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In the Community

2017: The Year of the Fire Rooster and its Clinical Implications

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2017 brings the Year of the Fire Rooster. As you may know, the energy of each year is different, and is named for its Chinese Zodiac animal.

Each animal represents different energetic implications for the year. With a basic understanding of the five elements, we can gain insight into the energetics of the year and the clinical implications for ourselves and our patients.



Let's look at the energy this year. 2017 is the year of the Yin Fire

(or Red) Rooster. Every year, we have both the energy from Heaven, and the energy from Earth. Each year is also Yin or Yang, alternating every year. 2016 was a Yang year, so 2017 is a Yin year, and 2018 will be another Yang year. The Heaven and Earth energies both follow the Yin/Yang polarity of the year. This year, the Heaven energy is Yin Fire, and the Earth energy is the Rooster, which corresponds with Yin Metal.

The Importance of Energetics

The *Huang Di Neijing Su Wen*, or *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine Basic Questions*, is filled with references to the five elements and six atmospheric influences that give us our weather. The energies of Heaven and Earth, the seasons and weather affect our lives and our health, as well as determining correct and incorrect treatment based on these energetic factors. *Su Wen* chapters 66-74 are dedicated to this topic, with many more references throughout the text. In fact, Paul Unschuld, translator of the most comprehensive English version of the *Su Wen*, states that over *one third* of the entire text is dedicated to this topic¹. With that much of the *Su Wen* discussing these energetics, it must be deemed a very important area of consideration and study.



The *Su Wen* even states that if one doesn't understand these energetic factors and their effects, one will be an ineffective physician!

By evaluating the five element correspondences and relationships between the elements each year, we can see the effects of the energy of the year on weather, emotions, organs, senses, etc. We can then consider our patients who may be more susceptible to certain imbalances each year, and take precautions to keep them balanced. We can advise our patients about diet, lifestyle and herbal remedies to prevent issues caused by the energy of the year.

We can also adjust our treatments accordingly. For example, in a damp year, cloying herbs will have a stronger effect. Conversely, in a hot and dry year, we need to be cautious about herbs that are warming and

drying, but we can probably use damp, cloying herbs with less side effects, depending on the individual patient, of course.

The Rooster

To analyze the energy of the year, we can start by considering the nature of the animal. Roosters are loud in the morning to wake us up at daybreak. They're very territorial, and protectors and guardians of their flock of chickens. They can also be quite ornery, as you may know if you've ever encountered a rooster! Many urban communities that allow the keeping of chickens ban roosters, due to their loud morning noise. So, we can expect this kind of energy and behavior this year, and we've seen a preview in American politics. Roosters also tend to have more extravagant feathers and coloration than the hens. Expect more loud, extravagant crowing for attention this year, from people and events.

Yin Fire and Yin Metal

Next, we consider the nature of the annual Heaven and Earth energies. The Heaven energy this year is Yin fire. Fire is hot, active, and passionate. Yin fire is more like the flame of a candle than a bonfire, so the weather will continue to be warmer than normal, but shouldn't be as hot as last year, which was a Yang fire year. Since fire corresponds with the Heart, we could see health issues involving Heart heat, fire, and Heart Blood deficiency. So, conditions like anxiety, insomnia and similar pathologies may be common.

The Earth energy this year is Yin metal. The nature of metal is dryness, but again, due to the Yin nature of the metal this year, we'll have mildly dry conditions. So, in general, we can expect warmer and dryer weather than normal. There is more potential for fires this year, but they shouldn't be as big as last year, since it's a Yin year.

We'll probably also have more humidity. The metal and fire create dryness, but as *Su Wen* Chapter 67 says, metal commands fog and dewⁱⁱ. (Earth is in charge of clouds and rain.) Interestingly, metal is also in charge of armored creatures, so we may see problems in clinic from insect bites, especially of the heat toxin type, due to the heat from the fire energy from Heaven.

We may also see problems with the Lungs, due to the metal energy. Combined with the fire energy from Heaven, we'd expect problems of dryness, but because metal also creates more humidity, we could see problems of both dryness and dampness in the Lungs and Large Intestine.

Emotionally, it's a good year to do group social activities that bring joy (the fire and rooster natures), but be aware that there could be more sadness, depression and anxiety in the fall (metal season).

