THE FOUR ELEMENTS,
ANIMAL GUARDIANS AND THE WU XING
(My Response to an Inquiry in the Witchcraft Fundamentals Q & A Forum)

The question presented is, in short, how do you reconcile Eastern elemental-directional correspondences with Western elemental-directional correspondences?

In this Western Witchcraft course, you’ll learn fairly soon that there are different systems of elemental-directional correspondences even within the umbrella of Western occult philosophy, and we cover three of them in this course:

The left two in the image above are from the end section of Chapter 1. You’ll cover the right-most correspondence in Chapter 10.

For those with a background in Western astrology, the left-most one (Agrippa) makes a lot of sense. The elements correspond with the zodiac sign associated with the equinoxes and solstices, and the directions come from the path of the sun per a geocentric model of the horoscopic Tropical wheel.

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa lived between 1486 and 1535, with *Occult Philosophy* published around 1533 (there are several different publication dates attributed, since it was a series of books).
Guillaume Postel lived between 1510 and 1581, with *Absconditorum clavis* published around 1547. The center elemental-directional correspondence is per the Golden Dawn, and I sourced this info from Israel Regardie’s text, and he credits these attributions to John Dee.

In Taoist ceremonial magic, the majority view and most popular or common elemental-directional correspondence is as follows, illustrated in the below chart.

![Elemental Directional Correspondence Chart]

In Taoist metaphysics, we work reference the Huang Dao heavily, which translates to Yellow Path, which is describing the Path of the Sun. Therefore, it aligns best with Agrippa’s method of reasoning for the elemental-directional correspondences since it is, in essence, the wheel of the year, marking the equinoxes and solstices. However, yes, immediately you can see the discrepancy with the south between the Western Agrippa system and the Eastern Taoist system.

West (Agrippa): SOUTH = Earth  
East (Huang Tao): SOUTH = Fire

Although personally, I’m digging the phoenix mythology of rising from the ashes, and ashes signify when Fire has transmuted into Earth.
In Taoist ceremonial magic, we follow the celestial dial. Typically, setting sacred space (aka circle casting) requires feng shui first. You need to assess the feng shui of the parcel of land you are going to set sacred space on and use the celestial dial to configure your elemental-directional correspondences.

However, in terms of modern practice, we now pretty much unanimously (sort of) observe that majority view configuration as illustrated. Even though the primary focus is on the four guardians and four compass directions, we don’t overlook the eight directions, forming the Ba Gua. Interestingly enough, you can see the influence of an agrarian culture in the animal attributions for the supplemental eight (southeast, southwest, northeast, northwest)—they’re the animals you’ll commonly find on a farm.

**Squaring the Circle**

Some fun bonus info about the Eastern philosophical concept of Squaring the Circle (alchemical symbol in the West for the Great Work):

In Taoist metaphysics, the Circle signifies Heaven and is studied through astrology. Think about the horoscopic wheel and the theme of cycles when it comes to astrology, East or West.

The Square signifies Earth and is studied through geomancy, feng shui, and alchemy (both nei dan and wai dan, or inner alchemy and outer alchemy).

The witch, shaman, or ceremonial magician is someone who finds the nexus that can bridge the two, Heaven and Earth. This is someone who treads between both worlds, a messenger that crosses thresholds.

**Four Elements vs. Wu Xing**

I do not try to fit the Wu Xing five phases into the Western four elements.

The conception behind the Western four elements is the reduction to some form of essential state of nature, which is fixed, at least until something happens to it and changes or alchemizes that state of nature.

The conception behind the Eastern Wu Xing or five phases is taking a snapshot of a moment of change. Wood is not a fixed state of nature; Wood is an expression of a state of change. It’s something changing into something and that changing phase is categorized as Wood.
So if we try to take the common denominator of the two concepts, the two do not align.

However, I do find that the Eight Trigrams can reduce down to a common denominator with the Western four elements. That’s probably exceeding the scope of this course’s subject matter, however. =)

**Reconciling the Conflicting Information**

This paragraph is my personal beliefs and perspective only: The elements are our perceptions of God’s or Divinity’s different emanations. Therefore, vantage point matters, and matters a lot in the same way if I hold up my left hand and say “left hand,” you who are standing across and opposite of me will need to make a minor adjustment of perspective, realizing that it looks “right” to you but you understand it’s objectively described as “left hand.” The reason we have so many discrepancies and conflicting systems when it comes to correspondences is exactly because we perceive the emanations of Divinity differently based on our very precise and unique vantage point.

Since this is a course on Western occult philosophy, we are studying Agrippa, Postel, and the Golden Dawn attributions as we take a decidedly academic and theoretical approach so that we can understand the fundamentals of Craft.

However, the actual practice of the Craft is messy and so case-specific that you could make a credible argument that learning occult philosophy itself is a joke. The actual practice of Craft rarely fits within the neat categorical boxes of theory and academia.

And that’s with any highly-specialized path of study. Jurisprudence and legal theory that you learn in law school is nothing like and nowhere near informative of what actual down and dirty practice of law in courtrooms and at negotiation tables are like.

In a course like this, I can’t tell you East is X, West is Y, etc. I can only tell you Person A says that East is X and West is Y; but Person B says that West is X and East is Y. Historically we have come to place Person A and Person B on pedestals and look up to them as authoritative figures on correspondences. As for what should you do in personal, private ritual space? Good luck. You’re on your own.

When I spent time in South America, I found that the Golden Dawn system (for me, intuitively) did not really work well when performing ritual magic on the land there. There’s the hemisphere difference, for starters. I found the Western elemental-directional correspondences to just not feel right, to feel a bit counterintuitive and
counterproductive, and causing more trouble than facilitating empowerment (which is the whole point of ritual magic, and never lose sight of your objective, because as long as you have clear sight of your end goal, you’ll know immediately what adjustments to make as you journey). Oddly, I found Eastern ceremonial magic systems to work a little better there, I think in no small part because the training an Eastern ceremonial magician would get would start with “first, assess the land; connect to the land and let the land dictate your elemental-directional correspondence.”

Since this is a course focused on Western occult philosophy, if your objective is to learn the fundamentals of Western occult philosophy, then I would compartmentalize Eastern ceremonial magic from the basic principles taught here.

When you learn Eastern ceremonial magic and Taoist occult philosophy, compartmentalize once again.

Then at an advanced level, that’s when you use discernment to reconcile all that you’ve learned into a cohesive, harmonized personal system of correspondences.

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