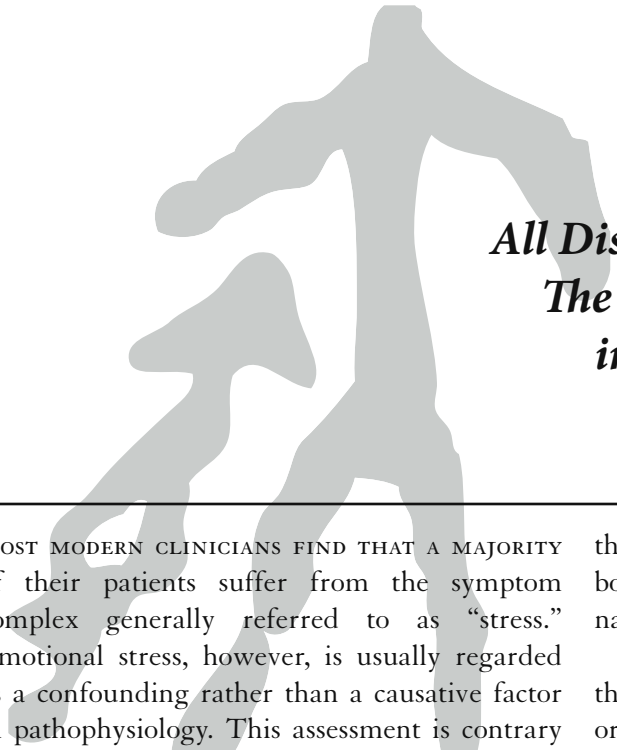

All Disease Comes From the Heart: The Pivotal Role of the Emotions in Classical Chinese Medicine

by Heiner Fruehauf

MOST MODERN CLINICIANS FIND THAT A MAJORITY of their patients suffer from the symptom complex generally referred to as "stress." Emotional stress, however, is usually regarded as a confounding rather than a causative factor in pathophysiology. This assessment is contrary to the tenets of classical Chinese medicine, which originally regarded emotional imbalance as a spiritual affliction of primary significance. While ancient Chinese philosophy considered emotional sensibility as our greatest asset in the process of fulfilling human destiny, it also regarded human temperaments as our greatest liability due to vast pathogenetic potential.

While Western medicine has encountered psychosomatic theory in the 20th century, the subtle and non-quantifiable nature of the emotions continues to be viewed as a nebulous factor by the purveyors of materialist science. The result is that modern physicians generally ignore or simply medicate symptoms of stress, depression, or anxiety. This bias has affected how institutionalized Chinese medicine views the topic of the emotions today. While the contemporary brand of Chinese medicine, exported by the People's Republic of China under the trade name "TCM," acknowledges that the treatment of non-local and non-structural symptoms belongs to its therapeutic domain, textbook TCM theory lacks both a cohesive and in-depth approach to the nature and dynamics of human feelings.

Through a review of relevant ancient sources, this essay intends to heighten awareness about the original complexity and significance that classical Chinese medicine bestowed on the subject of the emotions. Written more than 2,000 years ago, many of the texts cited below remind us that most diseases in urban human beings are caused by emotional stress. This is pertinent clinical advice that more than ever applies to the realities of contemporary Chinese medicine practice.

The Relationship of Body and Spirit

"I believe that there are two different human methodologies of knowing: one is time oriented, and the other is space oriented." [1] Thus begins an analysis of the differences between Chinese medicine and modern science by the contemporary philosopher Liu Changlin. He goes on to describe how Chinese medicine is time therapy, based in the ancient science of energy dynamics, while Western medicine is space therapy, rooted in the modern science of matter analysis. Indeed, the

© Copyright 2006 Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D.

major distinction between modern and ancient physicians is how they viewed the nature and relationship of matter, energy, and consciousness. What came first, the chicken or the egg? All medicines rooted in scientific materialism as well as Marxist materialism answer resoundingly in favor of matter. It is no accident that the modern Chinese term for psycho-somatic medicine is *xingshen bingxue*, literally the science of how (primary) physical form and (secondary) spirit relate in the disease forming process. A 1991 TCM primer on body-mind connections elaborates: "In the relationship of matter (*xing*) and spirit (*shen*), matter takes the leading role, while the phenomena of the mind and the emotions are secondary to it; first there is matter, then there is consciousness; consciousness is born of matter."[2] Within this paradigm, the philosopher Xunzi is generally regarded as a pioneer of "progressive materialist thinking," while most Buddhist and Taoist texts on the subject matter are identified as "idealist musings, spawned by the backward conditions of China's feudal past."[3]

It is no accident that the modern Chinese term for psychosomatic medicine is xingshen bingxue, literally the science of how (primary) physical form and (secondary) spirit relate in the disease forming process.

In contrast to this position, the defining classics of Chinese medicine establish that it is the invisible forces of *shen* (spirit) and *qi* (functional force) that rule matter. "Heaven comes first," asserts the *Lingshu*, "earth is second."[4] Or in the more elaborate words of Liu Zhou, a 6th century philosopher: "If the spirit is at peace, the heart is in harmony; when the heart is in harmony, the body is whole; if the spirit becomes aggravated the heart wavers, and when the heart wavers the body becomes injured; if one seeks to heal the physical body, therefore, one needs to regulate the spirit first."[5] Following the premise of one of Chinese medicine's most fundamental tenets, *jing-qi-shen* theory (the Chinese forerunner of contemporary body-mind-spirit theory), Chinese medical diagnosis aims primarily at determining the condition of *qi* and *shen*, while Chinese medical therapy endeavors to treat *qi* and *shen*. This includes situations where the primary goal is to affect changes in the physical body. The central Chinese medicine concept of *shen* appearing in early Chinese texts could conceivably be summarized as "that which is subtle and invisible, yet commands everything."

