

## Interpreting dressed colour choice for wellbeing purposes according to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

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### Abstract:

Natural ways such as herbal medicine was the main mean used to preserve health in the past before the appearance of modern medicine. The Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) followed the concept of holism, which studies the relationship between the surrounding nature and the whole organ. The classical theories of TCM focused on the concepts of holistic energy balance which mentioned the five-element theory and explained the five main colours that concerns the five organs. Each one plays a different role, supporting the energetic function of an organ. Since the main focus of one's being is to preserve and improve the state of health, this research focuses on the sufficient use of each colour according to the principle of TCM theory aiming to support the organs' function, their relation to emotions and their resonate colours in healing, via creating different coloured designs with the aim to expose colour irradiation in certain areas in the body aiming to activate different chakras, related body organs and systems that needs a healing boost. The research methodology is based on an inductive approach which relies on the collection of information to build a theoretical framework of the research and to a descriptive, analytical method for different designs.

### Keywords:

**Colour;  
Five-element theory;  
TCM;  
Chinese medicine,  
Energy.**

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### Introduction

The symbolism of colours varies and is determined by the spiritual and physical environment in which it is created (petru., september 2010). TCM reveals the relationship between the energy of the five colours and the flow of qi in the main five organs in the human body (j. Yang,;2000).

Early in the primitive society, human beings have compiled medical knowledge. In chinese classics, there are many records concerning medicine or drugs, such as "fuxi made nine needles" and "shennong tasted hundreds of herbs and was poisoned seventy times in a single day". These records indicate that chinese ancestors made great efforts to explore medicine in their life and work. In the spring and autumn period and the warring states, china has made political, economic and political advancements . In addition, medicine and the diseases have been well understood and the medical experience further enriched. The publication of huangdi neijing (huangdi's canon of medicine) symbolize the formation of such a new theoretical system of medicine. It collects a great number of materials concerning medical practice in the light of the theories of yin-yang and the five popular elements, consequently establishing a unique theoretical system for tcm and laying a solid foundation for the theoretical and clinical development of tcm. The major principle of tcm depends on holism and syndrome differentiation. Holism is further divided into two components: physical and spiritual holism, where physical holism focuses on the human body as a part of the universe and the surrounding environment whereas the spiritual part focuses on emotional aspects. The second characteristic

is a treatment based on the differentiation of syndromes. The syndrome can be described as an overall summary of the pathological changes at a certain stage in the course of a disease. Compared to western medical concepts, syndrome contains many symptoms and is related to the current phase of the disease or illness. So, the term 'syndrome' implies a more comprehensive assessment of a disease than a mere description of symptoms. In tcm concept, we can find different kinds of treatment for the same disease and the same treatment for different diseases as related to syndromes and not symptoms of a disease. Syndrome differentiation defines the procedure for identifying a patient's condition. (hongcai, 2010) the chinese medicine depends on meridians (smooth flow of qi in specific tracks). Treatment with chinese medicine depends on sorting out any blockages to the qi flow by finding out which meridians are obstructed and how to unblock these tracks so qi can flow naturally again. The five-element theory explains the source of anything in the natural world. Everything is derived from wood, fire, earth, metal and water. These major five elements are related to the major five organs in the human body and are influenced by five emotions in addition to sharing the same characteristics of five colours. Interactions between the five elements maintain a harmonious balance through the activities of constant inter-promotion and inter-restraint or reverse (abnormal manifestation of inter promotion or inter strength) among the five elements. To keep the state of balance (state quo) between the five elements, the system of five elements regulate the abnormal changes (either by reinforcement or suppression) to restore the new

balance. If one element becomes excessively strong or superabundant, it will be pacified by its dominator through inter-restraint action, where it will be weakened and eventually restores the original balance. (lei.a, 2009)

### Research problem:

- The disease is the physical manifestation of imbalances deep in our energy system. Chronic illness needs to be stimulated by colour vibrations to promote its movement towards an acute condition so that energy balance can be restored.
- Understanding the relation between TCM & colours is very important and will help us to find ways to introduce certain colours to our body organs to support our organs function and their related emotions that need a bit of healing.

