

The Three Realms, the Four Domains, and the Five Elements: An Investigation into Human Nature *by Elder Upasika Men Yi-ping*

Another famous yin metal personality is the Empress Wu Dze-tyan (武則天 A.D. 625-705). She exhibited keen mental capacities even as a young girl, and at age fourteen was summoned into the imperial court of Emperor Tai Dzung (太宗 A.D. 599-649) as one of his ladies-in-waiting. As a means to realize her personal ambition, she developed an intimate relationship with the crown prince Li Jr (李治 A.D. 628-683). After Emperor Tai Dzung's death, according to the custom of that time, she and other ladies-in-waiting were sent to a nunnery in Chang-an, where she became a Buddhist nun. The next year, after the crown prince ascended the throne with the title Gau Dzung (高宗), he issued a summons and recalled her to the palace, where she rose to the position of imperial concubine.

Wu Dze-tyan set to work. Focusing on the rift between Empress Wang (王皇后) the imperial concubine and Syau Shu-fei (蕭淑妃) she friended the empress and became her close associate. This way she won the trust of both the emperor and the empress. Soon, a daughter was born to Wu Dze-tyan. One day, the Empress Wang came into Wu's apartments to take a look at the newborn princess. After she had played with the infant for a while, the empress walked out. Wu Dze-tyan, who had been hiding behind the curtains, stepped out. Without a moment's hesitation, she strangled her own baby daughter and quickly walked out of the room. In a few minutes, the ladies of the palace came in. To their dismay, they discovered the dead infant lying in her crib! They cried out, "Who was here just now?"

At that moment, Wu Dze-tyan appeared as if on cue. Feigning innocence, she said, "The only person who came in was the empress."

When the news was reported to the emperor, he was outraged! Immediately he banished Empress Wang. Wu Dze-tyan was, of course, the natural substitute. Overnight she assumed the honored title of Empress Wu. After Gau Dzung's death, she seized power and usurped the throne, and renamed the dynasty Jou (周朝). In order to fulfill her political ambitions, she thought nothing of killing her own child. That is characteristic of extremely yin metal people. They can be wicked and cunning to the extreme.

Another yin metal personality, along the same lines, is the Empress Dowager Tzu Syi (慈禧 A.D.1835-1908), who dominated the Manchu court for forty-seven years toward the end of the Ching dynasty and was one of the major influences in bringing about the Boxers' Rebellion, the humiliating concessions to foreign powers, and the final downfall of the Ching government in 1911. Tzu Syi was known for her crafty and devious schemes. In order to develop her own ambition, she would resort to the most unethical and wicked means to realize her aims. We have the common saying, "A head-on attack is easy to

avert. But an arrow released in secret is difficult to escape." Yin metal people attack you when you're off guard. They might be all smiles, but a dagger is hidden in their hearts. In a critical situation, they can turn cold and callous, just like the forboding autumn wind that pulls down all the leaves from the trees.

Yin metal people tend to be jealous. In his *Maxims for Regulating a Family*, Mr. Ju left us these words of advice: "When others have cause for celebration, do not become jealous. When others encounter ill luck or misfortune, do not rejoice." Yin metal people are jealous of those who are capable and virtuous. When they see others suffering calamities or misfortune, they are delighted. Because they do not nourish their virtue, their offspring are often unfilial and unwholesome.

Yin metal people also like small bargains. They like to get off cheap. For example, they may have money of their own, but they like to "mooch off of" other people. Therefore, metal is related to the precept against theft. Yin metal people have to watch themselves especially with regard to this precept.

Because they have quick and agile minds, they can outsmart others if they do not employ their intelligence in proper ways. Some yin metal people like to steal a good name. They borrow the reputation of some organization and exploit it for their private interests. That is also a form of stealing. They are deceptive and clever. Society abounds with yin metal types right now.

Above, I have mentioned some of the more common types of yin metal people. They are pretty, young women who are given over to melancholy and tears. They are like bright, thin and sharp cutting instruments. People like Empress Lu and the Empress Dowager, on the other hand, resemble sharp and fierce blades. A cold, steel-like glint issues from them, making your hair stand on end. Some other kinds of yin metal people assume a friendly and pleasant appearance, yet they conceal a dagger behind their smile. Some yin metal people have narrow and petty minds. They are like small scissors or short knives, eager to show off their light. Their words are sarcastic and grating to the ear. They will manage to say one or two sentences that will ruin your day for you. In the critical moment, they can be extremely cruel, like red chili pepper in your nostrils, which burns your nose unbearably. Fierce yin metal people like to argue. If you get caught in a lawsuit with them, you probably aren't their match. They can twist the facts and make a case for themselves even when they are clearly in the wrong. This is a phenomenon called "metal overcoming wood (金剋木)."