One of the topics woven through all of the major medical classics—the *Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine* (Neijing), the *Classic of Difficulties* (Nanjing), and the *Treatise on Disorders Caused by Cold and Miscellaneous Syndromes* (Shanghan zabing lun)—is the concept of the superior physician (*shanggong*). According to all of these sources, it is the defining characteristic of a preeminent healer to be able to diagnose and treat diseases on the *shen* level. The *Neijing* states in an exemplary line: "The superior physician makes it his prerogative to treat disease when it has not yet structurally manifested, and prevents being in the position of having to treat disorders that have already progressed to the realm of the physical."[6] In contrast, "the low level physician finds himself salvaging what has already manifested in physical form, and treating what is already ruined."[7] The top-level physician thus perceives what the average practitioner cannot see:

> The physical body—yes, you need to work with it when your eyes cannot perceive, by asking where the discomfort is and by palpating the channels … *Shen*, on the other hand, yes *shen*—in order to diagnose on this level you need not be focused on what the patient tells you.

© Copyright 2006 Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D.

> Your eyes see the invisible, your heart is open, and your intuitive sensing is front and center. All of a sudden, then, the subtle truth will reveal itself to you, without being able to put your experience into words, seeing while everybody else does not; as if the night turns bright for you alone while everybody else remains in the dark, like the invisible hand of the wind moving the clouds. That is why it is called *shen*, mysterious.[8]

An exemplary doctor, therefore, "follows the tenets of ancient times, experiences their magic in the present, keeps the inner eye on the subtle and mysterious, and stays connected to the realm of the unlimited—what the pack does not see is what the excellent physician values; … that is why the superior physician works with the invisible sprouts when grasping *qi*, while the inferior physician is mired in the realm of what has already become manifest, thereby contributing to the decline of the body."[9] The priorities of a classical Chinese medicine practitioner are thus summarized as follows: "One, treat the spirit; two, know how to nourish the physical body; three, know the true transmission of herbal medicine; four, work with the large and small types of needles; and five, know how to diagnose the state of *qi* and blood in the *fu* and *zang* organs."[10]

Between Heaven and Earth: Human Destiny and the Heart

In 1174, the Song dynasty scholar-physician Chen Yan recapped three general causes for disease (*sanyin*) that still serve as a model for Chinese medical pathogenesis:

> The first category is called internal causes, referring to the seven emotions (*qiqing*) that emerge from the organ systems inside and then reflect as structural pathology in the body's outer regions; the next is called external causes, referring to the six excessive weather influences (*liuyin*) that invade the channel and collaterals from the outside and in due course end up lodging in the organ systems; the last is called not internal not external causes, referring to injuries to the vital force from eating too little or too much food, or by bites from tigers, wolves, and poisonous insects, as well as accidents involving weapons, drowning, and the like.[11]

While Chen's work generally gets credited with the introduction of "the theory of the three causes," the characterization of emotional versus non-emotional pathology is as old as the Chinese notion of disease itself. Beginning with the earliest medical texts, two Chinese characters are generally used to describe the concept of disease, namely *ji* and *bing*. An early dictionary defines



Oracle bone version of the character ji: a person struck by an arrow from outside

ji as "an acute disease that arises when alien *qi* strikes a person from outside."[12] In contrast, the more common term *bing* is described as "a more severe and complex disease"[13] that "is attached to a person's righteous *qi* inside the body."[14] On the most literal level, *bing* means "affliction of the heart." It consists of a combination of the disease radical (originally a pictogram of a dridden person) and the heavenly stem *bing*, which is associated with the phase element fire and the heart organ. Together, the complete character signifies a situation where somebody has become physically ill due to mental, emotional, or spiritual causes.[15]

Despite this unequivocal portrayal of the leading role of *shen* and its pivotal part in the disease forming process, contemporary TCM has

© Copyright 2006 Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D.

banished the role of the emotions to the historical archives of Chinese medicine, along with many other aspects of classical Chinese medicine that do not mesh with the ideology of Marxist materialist science. Consequently, many modern Chinese medical practitioners tend to pay more attention to viruses and bacteria than to emotional stress as causative factors of disease.

In contrast to this recent development, all eminent physicians of the past agreed that only animals and enlightened sages are capable of escaping the influence of the emotions, while the average human being is susceptible to their pathogenetic potential. The 18th century physician Xu Dachun once remarked: "The treatment of humans should differ from that of animals, because animal diseases are rarely caused by emotional factors, but by wind, cold, and food related problems."[16] As if augmenting this statement, Miu Xiyong pointed out in 1625: "In very ancient antiquity, human illness was primarily caused by the six excessive weather patterns rather than the seven emotions. Today, the situation is quite different—the seven emotional influences are severe and the five desires run deep."[17]

...in the early stages of Chinese medicine the heart was alternately classified as the earth organ, not the fire organ that it is exclusively described as today.

Feelings and emotions, therefore, are at the core of the human condition—defined by ancient Chinese sources as the plight of having been given a heart, a heart that keeps the human being suspended in the dynamic struggle between the earthy demons of the animal body and the virtuous spirits of his/her heavenly nature. The *Shuowen jiezi*, China's earliest dictionary, defines the heart as "the human heart; it is the earth organ."[18] In addition to distinguishing the complexities of the human spirit from other living things, this remarkable 2nd century statement makes reference to a little known fact: in the early stages of Chinese medicine the heart was alternately classified as the earth organ, not the fire organ that it is exclusively described as today. From the perspective of Chinese cosmology, it seems only appropriate that the heart—the "empty vessel" and container of *shen*—was first described as an earthen receptacle. Similar to the story of creation that appears in the Old Testament as well as other ancient traditions, Chinese mythology conveys that humans were first made from clay: "People say that when Heaven and earth opened and unfolded, humankind did not yet exist. Nü Gua [the creatrix] kneaded yellow earth and fashioned human beings."[19] The human condition, therefore, is metaphorically described as the state of having an earthen heart, which in its healthy state is capable of containing the fire of spirit, including the emotions and their potentially troublesome ramifications.