### Objective :

This study aims to evaluate the relation between TCM & colours to support our organs and their related emotions via creating satisfactory aesthetic designs based on colours to expose colour irradiation in main places in our body aiming to activate different chakras and the related body organs and systems that need a bit of healing boost.

### Significance of the Research:

- Using colour energy, can move blocked energy and change energy patterns deep within us so we can rebalance our energy and feel healthy.
- We need to understand the relation between TCM & colours to support our organs' function & their related emotions that need a bit of healing.

### Hypotheses:

- Using colour energy as a healing tool can move blocked energy in our system and will help to rebalance our energy to feel healthy.
- Understanding the relation between TCM & colours provides a useful methodology to find ways to introduce certain colours to our body organs to support our organs' function & their related emotions that needs a bit of healing

### Methodology:

The research is based on an inductive approach to collect information to build a theoretical framework of the research as well as a descriptive, analytical approach to different created designs.

### Theory of Five Elements

The five-element theory explains the physiological function of five organs and their relation to each other. This theory has a strong impact on the theoretical systems of TCM. Yin-yang theory and five- element theory is widely used to explain the

physiology and pathology of the body, and eventually sets a foundation of clinical management in ancient Chinese history. (Hongcai, 2010) & (What Is Traditional Chinese Medicine?, n.d.)

### The Characteristics of Five Elements:

- Wood is distinguished by growing easily, rising freely and smoothly. So, anything that has this kind of features or functions is attached to wood.
- Fire is distinguished by the temperature of the flame and burning, it is related to hotness, and ascent.
- Earth is distinguished by agriculture so it's related to harvest and crops and refers originally to the growth and harvest of crops. It is later used to generalize items that are characterized by creating, enduring and obtaining.
- Metal is distinguished by change and obligingness, to produce weapons and transform any mineral to metal. Items connected to metal are purifying, scraping, sinking and astringing.
- Water is distinguished by dampening and flowing downward. Anything marked by moistening, descending and cooling is attached to water. (Hongcai, 2010)

As an example of interactions between the five elements, if the wood becomes too powerful, it over-restrains earth. Earth is weakened in a restraining water; water is superabundant in restraining fire. Fire is weakened in restraining metal. Consequently, metal is too weak to over restrain wood. Wood gradually recovers, which makes the system of Five Elements come back to balance. Without this regulation, the superabundance or weakness of any element leads to disequilibrium of the whole system (Lei. A, 2009).

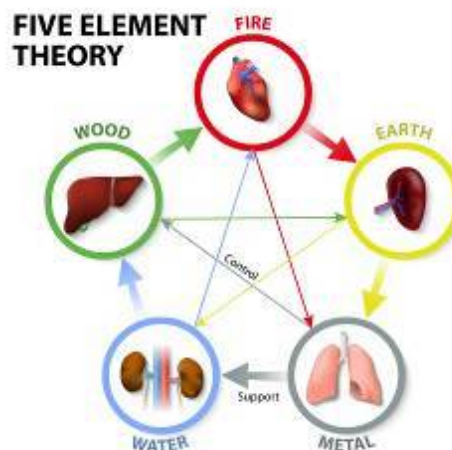


Figure (1) The five-element theory (WL\* 2020:6)

In TCM, things are classified according to their relation to the five-element concept. The comprehensiveness of this theory adopts the idea that things are not exactly identical with the characteristics of wood, fire, earth, metal and water per se. They are, basically, an analogy of the common traits of these five materials. This is conducted by first finding the specific features of things (form, function and nature) and how their essence is reflected, then make a comparison between these features and the Five-Element theory so as to determine their classification (Wong., September 2019) (H.Z.Wu, 2013).

