

Paper Horses

A Journey through the Ritual World of Change

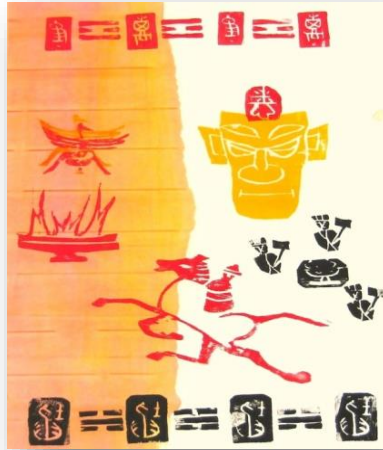


The Beast Face and the River of Life shows the birth of the Dream Animals from Bright Omens and the harvest of their symbols by the bamboo or book shamans.

Stephen Karcher PhD

Messengers of Change

Paper Horses (*mazhang*), also called “spirit-money” or “ceremonial papers”, are traditional wood-cut prints and paper objects offered to the Ghosts and Spirits and the Ancestors whenever the need to communicate with them arises. Each time they are used ritually, they re-open or re-create the old East Asian sacred cosmos.



Preparing the Move (64) shows a Primal Gate of Change, site of intense ritual activity that gathers energy for a major change. It is a campaign into the Demon Country and a crossing to the Spring Festival and the Paradise time.

The Horses carry vivid images shaped by the symbols of *Yijing*, the Classic of Change and the tradition of ritual artifacts from the old tombs. Empowered by burning, these “brave horses” cross the threshold between the worlds loaded with our desires, problems and offerings. They express our need to be heard by the spirit-world and call out for a response with the bold, tireless and resolute strength of the Horse Spirits for which they are named.



Breakthrough (43) shows the moment when we must make a decision, announce it and part from the past. It is a Great Transition that connects us with the creative power of the Dragon, cleaning old wounds and bringing the hidden to light.

Origins of the Paper Horses

Along with divination, the Sacred Meal shared with the spirits, the veneration of Ancestors and the idea of the Dao or Way, Paper Horses are a ubiquitous part of the bedrock religious practice of traditional East Asian people. The Horses have roots in the Neolithic practice of placing cowrie shells in the mouth of the corpse as guides to the other worlds, in the Han Dynasty practice of making red and yellow clay replicas of the furniture of early royal tombs as funeral offerings and in the Warring States development of “speaking pictures” as “guides to the mysteries of the Mountains and the Seas”.



Washing the Tokens (4) shows opening the secret place where the River-Mountain initiations begin and calling on its spirit forces, the Tiger and Dream Fox.

Through they reflect the traditional reverence for images and words on paper and the necessity to sacrifice and feed the ancestors to connect with the time and the Way, the practice of using Paper Horses in a ritual fashion was probably born out of the early split in traditional Chinese culture between the figure of the Confucian Scholar-Bureaucrat and his sense of moral rectitude and social norms and the *Wu*, the mediums, shamans and their art of individually “talking with the ghosts-and-spirits” to renew contact with the world of the Ancestors.

Here is a comment on the conflict from a thinker named Mozi (c.400 BCE), who also advocated property held in common, universal love and logical thinking and developed extremely effective methods of defending cities from the siege-attacks of greedy warlords:

One day Wu Ma-zi asked Mo-zi: Which are wiser, the Ghosts and Spirits (*guishen*) or the Sages (loved by Confucius)? Mo-zi said: The Ghosts and Spirits are wiser than the Sages by as much as the sharp-eared and keen-sighted surpass the deaf and blind.

In China, the origin of this conflict is associated with the close of the Warring States period (c.400- 226 BCE) and the rise of the Han Dynasty (c.200 BCE-220 CE), China's first Imperial regime. The Warring States period in China was a time of constant civil war, radical social change, destabilization and suffering, an axial age in which existing structures fell apart. It is also considered the golden age of Chinese philosophy, the most creative period in the culture. Many of the conflicts in this period were based in what I call *bad blood* – the blood of animal and human sacrifices used to feed the Ancestor spirits and the war machines of the aristocratic clans and the hatreds and social polarization that resulted.

