

## Original Research Article

# A comparative study on the cultural connotation of basic colors between English and Chinese

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the symbolic significance, cultural inheritance, and social relationships of colors in both English and Chinese through a comparative study of their basic color connotations. Colors are not only products of visual perception but also important carriers of cultural identity and emotional expression. The cultural connotations of colors profoundly influence language, social habits, and individual emotional cognition. Therefore, differences in color culture cannot be overlooked in translation, cross-cultural communication, and education. To address this, the paper proposes optimization strategies such as enhancing academic cooperation, increasing the dissemination of color culture education, and promoting international exchanges and exhibitions, aiming to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the cross-cultural research and application of color culture.

**Keywords:** Basic colors of English and Chinese; Cultural connotation; Comparative study; Symbolic meaning

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## 1. Foreword

Color is one of the essential ways humans perceive the world. However, color is more than just a physical visual stimulus; it carries rich symbolic meanings and emotional expressions across different cultures. English and Chinese, as two important language systems, exhibit distinct cognitive and emotional hues in their cultural connotations of colors. In language, color serves not only to describe but also to become a tool for cultural identity, social stratification, and emotional communication. This article aims to explore the differences in the symbolic meanings, cultural inheritance, and social functions of colors between the two cultures through comparative analysis of basic color connotations in English and Chinese, thereby revealing the profound impact of color culture on cross-cultural communication and understanding.

## 2. Basic color cultural connotation characteristics between English and Chinese

### 2.1. The symbolic meaning of color

In the cultural contexts of English and Chinese, colors often carry significant symbolic meanings. They are not merely visual phenomena of physical existence but also bear emotional, cultural, and social values. In English, colors are frequently used to convey emotions or abstract concepts; for example, “red” is often associated with danger, passion, or anger. In Chinese, however, red is often linked to good fortune, celebration, and festivals<sup>[1]</sup>. The symbolic meanings of colors vary across different cultural backgrounds, leading to differences in how colors are perceived and understood. By comparing the basic color symbolism in English and Chinese, we can reveal how the emotional hues of colors shape individuals’ perceptions of the world in these two languages.

### 2.2. Cultural inheritance of color

Color inheritance in English and Chinese cultures has a profound historical background<sup>[2]</sup>. In English cul-

ture, the symbolism of colors is often associated with Western religion, philosophy, and historical events. For example, white in the West often symbolizes purity and sanctity, closely tied to the Christian religious context. In Chinese culture, color symbolism is deeply connected to China's history and philosophy, such as Confucianism and Taoism. For instance, yellow represents imperial power in traditional Chinese culture, signifying nobility and authority. By comparing and analyzing the historical inheritance of English and Chinese cultures, we can reveal how colors have evolved under different cultural backgrounds and their impact on modern society. Colors are not just visual symbols; their meanings, passed down through generations, form a rich cultural heritage.

### **2.3. The relationship between color and social culture**

Colors in English and Chinese cultures carry profound socio-cultural meanings, often symbolizing social class, status, and power. In English, black is frequently associated with negative emotions such as death and loss; whereas in Chinese, black may be linked to the mysterious or the unspoken<sup>[3]</sup>. The cultural values embodied by different colors in social life often reflect a society's power structure, economic conditions, and social relationships. For example, in the West, gold symbolizes wealth and luxury; while in China, gold is often associated with the emperor, the imperial palace, and other noble matters. By deeply analyzing the relationship between color and socio-cultural contexts, we can better understand how colors shape social perceptions and construct social structures.

## **3. The existence of problems in the basic color culture connotation between English and Chinese**

### **3.1. Cultural errors in color translation**

Cultural errors in color translation are common issues in the comparative study of English and Chinese cultures. Due to differences in how these two languages perceive and symbolize colors, inaccuracies or misunderstandings often occur during translation. For example, "pink" in English represents a soft color, often associated with femininity and gentleness. However, in Chinese, pink is frequently linked to youthfulness and cuteness. Therefore, under the influence of cultural differences, translations may lead to emotional misinterpretations of colors. The cultural connotations and emotional hues behind color terms can easily result in misuse and misunderstanding during translation.

