men in Hong Kong still tend not to wear green hat in their dressing (趙, 李, 2003).
- 「攝青鬼」：Literally translated as “Green specter”. It comes from a folklore in China saying that one with a hatred heart can be transformed into “half-human, half specter” after lying underneath a corpse for 49 days. His blood would retrograde at the moment he dies and turns into green after another 49 days. In Cantonese, “Green specter” is used to describe someone who appears suddenly like a ghost without making any noise.
- 「黑馬」：Literally translated as “Black horse”, it means “Dark horse” in English. This term from England is used to describe a little-known person or thing that emerges to prominence, especially in a contestant that seems unlikely to succeed. The earliest-known use of the phrase is in Benjamin Disraeli’s novel “The Young Duke” (1831) (Dark Horse. Wikipedia online. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_horse).
- 「翻白眼」：Literally translated as “Turn up the whites of one’s eyes”. It means disliking or being disrespectful to someone.
- 「白紙黑字」：Literally translated as “White paper, black words”. ‘Writing black words on white paper’ means that there is written evidence and the fact brooks no deny.

COLOURS AND FENG SHUI

Many people in Hong Kong believe in *Feng Shui* which the theory of Five elements is applied. The five standard colours of black, red, blue-green, white and yellow correspond to the five elements of water, fire, wood, metal and earth (traditional Chinese physics) as shown in the following chart (Rossbach, Lin, 1994):

Colour	Blue-green	Red	Yellow	White	Black
Movement	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Direction	East	South	Center	West	North
Season	Spring	Summer	Change of Seasons <small>(Every third month)</small>	Autumn	Winter
Heavenly Creature	Green Dragon	Red Phoenix	Yellow Dragon	White Tiger	Dark Turtle

Some people choose which colors to use and which colors to avoid according to the theory of *Feng Shui*. It can be applied in many aspects, altering the choice of colour in dressing, furnishing or even visual branding. The overall goal of Feng Shui is to boost positive energy or significantly reduce the negative so that a person, a place or an issue can stay harmonious.

Taking the living place as an example, colour of the main entrance door is recommended according to its directions:

- North: If your home sits north, you are dealing with the element of water. Black should be incorporated. Colours corresponding to the earth and wood element should be avoided.
- East or Southeast: This direction corresponds to the wood element. A color in the green range is recommended. Colours corresponding to the fire and metal element should be avoided.
- South: corresponding to the fire element. Red is recommended. Colours corresponding to the water element should be avoided.
- Northeast and southwest: corresponding to the earth element. Yellow and brown are recommended. Colours corresponding to wood element should be avoided.
- West and Northwest: corresponding to the metal element. White and gold are recommended. Colours corresponding to the fire and water element should be avoided.

“RED, WHITE, BLUE” AND HK SPIRIT



Red-white-blue plastic bag.

Photo: Kan and Lau Design Consultants

It has been more than a decade after the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong from the United Kingdom to China while the continuous discussion about local culture, collective memory and core values of Hong Kong is still vigorous. Local creative talents have been trying to select representative color symbols from the short developing history of Hong Kong and make it a reference as the Hong Kong Spirit of today.

When people try to look for the aboriginality of HK culture, they tend not to seek clues from the influence of traditional British and Chinese culture although it is almost impossible. The reason is that the former one is part of the colonization and the later one is fading during the process of modernisation. Hence, some tiny elements from everyday life have been depicted and redefined in recreation. For instance, the “Red, White, Blue plastic bag” (hereinafter to be referred as RWB), a product for the grass-root level, has been regarded as one of the HK spirits in recent years and widely used in different kinds of trendy products.

Actually, in 1950s, RWB clothes were already widely used to protect outer walls of buildings or resist rainy days for residents living in log cabin area. Until 1960s, RWB clothes were used to produce tough but inexpensive plastic bags thus the material gradually integrated into daily products. From 1970s to 80s, HK’s economy was developing rapidly while in the mainland it was still rather backward. Many HK people invariably used RWB plastic bag to take all kinds of goods back to the mainland for their relatives therefore RWB plastic bag has suddenly become synonym for visiting relatives.

Hence, RWB plastic bag is supposed to be unrepresentable and irrelevant to lifestyle. So why would HK people emphasis on their grassroots character as citizens living in a so-called Asian’s World city? And what does grassroots character mean exactly?



RWB 330 eco cup.

Credit: Anothermountainman

The RWB trend gets started by HK artist Stanley Wong. Stanley was the first person who utilized the material to create artwork while he has got international reputation by exhibiting his RWB series of artworks in Venice biennial. But the Red White Blue trend was only recognized by art professions. It didn’t spread and get well known among the general public until Sam Hui, a Cantopop legend in 1970s, performed in a RWB costume in his concert in 2004. Sam Hui’s importance is that he was the first singer who wrote Cantonese songs about the society, giving voice to the working class in the 1970s with charm and wit. His innovation was remarkable in those days while English and Mandarin songs were still the main stream in music industry.

As an icon of grassroots culture, Sam Hui has made it easier for the general public to associate “Red White Blue” with the tenacious but also flexible character of HK people which is regarded as the driving force for HK’s economic success. The RWB spirit has appeared in time when HK was still recovering from the outbreak of SARS. It has inspired or reminded us that the legend of HK was actually driven by a simple faith in life which has a universal value.



RWB 330 tissue box.

Credit: Anothermountainman

Frankly speaking, the association of “Red, White, Blue” with HK spirit may just be a coincidence. But somehow in this lost era, HK people may have unconsciously re-invented tradition to build up self-identity for cheering up.

SPECULATION ON THE CLASS OF COLOURS

Taking bank notes as an example

Bank notes in Hong Kong are issued by three different banks while there are slight differences between them. But in general, it is not difficult to tell which color is more 'expensive': Gold for the biggest notes then followed by brown, red, blue and green.

Henry Steiner, the designer of bank notes issued by Standard Chartered bank in 2003 has explained his design concept: The colours gold, brown, red, blue and green are used to represent Chinese five elements which are metal, wood, water, fire and earth respectively (陳, 2011).

However, his modern interpretation of the five elements is rarely known by local people while traditionally the representing colours of the five elements should be White, Blue, Black, Red and Yellow. While the colors associated with relative bank notes have existed before Steiner's contribution, are there any other reasons for the arrangement?

Some hints could be found in Chinese tradition – taboos in the use of colours. In the past, people were forbidden to use yellow (golden colour), purple and *Xiang se* (the color of tea) because they were considered the monopoly colours for the upper class while yellow, the symbolic color of imperial power, was the most significant one. Green and blue were considered despicable. Only those who had taken up the cheesiest occupation, such as prostitutes and actress, would use green and blue in their clothing (趙, 李, 2003).

The above taboos of colours in clothing do not exist nowadays but it is possible that emotionally HK people are still influenced by perception of the class of colors. And this cultural background may probably explain why the new ten dollar notes in purple seems so hard to fit in the system while purple is supposed to be noble.

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Research Report 2013



India

the
Colours
of Asia

Red Yellow Blue Green Black & White

亞洲
色彩

紅黃藍綠黑與白



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INTRODUCTION

India is the land of a multitude of vibrant colours. Colours are an intrinsic constituent of the Indian psyche; evoking inspiration from the collective Indian consciousness and soaked in the roots of its philosophy.

The Rig-Veda; one of the oldest scriptures in mankind's history, referred to as an embodiment of absolute knowledge allocated nine colours to the nine numerals except zero '0'. Over the course of centuries, this understanding of colour, has found its way to the very evolution of the various dimensions of Indian Culture and heritage. The Indian Social System Varnas, the performing arts Rasas, Astrology Grahas, Yoga & Healing Chakras and Architecture Vastu are the five binding threads of the Indian way of life and their characteristic richness comes from the colours associated.

For nearly 4000 years India has accepted and absorbed foreign cultures while adding her own essence to them and giving birth to vibrant, warm and integrally intricate ways of life. A country invaded for centuries with every emperor leading his armies into it for the pure pleasure of plundering has somehow managed to consistently make the invaders stay and has embraced them while helping them become one with it. India is a country of endless patience and resilience and all its beliefs are based on positivity and creation. For the observer, India may appear to be a country burdened by past defeat. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

The offspring of Indian warmth & openness and foreign cultures was Diversity. Invaders brought their own cultures with them and the fact of the matter is; most of the invaders have stayed back in India. India is one of the most diverse countries of the world. The eternal foreign confluence still retained its originality and individuality leading to a rise in the number of different races and faces as well as the incredibly unique customs and traditions of respective peoples. Diversity and Contrast have uncannily become one in this country and hence it is quite aptly referred to as "The Land of Wonder". (Henri Stierlin, 1998) Despite having nearly 1000 million people worshipping over 330 million deities, every man, woman and child in India is still an "Indian" and feels "Indian" and thinks "Indian". It is the undisputable common thread that joins its people and holds them in togetherness and unity.

One cannot escape the overwhelming effect India has on all the senses. It is a furious melting pot of smells, voices, sculptures, arts, foods, music, flowers, herbs, greenery, traditions, religion, its unquestionable humanity and its colours. Everywhere your eyes turn, India appears to be what seems like a riotous kaleidoscope of brilliant hues, dyes and iridescent chromaticity.

In India be it Religion, Politics, Festivals, Celebrations, Birth or even Death; everything comes to life with colour. This is a country where a deep understanding of the prevalent diversity is perhaps the only common thread that ties its people together. In other words, the innumerable Colours of India are the Culture of India.

The entire Indian sub-continent is a mosaic of colours. From the elegantly coloured basic, simple saree of the sensual Indian woman to the myriad colours of the several turbans of several different shapes and sizes adorning the heads of purposeful Indian men, from the strong colours of the plush Indian spice & herb markets to the plethora of festivals, each one coming alive with specific associated colours; in India you can't escape colours. (Barbara Lloyd, 1997) The Indian sunrise as well as the sunset has distinct hues every morning and evening and the colours look different from every part of the country.

The Indian geographical landscape is as diverse as its people. Across the nation there are numerous geographical formations ranging from the green carpeted fertile plains to the enormous and insurmountable icy white barricade of the Himalayas. From a distance one can see a never ending expanse of what looks like an ornamental and multi-coloured arrangement of rugs spread across several kilometres; from deep red soils to lush green pastures, from bursting creamy cotton fields to the warm yellow of the mustard fields, from the fertile beige alluvial plains to the richly vivid flower plantations; there is no colour which the eye seeks that can't be found in India.

The Indian understanding of the four seasons in nature is largely dependent on the colours associated with each season. The rain brings new hope and feelings of romance in pure greens, whites, shiny silver drops and even a hint of romantic lustful transparency. The winters inspire darker colours like blues, black, full bodied browns and dark greens while the sunrise and the sunset in the colder regions seems to be nothing more than a gray, cloudy light. The summers naturally inspire brighter colours and floral prints in the spirit of happiness and freedom.

India being a country of extreme climates and weather the presence of spring and autumn is short lived but both the seasons never the less have distinct light yellows, earthy oranges and bright greens all over them.

Each city in the country no matter how big or small has its own distinct colour schemes. The most common yet delightfully respected references are Jaipur the "pink" city, rightly called so due to major part of its landscape being covered by buildings and structures made out of red sandstone and Jodhpur the "blue" city, called so because of the large presence of the colour blue on the outside walls of homes and buildings.

The Indian colourscape is reflected abundantly in its immortal architecture with the predominance of natural earthen colours of soil in the Harappa and the Mohen Jo Daro civilizations to the rock cut caves of Karla and Udaygiri crafted out of gigantic black basalt and red sandstone rock formations respectively, from the yellow sandstone temples of Konark, Saanchi and Khajuraho to the multi-coloured tile patterns in the temples of Deshnole, from the stark white marble plinths in the Taj Mahal to the presence of greens at the famous Lodi Gardens, Indian architecture is a domain unparalleled in its colours. (Kapila Vatsyayan, 2007) One can't forget the nearly four hundred churches in Goa; defining monuments of the "Indian Pre-Independence" Portuguese era. They are coloured in deep and earthy reds, sombre yellows, pleasant blues and serene whites.

Towards the south of the country you come across green paddy fields and banana plantations which are separated by streams with little blue and pistachio green boats carrying bright green un-ripened bananas and the colour of the skin of the people, is the darkest in the country.

In specific regions like Chennai and Mahabalipuram the flower, spice and condiment markets come to life with colours that leap out at you and the beaches glisten in golden under the sun. The temples of Kanchipuram are perennially resplendent with several hues of the yellow marigold. At several cremation sites in Orissa and the temples of Konark, *joginis* (Female servants of God) dressed in full white, are living a life of sanctity and chastity amidst walls loaded with erotic carvings.

Travelling towards the east of the country is an equally overpowering experience as far as colours are concerned. One encounters several flower and petal markets on the way with dazzling splashes of yellow marigold, deep red of the

hibiscus, lotus whites and iris blues. Calcutta is a city of many colours, quite a few of which we may not even have seen in as much intensity before. From markets and streets bustling with people selling all kinds of fares imaginable; orange yellow leather footwear to heaps and heaps of petals, amidst a city full of slowly falling apart Victorian architecture covered in fading brick reds, deep blues, creamy whites and browns; to the temples of Goddess Kaali (Hindu Goddess associated with empowerment) whose skin is black with a blazing red tongue out of her mouth – a sign of impending destruction upon all evil, Calcutta is a heady mix of smells, sounds, voices, smoke and colours.

Step into one of the holiest cities in the entire world, Varanasi and you will find yourself amidst *Sadhakas* (the ones who follow a particular way of life designed to realize the goal of one's ultimate ideal) and *Yoginis* (female master practitioners of Yoga and modern female spiritual teachers - in both Hinduism and Buddhism) dressed in yellowish orange overalls and white ash smeared across their foreheads as a sign of submission, devotion and belongingness to God.

Venture out into the deserts of Rajasthan and you will find an unbelievable splendour of colour waiting for you. The Rajasthani folk, dress in several colours as part of their normal daily robes. Their turbans with several diamond shaped colour patterns based on darker backgrounds with *Dhotis* (the traditional men's garment in India) ranging from deep reds, blacks to sparkling greens and orange and the women dressed in *Ghaghara's* (form of skirt which is long, embroidered and pleated) and *Choli's* (a midriff-baring blouse shell garment in the Indian sari costume) with several colour patterns and an intricate work of tiny mirrors interwoven into the fabric; add to that the gear worn by their camels as well and you will be privy to a sight you will never forget. (Anamika Pathak, 2008)

The Pushkar camel fair is one of the most vibrantly colourful festivals in the country. A large horde of tribals comes to the Pushkar fair and smears the landscape with their gypsy coloured clothing making it look like a painting coming alive by the moment.



Colourful glimpses of Pushkar

Photo: Elodie Nerot



The "pink" city of Jaipur is a bloom of colours in itself, with its gleaming pink sandstone walls dotted with thousands of bright green parakeets. The city of Jodhpur known as the "blue" city is almost entirely a mix of deep and watery transparent blues giving it a tint of cobalt. Udaipur boasts of the floating ivory

white marble palace on the emerald green waters of Pichola Lake. Jaisalmer has glowing sand that looks like it is no lesser than real gold.

One cannot leave out the mention of the festival of Holi. It is one of the most important festivals of the country. People from every race participate in it with great gaiety and gusto. It is not much of a surprise, is it?

When revealed that Holi is actually the festival of colours and is celebrated by smearing each other's faces with dried colours in virtually every shade and hue of ever known. By the end of the day when people step out after cleaning themselves of excess colour, they look pink, green, blue and yellow with their smiles reflecting joy, satisfaction, togetherness and mischief (<http://www.enotes.com/hindu-festivals-reference/hindu-festivals>).

In the extreme north of the nation, in serene, alabaster snowy white Kashmir; colourful *shikaras* (a type of wooden ship found on Dal Lake and other water bodies of Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir, India) glide along the surface of the Dal Lake effortlessly reflecting their silent cerulean blues, leafy greens and golden yellows in the tranquil waters. Everywhere your eyes turn, they will meet blue gray snow capped Himalayas in the backdrop of lustrous orange skies which turn to lighter greys, mauves and greens at different times of the day. Towards the extremes of Ladakh and Leh one meets pleasant and peaceful monasteries with pastel coloured string flags and monks roaming about in deep rust and red robes.

India is an intricately tessellated, mosaic of colours. Each colour comes alive in its usage and has a special place in Indian culture. It is impossible to understand India if one does not understand the importance of specific colours to its people. Some of the inescapable and defining colours of this country are Black, White, Red, Green, Yellow, Blue, Fuchsia, Saffron and Indigo which we shall discuss further ahead, along with their application in several essential aspects which together, form the fabric of India.

SIGNIFICANCE OF COLOURS IN INDIA

a. Red

The Soil of India is revered and respected by the largely agrarian people as the Force of Life. The burnt earthy red of its fertile lands has flowed into the way of life, in several forms and ways; from the auspicious *Sindoor* (a traditional red or orange-red colored cosmetic powder from India, usually worn by married women along the parting of their hair) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sindoor>) and *Tilak* (is a mark worn on the forehead and other parts of the body) on the heads and foreheads of its men, women and children to the warm and intricately sensuous auburn of *Henna* (is a flowering plant used since antiquity to dye skin, hair, fingernails, leather and wool) or *Mehendi* (Mehendi is the application of henna as a temporary form of skin decoration in India) on the palms and soles of its women in celebration, prosperity and joyous surrender to new beginnings. A symbol of purity and fertility, it is the primary colour of the robes and clothing worn for every occasion and ceremony.

Red is the colour of strength, fire, positivity, energy and happiness for the people of India. It is also the binding thread of spiritual transcendence. It has found its place in innumerable manifestations from religion to literature, from art to social beliefs, from political ideologies to architecture and clothing. (Barbara Lloyd, 1999) (<http://www.hindujagruti.org/hinduism/knowledge/article/why-is-kumkumoffered-to-durga-devi.html>).

Colours of Asia :: India

The red tongue of Goddesses Kaali and Durga has been a symbol of harsh punishment and danger for the evil doers in the world. The Hindi word for red originates from the Sanskrit word “Lauhit” which means fierce and fiery and used to be the word largely associated with the spirit of the warrior *Kshatriya* (Traditionally constitute the military and ruling elite of the Vedic-Hindu social system) class.

Red is the colour aptly associated with feelings of excitement and enthusiasm and since spice is thought of as being one of the important factors contributing to how a person feels (in the Indian understanding of how food and taste affect emotional state), red chilli powder is always associated with anger, thrill, mischief and ferocity. Most of the accompaniments with Indian foods such as pickles and chutneys are always red in colour because their preparations involve the use of red chilli powder.

Important social beliefs are centred on the colour Red. Red stands for everlasting and strong energy. It is the symbol of fertility and is used in the form of Sindoor in the parting of her hair as a sign that she is ready to take on the responsibilities of womanhood. The Indian bride is also, almost always dressed in blushes of red with her palms covered in intricate aromatic henna designs and her soles are covered in a bright red smear called *Alta* (a red dye which women in India apply with cotton on the border of their feet during marriages and religious festivals), believed to be auspicious as it signifies the presence and entry of the Goddess Lakshmi (the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity) into the home or premises ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alta_\(dye\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alta_(dye))).

b. Yellow And Gold

The true gold of India is Turmeric and the bright yellow of Marigold; the flower used most for religious offerings and cultural rituals. Turmeric, immensely referred to as the substance of absolute purity for its medicinal and beautifying properties is made into a paste and smeared on the bodies of the bride and the bridegroom on the auspicious occasion of their wedding; their new partnership soon to become a harmonious lifetime of divine togetherness. The Indian season of harvest, the Basant is a time of great gaiety and ceremonious celebration with all of nature blooming into the yellow warmth of spring. Quite appropriately, Yellow is the colour of Sanctity, Devotion, Wealth and Positive Change for the people of India. Precious Gold is used as an appeasement for gods and hence not only the metal but even its colour is considered most auspicious. It is the colour of wealth, power, status, royalty, richness and above all divinity. The people of India invest in Gold in festive seasons and on days of religious unity and celebration such as Dhanteras, Dassera, Onam, Pongal and Durga Puja; all of these days of immense social and cultural importance.

c. Blue

India, surrounded by oceans on three sides and being the land of abundant rivers and azure skies; Blue, has over centuries been of deep spiritual significance for the people. The colour of Krishna, the Divine Lover; one of the most worshipped gods in India, is Blue. It is the expression of absolute belonging and yearning in the devotion of Love. Blue signifies the pathway to heaven and soulful ecstasy. It has long been considered as the symbol of secularism and unity as encapsulated in the *Dharma* (Faith and Duty) Chakra. (H S Shiva Prakash, 2007) It is the colour of a lotus blooming in the dark night, an embodiment of pure, untouched beauty.

d. Green

One of the colours gracing the Indian flag is Green and it is believed to be the colour of growth, balance, new hope and freshness (<http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/in.html>). It is the colour of this country in many ways; from the fertile lush green plains of the Indus valley to the massive greens of the Ganges, it spreads across the nation like an almost endless carpet of bloom.

Also the most respected colour by the lively Islamic population of the country, it is an irreplaceable component of India's cultural togetherness. As the symbol of richness of character, virtues and truth it is one of the colours worn widely by artists from a range of performing arts; easily one of the defining colours of the Indian human fabric.

e. Black

India, the land of the yogic arts and mystic sciences believes in the power of Black as a protective shield against evil. It is the colour of depth, veneration and the meditative energies of the Chakra system and is the home of psychic fullness and potential. As the colour of Shyama or Krishna, Ayyapa, Goddess Kaali and Shiva it is greatly respected in the form of innumerable temples across the geographical landscape, carved in granite. A little dot of lamp black is applied under the ear or on the cheeks of infants as a measure of safeguarding against all that stems from the dark arts and the Mangalsutra; a sacred assemblage of black beads and gold is a must for every Hindu bride. It is believed to have protective powers over their holy union and the life of the earnest husband.

Black symbolises protection from the evil.

Left: Kohl marks on the forehead and cheeks of a baby

Photo: Pramod Mutkekar

Right: Mangalsutra - the sacred wedlock thread

Photo: Girish Lone



f. White

Three words can say everything there is to say about the significance of White to the Indian people; Truth, Purity and Simplicity - the highest values any man or woman may inculcate in their life. It is the colour of enlightenment; embodies absence of worldly desires and is worn by many a scholar and sage. It is present on the Indian tricolour as a representative of the truth and integrity of its people.

g. Saffron

Saffron, the extraordinary bright and endearing to the eye hue of red, has much significance in the Indian way of life. It adorns the Indian flag as a representation of the courage, unity and valour of the people. It is widely considered as the colour of renunciation and abandonment of all material pleasures in life; worn by Sadhaks and Sanyasis alike. India being the largest and the oldest producer of Saffron in the world has innumerable and varied applications of the spice as well as the colour.

COLOUR IN ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS

Traditional – Contemporary

The Indian realm of Traditional and Contemporary art is an alive, breathing space that is constantly evolving while not only adding but also giving birth to colour from within. Let us scratch the surface a little to see how overpowering the colours in Indian Artistic Expressions can be.

Alta, a bright red coloured smear is applied on the tip of the fingers and in the centre of the palm and toes to make the delicate *Mudras* (symbolic or ritualistic hand gestures in Hinduism and Buddhism) attractive and expressive in Bharatnatyam and other such classical dance forms. Some apply it for beauty while others feel the red awakens the *prana* (the Sanskrit word for “vital life”) in one’s body as well as the space in which one is dancing, thus infusing the dance with more sanctity. (H S Shiva Prakash, 2007)

Terracotta, a functional art, is the first creative expression of civilization. From the common earthy red coloured clay pot that stores drinking water to the deep red giant-sized equestrian figures of the rural Tamil deities of the Ayyanar cult, terracotta art occupies a central position in Indian life and culture.

Terracotta objects - utilitarian and decorative

Photo: Elephant, India



Gair dance is performed by men in western Rajasthan during the Holi festival. They are dressed in strong red coloured overalls and the dance involves a series of half-swirls of the lower skirt like part of the dress leading to more intricate formations during the performance. The Gair dancers also wear red coloured turbans or Pagadis and Phetas as known in local languages. The Indian man and woman have worn turbans since times immemorial and what's important about them is they are made in every colour imaginable. Some of the popular colours of the Pagadi are red, blue, yellow and pink (<http://www.rajsamand.in/gair-dance-of-rajasthan/>).

Theyyam is an exquisite Hindu ritualistic form of worship in North Malabar, Kerala. Theyyam stands for the corrupt form of Devam or God. The performers of Theyyam belong to the lower class community and dance in elaborate costumes with their entire body, including the face painted in vermillion. It is a form of worship where man dons the guise of God and propitiates the Gods through possessed dancing. Red symbolizes blood and fear and hence is the dominant color of the Theyyam dance form.

Taking into account the recurrence and reverence for the colour yellow in Indian culture, one cannot leave out the implementation of the Jaisalmer Stone. Jaisalmer has been called "the golden city" throughout history for its use of the yellow sandstone for a vast amount of architectural work. Jaisalmer is always perceived as a golden yellow city with its own distinct warmth.

Puli kali is a recreational folk art from the state of Kerala. It is performed by trained artists to entertain people on the occasion of Onam; an annual harvest festival. Performers painted like tigers and hunters in bright yellow, red, and black dance to the beats of instruments like Udukku and Thakil. The meaning of the word "Puli kali" is "play of the tigers" hence the performance revolves around the theme of tiger hunting. Puli Kali can be traced back to 200 years when Maharaja Rama Varma Sakthan Thampuran, the then Maharaja of Cochin, introduced the folk art to celebrate Onam with a dance that reflected the wild and macho spirit of the force. (H S Shiva Prakash, 2007) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puli_Kali) With time this folk genre became popular with steps and body language peculiar to a tiger being stalked by a hunter. The celebrations involved performing the art form dressed as tigers with steps known as 'Pulikkettikali'.

Trained dancers paint themselves Yellow and Black in the patterns of tiger skin, to invoke nature's energy and spirit during harvest.

Photo: Rajan R Madathil





Photo: Rajan R Madathil

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The supreme ruler of the cosmos Lord Vishnu is associated with the colour yellow and in his parlance, the yellow dhoti he wears is referred to as Pitambar. It is considered very important and auspicious for every Hindu man to wear a Pitambar during religious rituals and ceremonies. Even the Ganesha idols during Ganapati festival are predominantly painted in the Pitambar.

Indian traditional jewellery is indeed very colourful with rubies, emeralds, jade and other gem stones set in gleaming pure gold and silver. It is divided into three kinds – Temple Jewellery, Spiritual Jewellery and Bridal Jewellery; all the kinds have distinct and characteristic patterns, design styles and gem stone arrangements.

One of the other noteworthy metal based art forms is the Dhokra; non ferrous metal cast work using the lost wax casting technique to create beautiful decorative works of dull golden bronze and brass.

An irreplaceable the important aspect of Indian traditional dressing is the footwear. Originally known as *Jooties* (Shoes), this kind of footwear is made from beaten and tanned leather which is dyed in different colours and fitted with miniature imitation gem stones and silver sequins. Jooties are made vibrantly colourful by the use of heavy embroidery in different colours of wool, silk and even Zari.

The Zardozi and Zari golden weaving arts are a crucial aspect of Indian Royal Attire. Zardozi in Persian means “sewing with a gold string” and was one of the prosperous art forms during the age of the Mughal empire. Today Zardozi sarees are the attire preferred by the rich and famous. Zardozi and Zari works have an appealing, warm yellow about them. Zari follows the same principle of weaving and sewing with a real gold thread, however it is more prominent in attires made of pure silk. Historically, Zari consisted of pure silver wires fused with leaves of real gold, known as Kalabattu. (Anamika Pathak, 2008)



Zari work on a saree

Photo: Elephant, India

The royal vehicle for most of the Maharajas has been the elephant and as a result, decoration of the elephant was of great importance. The art of decorating the royal elephant is known as Nettipattam. Legend has it that Nettipattam was designed by Lord Brahma himself and is the ornamental jewellery based outfit worn by elephants during festivals in Kerala and comes in several combinations of yellowish gold and floral border arrangements.

Blue has always been associated with the gods in India. Mythology talks about Lord Shiva who drank the poison that was brought up when the gods and demons churned the ocean. To protect the earth from getting ravaged by this poison, Lord Shiva stepped in and drank it all. The poison didn't affect him but his throat turned blue. Indians have embraced gods in every part of their lives. Children dressed up as this Hindu deity are often seen on the streets begging for alms. They believe the good luck that the deity brings will help them get more money.

Children dressed up as this Hindu deity are often seen on the streets begging for alms. They believe the good luck that the deity brings will help them get more money.

Photo: Sandesh Bhandare



Another inescapable reflection of blue in Indian artistic expressions is Jaipuri Blue Pottery with a Persian blue dye used to make intricate patterns and designs in earthenware and porcelain pots and vases. The technique travelled all the way down to the south of the country from Kashmir.

Kathakali is a highly stylised, Indian classical dance-drama. This art form is primarily renowned for the attractive make-up of characters, elaborate costumes, detailed gestures and well-defined body movements. In Kathakali facial makeup is central to the portrayal of characters. Different colours are used to represent good or bad characters where a green and white face is for heroes and noblemen. Usually virtuous kings and the divine hero Rama are portrayed through green and white painted faces. Characters of high birth who have an evil streak, such as the demon king Ravana, are allotted a similar green make-up, slashed with red marks on the cheeks. Extremely angry or excessively evil characters wear predominantly red make-up and a flowing red beard. Forest dwellers such as hunters are represented with a predominantly black make-up base. Women and ascetics have lustrous, yellowish faces. The dancers wear large head dresses, and the contours of the face are extended with moulded lime. The extraordinary costumes and make-up serve to raise the participants above the level of mere mortals, so that they may transport the audience to a world of wonders (<http://www.artindia.net/kathakali.html>). Kathakali masks are also available as souvenirs and show pieces. Made of clay, Plaster of Paris or paper mache, they make ideal decorative items.



Usually virtuous kings and the divine hero Rama are portrayed through green and white painted faces.

Photo: Thrissur Kalamandalam

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The Indian Royal dressing style is mainly frock style garment tied with lapels on the right hand side. This is accompanied by tight fitted trousers, a colourful sash holding a dagger and a bejewelled turban. The entire ensemble is predominantly in white.

The craftsmen in Eastern India craft decorative items using a material called shola pith. This material is derived from a plant known as 'shola,' which grows in marshy lands and is seasonal. Shola pith is preferred to other similar artificial materials due to its malleability, texture, lustre and sponginess.

The artists use this material to create the crown, armband and the jewels of the gods and goddesses during festivals, the headdress of a wedding couple on the marriage day and other such things. Everything made from shola pith is always bright white.

Kolam is a form of painting that is drawn using white rice powder. Kolams are thought to bestow prosperity to homes (<http://www.indian-heritage.org/alangaram/kolams/kolams.htm>). Every morning in southern India, millions of women draw kolams on the ground with white rice powder. Similarly art of the Warli painting style is usually found inside huts where the walls are made of a mixture of twigs, earth and cow dung, giving a red ochre background for the stark white yet intricate wall paintings which are made from a white pigment made of rice paste, water and gum.



Kolam drawn on the ground

Photo: Elephant, India

Lippankaam is an art form made inside bhungas or mud huts in the villages of Kutch, Gujarat. Lippankaam is done inside as well as outside the house. Generally Harijan and Rabari women make peacocks, human figures, birds, trees and animals in Lippankaam. It is done with a mixture of clay and camel dung. The originality of this art form lies in the stark whiteness of the borders and walls (<http://www.design-flute.com/2007/10/08/mud-art-of-kutch/>).

One of the most attractive forms of art from India is White Marble Inlay work. It is the same work that adorns the Taj Mahal and other Mughal monuments

giving them a heritage, royal alabaster look and feel (<http://www.hastshilp.com/marble-inlay.htm>).

The mundumneriyuthum is the cultural costume of women of the Malayalee community and often referred to as the Kerala saree. The grace and appeal of the golden borders comes alive because of its contrast against the plain white fabric.

The tribal Kalbelias have been known for their nomadic nature since ancient times. Their main occupation is catching snakes and trading snake venom and skins. The graceful dance movements and the costumes of their community bear a resemblance to that of the serpents. The women folk wear a costume that is predominantly black.

Longpi in Manipur is famous for its ancient pottery known as Longpi Ham. It has attained national as well as international popularity over the years and even more so since it is not made by the potter's wheel. Longpi ham is made from a pasty mixture of ground black serpentinite stone and special brown clay. The clay is native only to Longpi village. After the pots are shaped, polished and sun dried they are heated in a fire and then polished with a special tree leaf locally called Chiron Ni to bring about the characteristic black colour (<http://www.aporv.com/handmade/?p=355>).

The term 'Bidriware' originates from the township of Bidar, Karnataka. It was an exquisite art form born during the rule of the Bahamani Sultans. Bidar is still the chief centre for the manufacture of the unique metal ware and Bidriware is famous because of its striking inlay artwork in a delicate combination of black and white.

Tholpavakoothu is shadow puppet of Kerala. In Malayalam thol means leather and pava means puppet and koothu means play. An ancient ritualistic art form, very little is known about the period of origin of Tholpavakoothu. Finding a place among the ancient art forms of Kerala, typically Tholpavakoothu is presented for a duration of seven to forty one days as an offering at temples dedicated to Goddess Bhadrakali and is always the combination of the black shadow of the puppet from behind a white curtain and a white light passing through the cut outs in the puppet to give it form and shape (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tholpavakoothu>).

Indian artistic expression also bears witness to a multitude of multi coloured art forms. The traditional Maharashtrian Paithanii saree's main design elements are parrot, peacock and paisley form. Classification by colour of the saree is as follows – Kalichandrakala; a pure black saree with red border and Raghu; Parrot green coloured Saree.

During Mughal period, the art of kundan work reached Rajasthan from Delhi. Later on, craftsmen from the different parts of the country migrated to the place and made Rajasthan a hub of Kundankari. Rulers and feudal lords gave patronage to the art and it developed into perfection. Today, Kundankari is known the world over, with Rajasthan serving as its centre of excellence. Kundankari is basically done on gold and silver jewellery with the dominant colours being green, red and white.

The Chhau dance is indigenous to the eastern part of India. It originated as a martial art and contains vigorous movements and leaps. Chhau dancers use large stylized masks with several colours on them. There are heroic dancers with swords, bows and arrows or shields demonstrating their dexterity. (H S Shiva Prakash, 2007)

Kathputli (the art of puppetry) is the much enjoyed string puppet theatre, native to Rajasthan, India and is the most popular form of Indian puppetry. The

puppets are marionettes and are operated by strings held in the hand of the puppeteers and every puppet is clothed in robes of several different colours with intricate designs and weaves.

Bandhani is a type of tie-dye practiced mainly in the states of Rajasthan and Gujarat, India. The term bandhani is derived from the Sanskrit word bandha ("to tie"). Bandhani is also known as Bandhej or Bandhni or Bandana, etc. as per the regional pronunciation. The main colours used in Bandhani are yellow, red, green and black. Bandhani work, after the processing is over, results into a variety of symbols including, dots, squares, waves and strips on the cloth.

Mumbai city's longest wall runs from Mahim to Dadar down the length of Tulsi Pipe Road. It is 2.7 km long and was splashed with colour and humour on the Independence Day. Each wall painting bore several expressions relevant to Mumbai and life in a multitude of colours.

Colour symbolism is used in a wide variety of fascinating ways in Buddhist art and rituals in the form of Buddhist Thangka Paintings. Five colours (panchavarna) together symbolize a state of mind, a celestial Buddha, a part of the body, a part of the mantra word Hum, or a natural element - blue and black are sometimes interchangeable. It is believed in the Thangka style that by meditating on the individual colours, which contain their respective essences and are associated with a particular Buddha or bodhisattva, spiritual transformations, can be achieved. (Kapila Vatsyayan, 2007) Yellow is a symbol of rootedness and renunciation, Green stands for balance, harmony, vigour and youth. Red stands for the life force, preservation, the sacred force and blood.

THE PRESENCE OF COLOURS IN INDIAN BELIEFS

The Indian belief system does not only involve the use of several colours for rituals and ceremonies but also revolves around the very meaning of the colours involved.

Red coloured *Tambe ke Bartan* (Copper vessels) have been used since ancient times for many activities including worship. Copper is the oldest metal in India and copper vessels are still used to preserve the qualities of the ingredients placed and enhance their aroma. Worship is one the single most important activities in the daily life of Indians.

Copper vessels used for worshipping rituals

Photo: Elephant, India



Colours of Asia :: India

The saffron colour – or the colour of *Agni* (fire) is strongly associated with Hinduism. Fire worship formed a core part of the Hindu belief system, which is possibly why saffron came to be representative of Hinduism. The colour is taken on by staunch believers & political supporters. It also forms the top band of the Indian flag, symbolising courage and sacrifice.

The deep red coloured Henna on a bride's hands is of great symbolic relevance in Hindu weddings. It marks the rite of passage into marriage, and her initiation into womanhood. The paste used for decorating the palms is derived from the leaves of the henna plant and stains the skin in an auburn red with an orange shadow. The Sindoor on a woman's forehead is a symbol of being married in Hindu communities. It connotes fertility, prosperity and commitment.



Hindu bride and groom

Photo: Girish Lone

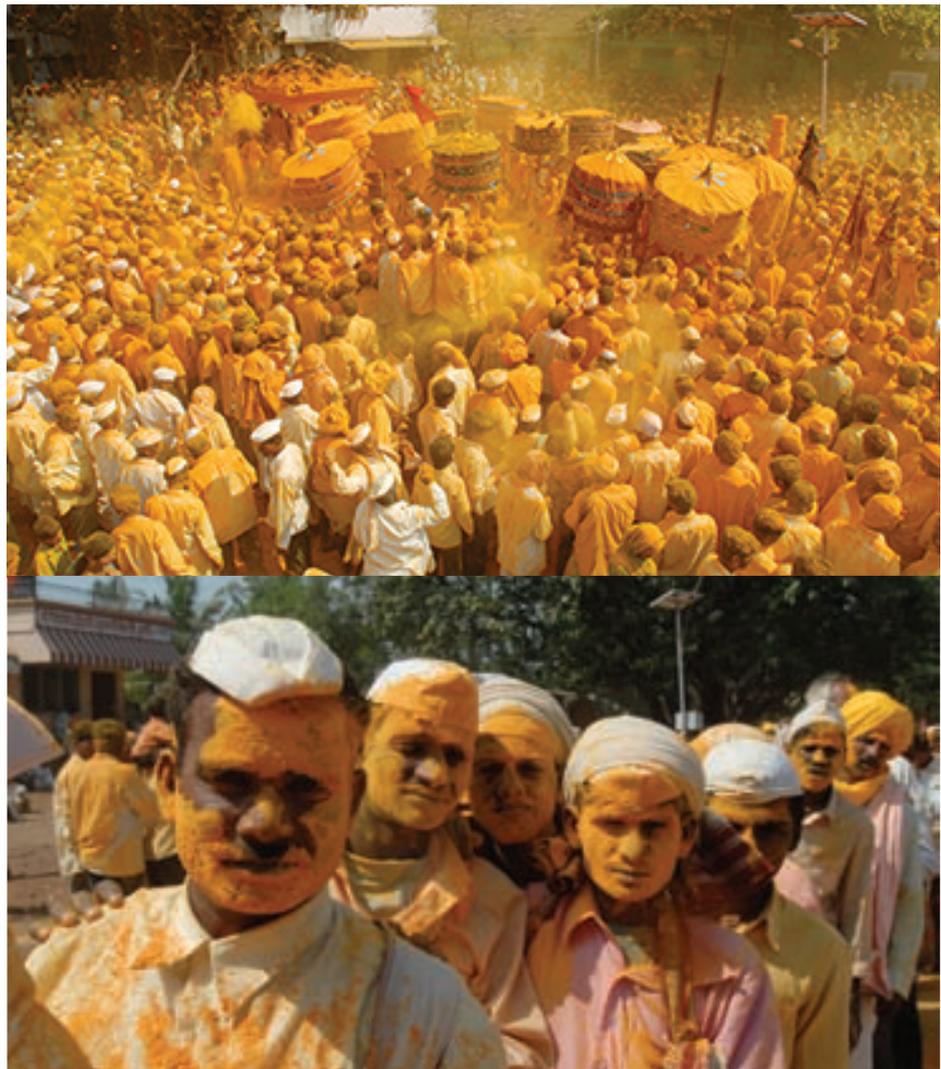
The red “Gulaal” was the original colour that one played with on Holi, and it remains a favourite even today. It is a symbol of the upcoming spring, and the change of harsh winter months into a season of colour. It looks like a soft, warm, pleasant hue of red. Deep red coloured earthen pots are broken during *dahi handi* (an earthen pot filled with curd and country butter, broken during the celebrations of Janmashtami – the birth of Krishna) by towers of men standing on each others’ shoulders. This tradition celebrated the god Krishna’s mischievous side by mimicking how he used to steal “*makkhan*” (country butter) from his mother’s kitchen.

Dhanteras is the first day of the Diwali festival. It is believed that new “Dhan” or wealth brings good luck on this day, so many Hindus purchase gold.

Panduranga is a Hindu god, worshipped predominantly in the Indian states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Goa, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. He is a manifestation of the Hindu god Vishnu or his avatar- an incarnation; Krishna, hence Vithoba is often depicted as a dark young boy, standing arms-akimbo on a brick & a yellow sandal wood round hat on the head. In the Bhandara festival, the primary custom is throwing great clouds of turmeric powder called Bhandara into the air; the pilgrims paint the town golden yellow, a colour they associate with the power of the sun and one suggestive of Khandoba’s solar origin. (Anupam Gajwani, 2009)

Pilgrims throw turmeric in the air as an offering to Khandoba (Lord Shiva) believing him to have originated from the sun itself.

Photo: Sandesh Bhandare



The darker Gods such as Krishna, Vishnu and Goddess Kaali are traditionally portrayed as blue in colour. Some explanations attribute the blue skin to the potential of these Gods to fight evil and spread goodness in the world.

The Sikh warrior sect, the Nihangs (meaning one who does not fear death) belongs to a martial tradition begun by the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh. Their way of life, style of dress, and weaponry has remained the same for the last three hundred years. Considered a relic from the past by some, Nihangs are a colourful and important part of Punjabi heritage. Skilled horsemen, they defended Sikh shrines and the Sikh way of life during times of persecution. In peace time they perform at festivals throughout India. Nihangs: Playground of Gods (Mayuri to add as appropriate)



Lemon-Chilly used to ward off evil

Photo: Milind Wadekar

Islam in India is strongly associated with the colour green. It finds its way into mosques, homes and clothing. The Quran tells of how the colour of one's state of mind in paradise is green.

A yellow lemon and green chillies are hung together, often on personal vehicles or on one's door to protect ones property and self from evil. In Maharashtra, women have baby showers or "dohale jevans" in the 8th month of their pregnancy. They are attired in a green saree, which is a symbol of fertility.

The Jain religion in India is always seen as "white". Devout followers clothe themselves only in this colour. The colour stands for the non-violence, purity and knowledge – all of which are pillars of Jainism. Goddess Saraswati of Knowledge is depicted as sitting on a white lotus in bloom (<http://www.koausa.org/Gods/God10.html>). Naga Sadhaks apply white ash all over their body as a way to cleanse themselves with the divine spirit.

In many parts of India black crow feathers are used as a way to ward off evil spirits from homes and surroundings. A dot of black *Kajal - Kohl* is applied on the face of a child or a beautiful woman and is said to ward off evil and the sinister intentions of others. It is commonly applied on the forehead, on one's lower eyelids, or on the chin.

No Hindu wedding is complete without a *Mangalsutra* – a sacred assemblage of Black beads and gold. As part of the *vivaah* (wedding) the groom adorns his bride with this token. Black, with its absorption power, signifies protection against the evil eye and bad intentions of others. With its Black colour, this marriage token gives its protective powers to the union. It is a symbol of love and goodwill for married women, and an assurance of a successful marriage. Married women wear the token around their neck from the moment they get married.



Mangalsutra in a Hindu wedding ceremony

Photo: Girish Lone



During the festival of *Makar Sankranti* women wear black sarees with silver coloured dots or sparkles to indicate a starry night of joy and happiness. This festival comes in the middle of winter, and the colour is used to retain the sun's warmth.

THE COLOURS OF INDIAN DESIGN

The choice on colours in Indian Design is based on the Universal Symbolism of respective colours. Red stands for love, passion, fire and blue stands for calm and sophistication. It is also based in the different materials, colour psychology and the need for adding an unexpected component to the product.

The colour red is believed to be able to trap heat and since earthen red is a colour synonymous with Indian aesthetics, most of the rural market cooking and kitchen sets are earthen red in colour. Often the material for such appliances is usually terracotta or burnt clay, which already has a natural deep red colour of its own (<http://handicraft.indiamart.com/materials/terracota-crafts.html>).

Popular Indian superheroes have a costume in the red colour scheme as red stands for strength and passion. Red has long occupied the position of the face of communism in India. Other warm colours such as saffron and orange come from the depths of the Hindu philosophy and stand for courage and sacrifice.

Warm colours such as reds, yellows and oranges also reflect the spirit of the youth of the country and are mostly used on packaging food products as they have an appetising effect on the potential customer.

Yellows have recently begun to make their presence felt in contemporary furniture. The preferred and much sought after furniture styles these days are often in yellow bamboo and other wood.

Yellow is considered a mass colour amongst Indian brands; most accessible and most easily reproduced – Telecom giant Idea took the original age old colour of the STD booth and trunk dialling and took it forward.

The endeavours for a better future by way of saving the resources on Earth are always represented by the colour Green. It stands for corporate social responsibility, energy conservation and green energy.

From the Indian comic books arena, came a cult character in the 1980's. He was known as Nagraj - the longest-running Indian Action Superhero in a comic series. Based largely on the Hindu myth of the shape shifting snake, Nagraj derives most of his powers from microscopic snakes that live in his bloodstream, in lieu of white blood cells and his costume is coloured green.

The roots of Indian medicine lie in Ayurveda and since Ayurveda involves curing and healing by way of herbs and hence is largely represented by a fresh green.

Modern packaging indicating ayurvedic ingredients

Photo: Elephant, India



Colours of Asia :: India

On the highway you can see Indian Truck Art; popular graphical illustrations and symbols like the Lotus, *Kalash*, "Horn OK Please", Peacocks and Flower Vases and the colour palette here is usually an eclectic mix of Fuchsia, Bright greens, Indigo, Reds and Yellows.

A beautifully painted Indian truck

Photo: Madhur Dhamadhikari



Colourful Indian trucks

Photo: Elephant, India



Colours of Asia :: India

The colour blue is associated with royalty and opulence and hence is used for the packaging of most premium products, ranging from teas to perfumes. Blue is also the contemporary colour of business and technology driven corporations. Products for relief from summer heat and headaches and pains are also packaged in blue as it is associated with cooling and calmness.

Technological products and gadgetry are often in the colour black as it bestows the product with sharpness and solidity. This is largely due to the colour influences of products made in technologically advanced countries.

A large part of Indian design involves the use of multi coloured combinations and arrangements. Pictures of gods and goddesses are often painted in lush, colourful emulsion and the same combinations have also transcended to print now.

The fusion of pop art and the unmistakable Indian street flavour is what is now known as Indian Kitsch. What initially was thought of as something out of date and old fashioned is now what's hep, hot and happening! Inexpensive typically Indian products are on demand and are rising as a trend. Everything from trinkets to kitsch notebooks, key chains, coasters, badges, fashionable bags and shoes and in some cases even furniture and home decor products are now heavily "Indian Kitsch" with prints of colours and symbols from the streets of India (<http://www.mydigitalfc.com/opinion/indian-kitsch-art-can-still-fire-creativity-361>).



Popular "Indian Kitsch" products

Photo: Elephant, India

THE DELICIOUS COLOURS OF INDIAN FOODS & CULINARY

Indian food and traditional cuisine is very colourful; the colours almost seem to be adding to the taste and the experience of relishing a true Indian feast. In India everything is a feast. We love food and eating is always one of the most joyous of all activities.

Indian gravies are of many different colours the primary ones however are red, green, yellow and creamy white. Red chillies are the most valued Indian condiments, especially for their high pungency and colour. They are primarily used to add heat and colour to any dish. They are also sun dried, powdered and pickled to make spicy accompaniments for meals and are always in different shades of red.



A typical Indian curry

Photo: Elephant, India

Another exquisite spice of India is *Kesar* (Saffron). It adds a beautiful, rich flavour and a golden - orange hue to food. It is often mixed with milk and is added to specialties like Biryani and indulgent Indian desserts like Kheer and Halwa.

Tandoori chicken is a highly popular Indian savoury, consisting of roasted Chicken marinated in yogurt, red chilli powder (used to give it a fiery red hue), turmeric and a variety of other spices. It is traditionally cooked with high temperatures in a Tandoor (clay oven) and served with green chutney, onion slices and a lemon wedge.

Reddish tomato-based gravy is commonly used in North Indian cuisine. It has a very hot red colour to it attributed to the generous use of red chilli powder to add taste. Cream and butter are used to prepare this gravy and hence the name "*Makhani*".

Also known as the "Golden Spice", Turmeric is one of most essential spices of Indian Cuisine. Turmeric is boiled, dried and used in the powder form. Almost all Indian vegetable and meat dishes use turmeric either as separate spice or in the spice mixture. It gives a warm, yellow hue, a sort of woody flavour and scent to food.

Lentils, the must have part of lunch and dinners in regular Indian meals is made of Toor Dal also known as the split pigeon pea. It is yellow in colour and turmeric is added to intensify it. A world famous snack time food item of India is called Dhokla, made out of a mixture of Dals it is primary in yellow in colour and is soft and tender when eaten. It is often garnished with fresh green coriander leaves.

Chopped coriander leaves are typically used for garnishing in a variety of dishes such as dals and *pulao* (pilafs). Coriander and Mint chutney is a very popular accompaniment. Neem leaves have a lot of medicinal properties. They are used to cure skin diseases such as boils, ulcers and eczema. Curry Leaves - Known as Sweet Neem are very popular in South Indian Cuisine used as a flavouring agent (tempered with oil and mustard seeds) in *Sāmbhar* (spiced lentils), etc.

Tulsi Leaves or holy basil is a principal herb of Ayurveda, (Barbara Lloyd, 1999) used to cure common colds, heart ailments, indigestion and respiratory disorders. It is also a very popular flavouring agent, especially added to *Masala Chai* (spiced tea). All the leaves mentioned are fresh, luscious green in colour.

In the Indian Subcontinent chewing of betel leaf and areca nut dates back to circa 2600 BC. Formerly it was a custom of the royalty, and lovers because of its breath-freshening and relaxant properties, hence the attached sexual symbolism. While a *paan* has a symbolic value at ceremonies and cultural events in south and southeast Asia, day-to-day use is as a palate cleanser and breath freshener after a meal, and also often offered to guests and visitors as a sign of hospitality. But the *paan* is much more than a digestive aid. It has its place in literature, sacred ceremonies, poems and of course, Bollywood (<http://www.spiritualjourneys.net/Paan.htm>).

A tray full of *Paan* (Betel leaf) at a local *Paan* vendor
Photo: Elephant, India



Rai/Sarson (Black coloured Mustard Seeds) are often part of the seasoning (Tadka) in Indian cooking. In the South, they are typically combined with green chillies and curry leaves and fried to form a spicy mixture on high heat.

Urad Dal can either be Black or White Lentil. It is largely used to make Dal from the whole or split, de-husked seeds. The bean is boiled and eaten whole or, after splitting, made into Dal; prepared like this it has an unusual mucilaginous texture. Ground into flour or paste, it is also extensively used in South Indian culinary preparations, such as dosa, idli, vada, and papadam.

Cloves In North Indian cuisine are used in almost all rich or spicy dishes as an ingredient of a mix named Garam Masala. They are black in colour.

Indian food and culinary never has had only one colour. Indian foods are always a colourful treat to the senses. South Indian *Thali* (a full meal – lunch or dinner) is typically served on a plantain/banana leaf, the flavour and accompaniments

vary slightly as per different regions of South India. It most commonly consists of a deep yellow coloured *Sāmbhar* (lentils), assorted curries in reds, greens and orange, rice, curd rice garnished with mustard and coriander or tamarind rice, fritters (papad, banana chips), curd, pickle and some kind of sweet milk (payasam). Since rice is the staple crop of South India, maximum dishes are made partially or entirely out of rice.

There are also other forms of the *Thali* from various parts of the country. There is a *Gujarati Thali*, a *Punjabi Thali* and a *Maharashtrian Thali* to name a few popular ones and they all have their own array of tempting colours.

Garam Masala is a blend of various spices and is generally quite strong and pungent. A typical Indian version of *Garam Masala* would consist of black & white peppercorns, black cloves, dark brownish green malabar leaves, peachy pink mace blades, black & white cumin seeds, black, brown & green cardamom pods, nutmeg, star anise and coriander seeds (<http://www.indianfoodsite.com/spices.htm>).

THE INFLUENCE OF COLOURS

The colours of every visitor who came to India and stayed back have automatically added themselves to the Indian colour palette. The Temple architecture of Goa is a synthesis and amalgamation of various styles. The 14th Century temple of Shanta Durga, the peace goddess was re-built in the 17th Century. It has a heavy influence of Baroque decorations, arched entrances, niches and pilasters from the typical European architecture of that period. There is a piping in white and that is the result of an unwritten rule during the Portuguese occupation of Goa, that only churches and chapels enjoyed the privilege of being white. Everything else had to be in colour. Temples being religious places were only allowed the white accents.

The Diwali festival calls for great decoration in the form of colourful lights and Kandils or Diwali paper lanterns. Traditionally they are made of colourful tissue paper stretched over bamboo sticks. They are multi-faceted to represent all the directions. However, the craft of making these lanterns is becoming rare & the world of Diwali lanterns is witnessing a massive inflow of beautiful, multi-coloured Chinese lanterns with the pictures of Indian Gods and Goddesses.

Diwali Kandils influenced by Chinese lanterns

Photo: Elephant, India



With increasing access to information & objects from around the world through online shopping, red flat shoes seem to be fast becoming an essential in a college girl's closet. This is perhaps an influence of SE Asian fashion as India is seeing a lot of imports from China & Thailand.

Dramatic and startling colours initially achieved with vegetable and natural dyes played an important role in Goan architecture. Colour was decorative and used purely to create a sensation. With a colour wash, the house looked “dressed” and therefore displayed the economic well-being of the family that lived in it. Here Art in architecture performed a social function. (H Y Sharada Prasad, 2007) During the Portuguese rule, the owner of the house could be fined if his house was not painted. Sunny yellow was a common choice as it could be achieved by the use of natural yellow iron oxide.

Born as a *Mahar*, a caste that was considered untouchable in late 19th Century, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar rose to be the architect of Indian constitution. A great philosopher, economist & political leader, he dedicated his entire life to fight against the caste system & inequality in the society. He chose blue as the Dalit colour as it is the colour of secularism. A prominent political party uses blue as their colour to symbolize their routes in Dr. Ambedkar’s philosophy. A large paint manufacturer has launched that particular shade successfully a few years ago.

Urbanization, IT boom & homogenization of architecture for work spaces has led to the selections of the colour blue as the colour of technology.

The Arabic word for “greenery” is mentioned several times in the Quran, describing the state of mind of the inhabitants of Paradise. Indian Muslims wear green during all religious activities & green has become synonymous with the religion.

Traditionally, Indian women did not wear black on celebratory events. But today, black is the high fashion code when it comes to dressing for formal occasions other than weddings. This is an ongoing trend by actresses, socialites & professionals alike as a result of European fashion influences.

Colonial influences run deep in India. Westerners and “whiteness” or being “fair” is associated with superiority, status & luxury. Fair & Lovely is an Indian brand that was made global by Unilever due to its phenomenal resonance with this concept of beauty. The obsession has not escaped Indian men either. In recent times there have been launched over a dozen “skin whitening” fairness products for Indian men.

Christianity in India dates back to the reference of Thomas the Apostle visiting Kerala in 52 AD. Several centuries later, Kerala now has the largest Christian population in India. With cross cultural influences, Christian brides in Kerala wear a white saree with a gold border instead of a white wedding gown. The white veil is reminiscent of Christian methods while the saree comes from the Hindu traditions.

THE PRESENCE OF COLOURS IN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Colours hold a deep rooted significance for the Indian way of thinking and creation. Indian language and literature haven’t been spared from the magnificence of the colours that inspire feelings, emotions and imagination.

The *Laal Dupatta/ Chunariya* (Red Veil) is a much quoted object in Bollywood, folk and devotional songs. The colour red in this instance signifies love while the veil is a metaphor of the strength and nurturing character of womanhood.

E.g. “ *Hawa mein udta jaye, mera laal dupatta mal mal ka, ho jee...ho jee Idhar udhar leheraye, mera laal dupatta mal mal ka, ho jee... ho jee*” (My red veil flies with the wind, flutters here and there, my red veil...).

Gulaal (Fuchsia Red) is the name of a recent controversial Bollywood film based on the nexus between politics and crime in western India. It reflects the bravery and rage of the warrior class. Set in Rajpur a fictional city of Rajasthan, where a member of the erstwhile royal family stakes claim to the land of Rajasthan and wants to go back to the days of royalty. His minions smear *Gulaal* (red) on their face as a sign on fury, rage and revolution.

Kesariya Balam (Saffron/ Tanned lover) is one of the oldest Rajasthani compositions sung in the Mand singing style. It is referred to as one of the greatest compositions of all time for its music and more importantly the lyrics.

Kesariya means tanned in the glorious deep orange of saffron and *Balam* means lover or husband (In the context of this song).

Feelings and emotions with similarity have been classified into what are known as *Rasas* (flavours). One of the *Rasas* in Indian literature is the *Raoudra Rasa*; it has transcended from its written scripture forms to the language of dance in the performing arts sector ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rasa_\(aesthetics\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rasa_(aesthetics))).

The Theyyam dancers in their full glory are painted all over in vermillion and their dance and movements revolve around expressing the *Raoudra Rasa* – the emotion of rage and anger.

Haath Piley Karna (Getting Hands Yellowed) is an expression for “getting married” based on the ritual *Haldi* (Turmeric) ceremony. This is an important ritual around the country, done in the privacy of the respective bride’s and groom’s homes a few days before the wedding takes place. The yellow colour of Turmeric is believed to add brightness and beauty to those anointed.

“*Pittabody*” Is an Ayurvedic term for a certain body type as classified by the principles of Ayurveda. The Atharva Veda is the first ever scripture written on Ayurveda and the working of Pitta largely associated with the colour yellow; Pitta refers to transformation using the energies of fire and water.

Mitti Se Sona ugley (Mother Earth as the giver of wealth and in the Indian understanding of wealth, gold holds maximum worth) – an expression inspired from the song of a milestone Bollywood film ‘*Upkar*’ - “*Mere desh ki dharte, sona ugale, ugale hire motee... mere desh ki dharte*” - My nation’s earth, produces gold and riches for us; signifying pride in one’s land.

Nil Darpan (The Mirror of Indigo) is a Bengali play written by noted literary figure of the time Dinabandhu Mitra in 1858–1859. The play was essential to Nilbidraha, the Indigo revolt of February-March 1859 in Bengal, when farmers refused to sow indigo in their fields as a protest against exploitative farming under the British Raj.

Neelkanth (Blue Throat) is used to describe Lord Shiva in ancient poetry. It is also the name of a famous literary work by Mahadevi Verma, an outstanding Hindi poet, a freedom fighter, woman’s rights activist and educationist and one of the pillars of the *Chhayawaad* (similar to European romanticism) movement in Indian literature. This is a poem about the ubiquitous friend of nature, the Blue Jay.

Neela Aasman (Blue Sky) is a metaphor in Bollywood Songs, signifying romance, happiness and possibility. Ancient Vedas and the Samhitas attribute the colour blue to the darker gods such as Krishna. Krishna is also the divine lover and his traits have inspired several devotional songs and poetry.

Sawan ke andhe ko sab hara hi hara nazar aata hai (One who goes blind in spring, sees only greenery all around) is a proverb/ expression based on a philosophy/ ideology used for people who fail to see reality or dire circumstances when

they have lived through prosperous times. *Hariyali* (Green fields/ Greenery) is a metaphor in Bollywood Songs, signifying spring (harvest), hope and prosperity.

“Buri Nazaar wale, Tera Muh Kaala” (Oh Evil-eyed one, may your face become black) is a widely known expression and refers to warding off evil.

The colour black implies absorption and in this context suggests absorption of negative intent. The phrase is often seen on the back of trucks, which are an important vernacular art showcase and they reflect local beliefs.

Bollywood Movie titles such as *Kaalia* (the black one), *Kaala Sona* (Black Gold), *Kaala Paani* (Black Water), *Kaala Patthar* (Black Rock- Coal), *Koyla* (Coal) to name a few, have protagonists/ revolutionaries combating evil.

Saphed Jhoot (White lie) is a proverbial expression based on cross-cultural influences through trade.

“Shweta aur Shyama” (light and dark) are a pair of opposites originating in Sanskrit (root language) scriptures. Shweta comes from the root word *çveyta* which in the Rigveda refers to lighting up of dawn.

This has translated into the colour white bringing new beginnings & higher consciousness and colour black signifying absorption & negation. In Indian literature, this pair of words has continued to signify the presence of brightness and darkness in unity, used in several poems and written works by the revered saint poet Tulsidas.

(all songs: research team, personal communications, August 2012)

COLOURS OF INDIA IN NATURE

The Indian natural landscape is an everlasting mosaic of colours which splashes about in every direction your eyes turn to. The resplendent pink lotus is the official flower of India. It is a symbol of triumph, since the lotus is rooted in the mud and can survive to re-germinate for several years. Even though it grows in mud, it remains pure and produces beautiful flowers. Thus, it symbolizes purity of heart and mind.

The scale insects and mealy bugs that are native to India and other Southeast Asian countries settle on young twigs of a plant and extract the sap to secrete a resin-like material that covers the whole colony and forms a mass around the twigs that enclose the insects. These twigs are gathered and treated to obtain the Lac red dye.

Turmeric is commonly used for its traditional associations in the dyeing of Indian clothing, such as saris. The essential process of dyeing requires soaking the material containing the dye in water and then soaking the clothes to be dyed in the yellow liquid.

The north western portion of Rajasthan is generally sandy and dry. Most of this region is covered by the yellow looking Thar Desert which extends into adjoining portions of Pakistan.

Bright happy yellow sunflowers are found planted on several landscapes across the country to fuel the raging demand for sunflower cooking oil. Mustard seed is a rich source of oil and protein and mustard is an important spice in many regional foods across India. The fields of mustard are a bright romantic yellow due to the little mustard flowers.

The National Animal of India is the tiger. It is respected in India for its strength and grace, as well as its incredible power. Although once popularly killed for its

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skin, there is now a movement to protect the tiger population. The tiger in its full glory is quite a heart stopping sight; black stripes on a deep warm yellow, in hunting stance, making its way through the tall grass, towards unsuspecting prey (http://www.theholidayspot.com/indian_independence_day/national_symbols.htm).

Heena is a green flowering plant used since antiquity to dye skin, hair, fingernails, leather and wool. The name is also used for dye preparations derived from the plant, and for the art of temporary tattooing based on those dyes. (H Y Sharada Prasad, 2007) Additionally, the name is misused for other skin and hair dyes, such as black henna or neutral henna, which are not derived from the plant.

Nestled among the green rolling mountains with the glistening Mt. Kanchenjunga towering over the azure sky, Darjeeling fondly called “Queen of the Hills”, provides a perfect gateway for those seeking to be in harmony with nature. This is the land of the muscatel flavoured Darjeeling green tea revered by connoisseurs across the globe.

Cherrapunji lies high above the hazy valley and foaming rivers, hidden in the rolling clouds and perched on a headland at 4,500 ft above the sea level. Cherrapunji in the north-eastern state of Meghalaya is a spectacular location known for its lush greenery with year-round rain, and fittingly has earned the coveted place in the Guinness Book of World records for being the wettest place on earth.

The four month period when massive convective thunderstorms dominate India's weather, is Earth's most productive wet season. Lasting from June to September the season is dominated by the humid southwest summer monsoon, which slowly sweeps across the country beginning in late May or early June. Monsoon rains begin to recede from North India at the beginning of October. South India typically receives more rainfall. During this entire phase the land of India transforms into a new realm of lively greenery.

In 1963, the blue peacock was declared as the ‘National Bird of India’ because of its rich religious and celebrated involvement in Indian traditions. It symbolizes the qualities like beauty, elegance, pride, delight, spirituality and mysticism. In India people believe that whenever the peacock spread its tails in an ornamental fashion, it indicates that rain is in the offing (http://www.theholidayspot.com/indian_independence_day/national_symbols.htm).

Indigo (Neel) is cultivated in India since ancient times. Kungarapattu is the last and only place in India where the cultivation of the Indigo plant is done. Cultivation of the plant is done on dry waste land and via crop rotation. In the range of natural dye colours, Indigo is a very fast colour and one of great delight and meaning to Indian folk.

An Indigo dyed fabric

Photo: Elephant, India



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The Andaman Sea is an azure blue body of water to the southeast of the Bay of Bengal east of the Andaman Islands, India; it is part of the Indian Ocean.

Ladakh is the highest plateau of the Indian state of Kashmir with much of it being over 3,000 m (9,800 ft). The region experiences heavy snowfall and looks like a white new world in itself. In the Thar Desert in the Kutch District of Gujarat, India, seasonal salt marshes look like a white carpet spread across many parts.

India has 30 per cent of the world's cattle. There are 26 distinctive breeds of cow in India. Cow is a sacred animal amongst Indian Hindus, symbolic of the divine mythological White Kamadhenu (kama-dhenu, wish-cow). Various Hindu deities are believed to dwell in each part of the cow's body. The White cow is the epitome of kindness, provider, abundance, good health and motherhood in Hinduism. Because the cow is respected as a sacred animal, it's allowed to roam unharmed, and they are pretty used to the traffic and the rhythm of the city. The sacred cow is always depicted in white in paintings and poems.

A poster depicting the sacred cow



Another white sight is the vast expanse of the cotton fields in the states of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Elephants in India have exuded the limit of being mere animals. It is part of historical royal legacy, religious and mythological importance and of course an important ingredient of our age old cultures. It is a fully protected, most revered and a very well treated animal in India. Herds of elephants can be seen moving about in calm across the landscape.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COLOURS IN INDIAN RITES OF PASSAGE

In India the rites of passage have definite and important colours associated with them. These colours have remained the same over the years, have not been replaced by any other ones and therein lies their beauty.

The *Vivaha* (Wedding) comes alive through the colours signifying purity, love, warmth and positive energy. The bride wears red *Henna/Alta* on her hands. Lifetime vows are taken and Vedic prayers are chanted while seven steps are

taken before Gods, where Gods consecrate the union of husband and wife in a temple or wedding hall around the sacred *Homa* (fire). During weddings, the husband anoints the forehead of the wife with *Sindoor* (Vermillion) as commitment and promise of a happy life. Matrimonial bliss and a promise of togetherness are all sealed by the warmth and binding power of the red drape and accessories for the Bride in most regions of India. Griha Pravasha, the bride's first step into her new home is characterized by the ritual of her having to dip her feet in red water and walk bare feet on the floor of the house to symbolize the beginning of her new role.

A hindu bride's hands adorned with *henna* and *chuda* (bride's bangles) performing the wedding rituals

Photo: Girish Lone



It is customary for Hindus to tie a red thread on the wrist at the beginning of a religious ceremony. The thread is tied on the right wrist of men and the left wrist of women and signifies self-pride. It is put on one's wrist when doing a ceremony, ritual or puja, such as worship to the Ganga River, a deity or for certain blessings. The thread helps preserve or imbibe those blessings when it is tied around the wrist during the ceremony. (Anupama Gajwani, 2009)

The thread can also be called a raksha or rakhi, and is put on the brother by the sister to show the sister's familial love. The knots in the thread are said to hold the love of the sister when she ties the knot. Thus, the brother wears the rakhi as a sign of his sister's love and wishes for protection.

Women who are not blessed with a son tie a red thread around the trunk of the Peepal tree or on its branches asking the deities to bless them and fulfil their desire. This procedure is referred to respectfully as Mauli.

Gulaal is used during many festivals and present-day celebrations, especially during Holi - the festival of colours- thrown into the air, smeared on faces and bodies and sprinkled on the feet of elders to pay respects. The powder was originally made from dried seeds of the *Palaash* (Flame of the Forest) flower and soil from the river bed, giving it the characteristic red colour. *Gulaal* is believed to draw divine energy through its fragrance and hence is used during worship. Mixed with oil, it is used to mark '*Tilak*' for the sacred and the brave. It signifies the all-seeing, all-pervading power that protects the inner wisdom of those that it is applied on. (Anupama Gajwani, 2009) The red tilak while sometimes used

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as a symbol of “blessing” from the elderly to the youngsters is also used in many customary functions. The colour red in all these contexts signifies purity, love, warmth and positive energy.

Haldi Lapan (Turmeric application) is one preliminary ritual of significance, done in the privacy of the respective bride’s and groom’s homes well before the wedding. Their bodies are anointed with *Haldi* (Turmeric), since the yellow root is known for its powers of fertility.

Traditionally, the colour yellow is also believed to add brightness & beauty and is applied for better complexion. The paste applied during the ceremony is popularly known as *Ubtan* with herbs, vegetable oils, fresh milk curds and sandalwood powder besides Turmeric. It is probably the most ancient form of Indian Spa Treatment.



A hindu bride being smeared with turmeric during the *haldi* ceremony

Photo: Girish Lone



Ordination in Buddhism means admission to the sangha (Buddhist congregation) involving two distinct acts - *pabbajja* (lower ordination), which consists of renunciation of secular life and acceptance of monastic life as a novice, and *upasampada* (higher ordination), official consecration as a monk. To be accepted the postulant shaves his hair and beard and dons the yellow robes of the monk.

Genda (Marigold) flowers, garlands are an inseparable part of Indian culture. Considered a drop of the Sun, the primary source of life, the yellow Marigold is available in abundance around the country and extensively used to decorate religious places and pay homage to idols and respected figures in society.

Every Hindu festival finds abundant use of marigold in the form of garlands, traditional floral bouquets and toranas.

Neelam (Blue Sapphire) as an instance, by the Indian Vedic astrology system is the gemstone worn to nullify the malefic effects of the planet *Shani* (Saturn) and should be worn embedded in an iron or silver ring.

It is considered the most powerful of all gemstones; believed to usher a good life by destroying disease, faults, sorrows and bringing good health, prosperity and glory for the one wearing it.

Godh Bharai (filling the lap/ baby shower) is a celebration of motherhood for the first pregnancy of the mother to be. The rite *Simant Puja* is performed for two days in the morning of the seventh or ninth month on a Tuesday, Thursday

or Sunday. The expectant mother wears a green sari and walks over a green strip of cloth and wears a lot of bangles made of mostly green glass. The sound of these bangles is supposed to reach the womb to encourage growth of life within. Inspired by shades of the harvest, green celebrates fertility of the woman.

In many agrarian communities in Western India, green is the colour of new life, creativity and rejuvenation and hence used in ceremonies besides the Godh Bharai.

The green *Paan* (Betel) leaf is used during worship or rituals. Many different leaves from some select trees are used as essential accessories. But among them all, the betel leaf enjoys a place of pride in India. In Hindu weddings, a betel leaf is tucked into the headgears of the bride and the groom. It is symbolic of freshness and prosperity. The *Skanda Purana* (scripture) says that the betel leaf was obtained by demigods during the grand *Amrita Manthan* (churning of the ocean). The use of betel leaf in India is mentioned in the great epics, such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, as well as in Buddhist and Jain literature.

The *Mangalsutra* is a sacred assemblage of black beads & gold and a must for every Hindu wedding across India. As part of the *Vivaha* (Wedding) rites, the bridegroom adorns the bride with this token. The colour black signifies protection due to its power of absorbing evil.

Thus, the *Mangalsutra* is believed to acquire similar protective powers over the holy union and the life of the earnest husband. It is a symbol of love and goodwill for married women and an assurance of a successful marriage.

The *Upanayana*, thread ceremony for initiating the child into the social system and the beginning of education; signifies coming of age and stepping into manhood. The thread is white for purity and the colour white is highly associated with the *Brahmins* (learned class) as it signifies academic brilliance and authority. The initiation ceremony is seen as a new birth; those groups entitled to wear the sacred thread are called the twice-born. In olden times this rite marked the beginning of the life-stage, *Brahmacharya* (Student hood) (<http://www.sanskrit.org/www/Hindu%20Primer/samskaras.html>).

The *Navjot* (New Worshipper) Ceremony in Zoroastrianism is the parallel of the Hindu thread ceremony; for initiating a child into Zoroastrianism and manhood. White is the primary colour worn for the same reasons- Purity and new beginnings.

Antyeshthi (funeral rites) have the colour white; worn in mourning as it signifies truth, absence of desires, separation from joy and as such all the colours of life. White is also worn by widows amongst Hindus, Jains and Parsis.

All funeral rites are performed with white objects and clothing- while a person is dying, disposal of the body, the soul's transit from a *preta* (ghost) to the realm of the *Pitrs* (ancestors) and honouring the ancestors. These contribute to the merit of the deceased and pacify the soul so that it will not linger in this world.

In a few other religions, The Jashan Ceremony in the Parsi Community also marks the passage into new ways of life, e.g. Marriage, Birth and even Death.

The colour worn by the Parsi priests is snowy white and the ceremonial cloth represents *Spenta Armaiti*- the pure guardian spirit of the Earth. In Islamic and Christian weddings, white is worn by bride and groom to signify purity.

THE PRESENCE OF COLOURS IN INDIAN SOCIAL CHANGE

Colours are of crucial importance to the people of India especially when they are expressing themselves with regard to the need for a positive change. It is believed that the colour they choose to represent themselves will be the main factor contributing to the success of their endeavours.

Jaago Re! One Billion Votes was a non-partisan nationwide movement initiated by Tata Tea Janaagraha (a non-profit organization). It aimed at awakening and enabling the citizens, especially the youth of India, to vote during elections. The movement was very effective with its use of bright youthful colours for all its communication.

The Gulabi (Pink) Gang protests against oppression of women. This is a movement by rural women to protect the powerless from abuse and fight corruption to ensure basic rights of the poor in rural areas and discourage traditions like child marriages.

The Pink *Chaddi* Campaign or Pink Underwear Campaign is a nonviolent protest movement launched in India in Feb 2009 in response to notable incidences of violent conservative & right wing activism against perceived violation of Indian culture when a group of women were attacked in a pub in Mangalore.

After starting to follow Zen philosophy, spiritual Guru Osho asked his disciples to wear maroon robes. He believed maroon colour joins people's energies and that robes create energy.

Nihang is a Persian word meaning crocodile. Nihangs were suicide squads of the Mughal army and wore blue uniforms. The Sikhs took the name and the uniform from the Mughals. Nihangs constitute an order of Sikhs who, abandoning the fear of death, are ever ready for martyrdom and remain unsullied by worldly possessions.

A Nihang is one who has nothing and is free from anxiety. The order is said to have been founded by Guru Gobind Singh himself as a fighting body of the Khalsa. The Nihangs were also called *Akalis* (Servitors of the Timeless God).

Nihangs' blue attire reflects the true spirit of warriors – immortality and heroism.



Nike launched its mega cricket campaign “Bleed Blue Pledge” in 2011, a new campaign where the pride, passion, and fearless soul of Indian cricket is brought to life through the voice of the elite athletes of Team India. “Bleed Blue Pledge” was not just the voice of professional players who play the game; it’s the voice of the sport as it exists inside the hearts and minds of millions of Indian fans and players.

India won the world cup that year & the campaign was a mega success. Pepsi launched a similar campaign in 2007 when they also launched a blue coloured drink.

In Pakistan, thousands of Facebook users displayed the Pakistani flag in their profile pictures in 2009 to support the “Go-Green” movement. This display continued till 14th August, the Independence Day of Pakistan. Such digital patriotism is also seen during cricket World-cup at T20 tournaments in India.

NDTV is India’s premier news channel. The NDTV-Toyota Greenathon was launched in April 2008; the NDTV-Toyota Green campaign was India’s first ever-nationwide campaign to save the environment.

The campaign is aimed at creating awareness about environmental issues by involving the people of our country to make a difference. The campaign was supported by Dr R.K. Pachauri and India’s Minister for Environment, Jairam Ramesh.

Crisp White clothes are the de facto uniform of political leaders in India and have been historically since the days of the Khadi revolution. Khadi is the cloth that was worn by the freedom fighters during the Indian independence struggle and originally Khadi was only available in one colour; white.

“Bell Bajao!” is a domestic violence awareness campaign which urges local residents to take a stand against physical abuse through simple acts. The campaign was launched on August 20, 2008 by “Breakthrough” in collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, (Reporter, Times of India newspaper, 2008) UNIFEM and the UN Trust Fund. The main colours used were black and white.

Anna Hazare started an indefinite hunger strike on 5th April, 2011 to exert pressure on the Indian government to enact a stringent anti-corruption law as envisaged in the “Jan Lokpal Bill”, for the institution of an ombudsman with the power to deal with corruption in public places. The fast led to nation-wide protests in support. The fast ended on 9 April 2011, a day after the government accepted Hazare’s demands. The government issued a gazette notification on the formation of a joint committee, consisting of government and civil society representatives, to draft the legislation.

The campaign and the movement were brought about through effective use of the colours black and white.

Sanyasis (Hermits) are outside the social fold and have no social bonds.

The word *Sanyasi* comes from *Sanyasa* (hermitage), which is the last life stage, of separation from the material world, where man wanders to attain salvation.

The colour saffron worn by *Sanyasis* is the sign of renunciation from comforts of the world. It denotes the Sun’s light giving glow and represents a determined focus on one’s spiritual goal of life. The colour also gives peace and tranquillity to the mind, which helps them on their spiritual journey and development. *Sanyasis* are required to continuously move and remain liberated. Sometimes they are located at *Mathas* (monasteries) where they return once every year, after pilgrimage.

THE COLOURS OF INDIAN ARCHITECTURE

Colour has found its way strongly into Indian Architecture and built environments since times immemorial. They are an intrinsic element of their beauty.

The ancient caves at Badami are carved out of red sandstone, found on the hillsides. Hampi is home to the ruins of the Vijaynagra Empire, and has a large number of temples, temple complexes and clusters – all in red sandstone. Red is a very auspicious colour for the Buddhists, and is used to do much of the fresco painting in Buddhist monasteries in Dharamsala.

The 17th century complex of the Red Fort in Delhi, was made of locally available red sandstone, and served as the residence of the Mughal emperors.

Like many structures in Fatehpur Sikri, and Old Delhi, the red sand stone finish of the built form came to be associated with the regal and large scale architecture of the Mughal Empire.

The ancient cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro were the first extensively planned cities of India – with a unique system of roads, drainage, waste disposal, water supply, and strong structures built of mud bricks. Due to its largely earthen non-baked nature, the remains of the city look yellow.

The Golden Temple at Amritsar was covered in real gold foil in the early 19th century after being rebuilt. It is this gold leaf that gave this Sikh Gurudwara its name. The gold foil was covered by Mahrana Ranjit Singh and stands as a symbol of the prosperity of this shrine.

The Golden Temple at Amritsar

Photo: Milind Wadekar



The Sun Temple at Konark was built out of yellow sandstone, as a chariot for the Sun God. A large collection of Jain and Hindu temples at Khajuraho is famous for the erotic sculptures. They are mostly built out of yellow sandstone since it was easily available in the region.

The town planning of Panjim borrowed heavily from the Portuguese, its orthogonal layout and the colour coding of its buildings for starters. Yellow was a colour reserved for government buildings by the Portuguese. Today, this code is followed for all the public buildings in Panjim, in order to beautify the city.

Colours of Asia :: India

Jaipur is known as the pink city because of the large number of structures in “terracotta pink”. It has been this way since the 1800’s, when it was coloured this way to welcome Prince Albert.

Hawa Mahal (Palace of Winds) palace in Jaipur is built of red and pink sandstone

Photo: Elodie Nerot



Jodhpur has long been known as the blue city, because of the blue painted Brahmin houses around the Mehrangarh Fort. The colour is mixed into lime wash and applied to the walls. It needs to be reapplied every year or every few years, and it enthusiastically maintained by the city.

Made of assorted trash and waste materials, the slums of Mumbai are a sub-culture within the city. Dhobi Ghat is a large outdoor Laundromat within such slums. The colour blue comes from the “Neel” that is used to wash clothes and the blue tarpaulins on the roof of the small sheds.

The Taj Mahal at Agra is the most well known token of love in Indian history. This symmetrical white marble structure, lies on the bank of the river Yamuna, and is surrounded by manmade water bodies.

Pride of India and symbol of love - Taj Mahal

Photo: Milind Wadekar



The temples of Ellora were cut into black basalt rock, with the workers starting from the top and working their way downwards. Black Basalt Rock is local to Maharashtra, and was the logical answer to the building material.

The Lingaraj Temple at Bhubaneswar is a Hindu temple dedicated to the God Shiva. It is built of oxidised laterite which gives it, its grey-black quality.

Salim Chisti's Tomb at Fatehpur Sikri is one of the few marble structures within the city. It was built by Akbar, as a tribute to the saint who foretold the birth of his son. The Jami Masjid was commissioned by Shah Jahan, and is the principal mosque of Old Delhi. It is built of marble and uses red sandstone for the accents.

Slate, Stone and Whitewash contribute to the black and white appearance of the architecture in Ladakh. The marble clad concrete frames of the Bahai / Lotus Temple were meant to signify a blossoming flower. It is surrounded by nine water bodies.

Swaminarayan Akshardham inaugurated on 6th November 2005 reflects the essence and magnitude of India's ancient architecture, traditions and timeless spirituality. The main monument, depicting ancient Indian "*Vastu shastra*" and architecture, is a marvel in pink sandstone and white marble. It was established through 5 years of devoted work of 11,000 artisans and volunteers.

A LOOK AT THE COLOURS OF INDIA THROUGH THE EYE OF TIME

Different times around the year inspire different feelings and emotions and hence we associate certain colours with those times of the year.

Varsha Ritu or Monsoon arrives in the *Shraavana* and *Bhadrapada* months of the Hindu calendar. The cloudy, rainy skies are deep blue all throughout these months. *Basant Panchami* marks the end of the winter and the beginning of spring in northern India. The colour yellow holds great significance as it symbolises the brilliance of nature at this time.

Gandhi Jayanti is celebrated on 2nd October to mark the occasion of the birthday of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi - the "Father of the Nation." The colour white, being the colour of Khadi (hand spun fabric) is worn with fervour at this time, in memory of Gandhi and the values he stood for- Purity, Simplicity and Truth. This day is also one of India's National holidays.

Children celebrating Gandhi Jayanti by dressing up as the 'father of the nation'

Photo: Suvashis Malik



Eid is a Muslim holiday that marks the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting. The holiday celebrates the conclusion of the 29 or 30 days of dawn-to-sunset fasting during the entire month of Ramadan. The celebratory atmosphere uses green as a strong component of the decoration.

Muharram The festival commemorates the martyrdom of the Prophet Mohammed's grandson- Hazrat Imam Hussein. It is celebrated with great fervour by the Muslims, especially the Shia community. The first month of the Muslim year, approaches with Muharram, and believers put on black clothes, in mourning.

Kumbh Mela has achieved international popularity as "The biggest act of faith." The pilgrims come from all walks of life, with a belief that their sins will be washed off in the holy waters of the sacred river Ganges if they take a dip during the *Kumbh*. The colour yellow finds significance in the colour of the Sadhu's robes.

Holi, the festival of colour, is originally an agricultural festival. In most regions of India Holi lasts for about two days, and is responsible for levelling differences in age, gender, status, and caste. Owing to the legends in Hindu Mythology, this festival also celebrates the victory of good over evil. (Anupama Gajwani, 2009)

Holi heralds the arrival of spring, a season of many bright and beautiful colours; and of the harvests to come. This occasion played a significant part in use of natural multi-coloured powders. The variety of colours also celebrates the diversity and richness of Indian cultures.

Happy faces smeared with colours during the festival of Holi

Photo: Elephant, India



The Pushkar Mela is a riot of colour. This is the time when the small holy town, set at the edge of the desert in the Western State of Rajasthan sees hundreds of thousands tourists flocking within days. The camel and cattle fair also attracts pilgrims who come to visit the Brahma Temple and bathe in the holy Pushkar lake for the Kartik Purnima (full moon).

Vasaara refers to the days of the week according to the Hindu calendar. Monday is the day of the Moon, and is associated with White. Tuesday is the day of Mars and is thereby seen as Red. Wednesday is for Mercury represented by the colour Green. Thursday is the day of Jupiter, regularly and religiously associated with the colour yellow and Saturday, or the day of Saturn is Blue.

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE MISCELLANEOUS COLOURS OF INDIA

There are several other areas of life in India with a strong presence of colours. Some of them have been discussed here.

Television is the most widely preferred form of entertainment and NEWS, Music Movie channels are usually in a red colour palette.

The Maoist Revolutionary Group in India is brewing a Red Revolution, urging multinational companies (MNCs) out of the country because, they say globalization causes a widening gap between rich and poor. (2010) In some parts of the country their tactics have worked, using violence and intimidation to turn India into a communist society, creating a so-called “red corridor” in areas where traditional law and order is almost nonexistent.

Post boxes in India can be found outside every post office and specific places for public convenience. The postal department of India's identity and the most common post box are in Red colour. The Red post boxes are meant for collection of mail, which is not local. The green post boxes are meant for collection of local mail. The Blue ones are meant for collection of mail addressed to metro cities and the Yellow post boxes are meant for collection of mails addressed to all capital cities. The traditional basic postcard of India is yellow in colour.

Since colours have made their way in International Cricket, the Indian National Cricket Team has chosen blue as their primary colour and has always worn one or the other shade of blue. The blue colour of their uniform has also earned them the nickname of “Men in Blue”.

The concept of chakras originates from ancient Hindu texts. The chakras are said to be “force centres” or whirls of energy permeating from physical points on the body. The solar plexus in the stomach area is considered yellow. The root chakra, at the base of the spine is said to be red. The heart chakra at the centre of the chest is green. The third eye chakra which is at the top of the head and the throat chakra is blue. The crown chakra is purple. And the sacral chakra is orange (<http://www.sensationalcolor.com/color-messages-meanings/color-meaning-symbolism-psychology/the-colors-of-the-chakras.html>).

According to the ancient science of Vastu Shastra, colours have a significant influence on our minds and bodies. Colours that are in harmony with planets and directions can help enhance a positive energy flow through the home.

The Vastu system uses the seven colours and their variants for the nine planets. E.g. Violet, the colour for Saturn embodies Spirituality and Mysticism. It brings faith and intuition, therefore should be used for a bedroom, preferably facing east. Blue embodies Peace and Vastness; Yellow - Intellect and Courage and Orange for Sociability and Aspirations. (Anupama Gajwani, 2009)

COLOURFUL INDIA

The incredible romance of India is indisputably played out by its colours. It is an ocean of hues and shades, surging, swelling and crashing against the rocks of inspiration to give birth to positive creation; like Radha (Krishna's divine lover) and Shyama (Krishna himself) reciting the dance of love in the holy embrace of the kingdom of eternal life.

All the colours of this ancient civilization are here to stay till immortality and can't be summed up in mere words nor put together in photographs. The colours of India can only be felt if one chooses to drown in them.

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Research Report 2013



Indonesia

the
Colours
of Asia

Red Yellow Blue Green Black & White

亞洲
色彩

紅黃藍綠黑與白



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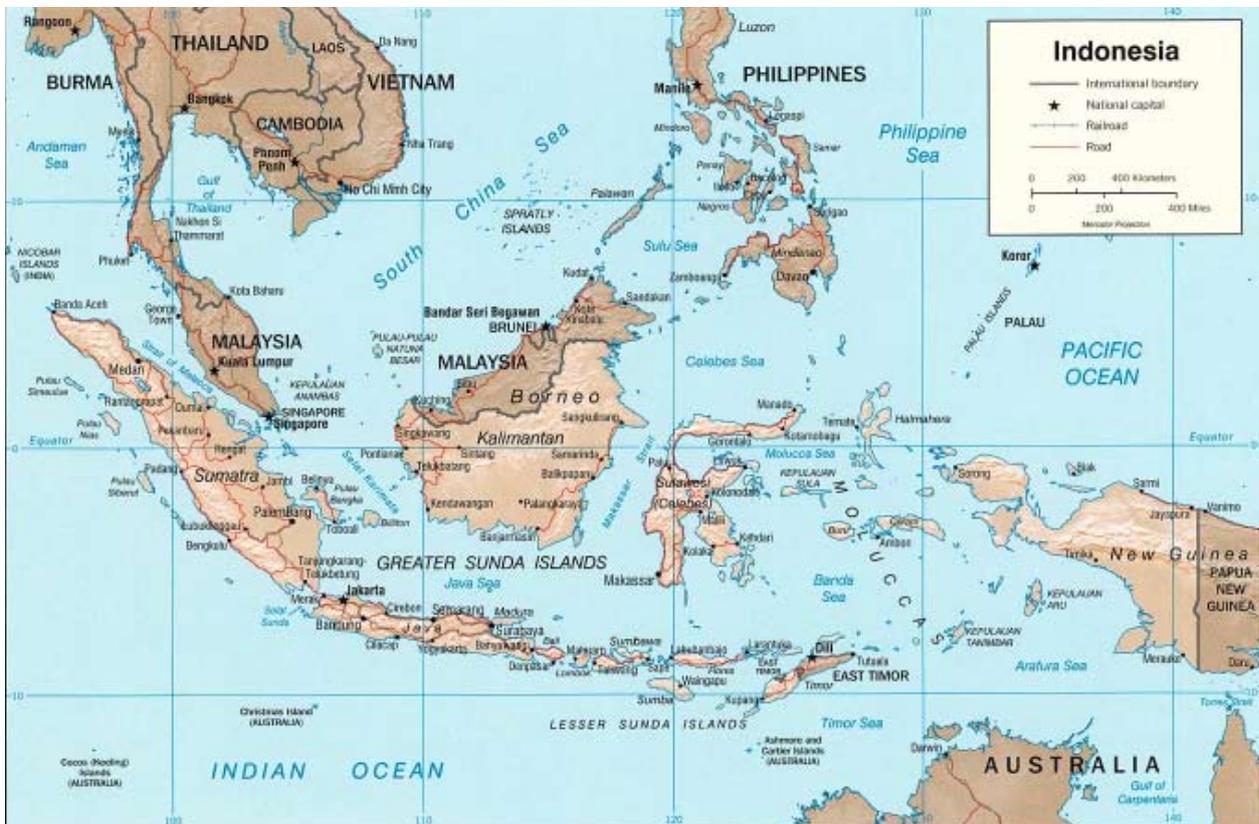
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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia officially the Republic of Indonesia, is a country in Southeast Asia and Oceania. Indonesia is an archipelago comprising approximately 17,508 islands. It has 33 provinces with over 238 million people, and is the world's fourth most populous country. Indonesia has about 300 ethnic groups, each with cultural identities developed over centuries, and influenced by Indian, Arabic, Chinese, and European sources.

The Indonesian archipelago has been an important trade region since at least the 7th century, when Sriwijaya and then later Majapahit traded with China and India. Local rulers gradually absorbed foreign cultural, religious and political models from the early centuries, and Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms flourished. Indonesian history has been influenced by foreign powers drawn to its natural resources. Muslim traders brought Islam, and European powers brought Christianity and fought one another to monopolize trade in the Spice Islands of Maluku during the Age of Discovery. Following three and a half centuries of Dutch colonialism, Indonesia secured its independence after World War II.

Across its many islands, Indonesia consists of distinct ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. The Javanese are the largest ethnic group. Indonesia has developed a shared identity defined by a national language, ethnic diversity, religious pluralism within a majority Muslim population, and a history of colonialism and rebellion against it. Indonesia's national motto, "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*" ("Unity in Diversity" *literally*, "many, yet one"), articulates the diversity that shapes the country.



Map of Indonesia.

Photo : Unknown source

Indonesian is a group of society with a multicultural and pluralism in the world. There are over hundreds of tribes and sub-tribes with its own social characteristics in Indonesia; with various tribes and sub-tribes languages; each tribes and sub-tribes also have their own ways of worshipping The Creator according to their lives and living situation; there are even many different human characteristics, and also many others. When religious disseminators entered Indonesia, with different interests and backgrounds, they were faced with different patterns, systems, living structure and social-life, culture, and adoration that has existed. Or, they were faced with the genuine spirituality of Indonesian people. And there are also possibilities that these religious disseminators made an adjustment or even mixing different religion teachings and elements from different cultures in tribe and sub-tribe in Indonesia. Along with that, there are factors that are related with identity such as religion, ethnicity, customs and traditions, are an important matter in Indonesia's society, since it has become a collective identity; and can also be a bond to build a nation. Otherwise, it can also be a power to illustrate dominance and superiority from other communities. (Role of religion in a pluralistic of Indonesia. (Jappy Pellokila). Retrieved from http://www.jappy.8m.net/blank_17.html).

Religion, culture and society will not be able to stand for themselves, the three subject has a strong relationship; harmonious in creating or else illuminating each other. Humans are born to the world with the legacy of ideas, mind-set system, and artefacts that has existed. There will be a difference when culture or religion is seen as a process, both is viewed in a form of continuous development, growth, and a disintegration of a culture. Culture and religion as a process is an inescapable reality. The fluidity of both subjects is a nostalgic pathway into the next pathway, which has the quality of tallying, altering or even vanishing. From those different religions then assimilation, incorporation and harmonization occurred. Many different beliefs and rituals/ceremonies of a religion since then been embraced by other religion followers. (Hubungan Agama-Budaya, April 24, 2008).

Indonesian Constitution from 1945 stated that "Every citizen is free to decide and practice their belief" and "the state guarantees their citizen a freedom to worship, according to their religion or belief." However, the Government officially only acknowledges 6 (six) religions, which are Islam, Christian, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist and Confucius. According to Justifications on President's Decree Number 1 Year 1965 Regarding Preventing Misuse and/or Despoiling of Religion) chapter 1, "Religions embraced by Indonesia's citizens are Islam, Christian, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist and Confucius".

According to history, immigrants have become the main endorser of religious and cultural diversity in the country with immigrants from India, China, Portugal, Arab and Dutch. However, this has changed since several changes have been adjusted to the culture in Indonesia. Hindu and Buddhist entered Indonesia since the 2nd and 4th century AD, when traders from India came to Sumatra, Java and Celebes, along with their religion. Hinduism then started to developed in Java in 5th century AD with Shiva worshiper, Brahmana caste. Traders also developed Buddhism further in the next century, and several Buddhism and Hinduism beliefs inspire wealthy kingdoms such as Kutai, Sriwijaya, Majapahit and Syailendra. The biggest Buddhist temple in the world, Borobudur, was build by Syailendra kingdom and at the same time, a Hindu temple, Prambanan, was also build. The peak of Hindu-Java glory, Majapahit kingdom, occurred in the 14th century AD, which was also the golden period in Indonesia's history. Islam first entered Indonesia in the 7th century through Arab traders. Islam spreads up to west coast of Sumatra and then developed to the east Java.

During this period, there were several Islam kingdoms, such as Demak, Pajang, Mataram and Banten kingdom. At the end of 15th century AD, there were already twenty Islam kingdoms, representing Islam domination in Indonesia. Catholic was brought in to Indonesia by the Portugese, especially in Flores and Timor islands. Christian was first introduced by Dutch in the 16th century AD with influences from Calvinis and Lutheran teachings. Animism advocates territory in East Indonesia and other parts were Dutch's main objectives, including Mollucas, Nusa Tenggara, Papua and Borneo. Afterwards, Christian started to spread through ports in Borneo beaches, missionaries then arrived in Toraja, Celebes. At that time, the missionaries were also aiming Sumatra territory, especially Batakese, where nowadays most of them are Christian advocates.

Various culture and belief in Indonesia creates uniqueness to each customs and traditions. In this paper, we concentrate on the colours of rituals and ceremonies in Indonesia, since in each activities, tribes and sub-tribes in Indonesia uses objects which envisions variety of colours and each of it has a meaning and philosophy. And also because rituals and ceremonies are a sequence of activity attached to certain rules according to customs and traditions, religion and belief, executed mainly for symbolic purposes. Rituals are implemented based on a religion, and can also be based on traditions of a certain community. Customary rituals and ceremonies, be it religious holiday celebration, rites of passage, mythical ceremonies, or even to be grateful for the gifts of God, are based on a same principle which is a form of gratefulness to the Creator, based on beliefs: faith in a religion. And in speaking of religions, it is "coloured" by many influences, where many of religious acts have been incorporated.

In this paper, we have selected to explain several ethnics, which we hoped would be enough to represent the principal/values of life that are practiced by many ethnics/culture in Indonesia. And most importantly, could represent insights and purpose of colour. Those ethnics are among others; Bali, Java, Toraja, and Bugis. Each ethnic has their own way of practicing their unique and different belief, spiritual conviction and celebration/tradition.

Colours are highly important in human lives, even more so in Indonesia whose natural riches present beautiful colours in each of their manifestation. Indonesians' understanding towards colours is deeply affected by their traditions. Indonesians of today commonly stand on two bases, the modern and the traditional. The divisions of colours are influenced by the Indonesian people who live by composing the understanding of life patterns. One such pattern is the Mandala, the pattern of four. The basic patterns of four are the cosmic and the metaphysical pattern, both representing the transcendental and immanent unity. In these patterns, perfection, strength, prosperity, and justice can only be achieved through the unity of the four cosmoses: sky, earth, ground, and sea. The *gunungan* in *wayang* has also a similar concept. *Gunungan* comes from the word *gunung*, meaning mountain, which connects the heaven and the earth, the upper world and the lower world. Due to the understanding of the patterns, colours in Indonesia cannot be seen as being independent, but must be considered as a part of cultural expressions, which bears the identity that goes along with the appearance of the colours. "Colours" of rituals and ceremonies in Indonesia, will be transferred into a visualization related to its culture, according to the view and understanding of the colour itself.

Gunungan, the most important requisite in the wayang theatre, Javanese.

Photo : Susi Mohamad



COLOURS PERCEPTION IN INDONESIA

Indonesia is a country with richness in colours, which is apparent from each of its rituals and traditional ceremonies that are still very much in practice by the Indonesian people, according to each of their ethnical backgrounds. In general, the meanings of colours in Indonesia possess similarities among different ethnics, despite the varieties of their rituals and ceremonies. Based on the field research at Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII) or Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park (literally translated), the guide claimed about several meaning of colours in Indonesia which are (personal communication, 2012) :

Red	White	Black	Green	Blue	Yellow
brave frivolous celebration life	purity sacred ritual	black magic misfortune disastrous death	fertility environment Islam	divinity	gentleness sincerety

The root of culture in Indonesia is the philosophy of Hinduism, the first practiced religion in Indonesia, which organizes the relationships among men, men and their surrounding, and men and nature. The teaching of Hinduism is thought to be quite acceptable by the public, since it is related to the environment and nature.

Red (Merah) (along with white) is the colour of Indonesian flag, which manifests bravery and courage. As an example, this colour is often expressed in national athlete uniform. Red is also used in many ethnic costumes, with a respective philosophy of relaying the sense of cheerfulness, uplifting and desire. **Yellow (Kuning)** associated Indonesia in the past was a kingdom; Majapahit is an example of a highly influential kingdom of that time. Up to today, there are some areas in Indonesia that resembles a kingdom, such as Surakarta and Yogyakarta. Symbols of wealth are described with gold, natural resources, and cultural rituals, as a display of gratefulness i.e. rice harvesting rituals and celebrations. **Blue (Biru)**, the many spectrums of blue, which emerge from the breadth of Indonesian territorial waters along with its beauty and natural wealth, have become the source of inspiration for people of Indonesian Archipelago, as a maritime country that consists of thousands of islands. **Green (Hijau)** in Indonesia, which is rich in natural resources, has been referred to not only as an archipelago, but also as an agrarian country. Indonesia has been nicknamed *Jamrud Khatulistiwa* (Emerald of the Equator) due to its surprising natural phenomena and bio-diversity. As much as 85% of the population in Indonesia are Moslem, based on the historical fact that Islam was introduced in Indonesia since the 7th century by Arabian traders. In Indonesia, the colour green is associated with Islam, and – as well as the current global perception about the green – it is associated with ‘green-lifestyle’ that represents eco-friendly behaviour. **Black & White (Hitam-Putih)** Indonesia has many rituals for every passage of life. On one hand, black in Indonesia in general represents mystic, myth, and death. In Indonesia there are ritual activities held in several areas,

such as the mystical science or black magic practices, i.e. in the Dayak people of Kalimantan/Borneo. On the other hand, white represents the elements of the sacred, holiness and purity. Black and white are predominant colours related to divinity, such as for the people in Baduy (Banten, West Java) and Kajang (South Celebes), who always use both colours in daily life.

Colours and Rituals in the Indonesian Archipelago

Indonesia, as a nation, is indeed a product of imagination. With a total of 13,487 islands spread across an area of 2.8 million km². Indonesia is a picture of diversity instead of unity. Yet, as of 2010, around 230 million people call themselves “Indonesians”. While still acknowledging their ties with the smaller communal units of ethnicity—Indonesia is home to 990 distinct ethnic groups (Biro Pusat Statistik, 2010)—they are bound together by a sense of camaraderie and a persistent idea of “an Indonesian nation”.

How can such an idea of nationhood be perpetuated? How, in the face of such sheer diversity, a vision of unity is maintained? One way to do it is through symbols, which can be found in abundance in rituals. The Indonesian archipelago has no shortage of rituals. Initially, rituals help a community maintain a link with its past and immediate surrounding. This is especially true for the distinct sets of rituals that have arisen in certain communities. Before the advent of the Abrahamic faiths in the archipelago, Hindu and Buddha had long co-existed and even merged with the ancient beliefs of the people there—whose traces can still be observed in places such as Toraja in Sulawesi and the land of the Batak in Sumatra. Rituals act as social glue, creating a sense of kinship and belonging within a community.

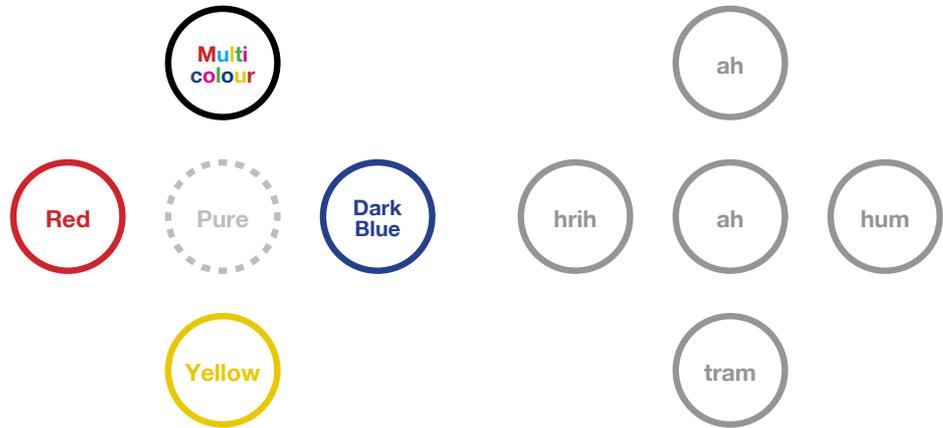
Some of the rituals in the Indonesian archipelago arose from the interactions between the people and the nature. Indeed, nature also forms one of the connecting threads that bind these diverse communities. It is a defining element of the culture and we can find elements of nature in many ancient belief systems. The Torajans, for example, believe that there are gods of the sky and gods of the earth; the Batak people believe in the “Tree of Life”; while the Balinese believe in the gods of the cardinal points.

Colours of nature play an important role in many rituals. Colours can represent the different gods in the Hindu-Balinese pantheon. Certain colours symbolise good fortune, while some others are seen as preventing harm. Colours in costume might also hint at the wearer’s social standing or even caste.

The modern Indonesian Dictionary lists fourteen different shades of red, many of them related to nature (Pusat Bahasa, 2002)—for example: terracotta red (*merah bata*), myrtle red (*merah bungur*), blood red (*merah darah*), pomegranate red (*merah delima*), liver red (*merah hati*), guava red (*merah jambu*), buffalo-spinach red (*merah lembayung*), mushroom red (*merah merang*), saga red (*merah saga*), sappan red (*merah sepang*). Blue is listed as having five shades: biru gerau, sky blue (*biru langit*), ocean blue (*biru laut*), bruised blue (*biru lebam*), and night blue (*biru malam*). The Dictionary lists only three shades of yellow: gold yellow (*kuning emas*), tusk yellow or coconut yellow (*kuning gading*), and langsung or lanzone yellow (*kuning langsung*). Intriguingly, in such a lush tropical country, rich as it is with green vegetations, the modern dictionary recognises only four shades of green: *hijau gadung*, moss green (*hijau lumut*), *hijau maya-maya*, and leaf green (*hijau daun*).

Primary Colours of the Indonesian Archipelago.

Ancient Balinese manuscripts of *Sang Hyang Nagabayusutra* and *Kalpabuddha* mention five colours along with their mantras or sacred syllables and their position in the cardinal directions:



The ancient Javanese text of *Korawasrama* from the late 14th to early 15th century has a rather elaborate explanation about colour and the cardinal direction, with the Sanskrit words having been translated into old Javanese: “In the case of ‘colour’ that applies to every person: *sweta* means ‘white’, its place is in the East; *rakta* means ‘red’, its place is in the South; *pita* means ‘yellow’, its place is in the West; *kresna* means ‘black’, its place is in the North.

“The mixture between *sweta* and *rakta* is called ‘pink’, its place is in the Southeast; the mixture between *rakta* and *pita* is called ‘orange’ like the flower of] *kuranta* tree (New Guinea Rosewood), its place is in the Southwest; the mixture *pita* and *kresa* is called ‘green’, its place is in the Northwest; the mixture between *kresna* and *sweta* appears ‘blue’, its place is in the Northeast. “When all the colours are present simultaneously, it is called *siwah* and its place is in the Centre.”

An ancient Javanese *kidung* or chant mentions five colours along with their associations with the sacred lotus flower, their magical power, and the cardinal directions:

“The great *wudi* tree in the East, the dove being its bird, its water is clear, lake being its name; whitelotuses grow there, surrounded with silver. The water runs clear. It is where people are healed from ... Grandfathers and grandmothers should bathe there.

“The great *randu* tree (cottonwood) in the South, the eagle being its bird; its water is clear, lake being its name; red lotuses grow there, surrounded with red bronze. The water runs clear. It is where people are healed from the ten sins. Fathers and mothers should bathe there.

“The great *angsana* tree, Also known as *kuranta* or New Guinea rosewood, in the West, the oriole being its bird; its water is clear, lake being its name; yellow lotuses grow there, surrounded with gold. The water runs clear. It is where people are healed from diseases and defects. Children and wives should bathe there.

“The *iren* tree in the North, the crow being its bird; its water is clear, lake being its name; blue lotuses grow there, surrounded with iron. The water runs clear. It is where people are healed from bad words. Grandchildren and great-grandchildren should bathe there.

“The *nagasari* tree in the East, the mynah being its bird, its water is clear, lake being its name; many flowers grow there, surrounded with a myriad of colours. The water runs clear as it is pure and flawless. It is there where I, Ra Nini (Durga), will bathe.”

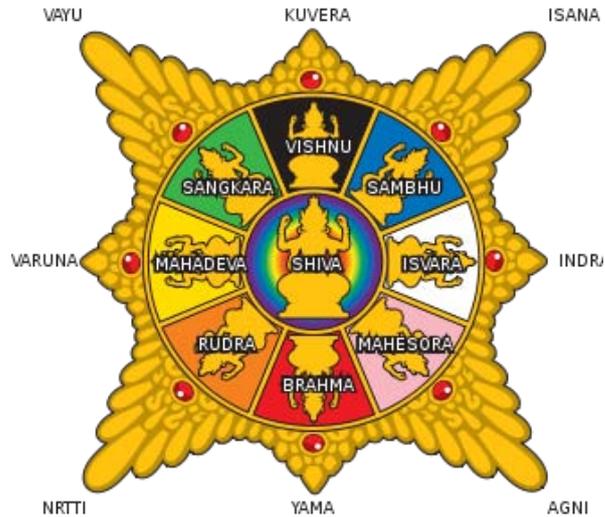
Meanwhile, the ancient Javanese also believed that the days of their five-day week are related to different colours each. Crawford has mentioned about this more than a hundred years ago:

“*Laggi, Pahing, Pon, Wagi, Kliwon...* the Javanese consider the names of the days of their native week to have a mystical relation to colours and to the divisions of the horizon. According to this whimsical interpretation, the first means white and the east, the second red and the south, the third yellow and the west, the fourth black and north, and the fifth, mixed colour and focus or centre.”

In the “Report from the Island of Bali” that Rudolf Friederich wrote in around 1849 after living on the island, there is a mention about the gods, the cardinal direction, and the colours of the offerings placed in accordance to the cardinal directions:



Similarly, H. T. Damste noted in 1922 in the article “Balische Oudheden” (Balinese Antiquities) some aspects of a cremation he witnessed in Karang Asem. He saw that there were nine pillows. At the centre of it was a multicoloured pillow, surrounded by plain-coloured pillows in the following position:



Nawa Sanga, delineates eight cardinal directions, symbolised by specific colours and deities according to Balinese mythology.

Photo : Wikipedia

In his translation of the later chant of *Manik Maya* from the 18th century, Raffles presented the following cantos in which we can find traces of the ancient traditions:

“And Hyang Girinata places the gods:

“In the East of the world, he placed Sang Hyang Mahadewa. His day is Legi, his wife, Batari Mahadewi. His fort is silver, his bird, heron, his sea is of the coconut milk, and his letters, ha, na, ca, ra, ka.

“Sang Hyang Sambu’s position is in the South. His fort is copper, his wife Batari Swagnyana, his bird eagle, his day Pahing, his sea is of blood and his letters da ta sa wa la.

“Sang Hyang Kamajaya is in the West, his wife Batari Ratih. His fort is of gold, his sea, honey, his bird oriole, his day pon, his letters pa da ja ya na.

“Batara Wisnu whose fort is of iron is in the North, his day is Wate, his wife Batari Sri, his sea is of indigo, his bird crow, and his letters ma ga ba ta na.

“Batara Bayu is in the Centre. His wife Batari Sumi, his day Kaliwon, his part is the ten letters of 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0. His fort is of bronze, his sea the *wedang* and his bird the *gogik*.”

We see again and again the presence of the five colours. In the Javanese symbolism, there are thus four primary colours of white, red, yellow, and dark blue. The central colour is formed by the mixture of the four colours surrounding it. These four basic colours were also mentioned in the stone inscription of Sukamerta that was issued by King Kertarajasa, the founder of Majapahit kingdom, dated 1218 Caka (1296 CE). It listed the four obligations for the land of Sukamreta: “all kinds of seeds, that are white, red, yellow and black.” Similarly, the Canto of Dewa Ruci mentions these four colours: “White, red, yellow, black, these are the colours of the universe.”

Woven Voices

Complex cultural practices focusing around rites of passage and the diverse local cosmologies expressed through the spiritual vision of the adat and agama fertilised the rich flowering of this textile art. Weavers must know the best roots, bark and leaves, and the most suitable season, as well as preparation methods, for producing the strongest colours. (Speaking in Cloth, 2005)

The Island of Java

a. Wayang

In wayang, red symbolizes hard character, impatience, strong emotions, bravery, emanating heat. Black symbolizes wisdom, grace, and responsibility. White symbolizes purity and cleanliness. Blue symbolizes narrow-sightedness, cowardice, and irresponsibility. Sometimes golden is used for technical reasons, as the colour reflects light better. Blazing orange-red in *gunungan* refers to the year 1443 Caka year (around 1521 CE), when Sunan Kalijaga created the wayang (Sunarto, 2004).

b. Baduy

The Baduy are original inhabitants of the Kanekesan area in West Java, in the land of the Sundanese people. They are preservers of the *mandala* or the sacred region, with the obligation to maintain the *kabuyutan* faith and the purity of the area designated to exalt the ancestors. It was Rakeyan Damasiksa, the 13th king of Sunda, who appointed the Baduy area as mandala.

The Baduy are separated into three groups: the inner Baduy or *urang tangtu* who wear all-white clothes, and the outer Baduy or *urang panamping* and *dangka*. *Urang tangtu* and *urang panamping* live in the village of Kanekes, while *dangka* in the outer Kanekes region. *Urang panamping* wear black and dark-blue clothes coloured by the indigo plant.



The inner Baduy or *urang tangtu*, who wear all white clothes.

Photo : Alex Neman (left)
Yetti Yustiati (right)

Outer Baduy or *urang panamping* wear black and dark blue clothes.

Photo : Fendi Siregar



As a child is born, the *paraji* or traditional healer places an bracelet made of white cotton threads. The boys wear the white bracelets on their right, while girls on their left. This bracelet is meant to prevent misfortune. As they reach puberty, these bracelets are taken off (Permana, 2001).

The Island of Sumatra

a. Batak

As evidence of how important the indigo plant is for the Batak people to make *ulos* cloth, a traditional poem says that the family tree bears resemblance to the indigo seed:

“arranged in a row, going to the source, just like the many-lobed indigo seed
Its sequence is regulated like that of the stairs to the house.”

Ulos tondi cloth is given by parents to their daughter who is pregnant with her first child. The *ulos* is seen as having the power to protect the pregnant female, enveloped as she is in a dangerous magical condition of pregnancy (Vergouwen, 2004). *Ulos mangiring* is originally made in the dark brown or maroon colour, given for the parents of a new-born baby. *Ulos Sibolang* has dark, muted bluish hue, and is generally worn in death-related rituals. A woman whose husband has just died would be given this *ulos* as a sign that she is now a widow. *Ulos Ragihotang* has dark brown colour with fine white lines and is worn by married people.

Colour swatches of Ulos Mangiring.



Colour swatches of Ulos Sibolang.

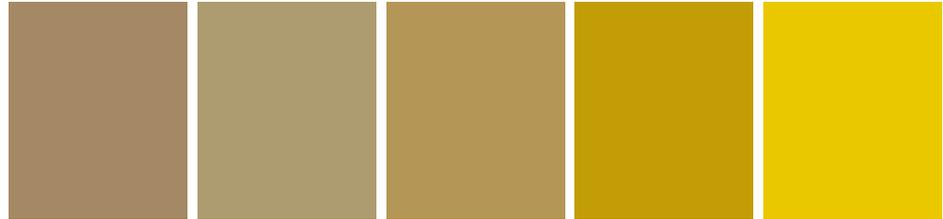


Colour swatches of Ulos Ragihotang.



b. Palembang

The *limasan* gold cloth means “lima emas” or “five golds”, referring to the five symbolic ideals of “sublimity and greatness”, “peace and harmony”, “civil courtesy”, “increasing tranquillity”, and “prosperity” (Jay, 2010).



Shades of gold - yellow

It might also refer to the great kingdom of Sriwijaya, whose colour was gold yellow, as can be read in the notes of Captain A. Meis when he wrote in 1840 about ceremonies in the kingdom in 1816-1821:

“In a Palace ceremony, the hall is decorated with yellow banners, the chairs of honor and the throne are covered with yellow silk, the letter tray is decked with yellow silk.”(Kartiwa, 2007).

