

From Stagnation to Depression – A Conceptual Analysis of *Yiyu*

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Abstract:

This paper explores the socio-cultural construction and evolution of depression in the Chinese cultural and historical context, particularly focusing on the term *yiyu* (抑鬱). *Yiyu*, now often synonymous with clinical depression in modern psychiatry, has a rich historical background rooted in traditional Chinese culture and medicine. Our analysis follows its expansion from an experiential term denoting “stagnation” or “being stuck”, to a medical concept addressing emotional illness.

We discuss how this change was not merely the importation of Western knowledge about depression, but also involved decontextualizing, transporting, and re-contextualizing of modern psychological concepts within a Chinese cultural and historical framework. We underline the term's metaphorical depth and its extensive use in different contexts, contributing to the pathologization of emotions in the Chinese lexicon.

This rich cultural history creates an overlap between the local understanding of *yiyu* and modern psychiatric depression, facilitating the acceptance of the later term. However, the transmission of the concept and its knowledge was not seeking transparent equivalence between cross-cultural realities. The paper, thus, points out the noticeable gap in understanding *yiyu* across different paradigms and calls for attention to the nuances of cultural and medical history when contextualizing mental health concepts.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese Medicine, Depression, Psychology, Medical Humanities

There is growing concern about the socio-cultural construction of depression in Chinese academia, yet the concept itself remains incompletely examined. While in English, the term “depression” has a long history closely tied to "melancholia," in Chinese, similar terms such as 憂鬱症 (*youyuzheng*), 抑鬱症 (*yi yuzheng*), 悒鬱症 (*yi yuzheng*) and 郁症 (*yuzheng*), are used to signify what is commonly referred to as depression in global psychiatry. Understanding whether these concepts share intra – or cross-cultural equivalence provides a more nuanced comprehension of the dynamic and hybrid creation of local knowledge related to emotions and diseases. In their updated research, Bai, Li, and Zhang (2022) examined the conceptual construction of *youyuzheng* to demonstrate how knowledge about depression was localized from the late Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China (1912-1949). They suggested that the building of knowledge about depression was an integration of traditional Chinese medical ideas and modern Western pathological concepts (Bai, Li, & Zhang, 2022).

This paper tracks the evolution of the meanings of *yiyu* (抑鬱) throughout Chinese cultural and historical contexts to identify key shifts in word meaning and outline the Chinese genealogy of emotional illness. Today, *yiyu* is more commonly used to refer to the state of depression, while *yiyuzheng* would be the proper name for depression in psychiatric terminology. The psychiatric lexicon of *yiyuzheng* was a combination of the pathological description “yiyu” and the medical title “zheng”, with the former being crucial to understanding the word's meaning. Some may suspect that "yiyu" is a foreign word in modern Chinese that only appeared after the knowledge about "depression" was introduced to China. However, the term appeared earlier than intellectual transplantation, allowing for comparisons and investigations of its particular consistency in conceptualization.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), recurrent experiences are structured by the nature of human bodies and physical and cultural environments, and "lead to the formation of categories" that define coherence in our experience (p. 230-231). When we perceive experience "as being structured coherently in terms of gestalts that have emerged directly from interaction," we understand our experience directly; when we "use a gestalt from one domain of experience to structure experience in another domain," we "understand experience metaphorically" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 231). In this paper, we argue that the early modern concept of *yiyu* in China ultimately derives from personal experiences of feeling stuck. Through ne-

arly two thousand years of cultural representation and medical records, *yiyu* had developed into a category of emotional illness, implying that emotion, as same as qi and universe, seemed like an ideally moving entity at risk of stagnation. We believe that to translate “depression” to “yiyu” was not a singular importation of Western knowledge; instead, the conceptualization process incorporated the decontextualizing, transporting, and re-contextualizing of modern psychological ideas.

