

**From: Elisa Rossi, “Quando il drago muove la coda”, ed. Nottetempo, 2008  
“When the dragon moves its tail”**

Translation by Peter Linnemann

#### THE SYSTEM OF THE MERIDIANS

.....The underground coach was cram packed. It was hot, she was offended by the smells, it would have been better to have gone on foot. She smelled the end of the day acidity of the milanese workers, the pungency of a group of Africans, and also the sweetish scent of garlic so typical of her compatriots. She had already caught it as she came down the escalator at Moscova station, strange that she had not seen them. Anyway, she had arrived. She was swept along by the crowd jostling to go down. She felt a burning sensation in her side. The stupid expression on the face of the girl in the advertisement in front of her became distorted, the colours of the station darkened to become completely black, her knees gave way. One thought managed to form itself in her mind: “I must become a spore. A spore”.

It is not true that in big cities people are indifferent. Two persons inquired whether she needed some help, but the three friends who surrounded Liu reassured them. It was just a little moment of weakness, it was the heat, their cousin was tired, they were taking care of her. The two men supported Liu Hong and the little group made its way toward the exit. As they proceeded the woman that made up the trio placed a pair of dark glasses before Liu’s empty eyes, an ample shawl around her shoulders and, stooping swiftly, some special soles on her shoes.

The timing of the three Chinese was perfect. Liu Hong by this point was totally unconscious and as stiff as a frozen sea bass, but the rollers now furnishing her shoes allowed the pair to propel her towards the exit and thence to the car. The tremors that shook her and her unseeing eyes were hidden by the shawl and glasses. The tender Ling busied herself supporting the neck soaked in cold sweat and wiping away the thread of green dribble that trickled from a corner of her mouth. Meanwhile she argued with the man with the mark over one eye; the rollers squeaked, stupid Bai hadn’t oiled them well, he could have also been a martial arts champion but he couldn’t do anything right, and then he became offended when they called him Dumb Bai.

He was an imbecile, slow and stupid.

Calm down, said Liu to herself. It was almost certainly Thursday morning; location unknown. Cold. Her guts, her muscles, her nerves gripped in a vice. There had not been enough time to complete the transformation into a spore. She had not sealed herself well and had lost energy. She was dying, she had to stop this ebbing away. She could feel nothing, not one muscle responded, her head was foggy. The body paralyzed, the mind dulled.

She found a little heat, enough to dissolve a little the terror that had totally engulfed her. She managed to decide to begin from the *jingming* point and to travel through the *zutaiyang* channel. Mentally she huddled in the inner corner of the eye. She was well acquainted with this crossroads, she used it often because the two extraordinary channels connected to movement met there.

Trying to gather some energy she moved cautiously along the part of the channel that covers the head. Arriving at the junction from which the secondary branch runs to the brain, she followed it. Thoughts became more lucid, the mind more clear. Liu resurfaced at the neck, to then slowly descend the back halting by each vertebra, in each point relating to the various organs, to control the lungs, heart, liver, spleen, kidneys. It was a matter much more complex than simply breathing or pumping blood. Liu helped herself by descending simultaneously a parallel branch so as to lean on various corresponding points situated more laterally.

Finally she arrived at the lumbar region where she paused, uncertain whether to go on deep into the kidneys or to proceed along the legs. She chose the latter route, which would lead right to the last toe, even if she feared the difficulty of the part below the knee. Here, in fact, the meridian becomes more superficial and very delimited, the energy moves in a different manner. In the Classics of acupuncture it is said that the meridians run initially from the fingers and toes, from the Well points, proceeding then rapidly, impetuously and changeably through the Stream points, becoming a powerful current at the Transport points, achieving fullness at the Cardinal points, to enter finally in depth at the height of the elbows and knees where the river joins the sea and the impetuosity of the current is calmed.

By the time Liu arrived at knee height she was tired out, she would never be able to make it down to the end, to the Well point. She wanted only to stop, to curl up at that point between river and sea, it felt so good there. No, she had to go on. She managed to gather her little remaining strength. She went on, but had trouble keeping it together. The last part of the meridian, being more superficial, is continually joined by external stimuli. She needed to be careful to remain within the principal meridian every time she passed by the points where it joined the secondary channels.