Another common denominator that relates the heart to the phase element earth and the evolving fate of humanity is the number five. Multiple ancient texts, including the *Neijing*, relate or make reference to the theory that all life forms are divided into five categories: the scaly creatures, signified by the water element and the number 1 (representative: dragon); the winged creatures, signified by the fire element and the number 2 (representative: phoenix); the furry creatures, signified by the wood element and the number three (representative: unicorn); the armored creatures, signified by the metal element and the number 4 (representative: turtle); the naked creatures, signified by the earth element and the number 5 (representative: human being or, in some sources, the sage).[20]

From an ancient Chinese perspective, humans quite literally tick to the rhythm of five. The *Guanzi*, a text attributed to the philosopher Guan Zhong who lived during the 7th century B.C.E., observes that "the human being completes physical form after five lunar months and is born after ten."[21] Five represents the union of the first

© Copyright 2006 Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D.

yang number 3 and the first yin number 2, and is described by many ancient traditions as the number of the ultimate sentiment—love. Five, as yang joining and moving within yin, is thus the numerical rendition of earth containing fire, or spirit moving within the body. This is perhaps the main reason why Chinese medical theory features the five phase element system as the primary means to diagnose the human being. It is the most suitable system to assess the flow of "humanity": the flow of divine spirit within the matter of the animal body.

The number five is inextricably associated with the five phases and thus with movement itself, harmonizing the upward momentum of earth with the downward momentum of heaven. The human heart, appropriately associated with the 5th month of the lunar cycle, is primarily earth and secondarily fire. A major part of being human means to come to terms with the nature of this clay: a dense clod with beastly memories, yet with a heaven-bound mission that is paralleled by the evolution of human posture. While most animals walk on four legs manifesting their earthly destiny, humans walk upright with their head pointed skyward, fulfilling a destiny that includes the discovery of heaven within earth. Five, therefore, is both the number of humanity and evolution. To the creators of Chinese medicine, being human meant to be endowed with a heart and the resultant potential to sense, connect to, and ritually celebrate the higher dimensions regarded as the source of all life. The ever moving and reactive nature of the human heart, however, requires that in this process the fickleness of fire is contained by the stability of earth. Otherwise, the spirit becomes ungrounded, opening the door for the seven emotions to unfold their consumptive effects.

To the creators of Chinese medicine, being human meant to be endowed with a heart and the resultant potential to sense, connect to, and ritually celebrate the higher dimensions regarded as the source of all life.

Heavenly Nature and Earthly Emotions

While the heart number five reflects the essence of earth—earth with a heavenly mission—the antithetical nature of Taoist reasoning prescribes that it is primarily used to signify the qualities of yang and Heaven. As such, it designates the five planetary movements in the sky (*wuyun*), as well as the heavenly disposition of the human being: "The way in which the human being resonates with the Way of Heaven is the following: inside, there are five *zang* organs that respond to the five sounds, the five colors, the five flavors, and the five directions."[22] Elaborating on this system of heavenly correspondence by the power of five, ancient medical sources further describe humanity as being endowed with the five sentiments (*wuzhi*) and the five natures (*wuxing*).

The five sentiments are the following: vigor (*nu*), associated with the wood organ, liver; ecstasy (*xi*), associated with the fire organ, heart; contemplation (*si*), associated with the earth organ, spleen; nostalgia (*bei*), associated with the metal organ, lung; and awe (*kong*), associated with the water organ, kidney. They are part of the physiological movement of the human heart, since "vigor causes the qi to rise, ecstasy causes the qi to open up, nostalgia causes the qi to dissipate, awe causes the qi to descend, … and contemplation causes the qi to congeal."[23]

Like every universal attribute associated with the number five, it is important to point out that all of the five sentiments are inherently positive, contributing to the process of upward movement on the human path of evolution. They are said to cause imbalance only when thrown off their proper course by selfish attachments that can

© Copyright 2006 Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D.

subsequently lead to a state of excess, deficiency, or stagnation. Xu Dachun comments: "If the five sentiments are indulged in beyond measure, then fire pathologies develop and cause disease."[24] In this case, vigor turns into anger, ecstasy into hysteria, contemplation into worry, nostalgia into grief, and awe into fear. Like all ancient symbol creation, the genius of Chinese character composition ensures that both o f these aspects of interpretation, the enlightening yang side as well as the dark yin side, are contained in the original names of the five sentiments.