#### THE FIVE TRADITIONAL CHINESE ORGANS

##### *Spleen/Stomach*

The Spleen is related to the element Earth. Earth controls the human life therefore the spleen is considered to be the essence of life. Spleen – Stomach function, is very essential for human body's nutrition (in TCM it is the foundation of life). Similar to Earth, its task is to nourish all living creatures i.e. the Spleen Qi help body organs to do their work.

Spleen monitors the movement of blood within the vessels (making sure blood does not exit blood vessels such as ecchymosis or petechiae). The spleen is most impacted by persistent fears, stress, and extreme mental work as stated by TCM (Wong, 2020) & (Hongcai, 2010)

- The external opening of the spleen is a mouth. If you have any condition with the lips, such as redundant saliva or bleeding gums, so this will indicate an impaired spleen Qi.
- In TCM if you have strong muscles this means your spleen Qi is effective. Otherwise, the redundant menstruation, hematuria and subcutaneous purpura are results of the spleen deficiency.
- Sweet taste resonates with the spleen, In TCM the weakness in spleen causes hanker to sweets, especially yellow or orange foods, root vegetables, and food harvested in the late summer.
- The corresponding emotions related to the spleen are; stress and anxiety. If you rapidly get anxious, you may have blockages or deficiencies in the spleen Qi, this may cause damage in your digestive health. (Stomach/Spleen Health, n.d.).

*Symptoms of Spleen Imbalance: exhaustion, loss of appetite, secretion of mucus, impaired sleep, distension of the belly, loose stools or diarrhea. Faint arms, light skin. Bruising, abnormal blood flow and other haemorrhage conditions (Chiazzari.) & (Wong, 2020)*

##### **Lung**

The Lung is the safeguard of a healthy immune system against pathogens, flowing Qi and liquids along the body emotionally and physically, gets the energy from the air and spreads it all over the body. Along with the kidney, the lung organizes water metabolism, sweat glands, body hair and skin moisture. The Lung (with its co-partner, the Large Intestine), is committed to helping the human body "pulled away" anything you don't use emotionally and actual metabolic by-products (Wong, 2020) & (Lung/Large Intestine Health, n.d.)

- ***The external opening of the lung is a nose,*** any deficiency in lungs can cause sneezing, congested sinuses, runny nose or loss of smell.
- Skin is the tissue associated with the Lung, it's important to have a healthy Lung and Large Intestine energy, to have clear and wrinkle-free skin.
- Spicy taste resonates with the lung.
- The corresponding emotions related to the lung are sorrow and grief. The imbalance in the lungs may cause easily crying or ***irritating in sadness and loss.*** (Lung/Large Intestine Health, n.d.)

*Symptoms of Lung Imbalance will include: easy crying, dry skin, exhaust, fatigue, sweating, allergies, asthma, shallow breathing, and other lung conditions (Wong, 2020)*

##### **Liver**

The liver is related to the element wood. The liver is responsible for smooth flow of emotions, Qi and blood. The gallbladder is a liver's partner. Excessive stress or emotions can simply affect the performance of the liver.

- The external opening of the liver is an eye. Any deficiency in the liver's performance can be reflected as red or dry eyes, blurry vision, and itchy eyes.
- The tendons are the tissue associated with the Liver. According to TCM power comes from the tendons, not muscles. Comparing cat and cow, it is found that cow has huge muscles but little power.
- Sour taste resonates with the liver. Cravings to sour foods indicate that your liver needs an extra boost.
- The corresponding emotions related to the liver are: irritable, getting angry simply, have trouble to let things go. Suffering from these emotions chronically or extremely can cause problems in the function of the Liver.