The Island of Sulawesi

a. Toraja

There is an ancient Toraja religion of *aluk to dolo*, which literally means “faith of the ancients”. Followers of the ancient religion believe in the existence of gods of the sky and gods of the earth. They are the powers that be, to whom the followers have to give offerings and revere by following the adat traditions. Rituals directed to the gods of the sky is lead by a male healer, *tomebalun*, while rituals directed to the gods of the earth is lead by a female healer, the *toburake*. The female healer wears a long red scarf, symbolizing the to’ *barana* or the banyan tree, the gate to the realm of the earth gods. There is also a transgender *toburake*, called the *toburake tambolang*. “Tambolang” is actually the name of a heron with black and white colours. The presence of the two colours in one bird is seen as important here, symbolising a cosmic union, just as the identity of the *toburake tambolang* who is a female and male at the same time. *Toburake tambolang* assists the female *toburake* in earth rituals, or rituals of life, directed to the east, the direction of life and the earth gods.

The Torajas recognise four castes: the noble or gold caste (descendants of the gods); the iron caste (from which come “the brave men” or the *tobarani* who would lead wars and head hunting missions); the *tana’ karurun* or sugar palm caste (most people are from these caste); and *tana’ koa koa* or the shrub caste, the former slaves.

In Mamasa, these caste differences are apparent in the design of the wooden house. The house of a noble, a gold caste, is called *banua’ sura*, painted black with coloured carvings. The house of a member of the iron caste is called *banua’ bolong* or the black house, painted black with no decorations. Wooden houses of the two lowest castes are not painted (Buijs, 2009).

Toraja house carvings are done over black background in three colours: red, yellow and white. Red symbolises blood, and the tint is made from red soil and vinegar. White symbolises human bones and flesh; the tint is made from

whiting and fermented palm juice. Yellow symbolises honor; the tint is made from yellow soil and fermented palm juice. (<http://mazeka82.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/perkmb-int-tradisional-tana-toraja.pdf>)



Torajan *tongkonan* within its traditional carving (left), Torajan women with her traditional clothing with the same colour composition (right).

Photo : Aris Setiawan

Galumpang cloth has reddish hue combined with yellow and blue and is used to cover the coffin. It shows two-directional arrow heads, symbolising the dynamics of life. The house of the deceased, meanwhile, is circled by a long red cloth (Kartiwa, 2007).

In an event of death, the ritual *pallulukan* or the blackening of clothes is done by the immediate family of the dead. The family would go to a prepared open space outside the village, or sometimes this might also take place at the space below the family's stilted house. A hole containing a mixture of water, soil, leaves of *bilante* shrubs and sweet potato has been prepared for the family, who would then dip their clothes there. A pig is sacrificed during the ritual and one of its ears is left in a bamboo hollow near the hole. Members of the family who are unable to come to the ritual could then come to the place, dip their finger in the hole and leave a black mark on the pig's ear. The family should refrain from eating rice and only wear black until the seventh day after the burial, on which day the family visit the grave again for the first time. As they go back home, they would eat rice again and discard their black clothes. Their refraining from eating rice shows their solidarity with the dead, who would no longer eat rice.

When a noble dies, a stone pillar would be erected. Under the pillar, a piece of iron and yellow beads, *manik riri*, are placed, symbolising strength and wealth, in the hope that the family of the dead would be strong and prosper.

b. Minahasa

A new-born baby is taken to the river, and a yellow necklace is placed around the baby's neck, symbolizing status and richness. The candlenut oil is spread on the baby's head and then the baby is bathed using the river's water, so that diseases can flow along with the river, away from the baby.

Children of around five and nine had "shadow wedding", in which the boy would wear bright red clothes and the girls in flowered sarong and kabaya. This shadow wedding does not bind them. Rather, this symbolizes the hope of the parents for the children to be able to get married as adults and not remain spinsters (Graafland, 1991).

c. Bugis

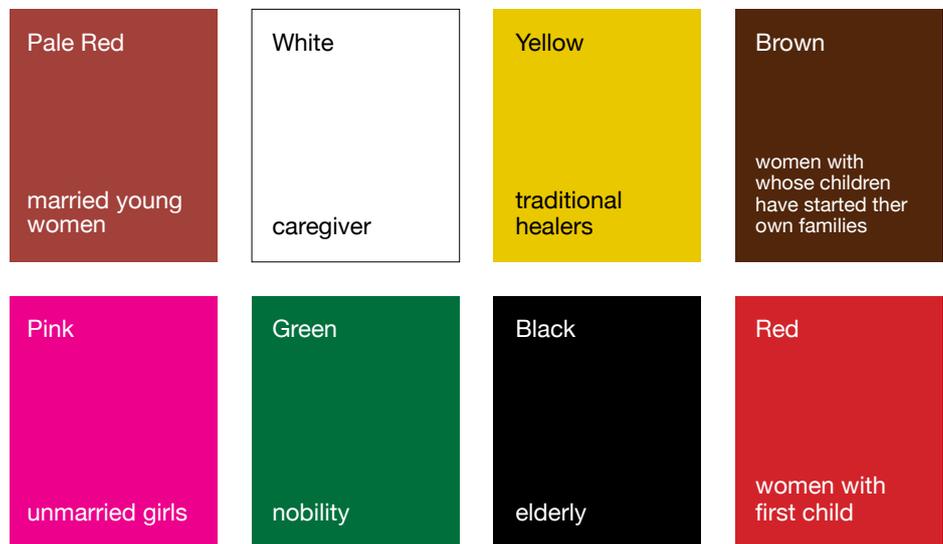
The semi-transparent *baju bodo* (bodo dress) is dyed in a single color and in the past should only be worn by nobles. Lise Sompā (marriage offering) is bundled in big, white cloth and hung on the neck (Millar, 2009). In the past, *baju bodo* has distinct colour regulation regarding its wearer: green for the nobility, white for the caregivers of the nobility, and yellow for the traditional healers. There are also regulations regarding the colour and its relation with the stages of life: pink for unmarried girls, pale red for married young women, red for women with first child, brown for women whose children have started their own families, and black for the elderly. The pink *baju bodo* is made in the usual semi-transparent cloth, showing the nipples of the wearer. As the women grow older, the darker the hue, the more opaque the cloth. Little girls stay bare-breasted until they reach puberty, when they would do the special ritual to wear their first clothes. (Pelras, 2006).



Colour swatches of *baju bodo* (bodo dress) regulation regarding its wearer (right).

Young women wearing traditional *baju bodo* (top).

Photo : Collectie Tropenmuseum



Food in rituals consist of *nasi ketan* (sticky rice) in four colours (white, red, yellow, and black), symbolizing the total universe (Pelras, 2006).

The noble clan is called the "white-blooded", descendants of the gods.

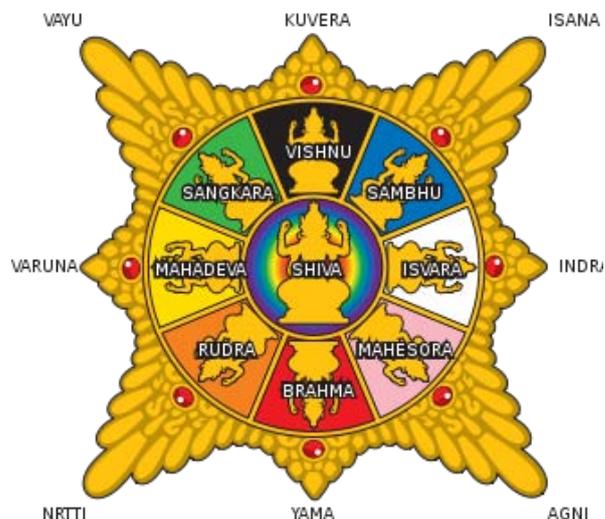
The Island of Bali

Gringsing cloth is made using a double-weaving technique. It is woven by the people of the village of Tenganan Pagringsingan in Karangasem. The dying of indigo and red/brown hues should not be done in the village, and done respectively in the village of Bug-bug (indigo) and Nusa Penida (using noni plant) (Kartiwa, 2007).

A Balinese legend tells us that “The gods concentrated to make human beings and produced two couples; one yellow in colour, Ketok Pita and Djenar; another red, Abang and Barak. From the yellow couple was born a boy, Nyoh Gading, and a girl named Kuning (yellow). The second couple had also two children, a boy named Tanah Barak, Red Earth, and a girl Lewek. Yellow Coconut married Lewek; Red Earth married Kuning, and their descendants did the same until the population of Bali was created.” (Covarrubias, 1972)

The Metjaru Before Nyepi

Before the sunset the evil spirits had to be lured and concentrated at the great offering, the metjaru, then cast out by the powerful spells of the priests. Facing toward the East, were altars filled with offerings: one for the Sun and for the Trinity, one for the ancestors, and a third for the evil gods. In the centre of the ground an elaborate conglomeration of objects was arranged: food of all sorts, every kind of strong drink, hundreds of containers of banana leaf with a sample of every seed and fruit that grew on the island, and a piece of the flesh of every wild and domestic animal in Bali; all arranged in the shape of an eight pointed star representing the Rose of the Winds, the whole surrounded by a low fence of woven palm-leaf.



Nawa Sanga, delineates eight cardinal directions, symbolised by specific colours and deities according to Balinese mythology.

Photo : Wikipedia

The colours of the four cardinal points were indicated by a sacrificed black goat for kadja, the North, a white goose for kangin, the East; a red dog for klod, the South; and a yellow calf for kauh, the West. Small pieces of black, white, red and yellow cloth were placed over each of the animals to give further emphasis to their colour. A chicken with feathers of five colours was placed in the centre, next to a small circular Rose of the Winds made of rice dyed in the eight different colours of the cardinal directions, with a centre of mixed rice of the eight colours.

The Eastern Islands

Certain motifs and colours can only be worn by the nobility. Red is the colour of heat and blood and a symbol of royal warriors. Like with certain designs, in old times only noble clans had the right to wear the colour red.

Every woman in Biboki used to have a loth kept at home for the time when she would die and be wrapped in it. The blue colour of this special cloth is from the fermented leaves of the indigo plant. (Speaking in Cloth, 2005).

The women of Rembong in West Flores use indigo to make woven black cloth from the cottontrees. There are dyeing experts in the village. As a man is married, he should present three pieces of such black cloths to the family of the bride, along with a pair of earrings (Dadu, 1997).

After a few days, a new-born baby is taken outside and the mother carries the baby and sits in the morning sun. This would be the first time the sun touches the baby. A bowl is prepared with clear water and a necklace of multicoloured beads. The mother takes the necklace to her eyes and her baby's eyes, in the hope that the eyes will not go blind and be free from diseases (Dadu, 1997).

COLOURS AND RITES AT THE BEGINNING OF LIFE

One rite of passage's most practiced ritual event is birth and early coming of age. Where in this phase, the parents give the (newborn) child prayer in order to counsel the foundation of life. In Indonesia, Javanese and Balinese has the strongest and active culture applied either in daily or traditional ceremony activities, where there are several of objects has a color associated to the perception of each ritual procession.

Lifecycle Ceremonies of Balinese People

The Indonesian Archipelago has been colonized by a number of huge kingdoms. Among other was Majapahit (1293 – 1500 AD), a Hindu-Buddha kingdom with a center at the current East Java, that spread its colony along the islands of Java, Sumatera, Malaka Strait, and Kalimantan. At the end of the kingdom's glory, a lot of artists, priests, family members and the palace staff moved to Bali. The Hindu-Buddha cultures that are still practiced up to today in Bali is a reflection of the culture of Majapahit Ancient Java. A lot of ancient rites are still practiced by the Balinese people are among others Manusa Yadnya ceremony, or a series of ceremonies in a human being's life. The series of Manusa Yadnya ceremony, which literally means sincere offerings to human beings, consist of the following ceremonies:

- a. *Magedong-gedongan (Garbhadana Samskara)*, when a foetus in its mother's womb reaches its 7th months old
- b. *Jatakarma Samskara*, when a child born
- c. *Kepus puser*, when the umbilical cord is detached
- d. *Ngelepas Hawon*, when the baby reaches 12 days old and is just given a name
- e. *Kambuhan*, when the baby reaches 42 days old
- f. *Nelu-bulanin*, when the baby reaches 3 months old – *Niskramana Samskara*
- g. *Otonan*, when the baby reaches six months old
- h. Ceremony for teeth loosening
- i. *Menek-deha*, when a child reach puberty
- j. *Mepandes/metatah*: teeth leveling
- k. Wedding

Mepandes / Metatah / Mesangih in Bali

As soon as a Balinese baby reaches one day old, his/her life is full of rituals. Starting from the ceremony for his/her birth, up to the day he/she dies. Among the ceremonies that he/she has to go through is Teeth Leveling Ceremony or *Metatah / Mesangih*. *Metatah* ceremony is among the most important rituals for every Balinese individual who practices Hinduism. This ceremony marks one phase of life, in entering adulthood. The purpose of the ceremony means a purification of a child who reaches puberty, for the child to understand the transformation to be a human being. *Mepandes* ceremony has the following aims:

1. To clear all dirt within a child in puberty. The dirt is negative characteristics, which are illustrated as the characteristics of *Bh_ta*, *K_Ia*, *Pisaca*, *Raksasa* and *Sadripu* [(six enemies in a human being, which includes *Kama* (lust), *Loba* (greed), *Krodha* (anger), *Mada* (drunk), *Moha* (confused),

and *Matsarya* (jealousy)]. The six enemies have to be cleansed from every human, so this ritual has become compulsory, so life afterward can be free from all those negative characteristics.

2. By having purity, a person can be closer to his/her God, gods and ancestors. In short, a person will be able to increase his/her *raddh* and *Bhakti* to Him.
3. To avoid poverty.
4. It is a must for parents who have the opportunity to raise a child. This kind of responsibility is a *Yajña* in a broad sense (including the teaching of ethics, moral values and religion), so a child can really become a *suputra*/ good child (which is a blessing for the parents).

The teeth leveling ceremony is a traditional ritual of Hindu-Bali people, which is included with *Manusa Yadnya* ceremony. This ceremony is conducted when a child is in puberty. The ceremony is usually conducted by a *Sangging* (a priest) who is specialized in teeth leveling ceremony, who will level the six teeth at the upper part, especially the fangs.

The teeth leveling ceremony is usually conducted in early morning, before the sun rises, from 3 to 5 AM, although some people conduct it also after the sun has rises, from about 7 AM to noon.

Before the ceremony, usually a *Mekekeb* or *Mepingit* ceremony takes place one day before. This is when the child is kept away for a whole day and is forbidden to come out of the house. In the next day, *Mepandes* is conducted in one of the house's altars. When the child climbs the altar, the first thing to do is to pray, while the whole family will stand next to the child in all the sides of the altar, then the child will be asked to sleep on his/her back, then covered with several clothes, both hands in fists above the chest. After this, the scaling knife of the *Sangging* starts to slowly level the teeth (source: www.babadbali.com/canangsari/banten/mepandes.htm). The ceremony chronologically goes as follows:

1. The priest or an elderly in this ceremony asks for blessings in a sacred spot, then children or teenagers who will go through the ceremony are given a splash of sacred water, then they ask for safety during the ceremony.
2. The priest cut the hair and write sacred symbols in order to purify himself and to mark the status as a complete human being, to leave the childhood to teenagehood.
3. Children in this ceremony climb the altar for *Mepandes* by firstly stepping on offerings as a symbol to ask for strength to *Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa* (The One and Only God).
4. After the leveling of the teeth, a child is asked to spit the rest of the teeth into a container made of a small yellow coconut (*Nyuh Gading*). The purpose of this phase is to keep the ceremony clean and sacred. Afterward, the family is to decide how much should the teeth be leveled, and it is in this phase that a mirror is produced, so the child can see the new form of his/her teeth. If this process is completed, it is continued with the cutting of a beetle leaf into three by biting, in order to check if the teeth are still functioning. The next process is to scrub the teeth with turmeric, then rinse with *brem* or vinegar, before the teeth are being rubbed with honey.
5. The ceremony is continued with purification by the priest, so the child can continue to teenagehood without his/her past misfortunes.
6. Conducting *Mapedamel* that symbolizes the blessings from God Semara and Goddess Ratih for a wiser life in the future. During this part of the ceremony, the child commonly wears traditional clothes in white or yellow.

A girl would wear white *kebaya* and a boy would wear *kemben* or long clothes that cover up to the chest. These are traditional Balinese costumes that are also worn in other Hindu-Bali ceremonies such as Nyepi, Melasti, etc.

These Balinese traditional clothes are white with yellow accessories; each colour bears its own meanings according to the Hindu philosophy in Bali. Yellow means sincerity and glory. Yellow in Hinduism also symbolizes the highest God. White represents purity. Other than in ceremonies or traditional rites or religion, clothes that are dominated by these two colours are also found daily in Bali.



White and yellow cloth often used in any kind of Balinese ceremonies, and in daily activities.

Photo : Susi Mohamad



Next to the clothes, the child also wears *pawitra* thread, coloured with the *tridatu* red, white and black as the symbol of self-commitment to religious norms. The child also has to taste six flavors (bitter, sour, spicy, sepat, salty and sweet), each of which has different meanings.

7. After *mapedamel*, comes the Natab Banten ceremony, which aims to ask for blessings from Hyang Widhi, so whatever is wished could come true. When the child climbs off the altar, a *canang* or *banten penatab* awaits to be stepped on. *Banten / canang sari* is Balinese offerings which divided in two, the simple ones for every day offerings, and the special ones for specific religious events. Banten has different colour, shape, and numbers of flowers and any other materials, which contains different meanings. The Colour of Banten, numbers and materials refers to the Gods who guard the direction of the wind. Dewata Nawa gods are nine deities of

manifestations of Ida Sang Hyang Wasa Widhi that maintain or control of the nine directions of the compass Sanga (Hinduism beliefs). The nine gods represent different colors: Vishnu (black), Sambhu (blue), Iswara (White), Maheswara (dice, pink), Brahma (red), Rudra (orange), Mahadewa (yellow), Sangkara (green), and Shiva (Pancawarna, Multi-coloured).

8. The process is continued with *Metapak*, which aims to let the child know that when the parents' obligations (giving birth, nursing and leading) are completed, he/she is expected to be a useful person. In return, the child kneels to respect and to show gratitude to the parents who have done the obligations (Ida Pandita Sri Bhagawan Dwija Warsa Nawa Sandhi)

Tedak Siten Ritual in Jawa

Tedak siten is a ceremony in Javanese culture that is conducted when a child is learning to walk, during his/her seventh or eighth months of age. Human beings go through several phases of growth. The first phase is a baby, who is very dependent on his/her mother and other people, and who can only demand. The second phase is an independent youth, who can do many things by him/herself. The third phase is an adult, who is already aware, independent yet unegoistic, and realizes that a person is dependent on another and cannot live alone. The beginning of the second phase is when a child is learning to walk, so when he/she wants something, he/she can already pick it up him/herself, without help. Upon walking, both feet of the child are stepping on the ground, no longer carried by the mother. Our life and death are on earth, meals and drink, housing and transportation facilities, all come from earth, therefore we need to respect the earth. This rite also represents as a gesture of respect to *siti* (earth) that has already given so much to a human's life.

Phases in a *tedak siten* ceremony, chronologically, are as follows:

1. Cleaning the feet
2. Stepping on the ground
3. Walking through seven containers, each of which holds a portion of rice porridge in different colours
4. *Tangga tebu wulung*
5. Putting the child inside a bamboo cage
6. Giving away money while spreading yellow (uncooked) rice
7. Releasing a chicken

Each of these phases has symbolical meanings that are represented by objects/artifacts, as well as colours with different meanings.

The procession of *tedak siten* begins with bathing the child with flower water, and then dressing him/her up in new clothes. Then, assisted by his/her mother, the child is to step on *jadah* (crushed sticky rice) with seven different colours, which are kept in containers that are arranged according to the colours: from dark to light. *Jadah* is food made of sticky rice, mixed with young coconut meat and salt, with seven different colours, as follows: **red, white, black, yellow, blue, pink and purple.**

Diorama of *tedak siten* ritual at the Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park) illustrates the procession of the ritual.

Photo : BD+A Design



The meanings that are invested in the *jadah* are symbols of life that will be experienced by the child, starting from when he/she puts his/her feet on the ground until he/she grows into an adult. The colors are an illustration for the child's life, who will face a lot of choices and obstacles. The seven-coloured *jadah* are arranged starting from the dark to the light colours, to represent problems that are getting lighter and lighter; however hard the problem is, there should be not only the point of problems but also the bright light of the solutions that can resolve the problem.



Then, assisted by his/her mother, the child is to step on *jadah* (crushed sticky rice) with seven different colours.

Photo : Angraini Karimuddin



After the seven-coloured porridge steps, the procession continued to *Tangga tebu wulung*, a ladder made of *arjuna* sugar cane, which represents the expectation that the child should be able to fight like Arjuna (a character in *wayang* shadow play), who is famous for his responsibility and endeavors. In Javanese culture, *tebu* (sugar cane) is an abbreviation for *antebing kalbu*, which means for the child to be able to go through life with a strong will and a persistent heart.



Procession continued to *tangga tebu wulung*, the child to climb up a ladder made of sugar cane.

Photo : Anggraini Karimuddin

The child is then put into a chicken cage that is already decorated with woven, young palm leaves, which represents the real world, where the child would be expected to choose an occupation. In the cage, a number of objects are spread, such as a ring, writing equipment, cotton, and so on – and even hi-tech gadgets (cellular phone, notebook, etc.) – for the child to choose from and pick.



The child is put into a decorated chicken cage with a number of objects inside, to illustrate the kind of interest and occupation that will be taken once the child has grown into an adult.

Photo : Anggraini Karimuddin

The one object picked by the child becomes an illustration of the kind of hobby and occupation that will be taken once the child has grown into an adult.

The next procession is spreading yellow (uncooked) rice mixed with coins, to be fought over by the audience. This procession represents the desired characteristic of the child in the future: being generous within his/her surroundings. The last part of the procession is where the child is bathed with a variety of flowers and dressed in new clothes, with the objective that the child stays healthy, brings good reputation to the family, lives wealthyly, and be useful to his/her surroundings.

In *tedak siten* ceremony, common offerings are *kembang boreh*, *baro-baro* porridge, a variety of kitchen herbs and *kinangan*. *Baro-baro* porridge, which is made of bekatul, is offered to *kakek nini among* (placenta). *Kembang boreh*, kitchen herbs and *kinangan* are offered to the ancestors. In this ceremony, traditional foods are available, such as *tumpeng* (conical cooked rice), red and white porridge, a variety of traditional snack, roots, etc.

As is in other ceremonies, the *tumpeng* should be a complete set. *Tumpeng* is cooked rice, shaped as a cone, served with *urap sayur* (a dish made of long beans, water spinach and mungbean sprouts, seasoned with steamed or fried coconut) and *ingkung ayam*.



Tumpeng, conical cooked rice, a symbolical traditional food found in many kind of rituals.

Photo : Goenadi

Tumpeng, which is made of cooked white rice, means that the colour illustrates that anything we eat, which will become meat for our body, should come from or made of clean resources. *Tumpeng* also represents prayers of parents to The Almighty for the child to grow into a useful person, the long beans symbolize the long age of the child, the water spinach means that wherever the child lives, he/she should be able to grow and develop him/herself, mungbean sprouts symbolize fertility, while the chicken represents the independency of the child.

Next to the white *tumpeng*, red and white porridge are also available. The red porridge is made of palm sugar that produces reddish brown colour; the white

porridge is made of coconut. This porridge was made as an expression of submission to God, or as an expression back to the origin of man, created by God through a mother's 'red blood' and a father's 'white blood' as an intermediary form of God in this world.

The variety of traditional meals is completed with a number of colourful traditional snack, such as *jongkong*, *centil*, *grontol jagung*, *lopis*, *gatot* and *tiwul*, which represents a lot of interaction of people with different characteristics, so the child is expected to be able to socialize within his/her society.

The variety of roots that are also available means for the child to possess an adap asor characteristic, or down-to-earth behavior.

As a whole, this ceremony means to teach the concept of independence to the child. *Tedak siten* is a Javanese tradition that is actually gradually diminishing. *Tedak siten* comes from the words *tedak*, which means "stepping", and *siten*, which comes from the word *siti*, or "ground/soil". Combined, *Tedak Siten* means "stepping on the ground". This tradition is directed to a child aged seven-*Japan*, or seven times 35 days (that makes 245 days in total). The amount of a *selapan* is 35 days according to Javanese calendar, based on *pasaran days*, as follows: *Kliwon*, *Legi*, *Pahing*, *Pon*, and *Wage*. In the age of 245 days, the child starts to step his/her first step on the ground, to learn how to sit and walk. This rite represents the readiness of a child, or an infant, to face his/her life. Usually, this happy occasion is held in the morning, at the front part of the house, attended by the child's parents and other family members. Offerings are necessary, since they symbolize the prayers to receive blessings and protection from God Almighty, also in order to receive blessings from the ancestors, to prevent the child from harm. This ceremony is also a form of expectation from the parents towards their child, to be able to succeed in facing the hardship of life. (<http://kamusjawa.com/upacara-tradisional-jawa-tedak-siten.html>)



Red and white porridge, one of Indonesia's traditional foods for rituals.

Photo : BD+A Design

BURIAL/DEATH RITUAL AND CEREMONIES

Burial ceremony is a ritual first known in a person's life before even knowing writing. Burial ceremony is based on the belief that the spirit of the person that has passed away will go to a place not far from the society where he/she used to live during their time on Earth. Several cultural traditions viewed death quite highly, marked by a significant burial, for instance the people of Bali with *ngaben* ceremony, and also the people of Tana Toraja in South Celebes with their *rambu solo* ceremony. Both cases are an example of a ceremony that symbolizes a social status/class or caste.

Rambu Solo, Burial Ceremony from Tana Toraja (South Celebes)

Tana Toraja, about 300 kilometres away from Makassar, South Celebes, preserved of customs and traditions inherited from their ancestors.

Toraja's indigenous belief system is polytheistic animism, called *aluk*, or "the way" (sometimes translated as "the law"). *Aluk* is not just a belief system; it is a combination of law, religion, and habit. *Aluk* governs social life, agricultural practices, and ancestral rituals. The details of *aluk* may vary from one village to another. One common law is the requirement that death and life rituals be separated. Torajans believe that performing death rituals might ruin their corpses if combined with life rituals. The two rituals are equally important. During the time of the Dutch missionaries, Christian Torajans were prohibited from attending or performing life rituals, but were allowed to perform death rituals. Consequently, Toraja's death rituals are still practised until today, while life rituals have diminished.

Torajans have several customary ceremonies and is held every year and it has become a magnet for foreign tourists. One of which is *Rambu Solo*, a burial ceremony for ancestors that have passed away a couple of years before. Most Torajans believes in Christian teachings, only a small portion believes in Islam teachings and some others still believe in animism teachings known as *Aluk To Dolo* (Way of the Ancestors), is an inseperable culture from life itself. *Rambu Solo* is a form of honour to elders, aside being a benchmark of social status. Family members of the deceased are obliged to hold a celebration as a symbol to honour the dead. To them, the deceased is considered as an ill person needing to be taken care of and treated as a living person. Family members need to accompany the dead, provide food and beverage, smoke or betel leaf. And during which, the corpse will be kept in a colourful coffin called *balun*, adorned with red fabric.

Rambu Solo ceremony consists of several stages referring to Torajans social class:

- a *Dipasang Bonggi*: Burial ceremony that only lasted for one night.
- b *Dipatallung Bonggi*: A three-day long burial ceremony, held at the home of the deceased. Animal sacrifice will also be a part of the ceremony.
- c *Dipalimang Bonggi*: A five-day long burial ceremony and held around the home of the deceased with animal sacrifice.
- d *Dipapitung Bonggi*: A seven-day long burial ceremony with animal sacrifice on each day.

A complete *Rambu Solo* sequence is as follows:

1. *Ma paroko paladan*

This means descending the corpse from its home to *Tongkonan* terrace. During this session, family members gather around the *Tongkonan* terrace as a sign of Torajans burial ceremony.

2. *Ma'badong*

Ma'badong is an expression of grieve through dancing and singing, commemorating the deceased's service during his/her life also as a form of condolence to his/her family members. Generally, the whole family members will don black outfit, as a sign of grive and appreciation for the deceased.



Family members gather and form a circle, singing and dancing, *ma'badong*.

Photo : Fendi Siregar

3. *Ma pasa tedong*

Next, a water buffalo will be presented and named by seven important figures. Afterwards, the water buffalo will be competed in a wide field.



Water Buffalo fight
(Ma pasa tedong)

Photo : Aris Setiawan

4. *Ma pasisemba*

Kicking tradition among villagers is seen as a sign of friendship. Villagers will gather at the field, face-to-face and perform their actions together. A prominent figure of the village will stand in the middle of the field guiding *si samba* ritual.

5. Transporting corpse from the terrace to the front of the house, and then paraded and escorted to their final resting place. In this process, thousands of people will escort the corpse. This process symbolizes the unification of the corpse with the ancestors. Meanwhile, spreading a long red fabric called *lamba-lamba*. In the traditional house, the coffin with the corpse inside it should be guarded the whole night by the families. Then they perform the dance of honour. Red fabric called *lamba-lamba* is then spread as a symbol of Torajans grandeur. The red sheet is spread wide as a symbol of the path the deceased must go through.

Families, relatives and neighbours hand in hand help escorting the coffin to the lower barn located right below traditional house. In Torajan belief, laying the deceased in the barn for three days symbolizes the deceased has stepped towards the real phase of death.



Families marching carrying lamba-lamba, a long red fabric as a symbol of Torajans grandeur. The red sheet is spread wide as a symbol of the path the deceased must go through.

Photo : Aris Setiawan

6. *Ma'patinggorok Tedong*

Water buffalo is a sacred animal for the Torajans. Torajans believe that the spirit needed water buffalo in order for them to arrive in *puya* faster when more water buffalos are sacrificed. *Rambu Solo* will be more festive when the deceased is a descendant of a king or a wealthy person; this appears from the amount of sacrificed water buffalo and pigs, this will be a measurement of their wealth and rank when they were still alive. Building tomb for family members that have passed away and having *Rambu Solo*' ceremony usually needs hundreds of million up to billions of Rupiah. No less than 150 animals are needed for the sacrifice; consists of water buffalos and pigs. Family members will share water buffalo and pigs meat to neighbours who have helped them with *Rambu Solo*' ceremony.

Tedong is a traditional Toraja water buffalo sacrifice ceremony. *Ma'patinggorok tedong* is a ceremony where water buffalos are sacrificed using *parang* or long machete in one cut. *Tedong*, is how Torajans call water buffalos. There are two kinds of *tedong*, a black *tedong* and *tedong bonga*. The price of black *tedong* is around 10-25 million rupiahs, more expensive than other cities.



Tedong (water buffalo)

Photo : Aris Setiawan

Meanwhile, the price of *tedong bonga* could reach to ten million up to hundreds of million rupiahs per buffalo, depending on the size and colour. The price of *tedong bonga* can be very expensive because of the rarity and these kinds of buffalos are difficult to breed. *Tedong bonga* species is included in mud buffalo category (*Bubalus bubalis*) which is the only species available in Toraja. Purportedly, once someone tries to take striped buffalo out of Tana Toraja, however, this species cannot survive outside of Tana Toraja, due to exhaustion or a difference in temperature. Some also believe it was due to mythical reasons. For Torajans who can afford to have a ceremony by sacrificing a *Tedong bonga*, this will increase the level of prestige in the society, since *Tedong bonga* is a symbol of prestige in Torajan culture.

Tedong Bonga or mottled buffalo that has an important role and became a symbol of prestige in Torajan society.

Photo : Aris Setiawan



7. *Londa stone tomb*

Torajans have a unique location for burial, or known as *Londa*. *Londa* is a tomb made of stone. Corpses will only be kept in a coffin and then rested inside the stone cave. *Tau-tau* is made to point out the number of dead people inside the cave. *Tau-tau* is a sign of how many Torajans is burried in the location.

Londa stone tomb and *Tau* as a sign of wooden effigies of the dead.

Photo : Aris Setiawan



Death is an important matter for Torajans. Other rituals performed as a part of *Rambu Solo'* is escorting the corpse from *rante* (burial) to the stone grave or *patane*. The corpse is believed to be able to walk due to the prayers to the ancestors and the spirit. However, this ritual is slowly disregarded since many of Torajans now believe in Christian and Islam teachings. However, this ritual can still be found in the rural areas of Tana Toraja. Historically, Torajans are used to exploring the mountains area by foot and the tradition is still held until today. They knows no *pedati* (small carriage), *delman* (horse carriage), cart

or some sort. During the heavy journey, the possibility of getting ill and then die always appear. Since the Torajans respects the spirit, to avoid abandoned corpse in other areas, and not be a burden for the living, with a kind of magic the corpse is required to walk back and stop only when they have lay their body in their own home.

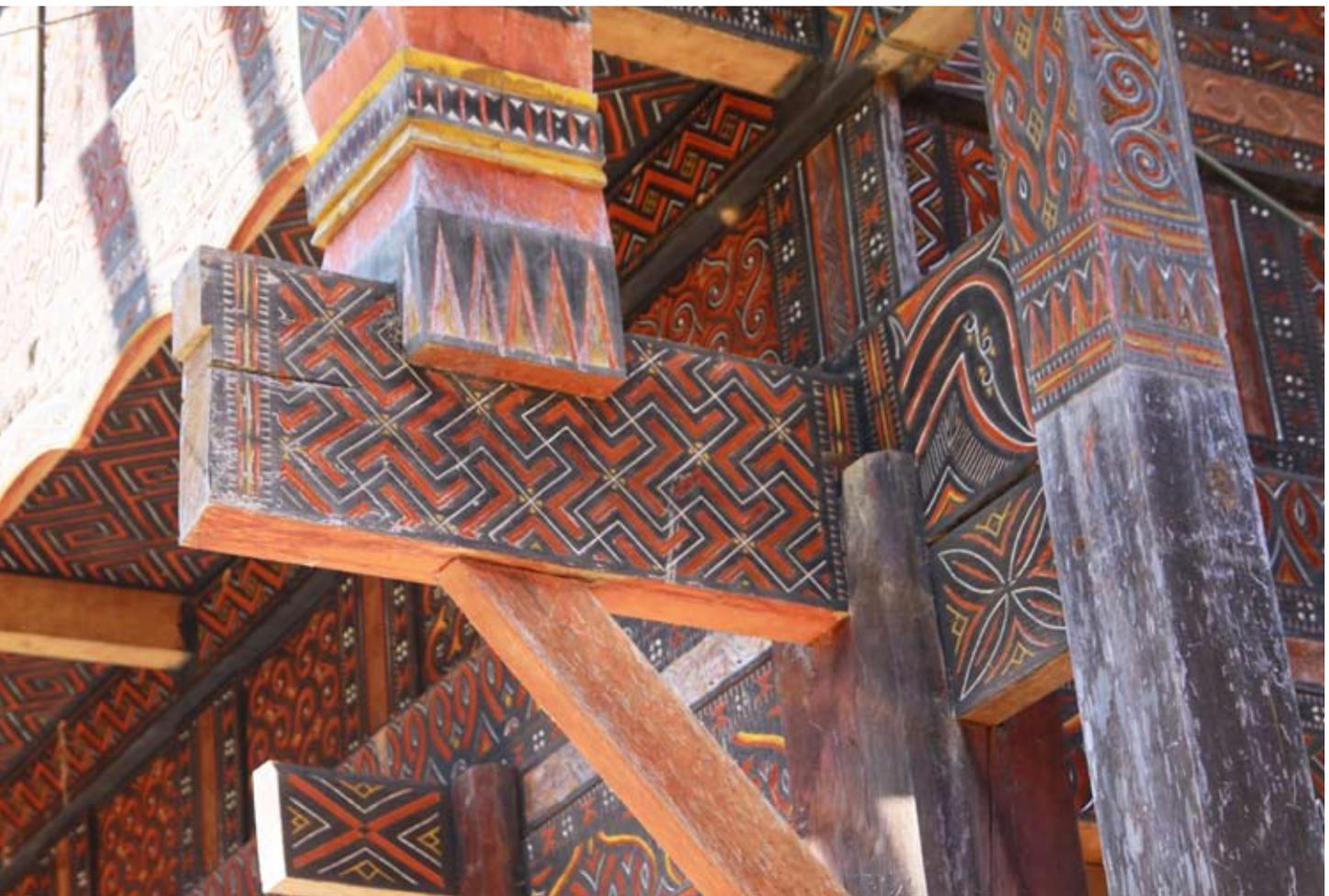
The correlation of water buffalo that Torajans value as sacred can also be seen in the architectural ornaments of *tongkonan* or traditional house in Toraja, stood above a stack of wood and decorated with special carvings in red, white, black and yellow colours. The word "*tongkonan*" derives from Torajan language tongkon (sit). *Tongkonann* is the centre of social life in Torajan tribe.

Multi-colour composition that consists of red, white, black and yellow are colours that reflects the *Aluk To Dolo* belief, in which each colours has their own meaning and purpose for Torajans, according to their life philosophy. Red and white are colours that symbolize the life of a human. The colour can be used anywhere and at anytime, in traditional ceremonies even in daily life. Yellow is the colour of glory as a symbol of divinity which is used in the *Rambu Tuka'* ceremony for the welfare of mankind. Meanwhile, black is the symbol of death or darkness and worn during *Rambu Solo'* ceremony (death ceremony). The meaning of the colour of black in the base of every *Passura'* (carving) is that each mankind's life comprises of death, because in the view of *Aluk To Dolo*, that this world is only a temporary place to stay. (Source: <http://budayatoraja.tripod.com/Ukiran.htm>)

Toraja wood carving
decoration on Tongkonan,
Torajan architecture.

Photo : Aris Setiawan

Since Torajan language is only spoken, with no writing system, therefore, the way they express the concept of religion and social is through wood carving, called *Pa'ssura* (or "the writing"). These wood carvings are therefore Toraja's cultural manifestation.



The correlation of water buffalo that Torajans value as sacred can also be seen in the architectural ornaments of tongkonan or traditional house in Toraja, carved in red, white, black and yellow.

Photo : Aris Setiawan



According to history, the carving was first known as 4 (four) basic drawings form (symbol) which are symbols of 4 (four) main values of human's life, which then applied in the *Tongkonan* House with the purpose of being the point of attention and will be remembered by the society. Therefore, the placement cannot be done in any place in the *Tongkonan* building or house, however, it is placed according to the view and life philosophy of Torajan (*Aluk Sanda Pitunna*). The four basic carving is called *Garonto' Passura'* (main carving) which is: *Pa' Barre' Allo*, *Pa' Manuk Londong*, *Pa' Tedong* dan *Pa' Sussu'*.

Torajans uses colours from the nature to create the carvings. Therefore, the use of colours in the carving cannot be replaced or changed in the usage. *Passura'* (carving) colour ingredient is called Litak which is the basic colour for Torajans. These basic colours are:

1. Red (*Litak Mararang*)
2. White (*Litak Mabusa*)
3. Yellow (*Litak Mariri*)
4. Black (*Litak Malotong*)

All colours of *Passura'* as mentioned above is the colour of nature since it is made of soil, except for black which is derived from earthen coal. The use of these materials is more lasting and imperishable to weather and climate compared to colours made of synthetic materials. (<http://budayatoraja.tripod.com/Ukiran.htm>)

Ngaben, Cremation Ceremony in Bali

Ngaben or Cremation Ceremony, is a ritual performed in Bali to send the deceased to the next life. The body of the deceased will be placed as if in a state of sleeping, and the family will continue to treat the deceased as being asleep. The Balinese cremation ceremony, or *ngaben*, has primarily been known as either a major tourist attraction that dazzled visitors with the splendour, intricacy, and drama of its performance, or as fodder for long-standing anthropological arguments about personhood and emotion on the island that debated whether or not Balinese people expressed, or even experienced, grief.

Ngaben is the last and most important ceremony in every Balinese life. It's the Balinese word for the cremation of the dead, in which the soul is released entirely from the body to ascend to heaven and to be reincarnated. But before a cremation can actually take place, there are various complex ceremonies and preparations to be done before and after the cremation.

In Bali a funeral takes place shortly after a person dies, unlike the Hindu in India where the deceased is cremated immediately. *Ngaben* is not always immediately performed. For higher caste members it is normal to perform the ritual within 3 days. For lower caste members the deceased are buried first and later, often in a group ceremony for the whole village, cremated.

The good day is usually determined by priests after an extensive consultation and viewing the present calendar. Normally, days of preparation are held long before the good day is determined. At this time, families prepares "bade and lembu" made of bamboo, wood, colourful papers according to the family's class or socio-economy status. The procession is performed through many procedure and ceremony utilities such as offerings and others as symbols such as other rituals often performed by Balinese Hindu.

Preparations for these people are always the best one can have, as the best priest is called upon, the holiest water is used and most appropriate date is chosen for the cremation. With everything perfectly planned and set for the big cremation, other bodies will be cremated as well so they can profit from the ideal setting in which the cremation will take place.

Families of the deceased will then know for certain that the soul will be guided to heaven under best circumstances. Before ngaben take place, numerous preparations need to be organized. The body will be taken out of its temporary grave at the Pura Dalem and carried to its former house three days before the cremation.

In order to ensure that the soul of the deceased doesn't find his/her way back home the men confuse it by twisting, twirling and making full circles with the tower. All the men in the village are delighted to be a part of this unorganized spectacle. As a spectator you will be surprised that the tower is still standing in the end. In front of the procession, another group of men are carrying the sarcophagus, often in the form of a black bull. It is an impressive structure and the decorations are often very grand as a lot of gold is used.



Bade, the cremation tower decorated in gold. (top)

Lembu replica (bull) in which the body will be placed just before the cremation. (right)

Photo : Susi Mohamad



The guests holding a white, long piece of fabric symbolizes the way or guide for the spirit to the holy heaven.

Photo : Ray Bachtiar (top)
Fendi Siregar (right)



After that is done, the guests then line up in front of the carriage. The carriage itself is adorned with various decorations which correspond to the person's spot in the society. The height of the carriage also increases according to the status of the person. Guests will be asked to hold a white, long piece of fabric which must not be dropped. This represents followers, like in ancient Bali, when the King was always escorted by his followers and guards and also symbolises the way/guide for the spirit to holy heaven.

The climax of Ngaben is the burning of the whole structure, together with the body of the deceased. The fire is necessary to free the spirit from the body and enable reincarnation.



Then the sarcophagus is set on fire in order to purify the deceased.

Photo : Susi Mohamad

Once everything is burnt to ashes, the soul is able to leave this world. The white ashes of the bones are separated from the others and then placed with flowers into yellow and white cloth. Only then will the soul of the deceased be ready for the final ceremony in which the soul of the deceased is awakened by the priest one final time. The final ceremony after the ngaben usually takes place 12 days after the cremation. Usually, since it is another expensive event, it can take longer before this ceremony actually takes place. During this ceremony the remaining ashes that were placed in white and yellow cloth are transported on a beautiful construction to the sea.

During the ngaben the soul of the deceased has been purified by fire and resides in heaven where life is just as in Bali only without diseases and problems.

However, during the last ceremony in which the ashes are placed in the water, the soul is released to a higher level. From here the soul can follow the final stage of reincarnation. Balinese people believe that the soul will return back as a reincarnation of a new family member, for example the first baby born after this final ritual.



The white ashes of the bones are separated from the others and then placed with flowers into yellow and white cloth.

Photo : Susi Mohamad

Every Balinese family has the responsibility to ensure that a proper ngaben takes place if a family member dies. If this does not happen this will have severe consequences for the deceased and his/her family. Families who can't afford a cremation often wait for the ngaben of an important or royal person.

In more modern practices, when Balinese have little time to spare, the dead can be easily cremated. Cremation services are becoming quite popular these days because it is more efficient and requires less work. Special packages are offered at a reasonable price without reducing the real meaning of Ngaben itself.

COLOURS OF RELIGIOUS CELEBRATION

Religion in Indonesia has a very important role in the local society; it is also mentioned in the national ideology, Pancasila “Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa” or “the divine almighty”. The religion that is common and recognized in Indonesia is Islam, Protestant, Catholic, Hindu and Buddha. Indonesia has hundreds of cultures and local traditions that are closely related to the society and religion itself. For example, religious Hindu ceremonies in Balinese culture and Islam as the majority religion in Indonesia show that religion is the base of every society in Indonesia, telling indirectly to always do what their religion told them to do and to preserve national culture.

A tradition that is driven by religion is made from human interaction from the holy bible that is believed to be the creative strength of each religion, conditioned by the context of human behavior, that is geographic factors, culture and several objective conditions.

Nyepi, Saka New Year, Hindu, Bali

Hinduism has a very great influence and controls every aspect of Bali's community life. The Hindu religion that has developed in Bali is mixed with animism that has been refined by the unique Balinese spirit. This has caused that the Hindu religion as followed by the Bali community will be unrecognizable as Hinduism by the Indian Hindu community as the centre for Hinduism in the world. Almost every day there are in Bali ritual ceremonies in the pura, beautifully arranged offerings or solemn traditional ceremonies to request the spirits of the ancestors and the gods to always protect the lives of the people (source: TMII's book p.52)

‘Nyepi’ is a Hindu holiday that is celebrated every year the New Saka. This day falls on a matter Tilem Kesanga (IX) which is believed to be on the purification of the gods at the center of the ocean that brings the essence of living water Amrita. For this Hindus worship at sacred to them. Nyepi is derived from the lonely (lonely, silent). Nyepi Day is actually a celebration of New Year according to Hindu calendar / calendar caka, which began in 78 AD. Unlike New Year celebrations AD, Saka New Year in Bali starts with solitude. No activity as usual. All the activities are eliminated, including public services, such as the International Airport was closed, but not for hospitals. The main objective of Nyepi is pleading before God Almighty, to purify Bhuana Alit (natural human / Microcosmos) and Bhuana Supreme / macrocosmos (the universe). Before Nyepi, there are several series of ceremonies performed Hindus, particularly in the area of Bali.

The lead up to Nyepi day is as follows:

a. Melasti or Mekiyis or Melis (three days before Nyepi)

Melasti is meant to clean the pratima or arca or pralingga (statue), with symbols that help to concentrate the mind in order to become closer to God. The ceremony is aimed to clean all nature and its content and also to take the Amerta (the source for eternal life) from the ocean or other water resources (ie lake, river, etc). Three days before Nyepi, all the effigies of the Gods from the entire village temples are taken to the river in long and colourful ceremonies. There, they have are bathed by the Neptune of the Balinese Lord, the God Baruna, before being taken back home to their shrines.



At the Melasti ceremony, Hindunese in Bali wear white; carry the holy symbol of Hindu religion to the sea to be cleaned.

Photo : Bambang Widjanarko

b. Tawur Agung (the day before Nyepi)

Exactly one day before Nyepi, all villages in Bali hold a large exorcism ceremony at the main village cross road, the meeting place of demons. They usually make Ogoh-ogoh (the fantastic monsters or evil spirits or the Butha Kala made of bamboo) for carnival purposes. The Ogoh-ogoh monsters that is usually red, symbolize the evil spirits surrounding our environment, which have to be got rid of from our lives. The carnivals themselves are held all over Bali following sunset. Bleganjur, Balinese gamelan music accompanies the procession. Some are giants taken from classical Balinese lore. All have fangs, bulging eyes and scary hair and are illuminated by torches. When Ogoh-ogoh is being played by the Seka Teruna, everyone enjoys the carnival. In order to make a harmonic relation between human being and God, human and human, and human and their environments, Tawur Agung is performed in every level of society, from the people's house. In the evening, the Hindus celebrating Ngerupuk, start making noises and light burning torches and set fire to the Ogoh-ogoh in order to get the Bhuta Kala, evil spirits, out of our lives.

Tedung or *Pajeng* is not a common umbrella that is used for everyday weather like rain or heat. Although its primary function remains as a protector, these multicoloured *Tedung* or *Pajeng* also used in Tawur Agung ceremony. Black and white pajeng symbolizes the balance of nature (Rwa Bhineda). Red pajeng symbolizes Brahma, the holy lights of God in the creation of the universe activity. Black pajeng symbolizes Vishnu, the holy light of God I the universe maintenance activity. White pajeng symbolizes Shiva, the holy light of God in the universe of fusion activity.



Multi-coloured *pajeng* (Balinese umbrella), each colour signifies it's own meanings.

Photo : Susi Mohamad

c. Nyepi

On Nyepi day itself, every street is quiet - there are nobody doing his or her normal daily activities. There is usually *Pecalang* (traditional Balinese security man) who controls and checks for street security. *Pecalang* wear a black uniform and a Udeng or Destar (a Balinese traditional "hat" that is usually used in ceremony). The *Pecalang*'s main task is not only to control the security of the street but also to stop any activities that disturb Nyepi. No traffic is allowed, not only cars but also people, who have to stay in their own houses. Light is kept to a minimum or not at all, the radio or TV is turned down and, of course, no one works. Even love making, this ultimate activity of all leisure times, is not supposed to take place, nor even attempted. The whole day is simply filled with the barking of a few dogs, the shrill of insect and is a simple long quiet day in the calendar of this otherwise hectic island. On Nyepi the world expected to be clean and everything starts anew, with Man showing his symbolic control over himself and the "force" of the World, hence the mandatory religious control.

Ngembak Geni (the day after Nyepi)

Ngembak is the day when Catur Berata Penyepian is over and Hindus societies usually visit to forgive each other and doing the Dharma Canthi. Dharma Canthi are activities of reading Sloka, Kekidung, Kekawin, etc. (ancient scripts containing songs and lyrics).

In essence the new Saka year anniversary, it is associated with peace, which the Balinese Hindu community to come to terms with a thoughtful man, with God's nature as a liability. Melasti (water resources), the Supreme Tawur: to make amends to the earth, Nyepi: reflect and draw closer to God, shoot Geni: to spark a new spirit in the New Year. The concept of Tri Hita Kirana is a concept that was adapted and implemented by the United Nations through the movement of World Water Day (March 21) - almost the same with Melasti (March); World Earth Day - about the same with the Supreme Tawur that possess the same concepts, which make up error human being on earth, then Earth Hour is about the same with Nyepi Day.

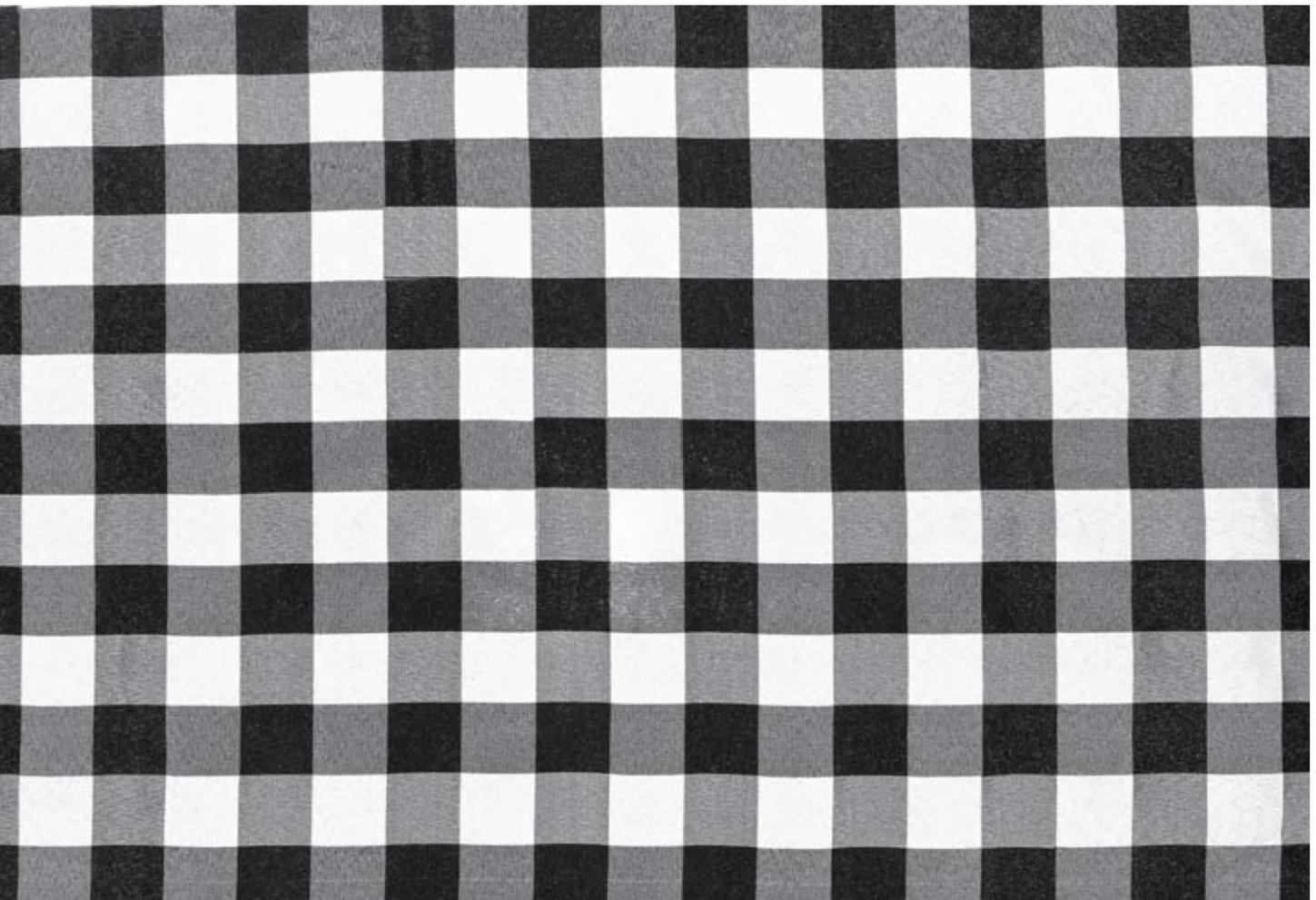
In each family or religious rituals, a piece of cloth is almost always a very important part. Traditional fabrics have a high cultural value, especially from the point of aesthetic, symbolic and meaningful to have an underlying philosophy of manufacture. Symbol / philosophy can be a value, which is a benchmark used to think and act. One application is to utilize local wisdom of the Balinese philosophy of life (not Hindu), namely saput poleng as a medium. Saput poleng is a piece of tartan cloth with white and black like a chessboard, which deals in all kinds of ritual in Bali, even in everyday life. According to tradition there are three types of saput poleng, among others, include:

1. Saput poleng Rwa Bhineda
2. Saput poleng Sudhamala
3. Saput poleng Tridatu

Saput poleng Rwa Bhineda is white and black. Dark colour (black) and light (white) is a reflection of dharma and adharma. *Saput poleng Sudhamala* is white, black, and grey. Ash is as a transition from black and white that mediate them. It means to align the dharma and *adharma* symphony.

Saput Poleng

Photo : BD+A Design Collection



Saput poleng Tridatu is white, black, and red. Red is the symbol rajas energy, black is tamas (sloth) and white symbols satwam (wisdom, goodness). *Saput poleng* as a symbol of the Hindu community in Bali is used by the *pecalang* (security device), the statue guards the gate, wrapped around the *kul-kul* or *kentongan*, worn by a shaman or traditional healer, imagined as the figures *ithiasa* (Merdah, Tualen, Hanuman and Bhima), leather worn by the puppeteer when implementing *pangruwatan* or purification, wrapped around the shrine is believed to serve as guards. In essence *saput poleng* is used as a symbol of the guard. Implementation of this philosophy can give us an implied reflection on religious life. This image below showed the various usage of *poleng* in daily life of Balinese people.



Various usage of *Saput Poleng*

Photo : Susi Mohamad

White colour in general is a symbolic of *satwam* which generally is a symbolic of the power of dharma which is fitting to give a reflection to us that the religious life we must uphold dharma principle which continues to provide peace. The black colour is symbolic of *tamas* (sloth) which is the strength of *adharma* is always there if there is dharma, and this is a divine law that always goes on. Adharma strength should not misunderstand, but we should control ourselves not to make an action that could provoke other people. Grey on saput poleng provide an implementation of an alignment between the forces of dharma and adharma. So this attitude is a reflection of the attitude of religious tolerance that provides alignment of the good and bad. The red colour symbolizes energy (*rajas*) that we should reflect on the spirit to foster religious harmony. Humans live in complex environments can live in harmony. Also, give wisdom to the people in addressing the human perception is different because of skin colour, race, ethnicity, and religion is a big family. This means that no only one religion is glorified, but all religions are seen as the truth. All are entitled to live in this country. Pluralism is like a colourful rainbow of God's creation. It is very beautiful and soothing peace of mind so as to regenerate the human race. (Source: By: Mahendra I Gede Wijaya, Fisheries and Marine Science Students IPB.)

Lebaran (Eid Celebration) and the Colour of Islam

Indonesia is a country with the biggest muslim population in the world, created a common perception identical with the Muslim colour which is the color of green. The common perception of GREEN is the identical sign related with muslim poeple that can be seen every where such as in a school, donation firm, political party etc. The Green colour of Islamic shool (or what we called as Madrasah) commonly applied to the local school base on the Islamic curriculum. It can be seen from the logo, building color and even the uniform of the students.



As the associated colour of Moslem, most of Moslem School in Indonesia uses green colour for their uniform.

Photo : Yogi Hadijaya

Eid Fitri is the biggest ceremony in all the other event held in the Muslim religious celebration, it is known as Lebaran. Eid Fitri is held base on the islamic calander falls on the first Syawal on the hijriyah calander. Lebaran celebration, like any religious celebration Lebaran has its own tradition, by commonly cooking a tipe of food that is called *ketupat*. *Ketupat* is a traditional south east Asia food made of rise wrap with wicker strips of coconut leaf (Janur Leaf). and *ketupat* has been a symbol of Eid Fitri celebration. Besides as a favorite food during Lebaran, ketupat also have become an icon of Lebaran, used as decorative items, especially for gift hampers or greeting cards that is usually in different shade of green.

Other identical items related is the packaging design in the ramadhan (holy month) eve. The retail production items is mostly wrap with a green themed finished, applied to the FMCG packaging, print ads, greeting cards, TVC etc. Embellished with ornaments of ketupat, and sometimes arabesque ornaments with arabic style typograph.

Ketupat has been a symbol of *Hari Raya Idul Fitri* (left), ketupat replica for gift hampers decoration (top right) and Eid celebration thematic F&B packaging (bottom right)

Photo : Yogi Hadijaya



Although green themed attribute dominated in most any visual promotion items in Muslim celebration eve, but its color does not reflect in the daily life activities of the local people itself such as cloths. In the Muslim clothing ware in Indonesia it's common to use white colored cloth during the Ramadan or any religious event.

In the Ramadan eve, majority of the Moslem men is using cloth what is called Baju Koko, often wore by male Moslem when praying, during Lebaran celebration, and any other religious Islamic events. While is a clothing accessory worn by Moslem female for praying (shalat).



Mukena, female Moslem wears for praying.

Photo : Susi Mohamad

Prophet Muhammad encourage that white clothes is better than the other color, because white appear brighter and radiant; white fabric is exposed to even a little dirt, so the person wearing it will change it right away to be kept clean. Another unique background stories of koko shirt (*baju koko*) white Moslem-wear. Indonesian male moslem doesn't wear clothes like the ones that is worn by moslems of the Middle East, but Indonesian wear *baju koko* that was actually influenced from China ("Thui-Khim" clothes) which is not a Muslim country. Among the Betawi people, Chinese men is usually called 'Engkoh-Engkoh', spelled in Indonesian 'koko'.



Koko shirt (baju koko) white
Moslem wear for men along
with its headgear.

Photo : Yogi Hadijaya



Another attributes that are identical to the Muslim is a cap that covering the boy head. Cap which is often used by Indonesian people is a black cap, called as Songkok cap that is similar to that worn by the workers of the Malay race. Black cap was become famous after it used by Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, who uses the cap as a characteristic of himself in order to show the equivalence between the peoples of Indonesia and the Netherlands.

CONCLUSION

Colours are important, as they entice our eyes and direct our perception on objects. It is known that through the appearance of colours, we may determine choices (*blue for boys, pink for girls*), establish moods (*to be sad is feeling blue*), expose identities (*green for army, blue for navy*), direct understandings (red means stop), and define interactions (*red equals hot and spicy*). It shows that colours create subliminal messages, one that instinctively interpreted in our minds and visually serve as objects' identities.

The research with title of Colours of Indonesia that we have explore on the paper indicating that the colour has a very important role in any traditional ritual performed at the various tribes and races in Indonesia. Indonesia has about 300 ethnic groups, each with cultural identities developed over centuries, and influenced by Indian, Arabic, Chinese, and European sources. Every colours have contained meanings, that did not escape from its religious and cultural beliefs. Each culture possesses unique perception on how colours are interpreted and assign meanings based on these knowledge. The inter-relationship between colours perception and cultural identities indicates that the inventory and interpretation of colours is one important part to understand cultural identities.

After we do research about colors in Indonesia, we can make a conclusion, where colors are closely bond with the traditional ritual and religious process. Colours that are believed to be sacred are white and gold/yellow, although the colour of black and red are commonly used in most Indonesian ethnic groups. White and yellow are believed to be the color of holiness among the Hindu people. Especially in Bali, this color has a meaning that symbolizes holiness and honesty, therefore this color is commonly used in the traditional ceremony and religious event like Melasti ritual. Other traditional item from Bali culture is the Poleng fabric. Poleng cloth can be found in the daily life of Balinese people. The poleng fabric that has a black and white pattern means to remind the Balinese people to keep their lives balanced.

The red color in Indonesia represents bravery, frivolousness, celebration and life. This research indicates that the Toraja culture uses the red color to symbolize life, and black as the last step of Humanity. Green is the common color that is used to be a part of a religious event of the Moslem people in Indonesia, reflected from the attributes in Moslem-related ceremonies as seen in gift cards, ketupat, hampers, political party etc. The last is Blue that relates to the condition of Indonesia as a maritime country or an archipelago. Blue is often seen in "Batik Pesisir" as an influence of cross culture that occur between our region and its surroundings.

As a conclusion, researcher expected this study has significances in both science and applied sectors. Study about colours of Indonesia, as part of Asia, was able to provide knowledge and insight for public that can be used as an inspiration in making creative product designs either for Indonesia and also in Asia. Understanding of colours meaning in this research might become a source of information for academic such as design students, professors, and practitioners in industrial design, marketing, retail and others associated with the end user. Knowledge of colours meaning and culture can also make easier for designers to make decision when they are producing design by determining a dominant colour that exist in each region and culture.

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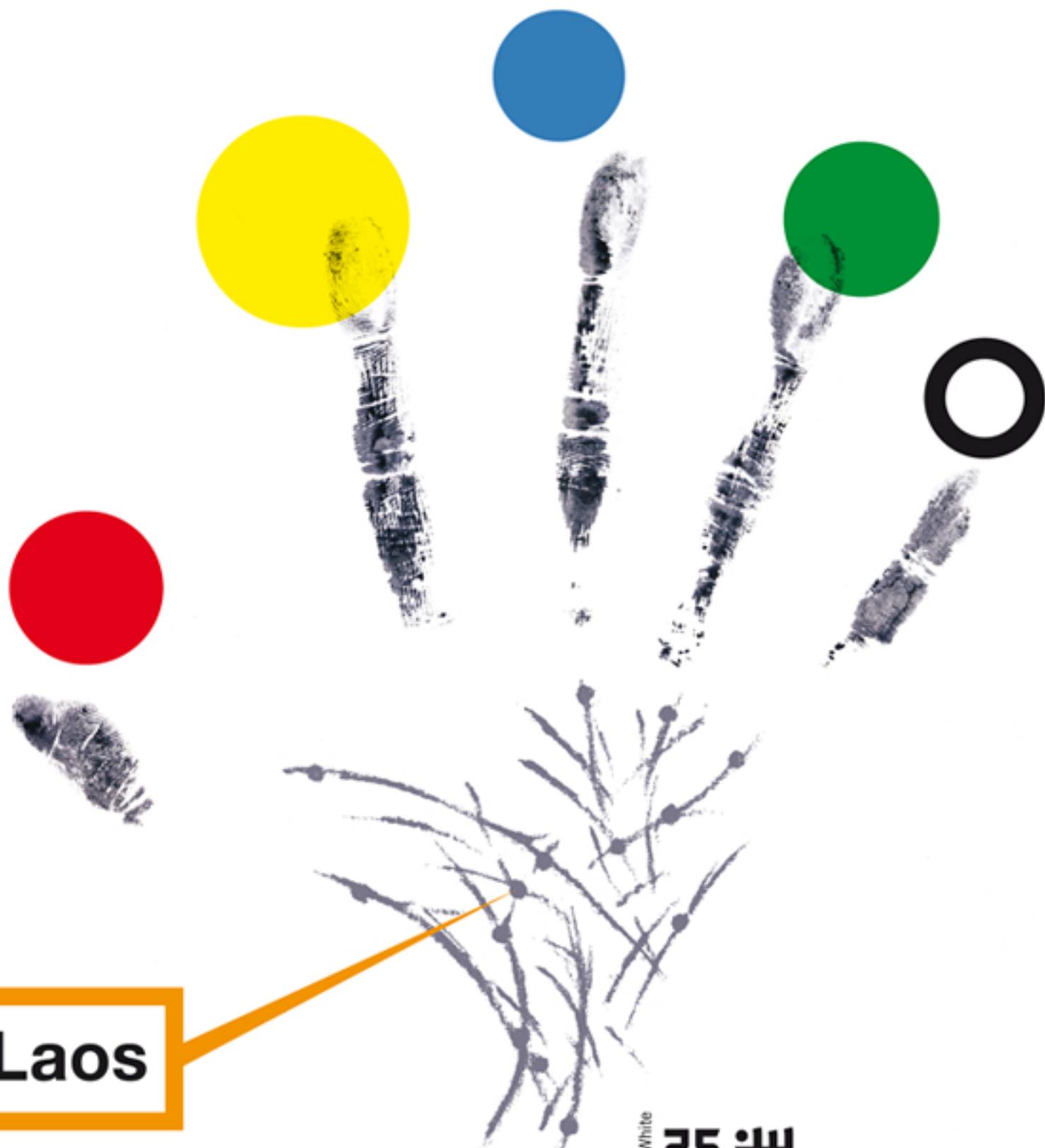
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Research Report 2013



Laos

the
Colours
of Asia

亞洲
色彩
紅黃藍綠黑與白

Red Yellow Blue Green Black & White



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Once upon a time...in Laos

Photo: unknown

THE NATURAL COLOURS OF LAO PDR

A Study of the Influence of Nature on Traditional Colours on Laos

Laos is a country that is rich in colours and culture. From the golden peaks of the Buddhist temples to the lush green fauna of the forests, and the calming blue of water the rushes down the Mekong River to the earth-red clay that forms the rich, fertile banks that forms its arable plains, the landscape of Laos exudes a rainbow of hues that influences the colours chosen by the Lao people in their daily lives.

The impact that nature has on the culture of Laos is clearly visible through the sub-conscious choice of colours made by the Lao in the design of their clothing and architecture, and how it also helps to shape their beliefs and rituals.

Careful observation will reveal that while more vibrant colours are now available in the Lao with the advent of synthetic dyes and pigments, the traditional colours that have survived the ages are closely linked to the natural influences found around them in the hills, forests and from the Mekong River that flows through the country.

It is also clear that colours are highly significant to the Lao by observing the way they celebrate the important events in their lives — weddings, New Year's Day, harvest festivals, and even the Elephant Festival, a more recent event celebrating the importance of the elephant in the nation's legacy.

In order to better understand how nature has influenced the choice of traditional colours in Laos, it is crucial to also understand a little about its history, geography and demography.



The Luang Prabang Kingdom of Lan Xang.

Photo: Unknown

HISTORY

The influence of nature on Laos can be traced as far back as the 14th Century when the Kingdom of Lan Xang Hom Kao – the Kingdom of a Million Elephants Under a White Parasol - was established by King Fa Ngum in 1353. (Evans, 2002) Lan Xang was centred around Muang Sua (modern day Luang Prabang) and flourished for the next 300 years during which they defeated invasions from Vietnam (1478-79), Siam (1536) and Burma (1571-1621). (Savada, 1995)



Flags of the three Kingdoms - left: Lan Xang Kingdom of Luang Prabang; middle: Kingdom of Viangchang; right: Kingdom of Champasak.

Photo: www.worldstatesman.org

Internal struggles plagued Lan Xang until 1690 when it split into three kingdoms – Louangphrabang in the North, Viang Chan (modern day Vientiane) in the middle and Champasak in the South. Weakened, the three kingdoms were reduced to tributaries of Siam in 1779. (Evans, 2002)

The French arrived in Luangphrabang as early as 1861 but it wasn't until 1907 that they formally took control of Laos from the Siamese with the signing of the Franco-Siamese treaty. While the French were instrumental in reuniting the three kingdoms of Lan Xang, their interest in Laos reflected the ulterior motives they had elsewhere – Siam and Vietnam. (Stuart-Fox, 1997)

The Japanese defeat of the French in March 1945 showed Indochina that the mighty colonialists were not as infallible as they had been led to believe. However, the Japanese reached Laos and most of Indochina late into World War II and within five months, August 15, 1945, they surrendered. In spite



Bombs left over from the Secret War.

Photo: Adam Jones
adamjones.freesevers.com

of a declaration of Independence by the Lao, French forces reinvaded Laos and retook power in 1946. As brief as it may have been, the Lao had savoured the glory of independence and the seeds of nationalism had been sown in spite of the return of the colonialists. (Stuart-Fox, 1997)

The next 10 years witnessed the rise of nationalism in Laos. In 1949, Laos entered the French Union as an independent member and in 1950, the United States recognised the independence of Laos. In 1953, however, Vietminh forces invaded Laos and defeated the French forces stationed to help defend Laos. In July 1954, the Geneva Convention was signed with the intention of ending the internal strife within Indochina. It was, however, not endorsed

by the United States as it didn't "meet certain conditions, namely ensuring the viability of stable non-communist regimes and preventing the spread of communism." (Stuart-Fox, 1997. 89)

From 1964 to 1973, the Americans waged the Secret War against Laos and in less than 10 years made Laos the most bombed nation in history. During the Secret War, the US dropped more than 2 million tons of bombs on Laos, including more than 270 million cluster bomb sub-munitions while keeping details of this war secret from Congress and the American public, until it was revealed when documents were declassified in the 1990s. Unfortunately, not all of these brightly coloured bombs exploded when they were dropped and today, many of them are still found in bamboo clumps, by children playing in shallow dirt or by farmers working their lands – as many as 300 people are injured or killed by these unexploded bombs every year. Since 1974, more than 20,000 Lao have been killed or maimed by these 'bombies' (the term the Lao use for the bombs) – many of them children. (Sutton, 2011)

The end of the Secret War in 1973 and the retreat of the American invaders set the stage for a new era in Laos. The year 1975 was marked by events that changed the political landscape of Laos. From the dissolution of the National Assembly by royal decree on April 13 to the "liberation" of Viang Chan on August 23, followed by the abdication of King Sisavangvatthana on December 1 and the proclamation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on December 2, marking the end of the constitutional monarchy and the transfer of power to the communist-led government that rules the nation through this day.

GEOGRAPHY

The only landlocked Southeast Asian nation, Laos has an area of about 236,800 square kilometers and shares its geographic borders with China, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia. A key geographic feature that runs from North to South along the border with Vietnam is the Annamese Cordillera mountain range, with the tallest peak rising to 2,817 meters at Mount Bia, just North of the nation's Capital of Vientiane. (Savada, 1995)



Map of Laos

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/electrostatico/412594631/>

The topography of Northern and Eastern Laos is mostly mountainous, with flatlands in Vientiane and the Plain of Jars. In the South, the Savannakhet and Champasak provinces feature large level areas that are suitable for extensive agriculture – namely paddy cultivation and livestock farming. The floodplains along the Mekong River, while accounting for only about 20 percent of the arable land in Laos, is very fertile and serves as the lifeblood of agriculture in Laos. (Savada, 1995)

Its geographic location has made Laos the unwilling buffer between more powerful neighbouring states that have waged battles with each other over the centuries but at the same time made it strategically suited as the crossroads for trade and communication in the region. (Savada, 1995)



Lao sports enthusiasts celebrating at a soccer game.

Photo: <http://laofootball.blogspot.com>

Population

According to The World Factbook published by the United States Central Intelligence Agency in 2009, Lao PDR has an estimated population of about 6.6 million people. (Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/la.html>)

A total of 49 recognised ethnic tribes contribute to this total and the diverse ethnic composition of Laos. (Vongpanaya, personal communication, 12 March 2012) The 2005 Census estimated that about 55 percent of the population are made up of the ethnic Lao tribe, about 11 percent are from the Khamu tribe while the Hmong account for approximately eight percent. The remainder 26 percent are of different ethnic tribes. (The World Factbook, Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/la.html>)

While Buddhism is the predominant religion of the Lao, it's followers only account for about 65 percent of the population. Christianity accounts for about 1.5 percent, Islam for a little less than one percent, while the remainder are mostly members of ethnic Hill tribes that practice spirit worship or animism. (The World Factbook, Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/la.html>)

The geographic distribution of people in Laos can be traced back to transmigration and / or historic conflict within the region. In an attempt to simplify the different ethnicities in Laos, they were categorised into three groups – *Lao Loum*, *Lao Theung* and *Lao Soung* – which literally translates to Lowland Lao, Midland Lao and Highland Lao, respectively.



Lao Loum are mostly Theravada Buddhist who give alms to monks as seen here in this photo.

Photo: Somvilay Chanthavong

***Lao Loum* or Lowland Lao**

The *Lao Loum* are the inhabitants of the plains and valley bottoms below 400 metres. They are the majority of the population and are represented by the majority Lao tribe and others who have moved to the lowlands totalling about 60% of the population of Laos.

Majority of the *Lao Loum* practice Theravada Buddhism, similar to Thailand and Sri Lanka, and are said to have more in common with the Thai of Thailand than the other minority ethnic tribes of Laos. Unlike the Thai in Thailand who have centrally encouraged the speaking and adoption of the Thai language, the central government in Laos has not and while most *Lao Loum* speak the Lao language, many still also communicate with each other in their tribal mother tongue...but are also able to communicate inter-tribally in Lao. This is because, unlike Thailand, the Lao tribes have stronger connections to their villages and cultures.

One characteristic aspect of the *Lao Loum* is that they consume and cultivate wet rice in permanent fields (unlike those who cultivate rice in irrigated fields).



Top: Lanten Family
Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/andriesoudshoorn/138925299/>

Left: Lahu Woman
Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/41597157@N00/3286406823/>

Middle: Lahu Elders
Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/seng548/7399948252/>

Right: Mien woman
Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/azwegers/6172391009/>

Lao Theung or Midland Lao

Lao Theung are mostly those living in the mid-level mountain slopes of Laos between 400 and 1,000 metres above sea level. This group includes the Khamu, the second largest ethnic group in Laos. Other ethnic groups include the Htin, Lamet, Loven, Katu, Alak and Katang. The Khamu and Htin are believed to have been the original tribal inhabitants of Laos, having been present in the area long before any of the other tribes. Economically, this group of Lao are not traditionally as affluent as their counterparts in the Lowland or Highland regions. (Cooper, 2008)



Top: Hmong tribe

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/learnscope/2429793946/>

Left: Hmong women

Photo:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/puppydogbites/2303447035/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/puppydogbites/2303447859/>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/puppydogbites/2304277050/>

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/puppydogbites/2303446007/>

Lao Soung or Highland Lao

The *Lao Soung* live in villages situated above 1,000 metres and include the Hmong, Mien and the Akha. The Hmong and Mien are believed to have migrated to the Lao region from the Yunnan region of China and have Chinese last names that indicate their patrilineal clan structures. (Cooper, 2008)

According to KaYing Yang, director of the non-profit organisation in Vientiane named VivnCaug (the Hmong word for sisterhood), there are predominantly three visual groups of Hmong in Laos. They are the Black Hmong, the White Hmong and the Patterned Hmong. Yang, an American of Hmong descent, went on to explain that the easiest way to differentiate them visually was that Black Hmong women wore black skirts, White Hmong women wore white skirts and the women of the Patterned Hmong clans wore skirts with patterns woven into them. She also explained that linguistically, the Hmong can also be sub-divided into two groups by colour — the Blue Hmong and the Black Hmong. While the language may be different, both Blue and Black Hmong can understand each other verbally. (Personal communication, 12 March, 2012)



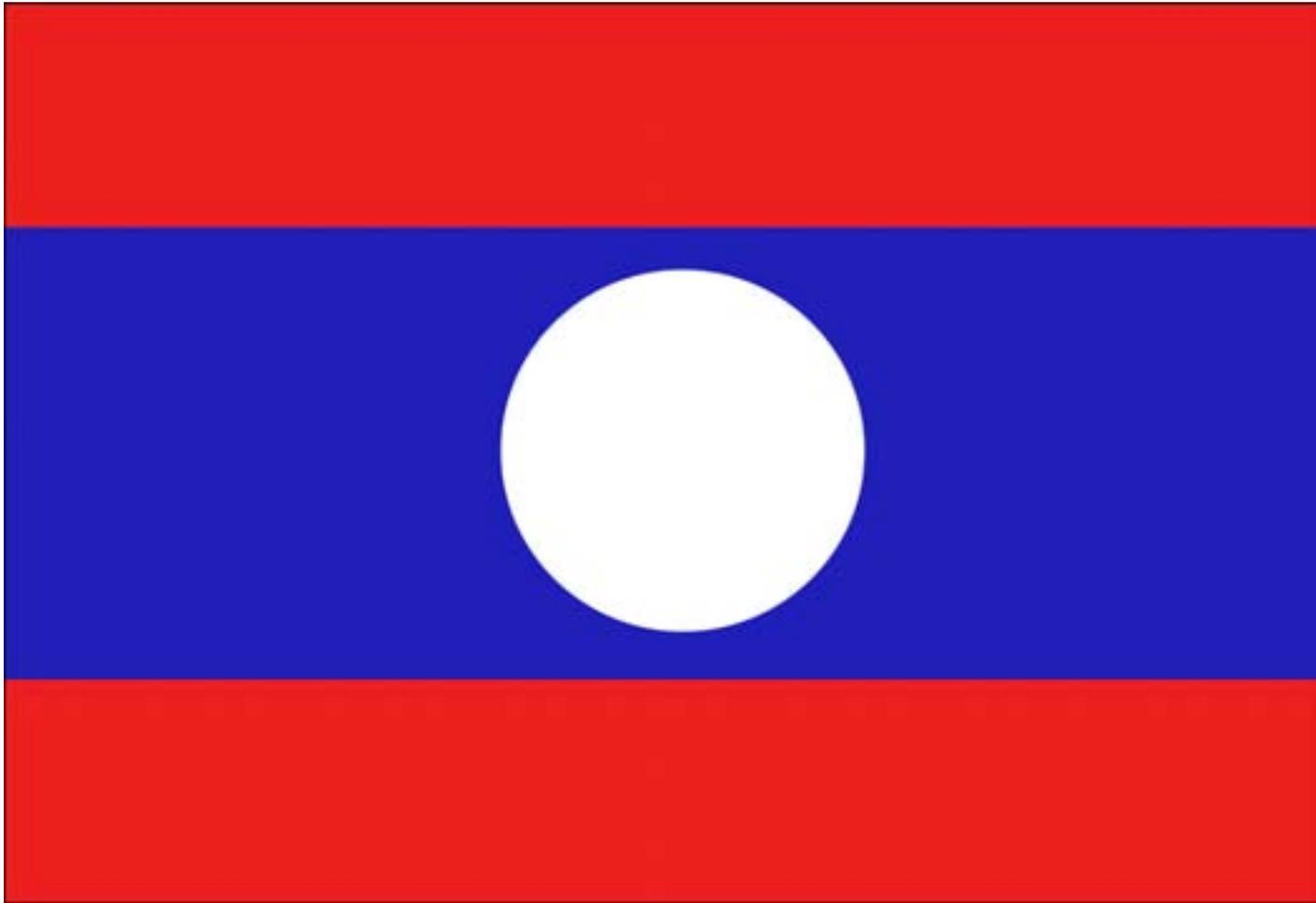
The Akha Heritage Foundation notes that the Akha – another *Lao Soung* tribe – originated from Mongolia and moved South over the centuries to avoid and survive wars. About 60,000 still live in the hills of Laos, many more also live in Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. The Akha are a peaceful tribe who are dedicated to living in the forest like their ancestors. As migration is no longer an option, the survival of the Akha is growing more and more dependent on the goodwill of others. (Retrieved from <http://www.akha.org/content/aboutakhalife/theakha.html>)

Left: Akha Women

Photo: http://www.flickr.com/photos/christian_bachelier/100843686/

Right: Akha Woman

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/atbaker/4199198770/>



Lao Flag

Photo:Unknown

THE COLOURS OF LAOS – VISUAL OBSERVATIONS

As a nation, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) has no official colours. The only colours adopted on the national level are those that are found on the flag – red, blue and white. According to Director General of the Department of Mass Culture, Ministry of Information Culture and Tourism Mr. Xyphaeng Vongpanaya, the colours of the flag are symbolic but not official colours for the nation. (personal communication, 12 March 2012)

The Lao flag is one of the few flags adopted by a “communist” government that doesn't have a star on it. The two strips of red are symbolic of bravery, patriotism and strength while the strip of blue between the red signifies prosperity. The white circle within the blue strip is symbolic of peace, unity and justice for all Lao nationals. (Vongpanaya, personal communication, 12 March 2012)

While the above may be the official explanation of the symbolic representation of the colours of the flag of the Lao PDR, another more nature-related explanation is also often heard. It is said that the red stripes are symbolic of the blood that was shed to secure the freedom of the Lao PDR. The blue strip in the middle represents the abundance of the resources the Lao receive from the Mekong River that flows through the country. Finally, the white circle in the centre symbolises the full moon that shines on the Mekong River.

It is therefore obvious how nature has taken on a quiet, subtle yet important role in shaping the Lao palette of choice.

Red / Daeng

While red is one of the three colours on the Lao flag, the shade of red that is seen more often in Laos is slightly darker than the shade of red that is on the flag. It can be described as a dark, earthy red tone often found on the exterior walls of Buddhist temples and spirit houses present at many homes and businesses.

Red is also often seen on textiles and clothing. Often used in fabric and textile patterns and design, red is traditionally achieved by using natural dyes such as lac. While many tribal costumes are dark, many are often trimmed or embellished with red.

Blue / Faa

The second of three colours of on the Lao flag is blue. Traditionally, however, the shade of blue that is more predominantly seen through Laos traditionally is a very dark blue. According to Professor Bounthong Nhotmanhkhong, professor of philosophy, artist and photographer, Lao people (not just the Lao tribe but most of the tribes) traditionally chose the dark shades of blue for their clothing because as working people who toiled in the fields, the darker shades of blue didn't appear as soiled as lighter shades of colours. Additionally, Nhotnamhkhong — who is also the founder and operator of Thonglahasinh which produces an extensive line of cotton products dyed in indigo — explained that dark shades of blue were traditionally chosen because it could be obtained from indigo, which is readily available throughout Laos. (personal communication, March 9, 2012)

Green / Kiew

It's impossible to miss the colour green in Laos. With their close connection with nature, green is everywhere. The streets of Vientiane are lined with beautiful trees and flowering bushes that are seen just around every turn. It's therefore no surprise that the colour green plays a significant role in the lives of the Lao — both in nature and in their traditional choice of colours.

Yellow / Leuang

Spend a little time in almost any part of Laos and one will soon realise that the shade of yellow most significant to the people of Laos, is beyond a doubt, that of gold. From the highest points of almost every traditionally designed building to the peaks of the countless Buddhist temples, golden pointed nagas rise reaching for the sky. Gold (or Kham in Lao) also adorns many of the walls, doors and stairs of most temples which often pale in comparison to the golden statues of Buddha himself within the wats.

Gold is not only significant in architecture but during one of the most important celebrations in the life of the Lao — the wedding. Gold is a very integral part of the wedding starting with the bride price that the groom and his family will negotiate with the family of the bride in exchange for the milk she consumed during her infancy. On the day of the wedding, both bride and groom are also accessorised in gold as it is symbolic of wealth and status.

Silver / Ngeun

Like gold, silver is the colour and metal that also symbolises wealth and status in the Lao culture. Silver is especially important to many of the hill tribes who didn't have easy access to gold. While both gold and silver are mined in Laos but silver was easier to refine and as such, became the choice of many of the traditional tribes. From headdresses to jewellery, pure silver signified the wealth of the people wearing them. Among the Hmong, old silver French coins

are worn on the vests of the men...the more silver coins they had, the wealthier.

While silver is embraced by the Lao as a metal, it is clearly also important when one understands most women will not wear jewellery made of pure silver on a day to day basis. Instead, they have exact replicas made in silver coloured alloy materials and recycled materials for their daily accessorizing needs... showing the significance of the colour to these women.

Black / Dam

Black isn't seen much in Laos and it is not a colour of choice among the traditional Lao. While it may be thought that many of the hill tribes wear black, they are actually in a very dark shade of blue produced by indigo dye. Some black does exist in the hills and is achieved through use of dye made from the ebony fruit.

White / Khao

The third colour on the Lao flag — white — represents peace, unity and justice on a national level. Culturally, however, white clearly symbolises purity.

A perfect example of this is the transitional stage when a man prepares to enter monkhood, he enters a stage when he wears white robes and is a petitioner. During his time as a petitioner — usually just about a day before he enters monkhood — he follows rituals to purify his spirit and his head is bathed and he is bathed to cleanse his spirit and as a symbol of giving up all worldly pleasures and wealth. The next day, he completes his rituals while still dressed in white and is then changed into a saffron robe, and is declared a monk.

Another example is the purity of the original baci strings used in traditional ceremonies in Laos. Traditional baci or sou khuan strings are always white to symbolise purity although in modern times, brightly coloured strings are used in conjunction with ceremonies held for tourists.

Baci is highly significant in Lao weddings...traditional and modern. In a traditional wedding, however, the man often opts to wear a white shirt made of Lao silk. While its intent is unclear, it is believed to be symbolic of the purity of his intent.

White is also symbolic in funerals. During a funeral, women related to the deceased are required to dress in all white as a symbol of turning “temporary nuns” as a symbol of purity and respect for the deceased. Men may choose to wear dark trousers but most choose white shirts. During the funerary ceremonies, men and women are not allowed to mingle and are kept separated.

EVIDENCE OF NATURE AND CULTURE ON TRADITIONAL COLOUR CHOICES

Being a landlocked nation, the traditional choice of colours depended mainly on what was more readily available in nature to the Lao people. They creatively made use of natural fabrics, dyes and metals, among other natural resources, to fill their daily wants and needs.



Lao Silk

Photo: Anna Lee

NATURAL FIBRES, TEXTILES AND FABRICS

Natural fibres in their raw, unadulterated form are extremely important to the people in Laos. They form the base of all traditional clothing worn by the minority hill-tribes and are also significant when it comes to textiles produced for the elite, religious leaders and tribal shamans.

Natural fibres were most commonly produced on the village level, which meant that only limited quantities could be produced at any given time depending on the amount of raw materials harvested during any given season. As such, certain fibres were considered more valuable than others depending on its rarity and quality, and used only for the elite in the villages. Other more readily obtained fibres were made available to the general community. (Cheesman, 2004)

Cotton

Cotton in both its raw and finished forms are highly important to Laos — both as a raw material and a commodity.

Cotton is harvested from the flower of the cotton plant and processed in the pretty much the same manner for centuries. The fluffs of cotton harvested are spun into threads and then dyed, following which they are woven on the looms into lengths of fabric. Depending on the thickness of the thread, the

weavers can produce either thick or thin fabric suitable for the different climate experienced in Laos.

While cotton is used for a variety of apparel, it is most significantly used for the production of the traditional Lao farmer's shirt. Dyed in indigo, the shirt is very



Cotton clothing worn by farmers standing in a field of indigo plants

Photo: Dr Bounthong Nhotnamhkhong

dark blue, often appearing almost black, and is not as readily stained as lighter coloured clothing. As such, it has remained very popular among working class Lao people. (Nhotnamhkhong, personal communication, March 9, 2012)

Cotton is also used to produce a range of home furnishing items and handicrafts. Items such as bedding, bags, wall hangings, blankets, to name just a few, are commonly made from cotton.

In its natural form, uncoloured white cotton is also very important to the people of Laos. It is used to produce baci strings that are a form of blessing for the people who receive them (the strings are tied onto the ones to be blessed...see below for more information on baci)

Silk

The Lao have been practising sericulture for centuries. Sericulture is the cultivation of silkworms (not really a worm, but the caterpillar of the silk moth *Bombyx mori*) solely for the purpose of harvesting its threads to produce silk. This multi-step process — starting with the cultivation of mulberry leaves, hatching of silkworm larvae, rearing of the worms and eventual metamorphosis into cocoons — has been practiced for centuries throughout Asia, and is believed to have begun in China as far back as 2650 BC. (Sericulture. n.d.)

Traditionally, the methods used in both commercial sericulture facilities and on the village level are similar — just on a different scale. The main difference is in the way the silk is harvested from the cocoons. In commercial facilities, the aim is to harvest as much silk as possible (each undamaged silkworm cocoon can yield up to 3,000 feet or 900 meters of silk thread) and hence the cocoons are killed by boiling in hot water to remove the adhesive excretions that bind the threads, making it easier to spin into fabric on the looms. (How much silk comes from one cocoon. n.d.) On the village level, however, the goal is subsistence and hence the cocoons are allowed to mature into adult



Silk yarn after dyeing

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/annamatic3000/2285436880/>



Silk being processed, woven and embroidered at Phaeng Mai Gallery in Vientiane, Laos

Photo: Phaeng Mai Gallery



moths, break free from the cocoon and reproduce. The discarded cocoons are then boiled and spun into thread for weaving. While this method results in the harvesting of less up to 30 percent less viable threads, it helps to ensure continued availability of silk in this cash-poor setting.

Like cotton, silk is a very important natural resource for the Lao. Unlike cotton, silk takes on certain natural dyes differently and often results in much more vibrant colours thus making it the natural fibre of choice for the elite and royalty.



Hemp clothing made by the Hmong

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/grjenkin/2209874879/sizes/o/in/photostream/>

Hemp / Kan xa

Hemp is among the most important traditional natural fibres for the Hmong tribes and is used in the production of clothing for daily use, household items, and other items for ceremonial use. While the process of harvesting and processing hemp is extremely laborious, the result is a fabric that is also highly resilient and extremely durable. (The Story of Hmong Batik. n.d.)

Hemp is derived from the Cannabis plant sp. Sativa, closely related but not the species that is used to produce the narcotic marijuana. Cannabis Sativa has no THC content making it completely legal in all countries. Hemp is considered one of the most useful plants worldwide, has been cultivated and harvested for more than 12,000 years and yields three times the amount of raw fibre than cotton. (The Story of Hmong Batik. n.d.)

Traditional Tribal Clothings

The 49 recognised ethnic tribes in Laos each have different styles of traditional clothing that help identify them from each other. Within each tribe, sub-groups and clans may also use different colours and patterns of colours that help them stand out from members of other sub-groups or clans. It is impossible to identify them each individually for the purposes of this paper, and as such they are grouped together in one colour category – multicoloured.

Colours and patterns of a combination of colours play a special role in how tribes identify each of their sub-groups. Many of the larger tribes use colours and / or a combination of colours and patterns to describe themselves.



Tribal clothing and a long-house tent at Phaeng Mai Gallery

Photo: Kelvin Wee

The Hmong, for example, have sub-groups that are identified by the colour of their clothing – Black Hmong, White Hmong, Blue Hmong, Green Hmong. Others are also described by the style of their clothing such as the Flower Hmong, Armband Hmong, etc. (Yang, personal communication. 12 March, 2012)

Other tribes like the Tai and Mien also identify some of their sub-groups with colour association, while others do not yet can be identified by certain unique colours that they wear such as the Lanten who have pink piping on their clothing and some of the Lahu who wear light blue tops.

It is therefore evident that colours play a major role in the daily lives of the tribal people in Laos. A further study into the individual tribes is needed to identify the specific traits of the 49 tribes and their over 100 sub-groups.



The sinh is the traditional Lao skirt commonly worn by women on a daily basis.

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/fetuskarate/2114659813/>

Sinh / Lao Skirt

The sinh is the traditional garment that Lao women wear on a daily basis. Generally made of silk or cotton woven with a variety of motifs, the simple tube skirt can tell a lot about the women wearing it. (Nanthavongdouangsy, 2006)

Colours are an important part of a sinh. Darker, richer colours on silk and cotton are preferred by more mature women which in a way reflect their preference for shades that are traditionally achieved with natural dyes. With the availability of synthetic dyes and fabrics, lighter, brighter colours appeared on the market and have fast become the choice of younger, more fashion conscious women in Laos.

Additionally, colours like silver or gold can be found on sinh made specifically for special occasions or the social elites. The richest of the women had specific sinh woven with actual gold or silver threads for use on specific occasions like weddings and other auspicious events. (Nanthavongdouangsy, 2006)

On the village level, animistic beliefs are reflected in the motifs of protector animals woven into the sinh. From golden nagas to mystical creatures, it was possible to identify which tribe or village women were by some of the motifs that are carefully woven into their clothing.

While the sinh is traditionally worn by women, there are men in certain tribes that fill the roles of shamans who also wear the sinh. Most, if not all, of these men were students of female shamans had wear the sinh in respect and tribute to the women who served as their mentors. (Nanthavongdouangsy, 2006)

It is important to note that women in the entire region – Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar and Cambodia – traditionally wore sinh of different styles. The Lao sinh is often compared to those in Thailand. However, the styles and designs are quite different from each other with Lao women wearing their sinh in very specific ways for specific occasions and events. (Nanthavongdouangsy, 2006)

NATURAL DYES

Natural dyes play an important role in the lives of the Lao as natural fabrics do. The art of dyeing is as much an art form as it is a science. It involves much more than just soaking the fabrics in the dye mixture. Many of the tribes had master dyers who spent their entire lives learning the tricks and secrets from the master dyers before them. From which mordants (or fixatives) to use with which fabric and dyes to prevent excessive fading, to what shades each raw material or combination of raw materials will render with certain fabrics. Colours can vary from season to season depending on the quality of the raw materials collected or the quality of the raw fabrics. Master dyers are revered for their skill and expertise, and are able to reproduce colours with surprising precision and often have several younger villagers learning the skills and secrets from them. (Cheesman, 2004)



Cotton dyed in indigo being dried in the sun

Photo: Dr Bounthong Nhotnamkhong



Indigo plant (top left) and indigo dying process

Photo: Dr Bounthong Nhotnamhkhong

Indigo

Indigo can be considered the single most important natural dye to the Lao people. Indigo is mainly used to produce shades of blue, the colour most used by many of the Hill Tribes. Interestingly, indigo dye takes well on cotton but not on silk as it's alkaline nature is destructive to silk, resulting in blue being the colour of everyday clothing and the attire of the farming communities. Additionally, because of this, only very rarely has indigo dye been used solely on silk historically. (Cheesman, 2004)

Lac is used to produce rich red colour on textiles.

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/40126427@N04/3754213360/>



Lac

Red is most often achieved by dyeing fibres in lac, the resinous excretions of insects from the *Coccoidea* family. These insects live on select host trees in the thousands, colonising branches on which they secrete their red-tinted sticky material that is used extensively as a dye to render fabrics different shades of red.

Red is a colour that doesn't take well on cotton but adheres very consistently and vibrantly on silk. As such, red has become the colour of festivity and elite status among the Lao people. On cotton, it often appears as pink or brown... and not red.

Lac also can be used as a clear varnish on wood products and has lent its name to the word lacquer. (Cheesman, 2004)



Mulberry also produces a reddish dye

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jamieanne/5053675308/>

Mulberry / *Xa*

The mulberry plant is a very important raw and renewable resource in Laos. As a source of natural dye, mulberry is used to produce a rich, burgundy colour on silk and cotton. The demand for farm-grown mulberry has increased dramatically in recent years not because of the demand for it as a dye but to meet demands for its leaves created by the growing silk and paper production and mulberry tea industries.

Mulberry plays an important role in the Lao silk industry as its leaves are the only source of food for silkworms. In Laos, silk comes from the larva of the *bombyx mori*, a kind of moth. Silkworms are raised in batches of about 5,000 larvae and each batch can consume as much as 80 kilograms of mulberry leaves each and every day. After about 28 days, the larva would have grown by about 300 percent and begins to spin a cocoon. This cocoon is where silk comes from. In Laos, there are two kinds of cocoons and both come from the same species of worm. They are white or yellow. Both colours are found in the North but only the yellow is found in the South. (About silk worms, n.d.)

Jackfruit / *mak mi*

Like Mulberry, the Jackfruit Tree serves more than one purpose. As a dye, the heart of the tree is used to render fabrics brownish orange colour and is often



The heart of the Jackfruit tree is used as a dye to achieve different shades of yellow

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ackgan/4969895197/>

used to achieve the saffronish colour on the robes worn by Buddhist monks. (The Jackfruit, n.d.)

Jackfruit is also obviously a food source for the Lao, those who are not used to it may not take to it as readily however, the Lao use it in their desserts and quite extensively as a substitute for meat. The wood from the Jackfruit tree is also a valuable source of timber for many in the region as it is naturally termite-resistant. (The Jackfruit, n.d.)

OTHER PLANTS & FLOWERS

In addition to being an important part of the Lao life as a raw resource for natural dyes and fibres, plants in their natural form are also significant in Laos. They also play a major, albeit subtle and sub-conscious, role in the choice of traditional colours and even influence Lao contemporary design.

***Dok Champa* / Frangipani or Plumeria**

The national flower and official symbol of Laos, ***Dok Champa*** (also known as Frangipani and Plumeria) comes in a variety of colours ranging from red, pink, yellow and a combination of other pastel colours. It is often used in ceremonial ceremonies and made into garlands that are given our when guests are welcome to Laos. This beautiful flower blooms daily, lasts long and emits a sweet-scented aroma — it is no wonder the ***Dok Champa*** represents sincerity and joy in life to the Lao. (ASEAN National Flowers, 2009)



Dok Champa or Plumeria

Photo: http://www.flickr.com/photos/degilbo_on_flickr/5354289292/

While the *Dok Champa* comes in a range of colours, the variety most seen on logos, photos and other images is the white / yellow variety. While there is no documented explanation for this, it appears that it is a subconscious choice in relation to what those two colours signify to the Lao. White being purity and yellow being wealth.



Marigold or *Dok Daoheung*

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/purplegecko/189407689/sizes/m/in/photostream/>

Marigold / *Dok Daoheung*

The brilliant golden-orange *Dok Daoheung* or marigold is quite possibly the most prominent flower next to the *Dok Champa* in Laos and the flower of choice when it comes to worship offerings. It is also often used in the form of garlands but more so in relation to Buddhist rituals than welcoming guest as above with the *Dok Champa*.

The *Dok Daoheung* is used extensively during Baci ceremonies and is prominently displayed in the *Pha Kwan* where it symbolises cheerfulness, creativity and brilliance. (Khampradith, Inversin & Somsanith, 2012) It is almost used in conjunction with two other flowers in this arrangement — the *Dok Huk* (symbolic of love) and the *Dok Sampi* (the symbol of longevity).



Bamboo

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/rowmuse/309542801/>

Bamboo

The bamboo plant is probably the most utilitarian plant in all of Laos. Two different colours are often associated with the bamboo — green and yellow.

The shade of yellow that relates to the bamboo plant is that of brown — the colour of the stems of the bamboo which are used in the production of a variety of products such as baskets, household items and even in construction materials for building homes. While the colour brown isn't significant in any religious or political way, it is the colour one will see most throughout the country in the cities and even in the smallest villages in the hills.

It is important to note that while most of us see bamboo baskets and other bamboo or rattan products as brown, they all do initially start out green. Green stems of bamboo plants are harvested and then split into long strips. Bamboo can only be easily cut and shaped while it is green as it is most pliable then. (Basketry, 2011)



Traditional Lao Basket

Photo: Kelvin Wee

After the bamboo strips are put together to form whatever they are intended to be — baskets, carrying backpacks, storage baskets, serving trays, etc. — they are hung high in the rafters of the village homes to be cured by the smoke from the hearth before they can actually be used. On the village level, this period can last up to a year during after which the bamboo strips take on a warm, light brown tone. (Basketry, 2011)

Bamboo reeds are also used to make the Lao national musical instrument known as the khene (or “better” in English). While many may be familiar with the khene from their visits to Thailand, it actually originated in Laos. Legend has it that the khene was invented by a woman who loved to mimic the calls of birds in the forest very long ago. It made its way to Thailand when Lao people brought it with them as they moved across the borders.

“In the 14th century the territory of LANXANG (old name for Laos) on the right bank of the Mekong River extended to the present province of Khorat or Nakhornrajasima in Thailand. Wars between the two neighbouring countries resulted in the deportation of many Lao people living on the left bank of the Mekong River by the Thai to populate the right bank and to use as their labourers. The Lao deported to Siam, thus, took along with them their rich culture and musical traditions. Many were eventually taken further south to central Thailand by Thai authorities. Wherever they went, the Lao were able to preserve their love for the Khene.” (Phraxayavong, n.d.)

In addition to serving as a source of raw material for basketry and construction, bamboo is also a source of food for many Lao. The shoots of bamboo plants are popular among many Asians cultures and the Lao are no exception.

The other colour connected with bamboo is green — more particularly the lighter shade of green similar to those of young bamboo leaves. The influence of “baby bamboo green” on contemporary design can be seen on many corporate logos in Laos.



Left: Food wrapped and cooked in banana leaves.

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/autanex/311093073/>

Right: Banana leaves are wrapped and flowers are added as offerings at Buddhist temples.

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/28705377@N04/4354358881/>



Banana

In addition to being an obvious source of food for the Lao, the banana plant also plays a significant role in the every day lives of the people in Laos.

The green banana leaves are most visibly used in conjunction with food — both serving and cooking of a variety of traditionally Lao dishes. A large variety of dishes from sticky rice, meats and fish are cooked wrapped in or along with banana leaves resulting in a sweet, fragrant aromatic dish that is simply irresistible. In addition to cooking, banana leaves are also often used to line the wicker trays that the Lao use to serve their dishes in.



Banana leaves are very important in the lives of village folks and great care is taken while harvest and cleaning it for use.

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/neilbanas/6980601101/>

Green banana leaves are also very integral to the worship and rituals practiced by the Lao. They are used to form the structure of marigold pyramids or *mak beng* that worshippers often offer at Buddhist temples. The leaves are intricately folded to form the foundation of the pyramid that stems of marigold flowers are inserted. Similarly, banana leaves are also used to form the main foundation in the *pha khuan* that are so central to *baci* ceremonies.

At the end of Buddhist Lent, the Lao celebrate *Loy Katong* (similar to the Thai) with the *Lai Heua Fai* Festival. There are three parts to this festival — *heua fai* (fire boats), *katong* (banana-leaf floats), and lanterns. The *katongs* are floats made of banana leaves that are woven together, filled with fruits, flowers, incense and candles, that are sent adrift down the Mekong River. Each *katong* also has flags on them bearing the name of one's ancestors, and a list of worries that one has in life.

"It is believed that when you place the katong in the water, the spirits of the ancestors whose names are on the flags will be called to the river, cleansing away the troubles and worries, bad luck, disease, and bad deeds. People are to let these katong float downriver and in no circumstance should they retrieve them; doing so will pass the burdens onto the retriever. In Lao, 'loy' also means to float, hence 'Loy Katong'. This aspect of the festival is perhaps the most celebrated in much of Southeast Asia." (Loy Katong, 2012)

The uses of the banana plant doesn't stop there. Another aspect of the celebration of Buddhist lent are the rafts or *heu fai* themselves.

"Heu Fai are rafts made by tying banana stocks together. They are made into many shapes and sizes. Some can be as long as 30 feet and as wide as 15 feet. They are decorated with dozens or hundreds of candles and lanterns. Each village along the Mekhong river makes one raft, which it enters into a competition on the last night of lent. The rafts are judged on creativity. In Lao, 'lai' means to float, hence 'Lai Heu Fai'." (Loy Katong, 2012)



Sticky rice can be black or white. (left) Traditionally, the Lao cook sticky rice in baskets that sit over a vessel of water.

Photo: Marc Roa Tobias



Sticky Rice / *Khao Neow*

Rice is the staple food for most, if not all, Asians. While most Asians consume irrigated rice, the Lao mostly consume wet rice. Sticky or glutinous rice has been cultivated in mainland Southeast Asia for over 4,000 years. Researchers believe that farmers grew sticky rice because it was either more suited for local growing conditions and / or because the farmers liked its taste and / or chewy nature. Many Lao will dispute that and say they prefer sticky rice because it takes longer to digest than “white” rice and keeps them full longer. (Ives, 2011)

Interestingly, glutinous rice was given its name because of its sticky nature and not because it contains gluten. In fact, it contains no dietary gluten and is safe for use in gluten-free diets. It is different from other strains of rice in that it contains almost no amylose and high amounts of amylopectin, which is what makes it sticky.

The Lao eat sticky rice both milled and unmilled. Milled sticky rice (with the bran removed) is white in colour whereas unmilled sticky rice has a purple or black colour when cooked. They are all three distinct and different strains of sticky rice and they account for 70 percent of all the rice grown in Laos. (Glutinous Rice, 2012)

How important is sticky rice to the people of Laos? It’s been said you can tell how Lao a person is by the kind of rice he chooses...if he chooses sticky rice over white rice — he’s more likely to be Lao.



Elephants were important for their strength and intelligence to the Lao Kingdom. This image from Luang Prabang shows elephants heading to war.

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/egui/238992003/>

ANIMALS – REAL AND MYTHOLOGICAL

Elephant

The elephant is symbolically significant to Laos on both the religious and national levels. As a nation, Laos was originally founded as Lan Xang, or the land of million elephants, hence the appearance of elephants on the royal crest of the Luang Prabang kingdom. (See section on History above)

According to Asian Elephant conservation group ElefantAsia Programme Manager Gilles Maurer:

“Given the diverse historical associations with elephants it is not surprising that these animals are cultural icons in contemporary Laos but not in a clear or uncontested manner... Elephants are inextricably associated with varied political meanings that allow interpretations of these animals to be used to demonstrate, legitimise and question the given social order. The social potency of elephants is ensured in contemporary Laos by their ambiguity and malleability to local contexts.”

In the rural areas beyond the reach of historic royal influence, elephants are the largest animals in the forest and implied strength and danger. The ability to domesticate the elephant, however, was symbolic of the human effort to continuously domesticate the paa or forest. (Maurer, 2008)

This respect for the elephant was translated into the weaving of clothing and basketry. Motifs of the elephant appeared in weaving patterns of the tribes that revered the beast, often in the more expensive and / or difficult to obtain

metallic threads. The elephant motif also appeared extensively in the cloths used by shamans in these tribes.

On the religious level, however, the predominant Buddhist culture has an strong affinity for the elephant because of its connection with Buddha. It is believed that Buddha fasted for a long time in his quest to achieve nirvana and this left him very weak. To help him break his fast gently, a monkey appeared and brought him some honey while an elephant gave him a bamboo flask filled with water. (Duffilot, 2010)

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the elephant appears on many of the murals painted on walls of Buddhist temples in Laos.

Left: White elephant in Vientiane

Photo: <http://nkpcommandos.com/>

Right: Three-headed white elephant statue

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/quitepeculiar/65338185/>



White Elephant / *Xang Peuak*

Unlike what its name implies, the white elephant is neither white nor an albino elephant. White elephants are born grey like all other elephants and their skin begins to turn a pinkish white around the eyes. There is no scientific explanation for the change of colouration of these pachyderms. There are seven characteristics of a “real” white elephant — the skin around both eyes turn white, followed by the skin on the back. They also have white gums and nails, and the hair on their tails will turn white. Finally, in the males, the penis will turn white which elevates it to *Xang Sangkham* or “important elephant.”

White elephants were highly prized by the royals in ancient Southeast Asian kingdoms. The prestige and influence of the king was determined by the number of white elephants he owned and more than one war was fought over them.

White elephants seemed to “disappear” in Laos when the last Lao King Savang Vatthana abdicated in 1975. It is unknown where they went or what happened to them, but the last surviving white elephant was rumoured to be a female ... hence making her less than “perfect.”

In 1995, one elephant emerged in Laos bearing all the signs making him worthy of the title *Xang Sangkham*. Chaya Mongkhul is the most auspicious and prestigious elephant in Laos today and lives in the Vientiane Zoo along with two “ordinary” female companions. (Winter, 2005)

It is believed that the reverence for the white elephant in the region is based on the Buddhist belief that a white elephant presented itself with a lotus flower to the mother of Buddha in a dream, which was a sign to her that she had conceived a son.



Left: A Naga in green and gold guarding the entrance of Wat Ong Teu in Vientiane.

Photo: Marc Roa Tobias



Right: Golden Naga at Wat Haysoke

Photo: Kelvin Wee

Naga or Water Serpent

The naga is a mystical serpentine creature that holds a special place in the folklore and daily lives of the Lao people, particularly those who inhabit the areas around the Mekong River. Its significance among the Buddhist can be traced back to the story told about the time Buddha was meditating in Bohd Gaya. According to the account, it rained for a week and water levels rose, when the seven-headed serpent named Mucalinda coiled itself below the Buddha forming a seat and covered his body with its seven heads to help keep him dry.

At most temples in Laos, naga is either golden or green and are seen guarding the stairs that lead to the entrance of the wats in its single-headed and multi-headed form. Golden nagas also reach towards the heavens forming the highest points of the multi-tiered roofs of many temples. The Buddhist belief in nagas is so strong that many Lao believe that at the end of Buddhist Lent, naga fireballs will rise from the river.

Nagas aren't only revered by the Buddhists in Laos. The ancient Lao believed that nagas lived in the stretch of the Mekong River that flows through the country and was the protector of the Vientiane, and by extension the rest of the Lao state. Many Lao people also believed that in order to ensure a safe journey across the river, they must offer sacrifices to the naga to ensure its protection.

METALS

Being a landlocked, cash-poor nation, Laos has limited access to precious metals that are not readily mined internally. The metals that are available within the nation are therefore valued very highly by the people.



Left: Silver Hmong Necklace

Photo: Marc Roa Tobias

Silver

Silver is both an important metal and colour to the Lao. It is a symbol of wealth, social status and success, and is worn extensively throughout the country by almost all tribes. Historically, silver has been mined and refined in Laos for centuries and tribal communities have used silver as a form of currency, dowry and symbol of their status and wealth. Even today, some hill tribes continue to trade with silver bars and balls, reaffirming its value and importance.

Silver is also a very important colour for the Lao, especially the women. While most Lao women will own jewellery made of pure silver, she will never wear it on a daily basis. Instead the real silver jewellery is safely stored away and replicas are made out of less precious silver coloured metals. These are the accessories that women in the hills and even in the cities will wear as they venture out to work on a daily basis.

Silver is not just used by in jewellery. The khan (literally translated to silver stem bowl in English) is an ornately crafted vessel used by the Lao in many rituals and ceremonies. Originally made of silver, these are now also available in less expensive silver-coloured metals. Similar to the khan is the oh tum, a silver bowl without the stem. The khan is often used as the base of the pha khuan in baci ceremonies.

Gold

Like silver, gold is also mined in Laos but in smaller quantities. As a metal, it is also valued for its rarity and signified the wealth and social status, and was available mostly to the elite. Gold was also not traditionally available to or popular with the Hill Tribes because it was traditionally difficult to refine. Modern refining methods have made gold easier to purify, and it has grown in popularity among the elite in urban communities.

While the popularity of gold as a metal has grown in recent times, it has been a colour of choice in the Buddhist community for centuries. It is literally impossible to travel throughout Laos and find a temple without some gold in, on or around it. (see section on Wat below) In many traditionally designed Lao buildings, the peaks of the roof are often also capped with golden nagas and many Lao homes and business feature spirit houses that are painted gold. Gold is also an important colour and metal in Lao weddings. (see section on Weddings below)



Left: Gold is very important especially at Lao weddings

Photo: KouKou

Recycled Metals

With such limited access to external sources of metals, the Lao have learned to be very creative by recycling all semi-precious and precious metals they can get a hold of. In modern times, the most commonly recycled metal has become aluminium that Lao recycle from bomb casings that were dropped by the Americans during their war against Vietnam.

Laos was the most bombed nation in history during the American war against Vietnam. Bomb casings that held the cluster bombs littered the nation are now collected and recycled. The recycled aluminium is made into replica jewellery and eating utensils and sold to tourists to help educate them about the violent past as well as offer them a keepsake at a fraction of the cost of silver. The money earned from the sale of these crafts help support the people with healthcare, education and community development.

rites of passage / rituals

Rituals and rites of passage are important to people throughout Asia. Each country has its own sets of rituals that people observe for different auspicious occasions. To the Lao, weddings and funerals are both important events in their lives — both also involve the baci ceremony that is central to almost every traditional Lao event. (It is important to note, however, that the following are observations of how the ethnic Lao people mark these life events.) Most other tribes have their own practices and rites that can differ greatly and are not covered here.



The Lao wedding is steep in tradition that predates Buddhism

Photo: KouKou

Weddings

The wedding is one of the most important and colourful events in the lives of the Lao people. A traditional wedding in Laos accompanied by a number of customary practices that the bride, groom, their families and friends all partake in. Colours that are symbolically significant are carefully observed although this may be done subconsciously. There are three colours that tend to stand out at a traditional Lao wedding — gold / yellow, white and green. In this section, we will explore the colours related to the costuming of the bride and groom in traditional weddings — gold. (white and green will be covered in the next section on the baci ceremony)



Elaborate costuming is a key feature of the traditional Lao wedding

Photo: KouKou

Gold implies wealth and good fortune. The traditional wedding is preceded with the negotiation of the bride-price or *kha dong* which often include the exchange of money, some gold and / or other items of value. The bride price is symbolic, and represents the token that the groom will pay the parents of the bride for the breast milk she consumed as a baby. (Lao Wedding, 2012)

Following this, a series of events take place at the bride-to-be's house in preparation for the actually day of the wedding.

*"The night before the Laos wedding takes place, an informal ceremony is held at the bride-to-be's home, and sometimes the groom holds the same ceremony at his place as well. This is call an *oun dong* (wedding or marriage warming) and it only involves close friends and relatives who come to help with wedding preparations as well as to eat and drink. The things to prepare include *pha khuan* (handmade marigold pyramid made of banana leaves), food for the big day and the new couple's bedroom. In this room tradition demands the bed must be made by the mother of the bride or an older female who has a good family (with a good husband and good children and who is not divorced, or a widow)." (Lao Wedding, 2012)*

On the day of the wedding itself, the bride will be dressed in the finest Lao silk *sinh* and a silk blouse. Both items of clothing will have embellishments of gold on them. Her hair will be done up and wrapped in gold and her outfit will be completed by a gold necklace, earrings, bracelets and a bell.

The groom will also traditionally be dressed up and will wear a white or light coloured silk shirt, often with some gold trim on it, and a silk *salong* (traditional Lao baggy trousers). Depending on how much the family can afford, the groom may also have gold chains that he wears over his silk shirt. It isn't unusual to see the groom in regular trousers these days as many men are no longer familiar with the traditional *salong* and find them uncomfortable.

It is visibly evident that gold is highly significant at traditional Lao weddings. This is because on the day of the wedding, the bride and groom are the most important people for the day and are treated almost like they are royalty for the day. Families that cannot afford to purchase all the gold they would like to help make the bride feel like the queen for the day will do whatever they can to rent the desired accoutrements to complete her look.

