




Short lived “red” fame in the internet age

网络时代，“红”只不过是昙花一现

Now that we find ourselves in a populist paradise where anyone (good or bad) might easily find Andy Warhol’s 15 minutes of fame—be it by footage of carnal acts in the romantic setting of the UNIQLO fitting room or by bold and largely inadvisable political statements online—red, or 红(hóng), has become the most sought after color of them all. To become “web red”, or 网红(wǎnghóng, online celebrity), is a dream many hold.



SEAL SCRIPT



CLERICAL SCRIPT



SEMI-CURSIVE SCRIPT



CURSIVE SCRIPT



REGULAR SCRIPT

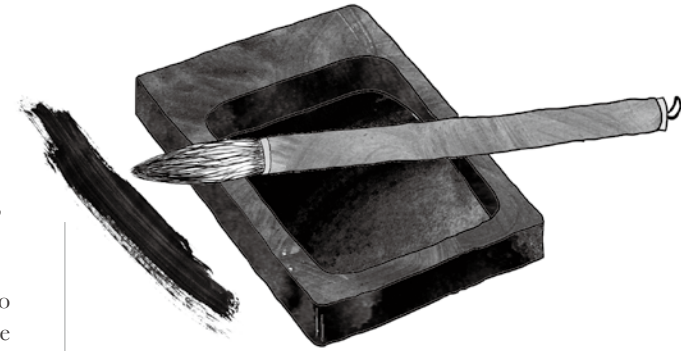
Red is undoubtedly China’s favorite color, with connotations of auspiciousness, revolution, and now a large and diverse internet celebrity community.

It took a long time for the character 红 to rise to its current fame. On the left side, the “silk” radical, 纟, represents its meaning, as many once associated the color of red with dyed silk. The 工(gōng) radical on the right indicates pronunciation. The modern dictionary may tell you 红 is the color of blood, but in ancient times the character referred to the color pink—a color created by weaving red and white silk threads together.

The words representing red in ancient times were 赤(chì) and 朱(zhū) and are still in use. A poem famously depicted the gap between the rich and the poor, “朱门酒肉臭，路有冻死骨。”(zhūmén jiǔròu chòu, lù yǒu dòng sǐ gǔ. Inside the red doors flows the fragrance of wine and meat, while falling bodies of the starved dot the road.)

When red was mostly associated with revolution, to call someone “red” was a compliment to their great loyalty to the revolution. Today, “red tourism”, or 红色旅游(hóngsè lǚyóu), themed tours of the Communist Party’s historic sites, is still very popular.

Traditionally, red is the color of wealth, celebration, and good fortune. When we are describing something flourishing, prosperous, or thriving, we use the word 红火(hónghuǒ). For instance, 生意红火起来了(shēngyì hónghuǒ qǐláile), or “business is booming”. Bonus or dividend is 红利(hónghì), while 分红(fēnhóng) means “to give bonuses or receive dividends”. 红包(hóngbāo), or red envelopes stuffed with money, are often given in private as a gift, tip, bonus, or, sometimes, as a bribe. In the term 红白喜事(hóng bái xǐshì), or “red and white affairs”, the red affair refers to weddings and the white refers to funerals. People want 开门红(kāiménhóng) for the new year—literally “open door red”, which means a smooth and successful year from the beginning. The “red luck”, or 红运(hóngyùn), is the kind of good luck you want. If someone



is lucky, you can say 走红运(zǒu hóngyùn). For example, 你真是走红运，什么好事都让你遇上了。(Nǐ zhēnshì zǒu hóngyùn, shénme hàoshìr dōu ràng nǐ yù shàng le. You are so lucky; only good things seem to happen to you.)

If you are a little bit jealous of such luck, the word to use is 眼红(yǎnhóng), literally meaning “red-eyed”, the Chinese word for the green-eyed monster—just on the opposite side of the color spectrum.

走红(zǒuhóng) is short for 走红运, which does not only mean to “have good luck”, but also means “popular”. For instance, 猫咪洗澡的视频在网上很走红。(Māomī xǐzǎo de shìpín zài wǎng shàng hěn zǒuhóng. Videos of cats taking a bath are very popular online.) Or 他是目前最走红的歌星。(Tā shì mùqián zuì zǒuhóng de gēxīng. He is the most popular singer right now.)

Popular people are naturally 红人(hóng rén), literally “red people”. For example, 网络红人(wǎngluò hóng rén, “internet red people”), or “online celebrity”—often shortened to 网红(“web red”). Red people can also mean those who are favored by power. For instance, 他是老板面前的红人。(Tā shì lǎobǎn miànqián de hóng rén. He is the boss’s favorite.)

For those who are extremely popular, you can describe them as 大红大紫(dà hóng dà zǐ, literally “super red and purple”) or 红得发紫(hóng de fā zǐ, literally “so red it starts to turn purple”). But remember an old saying, 花无百日红(huā wú bǎi rì hóng, “a flower, though beautiful, cannot retain its beauty for a hundred days.”) No fame lasts forever, and people love nothing more than a fall from grace. So, as you see all the auspicious red symbols of this new spring, perhaps spare a thought for the reds who don’t fare so well.

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