

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

*An Investigation into Human Nature  
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## *Mutual Overcoming of the Five Elements*

The principles concerning the mutual generation of the five elements have been discussed in detail. Now we will look into the mutual overcoming, or destruction of the five elements. In general, they go in this order:

wood overcomes earth  
earth overcomes water  
water overcomes fire  
fire overcomes metal  
metal overcomes wood

There are, of course, ways to counteract and transform the mutual destruction. We will briefly introduce the process of mutual overcoming.

1. Wood overcomes earth: There's a common saying, "When wood overcomes earth, someone ends up with a gastric ulcer." Yin wood people are defiant and tend to get angry. Yin earth people are rigid, stagnant, and narrow-minded. They suppress their anger, and this hurts their spleen and stomach, resulting in gastric disorders. When this happens, we should counteract the process by bringing forth the bright fire of clarity. This means clearly understanding the workings of cause and effect. Once you understand "as you sow, so will you reap," you will no longer feel resentful. At this point, wood will no longer overcome earth. Instead, wood can generate fire, and fire will generate earth.

2. Earth overcomes water: Yin earth people get stuck when they encounter something that does not go according to their wishes. At that point, water and earth get mixed up together and the situation becomes muddy and turbid. Such a person is lethargic and clouded over in his head. He is unable to strike up his spirits or attain any kind of clarity of mind. The antidote is to counteract the situation with yang metal (righteousness). When earth generates metal and metal generates water, earth and water no longer overcome one another.

3. Water overcomes fire: This situation is evidenced in a feud between a couple. Husband (fire) and wife (water) are at each other's throats. In a work situation, when the finance department (water) and the administration (fire) do not get along, we also have a situation of "water overcoming fire." Right within one's personality, this kind of conflict could also take place. Such a person is agitated and nervous. He desires to move fast and do things efficiently; however, the more nervous he gets (fire) the slower he becomes (water). His body and mind don't seem to cooperate. The mind wishes to act quickly, but the body dawdles and refuses to comply.

Two people can get locked into the "water overcoming fire" conflict. One individual is quick-tempered and restless; the other is a stick in the mud. The fiery person cannot stand it any longer, and so he blows up and yells at the slow person, accusing him of procrastination. At that point, the conflict becomes "fire curbing water."

Someone with the problem of "water overcoming fire" injures his heart. He is prone to develop coronary disorders, such as heart failure, fire in the heart, or palpitations, etc. In such a case, what should one do? One should develop yang wood, that is, a humane and loving attitude. Water will generate wood, wood will generate fire, and then water and fire will no longer be mutually destructive.

4. Fire overcomes metal: Yin fire people are violent and argumentative. They look at others' shortcomings but fail to see their own faults. Because they like to fight, they injure their own lungs and tend to develop pulmonary disorders such as coughing, asthma, pneumonia, bronchitis, etc. "When fire overcomes metal, the person taxes his mind." In what way can one counteract such a conflict? One should develop yang earth—trust and honesty. If such a person believes in cause and effect and recognizes that his conflict is brought on by his own bad karma, he will no longer feel the need to argue or contend. In that case, fire will generate earth, and earth will generate metal. Fire and metal will no longer be mutually destructive.

5. Metal overcomes wood: Yin metal people speak in a caustic fashion. They are critical and exercise their power of discrimination to a fault. Because of their tendency to annoy and vex others, they injure their own liver. Yin metal types tend to have lung ailments. The antidote is yang water. That means admitting one's own mistakes. By recognizing our own mistakes, we will generate the water of wisdom. Metal will generate water, water will generate wood, and metal and wood will no longer be mutually destructive.

#### Mutual restraint and transformation among the five elements

If you know how to bring mutual restraint and transformation among the five elements, what was mutually destructive to begin with can be changed around to become mutually productive instead.

- 1) Yang metal can restrain yin wood
- 2) Yang wood can restrain yin earth
- 3) Yang earth can restrain yin water
- 4) Yang water can restrain yin fire
- 5) Yang fire can restrain yin metal.

These principles will be discussed in greater detail in other sections.