Here is a description of the end of this period, taken from a later Daoist text, the *Huainanzi*:

In later generations, the [warring] states set up clan differences ... raising armies and attacking one another. When they laid siege to cities they slaughtered mercilessly, overthrowing the nobles and threatening the innocent. They dug up burial mounds and scattered the bones of the dead ... Out of a hundred who advanced, only one would return.

In these circumstances, the able-bodied and light-footed were made armored soldiers [fighting] a thousand *li* away, while family elders and feeble ones remained at home, sad and sick at heart. Menials and stable grooms pushed carts and distributed rations along endless roads in biting frost and snow, and their coarse felt clothing did not cover them. Others, exhausted, their carts falling to pieces and road mud reaching up to their knees, pulled one another along highways. They struggled with their heads on the road, fell prostrate on the crossbar of their wagons and died.

What the expression “annex the states and appropriate the land” meant was several hundred thousand dead bodies and smashed chariots ... The world finally reached a point where people used human skulls as headrests, ate human flesh, pickled human livers, drank human blood, and relished these more than the flesh of grass and grain-fed animals.

The Warring States period is considered the golden age of Chinese philosophy, the most creative period in the culture, but the burst of creative activity occurred against this ever-darkening background. The great question for all was: What is the way (*Dao*)? How was it lost? What is the way to save ourselves and our culture? The individual use of the divination system called *Zhouyi* or *Yijing* grew out of this breakdown. The Masters who developed this Way of Change actually introduced something quite new, but they described it as the re-invention of something very old. They affirmed a radical faith in the experience of a helping spirit (*shen*) and developed

specific techniques to contact or constellate it, using as image the practices of the ancient *wu*, the mediums and shamans.



59:60 *Dispersing and Articulating* displays the sacrifice of an old identity that dissolves obstacles between the spirit and the human worlds, revealing key moments where we can articulate the river of time into the shape of a new life for all. It is a Zone of Radical Transformation when the Ghost River (29) flows through the Opened Heart (61) and is purified.

It was here that the Paper Horses were born. To illustrate the nature of this birth I'd like to look at another Warring States ritual invention, the *Straw Dog*. Straw Dogs were a kind of simulacrum that took the place of blood sacrifice. They were "twisted together" in a characteristic gesture, a gesture that shifted the entire divinatory and ritual system. To the extent this phrase has passed into English it refers to a false target or decoy. In both languages it carries the sense of a stand-in, marker or messenger, something false but true. Straw Dogs are sacrificial *images* twisted together for the occasion and offered to the spirits as messengers that take things across the gates. This sort of gesture, the artful twisting together of a moment independent of its personal content represents a move that is also a fraud, a simulacrum that opens the subtle body.

The most famous literary mention of Straw Dogs is in the *Daodejing* or Way-Power Classic. It relies on a philosophical contrast between the central value of the Confucian Sage (*ren*/humanity) and the Daoist view of the Myriad Living Beings as "Straw Dogs."

Heaven-and-Earth is not humane (*ren*/Confucian virtue)
 It uses the Myriad Creatures like Straw Dogs.
 The Sage-Mind is not humane.
 It thinks of the Myriad Creatures as Straw Dogs.
 Now the space between Heaven and Earth is like a bellows.
 Empty, it never fails. Work it and the winds come.
 Making laws with windy words quickly exhausts you.

Better to keep the “empty” in your heart.

The Straw Dog is an empty gesture, twisted together for a moment. It represents an emptied mind and an opened heart, freed of conventional and bureaucratic structures of reality and the moral conventions of institutionalized “humanity”.



47:48 *Confining and the Well* displays the secret inner connections that lead a noble out of the spiritual oppression of a corrupt system through a return to human community, a common source of strength or life-water that all rely on.

The “imitation” the Paper Horses represent has deep religious significance. It affirms that the *images* of this world are the spirit body of the other world. Individual use of the Paper Horses represents a continual return of the old spirit world, freed from the corpse of bureaucratic structures, theological erections and the social machines of war. The lesson is that images please the spirits. Bad blood and “windy words” do not.



