

The Emotion of the Earth Phase: an examination of English translations, and the Classic texts

Synopsis: An examination of the emotions in Chinese medicine, their Chinese characters and a discussion of the differences between the normative terms for the emotions as found in various texts; especially the use of the term ‘sympathy’ for the emotion of earth (soil) by some European writers as compared with the more common term ‘(over)-thinking’.

Keywords: Five Element, Five Elemental Phases, Emotions, Chinese Characters

Introduction

Many of the attributes, such as colour, sound and odour and tastes, associated with five phases are consistently defined by a single Chinese character in the Classics. However, when it comes to the emotions we find that there are more characters than those represented in modern texts. There are also apparent inconsistencies and variations in the texts in relation to the attribution of these emotions. This article will focus primarily on the emotion of earth (soil) phase because there appears to be a particular difficulty in relation to this emotion. However, it is necessary to discuss the metal phase to some extent.

Chinese Language

Most readers are probably aware of some of the characteristics of Chinese characters and language. One primary thing to bear in mind in relation to the topic here is that Chinese

characters have a range of possible meanings and the intended meaning is sometimes dependent on context. Often we have to know which meaning is intended before we know which to use in a particular context. A good example of this is the first line of the Tao Te Ching.

道， 可 道， 非 恆 道
dào kě dào fēi hènɡ dào

The Tao that can be told is not the constant Tao¹.

Tao Te Ching – Gia Fu Feng

The character 道 *dào* appears three times in the line (‘the dao that can be dao is not the constant dao’); and in the second instance is understood to mean speech.

In this discussion I am approaching this subject as a clinician rather than as a sinologist; i.e. with an expectation of what the terms should mean in the particular context because of my training and clinical experience.

Five Emotions (*Zhì* 志) and Seven Affects (*Qíng* 情)

In Chinese Medicine the emotions have come to be understood in two ways. These are referred to as the five *zhì* (志) [wills/minds] and seven *qíng* (情) [emotions/affects].

These terms can both be translated as ‘emotions’ I am using the term ‘affect’ for the latter to differentiate the meanings.

The term *zhì* (志) here is the same as the specific *shén* (spiritual aspect) associated with the water phase; the five *zhì*, thus complement the five *shén*ⁱⁱ. The five *zhì* (志) are understood to include the normal healthy emotional expressions of the phases. For example in the case of anger; we can convey a healthy normal and desirable meaning by substituting the concept of ‘assertion’ as understood in modern psychology.

The seven *qíng* are more specific emotions usually associated with pathology. Just as with the external pathogenic factors these have a two fold aspect; they can be the cause of disease, or the manifestation of imbalance.

We should note however, that in the earlier chapters of the Su Wen the distinction between the *zhì* and *qíng* is not specifically stated, but is implied in the text. The systematisation that became the received teachings of modern TCM developed over timeⁱⁱⁱ. The San-yin Fang, written by Chen Yen in +1174 described the system of Seven Internal, Seven External and miscellaneous causes of disease (Hicks et al 26). It is not central to the discussion here, to examine the reason for extending the primary five emotions to seven when discussing pathology.

The following main part of this discussion focusing on the emotions of earth is complicated and so I have divided it into two sections. Firstly, I will present the various apparent confusions in the texts – specifically two passages from Chapter 5 of the Su

Wen, and a passage from Chapter 19 of the Su Wen. Secondly, I will present a passage from Chapter 8 of the Ling Shu that appears to go a long way to help resolve this confusion.

Part 1 – The Confusions

English Terms

The English equivalents of the five or seven emotions vary between texts. European books on acupuncture from the 1970s, especially those of J. R. Worsley and Felix Mann have listed the five emotions as: anger (wood), joy (fire), sympathy (earth), grief (metal), and fear (water). The main difference between this and modern TCM is that it is customary in many TCM texts to show ‘thinking’ or ‘over-thinking’ as the primary emotion associated with earth. Hicks et al seem to accept the latter terminology as correct; they comment on this difference with Five Element^{iv} teaching, and suggest that ‘sympathy’ was an innovation of J. R. Worsley. (110). However, the use of ‘sympathy’ also by Felix Mann would suggest that this may have been derived from a primary source in Japan or Taiwan. (72). Mme Dr. M. Hashimoto differs from the Worsley and Mann in having ‘worry’ as the emotion of the earth phase (16). Nigel Wiseman lists the five emotions as: joy, anger, anxiety, thought, and fear. (205).