The five human manifestations of heavenly nature (*wuxing*) are commonly discussed in texts written during the formative period of the *Neijing*, including *Master Xun* (Xunzi), *Heavy Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (Chunqiu fanlu), *The Elder Dai's Record of Ritual* (Da Dai liji), and *Comprehensive Debates in White Tiger Hall* (Baihu tongyi), yet virtually absent from modern Chinese medicine textbooks. These are also referred to as *wuchang*, the five constants, and represent the following: compassion (*ren*) associated with the wood organ, liver; propriety (*li*) associated with the fire organ, heart; integrity (*xin*) associated with the earth organ, spleen; selflessness (*yi*) associated with the metal organ, lung; and wisdom (*zhi*) associated with the water organ, kidney.[25]

It is one of the defining features of ancient Chinese systems theory that cyclical functions in Heaven, on earth, and within the human being are described in terms of twelve. More than 2,000 years ago, Han dynasty thinkers had finalized a holographic model of the universe wherein twelve major celestial houses in the sky resonated with twelve feudal states in China, which in turn corresponded to twelve functional organ networks in the human body. The system of twelve, which is found in most ancient traditions around the world, was preceded in China by a system of eleven, pairing the yang number five with the yin number six. Heaven, therefore, was the arena of the *wuyun liuqi* (the five planetary movements and the six climate influences), while the human being was the staging ground of the *wuzang liufu* (the five *zang* and the six *fu* organ functions). Note that the term *wuzang liufu* is still the primary Chinese term for the organ systems today, although the pericardium has technically taken its place as the sixth *zang* organ in the revised twelve cycle of Chinese medicine since *Neijing* times. This situation may be due to the pericardium's official duty "to generate the states of ecstasy and joy," defining it as the most emotional of the organ networks and thereby affiliating it with the earthly realm of six rather than the heavenly atmosphere of five.[26]

Another item that used to feature prominently in this all-embracing system of five-six correspondences was the *wuxing liuqing* arrangement of human responsiveness, linking the five heavenly features of human nature (*wuxing*) with the six earthly emotions (*liuqing*). The five natures and the six emotions were said to create the "weather" of the microcosm, just like the five planetary movements and the six climate influences generate the dynamic conditions of the macrocosm.[27] As Xunzi points out, the five natures are a gift of Heaven, while the six emotions are a secondary function associated with them: "That what the human being is born with is called his/her nature; … the love, hate, likes, dislikes, sorrows, and pleasure cravings that spring from this basic nature, those are called the emotions."[28]

Within the climate of human emotions, furthermore, the five natures are depicted as the heavenly constant that is in perpetual danger of becoming corrupted by the more unpredictable factor of the six emotions, which in most accounts are named as love (*hao*), hate (*wu*), excitement (*xi*), anger (*nu*), sorrow (*ai*), and pleasure (*le*). The number six, after all, is the label of three-dimensional space, associated with the seductive realm of the earth, the body, and the self.[29] As an early Taoist source states: "Everything that contains more of the five natures is like yang and thus compassionate, while everything that contains more of the six emotions is like yin and thus selfish."[30]

The six emotions, therefore, are generally described as a factor that brings humanity's

© Copyright 2006 Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D.

heavenly potential out of balance and throws it into chaos. "One should safeguard the five heavenly natures and eliminate the six emotions," an early *Laozi* commentator affirms, further elaborating: "When humans rid themselves of emotions and desires, moderate the sensual temptations of the material world, and purify the five *zang* organ functions, then the light of spirit will fill them."[31] This assessment is echoed by a host of Buddhist texts, illustrating the fluid interchange between the two traditions, and typically uses language like the following: "The six emotions must be restrained, just like one guards against dogs, deer, fish, snakes, monkeys, and birds."[32] Completing this argument, the 1st century source *Comprehensive Debates in White Tiger Hall* points out the etymological origins of the characters for nature and emotion: "Emotion (*qing* 情) is that which is meant to keep quiet (*jing* 靜), while nature (*xing* 性) is that which is meant to be active and unfold (*sheng* 生)."[33] Note that this general characterization also relates to the six *fu* organs of the body, which in their physiological state should be empty, but tend toward the pathological state of excess.

The five natures and the six emotions were said to create the "weather" of the microcosm, just like the five planetary movements and the six climate influences generate the dynamic conditions of the macrocosm.

Directly associated with the six emotions are the *liuyu*, the six catalysts of desire: the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind. The *Annals of Master Lü* (Lüshi chunqiu), compiled during the 3rd century B.C.E., first mentioned the relationship between the emotions and the desires:

> Heaven created the human being and endowed him/her with lust and desire. Desire is associated with emotion, and emotion is associated with moderation. The sage cultivates emotional moderation in order to control the desires, and never allows the emotions to run his actions in life. The ears' desire for the five sounds, the eyes' desire for the five colors, the mouth's desire for the five flavors, that is emotion.[34]

It was not until the 12th century, starting with Chen Yan's *Analysis and Formulas for Similar Diseases Generated by Three Causes* (Sanyin jiyi bingzheng fanglun), that the widely used concept of the six emotions/desires turned into the seven emotions, which represent the accepted terminology for emotional pathology in Chinese medicine today. This development was possibly inspired by the influential teachings of the neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi, who in turn appears to have based his concept of the seven emotions on an early mentioning of the term *qiqing* in the *Record of Ritual* (Liji).

It should be noted that other systems of categorizing the emotions also existed, such as the five emotions (*wuqing*), a term often mentioned in early Buddhist texts. Whatever number system is used, all traditional Chinese classifications of human temperament have in common that they describe the emotions as a major cause of disease.[3]

The Power of Ritual and the Emotional Therapy System of the Confucian Educator Wang Fengyi (1864-1937)

"The difference of being in command and losing command over the emotions is the root of life and death, and the starting point of living and dying."[36] Thus the *Annals of Master Lü* sums up conventional Chinese wisdom regarding

© Copyright 2006 Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D.

the quandary of human feelings, stressing that mastery of one's emotions is a requirement for maintaining health and longevity. The same source also reveals the now well-known medical fact that emotional imbalance initiates energetic stagnation, a potential cause for phlegm, blood stasis, and other harbingers of structural pathology. To resolve the acute discomfort brought on by emotional stress and depression, modern Chinese medicine practitioners commonly prescribe herbal remedies such as Xiaoyao San, the famous 11th century "powder for dispersing stuck emotions and restoring leisure and ease." However, many physicians of the past believed that the deeper strata of emotional injury cannot be treated with herbs, but need to be addressed by affecting the spirit directly. Xu Dachun, for instance, describes how to employ the controlling cycle of the phase elements to treat disease originating from excess emotional indulgence:

