

# Seasonal Moral Emotions of Neo-Confucianism

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## Introduction

In Neo-Confucianism, moral emotions seem different from the category of psychology. They have seasonal roots, deriving from human nature, which exists in human heart statically. When heart is touched or disturbed, human nature will emerge as a certain kind of emotion. Such typical kinds of emotions are compassion, feeling of shame, feeling of modesty (or humbleness), and feeling of justice in moral judgement. (Table 1)

In the table below, the successive elements in every row are cyclic, because the seasons are in cycle. Each element in every column is metaphorically and metonymically related based on the nature of seasons. The last row of the table is the four kinds of emotions from human nature in Confucianism.

There are five domains in the table. Diachronically, seasons is the first domain people know. Then come the four virtues of the Ultimate Truth in *Zhouyi, Book of Changes*. But the concept *Ultimate Truth* is typically Neo-Confucianism. The four parts of human nature *ren, li, yi, zhi* and the four parts of moral emotions put forward by Mencius appear later than the four virtues of the Ultimate Truth. As to the Five Elements, they come out a little later than the four virtues of the Ultimate Truth, but the theory of the Five Elements comes into being the latest in Han Dynasty when it is connected with the seasons.

In the middle column, *xin*(genuineness, integrity) is added to human nature later, to emphasize that human nature is true, sound as the earth we live on. *Xin* is the foundation of human nature. The four parts of human nature, together with *xin*, are called five common senses. They correspond with the Five Elements reflecting the Ultimate Truth.

Seasons	Spring	Summer	Mid-summer	Autumn	Winter
Virtues of the Ultimate Truth	Yuan (元) (primary)	Heng (亨) (prosperity, progress)		Li (利) (benefit)	Zhen (贞) (constancy, stability)
Five Elements	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Human Nature	Ren (仁) (benevolence, love)	Li (礼) (civility)	Xin (信) (genuineness, integrity)	Yi (义) (brotherhood, Personal loyalty)	Zhi (智) (wisdom)
Moral Emotions	Compassion, sympathy (惻隐)	Feeling of humbleness, modesty (辞让)		Feeling of shame (羞恶)	Feeling of justice in moral judgement (是非)

Table 1. Domains related to moral emotions in Confucianism

## Material and Methods:

All the data for this research come from *Analects of Zhuzi* (《朱子语类》), *Beixi Ziyi* (《北溪字义》) ---the earliest philosophical dictionary to interpret the ideas of Neo-Confucianism, and other works by famous Confucians. All the material is selected and analyzed with contemporary cognitive theory of metaphor, metonymy, image schema, and conceptual blending theory.

## Why are seasons the root of emotions?

The answer lies in the relationship among the five domains in the above table.

### 1. Seasons and the Ultimate Truth (Figure 1)

The Ultimate Truth, the truth of heaven, has four virtues (elements). They are *yuan* (元) (primary), *heng* (亨) (prosperity), *li* (利) (benefit), and *zhen* (贞) (constancy, stability). The four seasons correspond with them philosophically. However, people understand the four virtues according to the characteristics of the changes of the four seasons at the beginning.

With the help of conceptual integration theory, when spring and *yuan* as two spaces from different domains blend each other, the result of the blending is that *yuan* is the first stage of development, so do *heng, li, zhen*, they are the second, the third, and the fourth stages of development.

*Yuan*, the first stage of development, is like spring, when everything begins to grow. *Heng*, the second stage of development, is like summer, when crops, plants, grow thrivingly. *Li*, the third stage of development, is like autumn, when the crops are ripe, time for harvest. *Zhen*, the fourth stage of development, is like winter, when seeds are stored well or bury deep under the earth to keep alive for the coming of spring.

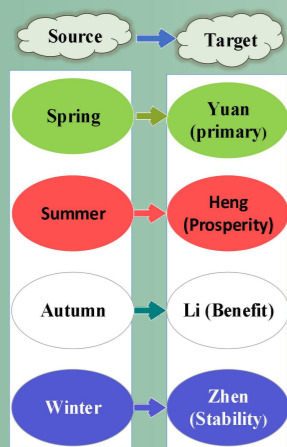


Figure 1. Mapping between seasons and the 4 virtues of the Ultimate Truth

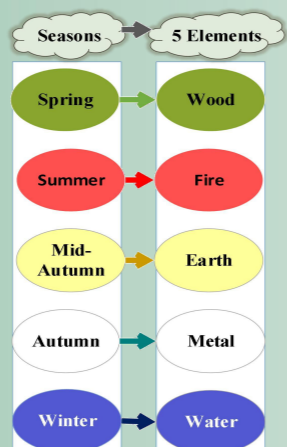


Figure 2. The Five Elements are attribute generalization of the seasons

### 2. Seasons and the Five Elements (Figure 2)

The Five Elements are wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. They are the attribute generalization of the four seasons. The Five Elements seem concrete, but they are metaphorical related with seasons, which is thoroughly discussed in *Classic of Internal Medicine*, the earliest classic of medicine in China.