Yang metal people are totally different. Metal is related to primal emotion, which means yang metal people are understanding and reasonable. They embody a profound sense of righteousness, and are considerate of the other party's feelings. One example of primal emotion brought to perfection is the story of old Mr. Jang who lived during the Tang dynasty. He practiced patience under insult. The more he endured, the happier he was. You could say his primal emotion had returned to its pure and perfected state. Mr Jang and all members of his large family got along very well. He made a vow that he would be patient one hundred times with particularly difficult events. He had passed ninety-nine

tests, when a special event occurred in his household. His son was getting married that day. A monk came to the house for alms and asked to be put up for the night. Mr. Jang graciously offered him the guest quarters. But the monk insisted on sharing the room with the bride! Now, would most ordinary people be able to put up with this? No, they certainly would not. But Mr. Jang was determined to be patient with what was difficult to be patient with, and so he allowed the monk to stay in the nuptial chamber and spend the night with the bride. The next morning, someone went in to get the monk up for breakfast. They discovered he had turned into a golden man. Thereupon Mr. Jang had an awakening: "Ah, it's a test after all. How could I take this gold as my own?" Thereupon he brought the gold man to the local monastery and had a holy image cast from it. From this incident comes the famous story, "Patient a hundred times, the man turned into gold" 百忍成金. Not only was Mr. Jang patient, his entire family was patient. It was said that the domestic animals and fowl in his household were different. The cats did not eat mice, the dogs did not bite people. Even the chickens and ducks became transformed by the power of patience. In the end, all the members of that family ascended to heaven, including the animals and birds.

Therefore, if you wish to develop your primal emotion, you should work on yielding and being patient. Watch yourself closely; when you yield, does your heart feel unhappy? Do you still have qualms or second thoughts? You must yield in a totally joyous and spontaneous way for it to really count. If you can yield at the ultimate level where it's hardest to yield, then you can achieve great righteousness. Even if your children demand things of you, you have to yield within a reasonable limit. You are born into a certain family because you have unfinished debts with its members. Therefore, you have to make at least some small sacrifices in order to repay your debts. If you absolutely refuse to yield on all accounts, but instead try to get off cheap on every occasion, in the future your offspring will ruin your family. If, on the other hand, you can look lightly on money, you will fulfill your responsibility to be righteous. With righteousness perfected, your primal emotion will also be complete.

The principles concerning the five elements need to be looked into carefully. As they say, "Cut and file, chisel and polish." From intensive investigation, you will gain the understanding of how to use the five elements in a flexible and practical way. For instance, you may have a wood character. One of your colleagues makes a snide remark to you and it feels like a sharp knife gouging into wood. You can't stand it! This is a case of "metal overcoming wood." What do you do at this point? You can "make your escape by water." If you take one step back, wood can go to water. Water means gentleness and compliance. Metal generates water. By being compliant and uncontentious, you can get metal to work for you instead of working against you. Water goes on to generate wood. In this case, not only is there no more mutual overcoming, there is mutual generation. What was an antagonistic situation to begin with is now turned around and becomes a positive situation. This is called "turning the five elements in a positive cycle (五行圓轉)." If you understand the workings of the five elements, you have found the secret to return from man-made reality to heaven-true reality. We say, "Those who know how to use it can transcend the three realms. Those who do not know how to use it have to undergo infinite suffering. "

There are many uses for metal. For example, copper, iron, and steel can be used to construct bridges, buildings, and machines, and may be used for many other industrial and technical purposes. Among all metals, pure, unadulterated gold is the most precious. It does not melt under tremendous heat, because the dross and impurities have been smelted out. Therefore, gold is often used to symbolize a majestic sense of righteousness that reaches the heavens. People endowed with a sense of righteousness are willing to take a loss. They are extremely agreeable and pleasant, and also capable. Do not think this is easy. There are people who "do things," and there are people who "get done in" by things. What's the difference?

People who do things have a good record. They grasp the spirit of the whole group. They are public-spirited and unselfish. For example, if a yang metal person were to build a house, he would invite everyone to join in the work. He would appoint appropriate people to the various tasks, so that the project could quickly be brought to accomplishment, to the delight of everyone involved. Such a person is one who can do things well. He has yang metal. A yin metal person, on the other hand, feels that no one is up to his level. He feels only he himself is capable of handling the job, and so he monopolizes the entire situation and does not give other people a chance to contribute their talents. He ends up taxing his brains and his energy and drives himself to exhaustion. This is called being "done in" by things. People who know how to do things stand outside of the situation. Because they have a connection with primal emotion, they understand the feelings of all parties involved, and their public relationships are healthy and wholesome. You must be considerate of other people's feelings and know their temperaments. A yin metal person hogs a project and has no consideration of others. He is guilty of "metal overcoming wood." He gets progressively bogged down by his work and becomes irritable and depressed. This is because he is not in touch with the common sentiment of the entire group. Therefore, you must bring about a unity of everyone's righteous spirit and their primal sentiment. When you get in touch with that basic element, you will be successful in whatever you do. You must be able to get along with the whole group. You must win their support and respect before you embark upon your work.

School News

- * Three students from Instilling Goodness and Developing Virtue Girls' Schools won awards in a state-wide poster contest. Berling Chen, age fourteen, won first place. Salina Bambic and Avila Hamp were also winners. Vajra Bodhi Sea will print the details in a future article.
- * Gold Mountain Monastery, San Francisco; Gold Wheel Monastery, Los Angeles; and Gold Buddha Monastery, Vancouver offer special weekend classes for children in Buddhism and Chinese.