Symptoms of Liver Imbalance includes: yellow eye colouration, headache, menstrual pain, irritability, and dizziness (Wong, 2020)

##### *Heart*

The Heart is related to Fire. According to TCM heart is the most important organ among all body organs, and there is a resonance between the heart and the stomach, if the stomach is balanced, the heart is balanced and in good health too (Wong, 2020)

The heart controls the body fluids. Perspiration gives an indication about the Qi deficiency of the heart, too much sweating gives a bad sign

- The external opening of the heart is the tongue. Tongue appears pale if there is insufficient amount of blood in the heart. On the other hand, the tongue will be dark purple in colour if there is blood stagnation. The lines down in the centre of the tongue may indicate a potential heart function issue.
- The blood vessels are the “tissue” associated with the Heart, the colour of human complexion gives a good indication about the state of the heart; red face is a sign of a redundant heart, while pale complexion indicates stagnation of blood.
- Bitter taste resonates with the heart, so craving to eat too much bitter food indicates that your heart is not doing well. (Heart/Small Intestine Health, n.d.)
- The corresponding emotions related to the heart are: lose hope, shortage in vitality and enthusiasm, sleeplessness, mental restlessness, and depression.

*Symptoms of heart imbalance: irregular heartbeat, insomnia, heart palpitations, difficulty in sleeping, poor long-term memory, psychological disorders (Wong, 2020)*

### **Kidney**

The kidney is related to the element water. In TCM it's the root of life, as they save the Qi, which nourishes the embryo before and after birth. Before birth, it stores reserve energy called “pre-natal Qi” inherited from your parents and it is responsible for our strength, constitution, and vitality as it's connected with the brain and supports our memory and our sight. After birth kidney controls growth, reproduction, fertility and development. Kidney supports any organ suffering of low energy and boosts it with extra Qi (Kidney/Bladder Health, n.d.) & (Chiazzari.). Also, kidney supports our lungs in water metabolism and respiration. It is connected with bones, teeth, ears, and hair (Wong, 2020)

- The external opening of the kidney is the ear. Any complaint in the ears, like ear infections, deafness, tinnitus, is an indication that the kidney is not functioning well.
- The bone is the tissue associated with the Kidney. Symptoms like osteoporosis, dental

issues, or developmental issues, gives a sign that your kidneys are not well.

- Salt taste resonates with the kidney. (Kidney/Bladder Health, n.d.)
- The corresponding emotions related to the kidney are anxiety, insecure, fear, severe panic attacks, and weak willpower

**Symptoms of Kidney Imbalance:** Frequent urination, urinary incontinence, night sweats, dry mouth, poor short-term memory, low back pain, ringing in the ears, hearing loss, and other ear conditions. Premature grey hair, hair loss, and osteoporosis (Wong, 2020)

### **COLOURS**

According to Chiazzari (1999), each colour and tone (sound) has its own vibration. Our body organs, glands, and different systems, are made up of cells aggregate together. Each group of cells operate at a certain frequency, which is in harmony and resonate with an individual colour and sound (Chiazzari, 1999). Gaurav, Ravinder, Preeti and Kapil (2010) also describe that vibrations are the main thing in our life, chakras in our body is a kind of energy field, our organs and body systems are all based in various vibrational types which consist of vibrating atoms, even the universe is a kind of energy in vibration (S.Gaurav, 2010). When we are dealing with colours, we can use them not only for their artistic value but also as a healing tool which can boost our energy (M.Maier., 2007). Kovacev & Maclean (1997, 2001) found that the symbolism of colours is affected by different backgrounds and cultures that reflects psychological and physical meaning of each colour (.Kovačev., 1997) & (MacLEAN., 2001). Practising colours is highly affected by cultures and religions where no one can defiance this bias (M.Muthuraman, 2016). Olesen (2019) finds that China has a potent 1 colour symbolism compared to West (OLESEN, 2019)

### **THE FIVE TRADITIONAL CHINESE COLOURS**

In Chinese philosophy, colours are related to symbolic meaning, as well the cosmos reflects the Five Elements, which has their main properties and sides. Together, they form and unify the Five Element Theory (Symbolism of Colors, Associations of The Five Elements in Chinese Beliefs and Feng Shui, n.d.)