Another important ritual in a traditional Lao wedding is the *baci* ceremony or *sou khuan*. (see section on *Baci / Sou Khuan* below)

Baci / Sou Khuan

The *Baci* ceremony is one of the most symbolic rituals performed at a variety of events, festivities and celebrations throughout the year. While most of the Lao a Buddhist, the *baci* ceremony dates back beyond the arrival of Buddhism in Laos and has some of its roots based in ancient spiritual and animistic worship and beliefs. (Khampradith, 2012)

*"Lao people believe that a human being is a union of thirty-two organs, each has a spirit or *khuan* (Lao word for spirit) to protect them. These spirits often wander outside the body causing unbalance of the soul which might lead to an illness. The tying of the white string represents tying of the 32 spirits to the body putting them back in harmony as well as bringing good luck and prosperity.*

*The *baci* ceremony is held on many different occasions or events through out the year. It can be held any day of the week though it has to be on a good day in the lunar calendar. These good days are known to elders, senior monks, or ex-monks. The ceremony can be held for both sad times and happy times. Some people might find it a little strange that there is a ceremony for sad occasions.*

The baci ceremony is held for happy occasions like weddings, welcoming guests, Lao New Year, house warmings, homecomings and other such occasions. A mother and her new born baby are given a baci, after the mother has recovered, to welcome the baby as well as to call back the spirits of the mother's that might be wandering away through the child bearing.

The ceremony is also held to raise spirits when someone is weak (physically and spiritually). After someone in the family has passed away a baci ceremony is held as it is believed to enhance the spirits and reinforce the harmony of the rest of family members after having been through sad times.” (Khampradith, 2012)

Elder lady blessing the baci, cutting it and then tying it to the wrist of the person to be blessed. The Baci ceremony dates back centuries in Laos.

Photo: Marc Roa Tobias



Another important feature of the baci ceremony is the *pha khuan* or marigold pyramid that is used as a centrepiece for the ceremony. The *pha khuan* is traditionally prepared by the women of the family, however, they can often be purchased ready-made in most cities in modern times.

“The pha khuan consists of one elegant pyramid or castle looking arrangement of rolled and folded banana leaves which is called maak beng. A pen-sized candle is tied on a stick which is then stuck into the pointed top of the maak beng. The maak beng is then placed on a big round tray or bowl, often in silver. To make it stable, rice is put on the tray around the base of the maak beng.

Baci ceremonies for different occasions use different size of maak beng. For weddings, usually two big 11-sprouted maak bengs are used, and 9 or 7-sprouted ones are used for baci for other occasions such as Lao New Year and welcoming honored guests.” (Baci Preparation, 2012)

The *pha khuan*, when completed, will bear the colours green, white and orange / gold on it. Banana leaves that are carefully folded and crafted to form the green pyramid base and the maak beng while the dok daoheung traditionally used as decoration and gives it the touch of gold or orange.

Baci strings are tied onto sticks and inserted into the *maak beng*, along with a few longer white threads to be tied onto the wrists of the ones to be blessed. Once complete, the *pha khuan* is placed in the centre of the room on a white piece of cloth. They are now ready for the ceremony.

Traditional baci strings have always been white as it symbolises purity and peacefulness. In modern times, colourful strings are used in events for non-Lao guests and tourists.

It is customary for women to wear white at funerals in Laos.

Photo: Jeffrey Suttlemyre



Funerals

The colour of significance at a traditional Lao funeral is white. Unlike in Western funerals, the Buddhist funeral isn't seen as a mournful or devastating occasion. Instead of breaking down and wailing dramatically, most of the people attending try to focus their energies on gaining merit for both themselves and the deceased.

During the funeral period, the family members are expected to wear white although some men do wear dark trousers. Women related to the deceased, on the other hand, usually wear all white which is symbolic of them turning "temporary nuns" to help earn merit for the deceased. Other visitors should wear black or darker clothing.

While it may not be actively practiced today, women were historically segregated from men and are not allowed to look them in the eye or speak to them during the wake. Furthermore, women are not allowed to communicate directly with monks throughout the funeral. Throughout the wake, monks will chant prayers. It is also expected that a women will not look directly at a monk in the eyes while he is chanting. Additionally, women who are pregnant and or menstruating are not allowed to attend the wake or funeral for prevent the spirit from entering the body of the unborn. The funeral ends with the cremation of the deceased in an open pyre, similar to one that Buddha himself was created in 477 B.C. The ashes of he cremated are kept in an urn and 100 days after the cremation, the most favoured possessions of the deceased are also burned so that they can enjoy them in the next life. (In Buddhist funeral, spirit of the deceased is elevated, 2001)



Petitioners leading a funeral procession in Laos

Photo: Jeffrey Suttlemyre

Petitioner

It is customary for Buddhist men to enter the monastery at least once in their life. Buddhist men in Laos do this to earn merit, either for themselves or for their loved ones. It is believed that entering the monastery is one way of achieving enlightenment.

Before they can become full monks, they must first go through a phase during which they are called petitioners. During this stage, the petitioner wears white robes and will renounce all worldly and materialistic desires. His head and face are shaved, he is asked a series of questions pertaining to his faith and upon consent of the elder monks, is allowed to enter the monastery.

Only upon completing this is he allowed to don the saffron robes that are worn by full monks.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

With about 60 percent of the Lao population being Buddhists, it is no wonder Buddhist temples or wats are found in large numbers throughout the built up areas of the country. The temples in Laos feature beautifully and ornately designed murals on their walls — both inside and out. The number of Buddhist temples found in Laos alone implies that the Lao are very spiritual and devoted to their faith.



Pha That Luang, or the Golden Temple, is one of the most well know Buddhist temples in Laos.

Photo: Marc Roa Tobias

Buddhist Temples / Wat

Buddhist temples or *wat* can be seen throughout Laos, and in all areas of cities. The Lao are very spiritual by nature and take great pride in their places of worship, as such a range of temples from the modest to the supremely extravagant can be found.

Two colours that are seen on just about every *wat* are gold and red. The gold is always brilliant, glimmering gold but the red is a darker, earthy red similar to the clay that's swept down the Mekong River during the rainy season. No expense is ever spared to get the architecture and / or colour right.



Wat Xieng Thong, Luang Prabang

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/mikecogh/3166535253/>

Wat Impeng, Vientiane

Photo: Kelvin Wee





Left: A seven headed Naga at Wat Chantha, Vientiane.

Right: Guard at the entrance of a Wat in Vientiane.

Photo: Kelvin Wee



The gold seen on Buddhist temples bright, radiant and awe inspiring. The colour gold is used lavishly and generously throughout the compound that the temples are found on. From the entrances to the stone walls, the stairs leading to elaborately carved gold doors. From pillars to roofs to the mystical naga forming the highest peaks of the temples. From the gold-leafed Buddha statues to the saffron-golden robes worn by his devotees. Gold is everywhere in, on and around the Buddhist temples in Laos.

To the laymen, gold symbolises wealth but to the Buddhist, gold is the personification of their devotion and reverence of their faith.

Many Buddhist temples also have dark, earthy red walls. While the significance of this colour is not understood, we plan on spending some time exploring the possible connection to the colour of the Mekong River during the rainy season which turns a deep red from the clay being eroded and washed downstream. An alternative explanation is the possible connection to the kind of stone that was used in the construction — limestone. It is possible that the Lao also used reddish hued limestone similar to the ones used in Angkor Wat.



Top: The famous Vientiane Night Market featuring a wide variety of contemporary designs and crafts.

Photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/simon-and-asia/3907513890/>

CONTEMPORARY PRODUCTS

As the world begins to discover the secret world of traditional Lao arts and crafts, fascination with the authentic will give way to enchantment for innovative, contemporary designs that are influenced by mastery of the ancient artisans. In 2012, fascination with the authentic is strong but the world has begun embracing the quality of the workmanship that goes into producing a range of contemporary arts and crafts that are now being exported from Laos to all corners of the world.

Contemporary Textile Products

The popularity of traditional Lao silks and cottons has had a significant impact on the design of contemporary products in Laos. Many charitable organisations are sprouting up in the cities and have adopted the mission of providing education and healthcare to tribal communities through the sale of items produced by individuals within those communities.

Below: Contemporary Cotton products at Tong Laha Sihh

Photo: Kelvin Wee





Left, Hmong Story Cloth and contemporary interpretations of products by Hmong artisans.

Photo: Kelvin Wee

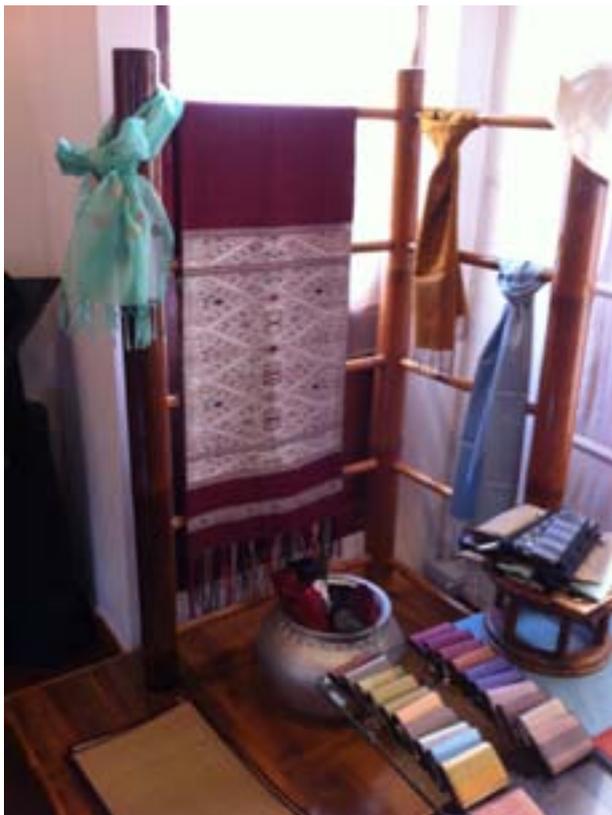


VivnCaug, for example, works with Hmong women and manages to provide services to their clients through the sale of ipad cases and cushions made from the elaborately embroidered Green Hmong women's dresses made of hemp. (Yang, personal communication, 12 March, 2012)

Saoban is a retail store that works very closely with craftsmen and women in different tribal communities and features their work in the store. Products range from ipad and laptop cases made from traditionally woven and dyed fabrics, women's clothing and accessories such as scarves and handbags made from hand-woven cotton dyed in natural dyes, baskets and silver jewellery produced by tribal metal smiths. While it may not be a non-profit charitable organisations, Saoban (which in Lao means worker) Managing Director Shui-meng Ng, Saoban's products are all eco-friendly and produced on the artisan level. (Personal communication, 10 March, 2012)

Similarly, Tong Laha Sinh is a retail outlet with several stores that features indigo dyed products produced on the artisan level. Founded and developed by Professor Bounthong Nhotmanhkhong, a professor of psychology, artist and avid photographer, Tong Laha Sinh has grown remarkably to even begin exporting its products to well-known Japanese lifestyle stores and boutiques. (Personal communication, 12 March, 2012)

Another local producer that has managed to reach beyond the borders of Laos is Pheng Mai Gallery, producer of fine silks that has fast become popular among the Japanese elite. Co-founder and Head of Design Production and Marketing of the Pheng Mai Gallery Viengkham Nanthavongdouangsy produces both traditional and contemporary designs in silk on the looms situated on the grounds of the gallery. She said they also work with women do not have the luxury of leaving home by providing them with looms to weave between their household and child-raising obligations. All the craftsmen and women who work



Contemporary silk products available Phaeng Mai Gallery, Vientiane.

Photo: Kelvin Wee

on products for the Pheng Mai Gallery are trained the same way Nanthavongdouangsy was trained by her mother and grandmother, and they all use the same methods, follow the same superstitions and produce the same quality of products that her family has been well-known for in Laos. (Personal communication, 13 March, 2012)



Recycled Bombware products sold at the Night Market in Vientiane.

Photo: Kelvin Wee

Bombware / Contemporary Adaptations of Tribal Jewellery

Asian tribal jewellery has taken the world by storm. Unfortunately, many countries in the Indochinese region do not have limitless supplies of bronze, brass, silver or gold and have to learn to be innovative with materials they use to try to meet this demand for the uniquely crafted accessories. Also, as the cost of precious and semi-precious metals continues to rise, many foreign admirers find they cannot afford the authentic and have learned to opt for lower-costing replicas instead.

As indicated above in the section on aluminium, Lao artisans have access to aluminium with which they can use to craft replicas of authentic-looking jewellery. With the support of non-profit organisations, these artisans have learned to recycle aluminium from the bomb casings that were dropped throughout Laos during the Secret War against the Americans.

Other organisations have also done their share to help ensure the demand for Lao tribal-style jewellery doesn't deplete the nation of its limited silver resources by sharing their knowledge of crafting with 0% silver.

CONCLUSION

Like most of its Southeast Asian neighbours, Laos is not easily defined by any single colour. While certain colours may prove more significant for natural or cultural reasons, the population in Laos is too diverse to be bottled into singular shade or hue.

And like its neighbours, Laos is better described as a land that embraces a rainbow of colours. It's the combination of colours that tell the story of the people, the culture, the traditions and the lives of the Lao.

It is important to note, however, that we were only able to chip on the tip of the iceberg with this project. Due to the short time available (less than 7 months in all) to conduct the research, it is clear that the natural selection of colours in Laos is heavily influenced by nature and other cultural factors. This publication is therefore intended as a jumping point for other researchers who are interested in further exploring the significance of nature and culture on the choice of colours in Laos.

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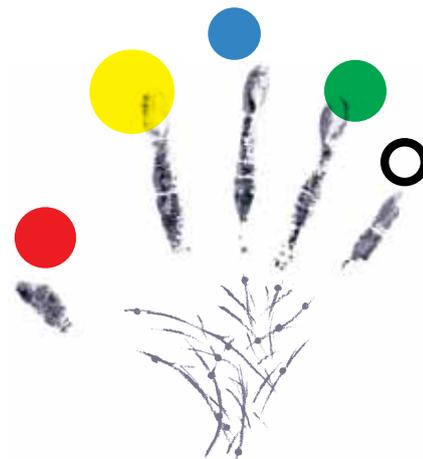
Research Report 2013



Malaysia

the
**Colours
of Asia**
Red Yellow Blue Green Black & White
紅黃藍綠黑與白

**亞洲
色彩**



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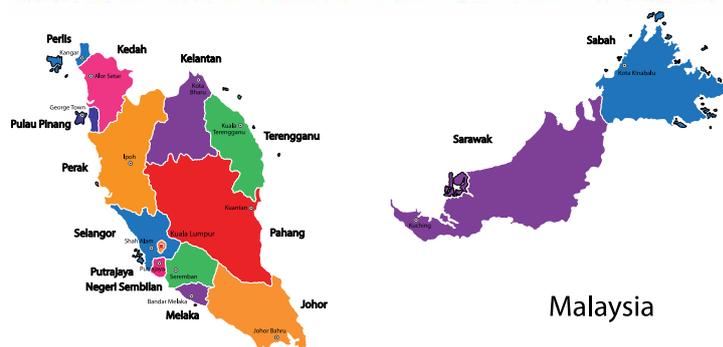
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1.0 The Malays, Origins

This research paper focuses on the colour perceptions and preferences of the Malay people of Peninsula Malaysia. Although some customs and traditions among the Malay community vary across the country, the paper presents a general overview with several sections focusing on colours specific to individual states, particularly, the East Coast states of Pahang and Kelantan. The latter is often referred to as “the Cradle of Malay Culture”.



Map: <http://www.mapcruzin.com/free-malaysia-maps.htm>



Malays (and related indigenous groups) comprise 67.4% of the current population of 28.3 million; with Chinese 24.6%, Indian 7.3%, and others 0.7%. Retrieved from <http://www.statistics.gov.my>

The earliest foreign reference of the descriptor “Malay” comes from the Sanskrit word Malayadvipa. It refers to a mysterious eastern archipelago city that was full of silver and gold. There are several mentions of the word “Melayu” in early Chinese transcripts as well.

There are many theories regarding the origin of the Malays. One is that Malays originated in Yunnan, China. They were seafaring people who first settled in coastal Borneo. They then expanded into Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula, hence the cultural affinities between Indonesia and Malaysia.

The Malays played a major role in the development of the great empires of Melaka (Malacca) and Johor. Melaka served as an international port for both East and West including South East Asia, China, India, the Middle East and Europe during 15th and 16th centuries. It has been recorded that 84 languages and dialects were spoken in the bazaars of Melaka. Present day Malays are descendants of the seafaring and tribal proto-Malays mixed with modern Indian, Thai, Arab and Chinese blood.

Retrieved from http://library.thinkquest.org/C001252F/intro/history/origins_of_the_malays.htm

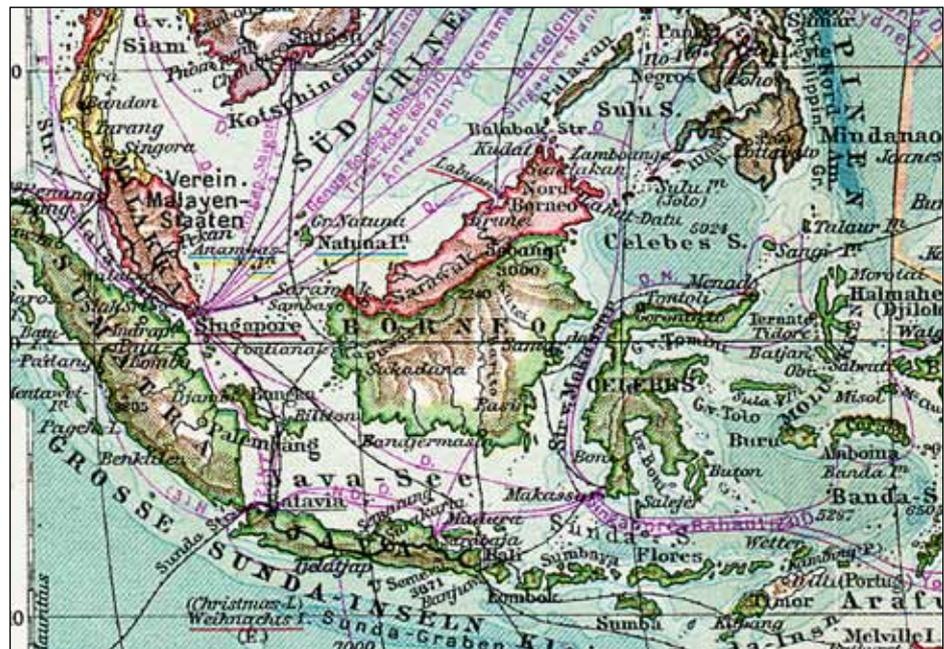
1.1 The Malay World

There are two strong factors which define the Malay world. One is geography and the other is the shared language.

Geographically, the Malay world is situated in the Southeast Asia region. It covers the countries of Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and southern Cambodia.

'An area stretching from Sumatra in the west to the Spice Islands in the east, and from the island of Java in the south to the plains of Kampuchea in the Indo-Chinese Peninsula in the north, is identified as the Malay world.'

(Osman, 1997).



Detail of map from *Meyers Konversations-Lexikon*, Volume 7, Leipzig, Germany, 1910

Bocman1973 / Shutterstock.com

This region consists of a collection of islands and is also known as 'Nusantara' or the world of islands.

Before the coming of Islam around 12th Century AD, the Nusantara region was known as 'Greater India', based on archeological and architectural evidence. Malay civilization then was characterised by Hindu and Buddhist influences.

Hindu temples and Buddhist stupas and figurines are the material evidence of Indian influence over the region, and its influence over language and social structure had left indelible marks.

Perhaps one of the more important aspects of these two earlier influences on Malay culture was the belief in *semangat* (spirit or vital force) which exists in both men and things. (Winstedt: 1961). This is likely the origin of the Malay's strong belief in spirits that may inhabit particular trees and rivers.

However, this changed drastically when Muslim traders set foot in the region and spread the teachings of Islam. This slowly changed life in Malay traditional society as they adopted the Islamic way of life. There are still traces of Hindu influences, most notable in the Malay wedding rituals and the belief in *semangat* and *tok bomoh* (witch doctor) is prevalent within Malay society even today.

Another aspect that reinforces the notion of Malay is the language. Closest to the Malay language would be the Indonesian language.

During the 16th century, there was significant communication between the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and English with Malay local rulers. Needless to say, this further strengthens the Malay language as letters between traders and rulers were exchanged. However, the inevitable colonisation of these areas by various colonial powers replaced the Malay language all together.

(Osman, 1997).

Malays are generally the descendants of the people of Nusantara sharing Islamic beliefs and practice similar cultural traditions.

2.0 Royal and Malay Society

Malay society holds social hierarchy, status or class with particular regard. Colour is an important signifier of status in Malay culture. The four colours that denote status in Malay society are **yellow, white, gold and silver**.

- **Yellow:** royal family, royalty, aristocracy
- **White:** purity, innocence, sacred, holy
- **Gold and Silver:** richness, luxury, extravagance, high-class living

Billboard commemorating the installation of the new *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* (Supreme Ruler or King), Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin, on 11 April 2012.

Photo: William Harald-Wong



The royal throne of the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* and his consort in *Balairong Seri* (Throne Room) at the Istana Negara (National Palace), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Photo: Gwoeii / Shutterstock.com



Yellow

In early Malay monarchy, one of the earliest code of conduct established by the Malay rulers was the use of yellow to set apart royalty from the commoners. As described here in the *Malay Annals*, yellow symbolises royalty and is reserved for royal usage.

“He (Sultan Muhammed Shah) was the first who prohibited the wearing of yellow clothes, in public, not even a handkerchief of that colour, nor curtains, nor hangings, nor large pillow-cases, nor coverlets, nor any envelope of any bundle, nor the cloth lining of a house, excepting only the waist cloth, the coat and the turban.”

(Leyden,1821).

“Umbrellas are of different kinds, as green, blue, or red; the highest ranks requiring the **yellow** and **white** umbrella ; the yellow umbrella being that which pertains to the descendants of princes and chief men ; the brown, the red, and green umbrellas belonging to the *sedasidas*, *bantaras* and *hulu-balangs* in general; but the **dark blue** umbrella is appropriated to the candidates for honours.”

(Leyden,1821).

A yellow umbrella is held respectfully over the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong*, Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin, during the celebration of *Colour of 1Malaysia* on 21 May 2011 in Kuala Lumpur.

White used to take precedence over yellow to represent royalty of the highest rank but the current preference is yellow.

Male members of royalty, dignitaries and guests wear colourful batik shirts which are considered formal wear in the country.

Photo: Ali Mufti / Shutterstock.com



Yellow is used as a device, a marker and a form of identification between the royal family and the public. All royal regalia are in yellow, signifying status, royalty, monarchy and aristocracy. The second excerpt also details how different colours are ascribed to different positions in the royal court.



The 100-year old Royal Mausoleum of Sultan Abdul Samad, the fourth ruler of the Malaysian state of Selangor, located at the old royal town of Jugra, Selangor, Malaysia.

Photo: shariffc / 123RF Stock Photo

White

White takes precedence over yellow when the royal rank is at the highest position where it is almost unreachable, and when it is seen as sacred and holy. This can be seen in the two excerpts below. In the first, white is the colour that separates the raja (king) from the rest of the royal family. In the second, white is ascribed to the divine attributes of a Malay king, in the form of his 'white blood', where it symbolises purity, sacredness, innocence and perfection.

"The white umbrella, which is superior to the yellow one, because it is seen conspicuous at a greater distance, was also confined to the Raja's person, while the yellow umbrella was confined to his family."

"I may add that royal blood is supposed by many Malays to be white, and this is the pivot on which the plot of not a few Malay folk-tales is made to turn."

(Leyden,1821).



In Malay weddings where the groom and the bride are considered 'King and Queen for the Day', the white and yellow umbrellas are symbolic of the 'royal' treatment the couple receives on this special day. Photos: flickr/dinoz

Gold & Silver

Gold and silver appeared frequently in historical texts as colour and materials that embody the essence of luxury, opulence and richness. These range from symbols of the extent of a king's power and ability to craft greatness, to detailed description of royal regalia and clothes worn by upper class women. Some examples are cited below.

"This stone being adorned by gold and silver, was left as a monument, and the Raja said that this would be found by one of his descendants who should reduce all the rajas of the countries under the wind."

"..if the Raja of Malacca wishes for me, he must first make a flight of stairs of gold, and another of silver, from Malacca to Gunung Ledang;"

"His Majesty, and pray give him quickly information of the fact, for he has caused a throne to be made for himself, with a golden chirei, and golden slippers, and wishes to assume the sovereignty in the land of Malacca. "

(Leyden,1821).

"Her dress was that worn by all ladies of rank, and usually consisted of a silk skirt of softly blended colours reaching to the ankles and fastened at the waist by a belt with a large golden buckle. The only other garment was a satin jacket of some dark colour on which were stitched cunningly wrought designs of beaten gold. This jacket had a tight collar, and the close-fitting sleeves were fastened by a long row of jeweled buttons reaching almost from wrist to elbow; it was loose at the waist and just covered the belt. Tiny heelless shoes, embroidered with gold and silver thread, completed the attire."

(Swettenham,1895).

Red & Gold

In the classical texts, red and gold seem to be the favourite colours in fashion and style. For example:

“All four dancers were dressed alike, except that the elder girls wore white silk bodices with a red and gold handkerchief, folded cornerwise, tied under the arms and knotted in front. The points of the handkerchief hung to the middle of the back. In the case of the two younger girls the entire dress was of one material.”

Malay Sketches, Pg 47

Raja Maimunah’s dress

“When out of doors, the Raja Maimunah would wear a veil of darkest blue, black or white gossamer embroidered with very narrow gold ribbon, a most becoming head-dress, the product of Arabian skill. Over this, again, was held coquettishly, to conceal the face from male eyes, a scarf of rich Malay-red silk, heavy with interwoven threads of gold, while one or two more silken sarongs of varying colour and richness of material were worn over the underskirt.”

Malay Sketches, Pg 181

Characteristics of Royalty, description of the dress of an old-time Raja

“Next came his coat. It was of reddish purple velvet, thrice brilliant the luster of its surface, seven times powerful the strength of the dye; the dyer after making it sailed the world for three years, but the dye still clung to the palms of his hands.”

The Malay Magic, Pg 30



Photo: Tourism Malaysia

2.1 Malay Social Hierarchy

Due to the need to confront the surrounding natural environment for sustenance and survival, the Malays have successfully organised themselves into a mutually supporting social structure. For instance, fishermen would go off to sea for months in search of lucrative catch, leaving the wife and children for long periods of time. This would require strong family and community support to ensure his family is looked after while he is away. Often times, the entire village becomes involved in the caring of any abandoned or sick community member.

'It is hypothesised that social structural arrangement and organizations are largely associated, at least functionally, of not casually, with the ecological demands of living'.
(Kling, 1997)

There is also a strong sense of loyalty and respect to the King in traditional Malay society. This strong sense of dedication is further extended towards the religious head.

'In traditional Malay society there seems to be a preference for community intimacy rather than privacy. The community is closely knit with close social relationships. The strong community spirit is fostered by homogeneous culture of the villagers and economic activities like traditional padi planting and fishing which create highly interdependent relationships between the villagers.' (Lim, 1987)

In such a structured society, colour plays an important role to communicate a village member's social hierarchy and role within the community. It is also used to assert power and authority when needed.



The traditional Malay village environment

Photos:
flickr/photologue | usedfree
flickr/zaki razali

3.0 Natural Dyes

It can be said that colour entered Malay traditional life when natural dyes were used for Malay textiles. From this, textile artists developed greater sensitivity towards the correlation between flowers, fruits and vegetation and the colours they produced. They would explore the use of herbal plants, fruit trees and roots in the production of colour dyes or pigments. (Khoo, 1994)

Colour	Origins—local plants and vegetation
Deep Red/Maroon	Root scrapings of the Engkudu tree (<i>morinda citrifolia</i>)
Purple tones	Engkudu mixed with various concentrations of lime
Yellow	Tumeric roots
Indigo	Boiling of shoots, barks and twigs of the indigo plant in water
Green tones	Prolonged dipping in indigo water
Black	Further dipping in indigo water until fabric turns into shades of black



Batik *sarongs* with patterns and motifs inspired by nature is daily wear in the *kampung* (village).
Photo: flickr/wizan

3.1 Aesthetics of Bold Colour Combinations

Malays love bright colours—they enjoy the mixing and matching of colours when they dress. An example is provided by this description of the clothes worn by Hang Tuah, the legendary warrior of the 15th century.

...The Laksamana wore silken trousers of radiant yellow, embroidered in bright crimson at the borders, with a sash of yellow silk imprinted with a floral design, a jacket of green and bronze, and a head-dress of rainbow hues. (Hikayat Hang Tuah)

One explanation could be an appreciation of the labour intensive process of traditional colour production.

'It may take months to extract dye and coax it to be absorbed by plant or animal fibres to the desired colour. Also plants may need to be gathered at certain times of the year in order for the dyes extracted from them to be effective.' (Khoo, 1994, pg.111)

The whole process of obtaining and brewing dyes for clothes was extremely tedious and required constant labour that became part of the household chores. Families would spend few hours every day to attend to their dyes, plant and roots gathering and cloth making.

Due to the challenges of producing bright colored cloths, it became a special item reserved for special occasions. This notion further elevated bright colours to be very attractive within Malay society.

This aesthetic remained even after the proliferation of synthetic dyes where modern Malay folks can still be seen adorning brightly colored attire especially during festive occasions.



Photo: flickr/phalinn

Colours of Asia :: **Malaysia**

Photos:

Batik seller: Shamleen / Shutterstock.com

Girl on swing: nizzam / Shutterstock.com

Batik display: Tourism Malaysia



Below: “Back to my Roots” — an event *Explore Singapore 2006* at the Malay Heritage Centre in Singapore.

Malays in Singapore and Malaysia share a common heritage.

Photo: National Heritage Board, Singapore
Right: nizzam / Shutterstock.com



Multi-colour decoration in Malay culture

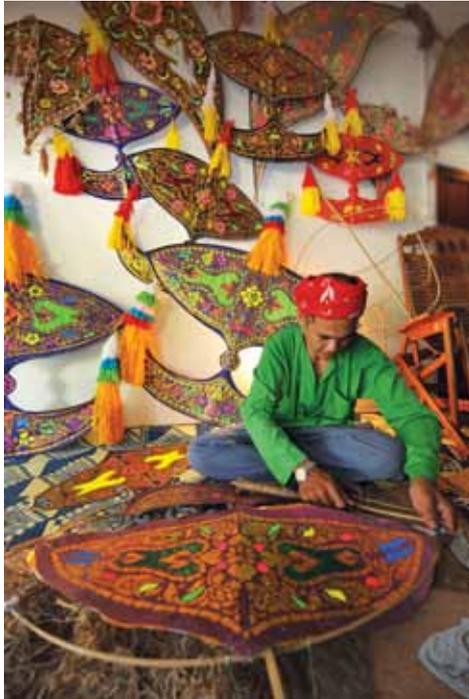
Multi-colour motifs appear on many traditional objects, be they functional, recreational, ceremonial, or ritual. Their application follows a centuries-old formula based on the punca or source (seed, flower, water, earth or spirit) and Malay cosmology.

Typical in terms of design and use of colour is the wau (Malay kite). Bright colours like red, green, yellow, black and white are used with controlled sensibility. The middle sections on the left and right sides of the wings are left empty to provide balance with the richly coloured areas that surround them. This balance is characteristic of Malay visual aesthetics.

In the fishing boat (following page), there is a balance between the lavishly decorated areas and those that are left plain.

Bold colours are more evident on the East Coast than on the West Coast of Peninsula Malaysia. The use of bold colours have changed to softer colours in this century.

Photos: Tourism Malaysia





Photos: Tourism Malaysia

A traditional dance from Muar, Johor. It is not uncommon for Malay men to wear vibrant pinks and fuschia during performances as well as during festive and formal occasions.

The colourful *Rebana ubi* drum ensembles compete with one another in post rice harvest festivals, playing interlocking rhythmic patterns

Photos: Tourism Malaysia



Many traditional Malay houses in the village, especially the older ones, are left unpainted on the exterior and interior. However certain parts of the house like ventilation panels and other panels are painted in bright hues to brighten up the dark wood interiors.

Photos: Tourism Malaysia
Wood Panel William Harald-Wong



Where the owners can afford housepaints, the houses are painted using either a palette of pastel shades or bright, vibrant colours.

Photo: Tourism Malaysia



During the 16–17 century, Malay political prisoners who opposed Dutch rule were exiled to South Africa. Today, the Cape Malay's love of contrasting colours can be seen in Bo Kaap, Cape Town, where they retain their strong sense of identity.

flickr/hope4happiness



3.2 Perception of Colours—An Overview

Malays can have different perceptions of colour depending on context and situation. One colour can carry multiple meanings.

- *Merah* (Red) signifies courage, as well as the nation's people. However in the context of emotions, red can signify anger, fury and outrage.
- *Kuning* (Yellow) is an important colour because of its association with Royalty. However since 1997 yellow has also been the rallying colour for *Bersih* (Clean), a campaign pressing for free and fair elections, which resulted in mass demonstrations.
- *Biru* (Blue) symbolises *perpaduan* (unity). It represents hardiness, bravery, strength and valor.
- *Hijau* (Green) is primarily associated with Islam, and is the dominant colour of the Malaysian landscape. Green is the colour of nature, fertility, life.
- *Hitam* (Black), according to Malay beliefs, represents the powers of evil. However, black can also be the character that changes from evil to good, representing bravery or strength.
- *Putih* (White) is the colour of Royalty and takes precedence over Yellow. It is associated with purity.
- Other significant colours for the Malay community are:
 - Purple
 - Gold
 - Multi-hued



Painted on a wall
in downtown Kuala
Lumpur

Photo: William Harald-Wong

4.0 Language

Language is an important conduit and embodiment of Malay culture, values and practices. This is especially in the form of poetry where there exists a rich and diverse literary tradition that plays an important role in containing, preserving and communicating values, beliefs and practices in the social, political, economic and religious dimensions of Malay life.

4.1 Colour Names

Many colour names were inspired by the flora and fauna of the natural environment. Some of the traditional metaphorical names are *kulit langsung* or skin of the *langsat* fruit or *kunyit kuning* (turmeric yellow) the colour of a yellowish dye produced from turmeric roots. Names like *kuning masak lemak* (yellow of a coconut milk dish) or *hijau kepala itik* (green of a duck's head) created in the environment of a traditional Malay village are still used today among Malays living in the city.

Colours, within the Malay context, falls into two main categories; *muda* (light) or *tua* (dark and rich). Below is a list of popular colour names.

Merah (Red)

Malay	Literal Translation	English (approx.)
<i>Merah tua</i>	Old red	Carmine
<i>Merah muda</i>	Young red	Light red
<i>Merah cili padi</i>	Red of chilli	Hot red
<i>Merah darah</i>	Blood red	
<i>Merah darah ikan</i>	Fish-blood red	Purplish red
<i>Merah hati</i>	Liver red	Dark purplish red
<i>Merah kesumba</i>	Red of the <i>kesumba</i> flower	Bright red
<i>Kesumba murup</i>	Fiery red of the <i>kesumba</i>	Bright red
<i>Merah jambu</i>	Red of the jambu fruit	Pink
<i>Merah lebam</i>	Red of a bruise	Purplish red
<i>Merah malar</i>	Constant / still red	
<i>Merah murup</i>	Fiery red	
<i>Merah merang</i>	Bright red	
<i>Merah marak</i>	Flaring red	
<i>Merah mawar</i>	Red of a rose	Scarlet
<i>Merah menjahang</i>	Fiery red	Crimson
<i>Merah menyala</i>	Flare red	Bright red
<i>Merah padam</i>	Fiery red (mainly used to describe angry face)	
<i>Merah dadu</i>	Red of the dice	
<i>Merah lembayung</i>	Red of water hyacinth	Crimson
<i>Merah pulasan</i>	Red of the <i>pulasan</i> fruit	Maroon
<i>Merah bunga raya</i>	Red of the hibiscus flower	
<i>Merah bunga cempaka</i>	Red of the frangipani	
<i>Merah melayu</i>	Malay red	
<i>Merah telur</i>	Egg-yolk red	
<i>Merah mawar</i>	Rose red	

Kuning (Yellow)

Malay	Literal Translation	English (approx.)
<i>Kuning tua</i>	Dark yellow	
<i>Kuning muda</i>	Young yellow	Flaxen
<i>Kuning raja</i>	Royal yellow	
<i>Kuning air</i>	Light yellow	
<i>Kuning daun</i>	Yellow of leaves	
<i>Kuning tanah liat</i>	Yellow of clay	
<i>Kuning bunga ketola</i>	Yellow of angled gourd	
<i>Kuning lemak ketam</i>	Crab fat yellow	
<i>Kuning langsung</i>	Yellow of a <i>langsat</i> fruit (Describes a skin colour, olive)	
<i>Kuning Mahir</i>	Yellow of the sun	
<i>Kuning Gading</i>	Yellow of ivory	
<i>Kuning Pinang Masak</i>	Yellow of ripe areca	
<i>Kuning Kunyit</i>	Saffron	
<i>Jingga</i>	Orange	
<i>Perang</i>	Brown	

Putih (White)

Malay	Literal Translation	English (approx.)
<i>Putih bersih</i>	Clean white	Pure white
<i>Putih lesu</i>	Weak white	
<i>Putih pucat</i>	Pale white	
<i>Putih luh</i>	More white	True white
<i>Putih melepak</i>	Powdery white (Usually used to describe fair skin)	
<i>Putih metah</i>	Very White	True white
<i>Putih sepur</i>	<i>Sepur</i> = Indonesian for 'train'	
<i>Putih umbut</i>	White of palm shoot	
<i>Putih langsung</i>	White of the <i>langsat</i> fruit	
<i>Putih kuning</i>	Yellow white	
<i>Putih puaka</i>	Ghost white	

Hitam (Black)

Malay	Literal Translation	English (approx.)
<i>Hitam birat</i>	Black of a punch mark	
<i>Hitam kelawar</i>	Black of a cave bat	
<i>Hitam legam</i>	Pitch black	
<i>Hitam jebak</i>	Trap black	
<i>Hitam jengat</i>	Incredibly black	
<i>Hitam lengit</i>	Weak black	
<i>Hitam lotong</i>	Black of a leaf monkey	
<i>Hitam kumbang</i>	Black of a beetle	
<i>Hitam usam</i>	Faded black	
<i>Hitam berkilat</i>	Shiny black	
<i>Hitam tampuk manggis</i>	Black of a mangosteen's tailbud	
<i>Hitam manis</i>	Sweet black (Usually used to describe a person's skin colour)	
<i>Hitam pekat</i>	Thick black	
<i>Hitam kerak dodol</i>	Black of burnt dodol	
<i>Hitam arang</i>	Black of charcoal	

Hijau (Green)

Malay	Literal Translation	English (approx.)
<i>Hijau tua</i>	Old green	Deep green
<i>Hijau muda</i>	Young green	Light green
<i>Hijau daun</i>	Leaf green	
<i>Hijau serindit</i>	Green of a parrot	
<i>Hijau pucuk pisang</i>	Green of banana leaf shoot	
<i>Hijau cekur manis</i>	Green of sweet cekur (a medicinal plant)	
<i>Hijau terusi</i>	Vitriol green	
<i>Hijau kepala itik</i>	Green of a duck's head	
<i>Hijau laut</i>	Sea green	

Biru (Blue)

Malay	Literal Translation	English (approx.)
<i>Biram tua</i>	Dark blue	
<i>Biram muda</i>	Pale blue	
<i>Biru manis</i>	Sweet blue	Light blue
<i>Biru laut</i>	Sea blue	
<i>Biru lebam</i>	Blue of a bruise	
<i>Biru senin</i>		
<i>Biru senam</i>	The original colour beneath	Dark Blue
<i>Biru raja</i>	Royal blue	

Ungu (Purple)

Malay	Literal Translation	English (approx.)
<i>Biji kundang</i>	Purple of the <i>kundang</i> seed	Light purple
<i>Ungu butir setar</i>	Purple of the starfruit	
<i>Ungu lembayung</i>	Purple of the water hyacinth	Deep purple

Kelabu (Grey)

Malay	Literal Translation	English (approx.)
<i>Kelabu asap</i>	Smoke grey	
<i>Kelabu abu</i>	Ash grey	
<i>Kelabu tahi anjing</i>	Grey of dog's excrement	
<i>Kelabu asap api</i>	Grey of fire smoke	

4.2 Poetry

Puisi (Malay poetry) can range from the playful (such as in the form of *pantun teka teki*) to *gurindam* (proverbial verses) to *perbilangn adat perpatih*, the embodiment of cultural rules and regulations in the state of Negri Sembilan and area of Alor Gajah, Melaka.

It is only when we consider the Malay language that we fully realise the important role of colours in the Malay community.

Colours often feature in Malay poetry in the form of symbolism, used in ways to denote positive or negative values by drawing connections between thoughts and emotions, reason and intuition, and between what is human and what is in nature. Colours often act as a literary device to evoke emotive responses from the readers by bringing to mind sayings, metaphors, analogies or aspects of the environment/natural world.

Colours that often appear in Malay poetry are colours associated with moral/ethical values, emotions, nature, etc. and the way they are interlinked will also provide a more layered reading into the meaning of the *puisi* (poem).

Things in nature have particular values ascribed to them – whether good or bad, positive or negative. Colours are often used to allude to these values and the use of a particular colour (e.g. black or white) can stand in for the essential meaning of the poem, proverb or lore.

Examples of poems from 2 national laureates, Usman Awang & A Samad Said.

From *Salji Hitam* (Black Snow) by Usman Awang, 1970

[sic]	[sic]
<i>dedaunan pine</i>	pine leaf
<i>di remang bulan merah</i>	amidst the fine hairs of a red moon
<i>berjajar</i>	in a row
<i>mengisi sesak kota</i>	filling in the congested city
<i>bergerak dan bergerak</i>	moving and moving
<i>seperti perpohonan di mata Macbeth</i>	like trees in Macbeth's eyes
<i>di sini salji lain warna</i>	here the colour of snow is different
<i>hitam</i>	black
<i>Hitam</i>	Black
<i>HITAM</i>	BLACK
<i>warna paling gagah</i>	mightiest colour
<i>itulah warnanya</i>	that is the colour
<i>tidak gugur dari bintang</i>	not dropped from stars
<i>bukan turun dari langit</i>	not fell from sky
<i>mengalir dari arus sejarah</i>	flowing from the currents of history
<i>tulang-tulang</i>	bones
<i>HITAM</i>	BLACK
[sic]	[sic]
	(<i>rough translation</i>)

Red

Used to literally describe the beauty of the moon on a particular night, as well as to paint a context or background of violence created by the people who inhabited the space. The violence is reinforced through the reference to Shakespeare's Macbeth who almost became insane due to his obsession with murder and blood.

Black

Used to describe the colour of snow, to bring to mind how humanity's actions pollute (black) the innocence that is found in nature (white). This can be read by seeing how the colour black is described in the poem – not as something natural or God-made (fell from the stars), but something that is rooted in human action, characteristics and behaviour (flowing from the currents of history; bones).

White

Although not explicitly mentioned, acts as the backdrop upon which all the stains of human history and action takes place. It is almost like the state of innocence before the interference by human action.

From *Merpati Putih* (White Dove) by Usman Awang

[sic]

*Merpati putih, jelajahilah dunia ini
hembuskan udara baru yang kau hirup
dari malam
bunga-bunga mekar menguntum
bibir-bibir segar tersenyum*

[sic]

White dove, go explore this world
exhale new air that you inhaled
from night
blossomed flowers are budding
fresh lips are smiling

[sic]

[sic]

(rough translation)

White

The colour is linked to the dove, which augments its connotation of purity, peace and love. White is seen to have a cleansing quality, which can bring about renewal and rebirth, including the cleansing of “sins” which is alluded through the use of “night” (darkness, black).

From *Kambing Hitam (Sebelum & Sesudah 13 Mei)* (Black Goat [Before & After 13 May]) by Usman Awang, 1969

**May 13 was a dark period in the history of Malaysia where race riots*

[sic]

13 MEI
*Secupak beras di ibu kota
Semangkuk darah harganya
Nilai pasaran Jalan Raja Muda
Tidak ada tukaran wang hari ini
Harga besi mengejut tinggi
Pembeli-penjual saling berebutan
Rumah jadi hitam langit hitam
Merah senja ibu kota
Merah warna jalanraya
Merah air sungai Kelang
Merah baju si anak malang
Menteri demi menteri di tv
–Demokrasi telah mangkat
Pemakamannya di mana saja, di mana
saja pemabuk politik-ganja
–Taridra 13 Mei
Mahkamah sepi para hakim
kehilangan palu
Kini dibentuk mahkamah dijalan-jalan raya
Masing-masing pendakwaraya
menghujah tanpa bahasa
Para hakim menjelma dengan wig merah
Saling menjatuhkan hukuman
Sorak-sorai para juri tanpa kerusi*

13 MAY
A cup of rice in the city
A bowl of blood is the price
Market value in Jalan Raja Muda
No currency exchange today
The price of steel is startlingly high
Buyers-sellers are scrambling together
House has become black sky black
Red evening in the city
Red coloured roads
Red waters of the Kelang river
Red coloured shirt of the unfortunate child
Minister for minister on TV
–Democracy is dead
Its funeral is any place, any place where
there are drunkards of politics-ganja
–Taridra 13 may
The courts are silent the judges
lost their strike
Now courts are built on the streets
Every prosecutor is advocating
without language
The judges appear with red wigs
Each issuing judgments
Juries without chairs cheer on

[sic]

SESUDAH
Kekuasaan negara berteriak mencar
"Mana dia kambing hitam
kambing hitam"
Pemabuk politik-ganja ramai
menjawab:"
Kambing hitam di sini
Kambing hitam"
Namanya perkauman
Namanya komunis
Namanya ultra
Namanya Gangster

[sic]

[sic]

AFTER
The powers of the nation shout in search
"Where is the black goat
black goat"
Together the drunkards of politics-ganja
reply:
"The black goat is here
Black goat"
Its name is racism
Its name is communism
Its name is ultra
Its name is Gangster

[sic]

(rough translation)

Black

Colour plays a significant role in this poem as a key signifier of change. It takes its name from the proverb *Kambing hitam*, which literally means "black goat". *Kambing hitam* is the scapegoat that is blamed for an incident. Here, black means misfortune (of being wrongly blamed, of the future), and also alludes to darkness in wisdom (ignorance).

Red

Stands in for literal and visual description of the violence (blood flowing, the colour that stains the shirt of the victim), and it also symbolically signifies the death of democracy (where democracy is seen as a living, breathing thing in society, and its blood is spilled through the blood of the people who live in a democratic society turned anarchic and violent).

From *Tetamu Senja* (Evening Guest) by A. Samad Said, 1970s

[sic]

Bila kita lihat manusia terbiar larat
Hingga mesti merempat ke laut biru
Ke kuning darat
Harus kita lekas sedar penuh pada tugas
Harus kita tegas sembah
Seluruh rasa belas

[sic]

[sic]

When we see humans who are left to suffer
Until they must stray to the blue sea
To the yellow earth
We must quickly realise fully to the duty
We must resolutely respect
Wholly the compassion

[sic]

Yellow & Blue

This is a deeply spiritual poem, which speaks about the importance of humility, repentance and reflection about the ephemeral blessings of life. Here, the colours yellow and blue are used in descriptive ways, to describe the physical realm that we inhabit, and to carry the reader into the "real" world, even as the poem delves into the spiritual. It is also worth noting that "yellow/gold earth" has special connotations in Malay culture, signifying fertility of the land, and a land that is blessed.

From *Unggun Bersih* (Clean Bonfire) by A. Samad Said, 2011

*Semakin lara kita didera bara—
kita laungkan juga pesan merdeka:
Demokrasi sebenderang mentari
sehasrat hajat semurni harga diri.*

[sic]

*Dua abad lalu Sam Adams berseru:
(di Boston dijiurus teh ke laut biru):
Tak diperlu gempita sorak yang gebu,
diperlu hanya ungun api yang syahdu.*

*Kini menyalalah ungun sakti itu;
kini merebaklah nyala ungun itu.*

Abused by embers, we're all increasingly
We still call out the message of merdeka,
Democracy as brilliant as the sun,
A common desire from sincere self-dignity.

[sic]

Two centuries ago, Samuel Adams exclaimed:
(in Boston where tea was poured into the blue sea):
We don't need a loud fluffy cheerleading
What we need is just an eminent bonfire.

Let's light up that sacred bonfire;
Let's spread out that sacred flame.

(rough translation)

Merdeka = independence

Yellow

Although not explicitly mentioned in the poem, the poem was recited during the *Bersih* 2.0 street demonstration where yellow as a colour was almost rendered illegal by the government. The poem speaks about the energy or the spirit of the colour yellow, its inherent capacity to cleanse (through burning), to ignite and catalyse collective change and to light the way to a brighter future. It is also given a sacred and spiritual value (which has special significance if read together with “yellow earth/soil” from his earlier poem), and as such, transcends what is created by humans (including manipulative lies in the form of “cheerleading”). Here, nature ascribed with colours can again cleanse what is polluted by humans.

From *Peludah Warna* (Colour Spitter) by A. Samad Said, 2011

*Kuasa gusar kini menggelegak murka;
warna kuning diisytihar racun terbisa.
Diragutnya baju-T segeram tenaga
dan diumumkan itulah busana bahaya.
Tapi, kita jahit semula perca kain,
menjadikannya panji terindah dan tulen
Warna kuning yang teramat tenang
dan syahdu
kita kembalikan damai ke dalam qalbu.
Kini cahaya mentari mungkin diramas
Kini cahaya mentari mungkin diramas
dan sinar kuningnya juga mungkin dicantas.
Memanglah mereka kini peludah warna
sedang menghimpun lendir kahak sebanyaknya.
Kerana nikmat amat lama berkuasa,
kuasa pun seolah menjadi hartanya.*

The power of anger is currently boiling
Yellow is declared the most poisonous of poisons
The T-shirts are grabbed and snatched wholeheartedly
And declared as a dangerous uniform
But, we stitch again the ragged cloth
The most peaceful and eminent colour
And turn it into the most beautiful and
authentic banner
We return peace into

4.3 Proverbs

Colours are also used to help transmit advice in the form of *pantun* (a Malay poetic form) or perbilangan adat perpatih (cultural rules and regulations).

Things in nature are perceived to have inherent goodness or badness, and are ascribed particular values accordingly. Colours allude to these values and are used as a way to communicate the lesson or the meaning in the verses.

An example from *perbilang*an adat *perpatih*:

<i>Ayam putih terbang siang</i>	White chicken flies at day
<i>Terbang hinggap papan gendeng</i>	Lightly lands on the skewed wooden board
<i>Berkili-kili gadeng</i>	Rolling and coiling around the spokes
<i>Mengelebang-ngelebang laman yang luas</i>	Potatoes sweeping across a wide garden
<i>Berseri-seri kampung yang besar</i>	A large village is radiant and glowing
<i>Akan gembala rumah yang gadang.</i>	Shepherding the great circumference of the house
<i>Ayam hitam terbang malam</i>	Black chicken flies at night
<i>Hinggap di rumpun pandan</i>	Lands on the pandan shrubs
<i>Kukutnya ada tampaknya tidak.</i>	Its claws are there but can't be seen.

The principal symbols in this *perbilang*an are the *ayam putih* (white chicken) and *ayam hitam* (black chicken).

¹ Mohd. Tilib Osman (ed.J, 1975.) Warisan Puisi Melayu, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, p157

White

Denotes positive characteristics in individual behaviour, such as purity, honesty and dignity, which will lead to prosperity and a safe society. This is alluded through the positive imagery and description of the home and the village.

Black

Denotes negative characteristics in individual behaviour, such as hypocrisy and lying, which will lead to fear, anxiety and disturbances in society. This is reinforced through the imagery of flight at night, and the latent presence of danger (its claws are there but can't be seen).

Examples from *peribahasa* (proverbs):

<i>Hitam dikatakan putih</i>	Black is said as white
<i>Putih dikatakan hitam.</i>	White is said as black

Meaning: What is bad is said as good. What is good is said as bad. In short: lying.

<i>Hitam-hitam gajah,</i>	The blackness of elephants
<i>Putih-putih udang kepai.</i>	The whiteness of shrimps

Meaning: What is abject remains abject, even if it looks beautiful. What is noble remains noble, even if it looks ugly. Here the elephant is seen as abject, while the shrimps are seen as noble (shrimps are deemed valuable as they are used to make *belacan* (shrimp paste), a favourite condiment at the Malay table.

<i>Hitam-hitam bendi,</i>	The blackness of carriages
<i>Putih-putih sadah.</i>	The whiteness of chalk

Meaning: What is ugly is more expensive than what is beautiful. Here chalk in its whiteness is seen as a thing of beauty, while horse carriages in its darkness/blackness is seen as a rough/shabby/ugly object.

<i>Hitam-hitam tahi minyak dimakan juga</i>	However black the oil, it's still eaten
<i>Putih-putih hampas kelapa dibuang.</i>	However white the coconut husk, it's still discarded

Meaning: Shabby/ugly objects are still useful while beautiful objects can simply be useless.

<i>Putih di luar</i>	White outside
<i>Kuning di dalam.</i>	Yellow inside

Meaning: Even though the person is born with goodness, his heart is filled with malice.

Black Abject, inherently bad, ugly, shabby, cheap

White Beautiful, inherently good, expensive, noble

Yellow Malice

5.0 Classical and Contemporary Writings

Introduction

Colours play a significant role in Malay culture. Some of this richness is captured in classical, anthropological and historical writings, which have become important sources for contemporary research in understanding the historical lineage of the Malays.

Until the 20th century, written Malay was confined to a limited circle. The literature of the majority of the population, beyond the royal courts, was preserved in the oral tradition. Malay oral history is largely captured through storytelling. However, some of these traditions were documented in three classical writings:

- *Malay Magic* by William Walter Skeat, first published in 1900. It is one of the earliest written anthropological study of folklore, popular religion, and magic as understood to be practised among the Malays of the Peninsula,
- *Malay Sketches*, a collection of anecdotal stories about Malay peoples and cultures by Sir Frank Swettenham, the first Resident General of the Federated Malay States, and
- *Sejarah Melayu (The Malay Annals)*, a historical narrative also known as *Sulalatus-Salatin* (Genealogy of Kings) believed to be commissioned in 1612 by Sultan Abdullah Mu'ayat Syah ibni Sultan Abdul Jalil Syah of Johor. The text records the cultural history, philosophy and values of the Malays spanning over 600 years. An important historical reference and the best known of all Malay literary works, it has long been essential reading for an understanding of Malay historiography, political culture and language.

All three historical texts provide a rich narrative on the different dimensions of Malay culture and norms, and the many ways that colours thread through these beliefs and practices. In Malay societies, there is a deep interrelation between the material and spiritual worlds, and there is no separation between these two realms. They are intimately linked, where one brings meaning into the other. The land and the person are deeply and spiritually connected. Colours are one of the main influences that stitch these two areas of life together.

Different colours carry different meanings and significance, with a complex system of beliefs and taboos surrounding the colours of objects that accompany particular rituals and their particular purposes. Colours play a key role in different dimensions of Malay social, cultural, economic and political life. They represent status in society, levels of spirituality in the practice of magic, in healing and religion, and in some instances, emotions. Colours also carry significance in important moments in life; especially in marriage and in death.

5.1 Emotions

In historical texts, the use of colours to express emotions is relatively rare. Below are some instances and these generally conform to universal modes of behaviour.

Red: anger, fiery, fury, outrage, negativity

Green: fresh, new, nature

Black: evil, darkness, haunting, fear, eerie, creepy

Red

Red often denotes the intensity of passion. In Malay culture, the colour red often refers to anger or strong negative emotions. Here's an excerpt from *The Malay Annals* where *Badang* describes seeing a *hantu* (specter, ghost);

"His eyes were **red** as fire" (Leyden, 1821).

And in *Malay Sketches*;

"As to the negative end, they reluctantly explained, in hesitating words and with every appearance of dread, that there also was a flame, but a **red** one of fearful and sinister import."

(Swettenham, 1895).

Red can also signify courage, as well as the nation's people, but this seems to be a more modern perception, with its origin in nationalistic ideals. It is also a popular colour for women's dresses. However it is seldom associated with luck and prosperity as in North Asia.

Black

Black is on the lowest rank in the "order of the colours" in Malay society. It is deemed as dark, evil, malicious and harmful. For example:

"In the dead of a dark night (and moonless Eastern nights can be **black as a sepulchre**) he assisted the four prisoners to make their escape through the window, while *the Penglima*, *Haji Ali*, and a number of their men slept peacefully on the other side of the sheltering curtain that gave privacy to the women."

(Swettenham, 1895).

'Black as a sepulcher' here describes black as the colour of death, through the darkness found in the confinements of a tomb at the end of life. This brings to mind fearful, uneasy or eerie emotions. (Asmah, 2004)

To compound the essence of his evil nature and the darkness of his spirit, every single internal part of his being is ascribed the colour black, from his heart to his spleen.

The following is a description of a lunar eclipse in a Malay folklore, where black is again used to refer to a spirit that brings wreckage and darkness:

"The Moon which bathes the earth in splendour, the Moon which is so dear to each one of us, is in dire peril this night, for that fierce monster, the *Gerhana* (eclipse), whom we hate and loathe, is striving to swallow her. You can mark his black bulk creeping over her, dimming her face, consuming her utterly, while she suffers in the agony of silence. How often in the past has she served us with the light."

(Skeat, 1965).

The colour black here describes the might and ruinous power of the monster, Rahu (a cut-off head of an asura or nature-being), who is about to swallow the moon in an eclipse.

5.1 Magic and Spirituality

Colours, their inherent energies and symbolism, play a powerful role in Malay folklore and magic. In magic, careful selection of coloured materials appropriate to its purpose is critical to enhance the power of spells and rituals through what the colours symbolise. Colours also represent holiness and different levels of divinity or spiritual ranking.

Order of the colours and their meaning:

White holy, sacred, purity

Yellow royal

Brown blue, red

Black evil, darkness

In the book *Malay Magic*, Skeat describes the “order of the colours” in divination and black arts according to Malay astrologers as follow:

“Thus white would be the best of all; yellow, as the royal colour, little, if at all inferior to white; brown, blue, or red would be medium colours; black would be bad, and so on.”

(Skeat, 1965).

And the order of colours of the gods of the sea are described as:

“The only other divinities (of the rank of ‘Mambang’) which are of any importance are the ‘White divinity’, who dwells in the Sun, the “Black divinity,” who dwells in the Moon, and the ‘Yellow divinity’, who dwells in the Yellow Sunset-glow, which latter is always considered most dangerous to children.”

(Skeat, 1965).

And here, the colour white appears to be at its holiest form, appearing as an animal spirit guarding a Muslim shrine. Malays regard white as strong, powerful and majestic.

“The shrine of Toh Kamarong is one of the most celebrated shrines in the Langat district, the saint’s last resting-place being guarded by a white elephant and a white tiger, the latter of which had been a pet (pemainan) of his during his lifetime.”

— Muslim shrine guarded by animal spirits (Skeat, 1965).

At the other end of the spectrum, black is the colour that is most symbolic of an evil spirit and its powers. The following is a description of the only genie in Malay mythology who rose to the level of one of the great Hindu divinities. He is the Black King of the Genies (Sang Gala Raja, or Sa-Raja Jin), and the mightiest of the Genies:

Peace be with you!
Ho, Black Genie with the Black Liver,
Black Heart and Black Lungs,
Black Spleen and tusk-like Teeth,
Scarlet Breast and body-hairs inverted,
And with only a single bone.

(Skeat, 1965).

To compound the essence of his evil nature and the darkness of his spirit, every single internal part of his being is ascribed the colour black, from his heart to his spleen.

The following is a description of a lunar eclipse in a Malay folklore, where black is again used to refer to a spirit that brings wreckage and darkness:

“The Moon which bathes the earth in splendour, the Moon which is so dear to each one of us, is in dire peril this night, for that fierce monster, the Gerhana (eclipse), whom we hate and loathe, is striving to swallow her. You can mark his black bulk creeping over her, dimming her face, consuming her utterly, while she suffers in the agony of silence. How often in the past has she served us with the light.”

(Skeat, 1965).

The colour black here describes the might and ruinous power of the monster, Rahu (a cut-off head of an asura or nature-being), who is about to swallow the moon in an eclipse.

5.3 Healing

The Malays believe in animistic-laced medicinal practices. Bomohs or pawangs (shaman or witch doctor) are often consulted for ailments and healing rituals, a practice that is alive until present day. Health and spiritual wellbeing are interconnected to various forces in nature. This could be traced to the cultures of pre-Islamic times when a majority of Malays were Hindu and Buddhist.

Colours play a role in visualising the intent in healing rituals. The use of different colours and different materials in healing rituals can invoke specific energies.

in traditional medicine colour is ascribed with certain qualities.”

According to the late Nik Abdul Rahman bin Nik Dir, Pawang Diraja Kelantan (Royal Shaman of Kelantan), colour in traditional medicine is ascribed with certain qualities...

Colors to Symbolise Characters for Medical Practices.	
Color	Meaning and Symbolism
Green	Asceticism
Blue	Godliness
Yellow	Authority
Red	Warrior-like qualities.
Black	Black
Grey	Bravery
White	Purity

Source: Al-Ahmadi and Raja Tun Uda (1997)

Order of colours in healing:

White **Yellow**

Here is a description of the importance of colours in a “soul abduction ceremony”, to cast out a demon from a sick body. The hierarchy of colours and their accompanying power where yellow/white (royalty, holiness) sits at the top is also similarly ascribed here:

“..yellow is the colour used by royalty, where as the more exalted and sacred colour, white (with occasional lapses into yellow), has been adopted by Malay medicine-men as the colour most likely to conciliate the spirits and demons with whom they have to deal. Thus the soul-cloth, is sometimes white and (much more rarely) yellow, and hence in the first instance just quoted, the yellow cloth, being, next to white, of the colour which is most complimentary to the demons, is the one which is put outside; and in the second instance, for similar reasons, the white cosmetic is to be used first.”

(Skeat, 1965).

Here is how yellow is used during the “offering to the spirit” ceremony:

“Next, at the hands of one of the company, he accepted, in two pieces, five cubits of yellow cloth (yellow being the royal colour), and a small vessel of “oil of Celebes”, with which, it may be added, he anointed the palms of both hands before he touched the cloth itself.”

(Skeat, 1965).

Yellow is not only used as materials for the offering, but also as a costume for the patient and the healer during this healing ritual:

“The Pawang now returned to the patient, and kneeling down in front of him, fumigated his hands in the smoke of the censer, and then, muttering a charm, wrapped the smaller piece of yellow cloth turban-wise round his own head, and slowly and carefully pushed the yellow robed patient (who was still in a sitting posture) forward until he reached a spot which was exactly under the centre of the tray, and which faced, I was told, the ‘place of the Rising Sun’.”

(Skeat, 1965).

Even in healing ceremonies, yellow is seen as a royal colour. With that, it carries with it both great power and responsibilities. For example, lanchang, also known as the “spirit boat” is a yellow vessel that carries disease / spirit to another space. It is painted yellow because of its royal significance and symbolism:

The original “disease-boat” used in Selangor was a model of a special kind of Malay vessel called lanchang. This lanchang was a two-masted vessel with galleries (dandan) fore and aft, armed with cannon, and used by Malay Rajas on the Sumatran coast. This latter fact was, no doubt, one reason for its being selected as the type of boat most likely to prove acceptable to the spirits. To make it still further acceptable, however, the model was not infrequently stained with turmeric or saffron, yellow being recognised as the royal colour among the Malays.

(Skeat, 1965).

5.4 Religion and Folklore

Colours are used in religious ceremonies and represent different aspects of religion. In the following classical texts, two colours are deemed to be of primary importance: white and yellow as mentioned earlier.

Maghrib is the time of day when the sun goes down and night begins to take over. It is also the name of one of the five daily prayers that is performed after the sun has descended. Here, yellow is used to describe both the colour of this particular period in the day, as well as to the spirits that roam freely during this time. As such, yellow represents both a literal description of the colour of the sky, as well as the spiritual and emotional connotations involved. It is also mixed in with a folkloric caution against being out in the evenings;

“The **yellow** glow which spreads over the western sky, when it is lighted up with the last rays of the dying sun, is called mambang kuning (the yellow deity), a term indicative of the superstitious dread associated with this particular period.”

(Skeat, 1965).

Describing the *kramat** at Tanjong Karang in the Kuala Selangor district

“To this sacred spot constant pilgrimages are made by the Malays, and the lower branches of the tree rarely lack those pieces of white and yellow cloth which are always hung up as an indication that some devout person has paid his vows.”

(Skeat, 1965).

**Kramat* (a holy place, a place of pilgrimage but not necessary a grave)

6.0 Rites of Passage

In Malay society, a lifetime is generally divided into six stages:

1. Babyhood to Childhood (birth to 7 years old, when **circumcision** is carried out)
2. Childhood (8 to 12 years)
3. Puberty or Adolescence (13 to 18 years)
4. Youth (19 to 39 years, during which one is ready for **marriage**)
5. Adulthood (40 to 62 years)
6. Old Age (63 years and above)

The concept of Adulthood at 40 years of age follows Islamic tradition— Muhammad was chosen to be a Prophet at 40, an age deemed ready to assume heavy responsibilities. (Malay Heritage Foundation, Singapore, 2010).

6.1 Wedding, Costume

Malays, known for their love of bright colours in clothing, pulls out all the stops when it comes to weddings. Bright arrays of pinks, magentas, reds, greens, blues, purples, browns, white and yellow serve as clothing for not only the groom and bride but also for their families who are often colour-coordinated.

Photos:
flickr/teducation, flickr/cpsbrunei
flickr/zul-mokhtar, flickr/ culexz



The bride's costume during the marriage ceremony:

"The bride's hair is done up in a roll (*sanggul*) and this is surmounted with a head-dress of artificial flowers, cut out of crackling tinsel (*p'rada kressek*) and raised on fine wires; her forehead is bound with a band or fillet of tinsel — gold-leaf being used by the rich — which is called *tekan kundi*, and is carried round by the fringe of the hair (*gigi rambut*) down to the top of each ear; for the rest the bride is clad in a "wedding jacket", which has tight-fitting sleeves extending down to the wrist, or sleeves with gathers over the arm, and which is generally made of "flowered satin" in the case of the rich, or of cloth dyed red with *kesumba* in the case of the poorer classes. This "wedding jacket" fits tightly round the neck, has a gold border, is fastened with two or three gold buttons, and fits closely to the person; the wealthy add a necklace or crescent-shaped breast-ornament round the bride's neck. She also wears bracelets and earrings and perhaps anklets, of five different metals. A silk *sarong*, which takes the place of a skirt, and is girt about the waist with a waist-cord (but not usually, in Southern Selangor, fastened with belt and buckle), and a pair of silk trousers, complete her attire."

(Skeat, 1965).

The groom's costume during the marriage ceremony:

"The groom, on the other hand, is clad in his best jacket and trousers, with the Malay skirt (*sarong*), fastened at the side, and girt above the knee (*kain kembang*). His head is adorned with the *sigar*, a peculiar head-dress of red cloth arranged turbanwise, with a peak on the right-hand side, from which artificial flowers (*gunjei*) depend, and which preserves its shape through being stuffed with cotton-wool. Its border is decorated with tinsel, and it has a gold fringe. Besides this head-dress the bridegroom has a small bunch of artificial flowers stuck behind each ear, whilst two similar bunches are stuck in the head-dress (one on the right and the other on the left).

Bridegrooms, however, who belong to the richer classes wear what is called a *lester* (= *destar*), whilst former Sultans of Selangor are said to have worn a gold cap (*songkok lelang*), which is reputed to have contained eighteen *bongkal* (or *bungkal*) of gold.

(Skeat, 1965).



There is no 'standard' colours for the bride and groom as long as they are matching.



A more recent development is for the bride's and groom's families and relatives to be colour coordinated but different from each other. This colour coding probably came about for a very practical reason—so that guests coming to the wedding reception could immediately identify members of the two families.

Black is also an acceptable colour to wear to a Malay wedding as long as there are touches of gold or silver.

Photos:
flickr/diloz
flickr/zul-mokhtar



6.2 Wedding, Rituals

Like other cultures, marriage is a sacred and integral part of Malay society. The activities that take place stems from the diverse cultural traditions of the indigenous, Hindu and Islamic. A Malay wedding could be grandiose and spread over a whole week depending upon the socio-economic background of the couple. However due to time constraints and raising prices, a simple wedding today would be held over one to two days.

For the Malays, there are certain preliminaries or activities, which must happen before the wedding takes place.

- a) *Adat Merisik* – “Asking / Investigation”
- b) *Adat Meminang* – “Proposal”
- c) followed by *Adat Pertunangan* – “Engagement”
- d) *Istiadat Hantar Belanga* – “Gift Exchanging”
- e) *Akad Nikah* – “Marriage Contract” / Solemnisation
- f) *Adat Bersanding* – “Wedding Reception”

Adat Merisik – “Asking / Investigation”

When a man chooses a bride for himself and announces to his family, or when his family identifies a potential candidate for him, they pay a visit to the potential bride’s family for the purpose of investigation. This does not constitute a formal engagement and it is possible that nothing might stem from this. Following the visit, both families will consider the possibility of a union more seriously.

Adat Meminang – “Proposal”

When all parties are satisfied with the choice of the bride and groom, the groom’s family comes once again with the formal proposal. This ceremony goes hand in hand with the Engagement Ceremony.

Adat Pertunangan – “Engagement”

It is customary for the groom’s family to bring small gifts. The groom sends a delegation to the bride’s house to formally request for her hand in marriage and to discuss the terms and conditions of the marriage.



Traditionally, this exchange is carried out entirely in rhymed verses, a form known as *pantun*, and men most skilled in improvising verses led the negotiations even though they may not be the most senior member of the family.

Istiadat Hantar Belanga— “Gift Exchanging”

This ceremony usually takes place the same night as the religious ceremony, *Akad Nikah*. The groom and his delegation will arrive at an agreed time at the bride’s house. His entourage will be carrying the trays on which the gifts are placed. The party is greeted at the door of the bride’s house with the beating of the *kompang* (drums). This ceremony is basically held for the purpose of exchanging gifts and dowry.



Akad Nikah— “Marriage Contract”

This is the religious ceremony where the actual matrimonial agreement takes place. In older times the bride is not part of this ceremony and instead sits in a separate room close enough where she can hear the proceedings. Nowadays, the bride sits in the same room but a little way off. This solemnisation is presided over by a religious official of the Shari’ah Court. A small sum of money called the Mas Kahwin (the amount is normally set by the religious authorities) is exchanged.



Just before the *Akad Nikah* the bride beautifies herself by applying henna on her hands and sometimes feet. Henna was regarded as having *Barakah* blessings, and was applied for luck as well as joy and beauty. Brides typically had the most henna, and the most complex patterns. Muslims also use henna as a dye for their hair and for the beards of males, following the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*), who used to dye his beard with henna. It's considered a *sunnah* and akin to something fortunate/good.



Islamic culture saw yellow in two ways. Golden yellow stood for good and wise advice whereas pale yellow stands for deceit. For royal weddings, the bridal procession must utilize four or eight white and yellow umbrellas with folds gathered at the edges. According to royal wedding customs, on the third night the bride must wear a dress of pure white and the sheet and pillowcases for the bride must also be bright white. The great pillow used for royal wedding must be white and yellow. In Malay culture white represents purity while yellow is the colour of royalties and monarchy.

A major feature of Malay weddings is the cooked glutinous yellow rice served on a pedestal tray on which are arranged red dyed eggs pierced with golden trembling flowers called *bunga telur*.

“And afterwards the elder relatives on the side of both husband and bride presented the rice, and Inche Mohamad Kassim presented **red eggs** to all the ladies and gentlemen, and the bridegroom led the bride with him into the bridal chamber by the finger, walking upon cloth of **purple and gold**.”

(Skeat, 1965)

Purple and gold seem to indicate the “royal treatment” of the bride and groom by their friends and family during this special day. Decorated eggs are an important ritual of Malay weddings, being given to guests as a blessing of fertility to the couple. The redness of the eggs seem to denote the passion that lies at the heart of this blessing.



Adat Bersanding – “Wedding Reception”

Adat Bersanding takes place after the solemnisation ceremony, either immediately or the day after. This is where the marriage is ‘blessed’ by family members, as well as important guests (usually dignitaries or business partners).

During this ceremony, family members step up to the dais and sprinkle *air mawar* (rose water), *bunga rampai* (flowers) and *beras kunyit* (rice infused in turmeric) onto the newlyweds’ hands to ‘bless’ them. There may also be performances by *silat* (martial arts) and dance troupes. As the groom and bride are considered ‘*King and Queen for the day*’, these court entertainment from ancient times are reenacted.



The bride and groom wear white for the solemnization ceremony, but go wild with colours for the Reception. Malay weddings do not generally hire wedding planners or extra help but instead engage the help of relatives. In order for guests to identify family members (to receive gifts or to be led to a table), members of each family opt to be colour coded to be spotted easily by arriving guests.



6.3 Death Rites

Funeral ceremonies in Malay culture are bound to Islamic beliefs. During the funeral, the corpse is wrapped in a simple plain cloth. The material and the colour of the cloth used may vary in different countries. In Malaysia, white cloth is used to serve as the shroud:

“Varnish or paint is forbidden in Malay coffins, but the planks are washed to insure their cleanliness, and lined with white cloth (alas puteh)”

The Malay Magic, Pg 399

In the coffin, where the body is laid on the bier, green-coloured cloth is used to cover the bottom of the bier.

“In the case of the keranda the body is laid in the coffin, which is carried on the bier; and in the case of the long, there being no bottom in this form of coffin, the body lies on a mat in each case the bier is covered with a pall kain tudung (pall) of as good coloured cloth (never white, but often green) as may be obtainable.”

The Malay Magic, Pg 403

Green is a colour often associated with Islam (as can be seen in the analysis of products for the Malay-Muslim market, Section 6.2). However, green seems less important than yellow and white in the older texts, where yellow and white are more linked to *adat* (cultural practices) and spiritual beliefs deeply embedded in lore and practice.

From the perspective of colour, this demonstrates a shift in the practice of Islam as a religion in the country, from one that is more intimately connected with the cultural norms and values of the Malay community, towards an “imported” version that is more linked to Arabic origins.

7.0 Crafts

The crafts of Malaysia includes pottery and earthenware, woodcraving, metalware, plaiting and basketware, textiles and embroidery. Recreational and ceremonial crafts include the puppetry, Malay kites (*wau*) and tops, and traditional music instruments.

The most colourful of these crafts are textiles and plaiting, the latter represented in this document by the *Tudung Saji* (food covers) from Kedah, northern Malaysia.



Photos (above): William Harald-Wong

Another decorative style of the *tudung saji* in a market.

Photo: limn / Shutterstock.com

A plastic version. Red seems to be the most popular colour.

Photo: nik-aizu / Shutterstock.com

This set of traditional food covers shows typical colour combinations found in mats, baskets, pouches and other plaited products from Kedah, northern Malaysia. The patterns are arranged decoratively with complimentary or contrasting colours creating optical rhythm. The names of the patterns are based on flora, fauna ('tiger's paw', 'crab carrying its young', etc), or an idea ('connected eyes', 'end-of-time', etc) (Syed Ahmad Jamal, 1994)

These traditional food covers are found in modern homes and are so popular that miniature versions are made for sale to tourists.





Colours of Asia :: **Malaysia**









8.0 Textiles

Textiles have cultural significance, for instance, *cindai* (known as patola in Hindi and imported from India) and local *kain limar* and *songket* have long held a place in Malay society, being used for important occasions and traditional costumes.

Colours also play a role; it was recorded in 1405 that the ruler of Melaka (Malacca) was sent as a gift a suit of silk clothing and a yellow umbrella. The latter has been the emblem and colour of Malay royalty.

Three popular types of textiles and samples of their colour schemes are illustrated in this document. These are the popular Batik, and the two 'royal cloths' Songket, and Tenun Pahang. (Kain Limar was produced only until the early 20th Century).



Songket yarn spinning.

Photo: Tourism Malaysia

9.0 Batik

Indonesian Javanese *batik* has been available in the Peninsula since the early 19th century and its techniques, patterns and motifs heavily influenced local production which started in the East Coast states of Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang in the 1920s. However through experimentation and exploration of new expressions in colour and design in the ensuing decades, Malaysian *batik* evolved to form its own distinctive character.

The colours of Malaysian batik tend to be brighter and more vibrant than deep coloured Javanese *batik*. Malaysian *batik* makers seldom use the canting (a copper stylus with an attached container filled with melted wax) which can create intricate patterns but rely heavily on brush painting to apply colours on fabrics, resulting in patterns and motifs that are larger and simpler than Indonesian batik.

Photos (clockwise from below left):
szefei / Shutterstock.com
Sia Chen How / Shutterstock.com
Batik Painters: Tourism Malaysia
Woman: Tourism Malaysia



Colours of Asia :: **Malaysia**

Malaysia's tropical forests, flora, marine life and geometrical patterns (including spirals which are unique to Malaysian *batik*) form part of the repertoire of *batik* patterns and motifs. But most distinctive are the vibrant colour combinations.

Batik is considered formal wear in Malaysia and can be worn at dinner functions

Photos:
Batik on clothesline: Tourism Malaysia
Model: faiz zaki / Shutterstock.com





Photos (clockwise from top left): izarizhar / Shutterstock.com, mrfiza / Shutterstock.com, mypokcik / Shutterstock.com, Enciktat / Shutterstock.com

9.0 **Tenun** (Pahang Diraja) by Ahmad Farid bin Abd Jalal

“*Tenun Pahang* is an indigenous weaving tradition created over centuries by the people of Pahang, encapsulating their traditional way of life, myths, religion, taboos and ceremonies. *Tenun Pahang* offers a subtle glimpse of the organic relationship that this weaving tradition has with its environment ultimately serving as a reflection of the ideals and psyche of the traditional Pahang community. Conceived and created in subtle hues, *Tenun Pahang*, at its best, evolved to its present refined art as a textile woven for the palace. Within the tapestry of its weft and warp is woven the symbiotic relationship between the royalty and the *rakyat* (the people). This highly evolved woven cloth has become the distilled expression of indigenous weavers who have dedicated their lives to the craft by their unconditional love and loyalty to their ruler. It comes as no surprise that *Tenun Pahang* has been elevated to the status of ‘Royal Cloth’ and is now known as ‘Tenun Pahang Diraja’. Tenun Pahang inevitably becomes a potent symbol of status and power, reflecting the refined aesthetic sensibility of its wearer...”

The use of the woven cloth is fairly common in formal and religious ceremonies or during the rites of passage marking a change in the social status of a person. There are numerous customs and practices that associate the woven cloth with the course of everyday life of the Malay community. These practices can be discerned from as early as when a new child is born into a family. Every mother in the Malay community will ensure that a piece of woven cloth is available to receive a newborn child. For women, the woven cloth becomes a valued provision for married life. The woven cloth is also a dowry given by the groom to his bride and later kept as a family heirloom.

There is a traditional practice known as *langkah bendul*, or literally stepping over the sill: a situation in which the younger sister marries before the elder sister. The groom is required to present a piece of silk cloth to the latter as a mark of respect due to the inadvertent ‘transgression’.

For the elderly, a woven cloth is always kept in preparation for that final day to be used upon death as a shroud for the mortal body.

In wedding ceremonies, the woven cloth is always the preferred choice. Marriage in the Malay community is often associated with the concept of “King for the Day”. On this auspicious day, both the bride and groom will be dressed in beautiful and expensive clothes made from the woven cloth, as if they are king and queen. Establishing once again, the tacit understanding of the status of the woven cloth as befitting of royalty and nobility.

His Majesty Sultan Abdullah Al-Mu'tassim Billah, the third Sultan of Pahang with his sons (from left to right); YM Tengku Aziz, YM Tengku Abu Bakar, YM Tengku Hussin and YM Tengku Ahmad attired in Tenun Pahang, complete with the headgear *Tanjak Songket Menghiasi Hulu*.

Photos: Muzium Sultan Abu Bakar, Pekan, Pahang





According to Nortipah binti Abdul Kadir, descendent of Keraing Aji, the acknowledged progenitor of *Tenun Pahang*, this choice textile is also used as an important feature for bridal gifts amongst Malay and Bugis aristocrats. Nortipah has inherited this tradition from her family.

An interesting feature of this tradition is the presentation of the *tenun* cloth in the form of *Lipatan 40*. The *Tenun Pahang* cloth is creatively folded as many as 40 times to form a beautiful layered square, usually 15cm x 15cm in size used as a receptacle for the *wang hantaran* (gift of cash). Another variation of *Lipatan 40*, is when the folds mentioned above open out to form flower petals known as *Lipatan Bunga Cina*. The *mas kahwin*, an obligatory monetary validation in cash, of a marriage in the Malay custom, is then artfully placed in between the petals of the flower.

Samples of the *Lipatan Bunga Cina* and the *Lipatan 40* using the *Tenun Pahang* cloth.

Photos: Muzium Sultan Abu Bakar, Pekan, Pahang



Such customary practices accentuate the vital role played by *Tenun Pahang* in Malay society emphasizing its use, then and now, as both a declaration of status and honour as well as a manifestation of the creative genius and meticulous attention to detail of the Malay artisans in their craftsmanship.

The significance of handloom weaving is also found in the traditional practice of *pemberian mertua* (gift of the mother-in-law). This customary practice is to fulfill the basic needs such as food and clothing for the daughter and her spouse, as they begin their new lives together. In this practice, there are 19 compulsory things that a mother provides for her daughter who is about to get married, of which 5 are associated with weaving, and they are:

- ani* : a gadget for suspending weaving yarns.
- belira* : a piece of wood shaped like a sword used to stretchtight and move the weaving yarns so that the woven cloth is taut and kept in place.
- kek* : a loom and a tool for weaving.
- pemasung* : a piece of wood used to hold the woven cloth.
- rahat* : a tool for winding the yarn or silk in handloom weaving.

Indeed, the philosophy of giving the handloom tools indicates the importance of the role of the handloom weaving activity, in the family life of Malay society since time immemorial.

In short, *Tenun Pahang* is a folk tradition that exhibits human diligence, creativity and intellectual activity reflecting the characteristic and lofty aspirations of a society. Its tasteful colours, designs and motifs eventually mirror a community's intimate association with its environment, habitat, and nature. Passed down for generations, the fabric unwittingly reflects the collective psyche of the community that has cultivated and still cultivates its evolution.

Lastly, *Tenun Pahang* is also a tradition bearing witness to the covenant between royalty and subjects, subtly understating the Malay concept of status, power and glory as represented by the *adat* (customs); fuelled by the undivided love, respect and loyalty of the people to their ruler.

In the use of colours, the weaver of *Tenun Pahang* chooses those that are soft. With a mixture of subtle tones of different hues that produce an appealing overall effect. The choice of colours reflects the soul of the Malay people who eschew overt demonstration of emotions and who have high regard for discreet, courteous and gentle behaviour.

There is a philosophical significance in the interlacing of the warp and the weft yarns underlying the *Corak Tapak Catur* (checked pattern), found in *Tenun Pahang*. These checked patterns are associated with the quest for perfection in human life. It is also a symbol of balance. The vertical pattern represents the strive for the spiritual to achieve oneness with the 'godhead'. Enmeshed with the loftiest of divine ideals are the horizontal patterns, which are also linked to 'live life to the fullest' in this mortal and material world. To achieve perfection and harmony there must be an integration and balance of the spiritual and the worldly. This value is essential in achieving one's goal and fulfillment in life.

The checked pattern represents the four important elements found in the human body: that is earth—physical, water—blood, fire—desires and wind—opinion or heart. The type of checked pattern also symbolises the social status of a person. The big checked patterns are meant only for the royalty and aristocracy, while the smaller patterns are for the *rakyat* (the people).

The following photographs are interpretations of the classic Malay dress by Zubaidah binti Sual, who is known for producing costumes that are traditionally and historically accurate for museums across Malaysia.

















10.0 **Songket**

by *Dr. June Ngo Siok Kheng*

Design and Colours of Handwoven Songket in Malaysia

Songket is a magnificent piece of traditional Malay fabric beautifully woven in silk or cotton yarns and it belongs to the brocade group of textiles. During *songket* weaving, fine bamboo stick is used to pick the warp threads that have been set on the loom according to the graph design. Later, the gold or metallic threads are inserted and woven into the cloth using the supplementary weft technique to form the *songket* motifs as shown in Figure No. 1.



Figure No.1 Traditional *Kain Samping* from Kelantan, end of the nineteenth century, from the collection of Museum of Asian Art (After *Songket: Satu Warisan Malaysia*, 1999. p.64)

As stated by Maxwell (1990), the factors that determined the beauty and merit of the Southeast Asian handwoven textiles are the textures of the material, richness of the colours, complexity of the motifs and skills of the weavers producing the fabric.

Thus comparably, a quality *songket* is determined by the creative skills of the weaver/designer in combining the usage of patterns and motifs, complexity of the design and interchanging of coloured metallic threads, intensity and evenness of the colours and weaving skills of the weaver.

Historically, *songket* is worn by royalty, aristocrats and their families. Today, *songket* is normally made for use during ceremonial functions such as inaugurations, religious ceremonies, weddings and ceremonies marking circumcision, ear-piercing and shaving the hair of a newborn baby. Malay traditional costumes are usually exclusively designed with special motifs and ornamental borders to cater for the type of Malay costume used during a particular Malay formal function. Recently, *songket* have also been transformed into apparel, fashion accessories such as handbags as well as home products such as place mats, cushions, table runners and gift items.



The Royal Malay Regiment wearing a songket *kain sampung* (a sarong-like cloth) during the installation of the King.
Photos: (Above) imagemaker / Shutterstock.com (Below) izarizhar / Shutterstock.com

History of *Songket* in the Malay Peninsula

Winstedt (1923) wrote that historically the Malay Peninsula was known as Malacca by Europeans. “Malay Peninsula” which was also known as the Isthmus of Kra, covers the section of Asia that resembles a long narrow neck of land below the southern part of Siam. The Straits of Malacca is located on the west and the South China Sea is on the east of the Malay Peninsula.

According to Wheatley (1961), Tom Pirés had described Malacca as a city made for distribution of goods. During the fifteenth century, the empire of the Malacca Sultanate includes Johore, Selangor, Bruas and Terengganu in the Malay Peninsula, as well as Rokan, Siak, Indargiri and Jambi in Sumatera. The ideal and strategic location of the Malay Peninsula in the middle of the trade route between the east and the west made Malacca an important entrepot for other cities situated along the coastal areas of the Malay Peninsula.

Detail of map from *Meyers Konversations-Lexikon*, Volume 7, Leipzig, Germany, 1910

Bocman1973 / Shutterstock.com



The origin of *songket* in the Malay Peninsula is a subject that is difficult to determine due to lack of reliable historic documentation. Winstedt (1923) claimed that the origins of the application of gold and silver thread used in weaving in the Malay Peninsula actually derived from India. On the other hand, Selvanayagam (1990) wrote that the Kelantanese claimed that the *songket* weaving technique actually came from Cambodia and then spread southwards to Siam, Patani, Kelantan and finally to Terengganu. But, the people of Terengganu had refuted this claim and argued that the *songket* weaving technique was first introduced by the Indians via the Sumatran Kingdom of Palembang and Jambi during the period of Srivijaya. Then, there is Sheppard (1949) as cited in Selvanayagam (1990) pointed out that *songket* weaving was believed to have arrived at the Malay Peninsula through intermarriage between members of the royal families in the Malay world since the fifteenth century for political reasons that include securing friendly coalition and to maintain and expand sovereignty over kingdoms.

Norwani (1989) wrote that it was because of the strategic location of the Malay Peninsula particularly with Malacca’s booming port, many traders from India, China and the Middle East came and traded their goods with the local traders. Apart from trade, the arrival of these traders could have an impact on the development of textiles in the Malay Peninsula as they had also brought with them their culture, knowledge, skills and materials. Norwani (1989) also stated that it was through trade with China, Cambodia, India and the Middle East that had influenced the techniques and motifs of *songket* weaving in the Malay Peninsula.

According to the 1910 Annual Report of Kelantan as stated by Maznah (2001), almost every house in Kota Bharu had a loom. Although weaving was still an important occupation that was only carried out by women mainly in Kuala Terengganu and Kota Bharu, there was a decline in income in 1920 as the weavers had to work very hard to compete against the cheaper imported textiles. Unfortunately in the 1930s, many women gave up weaving as competition against the imported textiles became economically not viable.

Although *songket* weaving is still being practised in Malaysia today, the numbers of *songket* weavers have dwindled over recent years. Most *songket* weavers are women who have learnt their weaving skills from their more experienced elders and they can be found in Malaysia, namely the states of Terengganu, Kelantan and Pahang in Peninsula Malaysia as well as Sarawak in East Malaysia.

Threads, Colours, Dyestuffs and Patterns for Songket Weaving in the Malay Peninsula

Since the fifteenth century, different types of cotton and silk were already being traded in Malacca's booming port, situated on the West Coast of the Malay Peninsula. At that time, the silk and cotton threads that were used to weave *songket* in the Malay Peninsula were mainly from China and India respectively. Mohd. Yusof bin Abdullah (1990) wrote that apart from spreading Islam and introducing silk fabrics to the locals in the Malay Peninsula, the Arabs also brought gold and silver threads with them to trade. Before the introduction of cotton and silk threads, the local weavers at the Malay Peninsula used threads that were made from vegetable fibre, mainly from pineapple leaves and banana stems, for weaving.

Skeat (1902) wrote that the cotton and silk threads used to weave *sarongs* and *Kain Lepas* in Kelantan and Patani were imported via Singapore during the early twentieth century. Fisk (1959) reported that during the survey carried out by him in 1958 on the handlooms industry in the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, the spun silk threads were imported from China. Synthetic dyestuffs were imported from United Kingdom, Germany, U.S.A and China while metallic threads were from India, Europe and Japan (p.20). Skeat (1902) and Fisk (1959) both stated that the handloom industry in the east coast imported their yarns from China through Singapore. This signifies that the threads used for weaving in the Malay Peninsula at that time were mostly imported and not produced locally.

Skeat (1902) also wrote that most of the natural dyes used then were blue (from indigo), purple (from an infusion of *Tengar* bark or a mixture of the light red *Mala* or sticklac with indigo), yellow (tumeric) and green (mixture of tumeric and chips from the *Kederang* tree or young rambutan shoots). The colour red was obtained from sticklac and grey was obtained by dipping in indigo. *Asam Gelugor* (tamarinds, *Garcinia Atroviridis*) and alum solution were used to fix the colours of the natural dyes. Lime and fermented coconut milk were used to darken certain colours.

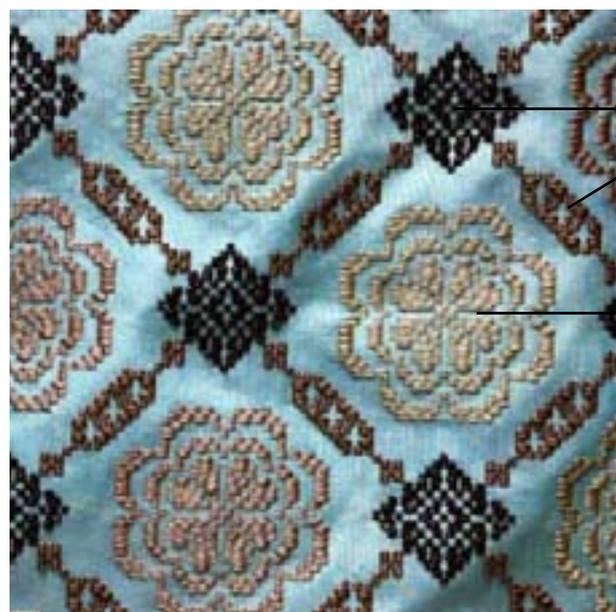
Traditional *songket* is usually made in a single dark colour, often red. Today, with more variety of colours made available from synthetic dyes, weavers have been more daring in experimenting with colours for their *songket* pieces. For example, colours such as pink, fuchsia, saffron, lavender, light blue, purple, violet and black are very popular with today's consumers.

As in the past, cotton and spun silk threads are still very popular in the *songket* industry today. Polyester threads have also gained popularity because they are cheaper compared to silk and cotton. They are also available in many colours. Besides the traditional gold and silver yarns used for *songket* weaving, colourful metallic threads such as red, blue and green, amongst others have been gaining popularity in recent years.

A traditional *songket* can be identified by the placement of patterns, motifs and colours used. Historically and until today, *songket* motifs and patterns are designed by the weavers themselves. It has been made known that there were a few royal members who had designed their own *songket*. For example, according to Mohd. Yusof bin Abdullah (1990), Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam Shah designed his own *songket* that he wore to the coronation ceremony of King George XI in 1937 and so had Sultan Ismail Nasiruddin. Today, many new *songket* designs have been created by young weavers, taking into account the suitability and compatibility of the patterns while creating these new designs.

Traditional *songket* motifs are inspired by the natural surrounding and daily activities in the vicinity of the weaver's home. The weaver's creative imagination has led to the creation of motifs influenced by trees, fruits, flowers, birds and even from the Malay cakes. As stated by Norwani (1989), many traditional *songket* motifs have been created. The early traditional motifs such as the *Gigi Bota* (Demon's Teeth), *Bunga Semangat* (Inspirational Flower) and *Burung Merak* (Peacock) were influenced by the Hindus during the Indian civilisation. Later during the period of Islam influence, the Indian influenced motifs were stylised and changed because Islam does not allow the use of realistic human figures and animals in art. That was the reason most of the later motifs were inspired by flora and the *Kerawang*, a type of decorative design.

Figure No. 3 illustrates a man wearing a traditional Malay costume, complete with a turquoise blue *samping*. The motifs used for the body (*badan*) of the *samping* are mainly *Tampuk Buah Kesemak* (Corolla of the Persimmon Fruit) in *Teluk Berantai* (Chain Design) with *Kuih Madu Manis* (Honey Sweet Cake).



Teluk Berantai
(Chain Design) with
Kuih Madu Manis
(Honey Sweet Cake)

Tampuk Buah
Kesemak (Corolla of
the Persimmon Fruit)

Figure No.3 Traditional Malay costume; the *samping* is produced by Sarawak *songket* weavers from Tanoti (Picture courtesy of Tanoti Sdn Bhd, 2012)



Figure No. 4. Olive green *samping*; the *samping* is produced by Sarawak *songket* weavers from Tanoti

(Picture courtesy of Tanoti Sdn Bhd, 2012)

Processes of Songket Weaving

Basically, there are eleven processes in the technique of *songket* weaving and these techniques have remained unchanged over the centuries.

The eleven processes are;

1. Designing and planning the *songket* motifs and patterns (*mereka corak*).
2. Dyeing the cotton or silk yarns (*mencelup warna*).
3. Unwinding the hanks and winding the yarns onto the bobbins (*menerai*). See Figure No. 5.
4. Warping the yarns on the warping frame (*menganing*). See Figure No.6.
5. Winding the warp yarns onto a warp board (*menggulung*).
6. Sleying the yarns through the reed (*menyapuk*).
7. Setting up the loom for weaving (*menyediakan kek*).
8. Making the frames for the string heddles and threading the string heddles to form the weaving shed (*mengarat*). See Figure No.7.
9. Plain weave weaving (*menenun*).
10. Calculating the number of threads and tying the hand string loop leashes following the draft pattern (*mengikat butang*). See Figures No.8 and 9.
11. Weaving the *songket* pattern with the gold metallic yarns (*menyongket*)



Figure 5. Process of winding silk threads onto a bobbin.



Figure No.6. Warping Process.



Figure No.7. Process of making the string heddles by a young weaver at the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation Kuching Branch.



Figure No. 8. Process of calculating the number of threads according to the patterns on the graph paper.



Figure No. 9. Process of tying the hand string loop leashes following the draft pattern.

Contemporary Handwoven *Songket*

In 2008, the PhD research by carried out by the author was commercialized by Yayasan Tuanku Nur Zahirah (YTNZ). Under YTNZ, a contemporary *songket* project spearheaded by the author, further research and development on *songket* weaving, weaving techniques and looms were carried out by the author.

In 2008, further research and development on *songket* weaving, weaving techniques and looms carried out by Dr June Ngo, under the auspices of a Royal Foundation, Yayasan Tuanku Nur Zahirah (YTNZ) has successfully produced a new range of contemporary *songket* fabrics that are soft, flowing and drape-able *songket* pieces which are lustrous and luxurious in appearance and can be adapted to make any textile item from apparel to home furnishing. These are now marketed under the brand “Royal Terengganu Songket” (RTS).



Model in contemporary baby blue lace *songket* shawl
Left, top to bottom: lace *songket* shawl in maroon,
songket shawl in blue orchid, and fuchsia harlequin.
(Pictures courtesy of Tanoti Sdn Bhd, 2012)

Products for the Malay-Muslim* Market



The green flag of Saudi Arabia, *Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques*, reinforces the perception that green is the colour of Islam. In fact, many Islamic countries do not have green in their national flags e.g. Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Egypt, Bahrain, etc.

Green is often associated with Islam. In the Arabian Peninsula where the religion originated, there was already a love of green before Islam as it was the colour of the oasis in the harsh, arid desert, a comforting place with shade and life-giving water. The Persian word for green is the same for garden and paradise. When the Prophet Mohammad (*peace be upon him*) united his tribes behind a green banner, the colour became closely linked with the religion.

In Malaysia, green is not a popular colour choice in the built environment because of the abundance of tropical foliage everywhere, which is green all year round. Malay womenfolk also like to wear the most vibrant multi-colours imaginable and mosques tend to be white and blue rather than green.

Nonetheless, green is generally perceived as a signifier of Islamic values in specific areas. One example are products targeted to the Malay-Muslim market. The following is a sampling of products taken off supermarket shelves and roadside stalls to illustrate this.

Minyak Hangat and Minyak Mestika

Green speaks directly and evocatively to a Muslim audience, particularly one that is conservative, who will associate the colour strongly with the tenets of Islam which upholds traditional family values.



All Product Photos: William Harald-Wong

Minyak = oil *Hangat* = hot *Mestika* = talisman, precious gem

Vita Cat

In this packet of cat food, green is used to draw attention to the statement *Pilihan Alternatif Pengguna Islam* (the alternative choice for Muslim consumers).

This provides Muslim cat owners with the assurance that the food has been prepared to *halal*** standards and is safe to handle.



* All ethnic Malays are Muslims, as defined by Article 160 of the Constitution of Malaysia (Wikipedia)

***Halal* is a term designating any object or an action which is permissible to use or engage in, according to Islamic law (see page 75).

Minyak Anugerah

Green is reserved for the most potent of the three oils: that which has been blessed to protect self and family from black magic practices. The Red box contains an oil to enhance beauty, and the Brown box to enhance the bonds between husband and wife.



Text on the green box

Every human is constantly exposed as victims to black magic that comes in various guises. True intentions of others are only known to Allah. Anger, jealousy and vengence often push humans to destroy other lives through various methods. Even in the smallest way. Thus we have to always seek protection from Allah and strengthen our aura. So it can defend us from black magic. Protect self and family from being victims to black magic practices.

Safi

According to Islamic edicts, it is compulsory for Muslim women to cover their hair although some women are more relaxed about this rule in multicultural Malaysia. Packaging for shampoo often portray women with long flowing hair and colours are used to differentiate ingredients and benefits. Safi has a range of colour-coded shampoo bottles but green is chosen to accompany an image of a woman with her hair partly and modestly covered, targeting a very specific audience.



Anugerah (Sanskrit) = a favour Safi (Arabic) = pure, clean or noble

However, green is not compulsory in packaging design to communicate to a Muslim audience. Historically, virtually all the arts created in the Islamic world over the past 14 centuries are colourful. There is also the White mosque in Ramla, Green mosque in Bursa, Blue Mosque in Tabriz and the Red Fort in Agra. Muslims in many parts of the world celebrate colours.

Where green is not used symbolically, it is substituted with symbols of Islam.

The most popular are geometrical designs found in the arts and architecture of Islamic lands (**Minyak Anugerah** and **Gamat King**). Others may include the image of a mosque (**Teh Wangi Ros**) or a prayer book stand, among others.



The image of an elderly holy man on a product is an icon rural communities can relate to. This is sometimes found in seemingly unrelated products such as goat's milk and coffee (illustrated below). The brand 'Tok Guru Pondok' means a teacher (guru) of an informal community space for religious study (pondok).

Its immediate association is purity and wholesome living, but the iconography of the elderly man can also be interpreted as a product promise for increased sexual virility. This symbolism is also very common in rural Indonesia.



Mahkota (Sanskrit) = a crown
Dewa (Sanskrit) = a demigod, deity, divinity

All products that are eaten or used on the body comes with a *halal* mark. The Red Henna paste was imported from Pakistan and has on its packaging the country's official *halal* mark. It has in addition the crest of the Malaysian Government printed on the box to assure the buyer that it has met local *halal* standards as well.

Pakistan's halal mark

Crest of the Malaysian Government



These are some *halal* marks used in different countries. They are predominantly green, reinforcing its strong association with the religion.



Malaysia



Indonesia



Thailand



Argentina



Germany



Turkey



Bosnia & Herzegovina

What is Halal?

Halal is an Arabic word meaning lawful or permitted. The opposite of *halal* is *haram*, which means unlawful or prohibited. These are universal terms that apply to all facets of life. However, we used these terms here only in relation to food products, meat products, cosmetics, personal care products, pharmaceuticals, food ingredients, and food contact materials.

<http://worldhalalcertification.org>

All foods are considered *halal* except the following:

- Swine/pork and its by-products
- Animals improperly slaughtered or dead before slaughtering
- Alcoholic drinks and intoxicants
- Carnivorous animals, birds of prey and certain other animals
- Foods contaminated with any of the above
- Foods containing ingredients such as gelatin, enzymes, emulsifiers, and flavors are *mashbooh* (questionable), because the origin of these ingredients is not known.

APPENDIX

Colour and the Contemporary Malay Household

Interviews by Suzy Sulaiman

The Malays have seen a dramatic mass migration from the rural heartlands to modern suburbs. Many families have been uprooted to start a new life in the city, drawn by better work and education opportunities. This has resulted in a drastic reduction of the village life that held together traditional Malay customs, values and worldview.

The change of environment has resulted in a dramatic change of behaviour among the Malays. Communal-living has become less of a common practice as modern housing estates and commercial centers do not promote, as yet, community-oriented activities.

Traditional arts and culture are now replaced by mass culture. In a 'contemporary' Malay household, one can see a large consumption of modern mass produced objects.

A key reason for this shift could be that many Malays no longer live next to nature—traditional Malay way of life is closely associated with nature.

Nonetheless, aspects of Malay culture remain in modern life. Notably, the Malay language and Malay dishes are still very much alive in highly urbanised areas like Kuala Lumpur.

The popularity of Malay traditional cooking would ensure the availability of ingredients in the city markets. Malay cooking relies heavily on specific spices and natural ingredients, which came from the traditional Malay environment. Plants and vegetables such as *kunyit* (turmeric), *daun pandan* (pandanus leaf), *santan kelapa* (coconut milk) and *daun pisang* (banana leaf) are key ingredients in most Malay food. Some of these ingredients are related to the production of natural colors e.g. *nasi kunyit* (yellow-stained rice), *nasi kerabu* (blue-coloured rice), etc.

The Malay House is a significant cultural production that displays the Malay aesthetic. It is in complete harmony with the natural environment as building materials also come from its surroundings. However, variations such as embellishments and colour usage reflect differences in social and economic status.



Beautiful ceramic tiles are used to decorate the staircase of traditional houses of Malacca.

Photo: William Harald-Wong

However, the Malay House which is ideally suited to tropical climate too is fast disappearing. A major cause is the erosion of confidence in local technologies and products as a result of Western-style models of development preferred by policy-makers and real-estate developers, diminishing resources and skills and building by laws.

Malay urbanites no longer carry out traditional activities like weaving, woodcarving or dye-making. In the case of clothing, natural dyes have been completely replaced by synthetic dyes. As time passes, the tools associated with traditional Malay customs like the betel nut tray becomes a decorative item in the modern household. The object becomes a mere representation of Malay traditional culture and is saddled with nostalgia.

The Interviews

In order to understand the color preferences within the contemporary Malay household, several homeowners were interviewed. 7 Malay women and 7 Malay men were selected for this observation study. They ranged from age 24-70. They live in the Klang Valley (which includes Kuala Lumpur and the suburbs), a relatively urbanised environment.

They were asked to select two items from their home. They were:

- 1) Favorite dress**
- 2) Favorite object**

These two items would hold a certain degree of emotional attachment and special meaning to its owner. The objective of this observation is to find out if color influenced the objects selected.

Participant 1

Gender	Female
Age	63
Location	Shah Alam, Selangor
Place of origin	Jasin, Malacca
Been living in the city since	1970

How she remembers colours in her life.

Like most women of her age, she was brought up in a traditional Malay village.

Weaving in the kitchen. (The *Rumah Dapur* or kitchen is usually separated from the main house as a fire precaution). The kitchen is the main area where she grew up in and spent her most of her time. It was the centre of life in the household. Besides cooking, basket-weaving and dodol-making (a sweet delicacy) were done in the kitchen. She was exposed to a lot of earth colours.

Food preparation was tedious and required many ingredients. Colour from the food was an indication of how delicious it will be.

Her late mother believes there is no short-cut to good cooking, so it is very important that there should be no substitutes for the actual ingredients.

Favourite Dress

This her favorite *baju kurung* print. The matching top has been misplaced but she still pairs the bottom skirt with modern blouses. It is her favorite because of the light, soft cotton material and the earthy colours.

Color breakdown
Favourite Dress

- Deep red
- Pink
- Moss green



Color breakdown

Favourite Object 1

-  Bright yellow
-  Orange
-  Deep red
-  Warm grey
-  Cool grey



Favourite Object 1

She enjoys collecting necklaces. This is her favorite necklace bought in Sarawak. She liked the simplicity of the design as well as the colours which were attractive to her.

Favourite Object 2

Celepa or 'Money/Betel Nut Leaves Pouch'

This was given to her by her late grandmother and is a family heirloom. It has been in her possession for more than 30 years. She does not use it but keeps it in her drawer for its sentimental value.

Color breakdown

Favourite Object 2

-  Cool grey
-  Warm grey
-  Moss green



A *celepa* is a traditional pouch which Malay women hooked onto a belt under the sarong.

Participant 2

Gender	Female
Age	60
Location	Balakong, Selangor
Place of origin	Muar, Johor
Been living in the city since	1970

How colour came into her life

Blue is her favourite colour because it reminds her of the sea and sky. Green tones remind her of her vegetable and fruit orchards. She cultivates unused land around her housing area and grows plants and fruits that she uses in her cooking. What is not used she will sell at the nearby market or share it with her neighbours.

Color breakdown Favourite Dress 1

-  Turquoise
-  Light blue
-  Bright green
-  Light green



Favourite Dress 1

Participant 2 likes this dress because of the light and airy cloth material, much suited for tropical climate. Most importantly, this dress is a combination of her favourite colours, blue and green.

Color breakdown Favourite Dress 2

-  Dark blue
-  Light blue
-  Bright blue
-  Black



Favourite Dress 2

She likes this dress because it is easy to wear. It is a *jubah* or Middle Eastern robe-like dress. The original *jubah* of the Middle East is totally black in colour. Her *jubah* has also been modified with Asian frog buttons that is associated with the Chinese *cheongsam*. The details are in blue, also a strong reason why she likes this dress.



Details of frog-buttons or mandarin buttons.

Color breakdown

Favourite Dress 3

-  Dark blue
-  Turquoise
-  Light blue
-  Pale green
-  Pink



Favourite Dress 3

This is a dress participant 2 enjoys wearing to simple family gatherings. It has soft pastel tones and is made of cotton which makes it comfortable to wear.

Color breakdown

Favourite Object 1

-  Light yellow
-  Orange
-  Light brown



Favourite Object 1

In her house, she has a display cabinet where she places her favourite objects and photographs. One of the items is this antique iron. It has never been used as an iron. She bought it for the reasons that it reminded her of how she used to watch her mother iron clothes when she was a small child in the village. This iron used heated charcoal that was placed inside.

Color breakdown

Favourite Object 2

-  Light yellow
-  Orange



Favourite Object 2

This tea set was bought by her when she went to Mecca to do her *Haj*. She found the highly polished surfaces attractive and decided to have it as a souvenir.

Color breakdown

Favourite Object 3

-  Light yellow
-  Orange
-  Light brown



Favourite Object 3

Tapak Sirih or Betel Nut Tray

Participant 3

Gender	Female
Age	32
Location	Seri Kembangan, Selangor
Place of origin	Sungai Petani, Kedah
Been living in the city since	2000

How colour came into her life

She has always liked bright colours. It gives her much delight when she wears *baju kurungs* (Malay dress) that are colourful. However, when it comes to colour selection for interiors, she likes maroon and beige.

Color breakdown Favourite Dress 1

-  Green
-  Dark green
-  Light green
-  Dark blue
-  Light blue
-  Blue



Favourite Dress 1

She likes the bold combination of the different green tones. She likes wearing this *baju kurung* to the office too as it transports her into a happy working mood.



Dress detail for colour

Color breakdown Favourite Dress 2

-  Beige
-  Brown
-  Dark brown



Favourite Dress 2

She also likes natural earth tones. Similar to the previous photo, she likes the bold combination of colours that create a line pattern.



Dress detail for colour

Color breakdown

Favourite Object 1

-  Light yellow
-  Light orange
-  Brown
-  Light grey



Favourite Object 1

Photograph and picture frame

Participant 4 adores this object because it is a photograph of herself as a child with her late grandmother whom she was very close to. This photo and picture frame of sunflowers and ladybugs represent warmth and happiness.

Favourite Object 2

Hand sewn blanket

This is a blanket which participant 4 used as a child. It is important to her because it was the last item made by her mother before she passed away. Her mother had hand-sewn the edge of the blanket as seen in the close-up photo below. She does not use this blanket anymore and safely stores it in her bedroom cabinet.

Color breakdown

Favourite Object 2

-  Magenta
-  Pink
-  Light blue
-  Dark blue
-  Dark green



Color breakdown

Favourite Object 3

-  Dark blue
-  Light blue
-  Bright blue
-  Black



Favourite Object 3

This book was a gift from her economics teacher when she was in secondary school. Having done very well in her economics exams, her teacher asked her to stay back after the class was dismissed. She remembered her teacher saying that it was rare for him to see a Malay girl excelling in economics and mathematics, and he gave her this book to stimulate her interest in the subject. Her teacher wrote this book.

Participant 4

Gender	Female
Age	35
Location	Subang Jaya Selangor
Been living in the city since	2002

Color breakdown
Favourite Dress 1

-  Brown
-  Beige
-  Orange
-  Light green



Favourite Dress 1

She generally prefers pastel colours. The material of the dress is also another important selection criteria as she likes to feel comfortable when she moves about for work-related reasons. She likes solid colour tones because she finds them suitable for meetings.



Dress colour detail

Color breakdown
Favourite Dress 2

-  Beige
-  Light blue
-  Light green
-  Light purple



Favourite Dress 2

She likes a combination of pastel colours too. She likes subtle colour combinations.



Dress colour detail

Color breakdown

Favourite Object 1

-  Light blue
-  Warm grey
-  Cool grey



Favourite Object 1

This is a watch given to her by her mother as a gift for doing well in her exams. She was 17 at the time. The watch does not work anymore, but she keeps it as a reminder of her achievements when she was in her teens.

Color breakdown

Favourite Object 2

-  Pink
-  Light yellow
-  Orange



Favourite Object 2

Self-made photo album

This is a photo album made by herself. It holds special photos of herself and her husband at several events before they were married. The photographs mean a lot to her as it reminds her of her romance with her then boyfriend.

Color breakdown

Favourite Object 3

-  Magenta
-  Pink
-  Light blue
-  Dark blue
-  Dark green



Favourite Object 3

Mickey Mouse figurine.

This figurine has been with her since secondary school. She remembers this figurine to be on her study desk when preparing for her SPM exams.

Participant 5

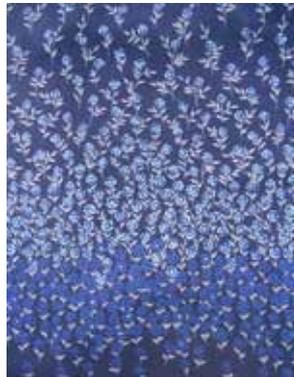
Gender	Female
Age	36
Location	Klang
Place of origin	Klang, Selangor
Been living in the city since	1970

How colour came into her life.

She grew up in an artist's studio because her father is a painter. She remembers vibrant colours in paint tubes and containers all over the `house`, as well as the different materials he used for his paintings like coloured bamboo and metallic coloured threads.

Color breakdown Favourite Dress 1

- Dark blue
- Light blue
- Blue
- Light grey



Favourite Dress 1

She likes different hues of blue because it has a calming effect on her. She also likes the material of this *baju kurung* because it requires no ironing. She wears this to the office and prefers darker tones for work-related activities. In her opinion, darker tones are more professional-looking.

Favourite Dress 2

This is her favorite *kebaya* top. It has embroidered motifs of chrysanthemum flowers. She likes the bright magenta colour as well as the soft *kebaya* cloth.

Color breakdown Favourite Dress 2

- Magenta
- Pink
- Yellow
- Orange
- Light green



Favourite Dress 3

She likes to pair the vibrant *kebaya* top with a *batik sarong* that has more subdued colours. She likes the earthy colours of this *sarong* because it reminded her of traditional *batik*. She also likes the *keladi* (yam) leaf motif on this *sarong*.

Color breakdown
Favourite Dress 3

-  Dark green
-  Purple
-  Yellow
-  Light brown
-  Dark brown



Favourite Object 1

Earrings

This was a gift from one of her students. It is a pair of hand-made metal earrings from Isfahan, Iran. She rarely wears it for long periods of time because it is quite heavy. But she likes the vibrant colours and its ethnic look.

Color breakdown
Favourite Object 1

-  Magenta
-  Deep green
-  Light warm grey
-  Dark warm grey



Participant 6

Gender	Female
Age	36
Location	Klang
Place of origin	Klang, Selangor
Been living in the city since	late 1970's

Color breakdown Favourite Dress 1

-  Dark blue
-  Magenta
-  Bright blue
-  Light green



Favourite Dress 1

She likes the dark tones combined with bright magenta. It somehow gives off a calming effect for her. The *baju kurung* was also given to her by her grandmother who lives in the village.

Color breakdown Favourite Dress 2

-  Dark blue
-  Yellow
-  Orange
-  Deep red



Favourite Dress 2

She likes the sunflower motifs and the colour combination; dark background with bright flowers. The colours give her a 'happy' feeling. She used to wear this often when she was a university student as it was easy to wear and met the school's clothing regulations. It is made out of airy material; suitable for the hot and humid Malaysian climate.

Color breakdown

Favourite Object 1&2

- Light yellow
- Orange



Favourite Object 1

This is a gold necklace given to her by her mother. She recalls seeing her mother wearing this when she was a child. The necklace reminds her of Hari Raya (or Eid, a three-day Muslim holiday that marks the end of Ramadan) celebrations where all the Malay women would use this occasion to don all their beautiful gold jewelry.

Favourite Object 2

This is another gold item given to her by her mother. This bracelet reminds her of the morning of the 1st day of Hari Raya, right after prayers and she would be instructed by her mother to wear the bracelet. She disliked wearing it at the time because it looked too traditional and it was heavy. But now, it holds memories of her mothers' village when she would visit them during Hari Raya holidays.



