

Correlative Cosmology: Energetics of the First Month of Spring and Lung Function (A collection of relevant classical sources)

Collated and translated by Heiner Fruehauf

According to the five phase element system, the lung is classified as a metal organ. Modern Chinese medicine discourse, therefore, has exclusively focused on this organ's association with the metal season of fall. In original *Neijing* cosmology, however, the five phase system is paralleled by a more complex and inclusive system of twelve functional entities that correlate the twelve months of the year with the order of the twelve channel systems that we now refer to as the "organ clock." In this system, which does not contradict but rather amend the simpler view of lung metal function, lung function is likened to the energetics of the first month of spring. By studying classical sources about the first month, therefore, we can recover valuable and clinically practical information about deeper aspects of lung physiology/pathology that are otherwise not overtly expressed in the *Neijing* itself.

Theme of heaven and earth intercoursing and spawning life:

- Liji, Yueling: 6. 8是月也，天氣下降，地氣上騰，天地和同 “In this month the vapors of heaven descend and those of earth ascend. Heaven and earth are in harmonious co-operation.” (Legge, 255)
- 正月二月，天氣始方，地氣始發 “During the first and second month, the heavenly *qi* begins to release, and the earthly *qi* begins to spring forth” (Huangdi neijing, chapter 16)
- Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sanguo liuchao wen: 乾坤交泰 “[During the first month] Qian (heaven) and Kun (earth) are intercoursing.” (見《書鈔》一百五十五，《藝文類聚》五，《白帖》)

Theme of beginning, commencement, initiation:

- Liang Yuan Di zuanyao (梁元帝纂要): 正月曰孟陽，孟陬，上春，開春，發春，獻春，首春，首歲，獻歲，發歲，初歲，肇歲，芳歲，華歲 “The first month is called First Yang, First Gathering, Top of Spring, Opener of Spring, Issuer of Spring, Presenter of Spring, Head of Spring, Head of the Year, Presenter of the Year, Issuer of the Year, First of the Year, Commencer of the Year, Fragrant Initiator of the Year, Blossoming Bud of the Year (see SKQS, Suishi guangji)

Theme of North-East (corner where yang *qi* is first born):

- 8. 7. 1正月為陬 “The first month is represented by the Fish Corner” (Erya, chapter 8). This passage from China's oldest extant dictionary, which continues to give one-character epithets for each of the remaining months, is perhaps one of the most meaningful in terms of symbolic information on the first month from pre-Han times, yet it is also most difficult to

interpret (due to the archaic nature of the characters used). It has been demonstrated that the twelve characters used in this passage are names for twelve archaic month gods that presided over the functions of each month (see Noel Barnard, “The Twelve Peripheral Figures of the Ch’u Silk Manuscript”). *Zou* means to gather, as in the accumulation of yang qi that is now taking place; it means corner, especially the north-east corner of the cosmograph where the year officially commences during the first month, when the Dipper and the Sheti stars point at it; and in some southwestern dialects it means fish, resonating with Western astrology where the asterisms Shi and Bi associated with the first month belong to pisces--fish. On the terrestrial sphere, *Zou* is the name of an ancient township in the northeast of China, at the foot of Mt. Tai in today’s Shandong Province. This is the place where Confucius was born and where his ancestors held office.

Theme of (returning) yang qi emerging/manifesting at the surface:

- 是故陽氣以正月始出於地，生育養長於上 … 故陽氣出於東北，入於西北，發於孟春，畢於孟冬，而物莫不應是。陽始出，物亦始出 “The first month is the time when the yang qi first emerges from the earth, and now begins its work of nourishing and growing above ground... Thus yang qi emerges in the northeast, goes back inside in the northwest, starts in the first month of spring, and is finished in the first month of winter—and there is not a single living creature that does not respond to its lead. When the yang first emerges, all plants and animals also begin to come out.” (Dong Zhongshu, *Chunqiu fanlu* [Heavy Dew on the Spring and Autumn Annals], chapter 11)
- 正月陽氣凍解地氣而出也 “During the first month, the yang qi frees the earth qi from its icy shackles and causes it to emerge” (*Huangdi neijing*, chapter 49).

Theme of emerging plant life:

- 正月…，其樹楊 “The signature tree of the first month is the aspen” (Huainanzi, chapter 5)
- 東門之楊，其葉肺肺 “The aspen at the Eastern Gate, abundant [like leaf-shaped lungs] are its leaves” (Shijing, chapter on the Songs of Chen). Creation of etymological word field that links 肺 (leaves of the lung) and 沛 (abundant water in the Yellow River) and 柿 (abundant foliage [of the willow])

Theme of (return of) water:

- 孝成帝時，客有薦雄文似相如者，上方郊祠甘泉泰畤、汾陰后土，以求繼嗣，召雄待詔承明之庭。正月，從上甘泉，還奏甘泉賦以風 (Hanshu, chapter 3) This Han dynasty quote from the biography of the writer Yang Xiong illustrates that the first month of spring was the time when the freshwater in nature returns (in the form of both rain and river/spring water). According to Han dynasty yin-yang cosmology, yang leads and yin follows. When yang (fire) returns, therefore, yin (water) will naturally follow. At this time, sacrifices were made to the nature spirits to ensure the return of this water of life, often referred to as “sweet spring water” (*ganquan*). Yang Xiong is the author of the famous ode “Ganquan Fu” (Fresh Water Ode), which was set to music and often performed during the rituals of the first months.

Theme of yin-yang balance:

- 正月之始，正月之後，立春之際，百刑皆斷，囹圄空虛，然而一寒一溫“From the time of the first month onward, starting with the ritual sacrifices at the Beginning of Spring, the 100 punishments/shackles are put to an abrupt end, the prisons are emptied, and in nature one part cold co-exists with an equal amount of warmth” (Lunheng, chapter 41). This quality of yin-yang balance during the first month introduces the aspect of balance, harmony, cooperation, peace, and equality that plays such an important role in the story of the lung: One part yang and one part water; one part north and one part east; one part wood and one part metal; one part cold and one part warm; one part moist and one part dry; one part black and one part white; one part inside and one part surface; one part releasing and one part keeping the lid on; one part freedom and one part restraint; one part wildness and one part civilization; one part qian and one part kun; one part heaven and one part earth; one part spiritual and one part physical (“lung qi” is comprised by an equal amount of each of these yin-yang aspects).

Theme of “opening the door” to the return of the warming light forces of life:

- Liji, Yueling: 其祀戶 “Its sacrifice is that at the door” (Legge, 251)

Theme of dance as an (earthy) celebration of the return of the earthly life force:

- Liji, Yueling: 6. 9是月也，命樂正入學習舞 “In this month orders are given to the chief director of music to enter the college, and practice the dances with his pupils.” (Legge, 255)

Theme of sacrificing in gratitude to the bestowers of earthly life forces:

- Liji, Yueling: 乃脩祭典。命祀山林川澤 “The canons of sacrifice are examined and set forth, and orders are given to sacrifice to the hills and forests, the streams and meres.” (Legge, 256)

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