

# 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)

**Theme of safe-guarding and kindling the initial expressions of the (returned) life force:**

- Liji, Yueling: 犧牲毋用牝。6. 10禁止伐木。毋覆巢，毋殺孩蟲、胎、夭、飛鳥。毋麇、毋卵 “Care being taken not to use any female victims (not to destroy the life unborn). Prohibitions are issued against cutting down trees. Nests should not be thrown down; unformed insects should not be killed, nor creatures in the womb, nor very young creatures, nor birds just taking to the wing, nor fawns, nor should eggs be destroyed.” (Legge, 256)

**Theme of avoiding images/actions of death, war, and destruction:**

- Liji, Yueling: 掩骼埋胔。6. 11是月也，不可以稱兵，稱兵必天殃 “Skeletons should be covered up, and bones with the flesh attached to them buried. In this month, no warlike operation should be undertaken; the undertaking of such is sure to be followed by calamities from Heaven.” (Legge, 256)

**Theme of commencement of agricultural activities (by surveying, planning, instruction, setting standards, dissemination of information):**

- Liji, Yueling: 6. 7是月也，天子乃以元日祈穀于上帝。乃擇元辰，天子親載耒耜，措之于參保介之御間，帥三公九卿諸侯大夫，躬耕帝藉。“In this month the son of Heaven on the first day prays to God for a good year; and afterwards, the day of the first conjunction of the sun and moon having been chosen, with the handle and share of the plough in the carriage placed between the man-at-arms who is its third occupant and the driver, he conducts his three ducal ministers, his nine high ministers, the feudal princes and his great officers, all with their own hands to plough the field of God.” (Legge, 254)
- Liji, Yueling: 王命布農事，命田舍東郊，皆脩封疆，審端（經）〔徑〕術。善相丘陵、阪險、原隰土地所宜，五穀所殖，以教道民，必躬親之。田事既飭，先定準直，農乃不惑。“The king gives orders to set forward the business of husbandry. The Inspectors of the Fields are ordered to reside in the lands having an eastward exposure, and see that all repair the marches and divisions of the ground, and mark out clearly the paths and ditches. They must skillfully survey the mounds and rising grounds, the slopes and defiles, the plains and marshes, determining what the different lands are suitable for, and where the different grains will grow best. They must thus instruct and lead on the people, themselves also engaging in the tasks. The business of the fields being thus ordered, the guiding line is first put in requisition, and the husbandry is carried on without error.” (Legge, 255)

**Theme of seasonal landmark (setting correct standards at the outset):**

- 昔自在古，曆建正作於孟春“Since ancient times, the standard landmark of time for the correct calculation of the calendar has been set at the first month of spring” (Shiji, chapter 3)
- 是故夏以孟春為正，殷以季冬為正，周以仲冬為正，夏以十三月為正，色尚黑，以平旦為朔“The Xia dynasty thus took the first month of spring as their standard seasonal landmark, while for the Yin (Shang) dynasty it was the last month of winter, and for the Zhou dynasty it was the second month of winter. For the Xia, the 13<sup>th</sup> month as standard landmark of time was associated with the color black, and within the cycle of the day corresponded with the hour of *pingdan* (Peace Before Dawn, 3-5 am).” (Shangshu dazhuan, chapter 3)
- 夫六氣者，行有次，止有位，故常以正月朔日平旦視之，睹其位而知其所在矣。運有餘，其至先，運不及，其至後，此天之道，氣之常也。運非有餘非不足，是謂正歲，其至當其時也“The movements and seasonal dominance of the six *qi* have order and direction. Customarily, their respective quality during a specific year is assessed during the *pingdan* hour (3-5 am) of the first day of the first lunar month. If the prominent *qi* phase will be in a state of excess, its influence will arrive before this time; if it will be in a state of deficiency, its influence will be observed only after this time segment for standard measurement has passed—this is the way of heaven and the standard according to which *qi* circulation expresses itself. If there is neither excess nor deficiency, then this is called a right-

on year, and the influence of the respective *qi* phase will make itself known at exactly this time.” (Huangdi neijing, chapter 71)