Modern TCM books tend to put more emphasis on the seven affects, but these also vary in their transliterations. I have not attempted to put these into a table because it is not immediately obvious which terms are equivalent.

Nigel Wiseman lists the seven affects as: joy, anger, anxiety, thought, sorrow, fear, and fright. (526)

Bensky & O’Conner have: happiness, anger, worry, pensiveness, sadness, fear and terror. (18)

Giovanni Macciocia Lists: anger, joy, worry, pensiveness, sadness, fear, fright. (130)

Essentials of Chinese Medicine list: anger, joy, melancholy, meditation, grief, fear, fright. (44)

The main difference that is noted particularly between the Five Element tradition and the TCM is the difference between ‘sympathy/worry’, and ‘thinking/over-thinking’ as the emotion^v associated with earth.

Chinese Characters

The five wills are introduced in Chapter 5 of the Su Wen; (for comparison purposes I will call this Passage A).

人有五臟化五氣，以生喜怒悲憂恐。

The Five viscera in man produce five energies which in turn are responsible for the five emotions, namely, joy [喜], anger [怒], sadness [悲], grief [憂] and fear [恐].

Henry Lu

Here is a comparison of the translations of these five emotions as used by Henry Lu, Ilza Veith and Maoshing Ni for the emotions in the Chapter 5 and in Chapter 19.

Table 1 – Comparison of Translations from Chapter 5 and 19 of Su Wen – translations from chapter 19 are shown in () where these differ from Chapter 5.

	Henry Lu	Ilza Veith	Maoshing Ni
喜 xǐ	Joy	Joy	Happiness (Over-excitability)
怒 [怵] nù	Anger	Anger	Anger (Rage)
悲 bēi	Sadness (Worry)	Sympathy (Pity)	Sadness (Grief)
憂 [忧] yōu	Grief	Grief	Worry
恐 kǒng	Fear	Fear	Fear and fright

It is immediately apparent that two characters *bēi* (悲) and *yōu* (憂) appear to cause translators some problems (and the character *sī* (思) most commonly found in modern texts is missing):

- *Bēi* (悲) Ilza Veith's translation of as 'sympathy' or 'pity' may be based on an attempt to make the translation fit the customary terminology as per Worsley and Mann that was already established. It is clearly idiosyncratic in the context. Sympathy and pity are possible translations of *bēi*; however, we shall see that *bēi* is not associated with earth in the passages that follow, but is clearly associated with metal.
- *Yōu* 憂 [忧] appears to be translated as either worry or grief. It is hard not to conclude (at least by a process of elimination) that in this passage *yōu* (憂) is

intended to be the emotion of earth and that Maoshing Ni's translation appears to be closest to the intended meaning.

- *Sī* (思) 'over-thinking' that is usually listed as the main emotion of the earth phase in modern texts, does not appear in the initial introduction of the emotions in Chapter 5 or in Chapter 19 of the Su Wen.

In following passages of Chapter 5 of the Su Wen we are given more information on the emotions, but the characters used vary from the introductory statement; for comparison with the above, (I will call this Passage B).

Su Wen Chapter 5

The East... corresponds to anger [怒 *nù*] in the emotions [志 *zhì*], anger [怒 *nù*] damages the liver, Sorrow [悲 *bēi*] overcomes anger [怒 *nù*]

The South... corresponds to joy [喜 *xǐ*] in the emotions [志 *zhì*], Joy (喜 *xǐ*) damages the heart, fear [恐 *kǒng*] overcomes joy [喜 *xǐ*]

The Centre... corresponds to contemplation [思 *sī*] in the emotions [志 *zhì*],

contemplation [思 *sī*] damages the spleen, and anger [怒 *nù*] overcomes contemplation

[思 *sī*]

