

# ***“Samanya Dharma***

## **And the Mystery Of the Five Elements”**

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This book is an historical, archetypal, and spiritual examination of Five Element theory. It seeks especially to explain the mysteries of the generating cycle, especially as it relates to the Metal and Water elements, and especially as they relate to a larger body of teachings known as *Samanya Dharma*. “Samanya Dharma” means “Universal Truth,” or “Universal Path to Happiness.” Samanya Dharma was developed through a process of divine inspiration and meditation by this author over a five-year span, beginning in October of 2018. Samanya Dharma is taught through the rubrik of the Chinese concept of Five Element Theory, or what is called *Wu Xing* in the Mandarin language. As such, any student of Samanya Dharma would benefit from a deep dive into this ancient theory of the elements. This book is offered to facilitate those dedicated students in their passionate pursuit of clarity as to the meaning of life. This book was first presented as this author’s master’s thesis, as part of his study of the science of Oriental Medicine. It was originally entitled: *Wu Xing Theory and the Water of Life*, and was written between August and October of 2007.

Thesis:

The Metal element represents the culmination of human psycho-emotional development. The Water element can be seen as the source of soul and divine love, from which all things come and all things return. Thus, the generation of Water from Metal can be said to describe the spiritually perfected and psychologically matured human being’s capacity

to achieve unity with the divine and to bring divine love into this world.

Definitions:

‘*Xing*,’ which is the original Chinese word here translated as “element,” is often found in the relevant contemporary literature reinterpreted as “phase.” Advocates for this new translation argue that “phase” better describes the unfixed and temporal aspect of *Xing*, whereas the term “element” somehow promotes the inaccurate belief that the *Xing* form the unchanging constituent parts of matter itself. Indeed, it bears stressing that: “The five elements. . . are not basic constituents of Nature, but five basic processes, qualities, phases of a cycle, or inherent capabilities of change of phenomena.”<sup>1</sup> The suggestion here is of ‘active principle’ rather than ‘primordial material.’

However, as is well argued in Maciocia’s *The Foundations of Chinese Medicine*, this desire for revision may in fact stem from a poor understanding of both the original Aristotelian intent of the Western philosophical conception of ‘element,’ which does not necessarily connote an atom-like, core quality. Maciocia also refutes the notion that the historical Chinese perspective on the *Xing* did not allow for the possibility of their seeded expression in form. But must we quibble? On a certain level, any effort to strictly define ‘*Xing*’ flies in the face of the Daoists’ immutable belief that the *Dao*— and, by extension, the *Xing*— cannot truly be grasped by pointing and naming. Therefore, because it is the intent of this thesis to explore the rich symbolic meaning of the word

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<sup>1</sup> *The Foundations of Chinese Medicine*, Giovanni Maciocia, Churchill Livingstone, New York, NY, 1989 (p.16)

*Xing* in a spirit of both play and reverence, the right to use either translation in the following pages is hereby reserved.

Outline in Brief:

1. Thesis Profile
2. Introduction
3. History of Five Element Theory
4. The Generating Cycle in Macrocosm
5. The Generating Cycle in Microcosm
6. Summary
7. Notes and References

Major Sources:

- *Dragon Rises, Red Bird Flies: Psychology and Chinese Medicine, Revised Edition*, Leon Hammer, M.D., Eastland Press, Seattle, 2005
- *Nourishing Destiny: The Inner Tradition of Chinese Medicine*, Lonny S. Jarrett, Spirit Path Press, Stockbridge, MA, 2004
- *Archetypal Acupuncture: Healing with the Five Elements*, Gary Dolowich, M.D., B.Ac., Dipl.Ac., Jade Mountain Publishing, Aptos, CA, 2003
  
- *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, Translated by Richard Wilhelm, Harcourt, Brace, & World, INC. New York, NY, 1962
- *Between Heaven and Earth: A Guide To Chinese Medicine*, Harriet Beinfeld, L.Ac. and Efrem Korngold, L.Ac., O.M.D., Ballantine Books, New York, NY, 1992 • *Wood Becomes Water: Chinese Medicine in Everyday Life* by Gail Reichstein • *The Web That Has No Weaver: Understanding Chinese Medicine*, Ted Kaptchuck, O.M.D., Contemporary Books, USA, 2000
- *Iron John: A Book About Men*, Robert Bly, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., USA, 1990
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- *Tao Te Ching*, translated by S. Mitchell, located online at <http://acc6.its.brooklyn.cuny.edu/~phalsall/texts/taote-v3.html>
- *The Bible*, located at <http://www.biblegateway.com/>

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I would like to thank my parents for their example and love, my teachers for their patience and instruction, my friends for their devotion and trust, and Almighty God, whose gifts can never be measured.

## Introduction

*“Heaven created water through the One. That is the true energy of the great One.”<sup>2</sup>*

The Five Element theory describes a progression of symbolic phases representing developmental and relational aspects of the universe at large and small, from the procession of the seasons to the beating of the human heart. The theory is Chinese in origin, yet it speaks to the physiological, psychological and spiritual concerns germane to the broad questions of all human existence. It at once distils, compounds, and expands the fundamental ‘suchness’ of life into five meta-natural concepts: Water, Wood, Fire, Earth, and Metal. Through the mechanism of these phases and their mutual interactions, Chinese philosophers and doctors alike have, throughout their history, gained profound insight into the ever shifting conditions of their kingdom and countrymen.

However, since its inception, Five Element theory has been criticized for sometimes lacking in internal logical consistency and practical applicability. Inquiry into its errors by its early critics generally began with the ‘generating cycle,’ which explains the processes by which the elements promote and create one another— Water promoting Wood, Wood promoting Fire, Fire promoting Earth, Earth promoting Metal, Metal promoting Water, and so on around. At first glance, the thing flows— water does indeed feed and sustain plant life, wood is often the source of fire, fire from volcanoes creates

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<sup>2</sup> *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*, Richard Wilhelm, Harcourt, Brace, & World, INC. New York, NY. 1962. (p. 21)

earth (and the ashes of burnt wood nourish it further), and the fact that metal comes from out of the earth seems quite straight-forward. But “Metal promoting Water”?

Every first year student of Traditional Chinese Medicine stumbles and fusses over the difficulties inherent in this particular alchemical assumption, and the riposte that is provided by their earnest professors usually falls flat: “In the old days, water was observed beading up on metal mirrors in the morning.”<sup>3</sup> Or, perhaps: “Metal shares many properties with water— they can both reflect a mirror image, and they both become solid when cold.” But the former example describes a defunct historical curiosity that seems far too trivial to act as metaphor for a ubiquitous phenomenon of cosmic scale, and the latter offers comparison when none is asked for.

Is it possible, then, that there is just no good answer to this fundamental tenet of the *Wu Xing* philosophy? Could it be that this system of thought, which has been painstakingly analyzed and put to great use by brilliant minds for thousands of years, has a giant, gaping hole in its conceptual matrix? On the surface, it would seem that the answer is yes— water simply does not come from metal in the natural world, there are no easy, poetic extrapolations to be made in defense of the suggestion that it could, and this is obviously so. Therefore, the *Wu Xing* theory must fail as a comprehensive method for explaining relationships in nature.

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<sup>3</sup>“Metal creates water: Ancient Mirrors were made of Metal. Water condensed on their surface overnight, thus Metal creates Water by condensation.” Appendix to the *Ling Shu*, Translated by Wu Jing-Nuan, University of Hawaii Press, 2004 (p. 278)

Or *does* it?

This thesis posits that, in actuality, the ancient sages that described the Water element promoting Metal in the generating cycle really did know what they were talking about, and it will offer what is hoped to be a convincing argument to that effect. Further, if we allow the Five Element theory some room to wiggle in the rich interpretive tradition of Western transcendental philosophy, we can not only satisfactorily answer the monolithic conundrum of how Water can come from Metal, but, in so doing, we may find that, not only does the *Wu Xing* theory become complete within itself, but so does our understanding of the path our souls take through this life.

But this question of how the generating cycle produces Water from Metal is not the place most folks would start when confronted with tackling Chinese Five Element theory, not when there are even more fundamental matters to consider. For example, why five? It must seem odd to any Westerner to learn that the Chinese have five elements, given that we seemed to have done quite well with only four— Earth, Fire, Water, and Air. And how is it, we might also ask, that the Chinese missed ‘Air?’ And wherefore ‘Wood’?

These questions will provide a starting place for our venture into the mysteries of the *Wu Xing*, which, if we are patient and very fortunate, will reveal their secrets to us through the bibliomancy of the *Yi Jing* as well as through a slew of more modern interpretive texts.



## History of Five Element Theory

*“This philosophy is, to a certain extent, the common property of all Chinese philosophical trends. It is built on the premise that the cosmos and man, in the last analysis, obey the same law; that man is a microcosm and is not separated from the macrocosm by any fixed barriers....The psyche and the cosmos are to each other like the inner world and the outer world.”<sup>4</sup>*

### Zou Yen and the Ho Tu

In order to properly understand the *Xing*, we must first investigate the *Wu*. Put more simply: How did the Chinese arrive at the number five? What we will discover is that the ancient Chinese sages did not stumble upon it haphazardly, but instead used numerology as a basis for their most penetrating spiritual work and philosophical efforts. Indeed, a key secret to understanding how Metal generates Water can be gleaned from understanding how the *Wu Xing* theory came to be generated itself.