Yiyu as a Classical Chinese Word

The word *yiyu* was considered to have a different nature in modern Chinese compared to ancient Chinese. In modern Chinese, it primarily refers to the depressing situation or the modern psychiatric disease depression while in classical Chinese, it could be understood as a two-part word/phase, consisting of *yi* [抑] and *yu* [鬱]. In the ancient Chinese language, single syllables were often sufficient to express meaning, whereas many modern Chinese disyllabic words are combinations of two monosyllabic words in classical Chinese, including *yiyu*.

The initial appearance of *yiyu* in classical Chinese literature can illustrate this situation. It first appeared in Sima Qian’s *The Letter to Ren’ An* (*Bao ren’an shu* 報任安書): “Now, however, I consider my body ruined and degraded. Whenever I act, I meet reproach. Those I would benefit, I only harm. ‘So it is I stifle my grief and have no one to speak to.’ [顧自以為身殘處穢，動而見尤，欲益反損，是以抑鬱，而無誰語] (Sima, n.d./2016, p. 22).¹ The translator made a literal translation of *yiyu*, “stifl(ing) my grief”: “stifling” for “*yi*” and “grief” for “*yu*”. *Yiyu* denoted a complex of negative emotions in its first appearance in classical Chinese.

In the first Chinese dictionary ‘*Shuowen Jiezi*’ Dictionary (*Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字), the author Xu Shen (30-124) classified *yi* 抑 as a member of the section “*ang* 印”, which meant press. The other radical of the character was “*shou* 扌” which means hands. Thus, the original meaning of *yi* meant

¹ The following references to ancient texts come from the research result from Chinese Text Project (<https://ctext.org>) if there is no further clarification. All of them are open to public usage and do not have an assertive publishing date. The resource of translation is listed at the end of the sentence; if there is no English translation available to date, it will be a literal translation by the authors.

applying pressure with hands. According to the dictionary and its later counterparts, the connotation of *yi* included low and deep voices, cautious, self-restraint, and stifling. As for *yu*, it belonged to the section *lin* 林 and is explained as the status of woods growing in thickets [木叢生者]. The original meaning of *yu* is related to the flourishing of the woods. The editors of *Kangxi Dictionary* (*Kangxi zidian* 康熙字典) sorted out more secondary meanings of *yu*: to accumulate and flourish (derived meaning from density), stagnation in mood, unpleasant sound, the putrid smell of flesh, stagnation of *qi* in the field of Traditional Chinese medicine, and sadness in the dictionaries of classical Chinese. The entries showed that the meanings of *yi* and *yu* are established in classical Chinese.

The two syllables together became the word *yiyu* meaning pressing and stagnating, which was similar to the word “depression” in a Western context. But it still requires an analysis of ancient texts to know whether “depression” and *yiyu* are linguistic counterparts only because of the similar morphological order. Only in context can we better understand how a concept about depression is constructed. The following two sections will examine the meaning of this disyllabic word, *yiyu*, to prove that the naming of “depression” in China is based on the foundation of previous knowledge of Traditional Chinese Medicine. The analysis will categorize classical Chinese texts that have mentioned *yiyu* into two groups, literary¹ and medical, since the former reflects how the general understanding of *yiyu* while the latter provides a more professional perspective. By examining the nuanced usage of *yiyu*, we aim to uncover its metaphorical suggestions and illustrate how its meaning develops in various contexts.

