

龍能大能小，能升能隱；大則興雲吐霧，小則隱介藏形；升則飛騰於宇宙之間，隱則潛伏於波濤之內。方今春深，龍乘時變化，猶人得志而縱橫四海。龍之為物，可比世之英雄。玄德久歷四方，必知當世英雄。請試指言之。

AS THEY DRANK, the weather grew dark with clouds threatening rain. The attendants pointed out a dragon cloud hanging in the sky, and host and guest leaned over the rail looking at it. Cao Cao said "Do you know all the changes of dragons?"

"Not really," said Liu Bei.

Cao Cao said "Dragons can be large or small, they can rise up or hide themselves. When large they excite the clouds and spit out mist, when small they obscure their glory and hide their shape. Rising, they fly upward into the cosmos; hiding, they sink deep and lurk beneath the waves. Here we are in mid-spring, and this is the time the dragon chooses for his transformations—just like a man who gains his will and sweeps over the whole world. A dragon's way of being can be compared to the hero of the time. You, Liu Bei, have wide experience: you must know who the heroes of the time are. Why don't you tell me?"

San Guo Yan Yi, chapter 21

Submerged

By Xiaoyao Xingzhe

"But what's in them?"

"The usual, plus a secret ingredient," Cook said, finishing off his dumpling with a flourish, then peeling off another dumpling skin and scooping more of the filling. "I've told you before."

The fat monk sat down, while he watched us wrapping dumplings, looking a bit rapt himself.

"Finely sliced cabbage, Chinese chives, shitake mushrooms, spring onion, dried tofu, and so on—anything you like, really, as long as you can chop it finely enough. Plus the secret ingredient," Cook said, giving me a wink.

Then he continued our conversation which had been interrupted by the fat monk's arrival. "To really understand the *Yi Jing* you have to study, actually pore over, the first two hexagrams," he had said earlier. "You want to look at the original ancient Chinese if you can. But most important is to take your time with the line changes, one at a time." I had just been about to ask what

he meant when the fat monk had bustled in, his arms full of oddly packed bundles. He dumped them on a table then came over to the warmer part of the hall where we sat and plonked himself down, eyes on the big bowl of dumpling filling.

So I asked my interrupted question. "But how *do* you study those hexagrams? Just read them? Memorise them?"

Cook nodded, then said "Yes, and visualise the situation described, and even more than that, feel it, and then look for and notice corresponding situations in the world around. That's the only way to make that knowledge real for yourself, and make the *Yi Jing* come alive around you: watch the changes happen in real time, in real life."

"But don't we do that anyway?" I asked, struggling to get two ends of a dumpling to match.

"Yes, but we have no framework for the pattern. We can't take it in, it is just endless and apparently meaningless change."

"What sort of framework?" I placed the finished dumpling on the tray, and saw that Cook had done five in the time it took me to do one.

dragon

“Well, let’s look at the cycle of changes that the first hexagram introduces: a series of situations, vignettes almost, of dragons in different situations.”

“The dragons are like code for pure yang energy,” the fat monk said dreamily, his chin propped on his two hands, his elbows on the table. His eyes were closed, but his nostrils flared.

“The first dragon is submerged, hidden deep in water,” said Cook. “Its energy is latent and not to be used, according to the text, but even without the text you can see it in the structure of the hexagram: five yang lines of intense potential, with a single line change at the bottom, in the beginning. It’s the very image of struggle at the start.”



Cook placed a final dumpling on an already stacked tray, then stood and carried the tray off toward the huge steamers waiting on the stoves at the other side of the hall. I continued to struggle with the pile of filling and dumpling skins left before me.

“Not to be used? What’s the point then?” I complained.

“To be aware of it, that subtle nudge, that *small still voice* within ultimate silence and quiet,” the fat monk said. “But there are more prosaic uses, too. Some say, for example, that line shows that you should not force children into educational and developmental activities too early, but should just let them play and develop at their own speed until they show an interest on their own.”

Cook heard this as he returned and said “That works for the first line, and could be applied, for sure, although not the only interpretation of course. *Show an interest on their own* is actually a pretty good example of the second line, which is a dragon showing itself on and off in a field.”

“So not always hidden, but manifesting occasionally,” said the fat monk, “Not yet leaping or flying.”

Cook looked at the huge pile of left-over filling left in front of me and sighed. Then he took a pile of skins, grabbed some filling and started wrapping again as he said “The text on this second line says *This is a good*

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Actually, the third line is the only one that doesn't mention dragons. But it is definitely about action.

time to see a wise person. A teacher would fit the bill, when the child shows some interest in learning.”