*Wood* originally means sprouts emerge from under earth, hence *wood* is spring. *Fire* is summer, as it is hot in summer.

*Earth* is mid-summer. This is an analogy. Where we stand is the center of the world, while mid-summer is the middle of the year. Besides, in mid-summer, crops growing on earth begin to ripe, and a sure harvest is as true as the *earth* we stand on.

*Metal* is autumn. *Metal* contracts in low temperature similar to the fact that *yangqi*, the positive energy, begins to recede in autumn as it begins to become cold in this season.

*Water* is winter. In winter, *yangqi*, the positive energy is hidden under the earth, similar to the fact that *water* runs to low places.

Ancient Chinese medicine has similar description of the relationship between seasons and the Five Elements. The theory of the Five Elements is that the elements may promote or produce, restrain or overcome each other. (Figure 3)

After the theory of the Five Elements, the manifestation of the Ultimate Truth, is set up, people tend to believe that the secret of seasons belong to the theory of the Five Elements as well.

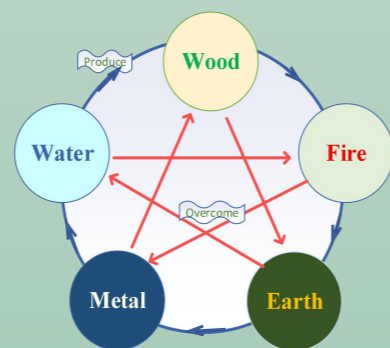


Figure 3. The relation between five elements. (Blue arrow means producing or promoting, red arrow means overcoming or restraining)

### 3. Seasons, the Ultimate Truth, and human nature (Figure 4)

Human nature is the reflection of the Ultimate Truth in our heart. Ancient Chinese people understand the four parts of human nature according to *yuan, heng, li, and zhen*, and the characteristics of the four seasons.

*Ren*(love) is *yuan*(primary). Love is primary, the beginning of all relations, like spring, the start of the year.

*Li*(礼) is *heng* (prosperity), which implies being propitious, favorable in human relation, similar to the fact that plants grow vigorously in summer.

*Yi*(personal loyalty, brotherhood) is *li*(benefit). All crops and fruits became ripe in autumn, and they do not interfere with each other, like brothers and sisters, which is harmonious and beneficial.

*Zhi*(wisdom) is winter, when plants or seeds and other living things are fully grown, which means perfect in the Ultimate Truth. If a person owns the perfect Ultimate Truth like plants or seeds in winter, he is wise.

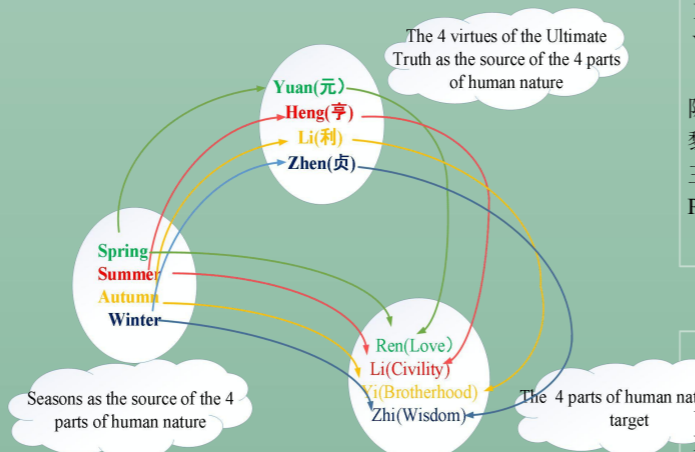


Figure 4. Relations among seasons, the Ultimate Truth, and human nature

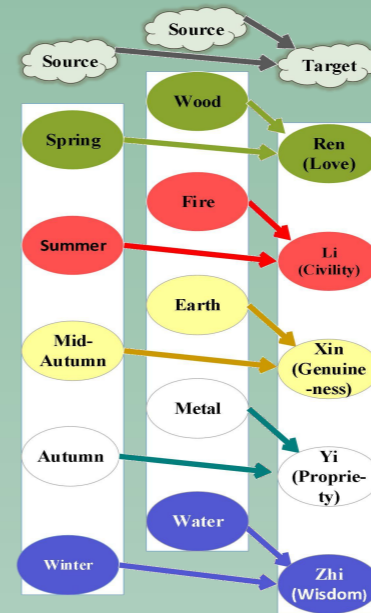


Figure 5. Metaphorical relationship of the five common senses of human nature

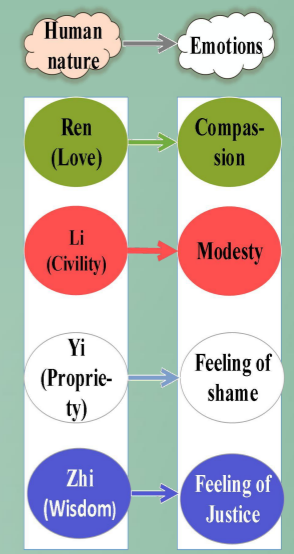


Figure 6. Emotion is the manifestation of human nature. It is metonymic, not metaphoric

### 4. Seasonal understanding of human nature (Figure 5)

The four parts of human nature *ren, li* (礼), *yi*, and *zhi* can be understood according to the Five Elements, and the characteristics of seasons. (*xin* is added to human nature later, to indicate and ensure that human nature is as genuine as earth.)