***Yiyu* in Classical Chinese Literary Texts**

As previously mentioned, it was in *The Letter to Ren' An* that *yiyu* was first mentioned. The author Sima Qian described himself as stifling his grief and having no one who could understand him. Since then, *yiyu* often reflected literati's negative emotional states due to the frustration in their career. However, *yiyu* in the later literary works subtly generalized to con-

¹ To be clarified, literary texts in this article's context also include some historical records because there is no clear differentiation between literature text and historical records in classical Chinese.

note more kinds of unpleasant feelings rather than merely unfulfillment. Huang Tao (?-911), who was a writer in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), wrote that “(l)eaving the gossips alone, I write to express the stifling and gloominess [驅走群言，寫抑鬱之懷矣]” in *A Rhythmic Essay of Autumn* (*Qiuse fu* 秋色賦). The autumn scenery motivated him to sigh with regret at both the withering of vegetation and the passage of time. Another writer in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) wrote “depressing about our separation” [*liqingyiyu* 離情抑鬱] in *Man Ting Fang – Silent Night Thoughts* (*Mantingfang jingyeshi* 滿庭芳·靜夜思), which demonstrated the author’s distress about separation and longing about romance. These examples demonstrated how *yiyu* became versatile and flexible.

Yiyu also enabled writers to project their mood onto music and atmosphere. A poet of Tang Dynasty, Zhao Dongxi (677-750) wrote: “Climbing and viewing the spreading dimness, I don’t know where to find happiness in such gloominess [抑鬱何以歡，陰氛亦登望].” The term *yiyu* here referred to the gloomy environment. In Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), *yiyu* was used to describe the sound of musical instruments in *The History of Song* used: “So-called xiadi, zhegu, huluqin, and bohaiqin, all of them sound boomy and depressing [有曰夏笛、鷓鴣，曰胡盧琴、渤海琴，沉滯抑鬱].”

In the article *Groaning Speech* (*Shenyin yu* 呻吟語), *yiyu* demonstrated its metaphoric nature as coming into the traditional notions about universe and ethics: “All things in nature will have their harmony within themselves, without the appearance of stagnation and reluctance [天地萬物各遂其同然之情，而無抑鬱倔強之態].” It is fair to conclude that the ethical good “harmony” and the real world that it rules are personified as if they had emotions. Considering the traditional Chinese worldview that is based on the flow of *qi*, it is reasonable to think *yiyu* kept constituency with the imaginary framework of universe and ethics. For they shared a common metaphor of a moving entity (universe/emotion) and the good was that things can move in order. What’s more important, there was a big difference between the use of *yiyu* and *youyu* in classical Chinese text: *youyu* had seldom been used to describe sounds or universal status; it had only been applied to the description of human emotions.

In the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), *yiyu* was more closely associated with illness and death. In a story from the collection, *Stories to Caution the World* (*Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言), it was stated that “(i)n the past, the duke had an ailment caused by excessive phlegm and internal heat. So many

miserable days spent in the small boat brought the ailment back [荊公原有痰火症，住在小舟多日，情懷抑鬱，人症復發] (Feng, n.d./2005, p. 55)." The phrase "miserable days" implied that the duke's depression worsened his health situation. In another story of the same story collection, *Wang Jiaoluan's One Hundred Years of Sorrow* (*Wang Jiaoluan bainian changhen* 王嬌鸞百年長恨), *yiyu* was referenced more clearly as an emotional disease. As the protagonist said, "My cousin's illness is caused by *yiyu* [表妹之疾，是抑鬱所致] (Feng, n.d./2005, p. 592)." These two examples showed that *yiyu* had been thought of as a source of physical disorders. Moreover, the second story presented a remedy, which was to ask the girl to go for a walk every day to release her repressing feeling of "yi" and stagnating feeling of "yu". These plots revealed that it was no later than the Ming Dynasty when Chinese people recognized *yiyu's* close connection to disease and implied that *yiyu* is caused by mobility restriction – a girl like *Wang Jiaoluan* was prohibited from seeing her lovestate.