> If the five sentiments have been strongly injured, this condition cannot be treated with herbs, but should be addressed via the controlling relationship cycle. Grief controls anger, use it to touch an angry person with tales of misery and dejection; excitement controls grief, use it to thrill a sad person by inundating him with waves of sarcasm and degrading language; fear can control excitement, use it to intimidate a maniacal person with threats of death and imminent disaster; anger can control worry, use it to trigger a depressed person with foul and shameful language; worry can control fear, use it to approach a panicky person with depressing news of potential loss.[37]

While this approach of "treating fire with fire" has also been reported in the clinical case histories of other physicians, it represents by no means a widely accepted cure for imbalanced emotions. More typically, some of the religious sources call for an outright "elimination" and "rejection" of the emotions, while most texts prescribe a more moderate approach, advocating the balancing of strong feelings by channeling them in appropriate ways. The key word used in this context is *jie* (to harmonize, to moderate, to create rhythm). Many of the relevant texts define moderation as a distinct quality of the sages, who alone are said to be capable of using emotions appropriately, to achieve deep connection without being led astray and eventually succumbing to illness. For the average person, the best way to moderate the agitated spirit is the institution of rituals, as the famous 1st century historian Ban Gu explains in the following passage:

> The human being contains both the yin and the yang influences of Heaven and earth, and consequently manifests the emotions of partiality, hate, excitement, anger, sorrow, and pleasure; hence the divisive nature of humanity which is so hard to moderate. The sages alone are capable of moderating this aspect of the human condition, and thus created ritual and music guided by the example of Heaven and earth, using them to stay connected to the all-governing light of spirit, establishing the laws of human behavior, straightening out the relationship between human nature and the emotions, and thus achieving moderation in the myriad affairs of life. For the feelings between a man and a woman and the sensation of jealousy, they created the ritual of marriage; for the social interactions between elders and younger members of the community, they created the ritual of celebratory banquets; for the feelings of grieving the dead and missing loved ones, they created the ritual of sacrificial mourning; for the desire to venerate one's leaders, they created the ritual of audience. A mourning ritual features ritual wailing and stomping, while music has a set format for dances and songs—sufficient to warm the sentiments of the straight, and to prevent missteps by those who are crooked. If the ritual of marriage gets abandoned,

© Copyright 2006 Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D.

History of the Five, Six and Seven Emotions

Source	Wuqing (5 Emotions)	Liuqing (6 Emotions)	Qiging (7 Emotions)
Liji (3rd century B.C.E.)			excitement (*xi*), anger (*nu*), sorrow (*ai*), panic (*ju*), affection (*ai*), hate (*wu*), desire (*yu*)
Xunzi (3rd century B.C.E.)		love (*hao*), hate (*wu*), excitement (*xi*), anger (*nu*), sorrow (*ai*), pleasure (*le*)	
Hanshu (1st century)		partiality (*shan*), hate (*wu*), excitement (*xi*), anger (*nu*), sorrow (*ai*), pleasure (*le*)	
Baihu tongyi (1st century)		excitement (*xi*), anger (*nu*), love (*hao*), hate (*wu*), pleasure (*le*), sorrow (*ai*)	
Chinese Buddhist scriptures (3rd-6th century)	not specified (associated with the five roots: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body)	not specified (associated with the six roots: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind)	
Hai lu suishi (12th century)	excitement (*xi*), anger (*nu*), sorrow (*ai*), pleasure (*le*), blame (*yuan*)		
Zhuzi yulu (The teachings of the neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi, 1130-1200)			excitement (*xi*), anger (*nu*), sadness (*you*), panic (*ju*), affection (*ai*), hate (*wu*), desire (*yu*)
Major medical texts featuring the present-day version of the seven emotions: Sanyin jiyi bingzheng fanglun (1174), Shiyi dexiao fang (1176), Jisheng fang (1253), Puji fang (1406), Binhu maixue (1564), Zhengzhi zhunsheng (1602), Jingyue quanshu (1636), Yizong jinjian (1742)			excitement (*xi*), anger (*nu*), sadness (*you*), worry (*si*), grief (*bei*), fright (*jing*), fear (*kong*)

© Copyright 2006 Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D.

> then the Tao of husband and wife will become lacking, and consequently the sins of sexual decadence and abstinence will increase; if the ritual of celebratory banquets gets abandoned, then the proper order between the older and younger generations will be lost, and the crimes of quarrelling and flattery will blossom; if the ritual of mourning and burial gets abandoned, then the gratitude we owe our own flesh and blood becomes weak, and many of the dead will forget about the living; if the ritual of audience gets abandoned, then the proper position of ruler and servant becomes confused, and war and turmoil will gradually arise.[38]

According to the system of the five natures/virtues introduced in an earlier section of this article, *li* (propriety, sacred connection, ritual) is the function most directly associated with the heart. As a scholar of Chinese medicine, it was most interesting for me to uncover this explicit connection between emotional healing and ancient Chinese ritual, a topic usually thought of as the musty turf of anthropologists and religious historians. It further strengthened the conviction first imparted to me by most of my older Chinese mentors that meaningful research on the foundational concepts of Oriental medicine requires an immersion in the textual environment of *Neijin*g and pre-*Neijing* times.