23:24 *Stripping and Returning* displays the process of stripping away the old within and the consequent return or re-entrance of the spirit that renews life.

The ritual use of the Paper Horses reflects this individual return to the heart of Change. They were seen as “spirit-money” that repays the debt of life contracted at birth that could be used to intervene in a crisis, “repaying the Debt and restoring Good Fortune”. They were offered to gods, ghosts and ancestors through burning (*huohua* or fire change) as a “gesture” that substitutes for the literalization of bad blood. The *jing-qi* or essence-energy of the images activated in the other world by the fire-change allowed the individual to negotiate the credit limits of their individual *Ming* or Destiny. These images support the other world as the blood of sacrifice once supported the Ancestors and insured the continued flow of blessings or *fu*.



The Blessing (42) shows the culmination of the Rang Ritual of giving away, when the Ancestors grant their stream of blessings.

This ritual use is grounded in the willingness to give away our certainties, our goods, our persona and our rational knowledge and power. It is what re-opens the old sacred cosmos.



The Offering (41) shows the beginning of the Rang Ritual of giving away. The old character shows two open hands, a reverential bow, a cauldron or sacred vessel and a circle that indicates empty, hollow, an offering of and to emptiness.

The Numinous Turtle and the Sacred Mountain

Paper Horses are traditionally offered in a stone bowl in a temple precinct that is filled with the ashes of their previous generations. This simple offering to emptiness opens a complex imaginative landscape, the old sacred cosmos or *temenos* that acted as a place of close encounter with the spirit world. This sacred cosmos has the shape of the *Ling gui*, the Numinous Turtle who swims the endless seas of the Way or Dao and sponsors the oracles. The *Fu-sang* or Sun Tree lies to the East; the *Ruo* or Moon Tree is in the far West. Each of these magical Trees has a pool at its base in which Sun-Mothers and Moon-Mothers bathe the Suns and the Moons.



31:32 Conjoining and Persevering display the process through which spirit enters and influences the human world, offering omens that, when given an enduring form, help the heart endure on the voyage of life.

The Ghost River on which Suns and Moons make their hidden journeys of transformation through the Yellow Springs and the Land of the Dead connects the two Trees, making them one great World Tree called the Bushy Mulberry. Above all is the upper shell of the Numinous Turtle, Sky or Heaven and the Great Bear or Dipper, the star constellation that holds the court of *Shang Di*, the Lord Above and the Royal Ancestors who bestow the Fates on all things. Below is the Turtle's lower shell, the square Earth with Four Hidden Lands at its corners from which the Hidden Winds blow, carrying the spirits into the All Under Heaven, the world we live in. This entire cosmos revolves around the Sacred Mountain that connects Heaven, Earth and the rushing Ghost River beneath.



11 Pervading/The Great Ritual *Tai*

Harmony, abundance, flowering, peace; expand, communicate; communion, love; the New King and the sacrifice that brings a fertile connection of Heaven and Earth, a site of intense ritual and mediating activity that connects our individual struggles with cultural change. The old character links the shape of the Great Person and the Great Mountain (*Tai Shan*), with two hands like the woods embracing its flanks that offer sacrifice to the waters running down its slopes that bring life and prosperity.

This is where the World Tree grows. It is an *axis mundi* or zone of absolute reality where there is perfect access to the spirit world, a place where the dead rest in peace and receive the great offerings.

The Portable Altar

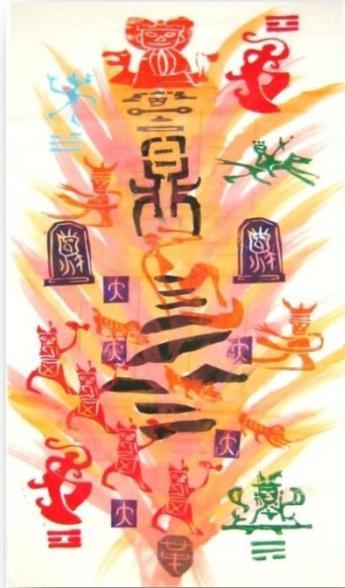
The Warring States re-visioning of the Classic of Change re-creates all the practices of the sacred cosmos, doubling them into its images and symbols. It is imaged as Ding, the Sacred Vessel.