Interestingly, in a later official historical record, *The History of the Ming* (*Mingshi* 明史), there were striking records of several historical figures who "died with/of *yiyu*". The Yangmingist¹ ideas that were popular in the Ming Dynasty enlightened intellectuals to delve into their personal experience and to consider emotions to be a manifestation of human nature, bodily and mental (Santangelo, 2021, p. 186-188). Emotions not only indicated moral claims but also could impact physical and mental well-being. In most of the literary documents at that time, *youyu* also appeared as an emotional disorder that can lead to disease. Thus, the changing understanding of *yiyu* might not be able to discriminate it from *youyu*. This proves that the changes of understanding emotions in that time, which has been called the "cult of emotion", had influenced people's understanding of the relationship between emotion and disease², and at this time, the meanings of *youyu* and

¹ Yangmingism, or School of the Heart [xinxue 心學], is one of the major philosophical schools of Neo-Confucianism starting from Ming Dynasty. One of its founders, Wang Yangming, developed the idea of innate knowing which means people can gain the truth of the world by using their consciousness and senses to bodily experience the world. This school and the idea that heart [*xin* 心] is truth [*li* 理] became influential during the Ming Dynasty, which motivates people to pay attention to their emotion and desire.

² The term, "cult of emotion", has been criticized by Haiyan Lee (2006) that it has not yet posited the individual against society and that the "Confucian structure of feeling" may be more suitable to describe the foundational nature of feeling and its relationship with social

yiyu showed some overlaps. The Ming and Qing Dynasties witnessed that *yiyu* in narratives casted shadows of corporal damage and destruction, which resonated with *yiyu*'s gaining ontological attention in the fields of medicine at that time.

Based on the analysis above, it is evident that the phase *yiyu*, which is a combination of “yi” and “yu”, signify emotional illness from its original meaning of negative emotion or mood. From its earliest usage, the representation of *yiyu* in poems and historical works had been dominated by depressive emotions from the libretti bureau. As time passed, *yiyu* started to depict depressing feelings in different contexts, and its association with disease became stronger. Additionally, since the original connotation of “yu” included low and deep voices, *yiyu* had been used to demonstrate a predicament or a gloomy sound. This highlighted *yiyu*'s broader use and deep-seated metaphoric nature compared to other depression-related concepts that merely referred to human emotion. Thus, tracing the evolution of this word not only witnessed the enrichment of its meaning but also provided evidence of the knowledge production process involved in the pathologizing of emotions. In the next section, this article aims to provide a medical perspective to clarify the knowledge-production and circulation of *yiyu*.

***Yiyu* from the Medical Perspective**

The earliest record of *yiyu* in medical records could be traced back to the Tang Dynasty. Wang Bing, a physician at that time, contributed to the annotated edition of *Huang Di's Inner Classic – Basic Questions (Huangdi neijing suwen 黃帝內經素問)*¹, entitled *Annotations and Commentaries to Huang Di's Inner Classic – Suwen (Huangdi neijing suwen buzhu shiwen 黃帝內經素問補注釋文)*². He associated *yi* and *yu* with the concept of

orders (p. 15 & 36) while the authors believe that the word “cult” can better illustrate the radical nature of the attention paid to emotions at this time.

¹ Huang Di's Inner Classic has been regarded as an eastern counterpart of *Hippocratic Writings* in ancient Europe extremely and *Su wen* is a valuable part of *Neijing* (Unschuld, 2011, p. ix).

² Though scholars have a dispute about the exact age/year of the book's coming into being, it is well accepted that Wang Bing's rearrangement and annotations, and his additions of “seven comprehensive discourses” have laid a foundation for the successive practitioners and scholars to understand *Suwen* (Unschuld 40).

qi, commenting on Huang Di and Qi Bo's discussion about the stagnation of five agents. He stated that “鬱 is: extremely oppressing heavenly *qi* [鬱謂鬱抑天氣之甚也] (Wang, n.d./2011, p. 493).” In the original Chinese sentence, *yi* and *yu* were used together as *yuyi* 鬱抑, which was distinct from the more usual phrase in ancient Chinese, *yiyu*. With the form of *yuyi*, the two characters constituted a tautological place name that both meant repression. In other words, although the two characters were synonyms, the meaning of the word was in accordance with the original connotation of *yi*. This word must be compared with another sentence in the same chapter that says, “It is alleged that wind and rain form in mountains. The reason is that the *qi* of soil gets oppressed and stagnated, and the heavenly wood control it [風雨生於山中者，土氣抑鬱，天木制之].” It discussed how the *qi* of the soil (*tuqi* 土氣) interacted with the heavenly *qi* of the wood, resulting in the formation of storms. In this sentence, *yi* and *yu* were put together in the form of *yiyu*, which meant oppression (*yi*) and stagnation (*yu*). This proved that Wang Bing distinguishes *yiyu* from *yuyi*.