The earliest documentary evidence situates its development in the third and fourth centuries, B.C.E., which is known as the Warring States period.<sup>5</sup> The theory was systematized in large part by a scholar and political advisor named Zou Yen, who popularized it mainly as a method for determining the health and longevity of dynasties. As a consequence, his council was highly sought after by the many competing rulers of the time, and he and his followers gained wide-spread fame. However, emergent aspects of the *Wu Xing* have been discovered that predate Zou Yen by perhaps as much as a thousand years.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> From the forward by the translator of *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*, Richard Wilhelm, Harcourt, Brace, & World, INC. New York, NY. 1962. (p. 11)

<sup>5</sup> This is roughly the same period in which scholars date the compilation of the *Huang Di Nei Jing*, which is the most important classical text in traditional Chinese medicine.

<sup>6</sup> Jarrett, *Nourishing Destiny*, (p.439): “While Yin-Yang theory stretches back into China’s remote antiquity, Five Phases theory was not documented until the fourth century B.C.E. It is nevertheless reasonable to assume that a scheme as complex

We can presume, for example, that Zou Yen’s efforts to organize the *Wu Xing* relied heavily on material from out of the Shang dynasty (1766 - 1122 B.C.E.). Records from the early part of this period include references to the *Ho Tu*, or “Yellow River Map,” which was an important milestone in the development of the five elements. According to legend, an image of the *Ho Tu* was revealed in a vision to the great culture hero, Fu Xi, who was the first of the three mythic sovereigns of ancient China, and who supposedly reigned for 116 years between 2952 - 2836 B.C.E. It was while sitting beside the Yellow River that Fu Xi saw a vision of a ‘dragon-horse,’ or possibly a turtle, rising up out of the water. On its back was a series of lines and dots that formed a kind of upside-down compass.

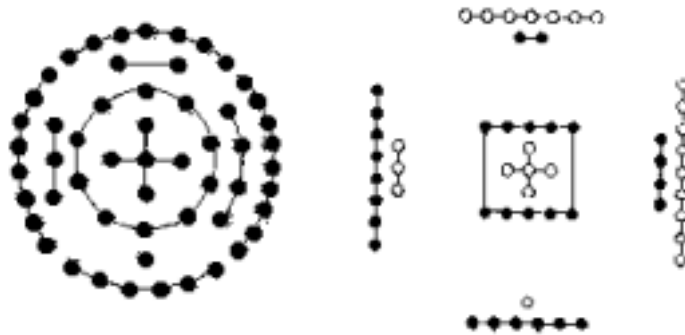


Figure 1: The *Ho Tu* Map in its ancient (left) and modern (right) forms.<sup>7</sup>

This compass was interpreted by Fu Xi as revealing each of the four cardinal directions,

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as Five Phase theory did not emerge spontaneously. The framework must have been gestating for some time. Some intimation of the Five Phases can be found in many writings of the period from about 500 B.C.E. to 200 B.C.E., which was a time of great intellectual, political, and social ferment in China. The Five Phase theory was first systematized by Zou Yen (approximately 350 B.C.E. to 270 B.C.E.) and his followers. The original emphasis of the theory was as much political as it was scientific.”

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.kheper.net/topics/I\\_Ching/history.html](http://www.kheper.net/topics/I_Ching/history.html)

and each associated with a season of the year: South with Summer, North with Winter, East with Spring, and West with Autumn. Each of the cardinal directions was also linked with a ‘trigram’— Qian, Xun, Kan, etc.— which are described in more detail later. The diagonal vectors were paired with an idealized bucolic principle: Mountain (NW), Valley (SE), Thunder (NE), and Wind (SW). The East and West poles were coupled with Fire and Water respectively, and this is historically the first mention of elemental forces that closely resemble their modern counterpart in *Wu Xing* theory.

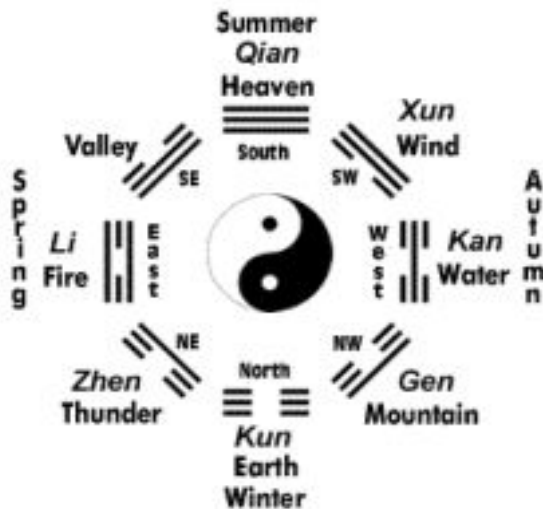


Figure 2: The *Ho Tu* with the Pre-Heaven Trigrams (in Wade-Jiles), the Four Directions, and the Four Seasons.<sup>8</sup>

True, ‘Earth’ is also found on the compass, where it is allied with Winter and the North, but at this stage of history it does not have quite the same connotations as it does in the medical model of *Wu Xing* theory, where it is at once a more active and mundane influence. Instead, Earth is here meant to be juxtaposed against its polar opposite,

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.flc.losrios.edu/~willson/fitns414/handouts/trigrams.html>

Heaven, which sits in the South and belongs to the Summer. In this context, Earth is thought to represent the entire created world in its idealized state. It is thus more akin to the Garden of Eden than it is to dirt and mud. Some have compared it to the Sanskrit concept of ‘*Yoni*,’ which represents the Divine Passage, the Womb, or the Cradle of All Creation.<sup>9</sup>

That said, it could be argued that nothing about the *Ho Tu* is meant to be taken to describe the mundane, its pastoral features to the contrary. What we actually have in the *Ho Tu* is a symbol of the metaverse in what is called its ‘prenatal,’ or ‘Early Heaven’ model. According to a prominent journal:

*“In general terms, Early Heaven represents innate energies. . . Innate, or prenatal energy is genetic and hereditary in nature-- it is life energy that represents life potentiality, or the possibility of life manifestation.”*<sup>10</sup>

The *Ho Tu* is therefore not a map of the world we live in, but rather of Plato’s pure Forms, or the way things exist outside of the influence of time. And it appears to be locked into a rather static, two-dimensional plane of xy coordinates.

In fact, representational thinking in two dimensions was very much in vogue at the time of the *Ho Tu*’s inception. It is certainly no overstatement to say that the early Chinese philosophers were utterly entranced with the dynamics of duality, and the legacy of their explorations into the matter has left a lasting mark not only on Chinese philosophy and culture, but on surfboards and tattooed shoulders the world over. Yes, we are talking

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<sup>9</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I\\_Ching](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Ching)

about the principles of *yin* and *yang* as expressed in the all too familiar *Tai Ji* symbol:



**Figure 3: The '*Tai Ji*,' or 'Supreme Ultimate'**

Interestingly, the theory of *yin* and *yang* owes much of its inception to the *Ho Tu* as well. Though it is hard to imagine, the strange dots and dashes in the original image (see **Figure 1**) were believed to hold the key to understanding its intricacies. Their baffling configuration was perceived as conveying the widest of spiritual profundities, which were ultimately expounded on in what became the most ancient (and arguably most important) text in the Chinese philosophical canon, known as the *Yi Jing*, or “Book of Changes.”

In order to institute a shift from four directions to five elements and in the process uncover a great clue as to how it is that Metal generates Water, we shall have to dive into the depths of the *Yi Jing*. Though the *Yi Jing* is famously complex, in plumbing a line to its murky bottom we shall also gain important insight into the concepts of *yin* and *yang*, *Qi* and the *Dao*, as well as the role of Humanity in Chinese philosophy, which will all serve us very well later on in our investigation. And so in we go, head first.

### The Yi Jing and the Wu Xing

Arriving precisely at an age for the *Yi Jing* is a chore that has defied even the best archeological efforts, but we can safely presume that it is at least 3,000 years old and perhaps as old as 5,000 years, which synchronizes well with the revelation of the *Ho Tu*. Even at its most elementary level, the *Yi Jing* comprises an intensely poetic and intricately mathematical analysis of the relationships between Heaven, Earth, and Humanity. These three forces are represented as three short lines stacked on top of one another horizontally. The bottom line represents Earth, the middle represents Humanity, and the top line represents Heaven.<sup>10</sup> Together, they are referred to as a “trigram.”

In the *Ho Tu*, there are eight trigrams depicted, (as shown in **figure 2**) . They are given names and properties as follows:

Trigram	Name	Meaning	Binary Value	Attribute	Direction	Image
☰	Qian	The Creative	111	Strong	South	Heaven
☷	Kun	The Receptive	000	Devoted, Yielding	North	Earth
☳	Zhen	The Arousing	100	Inciting Movement	Northeast	Thunder
☵	Kan	The Abysmal	010	Dangerous	West	Water
☶	Gen	Keeping Still	001	Resting	Northwest	Mountain
☴	Xun	The Gentle	011	Penetrating	Southwest	Wind
☲	Li	The Clinging	101	Light-giving, Clarity	East	Fire
☱	Dui	The Joyous	110	Joyful	Southeast	Lake

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<sup>10</sup> Chinese ‘Heaven’ is not to be understood in the same way that Westerners understand the word. Heaven was not so much a spiritual place as it was a synonym for ‘fate’, or the will of the gods, or even a personal god. The concept of Heaven was more vague than it is in the West, but the subject was usually the domain of politicians, who used the idea of Heaven to rule by divine permission, or what was called the “Mandate of Heaven.”

Much of the wisdom latent within the trigrams of the *Yi Jing* was drawn out in commentary by Kongfuzi, (better known as Confucius), who had this to say about the arrangement of the Pre-Heaven Trigrams:

*“Water and Fire compensate each other; Thunder and Wind do not disturb each other; Mountain and [Valley] are dependent of each other; Thus only change and transformation become possible, and all things become complete.”<sup>11</sup>*

Discussion regarding the meaning of the different trigrams forms the basis of the *Yi Jing*'s gorgeous text. Its interpretive prose proved so insightful that the book was actually used as a kind of divination tool. Doctors, sages, and royal advisors would cast yarrow stalks or coins to derive the lines of a trigram and then consult the *Yi Jing* for a broadened perspective on life's many challenges. The *Yi Jing* was also used as the source for the increasingly popular Chinese science of geomancy, or *Feng Shui*. But that's the topic of another discussion— back to the trigrams.