50 Vessel/Transformation *DING*

A cast bronze cauldron with three feet and two ears used for high divinations and the Sacred Meal shared with spirits, ancestors and noble people; hold, contain, transform, transmute through the symbolic imagination; a new spiritual paradigm and sign of blessing; establish, found, consecrate; found a noble house and line; secure, precious, well-grounded. The old character shows the cooking pot used for the Sacred Meal and a head filled with spirit.

This Portable Altar embodies the tradition of ritual art that lies behind the Paper Horses. Its symbols echo in an endless dance within the heart-mind, a dance that connect us to the old sacred cosmos and opens a pathway in the imagination to what Eastern Sages call the Source of Being, the *Dao* or Way.



49:50 Skinning and the Sacred Vessel displays a revolution rising from the depths that skins away old cultural forms to create a new vessel, a new image of collective destiny that re-connects us to the spirit world.

Both the Sacred Mountain and the Sacred Vessel were felt to reflect the shape of the human heart (*xin*). The Gate to the ritual enacted through them appears in the heart any time the high ritual and divination is performed.



The Burning Circle

The ritual journey of the Paper Horses as they spring from the fire to carry our messages to the Other Side proceeds through the *Bagua*, the Eight Spirit Helpers embodied in the eight trigrams or three-line figures of the

Classic of Change. The basis of all Eastern medicine, philosophy and ritual, these numinous figures are rooted in the practices of the *wu*, the spirit-mediums who handled spirits and the *shi*, the shaman-diviners or bamboo-*wu* of the ancient world who created word-pictures to release the spirit's "power and virtue" (*de*). Through these practices these figures suggest "change and transformation can occur and the fates of all things come to their perfection."

Look, there is a spirit within your person.
 Now it goes, now it comes.
 No one can grasp it
 But if you reverently clean its abode
 It will appear of itself.
 You will recover your own true nature,
 fixed in you once for all.

The Numinous Spirit that is mysteriously active in all things:

manifests in quake and thunder,	<i>Zhen</i> / Thunder/The Rouser
working through the Offerings	<i>Sun</i> / Wind/Wood/Lady of Fates
to reveal the Bright Omens.	<i>Li</i> / Fire/Bright Omens
Offered service at the Earth Altar,	<i>Kun</i> / Earth/Dark Animal Goddess
it speaks and spreads joy to all:	<i>Dui</i> / Lake/Mists/Joyous Dancer
It awes and wars in the Heavens	<i>Qian</i> / Heaven/Dragon
and rewards those suffering in the Pit	<i>Kan</i> / Water/ Ghost River
through words that bind us to accomplish fate.	<i>Gen</i> / Mountain/Bound

Zhen/Shake: **The Rouser**



Rousing Thunder, “the force that through the green fuse drives the flower” wakes the Dragon sleeping at the heart of the Mountain. Acting through the Great Person (*Da ren*), the Thunder from beneath rouses the inner images of the Ancestors after the dead time of winter and opens the ritual space in which the images the Horses carry are born.



51 Shake/Rousing ZHEN

Shake is the Arouser and Exorcist, driving out the old, rousing and opening the field of the new, the spark of yang born in the breast of yin. He is the Thunder rituals and incantations that inspire both terror and joy, the moment when the fetus begins to stir, associated with dawn, the east, the rising sun, green, Wood and the announcement of spring’s beginning. He is flamboyant and sexual, luxuriating, frightening and inspiring, green and full of juice. He is motion and moves all things, an emerging Dragon that stimulates everything that moves or moves in the body, purifies the blood, links eyes and sexual organs, desire and anger, vision and motivation, giving the capacity to act decisively.

The Thunder Ritual at the Field Altar opens the fields. An offering of dark millet wine perfumed with the sensual fragrance of the *orchis* that recalls the River-Mountain festivals wakes the Earth and calls the spirits to return. It is surrounded by a great Exorcism (*Da Noh*), a burst of violent noise and chaos that frightens away the spirits grown old, those whose time has passed.

