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**From Stagnation to Depression:
The Conceptual Construction of *yiyu* in China**

There is a conceptual history of depression (*yiyu*) in China long before it threatens mental health worldwide. Through revisiting the semantic derivation of *yiyu*, this paper unfolds how the modern usage of *yiyu* overlaps with the conceptual constructions surrounding literature, medical texts, official historical records, and popular culture. It provides an understanding of how this emotional problem and disorder has been defined and perceived. In the classical Chinese language, the word “*yiyu*”, which could be traced back to the Han Dynasty (BCE 3rd- BC 1st Century), was a compound word of “*yi*”(press) and “*yu*”(stagnation). Gradually fixed was *yiyu*'s referral to the emotional state of sadness and stagnation, with a pathogenic dimension that might cause death. Only with the introduction of western medicine knowledge at the turn of the twentieth century did *yiyu* become an equivalence of the western psychiatric notion of “depression”, which embodied the pursuit of modernity. After the Maoist era when psychiatry lost its validity, contemporary writings relocated *yiyu* within institutionalizing and thematizing the patient identity of depression, which signaled the re-emerging psychiatric paradigm of understanding depression in a new social context.

The post-covid normal makes both emergence and promises of people’s emotional toll, especially in China where the pandemic begins. Through chronologically comparing the meaning of *yiyu*, this paper identifies a socio-cultural context of depression but also demonstrates the local continuity of depression that has not been fully grasped. It prepares the ground for further research on Chinese beliefs in health/illness, individual/social, and life/death relationships.