From a clinical perspective, the concept of propriety, ritual, and moderated emotions is admittedly as popular today as wearing great-aunt Bertha's dress on a Saturday night out in town. It was thus an illuminating experience for me to encounter a group of Northern Chinese therapists who still use the Confucian teachings of virtue, ritual, and social relationship as their primary treatment tool. Their approach to healing is radical, especially when considering the fact that they are practicing in the territory of the People's Republic of China—their work is ostensibly devoid of pharmaceuticals, herbs, or needles, but exclusively uses the nonmaterial methods of storytelling and ritual affirmation. Echoing some of the ancient sources introduced earlier, these practitioners believe that most diseases originate from a darkening of the bright aspects of human nature by the veil of inappropriate emotions.

The origins of this healing modality—still practiced widely in the Northern provinces of Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang—are rooted in the teachings of Wang Fengyi, a Confucian educator and charismatic emotional healer who was extremely influential in this part of China during the early part of the 20th century. Wang's biography relates that he grew up as a poor and illiterate peasant, and became enlightened to the nature of human emotions and their disease-causing consequences while observing the traditional three-year watch over his father's grave.[39] He observed that all emotions arise from social interactions, especially within the nucleus of community relationship, one's immediate family. Driven by an urgent sense of mission to help save his community from the curse of disease amidst the misery of poverty and civil war, he began traveling from village to village, spreading a neo-Confucian version of everyday-life spirituality focusing on proper family relationships. His oral presentations, some of them preserved in the form of reprinted lecture excerpts, were legendary at the time, drawing large rural audiences. Many participants were reported to be crying, fainting, or vomiting when triggered into a state of recognition and ruefulness by the transmission of the master.

In addition, Wang Fengyi greatly contributed to the revolutionary movement of bringing education to Chinese women. He was instrumental in establishing and maintaining seven hundred schools for girls, since he considered it to be a shortcoming of traditional Confucian doctrine that women were not entitled to an education. Wang's philosophy of self-responsibility viewed the roles of women (mothers, wives, daughters-in-law) as the central element for the health of every family, and by extension, the health of every family member as well as the country at large. He felt, moreover, that women were best able to exemplify the core essence of his social philosophy,

© Copyright 2006 Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D.

namely the virtue of giving compassion to others while reserving severity for oneself. In this sense, Wang looms large as a modern transmitter of the teachings of Confucius, Dong Zhongshu, and Zhu Xi. Many of Wang's teachings, as well as those of his students, sound remarkably like the following passage written by Dong Zhongshu in the 2nd century B.C.E.:

> What the *Annals* are teaching us to regulate is how to deal with the self and how to deal with others. How to deal with the self and how to deal with others is exemplified by the virtues of compassion and selflessness. With compassion we make others feel good, while with selflessness we set the self straight; that is why compassion is associated with others, and selflessness with self. … Compassion is manifested by loving others, not by loving self; selflessness is manifested by straightening out the self, not by straightening out others.[40]

From the perspective of Chinese medicine, it is the elaborate system of five element associations that is the most significant part of Wang's legacy. This system contains the familiar relations of the five phase elements with the five organs, the five colors, the five smells, etc., but synthesizes them with the ancient teachings on human virtue as well as Wang's own remarkable insights and experiences as a therapist. Now as then, patients are generally asked to relate their stories and then are diagnosed with a specific breach of virtue caused by one of the five emotional poisons, specifically anger (wood), hate (fire), blame (earth), judgment (metal), or disdain (water). While Wang himself was known to be an exceptionally clairvoyant healer and some of his students maintain this gift, for the denser minded he has left behind detailed descriptions of how affliction in different body parts may be related to specific emotions and specific family members.

The curative process of Wang's system involves the therapist's weaving a narrative, ranging from very few words to night-long marathons of story-telling that are able to "turn the heart of the patient." The material for stories is often taken from the treasure trove of Chinese moral history, but most typically involve the daily environment of the patient: stories of Master Wang curing someone just like them, or vivid tales of the cure or demise of someone in the next village, or, ideally, someone present in the room or the village square who offers heart-wrenching and tearful testimony of their own healing process. This method is referred to as *xingli jiangbing*, literally "talking the disease away by appealing to one's higher nature." The curative effect is considered to begin when the patient is moved to acknowledge his own emotional involvement in the disease forming process, and commits to transform his/her blame toward others into a thorough reformation of self. At this point, which skillful storytellers are sometimes able to trigger in minutes while others may need days or even weeks, the patient typically begins to vomit into readymade buckets, or exhibits other sign of physical cleansing such as crying, sweating, or diarrhea. One of the healers I visited remarked matter-of-factly that "liver cirrhosis can be disgorged in one week, while with some cancers it takes three weeks or longer until no more tar-like materials are being brought up."

Transcripts of these healing sessions may often read flat, especially to someone who originates from a different cultural background, but both healers and patients insist that it is the transmission of the storyteller herself—achieved by a non-compromised lifestyle of virtuous conduct—that is needed to trigger a powerful response. Through modern eyes, the nature of these healing sessions may look similar to the phenomenon of the *qigong baogao* (Qigong transmission lecture) which were so common in China before the official crackdown on Falun Gong practitioners. By virtue of their humble demeanor and their radically selfless conduct, however, the talk-practitioners of the Manchurian plains tend to cut a different figure than the entrepreneurial Qigong masters of the 1990s. In the particularly moving example of a peasant healer I saw in a village near the Russian border,

© Copyright 2006 Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D.