### *The Five Elements:*

#### *Mutual Generation, Overcoming, Restraint, and Transformation*

##### *A) Mutual Generation of the Five Professions within a Country*

The Five Major Professions of a country: scholars, farmers, workers, merchants, and government officials are the five viscera (lung, spleen, liver, kidney, and heart) of the society. These five professions are involved in a mutually productive and destructive cycle. First, we will discuss how they generate one another.

1. Workers are related to the element wood. They are responsible for the construction and building of the myriad things. Government officials, on the other hand, are related to fire; they should be clear-headed about the rules of etiquette and social law. When workers generate income, the country starts to set up the different departments of government, and so government officials come to be. That is "wood generating fire." (木生火).

2. When officials rule the country well, they teach the people by their virtuous example. The people will farm the land and be productive. Farmers are related to the element earth. That is "fire generating earth" (火生土).

3. Since the farmers work hard, their income increases and they can afford to send their children to school. The children might become scholars (the element metal). That is "earth generating metal" (土生金).

4. Scholars and teachers (metal) can in turn teach the people to increase their knowledge. Such people will engage in trading and business, which are related to the element water. That is "metal generating water" (金生水).

5. When the merchants (water) do a good business, they generate more revenue and contribute to the financial stability of the entire country. With increased income, more workers are employed to carry out more construction and building. That is "water generating wood." (水生木)

In this way, the five professions mutually generate one another in a positive cycle. When people of the various professions fulfill their respective responsibilities, they can contribute to the prosperity, peace and order of the entire country.

### *B) Mutual Overcoming of the Five Professions within a Country*

If those of the five professions do not have mutual respect and do not fulfill their respective duties, there will be strife and social unrest. This could lead to the downfall of the entire country. For example, the intellectuals (metal)—the students and professors—of a country are dissatisfied with the policy of the government (fire). They might stage a protest. The state sends troops to quell the protesters. That is a case of "fire overcoming metal" (火尅金).

Then, the students get the workers roused up, instigating strikes and sit-ins. The workers will have a bone of contention to pick with the capitalists (metal)—their employers. This situation is evidenced in many labor strikes. This is a case of "metal overcoming wood" (金尅木).

Next, following the example of the workers (wood), the farmers (earth) also get involved in this unrest. They leave their fields and no longer do their jobs. This is a case of "wood overcoming earth" (木尅土).

Since agriculture and construction have both stopped, the country's economy (water) comes to a standstill. This is a case of "earth overcoming water" (土尅水).

Since the economy is stagnating, the merchants engage in illegal business such as running the blackmarket or selling contraband articles. This leads to social unrest and chaos. The government is financially crippled.

When the five professions are mutually at odds and move along a negative, destructive cycle, the country's energy is severely damaged. There is bound to be moral degeneration, poverty and turmoil. Therefore, the mutual generation and mutual overcoming of the five elements is closely related to a country's rise and fall.

For example, if the military system (fire) cherishes the citizens (earth), the citizens will in turn support the government. This is a case of "fire generating earth." The country will be strong and peaceful. The reverse situation would be when the military forces exploit the people, plundering their wealth and abusing their lives. That would turn into a case of "fire overcoming metal." History has repeatedly shown us examples of severe despotic rule that resulted in the clash between the ruler (fire) and the

intellectuals (metal) of the country. For instance, the first emperor of the Chin dynasty, Chin Shihwang (秦始皇 246-214 B.C.) was an extremely cruel autocrat. Wishing to bring the state under a centralized rule, he issued a decree against private tutorial boards and had millions of Confucian texts burned. At that time, Confucian scholars throughout the country rose up in protest. The emperor had over 460 Confucian scholars -- the cream of the crop -- buried alive. This was the notorious incident, "burning of Confucian Classics and burial of scholars alive," (焚書坑儒) that happened during the Chin dynasty. It was an example of "fire overcoming metal." Because the country was moving in a destructive cycle, the Chin dynasty was quickly destroyed within a few decades. Therefore, the interrelationship of the five professions has a profound effect on the state of a country. The entire world is like a large institution. The various countries are like the human body, with all the different professions and government departments doing their respective jobs. The various departments bring about a check and balance of power to maintain the equilibrium of the entire state.