The lines of the eight trigrams come in exactly two forms: one that is broken by a small gap in the center (- -), and one that is unbroken; complete (—). In examining the trigrams, we find that the three lines of each trigram multiplied against the two types of lines allows for  $2^3$  possible configurations, which is how we arrive at a total of eight.

The complete lines represent the universal principle of 'yang,' which is a word that describes things that are in a state of brightness, expansion, and ascension; whereas, the broken lines represent the universal principle of 'yin,' which implies a state of darkness, contraction, and descent. *Yang* is penetrating, while *yin* is receptive. *Yang* is function,

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<sup>11</sup> <http://qi-journal.com/philosophy.asp?-Token.FindPage=6&-Token.SearchID=EightTrigrams>

while *yin* is form. Thus, the trigram for Heaven consists of three complete lines, all *yang*, while Earth is represented by three broken lines, all *yin*. They are the top and bottom of each trigram, and are fixed at the vertical polarities of the *Ho Tu*.

### Heaven, Earth, And Humanity

Between these bookends is the world of Humanity, as represented by the middle line of the trigram. The Daoists believed that the human being existed as a kind of metaphysical force in its own right, equal in importance to *yin* and *yang*. More than suggesting that humanity is a kind of bridge between Heaven and Earth, this conceptualization actually holds that it is we humans that provide the context for their creative and destructive interaction, without which their existence would be essentially meaningless. The authors of the *Yi Jing* might just as well have called this line “The Universe,” and it is instructive that they did not. By putting Humanity here, the early Daoists proclaimed that the Universe is defined by our effort to observe and involve ourselves in its expressive probabilities (a sentiment echoed by quantum theorists of today<sup>12</sup>). This viewpoint was truly expressed by Lao Tzu, the founder of Daoism, when he remarked: “*How do I know about the world? By what is within me.*”<sup>13</sup>

Together, these three metaphysical mediums— Heaven, Earth, and Humanity— are said to issue forth from the *Dao*, which is the Center of Being, the Ultimate Expression of Oneness; the Inexpressible Mystery. More literally, it is the ‘Path,’ or the ‘Way.’ This

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<sup>12</sup> See *The Tao of Physics* by Fritjof Capra for an excellent discussion on the relationship between particle physics and Eastern mysticism. Also recommended is the fascinating article in the *New Scientist* entitled *Has Observing The Universe Hastened Its End?* (22<sup>nd</sup> of November, Marcus Chown, Issue 2631) in which modern researchers support this idea of humanity directing the course of reality at even an astronomic level.

<sup>13</sup> *Tao Teh Ching*, translated by John Wu, Ch. 54, p.77



passage from the *Dao De Jing*, the most important classic of Daoism, demonstrates how the Daoists assigned numerological importance to their metaphysical landscape:<sup>14</sup>

*Dao gives birth to one.  
One gives birth to two.  
Two gives birth to three.  
Three gives birth to ten thousand things.*<sup>15</sup>

Here the number “one” represents *Yang*, or Heaven, “two” represents *Yin*, or Earth, and “three” represents Humanity. The “ten thousand things” refers to all of creation. (We shall leave it up to Christian theologians to draw possible comparisons to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to the Book of Genesis. It is certainly tempting to do so. As Goethe said: “*Orient and Occident can no longer be kept apart.*”)<sup>16</sup>

This interpretation of the numerology in the above passage is supported by another verse from the *Dao De Jing*:

*Man follows the ways of Earth,  
The Earth follows the ways of Heaven,  
Heaven follows the ways of Dao,  
Dao follows its own ways.  
Thus, Man is one of the great four in the Universe.*<sup>17</sup>

So it is clear, then, that we have a metaphysics that focuses on the number ‘four’: There are the four cardinal directions, the four seasons, and now the four absolute powers in the cosmos.

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<sup>14</sup> *Who Can Ride the Dragon? An Exploration of the Cultural Roots of China*, Zhang Yu Huan and Ken Rose, Paradigm Publications, Brookline, Massachusetts, 1999 (p. 108)

<sup>15</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 42, translated by S. Mitchell

<sup>16</sup> From the forward of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, translated by Richard Wilhelm, p.10

<sup>17</sup> *Tao Teh Ching*, translated by John Wu, Ch. 25, p.35

### The Need For *Qi*

It is all very tidy and square. The problem with the number four, however, is that it lacks movement. It provides a lovely grid-map for the multiverse, but only if life remain static, which it never does. Indeed, the picture painted by the latter stanza seems to be missing that quintessential component of the former: The issuing forth of life and of the ten thousand things. Clearly it was important to the early Daoists to organize their universe around the number four; however, to set it in motion, to allow it to flow, they would need to breath vitality into their metaphysics. In short, the problem was a dearth of “*qi*.”

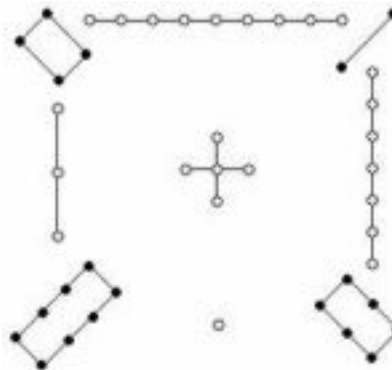
Though purely expressed in Heaven and Earth, the forces of *yin* and *yang* rarely exist alone in the natural world (being the world of Humanity). In a normal state of affairs, *yin* and *yang* will be found containing, creating, and complementing one another. It is their mutual interchange and interaction which engenders heat, life, and energy. These forces are loosely summed up by the Chinese in the word “*qi*.” *Qi*, in turn, expresses itself by further promoting the movement of give-and-take in the cycles of *yin* and *yang*. This perfectly balanced relationship has been elegantly and, we presume, inadvertently expressed in the equation  $E=mc^2$ , in which energy (*qi*) equals mass (*yin*) times the speed of light (*yang*) squared. *Qi* can also be thought of as air, or breath— its Chinese character is composed of an image of steam rising out of a pot. Thus, the issuing forth of

the “ten thousand things” could be thought of as the breath of Humanity, and in this sense *qi* bears considerable likeness to the yogic concept of *prana*. This interpretation helps

explain why the Chinese never thought to include ‘Air’ as one of their elements. Between the concepts of *qi* and Heaven,<sup>18</sup> the Chinese already had it well covered.

### The *Lo Shu* Map

Clearly, *Qi* opens the possibility of reinterpreting the eight trigrams in such a way as to include the Human, the world as it is, and all the living processes of our temporal existence. Thus, we come at last to the arrival of the five phases, which are said to dominate all activity in this reality. It was in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century B.C.E., about seven hundred years after Fu Xi saw the turtle, that it made a second appearance— this time arising from out of the Lo River. Yu the Great, a legendary ruler of impeccable character, bore witness to the event. He observed and recorded a new compass on its dorsal shell, which became known as the ‘*Lo Shu* Map’:



**Figure 4: The *Lo Shu* Map**

In this new configuration of dots and dashes, we have a seemingly simple 3x3 grid of grouped points representing the numbers one through nine, with even numbers in the corners and odd numbers on the sides. Like the *Ho Tu*, the number five appears at the

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<sup>18</sup> The Chinese term for Heaven was also used to reference the sky, much as it is in the Western phrase ‘the canopy of the Heavens.’”

center, and this is no accident. ‘Five’ connotes ‘perfect balance’ to the Chinese, and its central position is of extreme importance in their minds. Indeed, the character for the word ‘China’ is composed of two characters that together mean ‘middle country.’ But there is a curious new feature to this arrangement, which is that the sum of any of its rows, columns, or diagonals equals the number ‘15.’ In recreational mathematics, this is referred to as a ‘magic square.’

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

**Figure 5: The Magic Square**

The interplay of numbers within and between the *Ho Tu* and the magic square of the *Lo Shu* is astonishingly complex,<sup>19</sup> and the astrological significance of these arrangements was the source of extensive study throughout the ages. The number ‘15,’ for example,

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<sup>19</sup> Here are a couple dizzying passages from Wikipedia’s article ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic\\_square](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic_square)) on the mathematics of the *Ho Tu* and *Lo Shu*:

The Square of Lo Shu is also referred to as the Magic Square of Saturn or Cronos. Its numerical value is obtained from the workings of the I Ching when the Trigrams are placed in an order given in the first river map, the Ho Tu or Yellow River. The Ho Tu produces 4 squares of Hexagrams 8 x 8 in its outer values of 1 to 6, 2 to 7, 3 to 8, and 4 to 9, and these outer squares can then be symmetrically added together to give an inner central square of 5 to 10. The central values of the Ho Tu are those of the Lo Shu (so they work together), since in the total value of 15 x 2 (light and dark) is found the number of years in the cycle of equinoctial precession (12,960 x 2 = 25,920). The Ho Tu produces a total of 40 light and 40 dark numbers called the days and nights (the alternations of light and dark), and a total of 8 x 8 x 8 Hexagrams whose opposite symmetrical addition equals 8640, therefore each value of a square is called a season as it equals 2160. 8640 is the number of hours in a 360-day year, and 2160 years equals an aeon (12 aeons = 25,920 yrs). To validate the values contained in the 2 river maps (Ho Tu and Lo Shu) the I Ching provides numbers of Heaven and Earth that are the ‘Original Trigrams’ (father and mother) from 1 to 10. Heaven or a Trigram with all unbroken lines (light lines - yang) have odd numbers 1,3,5,7,9, and Earth a Trigram with all broken lines have even numbers 2,4,6,8,10. If each of the Trigram’s lines is given a value by multiplying the numbers of Heaven and Earth, then the value of each line in Heaven 1 would be 1 + 2 + 3 = 6, and its partner in the Ho Tu of Earth 6 would be 6 + 12 + 18 = 36, these 2 ‘Original Trigrams’ thereby produce 6 more Trigrams (or children in all their combinations) -- and when the sequences of Trigrams are placed at right angles to each other they produce an 8 x 8 square of Hexagrams (or cubes) that each have 6 lines of values. From this simple point the complex structure of the maths evolves as a hexadecimal progression, and it is the hexagon that is the link to the turtle or tortoise shell. In Chinese texts of the I Ching the moon is symbolic of water (darkness) whose transformations or changes create the light or fire - the dark value 6 creates the light when its number is increased by 1. This same principle can be found in ancient calendars such as the Egyptian, as the 360 day year of 8640 hrs was divided by 72 to produce the 5 extra days or 120 hours on which the gods were born. It takes 72 years for the heavens to move 1 degree through its Precession.

