

A Divination Early in the 2002-2003 School Year

In the summer I began writing interpretations of the hexagrams. After finishing my trigram article and my invocations to the Creative and Receptive, I began plodding ahead, writing notes for essays on each of the hexagrams in sequence. As the opening of classes drew near, I had rough drafts on 34 hexagrams, but I decided to put the project aside. After those early bursts of enthusiasm, discouragement crept in. There I was playing with symbols, but what was happening in the outside world was making it all seem hollow. The I CHING is a fine example of the symbol-maker's art, but appreciating it takes faith. I think my faith was at a low ebb.

My study of the I CHING had largely studied around reading various commentaries. For the first time in several years I did a divination with the I CHING oracle on Sept. 26. I obtained Hexagram # 35, Jin (Advancement), with changing lines in the Fourth and Sixth places. This was uncanny in several ways---first of all, the Jin hexagram was next in line for my essay-writing project.

Obtaining this hexagram stimulated me to write an piece about Hexagram #35. If nothing else, the coincidence got my attention: I was strongly interested in what that hexagram had to say. Another uncanny point was the changing lines: Four is "advancing like a flying squirrel, this one should practice constancy in the face of danger." (Richard Lynn translation) That's me alright!---managing only a semblance of intermittent flight, obsessed with nutmeats, going from branch to branch in the superstructure of the forest canopy. This is an iffy, touchy advance, like me sailing into the University of Pennsylvania on my brother's coattails, teaching a class that hasn't been taught for years, trying to make my undisciplined way in a strict academic field. And what some commentators have said about that poor flying squirrel! This is Cai Yong's description, as quoted by Wang Bi: "The five things of which the flying squirrel is capable do not amount to one real skill. Xu Shen's old dictionary identifies the flying squirrel with the *wu-ji-shu* (five-skills rodent): It can fly but not so that it can pass over a roof; it can climb but not so that it can reach the top of a tree; it can swim but not so that it can cross a small stream; it can burrow but not so that it can cover itself; and it can run but not so that it can outpace a man." Ouch!!

The changing line at the top is, if anything, even more of a slap in the wrist. There is nowhere left to advance except to attack a city. 'Perseverance brings humiliation' (or 'persevere in the face of humiliation'). Does this mean to advance by entering messy situations where the pulse of the city beats? This was a fitting omen of my upcoming visit with Bei Ling at New York Public Library that Fall. It was important to play along with his game of ambition, because at least that could stir things up and give access to my best fodder. I need the

fruits of messy engagement to think with. He is a scoundrel, but I could never have met some of my valuable friends except through him.

When writing my essay on # 35 Jin, I saw the top line as a kind of speculation: “Perhaps the top line plays a speculative role in the collective advance. Gains are largely reaped by those who support the risk-takers. Line Five, in his more central position, will stand to benefit from Line Six’s attempts.”

And the result of these changing lines will land me in Kun the Receptive, Hexagram #2. One way or another, I’m fertilizer (maybe only \$3.46 worth!) I hope it happens fast, without me getting stuck at the flying squirrel stage. Falling into the Kun role sounds nice. It means I have to be accepting and listen. I have to steer toward serving people. The students are mostly either a) trying to get a little of their own heritage to rub off on them, or b) preparing to be responsible scholars. My role stops at providing them with knowledge of the subject. To unearth personal meaning in these symbols is a reward they must give themselves. To present the materials in a form suited to them will be a true 'advance' for me. Only by advancing this way do I become their servant, to find my own reward in the dark body of Kun.