The West... corresponds to grief [憂 *yōu*] in the emotions [志 *zhì*], grief [憂 *yōu*]

damages the lung, joy [喜 *xǐ*] overcomes grief [憂 *yōu*]

The North... It corresponds to Fear [恐 *kǒng*] in the emotions [志 *zhì*], fear [恐 *kǒng*] harms the kidneys, contemplation [思 *sī*] overcomes fear [恐 *kǒng*]

(Henry Lu 34-38)

In the above passages six characters appear for the ‘five emotions’ because *sī* (思) has been added to the original list. Thus in the second passage:

- Thinking (思 *sī*) appears as the ‘emotion’ of earth.
- Grief (憂 *yōu*) is given as the emotion of metal
- However, sorrow (悲 *bēi*) overcomes anger (怒 *nù*)

In chapter 19 of the Su Wen (I will call this Passage C) we find the five emotions again as they were given initially in Chapter 5. The relation to particular organs is not straightforward and so this passage does not seem to dispel the confusion. The interpretive insertions in this passage are mainly derived from later commentaries.^{vi}

因而喜，大虛則腎氣乘矣，

Hence elation, causes great deficiency [of heart], kidney *qi* takes advantage [of heart]

怒則肝氣乘矣，

Anger consequently liver *qi* takes advantage [of spleen]

悲則肺氣乘矣，

Sadness consequently lung *qi* takes advantage [of liver]

恐則脾氣乘矣，

Fear consequently spleen *qi* takes advantage [of kidney]

憂則心氣乘矣，

Worry consequently heart *qi* takes advantage [of lung]

Based upon the three passages quoted above we would end up with several tables of the emotions and clues to their meaning:

Table 2: The initial list in Passage A – Su Wen Chapter 5

Primary	<i>nù</i> (怒)	<i>xǐ</i> (喜)	<i>yōu</i> (憂)	<i>bēi</i> (悲)	<i>kǒng</i> (恐)
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Table 3: The primary and overcoming emotion in Passage B – Su Wen Chapter 5

Primary Phase	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Primary emotion	<i>nù</i> (怒)	<i>xǐ</i> (喜)	<i>sī</i> (思)	<i>yōu</i> (憂)	<i>kǒng</i> (恐)
Overcoming emotion	<i>bēi</i> (悲)	<i>kǒng</i> (恐)	<i>nù</i> (怒)	<i>xǐ</i> (喜)	<i>sī</i> (思)
Overcoming phase	Metal	Water	Wood	Fire	Earth

Table 4: The emotions from Passage C - Su Wen Chapter 19

Emotion	<i>nù</i> (怒)	<i>xǐ</i> (喜)	<i>yōu</i> (憂)	<i>bēi</i> (悲)	<i>kǒng</i> (恐)
Organ harmed or harming	Liver	Kidney	Heart	Lung	Spleen

There does not appear to be any way to arrange these four lists that does not present contradictions. In Passage B *bēi* (悲), is said to overcome *nù* (怒), which would make us place *bēi* (悲), as the emotion of metal and by elimination we would then make *yōu* (憂), the emotion of earth, and yet in Passage B the emotion of metal is said to be *yōu* (憂). Passage C matches Passage A which is my reason for including it here; however, the particular organ affected is not straightforward and open to interpretation and so fails to clarify matters.

It is widely believed that the Chinese Classics are compilations of various authors and this could explain varying usage of characters. This would imply that these differences are not errors as such. With the characters representing the emotions [especially *yōu* (憂) and *bēi* (悲)] we shall see that we need to differentiate the meaning according to context.

So let us examine these specific characters in detail. Of the two *bēi* (悲) appears to be the more straightforward.

I - Bēi

Table 4 - Definitions of bēi

<i>bēi</i>	悲	grieve , be sad, sympathize (Wieger) sad , sorrowful, melancholy. (Oxford Chinese Dictionary)
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Bēi (悲) appears to most commonly be intended to mean sadness, grief, sorrow or melancholy and is most commonly attributed to metal-lung. Larre says that *bēi* (悲)

also appears in connection with fire-heart. We can understand this if we look at the components of the character.

fei 非 wrong, evil doing, opposing, not, no, un

xīn 心 Heart, mind, intelligence, soul.

