

#33 Dun Withdrawal



This hexagram reminds me of Su Dongpo's attitude toward seclusion. Once he resigned himself to banishment, he wanted nothing more than to belong to a self-sufficient network within "civil society." Dongpo's nostalgia for seclusion is not a fantasy of floating downriver on a raft toward the tree of the sun. It is based on his real success in gathering a circle of wits and thoughtful rustics during his exile to East Slope. It is based on his inclusion of unconventional friends in his cultural circle at the capital. If the emperor's favorites insisted on giving him a hard time, he didn't need the emperor: he could make a rich life for himself. There was a touch of the underworld in his interests, perhaps the sproutings of an anarchic impulse in his effort to keep in touch with so many like-minded people. Su Dongpo's efforts would have gone further to link up the underground networks, except that the court factions wouldn't let him alone. He had to be dragged back to the fray, and even thrown into prison, because he represented the "antireform" faction at court. Also, the success of his social network, as demonstrated by the abundant content of his poems, was unsettling. From the viewpoint of the court, Su Dongpo's literary connections were a gang-in-the-making. He had to be called back so a watch could be kept on him. The dynastic model of power was the only one allowed--the constantly encroaching chill of court bureaucracy, like First Yin of Hexagram #2. What a narrowing of possibility! No wonder the inverse of #33 is the Will to Power at #34. This is what many depend on for their preferments and appointments in #35.

Why was Su Dongpo's poetry copied as widely as it was during his life? Because it gave voice to the secret networks that wanted to affirm their private space against dynastic authority. Su Dongpo wrote a poem on the uncut jade of Sichuan being smashed open by a stonecutter's blade. This was his metaphor for the roadway cut through Jiange Mountain which opened transport to Sichuan. Once that happened, the place could never again be an innocent haven, content with its own natural riches. It became a threat, a base for warlords who posed a challenge to crumbling dynasties. But still somehow, in Su's mind, it was land of his idyllic childhood, as if the jadestone had never been smashed

open. He saw two different images of Sichuan superimposed.

Hexagram #33 also reminds me of the Yao people. It was also during the Song era that the Yao emerged, through intermarriage of earlier ethnic groups with soldiers in the mountain garrisons of Hunan. The Yao people adopted Daoism, mixed with totemic elements of their own. Through Daoist rituals they parodied the earthly court, and paid allegiance to a spiritual court that put them in a different cultural space (above and below the radar of the dynastic center), where they hoped to live out their lives. Realm of thought as territory. I want to find Eli Alberts' book and read more about his take on the Yao. [*A History of Daoism and the Yao People of South China*, Cambria Press, 2007.]

Progression:

Zhu Xi observes that in most other hexagrams, the first line stands at the beginning as a situation develops, but only in #33 is First Yin left at the tail end of something that has already unfolded. Some people have already made considerable strides going off to make a life for themselves outside of the power structure. First Yin is on the tail end of this effort, and is just now preparing herself. She can barely imagine where those before her might have gone. A reclusive life tends to leave the individual vulnerable, so Line Two works for cohesion among people who are withdrawing. She demonstrates that ties can be formed for mutual support, and begins to form a network of would-be recluses. Third Yang carries this act of forming ties further, but eventually this obstructs his freedom of movement. If he is going to associate with people, he needs to set clear boundaries and either serve or lead. Perhaps he will not get to withdraw at all. Fourth Yang focuses on breaking the sticky ties he once comforted himself with; he bides his time while trying to withdraw. Fifth Yang sets an admirable tone for withdrawal; his example makes seclusion something that others aspire to. Top Yang goes into areas of freedom the rest of us can only imagine.

This hexagram represents a messy and somewhat ironic social construct. Everyone is trying to escape social limitations and few of them can do it. But the effort sets up vectors of movement within the inertia-bound society. Human masses are like surging waves engaged in mass flight down the riverbed of history. So many people in the flood want to

escape threat of death and domination. But only a few drops of spray are hurled toward true spiritual singularity. Many particular movements toward autonomy actually settle into platforms for new orthodoxy (like the pilgrims coming to Plymouth Rock). Some people's bid for escape doesn't get beyond Line Two or Three---making bonds that will supposedly support their emergence later. Some people perform a desperate drama of self-extrication, but they only reach a space that is negatively defined by what they fled. The whole enterprise of human escape from bondage acts on different levels at the same time. What seems like escape for some may lead to worse bondage later. But while this goes on, genuine emergence may be happening at some levels for certain people

Xingqing:

Beyond the structural confines of our social lives, we hear a call of freedom. Because we sense that possibility, we may use the structure's resources to strengthen and prepare ourselves for going outside it. This hexagram is about what we do from within the structure that is directed toward getting outside of it. What we do will decide our chances once we do emerge. Also, those who have gotten partly outside must be careful how they relate with those still within. There is a history of relatedness that cannot be denied and should not be broken roughly. If we lack true understanding of the dynamic toward getting outside, the concerns of outsiders and the institution-bound will be split like night and day.

Centrality:

First Yin says, "I am only at the tail of the great effort toward escape Think how far some have gone! What dangers face me before I can close that gap!" Her visions are a kind of withdrawal-in-place, still far from true emergence. The more One imagines the lives of the great hermits, the further behind she falls. Second Yin forgoes these admiring visions to concentrate on building a support network: without these, true emergence would be impossible. Two must build problematically on values and resources that are acceptable within the structure. Three gets so involved building this network that he is in danger of being swallowed by relationships and losing orientation to the ideal. His relationships are more complex, but he could benefit from Two's clarity of focus: what are these relationships tied to? Fourth is focused on extricating himself from

comforts that sustained him within the structure. He can learn something from Five, who doesn't vacillate over fond ties vs. autonomy. Five harmonizes his emergent orientation with the sustenance he gets and gives. The best thing he achieves is a supporting condition so that Six has nothing holding him back, and can find full freedom.