Participant 7

Gender	Female
Age	24
Location	Shah Alam, Selangor
Place of origin	Klang, Selangor
Been living in the city since	late 1980

Favourite Dress 1

She likes the colour combination and often wears the black top with the checked shirt. Her friends commented that it look `grudge' and she liked thinking it is. She wears this to special events like music concerts or gigs. The material is comfortable to wear in humid and hot places; which it tends to be for outdoor events.

Color breakdown
Favourite Dress 1

- Black
- Light grey
- Purple
- Light purple



Favourite Dress 2

Usually, floral prints do not appeal to her. But somehow, one day, while she was shopping with her mother, she passed by a retail window and saw this shirt on a mannequin. The print and colour tones reminded her of `Japanese' prints. Unfortunately, it is sleeveless and her family is strict on how she dresses. They would not allow her to go out wearing a sleeveless shirt, so she pairs it with her black denim jacket.

Color breakdown
Favourite Dress 3

- Brown
- Beige
- Orange
- Light green
- Black



Favourite Dress 3

This is her favourite shirt of all. She likes the design of the shirt as it has very interesting ties and knots at the back of the shirt. It holds a sentimental value as it was selected by her ex-boyfriend when they were shopping together at Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur. She thinks a person must have confidence to pull off a piece like this because it exposes a lot of flesh. Her father dislikes her wearing this shirt and she has to compromise by wearing it under a cardigan or jacket which she feels will defeat the whole idea of wearing such a top.

Color breakdown
Favourite Object 2

-  Black
-  Light grey
-  Deep red



Favourite Object 1

This was purchased at an art bazaar. At the time, she liked pandas and rabbits a lot. The artist illustrated the box based on her request. The fact that it was customized made it very special for her. At the time, her friends and she had a booth at the bazaar also. Thus, every time she looked at this box, it would remind her of the times she had with her university mates. She would keep the photos of her friends inside.

Color breakdown
Favourite Object 1

-  Brown
-  Black



Favourite Object 2

This leather wallet was purchased in France two years ago. She visited her older brother who was studying in France at the time, with her mother. She likes the rustic look of the wallet and was delighted that she got a good bargain at 3 euros.

Color breakdown
Favourite Object 2

 Brown



Favourite Object 3

This pair of Vans shoes was a birthday present. She likes the black colour because it can be matched with all colours. It is an expensive pair of shoes which is another reason why it is special to her. She only wears it for special occasions so that it may last longer.

Color breakdown
Favourite Object 3

 Brown
 Black
 Dark yellow



Favourite Object 4

This is her favourite accessory because of the motif; a miniature Converse shoe and the bright colours found on it. This was also bought in France. She enjoys wearing colourful accessories because it stands out from her dark coloured clothes.

Color breakdown
Favourite Object 4

 Magenta
 Pink
 Black
 Light grey



Participant 8

Gender	Male
Age	38
Location	Klang, Selangor
Place of origin	Kampung Malaysia, Sungai Besi
Been living in the city since	1970's

Favourite Dress 1

He likes the `seasoned' look. The colours are more rustic and he feels comfortable to wear it because it is not attention-grabbing (like wearing bright pink or yellow). Also the material is very soft making it suitable to be worn on hot days.

Color breakdown
Favourite Dress 1

-  Cool grey
-  Deep red
-  Dark grey
-  Deep orange



Favourite Dress 2

This t-shirt is a memorabilia from his college life at Politeknik Ungku Omar in the early 1990's. The print on the t-shirt is an album cover of his favorite grunge rock band `Nirvana'. He remembers the times of cassette players, motor biking and playing on his guitar when he wears this t-shirt.

Color breakdown
Favourite Dress 2

-  Dark blue
-  Light blue
-  Blue
-  Light grey



Favourite Dress 3

He bought it at a 2nd hand store at a budget price. Legendary rock station. He likes the simplicity of the design and he finds it a `cool' t-shirt to wear. It reminds him of the rock n' roll years.

Color breakdown
Favourite Dress 3

-  Black
-  Light grey



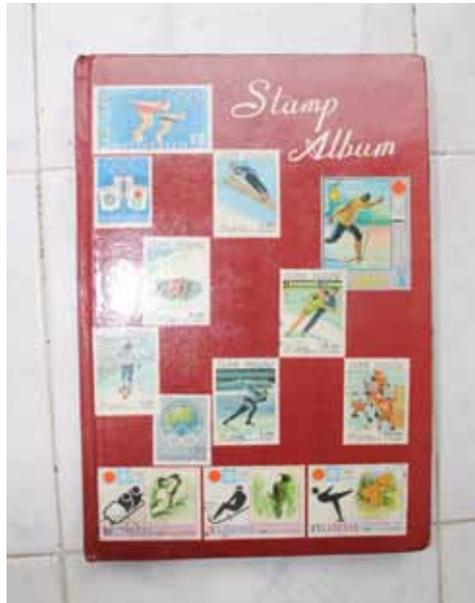
Favourite Object 1

Stamp albums.

His collection is from 1984-1994. He recalls the times when his family lived in Kampung Malaysia and they did not have a telephone. His eldest sister was studying medicine in India at the time and she could only communicate with her family through letters. The Indian stamps he peeled off from her letters reminded him of how his sister would always advise him to be a good student and take care of their parents while she is away. As a child, he would scour the rubbish bins for thrown letters so that he could take the stamps. The images on the stamps impressed him considerably and he would imagine that one day he would visit the countries represented on the stamps. He recalls wanting to visit Australia because of a picture of a wallaby on one of the stamps. The stamp album reminds him of a more romantic time when children did not have video or computer games. Instead they started many stamp collections.

Color breakdown
Favourite Object 1

Various



Participant 9

Gender	Male
Age	30
Location	Ara Damansara, Selangor
Place of origin	Klang Selangor, Sungai Besi
Been living in the city since	1980

Throughout his teenage days, he remembers wearing a lot of darker tones like maroon and dark blues. He only started to wear brighter tones in the last ten years when he noticed that colours affected a person's mood. For example, if he wants to be in a positive mood, he will select bright colours or white. He has personally experienced that this method works on several occasions.

Favourite Dress 1

This *batik* shirt has been in his possession for more than ten years. He likes the batik motifs which is Indonesian in origin. The traditional design and earth tones appeal to him as well as the lightweight cotton material which is well suited for Malaysian climate.

Color breakdown
Favourite Dress 1

-  Brown
-  Beige
-  Dark orange
-  Orange
-  Dark grey



Favourite Object 1

This is a pill container he bought in France. He bought the pills so that he could get the box. He likes the Art Nouveau design and the lightweight tin material.

Color breakdown
Favourite Object 1

-  Dark green
-  Light green
-  Deep red



Favourite Object 2

This Casio limited edition watch is another object he is very fond of. He likes the design of the watch—it uses different materials and has various textures; semi-translucent plastic, mirror and metal finish as well as the asymmetrical interface of the analogue watch. It is an interesting watch because it combines both analogue and digital clocks. He finds the colour combination of white and green beautiful because he feels one rarely finds that colour combination in watches.

Color breakdown
Favourite Object 2

-  Light green
-  Light grey
-  Light blue
-  Warm grey



Participant 10

Gender	Male
Age	35
Location	Putrajaya, Selangor
Place of origin	Raub, Pahang
Been living in the city since	1998

He believes that the local urban environment is highly influenced by international colour standards, for example, McDonalds and KFCs use red to denote `food`. White and green is associated with places of worship (mosques), whilst blue and white is associated with hospitals and clinics. He feels the Malay community did not invent these colour associations or symbolism, but instead merely following general perceptions.

He remembers the first time colours made a big impression was when he read his first X-men comic. He was 11 years old then and the comic was a present from his big sister who was living in Kuala Lumpur. That time, the contrasting colors in the comic book helped differentiate reality and fantasy. The bold colours worn by the superheros symbolised their special powers, as compared to a normal person.

Red is an attractive colour, according to him. Psychologically, he finds red also means `speed`.

Favourite Dress 1

Black T-shirt

His favorite clothing is a simple black t-shirt. He thinks the black t-shirt is an ideal medium to communicate a message. The black colour hides the body so people can focus on the message or image.

Color breakdown
Favourite Dress 1

-  Yellow
-  Black



The participant in one of his favorite t-shirt

Favourite Object 1

Dragon

The dragon is his favorite subject. He likes the striking contrast of gold and maroon or gold and dark blue. To him, these colours symbolised wealth, prosperity and power. Even though the dragon is of Chinese origin he finds that there is a common ground for all Asian cultures when it is associated with deities, the spiritual, and closeness with nature. This is quite the opposite with European culture which, to him, is inclined towards technology and modernity.

Color breakdown

Favourite Object 1

-  Bright red
-  Ochre
-  Black
-  Light grey



The participant's company logo design is influenced by the dragon motif.

Participant 11

Gender	Male
Age	26
Location	Shah Alam, Selangor
Place of origin	Kampung Bau, Sarawak
Been living in the city since	2005

For him, colours play an important role in his life, especially in his choice of clothes. Black and dark colours make him look slimmer. He is very aware of the functional effects of colour. He admits that his childhood days living in the village in Bau, Sarawak, where he was exposed to nature, shaped his perception of colours. His favourite colour is blue because he finds it soothing to the eyes. He spoke of the blue sky during a bright sunny day dotted with fluffy clouds. The contrast of the white clouds and the blue sky is what strikes him the most.

He feels that people in the past were much wiser when it came to colour coordination. This could be because people back then were exposed to nature, and in nature, colours were always harmonious. This is reflected in their attire and their accessories.

Favourite Dress 1

When he goes out with friends, he prefers to wear dark colours as it complements his looks, but he also considers the current weather. For instance, if it were a hot and humid day, he would prefer to wear off-white cotton or any light or pastel colours.

He notices that insects like mosquitoes like dark colours, especially black. When he follows his parents into the jungle, a past time he enjoys, he wears light colours to deter insects from being attracted to him.

Color breakdown Favourite Dress 1

-  Warm grey
-  Dark cool grey
-  Dark red
-  Brown



The participant in his favorite coloured attire.

Favourite Object 1

Beads

He associates beads with his childhood days especially at the time when his village converted to Christianity. Like most tribes in Sarawak (participant 11 is from the Bidayuh clan), they hold pagan beliefs and beads are part of their ceremonies. When he was 9, his family converted to Christianity and it was a traumatic period. All the beads and other materials associated with the Bidayuh's pagan rituals were destroyed. What saddened him the most was that they were family heirlooms, passed down to him by his grandmother. He secretly kept some beads which now holds memories of his village and grandmother.

Color breakdown Favourite Object 1

-  Deep red
-  Ochre
-  Black
-  Light grey



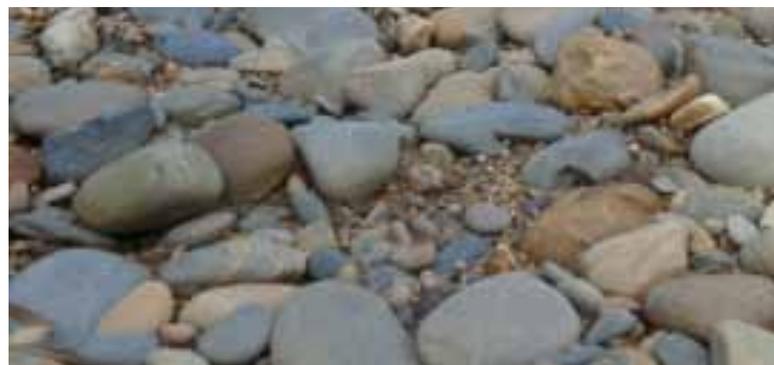
Favourite Object 2

River stones

He likes to collect river stones. As a child, he spent hours playing in the river with his friends. He discovered stones of many different shades of colours in the river. He would separate the stones into different hues, like reddish, black and different shades of white. Sometimes, he would collect crystals with many different tones. He feels that in the village, children did not have access to toys or technology, so the natural environment provided their playtime experience.

Color breakdown Favourite Object 2

-  Light warm grey
-  Warm grey
-  Dark cool grey
-  Dark red
-  Brown



Participant 12

Gender	Male
Age	30
Location	Cheras, Kuala Lumpur
Place of origin	Pendang, Kedah
Been living in the city since	2002

He grew up in Pendang in a government quarter (housing) where he recalls fond memories of playing football with his friends. He would observe nature and notice the many colours in his surroundings. Humans are responsive to the environment and he believes the surroundings will have a lot of effect on how a person behaves and shape their taste in colours.

City folks, in his opinion, choose colours to follow order. For instance, walking into a restaurant, rarely does one see a person wearing bright and pure red. Everyone tends to want to blend in.

Favourite Dress 1

He likes how the pink in this coat tie all the other colours together. Pink is the main colour in this coat, which is commonly thought to be a feminine colour. Despite knowing this, he still bought it because he was very attracted to it. After that, he did more research on the colour and discovered that pink was perceived as a masculine colour in the past.

This coat is also a sentimental object for him because he bought it during a trip to Geneva. He was selected by his university to go to Geneva to attend a youth-entrepreneur event. It was cold and he was short of cash, being a student on a tight budget. He opted for to buy a coat at the 2nd hand shop where this coat stood out and he bought it.

The coat's unusual colour and design became a conversation piece at the conference. People around him would respond more openly to him and he had strangers walking up to him and ask, 'Where are you from?'. He finds the coat has this uncanny ability to attract people's attention or to mesmerize them.

Color breakdown Favourite Dress 1

-  White
-  Salmon Pink
-  Deep purple
-  Light yellow
-  Sea blue
-  Lime green
-  Deep red
-  Blue-green



Above pic: Front (left) and back (right) detail of coat.

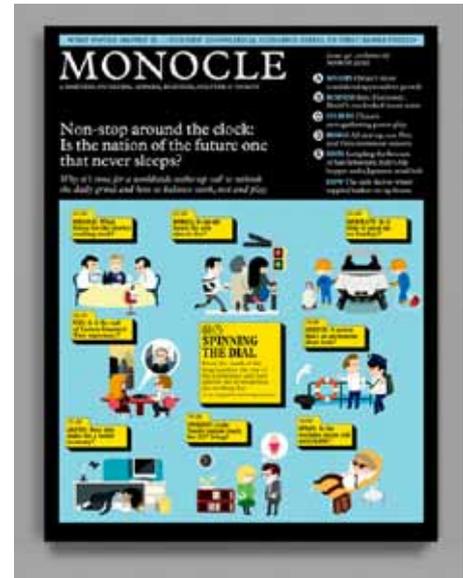
Favourite Object 1

Monocle magazine

He likes how the design utilises black and yellow. It seems stylish and fashionable. The cover of this magazine is clean and sleek.

Color breakdown
Favourite Object 1

-  Black
-  Yellow
-  Red
-  Light blue
-  Light warm grey



Participant 13

Gender	Male
Age	39
Location	Shah Alam, Selangor
Place of origin	Kuching, Sarawak
Been living in the city since	Unknown

His sensitivity towards design and colour has been with him for as long as he can remember. He recalls his mother putting him in charge of decorating the house; which shows how much she trusted her son’s taste in colour and design. During his primary school days, he moved to a bungalow house built by his late father. He was asked to assist with the selection of lights for the new rooms. Even then, he observed that fluorescent lights had a cool and warm tone and these tones determined the mood and function for each room.

However, the actual moment that he realised his natural talent was during the university entrance interview for ITM (Institut Teknologi MARA). The interviewer asked him about the outcome of different colour combination and he could answer it immediately. He was surprised that he could answer the questions correctly because he had no formal training in this before.

Overall, he believes that the individual colour is secondary to its functional role of harmonizing with other colours to create a mood or ambiance.

Favourite Dress 1

Attire

He believes that designers project their creativity and individuality through dressing. For him there should be a focus, like an accessory that pops up. For instance, he would choose a pink tie and then proceed to match the rest of his attire with colours that bring up that pink.

Color breakdown
Favourite Dress 1

- Pink
- Warm grey
- Light warm grey
- Dark cool grey
- Dark red



The participant in his favorite coloured attire.

Favourite Object 1

He admits his fondness for watches and considers himself gadget savvy because he appreciates good design found in products. He likes this watch because the colour combination reminds him of art movements like Pop Art. Thus he feels like he is wearing a piece of art with this watch.

Color breakdown
Favourite Object 1

-  Black
-  Yellow
-  Red
-  Blue



Participant 14

Gender	Male
Age	70
Location	Shah Alam, Selangor
Place of origin	Johor Bahru, Johor
Been living in the city since	1975

Colour and art have always been a part of his life. He believes he comes from a very artistic family where his late mother and older brother had different artistic talents. He recalls admiring his late mother's basketry works as she prepares food for special occasions. He said his mother was a great influence to his current artistic career as he would try to emulate her tastes in colour coordination in the kitchen.

As a young boy growing up in a small town, he remembers spending a lot of time playing among the trees and in the river with his brothers. Nature shaped a lot of his understanding of colour and art. He would notice how green and its hues would be very soothing to his eyes.

Open when he pursued formal training in art did he realise how colours function in space, that some would move forwards while others recede. During college, he explored how colour worked in space. Later on in his life, he observed that he used more green, blue and ultramarine. He says he likes the vibrations these colours emit.

Favourite Dress 1

When it comes to dress, he prefers earth tones or dark blues. He said that these colours harmonise with the surrounding easily. He also prefers a lightweight material like cotton as it is comfortable to wear in the hot and humid weather. He says he does not like to wear colours that would attract attention and likes subdued tones.

Color breakdown
Favourite Dress 1

-  Sea blue
-  Light blue
-  Dark brown



Favourite Object 1

He finds the *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet) a beautiful object. He admires the craft and the centuries of traditions the *wayang kulit* represent. He purchased this object in Indonesia more than 10 years ago. The colours on this *wayang kulit* are rather vibrant with strong yellow and gold. However, despite the bold colours, the object as a whole, seems to harmonise.

Color breakdown
Favourite Object 1

-  Light yellow
-  Ochre
-  Sea blue
-  Deep red
-  Black



FINDINGS



Above: Clothes with cooler tones were a popular choice.



Above: Cool tones but with a bold colour combination.



Above: Celapa pouch



Above: Betel Nut tray

The observation study conducted by the researcher has uncovered two interesting findings with regards to colour choices in a contemporary Malay household.

Firstly, the favourite clothes chosen consisted mostly of 'cool' colours, which were blue, green, purple, brown or grey. These colours can be considered to be more of 'natural' colour tones. This choice of colour tone was the same, despite the participants' varying age groups.

While they were 'cool' tones, the colours were pure and strong. They generally were not pastel or pale colours. It can be observed that the garments have a bold colour combination.

The choice of a favourite object yielded two different colour taste. Women from the older generation (50–60 years old) selected traditional items such as the celapa and the betel nut tray. On the other hand, younger women (30–40 years old) selected modern objects such as a decorative picture frame or a wristwatch given by the owners' mother. The colour choice in this finding was more evenly distributed, where some items were of warmer tones and the other were cooler tones.

Nearly half of the objects selected during the observation study were made of metal. They seem to hold special meanings for users and two of the items were family heirlooms, the celapa and tobacco pouch made from silver. This belonged to the great grandmother of one of the participants and had been in her possession for more than 30 years.

Another favorite object was the betel nut tray made from yellow brass. There are two types of brassware; yellow and white brass. The former is commonly used for utilitarian objects, while the latter has a more luxurious mirrored finish.

At the same time, it cannot be denied that there is an emerging contemporary taste in colours from the influx of modern day objects and the influence of mass culture and advertising.



Left: This Swatch Watch that had sentimental value to the owner as it was a gift from her parents after doing well in her SPM exams.



Above: A Mickey Mouse figurine that had sentimental value to the owner.

CONCLUSIONS

Among older women there seems to be an even split between liking nature colours or earth tones (fondly recalling the colours of the village environment) or bright vibrant colours.

The majority of Malay women, regardless of age or environment (urban or rural), will keep one or a couple of brightly coloured clothing in their wardrobe. These are usually worn during festive or special occasions like births and weddings.

In the past, colour was associated with one's place in society, thus more colours meant you were wealthier. Hence, bright coloured attire was worn during festivities to show off one's social and economic standing. Today, working professionals living in the city have adopted the opposite, preferring monotonous or demure colours to blend into a corporate environment.

Floral designs are the perennial favourites.

Many respondents of an older generation speak of the influence of nature on their perception of colours, something pointedly missing in the younger generation.

Teenage Malay girls are often frustrated by the strict dress code imposed by their parents as Islam requires the body to be covered up. Like most teenagers, they follow trends and brands.

Gold or silver items are especially attractive to Malays.

Favourite objects always hold fond memories. Sentimental value is more important than the object's monetary value. The object can be as simple as a hand-made photo album or an obsolete item which doesn't work anymore. This is true for all gender and age groups. Colour may have played a part when the object was initially selected but it is secondary to its emotional value.

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Research Report 2013



Middle East

the
Colours
of Asia

Red Yellow Blue Green Black & White

亞洲
色彩

紅黃藍綠黑與白



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INTRODUCTION

The Middle East is an important part of Asia's western side and covers a large geographic area including several countries. In our definition of Asia's Middle East, we will be looking at the Arab countries, which exclude Iran and its Persian culture. The Arab countries under this research are Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Oman. This is a challengingly large geographic area since it includes several different countries that have a lot of common grounds but yet they differ significantly on many other social and cultural levels, creating a complex field to explore when it comes to any visual research conducted in the area. To make things even more challenging, the Arab world is often seen at large to include the Middle East as well as North Africa - often referred to as the MENA region. Because the Arabic speaking countries extends all the way towards the west of Africa, the intercultural relations and connections between all the MENA countries play a considerable part in the understanding of the Middle Eastern culture. North Africa's Arabic countries include Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti.

Map highlighting the Arab countries which are spread between Asia and North Africa.

Photo: ProCon.org map based upon the Arab American Encyclopedia



The complexity lies then in the definition of the Middle East itself: a story of multiple identities in the Arab world, where the geographic area is commonly defined, as it is diverse. Walk in the market place of any Arabic city and you might feel they are all alike. Compare on the other hand very common daily life aspects in two different Arab cities, such as spoken language or behavioral daily habits, and you might feel you are in looking at completely different - if not opposite - cultures. After all, the Arab world - often referred to as the Middle East even with its African MENA side - is a world in itself. It covers a large geographic area stretching from Mauritania in the west all the way to the way to Oman at the far east of the Gulf area. While many look collectively at the Arab world as a region, the social and cultural differences within the different Arab countries and among Arab people are often underestimated. The spoken language and dialects are considerably different; the historical local and international influences in each country are very distinctive; architecture is rather individual to each area; social, political and religious behaviors are very diverse, and even aesthetics and visual appreciation are considerably divergent if you compare the visible trends of each country. An Arab individual is more

likely to experience some sort of a cultural shock while visiting another Arab country, and not when visiting a western country.

The only common element in the Arab world is the classical Arabic language, the written language used consistently in the Arab world. Besides the written script however, the major common thing consistently occurring across all the Arab world over the last two decades is “change”. On all aspects, most of the Arabic countries are experiencing rapid developments or transformations that are challenging and re-defining the self-projected identity of each of these countries. The civil war ended in Lebanon and a new post-war phase started in the country. The gulf region experienced a major boom that transformed radically most of the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) nations in an incredible short period of time, influencing the demographics of the region and the growth of the major cities towards new regional urban models. The behavioral norm views started to change considerably in most Arab countries, particularly with gender roles and the more active presence of women in society. Overall, across the Arab world, change has been happening on a rapid pace, a change that is considerably affecting how societies and nations perceive themselves, and how others view them. The turbulent political changes resulting from the “Arab Spring” and its revolutions are actually one part of these changes. It comes as a result of a more than a decade of rapid development, and is certainly not the last milestone in the transformation that the region is exploring.

Despite common grounds such as standard writing language, there is a lot of difference in belonging, beliefs and social habits - all under a common Arabic umbrella. It is a culture with many subcultures. For the same belief system, you have many practices and manifestations, which is cultivated in the customs and therefore often associated to colours.

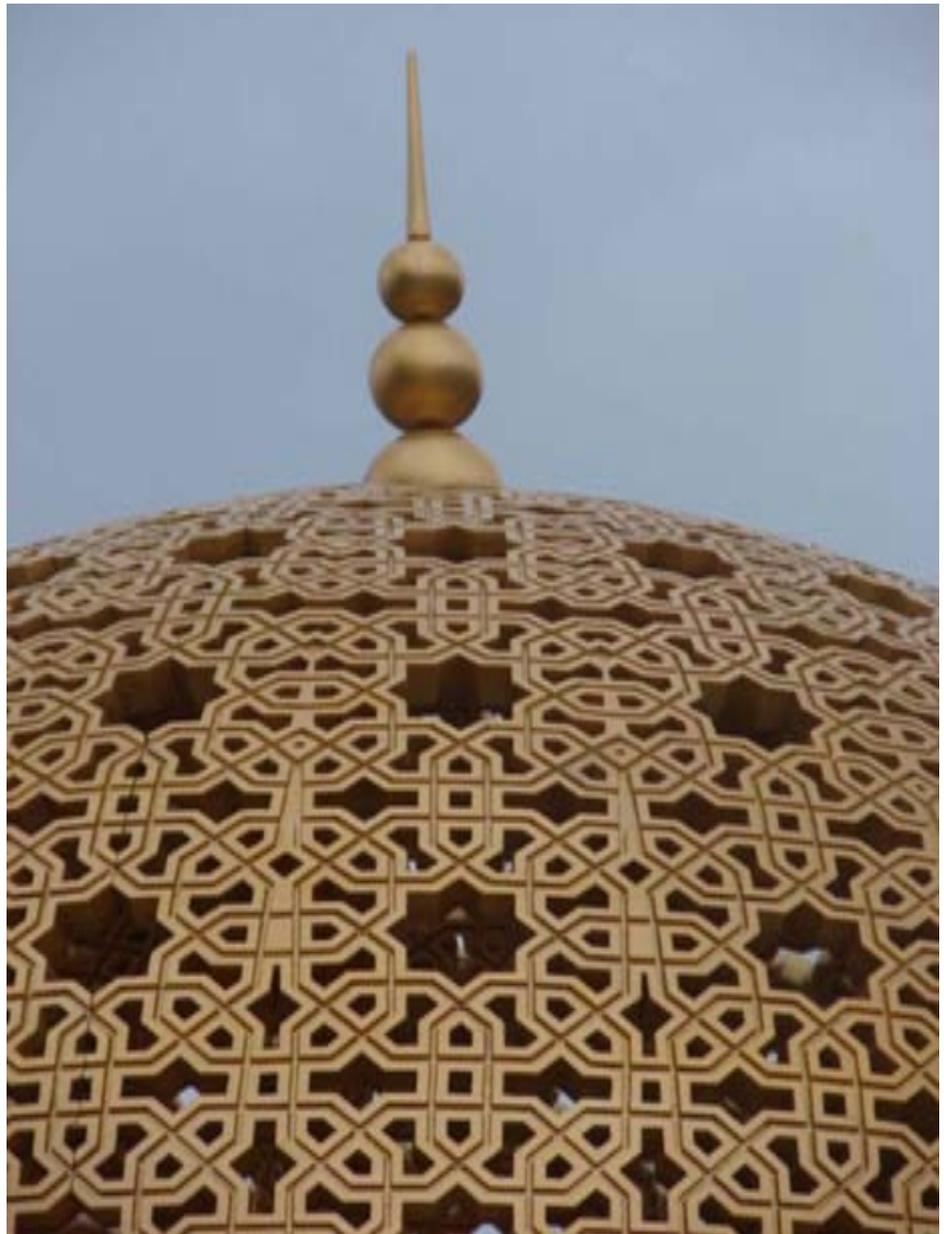
All this makes the definition of an Arab or Middle Eastern identity a very complex one, and makes the understanding of specific elements of this culture, such as visual culture, a very challenging task. There is certainly an identity crisis in the Arab world. Everyone acknowledges a common Arabic identity, and the recent trend in all aspects of visual culture was to embrace this identity and be part of it. Yet how everyone defines this identity, particularly when it comes to visual representations (colours, graphics, forms, photography, illustration, etc...) is totally different and done from a different perspective. Some people tend to visualize the Middle East in a nostalgic aspect; others in an orientalist aspect. Many paint a more traditional image of the Middle East. It is seen often in even more different perspectives: popular; futuristic; urban; exotic; western; iconic, etc...

This considerable difference in defining the Middle East and the Arab world manifests itself almost in every aspect of visual communication. Take architecture as an example: The amount of different architectural styles visible in the region today – all claiming to be typical Arabic traditional or contemporary expression - is rather unusual, particularly when these styles clash and often have nothing in common. Take corporate identity design as another example: As the identity of any Arab body kept on redefining itself, there was a growing need to visually express this transition and to visually project this new identity to a larger audience, in an attempt to keep up with the progressive reality of the Arab world. Every organization, company, institution, product or event quickly realized that they need to present themselves in a contemporary image that truly reflects their reality and aspirations in their own related context. The same issue and challenges were faced naturally when approaching any branding project, was larger identity issues, and where to position the look and feel of a new brand to be. Arabic or western, traditional or progressive, popular or high culture, there seemed to be a constant struggle to decide how local versus international the

look and feel of an identity needs to be. Almost everyone wanted an identity that looked very Arabic, an identity that fits the new Arabic identity of the Arab world. After all, any identity development needed a considerable thinking of its Arabic counterpart, in typography and design elements. However, the definition of the term Arabic and its representation as a visual language differed significantly; everyone seemed to look at it in a different eye. The fundamental challenge remained to find a visual identity that is truly native.

Dome of a mosque in Oman.

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design
- www.atrissi.com



Understanding the colours of Arabia is then not any different from understanding any of the other forms of visual communication such as the described above - if not even more complex - because colours are even more abstract, involve more personal opinion, and some aspects of their cultural history are even more difficult to trace back. In the context of the Middle East, looking at colours will fall immediately under the large issue of attempting to understand what the Middle East is and in what aspect to define it and look at it, and eventually study it. There will always be different angles in perceiving any study or research of

colour in the Middle East. Perhaps the most direct example that represents the cultural complexity of the Middle East when it comes to any aspect of visual communication is to look at iconic drawings used for toilet signage across the area. Even with such symbolism that is usually universal, the differences are striking if you compare various graphic / iconic illustrations representing how different countries adopt these.

We define our approach to studying and researching the colours of the Middle East as a specific one based on our own perspective of it. We certainly rely on our native understanding of the Arab world, with our research team being born and raised in the Middle East and able to understand complex and often very subtle cultural nuances that only locals can understand. We acknowledge on the other hand that we are more rooted to our background from a specific part of the Middle East covering Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine. Our vision of the rest of the Arab world will encounter with no doubt the cross-cultural aspects – even if are still within one unified overall Middle Eastern culture.

A true local understanding in the region - no matter which locality it comes from - is a very important aspect in conducting any visual study in the Arab world. The complex Arab identity issues described above - and even the doubt if a collective Arabic identity even exists - made the visualization of Arabia take a mistaken shape in many cases. The Arab world fell under a general cliché visual look and feel, an image often forced on the region from an external point of view, particularly from the West that carried a wrong visual association with the region ever since the colonial days. Such a visual representation has been so strong that it even affected the local taste in understanding its own environment and visual belonging. Take colours as a specific example: The Arab world is often associated to a specific colour palette that falls under a cliché trap which does not represent the accurate colours of Arabia. This wrong colour palette can sometimes be based on a desert environment colour theme, which is absolutely not representative since the Arab world varies in nature, and hence natural colour palette, more than one can imagine. Even Saudi Arabia, often wrongly represented as a desert land, contains so much variety and difference in its natural landscape.

The wrong colour palettes often associated as a representation of the region can be seen in many other different examples. In Islam, the most common religion in the Arab world, green seem to have been the one strong colour associated with the Muslim religion. But where did this come from? On what facts is this based? Is it because the very Islamic flag of Saudi Arabia, a country strongly associated with Islam, is green? Deep research below the surface will show that green is absolutely not the one and only colour of Islam, there lies a much more colourful Islamic colour palette beneath the surface. But how did all these colour misconceptions became so strong that even locals and Muslims began to believe it?

Arabia has a preconceived palette of colours on the shallow layer. Underneath this monotonous and imposed perspective - and the crisis of our daily lives and the Western projection on the outlook of Arabia - there lies a much richer and varied colour palette that is deeply ingrained in the Arab societies. How is the above manifested in the different colours mapping the Arab world?

Our research approach took this concept as a starting point and built further on it. We went on a journey across the Middle East to look for colours and their meanings and to highlight this colourful reality of our daily life. We looked in some cases at typical objects that are at the essence of our culture and history, and understanding their colourful compositions. Exploring in other cases the general concept of colour and how it manifests itself in different specific

environments in our societies. Our stories of colours, or colourful stories, link objects to colours and vice versa. They take us on a journey to know more the colours encountered in the Middle East to set the ground for further analysis, study and research.

Perhaps the dress code of women in the Gulf region, such as Saudi, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, is a good comparison to the general perception of colours in the Middle East. Women are always seen in public wearing their black *abayas* (robes), the traditional clothing in most of this specific region and which is essentially a robe-like dress. But beneath this black surface is a colourful reality: the clothing of women in private social and family events and particularly in wedding occasions combines strong vivid colours that contrast with the black dress code visible in public. Turquoise, orange, yellow, pink, violet and much more, these colourful *abayas* are a hidden reality. For many (non-locals, men, etc...) they can only be seen in store windows in the big malls where display models give a small projection of a wonderful and diverse colour palette hiding underneath the surface.

Colourful *abayas* (robe) worn in private social gatherings in the Arab Gulf countries.

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design
- www.atrissi.com



A COLOURFUL REALITY: HAND PAINTED TRUCKS IN LEBANON

The reality in the Arab world is very colourful. This mix of cultures living underneath one general culture expresses its differences through a rich and diverse colourful landscape, which can be seen on all levels.

The urban landscape in Lebanon, specifically, is a rather good projection of the deep integration of colours in daily life. This can be seen, for example, in the tradition of truck painting in Lebanon. The colourful hand painted trucks - and other sort of transport cars - decorate the streets of the country as they move from one area to the another. Through a visually appealing combination of colours, drawings and calligraphy, these vividly illustrate various cultural and social stories. This includes stories about human relations, highlights of family values, an admiration for beauty, a reflection of the difficulties of life, betrayal,

love, nationalism and religion. Primary strong colours are the main dominant colours used in this peculiar visual language that developed to become the key popular graphic style of the street. A deeper study of the colour palette of documented examples and photos of these vehicles clearly shows a strong and dominant presence of yellow, blue and red. This urban art form reflects a deep connection between the drivers and their vehicles, and a fascinating attention of decorating them such as a precious belonging. Just like how horses were regarded in the history of Bedouin Arabs, these trucks are seen as sign of wealth and prosperity and a reason for their owners to be proud of. These vehicles become a symbol of power that reinforces their special bond with the driver.

Photos of hand-painted truck graphics in Lebanon.

Photo: Houda Kassatly, 2009



Colours and calligraphy integrate closely to form the basics of the visual language of these trucks. After all, the calligraphy is painted with these bright colours over the most visible part of the vehicles. This combination of calligraphy and colours - which comes often hand in hand in different contexts and historical periods - holds different functional purposes. It serves first as an aesthetic and decorative element, enriching the appearance of the vehicle and making it stand out in the crowd with its flashy colours. The colour calligraphy combination holds as well a prophylactic function, protecting the vehicle and the owner from the envious eyes of evil people, who might be jealous from the truck ownership and the status of its owner. In addition, this combination holds

an identity function as the way each vehicle is painted can often suggest from which specific region it is coming from; south, north, east or other areas of Lebanon. An additional function is for individual recognition, giving each truck a personal character and the possibility to distinctively recognize it among others. They also have a cultural function, since all what is written and painted such as quotes, popular sayings, poems, songs and philosophical thoughts - relating to this transportation context or to daily life - ends up travelling across the country in different routes and projects this cultural layer to a wider audience. They hold a communication function as well, as they become moving billboards travelling around, and carrying messages ranging from love messages to personal opinions or even jokes. Colour and calligraphy combine then to hold an educational function as well, since often they play the role of transmitting the religious and cultural knowledge. On a more practical level and away from all the aesthetic consideration, the calligraphy plays a more useful role, acting like signage to label the specific storage areas of a truck, such as water, battery, tools, diesel, etc... One can easily notice that often the more functional labelling are placed on less flashy colours such as black or white.

Truck decorated with ostrich feather duster at the front.

Photo: Houda Kassatly, 2009



The most colourful element of these trucks are the ribbons that are placed on the front side of the truck, and that alternates very vivid colours - sometimes fluorescent - acting on one hand as safety element to make the front of the truck more visible at night. On the other hand, these multicoloured ribbons act as an acceleration of colours to lead to the most important part of the truck, its front, decorated often by a high quality ostrich feather duster. Its a merely decorative element, often coloured black and which is usually imported from China, and doesn't link to the Egyptian civilization symbolism of the ostrich feather which suggested truth and justice in that context. This decorative element placed at the very front of the truck relates strongly to the history of decorating the head of the horse in Arab heritage, and draws again a link between the pride of owning the vehicle in today's world just like the pride of owning the horse in the bedouin life in the history of the Arabs.

The process of giving these trucks their unique and colourful look is actually a long one that is the result of a chain of fabrication starting with the assembly of the truck; to the painting of the calligraphy and the colouring and the final ornamentation and decoration that makes the trucks look the way we see them on the streets of Lebanon. This process is called *tafsil* (tailoring), which is the verb usually used to describe the work of the tailor when working with fabrics. Specialized painters give the truck its dress by colouring the truck and adding the decorative layer by drawing cubes, diamond shapes and polygons, using mostly red, blue, yellow and green. Finally, and usually after 3 to 7 days period that allows the paint to dry on the vehicles, comes the work of the calligraphers who paint the last layer of lettering on the truck, adding the written word to this colourful canvas.

Similar to tattoos or henna this ingenious popular art form and manifestation of colours is firstly a reflection of a masculine dialogue, the one of the truckers, yet executed with a feminine and fashionable sensitivity to colours and visual aesthetics.

COLOURS AND ISLAMIC ARTS AND CULTURE

The complexity of the geographic and cultural definition of the Middle East becomes equally challenging when the focus on the region is made from a Muslim perspective; since Islam is the dominating religion in this part of the world, the geographic area where it was actually born. The Arab world / the Middle East is strongly associated with the Islamic world, and the Islamic influences in culture and art are strong and visible even in many aspects of other religions. However, when we talk about the Islamic influences, the geographic boundaries are further blurred since Islam conquered a much wider area than the Middle East and reached further west into Europe and all the way to the Far East. Islamic influences on art and culture are rooted or originating sometimes from within the Middle East but are in retrospect often developed in the wider context of the Islamic world and bring strong influences back all across the Islamic world at large. Even when talking about the Middle East specifically, looking at Islamic relations and meaning to colours will involve a wider and more complex intercultural connections, and specific case studies with colour interest will cover areas outside of what is defined for this research paper such as Turkey, Iran and south of Spain.

From an Islamic perspective, colours are to be seen in very different angles depending on the specific area, time and relating social, cultural and Islamic factors, making the subject of colours and Islam a subject of study on its own.

Various Islamic cultures that developed over 1400 years from Arabia, Morocco, Mali, Malaysia and Mongolia have all dealt with colours in very different ways; not surprising because colour perception has always been a result of the influences of its cultural and social surrounding.

COLOURS IN THE QUR'AN: YELLOW IS MENTIONED FIRST; GREEN IS MENTIONED THE SECOND MOST.

In the Qur'an, God's creation of colours is glorified through the phrase "and diverse are their hues". Colours have consistently played a significant role in the Islamic culture and art, and have manifested itself in several aspects of it; practical, mystical and poetic. Islamic art is visibly very colourful in all its forms. Islamic architecture, for example, clearly represents that, such as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (more on that below). No wonder then, that many famous buildings are named for their distinctive colour: *Jamii' Al-Abyad* in Ramla (The white mosque); *Masjid-I Kabud* in Tabriz (Blue Mosque); *The Lal Qila* in Agra (Red Fort) and the *Yesil Cami* in Bursa (green mosque), among many others. Manuscripts are another example of the central role of colours in Islamic visual communication - and the Blue Qur'an - also named after its colour, is probably one of the most known examples of that; which is a manuscript from the Fatimid period (909-1171) in Kufic calligraphic style. This multivolume manuscript is known as the Blue Qur'an because of its unique indigo-dyed surface. It is one of the most memorable and celebrated works of Islamic art. Although the calligraphy is the type of angular kufic common to most contemporary Qur'an manuscripts, it was copied in gold instead of black ink. The gold and the use of now-oxidized silver to mark verse separation make it a uniquely lavish, prized, and costly work. Firm chronology and places of production for early Arabic calligraphy are far from understood, but it seems likely that the Blue Qur'an was copied in North Africa - probably intended as an endowment for the mosque of Kairouan in Tunisia - in the early tenth century. If so, it may have been commissioned by the recently established and fast-rising Fatimid dynasty (909-1171), which conquered Egypt and Syria and found the city of Cairo. The choice of blue, gold, and silver may represent an attempt to emulate and surpass the imperial purple-dyed Byzantine codices in richness, thereby making a political and religious statement. The largest section of the manuscript is in Tunis, and the volume from which the present page comes was apparently dispersed during the Ottoman domination in North Africa.

When discussing colour's relation to Islamic culture, it is important to research some understandings and facts about colours that have been mentioned in the Qur'an, in order to understand the vision of the holy book on the variety of colours as well as their origins and their psychological effects; what we usually refer to as the drama of colour. Colours are an important element in the life of humans, and the Qur'an clarified this importance as many of the phrases highly prize the values of colour and ornamentation.

The concept of colour, in various Arabic linguistic variations, has been mentioned in seven chapters of the Qur'an. The word "colours" in plural has been mentioned in seven chapters. This is often attributed as God's sign for the known seven colours that form the colour white.

Yellow is the first colour that appears in the Qur'an, and is mentioned a total of four times, in different linguistic variations of the Arabic colour word yellow, *asfar*. It's meaning in the holy Qur'an has often been associated with sickness and end of life, and it suggests lack of energy and weakness. Its negative

connotations include destruction when describing the winds, and death when it comes to agriculture. However, when it is very bright or mixed with white it has a psychological influence of happiness and peace of mind. Yellow is particularly positively viewed when it is seen in animals.

The white colour, *abyad*, is the second colour to be mentioned in the Qur'an, mentioned a total of twelve times in twelve different chapters, making it the most mentioned colour in the Qur'an. White is referred to as the ultimate colour of purity and acceptance by God. It has several connotations as mentioned in the Qur'an. It describes the mornings and the rise of the sun. It colours the faces of the happy people at the judgment day. It is used to describe the colour of certain mountains and the colours of drinks of the paradise's inhabitants. On the negative side, it is linked to some diseases, such as the disappearance of the black of the eye to be replaced by white in the situation of extreme sickness.

Black is the third colour to be mentioned in the Qur'an. It appears eight times in seven different chapters. Black is given in the Qur'an the following connotations; it refers to the darkness of the nights, it colours the faces of the people in hell, it represents sadness and worries and reflects death as well. Black or *aswad* in Arabic is often used as the extreme opposite to white, not only as colour property but also in all metaphorical meanings.

Green, which is the fourth colour in order of appearance in the Qur'an, is mentioned eight times in eight different chapters, making it the second most mentioned colour after white. It is used to describe the colour of trees and agriculture after rain. It is also the colour of the clothing of heaven's inhabitants, as well as the colours of their pillows. *Akhdar* (green) is the dominant colour of heaven, showing prosperity and suggesting life, tranquillity and settlement. It also has a strong link with fertility.

Blue comes next in terms of order of appearance. It is mentioned one time in one chapter. It mostly refers to fear and shock, as it is used to describe the overwhelmed look on the faces of the nonreligious people on judgment day. *Azrak* (blue) is generally then attributed to deep sorrow, particularly when facing death. These negative connotations of the blue colours are totally opposite to the lighter colours or turquoise colours, that symbolizes love and romance.

Ahmar (red) is the sixth colour in order of appearance and is mentioned only once. It is the only colour to be used in combination with the word "colours" next to it, some say as if this is a sign that red is at the origins of all colours. It was used to refer to the colour of some pieces of mountains but mostly to the colour of fruits on trees.

Wardi, or the colour of roses, is mentioned once and is a variation of red. When we count it, the total number of colours mentioned in the Qur'an reaches seven as well.

COLOURS OF THE QUR'AN: UNPREDICTABLE HUES OF MANUSCRIPTS

This very colourful nature of the Islamic art and culture is often wrongly reflected or acknowledged today. There might be many reasons for that. On one hand and for a long time, the art history field has seen more publications relying on black and white illustrations, encouraging people mainly to study form and design much more than colours. On the other hand, specific symbolic or very well known elements related to Islam, such as buildings, monuments or flags took too much attention that they were able to impose a limited colour palette

that became wrongly associated with Islam. These specific well known Islamic symbols forced their own colours to become the rich commonly acknowledged perceived colours of Islam in our societies today. Green being a front runner, as well as white - maybe to their prominence as colours linked to Islam in the text of Qur'an. Blue and gold rank highly as well as perceived Islamic colours. Some of these associations were so exploited making them the expected cliché colours to reflect Islam. Analysing the colours chosen to be used in the corporate identity systems adopted to many Islamic organizations reinforces this point as one can easily notice the abundance of some specific colours that have been commonly acknowledged as associated with Islam.

But are these colours really the colours of Islam? Is it due to how the colour green is portrayed in the Qur'an the reason behind these associations?

To understand colours in Islamic art on a wider context, we observe and research beyond the textual aspect of the Qur'an and its reference to colours, and focus on the visual aspect of the Qur'an and its actual colour representations: by looking specifically at the manuscripts of the Qur'an produced by so many artists across different historical periods and in many different locations of the Middle East. The Qur'an and its text has been one of the most reproduced forms of art in the Islamic culture and is a key element to analyse when it comes to understanding the overall relationship of colours and Islamic culture.

We have conducted our studies and observations by visiting, documenting and analysing the calligraphic manuscripts (Qur'anic mostly but not necessarily) of two museums with a rich collection of Islamic calligraphic heritage: The Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Turkey; and the less known but equally fascinating Tareq Rajab Museum in Kuwait.

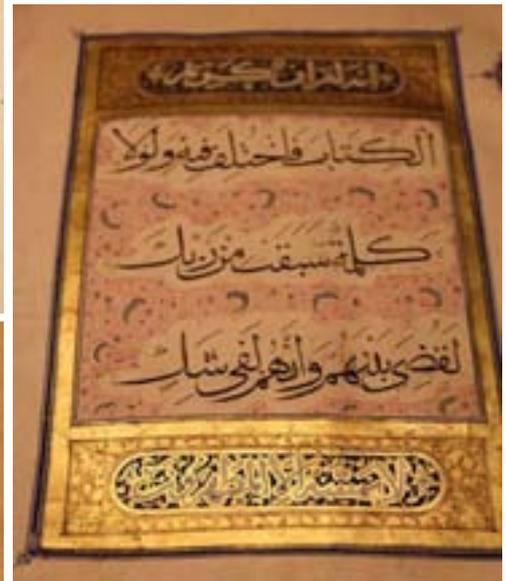
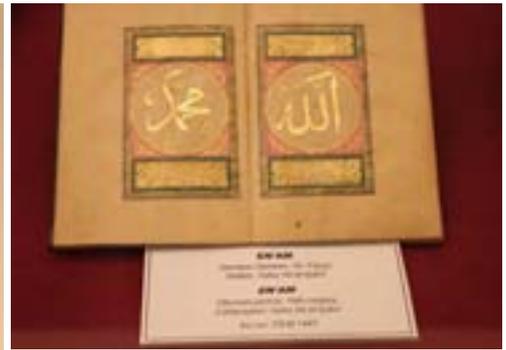
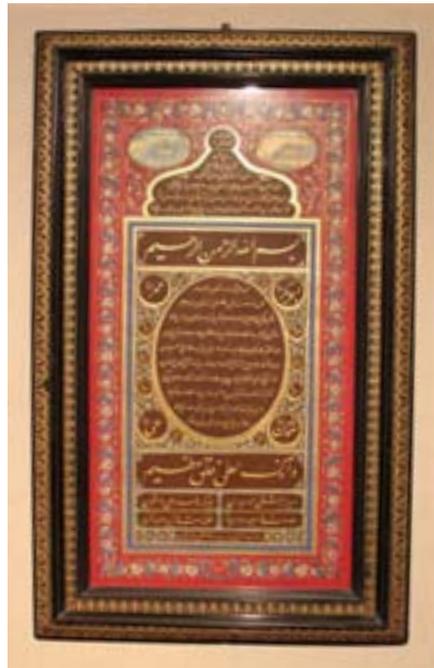
The Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul is one of the first museums in Turkey of its kind. Preparations for the founding of this museum commenced in the late 19th century and were completed in 1913. Known as the Museum of Islamic Foundations, the museum was opened to the public in 1914 and later on it was renamed the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts. It contains a huge collection of items representing almost every period and genre of Islamic art. Besides its remarkable carpet collection, the museum contains a unique collection of manuscripts and miniatures dating from the 7th to the 20th century, and artworks from the Seljuk, Mamluk, Timurid, Persian and Ottoman periods.

The Tareq Rajab Museum of Islamic Calligraphy opened its doors to the public in 2007. Its aim is to trace the development of the Arabic script. The earliest script in the museum dates back to the 7th century. It is an offspring of the general Tareq Rajab Museum, which houses a collection of over thirty thousand items collected over the last fifty years, of which approximately ten thousand are on permanent display. Calligraphy is one important aspect of its collection, and eventually made it into a dedicated museum housing all the calligraphy and manuscript collection.

One of the most striking aspects one can observe when analysing the colour palette of both these very varied collections is the abundance of very vivid and strong colours that are typically not associated with Islam, not in our contemporary culture at least. Pink seems as a strong reoccurring colour that dominates a lot of the manuscripts: A bright light pink that is soft and eye catching. A Qur'an leaf from the Abbasid period (9th - 10th century) on display in the museum of Istanbul uses large areas of pink colour to fill in all the space around the calligraphic text in the centre of the vertically oriented piece. The pink colour subtly surround the black-inked text without disturbing it and compliments the bright strong golden frame of the piece making it appear less classic in the way it's used due to this unique colour combination. Another example on display

Photos of Qur'anic manuscripts at the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design
- www.atrissi.com

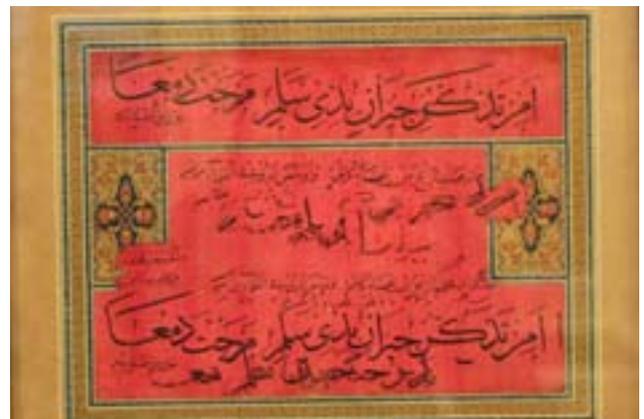
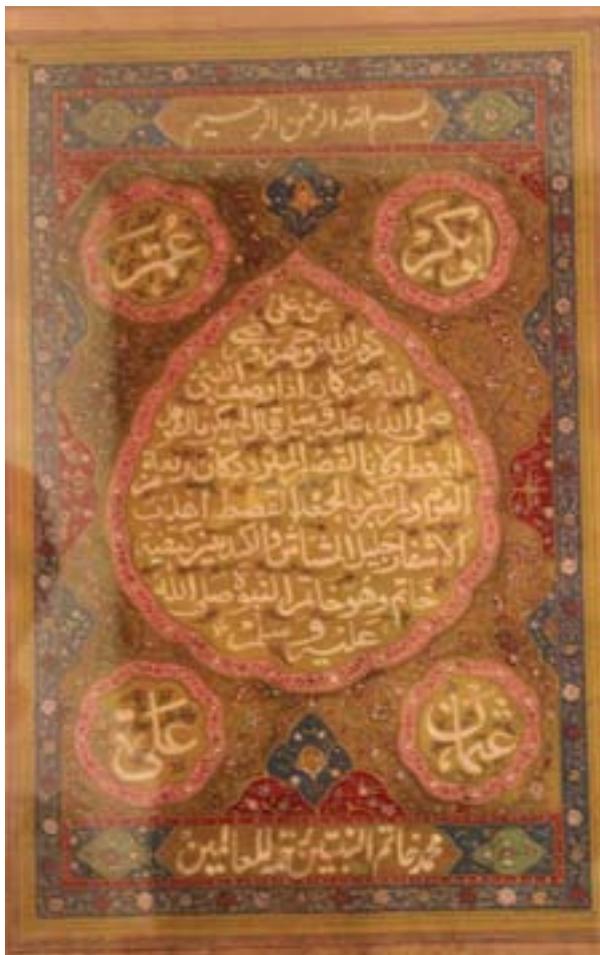
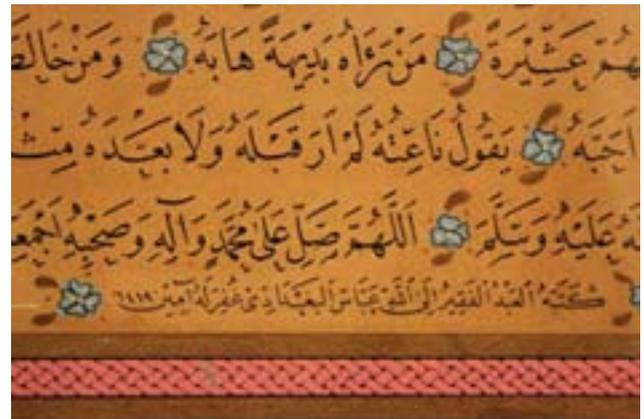
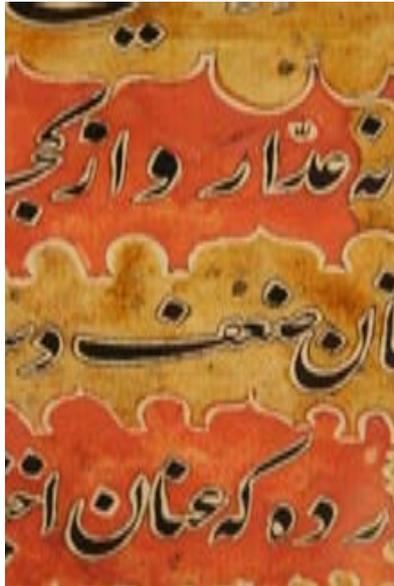


not far away is a “Hamse-i Attar” from the Timurid period, between 1405 -1445: Coloured more dramatically in pink as the full page background takes this vivid colour, and the black calligraphic text comes on it with a touch of gold again to texture the background. The same colour observation of pink dominance as a complimentary colour to gold is seen in another “En’am” from the Ottoman period, 19th century, by the calligrapher Hafiz Ali El Sukri. A more vivid and intense pink is seen more often in the dramatically more colourful illustrations of the miniature on display.

All the way across the Gulf in Kuwait city and in a less documented calligraphy-specialized museum the same striking observations can be made, even though the collection in Kuwait is even more varied in terms of style and time and contains a considerable contemporary pieces as well as many nonspecifically Islamic artwork. The same hue of pink colouring backgrounds and appearing repetitively in ornaments and arabesque patterns is visibly dominating, particularly in calligraphic albums. It changes the way the most

classic colours have been more commonly viewed in Islamic traditions. Pink is maybe the most visible repetitive common colour to be noticed, but the rest of unexpected flashy colours finding their way across all the manuscripts are not to be underestimated: Strong orange; fuchsia; light and deep turquoise blue; vivid yellow; lime green, etc... The colour palette depicted from both these collections and when taken out of context are more likely to look similar to a colour colour booklet with vivid spectrums of intense colours. This very diverse and imposing colour palette draws a parallel link to the much more contemporary cinema posters of Egyptian movies that overtook the Arab world in the 20th century with their colourful pop and graphic style. These Egyptian cinema posters - which felt collectively Arab and Middle Eastern because the Egyptian cinema industry was the leading in the region - had a popular style that is nostalgic and that keeps inspiring visual artists today. The never ending love story told through these different Arabic posters, narrated with imagery an important historical period of the Arab world, starting in the 1920s and accelerating in 1935 with the foundation of Studio Misr, making Cairo the third pole of worldwide cinema centres after Hollywood and Bollywood. The Egyptian cinema was enriched by its close association with the new Arabic song: Music was being developed hand in hand with movies, and the most popular singers of their day such as Umm Kulthum and Asmahan were the featured artists of these movies. Not to forget the presence of the Arabic belly dancers, soon becoming by Egyptian cinema a requirement in these musical films. Nothing expressed the fusion of these varied art forms together more than the posters that promoted these films, and that became printed invitations for the entertainment industry.

Photos of Qur'anic manuscripts at Tarek Rajab Museum of Islamic Calligraphy in Kuwait.



Photos: Tarek Atrissi Design - www.atrissi.com

For audiences all over the Arab world posters presented much more than promotion and advertising. They became a symbolic representation of part of the social and cultural daily changes the Arab world was living or aspiring to. They presented the courageous new image of the Arab woman, liberated from the veil and regaining the freedom of her body; and equally presented the new image of the male figure used as a sex symbol, all blended in flashy colours and graphics and illustrations. They represented as well the “dream life” for many of the poor masses, particularly in Egypt, and these movies became a sort of escape from reality. They presented the glamour world on one hand, and the national and revolutionary movements on the other hand. In short, these posters, despite being seen generally by critics as a secondary art form due to their functional purpose, quickly became an independent stylistic movement that defined very much the graphic art scene of the time, and expanded its influences on other form of printed communication. It became the leading element in the developing graphic art in the Arab world, anticipating in some cases the Pop Art visual movement. This graphic page of the history of modernity in the Arab World, for long neglected and unappreciated, and replaced since the 1970s with a less exciting style of graphic cinema promotion, became a clear reference to how visual art significantly and distinctively became a innovative representation of its surrounding.

Collection of poster art from Egyptian films.

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design - www.atrissi.com



Seen retrospectively as a form of kitsch art, particularly because of its bright colour combinations, this graphic style was revived, and became a rich source of inspiration. Similarly, the search for more hidden popular art forms became a trend, leading to a continuous recycling of a distinctive regional iconography by much of the young emerging artists, adopting popular imagery from public spaces and transforming the vernacular art into high art, in different forms, media, and personal interests and interpretations of different artists. It is yet

remarkable that a line can be drawn to connect the traditional manuscripts to these popular commercial posters - when one solely focus on their colour philosophy and approach. Not surprising though as both are by all means valuable practice of graphic art ad visual communication.

KEFFIYEH: WHITE, BLACK AND RED

The *keffiyeh*, also known as a *ghutrah*, *ḥaṭṭah* and *shemagh*, is a traditional Arab headdress fashioned from a cotton scarf. It is commonly worn by men in dry and hot regions, be it on their heads or shoulders, to protect their head from direct sun exposure, and sometimes covering the mouth and eyes as a protection from blown dust and sand.

The *keffiyeh's* base is made of white cotton cloth, and most versions of it have a woven checked pattern in either red or black thread. The scarf has two variations of woven patterns; fishing nets representing the fishermen on the banks of what is now Palestine, and ears of grain representing the inland farmers, as the scarf was originally worn by these two groups of the working class.



Black and white *keffiyeh*
(scarf)

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design - www.atrissi.com

Aside from the varying patterns, the *keffiyeh's* colours vary with different meanings. Gavin Young noted during his temporary in Iraq that the local *sayyids* – “venerated men accepted... as descendants of the Prophet Mohammed” – wore dark blue keffiyeh, in contrast to the black and white checker ones typical of the area’s inhabitants (Young, 1978). The original black and white colour symbolism reflected whether one has descended from the Prophet Mohammed or the Caliph, and whether one has done the *Haji* (pilgrimage) or not. Black symbolizes a relationship with the Prophet Mohammed, where white represents that the person has performed the Islamic pilgrimage, known as *Haji*. The plain white keffiyeh version is most popular in the Arabian Peninsula, such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. The red and white *keffiyeh* is most strongly associated with Jordan, red being both the traditional colour of the

Red and white *keffiyeh* (scarf)
fixed with a black *agal* (ring)

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design
- www.atrissi.com



workers' movement and the red scarf being indicative of a bedouin and rural background, therefore becoming a symbol of Jordanian heritage. The Jordanian *keffiyeh* has white decorative cotton or wool tassels on the sides. It is believed that the bigger these tassels, the more value it has and the higher a person's status. It has been used by bedouins and villagers throughout the centuries and was used as a symbol of honour and tribal identification.

In Yemen it is used extensively in both red-white and black-white pattern, in addition to some traditional Yemeni designs and colours. Multi coloured tribal *shemagh* were used widely before the 1950s. Nowadays these are restricted to wearers in Yemen and Oman, while in the Gulf and Levant the black-white, red-white or pure white styles succeeded.

Below are the three distinctions of the *keffiyeh* in terms of colour distribution across the Arab countries:

- Ordinary *keffiyeh*: a piece of white cloth with red or black woven patterns made from wool and cotton worn primarily by the Palestinians.
- *Shemagh*: a piece of cloth, usually made of cotton with red and white woven patterns worn primarily by the Jordanians.
- *Ghutrah*: a piece of plain white cloth made of cotton mild, worn in western Iraq and by the Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula.

A further detailed inspection to the colour distribution shows that the checked keffiyehs relate to type, government and participation in the *Hajj*. Current colour identification and separation is as follow:

- Black checkering: Worn in Republics, such as Syria and Egypt. The pattern is historically of Palestinian origin. Black represents presidential rule and white represents completion of the *Hajj*.
- Red checkering: Worn in Arab monarchies, such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan. It is generally of Jordanian origin. The colours signify that the wearer has made *Hajj* (white) and comes from a country with a Monarch (red).
- Black turbans: These are associated with Shi'a clergy who are somehow connected to the Prophet Muhammed or Ali Ibn Abi Talib the cousin of the Prophet who was the fourth Khalif of Islam and leader of the Shi'a sect. Whereas those who wear white turbans are associated with the lower echelons of the Shi'a hierarchy.

The colours of the stitching in a keffiyeh are also vaguely associated with Palestinians' political sympathies. Traditional black and white keffiyehs became associated with Fatah. The Islamist factions, such as Hamas, use green - representative of the Islamic faith - as a party colour, but for *keffiyehs* they stick to the traditional black-and-white or red variants, with no particular preference evident. Later, Palestinian Marxists, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) organization, adopted the red and white *keffiyehs*. Today, Palestinian Marxists have virtually disappeared, and red and white keffiyehs are instead identified with Hamas (Kim, 2007 : Binur,1990).

As for the original colour variations that sprung from Palestine:

- Black checkering signifying the Fatah Movement
- Red checkering standing for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

Colours of Asia :: Middle East

Contemporary designs for the *keffiyeh* with vibrant colours.

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design
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Other popular styles include rectangular-shaped scarves with the basic black-and-white pattern in the body, with the ends knitted in the form of the Palestinian flag. Since the *Al-Aqsa intifada* (uprising), these rectangular scarves have increasingly appeared with a combination of the Palestinian flag and Al-Aqsa Mosque printed on the ends of the fabric.

Traditionally worn by Palestinian farmers, the *keffiyeh* was worn by Palestinian men of every rank. It became a symbol of Palestinian nationalism during the Arab Revolt of the 1930s (Kim, 2007 : Torstrick, 2004). Its prominence increased in the 1960s with the beginning of the Palestinian resistance movement and its adoption by Palestinian politician Yasser Arafat (Kim, 2007). The *keffiyeh* would later become a trademark symbol of Arafat, who was rarely seen without a distinctively arranged black and white scarf.

The *keffiyeh* is usually folded in half, into a triangle, and the fold is worn across the forehead. Often, the keffiyeh is held in place by a black rope circlet, called an *agal*. Sometimes a white tight hat called *taqiyah* is worn underneath the *keffiyeh*, and, in the past, it has also been wrapped around the rim of the red fez, particularly in the Levant countries.

The *keffiyeh* pattern might be an indicator of which tribe, clan, or family the wearer comes from. However this is not always the case. While in one village, a tribe or clan might have a unique headdress, in another town an unrelated tribe or clan might wear the same headdress. While widely known, the colour symbolism is by no means universally accepted by all Arab nationals and wearers, and its importance should not be overstated.

Old man wearing the black and white checkered *keffiyeh*.

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TARBOUSH (FEZ)

Another headdress is the fez or *tarboush*, which is a felt hat either in the shape of a truncated cone or of a short cylinder, made of kilim fabric, red in colour, usually with a tassel attached to the top. The fez is largely believed to be of Moroccan origin and later spread to the Ottoman Empire where it was popularized. (Amphlett, 2003 : Kaya, 2004). The name is originated from the city of Fez in Morocco, which had a monopoly on the manufacture of fez caps, which were dyed with an extract of cherry wood.

The fez was initially a brimless bonnet of red, white, or black with a turban woven around. Later the turban was eliminated, the bonnet shortened, and the colour fixed to red. It was the official head cover of the Ottoman Empire (from 1299 to 1922) and was used in different variations in all the countries that formed part of that Empire; taller versions worn by Turkish *daraweesh* (folk people) and in Mount Lebanon, shorter versions worn in Morocco. They were used in a time when going out with an uncovered head was considered impolite.

In mid 20th century it was worn by most of the elite. It was considered a sign of modernity, while the turban was a sign of the working class, mostly the farmers, back then.



Red *tarboush* (fez)

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design -
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DRESS CODES IN GULF STATES: WHITE, BLACK, BROWN AND RED

In the Gulf state Bahrain, men usually wear the *thobe* (long robe) and the traditional headdress which includes the *keffiyeh* (scarf), *ghutra* (head cap) and *agal* (black cord).

- The *thobe*, sometimes called *dishdasha*, is a loose, long-sleeved, ankle-length garment. Summer *thobes* are white and made of cotton and winter *thobes* can be darker and made of wool.
- The *ghutra* is a white knitted head cap worn under the *keffiyeh*.
- The *keffiyeh* is a square scarf, made of cotton or silk, folded in a triangle and worn over the *ghutra*. In Bahrain, it is usually red and white checked or all white.
- The *agal* is a thick black cord that is worn on the top of the *keffiyeh* to hold it in place.
- In some occasions, Bahrainis wear a *bisht*, which is a cloak made of wool, over the *thobe*. Unlike the *thobe*, the *bisht* is soft, and it is usually black, brown, or grey.

The Hejazi turban or *amamah* is the turban of the traditional uniform in the region of Hejaz (Mecca, Madina, Jeddah, Taif, and Yunbu). The most well-known version is the orange two-wrap turban, also called the *ghabbana*. Artisans, craftsmen, and the common people in the old districts commonly wear the *ghabbana*. Another Hejazi turban is the white-coloured one, worn by the imams and the preachers of the holy mosques, scholars and merchants. Nowadays, the orange turbans are more common for folkloric purposes, or as a representation of the Hejazi cultural dress.

In Kuwait, most men wear a white or cream *dishdasha*, which is a floor length robe. Because it is so well suited to the climate, this basic garment has changed little in the last few hundred years. During winter, sombre-coloured and heavier cloths are used and the *keffiyehs* are changed to a red and white check. During this season, they also wear a heavy *bisht*, which is a cloak made of traditional thick dun-coloured camel hair or of heavy modern wool, over their *dishdasha*. On grand occasions, a semi-transparent *bisht* with *zari*, special gold braiding, is worn by the rich and powerful. The embossed look of the *zari* is created by first hand-embroidering the *bisht* with gold threads and then hammering the threads so that they become fused.

In UAE, men traditionally wear an ankle-length, loose-fitting and comfortable garment, called the *kandoura* or *dishdasha* complete with a high neck and long sleeves whilst a headdress, comprised of a head-cap (*ghutra*) covered by a long cloth, usually white *keffiyeh* all secured by a wool rope (*agal*) wound round the crown, protects the head and neck from the blistering sun. The *bisht*, a sleeveless flowing black or beige cloak trimmed with gold, whose material depends on the social status of the wearer, is sometimes worn, especially for ceremonial occasions. The fact that this form of traditional dress is still used, with minor variation, throughout the Arabian peninsula is a sure tribute to its comfort and suitability for the difficult desert climate, even though this is now alleviated by extensive air-conditioning. But it also points to the pride people have in their particular Arab identity.

Today in Saudi Arabia, as in antiquity, men wear a *thawb*, a simple ankle-length shirt of wool or cotton. Traditional headwear includes a *keffiyeh*, a large diagonally-folded cotton square worn over a *ghutra* (head cap) and held in

place by an *agal*, a double-coiled cord circlet. A flowing floor-length outer cloak, known as a *bisht*, is generally made of wool or camel hair in black, beige, brown or cream tones.

A man wearing a white *thobe* (long robe), with a white *keffiyeh* (scarf), held down by an *agal* (black cord circlet). This would be a regular summer clothing for Bahraini men.

Photo: www.shutterstock.com



WEAPONRY AS PART OF DRESS CODES IN GULF STATES

In addition to the clothes mentioned above, bedouin men were usually attired with weaponry of one kind or another. The *khanjar*, a curving double-edged blade, six to eight inches long, was once necessary for defensive purposes but has rapidly become a status symbol. The *khanjar's* curving wooden scabbard, is more extensively decorated, the upper part usually with engraved silver, the lower section consisting of strips of leather overlaid with silver and decorated with silver rings and wire, often in a geometric pattern and capped with a silver tip. Scabbards of a more recent manufacture employ gold for decoration. A single-edged tapering blade dagger with straight carved wood scabbard, silver overlaid at both ends is popular with the Shihuh of Ras Al Khaimah in UAE, as is the *yirz*, an axe combining a three foot shaft with a four inch steel head: the *saif*, a double edged sword and the scimitar-like *qattara* are usually only seen in museums or in ceremonial dance. Silver and copper were used to decorate containers for gunpowder and long-barrelled pistols. Modern rifles and cartridge belts slung around the waist were eventually added to the customary dress of the Bedouin: like the *khanjar* these too were used for defensive purposes but are now mainly a status symbol.

The *jambiya* (waist dagger) is used more as a status symbol in today's Yemen and surrounding countries.

Photo: www.shutterstock.com



Waist daggers, also called *jambiya*, are a common part of a Yemeni's traditional, as well as modern, attire. Men typically above the age of fourteen wear it as an accessory to their clothing. It is made in a mix of silver, metal, wood and rhinoceros' horns. The sheath is commonly decorated with various ornaments that signify status. These include silver work, semi-precious stones and leather.

The most famous sort of the *jambiya* is that which has a *saifani* handle, with a dim yellowish luster. When it is clearer, it turns into a yellow colour. This is called *saifani* heart. Some of the *saifani* handles are called *asadi*, when they

turn into greenish yellow. When the handle becomes whitish yellow, it is called *zaraf*. There is also an *albasali* (onionish) kind whose colour looks like that of a white onion. The *saifani jambiya* is often worn by dignitary persons; among them are the Hashimites (an Arab tribe which claims a direct bloodline to the Prophet Muhammad), the judges, famous merchants and businessmen.

KUMA: HIGHLY COLOURFUL AND ORNATE HATS

The headdress in Oman is unique to the country in comparison with its neighbouring countries. It varies in terms of shape, patterns and colours to other forms of headdresses in the Arabian Gulf peninsula. While some are ornate and modernized in terms of patterns and colours (mixing violet with silver and gold threads), others remain more modest and traditional keeping to two colours per hat with geometric patterns woven in.

A collection of colourful *kuma* (Yemeni traditional hats)

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design - www.atrissi.com



The distinctive hats worn by Omani men, called *kuma*, are commonly sold Oman's street markets, particularly in the Muttrah Souk in Muscat. These hats are worn by all Omani men, although it must be noted that they are only worn as casual wear. They come in a wide spectrum of bright and inviting colours and designs. Wearing a hat or a turban does not indicate the wearer's status, but it is rather a question of developed style.

EVIL EYE: VARIATIONS OF BLUE

The evil eye is a look that is believed by many Arab cultures to be able to cause injury or bad luck for the person at whom it is directed for reasons of envy or dislike. The concept and its significance vary widely among different cultures, primarily the Middle East, as it is a widely extended belief among many Mediterranean and Asian tribes and cultures.

The spreading in the belief of the evil eye towards the east is believed to have been propagated by the Empire of Alexander the Great, which spread this and other Greek ideas across his empire.

A number of unsubstantiated beliefs about the evil eye are found in folk religion, typically revolving around the use of amulets or talismans as a means of protection. In areas where light-coloured eyes are relatively rare, people with green eyes are thought to bestow the curse, whether intentionally or unintentionally. (Daniels et al., 1903). This belief may have arisen because people from cultures not used to the evil eye, such as Northern Europe, are likely to transgress local customs against staring or praising the beauty of children. Thus, in Greece and Turkey amulets against the evil eye take the form of blue eyes.

Small blue beads are used as amulets to protect from the evil eye.

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design - www.atrissi.com



Attempts to ward off the curse of the evil eye has resulted in a number of talismans in many cultures. Disks or balls, consisting of concentric blue and white circles (usually, from inside to outside, dark blue, light blue, white, dark blue) representing an evil eye are common apotropaic talismans in the Middle

East, found on the prows of Mediterranean houses and elsewhere. The crystal blue eye is commonly hung in homes, offices, cars, children's clothing, or incorporated in jewellery. People usually wear a blue/turquoise bead around a necklace to be protected from the evil eye.

A collection of evil eye amulets.

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A blue or green eye can also be found on some forms of the *khamisa* hand, a hand-shaped talisman against the evil eye and commonly used in jewellery and wall hangings which is found in the Middle East. The word *khamisa*, means five referring to the fingers of the hand. In Jewish culture, the *khamisa* is called the Hand of Miriam, sister of Moses; in some Muslim populated cultures it is referred to as the Hand of Fatima, so named to commemorate Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima Zahra. While the Levantine Christians call it the hand of Mary, for the mother of Jesus. Depicting the open right hand, an image recognized and used as a sign of protection in many societies throughout history, the *khamisa* provides superstitious defence against the evil eye.

The evil eye remains one of the most common components of gold and silver jewellery in the region (Badawi, 2004) historically and traditionally, it was most commonly carved or formed from silver, a metal believed to represent purity and hold magical properties. (Sonbol, 2005 : Lynch & Roberts, 2010). It is also painted in red (sometimes using the blood of a sacrificed animal) on the walls of houses for protection, (Schimmel, 1994 : Early, 1993) or painted or hung on the doorways of rooms, such as those of an expectant mother or new baby. (Sonbol, 2005). Highly stylized versions may be difficult to recognize as hands, and can consist of five circles representing the fingers, situated around a central circle representing the palm (Gomez, 1996).

The *khamsa*, or Hand of Fatima, can also be featured in blue as a protection from the evil eye.

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SADU: COLOURFUL WEAVINGS IN THE DESERT

In the Arabic language, *Al Sadu* means the extension of something mostly in a horizontal direction. For example, it is used to explain how a camel can walk faster by extending its steps. For weaving purposes, *Al Sadu* is used to refer to the traditional way of weaving among the nomad people of Kuwait and the Arabian Peninsula who are called Bedouins. Also, the same word is used again to name their floor loom as well as the different woven products that can be produced with that traditional type of loom. Such products are often used to build the Bedouins' black tents (*Bait Alshaar*), tent dividers, floor rugs and coverings, cousins, horse and camel saddles, saddle bags, shoulder bags, blankets, and other daily necessary woven items.

Traditionally, the basic fibres used in Bedouin weavings are sheep wool, camel and goat hair, and lately cotton in warping. All naturally coloured fibres are used in their natural colour state, however; only white wool used to be coloured with natural dyes. In the past few years more chemical dyes have been used to obtain brighter and more intense colours.

So far, it is unknown for how long female Bedouin weavers of Kuwait have been using natural dyes to colour their yarns. However, it has been reported that they used sheep wool as well as camel and goat hair in their original nonwhite colours (Crichton, 1998). There are few major natural substances that were used by the Bedouins to extract natural dyes such as: onionskin, turmeric, safflower, saffron powder, madder, pomegranate and henna (Al-Sabah, 2001 & Al-Sabah, 2006).

In the mid 1980's onionskin was used to create natural dye baths for white wool but that process did not last for a long time.

Turmeric was often used only if other yellow colouring substances was hard to find or comparatively expensive to use. Safflower was also used to create yellow dye baths, As for madder and henna, they were at some times used independently to get shades of red and brown respectively, however, they were lately used by the Bedouins with other chemical acid dyes to improve their end results.

Photos of the source materials used for the dyes.

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Challenges that arose from the use of natural dyes available for Bedouin weavers in their desert environments included the limitation of colours available through the use of the limited number of available natural dye substances alone. Because the desert environment was not very rich in colours such as green, red, blue, orange and maroon; Bedouin weavers turned later to chemical acid dye. The latest dyes provided the desired colours at very low cost and much less manual preparation efforts. Also, acid dyes were available at larger quantities at almost all times which made them very convenient. Finally, the natural colours were not fast nor very bright which made them not very popular. On the other hand, the use of natural dyes has been much safer to the weavers, and users, and the environment. Also, *Al Sadu* woven pieces that were naturally dyed had less bleeding problems than the ones coloured with imported acid dyes.

Hanging balls of yarn which are dyed in various colours to be used in the *Al Sadu* weavings.

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design - www.atrissi.com



Although Bedouin women were the sole weaver in those frequently moving trips in the dry Arabian desert, but they were very creative in their ways to prepare mordents to fix dyes. About eight decades ago weavers learned to mix the dry *arjoon* (a desert plant that produces white flowers in the spring) with camel urine then the mixture was added to the dye bath as a natural mordent. Both mordent ingredients were local materials. Later, few new mordents were introduced to the dyeing and fixing process. Such natural mordents include alum, dried lime, rock salt and vinegar.

Alum is often used as the main mordent, but because it is an alkali it does not fix the dye well. In 1994, Bedouin weavers who were members of the *Al Sadu* Weaving Cooperative Society learned for the first time to use vinegar as a new mordent. This new addition was taught by Jay Edwards, a British dye and weaving specialist, who taught the Bedouin weavers the proper method to use acid dyes in colouring wool (Crichton, 1998). Dry lime is also used as a mordent after it is mashed into very small pieces and placed in the boiling dye bath.

Since dye baths were originally done in a very easy way with simple set of equipment, dyeing equipment were very much limited in number and variety. The major pieces of equipment are the big glazed metal or aluminium dishes that are used to boil and prepare the dye baths. Also, the weavers used long wood sticks to mix the dye with the mordent and later to gently stir the wool as

the dye bath is getting boiled. A bucket or two, measuring cups, drying robs, three stones, wood or natural gas slender, and deep bowl.

The dyeing method or process for white wool is very simple but it is a little time consuming. It is often preceded by the cleaning of the wool from dirt and animal grease then spun into two-ply yarns. The yarns are then wrapped in an 8-shape and loosely tied in the middle and on both ends. This act helped to avoid any damage or tangling in the wool yarn when placed in the dye bath. Natural rock or sea salt is added to the dye bath and stirred to dilute quickly and slow down the dye absorption by the yarns. This helps colouring the wool yarns evenly.

Long wall hangings made by traditional weaving which is referred to as *Al Sadu*.

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design - www.atrissi.com



Dyed wool has often been used with naturally coloured wool and cotton to produce all necessary woven home products for Bedouin family use. However, recently many new contemporary products are being produced by *Al Sadu* weavings. Such products include ladies purses, handbags, office folders, seat

cushions, pillows, area rugs, wall hangings and many other items.

Sheep's wool is the most plentiful and popular to use. Camel hair is more valuable. Goat hair is long, strong and more difficult to spin. It is never dyed. It is mainly used for tent roofs as the natural oil in the hair sheds water. Cotton is the natural fibre from the seed ball of the cotton plant, and is strong and easy to wave with.

Man-made nylon and acrylic yarns in a multitude of bright colours are now available and have become popular due to low cost. These are often used in binding the edges and for decorative tassels and braids.

Camel, goat, sheep and cotton yarns are used in their natural colours of brown, black and white. White sheep's wool is also dyed. Natural plant dyes and mordents obtained from plant bark and flowers found in the desert were first used. Chemical dyes became popular as the colours were brighter and the dyes easy to purchase and use. Natural dyes are rarely used by weavers in present day Kuwait.

DESERT ROSE: YELLOW

Desert rose is the colloquial name given to rosette formations of the minerals gypsum and barite combined with sand inclusions. The petals are crystals flattened on the crystallographic axis, fanning open along characteristic gypsum cleavage planes.

The rosette crystal habit tends to occur when the crystals form in arid sandy conditions, such as the evaporation of a shallow salt basin. Desert rose crusts can reach thickness of up to 5 meter and range in colour from white to grey to green or red, depending on the host material. Gypsum crusts are found in all Earth's warm deserts, though their extent varies. They are found throughout the Middle East from Egypt, Palestine, Jordan and Syria, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. (Thomas, 2011). Desert roses are formed by sand that is tightly fused together under pressure. Many of these sand roses were shaped like rose flowers, hence the name. It is believed in the East of Saudi Arabia, where it is mostly found in the desert, that the founder of the desert rose is blessed with good luck and fortune.

Desert roses found in the Saudi Arabian desert.

Photo: www.shutterstock.com



DOME OF THE ROCK: BLUE AND GOLD

The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is one of the most important buildings in all of Islamic architecture, marked by a strong Byzantine influence (mosaic against a gold background, and a central plan that recalls that of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre), but already bearing purely Islamic elements, such as the great epigraphic frieze. The desert palaces in Jordan and Syria (for example, Mshatta, Qasr Amra, and Khirbat al-Mafjar) served the caliphs as living quarters, reception halls, and baths, and were decorated, including some wall-paintings, to promote an image of royal luxury.

Islamic art is unique in that it incorporates elements from different cultures as the religion spreads from one area to another. The common threads found throughout Islamic architecture are the interior striped arches, painted blue and gold tiles in geometric patterns, and the decorative use of calligraphy writing. Islamic paintings found in secular settings, boost rich bright colours of blue, yellow, orange, red and green. Scenes within the paintings are usually shown with a combination of people and the geometric patterns typically seen in mosques.



Shades of the colour blue as used in an arabesque tile.

Photo: www.shutterstock.com

Only very limited attention appears to have been paid to the unusual use of blue as a background for gold inscriptions or to the possible meaning and reception of this scheme in the early Islamic world. First, something must be said about the problem of defining blue both today and with reference to the past. Jonathan Bloom has pointed out the absence in classical Arabic of a word corresponding to the English blue, and the possibility that the colour of the Blue Qur'an might be elided in perception with, or be taken as a reference

to, the late Roman and contemporary Byzantine tradition for luxurious purple manuscripts (Bloom, 2007). Here he follows a recent study by Robert Nelson (205), suggesting that the distinction between blue and purple was either unnoticed or unimportant, or most likely that outsiders seeking to imitate imperial purple might have been unable to produce it and made do with blue; so there are issues here of perception and valuation in looking at blue.

In 2000 Michel Pastoureau published a book devoted to the colour blue in art, in which he observed that, as seems to be the case in classical Arabic, the ancient Greek and Latin languages also lacked a word corresponding to the generic blue.

It is undoubtedly true that some societies have a particular affinity for or aversion to some colours. Until the twelfth century, for example, the colour blue was disregarded, or even disliked, in Western Europe. In the Middle East, however, blue had long been viewed as a positive colour – the colour of life, the Nile, or the heavens (Pastoureau, 2000). Similarly, in the West, the colour yellow was avoided. It was the colour associated with the outsider, the colour of exclusion and even quarantine, of sickness and cowardliness. In the Near and Far East, however, yellow was viewed as a positive colour – of light and illumination.

Mosaic tiles are used for decorations of facades to add particular designs, colour and texture to surfaces. Green and blue colours are common usage in mosques, green resembling perfect faith and growth, blue symbolizes the reach to the heavens, white is purity, while gold is the heavenly reward.

On the other hand, Husayniyyas (Sh'iite mosques) are much more decorated on the facade than Sunni mosques with mosaic tiles of different shades of blue, white and gold.

MABKHARA: SILVER AND ORNATE

The *mabkhara* (incense burners) was traditionally made from clay or soft stone. Most *mabkhara* have a square pedestal base with inward sloping sides, which support a square cup with outward sloping sides. The cup itself is lined with sheet metal. Older burners were decorated with patterned combinations of soft metal pegs and brass tacks, often with mirrors in the panels of the upper part. The legs were ordinarily covered with sheet metal.

More modern variations of the *mabkhara* are made of shiny plated sheet metal. While they retain the traditional shape, they tend to be decorated with mirrors; coloured metals and come in many sizes, varying from a few inches to a few feet in height. The craft of making these incense burners is practiced today primarily by artisans.

The incense is usually burned in a *mabkhara*. It is customary in many Arab countries to pass *bukhoor* (incense) amongst the guests in the *majlis*, meaning congregation. This is done as a gesture of hospitality, and is used specifically on special occasions like weddings or on Fridays or generally just to perfume the house.

Gold coloured *mabkhara*
(incense burners).

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design -
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PALESTINIAN EMBROIDERY: RED AND COLOURFUL

One of the most attractive aspects of Palestinian embroidery is the variety of colours and the arrangement of colour schemes. Red, the colour of happiness and life-blood, was used in almost all Palestinian embroidery in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century. It was used on white, dark blue, and black

Embroidered cushions from
Palestine.

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design -
www.atrissi.com



linen or cotton fabrics. Village and Bedouin women were attuned to the various shades of red and they combined them in spectacular ways. Many different colours, such as yellow, green, pink, orange and white were used to accentuate the red tones.

Colour schemes were created in a manner that expressed a woman's feelings and stage in life. For example, in the Hebron region, older women wore dresses embroidered with purple threads whereas younger women and girls embroidered their dresses in red and green. In some Bedouin tribes, unmarried girls wore dresses embroidered on the back panel and the front panel with blue, while married women used the colour red to signal their status as wives. Older women who were interested in remarrying combined the colour blue with red flowers and sometimes intertwined figures of children with blue embroidery on the back panel of their dresses.

POLITICAL POSTERS IN LEBANON: OWNERSHIP OF COLOURS

Political parties in Lebanon have taken exclusivity over certain colours, to such an extent that wearing one of those colours on any day makes one instinctively a party supporter. While the colours of the March 14 party are mainly consisting of red, Future Movement is in blue, and yellow colour with green additions is reserved for the Hezbollah party.

As Rana K. (2011) from *Sawt Al Niswa* noted: "Here in Lebanon we always seem to have something to say to one another, and as a wise friend has pointed out to me, the abundance of symbols and our shared understanding of them seem to provide us with ample vehicles for such communication. It is likely that our insatiable desire to interact is what brought about the creation of all these symbols in the first place. Even the act of colour-coding our divisive political affiliations may therefore serve to simplify, facilitate and induce communication, by creating a shared language of symbolic commonality."

Political banners on the streets of Beirut.

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design - www.atrissi.com



ORIGIN OF THE PAN-ARAB COLOURS: RED, GREEN, WHITE AND BLACK

(Abdul Hadi, 1986)

a. Red

The Khawarij were the first Islamic group to emerge after the assassination of Caliph Uthman III, forming the first Republican Party in the early days of Islam. Their symbol was the red flag. Arab tribes who participated in the conquest of North Africa and Andalusia carried the red flag, which became the symbol of the Islamic rulers of Andalusia (756-1355). In modern times, red symbolizes the Ashrafs of the Hijaz and the Hashemites, descendants of the Prophet. Sharif Hussein designed the current flag as the flag of the Arab Revolt on June 1916. The Palestinian people raised it as the flag of the Arab National movement in 1917. In 1947, the Arab Ba'ath Party interpreted the flag as a symbol of the liberation and unity of the Arab nation. The Palestinian people readopted the flag at the Palestinian conference in Gaza in 1948. The flag was recognized by the Arab League as the flag of the Palestinian people. It was further endorsed by the PLO, the representative of the Palestinians, at the Palestinian conference in Jerusalem in 1964.

b. Black

In the seventh century, with the rise of Islam and subsequent liberation of Mecca, two flags - one white, one black - were carried. On the white flag was written, "There is no god but God (Allah) and Mohammad is the Prophet of God."

In pre-Islamic times, the black flag was a sign of revenge. It was the colour of the headdress worn when leading troops into battle.

Both black and white flags were placed in the mosque during Friday prayers.

The Abbasid Dynasty (750-1258), ruling from Baghdad, took black as a symbol of mourning for the assassination of relatives of the Prophet and in remembrance of the Battle of Karbala.

c. White

The Umayyads ruled for ninety years, taking white as their symbolic colour as a reminder of the Prophet's first battle at Badr, and to distinguish themselves from the Abbasids, by using white, rather than black, as their colour of mourning.

Mu'awia Ibn Abi Sufian (661-750), founder of the Umayyad state, proclaimed himself Caliph of Jerusalem.

d. Green

The Fatimid Dynasty was founded in Morocco by Abdullah Al-Mahdi, and went on rule all of North Africa. They took green as their colour, to symbolize their allegiance to Ali, the Prophet's cousin, who was once wrapped in a green coverlet in place of the Prophet in order to thwart an assassination attempt.

BACKGAMMON: CRAFTED IN BROWN

The making of backgammon games is a local craft in Lebanon, which is passed down generations of craftsmen. A lot of artistry is involved in the making of these boards that involves the combination of the various wood colours and ivory forming arabesque/geometric patterns. The wood used is acquired from the cedar, cherry and pine trees in the mountains of Lebanon.

Backgammon crafted in wood.

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design - www.atrissi.com



MEZZA BOWLS: BROWN FOR AN APPETIZING BACKDROP

The mezza bowl is made out of clay and holds in the Lebanese variation of the tapas, which is a variety of cold and warm appetizers eaten regularly before a main meal, such as olives, chickpea pasta and mashed roasted aubergines. This specific design and colour is widely common and restricted in used for the mezza bowls.

Mezza bowls still used today for serving appetizers.

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design - www.atrissi.com



WEDDING RITUALS: YEMENI WEDDING

Wedding ceremonies in Yemen are not much different from those of other Arab countries; however, they are much different from weddings just years ago.

Simple and economical weddings ceremonies have replaced the quite expensive and inflated ceremonies of the past as some people now use tents instead of renting luxurious halls that cost them too much. Tents are rented for a decent price and providing furniture by the tent owner could cost more money, so sometimes the neighbours of the groom help in bringing furniture from their own houses.

While guests, neighbours, and attendees are seated around the tent on pillows chewing qat, the groom is seated on an elaborately decorated throne up front.

Wedding ceremonies in Yemen take up to four days. First day is usually on a Monday, and it is called Green Day. The groom shows up and reads the first verse of the Qur'an, and the bride wears a green dress with green shoes and carries a green handkerchief. Tuesday is specified as engagement day, and the bride wears a pink dress. The third day is specified as a Henna day and is one of the important days in the Yemeni wedding celebrations. The bride wears a dress of expensive marigold. This is often on a Wednesday. *Dakhla* (literally: entry) is on Thursday night. The bride wears a white dress and it is called White Day, and guests dance with daggers, while the bride and groom's family shoot guns in the air in celebration until the sound of bullets overcome that of singing.

Scenes from wedding rituals across Arabia.



COLOURED SAND BOTTLES

Filling glass bottles with coloured sand that forms landscapes and sceneries is a common sighting in street markets in the Arab world. A lot of work and time is involved in creating these decorative bottles, some even created on demand with custom names of the purchasers, and varying colours according to taste. Different coloured sands are passed through a thin funnel to make intricate designs inside the bottle. The more different colours the artisan uses the more intricate and costly it is likely to be.

Coloured sand bottles.

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design -
www.atrissi.com



BARJEES

Barjees is a typical game famous in Damascus and the Levantine cities, and mostly popular among women. It was a common item to include in the bridal package among other things, for the bride to play with her groom. *Barjees* used to be handmade where women embroider a black velvet cloth with yellow, blue, green, red and violet satin threads. Rather than using dice to determine the moves, *barjees* uses cowry sea-shells instead.

Barjees is a board game made of cloth and played with little shells and metal pieces.

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design -
www.atrissi.com



AL LAWATIYA MOSQUE – OMAN

Officially named *Masjid al-Rasool al-A'tham* (Mosque of the Great Prophet), this religious building is widely known as the Al-Lawatiya Mosque. This mosque is used by members of the Lawati community, who migrated from India over 300 years ago. It is a fine example of Islamic architecture with a striking mosaic-covered gold-flecked dome and teal blue minaret dominating the skyline of Muttrah. Blue colour is favoured in this region as it represents water, which means coolness and refreshness, so often sought in the desert. Another reason is because it is associated with the sky, and therefore paradise.



A view on the Lawatiya mosque in Oman.

Photo: Tarek Atrissi Design - www.atrissi.com

CONCLUSION

The Middle East, in all the perspectives that one can observe it, is an extremely colourful culture. The English vocabulary has been, for a reason, enriched by the colours crimson, carmine, azure and lilac, all of whose names are derived from Arabic.

There is definitely no single or specific colour palette that can specifically reflect or be associated with the Middle East; but also not even with the Arab world or the Islamic culture. The Middle Eastern culture is simply too wide, too diverse and too varied to fit any specific colour labels. Colour plays an integral in the Middle Eastern culture and society, leaving a lot of room and possibilities for specific research to be conducted in this specific theme, particularly when it comes to the contemporary colour perception in societies today and beyond

the historical significance of colours in the region.

Perhaps a fine example of the unexpected colours of Arabia is the Asir region of south-western Saudi Arabia, wonderfully documented and studied in Thierry Mauger's book: "Colours of Arabia, The Painters's Garden, the Architecture and Murals of Asir". Blessed with a truly exceptional architectural and aesthetic tradition of its own, Mauger reveals how Asir has nothing to do with the cliché that clutter the Western imagination. It's dry-stone constructions are decorated with the inset quartz stones laid out in geometric or vegetal patterns. It's mud houses greet the visitor accustomed to the grey tones of the desert with wonderfully variegated facades- bold bands of colour that melt into each other, crystal rainbows, orgies of stratified colours, chromatic explosions against an arid landscape. These outer decorations are merely an envelope, however. Inside, a riot of polychrome decorations covers walls and stairs, ceilings and doors. It is as if the Asir houses were swallowing great draughts of colours. The local women paint as naturally as a songbird song.

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Research Report 2013



Philippines

the
Colours
of Asia

Red Yellow Blue Green Black & White
紅黃藍綠黑與白

亞洲
色彩



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INTRODUCTION

Colour, as it is understood in this study, is a product of culture. While the human eye is receptive to light and can distinguish the full spectrum of colours, people on the other hand do not perceive colour in the same manner as they see it through the filters of culture. More than lights or wavelengths, colours shall be considered here as categories that are differently defined by a given culture.

The Philippines is an archipelago of 7,107 islands populated by different peoples who speak different languages. According to an anthropologist, the Philippine nation is composed of over 77 major ethno-linguistic groups with 244 subgroups. Such cultural diversity is hereby acknowledged, but with the realisation that the historical influences across the centuries of western religion, colonial rule, local and international trade, a centralised national government, and a national educational system may have well served to homogenise colour perception and meaning among the peoples in the Philippines. The influence of mass media cannot also be discounted. This paper will strive to consider these various cultures, taking into account the methodological framework that it implies in terms of the existing recognised academic literature, as well as of the availability of—and accessibility to—primary sources. Thus it will primarily rely on secondary sources.

This research intends to look into the physical manifestations of colours among the peoples of the Philippines, to arrive at an understanding of the place of colour in their material and everyday life, and of the cultural associations and values they assign to colour. Language as an entry point in the perception of colour helps to define how colour is internalised and delineates some colour categories made by these cultures. Secondly, an investigation into the weaving traditions of some of these ethno-linguistic groups will attempt to put forth the significant technical, social and symbolical issues that arise from the relationship of colour to textiles. Finally, with presenting the occurrences of colour in literary texts, examining some of the striking colourful forms of artistic expressions, exploring the colour characteristics of Philippine food, and analysing the relevance of colour to architecture, it is hoped that this research will contribute to telling a certain story of how colour in the Philippines organises, reflects and conveys social codes, ideas and identity.

LANGUAGE AND PERCEPTION OF COLOUR

An initial approach to identifying the colours in the Philippines is through language, because in general language structures reality. In this sense, “it (also) structures the way of perceiving color for each social group. Such gives rise to different color systems, chromatic codes.” (Guillermo 1992, p. 23)

In language, once a word is given to name a subject that is perceived, then the very existence of the word establishes the subject’s existence in the world. The word becomes nomenclature. Perception of a subject is objectivised in language.

In the major languages and other languages of the Philippines, there are words that identify, describe, and name the colours white, black, red, blue, green and yellow.

White

Putî (noun) is the word used to say “whiteness”, “lightness in colour”, in the major languages of the country. This term relates to the Southeast Asian family: *puteh* in Malay; *putih* in Bahasa Indonesia.

Maputî is the adjective “white”: *ma-* comes from the Tagalog word *may* meaning “there is/are”, and as a prefix added to the noun *putî*, it gives the attributive quality of the colour. *Maputî* thus literally means “there is whiteness”.

An interesting verb, *maghimutî* means “to turn gradually white”, in the sense of “losing the original colour” (Panganiban, 1973).

Blue

In Tagalog, Sebuano, Bicolano and Hiligaynon, four major languages spoken in the country, the word is *bughaw*, which means “sky”. In the other languages of the archipelago, it is *asúl*, a word borrowed from the Spanish language (*azul*) which refers to blue azure. Azure, which formerly designated the lapis-lazuli stone, is a light blue hue or also poetically the blue of the sky. This reference could explain the use of the word *bughaw* in the vernacular languages, probably as a translation of *azul*. In Tagalog, *bughaw* also means discoloured, faded in colour.

But in truth, the dominant blue hue in the Philippines (specifically in textiles) has been the indigo blue. The plants *Indigoferia tinctoria* L., *Indigoferia hirsuta* L. and *I. suffroticosa* Mill. (depending on the region in the country) were sources for the dye. The colour blue that could be qualified as indigenous is the indigo blue: the colour is named after its plant source. The different languages in the Philippines use variants of the word *tagom* to refer to the plant. For some, *tayom/tayum* not only designates the plant, but is the word used to signify/name the colour (indigo blue). For example, peoples in Central Ifugao say *tinanayum*. For a group in the Cordillera region (northern Luzon), *táyum* is black cotton thread, dark blue cotton yarn, dyed indigo.

Tagom in Maranao (Mindanao Island, southern Philippines) describes black whereas *bilu* is their word for blue in general. It is *bilu* for the Maguindanao

people, who say “*malutu a bilu* to qualify dark-blue, a mature blue” (Roces 1991, p. 25). *Bilo/bilu* is a variation from the Malay *biru*, itself actually a corruption of the word ‘blue’ (Guillermo 1992, p. 24).

The Hanunoo Mangyan (Mindoro Island) has the word *mabiru*, meaning “relative darkness [of shade of color]” (Conklin 1955, p. 341).

It is also interesting to note that *tayum-tayumán* in Tagalog means a place where clothes are dyed, intimating somehow the idea that giving colour to a piece of cloth is to give it a dark colour.

The indigo plant was largely produced particularly during the Spanish colonial period when it was exported to Spain.

Yellow

This colour is also named after its plant source. Yellow dye was derived from several species of ginger or turmeric.

Diláw (adjective) is both the term for the plant and the colour in at least three major languages (Tagalog, Hiligaynon, Bikolano).

Other languages of the country use variations of the word, such as: *duláw* (in Samar Leyte, Kalagan - central Philippines), *du-au* (for the Manobo, Mindanao Island), *duyáw* in Ilokano (northern Luzon Island). The latter has also another term, *kusnig*, a variation of the Malay *kuning*, meaning yellow/light brown. The term *kuning* is used too in the Sama languages (southern Philippines); and finally the term *kunit* in Jama-Mapun and Sama-Badjao describes both ginger and yellow colour as well.

On the other hand, the Maranao say *korit* and the Tausug *kulit*, but it is to mean specifically “orange”.

The Kankanay (Cordillera region, northern Luzon Island) use *kúnig* to refer to *Curcuma zedoaria* (which bulbs yield a yellow dye), and they say *kinunigan* for yellow cotton thread, yellow-dyed cotton yarn (Vanoverbergh 1933).

In Kapampangan language (central Luzon), *diló* would only refer to ginger. They say *kule-ebun*, a compound word which literally translates as “the colour of egg” (the yoke), *ebun* meaning “egg”. This, for them, describes “yellow”.

The Tagalog language has *madilaw* and *marilaw* (adjectives) to mean “a very clear yellow”.

Black

Itím, *kaitimán* (both nouns) in Tagalog means “black”, “blackness”. The word *itím* is a variant to the Southeast Asian family *hitam*, used in Malay and Bahasa Indonesia.

Maitím is the adjective “black”: *ma-* comes from the Tagalog word *may* meaning “there is/are”, and as a prefix added to the noun *itím*, it gives the attributive quality of the colour. *Maitím* thus literally means “there is black or blackness”.

The variants *itóm*, *itúm* are found among peoples in the Visayas (central Philippines) and in Mindanao (southern Philippines). In northern Luzon Island,

some groups categorize black as “dark”, or in fact, as “having a chromatic value that is not bright” (Roces 1991 p.24) with the words *nangisit* (Itneg), and *ngisit* (Ilokano),

Tagom in Maranao describes “black”, together with the words *maitem*, *delem* (*dilim* in Tagalog) meaning “dark”.

Green

The Tagalog language has the adjective *lungtî* (or *luntî*) for “green”, and also the adjective *lungtîan* (or *luntîan*) which means “greenish”. In the *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala (1754, 1860)* by Noceda y Sanlucar, as quoted by A. Guillermo (1992, p.), the word *lungtîan* is said to have originated from *halong tiyan*, “the colour of bile”. In other languages, the term used is *berde* (or *birdi*) from the borrowed Spanish word *verde*. For several languages yet, the word for “green” is also the one used to say “unripe”: in southern Philippines, the Bukidnon say *hilaw*, the Manobo Dibabawon have *hiliw*; in northern Philippines, the Gaddang and Itneg Binongan use *naata* (Guillermo 1992, p.24). *Naata* is in fact in Ilokano the term for “unripe” fruit. And we may note that the Malay word *hijau*, signifying “green”, is in fact a variant of the word *hilaw* (in Tagalog, *hilaw* means “unripe” but not “green”).

As can be surmised here, in the case of the colour green, the colour name relates to the state of fruit/vegetable.

Red

Pulá (noun) is the term for “red colour” in many of the major languages. *Pulá* has a wide range, as its hues are as varied as the different vegetal and organic dyes that are produced in the various regions of the country.

Mapulá is the adjective “red”: *ma-* comes from the Tagalog word *may* meaning “there is/are”, and as a prefix added to the noun *pulá*, it gives the attributive quality of the colour. *Mapulá* thus literally means “there is red colour”.

In Ilokano (a major language) they say *labaga*, *nalabasit*. In Maranao, it is *marigà*; for the Maguindanao, *maliga*.

It is of interest to note here the two Tagalog verbs *namumula* and *namumutla* that use *pula* (the ‘p’ transforms into the infix ‘m’ in the verb) as the root word. These verbs relate to the idea of red as a colour indicating good health. With reference to the idea of blood colouring the face or body, these verbs refer respectively: to the blood rushing to the face thus colouring it red; and the opposite, the blood draining away thus leaving the face pale. A person who is *namumula* has a red glow on the face showing good health; whereas a person who is *namumutla* looks sickly.

The following colours are other colours that hold importance in Philippine culture:

Violet/Purple

Kulay-ube describes the colour violet/purple. It is a compound word formed with *kulay* (“colour”) and *ube* that translates as “the colour of the purple yam” (see further below the explanation on the term *kulay*). *Ube* is the local name for *Dioscorea alata* L., a tuberous root vegetable more familiarly known with the common name *Purple yam*. The vegetable indeed is violet/purple in colour, inside and out.

Brown

Kayumanggi is a term that means “brown skin/complexion”. According to M. Pastor-Roces, it could be related to the word *kayu*, meaning “wood” or “tree”. Hence it refers to the colour of wood.

Silver

In Tagalog, the word *pilak* refers to the metal. Used with the word *kulay* in the compound term *kulay-pilak*, it designates the quality of silver.

Gold

In Tagalog, the word *ginto* refers to the metal as well as to the colour.

Colour categories

There is a word for “colour” in Tagalog (one of the major languages): *kulay*. But it is important to observe that “the word *kulay* is used prefix-like in compound words indicating shades, tints, typical colours, and, as expressed by the accompanying word. For example: *kulay-abó*, ash-coloured; *kulay-apóy*, flame-coloured” (Panganiban 1973). This phenomenon in the language shows that some colours perceived are described referring to the colour of an object.

As revealed by some languages, the colours indigo blue and black are categorized as “dark”. In northern Luzon, the Ilokano say *nangisit* which means “dark-coloured”. According to M. Pastor-Roces, in the neighbouring Cordillera region, the Gaddang people’s word *nasipnget* meaning “dark”, describes blue and black as well as other dark tones. Still in the Cordillera, the Eastern Ifugao’s term *ingnitit* similarly identifies both colours, which to the quoted author suggests “that the word itself refers to a chromatic attribute rather than a color” (1991, p. 24).

The Hanunoo colour categories

The anthropologist Harold Conklin conducted a study of the colour perception of a particular group of people. The Hanunoo belong to the more encompassing generic term called the Mangyan group of people, and inhabit the island of Mindoro in the central part of the Philippines. Conklin's study began as a survey on the terminologies that the Hanunoo used for colour. Starting with a conventional approach, he used colour swatches and asked his informants for the local term for these colours. As he proceeded with his research, inconsistencies and overlaps in the terminology arose, that made him reconsider his approach. The new approach revealed that colour distinctions among the Hanunoo are made by contrasts at two levels: the first, and higher level, consisted of four classifications that served as the core of the colour system. The second level consisted of hundreds of specific colour categories that overlapped with each other.

The level 1 category consisted of these four distinctions: *mabiru*, the relative lightness; *malagti*, the relative darkness; *marara*, the relative presence of red; and *malatuy*, the relative presence of light green, or greenness. *Mabiru* covered the English colours black, violet, indigo, blue, dark green, dark gray, and deep shades of other colours and mixtures. *Malagti* covers white and very light tint of other colours. *Marara* covers maroon, red, orange, yellow, and mixtures in which these colours are seen to predominate. *Malatuy* covers light green, and mixtures of green, yellow, and light brown. All the colour-terms can be reduced to these four, and these four cannot be reduced further. It is important to note that these distinctions are of oppositions: darkness vs. lightness, freshness (or wetness) vs. desiccation (or dryness).

It is with these 'attributes' that the colours were categorized by the Hanunoo, and this goes beyond what is normally referred to as the chromatic differentiation between colours. The categories dealt with non-linguistic phenomena in the external environment of the Hanunoo. For example, the (reddish) brown coloured part of a freshly cut bamboo was considered 'wet', while the yellowish dried kernels were considered 'dry', even if it had no presence of green. So perhaps, the confusion that Conklin was seeing from the initial research was because a colour can be both dry or wet, though not at the same time, depending on the state of the object in which/where it is found.

A third level of opposition was also discovered, between that which is deep, unfading, and indelible against that which is pale, weak, and faded. This opposition contrasted a combination of two attributes: *mabiru* and *marara* against *malagti* and *malatuy*. Translated into material culture, the Hanunoo considered darker objects as more desirable and of more value. There is one exception though. The colour green, which is the same colour as the environment of the Hanunoo, was not considered as desirable as a decoration. Thus, green trade beads were considered worthless.

As shown in this research of Conklin, colours -and their corresponding values- are really cultural, and thus, a unifying categorization for colours across the peoples of the Philippines is not something that is easy to do. In an interview by the researchers, a person from another ethno-linguistic group had no term for the colour blue. In the example of textiles, dark-blue or almost black, and black seem to be interchangeable for some cultures. Their terms, as we have seen in the languages, translate that perception.

DYES, TEXTILES, INDIGENOUS HUES

In attempting to understand the place of colour in society, specifically in the cultural context of the Philippines, textiles constitute a rich material to investigate where the relation to the topic of colour is intrinsic. Indeed, colour in textiles implies certain questions around its very creation, such as the natural dye sources, the techniques of dyeing, and the techniques of weaving where the design pattern is linked to colour.

Natural dyes: a colour palette

Organic dyes were commonly used in the Philippines among peoples with a weaving tradition. These dyes are limited to what could be obtained from vegetative materials that abounded in their regions. Looking into the various plants that yielded the dyes allows us to understand the colour palette developed by the various cultures that created different textile styles.

The vegetal sources available in a people's environment differ from one region to another in the Philippines. Therefore there is a variety of hue obtained for one colour, throughout the archipelago. Furthermore, as discussed by J. Peralta, "the use of specific plants for a certain color and the techniques used in coloring are not constant among the different ethnic groups. (...) "Depending on the availability of dyeing materials in the immediate vicinity of habitation, and the channeled transfer of the technique within the group, the use of certain materials for specific colors and the manner by which pigments are employed vary" (2006, p. 17).

The indigenous colours derive from these vegetal and organic dyes:

Black

In the mountainous region of northern Luzon Island, the Itneg use several sources to obtain the colour black: from the boiled bark of the tree *Jatropha curcas* L. (the local name is *taotawa*) and *Jatropha multifida* L. (with local name *ataotawa*), juice is extracted where textiles are immersed. *Syzygium cumini* L. Skeels, a berry locally called *longboy*, is another source. For other groups in this region, black dye came from the pigmentation agents of a type of mud or earth.

Among the peoples living around the Davao Gulf in Mindanao Island, the following plants are known to be traditionally used:

- *Diospyros* sp. The local name is *kanaom* which is similar to the other neighbouring ethnic groups' term *kanallom* (Mandaya), *kinarem* (Tagabawa), and *kinalum* (B'laan). A concoction is made with this plant's young leaves and bark pounded into a pulp and boiled in water (Casiño, 1981, p. 132; Quizon, 1998, p. 111);
- *Terminalia catappa*. It is locally the *talisay* tree, from which dark brown dye is extracted (Casiño, 1981, p. 132);
- *Pasak* (local name) is mud used by the Mandaya people to give black tones that are described by them as *linangaw*.

Red

The plants listed below produce variations of the colour red. According to M. Pastor-Roces, “achieving red tended to be slightly more locally specific, in contrast to the almost universal use of *tagom* in Southeast Asia” (1991, p. 25):

- *Morinda bracteata* Roxb. (Fam) *Rubiaceae*. From the crushed and boiled roots of this plant comes the dye; the fibre or cloth is immersed in it. This is the plant largely used in Mindanao Island, in regions around the Davao Gulf: locally named *sikarig* by the Bagobo group, *sikalig* by the Manobo group (and the Central Bisayan people). As explained by M. Pastor-Roces, “red dyed into fibers and fabrics was called *liniba* by the Mandaya and *linombos* by the Bagobo, *limba* and *lombos* referring specifically to a maroon intensity” (1991, p. 26).
- *Morinda citrifolia* L. For the Itneg (Cordillera region, northern Luzon), this plant produces a red chromatic quality which they name *bangkudo*.
- *Morinda umbellata* L. The Itneg give the name of *apatot* to these two plants (above mentioned plant) of which they use the roots to extract juice. The dye obtained is of a deep-red.
- *Bixa orellana* L. This plant is known in the country as *achuete* (annatto), a colouring agent for food. The Itneg call it *apang* and derive red dye from immersing the seeds. The colours obtained are red and reddish yellow.
- *Caesalpinia sappan* L. In Tagalog, the local name of this tree is *sibukaw*. The Itneg call it *sapang* tree and they use its bark to produce a dye. The red dye obtained is named *nalabbaga*, different from another red they get from the *narra* tree (see below). The quality of this *nalabbaga* colour is literally ‘ember-like’ (Pastor-Roces, 1991, p. 26).
- *Sesbania grandiflora* (L.) Pers. The local names for this plants are: in Tagalog, *katuray*; in Ilokano, *katoday*; in Maranao, *katorai*.
- *Syzygium malaccense*. The tree is locally called *makopa* (mountain apple) (Casiño, 1981, p. 132).
- *Pterocarpus indicus* Willd. *forma echinatus* (Pers.) Rojo Syn. *P. Vidalianus* Rolfe. This is commonly known as the *narra* tree in the Philippines. The Itneg people extract from it a red colour they identify as *bangkudo* (Pastor-Roces, 1991, p. 26).
- *Pterocarpus indicus* Willd. *forma indicus* Syn. *P. Blancoi* Merr., and *P. pubescens* Merr. From Madulid’s *A Dictionary of Philippine Plant Names* (as cited in Pastor-Roces, 1991, p. 23)
- *Lago* tree (this is the local name, the scientific term has not been ascertained): its root is the dye source for the textiles of the B’laan people (Mindanao Island).

Blue

These plants produce a colour range from blue to blue-black:

- *Indigoferia tinctoria* L.
- *Indigoferia suffroticosa* Mill.
- *Indigoferia hirsuta* L.

Yellow

The following plants produce a colour range from yellow to yellow-orange by boiling their roots; they are turmeric, a ginger-like root-crop, also a source of yellow food colouring (Panganiban, 1973):

- *Curcuma longa* L. (Fam) *Zingiberaceae*
- *Curcuma zedoaria* (Berg.) Rosc.
- *Curcuma domestica* Val.

From Madulid's *A Dictionary of Philippine Plant Names* (as cited in Pastor-Roces, 1991, p. 23).

- *Bixa orellana* L. For the Bagobo (Tagabawa and Guiangan) people and the B'laan, orange or ocher is obtained from the seedpods of this plant (Quizon, 1998, p. 112).

Purple

- *Syzygium cumini* L. Skeels Syn. *Eugenia cumini* (L.) Druce. The local name is commonly *duhat*, otherwise *lamboy* (Bisaya), *longboy* (Ilokano), and *lungbuy daraka* for the Hanunoo Mangyan. From Madulid's *A Dictionary of Philippine Plant Names* (as cited in Pastor-Roces, 1991, p. 23). This is the same plant used for getting black dye for a northern Luzon group.
- *Sesbania grandiflora* (L.) Pers. This plant is used to extract purple dye for the Maranao people (Mindanao Island). Their term for the colour purple is the local name for the plant: *kasomba* or *kasumba*.

Traditional textiles, indigenous colour combinations

Looking into the traditional woven textiles of the many different ethno-linguistic groups in the Philippines reveals that black or dark-blue, red and white (more precisely the natural colour of the un-dyed fibres used) are predominantly the three main colours used and combined.

In the mountainous regions (known as the Cordillera) of northern Luzon Island, red and dark-blue, or black, alternate as the dominant and base colours in the cloths that are made into traditional garments (wrap-around skirt, sash, loincloth, headcloth) and blankets. The dark-blue colour originated from the cotton threads dyed indigo which were traded into these highlands from the neighbouring coastal lowland regions that cultivated the indigo plant.



Detail of a traditional women's wrap-around skirt, province of Abra, northern Luzon Island.