In another chapter, Wang Bing also used *yiyu*. He wrote: “(Between the *qi* of heaven and the *qi* of earth) when one is vigorous, the other is not recovered, *qi* gets depressed and stagnant, nowhere to move on [彼氣既勝，此未能復，抑鬱不暢，而無所行進].” It directly manifests that the losing balance of *qi* constricts the flow of *qi* and then causes *yiyu*, revealing the principle about how the universe works and does not work. After describing the oppression and stagnation of *qi*, Wang Bing discussed how the universal *qi* impacts the human body. As Kaptchuk (2000) pointed out, the resonance of the universe and the human body reflects the microcosm-microcosm relationship (chapters 1-2). Traditional Chinese medicine believed that when the balance of *qi* is broken, people can experience depression. In *Diet Notes* (*Yinshixuzhi* 飲食須知) published in the Yuan Dynasty, *A General Discussion about Plague* (*Guang wenyi lun* 廣瘟疫論) and *Jingyue's Complete Works* (*Jingyue quanshu* 景岳全書) that published in the Ming Dynasty, and *Ding Ganren's Compilations of Medical Cases* (*Dingganren yi'an* 丁甘仁醫案) that published in the Qing Dynasty, the cases about *yiyu* were all associated with the movement of *qi*. For *qi*, the material basis of life was constantly in motion and transformation, it has the quantity to “promote” human physiological activities and transform bodily substances (Zhang, 2012, p. 74). Thus, *yiyu* was an emotion that can be affected and caused by the movement of *qi*.

However, medical texts in the Song Dynasty showed a different interpretation of *yiyu*. *The Prescriptions of the Bureau of Taiping People's Welfare Pharmacy* (*Taiping huimin heji ju fang* 太平惠民和劑局方), a compilation book released by the official pharmaceuticals department [*heji ju* 和劑局], introduced a medicinal prescription for relieving internal burden [*qingxin lianzi yin* 清心蓮子飲] (1078-1085, vol.5). This medicine aimed to cure the ones who bear overwhelming thoughts in their mind and feels annoyed, restless, sad, and depressed because overthinking drains their energy [心中蓄積，時常煩躁，因而思慮勞力，憂愁抑鬱]. These patients might experience several symptoms including white muddy urine, wet dreams, and bloody excrement. In this description, *yiyu* was a negative emotion caused by overthinking that could lead to various diseases. It was not equivalent to the causes or the symptoms.

The book proposed using an herbal decoction with a mild quantity that can “clear one’s heart (*xin*), improve one’s spirit (*shen*), nourish the essence (*jing*) and heal weakness (*xu*), benefit the digestive system, and attune the blood (*xue*) and *qi* [常服清心養神，秘精補虛，滋潤腸胃，調順血氣].” This understanding delivered the message that the external medication would have the ability to moderate internal restlessness. Here, *yiyu*, was seen as part of the causation of physical symptoms rather than the problem itself to be cured, which was differently shown in later texts.