*Ren*(love) is spring. *Ren* originally means the kernel of nuts that sprouts in spring. The biggest love in the world is giving birth to life. *Ren* is also *wood*, which means plants that begins to grow in spring. This indicates that *ren* is primary to life, the start of life.

*Li*(礼, civility) is summer. *Li* originally means etiquette, and good behaviors. It should be as bright, and enthusiastic as summer. *Li* is also *fire*, which implies warmth in human relation.

*Xin* is mid-summer. *Xin* means genuineness and honesty, which is the core of human nature like mid-summer when a good harvest is sure in sight.

*Yi* (personal loyalty, brotherhood) is autumn. In autumn, every kind of fruit and crops become ripe, and they are right and proper, do not interfere with each other, like brothers and sisters. *Yi* is *metal*, which a knife is made of. Chinese believe *yi* defines the code of conduct, like a knife that can be used to cut everything in good trim.

*Zhi*(wisdom) is winter, and *water*. *Zhi* is invisible, as in cold winter, the dry season, plant life and water is hidden underground.

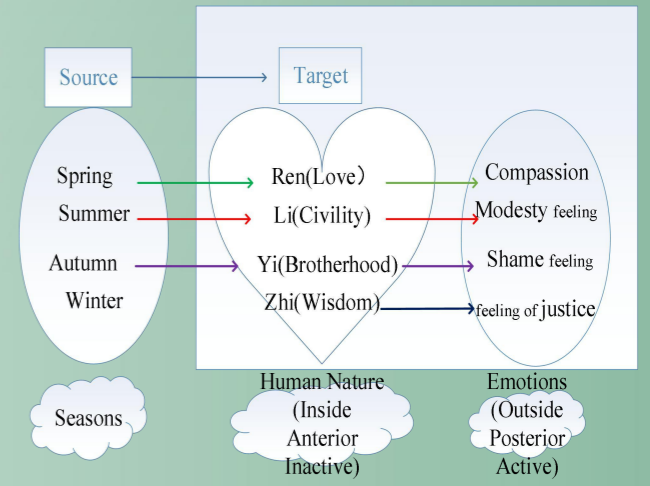


Figure 7. Seasons, human nature, and emotions

### Relationship between human nature and emotions (Figure 6)

In Neo-Confucianism, emotions are the explicit form of human nature. The four kinds of moral emotions correspond respectively with *ren, li, yi, and zhi*.

Human nature is inside heart. When our heart is touched, human nature will come out as emotions, and can be felt or seen by others. Hence, human nature is inside heart, inactive, anterior, while emotion is outside heart, active, and posterior. (Figure 7)

*Xin*(genuineness) comes into human nature later to emphasize that all human nature is true without cheating or hypocrisy. The consequent feeling is honest, sincere.

The emotions are not metaphorical related to human nature. But owing to the belief that spring and autumn, summer and winter are opposite in *yin* and *yang*--the negative and positive energy in the universe, and the promoting and restraining relationship of the Five Elements, human nature and emotions can promote and restrain their components. (Figure 8)

## Conclusion

In Neo-Confucian philosophy, moral emotions have seasonal roots.

1. The observation and metaphorical understanding of seasonal changes are the origin of Confucian philosophy.
2. Seasonal moral emotions result from the metaphorical relationship between seasons and human nature.
3. Moral emotions are mutually reinforced and restrained, conforming to the theory of the Five Elements, and the principles of the Ultimate Truth.
4. Moral emotions are cyclic, because seasons are in circle, for example, people tend to be more compassionate in spring. Metaphorical understanding of seasonal human nature influence our moral feelings in the end.
5. The concepts of human nature and the concepts of its moral emotion in Neo-Confucianism have three pairs of aspect: inside and outside, anterior and posterior, active and inactive, belonging to the three dimensions of space, time, and movement.

## What is left for further discovery?

In table 1, Nearly every concept in each domain has its counterpart. Almost all of them are mutually metonymic after their metaphorical relationship is stereotyped. The concepts of Confucianism have metonymic mutual replacement. For example, spring, *yuan, wood, and ren*, they have metonymic relation. Literal understanding would bring about misunderstanding. It seems more complicated in my future study.

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