

The true colors of the trigrams

by D.H. Van den Berghe ©1998

The eight trigrams of the I Ching are universal symbols. Ever since they came in existence , different authors have studied them and tried to link them with the things around us . Connections were made with : the eight directions , the seasons , the different family members , parts of the body , animals , the senses , colors , etc.. Most of these connections are very well documented in the vast amount of texts written on I Ching and mostly agreed upon . Concerning the colors however there seems to be a lot of confusion . Almost every translation gives different colorschemes .

After some reflection on the meaning of the trigrams and study of the different colors , I came to a color arrangement that is comprehensible . To do this I took the seven colors of the rainbow and black as an eighth color . It is of course logical to choose these basic colors to attribute to the trigram symbols . This is the arrangement :



Put in the Later Heaven (King Wen) sequence here , the elegance of this colorscheme becomes immediately clear. The 'warm' colors (red , orange and yellow) are in the area that corresponds to daytime and summer . The cold colors are at the nighttime or winter side of the diagram . Red is the hot noon , black the middle of the night . Green is in the daybreak or spring spot . Turquoise is at the evening and autumn place (the turquoise color is related to death in China) . The middle of the diagram is white : here all colors become one .

We can also see that complementary colors are opposite each other : orange - blue and yellow - violet . The red - green pair is put square and the turquoise color has no complementary color .

If we take the three major colors (Red, yellow and blue) we see that they are attributed to Fire , Earth and Heaven trigrams . Black belongs to Water trigram . With these four colors we can mix all the other colors . Thus we see that the major colors belong to the four major trigrams , the four basic elements : heaven , earth , water and fire.

These colors also fit very nicely with the 5 elements attributed to the trigrams :

Trigram	Element	Color
Thunder	Wood	Green
Wood		Orange
Fire	Fire	Red
Earth	Earth	Yellow
Mountain		Violet
Lake	Metal	Turquoise
Heaven		Blue
Water	Water	Black

If we draw the Earlier Heaven sequence we get this picture:



Here we see the three pairs of complementary colors always next to each other (red/green , orange/blue and yellow/violet .

I have found this color scheme to be a most useful one.