# Hexagram #3 Zhun: An Interpretation

Difficulty at the Beginning; Birth-Throes

The "Treatise on the Hexagram Sequence" says that the rough beginning of #3 Difficulty follows from Heaven[Qian] and Earth[Kun]. In all other cases, the "Sequence" derives the next hexagram from a single preceding one, but here it follows from a pair. This shows we are dealing with the outcome of a marriage---the first step of creation by Heaven and Earth. But I also feel we can use the "Sequence's" normal method to derive #3 Difficulty from #2 the Receptive alone. In in text of #2, with the "Wenyan Treatise" singing an admiring chorus, we surveyed the macrocosmic view of *Kun.* Now in #3 we are perhaps shifting to within the fabric of Kun---we are looking at one of the countless small beginnings that Kun embraces. This is one of those cinematic shifts we find throughout the "Sequence"---from outside to inside, from growth to downfall, from arc to tangent.

Who is to say that Kun is not herself composed of innumerable beginnings? There is no rule that says Kun cannot be fermenting with change within herself. Anything in the universe that is receptive to creative awakening is Kun. That is, even something already changing in certain ways can submit to transformation from another direction. Transformation comes on top of change. Just as absolute stillness is hard to define in a cosmos with many kinds of orbital motion, so pure receptivity is also relative. The change that Kun already contains is like the *Taiji's* white spot in the black-yin fish. Here at #3 Zhun we are looking at the white fish-eye stirring up within Kun. According to the etymology of the character *Zhun*, this is a sprout having difficulty pushing through soil. Kun would hardly be Kun if numerous rootlets weren't growing in her already. What is soil, anyway, but a teeming environment? When one of these beginnings really takes off, then Kun will make a change in *macroscopic* direction, and we will know her marriage with big *Qian* [the Creative] is happening. Right now we don't know whether this will happen or not. This is a seed-time and we will have to see.

Progression:

According to Wang Bi's comments on the attractions among lines, Two and Four are bound to nearby yang lines, but their hearts are set on distant yang lines. [Two resonates with Five, and Four resonates with One.] Meanwhile Line Six is next to a line it cannot 'have'. It is natural that Second Yin would set her heart on Five, but Li Guangdi frowns on commentators who would blame First Yang for giving Two a hard time. First Yang has its own phase of Difficulty; he does not exist to give Two a hard time.Many commentators, like Wang Bi, view the dynamic among lines as something like a palace drama. Su Shi is prone to such interpretations, and often speaks of certain lines obstructing the resonance between other lines. I do not think such elaborations are implied in the line statements. On the other hand, I think that many insights about centrality and position are consistent with the built-in progression. Therefore, I will discuss "progression" and "centrality" in these essays.

We are faced with a time of turmoil here. We see from the Judgment that one need not set forth, but one should provide oneself with helpers. Similar to First Yang in #20 Renewal, First Yang has well-founded strength. If it did not, no beginning would be possible. The line statement literally means "[well-grounded like a] boulder or sturdy

tree." However, some commentators take this as inability to make any progress. Being a *zhuyao* [line that embodies the hexagram's thrust], First Yang is encouraged to appoint helpers. One could also read this to mean that First Yang is a helper that one should appoint in this situation. In perilous times, any alliance can be dangerous, so people must find someone they can trust and throw in our lot together. As the lines progress, this kind of do-or-die relationship is characterized as a marriage. Second Yin suspects her would-be suitor to be a bandit, which is to be expected in chaotic times. She remains steady, perhaps waiting to see how this man turns out, but she intends to marry someday. Meanwhile, judging from the phrase *sheng-ma-ban-ru*, the suitor has difficulties of his own[1]. (Huang Zhengxian identifies Line One as the suitor at an early stage of his career. Cheng Yi describes Line One as an inferior rival to the real suitor at Line Five.)

Line Three comes at a dicey time, right where stimulus and danger meet, so it is venturing into a forest. Huang Zhengxian mentions that old history books use the phrase 'chase a deer across the Central Plain' to mean that several warlords fight to rule the kingdom. So this deer could be an image of contested leadership, or object of a quest. But a superior man 'discerns the signs' and desists from the chase. What are the 'signs'? The word *ji* in Chinese refers to an elusive thread or seed of development. Later the "Great Treatise" will turn this word into a philosophical term for minute beginnings, contained within the present, which have great effect on the future outcome. The "Great Treatise" uses this term to explain how divination with the *I Ching* works. Our 'superior man' in this line is one who can divine the outcome from circumstance.

Line Four has a suitor faced with ambiguous obstacles to movement, just like in Two. Here the marriage bodes well and is encouraged, perhaps because this line is a less latent position, so we can better know what sort of character the man has.

The ruler at Line Five has access to the 'fat of the land,' but in these times he must stay cautious. It will be hard to distribute these built-up resources. Huang Zhengxian identifies this line with the suitor who was approaching Line Two earlier. From Line Two's point of view, the suitor began suspiciously at One and began to look promising at Four. By now, at Five, he is fully in resonance with Line Two. This fits with the idea that different lines may represent stages of a person's development.

Being at the extremity of Birth-Throes defines Line Six's suffering---the tears of blood and difficulty of movement. The extremity of birth-throes means Six is perpetually in inception and cannot establish itself. It cannot meaningfully engage in the next step.

Centrality:

The bottom three lines are all held back, but Line Two's delay is a steadfast choice. Line One has good grounding, and is counseled to remain [lit.: "it furthers to persevere in dwelling."] Line Three is warned that going on will bring humilation. Line Two at the center is neither warned with 'humilation' nr encouraged with 'it furthers.' The word *zhen* in Line Two does not mean 'persevere.' Instead, it is used as an adjective of praise: '[She] is steadfast.'

Of the upper three lines, Four is encouraged to plead for marriage, and Six is stuck in a dead end of difficult beginnings. Meanwhile Five sits in an influential position, tapping a vein of milk and honey.

*Xingqing:*

[Kan above, Zhen below]  In this time of difficult beginning, the Abyss (a well of potentiality) is a circumstance, hence *kan* above. The self encounters danger and tries to rise to the challenge, hence the inner trigram *zhen*. However, there is still a question of what this internal surge of volition will lead to. This is a time when strong men battle for leadership. Unless a true leader emerges, their efforts will only prolong the chaos.

Zhang Huang visualizes this interaction in an interesting way: The hexagram's pent-up rainclouds remind him of the superior man pondering problems of the human world. Thunder is like the discriminating edge of anlysis, and massed clouds are like coherent groupings of categories. Out of these the superior man weaves a fabric of thought, which is also his model for worldly order. He keeps working toward a breakthrough in action. It is the job of a scholar to accumulate thoughts, to put thoughts together to make insights. When the time comes he will release his products of deliberation like beneficial rain.

[1] R. Lynn, who follows Wang Bi's commentary, translates *sheng-ma banru* in Line Two as 'two unequal horses in a yoke.' Wilhelm, who usually follows Zhu Xi's commentary, understands *sheng-ma banru* as 'horse and wagon part.' When reading this hexagram I always got a picture of a man unpleasantly trapped in a formation of horses, jogging along. This fits with Cheng Yi's explanation of *cheng-ma banru*: 'riding a horse among the ranks.' One can see how distant this language is from us. Even the old-time commentators argued about what it meant.