holds great meaning to the ancient Chinese because they divided their calendar into twenty-four periods of fifteen days. Thus, the resounding power and significance of the *Lo Shu* is that it anchored the Chinese philosophers to the temporal world. It is a diagram of the ordinary, the everyday. Juxtapose this against etherealness of the *Ho Tu*, and one could say that the Chinese now had both a map of both their inner and outer realities.

### The Post-Heaven Sequence

It should come as no surprise, then, that the next step for the ancient sages was to revisit the Eight Trigrams under the bold new revelation of the *Lo Shu*. It is unclear whether this inevitable reinterpretation of the trigrams came about via the efforts of Yu the Great, or by the epic hero, King Wen, who lived roughly 1,000 years after Yu's reign— the experts contradict one another on this point, though most fall into the camp of the latter.<sup>20</sup>

However, one might reasonably argue that the inspiration for a new trigram sequence came out of the necessity for justifying the seasonal and directional compass of the *Lo Shu*, (which was essentially the same as that of the *Ho Tu*), with the calendrical insights of the magic square (versus the *Ho Tu*'s proto-natural themes of Mountain, Wind, etc.) In other words, the question must have been: 'How to arrange the trigrams around the *Lo Shu* so as to summon forth a manifest rather than pre-manifest universe?' The answer came in the form of the 'Post-Heaven Sequence,' as shown below:

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<sup>20</sup> M. Alan Kazlev of [www.kheper.net](http://www.kheper.net) has Yu as the deviser of the Late Heaven Sequence, whereas Dr. Gary Dolowich has King Wen taking responsibility. The Late Heaven Sequence is often called the King Wen Sequence, which would seem to lend credence to the latter camp.

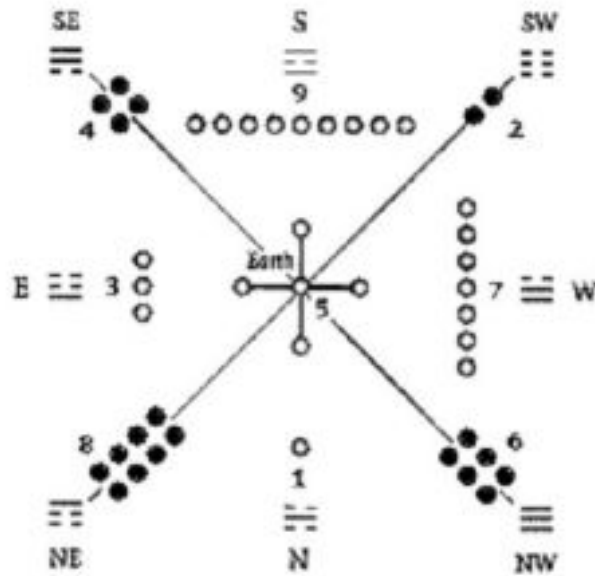


Figure 6: The *Lo Shu* with the four directions, the numbers of the Magic Square, and the Post Heaven Trigrams

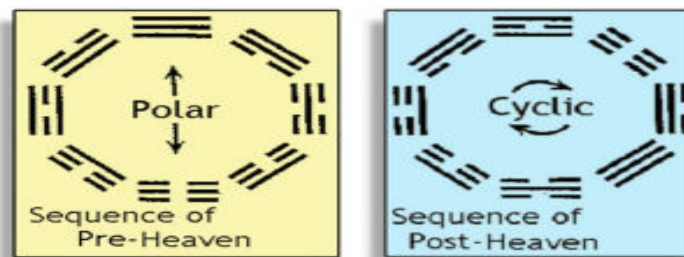


Figure 7: Pre-Heaven and Post-Heaven Sequences side-by-side for ease of comparison.

Notice how the Post-Heaven Trigrams of **Figure 7** (right) no longer share the polarity of the Pre-Heaven Sequence (left), in which Water was mirrored by Fire, Earth by Heaven, etc. This lack of balance across the compass was a pivotal innovation of the *Lo Shu*, expressing perfectly its emphasis on the movement of time through the cycles of

terrestrial existence. Notice also how the Earth element has been moved to the center of the picture (see **Figure 6**), as if to offset the asymmetrical wobble of the Post-Heaven Trigrams. The association of Earth with the center of things makes a great deal of inherent sense, especially given the *Lo Shu*'s material focus.<sup>21</sup> It also explains why the number '5' is also associated with 'movement,'<sup>22</sup> for its position at the axle allows the Wheel of Life to turn. If we envision the Earth axle arising out of the wheel like the spin axis of a gyroscope,<sup>23</sup> then the *Lo Shu* can be seen as existing on three planes (with an x, y, and z axis), four dimensions (including time), and five vectors (East, West, North, South, and Inward) of reality. The reason, therefore, that the Chinese have five elements has hopefully become clear—it is to set the whole arrangement firmly in the manifest and ever-changing universe of the here and now.

### Earth In The Balance

But shifting Earth to the middle leaves us wondering about the attributive aspects of the new trigram configuration. If Earth is at the center, then what is balancing Heaven? The answer, in fact, is that there is no 'Heaven' in the *Lo Shu*, for this is a map of the Human world.<sup>24</sup> Because Humanity stands between Heaven and Earth, it then follows that the place of the Human in the *Lo Shu* is also at the center, reaching inward and upward on the z axis towards Heaven.<sup>25</sup> In Heaven's place, however, come the Elements.

It would appear that sometime between the development of the *Ho Tu* and the *Lo Shu*,

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<sup>21</sup> "The number five allows us to navigate in the material world and to discern how the influence of early heaven impacts the functioning of material reality." Jarrett, *Nourishing Destiny*, (p.121)

<sup>22</sup> "Five is a number that is inherently connected to movement..." *Archetypal Acupuncture: Healing with the Five Elements*, Gary Dolowich, M.D., (p. 53)

<sup>23</sup> *Between Heaven and Earth: A Guide To Chinese Medicine* by Harriet Beinfield, L.Ac. and Efram Korngold, L.Ac., O.M.D. has an excellent illustration of the Earth as spin axle to the other elements on p.90, 1991 edition, Ballantine Books, New York.

<sup>24</sup> Because Humanity stands between Heaven and Earth, it then follows that the place of the Human in the *Lo Shu* is also at the center, reaching inward and upward on the z axis toward Heaven.

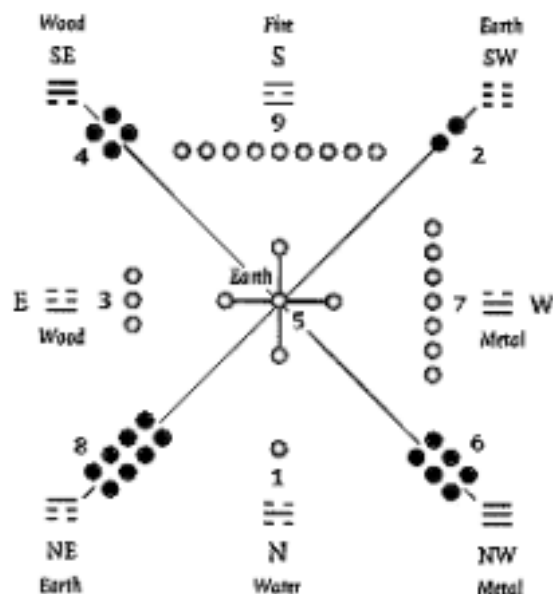
<sup>25</sup> One can imagine the Earth axle as being a kind of extension of the *Ho Tu* on the z axis, with the Earth wrapping around the Human, which wraps around Heaven in concentric circles.

the linking of the Fire and Water *Xing* in the Pre-Heaven Sequence with Summer and Winter, respectively, must have raised the issue of the other seasons and their need for descriptive elements of their own. The consequent theoretical exploration lead to the development of two quite original phases: Metal and Wood. Metal for the Autumnal season and Wood for Spring. Wood and Metal also help to keep the *Lo Shu* moving, for Wood has a vitalizing and uplifting quality, perfectly suited to Springtime, and this is counter-balanced by Metal, which has a heavy and sundering quality, which suits the Autumn season's falling leaves and descent into Winter very nicely.<sup>26</sup> Each is especially well suited to the *Lo Shu*, for they are really children of the natural world, rather than the spiritual— certainly more so than Water and Fire. Western religious tradition is rich with examples of Fire and Water as religious symbols. In the vacuum of pre-existence, we find the God of Genesis hovering over the Waters, and out of the nothing are uttered the first words: “Let there be light,” which could be seen as the summoning of the primordial Fire. Wood, on the other hand, takes its roots in the Earth, and Metal is dug out from within her.