- 79. 1孟春始至，黃帝燕坐，臨觀八極，正八風之氣 “At the time when the first month first arrives, the Yellow Emperor sits down dressed in ritual swallow regalia and carefully surveys the eight directions of the compass, in order to assess the standard quality of the eight seasonal winds for the year to come.” (Huangdi neijing, chapter 79)
- 離騷經曰：攝提貞于孟陬。案：漢天文志：北斗七星杓攜龍角，衡殷南斗，魁枕參首，用昏建者杓，夜半建者衡，平旦建者魁；如孟春昏時杓建寅，夜半衡建寅，平旦魁建寅也。攝提，星名，在龍角之兩旁，各有三星鼎足，鈞之直斗柄所指以建十二辰者也。真，正也；孟，始也，謂孟春也。陬，隅也。寅月曰陬，蓋是月孟春昏時龍角攝提星見在東北隅，隨斗柄指寅，故以為名也。”The classic *Lisao* contains the line ‘the true standard of the Sheti lodge is obtained at the First Corner.’ In the *Astronomical Annals of the Han* this concept is clarified in the following way: The handle of the Seven Stars of the Dipper flanks the Horns of the Blue-green Dragon, the yoke of the (northern) Dipper nudges close to the Southern Dipper, and the bowl of the Dipper cradles itself at the head of the Shen constellation. The handle is used as a directional pointer at dusk, the yoke is used as a directional pointer at midnight, and the bowl is used as a directional pointer at twilight. This means, for instance, that during the first month of spring the handle establishes the (earthly branch) position Yin on the celestial dial at dusk (by pointing at it), at midnight it is the yoke that establishes the proper location of Yin, and at the twilight hour it is the bowl that confirms Yin. Sheti is the name of a pair of star clusters that hug the Dragon’s Horns. Both of them contain three stars that are shaped like a tripod. This star formation aligns itself with the movements of the Dipper, and alongside it establishes the seasonal (earthly branch) positions on the celestial twelve dial... The month when the position Yin is established is called ‘The Corner Month,’ which is the month when the Sheti star formation next to the Dragon’s Horns is visible in the northwest corner of the sky, and alongside with the movements of the Dipper is pointing at the Yin position.” (from Yuan dynasty text by Dai Liang, *Jiulingshan fang ji* [A Collection of Writings from the Study Beneath Nine Spirit Mountain], vol. 26, p. 13; in *Siku quanshu*)

#### **Theme of governance over the standard of time (associated with emperor Zhuanxu):**

- 顓頊以今之孟春正月為元。其時正月朔旦立春。五星會于天庥營室也。冰凍始泮。蟄蟲始發。雞始三號。天曰作時。地曰作昌。人曰作樂。鳥獸萬物。莫不應和。故顓頊聖人為庥室也。 “Zhuanxu first designated what is now called the first month of spring as the beginning of the year. The exact time for this source point in time is the first day of the first month’s Beginning of Spring period. (At Zhuanxu’s time), the five planets met (then) in the heavenly Calendar Office, namely the Shi constellation. The ice first melts at this time, the hibernating insects start coming out of their burrows, and the chickens begin to crow three times. In the heavenly plane, this is the time when the wheel of the seasons begins and time is created; on the earthly plane, this is the time when everything flourishes; and in the human sphere this is the time when music and merry-making emerge. The

birds, the animals, and all living things respond in kind. Thus the sage Zhuanxu became the Official of Calendric Calculations and Measurements.” (See Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sanguo liuchao wen, chapter on sanguo wen, quoting the Lüli zhi section of the Jinshu)