Liu dragged herself along the last part of the foot, exhausted, but when she reached the end of the little toe her whole body was ready to respond. She could move. She checked by contracting each individual muscle, but even the most close observer would have noticed but the slightest tremor. On the monitor operating in the next room

the woman remained immobile.

Liu returned to the point of the toe, to the last meridian point, and from there passed to the neighbouring channel. Rising easily up to the kidneys, she entered the *mingmen* zone, the gateway of destiny, where is stored the deepest energy, the essence that comes from the places that precede the individual lives on this earth. From here Liu Hong waited, by now totally lucid. She could rely on perceptiveness and reflexes, on speed and power.

When big Bai opened the door to enter the room in which he had closed Liu, he had just time to take one step.

Like a spring the woman leaped from the bed with a thrust of the loins, and with the speed of a bullet, catapulted in a curl against the legs of Bai. It was the Armadillo posture, the best method for moving at highest speed occupying the least space.....

.....For sure, she knew the famous passage from the Suwen by heart, it was quite something else to put it into practice. "Strike straight and without allowing oneself to be distracted," it says. "As on the edge of a precipice, mindful not to fall, the hands as to hold a tiger, seize it firmly..." Heavens, another tiger! Ai Lixiang, however, cited another passage, that said that the qi arrives like a flock of birds and spreads out as in a field of millet, one cant know how it will move so the doctor must be ready, like an archer who releases the arrow at the right moment...

#### FUTURE AND RESPONSIBILITY

"Yes," said Marco, "but the Chinese ants are a great empire. The leaders who govern China now are followed without shocks from the maoist cadres. And they are very similar to the imperial functionaries of the past: the Chinese system is based on culture and a sense of state. Where we are nobody looks very far ahead, certainly not American capitalism, and neither international finance. Anyone very powerful can influence the choices of their country, can even make enemies to make war with, as we well know, for their personal gain. Whereas in China they think, look ahead and behind, they have a strategy."

Anna, who up to this point had spoken very little, said, smiling quietly: The Chinese do not wish to lead their lives like hungry ghosts." Everyone turned towards her. Roberto noticed suddenly that on each side of her smile were two wonderful dimples.

"Like hungry ghosts?" he repeated, feeling immediately like an idiot.

"Yes. After death, in monotheistic religions we go to pleasant or awful places, nearer or further from happiness, that is to say, God: there is a judgement and a reward. In systems based on reincarnation, the body and life in which we find ourselves depend on what we have done in the preceding one. In the classic Chinese thinking there is the cult of the ancestors: my time after my death will be peaceful if my children conduct the appropriate ceremonies: whereas I will wander in the form of a hungry ghost if the rituals are not made in the proper manner."

"To us" continued Anna in a lowered voice, "the cult of the ancestors seems a question of pure form, very superficial in respect to other religions, which foresee consequences for completed actions. But let us go beyond immediate appearances: if we look beyond the specific ceremonies, the prospective changes and we can see a system in which life and death are dependant on how we have educated our children. By children we may understand everything we have done in our life, not only our own actual, real children. In this way our actions have long term effect for generations away ahead in time" Anna paused for a moment, as if to gather courage. Nobody interrupted.

"What we have produced includes all that comes from it after our death. We are talking about seeds we have planted, for good and for ill."

#### INTERPRETATIONS OF THE YI JING

....she wanted to toss the coins to see what the Yi Jing had to say about the strange events of the morning.

Although the classic manner in which to consult the Yi Jing indicated the use of 49 yarrow sticks, it is possible to proceed by three coins of whatever currency, six times. Each throw corresponds to a line so that finally one obtains a hexagram. Each hexagram has a name followed by a brief description of the situation. Besides this there is a connected image, a text for each individual line and various remarks that have been added over time. Before throwing the coins one posits a question. The way in which the coins fall corresponds to the situation, the hexagram one obtains describes and indicates the most opportune manner in which to act.

There are sixty four hexagrams ,two raised to the sixth, that is to say, all the possible combinations of the two ways in which the coins may fall in six throws. One decides which face of the coins are worth two or three, and after each throw one writes the sum of the three coins. In the end there will be six numbers, which will represent the six lines.