Cook used his finger to draw six invisible lines on the table. “Remember these lines go from the bottom upwards; the first line of the hexagram is at the bottom, so this is an upward progression. And it is seen as a progression in time and over time, from budding, to blossoming, through to fully blown and then to withering. So it can apply to any phenomenon that begins from nothing, grows, manifests, flourishes, reaches a peak and then fades away.”

I saw the fat monk slip a dumpling into his wide sleeve. I didn't think it was the first one. He saw me, made a frowning face that meant *Wrap your dumplings and mind your own business*, then stood up and said “Um, I'll be back in a minute, I just remembered something,” and headed off towards the kitchen and its steaming pots.

Cook, startled, glanced upwards but then looked down again at the lines he had drawn. He said “In fact, this progression is one reason studying the first two hexagrams is so important; they encompass a whole year. The first line in *Qian* is the winter solstice, when yang is still hidden. By the third line it is springtime. By the last line it is full summer full yang energy, and that is when *Kun* begins, when yin starts to grow. And then it goes full circle.”

“So how do you know which line applies?” I said.

“You probably don't remember much from when we did your *Yi Jing* reading a few years ago,” Cook said, “but when you manipulate the yarrow stalks, or even throw the coins for that matter, you do each line individually starting, as I said, from the bottom. And each time you end up with one of four numbers, six, seven, eight or nine. Six and nine are the extremes.” He reached over to pull a stack of dumpling skins closer, and said “You can guess which is yin and which is yang.”

“Um,” I said, thinking. Then it dawned on me. “Odd is yang, even is yin.”

“OK,” said Cook. “Do you know why?”

I was ready for that one. “Yang initiates or begins a process, but it has to act on and come to completion in yin. Odd numbered things are inherently unstable and so tend towards movement and action, but when

they reach an even numbered state they are stable and come to rest.”

“Close enough,” said Cook. “But here we have the extremes: six may be an even number, but it is the extreme of yin, and extremes must change to their opposite. Nine is the extreme of yang, and so will change to yin. A line numbered six is yin that changes to yang; a line numbered nine is yang that changes to yin. During the reading for each hexagram we pay attention only to the changing lines, as that is how the *Yi Jing* draws our attention to the crucial aspects of the situation we are asking about.”

He stopped to wipe his hands on the wet towel next to his tray of dumplings, looking thoughtful. Then he said “You remember the *lóng mǎ* (龍馬), the ‘dragon-horse’ that legend says provided the *Hé Tú* (河圖 river diagram)?”

I remembered spending a cold evening huddled in a cave discussing that with the hermit when he had found me lost and shivering in the mountains several years before. I nodded.

“Well, that dragon is *Qian* and that horse is *Kun*.” He gave me a significant look. “The dragon actively rules the Heavens, the horse travels steadily over the Earth. This is yin yang, the basis of the river diagram.”

Just then the fat monk came striding up, carrying a platter of steaming dumplings and a small bowl of thinly sliced ginger soaked in black vinegar, along with some chopsticks. He set them down at the table and, seeing Cook's pursed lips, said defensively “It's just a snap quality-control inspection.” Then he winked at me. “Can't go supplying sub-standard dumplings. Speaking of which ...” He looked at the dumpling he had just picked up, which had split at the seams. “I think this is one of yours,” he said, with a sidelong glance in my direction. He dipped it in the vinegar anyway and popped it in his mouth, closing his eyes to appreciate the flavour. “Top-notch filling, multiple flavours, textures. So ... what was that secret ingredient?”

Cook pinched a hot dumpling with his chopsticks and ignored him. “*So what about seven and eight?* you may be thinking. If you get either of those numbers, the line does not change. Seven is yang and stays yang. Eight is yin and stays yin. Most of the time, you don't even read those lines.”

“What if no lines change?” I asked.

“Then you just read the meaning for the hexagram as a whole. For example, with *Kun* The Receptive, the second hexagram, it would basically mean *Don't fight it, just go along with it*, whereas *Qian* the first hexagram is all about action.”

“Yes, the dragons,” the fat monk said. “But you only got to the second line before, what about the rest of the dragons?”

