

Using emotion in diagnosis

Part 1 of a two-part series on **Identifying the Constitutional Element**

by John Kirkwood

Five Element acupuncture provides a unique and profound method of diagnosing and treating the core of a person's being. This article is about the use of emotion in this process. The method and its principles are readily applicable in the practice of both Shiatsu and acupuncture.

Introduction

In the cycle of the Five Elements, or Five Phases, the ancient Chinese provided us with a sophisticated model of the operation of the universe. In this model, the unmanifest Tao first manifests into Yin and Yang. Yin and Yang then unfold into the Four Directions, and then the Five Elements — and ultimately into the Ten Thousand things.

From this perspective, all aspects of existence, including human beings, can be seen as part of the dynamic, interactive cycle of the Five Elements.

Each Element has a particular vibration, and as the 'note' of each Element goes out into the world, all related notes vibrate in resonance. As individual humans, we both resonate with one of the five vibrations and live predominantly from the perspective of its corresponding Element.

J.R. Worsley saw that this Element is the first to weaken in our constitution, becoming our foundational imbalance, or Causative Factor. Other Elements are then weakened via the Shen and K'o cycles, producing a variety of symptoms and conditions. But if we can identify and treat the Element that first went out of balance, then all five Elements can come back into harmony.

Later practitioners of Five Element acupuncture gave other names to the Causative Factor, calling it the Constitutional Factor, Constitutional Element, or simply Constitution. In this article I will use the term Constitutional Element. However, all terms refer to the same principle that there is a single, unchanging, identifiable Element that is the

foundation of our being. This Element is our greatest struggle when we are out of balance, but also our highest potential when balanced.

In order to identify someone's Constitutional Element, we can use four distinct diagnostic tools. These are Colour, Sound, Odour and Emotion, i.e. the Colour in the face, the Sound in the voice, the Odour of the body, and the predominant Emotion in life. While there are other secondary characteristics of the Element that relate to body type, posture, movement, expression, and behaviour, these four diagnostic tools are the most reliable way of diagnosing the Element. In this article I will focus on the use of Emotion in diagnosis.

The Five Emotions

The Emotions of the five Elements are as follows. Fear is the emotion of Water. Anger is the emotion of Wood. Joy is the emotion of Fire. Sympathy is the emotion of Earth. Grief is the emotion of Metal.

When we are healthy, we appropriately express all five Emotions. For example, we laugh, (expressing Joy) at a joke, or we shout when we're angry. Conversely, when the Qi of an Element is imbalanced, the Emotion of that Element is not expressed appropriately. We will manifest an excess or a lack of that Emotion, or we may swing between these two extremes.

When looking to identify our client's Element, what we look for is emotional expression that strikes us as odd in some way. It may be either unusually strong, or surprisingly absent where we might have expected it.

Temperament

In assessing Emotion, we must distinguish between incident, mood and temperament. An *incident* creates a one-off emotion, for example, anger when one is mistreated. A *mood* goes on for some time. It may not be felt continuously but comes and goes, creating an overall mood state, for example, depression. *Temperament* is much deeper. It is a person's continuing predisposition to certain emotional incidents and moods, and is entrenched in the character structure. It is *temperament* that is the key to diagnosing our Emotion, and thus our Constitutional Element.

The whole personality develops around this imbalanced Emotion, impacting all the resources and capacities that we might otherwise access in mediating that emotion. Without inner support, the Emotion cannot be part of the natural flow of life, and becomes suppressed, exaggerated or otherwise distorted. For example, a Fire type may cut off her Joy, so there is either no lightness of heart, or a forced brightness. A Water type may be overly fearful or lacking in fear.

Testing for the Emotion

When the Emotion is present in a frequent and obvious way, the diagnosis can be simple. But in many cases the Emotion is lacking, indeed is notable by its absence.

When we notice what appears to be an absence, we can test our hypothesis by engaging our client in conversation on a subject that would normally elicit that Emotion. To do this effectively we need to genuinely access the Emotion within ourselves, and convey it authentically

and congruently through words, tone and body language. We can then gauge the response — does it seem appropriate or not.

Inappropriate Emotion can be the most accurate key to diagnosis. However, Emotion is the most complex of all the diagnostic factors, and can be loaded with judgements and cultural implications about what is or isn't appropriate. We always need to keep in mind both our own and our clients' cultural conditioning as we are making these assessments.

The Emotions

Fear and Water

The Water personality is built around the Emotion of Fear. Some people are obviously anxious and fearful, and this is evident much of the time. It can be seen in wide eyes, a trembling voice, or a focus on safety. But there are many Water types who appear fearless because they challenge and resist their fear. This persistent fearlessness can also be diagnostic.

When we name fear with something like, 'That must have been very scary for you,' the fearless Water type will

either reject the suggestion and show no emotion, or the fear may be seen as brief flash of fear in the eyes.

One of the characteristics of Water types is that they did not get enough reassurance from parent figures in childhood, which is why the world is so scary to them. They will tend either to reject reassurance, not hear it, or move quickly on to other fears.

One caveat here is that people with a history of physical, sexual or emotional abuse can sometimes look like Water types because of the prevailing fear that results from the trauma. In such cases, we need to look to the other diagnostic tools of Colour, Sound and Odour to accurately diagnose the Constitutional Element.