In addition, because the skin is part of the Lung system, skin diseases will probably be more of the heat and dry type, like psoriasis. The skin conditions will also most likely be itchy, since blood deficiency may be an issue this year.

The Five Elements

Why blood deficiency? Consider the five element relationships in the following diagram:



We can consider each element and its relationship with the others. Fire and metal are strong, since we have those energies coming from Heaven and Earth this year. Fire gives birth to earth, which strengthens it, but earth gives birth to metal, which weakens the earth. Therefore, earth gains some strength and loses some, so it's fairly neutral this year. People with Spleen and Stomach issues shouldn't really be affected by the energy of the year in 2017.

Our last two elements to assess are water and wood. Water has to control fire, and fire burns up water, but metal creates water, which strengthens it. The metal helps the water, but not enough to balance out the weakening effect of the fire, so the water element is slightly weakened this year. There may be more Kidney deficiency in general, and Kidney Yin deficiency in particular this year, when combined with the hot and drying effects of the fire and metal. Watch for dry eyes this year.

Last, we look at the wood element. Wood gives birth to fire, which weakens wood (it uses up Qi to have and raise children). But metal restrains or controls wood, which also weakens it. Therefore, wood is the weakest element this year. Watch for Liver and Gallbladder deficiency syndromes, like Blood deficiency previously mentioned. Also, look for problems with tendons, ligaments and the nervous system. Patients with anxiety, insomnia, gynecological problems and menopausal symptoms may need supplemental treatments and herbs to help them deal with the energetic effects of the energy of the Fire Rooster.

Finally, metal is sharp and cutting. Last year was Yang metal, like an ax or chainsaw. This year the Yin metal is more like a small knife, but it's still a good time to cut unnecessary excess out of your life, physically, mentally and energetically. There could be more injuries caused by metal and cuts this year.

Overall Health Implications

As previously mentioned, we may see problems with the Lungs. We may see more asthma, allergies, and colds with lots of mucus, but also dry coughing. People could have problems with diarrhea or constipation, depending on their constitution and diet.

Emotionally, be aware that there could be more sadness, depression and anxiety in the fall (metal season).

There may also be skin diseases with redness and dryness, and most likely itching, like psoriasis. This energetic effect started last year, and will continue this year, although it may not be as severe as last year.

Be careful with overwork this year, as it may have more of a burnout effect. People suffering from fatigue, hot flashes, menopausal symptoms, and dry eyes, may have a bit harder time this year.

Also watch out for problems and injuries with tendons, ligaments and the nervous system this year.

Anxiety and insomnia may be worse in summer and fall, especially in hot weather.

Politics in the Year of the Fire Rooster

Even though this is more of a clinical article, people keep asking about the political situation, so we can gain some insight through the same method of analysis. Fire represents passion, and as we know, it can go too far and become mania, especially in people who tend toward heat and in hot weather. Metal is sharp and cutting, and its nature is also about justice, or right and wrong. Since fire melts metal, justice and right and

wrong will most likely suffer this year. It's just the nature of the energy this year. However, next year is a double earth year, and earth represents harmony and trust, so things should be more harmonious next year. In the meantime, we'll still be seeing many patients stressed and upset about politics. We can counsel them to take breaks from it and get together with friends and do things that bring them joy (fire and chicken nature), but not talk about politics! And, of course, this is good advice for us as practitioners as well, to make sure we have some fun and play time (fire nature) to recharge ourselves so we can care for our patients well.

When you analyze the energetics of the year, and the interactions of the five elemental energies, you can get a good idea of what to expect clinically in any given year. Once you determine the strength and weakness of each element for the year, you can consider the five element correspondences for each element, and know what organs, senses, body tissues, emotions, etc. may have imbalances, and may need treatment. And as the *Su Wen* says, this can help us be effective physicians, and live long lives in harmony with Heaven and Earth.

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ⁱUnschuld, Paul U. *Huang Di nei jing su wen: Nature, Knowledge, Imagery in an Ancient Chinese Medical Text*, 2003, University of California Press, Berkeley

ⁱⁱUnschuld, Paul U. *Huang Di niw jing su wen: An Annotated Translation of Huang Di's Inner Classic - Basic Questions*, 2011, University of California Press, Berkeley, Volume 2, page 208