In traditional Chinese culture, colours hold exact meaning and we use it on its own. Despite that, the five colours together reflect hope for good luck and repel badness. (Kommonen., 2008)

According to the traditional Chinese medicine, the five colours are related to five organs corresponding to the skin colour- liver with green, heart with red, spleen with yellow, lungs with

white and kidneys with black (Examination and Diagnosis, n.d.)

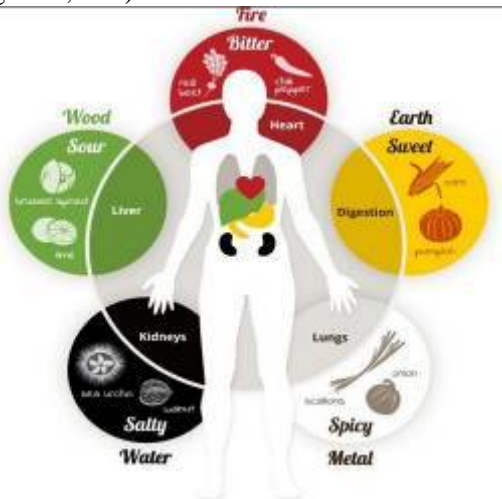


Figure (2) The five traditional Chinese organs (The Flavors of Five Element Theory 2015)

### Red

Red (红 hóng), fire element and summertime, it is the colour of luck, wealth and happiness, good luck named 红运 (hóngyùn), "red luck", when comes at the time of luck it's called 运 (zǒu hóngyùn) "walk-in red luck" (Terminiello, 2018)

"Red" is often associated with ceremonies and honour in Chinese culture, and Chinese children or even elders, waiting for the red envelopes "(hóngbāo) or" red twisting "containing money in the Lunar New Year (Yu, 2014) & (Terminiello, 2018)

Red is considered the colour of marriage. Brides used this colour because they believe it repels evil. In the past, it was the matchmaker (hōngniáng), or the "red aunt" that made the families of the new grooms in contact with each other; also, the "red thread" 红线 represents love (OLESEN, 2019) & (Terminiello, 2018)

The heart is the organ that is related to the colour red, like the fire element, its energy warms and nourishes the heart and the entire body. Most people like to wear strong shades of red in the cold weather and on some special occasions where it flames the passion, like Valentine's Day (J. Yang; 2000). Emptiness may be present on a dry face as a dull red colour, while the red colour will be darker if there is stagnation (Lucas, 2010)

Chiazzari (2014), mentioned the healing qualities of red as its alkaline, non-astringent, non-electric, production of iron, growth, stimulation, strength, detoxification, stimulates adrenals and energizes kidneys, increases

heartbeat and blood pressure (Chiazzari.)

### Yellow

Yellow (黄 huáng), Earth element, time of late summer. Yellow is an influential colour in Chinese culture. It is close to gold which stands for fortune and wealth (Angelika, 2017)

In Chinese symbolism, yellow is related to the centre of the universe, and it's the colour of the emperor with imperial strength and power. Myth set out that the first man-made out of yellow clay (Yu, 2014) & (Olesen, 2019)

Yellow also associated with the Yellow River 黄河 (Huáng Hé) and the fertile land 黄壤 (huángǎng) around which the Chinese civilization was born, on the other hand, yellow is less "noble" when we call it in "yellow" books and films 黄书 (huángshū) (Terminiello, 2018) and it's symbolic of pornography in publications in China (Olesen, 2019).