In relation to the heart we can see that *bēi* (悲) could be interpreted as referring to something opposite to the heart, i.e. ‘un-happy’, this is similar to another term: *bù lè* (不樂) literally ‘without joy’. In modern books the emotions are usually considered as causes of disease when excessive. But according to Larre ‘joy’ (*lè* 樂) is the main exception to this rule^{vii} (Larre 119). And those who place particular emphasis on the five phases in their clinical practice will recognize a distinction between a condition of ‘un-happiness’ or **lack of** joy associated with fire phase, and the **presence** of sorrow/grief associated with metal – both of which can apparently be represented by *bēi* (悲).

II - Yōu

Table 5 Definitions of yōu

<i>yōu</i>	憂 [忧]	worry , anxiety (Oxford Chinese Dictionary, Zhong Wen) sad, grieved , grief, melancholy (Oxford Chinese Dictionary - CD version*) grieved, anxious , in mourning, melancholy (Wieger)
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*It is particularly interesting that dictionaries give differing translations of this character – the Oxford Dictionary even gives a different translation between its paper and CD version.

It appears that two main meanings of *yōu* (憂) can be supported by the dictionary: ‘worry/anxiety’ or ‘grief/melancholy’. If we refer back to the beginning of this discussion we can see that Wiseman appears to prefer ‘anxiety’. Claude Larre uses the term ‘oppression’ (145). Felix Mann uses the term ‘anguish’ (72). Claude Larre also states that *yōu* (憂) is associated primarily with metal-lung, and also with earth-spleen, but is associated more than any other emotion, with **all** [my emphasis] the organs (145). I will argue below that this is partly misleading because as with the use of *dao* in the example given earlier, different meanings are actually intended according to context and so we cannot use one generic translation.

In relation to Wiseman’s choice of ‘anxiety’ as a translation for *yōu*; ‘anxiety’ is also a common translation of a variation on the same character that has the heart radical added.

Yōu (憂) worry, sorrow, anxiety; (Oxford Chinese Dictionary – CD Version)

The development of compound characters is a common way that characters developed differing shades of meaning and that meanings became clarified. Van Nghi in a reference to a passage in Chapter 6 of the Ling Shu refers to this *yōu* (憂) aptly as ‘worry of the heart’ (120). Various similar characters (i.e. with the heart radical in the same position) denoting anxiety are more frequently associated with the heart^{viii}. And so I prefer the translation ‘worry’ in the context of the earth phase.

It is interesting to note here that the main confusion we are discussing is with the emotion of the earth phase. Earth has a particular characteristic in that it is represented in the

centre of one arrangement of the five phases. It is thus consistent with the nature of earth that this emotion is associated with all the organs (especially metal). When the character *yōu* (憂) is intended to refer to more extreme grief it seems to imply that there is a *tai-yin* involvement.

Part 2 – clarity

I don't think that anyone would disagree that there are variations and apparent confusions in the material presented above; it is hard to imagine how one could resolve these without some help. But luckily or perhaps intentionally we do seem to find this in Chapter 8 of the Ling Shu - here the characters for emotions are given in double terms, for example *bēi* (悲) - grieve, sad, sorrowful, is paired with a character *āi* (哀) - grief, sorrow, lamentation.

“When [excess]^{ix} sadness (悲 哀 *bēi āi*) causes harm to internal organs, the soul (魂 *hún*) may be impaired, because the liver is the store of the soul.”

(Lu 727)

Because of the possibility of confusion of homophones, and the multiple meanings of any single character, double terms are often used to clarify a meaning in Chinese. These double terms if close in meaning can be translated simply as one word, or in this instance suggesting excess (i.e. 悲 哀 *bēi āi* - literally: ‘grief grief’ = ‘excess grief’). Sometimes the two characters although close in meaning have some differences in emphasis and so

in some contexts are translated more in a form ‘... and ..’ And so *bēi āi* (悲哀) can be translated as ‘sadness and lamentation’.

Claude Larre describes *bēi āi* (悲哀) as the appropriate expression of sadness and grief.

