

Talk about *Stubborn!*

Those who attended my Annual Talk in February will no doubt be amused by the stubborn avoidance of Justice/ACC Minister Judith Collins to openly front the media over questions concerning her Beijing dinner date. Her defiance is typical of a weak fire personality. In a Year of a Yang Wood Horse her weak fire is strengthened by wood and so it is not surprising she has responded as petulantly as she has. The fire of the horse is itself an explosive fire, and only serves to further increase her feisty temperament this year. Weak fire people are often described as flickering, impatient and overly emotional. Minister Collins who has frequently been accused of arrogance, I suspect, is simply evidencing her weak fire nature. This rather perverse behaviour, can in my experience, simply mask a profoundly deep and personal anger in such people. One I would say it safe to surmise, is probably burning deep within the Minister under the present glare of media attention and the attacks on her in Parliament by an Opposition keen to draw early blood in an election year.

Given that her current 10yr Luck Pillar from age 53 – 63 (2012 – 2022) has Yang Water sitting on the metal of the Monkey however; her personal element of weak fire is in a conflict relationship with both of these elements (water and metal). This to me indicates she is unlikely to ascend to the dizzying heights to which she is said to aspire. The Monkey is also her Yang Edge from which she runs the risk of encountering serious legal troubles. (This will be doubly strong in 2016, the next year of the Monkey.) It will be interesting to follow her career in the coming years. Personally, it seems to me anyone who flaunts as a badge of merit their refusal to apologise, has no place in public office; especially when questions of bad judgement so clearly arise. As a foot note, Winston Peters, Ms Collin's current parliamentary Nemesis, is also weak fire. Maybe it takes fire to fight fire?

Book Review:

I recently read Jung Chang's new book, *Empress Dowager Cixi, the concubine who launched modern China*. It provides a fascinating insight into the life and times of one of only two women ever to gather the reins of power into their hands and rule over China's vast territories. Of course, Cixi was not

Han herself; that is, she was not ethnically Chinese. She was the adored, semi-literate daughter of a noble but impoverished Manchu family; her daddy's favourite. At the tender age of sixteen, she was selected to be a consort for Emperor Xianfeng, albeit a consort of very low rank. As the darling of her father, she had not only been permitted a basic education but was encouraged to hold and express her opinions both rare exceptions for a young woman of her time. Not that these factors endeared her to her floundering, reactionary, husband/emperor.



Cixi Dowager Empress of China

However, on the death of Xianfeng she and the Empress were able jointly to wrest power from a cabal of incompetent regents and together lead China towards all the accoutrements of a modern state. Cixi's story is a truly inspiring and fascinating one, even more so given that she was a woman working in 19th Century China. She had the foresight to introduce a vast array of modernising reforms. It was Cixi who outlawed the 1,000 yr old Han tradition of binding women's feet, and the truly gruesome Han death penalty known as *li-qi* or death by a thousand cuts. She introduced electricity, the telegraph, railways, and a modern state army and navy; both stocked with up-to-date armaments. She even laid the foundations for real democratic reforms and although events were to overtake her and see these laid waste by successive republican regimes, it is clear from Jung Chang's research that Cixi in spite of considerable provocation at times, was an amazingly tolerant and perspicacious woman with a real talent for consensus politics. It is a real testament to her character that as a woman she achieved as much for China as she did. Her achievements would have been hard enough even for a male ruler at the time; in deed, her husband and the men who followed him were without exception dismal failures.

There was controversy of course. Chang's book examines Cixi's role in the quashing of the Taiping Rebellion that seriously threatened the entire Ching State, and then later, the infamous Boxer Rebellion in which Beijing's late 19th Century diplomatic corps were the subject of the rebel's focus; not altogether undeservedly, given the rampant imperialism of the foreign powers in China at that stage. In spite of her great achievements, posthumously Cixi has been much maligned by all subsequent Chinese regimes; not least the Communist Party. Much of the cause for this lies in her having ruled as one of the deeply hated Manchu. Even in death she was not allowed to rest. In 1928, 20 years after her death, one of Chiang Kai-shek's rogue army corps ransacked her tomb, robbed it, and left her earthly remains exposed; perhaps the most despicable of all desecrations possible in a society that above all else protected the sanctity of the dead. It has been postulated that it was this sacrilege that led an incensed Pu Yi, the last Ching emperor, to align himself, calamitously as it eventuated, with the invading Japanese who set him up as puppet ruler of their artificial state *Manchukuo*.

Jung Chang has gone to the root Chinese sources and uncovered many of the original documents of the period and constructed a fascinating and deeply engrossing biography of an immensely important and influential 19th century woman. I highly recommend it to all interested in modern Chinese history.

Ferry tragedy in South Korea:

In the early morning of the 16th April, 2014 a domestic ferry in South Korea carrying 459 passengers and crew met sudden disaster, capsizing with a high loss of life. 330 of those on board were high school students from just one school in Seoul. Although Asia has a shady reputation when it comes to ferry operators and a pretty poor safety record for ferry safety in general, South Korea has of recent years improved its performance in coastal shipping safety. The vessel was of Japanese manufacture, recognised as one of the world's safest ship manufacturers. No doubt we will eventually hear the legal findings as to exactly what went wrong but looking at this tragedy from the perspective of the Four Pillars several interesting factors come immediately to light.

The first is that the vessel was on a course between Incheon, a major port just to the west of Seoul in the north, heading to Jeju Island in the Southwest of the country. This meant the course of the ferry was almost directly south, which in 2014, meant it was directly challenging Tai Sui; a changing annual

influence one is always warned against travelling towards. The second is the timing of the capsizing. Local Korean sources give the time as somewhere around 8:40am which is in the hour of the Dragon. In traditional Chinese time keeping this hour is also known as the *Gate of Heaven*. This refers to the changes in the sky which attend the coming of the sunrise at this time of day. The hour of the Dragon (7 – 9 am) therefore, indicates the opening of this *Gate of Heaven*. The third is the month. This tragedy occurred in April and April is the Month of the Dragon. One of the stranger, more esoteric aspects that attend the appearance of the Dragon, is that whenever disasters occur and the Dragon is present, it is said there are few if any survivors. It would appear that this dreadful calamity was yet another to fall under the timing of the Dragon and its associated *Gate of Heaven*. As at the time writing this there are still 291 missing.

The continuing mystery of Flight MH370

The mysterious disappearance of Malaysian Airlines Flight 370 is another public transport incident to have transfixed recent international attention. While the search continues for the missing plane amid vitriolic accusations of a lack of transparency and incompetence on the part of Malaysian authorities, there is still no definitive answer as to exactly what happened to the missing jet. It appears from all the evidence so far that about an hour after take-off, the plane inexplicably returned to Malaysian airspace and without making contact, crossed the Malaysian peninsula from where it journeyed out into the vastness of the southern Indian Ocean and simply vanished. It has been postulated it would thus have eventually run out of fuel about 7 hours later and therefore crashed somewhere between 7 and 9am on the 9th of March, once again during the Hour of the Dragon, if this timing is in fact accurate.

Several well known feng shui masters have postulated on what may have happened, quoting both their opinions from the Four Pillars of the day in question, and some even casting the I-Ching to see if they can interpret from that what the fate of the missing plane might be. None so far have proved accurate. It took authorities two years to locate the black boxes from Air France Flight XXXX that crashed on route across the Atlantic from Rio de Janeiro to Paris in 2009. We may well be in for a long wait to find the real fate of MH 370; if in fact we ever do.

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Feng Shui Consultants New Zealand

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