At each throw the sum could result in 6,7,8,9, the even numbers correspond to a yin line, the odd ones to a yang line. The yin lines are represented by an open, interrupted line, the yang lines by a closed, continuous line. In both cases the lines may be either 'fixed' (7and 8), or 'mobile', (6 or 9), that is, lines which change into their opposite, from yin to yang and vice versa. In this case a second hexagram is created, named derived or prospective. As the idea behind the Yi Jing is that each little piece of reality contains the total and so also the way in which the coins

fall represents the state of the world. The fact that 7 and 8 are formed by diverse numbers (2+2+3) and (3+3+2) describes a context in which are found yin as well as yang, thus more stable, while the 6 and 9-insofar as they are the sum of only even numbers (2+2+2) or only odd numbers (3+3+3)- express a situation of maximum yin or maximum yang; that is to say a situation that cannot last long and is therefore changing: indeed the 6 and 9 form the changeable lines and a new hexagram. The hexagram that resulted for Marco was number 21, *shi she*, “Biting and uniting”.....Undoubtedly the Yi Jing was a fascinating book but, equally beyond doubt, an instant comprehension was not one of its characteristics....

.....her mission was important, she could not allow herself any false moves, she ought to ask the help of Ai Lixiang in order to understand well the situation, she would have asked her to consult the Yi Jing together. Consulting the Yi Jing was the right thing to do, doing so with Ai Lixiang was the most advantageous thing. Liu Hong had learned the technique and meaning of the I Jing from her Mistress, with her she had seen how the lines moved together with the world, she knew that the hexagrams could narrate the world. The difficulty lay in deciphering the narration, to act in a suitable way....

“...I would like to ask you a favour”, Liu Hong bowed lightly, “mistress, once more I am in need of your wisdom. May I toss the coins? I have an important question, I need an answer.” If Liu Hong wanted to use the coins instead of the yarrow sticks she must be in a real hurry: the method was quicker but less painstaking, less rich, less beautiful. Ai Lixiang made no comment, she prepared the paper pen and ink, and placed the three coins on a small mat.

Liu wrote her query, folded the paper and put it in her pocket. She threw the coins six times and Ai Lixiang six times drew a line. They formed the hexagram number 13, *tong ren*, that is , ‘persons together’, or also company between men, agreement, reuniting with companions, The text read: Persons together to the borders – favourable – it is propitious to cross the great river – for the wise man tenacity is propitious .” Being within the borders signified that Liu was working for her nation. She was doing well, also crossing the river would go well, despite being a challenging operation.

But a changing line had also come out, in third position. Liu was sitting sideways to her but Ai noted that her ear lobe had paled. Liu was afraid. The text of the line said “ Conceal arms in the hedge – ascend the high hill – for three years nothing moves”. The mistress Ai felt a hole in her stomach. Arms indicated aggressive intentions, the fact that they were hidden suggested subterfuge. ....

.....meanwhile I’ll tell you a story. It is said that the Yi Jing is like an old peasant who lives somewhere for a long time. The country he lives in is life which we are actually living. So the old peasant Yi Jing does two things: he looks up to see the energetic situation of the moment, that is, for example, if the weather is bringing rain or sun, then he looks at the person before him and evaluates his energetic state, that is, if he has good shoes, food, an umbrella etc. then he replies. For example, he says that the shortest path is the one that passes the river, it will only take two days, but probably tomorrow it will rain and so that road will be full of mud, so the shortest way is not advisable. There is also a path that follows the valley, it is easy and peaceful but very long. Finally there is the mountain path, it is disagreeable and takes three days. The peasant Yi Jing sees that the man seems used to walking, has good shoes and a wind proof coat. Today, for that traveller, the best way is the mountain path. But it is the traveller who decides”.

“ So the Yi Jing does not predict the future, it makes hypotheses based on the situation.”

“Exactly. The Chinese are pragmatic and know that the future is unpredictable. But they also know it is not totally uncertain. There is a fixed rule, for example, that the seasons follow each other, and there is an application of the rule which instead is variable, so that the seasons are not always identical.”

“This is why it is important that the labels on bottles of wine have the date of production”. “Yes, not all vintages are the same.”

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