Sun/Penetrating: **Wind/Wood/Lady of Fates**



Paper Horses are made of Wood. The inner images of the Ancestors roused by Thunder are fixed on and by this Wood process. It draws up the underworld Water of the Ghost River and lets it penetrate into our imagination through the images. Through the Fire transformation the images will be changed into a Hidden Wind. It is through this double transformation the Paper Horses can carry our offerings across the Gates opened by the sacrifice of our literal desire, subtly penetrating to and feeding the spirits. This “repays our debt to the dead and restores good fortune.”



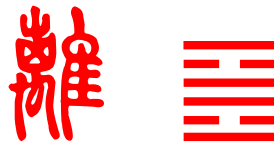
57 Subtle Penetration/The Lady of Fates SUN

Subtle Penetration, the Lady of Fates, lays out the offerings on the low altar and binds the Myriad Beings to their fates, crossing the thresholds and transmitting orders from Heaven. She finds the hidden sickness and works through hidden influences, the silent power of Wood and Wind. Her wrapped food offerings are an image of the Myriad Creatures toiling and laboring on the field of Earth. She is connected to the Central Palace where fates are consigned and represents a profound penetration of the above into the below which can lead to the awakening of wisdom. She prepares the food and drink for the great meal shared by humans and spirits and nourishes the people on ancient virtue. A spirit-worker and healer, she offers the virtue or *de* that actualizes an individual being. She controls desire and anger, giving vision, motivation and the capacity to act decisively at the key moment.

*Li/Radiance: **Fire/Bright Omens***



Paper Horses ride the great Fire-Water Axis that connects the Ghost River or River of Souls with the Bright Omens that are the signs of the Ancestral Spirits. Her Fire changes the spirit of Wood and the images the Horses carry into a Hidden Wind that will be carried to the Mountain where the Ancestors abide, reducing its body to ashes or Earth.



30 Radiance/Bright Omens Li

Radiance is the Bright Presence of things, a numen that surges from the depths and turns them into omens that reveal the spirits. She is associated with birds, nets and victims taken for sacrifice, the rituals of the bird dancers who call the spirits down and the creation of an oracular language, the openings through which they can speak. She evokes stringed instruments, a bride's veil and a woman's decorated girdle and suggests extraordinary happenings that separate people from the conventional. She is Brightness, Fire and the Light of the Heavenly Bodies, the midday sun, summer, the south and the beauty and splendor of things. Radiance is the culmination the Inner Fire-Water Axis of Change. She leads through her warm clear Light, through beauty, elegance and the Radiance of living beings holding together. She operates through the Heart, master of the organs and home of the spirits that bring inspiration and joy. She commands the pathways of the blood, brings the spark of life and offers a quiet center in which the spirits find a voice.

Kun/Field: **Earth/Dark Animal Goddess**



Just as the *bo*-soul or passion-body is separated from the *hun*-soul or spirit-soul at death, the ashes of the Paper Horses return us to the Earth. Through this return they connect us with the Horse Mother or Mare, Spirit of the Dark Animal Goddess and her ancient heritage of symbols that give security and refuge to all.



2 Field/Yielding KUN

Field/Earth/Yielding, the Dark Animal Goddess, supplies security and brings things to a good end through the Mare, her emblem animal. From her center at the Earth Altar, sacrifice is offered to River and the underworld waters and to Mountain, connecting Heaven and the Four Directions, the “four sides” or Hidden Lands and their four Hidden Winds. An age-old tradition underlies this figure, the tradition of the Valley Spirit often symbolized as jade and jade objects. The Dark Animal Goddess carries an ancient heritage of symbols. As Mother of the World (*Tianxia Mu*) she acts through these images and seeds to give security and refuge to all creatures through the power of Earth. The Way-Power Classic says: The Valley Spirit never dies. It is named Dark Animal Goddess. The door of the Dark Animal Goddess is called the Root of Heaven and Earth. Like an endless thread she endures. You can call upon her easily. He who has found this mother understands he is a child. When he understands he is her child and clings to her, he will be without danger when the body dies.

