# Cultural Color

## Cultural Meanings of Color and Color Symbolism

An understanding of cultural color and symbolism is essential to anyone doing business with other countries and other societies.

These associations with color have been a part of many societies for centuries and you must be aware of both the positive and the negative implications of using particular colors when marketing to these societies.

With the advent of the World Wide Web, there is a narrowing of the differences in meanings of colors between different cultures and countries........

.........however, if you are marketing to a particular ethnic group it is wise to take into account their color associations to maximize your impact.

By mixing appropriate amounts of different colors however you can often neutralize inherent negative cultural connotations.

The following is a basic list of some symbolic color meanings throughout the world.

* It is by no means a comprehensive list.
* I suggest you do your own research about the country or culture you are working with, to establish what colors are currently acceptable.

Times change and old associations may be slowly altered over the years. Western cultures have adopted some Eastern color uses while some Eastern cultures have adopted Western ideas. The Internet has allowed people to learn about other cultures and to adopt what they like from those cultures. Therefore, the following meanings are traditional and not necessarily in current use in these cultures.

**Cultural Color Meanings of Red:**

**Western:**

* energy, excitement, action
* danger
* love, passion
* a warning to stop
* anger
* Christmas combined with green
* Valentine's Day

**Eastern:**

* prosperity
* good fortune
* worn by brides
* symbol of joy when combined with white

**China:**

* the color of good luck and celebration
* vitality, happiness, long life
* used as a wedding color
* used in many ceremonies from funerals to weddings
* used for festive occasions
* traditionally worn on Chinese New Year to bring luck and prosperity

**India:**

* color of purity, fertility, love, beauty
* wealth, opulence and power
* used in wedding ceremonies
* a sign of a married woman
* also color of fear and fire

**Thailand:**

* color for Sunday

**Japan:**

* anger and danger

**Cherokees:**

* success, triumph

**South Africa:**

* color of mourning

**Nigeria:**

* usually reserved for ceremonies
* worn by chiefs

**Russia:**

* associated with the Bolsheviks and Communism,
* means beautiful in Russian language
* often used in marriage ceremonies

**Australian Aborigines:**

* represents the land and earth
* ceremonial color

**Hebrew:**

* sacrifice, sin

**Christian:**

* sacrifice, passion, love

**Cultural Color Meanings of Pink**

**Western:**

* caring and nurturing
* love and romance
* feminine

**Eastern:**

* feminine

**Europe:**

* feminine color
* baby girls

**Belgium:**

* pink was traditionally used for baby boys - now it is more common for it to be used for baby girls

**Japan:**

* well-liked by both males and females

**Thailand:**

* color for Tuesday

**Korea:**

* trust

**Cultural Color Meanings of Orange**

**Western:**

* affordable or inexpensive items
* Halloween, combined with black

**Eastern:**

* happiness
* spirituality

**Thailand:**

* color for Thursday

**Ireland:**

* religious color for Protestants
* appears on the Irish flag along with white for peace and green for Catholics

**Netherlands:**

* color of the Dutch Royal Family

**Hinduism:**

* Saffron, a soft orange color, is considered an auspicious and sacred color

**Cultural Color Meanings of Yellow**

**Western:**

* happiness, joy
* cowardice
* caution, warning of hazards and hazardous substances

**Eastern:**

* sacred
* imperial

**China:**

* sacred
* imperial, royalty
* honor
* masculine color

**India:**

* sacred and auspicious
* the Symbol of a Merchant

**Thailand:**

* considered auspicious as the bright yellow flower "cassia fistula" is a national symbol.
* represents Buddhism.
* yellow is considered the royal color, the color of Monday which is the King's birthday

**Egypt:**

* color of mourning

**Burma:**

* color of mourning

**Israel:**

* used to label Jews in the Middle Ages

**Middle East:**

* happiness
* prosperity

**Japan:**

* courage
* beauty and refinement
* aristocracy
* cheerfulness

**Europe:**

* happiness, joy
* cowardice, weakness
* hazard warning

**France:**

* jealousy

**Greece:**

* sadness

**Africa:**

* Usually reserved for those of high rank

**Buddhism:**

* wisdom

**Jewish:**

* yellow star badges of the Middle Ages and post war Germany and Poland

**Cultural Color Meanings of Green**

**Western:**

* lucky color in most western cultures
* spring, new birth, regeneration
* nature and environmental awareness
* color for 'go' at traffic lights
* Saint Patrick's Day
* Christmas combined with red
* jealousy
* greed