Until Ming Dynasty, *yiyu* appeared to have detached from the theories of *qi* in some medical books. The medical classic, *Four-Word Songs for Pulsing* (*Siyanjuyao* 四言舉要)¹ noted that in clinical diagnosis it was “necessary to examine the physical and the mental[必審形志]” since illnesses could be a result of “bodily and mental exhaustion, or damage to the middle burner caused by *yiyu* [或形勞志苦或抑鬱傷中]”. The author used examples of people who were once wealthy but became poor to illustrate the nature of *yiyu*, which is a mental problem that could result from social events. The medical records proved that, until then, Chinese medical practitioners had noticed certain experiences of social life could cause *yiyu* and then damage the human body. The social environment could arouse people’s embodied experience of emotions that needed the interaction of medicine. Thus, traditional Chinese medical physicians were asked to perform a throu-

¹ The book was originally composed in the Song Dynasty by Cui Jiayan and the existing edition is edited by Li Yanwen in the Ming Dynasty.

ghout process of looking (*wang*), listening and smelling (*wen*), asking (*wen*), and touching (*qie*) to examine and identify the illness (Zhang, 2012, p. 66). Thinking about the Yangmingist understanding that emotions were relationship-provoking and morality-intervened (Santangelo, 2011, p.186-203), it could see that the perception of *yiyu* in the Ming and Qing Dynasty had expanded its philosophical basis from the theory of *qi* to the contemporary Yangmingism. In this way, the medical practitioners took a closer look on the cause of emotion-evoked disorders. Meanwhile, medical knowledge interacted with contemporary philosophical thoughts. Compared to how mental illness is considered as the arrival of subjectivity after Foucault publicized *The History of Madness*, it is noticeable that the investigation of emotion-related diseases in the Chinese context does not lead to a centering of individuals. The “domestication” of the affective experiences and the diseases thereby only helps to define individuals as social beings.

In the late phase of the Ming Dynasty, Pei Yizhong noted the applicability of medication for emotional illness in *Dr. Pei's Talks about Medicine* (Peizi yanyi 裴子言医) – “the illness is caused by the oppression and stagnation of seven emotions and the inexpressible feelings, and thus it is incurable with medicine and pharmaceuticals [此病由於七情抑鬱，心志不克舒伸而得，終非醫藥所能療必也].” Later, the male patient became healthy, cheerful, and not senile after leaving family affairs behind and traveling with friends. Here, the author defined mental illness as *yiyu* and claimed that it could not be cured singularly by medication; only to expose the external environment could he become relieved from the suffering. This example proved that in this period, medical practitioners started to acknowledge the therapeutic methods in curing emotion-related disorders though the treatments were still targeted at the disorders rather than the emotions. Compared to the aforementioned herbal prescriptions, this method shows recognition of *yiyu* as a negative emotion that requires a non-medical treatment. It resonated with the above-analyzed vernacular story *Wang Jiao-luan's One Hundred Years of Sorrow*, in which a fake doctor asked a patient of *yiyu* to go for a walk every day to dispel her depressed feelings (Feng, n.d./2005, p. 592). By analyzing both the medical works and the vernacular story, it can be concluded that *yiyu* was gradually admitted to being an emotional disorder that required non-pharmaceutical treatment. In the Qing dynasty (1636-1912), there were more and more medical books to illustrate the solution to *yiyu* disease. Most of them would employ medicine to target

stagnant emotions and hope that the relieving process would cure the whole systematic body. At this time, *yiyu*, noting both stagnation and depression, was finally recognized as an emotion to be cured.

As we can see, Traditional Chinese medicine in its early stage integrated various factors, including climate, environment, food, and health, through the concept of *qi*. Gradually, emotions began to play a more prominent role in causing illness and disease. The concept of *yiyu* helped practitioners categorize and explore emotions, providing a framework for understanding mood disorders. However, the traditional Chinese medical approach to understanding and treating mood disorders differ from modern psychopathology due to the central role of the *qi* discourse.

Over time, *yiyu* evolved from being viewed as a manifestation of disharmonized universal *qi* to being recognized as a curable emotion. The diagnosing and prescribing of *yiyu* witnessed the changing medical perspectives on emotions, laying a foundation for the localization of knowledge in the 20th century.