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<sup>26</sup> “Metal represents functions in a declining state.” Kaptchuck, *The Web That Has No Weaver*, (p.438)





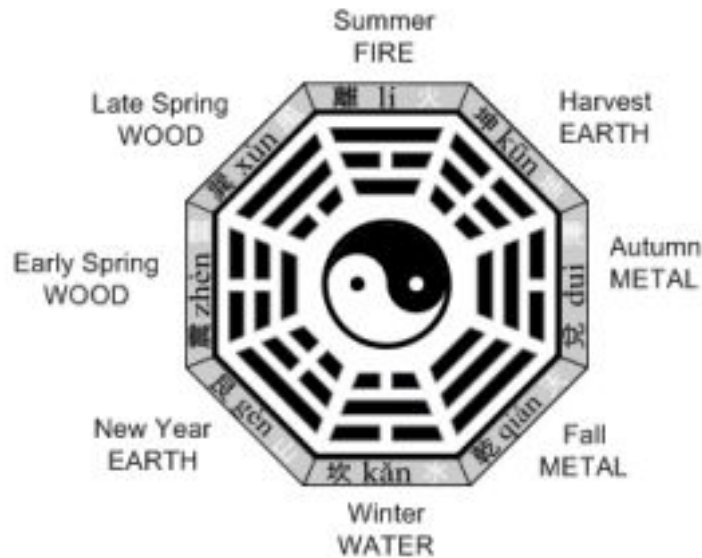
**Figure 8: The *Lo Shu* with the *Wu Xing* and the Late Heaven Trigrams of King Wen, with the Elements now in place: Wood in the East (Spring), Fire in the South (Summer), Metal in the West (Fall), Water to the North (Winter), and Earth at the Center, as well as in the Northeast and Southwest.**

In the same way, we find Yu’s careful placement of the elements around the *Lo Shu* allows for each of the *Xing* to unfold one from out of the other. This key characteristic of the *Wu Xing* leads us, finally, to the generating cycle—Wood creating Fire, Fire creating Earth, Earth creating Metal, and Metal creating Water, each in exact correspondence to the rise and fall of the seasons. Just as the seasons blend into one another from month to month, so do the elements; just as the seasons represent stations in the cycle of growth and transformation for all things that live and die, so also do the elements.

### The Meaning Of The Trigrams

Further insight into each of the elements and the rationale for their placement around the *Lo Shu* can be had by exploring the new meanings ascribed to the Eight Trigrams as they

are positioned in the Post-Heaven Sequence. Let us follow them around the map and see where they take us.



**Figure 9: The Post-Heaven Trigrams (Pinyin)**

Our days begin with the rising of the sun, and our year begins with the rushing upward of Spring’s vitality. It is appropriate, therefore, that the beginning of the Post-Heaven Sequence starts in the East. The Wood element symbolizes the sprouting of green reproductive energies, and it is most fittingly and evocatively set to the trigram *Zhen*, which means ‘The Arousing.’ Next comes the trigram *Xun*, the ‘Gentle,’ which also belongs to Wood, this time showing its softer side. This is Late Spring, when the flowers are in bloom, and the wind blows peacefully through the grass. Nature is at its best, and it is time for picnics.

Spring is followed by Summer, which has the single trigram *Li*, or ‘Clinging.’ The heat sticks to you, the plants have grown thick and tangled, and life is in a state of over

abundance. It is the culmination of yang, and its color is red.

Summer is followed by a bounty in the garden of vegetables and rich orange and yellow hues, heralding the arrival of the Earth element. Its placement here is nothing short of revolutionary— by pulling it from out of the center to join the march of the seasons, the concept of ‘Earth’ makes a concrete transition from its role in the *Ho Tu* as Primordial Birthplace, to simply being ‘earthy.’ Situating Earth at the diagonals further accentuates its role as provider of momentum.<sup>27</sup> Earth is now not only the axle but the spokes of the Wheel as well. Its trigram, *Kun*, implies ‘Receptivity, Yielding,’ and it allows the Earth to join the other *Xing* in the generating cycle as the time for harvest.

Along comes Autumn. Festivities and celebrations abound, for the work in the fields has been completed. Thus, the trigram *Dui* is called ‘Joyous,’ and it represents the satisfaction that comes from the fruits of labor. Metal makes the plow and the tools for tilling the land possible; it chops the wood that allows us to surviving the coming winter, and it makes the glimmering treasures by which we reward ourselves. Indeed, in early agrarian societies, the Autumn season was dominated by the mining, forging, and working of metal. *Qian*, the trigram that had once been ‘Heaven,’<sup>28</sup> is called ‘Creator’ in the *Lo Shu*. It is associated with the virtuous father, whose color is white, and its placement at the second stage of the Metal element in Autumn is intriguing. It suggests

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<sup>27</sup> Note also how Earth’s placement in the sequence seems to balance the lifting and descending of the uprising yang of Wood and the descending yin of Metal. Also, note the way the trigrams take on a resemblance to the *Tai Ji* symbol. Wood gets two trigrams in a row—it is as if the yang rises up and culminates in its archetypal expression, Fire. Metal also gets two trigrams in a row—it is as if the yin descends downward and culminates in its archetypal expression, Water. The Earth’s position could then be seen as the balancing place between these two sweeping forces; it at once returns things to a resting position of neutrality, and keeps yin and yang transforming into each other.

<sup>28</sup> The fact that the Heaven trigram of the *Ho Tu* is now placed in the season of Metal supports the commonly accepted idea that there is a connection between Metal and the Western element of Air. As we will learn later, Metal is also the element of the lung, which further strengthens the correlation.

that this is a time of year for governing, for looking toward Heaven, and for giving thanks.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the Metal element is very much associated with maturing into adulthood and looking inward towards the Divine. But Metal also has a lifeless weight; it bears downward, bringing the cycle of the seasons to its conclusion. Metal also belongs to Fall,<sup>30</sup> when the air grows sharp, the trees become like bronze statues, and the *qi* descends. It leads us to winter, which is dominated by Water.

The trigram for Winter is *Kan*, the ‘Abysmal.’ How powerful! In Wintertime we shun the outdoors, holing up within ourselves as everything around us dies. It reminds us of the inevitability of our own death. Facing our death leads first to fear, then to wisdom; thus, this is the time for spiritual courage and communion with the Divine. Water represents the end stage of our life, and its color is black.

But let us interrupt this walk around the trigrams; for it seems, at last, that we have a solution to our primary inquiry. The *Yi Jing* argues that Metal is in the right place in the generating cycle, because Metal best describes the Autumn season. Autumn is followed by Winter, which is dominated by Water. So the trigrams of the *Yi Jing* teach us that Metal does indeed generate Water in a profound and organic way, so long as you stir in a

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<sup>29</sup> Is it just a coincidence that this is the time of year when we choose to give thanks and elect our leaders and patriarchs here in the U.S.? One might assume these traditions come from a time in our country when people followed the natural order of the seasons. Indeed, Wikipedia suggests that Election day comes in early November “because the harvest would have been completed (important in an agrarian society) and the winter storms would not yet have begun in earnest (a plus in the days before paved roads and snowplows).”

<sup>30</sup> The words Autumn and Fall carry slightly different connotations, and their separate use and placement in this order is deliberate. In ancient Chinese astronomy, the Autumnal equinox fell much earlier than ours, in the middle of August. Accordingly, Autumn speaks more to a time of festival and celebration. The latin root is perhaps derived from *av*, which means to ‘satisfy oneself.’ Fall, on the other hand, clearly represents the descent into Winter. It heralds a coming time of death and transformation. Jarrett, in *Nourishing Destiny*, (p.260) sums up the point: “The season associated with the metal element is termed the *fall* in English. On an external level, it is a fall from the height of life back into the void and barrenness of winter. On an inner level, however, this may be seen not as a fall, but as a return to origin in a more highly evolved state.”

missing element—the Human being. Understand, the Chinese did not see Humanity as somehow separate from either the Divine or the Natural ordering of things. As we learned from the *Dao De Jing*: “*Man is one of the great four in the Universe.*” It was therefore no great stretch for philosophers to include elements like Wood and Metal in their cosmic scheme, for these were the elements of Humanity, which, at the time of the development of *Wu Xing* theory, was locked in an agricultural experience that had everything to do with iron plows<sup>31</sup> and bamboo stalks. And the agrarian life is entirely dominated by the ordering of the seasons. For these ancient people, Metal-time was followed by Water-time, as surely as day follows night. To argue with them otherwise might lead them to believe that perhaps you had not chopped your wood and would therefore never make it through the cold nights of Autumn’s end to greet the Winter. Thus, when we let go of the idea of *Xing* as ‘elements’ and emphasize that they are in reality ‘phases,’ or active processes in time, and if we see from the perspective of the Human, then we can start to appreciate why Metal can, indeed, generate Water.

And now to finish with the Post-Heaven Sequence. Traditionally, the next and final trigram lies in Earth’s domain, though some argue that it is in fact an extension of Water.

<sup>32</sup> It is *Gen*, or “Keeping Still,” and it might best be thought of as the hard, frozen ground of Winter in which nothing grows, nothing moves, and all has come to rest. In its

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<sup>31</sup> “The earliest iron plow found in northern Hunan dates from the Warring States period (475-221 B.C.E.),” according to <http://www.computersmiths.com>, which hosts an extremely extensive history of Chinese industry and invention. They cite Robert Temple and Joseph Needham, the preeminent Chinese historian, as their sources. This dating scheme synchs very well with the systemization of the *Wu Xing* by Zou Yen, who must have been struck by the utility of the iron moldboard plowshare. (It might not seem like much to get excited about, but the iron moldboard plow was a critical technology that was invented in China 1,400 years before it came to be used in Europe. When they finally arrive in Holland during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, these plowshares ushered in the Agricultural Revolution.) True, the *Lo Shu* was supposedly around at the time of the Shang dynasty, considerably before the iron age, but there had been bronze in China since roughly 3,000 B.C.E.