Photo: tDA Philippines

Generally, for the groups living in these highlands (commonly identified as Kalinga, Gaddang, Bontoc, Ifugaw, Kankanay, Ibaloi), where dark colour (dark-blue, black) or red is dominant, white is combined either as a band, stripe, border, line or as a motif. Yellow appears in the same manner as white, in some of these groups' textiles. Also, yellow and green in some instances like red or dark-blue, are applied only to motifs and patterns that are embroidered. Colour schemes that combine a dominant black and red as base, dark-blue and red, or dark-blue and white prevail respectively in the Kalinga, Gaddang and Ifugaw people's weaves: whether on wrap-around skirts, loincloths, sashes or blankets. Contrastingly, solid plain white cloth with blue borders are the colours of the neighbouring (summit of the western Cordillera) Tinguian people's traditional wear. Even more distinct in colour are the textiles of the Isneg (an ethnic group from the northern section of the Cordillera region): the garments are of plain solid blue of one shade only, or have light-blue bands in dark-blue cloth; or are dark-blue with alternate red and light-blue stripes. This dominance of blue in their textiles is related to the trade of indigo dyed threads and fabrics mentioned earlier that came from the northern part of the Ilocos provinces which is close to the Isnegs' region.

It is known that the use of indigo blue as a dye is widespread in Southeast Asia. Illustrations of native costumes in the Philippine islands in the sixteenth century *Boxer Codex* book attest to this fact, as well as the nineteenth century's travel accounts depicting life in the archipelago. In the Philippines, deep indigo blue was considered expensive because of the long process of dyeing the cloth over and over to obtain such a hue. Thus only the rich could afford cloth in that colour. The use of the natural indigo dye in garments ended following the decline in the country of the plant's cultivation.

The indigo blue colour, as part of an indigenous colour palette, can be said to survive today only in the traditional textiles that several cultures have kept, are still producing and using, as well as wear for celebrations and other special occasions within or outside their communities. But these cloths are now woven with commercial threads as there no longer is cultivation of neither cotton nor indigo plants. In some examples today, the dark-blue of indigo that was mentioned by early twentieth century accounts on traditional garments and blankets, is replaced by black.

In Mindanao Island (southern Philippines) among non-Muslim ethnic groups from the highlands around the Davao Gulf, black, red and white are also found to be the main colours in most part of their traditional textiles. The weavers from the Bagobo, B'laan, T'boli and Mandaya peoples traditionally made yarn from the fibres stripped off the bark around the stalk of the abaca tree (*Musa textilis*, a species of wild banana) that grows abundantly in their regions. The 'white' sections of the cloth they weave are in fact the un-dyed sections of the threads which are more of creamy beige or blonde, the natural colour of the abaca fibre. The patterns on the cloths woven with these abaca threads are obtained following the *ikat* technique whereby predetermined parts of the fibre are tied with another fibre treated to resist the dye. The fibres are then boiled in the dye bath. Black and red are the two dyes that are widely known in those regions and used: the textiles' colour scheme is based almost exclusively on these two colours, as it is for most areas in Southeast Asia that produce warp-*ikat*. The black dye derived from the *kinarum* tree is actually more of a brownish black shade. This use of black is a contrast to the more common practice



Clockwise from top left:

Contemporary version of the Bontoc women's traditional wrap-around skirt, Mountain Province; *kain ginamat*, Kalinga women's traditional adorned wrap-around skirt, province of Kalinga; Isneg women's traditional wrap-around skirt, province of Apayao; Ibaloi women's traditional ordinary wrap-around skirt, province of Benguet; Kankanay men's traditional loincloth, Mountain Province. These provinces are all situated in northern Luzon Island.

Photos: tDA Philippines, except bottom left image, Jerry Jose.

Colours of Asia :: Philippines

The *Boxer Codex*

A manuscript written around 1595 AD, around the time the Spanish first arrived in the archipelago that will be known later as the Philippines. The *Codex* contains illustrations of the inhabitants and their attire at that time. Indigo and red were the colours the royalty and ruling class wore, with red being associated more with the warrior. Aside from the richly coloured clothing, the presence of gold can be found in profusion, worn as necklaces, earrings, headbands, and arm, wrist, and leg bands.

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A native princess



Tagalog royalty and his wife, wearing the distinctive colour of his class (red)



Visayan *kadatuan* (royal) and his wife, wearing the distinctive colour of his class (red)



Tagalog royal couple



Pintados of the Visayas, showing their tattoos or *patok*.



Native *timawa* or *tumao* (noblemen)



Tagalog *maginoo* (noble) and his wife, wearing the distinctive colour of his class (blue)



T'boli women in full traditional attire, particularly their embroidered blouses. The tubular skirts are bought from outside their community.

Photos: Jerry Jose

of dyeing with indigo blue in Southeast Asia, just as noted previously in the case of the northern Luzon regions. According to scholars, “there is no certain record of indigo use among Mindanao’s non-Muslim groups” (Hamilton, 1998, p. 26). As for the red category, C. Quizon describes it as “encompass[ing] a spectrum of hues, from claret to maroon to chocolate brown” (1998, p. 110). Red dyed fibres or fabrics are named *linombos* by the Bagobo. The Mandaya also give a specific term to this red in their garments, it is *liniba*. Other less important colours on the cloth are found as accents, usually narrow stripes, often in yellow, green or purple. The combination of red, black and the natural white of the abaca create complex *ikat* designs achieving striking contrasts.

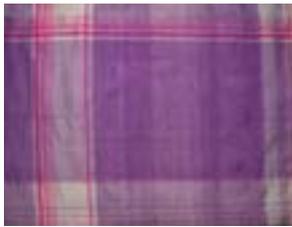
The activities of dyeing and weaving (and even extracting fibre from plant) necessitate the performance of rituals of prayers and offering to the spirits for guidance. The weavers are inspired in their work by the Spirit of Weaving who they believe visit their dreams to bequeath them with designs to create on the loom. The T'boli thus made their *t'nalak* cloth for the *kumu*, an important textile used as bride-price in a complex marriage ritual, and for men’s trousers. For the Bagobo, B’laan and Mandaya, this *ikat* textile (*dagmay* for the Mandaya) is woven into the women’s tube skirt. The Bagobo also produce an all-red women’s tube skirt (also called *linombos*) which worth is considered differently: “despite the significance of the colour red as a symbol of power and valor among the Davao region indigenous communities, this skirt is low in status compared to skirt made with *ikat* patterns.”(Quizon, 1998, p. 115)

Dyes dictated the value of the cloth, as what an anthropologist explains: *sikarig* dyed cloth was considered expensive due to the tedious labour involved in collecting the part of the plants needed, the long process for the dye to be well absorbed by the fibres, and the permanence of the colour obtained. On the contrary, cloths coloured with the *kinarem* (for black colour) were of much lower value because this dye is extracted from a common shrub, the process is less complex and colour fastness is less strong (Casiño, 1981, p. 132). Today the Bagobo weavers do not often used the traditional red dye from the *morinda* plant; it is replaced instead by commercial dyes (water-based) in maroon shades to execute as closely as possible the traditional hues (Quizon, 1998, p. 119). These woven garments of the older and finest types are preciously kept and handed down as inheritance, and are now worn on special occasions.

The *T'nalak* cloth of the T'boli people (left); the *Dagmay* cloth of the Mandaya people (right).

Photos: tDA Philippines





Detail of a *malong* (Maranao women's traditional tubular skirt), province of Lanao del Sur, Mindanao Island (top); detail of another *malong*, province of Maguindanao, Mindanao Island (centre); detail of a *seputangan* (Yakan women's traditional kerchief for headcloth), Basilan Island, Sulu archipelago (bottom).

Photos: tDA Philippines

In the western side of Mindanao Island, among the Islamized groups of the Maguindanao and Maranao, as well as of those inhabiting the Sulu archipelago, the colour combinations on garments differ radically from those of the ethnolinguistic groups in the highlands. Among the Maranao, red and particularly alizarine crimson, is a dominant colour too notably as background on the different types of their traditional long tube skirt called *malong*. Yellow is equally a favoured dominant colour and it would often be combined with red. However, the Maranao have generally a taste for the multi-colour. White, green and black may form the various motifs and design in *ikat* weaving which characterize their *andon malong*. In these regions of Mindanao, colours in the mauve, taupe, maroon, purple, magenta hues are found, which is "attributed to access to aniline dyes through trade" (Pastor-Roces, 1991, p. 27). This is visible in their traditional wear (tube skirt also worn by men, *salawal* or pants for the men only, head cloth).

From the first colonized islands in central Philippines, comes the distinct cloth made from *piña*, the Spanish word for 'pineapple'. *Piña* is considered as one of, if not the most, exquisite fabric that is created in the Philippines. It is a very thin transparent white textile woven from the fibres of the pineapple plant variety known as *Bromelia pigna*, also called Red Spanish, a variety which is grown in a semi-wild state. This is different from the variety grown for food, which can be easily cultivated. Most historical accounts say that the pineapple plant was introduced to the Philippines by the Spanish around the sixteenth century, as part of the global spreading of the plant by the Spanish and Portuguese for purposes of cultivation (Montinola, 1991 p. 27). The pineapple, originally from the Americas, quickly grew and adapted to the tropical climate of the Philippines. It was cultivated for food, as it retained water for long periods, thus making it a good source of vitamin C to prevent scurvy on long sea voyages. However, the leaves were also discovered to yield an exquisite fibre that was both delicate and elegant. Already knowledgeable on the process of extracting fibre from plants for a long time, the people in the Philippines saw the new fibre as an additional source of plant-based textile. In 1571, a decree by Legazpi, the Spanish Governor of the Philippine Islands, included *piña* as a possible tax payment, therefore making *piña* textile weaving an important industry in the colony. Another order issued in 1580 by the Franciscan missionaries advocated the teaching of crafts and trades to the primary schools. *Piña* weaving was one of the trades taught in the girls' schools founded by the Spanish religious orders. This created an atmosphere where this textile became an important item of trade. By the nineteenth century, *piña*, along with other fabrics made from local materials, was contributing to turning cloth making as one of the more successful household industries in the country.

The *piña* fibre was hard to extract from the plant's leaf, as it easily broke. Care was to be taken to the point that weavers had to work under the protection of a mosquito net because the "threads broke at the mere movement caused by a person walking" (F. Jagor as quoted by Montinola, 1991, p.19). Adding finely detailed hand embroidery created by highly skilled craftswomen made the textile all the more affordable only to the wealthy. It was also highly valued for two reasons: first, the light transparent fabric was much more suited to the tropical climate of the country; secondly, its value came from its popularity in the Philippines and in Europe for its uniqueness and beauty, especially when embroidery is worked on the textile. This sheer beauty "offered a most feminine



Different examples of items made with woven *piña* (pineapple) fibres (clockwise from top): Detail of a traditional *Barong Tagalog* (men's formal upper garment); women's clutch bag; shawl; detail of a finely embroidered tablecloth.

Photos: tDA Philippines

and refined look in an age of elegance and romanticism” (Montinola, 1991 p.16).

While there are a few examples then and now of *piña* textiles that were coloured, *piña* is best known and categorized as ‘white’ textile (the natural colour being *écru*). Why was this accepted in an era of colourful ornamentation, both in the West and East? L. Montinola attributes this to the fact that “whitework, or the use of delicate white embroidery over the finest white ground (...) was the most important fashion trend in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, and connoted the height of elegance. Those who could afford *piña* were up to date on this style preference and appreciated its aesthetics” (1991, p. 96). This sensibility to such a textile described as a “monochrome of restraint”, was prevalent among the upper-class natives who wanted to follow the example of the colonisers. Thus, among the highly prized textiles of the Philippines today, *piña* can be in fact considered as a textile “without ritual value and (was) not bound to the social tradition of a particular community” (Montinola, 1991, p. 68). It was of Western influence, and the value of the cloth rests primarily in the difficult manufacturing process and the addition of fine embroidery. This distinction made in the process of creation was what imbued it with some significance, not the stories or motifs woven into the textile, or its ceremonial use, like in other textile traditions in the country.

These myriad colour combinations in the different weaving traditions of the country differentiate the peoples who created them, one from the other. At the same time, colour is what identifies each of them as a distinct group. Ethnic identity is indeed possible only upon the application of specific colours to motifs and patterns, whether on textiles or other objects.

FUNCTION AND MEANINGS OF COLOUR

Each chromatic code holds a meaning in the culture that created it and within which it plays a role.

Taxonomic function of colour

As described previously, the value of traditionally woven textiles were mostly related to the type of dye applied and to the laborious process itself of dyeing to obtain a strong colour-fastness. In this way, among the cultures that made or also traded such textiles, owning certain garments and blankets was the privilege of those who were affluent. Colour could thus classify individuals in a group. Most often times the status of the wearer is reflected in his/her dress, in how it is crafted, assembled, decorated and worn.

For instance, in a Kalinga community in the Cordillera region (Luzon island), a wealthy woman is one who can don the traditional skirt (*kain* in their language) with its full embroidery and embellishments (*kain ginamat*). This skirt's base design has alternating bands of red and black, each bordered by a white line. Green, yellow and red zigzag-like patterns are embroidered over the seams where two panels of cloths are joined to achieve a single large wrap-around skirt. Embellishments such as shells, coins, pearls are sewn lined up on the red and black body of the cloth where white finger-like motifs are embroidered as well. For the rich men, the traditional kilt (or loin cloth, here specifically called *kinarau*) is also adorned, in this case with tassels and braiding at both ends of the cloth. The other colours applied to create a more elaborate design to the garments add more value to them. The women's wrap-around skirt, when only in plain red and black bands (plus white border) design, is considered the ordinary everyday (*kain linapogan*) dress that the less wealthy members of the community can afford to wear during festivities. Today, the men and women of this Kalinga community put on their *kinarau* and *kain ginamat* as traditional wear during cultural or community festivities or sometimes at family celebrations. However, such traditional distinctions in status can become less apparent nowadays in such community, as members of a family or clan can borrow from one another the necessary ornate dress or garment needed for the occasion.

From the weaving and textile handwork tradition of some regions in the northern and central Philippine islands, garments created from the *piña* (pineapple fibre) fabric have come today to epitomize ultimate traditional refinement and elegance in native wear for contemporary Philippine society. Evolving from the nineteenth century aesthetic sensibility of the Christianized upper-class, *piña* in its most exquisite workmanship (the sheerness of the fabric due to its natural whitish colour and very fine embroidery) continues to be owned by and worn as the textile of the wealthy, of those with social and political standing. Both men and women today don *piña* pieces as a formal upper garment for the former, and as a formal dress for the latter, on special events. The women's dress has also become a traditional wedding gown.

In the case of the Maranao people (Lanao highlands, Mindanao Island) who are said to be one of the few people in the country who recognizes a class

of royalty versus that of commoner, scholars have asserted that yellow, used singly in this people's textiles, connotes a high social status or indicates royalty. A. Madale emphasizes that "in the past, a commoner who wore a yellow shirt or pants could be ostracized or even beheaded" (1998, p. 156). The reason for this connotation is because in this society "yellow, which is associated with brass, refers to the upper echelon of [that] society since [it] is also the colour of gold" (Peralta, 2006, p. 16). It is therefore interesting to note here that the words for 'colour' in Maranao and Maguindanao (Mindanao) are respectively *warna* and *walna*: the etymology of these terms have been traced to the Sanskrit word *varna* meaning "color", "caste". According to M. Pastor-Roces, "the use of *warna* in southern Philippines likely derived from highly-Indianized neighboring peoples. In archaic Malaysian, *warna* was simply "caste", though "color" is the common referent today" (1991, p. 26). This would explain that in these two societies, colours and textiles "intimate social hierarchy in rather rigid ways" (Pastor-Roces, 1991, p. 26).

Cultural meanings

Colours in the Philippines come more often in combinations of two or three (even more) than used singly, particularly in textiles. However, some colours do carry certain meanings associated to cultural relationships specific to a community or people.

Among the Islamized groups in Mindanao Island, namely the Maranao, Maguindanao, Tausug and Sama Dila, green is common because it is the colour associated with Islam (Peralta, 2006, p. 16). Furthermore, it is considered by the Maranao to mean peace, tranquillity and stability: A. Madale describes that "green cloths and caps are appropriate for persons who enjoy a secure place in local society and wish to appear at once humble and accomplished" (1998, p. 156). On the other hand, he explains that "black is the colour of quiet dignity and purity, and it is a favourite colour for clothing among Maranao women of royal descent".



Sample of a traditional flag, Mindanao Island.

Photo: Jerry Jose

Red, on its own, stands out with strong meanings that stem from its almost intrinsic relation to blood: the blood of life flowing in the human body, but also the blood of life taken away. In several cultures of the Philippines, red has thus been linked to bravery of men, war and violence. For example among the Maranao, red is the colour of life or revenge: they displayed red flags to signify that they were at war, that a relative had been murdered or that there is a blood feud in the community. This is the reason why, according to A. Madale, "seldom a Maranao wears red unless it is softened by another color such as green or black" (1998, p. 156). Among the Bagobo, from a neighbouring region, war also had social significance as there was a class of prominent warriors called *magani* who were recognised for having taken human life in warfare. To them were reserved certain garments: P. Jan Raats identifies "a clareted or dark red waistcoat, the darker the red the higher the rank and the more the victims" (1969, p. 4-5). According to early twentieth century American anthropologists, a head cloth called *tangkulo* was worn if two lives were taken; if the *magani* "had taken four lives [he] wore pants of the same material, and those who had taken six lives were entitled to a full suit" (Hamilton, 1998, p. 31). The *tangkulo* is traditionally woven with abaca and resist-dyed in red-brown using the *pelangi* technique which ties the pattern in the cloth with waxed *abaca* thread, resulting

in this pattern to be revealed in the natural blonde colour of the fibre. The different depths of colour of these garments for the *magani* are said to indicate the number of victims: R. Hamilton explains that “the preoccupation with depth of red-brown shades (...) seems to have reflected the notion of saturation with blood” (1998, p. 31). The women priestesses and/or weavers (*mabalian*) who were the only ones allowed to make this *pelangi* cloth could wear it too. As a special fabric then called *tinangkulo*, it is used for a specific women’s attire, which is that of female shamans.

In today’s Bagobo society, C. Quizon records that “the compelling symbolism of the color red associated in the literature with chiefs and warriors of renown has (...) declined; it persists, however, in the women’s realm, among female healers who require part of their payment to come in the form of a red cloth, made of abaca or not, in order to protect them from the illness they have taken away” (1998 p, 127).

On the eastern side of the Davao Gulf, the Mandaya group also crafted special red garments for men of warrior distinction and women who were shamans (*ballyan* in their language).

Of colour symbolism in beliefs and rites

The work of evangelisation led by the Spanish missionaries in the Philippines during the Spanish colonial period (1521-1898) has resulted in Roman Catholicism becoming the dominant religion in the country. In a national survey conducted in 2000, 8 out of 10 Filipinos considered themselves Catholic (<http://www.census.gov.ph>). As a result, Christianity in the Philippines has put its mark in the symbolism of some colours; many of the rites and ceremonies associated with each stages of life follow Roman Catholic forms and codes. However, this does not apply to all of the peoples in the Philippines as some have kept their own beliefs and related rituals. Or rather, the present situation is that, although most have embraced Christianity through its different religious denominations, traditional beliefs (some would say superstitious) are still adhered to, in an attitude of syncretism. Another major religion in the country is Islam, prevalent in parts of Mindanao Island and in the Sulu archipelago where it is practised. Historians recorded that Islam was introduced in the southern islands of the Philippines in the middle of the fifteenth century, therefore before the arrival of the Spaniards in the central island of Cebu.

a. The colours of birth and childhood

Baptisms are an important social event in Philippine society. The father and the mother of the child invite family members and friends to the baptism rites held in a church, and it is usually followed by a celebration marked with food and drinks held either at the couple’s house, or more recently, in restaurants. The godparents of the child are also chosen from among the relatives or close friends of the couple, and as part of the ceremony in the church they take the lifelong vow to stand as the second parents of the child.

A Filipino baby is baptised in the Catholic Church wearing a white baptismal dress as a symbol of being sinless. During the ceremony, a white veil is put on the infant’s head with the accompanying words pronounced by the officiating



White baptismal dress and bonnet worn by babies for Catholic baptismal rites at a church.

Photo: Dino Brucelas

priest: "Receive this white garment, which mayest thou carry without stain before the judgment seat of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that thou mayest have eternal life. Amen" (W. Fanning, 1907). This is followed by the priest anointing the forehead of the child with the sign of the cross.

While the rites of baptism applies to and is followed by the Catholics all over the Philippines, some people have their practices that are unique to their own culture, and they practise this in conjunction with the Catholic rites without any problems. These people throughout their history have had rites associated with birth and the coming of age, the two important events for a child that are specific to their culture.

In the southern Philippines, various rites that follow Islamic practice are also done. However, some practices can be traced even before the entry of Islam in that region. Folk practices (possibly pre-Islamic ethnic culture) are followed among the Tausug people: the *pagka-ja* is a complex ritual for the first born and is practised exclusively by the natives of the island of Tapul (in the Sulu archipelago). When the first born reaches the age of puberty he is expected to perform this ritual accompanied by his family and an imam willing to perform the *dua'a*, a prayer to the spirits. "The food for the *dua'a pa ta-as* (prayer for the spirits) is strictly prescribed. The cooked rice should be colored yellow with turmeric, and extreme care taken in cooking the other dishes. The petitioner (*magkaka-ja*) takes this food offering to the top of the mountain, where the imam performs the prayer. The members of the party partake of some of the food, but they leave a greater portion of it at the place" (Mustafa, 1998, p.166).

In southwest Mindanao Island, the Maranao people have the use of flags that are displayed for many occasions including for the birth of a child. This is made known by the display of a rectangular flag at the house window, and the colour indicates the sex of the child: it is red (*mariga* in their language) for a boy and yellow (*binaning*) for a girl.

b. Colours in weddings

Again, in the predominantly Catholic regions in the country, wedding rituals follow the prescribed rules laid down by the Roman Catholic Church. White is the colour of purity; and also as the colour of the divine, it signifies eternity. In a typical Catholic wedding in the Philippines, the bride thus wears a white long dress or gown symbolising her purity, and a white veil covers her face to symbolise her virginity at the time of marriage. An important ceremony, which was brought to the countries colonised by the Spanish, is the veil and cord ceremony. A white secondary veil (other than the bride's veil) and then a cord placed over the couple represent the unity of the couple: the veil is to clothe them as one, to mean that they are the foundation of a new family; and the cord, looped in a figure of eight symbolising infinity, bounds them together as equals in their lifetime as a couple. Persons of importance to the couple are chosen to perform this ritual of placing the veil and cord: they are called today the 'secondary' sponsors, whereas the 'principal' sponsors are the actual legal witnesses to the Church marriage.

Aside from the Catholic ceremonies, there are other rites involving colour that other peoples in the Philippines perform, based on their distinct cultural traditions. An example of these, are "folk practices (possibly pre-Islamic ethnic



Catholic wedding in the Philippines

(Counter clockwise, from top left): Placing of the veil ceremony; placing of the cord ceremony; detail of cord and veil on the groom's *barong* (upper garment); the couple kneels at the Church altar, before the priest, while joined by the veil and cord.



Photos: Raymond Fortun Photography, courtesy of Aurelio and Tania Pascual

culture) in a Muslim Tausug wedding: the *pag-dulang* or serving of food to the newlyweds. This consists of a *maligay* –platters and baskets of certain foods like yellow rice, boiled eggs, chicken dishes, and various seafood. The bride and groom feed each other alternately with a *sampul* or ball of the yellow rice, with some viands on it” (Mustafa, 1998, p.167).

c. The colours of mourning

With the influence of Christianity, black is a colour generally associated with death, funerals, bereavement and sin. Because it is believed that a deceased person becomes dust and returns to the earth, he/she therefore goes to the darkness. This is why the chromatic symbol for mourning is black.

Blanket used for burial rites, province of Ifugao, northern Luzon Island.

Photo: tDA Philippines



The immediate family of a deceased person should exclusively wear clothes of black colour during the days of wake held before the interment, when relatives and friends come to pay their last respects to the dead and condole with the bereaved family. Usually, visitors to the wake are supposed to follow the same prescription, or at least wear dark-coloured clothes. The family continues to show its affliction and sadness in such black attire for a period of one year which is usually the conventional period of mourning.

In the Tagalog language, it is interesting to note that from the root word *itim* meaning black/blackness, the verb *mag-itim* is formed to mean precisely: “to wear black clothing, to be in mourning”.

In the Lanao highlands in Mindanao, the Maranao regard white as the colour associated with death, the colour of sadness and mourning. With their distinct tradition of using ceremonial flags, a display of the *pamanai* type of flags along a road leading to the community would signify a death in a family and the state of mourning. The *pamanai* are small triangular flags mounted on a short stick low on the ground. In contrast to these flags in white, red *pamanai* flags could be displayed to signify that the deceased died of a violent or unnatural death (N. Madale, 1998, p. 169). This specific practice illustrates an emblematic function of colour. Colour becomes here a sign, in the semiotic sense, that relays information on life events: death, birth, war.

d. Colours in burial rites

In the culture of traditional societies, black was a traditional colour for garments, whether these were for specific occasions or for everyday wear. Black in this way did not connote for them the sombre symbolism of death and funerals as it is for believers of the Catholic faith. In burials according to traditional beliefs of several ethnic groups, there is the principal use of a blanket whether to be placed next to the dead in the coffin or to cover him, or to enshroud the bones that are exhumed during what is called a second burial.



Detail of *trambia* blanket common among the Iloko people (northern Luzon Island).

Photo: tDA Philippines

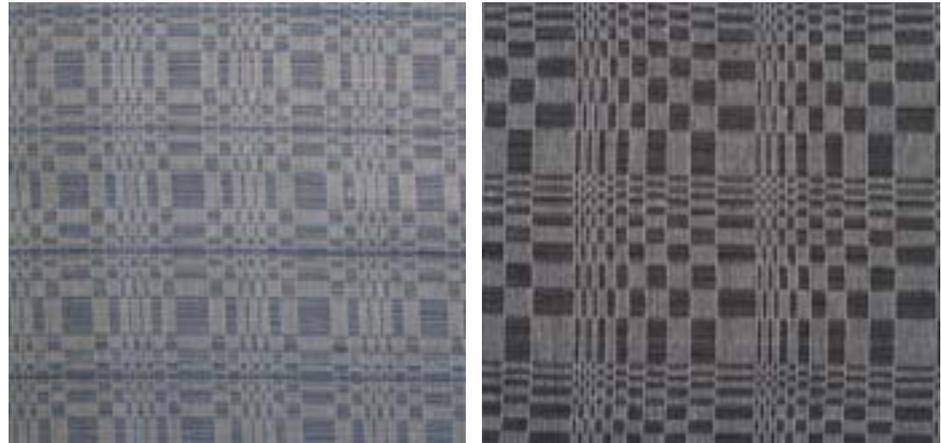
It can be observed that some cultural groups use white cloth. One example is from the Iloko people (from the Ilocos provinces in northern Luzon Island). The Iloko believe in making sure that the departed person is prepared well for the afterlife. Favourite clothing, footwear, and even coins are buried with the dead; and before the interment he is covered with a white blanket “from head to foot so that he may not feel cold” (Ingel, 2002, p. 21).

Another example is from the Hanunoo–Mangyan (in Mindoro Island). They conduct a second burial (an exhumation, or *kutkut* in their language, which is followed by feasting *-panludan* or *ponsiyon*) a year after the primary burial. Masaru Miyamoto, as cited by E. Dizon, recorded that “when everything is removed from the mound of the grave, the *panugkutkutan* (a male who plays the leading part in the ritual and is skilled in arranging the bones in the traditional way) spreads a white blanket on it. He grasps the central portion of the blanket with his hand, murmuring a prayer. This is, they say, to call the soul of the deceased.... Several days after the feast the *taragu?an* is practised: the set of exhumed bones wrapped in the blanket and dressed in new clothes is carried to a burial cave which is ordinarily located at the seacoast or at the edge of a high portion of a mountain commanding a view of the sea... The bones are placed inside the cave” (Dizon, 1998, p.109).

Among the peoples in the Cordillera region of northern Luzon Island, it is difficult to say that one colour, distinctive of a ritual object or cloth, is “assigned” to convey the meaning or to hold direct symbolism to the event of death. In their burial practices, blankets are an important part, and the usual requirement is that the best blankets be provided to accompany the dead. The most prized blankets are chosen. It is said that certain blankets are especially woven and exclusively used in such context. Depending on the group, the body of the dead is either wrapped in several blankets (as in the case of the burial among the Ifugao people), or only covered by one. For instance, in a Kalinga community, the best blanket is put in the casket together with the best clothes and favourite objects of the deceased, as this is considered the best way to honour him and to show one’s affection. For other groups, parts of the blanket are actually torn and distributed to the family members as mementos.

Detail of *binakul* textile patterns. The motif represents the spirit of the wind.

Photos: tDA Philippines



In the case of the Itneg people, their special blanket called *binakul*, together with other textiles which they most value, are hanged on a rope to be displayed behind the corpse (Ellis, 1981, p. 227; 230). The patterns of the *binakul* are graded squares and circles of white and black, or dark/light-blue, that achieve an “op-art” effect. The motifs and patterns on these blankets have spiritual and cultural meanings which, without the colours applied to them, would not be understood. The colours here uphold the power of the object (the blanket) in this ceremonial context.

Items for Christian worship

a. Multi-coloured candles

In the Catholic rituals, prayers for supplications are often offered to the saints and the . In a typical Catholic church in the Philippines, there are niches reserved for supplicants and there are candle trays to hold one’s lighted candle, symbolizing a prayer to the saint being asked for intercession. Outside of the churches, vendors sell candles of different colours, each standing for a specific meaning (some not necessarily needing the intercession of a Catholic

Multi-colour candles being sold outside of a Catholic Church in the city of Manila.

Photo: Dino Brucelas



saint). A red candle is believed to have an effect on one's family. Lighting a red candle and offering a prayer can send good fortune to the family member or to his/her affairs. A blue candle is to ask for peace of mind while a brown candle is for good fortune. A pink candle is to pray for love life and health. A peach candle is offered for success in studies, and a violet candle for material wealth. There are also white candles for purity in whatever form, and black candles for the conscience -either to release the burden in one's self or maybe inflict the same burden on others.

Aside from these multicoloured candles, there are also wax figures mostly shaped in the form of a human body. These figures are melted along with the lighted candles, and are said to be more effective if they are burned with candles of the same colour. They are usually for praying for one's early recovery from an illness; and sometimes used for disturbing another person's conscience. (Personal communication, 2012)

b. *Palaspas* (palm frond)

The *palaspas* (palm frond) is an item that is deeply ingrained in the religious practice of the Catholic Filipinos. On Palm Sunday, the *palaspas* makers can be seen outside of the churches selling these freshly woven palm leaves to the people going to Mass. At a certain point of the Mass, the priest asks the devotees to raise up the *palaspas* as a sign of welcome to the Christ. Then he blesses the *palaspas*. The light green of the fronds assembled with touches of coloured ribbons is quite a sight, and creates a unique atmosphere of worship. The *palaspas* are afterwards brought home by the churchgoers to hang on the doors of their houses or to put on altars inside their homes, with the belief that the *palaspas* will ward off evil spirits and illness, and bless the family. Even if the leaves have already dried up in time, and turned light brown, the Filipinos believe that the frond is still potent.



The *palaspas*

Clockwise from top left: Worshippers raise the *palaspas* (palm fronds) as a sign of welcome and celebration during the Catholic mass. As the *palaspas* are raised, the priest goes around and blesses them by sprinkling holy water; After the mass, the *palaspas* are brought home and hanged on the doors or by the house altar; Weavers make the *palaspas* and sell them near the church; Examples of different designs of the *palaspas*; Detail of a *palaspas*.



Photos: Yla Corotan





Offering of fruits and flowers at the statue of Lucban's Patron Saint, San Isidro Labrador.

Photo: Dino Brucelas

***Fiesta* (town festivity) in multi-colour**

A cultural trait of the so-called lowland regions in the country, particularly those that were first Christianized, is a community celebration (*fiesta*) on the feast day of the patron saint (of the Roman Catholic Church) of their town. The *Pahiyas* in the town of Lucban (province of Batangas, Luzon) is one example of these *fiestas*. It is held every May 15 in honour of its patron saint, San Isidro Labrador (*labrador* means farmer). In effect, that month of the year corresponds to the time of harvest and during this festivity villagers adorn the façade of their houses with the produce harvested in the locality. Rice is particularly represented in the form of a thin wafer called *kiping*, moulded from the *cabal* leaf (from the family of the coffee trees) and dyed with colouring agents. Local informants recall from almost extinct local lore that the colours of these *kiping* are inspired by the colours of ripening fruits and vegetables. All these decorations are to grace the procession of the image of San Isidro that will pass in the streets of the town. The bedecked houses are said to be especially favoured and blessed in the coming year. This, in essence, is a thanksgiving celebration for a bountiful harvest and an expression of faith and gratitude to the blessings of the patron saint. According to N. Respicio in a personal communication, the multitude and brightness of colours expressed by the display of nature's bounty pleases highly the spirits. For truly, in *fiestas* are fused in syncretism the Christian faith and the ancient belief of the *anitos* (unseen spirits) who are "powerful beings that have to be appeased, revered and consulted for good health, bountiful harvest, successful hunt and other political and economic activities" (Respicio, c1994, p. 100).



Façade of house adorned with rice husks, vegetable, and *kiping*.

Photo: Dino Brucelas

LITERATURE

As the Philippines is composed of several ethno-linguistic groups, with each community having its own history and culture, a thorough presentation of colour in literature cannot be covered by this research. Therefore, only a sampling is presented in this paper.

Legends and Myths

Legends and myths have been part of the oral tradition of the peoples of the Philippines since time immemorial. In the stories, the rainbow, the emblematic manifestation of colour, is both a harbinger of good fortune or of ill fate. Or for some, it is a road or ladder that connects the worlds of the deities and the mortals. The recurrent story is that a daughter of a deity falls in love with a mortal, but they are separated because the deity has to return to her realm. The rainbow becomes the way for the mortal man to see his beloved, and he brings along their child. For others, it is the sign of someone who did great deeds, or a deity who gave the rainbow as a gift to the people. One legend from the Kalinga people (who live in the mountainous region of the northern Luzon Island) tells that the rainbow is the *bahag* (g-string) of a leader named Fonad, who gave himself up as a sacrifice to the gods during a time of plague so that his people will no longer suffer. The Kalinga people would say that Fonad is laundering his multi-coloured g-string, and hanging it to dry in the sky (Reyes, 2001, p.186).

Oral literature

Other mentions of colour have been associated with the dead, or the deities of the dead. An example that has been greatly studied by various scholars is from the oral literature of the Bagobo people. The upland Bagobo people is described by J. Peralta as traditionally living in the east and south of Mount Apo, and the eastern side of Cotabato in the southern Philippines, in the island of Mindanao (Peralta, 2003, p. 49). The traditional Bagobo society, as described by Peralta was dominated by the warrior class called the *magani*.

In the oral literature of the Bagobo, the element of a black river is important as it give cleansing to the newly departed souls of the dead. The path from life to death, to the final resting place is ruled by Mebuyan, one of the major deities in Bagobo beliefs.

The priest Pieter jan Raats made a systematic study of the Bagobo beliefs and describes clearly the importance of Mebuyan and the black river: "Another path to the source of life which originally was in the centre upon the earth would be the path of Mebuyan that leads from the centre into the underworld. Those who go there are the common dead. They will find the black river (in the Beyond) that they have to cross and in which Mebuyan bathes them and bestows new life on them." (jan Raats, 1969, p. 4)

Mebuyan is identified as the daughter of Tuglibong, mother of all primeval beings. Mebuyan is the ruler of the Bagobo underworld. She, as a woman, is also associated with a mortar, a common theme in many Southeast Asian myths.

“All the spirits stop at Mebuyan’s town on their way to Gimokudan. There the spirits wash all their joints in the black river that runs through Mebuyan’s [town]. They wash the top of their head, too. This bathing (*pamalugu*) is for the purpose of making the spirits feel at home, so they will not turn away and go back to their own bodies. If a spirit could return to its own body, the body would get up and be alive again.” (Jan Raats, 1969, p. 25)

Proverbs and Sayings

Proverbs and sayings are a rich part of Philippine culture. This richness is attributed by D. Eugenio to the fondness and respect that Filipinos have for proverbs. It is used as medium of instruction in the primary education system, and some scholars have even tried to extract from proverbs a possible Filipino code of ethics (Eugenio, c2007, p. xxxvi). Colours in proverbs and sayings in the different languages of the various regions of the Philippines can be seen in these examples:

“To dream of a rainbow or of the dead is a good sign for the Kalinga hunter, but to dream of snakes or falling rocks is a bad omen.” (Casal, 1986, p.71)

Andeket, mareket no magaro malet. (Pangasinan language)

Black, beautiful, steadfast when she loves.

(Eugenio, a1992, p. 43)

Ing dicut mayaquit berdi

Qng aliwang pastulan

Dapot ya murin ing matuang damulag (Kapampangan language)

The grass may look greener in the other pasture,
but it’s usually the same old *carabao*.

(Eugenio, a1992, p. 214)

Magmabusag man la kay labsak kasingkasing tibulag;

Magmaitom man la kay langking kasingkasing tugod hin paghigugma.

(Waray)

White may he be, yet he’s pale and his heart is untrue;

Dark though he be, because he is black his heart is teeming with love.

(Eugenio, a1992, p. 545)

Saan nga amin nga puraw ket gatas. (Iloko)

Not all that is white is milk.

(Eugenio, a1992, p. 545)

Maputi ma't durog, daig nang garingang subok. (Tagalog)

White rice that is broken is inferior to dark rice that is whole.

(Eugenio, a1992, p. 545)

Riddles

Considered a universal art, riddles is enjoyed in the Philippines for its instructiveness and the enjoyable social interaction it brings. "It is a pleasant pastime during labor and leisure; riddles are associated with most social groupings, from harvesting to courtship to mortuary services" (Eugenio, 2007, p.xxxiv). Some also use their wit in asking or solving riddles as a show of intelligence, to be greatly admired by the people. Below are some examples of riddles that use colour as part of the puzzle.

May kabayong puti, nasa puwit ang tali. (Tagalog)

There is a white horse, its rein is tied to its tail.

(Answer: needle and thread)

(Eugenio, b1994, p. 602)

Nagtanim aco sin itom, namugña nin tatarom. (Bikol)

I planted something black, words were its fruits.

(Answer: ink used for writing)

(Eugenio, b1994, p. 651)

Maitim na parang uwak, maputing parang busilak;

Walang paa'y lumalakad, hari may kinakausap. (Tagalog)

As black as the crow, and of immaculate whiteness;

Without feet it can walk, and talk even with a king.

(Answer: letter)

(Eugenio, b1994, p. 652)

ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS

***Kiping* (rice wafer)**

Mario and Christie Nañola represent the few remaining *kiping* makers in Lucban (province of Quezon), a mountain town about 100 km south of Manila. They are typical present day *kiping* makers: they produce the rice wafers that will be bought by others for use as decorations during the May 15 *Pahiyas* festival that Lucban is widely known for. *Kiping* making is a local business that thrives only during the weeks before May 15. Gone are the times when each household was responsible for producing these rice wafers themselves. According to Mario and Christie, the *kiping* is a difficult product to create. Only a few people now can make the perfect *kiping* because only these few possess the know-how, passed on from generation to generation. A perfect *kiping* is a thin rice wafer that is translucent both from the thinness and the kind of rice used. Dyed with different colours using commercially available food colouring, the *kiping* tries to recreate the colours of the fruits and vegetables harvested during this time, traditionally offered to San Isidro Labrador, the patron saint of the Farmer and of Lucban. The tradition of making this rice wafer has been practised for a long time in Lucban, though Mario says that the actual history of how it came to be has been somehow lost in the oral transmission of local lore. Only a few elderly town folks in Lucban could remember as much on how the tradition began and how it developed. (M. and C. Nañola, personal communication, May 10, 2012)

While it is not clear where the word *kiping* comes from, a similar Tagalog word, *kipil*, exists. Defined as an adjective which means 'moulded by hand', *kipil* describes perfectly the *kiping* production process. Making the *kiping* takes a lot of time and patience. Beginning as early after the Holy Week (around April each year), the leaves used as moulds are gathered from the forest, or bought from other enterprising individuals. Rice is ground finely, and made into a thin paste then coloured with dye. Afterwards, it is spread thinly on the leaves, shaped with the hand, and then steamed until the rice paste is cooked. After steaming, it is allowed to dry before the paste is separated from the leaf moulds. Hardier leaves can last up to two or three steaming. Those less hardy are used up after each steaming. The wafer thus obtained is pressed down to be dried further, with the weight of books, newspapers, or any other handy material. Depending on the weather, the drying period can take from one afternoon to as long as two days. The family of Mario has a technique: they sleep on the drying *kipings* to make sure that much needed pressure is applied to keep the wafers flat. It is important that they are dried properly after steaming as fungus can start to form and ruin those that are not dry enough, thus destroying days of hard work. (M. and C Nañola, personal communication, May 10, 2012)

One *salop* (a wooden box used as a unit of measurement, approximately three liters of dry measure) of rice makes 130 to 160 *kiping* leaves. With each leaf / wafer selling at around 6 pesos, and probably half of that is the cost to produce it, *kiping* making has become an expensive production. This could be observed (during the *Pahiyas* festivities for 2012) in the limited number of houses whose façades were exclusively adorned with *kipings*. Most houses are embellished with a mix of actual farm produce like fruits and vegetables and *kipings* assembled to form various kinds of ornamental objects. These beautifully



The *Pahiyas* Festival
Every May 15, the town of Lucban in the province of Quezon, Luzon Island, celebrates their *fiesta* in honour of San Isidro Labrador, the patron saint of the farmers. The town comes alive in a riot of bright colours, reflected in the *kiping* creations that decorate the house, to the town's girls who join the yearly pageant wearing fashion creations in the same bright colours.

Photos: Dino Brucelas



and lavishly decorated house façades are the highlight of the *fiesta*: the many bright and lively colours displayed bring about the festive atmosphere, as they express the bounty of nature and life.



Taka

Taka is the general term used for the *papier mâché* sculptures and figurines that are made in the town of Paete in the province of Laguna, south of the country's capital city. These sculptures and figurines come in traditional forms such as a horse, rooster, *carabao* (water buffalo), and a maiden. More contemporary forms range from insects to reindeer, fruits and vegetables, and even Santa Claus. According to B. Fajardo, the *taka* was considered as toys for children and it was usually sold at the steps of the church during the *fiesta* (town festivity in honour of its patron Saint). These sculptures and figurines are traditionally painted in festive colours: usually a deep red base with some patterns of flowers or details in bright colours (usually yellow, green and white). While the reason for the colours, and perhaps the origin of the art itself, has been uneasy to trace back in time, the strikingly red *taka* horse has become an iconic representation of the town itself (Paete) for many years.



Examples of traditional *taka*.

Photo: tDA Philippines

Parol (lantern)

The Christmas lantern for the Philippines is traditionally made with bamboo and coloured paper (usually red, green, and yellow) forming a simple five-pointed star. In places like San Fernando City, the capital of Pampanga (a province north of the capital city), the *parol* has evolved into more elaborate and complex designs that use more expensive materials like the *capiz* (a translucent shell traditionally used for window panes). Some makers also add in the body of the lantern some electronically coordinated multi-coloured lights flashing in rhythm to Christmas tunes. The *parol* is said to have originated from

A Filipino vendor selling *parols*.

Photo: Keith Bacongo / CC BY 2.0



a *fiesta* (town festivity) commemorating the victory of the Spanish against a much more superior Dutch naval armada in the seventeenth century. The *fiesta* itself was a grand affair, especially in the town of Bacolor (then capital of the province of Pampanga), where multi-coloured lanterns were lined up to mark the route of the religious procession (Rodrigues, 2011, p. 109). These lanterns were kept hanging up to Christmas time. Since then, from an object used in a *fiesta*, the *parol* took on to become the symbol of the Christmas season in the Philippines.



Mat weaving

The floor mat, or *banig* in the Tagalog language, is an indispensable part of every Filipino house. Its uses vary: it is a floor cover to designate the sitting or eating area in traditional houses with bamboo-slat flooring; it is used as a sleeping mat or as carpet for festive occasions. In some provinces, it also has a ceremonial usage and is a valuable item in gift exchange.



The mat is woven from different materials (palm or *buri*, pandan (screw pine) leaves, and *tikog* grass) and created with different colour combinations, both depending on the region of the Philippines they originate from. The most colourful ones with intricate designs are made in the Visayas region, Mindanao and Sulu islands. For instance, the design and colour of mats typical of weavers from the Sulu archipelago are traditionally a combination of vibrant colours such as green, orange, red, violet, blue and yellow that are woven into stripes, squares, zigzags or geometrical patterns, using pandan (screw pine) leaves.

Examples of mats found in the Philippines.

Photo: tDA Philippines

Sorbetes cart (ice cream cart)

The *sorbetes* ice cream cart is a common sight in Philippines cities. The ringing of the *sorbetero's* bell (ice cream vendor) as the latter walks the streets calling for customers, is still a well recognised joyous sound in most neighbourhoods that announces *sorbetes!* The cart is made of wood, painted in bright colours (usually in a dominant yellow combined with red) with several metal canisters fit into it that contain the ice cream or *sorbetes* (a Spanish word). The peddler sells a local version of ice cream made from coconut and *carabao's* (water



Examples of *sorbetes* (ice cream) carts.

Photo: Winada Effendi



buffalo) milk which is distinct from what is known as sorbet. This is served in small wafer or cones, or nowadays even in bread buns.



An example of a *jeepney*.

Photo: Yla Corotan

***Jeepney* (jeep)**

The original body of the vehicle that is called *jeepney* by the Filipinos comes from the American military jeep used during World War II in the Philippines: many of these jeeps were left in the country at the end of the war, sold or given. From refurbished jeeps to full-blown passenger vehicles built with a roof and chrome-plated hoods, they are today privately-owned public utility vehicles that constitute one of the major means of transportation in the Philippines. The name *jeepney* is said to come from the words 'jeep' and 'knee' combined, as the sitting arrangement places passengers almost knee to knee, facing each other. The *jeepney* is painted in strong bright colours that contrast with the stainless steel parts of its body. Many colourful graphics decorate the sides of the vehicle, some with texts of various motto, or religious sayings; or other yet identifying text like the name of the owner or of his children. In some cities, monochromatic colours are used to identify the route of the *jeepney*. These colourful *jeepneys* are truly a part of Philippine culture.



While it may seem at first glance that these *jeepneys* are colour-coded according to a specific route, the colouring is highly dependent on the taste of the owner. Only a few *jeepneys* in the Philippines use colour to mark a specific route.

Photo: Winada Effendi



COLOUR AND FOOD

Rice

The Philippines, like other Asian countries, is a rice country. Rice is part of every Filipino meal. It is made into various food products that are eaten from breakfast to supper. According to food scholar Doreen Fernandez, an eighteenth-century Tagalog-Spanish dictionary lists more than 160 words related to rice (Fernandez, Sarap, 1988). In terms of colour, rice grains come in different colours and shades. The most common kind of rice is white rice. Of the non-sticky (or glutinous) variety, it is well-milled, and while uncooked has a translucent white colour, more elongated than oval, and has a fragrant smell when cooked. This kind of rice is used for all the major meals. Another kind of white rice is the glutinous rice, or *malagkit* (sticky rice). Sweeter in taste than the ordinary white rice when cooked, it is more opaque when uncooked, shorter, and a bit more powdery. The sweet taste makes this kind of rice more used as the main ingredient for rice cakes, but more ordinary rice also serves as a viable option. These two are the more common kinds of rice found throughout the archipelago. Fernandez notes that “grinding rice into flour produces galapong, from which comes an archipelago-wide array of cakes: *bibingka*, *suman*, *parosdos*, *palitao*, *palotan*, *puto*, *sapin-sapin*, *kutsinta*, *minoron*, and innumerable others. This galaxy of varied sizes and colors - eaten with sugar, eaten with grated coconut, with sugar and toasted coconut, with sesame seeds - marks most of the festive calendar.” (Fernandez, 1998, p.85)

These rice cakes, called *kakanin*, varies greatly from regions, localities, and even households. As Besa and Dorotan puts it, “In *barrio* [a small village] Maronquillo, Bulacan (north of Manila) alone, we could have spent a whole week just sampling the different *kakanin* that this tiny community produces and sells in the local market” (2012, p.12).

Wrapping rice in banana leaf is a common sight in community gatherings in many areas of the Philippines. It replaces the use of plates and is much easier to distribute, as well as being ‘eco-friendly’ to dispose of after eating.

Photo: Jerry Jose



Other kinds of rice are less common, and some are grown only in a specific locale or region. This rarity, and for some kinds of rice the extra effort of growing rice in isolated mountainous areas, make these kinds of rice twice or even thrice more expensive than ordinary rice. Brown rice, also known as upland rice, is a variety of rice that is cultivated in the mountainous regions of the Philippines, especially in Northern Luzon where it is cultivated in mountain terraces. Still grown the same way as centuries ago, brown rice is said to have more nutrients than white rice. It has a light-brown to reddish-brown colour that become slightly darker when cooked.



Puto bumbong (Rice cake).

Photo: tDA Philippines

Red rice is cultivated in a few place like the island of Bohol. Not really red, but more light brown to light red, it is another variety of rice that has seen an increase in demand because of its more nutritious content than white rice.

An even rarer kind of rice nowadays is the purple or violet rice called *pirurutong*. It is considered an endangered variety (Besa & Dorotan, 2012, p.67), and was used traditionally to make the *puto bumbong*, a kind of rice cake that is traditionally made – and therefore only enjoyed - during the Christmas season. Fernandez notes this sense of nostalgia associated with the *pirurutong* and *puto bumbong*: “Today’s Christmas feasting, although heavy with Spanish ham, ensaimadas and stews, is remembered longingly by Filipinos for the *puto bumbong* made from violet-colored *pirurutong* rice...” (Fernandez, 1998, p.85). In another book, she points to pre-Spanish, pre-Christianization use of rice in celebrations, which may have been the precursor of the association of Filipinos with *puto bumbong* to celebrations (Fernandez, 1994, p.159). *Puto bumbong* is made from a mixture of sticky rice and a small amount of *pirurutong* rice, ground into a flour, and then soaked in water. After it is soaked, it is then wrapped in cheesecloth and weights are placed on top to drain the water. To cook it, a few tablespoons are packed into a bamboo tube (*bumbong*) greased with coconut oil, and then steamed. The cooked rice cakes (*puto*), or more precisely, of cylindrical shape like rolls, are eaten hot and served with butter or margarine, and served with brown sugar.



Examples of *suman* (rice cakes) found in the Philippines: (top) *tamales*, a salty kind of rice cake made with various meat and egg, eaten as a meal; (below) triangular *suman latik* and tubular-shaped *suman pinipig*, sweet rice cakes snacks.

Photo: tDA Philippines

***Suman* (rice cake) wrapper**

Glutinous rice is mixed with coconut milk and wrapped in banana or palm leaf and then steamed or roasted, depending on the recipe. This simple delicacy of rice is found all over the Philippines, with variations in additions to the recipe or cooking preparation like adding turmeric, or making it salty instead of the usual sweet taste. The wrapping itself can range from simple folds to complex affairs. The colour of the wrap range from deep green to yellow green, even to a straw coloured yellowish brown.

***Ube* (Purple yam)**

Ube (purple yam) is defined as “a species of yam or root crop with violet-coloured flesh.” (English, Tagalog-English Dictionary, p.1509). What is interesting to note is that the colour violet in Tagalog is defined as *kulay-ube*, or literally, the colour of ube.

While known to be found across Southeast Asia and South Pacific, Besa and Dorotan believe that the *ube* is uniquely Filipino, and not to be confused with



Ube hopia (Purple yam sweet flaky bread)

Photo: tDA Philippines

taro or any purple potato or tuber (2012, p.222).

Ube is made into various sweet foods like *halaya*, a jam that can be eaten alone as a dessert or as one of the toppings in another Philippine dessert called *halo-halo* (literally: “mixed together”). *Halaya* is made by boiling grated purple yam in milk. *Ube* is also made into ice cream, *pastillas* (candies), cakes, tarts, and even bread.

An interesting thing to note here is that because the purple *pirurutong* rice is becoming harder to grow and buy nowadays, people have resorted to using *ube* as a colouring material for rice flour in making *puto bumbong*.

Achuete/Atsuete

The *achuete* (*bixa orellana* or annatto seed), originally from Mexico, was introduced to the Philippines by the Spanish. Used the same way as in Mexico, it gives flavour and colour to certain foods. (Fernandez, 1994, p.194). The annatto seeds when soaked in water give a red to red-orange colouring agent. This is then used in a variety of food preparations, from stews, soups, to grilled food. Claude Tayag, a respected culinary chef in the Philippines, recounted his gastronomic trip around the Philippines in a recently-published book. In the book, he describes the ingredients as well as the cooking method. What one can observe from his stories is the abundance of the use of *achuete* in food to give it colour. This abundant use of *achuete* for colouring becomes apparent in towns and regions that had a strong Spanish presence and sea ports.



Bixa orellana (annatto seed).

Photo: Leonardo Aguiar / CC BY 2.0

While the use of the *achuete* has been adapted to fit the local flavour or taste, there are some dishes that refer back to the Spanish-Mexican heritage, like the *pipian* of Vigan, Ilocos Sur, Northern Luzon Island. The dish can be described as “a gruel of ground rice cooked with chicken, its stock flavoured with *atsuete* and *pasotes*, from that fragrant Mexican leafy herb called “epazote”. (Tayag, 2012, p. 29). Tayag also further notes that the *pipian* is also found in Barra de Navidad, a small town located on the Western coast of Julasco, Mexico. This is a town that was used by Spain in the sixteenth-century for ship-building, repairs, and (more importantly) as a jump-off point to the Philippines. This town was the direct link between Mexico and the Philippines. Vigan on the other hand, was an important municipality during the Spanish colonial period and had a seaport. The *pipian* exists in the Mexican town with the same name and manner of cooking as the one found in Vigan. One can infer that the initial spread of *achuete* across the Philippines was through the Spanish seamen, but eventually it was through the locals who had adapted it into their native cuisine.



Pancit luglug, a dry noodle dish typically coloured with *achuete*.

Photo: Obsidian Soul / CC BY-SA 3.0

A lot of the other Philippine dishes that use *achuete* fall under what Fernandez calls *fiesta* (or festive) food (Fernandez, 1994 p. 224). These are foods only for special occasions, not for everyday meals. Along with other foods of Spanish origins, the *achuete* entered Philippine culture from a position of ascendancy. Its colouring property probably gave these foods a visual reference to what was “deemed superior, urbane, ‘civilizing’, greatly desired...” (Fernandez, 1994, p.224). Stews with flavourful ingredients and richly coloured red-orange by *achuete* probably gave rise to other varieties of Philippine dishes, with the Filipinos adapting the foreign influences to their own cuisine.



Kalamansi (Green citrus fruit).

Photo: tDA Philippines

***Kalamansi* (Green citrus fruit)**

The *kalamansi* (*Citrofortunella microcarpa*) is an ubiquitous dark green citrus fruit found on the dining table of most Philippine households.

It is described as “a smooth and slightly spiny plant, growing to a height of 3 to 5 meters. Leaflets are elliptic to oblong-elliptic, 4 to 8 cm long. Petioles are narrowly and scarcely winged, about a cm long. Flowers are axillary, solitary, rarely in pairs, white, and short-stalked. Fruit is yellow when ripe, nearly spherical, 2 to 3.5 cm diameter, 6- to 7-celled, and thin-skinned. The skin or peel is green to yellowish green or yellow, loosely adhering to the flesh. The flesh contains a few light orange seeds.” (Stuart, 2012)

Used as dip, juice, or marinade, the *kalamansi* is part of many Philippine culinary experience. Its deep green colour is a reassuring presence for many diners, as most Filipinos would always look for the *kalamansi* before a meal, for many consider it as part of the meal itself. It is mixed with soy sauce or fish sauce to serve as a dip, and most often, freshly crushed chili peppers are added. It can also be squeezed over some food like grilled meats, on raw fish dish called *kinilaw* (ceviche), or on the Philippine noodle dish called *pancit* and its numerous variations.



Itlog na pula (Salty red eggs).

Photo: tDA Philippines

***Itlog na pula* (Red eggs)**

Duck eggs are cured in a mixture of mud and brine and coloured red to distinguish it easily from the white chicken eggs. Traditionally dipped in a red colouring agent, there has been a movement away from this because of possible health hazards, but the ‘*itlog na pula*’ (red egg) will always be a part of the language of Filipino cuisine and the Filipino table. It is usually served with fresh red tomatoes.

It is widely believed that it was the Chinese settlers in the town of Pateros around the 18th-century who introduced the making of salted eggs. Pateros, located at the entry of the Pasig River from Laguna Lake, is known for its duck-raising industry and by-products: eggs.

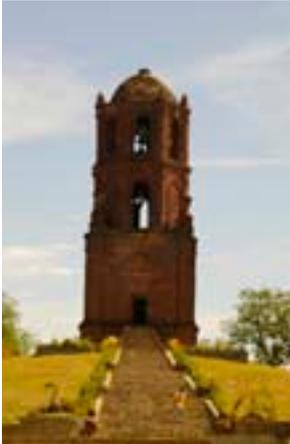
COLOUR AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

What is Philippine architecture? A lot has been written about the topic, and still there are certain ideas that remain uncertain. The term “Philippine architecture” covers a wide range of buildings and styles—from the primitive lean-tos, the houses and villages of cultural minorities; the *bahay kubo* (literally ‘cube house’) of the lowlands and its variations, the grand houses and the baroque and rococo churches of the Spanish colonial period, the houses and civic and commercial buildings of the American regime, and the works of the contemporary architects. One might attempt to identify certain common features, but after listing down a few, one has to admit that such features are not that common. These would include: the visual lightness and transparency of structure; the two-dimensional character of design; the propensity for ornament, color, and texture; space surrounded by space; the integration of structure and ornament, and, some might insist, the steep roof and stilts. Ultimately it is not particular forms or characteristics that matter, but a certain vision—erosional or communal, world view or mythology—translated into space and structure. (Perez, Encarnacion, Dacanay, 1989, p. 9)

Vernacular architecture in the Philippines has an almost monochromatic colour scheme of straw yellow or brown, due to the same materials used all throughout, with a few exceptions. As Dr. Jaime Laya notes in his introduction to Architect Valera-Turalba’s book, “the essence of Filipino vernacular architecture is therefore by and large similar throughout the land. There is a common denominator in the materials used—bamboo or wood beam and posts, some type of straw or grass, or dried and sturdy leaves (often from *nipa* and *anahaw* palms, or from *cogon* grass) for walls and roofs.” (Laya, in Valera-Turalba, 2005. p.x)

As noted in another book, “folk houses are not product of theory or design, but of instinct, intuition, common sense, and communal memory. Their form has been defined by climate, site, use and purpose, available materials, building technology, historical experience, and a world view. The last could involve a sacral view of nature or a symbolic alliance with it. Limited technology accounts for the rudimentary structure of post and lintel-vertical members supporting horizontal members, a play of vertical and horizontal lines and of right angles. Again, limited technology and also lack of materials account for the natural finish of the house. Its color is nothing more than the color of its materials—wood, bamboo, thatch. Only the *torogan* with its *panolong* makes use of color, and does so with a vengeance.” (Perez, Encarnacion, Dacanay, 1989, p. 8)

As Laya notes, while there are hardly any recorded monumental places of worship, except probably for the mosques in the Muslim southern Philippines, the introduction of Christianity meant new types of building had to be constructed. Churches and convents were constructed in almost all towns where the Spanish colonial government had a presence. Along with these places of worship, new buildings and infrastructure like ports, lighthouses, military forts, and offices and other official structures made their presence felt in the colony. The wealthy local elites also copied the new European-type architecture that they saw from the Spanish. (Laya, in Valera-Turalba, 2005, p.xi)



Spanish colonial era bell tower that doubled as a watch tower against raiders and pirates. Town of Bantay, Ilocos Sur, Luzon Island.

Photo: Dino Brucelas

These early churches were not just mere places of worship. They were the Spanish colonial government's, as well as the religious orders' showcases. The churches were built in such a way as to encourage, or impose, acceptance of the new religion as well as the new rulers. The décor and the rituals were used to attract, impress, and ensure obedience. The imposing church was built in a manner that dramatized the superiority of the of Christian god over the traditional deities. (The Filipino Nation Vol. 3, p.165)

“New construction materials also began to be used: stone—particularly adobe, a soft volcanic tuft—and coral rock, brick and eventually, portland cement.” (Laya, in Valera-Turalba 2005, p .xi) Along with the introduction of these new materials, architects and builders from Europe also arrived with the missionaries and conquistadors to build churches and forts, both used to make the Spanish presence felt, and seen, throughout the land.

It should be noted here that while the architects were Europeans, the craftsmen were Chinese, and this certainly influenced the outcome. Laya notes “this could explain such features as the graceful upturned tips of the many a tiled roof, a style unknown in Spain—the country which conventional wisdom assumes is the exclusive design source of our Spanish period buildings.” (Laya, in Valera-Turalba, 2005, p.xi)

Spanish colonial architecture

Valera-Turalba notes that “the arrival of the Spaniards in the sixteenth century catalysed the development of a different kind of architecture that was made possible by the technological know-how imported by the colonists to the archipelago.... Early structures, as recorded by the Spanish chroniclers, made use of light, indigenous materials and vernacular methods of construction. These buildings were simple stilt-type structures, uniformly constructed, mostly falling under the domestic kind. Dwellings were four-walled, some constructed directly adjacent to each other and separated only by walls. Provisional sheds (*camarins*) and fortifications were built using the same materials, and rarely would the buildings be of a religious nature.” (Valera-Turalba, 2005, p.23) She further notes that the materials used in this type of constructions were mostly bamboo, timber, *nipa* or thatch (*cogon*). Because of the nature of the materials themselves, these structures were prone to destruction by fire, strong typhoons, and earthquakes. The Spaniards, especially the friars of various religious orders, adapted a much more durable type of architecture, employing old construction knowledge systems from Spain and Mexico. (Valera-Turalba, 2005, p.23). With these architectural and building knowledge, added to an increasing understanding of the tropical climate and geologic conditions of the archipelago, the religious orders put these into use almost as soon it was possible, producing “buildings with unique design features that not only took into consideration distinct environmental conditions and available local materials, but also accessible manpower from the native community. (Valera-Turalba, 2005, p.23). While some of the local population were forced into this building labour, others were also enthusiastic in building the “house of God”.

“The architectural inspiration drawn by these early builders from the Spanish and American (Mexican) counterparts could be seen in the use of lime concrete (a processed material that had been employed in construction for centuries in

Europe, and which was similarly introduced by the colonists to the Americas) and brick, the use of stone locally found in construction vicinities such as volcanic tuff, or what we know locally as adobe, and coralline-type limestone, brought about distinct architectural styles unique to the archipelago.” (Valera-Turalba, 2005, p.23)

Valera-Turalba notes three typologies of architecture that developed during this period: religious, civic, and domestic. Religious architecture consisted mainly of churches, their *campanarios* (bell towers) and *conventos* (convents). Civic architecture consisted of government buildings such as *ayuntamientos* (town hall), *casa tribunals* (municipal hall) and *casa real* (residence and administrative building of the governor), *escuelas*, (schools), *puentes* (bridges) and hospitals. Domestic architecture centered on the houses of the wealthy, known as the *bahay na bato* (house of stone), simply referred to by the Jesuit priest, Ignacio Alzina, as *arquitectura mestiza* because of its being a product of the combination of stone and wood. (Valera-Turalba, 2005, p.24)

Spanish colonial era brick church in the town of Bantay, Ilocos Sur, Luzon Island.

Photo: Dino Brucelas



“The religious orders developed an architecture that was fortress-like, and which in some cases had actual defense functions. Massiveness and stability became associated with sound architecture, such that most of the churches during the early part of the Spanish colonization possessed formidable stronghold-like qualities. The religious groups, longing to stamp their influence on the people, produced this type of architecture that was jointly inspired by their creative fervor and the ingenious talent of the native manpower. It was the churches and *conventos* (convents) that became the identifying mark of the religious orders.” (Valera-Turalba, 2005, p.24)

Agustinian architecture

“The Agustinians, who, manifesting their affluence, would construct churches that exemplified architectonic monumentality. Their edifices became known works of art and were built to survive ages. Materials available in the islands were employed, like volcanic tuff, which was used as the main building material for structures such as the San Agustin Church of Intramuros... The availability of clay found in the northernmost part of the Island of Luzon would, on the other hand, produce Agustinian churches and edifices of brick, while those found in the Visayas would have masonry walls of coralline stone because of the abundance of limestone in the southern islands [more accurately, central Philippine islands].” (Valera-Turalba, 2005, p.24)

Dominican architecture

“Churches of the Dominican order that are found in the northernmost parts of the island of Luzon [North Philippines] -in the Ilocos and Cagayan Valley- would oftentimes use bricks, mainly because of the development of brick-making technology in the area, consequent to the availability of clay in these regions... As with any other structure using masonry-type building techniques, bricks were consolidated using lime-based mortar and plaster.” (Valera-Turalba, 2005, p.25) It should be noted here that Vigan and other town in Ilocos were well known for their clay jars, and thus already had kilns available.

Other orders and architecture

“Jesuit and Recollect churches found in the southern part of the Philippines (more accurately, central and south Philippines), particularly in the Visayan islands and in Mindanao, took advantage of the limestone quarry sites in these areas. These edifices used coralline stone as their main building material, which would consolidate with mortar and plastered with lime.” (Valera-Turalba, 2005, p.25)

These churches must have been an imposing sight to the Filipinos of that time. Amidst the verdant green foliage of a tropical country, these massive structures of gray, red, or white stood out, as a testament to the foreign god that was introduced by the Spanish priests. As Valera-Turalba mentions in describing one of these churches, “the (religious) complex must have been an awesome spectacle in the midst of the lush greenery...” (Valera-Turalba, 2005, p.34). Another author, describes it more colourfully: The town is truly picturesque, with a row of green mountains as its backdrop, a white Spanish colonial church at the rear of a small sandy plaza separated by a group of thick-walled Ivatan houses. The gray stone houses march in military precision away from both sides of the plaza... (Villalon, 2001, p.245)

Civic and domestic architecture

Valera-Turalba describes civic architecture during the Spanish colonial period as having similar features as their religious counterparts, but not having the same monumental feel as seen in the religious edifices. Unlike the churches, which would use full masonry construction in the wall, the civic structures

would employ wood for the upper part of the wall and stone or brick for the lower base.

Domestic architecture, as has been shown earlier, followed the civic architecture construction technique especially for the wealthy and middle class... The wealthy had the more elaborate and complex type of *bahay na bato*, the middle-class had a smaller version of the *bahay na bato* but which has more affinity to the *bahay kubo* in terms of interior space division. The *bahay na bato* in general made use of carved timber-paneled walls combined with sliding windows for its upper protective covering, and a masonry wall type of construction of brick, adobe tuff or limestone on its base. The windows are of capiz shells framed within timber stiles and muntin frames... These structures, originally roofed with *cogon* or thatch in the early part of the period, would eventually evolve into a much more sophisticated construction of *tisa* or brick. (Valera-Turalba, 2005, p.26)

An example of a *bahay na bato* (house of stone), a typical residence of the local elite during the Spanish colonial period.

Photo: Dino Brucelas



***Bahay na bato* influence**

Laya notes that “paralleled adjustments occurred in domestic architecture, influenced by the lifestyle of the new colonial masters. In contrast to the Filipino’s traditional practice of spending daylight hours almost entirely outdoors, Spaniards not only slept but also worked and relaxed indoors. The lifestyle of the colonial masters would have been emulated by the wealthy indios (as Filipinos were called then) who then began to move up from the one-room *bahay kubo* (literally, a ‘cube-shaped hut’, built of bamboo and suitable thatch) to the larger multiroomed *bahay na bato* (literally, ‘stone house’).” (Laya, in Valera-Turalba, 2005, p.xi)

Types of *Bahay na bato*

Laya lists four distinct types of *bahay na bato*:

1) the delightfully small multi-winged home with a wooden upper floor and a stone ground floor, a direct descendant of the *bahay kubo* and built by the middle-class native population. These can be seen in Central Luzon, and around Metro Manila.

2) The *convento*-type home, a high and large stone or stone-and-wood rectangular structure, usually L- or U-shaped, built by the elite. This type can be seen in the mestizo district of Vigan and in places like Taal in Batangas and Biñan in Laguna. All three are located in the island of Luzon, northern Philippines. These are large houses with stone walls rising from the ground to the tiled roof, like those of Vigan, or with a stone ground floor and a projecting wooden second floor, such as those of Taal and Biñan. The latter type is more common and can be found in towns all over the Philippines.



An example of the central interior court of a *bahay na bato* (house of stone) found in Intramuros, Manila, which was the seat of the Spanish colonial government.

Photo: Dino Brucelas

3) A Latin town-house type with central or side courts, built side by side in crowded towns and cities, some for ordinary people, some for the elites. Houses had to be built side by side in the more populous places, and large town houses with inner courts reminiscent of those in Southern Spain were standard in Intramuros (the seat of the Spanish colonial government). They still exist and can be found within Intramuros and the surrounding neighbourhoods. A few survivors can also be found in Taal, Batangas.

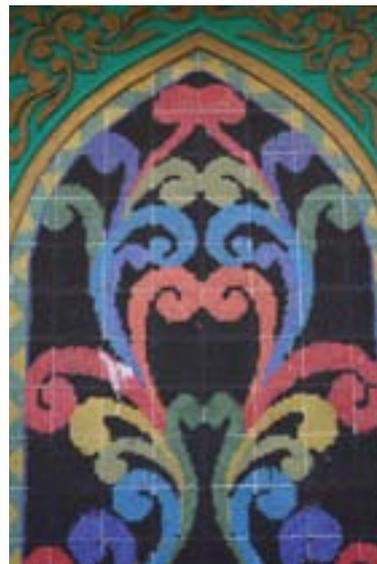
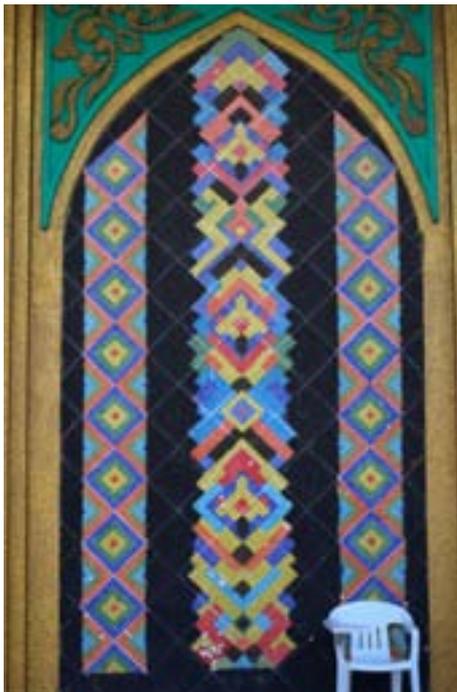
4) Victorian-era house adopted to the tropics, a frilly house built of brick, cousin to the colourful San Francisco “painted ladies”. These were built mostly towards the end of the Spanish regime and in the early American colonial period. They were built of brick and cement and wood, had large glass windows on heavily ornamented and brightly painted facades.

(Laya, in Valera-Turalba, 2005, p.xii)

The masses for the most part lived in *bahay kubo* or nipa huts, which still had the same structure, material, and construction techniques as encountered by the first Spanish. These houses were unpainted, thus retaining the natural colouring of the materials used, changing in colour or tone as the years progressed. The builders of these indigenous structures were careful in their choice of building materials, the time when trees and other plant materials were cut, and the treatment after cutting. This was because these affected the durability and susceptibility of the materials to insects. (The Filipino Nation, Vol 3 p.162)

Torogan

The *torogan* is the ancestral home of the upper-class Maranaos, who live in the Lanao region of Mindanao, Southern Philippines. They are located in settlements on the shores of Lake Lanao or on the hilly “dry-rice” areas near a water source. Being the house of the *datu* (or ruler), this is where the *datu* lived, held court, and kept his daughters in a room, hidden from everyone else. The *datu* also had exclusive right to the art of the colourful *okir* (*ukir*, *ukil*, or *ukkil*). It is described by Valera-Turalba as having a “distinct high gable roof... thin at the apex and gracefully flaring out to the eaves, sits on a huge structure enclosed by slabs of timber and lifted more than 2 meters above the ground by huge



Okir

Formerly the sole property of a *datu* (ruler) for use in his house –the *torogan*–, the *okir* has been used to decorate other structures like hotels, or as in this example, a mosque. Found in Manila, the capital city of the Philippines, this example of the *okir* was created by an artist using tiles.

Photos: Dino Brucelas

tree trunks set on rocks. As though bulk is not enough to assert the position of power, the end floor beams lengthen as *panolongs* that seemingly lift the whole house. The 'great house' is suffused with decor-diongal at the apex of the roof, intricately carved *tinai a walai* ("intestine of the house"), a ceiling of colorful woven malongs hanging from the rafters, and profuse okir on the floor, on the trim of the windows, and between and on the *panolongs*. According to Perez, Encarnacion, Dacanay (p 255) the *tinai a walai* holds up the king posts of the roof and stretches from one end of the house to the other. This beam is heavily carved and completely polychromed.

It is further described as "unique for its colorful, projecting, flaring beams or *panolong* which resemble the prow of a boat. With its posts standing on large stones, the *torgan* seems to float above the ground." (Perez, Encarnacion, Dacanay, 1989, p. 7)

David Baradas, an anthropologist, is quoted by Perez, Encarnacion, Dacanay as claiming that the *torgan* is the only structure permitted to make use of the *okir* motif. However, since no sanction prohibits the use of this motif in other objects, the artisans of Maranao have taken the opportunity to carve all available permutations of the *okir* into their musical instruments and everyday objects. Baradas further traces evidences of an indigenous development of the *okir* in some houses in Molundo, Pagalongan, and Bubong-all in the area of the lake region of Lanao, in Mindanao Island. These houses have nothing but geometric motifs and patterns all over and differ markedly from the *torgan* both in lines and in construction. And so he contends that these structures with these particular motifs are the forerunners of the *torgan*. Strangely, the quasi-geometric variety of the *okir* that Baradas presents as pre-*torgan* or non-Maranao-ish is strongly reminiscent of the highly individualistic *okir* designs of the Badjao, the boat people considered as a Muslim minority group though not yet as thoroughly Islamized (Perez, Encarnacion, Dacanay, 1989, p. 258).



Example of windows using *capiz* as panes.

Photos: Vince Locsin

Capiz

Capiz (*Placuna placenta*) is an anomiid's shell that was often used in place of glass for window panes in traditional Spanish colonial houses. The shell provides soft illumination to the interior of houses, giving protection against the glaring tropical sun. The material, a natural translucent white, is used uncoloured. Nowadays, *capiz* is used in various house décor objects ranging from lampshades, candle holders to even tissue holders, giving a certain sense of elegance to an otherwise ordinary house object.

Example of modern usage of *capiz*, as a chandelier (left) and as decorative plates (right)

Photos: tDA Philippines



CONCLUSION

Colours in the Philippines was very much part of the society of centuries past. The peoples who lived in this archipelago had an affinity to colour that was both symbolical and cultural. Colour was part of the belief system that paid tribute to the *anitos* (spirits). Economically, indigo production was very much alive and thriving up to the nineteenth century. It was then a product of export to Spain. Indigo was the colour of the garments of the *maharlikas*, or the upper-class in the traditional low-land (coastal, island) society. This fact can be attested by the illustrations of the sixteenth century *Boxer Codex* manuscript. With the coming of the colonising powers from the West, a change in the economic focus for the islands killed the production and know-how of centuries old dyeing process, with fields that grew indigo and cotton plant converted to cultivating tobacco, the new currency in a world that was addicted to it (Respicio, 2012, personal communication). The introduction of Christianity also added to a gradual change in the colour palette, or as in the case of the *piña* cloth, to a whole new sensibility to colour itself modelled after Western ideals. The people left with a traditional sense of colour were the groups that were geographically more isolated, or those that were influenced by Islam.

However, in the Philippines today, some of these groups have also added to their traditional colour palette the synthetic dyes, or even an entirely new colour palette influenced or also dictated by contemporary fashion and design taste. For example, the Yakan people (Sulu and Mindanao islands) now create traditional weaving using colours that did not exist before in their chromatic code, or were far less important colours, at the request of their clients from Europe. The Filipinos living in the urban centres are more attuned to the Western colours in terms of fashion and home décor as portrayed in Hollywood movies, TV shows, and imported as well as locally produced magazines.

The relationship of the Filipinos to colours is a very dynamic one. While it may seem that the traditional meanings and symbolism of colours have been lost to some groups or have become less significant and followed, there are other peoples who have held their belief in those meanings up to now. Others, as in the case of the *kiping* makers, are trying to revive interest in the symbolism of colours in their art.

It is clear that research into colours in the Philippines is an area that needs to be further explored.

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Research Report 2013



Singapore

the
Colours
of Asia

Red Yellow Blue Green Black & White

亞洲
色彩

紅黃藍綠黑與白



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Above: A 19th century illustration of *Thian Hock Keng*, Singapore's earliest Chinese temple, built in the 1840s in honour of Mazu, the Goddess of the Sea, on Telok Ayer Street. Many of the temple leaders and donors were Peranakan.

Photo from the collection of Peter Lee, Singapore.

INTRODUCTION

Southeast Asia region is densely populated, comprising of many ethnic groups, one of which is the Peranakans. However, one ethnic group that was of early prominence in the area were the Malays, whose original roots can be traced back to north western Yunnan in China. Anthropologists' records show that the ancestors of the Malays, were the Jakun, "a seafaring tribe whose travels took them to the Malay Peninsula via Borneo, Sumatra and other settlements dotted around the numerous islands in the Malay Archipelago." A Portuguese historian termed called these Malays 'salates' or 'orang selat', a Malay term, which denotes 'people of the straits'.

Further communication with early Hindu traders, who were drawn to the Malay Peninsula as a lucrative source of gold – and who were to bring about the rise of the religions, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam – led to the creation of early Malay feudal states in the second and third centuries AD on the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and Java. At the same time, Chinese influence started making its presence felt as early as the third century AD, having known the Malay kingdoms as sources of attractive commodities, through missionary works such as the "famed Buddhist monk I-Tsing cited Chien-Cha (Kedah) and Lang-Cha-Shiu (Langkasuka)" who used these Malay kingdoms "as transit points during his pilgrimage to India".



Above: 19th century map of Asia displaying the trade route.

Photo from the collection of Peter Lee, Singapore.

Importance of the Trade Route – Rise of Chinese Immigrants in Singapore

The Straits Settlements, comprising of Penang, Malacca and Singapore, once formed a historical political unit featuring thriving hubs of spice trade and straits produce. Although this unit no longer exists, the rich culture left behind from this trade route forms the basis of the Peranakan story.

Before the fifth century AD, Chinese documents had little mentions to the Nanyang, the Southern Ocean, which was the common term to reference the Southeast Asian region by, because most of the goods that were transported from West Asia to northern parts of China, were performed on land. From the fifth century onwards, with the discovery of a sea route, a growth was seen in the use of sea to transfer goods between West Asia and China via India, and thus the advancement of ports in the Malay Archipelago. Hence, “the exotic marine and jungle produce of the Malay Archipelago was drawn into the international market of early Asia.” The Archipelago was connected to these two great empires and commerce of the ancient Asian world by the monsoon wind system. “The Straits of Malacca are geographically at the ‘end of monsoons’ where ships had to await the change of winds to continue further, or return homeward.”

The first wave of Chinese immigration into the Straits was an established class of traders and businessmen from China's south coast. Emperor Yongle (1403 – 1424) of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), in advancing Chinese commerce overseas, chose Malacca as a convenient trading hub in the Straits based on the monsoon wind system. His Admiral, Cheng Ho arrived in the Malay Peninsula in 1409 and in 1411. Thereafter, Chinese immigrants could be found in groups along the west coast of Peninsula. However, it was only after the coming of the British in the Straits, that Chinese population increased significantly.

Although the Southeast Asian region was in hot contestation by the rivalling colonial powers, with Portugal presence in Malacca in the 1400s, and Dutch's presence in the 1600s, it was eventually the British in the form of the English East India Company that took predominance and possession of Dutch colonies during the Napoleonic Wars (1795-1815). Such occupancy was agreed for in the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824, where Malacca and Singapore was awarded to the British, keeping away other European nations from the Archipelago (Khoo, 1996).

Singapore, being part of one of the major trade routes between China and West Asia, attracted much foreign attention. In 1819, when Sir Stamford Raffles reached Singapore, there were less than fifty Chinese on the island, whom were most probably from Malacca or the neighbouring islands such as Riau. Only with the passing of five years, did the Chinese accounted for a third of the population, and subsequently formed a well established community in Singapore. Early Chinese traders who arrived in Singapore were on the hunt for the marine and forest goods, termed by the British as "Straits produce". These included "edible birds' nests, camphor, seaweed and dragon's blood, which is a red-dish gum from the rattan palm." (Khoo, 1996, p. 20)

The approach of the English East India Company was to allow foreigners to privatize as much land as they could clear, attracting much foreign settlers. "The Straits Settlements, comprising Penang, Singapore and Malacca as one administrative unit, was established in 1826 with Penang as the capital." (Khoo, 1996, p. 21) This corresponded with the developing trade in all three ports. "In 1832 the capital was shifted to Singapore, and in 1867 the administration of the Straits Settlement was transferred from India to the Colonial Office in London." (Khoo, 1996, p. 21) Unfortunately the English East India Company closed down soon after, having lost its monopoly to the expanding China Trade. However the trade in the Straits Settlement still increase exponentially towards the end of the nineteenth century because of the advent of steamships and the opening of the Suez Canal. (Khoo, 1996)

Right: Family portrait of Tan Cheng Siang.

Photo from Peranakan Museum A-Z Guide.







Previous: Peranakan bride and groom, Penang, 1930s.

Top Left: Family group, Penang, 1940s.

Top Right: Peranakan bride and groom, Singapore, 1950s

Photos from the collection of Peter Lee, Singapore.

Background of Peranakans

From the nineteenth century, Chinese traders setting up trading posts in the Straits Settlement, found it convenient to set up second homes in these areas, with local wives taking care of the commerce when they return back to their homeland. In most cases, the children of such inter marriages would marry among themselves. Daughters were promised to Chinese males who had recently arrived, and had shown great business skills and potential, while sons went back to China for education. (Khou, 1996) When the Chinese traders settled permanently in the Straits, their descendants, who went on to organise merchant associations, were more likely to group together in certain locations of town.

Peranakan families can track their Chinese lineages to “near or around the south-eastern port cities of China such as Quanzhou, Zhangzhou, Xiamen in Fujien (Hokkien); Chaozhou, Shantou (Swatow), Guangzhou, Dongguan in Guangdong, and Sanya in Hainan.” (Kee, 2009, p. 22) These cities are the bastions of the Chinese merchant class. Some historians do also have an alternate point of view about the Malay origins of the Nyonyas, stating their roots as Batak women from Sumatra. Batak women were slaves and it was likely that they earned their freedom through marriage with Chinese traders. However, the popular belief is still that local Malay women married the Babas. (Kee, 2009)

The Babas coming from a lineage of pioneers, and proud of their established standing in the British colony, termed themselves as “Peranakan”, thus creating a distinct identity from the recent immigrants from China. Straits Chinese, Baba and Peranakan are terms that describe this new group of people, while the womenfolk are called Nyonya. (Khou, 1996) Although the Babas of Penang, Malacca and Singapore are distinct and separate bodies of people within the Chinese population, they “exist at various levels of assimilation with the culture of the local Malays.” (Khou, 1996, p. 24)

The Nyonya adopted Malay outfits and created a spicy Malay influenced fare. The Babas, partially assimilated into Malay culture, also began to assume the European ways and customs of colonial culture. However they continued to be Chinese in their religious beliefs and rites. “The identities of the Babas, like their speech, tended to be a cultural blend of Chinese, Malay and European.” (Khoo, 1996, p. 25)

Viraphol’s opinion about Bangkok Chinese could be said the same for the Babas: ‘Their unique social structure was based on Chinese habits; but without renewal from China, great modifications by indigenous and foreign forces produced a distinct culture.’ (As cited in Khoo, 1996, p. 25)

The Special Position of Women

The privileged position enjoyed by Peranakan women is characterised by a route of total devotion to domestic pursuits while being sheltered from the outside world. Before the twentieth century, there was a scarcity of females in relations to males. This allowed for Nyonya daughters to be highly sought after and become prime candidates for marriage. Unlike in the usual patrilineal Chinese communities, where marriage caused a woman to live with her in-laws, the Peranakan adopted a matrilocal system whereby “a son-in-law got married at the bride’s home and took up residence with his in-laws, and where descent was often matrilineal, thus ensuring that property remained in the hands of daughters.” (Kee, 2009, p. 30) This ultimately gave more leverage to the Nyonyas whose husbands were almost ‘guests’ in their houses.

However, despite difference in marriage customs, the Peranakan still shared the customary Mainland Chinese perception that a young woman’s position was in the home and her biggest role was to carry on with the family line.

Below: Nyonyas dressed in Baju Panjang.

Photo from Peranakan Museum A-Z Guide.



Concurrently, she has to develop “a demure, genteel image and to master the necessary domestic skills in order to enhance the family name and reputation.” (Kee, 2009, p. 31) The whereabouts of daughters are monitored closely, and they had no freedom to participate in sports or activities outside their houses, and only a few from the more educated families were allowed to undergo basic English education through a tuition teacher. Instead, from birth, a young Nyonya was mentored by the older women in the household into a “competent (sometimes exceptional) cook and needlewoman, a highly domesticated creature who could handle a multitude of tasks” and would assume the place of the matriarch in later years, moulding into a “formidable, unyielding and assertive woman of an ostensibly patriarchal household.” (Kee, 2009, p. 31)



Right: A young Nyonya learns to cook Peranakan cuisines.

Photo from Lim Soo Peng.

To a bigger extent than the Babas, the Nyonyas of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the dominant force in the creation of the Peranakan lifestyle. Although their daily lives was imbued with Malay influences, ranging from “cooking and eating habits to language and dress styles (Kee, 2009, p. 31)”, they retain many of the ancient Chinese customs. This fusion of influence is reflected in the highly colourful style of their ornate household furnishings and accessories, and their opulent demonstrations of wealth during weddings and other festivals. “Nyonya tastes and preferences – not forgetting prejudices – largely determined the kinds of furniture, porcelain, silver, glassware and other artefacts” found in Singapore Peranakan townhouses or in colonial bungalows. The matriarch often had a big role to play in the Peranakan crafts, closely supervising the silver and gold items crafted by local immigrant Chinese artisans, and also the domestic accomplishments of embroidery and beadwork by the Nyonyas. (Kee, 2009)

Through the activities and milestones in a Nyonya’s life, this paper will concentrate on the domestic sphere of the Peranakans, to feature Peranakans’ use of a distinct and unique colour palette resulting in unique crafts and a identity they could champion as their own.



INFLUENCES

The Rise of Baba and Nyonya Culture

From the mid-nineteenth century to the 1940s, the Babas and Nyonyas were at the height of their wealth. It was during this period that Baba and Nyonya identity and material culture proliferated. Taking cues from Malay, Chinese and English cultures, Peranakans invested much time and effort in a celebrating their wealth and heritage. (Mahomood, 2004)

From extravagant mansions displaying an eclectic combination of Chinese and Anglo-Indian architecture styles to exquisite gold and silver jewellery that featured dragons and phoenixes imbued with diamonds and pearls; from detailed porcelain specially authorised from China to the intricate beadwork and embroidery that marked the Nyonya's fashion; the Peranakans were pompous and enthusiastic in displaying their wealth and a penchant for all things ornately decorated. (Mahomood, 2004)

Possibly, this penchant for ostentatious flaunting of wealth came with the spirit of being Chinese, for the Chinese custom was that in sharing one's wealth in the company of other, would it generate more wealth. (Mahmood, 2004) Whatever the motive, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Baba's identity of hybridisation from the different cultures it absorb, ultimately evolved into a culture they could call its own.

Above: Chinese brocade fabric.

Top Right: Detailed view of a *chien hup* displaying the Chinese inspired carvings.

Photos from Immortal Singapore.

Influences Behind Peranakan Embroidery

In essence, two kinds of stitches were used in Peranakan embroidered work, both styles borrowing heavily from traditional Chinese stitches. “The first was satin stitch, which is a smooth finished filling stitch used to give solid blocks colour.” (Khoo, 1996, p. 192) The second stitch is more commonly known as the Peking knot or Peking stitch, to foreigners in China, or known as the French knot in Europe.

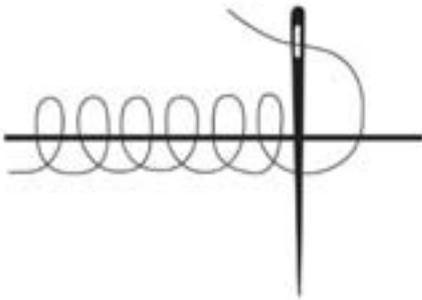
The Peranakan embroidery also bears a remarkable resemblance to that of the *Minangkabau* Malays of West Sumatra. This is probably due to the proximity of Malacca to the state of *Negeri Sembilan*, where a significant number of *Minangkabaus* migrated to in the late seventeen century. “Minangkabau hangings on bridal beds include long panels shaped like neckties and sumptuously embroidered with couched gold threads. Similar decorative hangings were featured in southern Nyonya beds.” (Khoo, 1996, p. 192) This couching technique, which employs more gold and silver threads, are used widely by Nyonyas in Singapore and Malaysia, while the Nyonyas in Penang generally employed more silk threads and beads.



Above: Illustration of Satin stitch.

Below: Illustration of Peking stitch.

Illustrations from Immortal Singapore.



Right: Beadwork tablecloth

Photo from Peranakan Museum
A-Z Guide.



Right: Metallic thread embroidery work.

Photo from Peranakan Museum A-Z Guide.

In addition, both European and Chinese gold and silver threads were employed by the Nyonya. The European thread is characteristically rounded and the alloy holds less gold, causing it to have a silvery tint. In comparison, the Chinese gold thread contains higher gold content. To produce this yarn, the metallic threads are wound round a core of silk or cotton thread.

A large amount of the instruments needed for embroidery, such as the motifs and stencils for slipper uppers and other accessories, were imported from China. However, towards the 1920s to 1940s, many such embroidery copied European patterns and designs instead. Some of the inspiration for the designs were taken from unlikely sources, such as designs on chocolate tins or illustrated books from European fables. Other types of sources like ceremonial outfits or household decorations were also brought in from China. Influenced by the Chinese, Peranakans have the habit of sewing additional embroidery on to already finished clothes, and items such as handkerchiefs, mirrors, purses and other festive and celebratory decorations. (Khoo, 1996)

The resultant objects from the infusion of different cultures, can look very Chinese or European in design, but what sets them apart from these parent identities are in the use of colours that is distinctively Straits Chinese. Instead of using subtle and subdued tone of the Chinese or European colour palette, there is “a directness, which sometimes approaches garishness because of the choice of harsh colours.” (Khoo, 1996, p. 194)

Another unique trait of Nyonya embroidery is perceived as the cut work. The outlines of a motif are sewn in satin stitch on the garment. Next, the garment enclosed by the outlines is cut out, giving arise to a beautiful pattern on kebayas.



Above: *Tok Wi*, an altar cloth used by the Peranakan Chinese in Singapore and Malacca.

Photo from Peranakan Museum A-Z Guide.

Colours and Their Symbolic Association

The Nyonyas, who belonged to an urban white collar community, used colours of gold and silver in their embroidery to display their wealth and status in life. Without a refined taste that comes from a European background, the Peranakans adopted the gold colour scheme from Chinese and European culture, and intensified such colour in their embroidery, to display their rising social status in the Straits Settlement. Hence, although the colour mixture might be garish in nature, it is uniquely their own culture through their evolution into a trading elite.



Above: A close-up view of a Peranakan tea cup.

Photo from Immortal Singapore.

Influences Behind Peranakan Wares

The design philosophy for Peranakan wares was undoubtedly borrowed from Mainland Chinese symbolism and art, given the close resemblance of Chinese motifs and style to the designs used on Peranakan wares. Most of the elaborate motifs used are also symbolic either of marital bliss or longevity as the intended purposes for these wares were gifts for festive occasions and wedding celebrations.

However, a departure from the Chinese style was in the fact that Peranakans designs were strictly confined to flowers, birds and insects. There are no “landscapes, romantic scenes, historical scenes, and allegorical themes or armorial designs that form much of the decoration on Chinese export wares during the early Qing period. (Kee, 2009, p. 52)” Figural motifs are also seldom used on Peranakan wares.

The reason for such a departure could be attributed to the fact of Peranakans’ absorption of the Malay culture, in which the Islamic religion prohibits pictorial displays of the human form, and thus allowing flora patterns to flourish as a result. Also, the use of floras, birds as well as insects was highly advantageous, as it allows for the highly ornamental treatment of Nyonyas’ decorative work on garments and beadwork. These patterns and motifs worked seamlessly to the enamelling medium. Babas were also highly Anglicised in their style and preferences, and having being estranged from the mainstream Mainland Chinese culture, would undoubtedly not be in a position to understand and fully adopt the many facets of Chinese art and culture onto Peranakan wares.

ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS



Above: A Peranakan shop house along Koon Seng road.

Photo from Andri Utomo.

Peranakan Design Ethos

“The desire to fill every available space was rooted in the oft-expressed Baba ideal of *halus* (finesse).” (Chin, 1991, p. 30) For the Peranakan, the finest items were those demonstrating “the virtuosity of the workman, which often meant the miniaturization and proliferation of detail.” (Chin, 1991, p. 30) Many of the intricacies of Peranakan art, particularly those on jewellery and handicraft, cannot be grasped fully except on close examination. Although the premise of this ideal is ambiguous, the want for finesse is often referenced to their seemingly “leisurely, somewhat sheltered, lifestyle, which allowed the minute inspection of the objects within their households.” (Chin, 1991, p. 30)



Above: A young *Nyonya* learning embroidering.

Photo from Lim Soo Peng.

Below: Straits Chinese beaded pouch.

Photo from Peranakan Museum A-Z Guide.

Embroidery and Beadwork

Nyonya girls have been disciplined on the art of needlework and embroidery from as young as eight to ten years old. Being kept mostly indoors, time weighed heavy for the sheltered young Nyonya, and she was made to engage and excel in such handiwork. An indication of the amount of leisure time the Nyonya had, and the training she received, could be recognised in the quantity and quality of her handiwork. Thus, an array of items embroidered in gold threads or beads was an indication of wealth and position. (Khoo, 1996)

Talent for such handicraft was a valuable qualification for marriage, as the Nyonya bride was supposed to create a range of smaller items for her trousseau. As marriage is the most important affair in her lifetime, all the talents of the young Nyonya were concentrated on the production of her wedding costume, bridal accessories and trousseau. (Khoo, 1996)

The colour palette of Nyonya handicraft was heavily influenced from Europe, where beading was very popular, and particularly, “pastel blues and pinks were popular in mid-nineteenth century Victorian Britain.” (Khoo, 1996, p. 200) This trend slowly travelled to Southeast Asia and was used by the Straits Chinese, but it only gain popularity in the early twentieth century among the Nyonya. “The earliest beadwork was stitched with silk or metallic thread onto the same Chinese silk, which has long been used for embroidery; These old beads were very fine faceted metallic ones. Later velvet was used as the base material.” (Khoo, 1996, p. 202) The colours used were mostly orange and green.



a. Beaded Purse



Although the custom of employing Rocaille beads to “fabricate both personal and decorative beaded ornaments” among the Straits Chinese was adapted from the practices of the Minangkabau Malays, the “uses which most of these articles were put to” were recognizably Chinese in its roots. (Ho, 1987, p. 61)

“Pouched shaped purses embroidered with beads and sequins or appliquéd with ornate gilded silver panels” are very much alike to silk embroidered purses in China except for the Peranakans’ adaptation from square like forms to pouch like shapes. (Ho, 1987, p. 61) These purses had to contain to hold at least a token sum, as empty purses are considered inauspicious. (Khoo, 1996)

b. Kasut Manek (Beaded Slippers)



Peranakan beaded slippers, also known as kasut manek which literally translates as shoe beads, was a popular footwear among Nyonyas. The British had a profound influence on Peranakan culture, especially on the art of beading. Peranakan beadwork adopted European motifs and patterns such as the “English rose and the swan, but also retained the more traditional Chinese symbols such as the phoenix, goldfish, chiling, flowers, children and others. (Greatpenang, n.d.)” The beads used were also imported from Europe and this introduced pastel pink and blue into the Peranakan colour palette.

Nyonya ladies made their own kasut manek and their handiwork is given to their in laws upon marriage as part of her dowry to the groom. It is mandatory for every young Nyonya girl to learn how to sew on the beads to make her own beaded shoes. The fine workmanship and detailed prints of a pair of beaded slipper is also a hallmark of highly accomplished Peranakan women, whose skills in embroidery and beadwork are highly valued. As part of a proud accomplishment, a special showcase of embroidered slippers was even prominently featured in the nuptial chamber. It was also customary to offer a pair of beaded slippers to the matchmaker for inspection.

For happy occasions, like the Chinese New Year or birthdays, these beaded slippers used colourful beads with intricate patterns. For sad occasions, the beads used were likely to be in black, white or blue colours (Chinese mourning colours), and the patterns were simple.

c. Embroidered Slippers

According to Ho (1987), embroidered slippers are usually “embroidered with a combination of gold and silver threads and multicoloured sequins, and even small, appliquéd silver ornaments fashioned into butterflies, phoenixes, finer citrons etc.” (p. 64) When gold, silver or silk threads are used, the patterns are all “raised in high reliefs.” (Ho, 1987, p. 64) Thin cardboard strips are used to create the main outlines, and then “pasted on to the surface of the velvet on which the designs have been traced by the use of tailoring markers.” (Ho, 1987, p. 64) The metal or silk threads are then stitched expertly over these strips of cardboard to create a beautiful embossed effect.



Top: *Oh Pao*. (Beaded purse)

Above: *Kasut Manek*. (Beaded slippers)

Below: Bridegroom’s embroidered wedding slippers.

Photos from Peranakan Museum A–Z Guide.



Nyonya Wares

Nyonya ware was mostly produced and painted at Jingdezhen in Jiangxi Province, China, between the mid-nineteenth century and the early twentieth century solely for affluent Peranakans. While the kitchens of Nyonyas were stocked with large quantities of blue and white crockery for everyday usage, “Nyonya ware was *de rigueur* for ancestor worship, special occasions such as weddings, birthdays, anniversaries and Chinese festival days” (Kee, 2009, p. 40).

Colour Association

A colourful character of the wares is featured prominently through their background colours and the ornateness of the decorative motifs, particularly in the fully enamelled wares. “Unrestrained, bold and daring combinations of rich and vibrant colours, often mixed in one piece, characterized the typical Nyonya tastes.” (Kee, 2009, p. 42) While most Chinese favour a minimal palette in their crafts, Nyonyas went for busy adornments “rendered in sharp contrasts of colours.” (Kee, 2009, p. 42)

Peranakans also “favoured muddy mixed tones such as olive green, turquoise and fuchsia over pure colours,” this colour palette departs from the deep orange “iron” red, green and pink hues of modern porcelain of the Chinese. (Chin, 1991, p. 32) The reason for such a distinct break off from the Chinese colour palette could be attributed to a desire for Peranakans to have a separate identity that they could call their own, while retaining some form of Chinese heritage.

For the Nyonya ware, their most prominent feature is the “profusion of ornate floral sprays (usually peony plants with large and gorgeous blossoms) and birds (predominantly phoenixes) painted in bold and variegated famille rose enamelled tints against a plain white porcelain background or, even more strikingly, a fully painted background of green, rose pink, yellow, coral red, blue, lilac, caramel and greenish brown.” (Kee, 2009, p. 74) Although seemingly gaudy to a contemporary audience, the conservative and superstitious Straits Chinese adored the arrangement of such “dazzling hues”, preferring them over the “pale and restrained colours and sparse but precise decoration” that portrayed pure Chinese taste. (Kee, 2009, p. 74) Dark and sombre colours such as black or dark blue were excluded, as these were celebratory wares and not be affiliated to colours of mourning.

Much of the colour tastes of the Nyonya could be associated with the trade routes, where goods and wares from overseas would influence, inspire and eventually create the Peranakan distinctive colour palette of bold and vibrant colours.

Previous: Peranakan dining plate.

Photo from Immortal Singapore.

Right: Soap and powder porcelain boxes.

Photo from Peranakan Museum A-Z Guide.



Tingkat (Tiffin carrier)

These Tiffin carriers named *tingkats* are usually three or four-tiered, decorated with enamel paint. It was a tradition that the British adopted from India and brought with them to Malaya in the mid 1800's. (Ipohworld, 2012)

By the turn of the century they were in common use throughout the peninsula, particularly in the Straits Settlements. Peranakan used them to contain and transfer food from the kitchen to workplaces. As food is an essential part of Peranakan way of life, the *tingkat* became a must have in every household to transport cooked food around. True to their love for everything colourful and ornate, the Peranakan had their carrier decorated in their favourite pastel colours and floral motifs. (Ipohworld, 2012)

Plates and Dishes

Nyonya ware plates and dishes usually contain two kinds of decorative elements, either the pervasive phoenix and peony motifs contained within a border of the Eight Buddhist Emblems (Bajixiang), or those accentuating Flowers of the Four Seasons, in pink, green and other colour mixtures. (Kee, 2009)

Spoons

Peranakan spoons are elaborately designed with “floral and bird motifs, particularly the phoenix and peony, painted in translucent polychrome enamels on a white ground.” (Kee, 2009, p. 115)



Above: Green-ground tingkat.

Below: Pink stem dish and wares with butterflies motifs.

Photos from Peranakan Museum A-Z Guide.



***Kamcheng* (Covered Jar)**

In the Hokkien language, *kamcheng* translates into 'covered vessel' or 'covered round container'. "It is a circular tub like container, heavily potted to withstand frequent use, with a wide mouth and low collar fitted over with a domed cover with a flat rim and shallow flange, a broad shallow foot-rim and a recessed based that is most often glazed." (Kee, 2009, p. 168)

While the exact use for the *kamcheng* is not known, some scholars have proposed that it was used for containing boiled water, soups and desserts. It is one of the three essential wares used in Peranakan weddings, the other two being the tea set and the *katmau* (covered jar). The colours and motifs of *kamcheng* are materialised in a dazzling variety. They range from motifs of peony sprays, phoenixes, eight Buddhist emblems, and colours in green, pink and blue.



Right: *Kamcheng* (covered jar) with pink and green enamels.

Photo from Peranakan Museum A-Z Guide.

Central Decorative Motifs of Nyonya Wares

Among the motifs found on Nyonya wares, the two most characteristic and common decorative patterns are that of the phoenix and the peony, both representations of the natural world, and when paired, stand for prosperity and righteousness. This distinctive theme – “of a phoenix or pairs of phoenixes among peonies” – describes almost all wares customised by the Nyonyas. (Kee, 2009, p. 53) This type of motif could be attributed to a famous category of Chinese painting labelled as ‘bird and flower painting’ (*huaniaohua*), which is from the source of two larger categories of Chinese paintings – ‘birds and animals’ (*chin-shou*) and ‘flowers’ (*hua-hui*). (Kee, 2009, p. 53)

Birds are recognised as noble animals by the Chinese, embodying freedom because of their ability to fly. The other common birds found in Nyonya wares, are the crane, magpie and mandarin ducks, featured in auspicious arrangements. Flowers are also commonly used as they represent nature and the order of the universe, being important icons in Chinese art. In Nyonya ware, most plants are featured as a flora spray – “a fruit and/or flower-bearing stem or branch or *zhe zi*, which means ‘a branch has been cut from a plant’ – representing prosperity. (Kee, 2009, p. 53) The common flowers used are the peonies, flowering plums, lotuses, and chrysanthemums.

It is clear that the Nyonyas understood the symbolism of these motifs with the repeated commissioning of vibrant wares with Chinese inspired motifs. It is plausible too, that wealthy Peranakan families sought the wisdom of people knowledgeable about Chinese auspicious symbols before the production of celebratory wares for weddings or significant birthdays. (Kee, 2009)

Below: Collection of Peranakan incense holder, vases, teapot, offering dish, wine cups, tray and incense burner.

Photo from Peranakan Museum A-Z Guide.





Above: A Phoenix motif is evident in the plate as shown above.

Photo from Immortal Singapore.

Below: High-heeled *kasut manek* (beaded shoes) displaying a Phoenix motif.

Photo from Peranakan Museum A-Z Guide.

Phoenix

The phoenix, is widely perceived as the ‘emperor of the feathered tribe’ in China, and is characterised by features of several birds: “the head if a golden pheasant, the body of a mandarin duck, the legs of a crane, the wings of a swallow, the mouth of a parrot and the tail of a peacock, the latter divided into two filaments with curling tendrils.” (Kee, 2009, p. 53) It is revered for its perfect beauty and grace and is representative of the female principle or yin. The five colours (red, white, yellow, azure and black) on the feathers represents “the five cardinal virtues of righteousness, propriety, wisdom, humility and sincerity. (Kee, 2009, p. 53)” In Nyonya wares, the phoenix is commonly depicted perched on various types of plants and rocks, or hovering in flight, surrounded by accompanying fauna.

Crane

The crane is an elegant long-limbed bird that embodies both status and longevity. In Nyonya wares, a common design features that of a single white crane “within a round medallion in the centre of the ware surrounded by Flowers of the Four Seasons and with a pair of magpies and phoenixes at the rim.” (Kee, 2009, p. 54) A possible commissioning of such wares could be for use at the sixtieth birthday of a matriarch, a celebratory and auspicious event marking the fulfilment of five cycles of the twelve years in the Chinese calendar.

Peacock

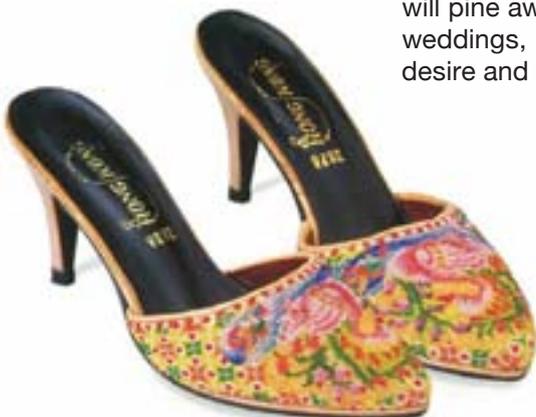
The peacock represents elegance, beauty and dignity, and also symbolises rank and the corresponding benefits of wealth and power, especially if it is featured spreading its tail, expressing magnificence. It is commonly depicted on the inside of medallions on larger wares. (Kee, 2009)

Magpie

The magpie is widely known as a bird of joy and good omen as its chirping usually means that good news is coming. A pair of magpies symbolises “conjugal bliss and fidelity” and is commonly found on Nyonya wares used during weddings and festive occasions (Kee, 2009, p. 54). A combination of magpie and peony represents daily happiness.

Mandarin Duck

The mandarin duck is celebrated for its supreme and beautiful plumage, one of the chief species of ducks. A pair of mandarin ducks represents “peace, prosperity and marital fidelity, because of the belief that ducks mate for life and will pine away if separated. (Kee, 2009, p. 55)” Commonly used in Peranakan weddings, when paired with lotus, the symbol of purity, they stand for the desire and blessings for a happy and lasting marriage.



Chrysanthemum

The chrysanthemum is thought of by the Chinese to be one of the 'Four Noble Plants', with the other three being the bamboo, plum and orchid. It is connected to autumn because it flowers during the season even during harsh cold weathers. The flower symbolises friendship, a peaceful retirement, and wisdom. Hence, the chrysanthemum is often used in Peranakan milestone birthdays, such as that of the sixtieth birthday of the matriarch. (Kee, 2009)

In death, bouquets of white and yellow chrysanthemums are used to honour and mark the passing of a loved one, symbolising respect and grief. Colour of white being associated with death. (Kee, 2009)

Peony

The peony is a highly valued flower in Chinese culture, known as the 'flower of wealth and honour'. It is praised for its "large pink and red ruffled blossoms, which are associated with female beauty and carry connotations of erotic lushness." (Kee, 2009, p. 61)" Symbolising spring, love and affection, it is a true representation of feminine beauty. In Peranakan culture, the peony stands for values considered desirable in a Nyonya bride: "femininity, chastity, youthfulness, beauty, fidelity and filial piety." (Kee, 2009, p. 61)" In Nyonya wares, the peony is matched to that auspicious motifs such as the phoenix, or it could exist as a main decoration on its own.

Bottom left: Pink-ground wine warmer.

Bottom right: Limegreen-ground vase and cover.

Photos from Peranakan Museum A-Z Guide.





Above: Overview of Peranakan ware.

Photo from Immortal Singapore.

The Colours of Nyonya Ware

White

“A lustrous white pigment made from oxide of lead and arsenic” – an excellent innovation during the early Qing because of its method in combining other pigments to tone down brilliant colours – is used for the background of many Nyonya wares, particularly those which were used for elaborate dinners on select events by the Nyonyas. (Kee, 2009, p. 75) “In the majority of cases, the white ground is ornamented with exuberant phoenix and peony motifs, large and gorgeous frilly peony blossoms or delicate fruiting and flowering sprigs and insects. (Kee, 2009, p. 75)” Otherwise, for bowls and teacups, a large expanse of white space is seen. In addition, white glaze also materialise as the background of some medallions on the sides and tops of porcelain.

Rose Pink

Rose pink, often used to match with green, is one of the two most widespread colours beautifying the background of fully enamelled Nyonya wares. There exist a range of rose pink shades, “from a light opaque salmon pink to an aubergine purple to a rich, deep shade.” (Kee, 2009, p. 76) The rose pigment derived from colloidal gold chloride, was uncovered in Europe in 1650 by a Dutch chemist, and was in Holland in about 1650 by a Dutch chemist and, as noted above, was transported to China for the fabrication of copper enamelling before having found its use on porcelain. Blended with white, the rose pigment creates a range of pinkish rose shades. (Kee, 2009)

Rose pink, along with auspicious red, is normally linked with weddings in Straits Chinese culture – when the more tasteful Nyonya ware is brought out for display and use. Rose pink represents values of happiness and longevity, youthfulness and innocence. It is also a very feminine colour. Embroidered *kebaya* blouses and *batik sarongs* displaying bright pink hues are almost always kept for young unmarried Nyonyas.



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Green

A characteristic colour of Nyonya wares would be the green enamelled backgrounds because of the “sheer dominance of the green, which is brilliantly offset by decorative motifs and borders in bold, contrasting colours, very often rose pink. The shades of green used for the background of Nyonya wares range from a dark translucent apple green to an opaque emerald green, from an imperial jade green to a bluish-hued turquoise green, and from a yellowish lime green to an olive green.” (Kee, 2009, p. 76) There are, of course, various hues of these bold greens, some more opaque than others. The fact that the enamel pigment is so constant on the green wares, especially the older pieces, implies that the various hues of green were deliberately produced by the artisans at the kilns at Jingdezhen rather than the result of mishaps occurring during firing. Green in Chinese colour embodies youth and spring, and although it is not for the same reason, Peranakans seem to relate and favour green as a mainstay colour in their crafts.

Yellow

Fully enamelled backgrounds in a bright yellow pigment are not usually found on Nyonya wares, probably because yellow was the official colour used in imperial wares and Chinese potters were in danger of persecution by the imperial overseers based in Jingdezhen for producing yellow wares for their Nyonya clients. “Yellow mostly occurs as a background colour in the circular, quatrefoil, ogival and rectangular medallions decorating plates, bowls, teapots and covered jars, providing a striking contrast to the other pigments used. (Kee, 2009, p. 81)” Yellow, together with red, is an auspicious colour and was highly valued by the Straits Chinese. It was not commonly linked with weddings, but more with celebratory events such as Chinese New Year and the all-important sixtieth birthday celebrations.

Coral Red

Coral red, like yellow, is not applied frequently on Nyonya wares although it was an auspicious colour. Perhaps the colour was also set aside only for imperial use. “Shades of coral red, which are derived from oxides, range from a bright russet red to a pale apricot red verging on an orange yellow, and are mostly found on the bodies of rounded wares such as covered jars and teapots. Medallions with a white ground frequently break up the fully enamelled coral red ground.” (Kee, 2009, p. 81)

Blue

“Nyonya wares with a blue background, ranging from a deep midnight blue to a lighter jasper blue” are abnormal, possibly because colours of blue and black are traditionally associated as Chinese mourning colours, and hence were not adequate for celebratory wares. (Kee, 2009, p. 81) However, light blue, often balanced with pink or yellow, is admissible as it carrier youthful representations.

Next: A piece of Batik cloth.
Photo from Immortal Singapore.





Nyonya Fashion

The evolution of Baba Nyonya culture was a continuous process of selective absorption and adaptation of foreign cultural traits, while maintaining a Chinese core. The criteria for the absorption of such outside elements was linked to other global developments within the Baba Nyonya culture and its place of dominance within the hegemonic Malay culture. The Nyonya started wearing the *kebaya* in the period of renaissance of Baba Nyonya culture during the time frame of British power in the Straits. The *kebaya*, as a distinct form of Nyonya fashion, flourished particularly during the British's decline. (Mahmood, 2004)

The colonial's power demise, and the rise of immigration from Mainland China, relegated the Baba Nyonya community to a minority among other Chinese groups in the Straits. Hence, Nyonya culture, "being neither 'inside' nor 'outside' Chinese or Malay culture, and occupying a too special a place in the social-political hierarchy of the colonial state, it was a community destined for change." (Mahmood, 2004, p. 41)

Correspondingly, the Nyonya *kebaya* came to be recognized with change. "As it eclipse it precursor, the *baju panjang*, it signalled the emergence of the new Nyonya: modern, feminine and sensual." (Mahmood, 2004, p. 41) The rising hemlines and the increasingly deterioration of modest Victorian fashion in the west, as well as the "tightening of the silhouette in the popular Chinese *cheongsam* in China's fashionable cities, was paralleled by the emergence of the Nyonya *kebaya*." (Mahmood, 2004, p. 41)

Above: Drawing of a Nyonya.

Artwork from Milica Bravacic-Milla.

Below: Nyonyas at an event.

Photo from The Peranakan Association, Singapore.





Baju Panjang.

Photo from Peranakan Museum
A-Z Guide.

Baju Panjang

Prior to the popular short *kebaya* in the late 1920s, Nyonyas wore the traditional Malay costume, the *baju panjang*. It translates into “long dress” and consist of a tunic which is a “loose, calf-length garment with sleeves that taper at the wrists”, and was worn with a “sarong (either of printed batik imported from Indonesia or woven fabric) and was secured with a set of *kerongsang* (brooch).” (Mahmood, 2004, p. 42)

The *baju panjang* was fashioned from a range of materials according to the trend of the time. In the early 1900s, majority of the tunics were cut from cotton cloth imported from Indonesia, patterned in small checks or geometric prints. In early examples, the colours were usually “sombre, ranging from black to ochres and earthy reds.” (Mahmood, 2004, p. 44)

In 1910s, factory milled textiles were introduced, and organdie became the trend for Nyonyas, wearing “white thread embroidery, called ‘lace cloth’ by the Nyonyas, as well as colourful printed voiles, often with bold flora designs.” Due to the transparent nature of these fabrics Nyonyas were forced to wear a “long-sleeved, jacket like garment with a stand up collar under their tunics,” made of white cotton. For formal and ceremonial events, A Nyonya would wear a “*saputangan*, a large square batik cloth folded into a triangle, across the shoulder of her *baju panjang*.” (Mahmood, 2004, p. 44)

Kebaya Renda

At the close of 1920s, the *baju panjang* was phased out in favour of a more daring type of blouse called the *kebaya*, which was gently shaped to show off a woman's figure. Like the *baju panjang*, "it was fastened in front by a set of three leaf-shaped or jewelled brooches, executed in open or pierced work, though these were usually connected by a chain unlike the earlier sets." More importantly, "the *kebaya* was made of sheer fabric, preferably a plain coloured voile, which was initially decorated with lace and later with embroidery", to be worn over a cotton camisole. This is outfit that marks the modern and flamboyant style of the Nyonyas. (Mahmood, 2004, p. 47) Other than Nyonya porcelain wares, the *Sarong Kebaya* is another perfect reflection of the Nyonya's love for strong clashing colours. Favourite combination of green with pink and yellow is also evident in the *Sarong Kebaya*.