Dui/Open: Lake/Mists/Joyous Dancer



Through the ashes of our desire, we imprint the Ghost River beneath the Earth with our words and wishes. The Joyous Dancer gathers these words and uses the Winds for a tongue. The Mists rising from the shimmering Lake of her opened mouth become a great flowing Voice calling for the carrying wave of spirit.



58 Open/Expression/Joyous Dancer Dui

The Joyous Dancer gives the spirits a Voice. She dances with them, feels the Bright Omen in her body and offers it to the human community through her inspiring words that bring joy, delight and freedom from the fear of death. We see her in the luminous Mists rising from open waters, fertile marshes and sunlit Lakes and in her Words that connect and inspire us. She is the moment when the harvest is home and the winter secure. She gladdens all things that welcome her, regulating the rhythm of life and rousing the power of inner images and the Great Person within us.

Qian/ Inspiring Force: Heaven/Dragon



Recognition of the Ancestors' Voice in the joyous words from the Lake calls the Dragon who rises to the Heavens. When we venerate the Ancestors, they change to Clouds and Rain that nourish the Earth and the Soul, bringing fertility and blessing. The Inspiring Force of the Dragon rises from the Underworld Waters in the Mists of the shaman's breath and the breath of the rituals that circulate the Waters of Life.



1 Inspiring Force/Dragon QIAN

Inspiring Force is a shape-changer at once inner and outer that constantly breaches natural reality. It rises in the heavens as the constellation Cerulean Dragon that presides over the growing season and connects with the Bin (Great Bear or Big Dipper) where *Shang Di* and the Royal Ancestors dwell and dispense our destinies. The Dragon's weaving body surrounds us as lifelines in the landscape through which energy flows and as inner imagery, an inexhaustible source of transformation that rises within us. The Dragon is the actualizing potential between the seen and the unseen, the inspiration in a work of art and the dynamic language of the myth-world. It brings seeing or visualizing (*jian*), becoming aware, connecting with inner images, being struck and moved by Inspiring Force. It is our connection with the Great Person (*Da ren*), the deep creative center in all of us and the great line of the Ancestors.

*Kan/Pit: **Water/ Ghost River***



The Joyous Dancer gives us the courage to face the ritual or symbolic death symbolized by the burning of the Paper Horses and their return as ashes to the Earth. This activates the Great Person within us, turning the Ghost River that lies beneath the Earth into a River of Life that flows from the past into the present to create a future, an Ancestral continuity that confirms the Bright Omen of our true identity.



29 Ghost River/Repeating the Pit Xi KAN

This is the sacrificial pit at the Earth Altar and the Underworld Waters that flow beneath it, the Ghost River that connects the Sun Tree and the Moon Tree and opens the Gate of Destinies. Its symbols are Dark Water rushing between steep banks, holes, pits and snares, tombs and graves, prisons and the Yellow Springs, the deep center where the Dead live. It evokes the north, midnight, winter and lonely striving. The Ghost River is the beginning of the Inner Fire-Water or *Kan/Li* Axis, the Burning Water or prima material of Change. It represents a critical moment that requires courage and determination in face of the great fear engendered by the presence of the Death, confronting and dissolving obstacles, venturing, falling and moving on through the fearless elegance of the Ghost Dancer.

Gen/Stilling: **Mountain/The Bound**



The Hidden Wind released from Wood by Fire works through the Dragon to transform the Ghost River within us and carry our messages to the Mountain. Mountain is a birth gate and a prayer house where the hidden Rivers pour out their streams of blessings. Heaven and Earth meet here in the Rains of the past and the Winds of the future, opening the Stone Doors to the Animal Ancestors. Going to the Mountain is going home.



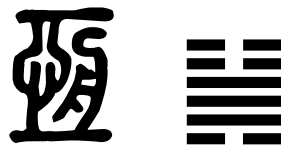
52 Bound/Stilling GEN

Bound fixes the omens and binds the fates, the guard and protector, the spirit of the Inner Work, the Mountain temple filled with images of the spirits and diviners who soar like birds beyond the ordinary limits of life. Bound stands at the limits, the limit of Heaven and Earth, the limit of old and new. The power of Earth works through Bound. The old time is bound and opened, offered to the spirits as a source of holy omens, footprints of the spirits.