From *Yiyu* to Depression

As the article from Bai, Li, and Zhang (2022) analyzes, the concept of depression has been introduced to China in the late Qing Dynasty and became pathologically explainable in the 1920s (p. 3-5). At that period, *youyuzheng* and *yiyuzheng* are used as the terms for the concept of Chinese linguistic counterpart to “depression” in magazines, journals, and newspapers. The following analysis would show how they finally merge into the notion of “depression”.

As the notion and related knowledge about “depression” were introduced from Western psychiatry and integrated with local knowledge about emotional illnesses, seeking information about its origin would be helpful. Stanley Jackson (2008) points out that “melancholia” was originally used to describe prolonged fear and depression, while “depression” gradually replaced it, particularly in the clinical description after the fourteenth century. The process had been long and had witnessed changes in mechanical philosophy, neurocentral theories, and psychoanalytic/psychotherapeutic/psychological explanations. In the twentieth century, “depression” almost replaced “melancholia” as a prescriptible diagnosis and the DSM had proved it, even though Jackson (2008) admitted that such a diagnosis lacks support

from a consistent pathological anatomy and may be influenced by various predisposing factors (p. 457).

The timeline that Jackson outlined is reflected in Chinese-English dictionaries published last century¹. In dictionaries such as *A Comprehensive English-Chinese New Dictionary* (*zonghe yinghan xin cidian* 綜合英漢新辭典) (1935), *A Bilingual Encyclopedia in English and Chinese* (*yinghan duizhao baike minghui* 英漢對照百科名匯) (1931), and *English-Chinese Dictionary for Usage of Comprehension and Composition* (*qiujie zuowen liangyong yinghan mofan zidian* 求解作文兩用 英漢模範字典) (1947), “melancholia” was translated to words indicating the medical meaning, like *youyuzhi* 憂鬱質, *youyubing* 憂鬱病, or *youyuzheng*; however, “depression” would be translated without a clinical implication, such as *yiyu* 抑鬱, *yayi* 壓抑, or *xiaotiao* 蕭條. However, in dictionaries that were published after 1980s², the translation of “depression” has been constructed as a medical and psychological concept, while “melancholia” is still translated as *youyubing* or *youyuzheng*.

Some may doubt that *yiyu* had seldom been seen as a “name” of a disease in the traditional medical records since none of the books officially defined *yiyu* as a disease. However, it could not be denied that knowledge about *yiyu* has been established through the etymological tracing of *yiyu* in the literary medical records. The literary texts show how the word connotes stagnation and repression in universal and personal terms, and the records from Traditional Chinese Medicine clearly show the possibility of understanding *yiyu* as a curable disorder.

As depression was conceptualized in China, the paradigm shift reaffirmed the medical dimension of *yiyu* rather than discursively inventing the disease. The long cultural and medical history of *yiyu* demonstrates that there is an overlapping or shared room for the meaning of *yiyu*/depression between local knowledge and modern science, which provides convenien-

¹ Search results of Chinese-English dictionaries in the first half of the twentieth century is based on the Modern History Database (<https://www.modernhistory.org.cn/>) and the ones in the second half of the twentieth century come from Duxiu Academic Search (<https://www.duxiu.com>).

² The dictionaries published from the 1950s to 1970s are very difficult to find probably because of the impact of current social movements. Arthur Kleiman did mention that during the “Great Peak” and “Cultural Revolution”, there was an anti-neurasthenia movement though the patients could suffer from the symptoms that would be called “depressive” nowadays (1986).

ces for receiving the psychiatric term. However, it does not mean that the transmission of the concept and its knowledge is opaque and straightforward. There is a notable gap between understanding *yiyu* in a different paradigm. Chinese emotional culture might find it hard to apprehend *yiyu* as a disorder of cranial nerves; meanwhile, a psychiatrist might ignore the implicit claim to break the stagnation.

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