Kebaya Biku

"This was the first type of *kebaya* to feature embroidery, even though the embellishment was mostly confined to simple scallops and cut work along the front openings or on the lapels of the *kebaya*." This was an attempt to simplify the formality and complexity of the *kebaya renda*, and was mostly worn on informal events. Colourful motifs such as polka dots, flora patterns and candy stripes, influenced by European styles were popular among the Nyonya. (Mahmood, 2004, p. 50)



Above: Details of *Kebaya* embroidery.

Photo from Peranakan Museum A-Z Guide.

Above right: Nyonyas wearing a wide selection of *Kebayas*.

Photo from The Peranakan Association, Singapore

Kebaya for Mourning

In the period that follows the funeral of the dead, "mourners will gradually make the transition from wearing all black for twelve months, black and white or blue for three months and green for three months." (Mahmood, 2004, p. 56) One can make a distinction between the mourning and normal *kebaya* by examining the mixture of colours of the material and embroidery. "Monotone and duo tone combinations such as all black, all white, all blue, all green, blue and white, green and white, and blue and green are typical of mourning *kebaya*." (Mahmood, 2004, p. 56) Although the colours are restricted, embroidery and cutwork remains excellent and intricate.

Batik Sarong

“A *batik sarong* is a rectangular piece of cloth featuring hand-drawn (*batik tulis*) or block-printed (*batik cap*) motifs made using resist dyeing method.” (Mahmood, 2004, p. 123) Nyonyas typically prefer batik fabricated from the region of Pekalongan, Java. Although batik in its traditional form appeared in colours of brown, yellow and cream due to the limited range of plant dyes in Indonesia, the importing of chemical dyes by European traders in the late nineteenth century created many colour possibilities for *batik*. What resulted was a unique style of *batik*, termed as *Batik Cina* (Chinese Batik), which was characterised by bright and daring mixtures of colours – “mint greens, shocking pinks, electric blues, royal purples, brassy browns and saffron yellow.” (Mahmood, 2004, p. 125) These colours, when paired with decorative Indo-European and Chinese art culture motifs, mirrored the Peranakans love for ornate and bright designs.

Below: A piece of *batik* cloth by Indo-Chinese Oey Soe Tjoen.

Photo from Immortal Singapore.





Above: Close-up of a *kerongsang* (brooches).

Photo from Immortal Singapore.

Bottom: A Nyonya shows how the brooch is worn on a *Kebaya*.

Photo from The Peranakan Association, Singapore.



Nyonya Jewellery

Jewellery for the Nyonya is a form of status symbol, as it displays the wealth and status of the family she comes from. Usually received as presents or as inheritance, jewellery was a Nyonya's most important possession, because it had resale value. For celebratory events, "Nyonyas were much given to a conspicuous display of their jewellery. They would adorn their hair, ears, neck, chest, arms, fingers and ankles with gold and silver, diamonds, jade and pearls." (Mahmood, 2004, p. 143) The jewellery was made from gold, silver and precious stones in a fusion of Chinese, Malay and Indo-European styles. Nyonyas especially favoured gold and diamonds, with jade and pearl being top choices as well. However, the Nyonyas do not wear coloured stones like the Malays.

The Peranakan style for jewellery can be considered as true hybrids, combining the best of Chinese, Malay and European traditions into something quite spectacular. Nyonyas of influence, who requested for unique combinations they could call their own, often commissioned these. The resulting combinations, offer "a glimpse into the mosaic of cultural influences felt by individual Straits Chinese (Chin, 1991, p. 107)." The development of the Peranakan designs could be attributed to the Nyonya's style of asking craftsmen to imitate the patterns of another tradition, resulting in often unique perspectives because craftsmen had different interpretations. This pattern of designs was not universal among the Peranakan communities, and regional variations were due to the different local cultures that formed the stylistic guide for these jewellery pieces. (Chin, 1991)

The style that developed in Malacca and Singapore was ultimately influenced from the "naturalistic school of diamond set Victorian jewellery. (Chin, 1991, p. 107)" The combination of this naturalistic style with Indian craftsmanship, resulted in jewellery pieces that had different designs including motifs of flowers, insects and birds in three dimensional abstract formations.

"Much of the jewellery is eclectic and fussy because of the mixture of materials, motifs and techniques employed. Ornamentation was more important than design. But it has a charm of its own and is much sought after." (Mahmood, 2004, p. 145) "During in times of mourning, and in keeping with the sombre colours of their clothes, pearls set in silver were worn in place of diamonds and gold." (Mahmood, 2004, p. 148)

Kerongsang (Brooch)

This is a brooch used to fasten the front opening of the *kebaya*, and usually consist of three brooches.

The early sets known as the *kerongsang serong* are made up of a peach or heart-shaped *kerongsang ibu* (mother brooch) and two *kerongsang anak* (baby brooches). These smaller brooches are normally circular and not as detailed in design as the *kerongsang ibu*. With the rise of the *kebaya* in fashion, *kerongsang rentai* (chained brooch) was made popular. These individual brooches are "elongated rather than round and usually identical in shape and design, were connected to one another by three delicate, decorative chains." (Mahmood, 2004, p. 149)

Kerongsang have been famous for their detailed design rather than their practicality. The intricacies of the designs were limited only by the skills of the craftsmen and the price they were paid. Some were simple in designs, fashioned out of gold and precious stones, while the more ornate ones were “encrusted with diamonds and comprised a mass of impressive filigree work.” (Mahmood, 2004, p. 149) Other popular ornate shapes of the *kerongsang* were “in shapes of paisleys, stars, mythical animals. Auspicious symbols of good fortune, fertility or long-life were also common.” (Lotoski, 2009)

Kerongsang fashioned out of silver and imbued with pearls, jade or sapphires were usually reserved for funerals or mourning events. Peranakans was believed to have adopted the pearl mourning jewellery of Victoria west, where pearls signified droplets of tears. (Bukitbrown, 2012)



Above: A *kerongsang* (brooch) worn during funeral or mourning events.

Above right: A silver belt.

Photos from Immortal Singapore.

Silver Belt

Silver belts was a flexible band fashioned out of silver with a hook at one end for connecting to the small buckle at the other end. There are usually three kinds of design. One is made up of “punched and decorative silver panels linked together, the second is made up of hundreds of linked and decorated silver chains, and the third is made up of silver wires or chains placed next to one another and held together by movable silver plaques. (Mahmood, 2004, p. 149)” A common design theme throughout was a plant-like design, accompanied by Chinese-inspired motifs.

The habit of sewing additional embroidery on to already finished clothes, and items such as handkerchiefs, mirrors, purses and other festive and celebratory decorations. (Khoo, 1996)

rites of passage

The Peranakan Wedding

Regardless of different kinship customs, the Peranakans still adopted the traditional Mainland Chinese perspective that a young woman's position was in the domestic sphere and her primary function was to continue the family line. Hence for the young Nyonya, marriage was an important milestone in her life that she had to fulfil, eventually becoming a dutiful and virtuous wife to her husband.

Among the Peranakan rites of passage, the wedding was the most elaborate affair of them all. Wedding rituals were detailed and complicated, often twelve-day affairs. Extravagant displays of wedding presents and the accoutrements that decorated the bridal bedroom and other sections of the house, presented a favourable circumstance to reaffirm a family's social standing and proclaim its affluence, hence also the heavy usage of the colour gold. (Kee, 2009) The other important colours would be red representing auspiciousness, white symbolising purity, and black symbolising sadness.

Right: A Nyonya bride getting ready for marriage.

Photo from Lee Eng Kong.



Ribbon

As part of the preparation before the wedding, the bride's hair was trimmed, and fringe "was tied into tiny tufts at both sides of the forehead." The ribbon used was "either white to signify the bride's purity, or red for the auspicious occasion; practices varied." (Khoo, 1996, p. 79)

During the combing, legends have it that if the hairline along the forehead refused to react to the comb and strayed towards curling, it was an indication of the girl's disgrace and loss of honour to the family. The tied tufts stayed intact throughout the rest of the wedding rituals, and some brides continued to wear this symbol of virginity till the birth of their firstborn. (Khoo, 1996)

Bride's Headdress

The headdress is made up of detailed and extravagant crown-like arrangements of hairpins on a special chignon. The bride would wear a band of silk or velvet on her forehead with attachments of silver-gilt or gold figures, in the shapes of auspicious figures such as Eight Immortals and the God of longevity seated on a crane. Christian Peranakans, would replace these gold symbols with flower motifs. Along with this, two dangling ornaments with auspicious motifs were added beneath this band. Every now and then, the bride would also adorn herself with "a special long hairpin, with dragon and phoenix, termed the thau tok". This was the mark of the Empress Dowager of China, and as with the local tradition of raja sehari, the bridegroom and bride were likewise king and queen on this auspicious occasion. (Peranakan Museum, 2012)

Wedding Jewellery

The bride also wore an assortment of dangling earrings, necklaces, chains and brooches, arranged extravagantly across her upper body. These were adorned with auspicious motifs and sometimes embedded with gems. In certain cases, these conspicuous arrangements were designed to inspire awe with jewellery worn on the back of the bride. (Peranakan Museum, 2012)

Right: Headdress with kingfisher feather details.

Far right: A wedding necklace.

Photos from Peranakan Museum A-Z Guide.



Bakul Bunga (Flower Basket)

A flower basket is usually hung on the wedding bed to symbolize fertility, consisting of entirely silver ornaments, often in motifs of phoenixes and butterflies. (Chin, 1991) A version in gold can also be found.

Bridal Chamber

Chin Pang Ceremony marks the first meeting between the couple where the bride would lead the groom into the bridal chamber where he would unveil her. Yellow and red are prominent colours found in the bridal chamber. “Carved in nam wood in southern China, the ornate red-and-gold style bed with its embroidered silk curtains, canopy, cushions, and golden hanging flower baskets (*bakul bunga*), decorated profusely with every imaginable Chinese auspicious motif, is in effect a shrine to fertility and wealth.” (Tan, 2003)

Bridal Chamber – Bed Hanging

“This is a chain-linked tiered hanging which, has as a central hanging, a reticulated box which could be opened and used to contain scented petals – the *bekas bunga* (flower box).” These boxes would be decorated additionally with a “bell-shaped top and a fancy shaped pendant.” There are a variations of these hangings which are also “purely ornamental, containing filigree figures of immortals within the boxes instead of flowers.” (Chin, 1991, p. 135)

Below: Overview of the bridal chamber.

Photo courtesy of NUS Baba House.





Bakul Sia (Auspicious basket)

Bakul sia or *sia* basket (auspicious basket) is a traditional Peranakan basket used during weddings. It is usually made of “rattans, bamboo or wood and wrapped with thick paper or leather (lacquered)”, and the basket was coloured with “red and black, then painted with gold auspicious motifs to symbolise prosperity and richness” (Enticz, 2011). Similar to the Chinese, the colours red and gold are widely used in Peranakan Weddings.

For the Peranakan wedding, a gift of a *pinang*, with a lacquered basket, was a sign of a marriage proposal from a suitor to his desired bride to be. *Bakul sia* is an important element in this Peranakan custom. Throughout the twelve-day wedding affair, wedding gifts were exchanged and transported in this basket.

Black Veil

The black lace veil worn by the bride symbolizes her sadness in departing from a carefree childhood, and her apprehension in beginning adulthood. (Khoo, 1996)

Kemunchak

On the third day of the wedding, after ceremonies at the groom’s house, the bride would take “the *kemunchak*, an ornament in the shape of a red phoenix symbolizing her virginity and fidelity, from a three tier offering known as a *sireh darah*, and take it back to the bridal chamber.” (Lee & Chen, 2006, p. 86-87)

Tempat Sireh

“During the twelfth day ceremony, a ceremonial *tempat sireh* or betel nut tray complete with silver containers of betel nuts, lie and gambier, would be prepared for the guests.” (Lee & Chen, 2006, p. 87)

Childbirth and Confinement

Nyonyas had to adhere to many restrictions and superstitions during pregnancy, childbirth and confinement. Having passed the 4 months mark since being pregnant, the midwife will be brought in to help the pregnant lady to a ritual cleansing. The midwife would chant incantations while cleansing the mother to be with water infused with limes and different coloured flowers. During childbirth, the Nyonya was instructed to insert a nail into her hair so as to block evil spirits from possessing her body. It was also commonly thought that the labour process would be smoother if all drawers and cupboards in the room were left ajar. During the confinement process, the Nyonya’s health would be strictly monitored, being given a diet of “heaty food”, to regain body heat to prevent the entering of evil spirits into her body.

Above: *Bakul Sia*.

Below: A *Tempah Siret* set.

Photos from Peranakan Museum
A–Z Guide.





Above: The family of Tun Tan Cheng Lock before the hearse of his mother Lee Seck Bin, Heeren Street, Malacca, 1956.

Photo from the collection of Peter Lee, Singapore.

Funerals

In the past, the recently departed would be outfitted in the white pyjamas worn on their wedding eve. Along with the body, some of the deceased's favourite clothes were left inside the coffin. The whole coffin would then be filled with silver paper replica of bank currencies. Although the use of white candles was the usual practice for the deceased, if the deceased was an octogenarian, having lived a long life, red candles were burned instead.

At the grave, "following prayers conducted by the Taoist priest all papercraft effigies and miniatures were burnt, together with plenty of gold and silver painted replicas of paper money to be used in the spirit world." (Khoo, 1996, p. 97)

Depending on each family, the period of mourning ranges and can be shortened to "twelve months of wearing black, three months wearing black and white or blue, and three months wearing green". (Khoo, 1996, p. 98)

Kim Tong Geok Lee

"Golden youths and jade maidens". These are paper mache statues of male and female servants to be burnt as offerings for the deceased into the afterlife. (Lee & Chen, 1996, p. 116)

BELIEFS

Overall, the Peranakan lifestyle is thought to be a mixture of: “Chinese religion, customs and practices; Chinese and European (including Anglo-Indian) architecture; Malay language, customs and cuisine. Their lifestyle of cultivated gentility was syncretic, being a fusion of mainly Hokkien Chinese, Malay and British elements, (Khoo, 1996, p. 26)”, and this fusion is displayed through their acts of worships and celebration of festivals.

Religions and Customs

Whether a Peranakan is Taoist, Buddhist or Christian, the person is still Chinese by his or her roots, and thus undoubtedly subscribes to the custom of reverence for ancestors. “Chinese religion, as practiced by Straits Chinese is an inclusive system in which the dominant belief accommodates other cults and deities” (Khoo, 1996, p. 49) It is not strange for local or popular gods to coexist with spirits, Buddhist deities, and Taoist heroes. The Chinese, particularly the women, sometimes visit places of legendary Malay supernatural power to offer reverence. This is not because they uphold the alternative customs represented there, but is merely a way to obtain the favour of all kinds of supernatural entities. (Khoo, 1996) Generally, Peranakan Chinese being superstitious people, practises all kinds of religion that best suits their way of life, differing from person to person. Such a fusion of religions and customs creates a variety of ways in which these acts of worships are displayed.

The Sacred Altar

The altar and shrine was positioned facing the main entrance, so that the household deity could protect the occupants from evil spirits. The altar was made up of “a high, long and narrow table and a lower square one”, and “en suite tables were made of carved teak or of blackwood with mother of pearl inlay.” (Lee & Chen, 2006, p. 44) A painting of the deity would be hung or a sculpture placed on the higher altar table.

Right: Front hall of the Baba house.

Photo courtesy of NUS Baba House.





Right: An ancestral altar.

Photos from Peranakan Museum
A-Z Guide.

Ancestral Altar

The ancestral altar consists of a big and tall table for the ancestral shrine (*kum*), and a square table for food offerings, and was commonly “elaborately carved versions with mother-of-pearl inlay.” (Lee & Chen, 2006, p. 60) The teak or hardwood ancestral shrine was often ornately carved and gilded, and contained the ancestral tablets of the family, which were usually inscribed with gold. The information would indicate the details of the death of the deceased and sometimes a short biography. “Flanking the shrine would have been the elaborate paraphernalia of an altar table, including a porcelain joss-stick holder, flower vase and a pair of cute crystal or glass oil lamps on ornate carved wooden bases.” (Lee & Chen, 2006, p. 60) Colours of black, gold and red are present, respectfully grand and auspicious in looks.

Tok Wee

It is a ceremonial embroidered panel used to cover the front of the square altar table and is used on festive or solemn occasions. (Lee & Chen, 2006)

Tiu Chiam (Chinese Fortune Stick)

Divination with inscribed stick, and the tip is coated red, signifying an auspicious item. The pious shakes the bamboo cylinder full of these sticks, so that one stick drops out. If more drops, he or she repeats again. The stick would then be exchanged for a prediction sheet foretelling the person’s fortune in the form of poetry. (Khoo, 1996)

Amulet

A *boo leng* (Hokkien for 'fish-dragon') amulet is worn by children to give them protection, and is silver in colour.

Festivals and Occasions

a. *Cheng Beng* (Festival to Tend to the Graves of Departed Ones)

This event could either represent a form of ancestor worship, where Straits Chinese visit their ancestors' graves to pay respects, or it could also represent a celebration of the end of winter. For the later, the significance of this event deals with rebirth, to once again see and enjoy the beauty of nature, and the dead are beseeched to join in this celebration.

Paper lanterns and money: Although in China, family members position yellow ribbons anchored by stones on top of tombs, the Straits Chinese places paper lanterns and replicas of paper money on the graves. Both goals were to ward off evil spirits and to refresh the wealth of the dead. Burning of joss-sticks and candles, and offerings of wine are included in this ceremony. (Khoo, 1996)

b. Hungry Ghost Festival

This festival is marked by the seventh lunar month where restless spirits of the dead who were not adequately cared for, roam the earth, and their living relatives would have to give offering in order to appease these neglected souls.

Dragon Joss Sticks: These are large and colourful pillar like joss-sticks used during the festival.

Flour Tortoises (*Mee Koo*): These are pink coloured steam buns given as offerings to the dead during the festival.

c. Chinese New Year

Chien Hup (Sweet-meat-box): "An ornate, carved, lacquered and gilded box used for the display of sweetmeat offerings to the deities during important festivals." (Lee & Chen, 2006, p. 116)

Chye Kee: "Red banner festooned above the main entrance of the house during festive occasions." (Lee & Chen, 2006, p. 116)



Above: Tiger claw amulet claws wrought in silver, early 20th century.

Photo from the collection of Peter Lee, Singapore.

Below: Different ways of stacking the *chien hup* (sweet meat box).

Photos from Peranakan Museum A-Z Guide.



Wedding Beliefs

Date of Marriage

Traditionally, the astrologer decided the important dates of the engagement and marriage day. "A deputation of about six elderly ladies (blessed with longevity) brought gifts from the groom to the bride's family." (Khoo, 1996, p. 74)



Right: Wedding gifts.

Photo from Immortal Singapore.

Gifts: Engagement presents differed, but the symbolic ones consist "of a bowl of *kueh ee* (small round balls of rice dough in a light syrup), candles, part of a roast piglet and two bottles of brandy. These gifts were usually transported in tiered cane baskets. A well to do groom's family would add hairpins, a wedding dress, shoes and two diamond rings." (Khoo, 1996, p. 74-75)

Among the gifts given in return from the bride's family were oranges, a silver belt, and men's slippers, which should have been embroidered by the bride. The groom was sometimes given a fan to carry on the wedding day." (Khoo, 1996, p. 75)

Initiation Ceremony

The sacred initiation ceremony signified the bridal couple's first step into adulthood and was performed on the eve of the wedding. Akin to an exchange of vows, it was performed in the houses of both the bride and groom from dusk to dawn. The bride and groom have to undergo the same ceremony but separately at the chosen time, dictated by the almanac. (Khoo, 1996)

The *Sam Kai* altar (Altar to the Three Realms): The *Sam Kai* altar is used for important ceremonies, particularly weddings. This consists of a "red lacquer and gilt table with a curved front, and a matching pedestal." (Lee & Chen, 2006, p. 46) Although its meaning is not clear, the word could translate as "three tiers", with the two tiers of the table combining with a *chien hup* (special wooden stand) to form three. "Altar cloths covered the front and back of the tables; the ceramics used would be yellow, which was the colour reserved for Chinese emperors, and the feet of the table has to rest on gold coins and gold-leafed joss paper." (Lee & Chen, 2006, p. 46) "Apart from the usual cooked foods, tea, wine, flowers, and a pair of glass lamps," "decorative skewers spiked with silvers of crisp young papaya" were placed inside the *chien hup*, to be given as an offering at the appointed time. (Khoo, 1996, p. 81)

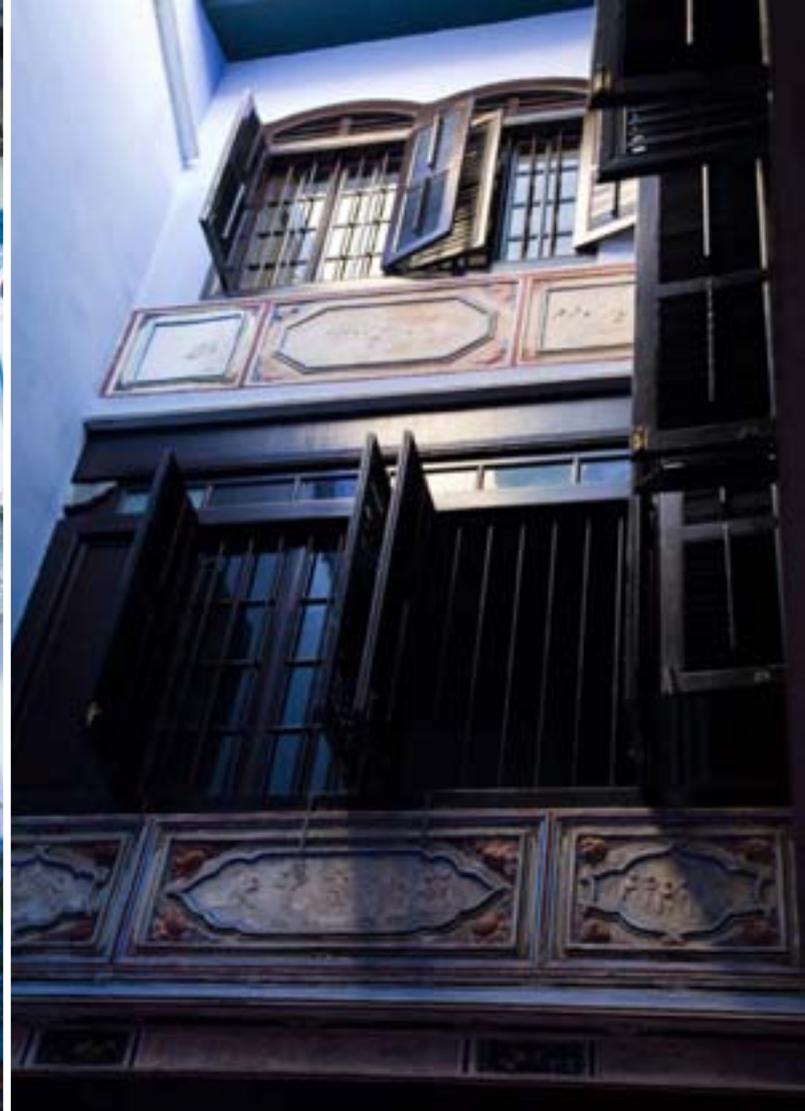
Purification rites: The initiation ceremony was performed in the area between the two altars. "A large round tray of plaited bamboo with a red circle painted in the centre was placed in the middle of this space. There was a wooden rice measure on the tray with its mouth upwards and covered with a piece of red cloth." (Khoo, 1996, p. 81) The bride in white pyjamas signifying purity, sat on the rice measure with an almanac laid on her lap.

Ceremonial items: "The bride and groom had to hold a Chinese almanac enclosing symbolic objects comprising a scale, a ruler, a mirror and a long red thread, representing, justice, wisdom, good judgment and longevity." (Lee & Chen, 2006, p. 50)

Below: A wedding basin.

Photos from Peranakan Museum
A-Z Guide.







Above: Peranakan shop-houses seen today.

Photo from Shutterstock.

Previous: Photographs of the Baba House.

Photos courtesy of NUS Baba House.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The Exterior

During the British colonial era in South East Asia, architects and engineers in the service of the English East India Company planned and built a lot of the infrastructure, bringing with them an Anglo-Indian style from India. The homes were built with the tropical climate in mind, with “European, especially Portuguese, Dutch and later British influence incorporated.” (Khoo, 1996, p. 133) The design intent was to keep the interiors cool, with the use of “large verandas, wide overhanging Chinese roofs, Anglo-Indian white stucco walls and high ceilings with *punkahs* (large swinging cloth fans operated by pulling a cord).” (Khoo, 1996, p. 133-134) Ventilation was circulated through the implementation of jack roofs, elevated floors and air wells. There was a variation of design influences from Portuguese, Dutch and British, and such influences became the “identifying features of the Straits Eclectic style, a form of urban architecture unique to Southeast Asia.” (Khoo, 1996, p. 134)



Above: Entrance of the Peranakan house in Penang.

Photo from Elroi Yee.

Façade

The facades of terrace houses were often decked with extravagant designs, and a great range of decorative styles can be seen. “Palladian columns on the ground floor may have green ceramic Chinese balustrades above them on the balcony.” (Khoo, 1996, p. 141) “The facades are painted in the pasted shades of Victorian rococo, while painted scrolls in the Chinese manner may be found above windows. The plaster work ornamenting the upper storeys of terrace houses displays the most diverse designs, ranging from Chinese symbolic motifs, mythological animals and whimsical creatures to European festoons, bouquets, posies, English roses and Grecian vases.” (Khoo, 1996, p. 141) Decorative work can also be seen on the overhanging of the arcade, with the use of green ceramic tiles shaped like bamboo. The result, is often a colourful riot of mixed designs. Decorative work on the houses also often forsook aesthetics in favour of symbolism and the dictation of geomancy.

Doors

The half doors were usually ornately carved and gilded. “The main doors, which were usually stained black or lacquered red, had decorative panels that had scenes carved on them, or were composes of openwork.” (Khoo, 1996, p. 141) Also, *yin* and *yang* discs were usually placed on the doors to protect the inhabitants.



Above: Peranakan floor tiles.

Photos from Peranakan Museum
A-Z Guide.

Below: *Rumah Bebe*'s store
entrance.

Photo from Yeo Kirk Siang, Singapore.

Floor Tiles

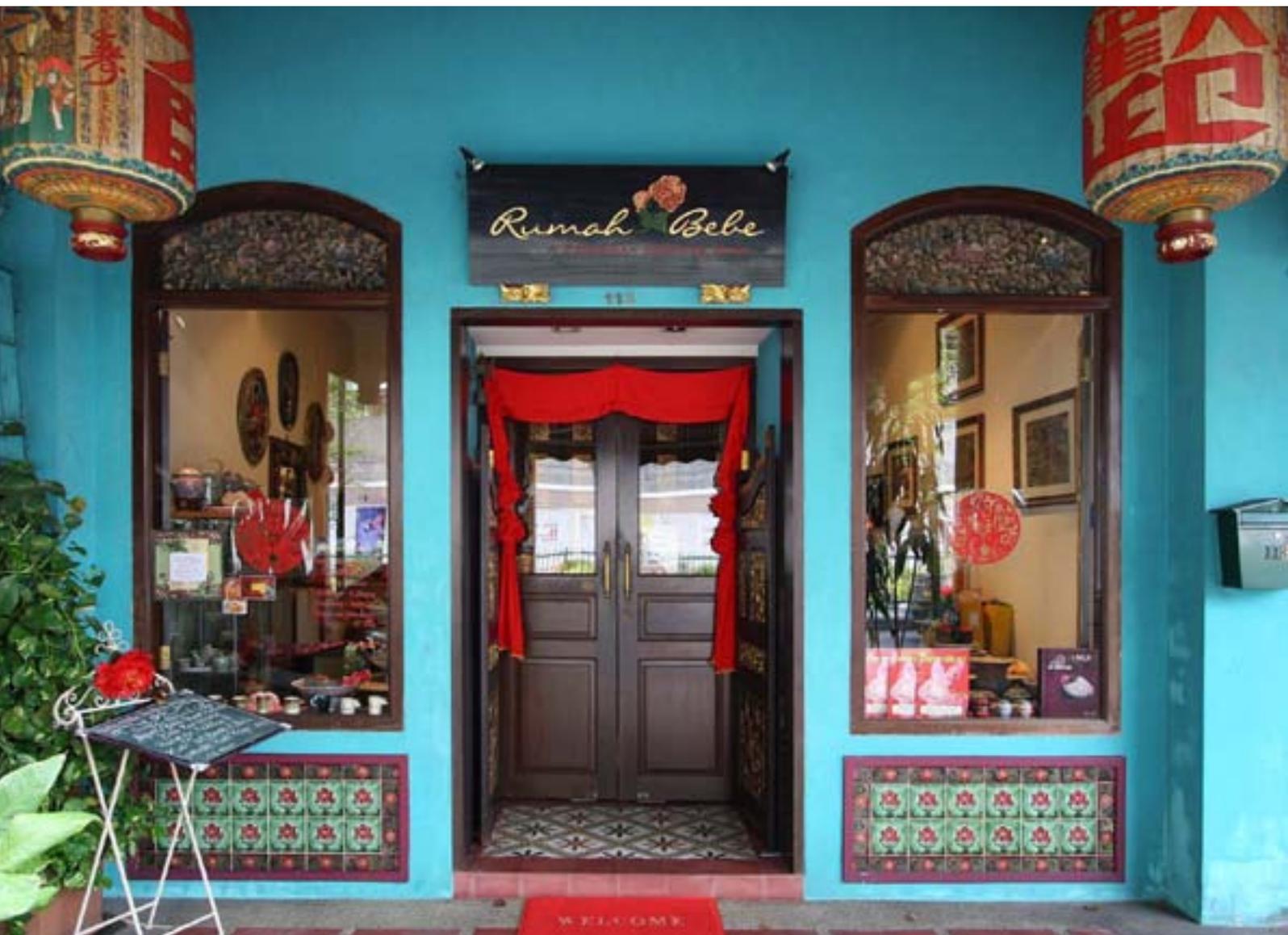
The front porch may carry imported European tiles in pastel colours displaying flowers or birds. Or in villas, "fine mosaic floor tiles were laid in floral patterns and in panels," often conceptualised in Italy and assembled locally. (Khoo, 1996, p. 164) These expensive tiles are believed to have been introduced by Dutch traders. Flowers and geometrical designs are usually painted on the tiles. The tiles are often found in shades of turquoise, red and green.

Stained Glass Windows

The windows may have the Art Nouveau colourful stained glass panes.

Red Lanterns

There are usually two permanent family lanterns with a special one to heaven in the middle. The family surname on the lanterns flanking the "central heavenly one augmented the calligraphy plaque above the door." (Khoo, 1996, p. 151)





Above: The main living area of a Peranakan house.

Photo from Elroi Yee.

Next: *Hup Soo Ee*, a Chinese-style blackwood armchair made of wood, porcelain, mother-of-pearls and bamboo.

Photo from Peranakan Museum A-Z Guide.

The Interior

The Peranakans had furniture in a range of styles, of which a few main types predominated. Most of the furniture was imported from China and was of “blackwood or rosewood with mother-of-pearl inlay, while a style favoured by the Straits Chinese was of lacquered and gilded namwood.” “The colonial furniture was more varied, in that besides perforated carving and marquetry, the designs themselves could range from Art Deco to the less common Dutch cupboards, French style consoles and chairs, and the occasional Dutch ladder-back chair.” (Khoo, 1996, p. 151)

The Reception Hall

“The reception hall of a Peranakan house was the most formal expression of the resident family’s pride, status and wealth.” (Lee & Chen, 1996, p. 41) The hall was often furnished and organized in a grand and rigidly symmetrical order, befitting the position of the householder.





Chinese Furniture

Grand suits of “ornate Qing dynasty blackwood furniture inlaid with mother-of-pearl” is a usual sight in a Peranakan home. In some homes, a “suite of carved teak Peranakan style furniture, often embellished with gold leaf, was used instead” (Lee & Chen, 1996, p. 42) Such a visual display is seen through the eyes of a Penang writer in that “the white marble of the porch flowed into the sitting room and contrasted dramatically with the hand carved black ebony furniture decked with mother of pearl motifs.” (As cited in Lee & Chen, 1996, p. 42)

Colonial Furniture

“English inspired living rooms, which became prevalent from the turn of the century, were outfitted in the latest fashions with ottomans, chaise-lounges, console tables, and Chippendale, Regency or Queen Anne style furniture, together with the older Dutch and Chinese heirloom pieces.” (Lee & Chen, 1996, p. 90)



Top: View of family hall.

Above: Interior of living room.

Photos courtesy of NUS Baba House.



FOOD

The kitchen in a Peranakan house is of utmost importance, as it was the *perut rumah* or 'stomach of the house', the central attraction of a household's life and movements. Alike to that of a Chinese community, social and religious customs was often expressed through food, whether it is for religious or celebratory purposes.

For the young Nyonya, culinary skills were among the primary accomplishments that centred around the life of a well brought up Nyonya. In Peranakan culture, cooking became a very detailed and complicated art, taking up hours of preparation and requiring the use of a range of kitchen tools. The skills were transmitted from the older generation or from Hainanese chefs who became masters of the Peranakan cuisine. Culinary talent became a criteria for marriage, and matchmakers would often grade the Nyonya's potential by "listening for the correct sound of pestle striking mortar as she prepared a meal. (Lee & Chen, 1996, p. 90)

a. Celebrations and Festivals



Previous: Family hall with ancestor photos.

Photo courtesy of NUS Baba House.

Right: A plate of *Ang Ku Kueh*.

Photo from Immortal Singapore.

***Ang Ku Kueh* (Red Turtle Cake):**

This is a popular snack found in red, consumed during joyous occasions and celebration. "The colour red is traditionally used as a symbol of joy and happiness whereas the tortoise symbolizes longevity, power and tenacity." (Black, 2012) One consumes the cake during the new born's first month birthday to gain blessings for the child. The print on top of the "*ang ku kueh*" will symbolise the sex of the child. A turtle and two marbles is the symbol for a boy while a girl is represented by two peaches. These tortoise cakes are sometimes made bigger to represent the wish for the child to grow up big and healthy. (Castella, 2010)

The black version of the *Ang Ku Kueh* is used for offerings for the newly deceased and also during the Hungry Ghost Festival.

Red Coloured Eggs

The red dye was extracted from annatto seeds, and these eggs represent fertility and their round shape represents harmony. The red symbolises luck and blessings for the new born. It was believed that if it was a boy, an odd number of eggs was distributed, and if it was a girl, an even number of eggs was distributed.

Peranakans are particular about the shade of red that is used. The reds Peranakan used are “*tu kwa ang* (maroon red), *zhui ang* (dark fuchsia pink) or *mawar merah* (rose red) or vermilion red.” (Won, 2007) Peranakans do not use chilli red as it looks like blood and thus is not an auspicious colour.

Mua Guek

The baby’s first month birthday celebration means “Full Moon” and signifies a new born baby’s healthy first month. Peranakans choose red and yellow as colours for the announcement of a child’s birth. The family would distribute *nasi kunyit* (yellow-coloured steamed glutinous rice), red coloured eggs and sweet *ang ku kueh*.

Nasi Kunyit

The yellow colour is extracted from tumeric, and this glutinous rice is considered to be a ceremonial food. The use of yellow is to represent royalty, and is added to the rice to increase the life giving qualities of the rice, which is traditionally thought to have a soul. (Khoo, 1996)

Kueh Ee (Red and White Glutinous Rice Balls in Syrup)

Peranakans traditionally consume this dessert on special occasions like birthdays, Chinese new year and weddings.

For weddings, the pink coloured ball signifies love whereas the white one signifies purity. It also represents a wish for a rosy and harmonious life together. The round shape represents perfection, which was why the couple was supposed to swallow the *kueh ee* without biting into it. It was usually served in a *kamcheng* (a Peranakan porcelain covered bowl) as the word ‘*kamcheng*’ sounds like ‘love’ in *hokkien*. In addition, a bowl of *kueh ee* may be placed under the bridal bed. It was believed that the more maggots found in them, the more offsprings the couple would have. (Tan, 2004)

On another celebratory occasion, winter solstice, the *kueh ee* is also made and consumed for good luck and fortune. They would stick “an oversized red *kueh ee* on one side and a white one on the other side of both front and back door posts to seek another good year. (Tan, 2004 p. 62)”

Below: Top view of *Kueh Ee*.
Photo from Immortal Singapore.



b. Religion and Customs

Ancestral Worship

During the first year death anniversary, in addition to other types of food, black *kueh koo* (glutinous rice dumplings) would be offered to the deceased.

After worship and paying of respects to the deceased is over, guests would be offered blue coloured *kueh koo* for tea. This represented that after a year of deep mourning expressed by the wearing of black and white clothing, the family would now be in blue coloured apparel in a year of lighter mourning.

c. Mourning

At Funerals

At the funeral of *Bibik Besar* (elderly Nyonya), the pallbearers would be given a *koo*, black glutinous rice dumplings to fill them up.

When the mourners went back to the family house, the loved ones would eat a meal together and have white *kueh wajek*. Normally, this glutinous rice cake is brown as it is prepared with palm sugar. On this sombre occasion, the cake will be cooked with caster sugar so that it is coloured white, as white is one of the colours employed during mourning. (Tan, 2004)

Crockery

Only blue and white coloured crockery is utilised to reflect the sombre occasion of the passing of a loved one, and brightly coloured plates and bowls are excluded.

d. Inspired by Nature

Peranakans usually use natural dyes in plants to colour their *kuehs* to suit the festivities of a joyous occasion or a sombre occasion. They would “extract red from *angkak* (annatto seeds), green from *daun pandan* (screwpine leaves), yellow from *kunyit* (turmeric), brown from *gula melaka* and black from *daun ramai*. (Tan, 2004, p. 74)”

For the blue, Peranakans would extract the colour from the blue pea flower (*clitoria ternatea*), a vine native to tropical and equatorial Asia, but has been introduced to Africa, Australia and the New World. Popular Peranakan desserts that used this blue dye were like the Peranakan *Bak Chang* (Pork Rice Dumplings), *Pulut Inti*, *Kueh Talam*.



Above: Nyonya *kueh* selects.

Photo from Peranakan Museum
A-Z Guide.

Right: Variety of Nyonya food.

Photo from Peranakan Association,
Singapore.

Next: A lounging area.

Photo courtesy of NUS Baba House.





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Research Report 2013



South Korea

the
Colours
of Asia

Red Yellow Blue Green Black & White

亞洲
色彩

紅黃藍綠黑與白



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INTRODUCTION

The colour governs human vision – the first element of human sensory system – and needless to say, influences everyday human experiences. Though the sensation is shared by everyone, the perception of it can differ dramatically, depending on their social and cultural environment. (F. Mahnke, 1996) Thus, the study on the colour in cultural context becomes inevitable for any visual communicators, especially in this ever-globalising world. This report aims to examine the colour in Korean sociocultural context based on in-depth secondary research. This will provide an insight to the colour as Koreans see it. Furthermore, the report will form a part of cross-cultural study, *The Colour of Asia* and provide comparative study on the Korean colours to the rest of participating Asian cultures. The similarities between the Asian cultures will define the character of the Asian colours. The differences will highlight the cultural diversity within the Asian community. The study as a whole hopes to provide an insight for the readers to better understand the Asian culture moreover for the Asians themselves to develop their culture from understanding it better.

Traditional Korean colour system finds its roots in Yin-Yang and the Five element theory, where five colours – Red, Blue, Yellow, White and Black – represents the whole spectrum of colours and further extends to explain the law of cosmos. (Moon, 2010) The theory spans its influence not only in Korea but China, Japan and Vietnam and is crucial in understanding Northeast Asian culture. However, each country has interpreted and integrated the theory in their own culture and has developed distinctive colour symbolism. In Korean case, those five colours in a set were called *Obang* Colour (the Five Primary Colours). The set was considered to represent completeness and auspiciousness and is applied to the traditional and contemporary Korean daily rituals, where white and red with blue used with greater importance. The study will examine the meaning of *Obang* Colour as a colour combination, followed by case-study of white and red in traditional context. The last part of the study will cover how their meanings have changed and maintained to contemporary society. In this report, the study on the traditional Korean colours will mostly focus on Joseon Dynasty(1392~1907), the last monarchy of the Korean history. Joseon Dynasty is the period where the contemporary Korean culture finds its foundation on and the period with comparatively greater number of resources remain to examine. The period after the World War Two, the report refers to South Korean colour.

1. THE KOREAN WHITE

1.1 Origin of Korean White

In 1880, Ernest J. Oppert reflected upon his impression on Koreans in his book, *A Forbidden Land: Voyages to the Corea* and described Koreans as “the white-clad folk”. As visually remarkable it was to Oppert, the colour white traditionally resonated its significance in the Korean cultural history as it is apparent on the *Myth of Dangun*(BC.2333), the founder of the first Korean Kingdom. The story goes as below;

“Dangun’s ancestry legend begins with his grandfather Hwanin, the Lord of Heaven. Hwanin had a son, Hwanung, who yearned to live on the earth among the valleys and the mountains. Hwanin permitted Hwanung and 3,000 followers to descend onto Hanbalk(today’s Baekdu) Mountain, where Hwanung founded *Sinsi*(City of God). Along with his ministers of clouds, rain, and wind, he instituted laws and moral codes and taught humans various arts, medicine, and agriculture.

A tiger and a bear prayed to Hwanung that they may become human. Upon hearing their prayers, Hwanung gave them 20 cloves of garlic and a bundle of mugwort, ordering them to eat only this sacred food and remain out of the sunlight for 100 days. The tiger gave up after about twenty days and left the cave. However, the bear remained and was transformed into a woman.

The *Ungnyeo*(bear-woman) was grateful and made offerings to Hwanung. However, she lacked a husband, and soon became sad and prayed beneath a *Sindansu*(Divine Betula) tree to be blessed with a child. Hwanung, moved by her prayers, took her for his wife and soon she gave birth to a son, who was named Dangun Wanggeom.

Dangun ascended to the throne, built the walled city of Asadal, situated near Pyongyang and called the kingdom Joseon - referred to today as "Old/Ancient Joseon" so as not to be confused with the Joseon kingdom which occurred much later. He then moved his capital to Asadalon Mount Baegak". (Wikipedia 2012)

In this myth, many words indicating 'light' appears; notice frequent use of *Hwan* for the names of God and God's son, which in Korean means "bright light." The first king, Dangun's *Dan* also means "bright light." *Hanbalk* Mountain also contains *Balk*, which in Korean also means "shining brightly." As evident here, there are countless Korean syllables that refers to brightness. To list there are;

balk, bya, bulg, bwaha, boolg, ppa, bel, bal, buel, bol, bul, bil, baek, bak, buk, buok, book, big, bae, ba, bue, bo, buu, by.(Lee, 2005, p.30)

What is to mark here is that the Korean word for 'colour' is *Sek*, which also means 'light'.(Moon, 2010) As Ancient Koreans worshiped the sun, the brightness of the light meant sacredness and the colour of light was white. It is also apparent in the archaic Korean word for white, 'ㅎ다' where the shape of the letter 'ㅎ' symbolises the sun.(Kang, 2009, p.13) This concept of colour white as light has passed down onto many other Korean myths; *Samguksagi*(History of the three Kingdoms, 1145) tells a story of the people of Woosoo province who made white deer as an offering to the Muyeol King, during the period of Sundeok Queen, the people of Cheongju made offering of white falcon and sparrow and in the era of Kyeongduck King, the people of Mujinjoo province made white pheasant an offering to their king, and remains as the names of sacred and important landmarks of today, for example the mountain Hanbalk appears on the myth above today is called Baekdoo Mountain, the top of the mountain Halla is called Baekrokdam where the syllable *Baek* refers to 'white'. (Lee, 2004, p.31)

This repetitive appearance of light in the myth and its transition into the word 'white' established perception of white as a sacred and holy colour, which symbolises innocence, purification and a sacred offering to the God. (Lee, 2004, p.31) The colour, thus, is used in the important rituals such as birth and death. The new-born babies were dressed in white garment called *Baenetjeogori*(a white jacket for babies) till they turn hundred days old. As the first garment of the man's life stage, *Baenetjeogori* was made and used with a special care. *Baenetjeogori* was only hand-sewn by the mother or the grandmother of the baby. People other than them were considered unclean and might bring bad luck to the garment. Only unbleached white cotton or hemp cloth were used, sometimes the mother would make *Baenetjeogori* from her own white cotton clothing and believed it would protect the baby from harmful spirits. Although *Jeogori* means a jacket, as the babies do not wear pants, it was made large enough to cover the baby's hand and legs. A white apron called *Dorungchima* were additionally worn to cover the baby's belly. The strong will of the mother to protect her baby from the harm and wish for the baby's health is reflected in

this garment and thus white for *Baenetjeogori* seemed the most appropriate; it is the colour of sacredness and cleanness.(Chu, 2000, p.17 and p.43) It extends to the use of white skein of thread as a belt, which holds the garment together where the thread symbolises a long life reflecting the mother's wish for the baby to live long and grow as an important person. *Baenetjeogori* can be said to be the result of the mother's love and wish for the good, making the garment spiritually precious piece. Therefore it was kept for whole life as a symbol of good luck and love. It is reflected in old Korean belief that says *Baenetjeogori* would help the baby win the state examination when he grows up.(Chu, 2000, p.17)

White was also used in the funeral, the last stage of the person. Kim(1998) finds the origin of this symbolism in ancient burial ritual. In ancient times, people left the corpse outside and waited for the skin to vanish and the bone to turn white. They later gathered this bone and called it *Baek*(soul, spirit), which pronounces same as the colour white. Moreover, it was believed that *Baekho*(the white tiger) - the mystical creature of Yin-Yang and the five element theory - brings death to the person who looks into its eyes. Moreover all the ghosts of the traditional horror stories from not only Korea, but China and Japan all appears in the white clothing.(Kim & Kim, 1998, p.346) Above reflects the belief that the sprit was understood to be white and so the death. However, death also meant revival in Asian philosophy of life and death. In *Shuowen Jiezi*(A book of "Explaining and Analyzing Characters" by Xu Shen published early second century) Xu Shen explains;

"The western sky of the end of the day is white and the eastern sky of the dawn is white. White is the colour of the death and the revival"(Xu Shen, Second Century)

Thus, the colour white is the colour of sacredness, signifying death, revival, hope and nobility, eternal like the life and death of the nature. (Kim & Kim, 19998, p. 347) In Korean funeral the mourning dress was made in unbleached white hemp cloth - the same fabric used for *Baenetjeogori*. It meant bereavement but also a purification and revival into the 'other' world of the 'light.' (Jeon, 2008) The mourners showed their grief by wearing unbleached hemp cloth, which is the most basic form of clothing. Nowadays the shroud dress is also made with the hemp cloth.

White in food is understood in similar symbolism and was served in every traditional Korean ceremonies and seasonal rituals. The most apparent example would be the rice cake. Rice cake was served and shared in every seasonal rituals. (refer to Table 1)

Rituals	Date	Rice Cake	Colour	Symbolism
New Year's Day	01 Jan.	Garaeddeok	White	Start the year with clean mind
The First full moon	15 Jan.	Yaksik	Brown	The wisdom of the crow myth
Servant Day	01 Feb.	Songpyeon	White	Encouraging and offering treat for the servant for a year of labour
Samjit day	03 Mar.	Hwajeon	White with pink from flower petals	

Rituals	Date	Rice Cake	Colour	Symbolism
Hansik	04 Apr.	SSookddeok (Mugwort Rice Cake)	Green	Consuming full vitality of Mugwort
Kogu	20 Apr.	Gaepeed- deok	White or Green	
Buddha's Birthday	15 May.	Nooteddeok (Zelkova tree rice cake)	Yellow-green	Celebrating Buddha's birthday with Zelkova tree (sacred tree of Buddha) leaf rice cake.
Dano	05 May.	Soorichui jeolpyoen	Green	Wishing the family's health for the hot summer
Yoodoo	15 Jun.	Ddeok Sudan (Cold rice cake soup)	White	Cooling off the summer's heat, wishing the best for the year's harvest to Dragon God
Chilsuk	07 Jul.	Jeungpyeon	White	Cooling off the summer's heat
Buddhist All Souls' Day	15 Jul.	Suktanbyeon- ng	Yellow	
Choosuk	15 Aug.	Songpyeon	White, Green	Thanks giving to the ancestor and the gods of heaven and earth for a year's harvest
Joongang- jol	09 Sept.	Gukhwajeon, Bamddeok	White, Yellow	Celebrating autumn with chrysanthemum or chestnut rice cake
Sangdal	01 Oct.	Shiruddeok	Red	Wishing to protect the family from hardship of winter and for good health
Dongjee	01 Nov.	Patjuk	Red	Protect the family from bad spirits for the following year
Napwoel	01 Dec.	Golmood- deok	White	Give praises unto God of Heaven and earth for the year
Sutdalgoo- moom	30 Dec.	Onshirood- deok	White	Wrapping up the year by making rice cake with leftover fruits

[Table 1. Rice cakes by seasonal rituals (Park, 2003 p.112)]

Rice cakes came in various shapes and colours and was made from the season's ingredients. However, the key ingredient was rice and therefore its basic colour



Image 1. *Garaeddeok*
Photo: FoodAD, 2012



Image 2. *Songpyeon*
Photo: FoodAD, 2012

was white. For the New Year's Day people prepared *Garaeddeok*, a long white rice cake made from the new rice of the harvest. This rice cake was preserved and consumed till the following year's first full moon. On the New Year's Day, instead of rice, *Ddeokguk*(the white rice cake soup) made with chopped *Garaeddeok*(image 1) was served. The long shape of this rice cake embodies blessings and signifies wishes for the expansion of family finance of the year. The circle shaped chopped *Garaeddeok* evokes the coin and auspiciousness. However compared to other rice cakes which comes in various colours, it is comparatively simple. However, it was chosen for its pure white colour as white is holy colour and embodies the hope for the clean and reverent New year. (Baek, 2007) *Songpyeon*(image 2), a stuffed rice cake in the shape of a half-moon (Hong, 1999), was served in two of the seasonal rituals and to mark the start and the end of the year's harvest; first to encourage the workers(the servants) by offering them a treat for their year's labour - number of *Songpyeon* was served according to the worker's age - and second to celebrate and thank the year's harvest. This dumpling shaped rice cake came in two colours; white and green and with various types of fillings. Each ingredients that creates the colours had its symbolism based on the spiritual white. The green came from mugwort and symbolises vitality, red bean filling stands for repelling power to the bad luck.

Other than the seasonal rituals, rice cake was also shared in important life events and ceremonies such as the four ceremonial occasions of coming of age, wedding, funeral and ancestral rites. The most common type of rice cake is called *Baeksulgi*, the white rice cake made of non-glutinous rice. The name literally means 'white snow' and as it is suggestive in the name, it was considered to be pure and sacred. It was served to celebrate the baby's twenty-first day of life, the hundredth day and their first birthday, or as an offering to the guardian spirit of a mountain or the Dragon King of the Sea when people wish for the good luck for the year's harvest.(Jung, 2003)

1.2 White as *Sosek*

The symbolism and worship of the colour white in Korean culture has heightened during Joseon Dynasty. The first King of the dynasty, Yi Seong-gye founded the Dynasty against its former, Goryeo(918 ~ 1392) and replaced the ruling principle from Buddhism to Neo-confucianism, the scholars enjoyed the similar respect and status of Buddhist monks of Goryeo Dynasty. Modesty, fidelity, candidness and frugality were considered the high qualities of the scholar and they tried to display this by avoiding extravagant lifestyle. In art and design the beauty of space and simplicity were celebrated. Reflecting the zeitgeist, the new concept of white emerged, called *Sosek*(literally means 'original colour'). *Sosek* is the concept of the colour that has no colour.(Moon, 2007) Best example of this colour is unbleached, original colour of cotton, hemp cloth or ramie fabric.(Lee, 2011, p.192) In contemporary sense, it might be called ivory or beige. The colour *Sosek* is used to describe the colour of snow(*Soseul*), a white face(*Soahn*), white clothing(*Sobok* or *Soui*) and autumn(*Sochu*) as it falls under white sector according to Yin-Yang and the five element theory. The white clothing(Referring *Sobok*) was favoured and worn regardless of social status. This is what Oppert observed when he saw "the white-clad folk"(Oppert, 1880). Throughout the history, there has been many attempts to ban people from wearing white. As an example, in the Fourteenth ruling year of the King Young-Jo(1783), Duk-soo Lee, the second ranking official wrote to the King;

"...our people have worn white for generations and it is deeply integrated as a part of our culture. It appears in my view to be wrong to discuss the banning of the white and replace it with blue and I would like to suggest the banning of such discussion..."(Lee, 2011, p.184)



Image 3. *Dopo*
Photo: Im, hark-hyoen. 2012

In agricultural Korea, it was widely worn for its practicality, where it was easy to keep white and appear clean despite the harsh daily labour done at the fields for the lower class workers (Kim, 2002). For higher-class scholars, it was the representation of their candidness, pureness and frugality. Therefore they enjoyed and was proud to wear white clothing such as *Dopo* (image 3, A gentlemen's robe) for their everyday dress. This is apparent in portraits of the time. The scholars of the time believed that the portrait of the person should be the same as the person, even to their 'tip of the hair.' They believed it would only allow the portrait to be true and reflect the person's mind and spirit. Hence the type of portrait called *Yabokbon* (the portrait of a men in informal attire) was preferred to of *Gwanbokbon* (official attire portraits), as it was more appropriate to depict the person as frugal and elegant scholar who has no desire for fame. In *Yabokbon*, the person usually is depicted in white *Dopo*. *Yabok* originally refers to the scholars who does not take an official position in government. However, towards the end of the Dynasty, even the government officials wanted to depict themselves in *Yabokbon* portraits. (Lee, 2011)



Image 4. *Changmoon* covered with *Changhoji*.
Photo: Im, hark-hyoen. 2012

Another example is found in traditional Korean architecture, the distinctive feature called *Changmoon* (Image 4, the door sharing the role of windows and vice versa, Im, 2010) that made up a major part of the facade of the building. *Changmoon* were filled with the tough and durable Korean paper called *Changhoji*. As the paper was used to protect interior from the outside, two to three layers of doors (or windows) were typically used. This use of layers of translucence white paper allowed the control of the light penetrating through the house and thus the temperature of the room according to the season. It also changed the tone of the house according to the time of the day, it starts the day with blue at the dawn, shifts to warm ivory during the day and turns to orange reflecting the sunset of the afternoon. It is again a *Sosek*, which reflects the nature as it is and allows Koreans to live integrated into the nature (Im, 2010).

Other example of the Korean White is *Baekja* (The porcelain of the Joseon Dynasty called Moon Jars or literally mean 'white porcelain'). After the fall of Goryeo Dynasty, the ruling class of Joseon Dynasty sought for various ways to distinguish their identity from the previous era. In this vein, using Goryeo celadon, although its quality and the unique turquoise colour was widely praised, was avoided as it became the symbol of the extravagant life style of the corrupt ruling class of the previous era. *Baekja* reflected the new values of Joseon; modest, humble, integrated to the nature and the importance of understanding the essence of the objects rather than blinded by their appearances. Thus *Baekja* came in white, depending on the availability of the pigment, its colour varied from ivory to bright (snow coloured) white. To define the colour of *Baekja*, new words for white emerged such as *Seulbaek* and *Yoobeak*. (Moon, 2012, p.322~326) It also often came in imperfect and asymmetric forms. Differ to the Goryeo celadon, *Baekja* was decorated with simple drawings or a writings from a poem, leaving large portion of the celadon empty. This again reflects Confucius teaching that "drawing a picture is to make white background first" and the praise for the beauty of space. (Yoon, 2007)

1.3 White in folk culture

The colour in folk culture generally followed the colour symbology that was set up by the ruling class of the time. Some were shaped by the enforced laws but in some culture they display their own interpretation of the colour. The good example of the colour in folk culture can be found in masked dance. Variety types of mask dance had developed regionally and the design varied accordingly. However, each mask design shared similar colour coding based on Yin-Yang and the five element theory. White is the most common colour



Image 5. Different types of Bongsan Mask. From left, a mask for character *Nojangjoong*(corrupted old monk), *Yangban*(aristocrat), *Miyalhami*(Old lady), and *Somu*(Young girl)
Photo: Im, hark-hyoen. 2012

used for the mask design,(Lee, 2009, p.66, image 5) and it was used to represent the character by their colour symbology(Encyclopaedia of Korean Culture & The Academy of Korean Studies, 2010). White connotes autumn, the season of life and it was used to portray young female characters decorated with vibrant colours, highlighting their vitality and ability to give birth and life to a baby. In other cases, it was used to depict feeble aristocrats who rely on social structure to impose their superficial authority. Their pretentious belief for ‘candidness’ and ‘cleanness’ by wearing white, here is converted and used to ridicule them (Kim, 2002 and Lee, 2009). On the other hand, black connotes winter, the death of life, thus, it was used to represent an elderly who is about to face death, a monk who turned his back on the world and a scabies patient who lives in darkness, locked in their rooms. (Kim, 2002)

As Oppert(1880) remarked Koreans as “the white clad folks”, Koreans have traditionally loved the colour white. The tradition finds its root from the ancient Koreans from the Dangun myth and their worship of the sun. The colour white represented the colour of the light from the sun and thus was considered sacred and holy. It is evident in various Korean mythologies and stories where white appears frequently to represent the important landmarks or the Kings or appears as the sacred offerings to the God. Thus, white also appears in everyday traditional Korean life rituals. Kim(2002), in her study on Colours of Costume in Korean Basic Culture, asserts that Koreans wear White from their birth to death. Indeed the first garment that were worn on an infant was in white, the mourning garment for funeral were in white. White clothing was common regardless of the class and generation, coincided with Confucius belief that ruled the Joseon Dynasty. The scholars of Joseon Dynasty considered wearing white as a proud, which represents their candidness, pureness and frugality. Therefore white *Dopo* was their favourite choice to wear especially in the portraits of themselves. The need to establish the national identity and distinguish themselves from the former Goryeo Dynasty also made the people of Joseon to turn to White. Coincided with the Confucius teachings, the people of Joseon Dynasty established the concept of *Sosek*, the plain colour that contains no colour but the nature. It is reflected in many examples such as *Dopo*, *Changhoji* and *Beakja*. The commoners of the traditional society also followed the concept of white established by the scholars and rulers of the time. This is reflected in their folk culture, which in this study examined the masked dance. The characters of the masked dance were defined by the colour of the mask design. However, masked dance was full of criticism, satire and humour. The white aristocrat in the play is portrayed to be weak and feeble, ridiculing the corrupt and pretentious ones who wear white and believe that they appear candid and clean.

2. TRADITIONAL OBANG COLOUR SYSTEM

2.1 Origin of *Obang* Colour system



Image 6. Samtaeguk on Changdukgyung Palace doors
Photo: Lee, Do-Young, 2012



Image 7. Samtaeguk on Subway map design
Photo: Lim, Hark-hyeon, 2012

As apparent on the previous example of the Korean white, colour in traditional Korean culture was perceived strongly with its associated symbolism. The symbolism originates from mythology of Dangun and ancient shamanism, which later combined with the Yin-Yang and the five element theory.(Jeon, 2008)

In ancient Korean shamanism, the cosmos was considered to be in a shape of circle, where three elements – sky, earth and human being – completes the system. Referring back to mythology of Dangun(p.2), we observe this theory where sky is Hwanin the god who comes to earth; Hwanwong is the earth, who became human after following Hwanin’s order; Dangun, the son of Hwanin and Hwanwong, is the human.(Ko, 1999) The theory was summarised in the form of *Samtaeguk*(Image 6.), which is similar to *Taeguk* of Yin-Yang. It symbolises the completeness, showing a circle with three colours, red, blue and yellow, each representing sky, earth and human respectively. This is considered the original of *Taeguk* symbol, which later simplifies, influenced by Yin-Yang theory. The result is the *Taeguk* symbol composed of red and blue in the Korean national flag (Wu, 2003). Original *Samtaeguk* is also found in both traditional and contemporary design motif such as a design motif on the traditional Korean drum, a red gate with spiked top for shrines, gate and steps on the palaces (image 6.), and on Seoul metro map (image 7.) design.(Wu, 2003)

The three colours established from ancient Korea has developed into a set of five primary colours – Red, Blue, Yellow, White and Black – called *Obang* Colour, influenced by Yin-Yang and the five element theory where the colours were used as symbols to explain the laws of cosmos and nature. The theory links five colours with the nature and human sensations; the direction, the season, the taste, the mythical animals, the five primary substances, the five constant virtues, the five viscera, the five sensory organs, and the five sound. (Kang, 2009, refer to table 2.)

	White	Black	Yellow	Red	Blue
Direction	West	North	Centre	South	East
Season	Autumn	Winter	Four seasons	Summer	Spring
Primary Substances	Metal	Water	Earth	Fire	Tree
Mythical Animals	The White Tiger	The Black Tortoise	-	The Vermillion bird	The Azure Dragon
Taste	Pungent	Salty	Sweet	Bitter	Sour
Constant Virtues	Righteousness	Wisdom	Fidelity	Propriety	Benevolence
Viscera	Lung	Kidney	Spleen	Heart	Liver
Sensory Organs	Nose	Ear	Mouth	Tongue	Eye

Table 2. Korean Symbolism (Ku, 1992 p.74)

The theory explains there are two opposing and harmonising energies – Yin and Yang and that they form all creations in the universe. From nothingness, the Yin and Yang is created, which became the sky and the earth. It produced

five elements – metal, wood, water, fire and earth. They can be represented by five colours – white, blue, black, red and yellow respectively. Each element has both affinity and enmity pairs, in which they help, cast away, produce and oppose each other(Kang 2009). The five elements represent one Yin and Yang and this Yin and Yang forms *Taeguk* and *Taeguk* is the neutral and complete state. Yin and Yang becomes *Gun* and *Gon*, representing male and female elements where all things were created. Basically, Yin and Yang are contrary to each other – Yin represents female elements, which are passive, dark, cold, humid and soft while Yang represents male elements, which are active, bright, hot, dry and solid(Jeon, 2008). This theory became the basis of the Korean neo-Confucianism in sixteenth century, which developed into the theory of natural principles of reason and energy. It teaches to learn natural principles and follow the natural energy in everyday practice and influenced every aspects of the traditional Korean culture(Lee, 2008).

2.2 Obang Colour in textile

Obang Colour, often except the black, was often used together in harmony. The use of these colours was believed to protect Koreans from harmful energy and taught Koreans the concept of life – each colour represents five virtues; gentle, good, politeness, humbleness and simplicity (Cho, 2003). A distinctive form of clothing called *Sekdong*(multicoloured strips), where the sleeves of the clothing was composed of stitched strips of different colours, was developed. The colours were carefully selected from *Obang* colour system, in which the stitched colours form affinity pairs (see diagram below for affinity and enmity pairs) and the colours in between.

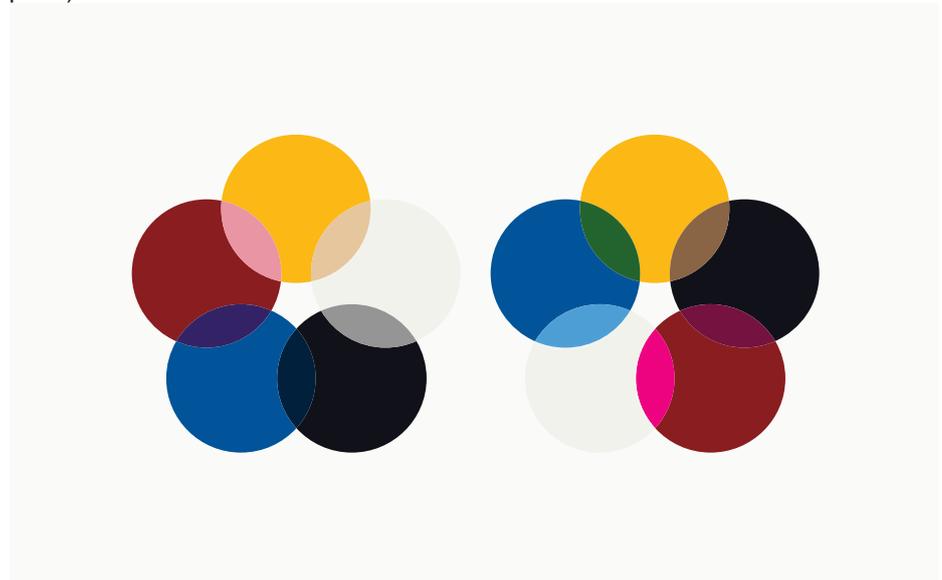


Diagram 1. Affinity(left) and Amenity(right) pairs in Korean Colour system (Moon, Eun-bae, 2012)



Image 8. *Kkachidooroomagi*
Craft: Ahn, In-Sil, 2012
Photo: Lim, Hark-hyeon, 2012

The garments with *Sekdong* sleeves were worn in special occasions and worn by shamans for their performances. The example(Image 8) is *Kkachidooroomagi*(multicoloured overcoat for children), an overcoat worn by a year old baby for their first birthday. It is the first colourful garment worn by the baby - before then they usually wear clean white *Baenetjeogori*. As the child's death rate was high in traditional society, the first birthday for the baby meant that they survived their first critical stage of life.(The Korean Traditional Costume and Culture, 2012) It is also the time where their growth is visible to their parent's eyes. To celebrate their health and to give blessing for rest of their life, the parents dressed the baby with *Kkachidooroomagi* with *Sekdong* sleeves. The use of *Obang* colours in their affinity relationship was



Image 9. *Hogun*
 Craft: Ahn, In-Sil, 2012
 Photo: Lim, Hark-hyeon, 2012

believed to assert good spiritual power to the baby and protect them from evil.(Chu, 2000) Only colour avoided from *Obang* colour system was black, as it symbolises death and sadness. Instead, colours such as green and pink, called *Ogan* colour(The colours created in between *Obang* colour) were used to balance the tone. Kwon(2003) explains that this reflects Hanism(Original Korean philosophy reflected in Korean word *Han*), where the values such as unity, wholesomeness, transcendence, totality, cooperativity and tranquility are highlighted. Therefore rather than using the contrast of the complementary colours, Koreans used different tones of colours for harmonious combination of colours. The colourful sleeves reminded traditional Koreans of the rainbow and they thought it reflects the naive innocence of the children.(Kim 2004) The full attire included the tiger shaped *Hogun*(image 9, a hat, mimicking the shape of Confucian scholar's one) for boys as a blessings for their intelligence and *Jobawii*(a woman's winter hat with earflaps) for girls. After the first birthday, the children were dressed with *Kkachidooroomagi* for celebrative occasions like the New Year's Day, moon festival and their birthdays.(The Korean Traditional Costume and Culture, 2012) Shamans in Korea also wore *Sekdongjeogori*(a jacket with multicoloured sleeves), as they believed the colours had spiritual colour when combined in affinity relationship which allows them to enter the world of the gods. Shamans therefore hung coloured stripes of cloths on the path to their shrine and decorated the paintings of gods with five colours(Jeon. 2008).



Image 10. *Jogakbo*
 Photo: Im, hark-hyoen. 2012

This *Obang* colour combination appears commonly in the traditional Korean craft culture, which largely led by female household craftsmanship called *Gyubang*(Women's quarters) culture. In traditional Korean culture, the main role of the females was to produce the household items such as blanket, wrapping clothes, sewing box and ornaments. In each element, use of *Sekdong* was common, following Yin-Yang and the Five Element theory. *Jogakbo*(image 10, Patchwork wrapping cloth) is a good example of *Gyubang* Culture. Wrapping clothes were versatile, in traditional Korean household, almost everything were kept away, wrapped in a cloth. When not in use, it was also convenient to store itself away. *Jogakbo* is also a unique folk culture and not as common in royal culture. *Jogakbo*'s main purpose was to keep things away but it was also made with scraps of leftover fabrics and therefore the second main purpose was to make the most of the fabrics used in household. Hence each *Jogakbo* presents their own unique shape and colour combination. Although the patchwork might seem random, each pieces of fabric are put together considering the colour harmony. Even the colour of the thread is considered for harmony of the colours.(Huh, 2004) Use of *Obang* colours, as discussed earlier, was believed to possess spiritual power that repels the evil and invites the good. Thus, storing the goods wrapped in a *Jogakbo* was considered to protect the goods from the evil spirits. Moreover, the patchwork took a long time. Each pieces of leftover fabrics were considered for colour harmony, it sometimes took more than a year to complete one *Jogakbo*.(Kim, 2012) However, it was also a way for women traditional Korean culture to express their creativity and sooth any emotional hardships locked in the role of women, locked inside the small world inside their home.(Kim, 2009, p.29) Therefore a good *Jogakbo* were stored preciously away for special occasions or to pass down for generations. (Kim, 2009, p.30)

2.3 *Obang* Colour in Food

The five colours appear also in food as each colour represents five tastes – red for salty taste, green for sweetness, yellow for sourness, white for spiciness and black for bitterness.(Kang, 2009) Koreans believed that harmony of those five colours and taste forms the complete and healthy food. The obvious example

of this is *Bibimbap* (mixed rice). It was considered an ideal food where the five colours and tastes harmonise together in one dish. The ingredients presents *Obang* colours; black from mushrooms, beef or bracken, red from carrots or shredded red pepper, white from bean sprouts, blue(green) from pumpkins or ginkgo nuts, yellow from egg. Another obvious example of it is *Ohoonchae*, five seasoned vegetables that was served at the coming of the spring. The types of vegetables varies by the region, but each vegetables represented each colour in *Obang* colour. The vegetables served as *Ohoonchae* includes scallions, *Sangat* (Korean native mustard leaves), angelica plant, sprout of water parsley, radish shoot, spring onion, garlic, wild chive, and purple onion. These vegetables were served according to Yin-Yang and Five Element theory where the yellow comes in the centre, blue(green) on the east, white on the west, red on the south and white on the north. (The National Folk Museum of Korea, 2012) Each vegetables also represented five viscera according to the theory and Koreans believed that eating *Ohoonchae* helps their body balance and improve their health. (Kwon, 2003, p.23) Another example is *Kimchi* (image 11), the symbolic Korean food. Though it appears dominantly red, it contains five colours in ingredients like in *Bibimbop*; white of cabbage, green from shallots and cabbage leaves, yellow from the core of the cabbage, garlic and ginger, red comes from red pepper powder, black from salted fishes. (Kang, 2009) *Kimchi* is also an example of how traditional Koreans perceive the colours conceptually; though it is red, it contains five colours in its ingredients and thus it is complete and healthy food. Moreover, the recipe for *Kimchi* includes the process of keeping it in a pot under the earth where the natural yeast and the warmth of earth finalises the taste of *Kimchi*. This reflects strong Korean belief of naturalism where people tried to live integrated to the nature. (Kang, 2009) Buckwheat was also an important ingredient where five colours all appear; the leaves are green, the flower is white, the stem is red, the fruit is black and the roots are yellow. It is traditionally said that when one consumes *Muk* (Jellied food) made from Buckwheat, he or she will become handsome and beautiful and they will be able to have son. It was also served as an offering to the god of the sea. (Moon, 2012, p.385)



Image 11. *Kimchi*.
Photo: FoodAD, 2012

Other than the symbolic colours by the taste, the appearance of the food was considered important. Therefore five coloured *Gomyoung* (Garnish, refer to table. 3) was developed, in which *Aljidan* (thinly sliced fried egg) creates white and yellow, Mushrooms create black or brown, stir-fried ginkgo nut creates blue, pine nut powder creates white and shredded red pepper creates red. (Moon, 2012) Each *Gomyoung* accompanied the food by their colour. For examples, in dark brown short-rib stew is served with white and yellow *Aljidan* on top and white steamed fish dish is served with yellow *Aljidan*, shredded red pepper and black mushrooms.

Five <i>Gomyoung</i>	Ingredients
Red	Red pepper, Jujube, Carrot, Fruit of <i>Maximowiczia typica</i> , Pine endodermis, Cockscomb.
Green(Blue)	Water parsley, Pumpkins, Cucumber, Small green onion, Crown daisy, Ramie, Mugwort.
Yellow	Egg yolk, Walnut, Sesame, Gardenia seeds
White	Egg white, White radish, Chinese cabbage, Rice powder, Flour
Black	Mushrooms, Dried seaweed(laver), Balck sesame

Table 3. Five Garnishes (Moon, 2012 p.384)

2.4 *Obang* Colour in rituals

By the ruling principle of Joseon Dynasty, Neo-confucianism, there were four ceremonial occasions of coming of age, wedding, funeral and ancestral rites. Each had set costumes and table settings which, although varies by the region, shares similar colour codings based on *Obang* colours and Yin-Yang and Five Element theory. Wedding and funerals today are practiced in both traditional and western way, yet coming of age and ancestral rites are still performed in simplified yet traditional way. Moon(2012) sees the worship of ancestors forms a basis of Korean culture. Indeed it is the rite that is held annually where other rites happens only once in the person's life time. Ancestral rite is a way to thank for the existence of oneself and remind where they come from. In Joseon Dynasty, it was widely encouraged by the government, where holding ancestral rites was considered the compulsory responsibility of the person. As the event of life and afterlife, in royal ancestral rites mainly white and black dress were used, where white represents Yang, the life and the black represents Yin, the afterlife. It was the harmonious meeting point of Yin and Yang and people believed that it will bring the good harvest for the year as well as the peace and safety of their children. The rite takes a form where the descendant serves a table of food and show their courtesy for their ancestors. Thus the table setting came under strict rule set up by the Yin-Yang and Five Element theory. Red fruits were put on the right hand side of the table, the white came in the left. The foods were cooked without red pepper or any other seasoning, even Kimchi were served white. Vegetables are limited to the white, green and dark coloured ones. All the members of the family wears mourning dress, typically white with black accent.

The Korean perception of colours and their symbology is an aggregate of various traditional philosophy such as ancient Korean shamanism, naturalism, Hanism and Yin-Yang and Five Element theory. The ancient Korean shamanism found three colours – red, blue and yellow – representing three elements of cosmos – Sky, earth and human respectively, which is reflected on the Korean national flag and many other traditional and contemporary design motifs. This later combines with the Yin-Yang and Five-element theory where the colour palette expands to five, adding white and black. The theory also formed a bases of Neo-Confucianism of Joseon Dynasty. The philosophy explained Korean the laws of cosmos using the five primary colours. The five primary colours called *Obang* colour represented direction, season, primary substances, mythical animals, taste, constant virtues, viscera, sensory organs and sound. Its influence was not only limited to the books but extended to each corner of everyday Korean life as observed in textiles, food and rituals.

In textiles, unique form called *Sekdong*, multicoloured strips appeared. The use of five colours were used as a blessing for one's health, wealth and general well-being. The colours, according to Yin-Yang and Five Element theory, had affinity and enmity relationship and the colour combination were following to this rule. The colours were laid out in their affinity pairs. In *Sekdong*, other colours such as green and pink appear, which falls under *Ogan* colour palette, the colours created when combining two primary colours. This was because they considered the harmony of the colour important influenced by Hanism, rather than use the contrast of the complementary primary colours by their relationship. This appear in the case of *Jogakbo*, the important Korean household item and the find art work of the traditional *Gyubang* culture. *Jogakbo* was the patchwork of scraps of leftover fabric, however, the colours were considered to create a harmonious tone by the affinity relationship of the colours.

The colour of the food was also important. Having a healthy diet in traditional Korean culture meant consuming the food composed of five colours. The

colours represented the five taste but its related symbology extended to five virtues and viscera. By consuming the five colours in harmony, traditional Koreans believed they will be able to achieve healthy life spiritually and physically. The colour of the food were determined by the physical appearance of each ingredients visible on the dish but also in the ingredients itself. For example, in *Bibimbab* we can clear see five ingredients physically display five colours. On the other hand, *Kimchi* and buckwheat appears red and brown in the eye but its ingredients displays the five colour and they were also considered complete. The garnish of the food called *Gomyoung* was also developed based on the five colour and they complimented and completed the dish by adding appropriate colours that the dish might lack.

As a Confucius country, during Joseon dynasty, there were four important ceremonial occasions of the life stage. The costumes and colours of each ceremony were determined again by the Korean beliefs. The ancestral rites that was considered even a compulsory responsibility of a person, was composed carefully by the colours used in the ceremony. As a ceremony that connects the life and the afterlife, white and black appeared the most in the costumes. Same applied for the food, red pepper and any seasoning were avoided and they were served white. The fruits were served by their colour and direction according to the Yin-Yang and Five element theory.

3. THE RED

3.1 Shamanistic Red

Red is the second most commonly used colour from *Obang* Colour after white for it taking the strong Yang segment – positive, bright, lively – and oppose Yin, the dark spirits.(Jeon, 2008) Like the colour white, red frequently appears in myths and stories of legends. For example, the founder of the Gaya Kingdom (AD 42~562), King Suro(AD.?~199) is told to bone from the red wrapping clothes, his wife, Queen Hur came on a boat with red sail. The founder of Goguryeo(BC. 37~AD. 668), King Dongmyoungsung's(BC. 58~18) real name was Joomong, where *Joo* in Korean means red. There also is a popular folk tale called Kongjui-Patjui, where strong association with red appears. The story goes as follow;

Once upon a time, during the mid-Joseon Dynasty, there lived a government official named Choe Man-chun. he lived a happy life in Jeollanam-do province, renowned as the breadbasket of the country, with his wife Cho and a daughter Kongjui. But his wife Cho suddenly died of illness. Most government officials in those days were financially well off, so Choe remarried a widow named Bae. They had a daughter named Patjui. For whatever reason, Patjui was a mean-tempered girl. In fact, Kongjui's stepmother Bae, and stepsister Patjui, began to abuse Kongjui in every way they could think of. Fortunately, a fairy came to Kongjui's rescue and she was able to marry the top official of the country. Kongjui's stepmother and Patjui then came up with a wicked plan to get rid of Kongjui, and they succeeded by drowning her in a pond. Kongjui, however, returns to life and takes revenge against her stepmother and sister.(the origin of the story is unknown, extracted from Koo, 2012)

Koo(2002) explains that hearing story as above as a child, Koreans develop strong impressions about *Kong*(bean) and *Pat*(red bean) where red is strongly associated with the evil. In traditional Korean rituals, red bean often plays a significant role, where it is believed to repel the evil spirits.

The obvious example is found on seasonal rituals and the food served for each. By the Yin-Yang and Five Element theory, the sun represents Yang and the



Image 12. *Patjuk*
(adzuki-bean porridge)
Photo: FoodAD, 2012

moon represents Yin. The twenty-four seasonal division was determined by the movement of the two. For example, *Dongji*(winter solstice) is the twenty-second division of the year. It is the day of the year where the night is the longest, the day is the shortest. Koreans believed it was the day where the Yin spirits reaches its peak of the year. To balance Yin and Yang, red *Pakjuk*(image 12, adzuki-bean porridge) with small rice cake dumpling was prepared. Prepared *Pakjuk* was made as an offering to the spirits and left at various places inside the house such as each rooms in the house, shed and on top of a crock. When it cools completely, the family gathered and ate it. The leftover adzuki-beans were sprinkled near the doors and walls.(The National Folk Museum of Korea, 2012 and Koo, 2002, p.68) Eating, leaving and sprinkling red adzuki-bean and *Patjuk* was shamanistic ritual to cast away the bad spirits. Red was the colour of Yang and Koreans believe the bad spirits(Yin) were scared of the colour red. On the other hand it was also a day to celebrate as the day(sun) starts to get longer. Therefore a nickname for *Dongji* was ‘small New Year’s Day.’ Thus the red also connotes blessing that brings good luck. As previously mentioned, rice cake called *Shiroddeok*(steamed rice cake with red adzuki-bean covering) was shared as well. White base of the rice cake is the holy, spiritual and purifying colour. Combined with red of adzuki-bean, it amplifies the Yang power. This rice cake was not only served for *Dongji* but also to mark the beginning of the new project, work or life, such as at *Gosa*(a shamanistic ritual in which food is offered to the spirits in order to avoid misfortune and bring good luck) and when moved to the new neighbour. This tradition continues in contemporary Korean culture.



Image 13. Traditional *Jori*
Photo: Lee, Do-young, 2012

In the same vein, Koreans brought a whole year worth of *Jori*(image 13), at the beginning of every year, strung with red thread. *Jori* is a traditional Korean strainer woven with straw. As its primary function is to filter unwanted things – say small rocks from rice - out, it was hung around the house to filter out bad sprits entering from the outside. Red string here also signifies Yang spirit, which protects the household and became a symbol for good luck. Today, *Jori* is replaced with stainless strainer. However, in the new years season, the traditional *Jori* is still a popular item for purchase, yet now as a small gift toy version with red ribbon, wishing a good luck for the year.(Image 14, Encyclopedia of Korean Culture & the Academy of Korean Studies, 2010) Similarly, *Boojuk*(a written amulet on a small piece of paper by monks or shamans) is always written in red ink. When the baby boy is born, red pepper were hung across the main gate to the house. (Kwon, 2003)



Image 14. Contemporary *Jori* as a gift item comes with fortune pocket and red ribbon.
Photo: Im, Hark-hyoen, 2012

3.2 Red and display of social class

The use of vivid red on textile can penetrate stronger impression than its form. Therefore, it was actively utilised by the ruling class to assert their power and authority. Moreover as previously mentioned, various myths associates the King with the colour red. Red was also a colour of the noble class. During the Joseon Dynasty, red clothing was only reserved for royal classes, especially the King and the Queen.(Woo, 2005) Besides, vivid red was the hard colour to achieve in traditional society.(Lee & Kim, 2006) For this reason, the colour red also meant wealth and prosperity for the commoners. The rank of the government officials were distinguished by the colour of their uniforms. In *Gyeongguk Daejeon*(Book that recodes complete code of law, acts, customs and ordinances, published in 1485), it clearly states specific and colour and its tone for each rank of government official. The King wears bright red, first and second ranking officials wear red, third to sixth ranking officials wear blue, seventh and lower ranking officials wear green. The commoners were banned from silk or patterned clothings with exception to special occasions such as weddings.(Kwon, 2003, p.21) Outside the palace, the government

officials enjoyed wearing white to show off their candidness and intellectuality as previously mentioned. However, they also enjoyed wearing ornaments and put accent to their fashion. For example, instead of their black official hat, they wore black *Gat* (Korean traditional hat made of horsehair), it served a function of a hat but also a shade, which hid part of their eyes. On white *Dopo*, they wore *Jasek* (dark red, almost brown coloured) rope belt with knot decoration. Gardenia seeds, the dye for *Jasek* was rare in Korea, therefore although the colour falls under *Ogan* colour palette, its colour was favoured by the noble class.



Image 15. Morando
Image: National Palace Museum of Korea, 2012

Moran (Peony blossom) flower was one of the common subject drawn on folk paintings (image 15). Differ to other plants appearing on the Korean paintings, *Moran* was portrayed in their realistically red colour in exaggerated yet detailed way as a bunch. *Moran*, for their splendid beauty and colour signified prosperity.

Therefore the paintings of red *Moran* flower were used to decorate the rooms for newlyweds, wishing them to flourish their wealth and happiness with many children. (Kim, 2007) The appreciation of *Moran* is apparent in various historic and folk tales. *Seulchong* (618~692), the philosopher of Sila era (B.C. 57~A.D. 935) wrote a story called *Hwawanggae* (The tale of the Flower King). Basic plot of the story is about the Flower King, *Moran*, who wonders whether to listen to the beauty, rose, or the loyal retainer White headed elder, pasqueflower. Han (2006) finds the reason for this personification from the shape and colour of *Moran*. *Moran* has strong and thick roots. The Koreans thought shoot of *Moran* was similar to penis. The peony blossom is red. Therefore *Moran* was categorised in Yang segment and retained positive perception. *Moran* was also a precious flower, personified as the King of the Flowers, which later developed into the symbol of fortune, prosperity and long life. (Han, 2006, p. 30-34) The significance of *Moran* varies according to its accompanying subject. Firstly to bless a person to live in splendour of wealth and honour, *Moran* was drawn with roses. Second, to celebrate birth of a child or a birthday, painting of *Moran* drawn with rock and peach blossom was presented. Third, to wish a newlyweds for long lasting love, *Moran* was painted with pasqueflower. Fourthly, to wish a household for wealth and honour, sweetbrier accompanied *Moran*. Fifthly but last, to help a scholar to succeed in his career, a painting of *Moran*, sweetbrier and yulan was presented. (Han, 2006, p.54~55) The tone of the colour in *Moran* painting also varied from palace painting to folk painting as well; the painting used to decorate the palace was lower in tone, yet in folk painting the brighter and crispier colour was preferred. This was because that commoners used the painting more for a shamanistic reasons. In palaces, lower tone was preferred to follow Confucius teachings and Hanism. (Han, 2006, p.61)



Image 16. Bongsan Mask for a character *Chuiibali*, the heroic character.
Photo: Im, hark-hyoen. 2012

On the contrary to the colour red for the royals, it was also used frequently in traditional Korean mask dance for the heroic characters (image 16). Red, in Yin-Yang and the five element theory stands for summer and vitality. Thus it was used to portray brave, young heroes who triumphs and thunders over old or corrupted aristocrats. The darker shade of red was used for complaint slave characters that would openly criticise their higher-ups. As typical Korean mask dance was a social satire for common people, thus the red here expresses the resistance towards superficial authorities in a humorous way. (Kim, 2002 and Encyclopaedia of Korean Culture & the Academy of Korean Studies, 2010)

3.4 Red with other colours

Red, when combined with blue was considered to form completeness; *Taeguk*. This red and blue Yin-Yang is distinctive Korean culture, where the influences from folk shamanism are evident. The colour combination was used in various



Image 17. Traditional Wedding
Photo: Im, hark-hyoen. 2012

design motifs and ceremonies such as wedding. The wedding in Korea was considered an event of Yin(female) and Yang(male) uniting together in harmony, therefore the prominent colours used in the ceremony was red and blue. Although the commoners of the Joseon Dynasty were banned from wearing bright and colourful clothes, they were allowed to wear them for weddings as it was considered an important matter of life.

The groom wore the official uniform. Therefore it varied by the rank of the person however the commoners were allowed to wear the uniform for their wedding(Image 17). Typically blue(navy) or *Jasek*(dark red) uniforms were worn. (The Korean Traditional Costume & Culture, 2012) The blue makes pair with the bride's red dress, while *Jasek* were considered noble.(Lee, 2011, p.160) The bride's red wedding dress followed the form of ceremonial dress of the royal family. The red dress was decorated colourfully with *Moran* patterns. Inside the red outer-dress, yellow jacket and red skirt were worn, which forms the affinity relationship with red. On the tip of the sleeve, *Sekdong* appears. Like the case of *Kkachidooroomagi*, the multicoloured strips were used for bride's dress to represent the harmony and as a blessing to protect the bride from the bad spirits. The bride wore red make-up called *Yeon-ji*(red rouge on the cheeks and the forehead). Lee(2011, p.44) finds its origin from shamanistic beliefs on red, which repels the bad. In other cases, women wore *Yeon-ji* make up when the infectious disease spread around the village or in *Dano*, the fifth day of the fifth month of the year to protect themselves from the misfortune.

Other elements involved in wedding ceremony display red and blue again. The colour combination signified the unification of the two. *Cheongsachorong* is the name of the silk lantern which was used to light the road for the groom's parade from his house to the brides's where the ceremony was held. Top half of the lantern was red and the bottom half was in blue.(Moon, 2012) All wrapping clothes used in the ceremony were also in red and blue. Differ to *Jogakbo*, where the patchwork uses the colours, the wrapping clothes used here differed in colour on each side to represent the two coming as come. *Hahm*, the gift box that bride and groom sent to each other's house before the wedding were wrapped in this wrapping cloth. The box from the groom to the bride was wrapped so that the red come outside and vice versa. Each presents and documents involved in the ceremony was also wrapped and enveloped in red and blue wrapping clothes.

At the ceremony, red and blue appears again. At the beginning of the ceremony, the parents of the couple light up the blue and red candle. Red and blue thread bunch is exchanged, blessing for long lasting love. The symbol of love, the coupled wild goose or ducklings are wrapping in red and blue wrapping clothes.

Like the case of the wedding costumes, except for the case of white, Koreans wore two or more colours, considering the colour relationship by Yin-Yang and Five element theory. The examples show as below (table 4).

Red-Blue	Red-Yellow	White-Red	Red-Red
Represents a union of two, thus a marriage. (affinity pair)	The combination was used in royal servant's uniform, shaman's performance and with <i>Sekdong</i> . (affinity pair)	used to create vivid contrast and make impression in shamanistic rituals. (enmity pair)	Different tones of red were used for the female clothes to supplement them with strong Yang spirits.

Table 4. Colour used with red in traditional Korean Culture (Kwon, 2003 p.28)



Image 18. Danchoeng at Gyeongbokgung palace
Photo: Ahn Graphics, 2012

Influenced by strong naturalism and Hanism, Korean traditional architecture avoids the use of artificial colours. The natural colour of the mud, straw, timber, stone and roof tiles were used without any colouring. Especially during Joseon Dynasty, colouring of the architecture were banned except for the case of royal palaces and the Buddhist temples. The bluish-grey tone of the roof tiles easily integrate with the surrounding greens. The colour of straw, mud and timber naturally stands on the yellow colour of earth. The interior was the same. The wall paper, the flooring and as explained earlier the window paper was in its *Sosek*, creating rather cozy and comfortable atmosphere. (Joo 1980 and Kwon 2001) Moon(1998) finds the reason from Korean natural environment, which is temperate and composed of hills and fields. The colouring of the palaces and the Buddhist temples also displays this tendency of naturalistic approach. In traditional Korean architecture, the paintwork below the rooftop tiles was called *Dancheong* (image 18, literally means red and blue) and it was decorated again with *Obang* colours, where the red takes the major part. Practically, it protected the wood from being weathered, hid the rough surfaces of pine timber. However it was also used to separate the building from the rest, the splendour of colours imposes a majestic air in the palaces and dignifies the temples. (Lee, 2008) *Dancheong* at palaces depicted the dignity and prosperity of the ruling power, *Dancheong* at temples often portrayed the stories from Buddhist scriptures. For the surfaces of the building, Koreans used vivid colours as an accent such as yellow to brighten up the building. Inside the building, the petrol blue was used to highlight the light coloured decorations by maximising the contrast. However, the use of complementary colour borrows the colour of nature – the red trunk of pine tree complemented with green leaves and the feather of mallard and pheasant. (Kang 2002) Evidently, the pillars of the building were painted red and *Dori* and *Changbang* (the supporting part for the rooftop of the Korean architecture) were painted in green following the colour of the nature. Yak-yong Jeong, philosopher, scientist and politician of eighteenth century wrote that the colours of *Dancheong* symbolises health and peace of this life and embeds the prayer for the afterlife. (Lee, 2008) A study by Kwon(2003) on Korean red also proves naturalistic and Hanistic approach taken by *Dancheong*. In his study, he compared the colour of Korean, Japanese and Chinese traditional architecture.

As the three shares the culture of Yin-Yang and Five Element theory, general colour palette shared the similar colour coding. However, the colours use in Korean *Dancheong*, compared to others had a low chroma to avoid high contrast to the natural surroundings.(Kwon, 2003, p.58)

3.5 Red and changing meanings in contemporary society



Image 19. The Red Devil cheering Merchandise with the image of Chiwoochunwang
Photo: Im, Hark-hyeon, 2012

While the industrialisation and westernisation of the Korean culture changed or added new layers of meanings to the colours, the traces of the traditional Korean red still remain today. The first example is the piggy bank(image 19), which was first introduced in Korea around 1970s. Coincided with and encouraged by the ethics of *Saemaulundong* movement - saving every penny for country's greater economic benefits - piggy bank quickly became a popular household item. Though it was cheaply mass-produced, its design ironically evoked the images of wealth by using red colour with gold lettering saying 'fortune.' It takes its connotation from traditional Korean design where red connoted wealth and was believed to bring fortune(Kim, 2009). Another example would be the name for cheering Squad for national soccer team, which became popular around 2002 Korea-Japan World cup. The name first appeared in 1983, where the Korean youth soccer team made it to semi-finals. Taken by surprise, foreign media used 'red furies' to describe the team. It translated into 'Red Devils' and the cheering squad took the name from this. The red represents passion and courage both in traditional contemporary sense. The colour red is also known to have emotional effect on people by exciting them(Moon, 2010). In 2002, combined with Korea-Japan World Cup and television commercials actively promoting the brand together with the Red Devils, tremendous number of people gathered around the squares and streets to cheer for the Korean team. The scene was captured by many foreign media as well as Korean media and has been indicated to be a distinctive 'Korean' culture(Kim 2012 and Suh, 2010). The graphic identity borrowed the powerful image from mythical character called Chiwoochunwang and combined it with the colour red(image 20).



Image 20. The Red Devil cheering Merchandise with the image of Chiwoochunwang
Photo: Im, Hark-hyeon, 2012

Although Kwon(2003) finds the phenomena related to the traditional perception of red that remained in Korean mind, the welcoming of red was quite unusual in contemporary Korea. This was due to changed perception on red. The colour red became synonymous to communism after the World War Two and independence of Korea from Japanese occupation(1910~1945). The conflict of ideology between communism and liberalism and Korean War(1950~1953) soon followed the independence. Despite the traditional positive perception on red, in South Korea what Kang, Joonman, the journalist calls 'Red Complex' developed and the colour red was avoided. According to Kang, Red Complex refers to social pathology where the exaggerated fear and threat from the communist North, represented by the colour red extends to where the obvious violation of human rights are tolerated for it.(Kang, 1997) The drastic and rapid turn of the perception of red, needlessly to say, were taken by surprise by many scholars such as a literary critic, Lee, Ehryeong and Joo, Kanghun, the professor of Folk Culture Study Lab, in which they remarked this as "Revolution of Image." (Kwon, 2003, p.15).

The strong impression of the colour red is reflected in its strong associations. In traditional Korean society, the colour red was a noble colour, considered above others, after white. In this context, red was actively utilised in everyday life based on shamanistic belief that it repels bad spirits. This belief was backed up by Yin-Yang and Five Element theory but also by various myths from ancient Korea and popular folk takes such as *Kongjui-Patjui*, which remarked strong impression in Korean mind. *Patjuk* and *Shirooddeok* are exemplary of this

deep-rooted belief. Similarly, traditional Korean household purchased bunch of *Jori* at the beginning of the year and strung it with red thread to filter out bad spirits, Shamans wrote an amulet only with red ink and red pepper were hung across the main gate of the house when the baby boy was born. Despite the change of the era, above traditional rituals still continues while others has faded away. This, on the other hand, proves how strongly the perception on red is rooted in Korean culture.

Red was also used to assert authority of the ruling class. During Joseon Dynasty, social class was clearly distinguished by the set colours of costumes. This colour coding system of the social class was enforced by the fundamental law, where the bright red was only allowed for the royal family. Top ranking officials' uniforms were in toned down red and others were prohibited from wearing red except for the important occasions such as Weddings. For this reason, red also meant prosperity to the commoners and thus red was also utilised as a blessing for wealth and honour. Good example of this is *Moran* paintings. *Moran* was often called to be the king of the flowers for their splendour of blossom and bright red colour. Its symbology has developed and extended to signify fortune, wealth, prosperity and long life. There were various types of *Moran* painting, classified by the use and the subject appear with Moran, in which all connotes wishes for wealth, honour, success and long life. Red not only implied authority but also power. In traditional Korean Masked dance, red masked characters were the heroes of the story, who thunders and triumphs over old or corrupted aristocrats. The darker the tone, the more satiric the character became. This, in turn, the way the commoners of traditional society express their resistance towards the authority in a humorous way.

Red was often used with other colours and the meaning got enriched. It was also natural for Koreans to use red with other colours to create harmony as the traditional belief emphasised on harmony. Wedding is a good example showing how red with blue creates new symbology; love and harmony. Traditional Korean wedding involves many costumes and objects that are in red and blue. The costume of groom and bride are in red and blue, the wrapping clothes and envelopes used in the different stages of ceremony were two-sided where one side was red and the other blue. *Cheonsachorong* lantern that lit the parade of the groom was also half red and half blue. The use of red with blue therefore signified the coming of two in harmony, and therefore love of the couple. Red with yellow is in affinity relationship according to Yin-Yang and Five Element theory and therefore was considered to bring fortune. It is typical colour combination appearing on girl's costumes, royal servant's uniform, shaman's performance and in colour arrangement in *Sekdong*. Red with white are enmity pair, which creates sharp contrast and it was used to mark strong impression. Another good example of red colour combination is *Dancheong*, where red and blue(green) were utilised to make the architecture integrate with the surrounding nature. The colours reflect the red trunk of pine trees and green needles.

Although the colour red enjoyed its firm position as a noble colour, in the history of modern Korea its meanings has changed drastically. Some coding of red remained as apparent on the example of piggy bank where red evokes prosperity and wealth as of *Moran*. However, its association with communism and 'Red Complex' in South Korea shifted its symbology to enemy and evoked South Koreans of agony from the Korean War. Nonetheless, this negative connotation flips again in 2002 where the Red Devil phenomena inverted the meaning of red as passionate and young. Many remarked this as 'revolution of image.'

4. CONTEMPORARY COLOURS

4.1 Modernisation of Black and Gray

The transition from traditional Korean society to the contemporary has witnessed influx of foreign influences. Not until the declaration of Open-door policy in 1876, Joseon Dynasty kept its doors closely locked. The beginning of Open-door policy to foreign – majorly western and western modernised Japanese culture – and following occupation by Japan brought rapid changes in traditional life of Koreans. Not only their influences were strong but their propaganda shouted out for ‘modern’ culture that the traditional Korean values are superstitious, outdated and that the modern culture is progressive and celebrative.(Kim, 2008) Consequently, strong held beliefs and traditional values faded and inevitably the Korean perceptions on colours shifted.

During this period of transition, the drastic change came in the colour black. Traditionally, it was the colour of death, winter and sadness. While traditional Koreans favoured wearing white, wearing black was avoided and considered to bring bad luck. However, introduction of westernised private schools brought changes to this perception. At first, as there were negative connotation with the colour black, so the first uniform came in purple and white and in *hanbok*(traditional Korean costume)-style.(image 21) However the high-class scholars lamented and complained about how it can cause chaos in Korean social system.(Kim, 2011) Hence, this gradually turned into black and white, as the Western or Japanese western style uniform was introduced. Here, the colour black signaled the introduction of new social class and became the symbol of the modern and western civilisation, progressive and intelligent mind.(Lee and Kim 2006 and Kim, 2011)



Image 21. *high-school* uniform in 1925.
Photo: Ehwa Girl's High-school Archive, 2012

Black continued to represent modernity and as the westernisation continues, black gained new values such as prestige, bold, stylish and avant-garde. (Lee & Kim, 2006 and Ramstad 2011) Alongside with black, new meanings on Grey have been introduced as it represents new technology and futurism where in traditional culture it represented low-class and a symbol for ascetic life of monks.(Lee & Kim 2006) A recent study by Hyundai-Kia Motor Co. shows striking result that nine out of ten cars in Korea are white, black or silver. (Ramstad 2011) The result mirrors this new tendency of contemporary Koreans towards colours.

However, Kim(2002) suggests another perspective on the phenomena. She explains in her study of colours of costumes that vivid colours were traditionally used to distinguish social class as of the case of red – the royal class, which is only allowed for commoners in ceremonial occasions such as wedding. Therefore, the colours in textile divide into two segment of life where bright colours are considered to be appropriate for special occasions and achromatic for everyday. The contemporary trend of cars and fashion could also be the reflection of this rooted idea of colours.

4.2 The Government invention of the Korean Colour

Soon after the World War Two and consequent independence from Japanese occupation, Korea again faced the Korea War and the historical building and rituals turned into the ashes of the war. Building up the country, almost from zero, Korean government actively promoted and propagated various movements and activities, calling people to help rebuild the country. These propagandas emphasised on the ‘Koreaness’, instilling patriotism. However, their attempts to define the ‘Koreaness’ were often censored by authoritarian government and reflected the political stance or the mere personal taste of the ruling government of the time.

This was the most apparent in the case of the authoritarian government from 1963 to 1979 under Park, Jonghee, the longest serving president in Korea. He actively utilised colours in government propagandas calling for people under passionate patriotism, which often reflected his political stance, belief and personal taste. For example, Park saw white as the colour to define the 'Koreaness'. He believed the use of traditional *Obang* colour was pre-modern, superstitious and replaced with white or creamy white which was named after him. The colourful *Dancheong* was removed during the restoration of historical buildings; the concrete architectures of the time followed the form of wooden architecture of Joseon dynasty yet was painted white. This ironically reflects his denial over the traditional culture from Joseon dynasty, which coincides with the defined *Beauty of Korea* by Yanagi Muneyoshi of the Japanese occupation period. The power of this authoritarian government extends to influence the colour of significant architecture, controlling the design by the mere personal taste. The exemplary architect of this is the house of parliament. There were three architects working on the original design of the building without the dome yet the politicians of the time demanded that they need the dome to show the



Image 22. Saemaul Movement merchandises
Photo: Im, Hark-hyeon, 2012

authority of the house of parliament like of Japan and United States. Without the architects' consent, the house of parliament went on built with light pastel blue dome, which was coincidentally the colour that the first-lady of the time favoured. (Kim, 2008)

Exemplary political movement and propaganda of this period is *Saemaulundong* (The New Community Movement). The movement was promoted through various mediums; there were *Saemaul* song, *Saemaul* exercise routine, television propagandas yet among them the most prominent was the logo, composed of yellow pictogram of rice on a green background. Various merchandise (image 9) such as caps and flags using this green and yellow logo were distributed around the agricultural community.(Image 22) The colours were tactfully chosen to reinforce the identity of Park; Green on a surface level represents agricultural field together with yellow rice symbol, but it also represent Park's political stance who led the military takeover, where green evokes the camouflage of the military uniform; and lastly it was chosen as an

opposing colour to red, which represented their enemy, the communist North. (Kim, 2012) The movement rapidly spread over every corner of the everyday life of Koreans. Every government offices hung *Saemaul* flag alongside with South Korean national flag, the public train was renamed after the movement in 1970s and its colour was converted to green and yellow from blue and red.

The main ethics of the movement stressed the importance of the teamwork within the community and furthermore the whole country. In uniting the whole country under the movement, the government used the model of enemy – the North represented by red. It is also observed in TV cartoon series, infusing anticommunist ideas to children. The most popular cartoon series of the time were *Ddoli Jangun*(the General Dolli, 1978), *Robort Taegwon V*(1976) and *Taegwon dongja Maruchi Arachi*(Taegwon kids Maruchi Arachi, 1977). The cartoons commonly share the story of brave child character who fights against red enemies representing the communists who appears in a form of animals – often in pigs. The stories also mirrored the social issues of the time. For example, in *Ddoli Jangun*, one of the episode was called Third Underground Tunnel, which refers to the North Korean underground tunnel discovered in 1978.(Kim, 2008)

The success on promotion and implementation of the movement spread across the country and has resulted in rapid industrialisation and economic development of the time, which was called ‘the miracle of Han River.’ In the promotion of the movement, the colours were tactfully utilised, instilling patriotism in the Korean mind. However the ‘Koreaness’ implied by Park’s government often lacked in-depth understanding on the Korean traditional culture and an attempt to observe and develop upon what already existed. This reflects typical practice of Nationalism, where the government ‘invents’ the National image by referring to and highlighting certain point of time in history. From this, Hobsbawm(1992) explains that the traditions we believe to be existed long enough are in face invented in recent years. Park’s invented ‘Koreaness’ is a good example of it as though his invented Korea lacked links to traditional Korea culture. However, ironically it still is considered a typical image of modern Korea.(Kim, 2008)



Image 23. Seoul Orange colour Taxi design by City of Seoul.
Photo: Lee, Do-young, 2012

Similar attempts to define the ‘Koreaness’ led by government still continue. City of Seoul introduced new colour for taxi based on their colour study in 2009. The new design is painted in the colour of red clay, extracted from mud wall colours of traditional Korean architecture, which was named as ‘Seoul Orange.’ (Image 23) The City of Seoul announced that they anticipate the new colour palettes to liven up Seoul environment, which is primarily grey and that they ultimately hope that this new design will establish itself as a part of the City of Seoul brand identity.(City of Seoul, 2009 and City of Seoul, 2012) However Korean designers on the field are cynical towards this opinion as City of Seoul borrows colours from the traditional landscape, which vastly differ from contemporary Korea.They assert that it is insufficient to truly reflect contemporary Korean culture or identity. (Jang, 2012)

4.3 Political parties and Colours

The western political system was new to Korea who just found its independence from long occupation from Japan. Much western – or international colour coding of political stance is also apparent in Korea as well. For example, Hanara party, the conservative party of Korean politics used blue colour to represent their political stance, which complies with international trend of political colour. The blue colour connotes peace, cleanness and freshness.(Wikipedia, 2012) However, interestingly enough, Saenoori party – the conservative party of Korean politics branched out from the old Hanara party – uses the red colour in

attempts to escape the old imagery of Hanara party. The official representative explained that the new colour was taken from Red Devils to represent passion of the youth.(Design House, 2012) However the choice of colour was widely ridiculed for being pretentious, as people saw no difference or change in members of the party. It is also interesting as internationally red represents communist party in political sense, which in South Korea connotes the North, which was actively promoted to be their enemy in 1970.(Kim, 2008) Yellow is internationally commonly used for Liberals and the same applies to Korea. At the Korean national funeral for the sixteenth president of Korea, people gathered to mourn for his death and held yellow balloons or scarfs, which was used in his election campaign. The former president committed suicide while being interrogated for bribery charges. His supporters understood his suicide as his innocence and they brought yellow items to show their political support. It made a rare scene of funeral covered in yellow, which is non-precedential. (Hwang et al., 2009) Hence, the political colours in Korea can be understood to generally follow the international representation of the political philosophy – red for communism, yellow for liberal and blue for conservative, which differs from traditional Korean colour beliefs.

4.4. Practical colours



Image 24. Rubber Gloves
Photo: Im. Hark-hyone, 2012



Image 25. Italy Towel
Photo: Im. Hark-hyone, 2012

The development of technology has expanded the Korean colour palette. However, the rapid advancement and implementation of the technology also resulted in the colour applied without much consideration compared to the traditional Korean colours. Rather, what was available and practical was what was taken. It lacks deep symbology, yet it mirrors unique Korean culture. For example, colour of contemporary cityscape is determined by apartment, a form of house taken by majority of the Korean living in the metropolis area. From early days apartments kept achromatic colour on its surfaces. It was an economic choice as practical functioning of the apartment was considered foremost. The result is regular design of apartment throughout Korea creating achromatic cityscape.(Jang & Lee, 2009 and Park, 2007) Aluminium food container for delivery became popular for its practicality again; it easy to maintain and clean than the original wooden container. The bright silver of aluminium also makes the contained food feel hygienic.(Choi, 2009) Another example is found in everyday Korean household items. Korean rubber gloves typically in red or pink.(Image 24.) Rubber gloves were first introduced in Korea around 1970, at the period of the rapid industrialisation and modernisation. This new product was adopted to suit the Korean lifestyle and red colour came from there. Rubber gloves are typically used for washing dishes in Korea. However its another important usage is to protect hand when marinating *Kimchi*, which leaves strong red stain that does not come off easily. For this reason, red was chosen as the typical colour of rubber gloves in Korea.(Yoo, 2007 and Wingwave, 2002) Italy Towel(Image 25), a widespread scrubber(flannel) in Korea, made of a fabric from Italy was first introduced in 1962. Then, green was the only colour available in Korea and so was the product. Though the colour was chosen unintentionally, the green colour became to represent the product itself, where no other colours were introduced to the market until recently.(Choi, 2009)

4.5 Colours applied in contemporary product design

Industrialisation of Korea has also boosted the development of commercial graphic design in food, which was absent in traditional Korean society. The colour here plays important role; leaving impression and further developing into the representative of the product itself. Shin Ramyeon instant noodle soup is an example, the representative of the Korean instant noodle. It was first introduced in 1986. The instant noodle soup was a modern food that never existed in traditional Korean cuisine. It rather came from Japanese influence.



Image 26. *Soju* package design by Jinro
Photo: Im. Hark-hyone, 2012

However, Shin Ramyeon adopted the recipe and developed its unique spicy taste and quickly became the most popular instant noodle in Korea. Its success also lies in its effective package design using intense contrast of red and black to evoke the strong spicy taste of the noodle soup (Choi, 2009). This colour arrangement is hard to find in traditional design. Another example would be packaging for *Soju* (image 26, Korean distilled spirit), the most familiar drink for the common Koreans. Its green bottle design was first introduced in 1993 to reflect the motif from a bamboo tree by Jinro. They also updated their cooperate identity accordingly; from black toad to green. It was effective to advertise both traditional and nature-friendly image of the manufacture (Lee, 2010, p.147) and communicate the drink that's clean, easy and soft to your body and was successful in attracting female consumers who avoided the drink for its strong taste. This is similar to the case of *Songpyeon* and modern Korean literature where the green colour of nature is used to represent healthiness and vitality of life. However, the arrangement of colours used in above cases are far from *Obang* colour and it is hard to consider both in the same vein. Therefore Jinro succeeds in presenting the traditional drink fashionably, while still making reference to the traditional colour coding. (Lee, 2010, p.152) Following its success other *Soju* manufactures started to make their bottles green making it the significant colour that represent the drink itself regardless of the brand. (Park, 2009) Above two examples show that in contemporary Korea the colours in design rather directly related to the image that they are promoting. The example also suggests that the perception on colours in Korea is ever changing according to the social but also commercial landscape.

4.6 Contemporary colour through modern literature

A study by Park (2010) revises the modern Korean literature from last hundred years. Comparing the result from Park's study with the traditional colour symbology examined from Joseon Dynasty is another way to understand how the contemporary Korean perception on colours has changed or remained from the traditional one.

White and black are two colours that has generally kept its symbology from traditional culture to today. *Flag of Sentiments* (1960) by Kim, Nam-jo, *Have You Heard of that Far Away Country?* (1939) by Shin, Sukjung both utilises a metaphor of 'white sand' and 'white goat' to portray innocence and pureness of mind. In *Green Grapes* (1939), Lee, Yuk-sa longs for lost country by writing that he is waiting for the day when the "a boat with white sail comes", where the 'white sail' symbolises independent Korea and Korean culture. On the other hand, in *Platanus* (1953), Kim, Hyungseung, describe of 'black sand' where the soul resides, thus, the death. Han,

Younghoon, in his poem *We Cannot Know* (1926), compares the period of Japanese occupation to the 'black clouds', as the symbol of hardship and deep agony and juxtapose it with 'blue sky' where the persona sees the hope. In traditional Korean colour system, white symbolised innocence and pureness and the black represents the death and sadness. The poems above follows the same symbolism. Comparing Korean culture to white is also to note as the traditional Korean were called 'the white-clad folks'. However, spiritual power and the importance of harmony of Yin and Yang seem to have weaken; the white is no longer described as holy and the 'black cloud' was juxtaposed with blue sky instead of white.

Similarly, red remains as a symbol of vitality of life, passion and love. However it seems to have lost its powerful spiritual Yang power that repels the bad. In modern poetry, red is often used to describe the colour of the flower and fruits to symbolise the vitality of life, passion and love for the country. It was often

utilised to reflect persona's longing for the independence of the country. For examples, Lee, Yuk-sa in his poem *Flower*(1946), praises for the red flower that blossoms at the end, despite the hardship of the winter. The vitality of life that overcomes the hardship symbolises his belief that in the end the independence of the country will come.

In traditional culture, green was the colour of the nature and symbolised the vitality of life. It is applied the same in modern literature. In traditional Korean colour system, green falls in *Ogan* colours. Although it was not considered as important as *Obang* colours, it appears frequently in Korean rituals and life, as a symbol of nature and life. For example, during the autumn Moon festival, it is the tradition of Korea to serve the rice cake called *Songpyeon*. It was served in many colours but mainly white of rice and green of mugwort. The rice cake was cooked with the pine needles and it was believed that by doing so the rice cake would absorb the vitality of life from the pine tree, which is green throughout the year. Green version was used to reinforce the healthiness of this rice cake, which was believed to cure sickness.(Hong, 1999) In modern poetry, green appears also to symbolise the nature and its vitality of life. 'Green trees' in Suhr, Jung-joo's *Chunhyang Says No.3*(1955) and 'Green Grapes' in Lee, Yuk-sa's *Green Grapes*(1939) are the example.

Blue on the other hand enriched its meaning in modern literature as a symbol of hope, ideal future, innocence, peacefulness and vitality of the young. In traditional sense, it was the colour of spring. However it was not as favoured as white or red as the other two were considered more important for shamanistic reasons. Therefore the modern literature can be said to extend the symbology of the tradition as the spiritual and shamanistic approach to the colour symbology fades. 'Blue sky' is the most frequent metaphor appearing in various poems such as *Arbor*(1940) by Lee, Yuk-sa, *The doves of Seoungbukdong*(1968) by Kim, Kwangsub and *Would You Understand How I Feel*(1930) by Kim, Youngrang. It is used to symbolise the ideal, the peaceful world, and innocence, respectively.

On the other hand, darker or louder tone of blue was used to represent loneliness, heartlessness, sorrow and melancholy of modernised city life. Kim, Keerim and Shin, Kyeounglim in their poem *Sea and butterfly*(1939), *Love Song of the Poor*(1988) portray 'deep-blue moon.' The metaphor represents the cold-hearted reality and loneliness from unavoidable yet cruel reality and from being poor in the harsh city life. It is more apparent in Kim, Kwangyun's *Outsider's Village*(1939), where the 'blue light' of the station symbolises modernisation, introduction of new technology that also brought melancholy and sorrow of living in the city. This is new tendency in colour symbolism as the traditional colour symbology display distinctive 'positive'(Yang) and 'negative'(Yin) colours. The colour blue has now extended so that both positive and negative connotations are included in his symbolism.

The transition from traditional culture to of today involved rapid industrialisation, modernisation, westernisation and influx of strong foreign influences. As a result, traditional philosophies are regarded superstitious and old-fashioned. The colour system that was established upon those has faded. Some rituals and symbology remains yet again the connection to the traditional culture is weak as it loses shamanistic value.

The highlight of the change is observed in colour black and grey, where their connotation reversed. Black was considered the colour of death, sadness and winter. Today, it is the symbol of modernism; it is progressive, sophisticated, bold and fashionable. It set new social class in modern Korea with introduction of school uniforms. Only the poor and monks wore grey clothing in traditional Korea, however grey today is futuristic and represents new technology. As the

traditional Korean favoured white clothing, today people favour only black or grey cars.

After the World War Two and the Korean War, South Korean government had various attempt in defining Korean colours to reunite people under Nationalism and rebuild the country from the ashes of the war. However, the lost connection to the tradition, together with authoritarian government, only a fragments of traditional culture was retrieved, which suits the taste of the ruling government. Under the government of Park, *Obang* colours were excluded from Korean colour palette. Instead, the government defined only white as the colour of Korea and painted colourful *Dancheong* in white. The most famous movement and propaganda of the time neither reflected traditional Korean colour palette. It was composed of green and yellow to reinforce the political stance of Park's government and to set the North as the enemy, represented in Red. The propaganda even reached to children's cartoon series, where the heroic child character triumphs over red pigs, contrary to traditional masked dance, where red character triumphs over white and black. This government invented colours of Korea yet is considered to be colours of modern Korea as it is representative of the period.