In the still center of Mountain we open the subtle body. This is the place where the invisible and the visible worlds join in a mystery Jung called *synchronicity*, a healing of religious experience. By enacting a ritual here we heal the time, joining the present to past and future in a new and living relation. We enter the House of Dreams.

The Ancestors' Voice

Working with Ancestors in the still center of the Mountain is the central mystery of the world of the Paper Horses. In the old traditions, whenever the world is out of balance, when we are divided against ourselves, it is ritual work with the Ancestors that redresses the disequilibrium. All these rituals are part of an investment in darkness. They turn the presence of death into an image through which blessings can flow. When we work with the Ancestors we discover ourselves in a great flowing River that reaches from our personal ancestry to the great stream of life itself. Ritual “fixes” (*heng*) this spirit, giving it an enduring form in the heart. It can then be present in the human community, extending its radiant and liberating blessings (*fu*) to the ten thousand generations of its descendants.



32 Persevering/Fixing the Omen HENG

Create an enduring form for the gifts of the spirit, make power and virtue (*de*) endure in the heart; continue in what is right, endure and renew the Way; constant, consistent, durable, self-renewing; stable, regular, perpetual, universal; a married couple; the Moon Almost Full, the moment when the Changes are cast. The old character shows a heart, a boat moving between the two shores of a river and the curve of the waxing moon, the spiral path of life.

Retrieval of the Ancestral traces is retrieval of Soul – soul-making. By establishing a relationship to the Dead and *Kan*, The Ghost River we redeem the Ancestors and release the *Li*, the Bright Omens they carry. Ritually, this is the installation of the Fire-Water or *Kan-Li* Axis within us.



29:30 Ghost River and Bright Omens displays the fundamental powers of Fire and Water as they establish the Inner Axis of Change within the realized individual. It is a Primary Site of Radical Transformation, an Engine of Change that recharges our existence with meaning and energy.

Old cultures venerate the Dead to appease a spirit's sorrow or anger at being separated from the world of the living; they honor the Dead for the protection they offer and the gifts they bestow. Work with the Ancestors returns us to a River of Life that flows from the past into the present moment to create a future.

The life of ritual restores the balance between the worlds and re-opens communication by sacrificing what has become corrupt in culture. When we engage in ritual drama and divination, the shift in our awareness sends a wave towards the future and another towards the past, so that past, present and future are bound together, existing simultaneously in a "non-locality" where all points in space-time are in touch with all other points. This is the place where the invisible world and the visible one conjoin in the mystery of what Jung called synchronicity, a healing of religious experience. By enacting an image here, we heal time, joining the present to past and future in a new and living relation.



Opening the Stone Doors (39) shows the culmination of the River-Mountain initiations, opening the doors to the Ancestors held in the great Elephant Mind of the symbols and giving their stories a place in our lives.

On Ritual Space

All of this occurs in what we might call ritual space. This ritual space is first of all a heightening of awareness, a perception of the possibility of the numinous, a listening for and to it. It is an awareness of silence, the fertile darkness that is the ground of being. This awareness opens an imaginal

space through which the ever hidden yet ever-present “ghosts and spirits” that animate the world can come and go.



Delivering the Ancestors (39:40) describes the ritual goings and comings (*wanglai*) on the river of time that release energy bound in past fixations, an archetypal site of deliverance that evokes the Limping God and culture founder, Yu the Great.

This is a rough, dangerous borderland, a space between old and new, past and future, life and death, a place of “going and coming” (*wanglai*). It is where the old wisdom dwells, where the old myths instruct us and where our identity is dissolved and re-woven. We have a ritual identity in this space that makes offerings, speaks a special language and enacts things in a sacred or imaginal way – an intent that separates them from the literal. The words and actions performed here directly affect the Dream Body, the great body of dreams that that is both within and around us.