The spleen is the organ that is related to the colour yellow, like the Earth element its energy sustains the Spleen, just as the energy of Earth does. This colour has bright and warm energy that can protect the spleen's Qi to become inactive, in the rainy days it's the perfect choice to be worn (J. Yang; 2000)

A yellowish face complexion indicates that a person may suffer from a disease in the digestive organs, also may show that chronic dampness and/or chronic qi and blood deficiency occur. (Cho, n.d.) & (Lucas, 2010)

Chiazzari (2014), mentioned the healing qualities of yellow as their cleansing and purifying actions on spleen and pancreas. Tones and cleanses the blood through promoting sweating and opens pores in the skin (Chiazzari.)

### Black

Black (黑 hei), water element, time of winter. It represents the king, dignity and imperial colour (eChinacities.com, 2017). Black is the colour of the bad luck, darkness, depth, sin, catastrophe, death and it can't be worn on happy occasions. On the other hand, this colour represents honour and righteousness (Olesen, 2019).

This colour stimulates the magnetic and feminine energies in our body. It stimulates the subconscious mind, also it carries a protective and calming quality. You can always find black colour with white as in Taiji symbol showing yin and yang, and rarely to find it by itself without combining with other colours. (Angelika, 2017) & (Colour Healing, n.d.). Kidneys are the organ that is related to the

colour black, like the water element it nourishes your kidneys as water does, also has cleansing quality as it wiped out the fear feelings and calm your nervous energy, black protects your kidneys from cold in winter (J. Yang; 2000)

Dark complexion indicates that kidney disharmony occurs, usually, patients with renal(kidney) failure have darker complexion than normal, also when someone is cold or feeling great fear their complexion also will get darker (Cho, n.d.) & (Xian, n.d.)

**White**

White (白 bai), Metal element, time of Autumn. White colour has multi-uses in Chinese culture, it is the colour of purifying, cleansing, creativity and boosting energy. This colour enlarges the effects of any colour that combines with it. On the other hand, it is the colour of mourning and ghosts (Angelika, 2017) & (Colour Healing, n.d.).

The lung is the organ that is related to the colour white, it's like the shining Metal when it is polished. White boosts the lungs, allows deep breath, and protects from seasonal allergies, despite the dry air of the autumn. (J. Yang; 2000)

People with white complexion (greyish in colour) may suffer from lung ailments like

emphysema, and like elderly people who mostly look kind of grey because their lungs have lost the capacity to maintain a proper flow of oxygen and carbon dioxide. Also, It is stated that light pale maybe a reference a situation of yang trouble, while a dimmer shade of pale may be a signal of blood deficiency. (Cho, n.d.) & (Lucas, 2010)

**Green**

Green (青 qing), wood element, time of spring (Angelika, 2017), This colour nourishes the liver like the energy of wood does. After the harsh time of winter our body, especially liver needs to rejuvenate and restore its energy, green colour can help you to release bad emotions such as irritation or hatred and will replace it with positive energy (J. Yang ;2000)

If the person's complexion turns to green tint, this indicates that disharmony occurs in the liver, and the liver qi stagnation may lead to blood deficiency, headaches, digestive issues or even rashes. (Lucas, 2010)

Chiazzari (2014), mentioned the healing qualities of green as they are calming, normalizing action, a tonic for mind and body, pituitary gland, sedative, balancing, chronic inflammations and swellings, works through the sympathetic nervous system (Chiazzari.)

<b>Element</b>	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	water
<b>Colours</b>	Green	Red	Yellow	White	Black
<b>Yin/yang organs</b>	Liver/GB	Heart/SI	Spleen/Stomach	Lung/LI	Kidney/UB
<b>Taste</b>	Sour	Bitter	Sweet	Spicy	Salty
<b>Sense organs</b>	Eyes	Tongue	Mouth	Nose	Ears
<b>Emotions</b>	Anger	Joy	Anxiety	Grief	Fear
<b>Tissues</b>	Tendons	Blood vessels	Muscles	Skin	Bones
<b>Seasons</b>	Spring	Summer	Late Summer	Autumn	Winter

Table (1) Five element theory

**DRESSING COLOURS ACCORDING TO TCM**

Colour is one of the distinguishing factors as stated by the Five Elements chart, that can support the energetic function of an organ. The external, visible symptoms point to an internal, invisible imbalance in our body. The imbalance is unseen as it exists on the body's energetic level. Colours are a great way to support the organ function that needs a bit of a healing boost (what colour are you, n.d.)