Yōu (憂) can also mean grief, but suggests more extreme or entrenched grief. Claude

Larre quotes the following passage that illustrates these meanings.

At the death of his father, a son wept without interruption for three days; for three months he removed neither the arm band nor the hemp belt; for a year his thoughts were filled with profound feelings of **sadness** [and lamentation] *bēi ai* [悲哀] (he wept morning and night). His **grief** *yōu* 憂 lasted for three years.

LiJi, Couvreur II, p 704, revised translation. Quoted by Claude Larre.

Also in Chapter 8 of the Ling Shu in relation to earth phase we have the double term 愁

憂 *chóu yōu*:

愁 *chóu* – worry, be anxious (Oxford Chinese Dictionary)

憂 *yōu* – worry, anxiety. (Oxford Chinese Dictionary)

An excess of worry (愁 憂 *chóu yōu*) will cause harm to the sentiment (意 *yì*), because

Spleen is the store of sentiment.”

(Lu 727)

In other words Henry Lu has assumed (I believe correctly) that the pairing of *yōu* (憂) with *chóu* (愁) is best expressed as suggesting excess and clarifies the intended meaning of *yōu* (憂) in this context as ‘worry’.

For completeness here are the double terms from Chapter 8 of the Ling Shu

Table 6 – Double Terms from Chapter 8 of the Ling Shu

恐 <i>kǒng</i> - fear, dread, terrify, intimidate 懼 <i>jù</i> - fear, dread	Translated as ‘enduring fear’ by Henry Lu. Persistence in time, as an aspect of excess, is suggested by the double characters.
愁 <i>chóu</i> - worry, be anxious 憂 <i>yōu</i> - worry, anxiety	Translated as ‘excess of worry’ by Henry Lu
悲 <i>bēi</i> – grieve, sad, sorrowful 哀 <i>āi</i> – grief, sorrow, lamentation	Translated as ‘sadness’ by Henry Lu. It is not clear why he did not add ‘excess’ in this case.
喜 <i>xǐ</i> – happy, please, like, be fond of, 樂 <i>lè</i> – happy, joyful	Translated as ‘excess joy’* by Henry Lu
盛 <i>sheng</i> – abundant, grand, great 怒 <i>nù</i> - anger	Translated as ‘swelling anger’ by Henry Lu

* This combination of characters can also translate as ‘joy and elation (or pleasures)’ with different connotations of the two characters.

** This is the exception to the structure of the terms; a character that appears paired with anger literally means excess. This could also be taken as the embedded clue that the double terms are generally intended to denote ‘excess’.

If we take the above double terms as clarifying the intended meaning of the characters then we can feel reasonably confident that 憂 *yōu* – worry is the intended earth emotion.

If ‘worry’ is the correct term for *yōu* then to be consistent with the concept of *zhì* we have to find a positive expression of this. According to Claude Larre *yōu* (憂) can also mean ‘concern’ and he comments:

Is it possible to have a positive meaning of *yōu* [憂], because there is a good meaning of all emotions? Not in medical texts, but in other texts we can have legitimate *yōu* [憂]. For example, if you are the emperor or if you are a practitioner you can have in your heart and in your head for a certain time, and up to a certain point, concern as to how to rule or how to treat. Especially in Confucian texts! In Daoist texts there is not so much, they say no you should not have this kind of concern even for the best of intentions it is too dangerous, and exhausts your vitality and you are less able to cope with the situation... In these texts *yōu* is very close to obsessive-thought, or thinking which can become obsessive.

Larre 148

And thus perhaps the positive meaning of *sī* (思) as ‘contemplative-thought’ became favoured in medical thinking as the healthy expression of earth. Perhaps the Taoist perspective being more dis-passionate sees ‘contemplation’ as representative of the

balanced state of health, Buddhism with its emphasis on com-compassion would perhaps favour ‘concern’ (憂 *yōu*) (thus out-voting the Confucians).

It is not a big leap from the concept of ‘concern’ to the idea of ‘sympathy’ as used by J. R. Worsley and Felix Mann. Hicks et al explain sympathy as ‘the need to feel cared for or understood’ (32). *Sī* (思) often given as the main emotion of earth, is not an emotion per se, it conveys the idea of ‘contemplative-thought’ when healthy, and ‘over-thinking’ when unhealthy. However, the latter also implies ‘worry’, and thus *sī* (思) and *yōu* (憂) can also be seen as complementary terms when applied to earth.