<sup>32</sup> “This trigram can certainly be related to the element Water, as it holds in its stillness the potential for what will unfold in the coming year.” *Archetypal Acupuncture: Healing with the Five Elements*, Gary Dolowich, M.D., (p. 240)

stillness, it is like a return to the center of the *Lo Shu*, to the primordial Earth.<sup>33</sup> But in the sense that time never stops flowing in the Post-Heaven Sequence, it is also like the Water element, now turned to ice. Eventually, however, even the glaciers retreat, and out of the mix of earth and water<sup>34</sup> the world is renewed.

### The Generating Cycle In Macrocosm

*“The water of the sea is smooth and mirrors the moon in its surface.”*<sup>35</sup>

#### Evolutionary Procession

This metaphor of retreating glaciers is actually quite helpful because it draws a parallel between the seasons of the year, so beautifully articulated in the trigrams of the Post Heaven Sequence, and the greater story of the Earth’s own journey as it relates to the *Wu Xing*. There is certainly a kind of pan-historic or evolutionary way of appreciating the generating cycle of the Elements, and exploring it at a macroscopic level will help provide a wide backdrop for our investigations into its minutia.

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<sup>33</sup> “The trigram *Ken*, mountain, Keeping Still, is the symbol of meditation, which, by keeping external things quiescent, gives life to the inner world. Therefore *Ken* is the place where death and life meet, where ‘Stirb und Werde’ is consummated.” (p.18) [*Stirb und Werde* means ‘death and becoming.’] *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, Translated by Richard Wilhelm, Harcourt, Brace, & World, INC. New York, NY, 1962 (p.18)

<sup>34</sup> The modern generating cycle of *Wu Xing* theory has dropped Earth’s placement at this juncture in favor of an extension of Water, and that is a real pity. Sure, Wood comes out of Water, but not without a little soil to plant its roots in. The watering of the earth to make wood is a much better metaphor. Removing Earth from this position also denies its role as balancing point between the rising and descending forces of *yin* and *yang*.

<sup>35</sup> *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, (p.77)



**Figure 10: The Generating Cycle of the Five Phases**

One could argue, for example, that the Water element marks point zero on the planetary timeline, for it represents the vast, empty oceans of primordial earth. Again, the image of God floating alone above the lifeless waters comes to mind. But living things did eventually appear in this world. When God<sup>36</sup> said "*Let the earth sprout vegetation,*"<sup>37</sup> what He functionally said was, "Let there be life." Wood is the only phase represented by organic matter, and its nature is to rise up and flourish. The Wood element, then, represents the beginning of life in this world. Next comes Fire, which signifies the spark of conscious awareness, self-directed movement, and red-bloodedness. It is quite natural to see it as the phase belonging to the arrival of the animal, especially the reptile. The ego emerges from the reptilian brain, and its expressions, desires, and passions are powered by Fire. Mammals, on the other hand, with their inclination towards mothering and nurturing, belong to the Earth element. They are the culmination of the planet's work in

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<sup>36</sup> Warning & Disclaimer: As may be apparent by now, this paper will include discussion about God, Jesus, Love, and the Divine, and it will reference the bible on occasion. Keep in mind, the author of this paper does not claim any particular religion as his own, and there is no hidden agenda here to preach or convert. The bible stories are the inheritance of our collective Western culture, and if including them or the stories of any other spiritual tradition proves instructive, then they will respectfully be included to support this thesis. That said, apologies are offered in advance if the paper offends any deeply held religious convictions, or worse, if it starts to sound like a sermon.

<sup>37</sup> Genesis 1:11

the sphere of animal life, the top of the food chain, and therefore it is in the Earth phase of the Earth's development that Humanity steps into the picture. The human being spent who knows how many hundreds of thousands of years living in a state of savage purity, and it is this prehistoric aspect within our modern selves that is governed by the Earth phase. Metal, therefore, represents the development of tools, technological savvy, and the other signs of moral and intellectual maturity that came with the dawn of civilization. One need not look past the gold rims of one's glasses to see that we live in the time of Metal right now. Indeed, the prevailing taxonomy of our social reality could be summed up by an amusing anecdote from Douglas Adams' science fiction classic, *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*, where, upon arriving in England, a space alien decides to take on the name 'Ford Prefect' after wrongly assuming the dominant life form on the planet is the automobile.

### Returning To Water

Metal completes the circle, but the cycle never stops. The question then becomes, what will the inevitable transformation back to the Water phase look like for the world and for humanity? As is typical of inquiries into the secrets of Water, the answer can only be had by patiently waiting it out.<sup>38</sup> Yet, one cannot help but point to the deluge myths for one possible (certainly more pessimistic) resolution.

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<sup>38</sup> "The road to the Water of Life feels crooked and dark, its direction uncertain." *Men and the Water of Life*, (p. 302). Also, this from the Dao De Jing:

*Do you have the patience to wait  
till your mud settles and the water is clear?  
Can you remain unmoving  
till the right action arises by itself?*



Book Six of Genesis explains God's rationale for washing the Earth clean of mankind:

*Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them."<sup>39</sup>*

The tools made during Metal-time can be used for parsing ideas and cutting away spiritual falsehoods or for hacking at flesh and the planet itself. Every human being alive today has grown up under the threat of total global annihilation by an ultra-violence; it is only by a triumph of moral imagination over baser instincts that we have survived thus far. But we are not out of the water yet, for the heat of our global industrial forge has so far upset the natural balance that generations to come may live in a world that, like a pot, has quite literally boiled over.

But Water has a twofold temperament,<sup>40</sup> as Lao Tzu observes:

*Nothing in the world  
is as soft and yielding as water.  
Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible,  
nothing can surpass it.<sup>41</sup>*

Accordingly, we have two options— embrace the wisdom of yielding, or be dissolved away. Become soft, or drown under the combined weight of our self-destructive fears.

As Michael Meade, the well-known archetypal psychologist, puts it: "*On the way to the Water of Life, acceptance is more valuable than will, and surrender more meaningful*

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<sup>39</sup> Genesis 6:11-13, New International Version

<sup>40</sup> "The rhythm of water possesses two beats that define the destiny of each human being. These moments of time reflect the conception and death of each thing that comes into existence." Jarret, *Nourishing Destiny* (p. 179)

<sup>41</sup> Chapter 78, translated by S. Mitchell, <http://acc6.its.brooklyn.cuny.edu/~phalsall/texts/taote-v3.html>

than force.”<sup>42</sup> The *Dao De Jing*, China’s most treasured compilation of Daoist wisdom, offers us clear instruction on how to succeed in transitioning into Water-time:

*The supreme good is like water,  
which nourishes all things without trying to.  
It is content with the low places that people disdain.  
Thus it is like the Dao.*

*In dwelling, live close to the ground.  
In thinking, keep to the simple.  
In conflict, be fair and generous.  
In governing, don't try to control.  
In work, do what you enjoy.  
In family life, be completely present.*

*When you are content to be simply yourself  
and don't compare or compete,  
everybody will respect you.*<sup>43</sup>

One hopes that “everybody,” in this case, includes the Earth itself. Regardless, it seems that, in the course of our endeavor to learn how Water might come from out of Metal, we have discovered a hidden imperative—for the sake of our survival as a species, we must decide that the form of the Water phase be that of the ‘supreme good.’ The alternative is a leviathan<sup>44</sup> that consumes the world.

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<sup>42</sup> *Men and the Water of Life: Initiation and the Tempering of Men*, Michael Meade, Harper Collins, New York, NY, 1993, (p. 302)

<sup>43</sup> *Tao Te Ching*, Ch. 8, translated by S. Mitchell

<sup>44</sup> Leviathan, the sea-dragon of the bible, is often associated with the end of the world. Job 3:8: "May those who curse days curse that day, those who are ready to rouse Leviathan." Or as it told in Isaiah 27:1: "In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea." Of course, many ancient myths of the sea-dragon have him eating his tail, as with the Ouroboros of Greece, and the Nordic Midgard Serpent, which symbolized that even in the end times, things will have a way of looping on around to their beginnings. In this sense, the sea-serpent represents the negative aspect of the cycle of renewal. But renewal is still on the table, and that’s not all bad. As Robert Bly puts it in *Iron John* (p.204): “The dragon in the old myths is not evil. He’s a dark water-energy, a little regressed maybe, but his hunger is old and understandable.” So do not be glum—even if humanity fails to enter the Water phase carefully, life will rise anew, and the *Wu Xing* will continue spinning the wheels of karma, just as they always do.

## The Generating Cycle In Microcosm

*“In five element theory it is impossible to discuss one function without eventually discussing all of them.”<sup>45</sup>*

### A New Science

Having now explored the *Wu Xing* in the grand historic context of the birth of the planet and the evolution of our Earth journey, it is time to take a closer look at how the elements work through the phases of a single human life. Our plan in doing so is to discover along the way a route within the human psyche by which Metal could be said to create Water.

To get to the psyche, we may have to untangle the threads that hold together body and soul. This is a less difficult task in the context of the Chinese intellectual tradition than it would be in the West, where the problem of Cartesian duality, or how it is that the soul interfaces with the body, was rarely considered by the giants of European philosophy for fear of treading on church dogma.<sup>46</sup> The Chinese, on the other hand, never outsourced their ontological inquiries to a single holy book, which unfortunately for Westerners, proved surprisingly mute on the matter. Instead, they took the issue into their own hands and experimented like pioneers of a new science. Their work resulted in a profound and expansive understanding of the relationship between the body, the spirit, and the many facets of the soul. In particular, it conveyed to the world an entirely new branch of knowledge in the form of the map of the meridian system and its acupuncture points.