“Actually, the third line is the only one that doesn't mention dragons,” Cook said. “But it is definitely about action. The third line is at the top of the bottom trigram, and between the bottom and the top trigram there is considered to be a bit of a gap that must be crossed. So here it says *The refined person is assiduous during the day and cautious at night...*”

“What do you mean ‘assiduous?’” I interrupted.

“‘*Qian Qian*’ is the original wording, so you are *qianing qian*, if you can get that. In other words, since *Qian* is the most yang, the most vigorous, the most indomitable, then you, too, should be like that if you are in this situation, which is transitioning from hidden to manifest, from darkness to light, from winter to spring. But you should also be careful about the dark side.”

“Yes, the dark side,” the fat monk said, with an ominous lowering of his eyebrows.

Cook rolled his eyes, but lifted his hand when he saw me open my mouth. “He means the first two lines, the ones below the third line. We've already talked about them, the hidden influences, barely stirring, that's the first line. Then the impulses that arise on and off, that's the second line. But you need to start to get a feel for this yourself, you can't always just look to me for answers.” His chopsticks paused above a dumpling as he glanced at the fat monk and said in a deprecating tone “Or, heaven forbid, him.”

The fat monk looked hurt for a moment, then they both laughed.

“The bottom two lines are *Dì* (Earth), the next two lines are *Rén* (Humanity), the top two lines are *Tiān* (Heaven). So the third and fourth lines mainly reflect human activities, while the fifth and sixth are celestial.”

The fat monk dipped another dumpling in vinegar and popped it in his mouth. He was about to spear the last dumpling, but Cook

beat him to it, even as he said “Remember that gap I mentioned just before, about the distance between the upper and the lower trigrams. That is shown in the text for the fourth line: *Possibly leaps the abyss—no blame*. So this is a fearful place: dangerous, and there are no guarantees, but also no blame for trying.”

“You said the fifth and sixth lines were celestial,” the fat monk said.

“Yes,” Cook said, “but the fifth line, in the middle of the upper trigram, really reflects back down to the second line, in the middle of the lower trigram.” He wet his finger and drew the hexagram on the table: ☰ “Do you see how you get the trigram *Li* ☲ in the lower trigram? *Li* is the sun, an eye, illumination. See how it is empty in the middle? Only emptiness allows wisdom to enter. The text said *a good time to see a wise person*. Well the change at the fifth line gives the trigram *Li* in the upper trigram. The second and fifth are the only two lines that mention wise person. But while the wise person in the lower trigram is an everyday teacher, here ...”

“Is a celestial teacher,” the fat monk interrupted. “But what I want to know is, what was the secret ingredient in those dumplings?!”

“Always so extreme,” Cook said in a maddeningly mild tone. “Just like the last line, in the hexagram: ☰ where the dragon has gone too far, become haughty. But I can tell you that the secret ingredient is none other than ...”

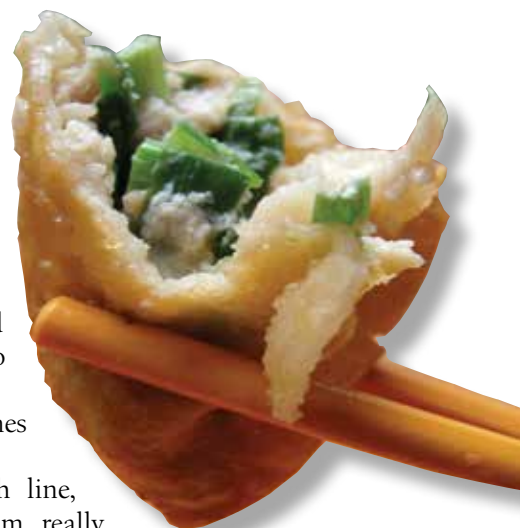
Just then Xiao Fang came running in, saying “Cook! The Abbot wants you!”

Cook looked alarmed and began to rise, but the fat monk grabbed his arms and held him down. “No way!” he said. “Spill the beans. 'fess up. Lift the lid, bring it all out into the open. Do it now ...”

“OK, OK!” said Cook laughing, pushing his hands away. “I cooked sweet sticky rice, mixed it with a spicy bean paste, then simply added that to the shredded mushrooms and veggies.”

“Ah, so *that's* it,” said the fat monk. I could see him tasting with his mind.

“Don't tell anyone,” Cook said, as he walked away.



■ Xiaoyao Xingzhe is an amateur cook who believes the primeval chaos of the universe—the 混沌 *húndùn* (otherwise pronounced wonton)—can be tamed only by consuming it.