- 顓頊受命。歲在豕韋。衛居其地。亦在豕韋。故春秋傳曰。衛顓頊之墟也 “When Zhuanxu received the mandate of heaven Jupiter was in the Shiwei constellation (alternate name for Shi). He took up residence in the State of Wei, which is the earthly territory associated with the Shiwei constellation. Therefore it is written in the Spring and Autumn Annals that ‘the state of Wei is the realm of Zhuanxu.’” (See Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sanguo liuchao wen, chapter on sanguo wen, quoting the Wen Di ji of the Weizhi).
- 謂之顓頊何？顓者、專也。頊者、正也。能專正天人之道，故謂之顓頊也 “What does emperor Zhuanxu’s name mean? Zhuan means to measure with a standardized instrument, and Xu means straight, standard, correct. He was able to set a correct standard for uniting the pathways of heaven and humanity, therefore he was called Zhuanxu.” (Baihu tong, chapter 2)
- 耑，物初生之題 (端) 也。上象生形，下象根也。”The character Duan 耑 (original version of Zhuan 顓) is an image of a plant when it first sprouts. Above it looks like budding plants (the basis for the character 生, to give birth), and below it looks like roots.” (Shuowen jiezi) The oracle bone version of this character is a pictogram of a weed breaking its head through the ground, supported by roots underground, and encouraged by raindrops above. (see Jiagu wenzi gulin, volume 1, 840) Note that the characters duan 耑, duan 端, zhuan 顓, and yuan 元 are all etymologically synonymous, meaning both beginning and end. Specifically, they are often used to designate chun 春, spring (in the oracle bone record, 耑日 is most likely 春日). An interesting analysis by the contemporary philologist Chen Shihui suggests that the character 耑 is a combination of 之 (emerging at the top) and 不 (image of weed roots that look like hair, or a person planted upside down in the ground); the combined image thus shows the “plant head” emerging from the ground (JGWZGL 1, 841). In the light of these most ancient etymological clues, it makes sense that the name Zhuanxu literally means “Head that Emerges in Spring.” (for the discussion of bladder symbolism, take note of the pairing of 耑 (spring: “yes;” plant head is emerging from the ground) and 不 (fall: “no;” plant head is entering the root phase).
- Zhuanxu therefore related to fish and pig totems, both representatives of winter (pig is beginning of winter, fish is end of winter); fish is a definite reference to pisces, see SHJ.

#### Theme of ecology (adherence to the laws of nature):

- Liji, Yueling: 毋變天之道，毋絕地之理，毋亂人之紀。” No change in the ways of heaven is allowed; nor any extinction of the principles of earth; nor any confounding of the bonds of men.” (Legge, 257)

#### Theme of observing and recording cosmic laws as a time-honored tradition:

- Liji, Yueling: 司天日月星辰之行，宿離不貸，毋失經紀，以初為常。 “[The emperor orders the Grand Recorder to] especially to observe the motions in the heavens of the sun

and moon, and of the zodiacal stars in which the conjunctions of these bodies take place, so that there should be no error as to where they rest and what they pass over; that there should be no failure in the record of all these things, according to the regular practice of early times.” (Legge, 254)

**Theme of establishing and upholding the principles of law:**

- Liji, Yueling: 6. 6乃命大史守典奉法 “[The emperor] also orders the Grand Recorder to guard the statues and maintain the laws.” (Legge, 254)

**Theme of restraint (restrained exuberance); yang is on the move, but (actual) temperature is still cold; implying restraining function of the law:**

- 49. 1 正月陽氣出在上，而陰氣盛，陽未得自次也” During the first month the yang is appearing in the upper position, yet the yin *qi* still has the upper hand, therefore the yang does not get to rule yet” (Huangdi neijing, chapter 49). See notes on the theme of yin-yang balance above: during the first month, the yang force is empowered to take the momentum, but the physical reality of the human environment is still dominated by yin (cold) qualities. In the development of the multi-layered themes associated with the first month, the restraining influence of this cold “envelope” in nature is associated with the restraining function of the law in a social context.
- 正月之時，天甫淒栗，里語：「大暑在七，大寒在一。」一謂正月也，人家不能羸袍異裳，脫著身之衣，便為風寒所中，以生疹疾，疹疾不瘳，死亡必矣 “During the time of the first month, nature is still filled with quite a chill, therefore the saying ‘big heat in the seventh (month), big cold in the first (month).’ It is thus also said that during the first month people should not exchange their seasonal wardrobe for thinner layers of garments yet, nor take off their clothes, otherwise wind cold influences will invade the body and cause skin eruptions, which in turn can potentially cause death if not healed in time.” (Fengsu tongyi, chapter 11)