### **3.2. Barriers to cross-cultural understanding**

The cultural connotations of colors pose certain barriers to cross-cultural communication. Differences in how different cultures interpret the same color often lead to misunderstandings and even conflicts. For example, red is a symbol of happiness and auspiciousness in Chinese culture, but in some Western countries, it may be associated with warnings, danger, or love. Such cross-cultural misunderstandings frequently affect international communication and cooperation. To reduce these cultural barriers, cross-cultural education and sensitivity training are crucial.

### **3.3. Lack of systematic cultural education and research**

Currently, the comparative study of cultural connotations of basic colors between English and Chinese still lacks systematic educational and academic research. In some language and culture courses, the cultural significance of colors is often not given enough attention, leading to a skewed understanding of color culture among students. Although a certain amount of research on color culture has been conducted in academic circles, over-

all, systematic and comprehensive studies remain insufficient. This situation limits scholars' deeper exploration and understanding of color culture.

## **4. The countermeasures to optimize the basic color cultural connotation comparison between English and Chinese**

### **4.1. Strengthen academic cooperation in color culture comparison research**

To optimize the comparative study of basic color cultural connotations between English and Chinese, interdisciplinary collaboration is crucial. Through the collaboration of linguistics, cultural studies, sociology, psychology, and other disciplines, we can delve into the multi-dimensional connotations of color culture from various perspectives. For example, linguists can study the grammatical and semantic differences in color vocabulary, cultural scholars can explore the symbolic meanings of colors in their respective cultures, and sociologists can analyze how colors serve as symbols of identity, power, or class within social structures. Such interdisciplinary cooperation not only promotes a comprehensive understanding of the cultural connotations of colors but also provides the academic community with more new research frameworks and perspectives. Cultural exchange and collaboration between English and Chinese scholars are key to advancing comparative studies on color culture. Through academic conferences, collaborative publications, and joint research projects, scholars can share research findings, propose theoretical models with a broader global perspective, and thereby promote mutual understanding and communication between Eastern and Western cultures.

### **4.2. Improve the popularity of color culture education**

Adding color culture courses to the education system can effectively enhance students' intercultural sensitivity and deep understanding of colors. As important cultural symbols, colors influence individuals' worldviews, values, and emotional expressions; therefore, educators should pay attention to the uniqueness and symbolic meanings of colors in different cultures. By introducing color culture courses, students can not only learn about the historical, social, and psychological functions of colors in various cultures but also gain a deeper understanding of the cultural logic behind them, thereby enhancing their intercultural cognitive abilities. In addition to classroom teaching, using multimedia and interactive teaching methods can significantly improve the understanding and application of color culture. For example, employing videos, virtual reality, and other means for color presentation and scenario simulation allows students to better understand the cultural connotations of colors through immersive experiences. Schools and research institutions should offer specialized lectures on color culture, inviting experts and scholars from different fields to share their research findings. This not only helps students broaden their academic horizons but also promotes greater attention and in-depth exploration of color culture research in academia.

### **4.3. Promoting international exchange and display of color culture**

To help more people understand the cultural connotations of basic colors in English and Chinese, promoting international exchanges and exhibitions of color culture is an indispensable part. International conferences, academic forums, and cultural exchange activities provide a platform for scholars worldwide to showcase and share their research findings. On these platforms, scholars can exchange and display their understanding and research on color culture, thereby stimulating greater academic interest and exploration. Cultural events such as art exhibitions, film festivals, and design displays are also important channels for spreading color culture. For example, artistic creations and design works based on color culture can be showcased to global audiences through exhibitions or films, enhancing public understanding of color usage and symbolism in different cultures. These cultural exchange activities can promote awareness of color culture globally, especially deepening

the understanding of color symbols in English and Chinese cultures. Building on this, publishing related books, papers, and translations can disseminate the research findings of English and Chinese color culture to more countries, contributing to the internationalization and sharing of color culture studies.

## **5. Sum up**

This paper reveals the different symbolic meanings and social functions of colors in English and Chinese through a comparative study of their basic color cultural connotations. The research finds that the cultural connotations of colors play a crucial role in cross-cultural communication, effectively reflecting a society's cultural values and emotional perceptions. However, due to significant differences in how English and Chinese cultures understand and use colors, this can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts in cross-cultural communication. To promote smoother international exchanges, this paper proposes strategies for enhancing academic cooperation, increasing the popularity of color culture education, and promoting international color culture exchanges.

## **About the author**

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