

## Pet Personalities:

### How They Affect Our Relationships and Training

by Dr, Jona Sun Jordan

Have you ever wondered why a training method that worked so well for your neighbor's dog did not work at all for yours?

Or why your new cat exhibits crazy behaviors that your old cat never did?

Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM) recognizes that pets and people have five major personality types that are distinctly different and that influence how we relate to each other and the world around us.

Making an effort to understand the fears and motivations of the five different personality types can facilitate a more successful path to influence our pets (and our friends) behavior with much less stress to both parties.

Very rarely is any pet or person purely one personality type. We all tend to behave differently in different situations, but most of us have a “go-to default” behavior when we are under stress. That go-to default is our fundamental most in-grained behavior reflex. By identifying the core element of a pet's personality, the owner and veterinarian can address possible imbalances a pet might be prone to under stress and make lifestyle and training choices to keep the pet's health balanced.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) the five basic personality types are called Fire, Earth, Metal, Water, and Wood. Here are some simple examples of those types and the issues they are prone to. Which personality type do you think best fits your pet?



#### **FIRE – the Life of the Party)**

*“I've never met you before – I must kiss you a thousand times!”*

- Associated organ: Heart. In TCVM the Heart is considered to be in charge of the connection to others and general mental state.
- Common personality traits: high energy, easily excited, extroverted, enjoys physical contact, loves to be the center of the party, difficult to calm down, & likes stimulating environments.

Social butterfly.

- Prone to: heart disease, restlessness, heat stroke, sudden death, general and separation anxiety.

In general, keeping the Fire animal cool is very important. Beef, turkey, white fish, duck, and rabbit are good proteins. Cucumber, celery, and asparagus, and chamomile tea are excellent additions to the diet for cooling. Providing a calming environment and regular exercise are important, but avoid non-stop all out exercise (though Fire pets may want to), as they are poor at self-restraint and prone to overheating.



#### **EARTH -- the Sweetheart**

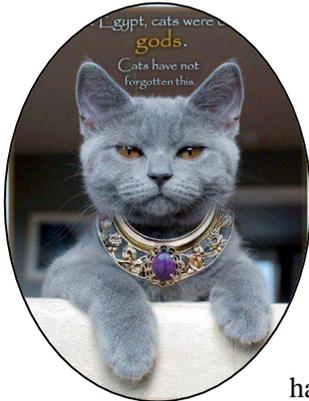
*“Let's all get along!”*



Associated organ: Spleen/Pancreas. In TCVM the Spleen is in charge of the overall digestive process, muscles, “holding in or up”, and general strength.

- Common personality traits: nurturing, dependable, supportive, loyal, slower response to stimuli, sweet, easy going, and kind.
- Prone to: gastrointestinal problems, edema, diarrhea, colic, obesity, and tumors.

Excellent foods for the Earth Animal are chicken, beef, lamb, herring, mackerel, green beans, squash, carrots, turnips, and sweet potatoes. Consider Damp draining foods like kidney beans, mushrooms, dry mustard, and dash of dry ginger. Moderate exercise daily, with 2 or 3 days of heavy exercise keeps the Spleen from becoming stiff or stagnant and accumulating damp and phlegm. Training is generally easy as Earth pets are sweet natured and willing to do anything for food or loving.



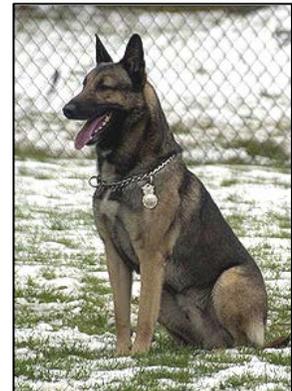
### METAL – the Aristocrat

*“Life is better when we all follow the rules!”*

Associated organ: Lung/Large Intestine. In TCVM the Lung is in charge of moving water throughout the body, & acquiring and distributing “cosmic qi” (aka oxygen).

- Common personality traits: aloof, dignified, good vision, confident, leader, neat, excellent self control, organized, likes a predictable schedule, Good hair coat

- Prone to: nasal congestion, frequent colds, cough, skin issues, and constipation.



Both the lung and the large intestine are sensitive to dryness and as a result, these pets need to eat moistening foods like duck and greens, as well as blood tonics like beef and sardines, and Qi/ Yang Tonics like lamb, chicken, and cinnamon. During the heating & cooling seasons, (when interior heaters or air conditioners dry the air) consider adding water to the food and using a humidifier periodically to help prevent drying the lungs and skin. Gentle exercise like walking or a light run is perfect for Metal animals. Training should be regular, routine, and scheduled.



### WATER – the Worrier

*“What was that?!”*

Associated organ: Kidney. In TCVM the Kidneys are in charge of Water, Fight or Flight, Bones, gonads, hormones, and the Essence of Life (aka “Jing” or the genetics/DNA you were born with).



- Common personality traits: loving with their own family but very alert and suspicious of strange people, strange sounds, strange places, strange smells, cautious, introverted, quiet, noise sensitive, may panic and bite, and may crouch, hide, or leak urine when approached. Do not startle!
- Prone to: lower back and hip pain, infertility, edema, depression, urinary infections, deafness/tinnitus, panic attacks.

The Water animal needs to keep the kidneys cool and moist. Offering any type of bean, peas, Sweet potatoes, spinach, asparagus, beets and celery are helpful. Proteins like rabbit, eggs, dairy, and white fish are good. Start training at an early age to help them overcome stressful social situations and **gently** expose these pets to as many new environments and people as possible. Use positive reinforcement training **only** as dominance or punishment will make this dog's anxiety worse and create behavioral problems like inappropriate urination and fear biting. If you constantly make an effort to increase the Water pets self-confidence they will bloom into a wonderful pet that is just a bit shy at first.



### **WOOD – the Jock**

*"I'm in charge and I'll be the judge of that!"*

Associated organ: Liver. In TVCM the Liver is in charge tendons ligaments, as well as bossing all the other organs around.

- Common personality traits: dominant behavior, enjoys being first, speedy, impatient, bossy, competitive, quick to anger when challenged, alert, very responsive to stimuli, and adapts to change quickly. These pets tend to be athletic, muscular, and competitive.
- Prone to: hypertension, stroke, allergy, neurosis, depression, irritability and aggression when frustrated, eye problems, and athletic injuries - especially to tendons and ligaments (cranial cruciate tears, etc.)



Because the liver is often Blood deficient, blood tonic foods such as Beef, rabbit and chicken are good choices, as are carrots, celery, broccoli, spinach, and chard. Seaweed helps keep things moving as well. Moderate to heavy exercise and a “job” are important to help keep these animals happy. Brush up on your leadership skills to work with Wood dogs or they will rule the roost!

*More information on Chinese Medicine and Pet Personalities can be found in the book “Four Paws Five Directions” by Cheryl Schwartz, D.V.M.*

***A Note on Training Philosophy: Leadership is not the same thing as Dominance.***

- **Dominance** is “You will do as I say or I will hurt you.” Your pet does something for you because he is afraid of punishment if he doesn’t do what you ask. Pets trained with the Dominance method avoid volunteering new behaviors for fear of getting it wrong so if you ask them to do something they can’t do they often shut down.
- **Leadership** is “Hey, look at all this really terrific stuff I own – if you do what I want maybe I will share!” Pets trained by the Leadership method will volunteer alternative behavior when they hit a roadblock (for example: offer you a pinecone when they can’t get to the ball you asked them to fetch) because they are not afraid of punishment – they are striving for the pleasure of rewards from a friend not trying to avoid pissing off the boss.