Different materials can carry the energy but fabrics are one of the best that can hold and absorb different vibrations. This explains the power of fabrics to absorb dyes and hold the aroma for a long time, but the best fabrics to hold energy is the

natural ones like cotton, wool, muslin and silk, as the vibrations of these are in harmony with our vibrations (Chiazzari.)

There is no distinct division between the psychological, the somatic, and physical in the consideration of colour therapy and healing. While colour healing for physical illnesses has not received acceptance and credibility in modern medicine. The tolerance for what colour can do for the human psyche is somewhat more evident. Several colour healers believe that the health of the body and mind depend upon a balance of aural colours, and should colour be missing or out of balance, it can be compensated, (Mahnke, 1996)

According to many kinds of research, colours

affect us psychologically and physiologically in a specific manner. We will apply the colour irradiation technique to expose our body to different colours to activate different chakras and the related body organs and systems. So, in this research we did several designs based on the five organs, their related emotions and their resonate colours in healing, aiming not only to create satisfactory aesthetic designs but also to boost our energy level.

**Dressing colours according to TCM:**

**Designs Based one Blue & Violet:**

Applying blue & violet on our neck will affect the liver organ, and this organ is related to the anger emotion according to TCM. So those cool colours will trigger us to be cool and calm down. And we can apply it with a yellow colour on the back and the back of the knee. As yellow colour stimulate self-esteem, cheerfulness & mental clarity.



*The Blue & violet designs with its implementation in fashion*

Blue evokes the feelings of relaxation and calmness, health, mental relaxation and peace (Naz Kaya, 2004) While Violet is connected to our spiritual level and reflect the generosity & selflessness. (S.Gaurav, 2010)

**Designs Based on Blue & Green:**

Applying Blue & Green on the throat chakra will

affect lungs, and the lungs are associated with grief and sadness. Those cool colours providing relief from tension and evoke positive emotional responses. The blue colour will let us feel happiness & peace. While green the master of all colours will trigger stress reduction & balance. (Naz Kaya, 2004)& (S.Gaurav, 2010)



*The Blue & Green designs with its implementation in fashion*

**Designs Based on Indigo:**

Another cool & soothing colour boost feeling of understanding and stillness. It is related to the spleen which is in resonance with the worry eotion.

So applying indigo on the spleen centre can purify this place and kill bacteria, then we have to apply yellow-orange over the solar plexus zone and blue on the lower back. (Chiazzari.) & (S.Gaurav, 2010)



*The Indigo designs with its implementation in fashion*

**Designs Based on Green:**

Applying Green on the heart chakra will resonate

with the heart organ and joy emotion, As green is a balanced colour carrying warm & cool rays



achieving the required balance and bringing calmness, and happiness to our wellbeing.



*The Green designs with its implementation in fashion*

### Designs Based on Orange & violet:

Applying orange on the lower part of the body and as warm colours showed a strong pattern of stimulation (Raza, 2005), this colour is a vital ray flows up through feet and legs releasing any energy blockages which prevent the golden life

force filling every part in our body. Also, violet is very important to be applied in the centre of the back of the knee which is linked with the kidneys and fear emotion. (Chiazzari.)



*The Orange & violet designs with its implementation in fashion*

### Conclusion

Using colour energy, like sound vibrations have the wonderful capacity to move blocked energy and change energy patterns deep within us, and we have to find different ways to introduce certain colours to our body organs to reach the balance in our energy and feel healthy.

Fashion design is a very creative and useful way that we may use to support our body organs & emotions, via creating designs based on certain philosophy like TCM.

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