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<sup>45</sup> *Nourishing Destiny*, (p.131)

<sup>46</sup> When they did make forays into the question, it was handled tentatively at best. (The pineal gland, Rene? Really?)

These channels of energy that course the length of the body and the energy centers that dot their pathways could be viewed by Westerners as the long lost missing line of communication between organs and soul, flesh and spirit. Indeed, the relationship between the meridians, the internal organs, and the *Wu Xing* form a completely synthesized and internally harmonious explanation for how the soul interacts with and progresses through this life. For example, each of the five phases was seen to manifest in the body along multiple categories of human existentiality, both interiorly and exteriorly, only some of which are listed below:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Wood</b>	<b>Fire</b>	<b>Earth</b>	<b>Metal</b>	<b>Water</b>
<b>Yin Organ</b>	Liver	Heart	Spleen	Lung	Kidney
<b>Yang Organ</b>	Gall Bladder	Small Bowel	Stomach	Colon	Bladder
<b>Virtue</b>	Courage	Passion	Compassion	Righteousness	Wisdom
<b>Emotion</b>	Anger	Joy	Worry	Grief	Fear
<b>Weakness</b>	Anxiety	Cruelty	Depression	Insecurity	Fright
<b>Sense Organ</b>	Eyes	Tongue	Mouth/Lips	Nose	Ears
<b>Flavor</b>	Sour	Bitter	Sweet	Pungent	Salty
<b>Dislikes</b>	Wind	Heat	Dampness	Dryness	Cold
<b>Odor</b>	Rancid	Scorched	Fragrant	Rotten	Putrid
<b>Voice</b>	Shouting	Laughing	Singing	Crying	Groaning
<b>Tissue</b>	Tendons	Vessels	Muscles	Skin	Bones
<b>Exterior</b>	Nails	Complexion	Lips	Body Hair	Head Hair
<b>Difficulty</b>	Reading	Walking	Sitting	Lying	Standing
<b>Dislikes</b>	Wind	Heat	Dampness	Dryness	Cold
<b>Stage</b>	Birth	Growth	Change	Decline	Death/Renewal
<b>Soul</b>	Soul ( <i>Hun</i> )	Spirit ( <i>Shen</i> )	Thinking ( <i>Yi</i> )	Anima ( <i>Po</i> )	Will ( <i>Zhi</i> )

<b>Season</b>	Spring	Summer	Indian Summer	Autumn	Winter
<b>Color</b>	Green	Red	Yellow	White	Black
<b>Number</b>	8 & 3	7 & 2	10 & 5	9 & 4	6 & 1
<b>Planet</b>	Jupiter	Mars	Saturn	Venus	Mercury
<b>Direction</b>	East	South	Center	West	North
<b>Heavens</b>	Stars	Sun	Earth	Constellations	Moon

### Going Into The Black

As might already be apparent from the ‘Stage’ category above, the Chinese have long associated the five phases with specific aspects of the growth stages of human life: Wood with birth and childhood, Fire with adolescence, Earth with child-bearing years, Metal with late adulthood, and Water with old age and death. In the Western tradition, similar associations have been made by contemporary depth psychologists. One noted example is the author, Robert Bly, who describes the processes of maturation that a man must undertake in his poetic masterpiece, *Iron John*. He sums up the work as follows:

*“If we take nothing else away from the Iron John story, we could usefully take this idea that the young male moves from red intensity to white engagement to black humanity.”<sup>47</sup>*

Here we see a progression that lines up nicely with the red Fire of adolescence, the white Metal of late adulthood, and the black Water<sup>48</sup> of old age, death, and renewal. (Earth’s yellow is skipped by Bly, but doing so is not uncommon even amongst Chinese philosophers, who often put Earth in the role of transitional element and place it

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<sup>47</sup> Robert Bly’s *Iron John*, (p.205)

<sup>48</sup> ‘Blackwater Worldwide,’ the private military contracting outfit that has seen so much time in the news lately due to controversies over its role in Iraq, would seem, in this context, to have taken on a name with a loaded meaning: ‘Death.’ One wonders if it was deliberate.

between the intersection of the other phases.<sup>49</sup> Hence the label ‘Change’ in the chart under the ‘Stage’ category. Wood is skipped as well, but is that not always the case with childhood in our biographies? Even Jesus’ childhood gets overlooked by the authors of the New Testament. It is as though the child is so green, he is more like a plant in the mother’s garden rather than a red-blooded animal capable of moving independently in the world. Until the child becomes an individual in its own right, society seems unconcerned with their thoughts and deeds.) Bly helps us enormously with his rich descriptions of the red, white, and black phases, particularly the latter two, which, as Metal and Water, are the subject of our survey. He describes the white phase here:

*“A white knight is gleaming and shining. We usually make fun of that, but a white knight is also engaged. He fights for the good, and he is no longer randomly antisocial. . . Looked at positively, we could say that going into the white means that a man can have a relationship with the dragon.”*<sup>50</sup>

The white knight knows his place in the world; he does not question his mission.<sup>51</sup> His task is to conquer the small self of Fire-time. He sacrifices himself for the betterment of the Great Self; for the soul of Humanity. With his sword, he cleaves a straight line between right and wrong—there is no grey area. His courageous<sup>52</sup> death will bring honor

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<sup>49</sup> This harkens back to Earth’s role as spokes and axle of the Wheel, as establishes by the *Lo Shu*.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Bly’s *Iron John*, (p.204). Again, we are reminded that the sea-dragon, the leviathan, awaits those that step into the violence of the Metal phase. But being able to face the dragon does not necessarily imply that one becomes the dragon. Nor does conquering the dragon necessarily mean slaying it. As Bly goes on to say: “We know that Christian crusaders, who found the Saint George and the dragon myth in Palestine, distorted in on coming home. In some old versions the dragon transforms into a woman, or gives treasure; he transforms himself.” (p.204)

<sup>51</sup> As Leon Hammer, MD, puts it in *Dragon Rises, Red Bird Flies*, “...Metal yin energies guide us to a more profound sense of our own identity, to a more sure knowledge that ‘I am.’”

<sup>52</sup> In Chinese medicine, ‘courage’ is more often associated with the Gallbladder energy, which belongs to the Wood phase. However, one gets the sense that this refers to a less conscientious kind of courage—almost like pluckiness, or an instinctive inclination to pick a fight. The courage of Metal, on the other hand, is of a considerably more sober type. It is the stuff we muster when we premeditate a righteous undertaking. Metal courage comes in spite of desert temptations and despite tears of blood. It is what gives us the ability to overcome the strong desire of our fleshly bodies to stay out of harms way. The Lung houses the spirit of the body, or what Richard Wilhelm translates as the ‘anima,’ which is called the *po* in Chinese medicine. Thus, in the process of mustering up this kind of courage, the Metal must knowingly sacrifice its own soul. The *Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Medicine*, the most important and ancient text in Traditional Chinese Medicine, offers a truncated confirmation of this analysis: “The lungs house the po, or courage and boldness.” (p.96) Also: “Dryness arises

to his living parents, (or their memory, so long as an audience takes note), and when she<sup>53</sup> is sacrificed to the volcano, the gods of fire are pleased. She is at one with Heaven's will,<sup>54</sup> and she inspires hope.

Those in the Metal phase are the beautiful people. He is the golden child; she is the virginal princess. Yet, the white knight has little real experience with the world as it is. He is pure and lovely, but no one turns to him for advice on marriage, or finances, or the affairs of state. He has never put on the black robes of impartiality or suffered the wounds of sin. No— these are the qualities of a man who has gambled and lost, who has been swallowed by the leviathan and lived, or whose heart has been broken more than once. This is the woman who has heeded the call of the moon. When we enter the Water phase, we collect our scars around us for protection, and no one is a stranger anymore.

*“It takes a long time to move into the black. How many years pass before a man finds the dark parts of himself that he threw away? When he does find those parts, people will begin to trust him.”<sup>55</sup>*

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from the west. It can enhance metal energy, which is clean, uninhibited, and bold.” (p. 256, Shambhala Press, 1995, as translated by Maoshing Ni, Ph.D.)

<sup>53</sup> The gender switch here is deliberate, for we do not want to alienate women, who pass through the white just as men do. However, it is also the case that Metal-time is peculiarly male in its articulation, perhaps above all the other elements. As Gail Reichstein puts it in her useful exposition on the *Wu Xing* entitled *Wood Becomes Water: Chinese Medicine In Everyday Life*, “Metal’s learning and discerning, its questing and heroics, are archetypally masculine attributes, just as Earth’s nurturing is quintessentially feminine. The Metal element thus represents archetypal father energy, which compels the masculine part of each of us to journey forth to seek treasure, slay dragons, and to teach our hard-won wisdom to those who walk behind us.” Published by Kodansha America, Inc., New York, NY, 1998. (p. 129)

<sup>54</sup> We should remember that Heaven’s trigram, *Qian*, presides over Metal and the white.