Initiation is the simple act of walking in this space, recognizing the archaic in our own nature. Here we learn there can only be a yield, a harvest, when we yield and give ourselves a Way. This diminishing of our normal identity transforms our personal suffering into compassion for and connection with all things.

Ritual Language: Story, Myth and Ceremony

The stories and myths embodied in ritual are the Great Regulators that order the processions of the inner, outer and hidden worlds. They establish a base for inter-world communication by engaging the complex self-representational capacity that underlies dreaming. This close engagement of ego-identity with the systems of the unconscious gives us access to a sort of Dream Ego that can be managed and healed through ritual enactment.

What the old Chinese called the All-under-Heaven, the World we live in, is actually a community that is constantly talking to itself. Each word in its language, each story or myth, weaves us into its magical space. These words meet in the zones of dream and vision, in story, song, prayer and divination to form a language. The gift of this “language of the others” develops through the crisis of initiation. By surrendering to the ritual, we receive the power of what is haunting us. It becomes our ally through the vehicle of the ritually empowered language that shapes the silence. All beings become our companions, each with a story that wants to be heard and be told.



63:64 Already Crossing and Not Yet Crossing display the Burning Water and the Crossings of the River of Life and Death, the soul entering the Great Stream and its eternal return. It is where the significance of life is revealed.

A Sangoma I once worked with said that “the Ancestors are our immune system.” In the same way, stories and myths are our protectors, circles of protection that carry our spirits to and through the gates of death. They approach us from the radiant darkness, going and coming (*wanglai*) on the Great River of Time.



Entrance of the Lady of Fates (44) shows a new destiny at the borders of awareness, a Great Transition that connects to the Inspiring Force of the Dragon.

The deep structure of the cycle of rituals and ceremonies, the circles of protection in the world of Change that bring this new destiny into the psyche seem to center on two crucial passages:



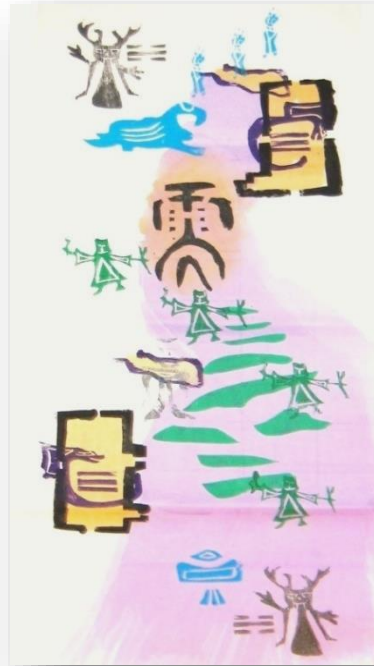
27:28 Tiger's Mouth and the Great Transition displays an initiatory ordeal that transforms the soul, correcting the sources of nourishment and conferring the power to become an individual free of collective judgments. It is an Engine of Change that recharges our existence with meaning and energy.



61:62 Opened Heart and Flying Bird is a conjunction of the four shamanic powers, the Rouser and the Sacrificer, the Lady of Fates and the Joyous Dancer that connects the inner and the outer in the thought of the heart and articulates the meaning of a life fully lived. It is an Engine of Change that recharges our existence with meaning and energy and the Gate to the final stage of the Symbolic Life, birth into the life of the spirit.

By engaging with these two great Engines of Change, a birth into individual life and a birth into the spirit, our lives become a ritual of waiting on and for

the spirit. Through this waiting we acquire the capacity to act as rainmakers, agents of the fertilizing rains of the Inspiring Dragon.



Attending/Spirit Visitors (5) shows a ritual that calls down the spirits and the arrival of the spirits it brings in dreams. The old character shows rain falling from the One above and an old man, a “beard” whose prayers bring the fertilizing waters.

This new way to tell the story of ourselves transforms experience into a great flow of blessings carried by the Dream Animals, a flow that is turned into symbols by our continual act of remembering them that “allows change and transformation to occur and the fates of all things come to their perfection.” This is the true gift of the Paper Horses. They open a space in our lives for the Ancestral Voices.



