

Not Eating at Home

By Denis Mair

Hexagram #26 has the phrase “not eating at home, good fortune.” A related phrase is found in #41.6: “a favored minister has no home.”[1] Since the man in question is in good favor, food will surely be provided for him. Having no home does not mean he is a vagabond, necessarily. It means he keeps very busy, like the legendary Great Yu, who passed by his doorway while taming floods.

#20.4 doesn't say “not eating at home,” but it uses a similar phrase: “it furthers to be employed as a courtier by the king.” This implies the man's wants will be provided for while he serves at court.

The cauldron #50.4 may be a communal cooking pot, since the line mentions the spilling of a large amount of food. The “duke's food” can also mean “food meant for everyone.” [This is similar to the modern “big rice pot” in Mandarin.]

The goose in #53.4 has a yearning brush with domesticity: it casts an eye on a tree limb shaped like a rafter [JUE2]. The rafter-like branch is a reminder of the home the goose could have had. Below in the first line, the same goose had honked back and forth [with its mate] over the food they found.[2] Now the goose is away on a lonely trek, so it is no longer eating at home!

In #29.4, a bundle is handed in (with edibles) through the window of a seclusion hut. In ancient times, during the early period of mourning, there used to be a period of isolation. Such an ordeal is being described in this line, where food is handed in through the window. The person inside is not eating at home.

The domestic meal of #37.2 belongs together with this cluster, since it presents the directly opposite concept: “feeding people within the home.”

What strikes me are the slight shifts of emphasis. #20.4 occurs in a context of government administration [between #19 and #21.] #26 occurs after a hexagram of vital beginnings [#25] and one of transient impulses [#25]---a juxtaposition which suggests deep inquiry into the origins of things. #29 occurs a context of rituals and ordeals [#28-#30]. #41.6 belongs to a pair [#41 & #42] that touches on expenditures/ economics.

Feng Youlan, in his writings about the Hundred Schools of the classical philosophy, said that the ancient "men of honor"[shi4] were closely attached to early Zhou kings

and feudal courts in various capacities. Some were expert in lore of the stars, some were strategists, some were swordsmen, some were knowledgeable about administration. Later, due to internecine fighting and other social changes, these men of honor were cut loose from their positions in the duke's courts. They became unattached scholars, still subscribing to a code of personal loyalty, but looking to sell their services. Confucius was the best example of this kind of unattached scholar. His services were not welcome in the state of Lu, so he traveled with his students to other states where he worked as an advisor. [While serving in the state of Wei, he was "not eating at home."] Feng says that the major schools of classical Chinese philosophy had their background in the special lore of different kinds of courtiers/ retainers in the Early Zhou.

According to the Image Treatise, the theme of #26 is to accumulate knowledge of history and thereby become wise, which would fit with an archivist at a feudal court. According to Feng Youlan, archivists were supposedly the precursors of the Daoists. Laozi was said to be an archivist at the Zhou court.

The courtier in #20.4 travels about surveying the populace. "Viewing the breadth of the kingdom." He deserves employment because he is so well informed. Perhaps he is a predecessor of the Zong-Heng [Diplomatic Persuader] School. Members of this school were knowledgeable about politics and were employed as advisors.

The retainer in #41.6 is mentioned in a context of simplicity: "What shall we use? A plain clay vessel is sufficient for the offering." Thus the phrase "not eating at home" in #41 suggests a strongly Daoist theme. The *Daode Jing* tells us that followers of the Dao practice the way of decrease, and presumably that would include a life of renunciation, without an emphasis on domestic comfort. There is also a theme of expenditure and public works in the pair #41 and #42. The reference to public works appears in the hexagram Increase, where "it would be beneficial to employ him in relocating the capital." Later, the Moist school was established by persons who were knowledgeable about public works.

The man who undergoes the ordeal of seclusion in #29 does things by certain ritual rules. In this sense he is a precursor to the Confucians.

In #37 the king sets up a shrine at home. "The king proceeds (devotedly) toward his home." Evidently he is supposed to bring his ceremonial role into a domestic setting, and presumably treat all under heaven like a family. This is typical of role-based ethics that will be adopted by Confucianism.

The lip-smacking mastication in #21 is an antithesis of the other kinds of eating mentioned above. How strange, that the *Yijing*'s grossest form of eating appears in this hexagram about social enforcement. If there is a proto-school of philosophy here, it would be the Legalist school. Or perhaps what we see in this hexagram is the seed of a constabulary.

The people who will eat from the cauldron of food in #50.4 are pretty close to Revolution, #49. Maybe they were predecessors of the Agriculturalists, who had some fairly revolutionary, communitarian ideas. The agriculturalists believed that the land should belong to everyone, and the leaders should participate in farm work.

It is interesting that the word “*jia*” [home, family] came to mean a philosophical school. The Taoists, for example, were called the Dao-*jia*. The courtiers who served under rulers are described in the *Yijing* as “not eating at home,” probably because they served at court and their wants were provided for. Even rich families had groups of retainers/advisors who were called “*shi-ke*”---literally “eating guests,” or guests whose livelihood was provided for. Later, the displaced courtiers founded schools based on their knowledge. By that time they did not belong anywhere except with their schools, and perhaps this is why their schools came to be called *jia*.^[3]

Notes:

[1] I seem to remember that *de2chen2* was used to mean “favored minister” in the *Zuozhuan*.

[2] See Brad Hatcher's *Rogue River Commentary* at www.hermetica.info.

[3] The word *jia* can also mean one who masters the knowledge of a school or branch of learning. In Japanese, the word *otaku*, written with the same Chinese character as *jia*, is now used to mean “geek”[someone who is completely at home in a subject.]