**Theme of dissemination:**

- Liji, Yueling: 6. 5命相布德和令，行慶施惠，下及兆民 “[The emperor] charges his assistants to disseminate lessons of virtue and...bestow his favors.” (Legge, 254)

**Theme of rulership of space/matter (associated with Sikong, the Minister of Works):**

- 正月官司空 “The officer associated with the first month is the Minister of Works” (Huainanzi, chapter 5)
- 司空主地 “The Minister of Works is in charge of the earth” (Baihu tong, chapter 7)
- 司空掌邦土，居四民，時地利 “The Minister of Works is in charge of the state’s land, and of managing the four classes of subjects (scholars, peasants, workers, and traders), and the timing of land productivity (Shangshu, chapter 48)
- 5. 39司空執度，度地，居民山川沮澤，時四時。量地遠近，興事任力 “The Minister of Works is the arbiter of laws and measurements. He assesses the features and

properties of the land; he manages the people, the mountains and rivers, the wetlands and lakes; and he times the seasons. He measures the distances in the land, and prompts the labor of the people” (Liji, chapter 5) 【前漢·律歷志】度者，分寸尺丈引也，所以度長短也。本起於黃鐘之長，以子穀秬黍中者，一黍之廣，度之九十分，黃鐘之長，一爲一分，十分爲寸，十寸爲尺，十尺爲丈，十丈爲引，而五度審矣

- 2. 6下理坤道，上和乾光，謂之司空。《北堂書鈔·設官部》、《太平御覽·職官部》” To regulate the way of earth below, and to harmonize it with the light of heaven above, that is the function of the Minister of Works.” (Hanguan liuzhong, chapter 2)  
Note that this is the precise function referenced by hexagram 11 (Tai), which is about the “intercourse of qian/heaven and kun/earth” (mentioned as a theme in itself above, as well as in the description of hexagram 11).
- 伯禹作司空 “Master Yu served as the Minister of Works” (Shangshu, chapter 2); 禹作司空，平水土 “Yu served as the Minister of Works, leveling the waters and the soil” (Qian Han ji, chapter 5)
- 溝瀆雖遏，水為民害，則責之司空 “When the irrigation ditches are plugged up and cause flooding, and the waters are causing calamity for the people, then the Minister of Works needs to be called upon” (Shangshu dazhuan, chapter 1); 山陵崩竭，川谷不流，五穀不植，草木不茂，則責之司空 “When the mountains and hills erode via mudslides, and when the rivers and streams are not flowing, and when the five kinds of grain are not growing, and when vegetations does not flourish, then the Minister of Works needs to be called upon” (Han shi waizhuan, chapter 8)
- 度量不審，舉事失理，都鄙不脩，財物失所，曰貧。貧則飭司空 When standards and measurements are disregarded, when human actions are executed without principle, when the sense of good and evil is not cultivated, and when material goods are improperly distributed, then this is called poverty. When there is this kind of poverty, then the Minister of Works needs to diligently work to rectify the situation. (Kongzi jiayu, chapter 25)
- 隧路亟，行輜治，賦丈均，處軍輯，井竈通，此司空之官也 “To make the roads swiftly passable, to organize the supply routes, to adhere to even building standards for military camps, to settle the troops in an organized fashion, to make sure that wells and hearths stay open, these duties belong to the Minister of Works” (Huainanzi, chapter 15)
- 危東六星，兩兩相比，曰司空 “The six stars east of the Wei constellation, arranged in pairs of two, are called the Minister of Works” (from the “Tianguan shu” of the Shiji, chapter 3). Note that these stars are located in the direct vicinity of the Shi constellation, which is associated with the first month. The later *Yuanming bao* adds that these stars are “in charge of water flow.”

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