Contemporary political parties display colours according to their universal colour coding; red for communism, yellow for liberalism, blue for conservatism. This was because the concept was newly introduced after the independence of Korea. However, recent change of conservative party's colour, from blue to red proves that the meaning of the colour can vary by the culture and society.

In commercial world, colour is chosen purely upon economical, practical and technological reasons, contrary to traditional colours, which was based on strong philosophies and symbology. Grey apartment, silver food container, pink rubber gloves and green Italy towels are the examples. Although it lacks symbology, it still reflects everyday Korean life. Grey forest of apartment reflect rapid industrialisation of Korean modernisation, aluminium silver food container reflect new culture of delivery food, marinating of traditional food, *Kimchi* requires pink rubber gloves and Italy towel reflect unique bathing culture. In advertising, the colours are drawn directly from the referring images such as spiciness and bamboo tree, highlighting sharp contrast or bright colours. The colour combination and choice here again differs from the nature-integrated traditional way of colour coding.

The colour symbology utilised by modern literature also reflects fading traditional colour perception, especially of shamanistic side. Generally the colour symbology was kept in accordance with traditional ones. However, white and red is no longer considered as important as in classic novels and mythology. They are used on a same level as others. Blue on the other hand extended its layer of meaning, which extends to include both positive and negative connotations.

CONCLUSION

The colour of Korea is a vast area of study, spanning across various cultural and historical aspects of Korea. The report examined the colours in Korea from traditional and contemporary perspective and had drawn following conclusion.

Traditional and contemporary colour symbology(Black and White)

First, traditional colours in Korea are rather conceptual than visual. The concept and symbolism behind the colours came the foremost sometimes creating a conflict with its physical appearance. The symbology was established largely on Yin-Yang and Five Element theory, Hanism, Shamanism, Naturalism and Confucianism. The best example of this is found in concept of white called *Sosek*,

the none-colour, where there is no artificial colours added from bleaching. This colour is understood to be included in white palette, yet includes colours like cream and ivory in contemporary sense. White was the most significant and sacred colour in Korea as it was the colour of the nature as reflected in *Sosek*. It was also believed to have spiritual power of purification and protection, and symbolised the values of ruling principle; candidness, innocence and frugality. For this reason, white was the most common colour that all Koreans enjoyed wear, which Oppert described by calling Koreans 'the white-clad folks.' (1880) White was used in various traditional Korean rites – from the birth to death. However, going through transitions from traditional to contemporary society, the old philosophies that formed the bases of traditional colour symbology has faded. Instead, new western values were introduced and black turned its significance upside down; from death, sadness and winter to modern, progressive, sophisticated and fashionable. It remarked the birth of new social class and values. From rapid industrialisation, the colour was mostly chosen for its practicality or depended upon available technology. Therefore from the contemporary colour, it is hard to draw deep symbolism as did in traditional colours. However, it can be understood as direct mirror of Korean society and its modern history.

Combination of Colours

The symbology behind the traditional colour system, *Obang* colour, originates from Korean folk shamanism combined later with Yin-Yang and Five-element theory. The theory explains the laws of cosmos and links five element with five colours and other aspects of life.

All of *Obang* colour, when used in affinity combinations, was believed to have spiritual power that repels the evil spirits. The combinations of the colours were called *Sekdong* and were used in various costumes and household textiles. It was the same in food, where the food with five ingredients and five colours was considered complete and healthy. This reflects unique Hanism, where harmony and integrity were valued the highest.

Use of pair from *Obang* colour system enriched the symbology. Red as a strong spiritual colour was often used with other colours to suit the occasion. Red with blue signified harmony of Yin and Yang. The two is best presented in traditional wedding ceremony, as a symbol of marriage and love, where the couples comes together as one. Affinity pair of red is yellow and the two colours were used in girl's costume, royal servant's uniform and in shaman's performances as an amulet that brings fortune. Red with green is used in traditional Korean architecture to integrate with the colour of surrounding nature.

Strong symbology of red and its changing meanings. (Red)

Red was the second most frequently used colour among *Obang* colours as it takes strong Yang segment of the theory. Therefore it was often used to assert shamanistic power to prevent the bad lucks as evident in *Dongji* ritual. It was also a colour of the ruling class, which for the commoners meant prosperity and wealth as well. This interpretation on red still remains in contemporary design such as the red piggy bank and Red Devils.

However, red was the colour that also changed its meaning drastically from the Korean War and followed 'Red Complex'. Red became the colour of the enemy, communist North Korea. This strong impression of pain and agony of the Korean War remained until 2002, tactically utilised by authoritarian government to encourage patriotism. The image of red turns again associated with Red Devils phenomena, which is referred as the 'revolution of image.' It is now a symbol of passion, vitality of young and nation. Its influences ironically

turns the conservative party to chose red to replace their old image set in blue, creating unique political colour palette in South Korea.

Government invention of the national colour

Going through a series of historic events from Japanese Occupation to the Korean War, the link between the traditional values has weakened. To recover the country from the damages of the war, Korean government encouraged people Nationalism and created Korean image that will gather the people together. As an example, the invention of tradition by authoritarian government by Park, Junghee, redefined the Korean colour as white. Although it was traditionally important colour of Joseon Dynastry, the government fails to link philosophies behind it. As a result, only a fragment of the tradition is utilised, which distorted the tradition and sometimes denied it. The government also led national movements called *Saemaulundong*, actively used green and yellow to promote the military background of Park and to set communist North as an enemy. Nonetheless, it forms a part of Korean colour spectrum as Hobsbawm explains in his theory called 'Invention of history.'

Consumerism and modern colours

Rapid industrialisation and limits of the technology often defined Korean colour in consumerism. In contrary to traditional Koreans who made colour choices by the philosophies and according symbology, modern Korean chose colour for practicality and availability. The commercial products such as rubber gloves and Italy towels are great example of this, where the practicality and limitation of the technology ended up defining the representative colour of the product. Although it might lack meanings behind, it directly mirror the culture and society. The new consumerism enabled by introduction of new technology did not see necessity to make connection to the traditional colour symbology either. The colours were chosen directly from its referring images such and red pepper and bamboo tree as seen on the example of *Soju* bottles and Shin Ramyeon, which gained popularity and became representative of the product itself.

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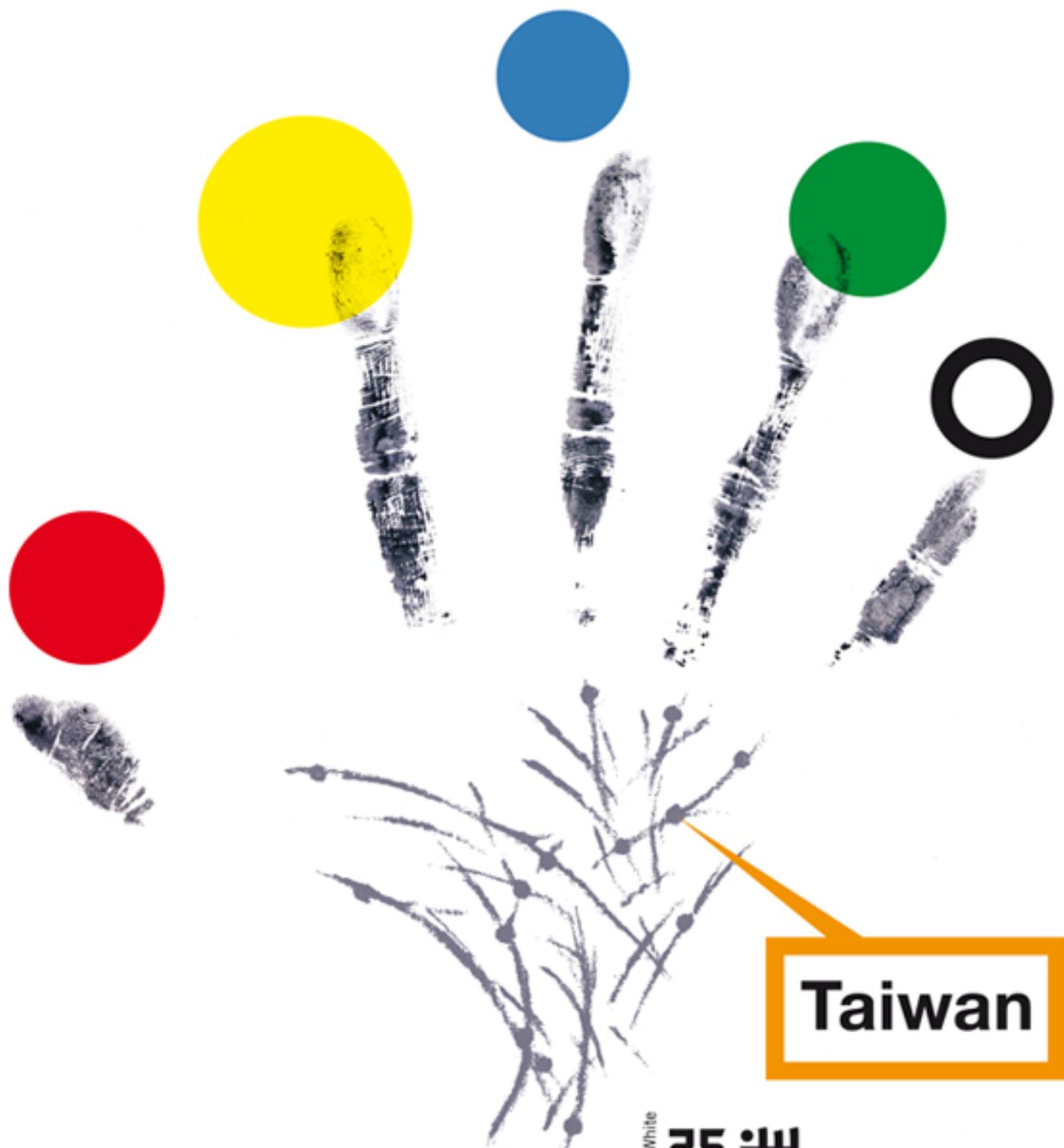
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Research Report 2013



Taiwan

the
Colours
of Asia

Red Yellow Blue Green Black & White

亞洲
色彩

紅黃藍綠黑與白



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PREFACE

About Taiwan

Taiwan, an island located at the rim of the Pacific Ocean, has an estimated population of 23 million people. (Monthly Bulletin of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of China, 2012) The population is composed of the Han ethnic group and the aborigines on the island. The island is 36,188 square kilometers; the distance from north to south is 394 kilometers. Within the long and narrow island, mountains and hills accounts for about two-thirds of the total area on the island. The earth crust was squeezed and uplifted and then a mountain was formed from north to south running through the whole island. The steep Central Range is the main body of this mountain. (Wikipedia) Taiwan is located below Japan, northeast of South Asia Islands and only separated by the narrow Taiwan Strait with the east coast of China, across the Pacific Ocean facing the American continent distantly. Since the 17th century, after the colonization of Spain and Portugal, Taiwan became an international harbor and a transit port as well as became active on the world stage.

From the natural geographical perspective, Taiwan is a mountainous island with abundant species. Taiwan Island is not too large and is only 36,000 square kilometers. However, due to the mountainous terrain caused by elevation of earth crust, the tropical, subtropical and mild climates coexist on the island. Thus, there are many different kinds of plant species and animal species. (Chen, 1957) There are also many unique species in Taiwan. According to the constructive study in Catalogue of Life in Taiwan, nearly two hundred local taxonomists have collected 495 kinds of viruses, 447 kinds of bacteria, 6 species of Archaea, 1,381 species of Protozoa, 1,944 kinds of the original algal community, 6,087 species of Fungi, 8,162 species of the plant kingdom and 35,657 species of the animal kingdom by the end of July 2011. (Biodiversity Research Center, Taiwan Academia Sinica, 2011) The performance of colour in various regions in the world has a significant association with the local climate and species. For example, residents make dye from locally grown plants to dye the fabric and use the local mineral resources to construct buildings. Thus, a great variety of plants and animals species adds more possibilities to the original "Taiwan colours".

From the perspective of human geography, Taiwan's special geographical location also reflects on its culture. Taiwan's multidimensional culture has gradually established due to its composition of a wide variety of ethnic groups from different times and backgrounds. We will discuss in chronological order here. The earliest Taiwanese culture was based primarily ethnic groups, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain each colonized Taiwan for a short period of time and impacted on contemporary architecture and custom at that time subsequently. After recovering Taiwan, Zheng Chenggong moved a large number of Han immigrants such as Hakka from southern Guangdong and Fujian. The integration of the local Pingpu aboriginal culture and Han culture became Taiwan's major culture forcefully. It had a significant impact on custom in daily life and festivals as well as religious beliefs. During the fifty years of Japanese colonial period, the thirty-three-year-old Meiji Restoration from Japan introduced both western culture (such as artefacts, systems, and custom) and Japanese culture (such as eating habits, language culture) (Chen, 2005) After the WWII ended in 1945, a large number of immigrations from many different provinces in China brought the more diversified Chinese culture. We can tell this great impact from observing eating habits in Taiwan. The Taiwanese culture has integrated Confucian from Han culture, Japanese, European and American

culture, as well as the aboriginal culture. Therefore, the Taiwanese culture is unique due to a fusion of many different cultures. As long as you live in Taiwan, you can find these elements around, mixed, crossed and vibrant in people's daily life.

Traditional Temple Fair in the Street

Photo: OMine Chang



Colours of Taiwan

Colour experience in a region is closely related to the local culture and the living environment. Under the influence of diversified landforms, animal and plant species, as well as cultures brought from immigrants, colours in Taiwan are vibrant, multicultural, and ever evolving.

In the following, we will discuss colours of Taiwan through observing two aspects. First, we will discuss colours of Taiwan by classifying different colours in modern colour science. Second, from a cultural view, we view some interesting phenomenon related to colours in custom and life experience in daily life. We hope to outline the contemporary colour impression in this article.

Plentiful Colours of Taiwan

Red

Red is very popular in Chinese culture. In Taiwan, there are many different aspects of the application of red. Red is particularly prevalent in everyday life. Red is the colour of festivity in Taiwan. Red often represents that something good happens; this feeling towards red is common regardless of class, age, and gender. Thus, red is the most often chosen colour in daily life. Many daily used items are in red, dark red or pink in Taiwanese daily life.



Red and White Plastic Bag

Photo: NDD Design

Red and White Plastic Bag

Plastic bags that often appear in grocery stores, farmers' markets, and food stalls etc. are loaded with stuff from eggs, fresh fruits and vegetables to all kinds of snacks. For Taiwanese, plastic bags seem to be red and white. With the rise of environmental awareness, people have gradually used the red and white plastic bags less. Now the plastic bags are made of thicker material and are not given to customers free anymore.



Red Plastic Rope

Photo: NDD Design

Red Plastic Rope

Before plastic containers became popular, containers and wrapping materials were made with natural materials, such as bamboo baskets and straw rope. As Taiwan gradually became an industrialized society and plastic products became popular, plastic rope gradually replaced the role of the traditional ropes. The plastic rope can bundle things quickly and securely and often appear in all kinds of occasions requiring bundling and boxing. The red plastic rope can also help secure goods to motorcycles. Such red is similar to the glossy dark pink hue in the red and white plastic bags and represents convenience, common, and solid.

As mentioned earlier, in Taiwan there are plenty of these dark pink plastic products. Due to the habits of the Taiwanese, a product in red sells better than that in other colours. As a result, the red products exist for a long time in Taiwan.

There are all kinds of plastic bags in Taiwan. In addition to the red-and-white style, there are also many white-based styles such as white-based plastic bags with red patterns on them. There are red trademarks and introduction of product on some plastic bags made for general stores. We could know red is extremely important and common for Taiwanese from these red plastic products.

Today, it is difficult to reason why Taiwanese prefer red when choosing daily products or why red pleases Taiwanese most in daily life. It may be because red gives Taiwanese an air of festivity or because they are keeping their old habits.



Glass Jar with Red Lid

Photo: NDD Design

Glass Jar

When supermarkets were not popular yet in Taiwan, there were many grocery stores on the streets. Biscuits and candies sold in grocery stores were not wrapped in fancy packaging. Instead, they were stored in large or small glass jars instead. The most prominent part of a glass jar was its red lid. We can recall that the red lids seemed to have some scent from the biscuits or candies.

Today, the jars are made of plastic but red lid remains. Red lid and transparent jar may store biscuits, snacks, preserved fruits, or rubber bands. Nevertheless, the most impressive ones are the jars storing Chinese medicine. When Taiwanese go visiting the traditional Chinese doctors, if the doses are large, then the medicine will be stored in a jar. This kind of jar does not remind people of the scent of biscuits or snacks but the bitter taste from Chinese medicine.



Broom and Mop

Photo: NDD Design

Broom and Mop

Broom and mop are must-have cleaning tools in every household in Taiwan. In early days, the grip part of broom or mop is made of wood and wrapped with a layer of red plastic. Today, most grip parts are made of plastic. However, the colour of brooms or mops is mostly red. The red brooms and mops remain as time goes by.

For Chinese people, red is often related to festivals such as New Year, weddings, worship, new homes completed, and *bando* (banquets) etc. These red represents the various stages of life. When a festival occurs, house is tinted with all shades of red such as red, crimson, and pink everywhere. People colour non-red items red in various ways.

During Chinese New Year, doors are dressed with red spring festival couplets and the windows are dressed with red paper-cut window decorations. When a couple is getting married, walls and doors will be decorated with red stickers with double-*Si* (lucky) written on them. To celebrate the first month of a newborn baby, his or her parents will send red-dyed hardboiled eggs and glutinous rice to their relatives and friends. When result of all kinds of entrance examination is announced, schools post the result on noticeboards. On the notice board, the name of a candidate and the school that the candidate is admitted to are listed. When new homes are completed or the stores open, people set off red firecrackers, as well as hang up red cloth and the Eight Immortals Colour accented with golden thread. Red closely links with all kinds of ceremonies or celebrations in life.



Rice Sieve

Photo: Ya-Wen, Wang

Rice Sieve (With Red Eight Trigrams printed on it)

A Taiwanese wedding is full of many traditional rituals and custom; most of the rituals and custom are related to red. A red rice sieve with the eight trigrams printed on it is one of them. When the bride gets out of the car, somebody would use such rice sieve to cover over her head until the bride enters newly wedded couple's new home. This rice sieve in Taiwan represents different meaning. However, in general, it is for praying for peace and luck for the newly wedded couples.



Red Glutinous Rice Ball

Photo: NDD Design

Red Glutinous Rice Ball

Tangyuan (glutinous rice ball) is a kind of traditional Chinese food, and often appear in various joyful events. The pronunciation and the meaning of the rice balls indicate a wish that anyone who eats the rice balls can reach perfection. In the Chinese New Year, eating rice balls with gathered relatives represents family reunion.

The main ingredients for making rice balls is glutinous rice paste and it is originally white. The rice balls dyed with red food colour appear more festive. White and red rice balls add even more festivity in celebrations. Today, even if not in the weddings or festive occasions, many traditional vendors are selling red and white mixed rice balls. Red and white rice balls, originally a symbol of festivity, have slowly evolved into a life impression.



Red Notice board

Photo: NDD Design

Red Notice board

After entrance exams for universities or colleges, the red noticeboards on exterior walls of the schools announce the name of candidates, and which schools the candidates are admitted to. With the prevalence of the modern Internet, the candidates have already learned the result of the exams before the school posts result on red noticeboards on the walls. However, each school in each year still posts the result of the exams on noticeboards on the exterior walls because it does not only convey messages but its bright red colour also represents congratulations and blessings to the candidates admitted to their ideal schools.



Red List Documenting Donation

Photo: NDD Design

Red List Documenting Donation

There are many temples in Taiwan, and the believers of the temples are countless. When going to the temple to worship, many people will donate money to light up the oil lamps in the temples. The temples document that how much money donated by each believer; the names of the believers are written on pieces of red paper. The texts on red paper show believers' respect and devotion towards their faith. Moreover, the red colour sets off the believers' respect and devotion.

The Eight Immortals Colour

The Eight Immortals Colour is made with multicoloured embroidery on red cloths. They are usually hanging over the edge of the tables or doors in celebrations such as a completion of new home, wedding or worship. The theme figures on the red canvas are eight immortals in the Chinese mythology; the story about how those mortals became immortals is often performed in plays in all sorts of temple fairs.

Taiwanese see the Eight Immortals Colour as a mascot not only because it is derived from folklore but also because eight and *fa* (making money) are homonyms. In addition, colour is also a symbol of good luck. The title of the Eight Immortals Colour is quite lovable.

With the clever composition, layout, as well as skills from the artists, the Eight Immortals Colour combines all kinds of auspicious patterns and implication. (Gan, n.d.) Therefore, despite its variety of styles and multicoloured embroidery, the Eight Immortals Colour is always made of the red cloth as background accented with some golden thread, the two main festive colours in Taiwan.



The Eight Immortals Colour

Photo: NDD Design

Firecracker

In Chinese culture, firecrackers are inseparable and indispensable in joyful occasions. In the New Year, weddings, new homes completed, or temple fairs, firecrackers are always set off. Also because of such association, the main colour of firecrackers is red most of the time. Red firecrackers crumbs on the ground after those occasions are also symbols of celebrations.

The meaning behind each colour changes with different culture. However, some of the implication of the colour has become international. Take traffic lights as an example, a green or blue sign usually represents a directional sign such as left or right turn. A yellow sign represents a warning sign. A red sign represents ban on certain acts or certain direction moving. Under the influence by these international rules, there are many yellow items representing warning and red items representing prohibition in the public space in Taiwan.



No Parking Sign

Photo: NDD Design

No Parking Sign

Taiwan is densely populated and the population is concentrated in urban areas. Additionally, many areas are underdeveloped in public transportation. Thus, there are many vehicles in most of urban areas in Taiwan. Parking space is very valuable; red no parking signs are popular. The large-sized text and the red colour of the signs imply warning and intention to defend one's own parking space.

The material of no parking sign is iron and originally is grey colour. People coat the no parking signs with red colour because of the same reason why red is used on the traffic lights. The colour of the red no parking sign gets people's attention. Among different colour, the red used in public spaces usually implies warning. In addition, Chinese like red so the red "no parking" signs are not that harsh to people's eye.

Natural Dye of Red

Since synthetic dye was available, natural dye was used much less. Natural red dye in early Taiwan was derived from safflower. People loved safflower because cotton and linen could absorb and retain safflower-derived dye very well. Safflower is not only the fabric dye but also the red pigment in makeup, food colour, and printing colour.

Safflower is not native in Taiwan. Most safflowers are imported from China. People can still purchase safflowers in traditional Chinese pharmacies. The useful part of the safflower is its petals. However, its petals are highly perishable and tend to get moldy, spoiled or deteriorated during long time transportation. Thus, after harvesting, the safflower petals need to be dried to prevent from being perished. The size of a dried petal is just like that of a grain of rice. Therefore, people called the petals "safflower rice". (Tseng, 2007, P.38)



Safflower-Dyed Clothes

Photo: NDD Design

Red Egg

To celebrate the first month of a newborn baby, Taiwanese worship gods with red eggs and glutinous rice and sent them to relatives and friends. People use red eggs as gifts because the egg represents prosperity and its round shape implies perfection. The shell of an egg is originally white, which is somewhat pale and not festive enough. Thus, people dye hardboiled eggs red. The red eggs represent the joy of the families of the newborns. The recipients feel and share the joy of the families of the newborns.



Red Egg and Glutinous Rice

Photo: NDD Design

Regarding to dyeing eggs and the raw materials this activity required, Professor Chi-Hsiung Tseng wrote, “Red egg dye is usually purchased in the grocery stores in the villages. It comes in bulk or individual small packets. When people use it, they dissolve dye in the lukewarm water and stir a bit, then put the hardboiled eggs in the red lukewarm water to dye the shells of eggs. The dye is still available. Now there is Red No.6 printed on the packets. In southern Taiwan, people called Red No.6 Safflower Dye; in the central Taiwan, people called it Safflower rice.” (Tseng, 2007, P.38)

Pingpu aborigines (a kind of aborigines) in Taiwan called foreigners ‘Red barbarians’. We assume it is because the hair colour of the foreigners is quite different from that of aborigines in Taiwan. Therefore, the *Pingpu* aborigines used the foreigners’ most prominent feature- hair colour- to call them.

Professor Chi-Hsiung Tseng wrote, “Red barbarians broadly referred to the westerners living in Taiwan, including Spaniards, the Portuguese, the British, the French, and the Dutch people. We can still find Fort San Domingo in Kaohsiung and Danshui as well as Red Barbarian Wall in Chiayi. Towards the end of the Ming dynasty, General Chung-Huan Yuan guarding the frontier used the red barbarians’ artillery to defeat Qing’s army invading from outside the customs. The red barbarians in “red barbarians’ artillery” referred to the westerners from different countries in southern trading ports in China. Because the westerners brought the artillery in China, Chinese called the artillery red barbarians’ artillery”. “(Tseng, 2007, P.38)

Inkpad

Stamping documents with ink indicates signing and endorsing the documents. Chinese are accustomed to using red ink. Red marks are very eye-catching on black and white documents. There are two assumed reasons to explain why the Chinese are accustomed to using red ink. First, red ink is made of raw materials- cinnabar- and the ingredients to produce red ink are much easier to obtain. Second, because Chinese are accustomed to use black ink to write and draw signatures in red are more eye-catching. Today, the calligraphy fonts of stamps, the beauty of various layout, the darker or lighter shades of ink, or even the stamping techniques also have evolved into a science.

Regarding to the raw materials – cinnabar- inkpad, Professor of Colour Science, Chi-Hsiung Tseng, in *Lost Colour in China* wrote, “red ink can only be used in painting because it contains cinnabar, also called HgS, which is toxic. Cinnabar originated from two thousand years ago since Shang period in China. During Shang Dynasty, after engraving text onto tortoise shells or ox bones, people used cinnabar to make the text look more obvious. There were many red signatures in many books and paintings in Han Dynasty. Cinnabar is one of the heavier pigments, its coverage, tortuosity ratio, and complex tortuosity ratio is better; its durability is excellent but it is low-tolerant of light; after exposure to light, its colour starts to become black.” (Tseng, 2007, P.281)



Red Date

Photo: NDD Design

Chinese Herb to Help Increase the Blood

“Blood deficiency” is used to describe anemia in the traditional Chinese medicine and it often occurs due to massive blood loss after the surgery and other circumstances. It intends to cause palpitations, dizziness and other symptoms. Thus, iron-containing food is good remedy for human body to increase more blood cells. Iron-rich food tends to be red or reddish-brown.

In a very common Taiwanese concept, consuming blood helps body increase the blood. Taiwanese often achieved that purpose by consuming blood or livers of pigs etc. Therefore, in the Taiwanese culture, it is easy for people to associate red and reddish-brown food with enriching the blood.

Many Chinese herbal medicines are considered powerful to help body enrich the blood such as widely used red dates and wolfberries. Their bright red colour strengthens this association related to “increasing the blood”.



Wolfberry

Photo: NDD Design

Yellow

Yellow is an extremely bright colour in modern colour science. It gives off a kind of harsh brightness close to the light. In many artists' drawings, this kind of yellow can be seen. In Chinese, yellow and golden are the most commonly used adjectives to describe the colour of the gold. Yellow is associated with the image of gold or golden colour. In traditional custom and religion, yellow is the best option to highlight the extravagance and luxury. In various worship, believers offer gods golden items to represent their faithful and precious appreciations.



Golden Hat

Photo: Bi-Fen Huang

Black faced Mazu, Golden Medal, and Golden Hat

Belief in 'Mazu' has been a very important religious culture in Taiwan. 'Mazu' is originally a sea goddess protecting fishermen and sailors. The earliest Mazu temples in Taiwan were all facing the ocean and the ports while a small number of Mazu temples were facing the mountains because Mazu intended to protect its believers from aborigines' human head hunting. During the Sino-French War and World War II, there were legends relating to Mazu's patrolling the coast, picking up the bombs, and rescuing soldiers in the war. Mazu also warns its believers of typhoons, floods, earthquakes, plague and quells the natural disaster. According to legend, Mazu not only protected its believers from natural disaster and protected them from the disaster of war. Mazu has a close relationship with Taiwan's history and people's life. Its localization also reflects the history of immigrants' life. (Lin, n.d.)

In many large Mazu temples, statues usually appear black due to incense smoke in many years. Nevertheless, the clothes with yellow embroidery, hats with gold foil, and gold medal devoted by believers are replaced periodically. The shiny golden from clothes and accessories set off the black statues; this is also the image of a well-known temple with large number of believers in people's mind.

Cash Money, Silver Spirit Paper, Gold Spirit Paper

In ancient time, the main source of golden colour is from gold. As time goes by, an endless variety of alternative material replaces the role of gold to express the golden colour.

There is gold foil glued to gold paper for worship; for some other kind of joss paper, people would use silver foil. Nevertheless, it was too wasteful and almost impossible if real gold and silver foils were burn. Thus, gold and silver foils had gradually replaced by inexpensive tinfoil. (Tseng, 2011.)

The body of gold paper was originally made of shredded bamboo fiber pulp. Thus, gold paper appeared light beige naturally. However, in recent years, gold paper made in old-fashioned way has been substituted by dyed paper.

Different types of joss paper are used based on different purposes and different spirits. There are many different shapes and specifications in joss paper. The gold spirit paper used to worship god is also known as god paper: tinfoil is glued to its back; it is gold lacquered; its front is stamped with red marks. Gold spirit paper is given to the heaven and the earth; the gods and Buddha in the three realms; and the ancestors died more than three years ago worshipped at home. If the front of gold paper is covered with auspicious patterns or praying words, the purpose is to worship, pray, and pray for peace. Silver paper is common in traditional custom: tinfoil is glued to its back; it is not gold lacquered;

its sides are stamped with red marks. Silver spirit paper and cash money are given ancestral spirits, ghosts, and all soldiers and generals from underworld. The purpose is to devote and seek for safety. (Fulusoo workshop, n.d.) In the rituals, the gold paper sometimes is folded, bundled and assembled into many shapes, such as Lotus or ingot etc, based on different occasions.

God of Wealth from Five
Directions Gold Spirit Paper

Photo: NDD Design



Yellow food colour

Yellow food colour is often added to transparent or close-to-transparent white food to bring out the shiny golden and to make food more appealing. In traditional Taiwanese snacks, alkali dumplings, rice cakes, pickled radish etc. always have their yellowish shine in front of us.

Alkali Dumpling

During the Dragon Boat Festival, the transparent yellow alkali dumping is just like a dessert. It is also known as 'sweet rice dumplings' or 'rice dumplings' in Hoklo and it tastes soft, a bit of sticky and chewy. Adults and children all love this traditional festival food when topping it with some fructose or honey.

Alkali dumplings are made of glutinous rice. To reduce the mutual adhesion between the alkali dumplings and bamboo leaves, some manufacturers add a small amount of borax while cooking dumplings. Besides inhibiting the dumplings from adhering bamboo leaves, adding borax also helps preserve the dumplings and improve their texture. In recent years, borax has been banned because it is harmful to human health. Government continues to promote using another food additive - SODIUM TRIMERAPHOSPHATE (BRATYAX) to replace borax. Bratyax can also inhibit adhesion between the dumplings and bamboo leaves effectively. In addition, it can improve the texture of dumplings but is harmless to human.



Rice Cake

Photo: Jhao-Siang, Jheng

Rice Cake

This food is made of mixed rice flour and tapioca from cassava, with a chewy taste and transparent appearance. Street vendors and shaved ice shops in the market usually sell rice cakes. A worker in the shaved ice shop splits a big piece of rice cake into bite sized pieces with a spoon and then tops them with black molasses. A bowl of shaved ice topped with rice cake and black molasses is a summer staple dessert in Taiwan.



Yellow Pickled Radish

Photo: NDD Design

Yellow Pickled Radish

In Taiwan, the yellow pickled radish is the main role in a braised pork rice dish or a wooden lunch box. It also brightens the brown toned food in the lunchbox and instantly refreshes the flavour. The slightly sour taste and crispiness of pickled yellow radish help tone down the greasiness. Many gourmets might feel disappointed if they do not see the thinly sliced yellow pickled radish while enjoying the famous turkey rice dish in 'Chiayi'.

Yellow Commou Gardenia, Natural dye with Medicinal effects

The unique yellow colour of these traditional Taiwanese food evokes memory and appetite of each Taiwanese. Early yellow food was dyed by Commou Gardenia(Gardenia). Gardenia is also a traditional Chinese herb, which has the power to reduce fever. Thus, Gardenia is typically used in summer food but is gradually replaced by inexpensive Yellow No.4.

Gardenia (Commou Gardenia) is a small evergreen shrub one or two meters tall and its scientific name is *Gardenia Jasminoides* Ellis. (Taiwan Department of Health, Committee on Chinese Medicine and Pharmacy, 2003) The native species in Taiwan is unipetalous. The interior of its fruit is orange and is called mountain yellow Gardenia. Yellowish red fruit with pointed ends is oval-shaped. It is commonly known as mountain gardenia. There are six ridges on both sides, with flesh, about three centimeters long. Gardenia is an excellent detoxification agent, natural dye, and external medicine. (China Medical University, n.d.)

The fruit contains a yellow pigment called Crocin; Crocin is usually used as a yellow dye and thus called yellow Gardenia. It is natural dye and natural food colour in ancient time. Dried Gardenia could be purchased in early traditional pharmacies. People soaked the dried Gardenia in lukewarm water and obtain Crocin. Adding yellow pigment in pickled vegetables makes them delectable and pretty.

According to Shennong's Classic of Materia Medica, Gardenia can cures fever, high fever, upset, insomnia, cooling blood, and detoxification effect etc. On hot summer days, transparent yellow rice cakes bring people a sense of cooling effect due to its medicinal effect.

In recent years, Gardenia has been hard to obtain in southern Taiwan because the fluctuating market price, caused by uneconomical supply. Now dried Gardenia found in traditional pharmacies is imported from China. Thus, most yellow rice cakes and pickled radish in the market are dyed using yellow food colour. The chemical food colour poses a health concern and makes the food show unnatural and gaudy colour. The intention to achieve medicinal effects through adding Gardenia herbs into food is disregarded. It is a pity that the sticky texture and soft yellow colour generated by Gardenia disappear.

Yellow is a very bright and with high saturation. It is also highly recognizable. Especially when yellow combined with black or red, the extreme contrast brings much more visual impact than using yellow alone.

Therefore, people use these colour combinations on much traditional food packaging to make the products on the shelf more eye-catching. The following describes several common yellow packaging, which makes deep impression on Taiwanese with dazzling yellow.



Jade Rabbit Ball Point Pen

Photo: NDD Design

Jade Rabbit Ball Point Pen

Founded in 1947, Jade Rabbit Stationery Company began its business by manufacturing typing wax paper, carbon paper, pins, and paper clips. It was also one of the big three stationery companies in early Taiwan and launched the first ballpoint pen in 1966 in Taiwan. Its ballpoint pen is the collective memory of many Taiwanese. (official website of Jade Rabbit, n.d.)

The Jade Rabbit's ballpoint pen comes with yellow lever, the hexagonal shape, and chrome yellow body. Nevertheless, the different colour caps and tails of the pen imply the different colour ink so that people can recognize the colour of the ink easily. Jade Rabbit Stationery Company is still producing the ballpoint pen until today. Although the major function of its factory is transformed into tourism, people still can purchase its products, and the appearance of the ballpoint pen remains for four decades.



Apple Cedar

Photo: NDD Design

Apple Cedar

Apple Cedar is a kind of soft drink produced from natural apple juice; its producer is Atlantic Beverage Co., Ltd. founded in 1963. The company exports its apple cedar to all over the world. Although it has different colours of packaging in different places all over the world, the packaging in Taiwan is always yellow background with an easy-to-identify wavy red apple pattern; in the middle of the red apple is the brand name 'Apple Cedar' and green stalk is on the top of the apple.



Packaging of MSG

Photo: NDD Design

Packaging of MSG by different Manufacturers

Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) is a kind of seasoning which brings out more umami from the food. MSG is manufactured from extracting and concentrating derivatives from algae, plants, and nowadays mostly from fermented starch, sucrose, or beet sugar. The main chemical composition in the MSG is monosodium glutamate. (Xie, 2004)

In recent years, people generally feel MSG is not healthy and use less MSG to season their food. However, the yellow combined with red the packaging of MSG remains until now. Manufacturers of seasoning other than MSG avoid yellow and red packaging used by MSG manufacturers to avoid consumers' confusion. This act reveals that the visible packaging of MSG has become a common impression on MSG for Taiwanese.



Packaging of Shao Mei Ice Cream

Photo: NDD Design

Packaging of Vanilla Ice Cream – Shao Mei Ice Cream

Established in 1945 after World War II, six decades old ‘Shao Mei’ ice cream is the earliest local ice cream manufacturer in Taiwan. ‘Shao Mei’ dominated the ice cream market in Taiwan in the 1970s and had up to 70% market share. Afterwards, it developed many different ice cream items such as red bean and rice cake ice cream bar etc. It is indeed the leading local ice cream brand in Taiwan. (official website of ‘Shao Mei’ ice cream, n.d.) The signature colour of yellow and red packaging for its long-lived product, vanilla ice cream, has not changed for a long time.

Green

In modern colour science, green and purple are classified under secondary colour because they are created by mixing cold colour and warm colour. They are neither cold nor warm, neither too bright nor too dark, neither too brilliant nor too muddy and thus are called the secondary colour. Green brings out peaceful and calm feelings. In nature, most plants are green. Thus, green also gives people the impression of full of life and close to nature. (Tseng, 2007)

In Taiwan, many corporations with long history utilize all shades of green on their brands. The bottles of Ming Sing Toilet Water and Taiwan Beer are lime green. Tatung uses subtly bluish green on its products. A mailman with Chunghwa Post wears forest green uniforms. The grassy cake prepared for Remembrance Day is one of the classical green pastries in traditional food. Below is more detailed introduction.



Ming Sing Toilet Water

Photo: NDD Design

Ming Sing Toilet Water

Ming Sing Chemical Corporation Ltd. in Taiwan manufactured Ming Sing Toilet Water. Besides its trademark and a picture of a dancing star on the bottle, “the older the better” is written on the perfume bottle. In addition, the slogan “the older the better” has become one of the major features of Ming Sing Toilet Water. As soon as the company launched Ming Sing Toilet Water, this product became so popular that the product was in short supply soon after its launch. From 60’s to 70’s, this product became an essential good for many women (Chang, 2004).

Even toilet water in the bottle is green besides its green packaging. Because the product contains lots of alcohol, it also can be used to disinfect. Taiwanese has gradually developed some unique usage for this toilet water such as a cure for mosquito bites, an anti-itch spray, sterilizer for the home environment, and deodorant for bathrooms. The additional usage made this product integrated more into the daily life of Taiwanese. The image of this green bottle naturally engraves deeply in the hearts of the people of all ages.



Taiwan Beer

Photo: NDD Design

Taiwan Beer

Taiwan Beer was formerly known as the “Takasago ale beer”, which was produced in Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period. In 1945, its name was changed to “Taiwan Beer”. (official website of Taiwan Beer, 2007) It is one of Taiwan’s most popular beers. Sometimes the colour of the bottles are different, either green or brown because the shelf life of beer selling for domestic and foreign markets is different. For its logo, the background colour of label remains green; the beer carton for transporting is also green. Of course, ladies promoting Taiwan Beer in many eateries and professional basketball team players under Taiwan Beer both wear green uniforms. In its recent commercial, Taiwan Beer emphasized its slogan “Taiwan Beer *Shang Cing* (The freshest) !”. “*Shang*” in Taiwanese means “the most”; “*cing*” means green and fresh. Blue or green (later in the article or book, we will mention that blue and green is the same colour in Taiwanese) imply fresh, which helps emphasize that Taiwan Beer is produced locally; thus, the most “green” beer for Taiwanese, of course, is Taiwan Beer.



Tatung Rice Cooker

Photo: NDD Design

Rice Cooker Produced by Tatung

Tatung Company was established in the Japanese colonial period. Now it has become a famous brand of home electronics in Taiwan. Its early launched electronics such as fans and rice cookers have changed people's life. Almost every family owns at least one Tatung rice cooker. It could be on a traditional countertop or a modern westernized kitchen. Tatung rice cookers also help many Taiwanese in foreign countries cook their moms' best dishes. Either fans or rice cookers manufactured by Tatung are green. Even its school and other business buildings are green. People call this kind of bluish green "Tatung green". Thus, we know how representative this bluish green is.



The Convenience Box
launched by Chunghwa Post

Photo: NDD Design

Chunghwa Post

Mailmen going up and down on each street in Taiwan are wearing green all over except their white hat. In an old saying, when people say that a man is "wearing green hats", they imply that his wife is having an affair. Thus, mailmen in Taiwan do not wear green hats. However, their uniforms, the delivery truck and motorcycles are green. The bright forest colour has become the representative colour of Chunghwa Post in Taiwanese's impression.

Chunghwa Post launched the convenience box (bag) service in 2005. [21] The design of the convenience box is a white dove on the yellowish green box. Because the clean and simple design won many people's hearts, Chunghwa Post later launched several limited editions on some major holidays (Valentine's Day, father's Day, Mother's Day, and Christmas, etc.) in 2006.

Even foreign tourists to Taiwan were attracted to the design of this convenience box. Japanese media also ranked it as the sundry fans' must-have item.



Grassy Cake Stuffed with
Shredded Radish

Photo: NDD Design

Grassy Cake

Grassy cakes along with the red turtle cakes are the common food showing up on Remembrance Day. Grassy cakes are green because maker adds Cudweed into the skin and then kneads together. Hakka people in Taiwan add Wormwood to make green rice noodles. People use minced radish, bamboo shoots, dried vegetables or refried beans to make the stuffing; it depends on whether they are making savory or sweet grassy cake. Each household has its unique secret for making grassy cakes. Kneaded green grassy cakes are wrapped in greased leaves and then steamed. The cooked grassy cakes set off the subtle Cudweed fragrance and make people mouth-watering.

Green is a secondary colour and gives people a peaceful and calm feeling. Maybe it is because the sense of stability or the idea to add more green in environment. Besides being the representative colour of many brands and being applied to traditional food mentioned above, green is also applied to exterior accessories on building such as window shades, fences used in construction sites, the traditional wooden window frames, as well as door and window screens etc.



Corrugated Steel Fences surrounding Construction Sites

Photo: NDD Design

Corrugated Steel Fences surrounding Construction Sites

People in Taiwan often call the corrugated steel fences around construction site “iron sheet”; they are very common and sometimes even are used as building materials. The corrugated steel fences used as building materials are usually pale gray, crimson, pale blue, dark blue. However, when they are used as temporary fences, the majority of them are pastel green.



Green Window Shades

Photo: NDD Design

Window Shades

Window shades are mostly made of plastic canvas and mainly set up along the windows to increase the area of the shade because Taiwan is located in subtropical area. Window shades are mostly made of PC plastic and used heavily on the buildings in Taiwan. Thus, such translucent light green has also become everyone’s memory.

Screen Door

People use screen to replace glass on door and window to help ventilation in the house and prevent mosquitoes from getting inside the house. Screen doors and windows are also architectural features in subtropical regions. People often use green screen on doors and windows in early days. To meet the demand of modern architecture, now the colour of modern screens has changed to pale gray. To avoid dust in the city, in some buildings with central air-conditioner, screen windows have been removed completely; sometimes the windows are even sealed. Cool breeze through green screen has become the privilege and enjoyment for people living in rural areas or the old neighborhood.

Green Wooden Window Frame

Photo: NDD Design





Canvas Schoolbag from Tainan First Senior High School

Photo: NDD Design



An early Workbook in Elementary School

Photo: NDD Design

Green Elements in Campus – Canvas Schoolbag, Workbook, and Uniform

Most schoolbags are khaki green because they are mass-produced in factories using the same canvas used for making outdoor items, or because in early days schools in Taiwan used military education to manage middle and high school students; thus, every student was asked to wear khaki uniforms and carry khaki green schoolbags. The schoolbags that middle school and high school students carry over their shoulders are mostly this kind of one shoulder khaki green canvas bags with white school names printed on them.

Another green items relating to school are workbooks in elementary schools. The pale green Mandarin workbooks are many people's childhood memories. Because current teaching materials are well diversified in elementary schools, this type of simple workbook is hard to find today. Nevertheless, if people visit some local stationery stores, they probably can still find the simple workbooks with pastel green cover.

Another green element in school is uniform. Students in two schools are wearing green uniforms in Taiwan. One is Taipei First Girls High School and the other is Taichung Girls Senior High School. The two girls' high schools are both ranked first in Taipei or Taichung. Green top and black skirt has become the symbols of the schools. There are many explanations why the uniforms are green. Students were not wearing green uniforms when the two schools were founded. In 1952, the principal of Taipei First Girls High School feared that white uniform would make students appear too obvious during air raids in the war so the uniforms were changed to green to protect students; Taichung Girls' Senior High School changed the colour of its uniforms for the same reason. After the World War II, many schools changed the colour of their uniforms back to white or khaki, only Taipei First Girls High School and Taichung Girls Senior High School did not. Today the green uniforms have become the symbols of these two high schools.

Uniform of Taipei First Girls High School

Photo: Yu-An, Chen



Blue

Solid and durable blue items are as the following items. Blue is very common on early items in Taiwan. From these items discussed later, we can tell that the blue may represent solid and durability personality for Taiwanese.



Blue and White Slipper

Photo: NDD Design

Blue and white slippers:

Blue and white slippers are common memory for Taiwanese. Due to their distinctive contrasting colour and durability, many Taiwanese still choose blue and white slippers as their indoor or outdoor slippers. Many young people still love to wear the blue and white slipper because it represents Taiwan.



Small Truck

Photo: NDD Design

Small truck:

Such trucks are mostly for commercial use and provide shaded cargo space. Because of its moderate size, there is sufficient space for cargo but also can shuttle back and forth on the streets. Thus, they are the first choice of truck for grocers, fruit vendors, and water and electricity workers for transporting goods. Additionally, because of these reasons, Taiwanese nicknamed such a small truck “fortune earner”, symbolizing spirit of Taiwanese hard working to achieve wealth. Such small trucks are mostly blue, when Taiwanese mentions “fortune earner”, they tend to think of its solid and durable qualities. Regular sedans generally are not coated with this kind of blue. This blue seems a representative of solidity and durability.



Blue Rimmed Bowl

Photo: NDD Design

Blue-rimmed Bowl

This bowl is used for food stalls mostly. The most prominent feature of the bowl is a circle of blue glazed on the rim of the bowls. This simple decoration adds more colour on the look of white porcelain. Some bowls are with blue patterns inside and outside of the bowl. White porcelain tableware coated with blue glaze is very common at the food stalls or at the family dinner table. It is widely believed that this idea of glazing the rim blue on white porcelain bowls is influenced by traditional blue and white porcelain.

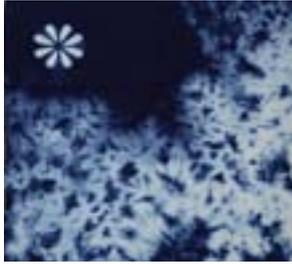


Blue Shirt

Photo: NDD Design

Blue Shirt

Blue shirts worn by early Taiwanese were dyed by pigment derived from plants naturally in the era that chemical dye was still not universal. First, natural dye was more suitable for cotton and linen, but not for silk. Second, blue clothes did not show dirt easily. Thus, blue clothes became the common wear for public. Now Hakka people preserve more these traditional clothes among the various ethnic groups in Taiwan.



Indigo Scarf

Photo: NDD Design

Indigo Scarf

Early Taiwanese often apply plant-derived blue dye on the fabric. With the introduction of chemical dye, natural plant dyeing technology gradually declined. In recent years, due to the rise of environmental awareness, people began to feel the beauty of the traditional folk art. Many people re-establish the technology of plant-derived dyeing. Blue dyeing is one of the more prevalent folk art. There are many related experimental courses in different areas in Taiwan. Such easy made blue dyed art works such as scarves show a variety of facets as time goes.

Many plants can be used to generate blue dye. Professor of Colour Science Chi-Hsiung Tseng broadly introduced the type of plants for blue dye in his article as following, “*Song Lan* (*Isatis tinctoria*), *Liao Lan* (*Polygonum tinctorium*), and *Shan Lan* (*Strobilanthes cusia*) are three kinds of bluegrass used to generate blue dye in Chinese history; they are classified under different families and grown in different areas. *Song Lan* (*Isatis tinctoria*) is grown in northern China, the colder area around the the Yellow River basin and its root is called *Ban Lan Gen* (*Isatis Root*) in traditional Chinese medicine. *Liao Lan* (*Polygonum tinctorium*) is grown mainly around the Yangtze River basin and classified under Polygonaceae. It was introduced to Japan from “Wu” in ancient China; thus, Japanese called it “Wu Lan”. *Shan Lan* (*Strobilanthes cusia*) is grown mainly in the southern China such as Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, Guangdong, Fujian, Taiwan, and Okinawa. It loves humid and cooler weather. In winter, people can find a plant with clusters of pale purple flowers, which is Shan Lan, under the shade of a tree in Sitou, Taiwan. In addition, *Mu Lan* (*Indigofera tinctoria*) is classified under Fabaceae and was used as blue dye in early Europe; it is also called India blue because it is imported from India and the colour it dyes is called Indigo.” (Tseng, 2006, P71)

Taiwan exported Indigo in early days. Indigo is a traditional dye derived from bluegrass. Regarding to history and applications of Indigo in Taiwan, Wun Cui Lin discussed about is as below.

“It is untraceable when Taiwan began to producing indigo. Under the ruling of Dutch and three generations of Zheng (Cheng-Gong Zhen) Family in Taiwan, we can find some reliable documents. In 1856, Taiwan had a record of 7000 quintals output of indigo. In the early 19th century, indigo had been stably produced. At that time, indigo from Taiwan was very popular in its neighborhood. For a period of time, fabrics were even send to Taiwan to dye and then shipped back, perhaps because people believed that they could get excellent blue clothes by fresh dye. After harvesting indigo, businessmen usually had dye made, then transported with coal and linen on the same sampans from Bangka (Wanhua) to ports in Quanzhou, Fuzhou, Wenzhou, Ningbo, and Tianjin in exchange for cotton, iron, medicine, and other supplies from Nanjing. Around 1880, the shipments of indigo were fewer than those of rice and coal. The value of exported indigo ranked the highest. The average annual output was about 21,000 quintals, worth about 150,000 silver dollars. The output of indigo depended on the relationship with aborigines because most indigo were grown in remote areas. Later, the output was not sufficient due to competition of land use caused by more lucrative tea business and worsening relationship with aborigines. Thus, periodic import of indigo was necessary since 1896. Nevertheless, the amount imported was small. The local indigo still had more market share. While the domestic demand for indigo increased, export of indigo decreased. The higher quality indigo once mainly for export became popular in Taiwan.” (Lin, 1992)

Blue dye once declined due to the introduction of chemical dye. In recent years, many crafts men dedicated themselves to revive natural plant-derived dye, mostly on blue dye. To retrieve the blue dye, the first step is to find bluegrass. Because blue dye declined, people thought the growth of bluegrass are limited to a few areas. Nevertheless, with the promotion of blue dyeing, people found Da Jing (Shan Lan, *Strobilanthes cusia*) or Siao Jing (Mu Lan, *Indigofera tinctoria*) in many places. Moreover, people found that the places with Jing in their name were associated with bluegrass.

Later on, planting bluegrass and producing of dye has gradually developed. Many places began to produce indigo. People gradually recovered the traditional blue dyeing. Craftsmen not only recover this traditional crafts but also improve the application of blue dyeing from modern perspective. From the perspective of agricultural tourism, Jhuo Ye Cabin in Sanyi developed a very complete cycle from planting bluegrass, harvesting, manufacturing indigo to blue dyeing. In Tian Ran Studio, Jing Lin Chen and Yu Siou Ma utilized indigo to create paintings quite different from their previous works. They recovered the process of blue dyeing and crafts after years of research. They applied blue dyeing to functional fabric at the beginning. Then due to their art background, they create very different style from that in traditional blue dyeing.

In Taiwanese Hokkien, people use “*cing*” to refer to blue, but sometimes refer to green. People often have to rely on text prior and after *cing* to determine whether it refers to blue or green. Professor Chi-Hsiung Tseng described the relationship between *cing*, blue, and green in one paragraph in his article as :” Meaning of *cing* changed due to the immergence of blue dyeing. Quan Xue Pian by Xunzi recorded that “Green is derived from blue”, expressing the idea that green is created from blue dyeing; nevertheless, the colour resulted from blue dyeing actually is blue. It shows that *cing* refers to both green and blue colour in the era that Xunzi was alive. The phenomenon that *cing* can refer to both blue and green is very common; in Taiwanese Hokkien and Hakka, people use *cing hang lamp* (it means green and red lamp) to refer to traffic lights but listeners can understand *cing* specifically means green, not blue. It is also common to see people use *cing* to refer to blue and green; for example, the “blue” sky is pronounced *cing kong* and green sky is also pronounced *cing kong*. *Cing* is also used to refer green in “green grass”. For modern people, *cing* is a confusing word for description of colour; that is why *lan* is created to replace *cing* when people refer to blue. Though *lan* was initially used in early age but not used frequently. *Lan* was used much more frequently since Ming Dynasty but it does not completely replace *cing* yet.” (Tseng, 2006, P70)

“This confusion caused by *cing* and *lan* is related to the dyeing process in early days. In the literature, in addition to the Xunzi, Shi Jing recorded in a poem, “cropping bluegrass towards the end of the day”, illustrating that bluegrass had become a cash crop at that time. In Han Dynasty, Shu Zhen Xun, in *Huai Nan Liao* by An Liu, recorded, “use blue dye to make green”. This described the same idea we read in last paragraph in *Quan Xue Pian* by Xunzi. From the actual process of using juices from rubbing leaves of bluegrass to dye, we can understand that freshly juiced dye are actually green. After immersion and agitation, the green juice gradually turns into blue. As if, the blue is born out of green. It is no wonder that the ancient Chinese people often mixed blue and green up, thought the relationship between them as mother and son, and sometimes even thought they are equal. However, modern people think blue and green are different colour.” (Tseng, 2006, P71)

The Process of Blue Dye



Step 1: *Strobilanthes cusia* (Nees) Kuntze
Step 2: Soaking
Step 3: Fish up
Step 4: Pouring Lime

Step 5: Stirring
Step 6: Precipitating
Step 7: Dyeing
Step 8: The Dyeing work of Jing-Lin Zhen

photo: Yu-Siou Ma, Jing-Lin Chen

White

White can express a wide range of off-white. Conceptually, white includes all kinds of off-white because in colour science white is defined by its lightness, not saturation (also chroma or intensity). In Chinese, the meaning of white and off-white are very close. In the past, people did not have industrial bleaching techniques so they used techniques like soaking in water, sun drying, boiling, or alkaline substances to bleach; (Tseng, 2009) therefore, they cannot achieve clean white but off-whites and there was always some impurities. That is why the traditional white is not as pure as the current clean white is. Without the help from bleach and fluorescent agents, the traditional white is softer visually.

Due to its achromatic characteristic, white always makes people feel clean and tidy; bright and pure; clean and flawless. Below are a few white objects with such perception.

Tea Package in Jhen Fa Tea Store

Jhen Fa tea store in Tainan was founded more than 140 years ago. There is a black sign hung up in the hall of traditional townhouse; the golden colour “Jhen Fa” is engraved on the sign. In the store, people can find many about one hundred-year-old tin cans with faded text on them. The old tin cans contain new tea, old tea, and old days in Tainan city. Jhen Fa tea store has been packaged its tea with white wrap. Lighting reflected on paper shows different shades due to uneven creases created by wrapping. After wrapping the tea, the store stamped its name and types of tea on the packages. The packages are neatly placed on the shelves in the grayish-toned store. The old time are kept in the aroma scented by the tea leaves.

Tea Package in Jhen Fa Tea Store

Photo: NDD Design



Face Threading



Face Threading

Photo: NDD Design

Face threading is a way to remove very fine hair on the face. In the early custom, brides-to-be usually had their face hair threaded before wedding day to impress grooms so that grooms would fall in love with the bride on the first sight. However, nowadays it has gradually become a part of facial. In some traditional markets in small towns, we still can see many old women are sitting on short stools to receive their face threading service and chatting to each other at the time. The cosmetologist put on white and chalky powder to decrease friction. Thus, white chalky face is people's impression on face threading. People call this white chalky powder “face powder”. Hsinchu is the area producing most of this face powder.

Freeway 100 Scooter

Freeway 100 scooter is a standard equipment of a “*Tai-ke*” (a phrase that originally meant “redneck“ but has now come to encompass a youth-focused lifestyle that celebrates both the declassé and the haute.) in 1970s and 1980s.

Thai-kes, wearing their bell-bottoms and Farrah hair style, rode their scooters with customized stereos through many streets in Taiwan. These scooters were fashionable and eye-catching during that era.



White Mosquito Net

Photo: NDD Design

White Mosquito Net

Speaking of childhood memories related to white, many people would recall the prismatic pattern on white mosquito nets. This pattern is made of four pieces rhombus and reminds people of the swinging white shadows as the rhythm of a lullaby while they were sleepy at night in their Grandmothers’ place.

Those mentioned earlier are positive emotions related to white. Negative sense of value related to white is also common in daily life. In Taiwan, the theme colour of a funeral is white such as white decorations or arrangements and white mourning clothes in a funeral. Funeral gifts are also wrapped in white envelopes because white brings out the deep sorrow and grief. Thus, a protester on the street often writes on a long strip of white clothes to express his or her dissatisfaction.



Funeral Gift

Photo: NDD Design

White Inexpensive Tableware

White disposable tableware feels cheap due to its colour. This white disposable tableware is very easy to spot at food stalls in night markets. It is made of Styrofoam, PP or PE plastic. The reason why it became so popular was the poor disinfection technology of tableware, leading to the transmitted diseases, especially hepatitis B. Thus, government started promoting disposable tableware. In addition, disposable tableware is inexpensive, light weighted and easy to carry. Eventually, disposable tableware became so popular in restaurant business.



White Clothes used by Protester

Photo: NDD Design

However, to protect environment, in 2001 Taiwan passed the Waste Disposal Act, prohibiting restaurant from offering disposable tableware and plastic bags. Thus, many eateries began to use regular tableware again and then use ultraviolet to disinfect it.

Black

Black can be defined as the visual impression experienced when no visible light reaches the eye. This makes a contrast with whiteness. Black gives people a static and introverted image on a spiritual level. However, people are not used to black decorations in the temples in Taiwan. Black becomes the main colour for some other reasons. In this article, we will explain how black replaces other colours in the temples. In addition, pure black does not often appear in processed food. Adding the dark ingredients such as brown sugar actually makes food dark brown. We include dark brown in the scope of black.



Black-faced Mazu

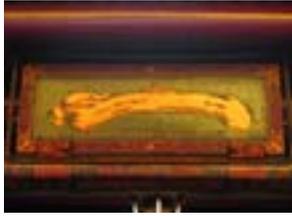
Photo: Vito Yang

Black used in Temples – Beiji Palace and Tsai’s Family Temple

The main colour in the temples in Taiwan is mostly red and artefacts in temples are mostly red or golden. Nowadays most black artefacts in the temple were not black originally. They actually have gradually turned into black because the devoted followers used incense and the smoke from burning incense darkened those artefacts day by day. The main colour of Beiji Palace is black. Beiji Palace is a temple worshipping “Tien God”; “Tien God” is the god of North in Taoist. The “north” corresponds to black in the colours of the five elements in China. Thus, pillars and doorsills in Beiji Palace are black and different from red in other temples; thus, Beiji Palace looks more dignified than other temples. When people are walking underneath the black pillars in Beiji Palace, as if there are some natural forces, people start to watch out what they say and how they behave.

Red is the main colour of most temples in Taiwan, but some temples use other colour as their main colour. Professor Chi-Hsiung Tseng mentioned that once in his column, “The white walls with blue and black decorations in San-Shan Guo-Wang Temple, the Hakka faith centre, are quite different from those Hoklo temples; they are very special and fresh. Tourists feel that the black walls in family temples in Kinmen look special. There are many family temples in Kinmen. Ancestors are worshipped in family temples. Family temples are different from Buddhist temples or other temples; thus, the colour used in family temples cannot be the same colour used in temples to worship gods; therefore, the walls in family temples are black. Large dose of black is hard to be ignored on the spacious wall.” (Tseng, 2010, P47-48)

“There is a great variety of colours in Taiwan’s temples. Besides the most popular red, the interior of temples is sometimes greyish black due to the large amount of smoke from burning incense. Thus, faithful followers repaint and add gold foil on smoky statues periodically. Nevertheless, soon after the retouching, the gods’ statues are smoked to dark black again. Even the face of Gods statues becomes black although the original face is other colours. The classic example is black faced Mazu. Black interior could set off the will of gods and add mysterious atmosphere. Some say that black is the most suitable colour for the temples. After the long red incense burns, its smoke adds sacred atmosphere in the temples and melted into the smoky podium. The black background sets off the curling upward green smoke and other multicoloured artefacts or decorations in the temples. This is because people feel colours are brighter when the background is black.” (Tseng, 2010, P49)



Sign Board in Tien Gong Temple in Tainan

Photo: NDD Design

Sign Board

When temples or shops are completed, there will be a piece of sophisticated and engraved sign board hanging above the hall. Now fewer stores hang up these sign boards, but the temples still do. Many sign boards in the temples look sophisticated and graceful and have become the focus of believers' visit. The background of sign boards was black because in the process of blending different colours if paint contacted minerals, paint would corrupt and cannot be used anymore. Nevertheless, at that era, only black and red pigment did not contain minerals. In addition, black gave people a feeling of retreating and hiding and could show off the engraved golden words better. Thus, most sign boards were with black background at that time.



Whisbih Medicinal Liquor

Photo: NDD Design

Whisbih Medicinal Liquor

From 1960's to 1970's, the economy in Taiwan took off, so the workload of labour increased a lot and labour inevitably had to work longer hours. Nevertheless, once they are sick, they cannot make money. Thus, labour started to emphasize health care because it costs too much to be sick and Whisbih became their friend. Chinese takes herb tea to cure their diseases and they believe that the darker the colour of the medicinal herb tea is, the more potent it is. Thus, the packaging of Whisbih is different from that of other beverages. To make Whisbih look reliable and effective, either the dark brown glass bottle or the label on the bottle of Whisbih are black toned. This marketing strategy corresponds to Chinese belief related to the colour of medicinal herb tea.



Pearl Milk Tea (Boba Milk Tea)

Photo: NDD Design

Boba Milk Tea(Pearl Milk Tea)

The pearl in pearl milk tea (Boba Milk Tea) is actually tapioca, which is originally yellowish white refreshment in Taiwan. Cooked tapioca is round shaped and black. Taiwanese usually add syrup or ice into cooked tapioca while enjoying it. In 1980's, bubble teashops were prevalent everywhere in Taiwan. To create some unique beverages to attract more customers in this competitive business, some bubble teashops began to add cooked tapioca in their milk tea to add more texture in milk tea. Boba milk tea became popular in student groups and then gradually became a national beverage. Black tapioca and light brown milk tea is not only the favourite of Taiwanese but also a representative beverage in the world because the recommendations from tourists and the establishment of international chains selling Taiwan's beverages.



Tapioca

Photo: NDD Design



Soy Sauce

Photo: NDD Design

Soy Sauce

Soy sauce was a condiment originated from a sauce used by the ancient royal families and derived from fermented meat (similar to the process of manufacturing fish sauce). It gradually spread to the public and later people found that they could manufacture this sauce with soybeans. The flavour of soy sauce was very close to that sauce but the cost of soybeans was much lower. Then soy sauce was widely spread to many areas in the world through Buddhist monks. The dark brown colour of soy sauce colour is from large amounts of sugars and amino acids etc. contained in the ingredients. A browning reaction during fermentation makes soy sauce appears dark. Taiwanese cuisine is derived from China; soy sauce is indispensable in the Chinese culinary culture. People living in northern China and southern China each have their own preference. The ways of making soy sauce are various. Siluo (in Yunlin, Taiwan) is the centre of soy sauce industry; its history has been more than a century due to the good water quality, temperature and humidity in Siluo. Thus, Siluo is known as a “Soy Sauce Kingdom” in Taiwan. Soy sauce manufactured in Siluo is aromatic, thick, and has its unique flavour. (Shi, n.d.)

Chinese use “inky” to refer to black. In Taiwanese (a variant of the Min Nan speech of Fujian province), people pronounced black “ou” and use “ou” to refer to all various hues of black. However, “ink” can also refer to ink stick, a kind of black pigment, used in Calligraphy and traditional Chinese painting. Ink stick is made of soot, pine soot, and glue; it is the presence of the amorphous type of carbon elements. To make the black ink, the ink stick is rubbed in water on an ink stone. The grinding action rubs ink from the stick, enabling it to mix with the water.

Culture of Colour Combination and Tradition in Taiwan

The cultural and sociological research on colour can be conducted first from the popularity of colours, also the colour scientists' most concerned topic. The accumulated data in various fields for a long period is required for research on colour preference so that we can tell the interrelated effect between region, nations, religious belief, and locality. This kind of information can provide very useful data to people who decide which colour is more favorable for the products they are developing when the products are closely related to the colour trend or national and cultural differences.

Of course, the colour preference and preferred colour combination in each country are closely related to fashion at that time. Contemporary fashion is generally a phenomenon in a shorter period; media speeds up the expansion of fashion and their relationship can't be overlooked. Culture, artistic styles and living habits were hard to be spread and were exclusive to a certain area due to the inconvenient transportation as well as slowly transmitted information. Today's media completely eliminates time and space constraints, and updates all fashion information in no time. From its rise to its maturity and then to its disappearance, it took two centuries (15th and 16th) for Italian Renaissance style to evolve completely. Nevertheless, after the 21st century, the cycle of modern art is often rather short. Nowadays it is very difficult to distinguish what the mainstream art is. Colour preference changes so fast that nobody can catch up. (Tseng, 2005)

Religious belief and habits in a country deeply influence the usual colour and taboo colour in a long period. Some interesting rules can be discovered through careful and closer observation. New elements, such as the worldwide popular culture spread by media, new art, new materials, more advanced science and technology as well as merchandise from local corporations etc, have spiced up Taiwanese culture and characteristics of colour combinations. Contemporary colour impression has evolved over time.

We will discuss Taiwan's cultural background related to colour in several classifications as following.

Daily Usual Colours

1. Red and Green

Red and green is complementary colour. Red and green are in many Chinese sayings, such as "one dash of red in green" and "red flowers and green leaves". People think red and green require each other to be outstanding. Another saying is "red and green is too gaudy" which means red and green is too eye-catching in a negative way. Complementary colour has a great visual impact on humans.



Pineapple Multicoloured Ball

Photo: NDD Design

Sign in the Temples

Red is usually the main colour of the objects in a temple. Signs are golden text with red background and the green rim makes them more outstanding and prominent in the temples.



Red and Green Broom

Photo: NDD Design

Red and Green Cleaning Tools

Traditional cleaning tools in Taiwan are often red and green. It is untraceable why the low-key cleaning tools would be red and green. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that this contrast colour is Taiwanese impression for cleaning utensils.

Terrazzo

Terrazzo is a method of paving and polishing floor. Most floors in the house in early Taiwan were Terrazzo. Besides all kinds of colours of fine stones, there was usually a main colour. Red and green appeared together on Terrazzo often. Perhaps because there were also a small dose of other colours, red and green did not look that weird.



Red and Green Terrazzo

Photo: NDD Design

2. Embroidery

Embroidery is one of the traditional craft in Chinese culture, using needle and thread to create all kinds of patterns. From a surface to three-dimensional dress and shoes, embroidery is multifunctional. All different colours of thread are used in Embroidery. What colour and texture of thread to use depends on what kind of patterns to embroider. In the eyes of the people in Taiwan, they still have a certain colour image of the traditional embroidery, such as red or achromatic colour background cloth with golden or silver thread.

To introduce colour of embroidery briefly, we quoted some paragraphs from articles written by three craftsmen.

Through observation of the existing artefacts, the basic characteristics of traditional embroidery in Taiwan are inherited from that in southern China (Fujian and Guangdong). The basic characteristics show that people preferred to contrast colour-sewing multicoloured or golden thread onto red or black clothes to express rich colour. The way that people love using red in celebrations also shows in handicrafts and forms a special aesthetic view for the embroidery colour. For religious embroidery, in addition to the widely used red for background, extensively use of golden and silver thread and cotton stuffing presented a shiny style. From a cultural psychology view, this aesthetic concept maybe related to the early immigrants' subconscious formed by their hardships in the early life and depressed lifestyle. (Lin, 2006)

Craftsmen usually love to use pure and contrast colour, such as red and green, to present a vivid and rich work. It is worth mentioning that golden and silver thread is usually used to go along with each other in Taiwanese embroidery. Extensively used golden and silver thread is not only decorative but can achieve a festive and splendid visual effect. Gold is the favourite of craftsmen and the people because gold implies wealth. (Wang, 2000)

Taiwan's various ethnic groups use slightly different colour for embroidery. "Cih Jhen" and "Jhèn Jhen" techniques are often used in northern Hsinchu : light-coloured thread such as beige, light green are embroidered onto dark fabrics such as black fabric to highlight the beauty of the slender lines with contrast colour.



Religious Embroidery of Eight Immortals Colour

Photo: NDD Design

Hakka ethnic group in Dongshi, Taichung especially loves to use black clothes stickers (such as the black cloud scrolls pattern stick to the lower end of the sword bag), the edge of the sword bag is dressed with golden thread, decorated with rectangular spirals, golden, red, black to make the work look classic and elegant. (Kao, 2006)

3. Sign

A large and attractive sign is probably a necessity for a business owner. The business owners in Taiwan has not only a three-dimensional sign in front of the store but also a standing-up light box on the sides to let passing-by vehicles spot the store from far away. Individual and small sized signs, LED marquees, flashing neon lights, special design of LOGO light boxes are the more the better. Tons of signs often amaze foreign tourists greatly.



In Taiwan, there are various colours of signs. Chains or larger businesses usually have their representative colour, so that the public can see and recognize them from far away. Regular businesses want outstanding colours for their signs and usually are open to many different colours. In a night market, most vendors selling hot food usually use warmer colour signs, such as red and yellow. The vendors selling cold beverages are not necessarily use warm colours; some of them use yellow and some other use cooling white as background of their signs.



Signs in a Fruit Stall

Photo: NDD Design

There are many gourmets-beloved eateries all over Taiwan. Those eateries usually hang up menu on the wall so that the customers can see it as soon as they arrive. Many customers can quickly browse through the menu on the wall and place their orders instantly. The design of menu tends to be functional. Thus, the background of the menu is usually white with red, blue or black text on it with obvious contrasting. On some more complicated menu, different groups of dishes were presented with different colours. From the menus in the eateries, we can tell how much Taiwanese love red and their resistance to black. Although black on white is clearer visually than blue or red on white. In the eateries, blue and red text on the menus still more popular than black one because black text looks too heavy.



Signs in a Hardware Store

Photo: NDD Design

Signs in many shops are quite distinctive. Merchandise in many shops (such as grocery stores, hardware stores or fruit stalls) change signs constantly because the names of the products change or the prices vary. These signs are usually quite simple and straightforward. By coincidence, many stores choose yellow as their main colour for signs. Taiwanese use white much less because too many white signs would give people bad associations. Thus, they choose a lighter colour, yellow, a more striking colour among light colours. Thus, everyone can see all kinds of yellow signs in the stores.



House or Apartment Leasing Advertisements

Photo: NDD Design

Besides all kinds of billboards on the streets, there are all sorts of apartments or houses leasing and selling advertisements on the noticeboards in villages or the residential areas near schools. There was difference in colour between the leasing and selling advertisements - leasing advertising paper was yellow but selling advertising was red. Nowadays there is no colour difference anymore. Additionally, in recent years most sales have been processed by real estate agencies. Therefore, most advertisements on bulletin boards are related to leasing. Although there is no colour difference anymore, most leasing advertisements are printed on red or yellow paper and seldom on white paper. It is still unknown whether it is because white gives Taiwanese bad associations. However, we can be sure that using red and yellow paper has become a tradition. Yellow is very eye-catching and red gives people happy associations. In recent years, many light pink leasing advertisements appear; pink tones down the harshness of red but still keeps the happy associations.



Painting on Transformers

Photo: Wen-Qi, Ceng

Transformer

Multicoloured transformers can be considered one of the unique scenes on the streets. Perhaps due to government policy to beautify and green the landscape in the city, government agencies felt that monochromatic transformers were not beautiful enough; therefore, they decided to paint transformers with multicoloured theme including all nature and undersea scenery, animals, plants, and even cartoon theme etc. Sometimes people would not know whether to laugh or cry when they saw the somewhat deformed SpongeBob on a transformer waving to them. Nevertheless, this is also revealing Taiwanese's unique broad mind and aesthetic view.

Although the transformers are with a wide range of multicoloured themes and situations, most background colour is either blue or green. Blue and green are soothing colours for eyes and also very common in nature, such as the blue sky and the ocean as well as green grasslands and plants. Whether the blue and green transformers add more nature scenery in the grayish cement jungle, it is up to the viewers.



Bando

Photo: NDD Design

Bando

"Bando" (banquet) in Taiwan is a festive banquet for weddings, worship, completion of new homes or elections etc. In the past, tables, chairs, tableware, and food was usually from hosts' home. As the bando culture evolves, specialized contractors supply the tables, chairs, tableware, and food nowadays.

Bando is full of lively and festive atmosphere, and furniture, tableware and food are associated with how to create this atmosphere. In bando, tables are covered with red tablecloths; red stools are stackable, tableware, such as bowls, plates, sauce dishes, cups and even tissue paper, are pink. Thus, all shades of red make bando very festive. Besides white tableware, the most common disposable tableware is the pink one. It does not only appear in bando but also other occasions such as in eateries, night markets, or in a Mid-Autumn Festival barbecue.



Red Plastic Stools

Photo: NDD Design

Colour Taboo

1.Red and White Pastry



Red and White Stick

Photo: NDD Design

As the discussion related to the colour hue described above, red is usually associated with festive events while white indicates funeral or death. Thus, in order to avoid the negative perception of white, a little bit red will be added into the white pastries made with white rice, white sugar, especially festive food, to be more festive. Besides practices like combining red and white, some white pastries will be stamped with red food colour to achieve festivity and some kind of declaration of copyright.



Salt Cake Sold by Temples in Tainan

Photo: NDD Design

Festive candies like red and white stick in Chinese New Year, tangyuan (rice ball) in Lantern Festival, salt cake sold beside temples, and post-labor must-have pon cake (usually pan fried with sesame oil and eggs) in Tainan, are red and white classic food.



Pon Cake

Photo: Yu-An, Chen

Pon cake is one unique pastry in Tainan. It originated since Ming Dynasty. The appearance is 8 to 9 cm diameter round dish; its body is puffed and hollow with brown sugar or sugar paste adhesive inside. Its skin is flakey and has a pure and simple flavour. The pon cake is made of flour, peanut oil, salad oil, lard, white sugar, black sugar molasses, and maltose. Maker blends flour and oil proportionally then put sugar paste inside. During baking, it rises naturally by the heat inside. After giving births to babies, women eat pon cake to nourish their bodies, so it is also called post-labor cake. The way to make it is poking a hole in the centre of the cake, pour raw eggs, plus dried longan, ginger or rice wine and then pan frying on the pan greased with sesame oil. It is a nutritious supplement when resources were limited. Because its scent is inviting, people call it fragrant cake. Tainan City Government Department of Cultural Affairs made it the Tainan specialty and named it Tainan Fragrant Cake. (Zhang, n.d.)

Pastries contain cultural meaning of custom and festivals including birth, weddings, festivals, and worship. Pastries accompany everyone while growing up and load the special meaning of life and gustatory memory. The salt cake sold by temples is a kind of pastry used to worship gods. It also represents an auspicious wish for “going upward”. The salt cake is made of cooked glutinous rice flour, sugar, and salt. Due to the stickiness from glutinous rice, it is actually easier to make texture of salt cakes more even and tastier by hand than electronic mixer. Tasty salt cakes have to be handmade; nevertheless, handmade salt cakes are laborious and time-consuming. The younger generation does not want to take over and the old masters insisted on hand making pastries. The bakeries that still use old-fashioned way to make pastries are hard to find.

Red and White Rice Ball

Photo: NDD Design



Custom Related to Festivals and Holidays



Parade Formation

Photo: OMine Chang

Parade Formation and the Eight of the Dead World

Parade formation, a kind of folk art, is an integral part of a temple fair in Taiwan. The parade formation is divided into regular parade and martial parade. Regular parade includes drums, transition to spring, cattle plow, *bu ma*, *cai jiao jyue*, the big drum troupe, song of sick kids, and *shih ba mo*. Martial parade includes Song Jiang parade formation, the eight of the dead world, lion parade, dragon parade, and *ci ye ba ye*. (Huang, 2002)

In the early years, the parade formation in temple fairs gave the mixed impression because some gangsters, mafia bosses, and dropouts were involved with the Parade formation. On top of it, those people sold illegal drugs and fight with each other. Thus, the public is afraid of and respect them. However, in recent years, because the government implied policies to revitalize local industries and many well-known Parade formation groups appeared on the big screen via the mass media communication, the public started to understand the culture of Parade formation.

Multicoloured makeup and costumes could be seen in the Parade formation. The pattern of makeup changes as the role's status changes. Take the Eight of the Dead World, for example, in order to intimidate evil spirits and escort god, players of the Eight of the Dead World have to use makeup to exaggerate facial features with brilliant contrast colours to show mean and evil look. This makeup is known as "open face". After opening one's face, he would become the god he wants to play and has godhead.



Parade Formation

Photo: OMine Chang



Painting on a door in a Temple

Photo: NDD Design



Colour Image of a Temple

Photo: NDD Design



Tiger on an altar

Photo: NDD Design

1. Painting in Temples

When it comes to the temple painting, we inevitably have to start with the religious beliefs in Taiwan. Taiwan is very religion diversified. Taiwanese not only respect traditional beliefs but also have broad mind to religious beliefs from outside. Thus, there are many foreign religions and their branches in Taiwan. Traditional religions are Buddhism, Taoism and folk beliefs. However, except several temples are pure Buddhist monasteries, belief in other temples is mixed with Taoism. Because of the generous religious views, the confluence of Buddhism and Taoism in a temple is Taiwanese characteristics (worship of different gods in one temple). (the Time of Taiwan website, n.d.) Regarding to temple painting, this article will focus more on common Taoism.

In Taiwan, there is a wide variety of decorations in temples. The decorations in temples includes a variety of arts, such as stone carving, woodcarving, cochin ceramic, embroidery, sign board, and painting etc. The painted subjects are all kinds of historical stories, mythology, and fables. A variety of subjects and styles of painting make the temples in Taiwan unique.

Painting in the temples can be broadly divided into door-god painting, painting on beams and walls. Shao-Rong Kang investigated the colour use in the temples in southern Taiwan and wrote a paragraph relating to door-god painting as s, “During door-god painting, the main colours used are red, green, red, yellow, purple, black, and white etc. To reduce the gaudy feel from the highly saturated pigment, artists use the secondary colour more or add a little black. For door-god painting, artists use cloisonism (a kind of colouring technique) and emphasize more on decorative function. For beams and walls painting, artists use light and pastel colour and not pursue rich and vivid visual effect. When using colour, artists are subjective to colour use, follow the original colour of the subject and try hard to pursue coordinated and harmonized colour to fit life experience of the people.” (Kang, 2010)

2. Impression of Multicoloured Altars in Religious Festivals

When Qing Dynasty ruled Taiwan, many residents of Zhangzhou and Quanzhou in China immigrated to Taiwan. Large numbers of immigrants carried statues of gods, incense, and incense ash as talismans. Most people carried statues of Mazu because Mazu is the goddess in the sea. Therefore, believers placed statues of Mazu on boats to pray for their safety while crossing the ocean.

In early reclamation, due to under-developed medicine, whenever there was an endemic disease, it would cause death of many people. Thus, people believed in disease-dispelling gods, Wangye. Wangye were also known as “Chen Shui Ye” or “Fu Chen Shui”, with many different surnames. According to legend, Wangye could cure disease, so people believed that those gods have power to grant them health. Later, the village gradually prospered so believers built many temples to thank God. Thus, temples worshipping Mazu and Wangye accounted for more than half. In the people’s mind, temples were not only religious centres but also enlighten and relieve the local people. (the Time of Taiwan website, n.d.)



An altar in Jin Luan Palace

Photo: NDD Design

Thus, most recognized religious festivals are related to Mazu and Wangye, such as Mazu touring of inspection from Chaotian Temple at Beigang in Yunlin; Chen Nan Temple in Da Jia district, Taichung; Tianhou Temple at Lugang in Changhua and Wangye festivals such as “Jian Jiao” and burning replica boats etc. Their organizations and custom are large-scaled, complex and different in many areas. We will use the colour of altars during one Wangye festival (burning replica boats in Jin Luan Palace at Jiading in Kaohsiung) as an example to discuss.

“Jiao” means great religious festivals held to thank gods. Burning the replica boats is very critical and the climax during the activity. People could see a long and spectacular altar extending in the square of Jin Luan Palace. People could find flowers and animals made of carved vegetables or fruits; they looked sophisticated and vivid. Light box with text “ritual ceremony” on it was made of carved winter melon; its transparent flesh reflected bright yellow through the light. Beautiful peonies made of carved watermelons; its pulp formed petals; white flesh highlighted the contours of pink petals and strengthened the three-dimensional sense. The whole altar was decorated with yellow and red and sometimes dressed with a little green from peel and leaves to make red stand out. The altar was full of the colour of festivity in the mind of Taiwanese.



An altar in Jin Luan Palace

Photo: NDD Design

The tableware on the altar was set up for gods. Thus, gold was the best choice such as golden plate, golden bowl, and golden-rimmed red teacup with the most distinguished dragon and phoenix patten. The silk and shiny fabric decorated items on the side. People did their best to show how much they valued this festival to gods. The flowers on the altar were mostly tropical flowers such as chrysanthemums, orchids etc. due to Taiwan’s geographic position. Most of them were warm colour, such as red and yellow, bright, and with high saturation. They also set off the colour on altar.

Different from the meticulous style in the temples, the painting in the ceremony (more like painting used in the outdoor traditional drama in countryside) is usually lively, brilliant and with high lightness (value) and saturation(saturation). In addition, appealing bold lines are used and contrast colour is frequently used to emphasize the theme of the picture.

Painting in the Ceremony in Jin Luan Palace

Photo: NDD Design



Colours of Political

As long as it is close to an election day, we can see all kinds of bursting advertisements on billboards and all kinds of flags. Each party has its own vibrant and representative colour, such as blue for Kuomintang, green for Democratic Progressive Party, yellow for New Party, and Orange for People First Party etc. Many Taiwanese media uses the “blue confronts green” and “Sky is blue above Choshui River “to replace the official name of each party. Taiwanese use similar way to describe their political stance. Pan-blues and pan-greens correspond to the right and the left used in Europe or the United States.

The most distinct colours appeared in the final campaign rallies for Taiwan’s presidential election. The colours of the flags, uniforms, hats, vests, etc. were making a distinction, which is an interesting phenomenon in Taiwan with quite mature democracy. Chiayi in the centre of Taiwan has been considered the city where two main parties were tied. There is a roundabout with fountain in the centre of the city. This roundabout is open to both the main parties in large elections (legislators and President) for the last night of the election campaign. The roundabout was divided into blue and green sides. The supporters of each party were in high spirits to support their political parties. There was even the performance of the dance troupe on the amusing car and Parade formation. Under the tense caused by confrontation, regardless of who win the election, this as- if- carnival political campaign always ended peacefully. Taiwan media call this place the Holy Land of democracy.

However, in recent years, because of serious rivalry in the political arena, some candidates also avoid the representative colour as the background for billboards to show their neutrality, therefore, they can attract voters in the middle.

Election Flags

Photo: Wei Yun Hsu



On October 10, 2006, a political activity with distinctive colour image occurred on the streets in Taiwan, news media called “Red Shirts Anti-corruption march”. During activity, all protesters wore red shirts instead of holding white flags. Ming-The Shih, the former Chairman of Democratic Progressive Party, initiated this protest to ask the president Shui-Bian Chen to be responsible for State Affairs Fund case, many scandals related to their cronies and family and to resign voluntarily.

Setting aside the political effectiveness and the content of the protest, “red mass” gives the most profound impression on the people in addition to the gestures and slogans. Red is very outstanding and symbolizes anger. The picture of Ketagalan Boulevard packed with protesters in red is memorable. News media called it “millions of red tide”, “the chaos of the Red Shirts”, and “Red Shirt movement” etc. We can tell the colour image of the campaign is strong enough to represent the main spirit of the protest.

The reasons why red was chosen as the theme colour for this protest were widely divergent. First, protestors wanted to avoid being mixed up with the representative colour of other political parties in Taiwan (blue, green, yellow, and orange). Second, protestors wanted to express their anger to corruption. Of course, there are some other stronger political explanations. In any case, the red image of this protest is considered politically representative in Taiwan.

Campaign in Taipei

Photo: OMine Chang



Countryside Culture

1. Gaudy Colour Combination and Lighting / Amusing Car, Taiwanese Puppet Show, Taiwanese Opera

Amusing car show is a special Taiwanese culture; this culture was introduced to Taiwan from “Arts Club House”, performing traditional Chinese nanguan music, in Xiamen or Quanzhou. Cars used in amusing car show have evolved from originally vehicles carrying by humans, cows, to wooden-wheeled vehicle, electric cars, or even large trucks. Decorations on stage were getting fancier. With the emergence of advanced technology, a variety of sound and lighting effects and hydraulic stage appeared. (Wikipedia, n.d.) Nowadays amusing car show is the most famous folk culture in Taiwanese countryside events, weddings and funerals. The content of the performance on amusing cars has gone through many changes, from early music playing slowly transformed into a performing stage for female artists, later even followed by striptease and pole dance etc. Mainstream of songs performed on stage has changed slowly from Taiwanese pop music to the electronic dance music.

After several changes, amusing cars are like “Transformers” in the movie. In a short period, a truck will be able to expand into a large stage, with gorgeous decorations, dazzling lights, and the deafening sound stereo. This electric stage car is said a stunning and unique product in Taiwan.

Chao-Liang Shen, photographer in Taiwan, spent over four years traveling all over Taiwan. He shot stages on amusing cars without dancers and the audience deliberately around the “magic hour”, which is about sunset but sky is not very dark yet. In the unique lighting, space and environment, the dazzling amusing cars would be able to perform. His series of works - STAGE- demonstrated varieties in Taiwan, are thought-provoking and amazed Taiwanese and foreigners. (Xie, 2011)

An Amusing Car with excellent sound and lighting effect

Photo: Meng Yin Chen





An Amusing Car Dancer

Photo: Meng Yin Chen

After an introduction of the history and the body structure of the amusing cars, we want to guide you in the colours. The colours in amusing cars, like the bold performers on the stage, have a native rustic charm. There is a wide variety of fantasy themes such as the Rainbow World, western unicorn methodology, and castle in Arabian Nights, insect and butterfly garden, undersea amusement park, and the track in outer space and so on.

In addition to vibrant colours with high lightness and saturation, extensively used dazzling fluorescent colours and unique neon colours, the stages are dressed with a wide variety of sparkling silver mirror-like mosaics and multicoloured LED bulbs. Because amusing car shows starts at night most of the time, various sources of fancy lighting, such as multicoloured neon lights, projection lamps, LED lights walls, transforms its intensity and hue as the show changes, add more three-dimensional effect on originally fancy stage, and create a psychedelic entertainment space for a dreamy night.



Betel Nut

Photo: NDD Design

2. Betel Nut Culture

Betel nut (*Areca catechu*, LINN.), the seed of the areca palm, like coconut, is palmaceous evergreen and can grow to up to 21 meters. Betel nuts come from the Indonesian and are originally one of the important medicinal plants, but in modern time, most betel nuts are used as refreshing food. (Wei, n.d.) It is estimated that red-lipped family (people who are addicted to chewing betel nut) in Taiwan spend more than a thousand billion Taiwan dollars annually on betel nuts, also known as Taiwan chewing gum. According to figures from the Council of Agriculture, up to seventy thousand farmers grow betel nuts, and betel nuts are Taiwan's most important cash crop after 1990. However, the way that Taiwanese consume betel nut significantly strengthens its carcinogenic. Although it does more harm than good, betel nut chewing is still very common in Taiwan.

Betel nut kiosks in Taiwan, decorated with bright neon lights, are quite common in the north to south freeway in the western Taiwan and roads in suburbs. Their main customers are truck drivers, who need to keep themselves awake by chewing betel nut in the long-distance driving. To attract more customers and compete for high profits, some kiosks hire girls who were dressed sexy to sell betel nuts and refreshing drinks and successfully got the attention from many truck drivers. Due to more and more other businesses in the same trade followed the same selling strategy; the business became more and more competitive. 'Betel nut beauties' are wearing less and less and the lights decorations are more and fancier. Neon shining light-emitting kiosks on the industrial roads are trying to be the most luminous.

The fronts of betel nut kiosks in Taiwan are usually designed with large floor-to-ceiling glass. Betel nut beauties working inside look like dolls displayed in a store. Signs are usually flashing neon tubes or twinkling projection lamps and decorated in a mosaic way. The colours used on signs are mostly highly recognizable contrast colours so the drivers can immediately notice the betel nut kiosks in the middle of the night. Betel nut kiosks sell refreshing drinks and bottled water etc. besides betel nuts.



Neon light decorated Glass
Betel Nut Kiosk

Photo: NDD Design

The origins of the “betel nut beauties” in the betel nut kiosk are divergent. It is said that in 1976 the mother in Hsie family was selling betel nuts. Her kiosk was located at a section of Shuang Dong Road on Jhong Tan Highway. Although Shuang Dong is a transportation hub between Puli and Taichung, where a large number of vehicles comes and goes, very few customers came to purchase betel nuts. The mother suddenly had an idea of letting her three daughters, who worked in the factory and made twenty thousand Taiwan dollars monthly, sell betel nuts. After the three sisters in Hsie family took over their mother’s business, the business was surprisingly good. Thus, this result soon set off a wave in Shuang Dong. Various betel nut kiosks had their daughters or some hired young women to sell betel nuts also. Shuang Dong became the place of origin of the betel nut beauties.

In 2002, the local government in Taiwan started prohibiting betel nut beauties from wearing too less, and used an administrative order or law to regulate the kiosks initially from Taipei to Taoyuan County. So far, in the metropolises, such as Taipei, Taichung, Tainan, and Kaohsiung, only sporadic betel nut beauties are located in the suburbs or near the interchanges, but many of them do not reveal their body that much as before. (Zhang, n.d.)

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Neon light decorated Glass
Betel Nut Kiosk

Photo: NDD Design



BIE-SIA-SIA Laundry Powder

Photo: NDD Design



BIE-PAU-PAU - Baby's skin

Photo: Cun-Min, Zheng

Language and Culture, Rhythms of Colours

In Taiwanese Hokkien, using colour adjectives with ABB form to describe things is very lively and vivid. In her thesis, Semantic Investigation on Colour Adjectives with ABB forms in Taiwanese, Pei-Tsi Liu from National Hsinchu Teachers College discovered that even with some overlapping, the semantic characteristics as a whole are unique for each ABB form. In other words, in the concept of considering the phrases in whole, even if some colour adjectives with the same “A” in ABB form, the meaning of different colour adjectives is not the same. (Liu, 2003) In Taiwanese Hokkien (Hoklo), people use the colour adjectives with ABB form very often. In the colour adjectives with ABB form, “A” describes the colour, “BB” is adverb used to modify “A” and supplements description of lightness, saturation, length, heat, hardness, taste and state of mind. The following examples are used to illustrate some colour adjectives.

BIE-SIA-SIA: it describes the new and bright white image. A laundry detergent manufacturer even use BIE-SIA-SIA as its brand name

BIE-PAU-PAU: it is often used in conjunction with the softness .It can be used to describe fresh-baked white fluffy bread (steamed buns) and sometimes is used to describe children’s silky, supple and smooth skin.

BIE-CHANG-CHANG: it is used to describe something very white and make people feel pale and barren. It is sometimes used to describe a person’s face or hair colour.

OU-MA-MA: in Taiwanese Hokkien, “OU” is used to refer to black and no specific word is assigned to describe black. “OU-MA-MA” is often used to describe the colour of sky, “MA-MA” describes an opaque feel.

“OU” is used to refer to black in Taiwanese Hokkien. OU-SHOU-SHOU is used to describe a place is very dark without light so people cannot see anything.

“OU” is used to refer to a mass of black and “LIU-LIU “describes glossy feel. OU-LIU-LIU is often used to describe the black shiny feel, usually used to describe hair.

HANG-CHI-CHI: Festivity is usually presented by the bright red colour, the kind that neither too brilliant nor too claret, “HANG-CHI-CHI” describes the above-mentioned red applies to the wall of the whole room, space full of red.

CING-SHUN-SHUN: Green refers to ashen face. “SHUN-SHUN” describes a bleak look in the Taiwanese Hokkien. CING-SHUN-SHUN usually describes a person’s ashen face. When an environment is full of green light, people also use CING-SHUN-SHUN to describe the colour and atmosphere.



HANG-CHI-CHI - Lantern

Photo: NDD Design

Conclusion

Local colour image is inseparable with local culture, custom or historical culture. This article describes interesting symbols of Taiwan and Taiwanese collective memory based on colours, and supplements some background information for the readers with different cultural backgrounds. In the field of colour science, we quoted a large number of articles by recognized scholars in Taiwan. We are particularly thankful to Professor Chi-Hsiung Tseng for providing us precious research material. If we did not use their intently explored knowledge in the field of colour science as our basis for the study, our team cannot possibly complete this work.

Because the article describes the colour and its implications in a more contemporary vision, sometimes due to the changes of era, we cannot find the most primitive reasons or causes. We hope this imperfection could encourage other experts in this field to discuss and explore further.

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Research Report 2013



Thailand

the
Colours
of Asia

Red Yellow Blue Green Black & White

亞洲
色彩

紅黃藍綠黑與白



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COLOURS OF THAILAND: CLASSES AND BELIEFS



Thailand is situated in the centre of the Southeast Asia region, bordered by Myanmar, Laos in the West, the North and the Northeast, Cambodia at the Southeast and Malaysia at the South.

Photo: Unknown source

In the past few years, many incidents have been occurred in Thailand. The Thais have witnessed the royal cremation of HRH Princess Bejaratana Rajasuda Sirisobhabannavadi, experienced the political demonstration of the so called “the May Massacre” and to welcomed the birth of the latest vintage theme park, *Ploenwan*. When we look at the series of these mismatched incidents and examine them in terms of colours, many questions arouse. Can we decode the origin of colour using? What are the main colours used in a certain period and a certain place? And why these colours are used in that specific way in regards to the Thai ways of living?

Geographically, Thailand is situated in the centre of the Southeast Asia region, bordered by Myanmar and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic in the West, the North and the Northeast, Cambodia at the Southeast and Malaysia at the South. It is a perfect spot for the country to experience and influence by dazzlingly different cultures from all over the land, regardless the direction, whether it would come from the North, the South, the East or the West. As one of the member countries of Greater Maekong Subregion, though it is not geological region but Thailand has long shared both tradition and culture, including many common beliefs with states in the Maekong Basin; Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Vietnam and the Yunnan Provice of China. Not to mention, Northern hill tribes which have also a part to play in the area. A melting pot of all cultures here and far, it is not surprised to see the main use of colours in Thailand is unique, a colour combination of Hindu, animistic and Buddhist beliefs with a tip from Western influences kick started in the 1960’s, that painted the Thai lives in every aspect, from delicate costumes to elaborated art and architecture, from the character of utmost loyalty to political ideology and from pleasuring recreation to humorous design. These colours are us, and they all have become the soul of this country’s identity.

The elite tradition of mixing and matching colours is brought back once again in the royal cremation of HRH Princess Bejaratana Rajasuda Sirisobhabannavadi during April, 8 - 12, 2011. Originated from the Brahman-Hindu belief, colours representing Hindu astrology and mythology have long influenced the Thai traditional in wearing day-to-day costume for good luck, power and glory and were widely adopted by courtiers of the royal palace before it was spread down to commoners. Slow living behind the palace's wall meant court ladies gently put fineness in their livings, especially in the way they dressed up themselves. According to days of the week, they paired colours for their garments and shawls, red with green and yellow with blue, to name a few. The Siamese twist of paring colours created a new and widely accepted pattern in colour using for prosperity.

The ingenious creation even went further when the two colours were not just paired up but mixed together to make new shades of opulence, expressing in traditional arts and royal crafts. However, as time goes, by the adapted originality of paring colours were put on a test, when Western colour influences roamed the court at the turn of the 20th century and forced some colour adjustment in certain moments like mourning period and the royal funeral to be matched with the civilised changing world.



Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) invaded street of Bangkok

Photo: Unknown source

The political demonstrations from both the National United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) and the protestors of People's Alliance for Democracy, PAD interestingly show the transition of colour meaning where red, the colour of UDD, and yellow, the colour of PAD, are appropriated in different connotations, created an impact shift of meaning for the two colours among the Thais' perception. They become a colour demonstration of a totally different belief and identity that have subtle implications of classes and political ideology. In a political context, red and yellow have meaning for the nation no less than the tricolours of the country's flag; red, white and blue. In fact, they represent the power of belief and the determined will to change which were vividly expressed when protestors either from UDD or PAD invaded streets of Bangkok and ephemerally changed its scenery with huge waves of their representative colours.

However, during the long period of the political turmoil of 2006 - 2010, other colours also appeared on the scene. Green for the military, blue for the monarchy and multi colours for people who did not agree with the abovementioned two, they gave more layers of meanings to the complicated political colour context which clearly shown us that each group has its own agenda and the road to reconciliation would not be that easy as simply mixing their colours together and create a new colour palette out of them. At the beginning of the 1990's bright colours from nature and folk ways of living were explored with hope to find a new meaning of being Thai, which were somehow lost and succumbed to the rapid change of the 1960's. The relocating of labors from countryside to the capital city of Thailand with the economy shifted from agricultural base to industrial base results in diversity of folk culture and beliefs flooding the city which, subtly or not, becomes a source of inspiration for many art and cultural practitioners. The quest for authentic Thainess in terms of colour took artists, and people in the creative industries throughout the land where ochre red and indigo blue of folk textiles were selected to express the newly interpreted Thainess along with synthetic pink and glittery green of temple fairs. Not like the sophisticated colours of the court and the royal crafts, these colours are everywhere, easy to find and have nothing of the deep root. However, it does not mean that these colours have no value, on the contrary, they mean that the Thai have another pattern colour using, down to earth, fun and playful.

These bright colours are embraced in the modern Thai context as a new "colour" asset for design and creativity which show the world how the typical tropical people of Thailand portray themselves through colours. A theme park, art pieces, commercial ads and movies are among the top creations that are benefits from these folk colours and make use out of them. In a way, the use of these commoner colours is the counter attack to the state and its set of the "Thai identity" where royal and traditional colours are used and standardised the colour identity of Thailand. Last but not least, they are all part of the searching for "Thainess" brand to be sale in the Western Market as a new Thai colour Identity.

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เร็ววันสี

PAIRING AND MIXING COLOURS: FROM ROYALS TO COMMONERS

In April 2012, during the royal cremation of HRH Princess Bejaratana Rajasuda Sirisobhabannavadi¹, the Council of Ministers of Thailand issued an official statement requesting a collaboration of all Thai citizens to wear black clothes as a formal sign of mourning for 3 days (The Secretariat of the Cabinet, 2012). The Television Pool of Thailand broadcast the entire ceremony, as well as the royal pink-tinted golden crematorium housing an enormous golden urn containing the body of HRH Princess Bejaratana². The crematorium was elegantly erected at the Royal Ground (Sanam Luang) with the regal Grand Palace serving as a backdrop. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, dressed in black and white with yellow sash, and Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, dressed in all black with yellow sash, arrived at the ceremony in an official state car in ivory colour, the colour of Royal vehicles. Other members of the royal family were dressed in black while the royal guards were in red uniforms. Police officers, government officials and other high-ranking officers were dressed in their respective colours according to the units they belonged to.

HRH Princess Bejaratana Rajasuda Sirisobhabannavadi, the sole daughter of King Rama VI of Chakri Dynasty, was born on the 24th of November 1925. Her “birthday colour” is pink. The birthday colour of each king or royal family member is the same as the skin of the guardian god of each particular day.



Royal pink-tinted golden crematorium housing at the royal cremation of HRH Princess Bejaratana Rajasuda Sirisobhabannavadi

Photo: Kanteera Sanguantung.





Chandra

Photo: Unknown source

Based on traditional astrological beliefs, a particular colour is assigned to each day of the week in accordance with the corresponding guardian gods (or Mae Seu in Thai), starting from Sunday until Saturday. The seven guardian gods have their own respective legends (Sor. Plynnoi, 2006, 101)

Surya

Legend has it that Shiva, one of the three Hindu supreme deities, gathered 6 Great Lions (Rajasiha), ground them into powder and wrapped them up with a rose-red fabric before sprinkling them with an elixir, thus creating the red-skinned god Surya.

Chandra

Legend has it that Shiva magically turned 15 female angels into powder and wrapped them up with a light yellow fabric before sprinkling them with an elixir, thus creating the light yellow-skinned god Chandra.



Brihaspati

Photo: Unknown source

Mangala

Legend has it that Shiva magically turned 8 buffaloes into powder and wrapped them up with a dark red fabric in order to create the god Mangala with zircon-colour body. Some say that his body is actually "pink".

Budha

Legend has it that Shiva magically turned 17 Great Elephants into powder and wrapped them up with a leaf-green fabric before sprinkling them with an elixir, thus creating the god Budha with emerald-green body.

Brihaspati

Legend has it that Shiva magically turned 19 Rishis (Hermits) into powder and wrapped them up with a bright red orange fabric before sprinkling them with an elixir, thus creating the god Brihaspati with bright red orange body.



Shukra

Photo: Unknown source

Shukra

Legend has it that Shiva magically turned 21 cows into powder and wrapped them up with a light indigo blue fabric before sprinkling them with an elixir, thus creating the god Shukra whose body is rumored to have different colours. However, based on paintings and pictures of this god, he has indigo blue skin.

Shani

Legend has it that Shiva magically turned 10 tigers into powder and wrapped them up with a dark brown sepia fabric before sprinkling them with an elixir thus creating the god Shani with dark brown sepia body.



King Chulalongkorn (Rama V)

Photo: Unknown source

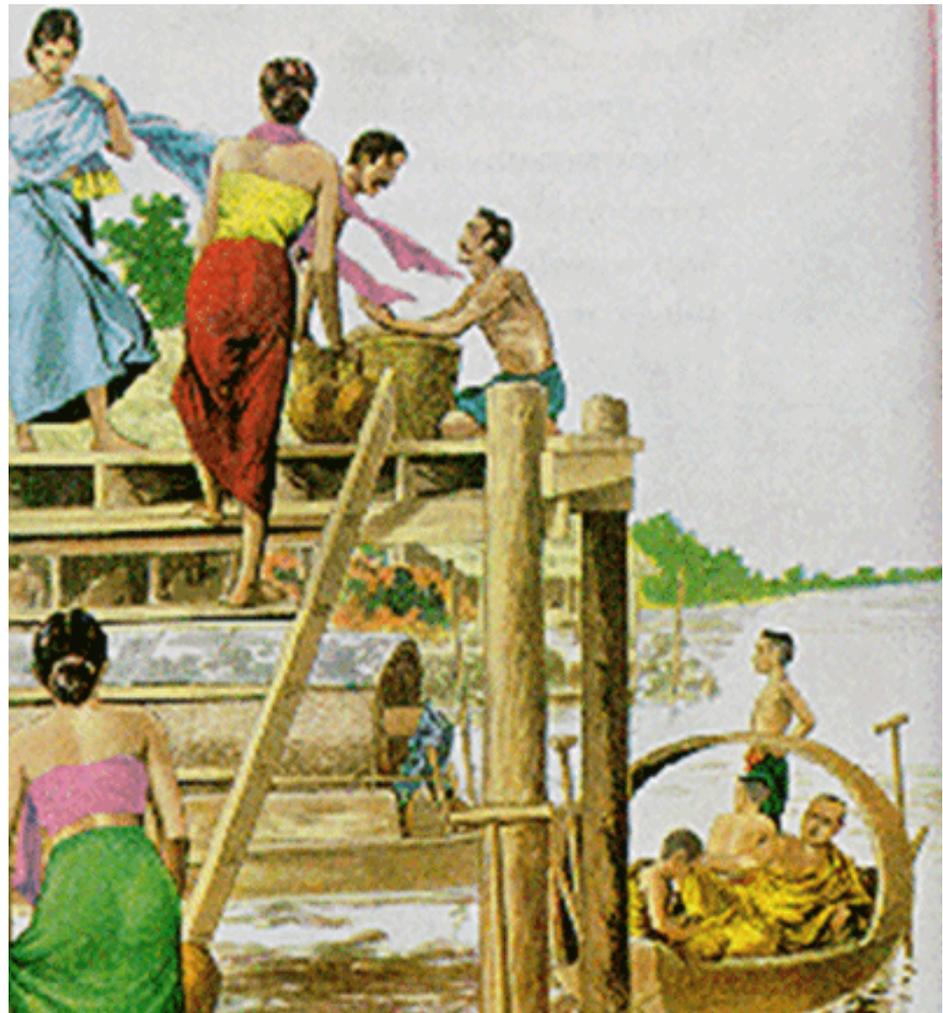
The birthday colour of each royal family member will be used as the main colour theme in royal ceremonies, just as pink was used in the royal crematorium of HRH Princess Bejaratana's³. The symbolic colours associated with each king of Chakri Dynasty are based on their birthdays as follows:

Rama I	Wednesday	Green ⁴
Rama II	Wednesday	Green
Rama III	Monday	Yellow and White
Rama IV	Thursday	Orange ⁵
Rama V	Tuesday	Pink ⁶
Rama VI	Saturday	Purple, black and dark blue ⁷
Rama VII	Wednesday	Green
Rama VIII	Sunday	Red
Rama IX	Monday	Yellow and White ⁸

It is thought that the belief in the colours of days and guardian gods was introduced into Thai culture since Ayutthaya period. These colours were believed to bring power and fortune. The kings in the old days would choose to dress in accordance with the colour of the day in which they would go into battle. Sunthorn Phu, a Thai royal poet active in the reign of King Rama II, mentioned about the use of colours in one of his poetic works called “Sawaddiraksa”, which was intended to teach men about various aspects of life, as follows (Sunthorn Phu, 1970, p. 51):

As for raiment of warring men, a complete set of attires in seven colours is essential. For Sunday of luck and fortune, wear auspicious red garments. Pearly white is best for Monday, as you will live on for years to come. Tuesday is for purple with a tint of indigo, as you will be blessed with power to win. Shiny orange is best for Wednesday, with glassy shades mixed within. Prepare green and yellow for Thursday. Wear smoky gray on Friday and wars will be won. With black apparels on Saturday, enemies will cower in fear. Follow these colour rules and you will be free from harm.

The use of the colour of the day in this work is based on traditional beliefs of older generations, which is different from the current colours of guardian gods (or Mae Sue). For example, indigo blue is for Tuesday, orange is for Wednesday and yellowish green is for Thursday. This is due to the fact that the colours we use nowadays follow a new set of rules established in the era of King Rama VI, which will be discussed later on.



Sawaddiraksa, poetic works by Sunthorn Phu

Photo: Unknown source

The fact that ladies of the court or palace women officials are dressed in accordance with the colour of the day is considered as a part of Thai culture that combines traditional beliefs with the use of multiple colours (Mrigadayavan, 2007). This consequently results in a beautiful and eye-pleasing combination of colours in court fashion. This is truly suitable for those living within the Grand Palace which symbolizes the Heavenly Abode. It is believed that by following the dressing colour rules, the power and virtues of the King will be augmented proportionally. Momchao (M.C.) Jongjitthanom Diskul mentioned about the use of colours in one of her memoirs as follows (Weerasilchai, 2006, p.39):

...on Sunday, wear a lychee-red garment with a light green shawl, like the colour of an asoka tree, or a leaf-green garment with a ruby-red shawl. On Monday, wear a light yellow garment with a navy blue shawl or a purplish red or a grayish blue garment, like the colour of a pigeon, with an orangey yellow shawl. On Tuesday, wear a light purple garment with a light green shawl, like the colour of an asoka tree, or a light green garment with a purple shawl. On Wednesday, wear an iron-gray or mung-bean-green garment with a light or dark orangey yellow shawl. On Thursday, wear an orange garment with a light green shawl or a leaf-green garment with a ruby-red shawl. On Friday, wear a dark navy blue garment with a yellow shawl, like the colour of a yellow oleander flower, or a darker shade of yellow is also possible. On Saturday, wear a purple garment with a light green shawl, like the colour of an asoka tree. On Buddhist holy days, wear a red garment with a pink shawl..."



Dressing colour rules for palace women

Photo: Unknown source

In the novel “Si Phaen Din” (Four Reigns) by Mom Rajawongse (M.R.) Kukrit Pramoj, the difference in the use of colours in fashion between ladies in the court and normal female citizens during the reign of King Rama V and the influence of the colours of the guardian gods on the court fashion are described as per the following text:

...took the raiments out to have a better look. I have been living outside the palace for so long that I am now too familiar with the way they are freely dressed out there. These people are actually quite strange. They will wear whatever colours they feel like to - as the whim takes them. Sometimes, the garment and the shawl are even in the same colour, unlike the combination of different colours that we like to use here in the court. The eldest daughter of my lord, for example, likes to wear whatever she wants to and I once told her that the way she was dressed wasn't like that of the people in the palace at all. Well, I got her mad at me for days... (Pramote, 2010, p. 42).

It can be summed up as follows:

Sunday	Wear a lychee red or light red garment with a light green shawl
Monday	Wear a light yellow garment with a purplish red shawl
Tuesday	Wear a purple garment with a light green shawl
Wednesday	Wear a mung-bean-green garment with a light yellow shawl, like the colour of a sonchampa
Thursday	Wear an orange and light or leaf green garment with a bright red shawl
Friday	Wear a dark blue garment with a yellow shawl
Saturday	Wear a purple garment with a light green shawl

In the past, fashion leaders always came from within the palace because it was the centre of politics and administrations in which leaders of all kinds came to meet, including those who led the fashion trends as well. Citizens usually admired the way in which these people were dressed up. Apart from the traditional beliefs in colours passed to them from older generations, the villagers and citizens, especially those with sufficient economic means, would follow the fashion trend of palace officials and nobles.

“Si Phaen Din” (Four Reigns)
by Mom Rajawongse (M.R.)
Kukrit Pramoj

Photo: Unknown source



During the reign of King Rama V, dressing etiquette was reformed in order to catch up with the western modernization and to gain international acceptance. The tradition of combining two different colours in one dress was then replaced by a new trend of uni-colour apparel. The use of the colour of the day was also changed to what we are now using today. (Mrigadayavan, 2007)

Sunday	Maintained as red
Monday	Changed from white cream to yellow
Tuesday	Changed from purplish indigo blue to pink
Wednesday	Changed from shiny and glassy orange to green
Thursday	Changed from greenish yellow to orange
Friday	Changed from smoky gray to blue
Saturday	Changed from black to purple

In the present, although the traditional belief in the colours of guardian gods may not be as prevalent as in the past due to outside fashion influences from western and eastern cultures, many people still believe in choosing and matching the right colours with the right days or occasions. This practice is actually gaining more popularity and is not limited within the royal households only anymore. For example, an orange attire is recommended for a grand opening of a new shop in order to gain more prosperity, black is not recommended for Friday because it may bring misfortune or green should be matched with blue for a job interview on Monday in order to gain support from senior people.

Table of lucky colours for your daily attire

TABLE OF LUCKY COLOURS FOR YOUR DAILY ATTIRE										
Day	Power/Authority			Fortune			Support/Alliance		Misfortune	
Monday	Green			Peach purple			Lightblue	Brightnavy blue	Red	
Tuesday	Purple			Brightorange			Red		Yellow	White
Wednesday	Brightorange	Orange		Black	Dark brown	Dark grey	Yellow		Pink	
Thursday	Lightblue	Navyblue		Red			Green		Purple	
Friday	Yellow	White		Pink			Brightorange	Orange	Black	Darknavy blue
Saturday	Black	Darkblue	Brown	Brightnavy blue	Lightblue		Pink		Green	
Sunday	Pink			Green			Black	Darknavy blue	Brown	Lightblue
									Brightnavy blue	

Apart from a fashion of dressing in accordance with the colour of the day and a concept of lucky colour introduced by the royal court, there is also a dress code for a period of mourning. In the past Thai people had mourning clothes in different colours categorized by age and amity. Colours used were white, black and dark purple or dark blue. According to the Thai tradition those who dress in black must be older than the deceased. Dark purple or dark blue is generally for those who are neither direct relations nor friends of the deceased. “...during a period of mourning wore a purple garment with an ivory shawl or a green garment with a light or dark purple...” (Weerasilpchai, 2006, p. 39)

White mourning attire conveys special connotation. During the reign of Rama I in 1808 at the royal cremation of HRH Kromluang Srisunthornthep, His Majesty King Phutthayotfa Chulalok wore a white garment during the mourning period. Regarding to this he remarked “He was my beloved child so I dressed in white for him.” Also in the reign of Rama III at the royal cremation of HRH Krommuen Apsornsudathep in 1845 His Majesty King Nangklao wore a white garment since he doted on the deceased princess. This is to say white in a way implies love and mournfulness. (Sor Plynoi, 2006, p. 108)

According to Thai tradition anyone attending the royal funeral must be in white. In the reign of Rama IV, however, the king had all members of the royal family and the court officials dress in black at the royal cremation of HRH Princess Chandornmondon (18 February 1863). This practice was later adopted and then led to today’s fashion of wrapping 6-7 inch cloth around one’s left arm as a sign of mourning for the deceased who is younger or in lower position. The custom for mourners to dress in all black like in the western countries was introduced in the reign of Rama VII. (Chantawit, 2006, p. 77)

In the royal cremation of HRH Princess Bejaratana Rajasuda Sirisobhabannavad the tradition of the “royal mourning” was revived when all court officials of the Maruek Kathayawan Palace dressed in white.

Today colours of mourning clothes have been varied accordingly. In the city men usually wear a blue, brown and ivory shirt with a black necktie or armband while women wear a black suit. In the upcountry, however, mourning clothes don’t have to be black, or rather, it depends on what people have in their wardrobes. In the north eastern provinces when a senior villager passes away, mourners usually shave their hair and dress in white. They also observe the five or eight precepts as a way to show their gratitude to the departed.