Wang Fengyi's System of Five Element Associations

5 Phase Elements	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
5 Zang Organs	Liver	Heart	Spleen	Lung	Kidney
5 Sources	Original Nature *Yuanxing* 元性	Original Spirit *Yuanshen* 元神	Original Vitality *Yuanqi* 元氣	Original Affectivity *Yuanqing* 元情	Original Essence *Yuanjing* 元精
5 Virtues	Compassion *Ren* 仁	Propriety *Li* 禮	Integrity *Xin* 信	Selflessness *Yi* 嶷	Wisdom *Zhi* 智
5 Positive Qualities	Sense of Direction and Strategy *Zhuyi* 主意	Understanding Sacred Connection *Mingli* 明禮	Trust and Reliability *Xinshi* 信實	Radiance of Sound and Light *Xiangliang* 響亮	Soft and harmonious *Rouhe* 柔和
5 Powers	Containment *Rong* 容	Respect *Jing* 敬	Commitment *Zhi* 執	Discernment *Bie* 別	Awareness *Lin* 臨
5 Emotional Poisons	Anger *Nu* 怒	Hate *Hen* 恨	Blame *Yuan* 怨	Judgment *Nao* 惱	Disdain *Fan* 瘨
5 Taboos	Kill	Inappropriate Sexual Behavior	Lie	Steal	Drink
5 Family Roles	Oldest Child	Father	Ancestors	Younger Children	Mother
5 Social Roles	Workers	Leaders	Farmers	Scholars	Businessman
5 Religions	Christianity	Confucianism	Daoism	Islam	Buddhism
5 Facial Features	Long	Pointed	square	round	plump
5 Speech Instruments	Teeth	Tongue	nose	lips	throat
5 Vocal Expressions	Abrupt	High	level	drawn out	low

© Copyright 2006 Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D.

his simple house had been converted into a makeshift hospice where deathly ill patients traveled to from far away and stayed for free, were fed for free, and received treatment for free—day after day for the last twenty-five years, sometimes adding up to 20-40 people per day. Prior to receiving permission from his mentor to start the practice of therapeutic storytelling, moreover, he had spent twenty years preparing for this work by first clearing his own emotional issues.

Last summer, I had the privilege of spending one week with healers of Wang Fengyi's lineage, and was able to directly witness the intense process of storytelling and ensuing physical cleansing. While this was far too little time to verify many of the miraculous outcomes that this method of treatment is said to have achieved during the last century, including the complete cure of diabetes, aplastic anemia, congenital heart disease, and many types of cancer, it is my distinct impression as a medical professional that I witnessed something very profound, existing in the present moment and on a relatively large scale. As a scholar of the foundational theory of classical Chinese medicine, moreover, I marvel at how completely the ancient system of emotional pathology and therapy has survived in this lineage, and how relevant it is still today.

In conclusion, I feel that the ancient Chinese theory on the emotions offers another example of the profundity of ancient medical theories. Confucius himself once emphasized, "He who by reanimating the Old can gain knowledge of the New is fit to be a teacher."[41] Wang Fengyi and his students have demonstrated that no matter how antiquated or out-dated an ancient concept may look, truly classical knowledge is timeless and has the capacity of being fiercely relevant for the present. I hope that this essay can serve as a beginning step in clarifying some of the confusion surrounding the theory of the emotions in Chinese medicine, as well as inspire some relevant clinical insights.

Endnotes

[1] See Liu Changlin, "Fazhan zhongyixue de guanjian" (How to Develop the Core Essence of Chinese Medicine), in Zheyan kan zhongyi (Chinese Medicine Seen Through Philosophers' Eyes) (Beijing: Beijing Kexue Jishu Chubanshe, 2005), pp.28-34; English translation by Heiner Fruehauf viewable at www.classicalchinesemedicine.org.

[2] See Dong Lianrong et. al., ed., Zhongyi xingshen bing xue (Body-Mind Relationships in Chinese Medicine) (Beijing: Guangming Ribao Chubanshe, 1991), p.3

[3] Ibid., p.1

[4] See chapter 78 of the Lingshu, in Guo Xiechun, ed., Huangdi neijing lingshu (The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine: The Spiritual Pivot) (Tianjin: Tianjin Kexue Jishu Chubanshe,), p.514

[5] See chapter 1 of the Liuzi (Master Liu), in Baizi quanshu (A Complete Collection of Works by the One Hundred Masters), 8 vols. (Shanghai: Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1991), vol. 6, p.1.

[6] See chapter 2 of the Suwen, in Nanjing Zhongyi Xueyuan, ed., Huangdi neijing suwen yishi (An Annotated Text With Translation of the Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine: Plain Questions) (Shanghai: Shanghai Kexue Jishu Chubanshe, 1991), p. 16; see a similar version of this quote in chapter 55 of the Lingshu, in Huangdi neijing lingshu, p.379

[7] See chapter 26 of the Suwen, in Huangdi neijing suwen yishi, p.204

[8] Ibid., p.206

[9] See chapter 73 of the Lingshu, in Huangdi neijing lingshu, p.473

[10] See chapter 25 of the Suwen, in Huangdi neijing suwen yishi, p.198

[11] See the Siku quanshu introduction to Chen Yan, Sanyin jiyi bingzheng fanglun (Analysis and Formulas for Same Diseases Generated by Three Causes); in Yan Shiyun, ed., Zhongguo yiji tongkao (A Comprehensive Analysis of Chinese Medical Books), 4 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai Zhongyi Xueyuan Chubanshe, 1992), vol.2, p.2239

[12] See Shiming (An Explication of Terms), quoted in Zhang Liwei et.al, ed., Kangxi zidian tongjie (A Comprehensive Explanation of the Kangxi Dictionary), 3 vols. (Changchun: Shidai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1997), vol.2, p.1392

© Copyright 2006 Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D.