**Eastern:**

* new life, regeneration and hope
* fertility

**China:**

* new life, regeneration and hope
* fertility
* disgrace - giving a Chinese man a green hat indicates his wife is cheating on him
* exorcism
* studies show it is generally not good for packaging

**India:**

* the color of Islam,
* hope,
* new beginnings
* harvest
* virtue

**Thailand:**

* color for Wednesday

**Japan:**

* eternal life
* youthfulness
* freshness

**Indonesia:**

* a forbidden color

**Ireland:**

* religious color for Irish Catholics
* color symbol of Ireland - the Emerald Isle

**France:**

* not good for packaging

**North Africa:**

* corruption and the drug culture

**Egypt:**

* spring

**Middle East:**

* color of Islam
* strength
* fertility

**Saudi Arabia:**

* wealth and prestige

**South America:**

* death

**USA:**

* money
* jealousy

**Cultural Color Meanings of Blue**

**Generally the safest color to use world wide**  
**Western:**

* trust and authority
* conservative,
* corporate
* peace and calm
* depression,
* sadness
* "something blue" bridal tradition
* masculine color
* baby boys

**Eastern:**

* immortality

**China:**

* immortality
* associated with pornography and 'blue films'
* feminine color

**India:**

* Lord Krishna
* national sports color

**Japan:**

* everyday life

**Korea:**

* color of mourning

**Thailand:**

* color for Friday

**Belgium:**

* light blue was traditionally the color for baby girls - now it is more common to use it for baby boys

**Cherokees:**

* defeat, trouble

**Mexico:**

* mourning
* trust
* serenity

**Iran:**

* color of mourning
* heaven and spirituality
* immortality

**Israel:**

* Coat of Arms

**Egypt:**

* virtue
* protection - to ward off evil

**Middle East:**

* protection

**Colombia:**

* associated with soap

**US Politics:**

* liberalism

**UK & European Politics:**

* conservatism

**Religious Beliefs in Many Cultures:**

* **Christianity:** Christ's color
* **Judaism:** holiness
* **Hinduism:** the color of Krishna
* **Catholicism:** color of Mary's robe

**Cultural Color Meanings of Purple**

**Western:**

* Royalty
* spirituality
* wealth and fame
* high ranking positions of authority
* Military Honor (Purple Heart)

**Eastern:**

* wealth

**India:**

* sorrow
* comforting

**Japan:**

* privilege
* wealth

**Thailand:**

* color of mourning for widows
* color for Saturday

**Brazil:**

* death and mourning

**European:**

* Royalty

**Catholicism:**

* mourning
* death, crucifixion

**Cultural Color Meanings of White**

**Western:**

* brides and weddings
* angels
* hospitals, doctors
* peace - the white dove
* purity and cleanliness

**Eastern:**

* death, mourning and funerals
* sadness

**China:**

* death and mourning
* virginity and purity
* humility
* misfortune

**India:**

* unhappiness
* symbol of sorrow in death of family member
* traditionally the only color a widow is allowed to wear
* funerals
* peace and purity

**Japan:**

* White carnation symbolizes death

**Thailand:**

* white elephants are considered auspicious,
* white symbolizes purity in Buddhism

**Korea:**

* purity, innocence,
* morality,
* birth and death

**Middle East:**

* purity
* mourning

**Cultural Color Meanings of Black**

**Western:**

* power, control, intimidation
* funerals, death, mourning
* rebellion

**Eastern:**

* wealth, health and prosperity

**China:**

* color for young boys

**India:**

* evil, negativity, darkness
* lack of appeal
* anger and apathy
* used to ward off evil

**Japan:**

* color of mystery and the night
* may be associated with feminine energy - either evil and a threat or provocative and alluring

**Thailand:**

* unhappiness,
* bad luck, evil

**Judaism:**

* unhappiness,
* bad luck, evil

**Middle East:**

* mystery

**Africa:**

* Age and wisdom

**Australian Aborigines:**

* ceremonial color
* commonly used in their artworks

**Cultural Color Meanings of Brown**

**Western:**

* down-to-earth, practical
* comfortable
* stable, dependable,
* wholesome

**China:**

* In Chinese Horoscopes brown is the color for earth

**India:**

* Color of mourning

**Nicaragua:**

* Sign of disapproval