<sup>55</sup> Bly, *Iron John*, (p. 206)

To traverse the cold, grey place between white and black, one has to take a dangerous road. This is the quest for the holy grail, a search for a sip from the cup of the blood of Christ;<sup>56</sup> that cup being the ultimate expression of Metal containing Water.<sup>57</sup> As Moore puts it: “*The Water of Life can only be found by breaking down, by wandering away, by being and feeling lost.*”<sup>58</sup> He is describing the dark night of the soul. It is the place Jesus found himself when on the cross he did cry: “*My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?*”<sup>59</sup> In truth, there is a world of difference between willingly taking on the sins of humanity, which is the job of the white knight, the true human being— and staring into the depths of the infinite Abyss. But it is when we are entrenched in this wretched place of doubt— of humiliation before Death, before one’s mortality, before one’s inescapable humanity— it is then that we find Water, which is in reality a state of grace.<sup>60</sup>

### Kidney Essentials

In Chinese medicine, the organs that relates to the Water element are the Kidneys (see the chart above). The Kidney energy of the body is what gives us our bones, our teeth, and it is the source of the original *qi*; the *qi* given to us by our ancestors. The Kidneys are the root of our physical being. Their health determines our capacity for carrying “ancestral spirit,” or essence; what is called *jing*. When our faith is tested, we rely on the strength of our Kidney *yin* (or Water) energies, which are derived from *jing*, to support us. Says

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<sup>56</sup> Forgive the halting prose—it was an attempt to evoke the knight’s plodding horse. Feeling it yet?

<sup>57</sup> We have given up a secret here. More on this later.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Moore, *Men and the Water of Life*, (p. 299)

<sup>59</sup> Matthew 27:46

<sup>60</sup> “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” Isaiah 12:3



Leon Hammer, MD, in his incomparable work on Chinese psychology, *Dragon Rises, Red Bird Flies*:

*“At this level of abstraction, the role of Kidney yin calls for theological speculation, seeing it, for instance, as the water of life that baptizes and cleanses the spirit and as the essence of divine love.”<sup>61</sup>*

Kidney *yang* energies provide the impetus to seek out the power of God, to move forward in our quest for redemption. Kidney *qi* maintains a balanced approach to the effort so that we do not drown in the moment of inspiration, or burn out in our passion for acquiring it. Thus, it is the combined Kidney energies of *yin*, *yang*, *qi*, and *jing*— literally our capacity for knowing Divine Love, our drive for and steadfastness in pursuing it, and the favor of our ancestors— that makes approaching our deaths an opportunity for salvation. Dr. Hammer helps us conclude the matter with great poignancy and alertness to the ironies:

*“On the spiritual plane, the final step and ultimate freedom stimulated by Kidney yang and mediated by Kidney qi energies in the ‘evolution of being’ is the internal search for God’s will and the surrender of our inherited will to the will of God. It is the paradoxical function of the Kidney energies to supervise the endless transmission of the ego from generation to generation, always directing it to its conclusive destruction, to the death of the ego.”*

### You Say Potato

Of course, feel free to toss the religious clap-trap— nothing here is necessarily sacred. Each of us has the same meridian system as the next, and Chinese medicine works regardless of the metaphysical orientation of the patient or practitioner. The same process of ceding power to the Almighty applies equally to one’s relationship

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<sup>61</sup> *Dragon Rises, Red Bird Flies*, by Leon Hammer, MD, p. 101

with chance, or luck, or the cruel winds of fate— howsoever one calls ‘It.’

Inescapably, the atheist or agnostic faces these things the same way a man of faith does— with a healthy dose of fear. How could it be otherwise? As Jarrett says in *Nourishing Destiny*: “Ultimately, the greatest fear underlying all others is the fear of death.”<sup>62</sup>

In most respects, Metal and Water are simply metaphors (rather good ones, as both are reflective) for the mirror of mortality in which we must all gaze at some point in our lives. To do so requires a steadfast courage; this is the meaning of Metal, nothing more. What we see is infinity; this is the meaning of Water, nothing less. And when confronting death, one always has two choices: 1) Surrender to the awesome reality of one’s staggering inconsequence, or 2) Every other wrong-headed alternative. ‘Divine Love,’ ‘Water of Life,’ or ‘liberation-from-neurotic-denial-by-owning-up-to-the-frailty-of-human-existence’—regardless of how one packages the language of religion and spirituality, the only ticket to real sanity in this life is to enter the deep patience, humor, and omni-lateral compassion that comes with the sure knowledge that all humans are at once beautiful and flawed, we will all die, and that is all just fine.

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<sup>62</sup> Jarrett, *Nourishing Destiny*, (p. 187)

## Summary

“*Metal will store water (but does not produce it).*”<sup>63</sup>

[Criticism of *Wu Xing* theory by a Mohist contemporary of Zou Yen (fourth century, BCE)]

### Concessions

Have we satisfactorily shown that Metal generates Water? In a literal sense, no. We must concede that there is no way for Metal to directly create Water in the natural world. The periodic table objects. Metaphorically, however, there are many ways for it to be done<sup>64</sup> — from the conversion of the seasons, to the transformation of epochs, to the maturation of the body and its passage into old age and death— especially if we take *Xing* to be ‘phase,’ rather than ‘element.’ If our task was to show that the poetry of ‘Metal creating Water’ works teleologically, then *fait accompli*. Besides, a literal standard for evaluating the instructive power of the generating cycle (or any other aspect of the *Wu*

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<sup>63</sup> *The Web That Has No Weaver*, Ted Kaptchuk, O.M.D., p. 447

<sup>64</sup> There are a few more very good ones that came up while brainstorming this thesis. For example, one might guess that if ancient Chinese doctors knew that Calcium, which is a metal, was what made up most of our bones, they would pounce on the idea that this metal creates blood, the life-water of our bodies. Or how about the fact that the iron in our blood makes it come alive? Here’s one that’s hard to argue with: According to the most recent and best geogenesis theories, the water of our planet all came from huge chunks of metal, ore, and ice that orbit the sun at enormous distances, otherwise known as ‘comets.’ And there you have it— water from metal. Of course, there are many more. For your poetic pleasure, below are a few explanations on how it is that metal generates water offered by the various texts that supported this thesis. (It is worth noting that most of the authors did not even bother trying to do so):

- “In the cycle of creation, metal in the veins of the earth nourishes the underground waters...”  
*Taoism*, (P. 131)
- “*Metal* vitalizes *Water* by permeating it with refined substances that enhance its life-giving properties.” *Between Heaven and Earth* (p.96)
- “In its liquid form, mercury represents the flow of flexible consciousness that promotes the generation of water from metal along the sheng cycle as each new round of evolution is initiated.” *Archtypal Acupuncture* (p.258)

*Xing* theory, for that matter) is far more stringent than what any Chinese philosopher or practitioner of Chinese medicine would themselves propose. In fact, instructions to the contrary are oft repeated in all the major textbooks on Chinese medicine: “*It is an explanatory theory and is not meant as a binding doctrine.*”<sup>65</sup> We therefore need not concern ourselves with unrealistic (and by unrealistic, we mean ‘realistic’) standards.

However, a far more serious concession must be made regarding the spiritual basis for Metal generating Water. Full disclosure: Metal cannot ever be said to directly generate Water in a mystical sense, either. It turns out that there is a gaping existential chasm between the white phase and the black. The transition between these phases requires nothing less than the death of the ego or the individuated self. The improbability of squeezing moisture out of iron is, ironically, an apt metaphor for how difficult and unlikely this process of ego death really is. When it does occur, the person that once was is no more. There is a rebirth, an alchemical transformation. Thus, although Water does and should proceed from Metal sequentially, there is no productive link between them.<sup>66</sup> The ancient Chinese could not win; they had the ordering and the nature of the elements right, but the generating sequence had a fatal flaw, that being the path from death to life.

### The Mirror

But do not despair; our thesis remains intact. For it turns out that we have had it wrong from the start. Zou Yen never actually claimed that Metal could ‘create’ Water. Those were not the words that he used, nor is it how the Five Element practitioners traditionally

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<sup>65</sup> *The Web That Has No Weaver*, Kaptchuk, (p. 443)

<sup>66</sup> Unless by grace. But we promised no sermonizing.

explained it. The ‘Definitions’ section of this paper needs an update: Instead of “promoting” Water, Metal was rightly said to “contain” or “collect” it.<sup>67</sup> Now here is a lexicon we can work with! How fitting a description of the mystical process! (*Deus ex machina* in a philosophical dissertation? Why not!)

We can now satisfy our thesis by here positing that the human being in the Metal phase must be made into a kind of pure vessel if it hopes to contain the Water of Life. Thus, the secret meaning of the quest for the holy grail is revealed. One never finds it; one *becomes* it. So rather than arguing that there is a transformation of Metal to Water, what we have instead is a kind of union of the two. When masculine Metal yields into the feminine form of a mystic receptacle, it can then act as vehicle for the transmission of divine love, the Blood of Christ, to the whole world. This was the work of Jesus, and it is why he asked us to drink from his cup.<sup>68</sup>

Incidentally, we have also uncovered a vindication of the beleaguered professor of Chinese medicine who suggests to his skeptical students that Chinese philosophers based their description of Metal generating Water on their observation of dew condensing on mirrors. The ancients must have seen in this a beautiful illustration of the right path: When one can become like a mirror— pure in thought, devoid of self, reflective of the light of Heaven— one can then ‘collect’ the Water of Life.

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<sup>67</sup> The quote at the top of this section is testament to this more strict definition of Metal’s relationship to Water on the generating cycle. The context of the critic’s argument tells all: He had no beef with Zou Yen’s apparent assertion that *metal contains water*; but, like the rest of us, he felt their relationship conflicted with what he considered to be the central descriptive factor of the generating cycle, namely the birthing of one element from the next. Typical Mohist— no appreciation for things abstract.

<sup>68</sup> Again, the author of the paper is not a Christian and has no ulterior designs on your soul. Christ’s story is simply as compelling as they get, familiar to most, and useful in this context for its explanatory power.

The thesis of this paper is as follows:

“The Metal element represents the culmination of human psycho-emotional development. The Water element can be seen as the source of soul and divine love, from which all things come and all things return. Thus, the generation of Water from Metal can be said to describe the spiritually perfected and psychologically matured human being’s capacity to achieve unity with the divine and to bring divine love into this world.”

[Wiping hands; stepping away from laptop.]