[13] See Xu Shen, and Tang Kejing, annotator, Shuowen jiezi jinshi (A Modern Annotated Version of Elucidating Lines and Explaining Complex Characters), 2 vols. (Changsha: Qiuli Shushe, 2002), vol.1, p.1016

[14] See Shiming, quoted in Kangxi zidian tongjie, vol.2, p.1393

[15] See also Liu Lihong's interpretation of the character bing, in Liu Lihong, Sikao zhongyi (Contemplating Chinese Medicine) (Guilin: Guangxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 2003), pp.151-53

[16] See Xu Dachun, "Shouyi lun" (A Discussion of Veterinarian Medicine), in his Yixue yuanliu lun (A Treatise on the Source Traditions of Medicine), in vol. 2 of the Siku quanshu edition, no page numbers

[17] See Miu Xiyong, "Yaoxing zhuzhi canhu zhigui" (A Reference Guide to the Nature and Therapeutic Effect of Herbs), in his Shen Nong bencao jing shu (An Annotated Version of Shen Nong's Materia Medica), in vol.1 of the Siku quanshu edition, no page numbers

[18] See Shuowen jiezi jinshi, vol.2, p.1438

[19] See the Han dynasty text Fengsu tongyi (Explanations of Social Customs), translated in Anne Birrell, Chinese Mythology: An Introduction (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p.35

[20] See, for instance, the Da Dai liji (the Elder Dai's Record of Ritual); in the Neijing suwen, this concept is referred to in chapters 67 and 70.

[21] See chapter 39 of the Guanzi (Master Guan), in Baizi quanshu, vol.3, no page numbers

[22] See chapter 11 of the Lingshu , in Huangdi neijing lingshu, p.137

[23] See chapter 39 of the Neijing suwen, in Huangdi neijing suwen yishi, p.283

[24] See Xu Dachun, "Wai nei jun xiang pian" (On External, Internal, Imperial, and Ministerial [Fire]), in his Chishui xuanzhu (Mysterious Pearls from Chishui), in vol. 1 of the Siku quanshu edition, no page numbers

[25] Lonny Jarrett is the only contemporary Chinese medicine scholar who has extensively discussed the phenomenon of wuxing (translated as the five virtues) in a foundational work on Chinese medicine; see Lonny S. Jarrett, Nourishing Destiny: The Inner Tradition of Chinese Medicine (Stockbridge: Spirit Path Press, 1998).

[26] See chapter 8 of the Neijing suwen, in Huangdi neijing suwen yishi, p.70. Although it would go beyond the framework of this essay to describe the psychopathology of the pericardium in detail, it should be noted that this organ network does indeed manifest as the primary source of emotional wounding in the context of modern clinical practice.

[27] See, for instance, the following description by the philosopher Dong Zhongshu during the 2nd century B.C.E.: "The qi of yin and yang exists in the realm of heaven, but also unfolds its dynamics within the human being; in humans, it manifests as love and hate, like and dislike, while in Heaven it presents as warmth and cool, cold and heat;" in chapter 79 of the Chunqiu fanlu (Heavy Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals), in vol. 17 of the Siku quanshu edition, no page numbers

[28] See chapter 22 of Xunzi (Master Xun), in Baizi quanshu, vol.1, no page numbers

[29] The six emotions were quite literally associated with the six dimensions of space. As is stated in Ban Gu's Baihu tongyi (Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall): "Ecstasy is in the West, anger is in the East, love is in the North, hate is in the South, sorrow is below, and pleasure is above;" in chapter 30 of the Baihu tongyi, in Baizi quanshu, vol. 6, no page numbers

[30] See chapter 6 of the Taiping jing (The Classic of Heavenly Peace), in Shanghai Shudian, comp., Daozang (Repository of Daoist Works), 36 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai Chubanshe, 1994), vol.24, p.344; the same idea is reflected in chapter 30 of the Baihu tongyi.

[31] Frequently quoted annotations to chapters 12 and 5 of the Daode jing by the 2nd century Taoist scholar with the pen-name Heshang Gong.

[32] See Ding Fubao, ed., Foxue da cidian (The Great Dictionary of Buddhist Studies) (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1984), p.326

[33] See chapter 30 of Baihu tongyi, in Baizi quanshu, vol.6, no page numbers

[34] See the section entitled "Qingyu" (The Emotions and the Desires) in chapter two of Lushi chunqiu (Annals of Master Lu), in Baizi quanshu, vol.5, no page numbers

[35] The only visible Han dynasty source that defends the emotions as something that is "not inherently sinful" is the 2nd century work Shen jian (Extended Reflections) by Xun Yue; see Chi-yun Ch'en, Hsun Yueh and the Mind of Late Han China: A Translation of the Shen-chien (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).

[36] See chapter 2 of Lushi chunqiu, in Baizi quanshu, vol.5, no page numbers

[37] See Xu Dachun, "Wai nei jun xiang pian," in Chishui xuanzhu, in vol. 1 of the Siku quanshu edition, no page numbers

© Copyright 2006 Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D.

[38] See Hanshu (History of the [Former] Han), quoted in Xun Rui, Qian Han Ji (A Record of the Former Han), vol. 5 of the Siku quanshu edition, no page numbers

[39] See *Wang Fengyi nianpu yu yulu* (A Biographic Table of Event's in Wang Fengyi's Life and Record of His Oral Teachings) (no publisher, 2000). Note that most of the numerous publications on Wang Fengyi's teachings are reproduced and circulated by tight-knit Buddhist or Confucian circles and are generally not for sale to the public.

[40] See chapter 8 of the Chunqiu fanlu, Siku quanshu edition, no page numbers.

[41] See Arthur Waley, tr., Confucius: The Analects (London: Everyman's Library, 2000), p.82.

© Translation Copyright 2006
Heiner Fruehauf, Ph.D.