Awamongkol (Inauspicious)
(1979) by Chalermschai
Kositpipat, national artist

Photo: www.rama9art.org

The painting *Awamongkol (Inauspicious)* (1979) by the national artist Chalermschai Kositpipat portrays a plain funeral of a villager held at a Buddhist temple which reflects a contrast to an elaborate royal cremation. Despite differences in details black is a primary colour for mourning and paying respect to the dead. In addition the work of art also shows a deep-rooted Buddhism concepts in people way of life, especially in a funeral where Buddhist monks in yellow robes performing the ceremony⁹. The royal cremation, however, embraces elements of both Buddhism and Hinduism. Leading the funeral procession were Brahmins --in traditional costumes with a high-pinnacled hat --who are believed to take the spirit back to heaven. The picture also shows that interior decoration of the temple adhere strictly to the traditional Thai fine arts dates back to the time when Rattanakosin was established. This can be seen through elaborated patterns, good proportion and assorted colours that perfectly blends together.

The Grand Palace as a backdrop was built in the reign of Rama I when Ayutthaya art coupled with Hindu belief played an important part. The building was ornately decorated in green, red, yellow, blue and white. Its glass mosaic glitters brilliantly produces a feeling of inspired concordance between the city and its name "Nopparat Ratchathani"¹⁰ (a city of nine gems). Like other fields of art, an interior painting shows cultural influences of Indian works.

Classical Thai visual arts represent idealism. They are small in scale and possess a surreal quality, featuring magnificent apparel and finely bold drawing lines. The composition is well structured, depicting not only Buddhist principles and philosophy but also classic literatures and happenings, including a figment of artists' imagination which is exquisite and original.

Traditional Thai painting can be roughly divided into two groups according to social contexts of different regions and times. Also it is categorized by craftsman schools namely the royal craftsman school that adheres to the royal court arts. Examples are the mural paintings of Phra Thinang Phutthaisawan and the Bangkok National Museum. The other school is the local craftsman school of which artists can be the native or come from other provinces. The local art school is not so sophisticated as the first one in terms of expressing ideas - besides it provides more freedom for artists who create folk arts representing special characters of each specific region like the Hoob-Tam (paintings) of the northeastern.



Colours used in traditional Thai painting

Photo: www.sites.google.com

The rules to control colour outlines

There are rules to control an overall colour outline in order to acquire a total harmony of the whole paintings. The rules are as follows:

1.The rule of using close colours in the colour chart

In Thai traditional paintings, it is important to pre-design which colour outline would be used in order to obtain the colour pattern needed. By using close colours in the colour chart, it is a way to control the overall colour outline for example, use the series of colours green, blue, yellow, orange and etc.

2.The rule of using colour in the same colour tone

In Thai traditional paintings, another way to control the colour outline can be done by choosing colours according to their tones; hot, warm and cold. It makes it easier to control the colour outline.

3.The rule of evenly equalizing and averaging colours all over paintings

It is the other way of controlling colour outline by setting numbers of colours using in a painting. For instance, if the colours are fixed at twelve colours in the painting, try using these twelve colours all over the paintings with a condition like if there is red colour in the painting, try paint the colour and spread the colour out to cover all area of the painting. However, it is important to know which colour should be used less while which colour should be used more. It can be appropriately adjusted but nevertheless it should consist of all colours that are marked to use.

4.The rule of blending a neutral colour to all colours

It is the easiest way to control the colour outline. By choosing a neutral colour, it means to use a colour that when mix with other colours it would not change much their colour shade. These colours are for instance white, grey, yellow and black (which is not a neutral colour in a colour theory.) In order to use the neutral colour rule, simply choose one of the colours mentioned, for example, if the colour chosen is grey, mix this colour into all colours planned before use them in painting.

5.The rule of reduce colour shades

By mixing any colour with its opposite colour according to the colour chart, it is a method that sometimes used in painting Thai traditional paintings. However, the opposite colour shade blended should not be exceeded 20% of the original colour. For example, before painting the colour of red, 5-15% of green colour is mixed and blended into the red colour. The result is a not too bright red colour and with this -way it is how to control the colour outline. (Suwat Saenkattiyarat, 2007, p.77-78)

Colour used in traditional Thai paintings by both schools is powder colour. Powder colour is a natural substance that comes from variety of sources such as soil, mineral, metal, plants and animals. The material is then ground into powder, so it is called “powder” or powder colour. Lychee-red or blackish-red, for example, is obtained from seeds of Cinnabar which gives delicate texture. Their dried seeds become dark pink. Gold colour is derived from 100% gold leaf. It is used to emphasize some particular parts. Earlier traditional Thai paintings was monochromatic (single colour) -- gold patterns on a black background. Later there was a use of various powder colours on a background of white clay filler mixed with tamarind resin. Then came a fashion of polychromatic (multi-colour) and five primary colours (white, black, green, red and yellow).



L: Scene from “Maiyarab” in Thai Ramakien, mural painting at Wat Phra Kaew

Photo: www.603thai-finearts.blogspot.com

R: Thai painting by Naris Prayotamornkul, acrylic on canvas

Photo: www.amazonlinestore.com

The difference between powder colours and acrylic colours

Powder colours are made mostly from natural substances. They tend to be less cohesive than acrylic colours. Soft and smooth, powder colours are matt and very suitable for painting works that require a natural touch with a serene sense from their matt texture. Examples of natural powder colours are as follows;

Black - The colour comes from sooth. Sooths from resins provide refined colour powders. It can also be inquired from burning animal bones or ivories.

Red - The colour comes from red soil that gives the colour of rust red with crude texture. The Indian red soil colour is called *Din Daeng Ted* (red foreign soil) whiel red soils from China are call *Tua Bai*. The colour also comes from seeds of a kind of Chinese cinnabars mixing with mercury and sulphur called in Thai *Chadhorakun*. The colour is commonly called cinnabar red or *Daeng Chad*, which chad means red in Thai (or *Chad Ai Mui* and *Chad Ang Jor Sae*). Another cinnabar red from China is called *Daeng In Chi* which comes from tin. It has a rust red tone or *Daeng Sen*, a colour of red mixed with orange or yellow (also called bullet wood fruit colour or *Si Loukpikul*)

White - The colour comes from limes crushed and filtered until they become very fine and clean powders. It can also be obtained from burning white soils and crushed them into refined and purified powders which are called *Krabang*. The colour can be made from tin but they are not in good quality as the colour can get dark with time. In order to make white colour from tins, tins would be cut into small pieces and placed in a jar filled with vinegar. Find something to cover the jar and leave only a small whole for six months, it would become small white dusts, bright but spongy in terms of texture.

Yellow - The colour comes from ochre, crushed and filtered until the dark yellow colour powder is appeared. Refined and pure, yellow powders from ochre have good quality and can be lasted for a long time when used in painting. Ancient craftsmen also used this ochre as pencils to write down on slate boards. The colour can also be inquired from resins of a plant called *Rongronng* which can be get from cutting its stalk and find a flesh bamboo flask to collect its resins. When full, take this bamboo flask and grill it on low fire until the resins inside get dried. Cut the flask vertically in half and it would become a yellow colour resin in a shape of a bamboo flask. Mixing the resin with water and it would produce a yellow colour called *Si Rong* with glue like nature. Hence it does not require to be added glues or mixing solution like other colour powders. The colour also come from a kind of mineral called Realgar (in Thai *Horradan*) which has two types; one is called *Horradan Hin* while the other is called *Horradan Klalib Tong*. The former is a soft texture and can be grinded and filtered into fine powders in order to mix with glue like substance for painting while the latter has a harder texture but more refined which produces a better quality of colour. However, it is much rare to find and much expensive. In order to use, It requires sharpening with stones since it is too hard to be grinded. Moreover, the colour can be made of tin, but it tends to be used for enameling ceramics.

Green - The colour comes from green soils, it is authentic and provides good painting quality. The colour can also be produced from Turquoise by sharpening the stone until it becomes powders. Turquoise has an indigo like colour with a hint of yellow incorporated all over which together create a green colour that even though it is not in a vivid shade but it is durable and long lasting. The colour can be made of bronze patina imported and introduced to the Siamese court by foreigners. It is called *Si Kiew Shinsi*. The one imported from China is called *Si Kiew Tang Sae*, bright but not so good in terms of quality.

Indigo Blue - The colour comes from plants like indigo trees by using indigo tree leaves, pounding and squeezing their juices and later filtered until it becomes dry substance. Grind it and it would become indigo blue powders. The colour can also be obtained from a kind of mineral, burn grinded into powders. The process is very hard to produce hence the colour made this method is very rare and expensive. (Suwat Saenkattiyarat, 2007, p.79)



Yellow powder colour and ochre

Photo: Unknown source

Thai craftsman used these five primary colours to create wide-range of shades with different names as follow (Chalermchai Suwanwattana, 2010, p. 66)

red (natural) + white	= yellowish red
dark red + white	= brownish-red
red + white	= whitish-red
bright red + white	= rouge
red (natural) + black	= dark red
dark red + black	= dark brownish-red
yellow + white	= ivory
yellow + black	= dark green
yellow + red	= orange
yellow + dark red	= brick-red
yellow + indigo	= agasta green
indigo + white	= pale indigo blue
indigo + black	= indigo blue indigo grey
indigo + red (natural)	= purple or peepal tree
black + white	= gray sable
indigo + whitish- yellow	= see green
indigo + blackish-yellow	= greenish-yellow
indigo + blackish-white	= dark gray
indigo + whitish-black	= dark blue
red + blackish-yellow	= dark spra
red + indigo white	= light purple
red + whitish-black	= sombre purple

Table of colour mixing in Thai traditional paintings



Thai traditional paintings
Photo: Unknown source

Yellow + White	= Moon Yellow (Ummellow Yellow)
<i>Tae</i> Yellow (School Bus Yellow)	= <i>Rong</i> Yellow (Yellow Process)
Yellow-Green + Red + White	= <i>Luam Prapassorn</i> (Dark Goldenrod)
Yellow + White	= Light Yellow
Yellow + Red	= Dark Yellow
Yellow-Green + White + Black Olive	= Grey Yellow
Yellow + some <i>Saen</i> Red (Scarlet)	= Sonchampa yellow
Natural Yellow	= Ochre
<i>Saen</i> Red (Scarlet) + White + India Green	= <i>Mak Suk</i> (ripe areca-nut)
<i>Saen</i> + White	= <i>Hong Saen</i>
Yellow + <i>Daeng Chad</i> red + White	= <i>Hong Bad</i>
Orange + some Red	= <i>Daeng Saen</i> Red
<i>Daeng Chad</i> Red + White	= <i>Hong Chad</i> Red
Red Soil Red + White	= <i>Hong Din Orn</i> Red
<i>Daeng Chad</i> Red + Indigo	= <i>Hong Din Kae</i> Blue
Red + some Orange	= <i>Daeng Chad</i> Red
Red + Yellow	= Red-Orange
Vermillion Red	= Hibiscus Red
<i>Daeng Chad</i> Red + White	= Lightning Red
<i>Saen</i> Red (Scarlet) + White	= <i>Samlan</i> Red
<i>Daeng Chad</i> Red + White + Indigo	= <i>Bua Roy</i>
<i>Daeng Chad</i> Red + some Indigo	= Litchi
	= Red Soil (from Nature)

Indigo + <i>Daeng Chad</i> Red and White + some Black	= Queen's flower
Indigo + <i>Daeng Chad</i> Red	= Dark Violet
Indigo + <i>Daeng Chad</i> Red + White	= Light Violet
Indigo + <i>Daeng Chad</i> Red + White	= Indigo Violet
Red + <i>Daeng Chad</i> Red + Red Soil Red	= Dark Bronze
Red Soil Red + Yellow + Black	= Lacquer
Green + Indigo	= <i>Kiew Kab</i> Indigo Green
Yellow + <i>Daeng Chad</i> Red + Black	= Bronze
Green + White	= Pale Green
Pure Green	= Bright Green
Yellow + Indigo and White	= Light Green
Yellow + Indigo	= Green
Yellow + Indigo	= Dark Green
Dark Green + White	= <i>Bai Kae</i> Green
Indigo + Green and White	= Running Water Green
Indigo + White	= Light Indigo
White + Indigo and some Black	= Dark Cloud
White + Black	= Light Ink
Indigo + Black	= Kab
Matt Black	= Black
Shine Black	= Ink Black
Green + Black	= Dark Green

(Suwat Saenkattiyarat, 2007, p.84-87)

Powder colours are used by both schools, though they are quite distinct in terms of styles. The royal court school seeks for more sophisticated colours and together they harmoniously blend them and make the piece powerful. On the other hand local craftsmen keen on using vivid colours easily obtained from natural materials. For example mural paintings in the northeastern are usually in cool colours namely green, blue and yellow, whereas those of royal temples in central Thailand mainly use red and other warm colours.



RED AND YELLOW: PAINTING THE NATION WITH IDEOLOGY

May 2010, the long protests of the so called “Red-Shirts” were put to the end after the bloodshed incident that was later called “the May Massacre” occurred, leaving the protestors of the National United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) devastated and frustrated without leaders. In televisions, footages of the army clashing with the protester’s homemade defences, the mysterious troop of snipers in black and the scenes of the burn down Central World department store, Siam movie theatre and other buildings were nearby repeatedly broadcasted over and over while in the online world, curses and moans of the bangkokians were everywhere aloud in all social media platforms. Right after the bloodshed, kind-hearted people¹¹ were hurriedly out to the scene, rushing to ‘clean’ everything in the area away as quick as possible. Unfortunately that the decent act did not wash away the inconvenient truth that Bangkok was somehow divided and “battles between the colours” was then something undeniable for everyone in this nation.

The war between the Yellow-Shirts (the protestors of People’s Alliance for Democracy, PAD) and the Red-Shirts was ignited by the discontentment resulted from the 2006 coup d’état which was occurred in the same year with the Sixtieth Anniversary Celebrations of HM the King Bhumibol Adulyadej’s Accession to the Throne. That year, millions of the Thais from all over the country together wore royal-yellow t-shirts as a symbol of their utmost loyalty to his majesty the king. On Friday 9th of June, when the king and the queen held the grand audience at the balcony of Anantasamakhom Throne Hall, down below at the Royal Plaza, people were harmoniously waving the king’s yellow royal emblem flags together with the red-white-dark blue flags of Thailand. It was not a doubt that the stunning moment was broadcasted all over the world.¹²



Millions of the Thais together wore royal-yellow t-shirts as a symbol of their utmost loyalty to his majesty the king.

Photo: Unknown source

The same yellow colour was used since 2005, one year before the coup, as a symbol of the protestors of People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), simply known as the Yellow-Shirts. At that time, members of the PAD heavily protested against the government led by the Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra. The situation got even worse when the then 23rd Prime Minister sold his Shin Corp. stocks for around 73,000 billion baht. (Baitonghaeng, 2012, p. 25)

The PAD then decided to use the colour as its symbol of supporting the king. By wearing royal-yellow t-shirts with matched headbands, they demanded the Prime Minister and his cabinet an immediate resign as a way to clean the country from the "Thaksinocracy" or "an authoritarian democratic system under power of a political party run by big capitalists with poor marginal people as alliance". (Techapeera, 2010, p. 42)

Sondhi Limthongkul, leader of the PAD, used to talk about an importance of the monarch institute to the Thai society at his first MuangThai Rai Subda Sanjorn (Thailand weekly) a talk tour at the main hall of Thammasat University that "... the nation consists of two institutions only; the religion and the king, nothing else, not the 30-baht healthcare scheme¹³ ...the king is the last buffer that our society can turn to when facing a tyrant but once the king would be turned into just a politically rubber stamp, the nation then could be sold, since the constitution was made by politicians manipulated by capitalists who owned their party..." (Sitthisaman, 2006, p. 54-55)

Yellow was used as a symbol of the protestors of People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD).

Photo: Unknown source





Flag of Thailand

Photo: Unknown source

“Nation, Religion and Monarchy” are the three major institutes that the Thais must be loyal to. They are symbolised with the colours of red, white and dark blue respectively. The tricolours also appear on the nation’s flag or *Thong Trirong* since 1917 in the reign of the King Rama VI. The flag was launched shortly after the country’s name had been changed from “Siam” to “Thailand” and it has been used as the flag of Thailand until today. The dark blue colour that represents the king comes from the colour of the King Rama VI’s birthday which was Saturday. The colour was also the king’s favorite colour (Jameoun amornararak, 1969) but the fact that the PAD chose to use yellow as the symbol is not from the reason that it is the colour of the monarch institute; on the other hand, it rather got selected as an easy link to HM the king more than anything else.

As the demonstrations by members of PAD or the Yellow-Shirts continued, finally on 19th of September 2006, General (ret.) Sonthi Boonyaratglin, then Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Army overthrown the government in the coup that he claimed for the sake of the monarch institute. Acted as the head of the Council for National Security, the leader of the military junta said the coup was happened to restore the country back to its previous position before the corrupted government had torn Thailand apart with series of incidents that could be lese-majesty. (Maketrirat, 2011) Kasian Teechapeera, professor at Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat Universty, mentioned that the coup was performed by “an alliance between bureaucratic state (the army-the judiciary-network of courtiers) and civil society (bourgeoisies and elites outside the government circle). (Teechapeera, 2010, p.42)

Surprisingly enough, the military coup was happened without any bloodshed. In the atmosphere of clam and surreally tranquil, people who supported the coup, were out in the streets, giving roses to soldiers with bright smile on their faces. On that day, it seemed not a strange picture at all to see civilians taking photos with heavy tanks and army officers in green uniforms who patrolled and invaded all over Bangkok. However, for people and supporters of Thaksin Shinawatra or people who did not support the coup, the incident made some of them united and later formed the Red-Shirts.



People who supported the coup, were out in the streets, giving roses to soldiers with bright smile on their faces, taking photos with heavy tanks and army officers in green uniforms.

Photo: www.theepochtimes.com and www.flickr.com/jfxberns





Klum Polamuang WiWat (Civil Evolution Movement) expressed their feelings with posters and banners and the slogan “Maiaow Mairab Maipleum” (no need, no accept, unappreciated).

Photo: www.prachatai.com

As for others, the results of people who did not agree with the military coup and the drafting of new constitution at the beginning stage resulted in various demonstrations organised by political groups such as *Klum Kon Wan Sao Maiaow Padejkarn* (Anti-dictatorship Saturday Alliance) who in their protests wore black as a mourning symbol for democracy (peunlansaekna, 2011, p. 28), or *Klum Polamuang WiWat* (Civil Evolution Movement) led by Sombat Boonngamanong or *Laijud* (polka dot) editor who organised political activities in respond like “*Daeng Mairab*” (red unaccepted). In one of their protests, members of Civil Evolution Movement expressed their feelings towards the drafting of 2007 constitution which was a result of the coup, with posters and banners and the slogan “*Maiaow Mairab Maipleum*” (no need, no accept, unappreciated). Moreover, they would wear red t-shirts which marked the beginning of the red-shirt movement in the society (peunlansaekna, 2011, p. 27). That red colour which at that time meant to express their denials of the new constitution, later became the symbol of their movements for democracy.

From Sombat Boonngamanong’s interview, the reason he chose red colour as the group representative was because “...the use of red colour comes from the fact that in every referendum around the world, colours are always used in voting, green for yes and red for no. We do not agree with the drafting of the constitution so we go with red as our colour symbol...” (*Laijud* editor, 2011)

Moreover, Sombat also said that “red” was the colour used by people sector worldwide since it was powerful and had a good meaning. In battles, red had psychological effects to those who fought. In his political campaign activities, he tried to relate and create connotations between political lives and everybody daily lives by choosing the right time and the right place to convey his message through series of symbolic activities such as tying red cloths, aerobic dancing and dressing up as ghosts. All activities organised by him were always based on these principles and sent the same messages to people which were demanding of justice and encouraging people to stand up against the dictatorship without fear (*Laijud* editor, 2011)

On 11th of October, 2008, it was officially announced on the talk tour, *Kwam Jing Wan Nee Sanjorn*, (Truth Today) at the Impact Arena, Muangtongthani that the red shirts would be the symbol of the UDD when the so called “three amigos” led by Veera Musikapong asked participants to wear red shirts to attend the event. After it turned official, a gathering that clearly shown the massive power of the Red-Shirts was their second meeting at the Ratchamangkala Stadium on 1st of November, 2008 where it was considered one of the biggest events of the Red-Shirts ever.



The second meeting of Red-Shirts at Ratchamangkala Stadium on 1st of November, 2008

Photo: Unknown source

While the unions of the Red-Shirts were expanding with increasing numbers of members from Bangkok and other provinces, the Yellow-Shirts gathered together to protest the Power People Party and the government which they believed to have hidden common interests with Thaksin Shinawatra. During their political demonstrations, the Yellow-Shirts successfully managed to seized important locations around Bangkok including Makkhawan Rangsan Bridge, the Parliament House, Don Muang Airport¹⁴ and Suvarnabhumi Airport. The siege of the latter airport continued until 2nd of October, 2008 when the constitutional court read the juridical decision to dissolve the Power People Party, the Chart Thai Party and the Neutral Democratic Party, it was then that the PAD demonstrators announced to end their siege as they had reached their goal.

Later when the government led by Abhisit Vejjajiva of the Democrat Party ruled the country, the Red-Shirts came out to protest in several occasions, demanding the government to take charge to the Yellow-Shirts on their siege of the country's biggest airport, expel the elite bureaucrats, dissolve the parliament and organise a new election. The protests continued until May, 2010 when they were ended with bloodshed. Every newspaper put a headline of “the May Massacre” and the questions of who was the troop in black who assassinated one of UDD's leaders and where did all war weapons come from which side remained as mysteries.

In a research called “Who are the Yellow-Shirts and the Red-Shirts” conducted by assistant professor Aphichat Sathitniramai and his team from faculty of Economics, Thammasat University, it revealed that in terms of professions, most of the Yellow-Shirts were government officers and businessmen whereas members of the Red-Shirts tended to be farmers, workers and informal workers. Moreover, in a field of education, the average education of the Yellow-Shirts was at the diploma level which was considered to be higher than the one of the Red-Shirts. As for the income, the Yellow-Shirts also earned more income than the Red-Shirts but if judging by the poverty line according to National Statistical Office, none of the abovementioned was considered to be poor. They were just economically different.

In the research, they also found out that the Red-Shirts were the direct beneficial from the populist policy such as the 30-bath healthcare scheme or the village fund since they were mostly out of the social security system with instable income from fluctuated pricing in agricultural products. Without stable income, these projects would suit their needs so they accepted the policy of the Thai Rak Thai Party. As for reasons for demonstrations, there protested to the political interference from the army, to fight against the problem of double standard and injustice in the society and to fight against the Abhisit’s government which was not come from any election. The problems of poverty and unequal were not their reasons for their movements.

Moreover, assistant professor Aphichat also summed the four interesting points of the Red-Shirts that 1. Poverty and unequal were not the reasons for the Red-Shirts’ frustrations. 2. Unequal was not the origin of the red-shirt movement. 3. As their economic status was inferior, the populist policy was well-received by them 4. If the transformation of Thailand would be focused solely on unequal in the income distribution, it was not change anything. The feelings of being looked down, being *Isan* people (people from the Northeast) of being the Red-Shirts and of being judged as the inferiors by the society were unfair to them. They felt that whatever they did seemed wrong so they decided to fight, to emand for democracy and for getting their rights back. (Who are the Yellow-Shirts and the Red-Shirts, 2010, July 18, retrieved from <http://prachatai.com/journal/2010/07/30362>)

Members of Red-Shirts and Yellow-Shirts

Photo: www.flickr.com/photos/pittaya and www.flickr.com/photos/prachatai





Apart from the Yellow-Shirts and the Red-Shirts who were the major groups coming out to express their voices and demand political transformations, there were other groups who used other 'colours' to express their different opinions in the political turmoil such as the Multicoloured-Shirts who denied the use of any specific colour as their symbol and came out to express their discontent with the demonstrations of the UDD in 2010 as well as to give their full supports to the army and Abhisit's government or the Dark Blue-Shirts who interfered with the protests of the Red-Shirts in many occasions. On their shirts were the mottos of "Defending the monarchy" and "Peace, Serenity and Unity"

The Multicoloured-Shirts also had a nickname of *salim*, from *sarim* a Thai dessert that has three colours; white, pink and green. Peunlansaekna described the group of people in a book called *Bangkok* that *salim* were the city's middle class whose ideas and reactions tended to follow the majority of the society. *Salim* had no logic in making decisions but would use feelings and trends to be their guidelines. *Salim* hated the Red-Shirts with the ideas that they were hired to do the protests, stupid and fooled. Moreover, *salim* believed that Thaksin was evil, that all politicians corrupted and the election meant nothing since the people were uneducated and their votes could be bought. Most of *salim* were loyal to the king that there was a time when they all changed their Facebook avatar surname to be "Rak Nai Luang" (Love the King) (Peunlansaekna, 2011, p. 126)

Since the May Massacre in 2010 until the last election last year when the Thai Rak Thai Party won and Yingluck Shinawatra, sister of Thakin Shinawatra, became the Prime Minister, it was once again a significant victory of the Red-Shirts while the Yellow-Shirts have somehow disappeared since their members were lost without confidence in their leaders and their objectives. And for those who support the monarch institute, they now prefer to wear pink instead of yellow as they pray for the King to have a better health.

Members of Multicoloured-Shirts, known as Salim

Photo: www.flickr.com/photos/prachatai

The issue of political colours is also reflected in Thai contemporary art and film. An exhibition titled “Who’s afraid of red, yellow, and green” (2010) by a contemporary Thai artist, Rirkrit Tiravanija was held at 100 Tonson Gallery located not very far from Ratchaprasong intersection – a protester gathering site. A film titled, “Saturday Killer” (2010) by a director, Yuthlert Sippapak was filmed at Lumpini park where the Red-Shirts anti-government protesters were gathered.

In the exhibition “Who’s afraid of red, yellow, and green”, Rirkrit uses red, yellow and green colour from three choices of Thai curries – Red curry, Yellow curry and Green curry – to represent political institutions which are the Red Shirts, Yellow Shirts and military. Mukhom Wongthes said, “...not only to tease and challenge audiences, but he also teased and challenged himself. Moreover the exhibition makes me wonder where the blue is. To leave the blue colour out of the exhibition for whatsoever reason implies audiences which colour is the most powerful colour and who is really afraid of it...” (Wongthes, 2010, p.18)

Three big enamel pots of three curries were set in a centre of a room. Audiences were invited to have curries with rice by using enamel plates and spoons. Kitchen utensil and cooking ingredient were also set up in the space where the walls were filled with charcoal drawings of the Massacre of 6 October, Black May demonstrations at Ratchadamnoen Avenue, soldiers carrying guns, people holding flags and cheering props in form of clapping hand, protest of the PAD and the Red-Shirts.¹⁵

Even though the drawings were in black and white, but audiences could easily get meanings of symbols in the drawings from being exposed to media. A booth selling a cookbook titled “Rirkrit Tiravanija Cook Book Just Smile and Don’t Talk” (2010) which is at the gallery entrance did not distract audiences from the exhibition concept of political institution to Thai cuisine. Both curries and charcoal drawings were cooked and crated by Rirkrit’s close chef and students from Silpakorn University.



“Who’s afraid of red, yellow, and green” exhibition by Rirkrit Tiravanija

Photo: www.flickr.com/photos/borix1

Directed by Yuthlert, a scene of Saturday Killer was set in an era when political institutes were a big issue and a hit man was common in society. The film followed a hit man who suffered from impotence problems and tried many ways to solve it; however, the story which lied behind the story of the hit man was political institutes, revenge, getting rid of politicians, and political parties who hold different beliefs – green, purple, and brown parties. The hit man who got rid of dishonest politicians became a hero who saved the nation.

The film showed Thai political corruption and how to terminate rivals without any regard to how or the form of government (Democracy) to choosing a side of political institutions was the only way out without considering how to live together as a society as a dialogue of Chris, the female protagonist, and her dad went on about how her dad would hate her for the rest of his life just because she joined another political institution. The film was also sarcastic Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva, the Prime Minister, through a character named Mark who was instable, sometimes acting to be good while other times not. There was no balance point and inefficient. (Political view of an entertainer from the film titled, Saturday Killer” (n.d.) Retrieved from http://spiderconan.multiply.com/journal/item/18?&show_interstitial=1&u=%2Fjournal%2Fitem#)

Not only in the local art scene and films, the local fashion industry also affected from the political turmoil. Any fashion collection that was released during these years of political upheavals, red and yellow were the two colours to be avoided. As for people who supported the King, they changed from wearing yellow shirts to blue or pink shirts, the colours of the T-shirt that his Majesty the King wore on the day that he left Siriraj Hospital after spending a long period of time in the hospital in 2007. However, as time goes by, this colour attitude has slowly disappeared and today wearing these two colours would no longer be tied to any political ideology, at least for ones who do not have any political preference.

People who supported the King changed from wearing yellow shirts to blue or pink shirts

Photo: www.thaienews.blogspot.com







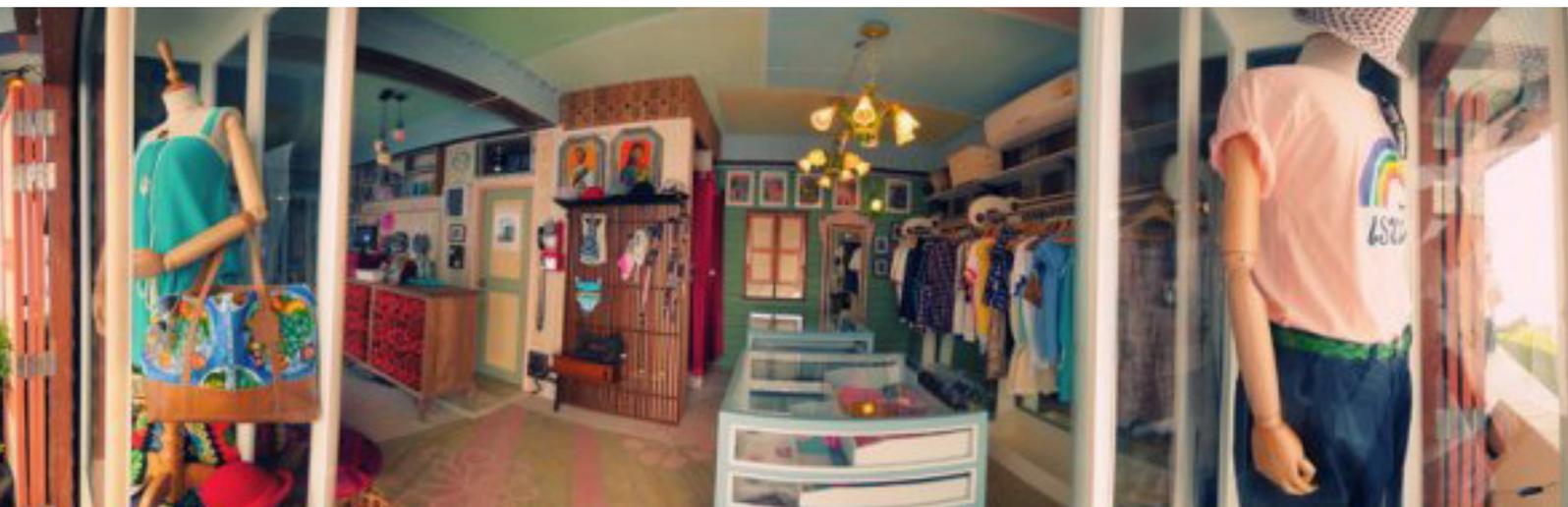
Ploenwan

Photo: [www.facebook.com/
PloenwanHuahin](http://www.facebook.com/PloenwanHuahin)

NATURAL AND BRIGHT: SEARCHING FOR THE ALTERNATIVE THAI IDENTITY

In Hua Hin 2009, one of the most famous and busiest beach towns of the west coast of Thailand, a new theme park was officially opened. Located on the main highway not far from the city's downtown area, *Ploenwan* (Enjoying Yesterday) brings the past back to the present and let everyone enjoy the experience of living in Thailand in the late 1950's - the 1960's. The centre of all tourist attractions is totally different from other sightseeing places nearby. It is not like the newly renovated Mrigadayavan Palace, the summer palace of King Rama VI, where visitors can see how the king and his courtiers used to live and admire Thai-European style architecture in a form of blue and yellow teak buildings with red tiles situated along the most beautiful beach in the area, on the contrary, *Ploenwan* offers another kind of experience. Like an old time photo come to life, its grayish rusty looked warehouses are outstanding with newly designed to be vintage shops painted in all shades of rainbow colours, from pastel to psychedelic, where all most every kind of old fashioned folk entertainment one can imagine are inside. Clearly that the location is not its selling point, it is not even on the beach, but what the theme park has to offer, and seems like everyone loves it, is fact that pieces of memories and things gone by are return with a promise to be there whenever one feels like enjoying yesterday.

Temple fairs and Thai ways of living are the original concept of *Ploenwan*. (P.Sahawat, personal communication, November 12, 2010) Elements and activities commonly found in temple fairs were carefully selected to be included the theme park design from white, red, green, pink, blue and purple neon lights decorated the Ferris wheel to game booths like a colourful balloon dart game with dazzling prizes. Selected vintage shops are everywhere around the park, packed with old fashioned goods. On the second floor, a Thai style bar serving herbal liquors opens its door to visitors, offering a vivid colour atmosphere of bars in the countryside. At the very end of the park, lies a local style outdoor cinema, screening old films every night. *Ploenwan* calls itself a living museum, even though it does not offer any proper set of knowledge of things happened in the past, but everything in the tiny village is there at the right time when people are yearning for all things nostalgia in the era that colourful living of yesterday is swallowed by the off-white lights of modern cafés, golden grand movie theatres and Western style urban mega shopping centres, decorated with silver looked material, giving a cool black and white feeling. In a way, *Pleonwan* is different from these places as the theme park offers another set of experience, based colours and feelings from countryside temple fairs that turned to a 'colour' asset for a new interpretation of creativity. Surprisingly, it was not until the late 1990's that this colour style was recognised as part of the Thai identity. Vulgar and low-taste, it was totally neglected during the earlier decade when Thailand was enjoying the economic bubble.



Selected vintage shops and Temple fairs concept at Ploenwan

Photo: www.facebook.com/PlearnwanHuahin



The rapid change and the social and economic transformation after the late 1950's were sudden. In 1952, the number of population in Bangkok was around 480,000 but the number later enormously increased to be more than 4,000,000 in 1977. (Nawikkamool, 2010, p. 23). It showed the expansion of the capital almost up to its limit as the centre of the country. In 1961, when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat initiated the national economic and social development plan with supports from the US who was in the region due to the Vietnam War, Thailand was developed in every way possible¹⁶. With more highways and railways as well as new airports on main strategic cities all over the country, progress and advancement were around the corner while Thailand opened its gate to the first waves of Western culture led by the American fever at the post-war era. Cowboy movies of the 1960's, rock and roll music in Elvis Presley style and even new menu like hamburgers, just to name a few, are example of the invasion from the West that completely changed the nation's consumption habits and taste to be more westernised. (Phushadaphirom, 2007, P.210-215)

After the political turmoil and the bloodshed incident of "Black May" back in 1992 when globalisation was ruling the world, it was the time for local trends to be back up on the mainstream media. Popular culture and folkways turned to be cultural assets for creativity after a long period of neglecting and forgetting as a cheap culture that no one paid any attention¹⁷. Thai artists and creatives who began to gain worldwide recognition, were forced to show the outstanding Thai identity in order to outwit in the international platform. They started to ask themselves about the authentic of "Thainess" and went back to folk culture to express the true meanings of being Thai that went beyond the limited definitions defined by the state. (Poshyananda, 2006)

"Don't be misunderstood that the sub consciousness of Thai ways of living... is simply limited to mural paintings, Thai literature, or a carving watermelon in Thai traditional motifs. It can be feelings, moments or any period of time in our lives that only the Thais can deeply understand and be part of it...it is everywhere around us, somewhere, we may not be able to touch it, see it as it was right at the tip of ours wide flat nose and maybe there are only beach massagers, sideway seamstresses or garland vendors on the streets who could give us the answer..." Designer and creative, Bhanu Inkavat, the then creative of Leo Burnett Thailand used to write in the catalogue of B.A.D. Awards 1995 (Bangkok Art Directors) (Suveeranont, 2011, p. 17). The article was a direct critique to the Thai identity constructed by the state while in the meantime presented a new interpretation to what should be Thai identity or Thai cultural identity from folk and popular culture.

Pracha Suveeranont, famous Thai graphic designer, calls things showing the new Thai identity such as *Tuk Tuk* motor taxis or one-baht comics "Thai Thai". It refers to something unsophisticated and widely practiced by the grassroots, which colour using is undoubtedly one key design element included in this "Thai Thai" identity. In his recently published book, *Thai Identity: from Thai to Thai Thai*, he wrote that *"...new Thai identity can be easiness and pleasure in daily lives, it does not have to be rooted and reflected the essence of Thainess..."* (Suveeranont, 2011, p. 46) The same ideas were also presented in a book of Philip Cornwel-Smith and John Goss, *Very Thai: Everyday Popular Culture* (2006).

As for the artistic expressions, *Tears of the Black Tiger* (2000) a cult film by Wisit Sasanatieng is one of the examples of how Thainess or Thai popular culture is used and interpreted. The film did not play with famous Thai style humor as shown in the commercial add of Black Cat whiskey label or universally known as “*Ai rit kin black*” (Rit drinks Black Cat whiskey) which was on air three years ago and received many international advertising awards, but instead of that, the film chose to play with dyed film technique, giving the film surreal bright colours, especially when it came to pink and blue, which was inspired by old Thai movies and popular lines form early days cowboy movie scripts. Picked as the director’s favorite colours, pink and blue were not just Wisit’s personal interpretation of colour into the movie, it turned to be a vivid example of how to define Thai identity through colours. The result was sensational and the film created a new colour trend in Thai cinematography. Wisit mentioned about the reasons to study old Thai films and use them to develop *Tears of the Black Tiger* in a behind-the-scene interview that “...we have not evolved from our identity, we just left it there, dusty on the shelf, without thinking of taking it down...so part of that makes our own true self kind of disappear..” In his following film, Wisit continued to use this colour technique. *Citizen Dog* (2003) was inspired by easy to find Thai houses by the small canals painted in bright colours as mentioned by him in the movie’s behind-the-scene interview.



Citizen Dog (2003) directed by Wisit Sasanatieng

Photo: Unknown source

The trend was repeated once again in *Transistor Love Story* (2001) directed by Pen-ek Rattanaaruang where colours of country lives depicted a life of a country man whose dream of becoming a country singer star leads him to series of adventure. A dark comedy, the film has houses by the canals, temple fairs, and a country music competition stage as backgrounds which present the different colour of Thai identity from Pen-ek's previous movies.¹⁸

As for *Yam Yasothorn*, a comedy film about two couples in Yasothorn province of the Northeast, or *Isan* region, which was once seen as the poor and uneducated region of Thailand in the eyes of others, the film director, Petchtai Wongkamlao who is an Isan superstar comedian, chose to play with exaggerated fluorescence colours seen in costume and setting scene. The film costume was inspired by 60's fashion style while the set design was influenced by vividly painted scenery of rice paddies in popular style from tour bus airbrush painting decorating or in shop house style restaurants in the past. Apart from the overwhelming colours, the movie scripts are all in *Isan* dialect instead of the standard Thai dialect. Moreover, the use of strong colour tone in this movie could also imply to the exaggerated cliché jokes about the Isan poor taste, but this time, the joke was played by its own people as a counter attack symbol to those who used to look down on them.

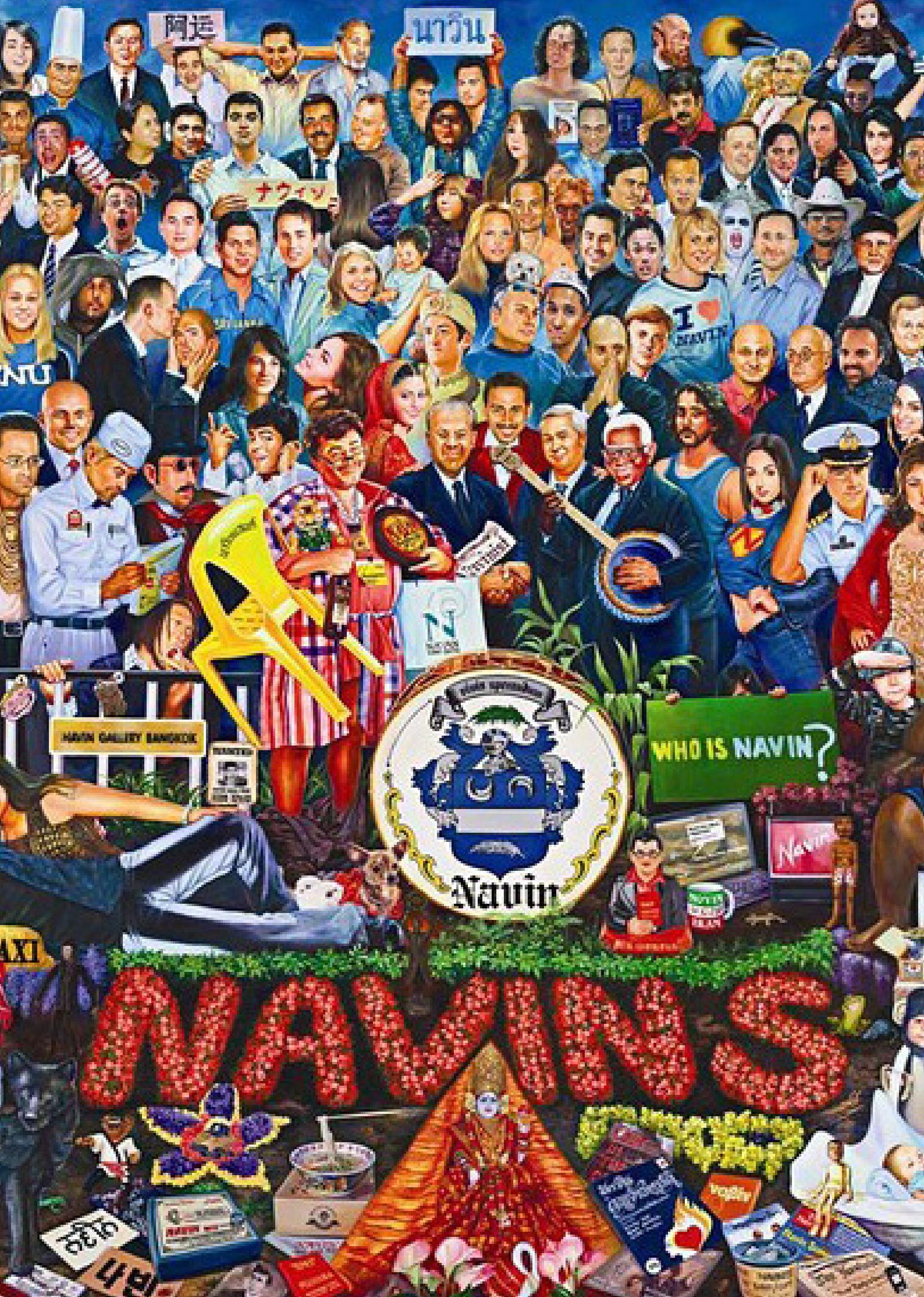
In contemporary art, popular culture in forms of bright colours can be seen in works of many artists. In case of Navin Rawanchaikul, a Thai-Indian artist from Chiang Mai, it portrays through his works featuring Thai style aesthetics like *Tuk Tuk* taxis, one-baht comics, slogan stickers behind trucks, likay scenes or even karma band while for Suresi Kusolwong, the international acclaimed artist, pattern of colour using can be found in everyday objects even though the content and the context have been changed differently. In his *Free-For-All Project* (1998), he puts all items commonly found in any grocery shop in a truly unique installation that perfectly defines taste of today consumers and give a clear picture of colours and Thai identity.



Transistor Love Story (2001)
directed by
Pen-ek Rattanaaruang

Photo: Unknown source





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I LOVE BEASTIES

NAVIN GALLERY BANGKOK

WHO IS NAVIN?

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CLASHING OF THE COLOURS: THAILAND TODAY

What would be the future in terms of colour using in Thailand? One might ask. As long as the people shall live, the use of colour in Thailand would continue to be changing, evolving with incidents affected. It would be an easiest way to express Thailand's long history and identity and a perfect way to examine what happen in the society. In a context of contemporary world, time and place is no longer the only frame for defining a single set of colour meaning but it would be a setting of many colour interpretations in regards to history, belief and identity. It is amazing to observe that everything from surrounded buildings to activities happened one single space in a certain period of time can become an outstanding example of how colours have different layers of meaning, living together and clashing to one another.

It would not be any incident more perfect to describe the clasing of colours than the two-year anniversary of the "May Massacre" on the previous Saturday, 19th of May. Organised by the lead members of the National United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), thousands of the Red-Shirts from all over the country were reunited once again at the Ratchprasong intersection to commemorate the bloodshed incident occurred two years ago with the newly renovated and recently opened Zen department store as their background where the red colour is compared with the modern white Western style mall with a view of the traditional tile roofs of orange, green, yellow and gold of Chulalongkorn University, the oldest University founded by king Rama VI from a far. Just across the street, traditional dancing troop in jewellery costumes were offering their dancing to the Brahma in the golden Erawan shrine while people were worshiping the supreme deity with marigold garlands. A little bit down South towards the green atmosphere of Lumpini park, many bright colour tour buses of the Red-Shirts were double parked along the street of Rama IV, causing a paralised traffic jam, whereas if heading north from the intersection, shoppers were busy buying multi-colour fast fashion items at Pratunam, the area which was developed in the 1960's. In a way, they all piled up on one another and create new interpretations for colours of Thailand.



Footnotes

1 Deceased on 27th of July 2011 but the Royal Cremation took place during 8th – 12th of April 2012 (The Secretariat of Cabinet, 2012)

2 According to the traditional belief in “Dhevaraja” (or Divine-King), borrowed from Hinduism and especially the Brahmins, and the belief in “Buddhrajā” (or Buddhist King) from the Mahayana branch of Buddhism, the king and royal family members are believed to be avatars of heavenly being coming down from the High Place in order to help solving mundane problems in this world. Upon their deaths, royal cremations will be organized in order to send their souls back to heaven. The tradition has been practiced since Ayutthaya era. A royal crematorium represents the Mount Meru (or Sumeru) in a mythological world of Trailokaya, according to Hindu and Buddhist cosmology. It is believed that Mount Meru is the core and centre of the universe. The Brahmanic Hinduism was introduced into Southeast Asia through Cambodia when King Jayavarman II was actively promoting the belief in God King (or Universal Monarch). Khmer traditions have had a huge influence on Thai beliefs and practices concerning the Royal Thai Dynasty and this is the reason why Thai royal ceremonies always involve Brahmanic rituals.

3 Apart from pink and gold, orange, her favorite colour, was also used here. “The main colours of the crematorium are gold and pink with orangey tint as her birthday was Tuesday and orange was her favorite colour” (Busaratanapan, 2012).

4 For this reason, green was one of the main colours that appeared in the sash of commemorative coins on the occasion of Rattanakosin Bicentennial Celebrations in 1982.

5 Orange is the symbolic colour of King Mongkut’s University of Technology

6 Pink is the symbolic colour of Chulalongkorn University. People generally offer and put pink roses at King Rama V Equestrian Monument in order to pay respect him.

7 The dark blue colour of Thai flag symbolizes the monarchy and it was also King Rama VI’s favorite colour.

8 The King’s flag with royal cypher “n.u.s.” has yellow background.

9 Yellow is a colour for Buddhist monks whose belongings such as candles, sandals, sacks and umbrella are also in yellow.

10 Bangkok’s full ceremonial name is Krung Thep Mahanakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahintharayutthaya Mahadilok Phop Noppharat Ratchathani Burirom Udomratchaniwet Mahasathan Amon Phiman Awatan

11 It is noted that everyone who joined the Bangkok “Big Cleaning Day” would wear different colour t-shirts by avoiding either red or yellow while the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) had produced white t-shirts with a silkscreen slogan “Together We Can” in the colours of the nation’s flag (red white and dark blue) with black typography as part of the campaign to promote the reconcile among the Thais.

12 As earlier mentioned, yellow is the colour of HM the king Bhumibol Adulyadej who was born on Monday, 5th of December 1927. It is also the colour of loyalty to the king, the monarch institute and the Absolute Monarchy.

13 The 30-baht healthcare scheme was one of the populist policy that Pheu Thai Party run campaigns for the election.

Footnotes

14 The sieges of the two airports made an enormous lost in terms of Thailand's image to the global community and income. Many tourists missed their flights as it was impossible to operate the airports

15 Exhibition opening can be viewed from <http://vimeo.com/13939609>

16 Regional universities were founded in all regions of Thailand such as Chiang Mai University, Khon Kaen University. New highways were constructed with managed water supply while street side hawkers were banned. (Nawikamoon, 2010, p.39)

17 Ministry of Culture was founded during 1952 - 1958 to promote Thai culture through music, performance and fashion with heavy campaigns from the state. It was a result of constructing the "right" Thai identity for the nation during the government of Field Marshall Plaek Piboonsongkram (1938-1944, 1948-1957)

18 Most of Pen-ek's films feature scenes that reflect the urbanised Bangkok

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Research Report 2013



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Hoa Sen Lotus - national flower of Vietnam.

Photo: Nguyen Hoang Long



Paddy rice harvert. Typical landscape of rural area in Vietnam.

Photo: Nguyen Dan

COLOURS AND CULTURES

a. Overview of Vietnamese Culture

According to Tran Ngoc Them (1997), Vietnamese culture history may be divided into six stages: prehistoric culture, Van Lang – Au Lac culture, culture of the period against Chinese domination, Dai Viet culture, Dai Nam culture and modern culture. These six stages create three overlapping layers: native culture, culture mixed with Chinese and regional cultures and culture mixed with Western culture. In each stage or layer of culture, there are unique changes and development in the Vietnamese people's thoughts of colours, which express Vietnamese people's unique characters.

b. The layer of local culture was created in two stages

Period of prehistoric culture and period of Van Lang – Au Lac culture, with the specific characteristic of the formation of the culture of wet rice agriculture on the whole ancient Southeastern area. If the prehistoric culture was the period of the formation of wet rice agriculture, Van Lang – Au Lac culture inherited and developed achievements of the culture of wet rice agriculture to a high level.

c. The Layer of Culture Mixed with Chinese and the other Regional Cultures

The layer of culture mixed with Chinese and the other regional cultures was created in two stages: culture of the period against Chinese domination and Dai Viet culture, with the common characteristic of the parallel existence of two opposite trends: Sinologization and anti-Sinologization in culture. During the stage of culture of the period against Chinese domination (from B.C to the 10th century A.D), Vietnamese people always heightened their permanent antagonistic consciousness to the risk of invasion from the Northern feudal country. On the other hand, this stage also remarked the commencement of the progress of culture exchange and influence from China and the region. In the stage of Dai Viet culture, the stage of recovery and sublimation of Vietnamese culture (from the 11th century to the 18th century), also known as the most prosperous time of Buddhism in Vietnam, Vietnamese culture opened to adopt Confucianism and Taoism from China. As of Le Dynasty, Confucianism had reached its climax and controlled the whole social machine. The trend of adopting Chinese culture

(Sinologization) was the decisive trend and Vietnamese culture changed to the period of Confucianism.

d. The Layer of Culture Mixed with Western Culture

This culture layer consists of two stages: Dai Nam culture and modern culture, lasting from the 19th century until now. This was the period when Vietnamese culture exchanged with Western culture and integrated into world culture.

Influences of cultural exchange to Vietnamese people's thoughts of colours

Influences of the Eastern – Western cultures through centuries are reflected quite clearly in Vietnamese people's thoughts of colours. The widest and deepest influence is the conception of the Five primary colours (of black, red, blue, white, and yellow), derived from the theory of the Five Phases (also known as Five Elements).

In accordance with ancient Chinese philosophy, everything was originated from five basic elements and always went through Five Phases called: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water (Chinese: 木, 火, 土, 金, 水; pinyin: *Mù, huǒ, tǔ, jīn, shuǐ*). These Five Phases, called Five Phases (五行), are not the materials as in simple understanding of the literal meaning from their names, but more exactly, the names ancient Chinese people used to study the interaction and relationship between all things. These five elements and basic principles of the Five Phases have had strong influence on various areas of activities of Chinese people as well as a number of neighbouring nations and territories such as Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, etc... from ancient times up to now, in various areas of marriage and family, music, painting, architecture, traditional medicine, military, etc... Among applications of the Five Phases in life, application of colours (the Five primary colours correspond to the Five Phases) is considered as one of the most typical ones (see the Table 1.1 below about applications of the Five Phases). Tran Ngoc Them (1997) commented: "Among these meanings, in terms of culture, the especially prominent one is the system of symbolized colours and animals in accordance with the Five Phases".

No	Areas	WATER	FIRE	WOOD	METAL	EARTH
1	Ha Do Number	1	2	3	4	5
2	Compliment Phase	Wood	Earth	Fire	Water	Metal
3	Counter Phase	Fire	Metal	Earth	Wood	Water
4	Material	Water	Fire	Tree	Metal	Earth
5	Direction	North	South	East	West	Centre
6	Weather (season)	Winter	Summer	Spring	Autumn	Change of seasons
7	Taste	Salty	Bitter	Sour	Pungent	Sweet
8	Land shape	Curve	Acute	Long	Round	Square
9	Colour	Black	Red	Blue	White	Yellow
10	Animal	Turtle	Bird	Dragon	Tiger	Human

Table 1.1 Some applications of the Five elements (Tran Ngoc Them, 1997)

The concept of the Five Phases in general and of the five colours in particular is popular in Vietnamese culture, especially in folklore. In the popular custom of worshipping Mother Goddess in Vietnam, statues of Mother Goddess wear clothes of five different colours to express the Five Phases. Heaven Mother Goddess of fire phase wears red, Earth Mother Goddess of earth phase wear yellow, Water Mother Goddess of water phase wear black (or black-purple), Greenwood Mother Goddess of metal phase or wood phase wear white or blue. Vietnamese people often suppress evil spirits by charms with five-colour thread, or by the folk painting of Five Tigers (five tigers in five directions with five colours to define of the Five Phases). During festivals, Vietnamese people use square cloth flags with five colours of the Five Phases. Since red is regarded as the colour of happiness and auspice, on merry occasions of wedding, Tet holiday, good events, and Vietnamese people often decorate their houses and furniture with red colour or use red things. Blue is regarded as the colour of life. On the contrary, white and black are the colours of death. In funerals, Vietnamese people often wear white or black and use these two colours for decoration. According to Doan Thi Tinh (1987), in the funeral of King Le Thanh Tong in 1497, during 100 days officials had to wear white and out of that 100 day period officials had to wear black when they attended the king's audience. Influences of the Five Phases and Five Colours cover many other aspects of Vietnamese people's life such as cuisine, feng shui, costume, construction, architecture, etc... as analyzed in the next parts.

In addition to the wide and deep influence of the Five Phases from Sino-culture, Vietnamese people's thoughts of colours also had new changes when Vietnamese culture exchanged with and integrated into Western culture, from French culture at the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century to Eastern European culture at the latter half of the 20th century and global culture at the first years of the 21st century. If black used to be regarded as the colour of death and grief, which needs to be avoided, nowadays black costume is always regarded as elegant and stylish costume. Colours of cuisines imported from the West even become inhere names, for example, "brown" is used to call milk coffee while "black" is used to call black coffee – these names had never appeared before the French came to Vietnam and brought along coffee seeds. Alternative colours of modern painting and young colour schemes in contemporary architecture and construction are proofs of the integration of Vietnamese culture into world culture.

COLOURS IN ART

a. Colours in Vietnamese Folk Paintings

Dong Ho Painting

Dong Ho painting (also known as Dong Ho folk woodcut painting), is a genre of Vietnamese folk painting originated from Dong Ho village (Song Ho commune, Thuan Thanh district, Bac Ninh province). In the past, such paintings were mostly and popularly sold at Lunar New Year, when farmers bought paintings and pasted them on the wall to celebrate a new year, and replace the old ones from last year.

The originality of Dong Ho painting lies on the colours and material of paper. Paper used for printing Dong Ho painting is called diep paper. Craftsmen crush seashell of scallop (a kind of sea oyster), then mix it with rice-based sticky glue, and use pine-leaf brush to paint that mixture on dzo papers. Pine-leaf brush creates grooves along the paint line and natural seashell creates sparkling white



Hung dua (Coconut collecting)
Dong Ho Painting.

Photo: Haki

with small flecks of seashell in the light. Colours used in paintings are natural, which are originated from trees such as black (from charcoal or bamboo-leaf coal), green (from verdigris, cajuput leaves), yellow (from sophora flowers), red (from red gravels, sappan wood), etc... As these are primary colours without mixture, craftsmen often use a maximum of four colours in a Dong Ho painting. Dong Ho painting is considered a famous folklore heritage of Vietnam.

Hang Trong Painting

Hang Trong painting is a genre of folk painting originated from Hang Non, Hang Trong streets of old Hanoi. This genre is lost and such paintings are only saved in museums. Both printing and painting techniques are used in Hang Trong paintings. Firstly, the craftsman starts with woodblocks to print black outlines. Then they paint the picture with water-colours by wide soft brush, half of the peak of the brush is dipped in colours, and the other half is dipped into water. The painting is coloured under techniques of setting off colours. Each painting has only one woodblock with black outline, then it is coloured in by hand. Major gamuts used in Hang Trong painting are blue, pink, sometimes green, red, yellow, orange, etc... There is no standard formula for proportions of colours, but it depends on each craftsman. As craftsmen used pen brush and pigments to colourize their works, colours of Hang Trong painting is deeper than colours of Dong Ho painting

Kim Hoang Painting

Kim Hoang painting is a genre of folk painting which developed strongly in the period from the 18th century to the 19th century in Kim Hoang village, Van Canh commune, Hoai Duc district, Ha Tay province (now Hanoi). Kim Hoang painting has the meticulous glyph of Dong Ho painting and the bright colours of Hang Trong painting. Craftsmen did not use diep paper of Dong Ho painting or dzo paper of Hang Trong painting for Kim Hoang painting; they used red, scarlet or Chinese yellow paper. Craftsmen of Kim Hoang painting freely colourized the painting due to each person's feelings, which embue the originality of each painting even from the same woodblock. Kim Hoang paintings were colourized with Chinese ink and other natural colours, such as white of plaster, chalk; cajuput green from Chinese ink mixed with water from cajuput leaves; red from vermilion; black from straw ash; green from verdigris; yellow from gardenia flowers.

b. Colours in Lacquer



The altar in pagoda.

Photo: Doan Van Hien

Lacquer is a long traditional craft in Vietnam. For hundreds of years, lacquer works were regarded as the most high-class furniture, which were usually used for worship and decoration in public places like village halls, pagodas, temples, or altar of each family. Only the King used lacquer works for decoration in his palace and for daily use. Normal people only used lacquer caskets to contain ritual stuff from the groom's family to the bride's family in wedding occasions.



Lacquer painting of Nguyen Gia Tri in Vietnam Fine Art Museum.

Photo: Pham Thanh Huong

For a long time in the history, lacquer craft only used 3 colours of black, red and yellow. Black and red were used to paint the surface of the work as background for decoration, not to draw. Decoration vignettes were painted with yellow on the black or red background. All 3 colours of black, red and yellow are colours of natural materials and used originally without any mixture. Craftsmen processed these colours totally by hand.

Black and cockroach-wing colour (or honey colour) are directly created from lactic of wax-tree. Red is created from a kind of clay called sinople (also a medicine). Yellow is 24 karat gold flattened by hand. Craftsmen paint or draw decoration vignettes with cockroach-wing colour on the surface painted black or red of the product, then press gold leaves on the painted area and use pen brush to slightly sweep away the superfluous gold.

In the early of 20th century, painters of Dong Duong Fine Arts School (Hanoi) and craftsmen renovated the traditional lacquer craft by using new colours in drawing pictures. Since then colours of handicraft lacquer products have become more and more diversified, though natural materials are still majorly used. White is created from egg shell; red and black are not only used as background but for decoration as well; some colouring agents are also used to make the product more colourful.

The originality of lacquer products is their conventionality in colours even in realistic paintings. The black sky may have sunlight; or the sky, the earth and the water are all black or red but they can be still distinguished.

To satisfy market's demand, current lacquer products are colourful due to the use of colouring agents and pastels. More techniques of creating surface make more colours for lacquer. More types of techniques of pasting gold and silver, sprinkling farineose, gluing eggshell, etc... create more tints for each colour. Therefore, there is no limitation of colours in lacquer products, some colours are even unnamed.

c. Colours in Theatre Art - Meaning of Face Colours in Vietnamese Classical Drama - *Tuong*.

In the past, actors in classical drama used to wear masks during performance. However, nowadays, they have their face painted instead of a mask. Whether it is a painted face or a mask, faces in classical drama are always highly symbolic with a specific value system. Typical drama faces are: white face (symbol of beautiful and calm characters), red face (symbol of wise, brave and mature characters), striped face (symbol of ugly and hot-tempered characters), red or blue face with red streaks is the symbol of hot-tempered characters, with black streak is a brave face, etc... Actors in classical drama are called *kep* and their face colour depends on their type of role. Males are called *kep* and females *dao*.

Face of actors in the role of a civil mandarin (*Kep Van*) is often pink, which expresses their calm characteristics, contrary to the hot-tempered and blunt characteristics of the role of *Kep Vo* a military mandarin (with a blazing red face). Sometimes an actor in the role of a *Kep Van* has a red face to express his loyalty (red in classical drama is the symbol of loyalty). However, instead of sharp features of the role of a military mandarin such as slanted upward eyes, resilient corners of the mouth and a blazing red face, features of eyebrows, eyes and corners of the mouth of the role of a civil mandarin are more horizontal.

Features in the face of the role of a *Kep Van* are often soft and curved according to the face of the actor, but not too formalized like the face of the role of a *Kep Vo* military mandarin. Actors (*kep*) and actresses (*dao*) in the role of a civil mandarin have the same identification features in terms of colour and lines; the only difference is of the gender. Similarly, actresses in the role of a military mandarin have the face with the same colour and lines as actors, but as females, lines in their face are softer and more flexible.

Role of a military mandarin (*Kep Vo*) is a symbol of strength and loyalty, which makes the face blazing red to express loyalty and hot-temper, and the eyebrows and the eyes totally slanted.

Sometimes the face of the role of a military mandarin is white with black streaks as a symbol of loyalty and strength. The role of a military mandarin always has a mission to exterminate the evils and protect the weak.

A flatterer role (*Kep Ninh*) always has a white face as the symbol of a mean person who crawls to get promoted and bad-mouths loyal mandarins. A flatterer role often has sparse or disordered beard and a crooked nose.

A child role (*Kep Con*) in classical drama is for small character who intends to be a loyal person, whose face is light red. Features in the face of a child role are not too complicated to express the purity and innocence of the children. The eyes are the most significant feature of this role.

A king role (*Kep Vua*) express the role of a king, with a dark red face and eyebrows in the shape of a flying dragon. A king role's face expresses the extraordinary gravity and majesty with a beautiful long black three-tuft beard.

Kep Nui is the role of mandarins sent to the mountains to learn and be trained, and become talented after get down from the mountains. The face of a *Kep Nui* is black, white and brown, or half white half blue, as a symbol of the mountains and forests. The outstanding feature in the face of a *Kep Nui* is the eyes, which are drawn as the head of two birds. *Kep Nui* is often a straightforward person with a mission to help the king exterminate bad mandarins.

Role of a civil cum military mandarin (*Kep Van Pha Vo*) is a character who is good at both literature and martial arts. This mixture makes the face of this role is pinker than the face of an actress in the role of a civil mandarin but less red

than the face of an actress in the role of a military mandarin, or just plain white. The features of eyebrows, eyes, corners of the mouth are drawn neutrally, not too slanted but not too horizontal either. A white face in classical drama is the symbol of a person who is straightforward, and good at both martial arts and stratagem.

COLOURS IN RELIGION



Monks in National Day celebration.

Photo: Nguyen Dan

a. Colours of Buddhistic Costumes

Buddhism in Vietnam is divided into two sects: the north school of Zen sect and the south school of Zen sect. Monks of the North school often wear brown clothes. In the rites, monks of low level wear brown tunic while monks of high level wear yellow tunic with a cover cape called Kasaya, which is brown or yellow according to the level of the monk. All clothes of monks are of tarnished gold colour (colour of incense). Monks of the South school of Zen sect do not use sewn clothes but they use a big yellow or brown cloth to cover the body in different ways. In the rites, they often wear a colourful hat in the shape of a seven-petal lotus. Buddhists often wear brown clothes when they come to pagodas for the rites.

b. Colours of Christian Costumes

If the common colours in Buddhism are brown and yellow, the common colour in Christianity is black. Bishop dignitaries often wear black clothes over the white underclothes. The Cardinal wears red clothes and hat. Cloisterers and nuns also wear black and white.

COLOURS IN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Colours are not only a property inhering in the nature, but also a special spiritual factor of human beings. For their importance, colours are considered one of the first formats of culture which were recorded and symbolized through language. Each race has their own copious and unique system of terms for colours. Since 100 years ago, scientists from all over the world have been interested in the difference in the colour perception ability between races in the world.

Discussions have attracted more and more scientific fields, such as ethnology, psychology, linguistics.

In Vietnam, the country of long-standing culture and rich spiritual life, colours have become an essential part of tradition and culture. From ceramic art to folk painting genres, from unique colourful ethnic costumes to the resplendence of palaces and temples, roles of colours are expressed everywhere with cultural meanings and symbols connected to historical tradition. Moreover, the natural environment of a tropical country is very colourful. With such natural and social advantages, it is not a surprise to say that Vietnamese people have a store of languages to express colours.

a. Category of Words of Colours in Vietnamese

According to Nguyen Khanh Ha (1995), there are over 800 terms to express colours in Vietnamese, which can be divided into three major layers of (a) words of basic colours; (b) words of derived colours; and (c) words of specific colours.

The Layer of Words of Basic Colours

This layer consists of nine single terms of blue, red, yellow, black, white, violet, grey, brown, and pink. They have common characteristics as follows: (i) being the most popular in Vietnamese community; (ii) being simply monosyllabic; (iii) in terms of meaning, these words cover a wide range of meaning and are used to refer to a number of rich and diversified things and phenomena in life at a relatively high level of abstraction; (iv) to have the ability to create a range of words of derived colours, for example, (*xanh ngat, xanh le, xanh xao...*) deep blue, greenish blue, pale blue, etc... for blue and (*do oi, do bam, do gay...*) flaming red, dark red, crimson, etc... for red.

The Layer of Words of Derived Colours

This layer consists of a wide range of words (over 700 terms). In terms of form, they are polysyllabic (light red, silky yellow, very black, deep blue, etc). In terms of meaning, they are used to refer to colours of various things and phenomena, which make them less abstract than words of basic colours. In other words, they are much more particular than words of basic colours.

The layer of words of specific colours (about 100 terms)

These are words of colours that are borrowed directly from names of particular things and phenomena in the objective world, such as lime, cream, canary, honey, etc... The significant characteristic of this layer is that is highly particular.

In comparison to other languages like English, Vietnamese has an outstanding characteristic of the generalization of blue and orange colours. In English, green and blue are two different colour categories, but in Vietnamese there is only one word of *xanh* for all colours regarded as green or blue. The difference among various tints is remarked by the use of predicates to modify the word "*xanh*", for example, navy blue (*xanh nuoc bien*), greenish blue (*xanh la cay*), (*xanh da troi*) azure blue, etc... In English, orange is a specific colour category beside other categories. However, in Vietnamese, there is no word of basic colours for orange. Orange is considered a complementary colour of yellow, which creates the word of orange yellow (*vang cam*).

b. Colours in Linguistic Life of Vietnamese People

Words of Colours Referring to Particular Things and Phenomena in Life

Vietnam is a tropical country with year-round green and fresh trees and a lot of rivers, lakes and seas, which create various tints of blue and green colours in the nature of Vietnam, such as (*troi xanh*) blue sky, (*may xanh*) blue cloud,

(*anh trang xanh*) blue moonlight, (*khoi xanh*) blue smoke, (*non xanh*) green mountain, (*song xanh*) blue wave, (*song xanh*) blue river, (*rung xanh*) green woods, (*lua xanh*) green rice, (*co xanh*) green grass, (*cay xanh*) green tree, (*reu xanh*) green moss, etc... Red is used to describe the sun, the colour of alluvial soil, fire, the colour of flowers, ripe fruits, etc... Yellow is used to describe sunlight, moonlight, the colour of cloud, flowers, ripe rice, etc... White and black create the opposition between darkness and light, nights and days, etc...

In addition to the function of referring to colours, words of colours also point out the characteristics of things and phenomena. Vietnam is an agriculture country, where people's life depends a lot on the rice. Thus for a long time, people have become used to observing changes in weather to better forecast, just so they can take appropriate care of the rice to avoid a lost harvest. Moreover, our ancestors knew how to depend on the colours of nature to be aware of such changes. For example, "Golden cloud on the sky-line means shine, white cloud means rain" ; "If the black dragon takes water, it shines/ If the white dragon takes water, it rains" ; "Blue cloud means shine, white cloud means rain"; "In sunny summer, white Bermuda grass means rain". Colours also express the difference in climate. Laos wind is different from Northeastern wind. Laos wind is hot and brings about sand and dust, which leads to "make both of the earth and the sky yellow". On the contrary, Northeastern wind is cold and dry, brings the coldness into the skin, which make its colour grey as in: "An exit as wide as the gate of a village hall let grey winds blow through in gusts". The colour of the coldness in the winter is also different from the colour of the sunlight in the summer: "The coldness even wants to paint leaves purple"; "It is twilight, and the sunlight is glaring on the white burned soil, there are shades only in the hamlet and under the bamboo grove".

The colour of the rice in each stage may express its growth process. Young rice is green: "Cracked season, summer rice is green", but ripe rice is red "When the rice has the red colour of *Aglaia duperreana* flower/ We shall be back for the seasonal festival"; "Who will harvests red rice/ You bring home and beat and dry in time"; "The winter rice is becoming red".

Dishes are an area with rich and diversified colours. Colours create the beauty of dishes, and stimulate appetite. We may know the way dishes are made due to their colours. Grilled fish is only done when it turns yellow: "Burn charcoal to grill fish to yellow/ Take money to buy wine for you to enjoy". If we cook shrimps with too much salt, they shall become white "salty shrimps cooked with brine shall become white". White rice, from a good dish "Vegetables and fish from the countryside are enjoyed/ Nothing can compared with sweet-smelling and small-grained and white rice (*gao tam xoan*)" has become a symbol of richness and happiness "If you want white rice and dropwort soup/ Come to Dong – Lang to work with me"; "White rice with grilled chopped bird make both husband and wife beautiful/ Musty rice with cooked egg-plant make both husband and wife ugly and thin".

Words of Colours Become Names of Things

People recognize the colours of things in the surrounding environment as their characteristics. For some things, their colours are even inherent and typical characteristics for people to distinguish them with other things of the same or different kinds. From that conception, Vietnamese people have used words of basic colours to name a number of particular things and phenomena. Colour-names may be fixed or provisional. Fixed colour-names are names generally accepted and used by Vietnamese people on a daily basis, for example: gold (metal – pronounced the same as yellow colour in Vietnamese), brown (a kind of pig), kaki (fruit – pronounced as pink in Vietnamese), etc... In such cases,

words of colours are not adjectives but nouns: gold refers to a metal, brown refers to a kind of pig, black refers to a kind of wood, and kaki/rose refers to a kind of fruit/flower (both pronounced as pink in Vietnamese). In other cases, adjectives referring to colours are used to categorized small kinds of things, for example: black bean, green bean, yellow bean, red bean; white rice, red rice, yellow rice; white pepper, black pepper; green tea, black tea; yellow rose, red rose, white rose; black ink, blue ink, red ink; (musical) black note, white note; (traffic) red light, yellow light, green light; etc... Provisional colour-names only exist for a certain period or are used in a smaller scale, for example white meat (pork, chicken meat, etc...), red meat (beef, goat meat, etc...), red music (revolutionary music), yellow music (pre-war music), name of roles in classical drama (red role, white role, etc).

Words of Colours to Portray People

Through words of colours, the portrait of people in everyday life, in the relationship with the environment and the society is expressed lively and sharply. Words of colours used in daily conversations, in idioms, proverbs and folk-songs, etc... have expressed the unique character of Vietnamese culture.

Vietnamese people love to use words of colours to describe outlook, especially the complexion, countenance, the eye colour, teeth, hair, lips, etc... For example, to describe the complexion, Vietnamese people use many words of basic colours, such as white, black, blue, yellow, violet, red, pink, etc... In accordance with Vietnamese people's standards, a beautiful girl must have "white skin and long hair": "It is a pity for a girl with white skin and long hair to be married to an idiotic man". In the ancient society, white skin was used to refer to noble women, opposed to black skin which was the symbol of poor and hard labourers: "White skin due to powder/ Black skin due to the noon market"; "I do not like people with the skin as white as cotton / I love people with black skin from doing farming works". Ruddy skin is also a pretty image of girls: "ruddy skin warm body", "pink cheeks slender eyebrows"; "Hey girl with red cheeks and ruddy skin / You leave your hometown for your husband". The opposed image is the pale blue complexion which expresses tiredness and weakness: "pale face yellow teeth", "face as pale green as leaves", "Who goes Uong Bi, Vang Danh / Leave pink cheeks and bring home pale cheeks".

Vietnamese people have a saying of "Teeth and hair show the beauty of a person" – the beauty of women is expressed clearly through their teeth and hair. A standard of the beauty of women in the ancient society was black teeth "Teeth as black as melon seed/ flashing smile like that of an unmarried girl"; "Get married to a man who is worth your make up of pink cheeks and black teeth". On the contrary, yellow teeth showed a not-good-looking vision "Three girls with elongated neck and yellow teeth / Four girls passing by with clothes smelt acrid".

Colours do not only express the beauty or ugliness of the outer looks, but also express feelings and attitudes of a person. For example, anger or too hard work leads to "red face purple ears", "face as red as sappan wood", shyness leads to "face as red as cochinchin gourd", being too scared leads to "pale face grey eyebrows", "indigo blue face", "face as grey as a stucked chicken". To describe changes of attitude, Vietnamese people have a saying of "Not hit others yet, face as red as sappan wood/ Already hit others face as yellow as saffron".

Among Western idioms is "The cloth does not make the monk", but in Vietnamese culture, colour of a outfit is an important factor to make the position of a person in the community. Colours of clothes may let others know about the social

status and occupation, etc... of the person who is wearing such clothes. For example, the colours of clothes for the king and his mandarins are yellow and purple: "Five mandarins prepare carefully/ Yellow belt and purple dress when attending the king's audience ". Yellow belt was the costume of soldiers in the past "Lumbar yellow belt/Conical hat on the head and long gun on the shoulder". Black clothes were also popular in the ancient society ("Black clothes with five buttons on the hem of the lap/ Who sews for thou or thou sew yourself?"; "Go to the mound every afternoon /Hide under the hat to wave: Hey you the student in black clothes!"). White dress was of noble ladies "Fairy roll and peach blossom/ The white dress cover the blue eyes"), as well as "white pants silk belt" showed a rich person. "Brown pants mended clothes" were absolutely costumes of poor people, while "blue crepe scarf" was the costume of noble people. Among colours, red is always a symbol of elegance and richness: "See a lot of people in red clothes / See no people in torn clothes/ Stand until legs are worn out ". A pretty outfit of girls in the past was "Red brassiere, pink scarf", which was the origin of such folk-songs like: "See the girl in red brassiere with black teeth / Amida Buddha for forgetting the pagoda!"; "Red brassieres are glaring on the ground/ Blue clouds shine brightly on the sky"...

Colour Symbols Originated from Chinese Cliches

Influenced by Chinese culture for many centuries, Vietnamese people have borrowed a number of colour symbols from cliché of Chinese literature to refer to abstract or highly abstract things and ideas.

The opinion of "Yang heaven, yin earth" has existed in the Vietnamese consciousness for a long time with a supernatural meaning. However, many names of the heaven and the earth are borrowed from Chinese culture. According to Ching "The sky is black blue and the earth is yellow", so blue yellow is a name of heaven and earth. Heaven - earth are the origin to make everything, to decide all evolutionary and growth processes of the universe and human beings. Therefore, the heaven is not only called blue, blue heaven, sky, but also called the blue creator (*khuon xanh*). This name originates from a Chinese word, which means the mould of the heaven, the mould to create everything: "As long as we are loyal/ The red constancy inside and the blue creator above". Ancient people thought that all ups and downs in a person's life were due to the heaven. The creator decided predestined affinity: "Lament that our predestined love tie is/ Due to the blue heaven's matchmaking and the old Lunar marry ". The creator was also a significant witness for vows: "Our vow is witnessed by the creator, Omniscience so I do not mind following." Since the creator had such an absolute power, people were willing to completely entrust the creator with their life: "Let gossips flowing/ I entrust the creator with my red heart". Another pair of opposed yin - yang of this meaning are the earth (yang) and the hell (*yin*). The earth is also called "red dust" (*hong tran – bui hong*); which means the earth is a dusty ephemeral temporality; the Yellow Creek of Underworld (*Suoi Vang*) is a symbol of the *yin*, originated from Chinese word of yellow river. Yellow river means the underground spring or water artery and that name is due to the yellow colour of the earth.

Among Chinese clichés, the typical colour of women is pink, with such word combinations of pink beauty (pink vision in Vietnamese), pink cheeks (beautiful girls), pink pants (*quan hong*), and pink scarf. Even teardrops of women are called pink drops.

Other colourful images originated from Chinese typical incidents are black mob (black people) *dan den*, newly-born baby (red child) used to refer to civilian; *to hong / chi hong*: marriage tie - pink silk cord used to refer to predestined love "Hundred years, hundred years old, hundred husbands/ Which marriage tie

helps to find the right one?"; green spring (green age) used to refer to the youth "Green age has just passed into mature, the red love tie is early to bind". Golden board and blue stone stele used to refer to success in studying "I am so good to get green stele and yellow board" (Nguyen Khuyen, n.d.).

COLOURS IN RITES

a. Colours in the Wedding



Wedding gift.

Photo: Hoang Thu Ha

The major colour in a traditional wedding of Vietnamese people is red, a symbol of happiness and luck. Bright red can be seen everywhere: from invitation card, betrothal offerings wrapped in red paper, red wooden round caskets, paper decoration of red words of "*song hi*" (double happiness), etc... Colours of costumes in a wedding are diversified. Brides in the North often wear a three-layer dress, with the outermost layer of dark chiffon, the inside pink and green or yellow and pale blue layer, then a white blouse, and the innermost layer of peach-coloured brassiere and white silk belt. Brides in the Central also wear a three-layer dress, with the innermost of red or scarlet layer, then indigo layer, and the outermost of black dress. Brides in the South wear red or scarlet brocade ao dai with black silk pants and embroidered shoes. Grooms in the three areas often wear deep blue ao dai with white pants and deep blue turban.

In modern weddings, brides often wear two kinds of costumes. The first one is traditional ao dai in bright red or scarlet. The second one is Western white bridal gowns. Grooms wear black or white suit. However, red is still the major colour in decoration and articles in a modern Vietnamese wedding.

b. Colours in the Funeral



Flower for funeral

Photo: Pham Thanh Huong

In feudal period, rules on costumes in state funerals were very strict. In Le Dynasty, when the king died, all people had to have their hair long and wear white dress in 100 days. Mandarins had their hair long and wore white dress in three years, but they could wear blue dress at home. After 100 days people were allowed to wear black or blue dress, but not pink or green dress.

According to Nguyen Dang Duy (2001), in a funeral there was often a group acting Tang Sanzang, Sun Wukong, Sha Wujing and Zhu Bajie, with the meaning of using Buddha's superior power, represented by the triple heroes of Sanzang, Sun Wukong, and Zhu Bajie, to drive away old evil spirits, not to let them bully the new ghost, i.e. the soul of the newly-dead person.

However, in the broadest sense, Tang Sanzang's red dress (fire phase), Sun Wukong's yellow dress (earth phase), Sha Wujing's green dress (wood phase), Zhu Bajie's black dress (water phase) and the white horse (metal phase), all were the representation of the just power of the Five Phases. Leading in a funeral were five-coloured fairy flags as a symbol of the power of the Five Phases to drive away evil spirits.

In addition to the five-colour combination, if there are red baldachins in a funeral procession that means the deceased person was 70 years old or older, i.e. "normal death", and the deceased person's soul shall soon be reincarnated. Red is the colour of growth. If baldachins are white, that means the deceased person was less than 70 years old, i.e. within the life-and-death circle, which makes it difficult for his or her soul to be reincarnated. The negative white expresses coldness.

The colour of mourning headband for children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, i.e. 3 generations from the deceased person, is white, since number 3 is a number full of yin and yang, when yin and yang in the form of human has gone, white headband is used. If there are small children wearing



Peach flower and Kumquat tree in Spring - a typical landscape of Tet - Vietnamese Lunar New Year.

Photo: Pham Thanh Huong

yellow and red mourning headbands, they are great-great-grandchildren and great- great-great-grandchildren, who are very far from the deceased person. Yellow and red headbands express the happiness about their forefather's longevity. Great-great-grandchildren and great- great-great-grandchildren wear yellow and red mourning headbands to express that the deceased person is ready for reincarnation.

c. Colours in Lunar New Year

Lunar New Year is the most important rite in cultural life of Vietnamese people. Vietnamese people believe that on this occasion everything must be new and refresh, from external things to the inside of a person. Thus, about ten days before the Lunar New Year, they often repaint their house with paint or lime. They are also busy going shopping to buy new clothes to wear on this occasion. According to opinions of ancient people, the spring should be colourful to express the vitality of all things and a large family with many children and grandchildren, so people should wear colourful dresses (pink, red, yellow, blue, etc) to create enthusiasm and jubilation. That is the reason why monotonous and melancholic colours are avoided, especially black and white, the two colours of funeral and death.

On Lunar New Year, on the ancestor altar of Vietnamese people, the indispensable thing is a tray of the five fruits. A tray of the five fruits includes five fruits with five different colours. The number 5 expresses the wish of Vietnamese people of "five blessings into the house" (*Ngu phuc lam mon*): riches, honours, longevity, health and peace. The five colours mean assets from 5 directions to be respectfully presented to ancestors. The tray of the five fruits must contain 5 fruits with 5 different colours. First of all is green banana – respective to the spring (wood phase). The second one is yellow Buddha's hand fruit – respective to earth phase, which is put in the middle, on the banana bunch. In case of no Buddha's hand fruit, a yellow ripe pomelo can replace it with the same meaning.

Following are three other fruits with colours of red (respective to the summer – fire phase) like chilli pepper, ripe orange – tangerine, lucuma, kaki, etc...; white (respective to the autumn – metal phase) like bell fruit, peach; and black (respective to the winter – water phase) like plum, sapodilla, etc... These five colours symbolize the Five Phases in the universe of Metal, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth (Vietnamnet, 2011).

The tray of the five fruits on the gods altar in the Northern part of Vietnam is a little different in terms of fruits, but the colours are the same: red orange or tangerine (fire phase), green banana (wood phase), yellow pomelo, or yellow Buddha's hand fruit (earth phase), custard-apple (the inside is white) (metal phase), and custard-apple with the white inside (metal phase), purple (black) kaki – water phase (Nguyen Dang Duy, 2001).



Banh chung - Special dish of Tet Holiday - Vietnamese Lunar new year.

Photo: Haki

Banh chung is a traditional dish of Vietnamese during Tet holidays. *Banh chung* is made from glutinous rice, green bean, pork and other spices. All of them are wrapped with squares of dong leaves or banana leaves. As simple as that, but when well-boiled and cut into pieces, *banh chung* shows a harmonious five-coloured picture to people's eyes: the yellow fragrance of sweet-smelling beans, the pinkie red of cooked pork, the snow-white of sweet-smelling glutinous rice, the very blue of dong leaves or banana leaves on the outermost layer of rice and the black dots of cardamom or pepper. These five colours symbolize the Five Phases in Eastern philosophy: Water (black), Fire (red), Wood (green), Metal (white) and Earth (yellow).

Vietnamese families have a custom of hanging "a pair of red paper of parallel sentences" (*cau doi do*). These parallel sentences are written in Chinese or Ancient Vietnamese script with black or yellow ink on red or scarlet paper.

Traditional decoration trees and flowers for Lunar New Year are peach blossom, apricot blossom and kumquat. Northern people often choose a branch of red peach blossom for in-house decoration due to their opinion from ancient times that peach blossom may exterminate evil spirits and red has strong vitality. Northern people also like to decorate their house with a kumquat with dense clusters of fruits and green and fresh leaves as a symbol of richness and luck. On the other hand, Central and Southern people love yellow apricot blossom since yellow is the colour of elegance, luck and wealth.

In addition to these two typical flowers in Tet holidays of peach blossom and apricot blossom, almost every house are also decorated with other colourful flowers for worship and decoration.

COLOURS IN COSTUMES



Non la - Selling conical hat at the market.

Photo: Nguyen Dan

According to Nguyen Thi Duc (1998), Vietnamese culture is the culture of agricultural inhabitants of a wet rice economy in the context of the "botanical civilization" in Southeast Asia, so Vietnamese costumes were created in the harmonization and closeness to the nature. The light brown colour is close to the colour of alluvium of mud, the blue and indigo colours are close to the colour of the mountains, and bright colours seem to originate from colours of fruits and flowers.

We would like to introduce a number of outstanding features of the colours in Vietnamese costumes.

a. Costumes Over History

Palatial Costumes Over Dynasties

From 1300 to 1395, historical documents of Tran Dynasty recorded regulations on mandarins' grade attire: Civil mandarins wore black hat; civil mandarins who served the king wore blue flower hat; highest ranked mandarins wore

purple dress, second highest ranked mandarins wore pink dress, third highest ranked mandarins wore peach-coloured dress, fourth and fifth highest ranked mandarins wore green dress, seventh highest ranked mandarins wore bluish green dress, eighth and ninth highest ranked mandarins wore blue dress. Ones without a grade wore white dress. Shoulders wore blue dress with wide sleeves.

In Le Dynasty, the king wore royal robe (yellow dress) on the first and fifteenth day of the lunar month, and wore blue dress on normal day. On great festivals, Trinh Lord wore purple dress. Yellow was the colour of the king and no one else was allowed to wear.

Costumes of Civilian

In feudal period, the most common colour of civilian's costumes was black. Following were brown, white, dark green, horn colour. Civilian was not allowed to wear yellow since it was the colour of the king and his mandarins.

In the period of French domination, the monarchy became weak while influence of French culture led to the renovation of costume colours. In rural areas, the common colours of costumes were still brown, black and white, but in cities, they became much more diversified.



Tradition costumes for festivals.

Photo: Pham Huyen Kieu

After the August Revolution, with the establishment of Democratic Republic of Vietnam, there were changes in costumes, with the typical colours of peaceful blue, the colour of cement, light pink, black or beige pants.

From 1954 to 1975, there were two regimes in Vietnam: the socialist regime in the North and the pro-American regime in the South, which led to the development of two different costume trends. In the North, the costume trend was simple, economic, uniformed, which effaced the gap between rural and urban areas or between social classes. Common costumes were black silk pants, light brown or blue shirts in ordinary days and white, peaceful blue and colourful dress on festivals. In the South, the costume trend expressed the gap between rural and urban areas and between social classes. In rural areas, the most common costumes were black pants and black, brown or white loose-fitting blouse (ao

Tradition costumes for festivals.

Photo: Nguyen Dan



ba ba), and white-stripped black bandanna. In urban areas, costumes were very diversified in terms of design and colour due to influence from European-American culture.

b. Costumes in Holidays and Festivals

Holidays and festivals are the days for community activities, religious activities, entertainment, etc... according to traditional custom. Vietnamese people often wear their best costumes on such occasions.

During feudal period, in Northern rural areas, traditional costumes of women on holidays and festivals were the multi-layered dress. It was a set of three *ao dai*s. The outermost one was a black, brown or tam-giang-coloured four-panel traditional dress. The two dresses inside were chicken-fat-coloured and lotus-petal-coloured, then a white dress, and the innermost was a red brassiere. The long dress was black with light yellow or scarlet hem and chicken-fat-coloured or pink belt. The kerchief was violet or black. The *non quai thao* (flat palm hat with fringes) was white with black strap. In the Northern urban areas, women often wore black long dress, white blouse, pink belt, white or pink brassiere with some gold jewellery. Women in the Central and the South wore light-coloured *ao dai* and white pants. They rarely wore black pants.

Ao dai - Vietnam traditional long dress.

Photo: Nguyen Hoang Long



In the period of French domination, in urban areas, costumes for holidays and festivals of women had some audacious changes, of which the most outstanding one was the appearance of *ao dai*, with diversified colours and good-looking designs. The image of Hue girls in violet *ao dai*, white pants and hat has become popular in poetry. Men also wore *ao dai*, with popular colours of white, black, brown, dark blue, and white pants and black turban.

Since 1954, festival costumes of Vietnamese people have changed in accordance with new trends and under influence from domestic and foreign cultural interference. However, in traditional festivals, people still wear traditional costumes. Vietnamese *ao dai* has become the “national costume” and a classical symbol of Vietnamese culture.

c. Costumes in the Wedding

In feudal period, the costumes of brides on their wedding day were their festival costumes as well. The most outstanding feature of Northern brides was a set of three parts, with three different colours: the outermost of a black sheer, which made the two dress inside of pink, blue or yellow become vague, then a white blouse, and the innermost of a peach-coloured brassiere with a white silk cloth. The long dress was black and the belt consisted of three cloths of three colours: pink, green and black. They wore a black velvet turban on the head. Central brides wore white pants instead of long dress. They also wore three-layered dress, with the innermost of red or pink, then an indigo thin dress, and the outermost of black thin dress. Red and pink became a special violet through the indigo thin cloth. Southern brides wore *ao dai* of various colours and black pants. Grooms wore black turban, white silk pants and black *ao dai*. In some areas, grooms wore a double dress of white *ao dai* inside and dark blue, pink or yellow *ao dai* outside.

Wedding dress.

Photo: Haki



Wedding dress.

Photo: Haki

In the early of the 20th century, brides in urban areas already wore renovated *ao dai*, but still in “double style”. The outer was a black thin dress and the inner was pink, blue or white. Traditionally, white was not used in the wedding since it was the colour of death and grief. The colour of a wedding was often red, the colour of happiness and joy.

Since the mid-twentieth century, when the feudal regime completely collapsed, brides changed their costumes to palatial costumes of red or yellow brocade *ao*



Cao Dai followers worshipping in a Cao Dai temple

Photo: Nguyen Dan



Ao tu than A kind of tradition dress of Kinh (Viet) people.

Photo: Nguyen Dan

dai with decoration of image of dragon and phoenix, white pants, red, yellow or dark blue shoes embroidered with image of dragon and phoenix, yellow, dark blue or red turban in queen style.

Since the late of the 20th century, along with the strong integration of Vietnam into the world, Western style has significantly influenced the way brides and grooms choose their costumes. White is no longer a taboo colour. Popular wedding costumes nowadays are ton-sour-ton suit with a white shirt inside for the groom, and white wedding dress for the bride, with some white decoration flowers on her hair. Grooms and brides often wear traditional wedding costumes in their betrothal ceremony, and Western-styled wedding costumes in the main ceremony.

d. Costumes of Ethnic Groups in Vietnam

According to Nguyen Van Huy (1998), "Vietnam with 54 ethnic groups is beautiful like a mosaic picture or a woven carpet with harmonious colours of the ethnic groups. (...) The carpet of Vietnamese culture is woven from 54 major coloured threads and thousands, tens of thousand, of cultural factors from each ethnic groups". Among cultural factors creating the characteristics of Vietnam's ethnic groups, an outstanding one is the colour in ethnic costumes. We would like to introduce features of colours in the costumes of some ethnic groups in Vietnam.

Cham people, who live in the Central coastal region of Vietnam, create a bright culture under influence from Indian culture. Common costume for both men and women is a long rolling skirt. Men wear a short jacket with buttons. Women wear a long pullover. The major colour of costume is the white of cotton.

Co Ho people have lived in Highlands for a long time. Their common costumes are loin-cloth for men and skirt for women. Co Ho women often wear a black or indigo long rolling skirt with white decoration vertically along the skirt.

Gia rai old man

Photo: Nguyen Dan



Co Tu people live in the northwestern mountains in Quang Nam province. Their traditional costume is woven clothes with decoration of lead or white courbary-bead on a black background. Men wear loin-cloth and no shirt. Women wear pullover dress. They wear a white belt on festival days.

Dao people live in the northern mountains of Vietnam, divided into various groups (white-pant Dao, Ao-dai Dao, Thanh Y Dao, Red Dao). Costumes of Dao women are diversified, with ao dai, brassiere, dress or pants. Their costumes are colourfully embroidered. They do not use a drawn design but use their memory to embroider decorations of pine, bird, human, leaf. Dao people also have an unique technique of printing decorations on fabric by bee wax. First they use a drawing pen or dip the printing form in melt wax and then print on the cloth. After the cloth is dyed indigo, blue decoration shall appear since the areas with bee wax are not dyed.

E De people live in the centre of Highlands. Their traditional costumes are long rolling skirt to heel and short blouse for women and loin-cloth and short jacket for men. Both men and women sharpen their teeth, stretching their ears (ca rang cang tai) and blackening their teeth.

Giay people live in the northern mountains of Vietnam. Women used to wear circle skirt but now they wear black indigo pants with a red cloth on the upper hem, a blouse covering the bottom with the wristband of another colour. Their hair is winded on the head with pink threads. They wear bag embroidered with colour threads on their shoulder.

Gia Rai people live in the mountainous area in Highlands. Common costumes of men are white lion-cloth with dashes of various colours, long indigo fabric lion-cloth with pattern and colourful threads on both sides on festivals, black sleeveless shirt with pattern of colour threads on the rim. The village patriarch wears indigo long shirt with a piece of red threads on the chest. Women wear



Hmong minority people go to market.

Photo: Nguyen Dan

indigo dress with pattern on the under hem and white or colour thread on the upper hem, black indigo short blouse with pattern of colour threads on the sleeves.

Hmong people live in the northern mountains of Vietnam. Their costumes are colourful and diversified. White Hmong women wear white skirt and patterned blouse. Hoa Hmong women wear indigo skirt with flower-pattern printed by bee wax and covered with colour or embroidered fabric. Black Hmong women wear indigo skirt with pattern printed by bee wax. Blue Hmong women wear pullover dress. The outstanding feature of Hmong people's costumes is the creation of pattern by drawing with bee wax then indigo dyeing (like the technique of Dao people). Women use a pen dipped in melt bee wax to draw pattern on white linen. Then such linen shall be dyed indigo many times until it is satisfactorily black. After that people dip the linen in hot water to melt bee wax, leaving white pattern on the indigo background.

Hoa people live scatteredly all over Vietnam. Costumes deemed to be their traditional are only worn by old people or in weddings or funerals. Women wear pink or red or dark clothes. Men wear black or dark blue clothes.

Kho Me people majorly live in the Mekong Delta. Kho Me people often wear silk xa rong woven by themselves. Old people often wear black loose-fitting clothes, and rich people often wear white loose-fitting clothes and black and white bandanna winded on their head or thrown over on their shoulder. Wedding costumes most clearly show the traditional characteristics of Kho Me people. Grooms wear colourful xa rong, red jacket and white scarf. Brides wear violet skirt, red long jacket, scarf and traditional wedding hat.

Muong people live in the Northern midland. Their costume for women is quite original. Turban is a non-embroidered white rectangular cloth, white brassiere and blouse, long skirt with sophisticated pattern.

Nung people live in the northern mountains of Vietnam. Their traditional costume is simple, which is made of indigo-dyed self-woven plain fabric without any pattern.

Pu Peo people live in the northern mountains of Vietnam. Blouse and skirt of women are original with the technique of covering with colour cloth. Their blouse and skirt are often decorated by covering with clothes of different colours arranged into a triangle, a square or a diamond. Collar and sleeves are also hemmed with cloth of different colours.

San Diu people live in the northern mountains of Vietnam. Traditional costumes of women include black scarf, ao dai (single or double), if a double the inside is white, and the outside is indigo, red brassiere, white, pink or blue belt; indigo skirt covering the kneel with white upper hem; silver jewellery. Men's costumes are as Viet people's costumes of black ao dai, white pants and turban.

Tay people live in the northern mountains of Vietnam. Their traditional costumes are made from indigo-dyed self-woven cotton with almost no pattern.

Thai people live in the northern mountains of Vietnam. Women often wear a short blouse of different colours enclosed with silver buttons in the shape of butterfly or spider, etc, black tubular skirt, and green silk belt. Thai women wear their famous pieu scarf with colourful patterns. Men's costumes are majorly black or the light-brick-coloured with dash or white pattern.

Tho people live in the Central of Vietnam. Men's costumes are similar to Viet people's costumes of white pants, black ao dai and violet turban. Women wear black or indigo cotton skirt with two lines of colour threads from the upper hem to the under hem. Some women wear black or white five-panel traditional dress. Women all wear a white square scarf like Muong women.

COLOURS IN GRAPHIC DESIGN

Along with the development of design and graphics in Vietnam from the classical period to modern stage, there have been certain changes in the usage of Vietnamese colours. Traditional meanings of colours are still kept and used in traditional art works, but they have changed in art works of modern time.



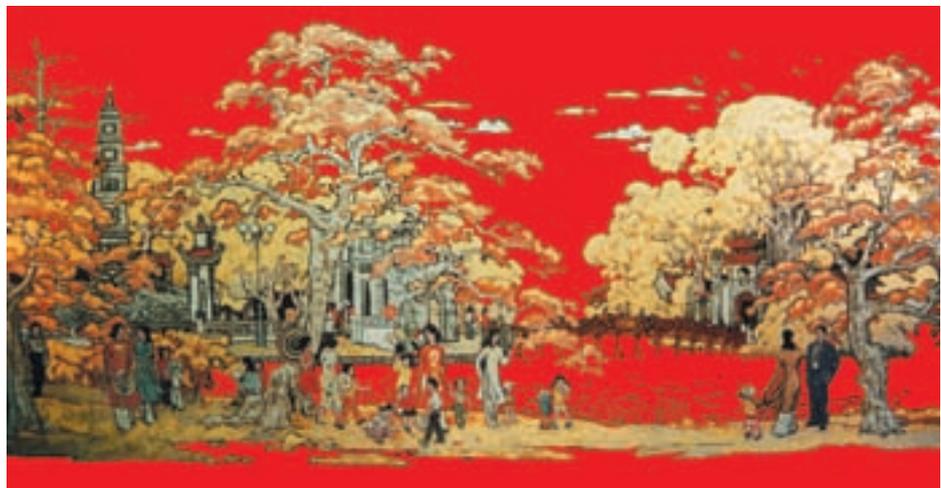
Bowls and tray. Lacquer ware.

Photo: Haki

a. Lacquer with Red and Black Colours

Vietnamese lacquer has many unique characteristics in comparison with lacquer of China and Japan. This kind of art has a long history with significant progress in the 30s of the last century, when painters of Dong Duong Fine Arts School found new materials and introduced grinding technique.

The technique of making lacquer in Vietnam also has Vietnamese characteristics due to the climate conditions of the country. Local materials are raw paint from wax trees, majorly in Phu Tho, which have been exported to the two countries above for a long time. Vietnam's raw paint has special quality compared to lacquer paint of Japan, which make it easy to recognize Vietnamese lacquer with naked eye.



Den Ngoc Son (Ngoc Son temple) Lacquer painting.

Photo: Vu Hong Ngoc

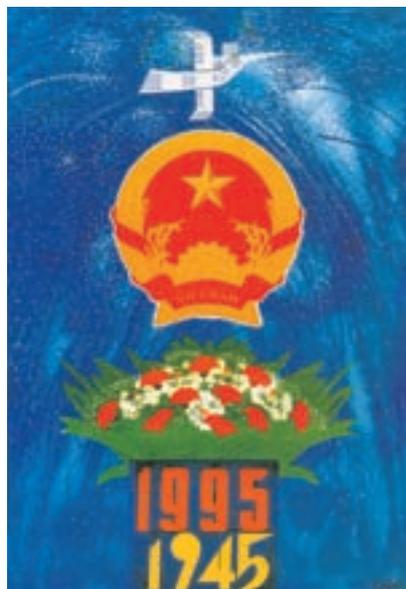
The two major colours of traditional Vietnamese lacquer are red (vermilion) and cockroach-wing black. Yellow is also an outstanding colour due to its special material and method of pasting real gold foil on the cockroach-wing paint. Huge progress in the 30s of the last century introduced new colours in lacquer of ivory-white, eggshell-colour, thin-goldleaf-colour, oystershell-colour, etc.

Typical colours in traditional lacquer are black, red and yellow, which make lacquer appropriate for decoration in solemn and noble environment, such as altar, drinking table, living-room, or bigger space of temple, village hall, pagoda. Yellow and vermilion represent richness and honours, which are suitable to such places.

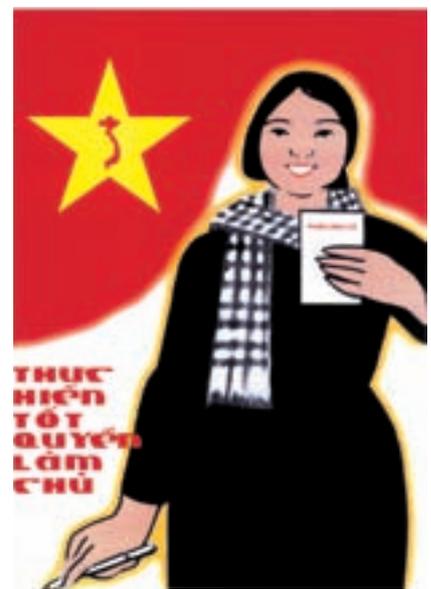
With the introduction of new colours, lacquer has become more popular to the masses. Lacquer works now can be seen in many places which are more open, private or informal.



Khai thác nhiều nguồn phân để tăng năng suất lúa! Finding more kinds of fertilizer to harvest more rice!



50 years of National Day celebration. 1945 - 1995



Thực hiện tốt quyền làm chủ. Propaganda poster of Election Day.

Photo: Propaganda poster series of artist Pham Tri Tue

b. Colours in Propaganda Posters, a Modern Kind of Art

Propaganda poster is a kind of fine arts which has been used popularly in the period of defense resistance and later periods. Mostly presented in paper, but in many cases such posters are painted on the wall and other suitable plain surface.

Bright, strong, striking and eye-catching colours are often used in propaganda posters. In the colour palette commonly used for propaganda poster, red is the most popular one. Red represents blood of people and soldiers which was shed and eager to be shed to protect national will, independence and freedom to unite the country. From the red used in the national flag, this meaning of red has experienced a long history of usage in the enduring Resistance War of Vietnam. Red is also a colour with good ability to create contrast, to express square shapes of important role in propaganda posters.

Blue, representing peace and national union, also has a certain position in propaganda poster. The most famous model of mixing blue, red and yellow is the flag of half blue half red with a yellow star of National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam. Variants of this model appeared in propaganda products during anti-American-troop resistance. Due to low ability to create contrast, the appearance frequency of blue is the same as that of yellow.

Yellow, representing Vietnam nation, conciliation and union, though appearing popularly in other kinds of fine arts, is not as popular as red in propaganda poster. One reason is the lower ability to create contrast as of red. The other reason is that, its meaning of representing Vietnam nation is popular in people's consciousness; thus since feudal period flags of Vietnam have always consisted of yellow. The meaning of yellow is national conciliation and union, not as fighting as of red, which limits its usage in propaganda poster.

COLOURS IN CUISINES

Green of vegetable - typical on every daily meals.

Photo: Pham Thanh Huong



Xoi bay mau. Seven colours sticky rice.

Photo: Hoang Thu Ha

Vietnam is an agricultural country in the tropical monsoon region. Characteristics in geography, climate, culture and nation have created originalities in Vietnamese cuisine culture. Vietnamese cuisine culture is rich and diversified with a lot of delicious dishes from various areas and ethnic groups. Vietnamese dishes incline to vegetables, fruits, soups, especially sour soups. Dishes from animals are smaller in quantity, but they are also diversified. The characteristic of Vietnamese cuisine is the neutrality in the mixture of ingredients and spices: not too pungent, too sweet or too fat. Additional ingredients for making dishes in Vietnam are diversified. Although Vietnamese people do not incline to highly aesthetic display like other countries, e.g. Japan, colours in cuisines are an important factor that makes the originality of Vietnamese cuisine. To Vietnamese people, colours of dishes do not only beautify the dishes but also help people to identify nutrients in various kinds of food. Yellow food helps improve digestive system and the brain, for example bananas help improve digestive function and reject toxin from blood. Oranges and tangerines provide vitamin C, improve immune capacity of the body. Kakis enhance functions of spleens and cardiovascular. Black food like black sesame, cat's ears (black mushroom), black beans are good for kidneys. Green food like vegetables is good for livers, protecting gastric and digestive system. Red food like tomatoes, red apples, red grapes, red chilli peppers, and watermelons helps prevent cancers and diabetes. White food such as pears, cauliflowers, potatoes, mushrooms, onions and garlic help people relax and enhance immune system. Violet food like plums, violet grapes, violet cabbages and eggplants help improve cardiovascular, etc.

Therefore, each Vietnamese dish is a colourful picture of the precise mixture of various kinds of ingredients and spices, such as five-coloured rice, five-coloured fried mushrooms, five-coloured steamed glutinous rice, five-coloured rolled eggplants, etc... A typical dish is five-coloured steamed glutinous rice, the famous special food of Tay people. The steamed glutinous rice has 5 colours of white, red, green, violet and yellow. White is the colour of pure rice, and the other colours are made by soaking rice with water from leaves and bulbs of the forests. Red is from gac, green is from ginger leaves or pomelo peel, yellow from saffron, and violet from black rice leaves (*la com den*). Ancient people had an opinion that on Tet holidays, who ate five-coloured steamed glutinous rice would get a lot of luck and goodness.

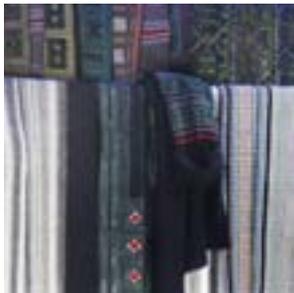
COLOURS IN HANDICRAFTS

a. Fabric Dyeing

According to Nguyen Thi Duc (1998) Nguyen Trai recorded in the Record of things in the capital (Thuong kinh phong vat chi): “Hang Dao – Dai Loi Wards have the handicraft of dyeing: white as snow without a black dot, red as blood not fading with time, black as ink, jet-black mixing purple, azure mixing indigo blue, various tints of the same colour, such as dark pink, light pink, bright red which purple cannot outshine. Yellow is the main yellow, miscellaneous colours are jet-azure, peach-colour, indigo blue, quan-luc colour; no two colours are the same” (Record of things in the capital, Historical Research Magazine, 7-8/1971).

Nhuom cham. Drying fabric after indigo dyeing.

Photo: Hoang Thu Ha



Thai fabric.

Photo: Vu Hy Thieu

Ancient Thang Long – Hanoi was the centre of silk trading, as well as the location of many dye guilds. Woven fabric was yellow or white due to the original colour of silk, would be dyed under Vietnamese people’s techniques to make different colours. The most common dyed colours were black (dark), brown (light brown, dark brown), green (*tam-giang* colour, yellow green, azure), red (scarlet, day-lily colour). People did not dyed yellow since it was the colour of the king. Even the name of colours showed their natural origination. For example, brown fabric was dyed from *cu nau* (“brown fruit”) before people use mud water from lakes and ponds; black fabric was dyed from water of leaves of umbrella trees, oaks and steeped in mud in seven days. Day-lily-coloured fabric was dyed from water pressed from day-lities, etc...

b. Brocade



Cham fabric.

Photo: Vu Hy Thieu

More than 50 out of 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam have the handicraft of brocade and use brocade every day. Each ethnic group has their own manners, customs, and costumes, which lead to decoration patterns and colours in their brocade are different. Among people love blazing red; Tay people only use indigo; Thai people arrange dense pattern all over the brocade with diversified natural images; E De people only make thin lines on the black background. The only similarity of brocade of ethnic groups is that all patterns are woven on a black ground. Later, upon market demand, some areas use white or light-coloured background to make it easy to use patterns of other colours.

The least colourful brocade is the blanket surface of Thai people with only black and white. Black is dyed from leaves, and white is the original colour of cotton. However, patterns are diversified and repeated all over the surface. Dao people



Gui may. Rattan bag.

Photo: Vu Hy Thieu

also have a kind of brocade with the background of dark indigo and patterns of white fabric. The most colourful brocade is of Thai people, too, which describes images of many animals, and colours of the animals are only for decoration, not for imitation of the nature. In general, ethnic groups only focus on meanings of patterns, which are often images of surrounding nature with close feelings; some patterns even have their own stories. In terms of colour, they are only for beautiful and eye-catching decoration. Thus there are black, blue, white or red elephants. They all depend on the mix colours of the whole brocade.

In general all ethnic groups share a similarity that they use black or black and white for tenderness, colourful patterns for decoration, black and red for emphasis. Lo Lo people even make cotton balls from red threads attached to their collar for more resplendence.

c. Rattan, Bamboo and Sedge Knitting

Products of knitted rattan/bamboo often have the original colour of materials – the ivory-white of rattan/bamboo lath. Sometimes, to highlight patterns, ancient craftsmen dyed laths but only with green colour. Dyeing material was soaking cajuput leaves, same as for dyeing brocade. People used straw and firewood to smoke out laths to make them shiny dark brown. Subject to market demand, recently craftsmen have dyed bamboo lath. Dyeing material is pastels available in the market. Colours depend on requirement of each particular product.

Products of knitted sedge often have the originally ivory-white of sedge as well. To make products more attractive, craftsmen often dye sedge to knit on the white background of sedge. The three common dyeing colours are dark yellow, purple and dark green. These three colours can be mixed easily on the ivory-white background of sedge.

Bamboo handicraft in rural area still a good work for farmer in free time.

Photo: Pham Huyen Kieu



NATURE IN VIETNAM'S TRADITIONAL FINE ARTS COLOURS

Nature has left unforgettable impression in Vietnamese fine arts, especially from ancient times, before the influence of Western culture. This is expressed clearly in folk paintings handed down from many centuries.

Nature decides the colour palettes used in traditional folk paintings, from woodblock engraving then printing method of Dong Ho painting, to printing and drawing method of Hang Trong painting, which are the two most famous folk paintings styles in Vietnam. Black is made from bamboo-leaf coal or straw coal. White is made from seashells, a kind of oyster with thin shell living in the sea. Seashells are grinded and mixed with mortar cooked from rice or manioc and then painted on do paper with a pine-needle brush to create veins on the sparkling white background. Warm yellow is made from sophora japonica or gardenia. Cajuput green is made from cajuput leaves. Yellow red is made from sappanwood; vermilion is made from ochre on the hill. We can see that most of colours derived from nature are different from colours of European paintings in the same period, which were products of chemistry. This creates characteristics of colours in Vietnamese paintings of ancient time, which are controlled by their own natural origin: basic colours without any mixture, which make them bright and fresh, different from modern colours by their own characteristic in each colour, such as the white of seashells above.

To draw painting, first of all craftsmen prepare do paper. They are made from do tree of the Northern mountains, and was once bought in Vietnam to be sold in China by traders from the Eastern Roman Empire, as written in ancient books in 284 A.D. Then they use pine-needle brush to paste seashell powder mixed with rice mortar on the do paper to make it hard and thick with characteristically sparkling white colour and distinguishable veins on the background. On such background they use the engraved woodblock to print colours on it. There are multiple colours in Dong Ho painting, usually four colours. In Hang Trong painting, craftsmen use black woodblock to get forms then use brush to paint colours.

Yellow paddy rice field landscape.

Photo: Nguyen Dan



Natural themes have a significant position in Dong Ho and Hang Trong paintings. These paintings may be hanged on the wall for decoration, with themes of Four Seasons (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter), or Dancing Peacock (Two pieces), or Moon-looking carp. Nature may be the main theme as in paintings above, or be an important part in the theme of the painting, as in Tending buffalo and Blowing flute with the lotus leaf as an umbrella and weed under the legs of the buffalo; or in Catching coconuts, with the husband climbing the tree and the wife raising her skirt to catch the falling coconut. Or more secretly, nature may appear through small details in the painting, as in Herdsman is flying a kite. Many anthropomorphism paintings like Mouse's wedding, Pig herd, do not only criticize bad habits of life, but also teach morals, or they are simply a wish of peace. No matter what the meaning is, there is always remark of nature in paintings.

Since nature controls colours and materials used to draw paintings, folk paintings of Vietnam contain unforgettable impression of nature. In addition to nature-related contents, the colours of the paintings also clearly reflect that, from the sparkling white seashells to cajuput green or vermilion, etc. Nature deeply printed in folk paintings has left an unforgettable hallmark in Vietnamese people's consciousness.

COLOURS AND CHARACTERISTICS IN VIETNAMESE CULTURE

a. The Custom of Eating Betel



Invite guess with *Trau tem canh phuong* betel and areca nut in wedding party.

Photo: Pham Thanh Huong

The custom of eating betel is very popular in nations in the Southeastern region, and Vietnam is not an exception.

According to Nguyen Dang Duy (2001), in *The Wonderful Tales of Linh Nam* (Linh Nam Chich Quai), the Story of Betel and Areca recorded that: Hung King came to a temple on his inspection and saw a luxuriant tree with lianas full of green and fresh leaves. After asking, he knew that two men named Tan and Lang and a girl named Lien, who was faithfully in love, died and transformed into such. He commanded people to pick areca-nut and betel leaf to chew together, then spitted on the rock. The spitted saliva was red and sweet-smelling. The king asked people to use the rock for calcinations to chew together with the nut and leaf and found out they were good and made lips red, cheeks pink.

Since then, betel and areca have been used as offerings in wedding occasions. Betel and areca are associated with wedlock and express the harmonization of yin and yang and growth (betel and areca are positive, lime and earth are negative).

b. The Custom of Blackening Teeth



Old woman with blackening teeth smiling.

Photo: Doan Van Hien

In Vietnam, the custom of blackening teeth was popular in Northern and Central ethnic groups since ancient times.

According to two French scholars Huard and Bigot, as of 1938, 80% of Vietnamese farmers had their teeth blackened (Phan Ha Linh 1998, adopted from Huard and Bigot, n.d.). Phan Hai Linh (1999) believes that this custom associated with Vietnamese's people opinion about aesthetics. Vietnamese people believed that "teeth and hair show the beauty of a person" and a "custard-apple-seed-like shiny black set of teeth" was a standard of beauty. The black of teeth was also a sign to distinguish races and classes in ancient Vietnamese society. Ancient Vietnamese people had a saying of "teeth as white as Wu people" to distinguish Vietnamese people (black teeth) and Chinese people (white teeth). People who did not have their teeth blackened were disparaged that "teeth as white as dog's teeth".

The process of blackening teeth of Vietnamese people was quite complicated, including 5 steps. Step 1 was cleaning teeth with dry areca peel, charcoal powder and lemon juice. Step 2 was reddening teeth with lac powder mixed with lemon juice/vinegar and wine. Step 3 was blackening teeth with ferrous sulphate, pomegranate peel, cinnamon bark, sweet fennel, clove, etc... Step 4 was enhancing the black colour of teeth with oil from coconut shell. Step 5 was maintaining the black colour of the teeth by apply dye on teeth 3 times, each



Minority girls with black teeth.

Photo: Nguyen Dan

time in 5 minutes every 2-3 year.

Since the 40s of the 20th century, due to influence from Westernization movement, Vietnamese people have eventually dropped the custom of blackening teeth and had white teeth. As of the end of the 20th century, only few Vietnamese people had their teeth blackened, mainly older people. However, the custom of blackening teeth is always considered one of the typical customs of the beauty of ancient Vietnamese people.

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