

EAST & WEST PSYCHOLOGY: WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES?
AN ASTROLOGICAL EXAMPLE

June 6, 2012

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

The Four or Five Elements

I have long been fascinated by Asian philosophy and psychology and how it differs from that used here in the West. It can be difficult to explain the difference between these two systems, but I have one clear astrological example that you might appreciate.

I have been studying astrology for some fifty years, so long I forget when I actually started and what constitutes studying anyway? I have also been studying Chinese astrology for a long time. I find Chinese astrology very profound and not something one can learn in a month, day, year, or even years. I have never written much about the subject because I am still just a student, but I do want to share a little bit of Chinese astrology with you so that you have a taste and see if you like it too. To do this, I will compare just one facet of astrology as we view it through Western methods, and as the Chinese see it. You will get the idea, I am sure. I am going to use the Four Elements.

The Four Elements in western astrology (Fire, Earth, Air, and Water) and the Five Elements in Chinese astrology (Fire, Earth, Metal, Water, and Wood), while calculated quite differently in each system, are similar enough in use for this comparison.

There are twelve zodiac signs, three fire signs, three earth signs, three air signs, and three water signs. So the Sun, Moon, and planets at your birth were each in a zodiac sign, and each zodiac sign is one of the four elements. In modern astrology here in the west, we tend to add up the elements for the Sun, Moon, and planets to get what is called the "Elemental Balance." The elemental balance at my birth looks like this:

Earth Signs: 4 planets

Fire Signs: 3 planets

Water Signs: 2 planets

Air Signs: 1 planet

As you can see, I have a preponderance of Earth and only one planet in Air. The way I have taught this for years is as follows: The elements we have the most are "What we have to do," while the element we have the least of or lack (Air in my case) are what we lack or "What we want." Then I tell my students that we do what we 'have' to do and we become what we 'want', using the word 'become' in the sense that a dress becomes a woman, to turn toward or accent. So, if we have zero planets for a certain element, we endlessly turn toward or try to fulfill that emptiness, etc.

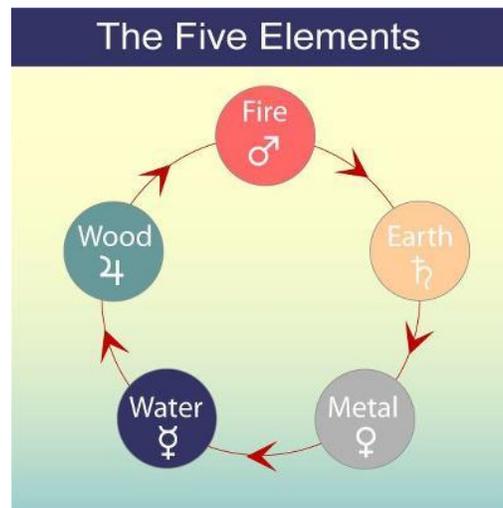
In other words, we do what we 'have' to do, and we become what we 'want'. In Western astrology, we draw attention to what we most want or lack. This is roughly how I teach it. However, the Chinese have a different approach, one that I believe will show you how different their philosophy is from ours, and a profound view it is.

In Chinese astrology, the element you have the least amount of, the one you want or lack, is

called your “Lucky Element,” which is the polar opposite of what we call the missing element here in the West.

The Chinese say it is your lucky element because when it occurs and you find some of it in the world, you then come into balance. What you want or lack is what will make you whole. In my case, I want Air, so when I get any ‘Air’ in life, I become more whole and balanced. You get the idea. Note the difference between the two systems.

As you can see the Chinese have an interesting positive twist on what we tend to make a liability. It is this kind of (I call it profound) view that makes Chinese astrology so fascinating for me. Perhaps you can see why it interests me. Any thoughts?



CHINESE ELEMENTS: TWO DIAGRAMS

June 6, 2012

Brief note: There are about as many views of the elements among Chinese astrologers as we have opinions about astrology here in the West. Just a quick comment here.

There are two major diagrams that are used to illustrate the sequence of the five elements and, unfortunately, each has flaws. In the one on the lower right, we see the production sequence (one produces the next, in clockwise order) clearly, but there is no convenient way to line up five elements with the four seasons, the four directions, and so forth.

With the diagram at the top left, we see how four of the elements line up with the four directions and four seasons, but the Earth element is out of sequence. It is in the center.

The diagram at the lower right shows how the Chinese tradition integrates the Earth element into a five-seasonal approach. Both methods and diagrams are used, but when all is said and done, the four-seasonal diagram (upper left) seems to be the default. However, the diagram on the lower right is the standard way the Chinese view the five elements. I have a free e-book called “The Art of Feng Shui” which goes into all of this.

Two Styles

