

# *The Three Realms, the Four Domains, and the Five Elements:*

## *An Investigation into Human Nature*

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### **The Element Earth**

*continue, from issue #220*

The element earth is divided into *wu* (戊土*yang*) earth and *ji* (己土*yin*) earth. Earth people are by and large short, or of medium height. Their bodies are "thick" in three aspects: their backs are thick; they have thick lips; and the backs of their hands are also thick. They have round faces, "garlic bulb" noses, and a yellow tinge to their complexion. They move in a slow and steady manner, and speak through their noses. When they get angry, their faces turn yellow.

By studying the physique, facial features, voice, and mannerisms of a person, you can deduce his predominant element, and if you know the makeup of your own nature, as well as the natures of other people, you'll be able to get along with them. For instance, in speaking to a wood character, use a gentle manner, and he will come around and listen to you. Face to face with a fire character, don't let him talk too much, because fire types like to argue. Once they get into a heated argument, there is no end to it. As for dealing with earth people, do not be overly assertive. If you talk too fast for him to keep up with you, he will simply stand there staring at you--he won't be able to say a word!

*Yin* earth people are heavy and dull. Metal people, on the other hand, are agile and nimble, endowed with quick wit and a quick tongue. *Yin* metal people are caustic and fond of arguing. Water people talk in a very slow and muffled way, much like slow-moving water.

An ancient adage says, "One who knows people's natures can get along with them." If you fail to recognize other people's propensities, you might exert a lot of futile effort in your dealings with them. Therefore, I encourage all of you to investigate the nature of the Five Elements. As we say, "If you know your own position, as well as the other's, you will come out victorious in every battle."

In general, 1) Wood people are slim and tall. They walk with a pronounced gait. Their manner of speaking is direct, the words clipped and articulated primarily through the teeth. They have a green tinge to their faces.

2) Fire people are fleshy and plump. They have date-shaped, ruddy faces. They move in a speedy manner. Their voices are sharp and shrill, issuing from the tongue.

3) Metal people are slender and slight. They have long and pale faces, elegant features, and nicely-shaped brows and eyes. They are nimble and sportive, but given over to frivolity. Their voices, issuing mainly from their lips, are clear and resonant, like bronze bells. Their faces turn white when they become angry.

4) Water people are pudgy and heavy-set. They have "pig stomach"--shaped faces, dark, bushy eyebrows and large eyes. Their hair is a dark color, and there is a slight black tinge to their faces. They are lethargic and move about slowly, as if dragging their feet in the mud. They drawl when they speak, their voices emanating from the throat. In short, they are slow and not alert. You will understand the subtle connections between the Five Elements by investigating their specific features and relationships. For example, if ten people are walking, there are ten different ways in which they carry themselves. If ten people are speaking, there are ten distinctly different voices. These are related to the changes and transformations within the elements, which are infinite and inexpressibly wonderful. Later on we will investigate the principles of "mutual generation, destruction, restraint, and transformation" (生剋制化) of the Five Elements. If you know how to "turn" the Five Elements in a positive cycle, you'll then be able to benefit yourself and others. But first we will investigate some of the relationships between the elements.

Among the five positions, earth is located in the center, and applies to all of the four seasons. In Confucianism, it is related to faith, or trustworthiness (信). In Buddhism, it is associated with the precept against lying. In Taoism, it is related to the primal breath (元氣).

#### The Five Elements and Their Relationship to the Four Seasons

spring	wood	east	green
summer	fire	south	red
autumn	metal	west	white
winter	water	north	black

According to the Chinese calendar, each season has seventy-two days. At the end of each season, an extra eighteen days, associated with earth, are added. For this reason, we say that earth applies to all four seasons. The Chinese lunar calendar (陰歷), also called the farmers'calendar, was devised by the Emperor Yao (帝堯, ruled 2356-2255 B.C.). It is based, like the *Book of Changes*, on the eight hexagrams, discovered by Fu Syi (伏羲, ruled 2852-2737 B.C.).

Because ancient China was an agrarian society, the calendar was closely connected with farming practices. A year was made up of 360 days. It was divided into four seasons, and further divided into twenty-four sub-seasons(節氣). Farmers to this day observe those twenty-four sub-seasons that make clear demarcations in the various stages of farming. There's a definite time to sow, a definite time to plough, and to reap.

In the family, earth occupies the central position, and is related to the grandparents, as well as deceased ancestors. Among the five viscera, earth is related to the spleen. The spleen and the stomach work as a pair. Actually the ten viscera work in pairs:

Five Elements	solid organs 臟-實	hollow organs 腑-虛
wood	Liver 肝	gall-bladder 胆
fire	Heart 心	small intestine 小腸
earth	Spleen 脾	Stomach 胃
metal	Lungs 肺	large intestine 大腸
water	Kidneys 腎	Bladder 膀胱

Among the five poisons,\* *yin*-earth is related to resentment. People who are resentful damage their spleen. They are likely to develop gastric disorders, peptic ulcers, problems such as indigestion, bloating of the stomach, vomiting, diarrhea, shortness of breath, even stomach cancer.

*Yang*-earth people are faithful, honest, sincere, and true. They are tolerant and all-embracing like the earth, *yin*-earth people, on the other hand, are stubborn, rigid, and small-minded. The major faults of *yin*-earth types are:

- 1) stupidity 蠢
- 2) clumsiness 笨
- 3) awkwardness 愚
- 4) cowardice 囊
- 5) intransigence 佞

They easily sink into depression, feeling miserable about themselves. Once they lapse into such a dark mood, they stagnate and refuse to budge, like a clod of hard, cold earth. Right after an infant is born, you can discern its predominant element by listening to the way it cries. If he cries loudly, and then suddenly stops, he is a wood person. If he cries in rapid succession, he is a fire-type. If he cries in a slow and drawn-out manner, he is a water type. If he cries intermittently with frequent stops, and whimpers instead of crying

out loudly, then he is an earth type. A metal type cries without interruption with a loud, clear voice.

*Yin*-earth people suffer a heavy burden throughout their lives. They suppress their resentment and feel sorry for themselves. This can lead to gastric disorders and ulcers. They are incompetent, and yet they blame others. There's a joke about a *yin*-earth person. In traditional Chinese society, the husband would sometimes beat his wife. A certain husband flogged his wife several times. Finally, in a very slow drawl, she asked, "Whom are you beating up?"

He cried out, "Good heavens--I'm beating you! You mean you don't even know that?" That's a caricature of *yin*-earth people.

*Yin*-earth people are slow and stubborn. They also tend to tell small lies. This is because they are incompetent and timid and afraid of being blamed when they fail to do their jobs well. For this reason, they "pass the buck", and put the blame on others. Very heavy *yin*-earth types will go on to tell big lies. One wishing to bolster his *yang*-earth must cut out lying at all cost. In fact, you shouldn't even entertain false thoughts, much less engage in false speech. It is said, "Words spring from the mind" 言由心生。Whatever you say stems from your thoughts. Having spoken untruthfully, you cannot rationalize for yourself by saying, "I spoke with perfectly innocent intentions; the listener misinterpreted it." Words are the vocal expression of our thoughts. Therefore, we must first and foremost work on the mind-ground, and not allow errant or random thoughts to arise.

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\*See VBS Issue#208, September, 1987