Anger and Wood

For a Wood person there is a sense of injustice, that life isn't fair. This belief springs from a childhood in which he felt abused, or sensed limitation or injustice. This perception permanently imprints his emotional life.

The Wood type who is overtly angry is easy to spot. He is easily enraged

by even insignificant things, and tends to stay enraged and struggle with his rage. Underneath this anger is his sense of injustice.

However, in many Wood types, the anger is suppressed, and the lack of anger is notable.

Suppression of the expression of anger is common, and there is a significant, almost pathological avoidance of conflict. To test for the suppressed Emotion we might say something like "That was a really awful thing that person did to you. It's outrageous!" together with congruent tone and body posture. The suppressed Wood person will respond with denial of anger, or a surprisingly sudden, jerky reaction. Altogether there will be a lack of smoothness in the response.

A caveat here is that not all people who are evidently angry are Wood types. We need to look at the motivation for the anger. Fire types can be angry because they feel unloved, Earth types because they're not getting what they need, Metal types because they feel unseen or unvalued, and Water types because

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they are afraid. Wood types are angry because things are not fair.

Joy and Fire

Many people want to be Fire types because being joyful looks a lot better than being angry or scared or grieving. This preference arises from a misunderstanding. For all of us, the basic wounding is not so much that the particular Emotion we are stuck with is negative, but that we have so few resources to deal with that emotion. So the Fire type struggles with the Emotion of Joy just as deeply as other types struggle with anger, or fear, or grief.

For the Fire type the wound is to the heart, a sense that she is unloved or unlovable. This belief is the lens through which she views the world and lives her life. Much of her behaviour is a reaction to this belief. She is driven to be forever joyful, at times almost manic, or she has an air of flatness and joylessness that reflects a grey inner landscape.

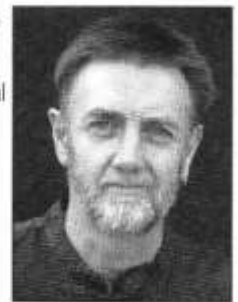
When we offer the Fire person an expression of personal warmth from our heart, or talk about an event in her life that is normally joyful, she will usually respond with no joy at all, or an excessive joy that doesn't naturally drop away.

Sympathy and Earth

For the Earth person, there is an imbalance in the Emotion of Sympathy. She expresses this imbalance as either of two extremes. One is a deep need to receive the sympathy of others — we feel a pulling demand for attention, and sense a hole that cannot be filled. The other extreme shows up as outwardly directed care-taking — she habitually goes out of her way to meet the needs of others, often at her own expense. Since care-taking is actually an outward projection of the need to be taken care of, there can also be a swinging back and forth between these two extremes, which are simply different expressions of the same difficulty.

This dysfunctional pattern arises out of early childhood wounding in which the Earth person perceives the mother to be unsympathetic,

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unsupportive or unnurturing. While this may or may not be objectively true, the Earth type interprets her early life through this lens. Thereafter, she spends her life in reaction to this wounding by overly giving or overly seeking sympathy.

When we offer sympathy to the Earth type, for example 'That seems like a really difficult situation for you', she will either not hear it or reject it in some way, or she will take it as an opportunity to pull for more sympathy.

Grief and Metal

Loss is the emotional focus for the Metal person. We notice a pervasive sadness that seems to arise from the loss of something important. This can appear in his downcast face and posture, or a sense that he's on the verge of tears. Conversely, he may be chronically closed to his grief and does not or cannot cry, even when it would be appropriate.

The sense of loss arises out of the Metal type's childhood experience of feeling unseen or unvalued by the parents, especially the father. Often, his abilities were not recognised, and in adulthood it is difficult for him to recognise his own capacities. When we compliment him on a positive quality, he tends to deny or diminish that quality.

When we ask a Metal person about something precious that has been lost, such as a life situation, a relationship, or a valued object, there will be a significant response. He is likely to choke at the throat or tighten in the chest to stop the feeling, or he may become overwhelmed with grief.

Treatment

Once our client's Constitutional Element has been confirmed by the four diagnostic tools, it becomes and remains the primary vehicle of ongoing treatment. While our client's presenting symptoms are not ignored, and their corresponding Elements are included, we always focus on the meridians of the Constitutional Element. Of particular importance are the inner and outer back-shu points, mu points, source points, five phase points, luo points, window points, and other primary spirit points.

Once the Constitutional Element has been identified and treatment progresses, people often say things like, 'I feel like my old self again,' or 'I haven't felt this good in years'. These are also indications that we have correctly identified the CE.

The power of Five Element treatment derives from the principle that we are treating the fundamental imbalance of a person's life, not simply reacting to her presenting symptoms. As the Constitutional Element returns to balance and health, all Five Elements return to dynamic harmony. From this place, the person can once more be who they truly are, balanced in physical and emotional health, easefully expressing their innate capacities in the world.

Recommended reading

Dechar, Lorie Eve (2006) *Five Spirits Lantern*, New York

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Jarrett, L. (1998) *Nourishing Destiny* Spirit Path Press, Stockbridge

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