*C) Mutual Generation of the Five Elements in a Family*

From the country, we move to the family, deepening our investigation. The world is made up of various countries and the country is made up of families. People of the five professions are all raised in their families to begin with. If filiality, fraternity and kindness are taught in the family, then a country's citizens will naturally be loyal, yielding and law-abiding. Therefore, the five elements (or five major roles) within a family are very important. If these elements operate in a mutually productive cycle, families will be at peace. When families are at peace, the country will be at peace. When countries are at peace, the world will also be at peace. These things are interconnected in every way.

	<b>NORTH - WATER</b>  Primal Essence Mother (wife)	
<b>WEST - METAL</b>  Primal Emotion sons, daughters, daughters-in- law, grandchildren, etc.	<b>CENTER - EARTH</b>  Primal Breath grandparents	<b>EAST - WOOD</b>  Primal Nature Eldest son (who leads in the work)
	<b>SOUTH - FIRE</b>  Primal Spirit Father (husband)	

*The Five Elements in a Family*

1. The Grandparents: If the grandparents have already passed away, then the ancestors of the family will occupy this position in the center, which is related to Earth and Primal Breath. If the old people always look at the good points of all the other members of the family, they will help generate a lot of good energy. Earth can make the myriad things grow. For this reason, traditional Chinese society stressed the thorough carrying out of funeral rites for parents and the worship of ancestors, as a means to uplift the virtue of the people. When people wished to enter the Path of Virtue Society, the very first thing they had to do was "recount the virtue of their ancestors and confess their own faults." By recounting the virtue of our ancestors, we bolster the "earth" element in our lives and thereby establish a firm foundation for cultivating moral virtue.

2. The Father (husband): The head of the family occupies the fire position in the south. He should be public-minded and unbiased. Fire is related to Primal Spirit. The father must understand the laws of etiquette, be fair and clearheaded. Then he will be equipped to lead his entire family on the proper path.
3. The Mother (wife): She occupies the water position in the north, which is related to Primal Essence. The mother must be gentle and amiable like water. Water stays in low places but nourishes all things. By being gentle and agreeable, a mother can inspire harmony in the entire family.
4. Eldest Son: He occupies the wood position in the east and is related to Primal Nature. He must embrace the "wood" qualities of diligence, humaneness and conscientiousness. The eldest son should have his feet firmly planted on the ground and be able to shoulder great responsibility.
5. All of the Other Children: Brothers, sisters, as well as other members of the family fall under this final category which occupies the position of metal in the west. Metal is related to Primal Emotion, which means people in this position should be mutually respectful and harmonious.

How do members assuming the five major roles in a family function in a mutually productive cycle?

1. The father (fire) should bring up the praiseworthy qualities of the family ancestors. He should exhort his wife and children to be respectful to the grandparents (earth). That is "fire generating earth."
2. The grandparents (earth) should not meddle in the day-to-day business of running the household. Instead, they should remain cheerful and friendly, not cold and austere. They should teach their grandchildren (metal) by telling them inspiring stories and exhorting those children to be filial towards their parents. That is "earth generating metal." Such a family will enjoy an auspicious, peaceful energy. We call this the "five stars arriving at the home" (五福臨門). What are the five stars?
  - a) the grandfather is the star of longevity (壽星)
  - b) the grandmother is the star of blessings (福星)
  - c) the father is the star of fortune and wealth (祿星)
  - d) the mother is the star of happiness (喜星)
  - e) the daughter is the star of nobility (貴星)

Since the grandparents are responsible for preserving longevity and blessings, there is a common saying that goes, "When the old lady sits comfortably on her couch, her blessings quell the hundred disasters."

3. When the children (metal) obey their mother's instructions (water), they will become wise and intelligent. That is "metal generating water."
4. When the mother/housewife is happy, she will be attentive to the food and drink of those who work (wood). She will take good care of them. That is "water generating wood."
5. When the eldest son (wood) feels he is well taken care of, he works even harder. He is filial to his father and honors his father's instructions. That is "wood generating fire."

When the five major roles in a family move in a mutually positive cycle, the various members each do their job and also get along. That is the secret of "regulating a family!"