Can we now revisit the various texts and make some sense of them? The following table contains the various characters we have discussed and some common keywords that are used in relation to these terms that serve to illustrate that although the use of characters does seem very confusing the various meaning of the characters do appear to fit the context.

Table 7 Five Emotions: Characters, Translations, Keywords

Phase	Emotion [Healthy]	Pathology
Wood	<i>nù</i> 怒 - anger [Assertiveness]	<i>sheng nù</i> 盛怒 - great anger, rage ‘anger, frustration and unfulfilled desires’
Fire	<i>xǐ</i> 喜 - joy [Elation]	<i>xǐ lè</i> 喜樂 - excess joy (excitability, elation, pleasures)
	<i>lè</i> 樂 - joy	<i>bēi</i> 悲 - sadness, un-happy <i>bù lè</i> 不樂 - lack of joy

Earth	<i>yōu</i> 憂 - worry [Concern (Sympathy)]	<i>chóu yōu</i> 愁 憂 - excess worry	Tai-Yin? <i>yōu</i> 憂 - oppression or anguish
	<i>sī</i> 思 - thought [Contemplation]	<i>sī</i> 思 - over-thinking	
Metal	<i>bēi</i> 悲 - sadness or grief [Spiritual Longing]	<i>bēi āi</i> 悲 哀 - excess sadness, or grief and lamentation, [negativity] <i>yōu</i> 憂 - prolonged grief	
Water	<i>kǒng</i> 恐 - fear [Awe]	<i>kǒng jù</i> 恐 懼 - excess or enduring fear	

Conclusions

It would seem that we can not find a single normative translation of the characters for emotions because:

- More characters are used, with different meanings according to context, than in the systematized teachings, which are thus a simplification.
- Emotions are seen as encompassing a range from healthy normal expressions to pathology that is hard to encode in one English word

Many of J. R. Worsley's teachings have been thought of as either his own innovation or derived from a more esoteric tradition. Peter Eckman in his 'In the Footsteps of the Yellow Emperor' has traced the origin of many of the teachings of J. R. Worsley and other Europeans to teachers in Taiwan, Japan, and Korea. Further to this it would seem from examination of classic texts that these teachings (as with this one example) although differing from the received principles of modern TCM are well founded in the classics, and indeed demonstrate an understanding that has been lost from the later systematized teachings. If 'sympathy' was an innovation of Worsley then it was an inspired return to

canonical principles, I think it is more likely that it was based upon knowledge received from teachers in the Far East.

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ⁱ The Wade-Giles form ‘Tao’ is retained as a direct quote from the published text.

ⁱⁱ The comparison of phase and the *shen* and the *zhi* inform our understanding of the intended meaning of each .

ⁱⁱⁱ The systematized modern teachings that we are familiar with are not found in this form in the classics. The process of systematization has taken place over the time since the classics were written and is the product of many authors.

^{iv} I use the phrase ‘Five Elements’ specifically when referring to the school of J. R. Worsely, even though I prefer to use the term five phases for general usage.

^v It could be pointed out that over-thinking is not an emotion per se.

^{vi} The difference in the attribution of emotions and organs is probably similar to what we find in relation to tastes. Tastes that injure or benefit an organ are often not the primary taste attributed to a phase, but are most commonly (but not exclusively) related by ko cycle.

^{vii} In most instances it is accepted that excess of the five or seven emotions is the cause or sign of disease, Joy/elation appears to be an exception, a ‘lack of’ is referred to in the Classics, but not commonly considered in modern texts.

^{viii} These are the various emotions that do not appear to have been included in the Seven Emotions all have the heart radical in front of the character and appear to be most commonly associated with the heart.

Yōu 憂 worry, sorrow, anxiety

chù 怵 fear, feel apprehensive

Ti 惕 cautious, watchful, be on the alert be vigilant.

^{ix} In all other instances Henry Lu translates the double terms as ‘excess ...’.