

Education and the Symbolic Life

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We talk a lot about education these days. We deplore the state of our schools, make plans to get our children into a good MBA program, develop courses to ready social aliens to enter the work force by upgrading their computer skills and try our best to teach chronic introverts how to sell themselves. A rose by any other name would smell even sweeter, we say, and who cares what the name is as long it keeps up with the latest consumer poll. At the same time, though most of us are formally educated, often highly, we spend countless hours searching the world's spiritual supermarkets for something that can raise our consciousness, though we seldom have any real idea of what is being raised or how. It seems our educational and religious institutions have completely failed us. They offer no real symbols to hold our lives together. Our souls and our dreams have become a battlefield of violently diverging feelings, needs and aspirations.

We might call this falling apart of the connectedness of things, of psyche and spirit, of the generations, of humans and their world, by a modern term that has become quite familiar: "spin". The spin we are caught up in is an ever-widening dance of empty signifiers that destroys any connection between the names of things and what they could possibly mean. W. B. Yeats' famous words, written back in the 1930's, seem even more true today as we confront an escalating war of competing fundamentalisms backed by a media-driven market economy capable of reducing anything to a series of meaningless but highly emotive slogans:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre,
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of a passionate intensity.

... and what Rough Beast, its hour come at last,
Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?

W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming"

The Mirror of Change

So what is this ritual education, this ceremony being drowned by the "blood-dimmed tide"? Is there a way we might reclaim it without creating another fundamentalism, yet another "Rough Beast"? And how might we use it to turn the Rough Beasts we meet in the news everyday into Dream Animals that might educate us?

Now, the word education itself (from Latin *educare* and *educere*) means something like "bringing out or bringing up" (literally, drawing someone out of their cave), "developing something from latent or potential existence by disengaging it from a previous connection" (OED). For the past 30 years or so I have steadfastly maintained that using a divinatory system like *Yijing*, Ifa or some of the less violently mercantile forms of Tarot or Astrology might work this kind of educational magic on a individual level. It might disengage us from our previous connections and effect what Jung called the profound transformation of our thought that can release us from the ever-widening circle of violence and retribution that spin represents (Karcher, *Re-enchanting the Mind*).

However, given the current state of our spiritual supermarket and the greedy piracy of our post-modern minds, I'm not so sure. Rather than translate ancient wisdom into modern terms, I have come to feel more and more that we first must let ourselves be translated back into the ritual world that wisdom represents. Jung once said that Change (*Yijing*), the world's oldest and most sophisticated system of wisdom divination, is "our mirror". The mysterious doubling of experience this mirror offers is the place where we see exactly what we are and

what we're not. Now, stepping into this mirror rather than constructing academic theories or elevating moral fantasies about it is a risky business, to be sure. It's the difference between meeting the animals on a hidden trail in the dark forest and studying them in the zoo. But, to my mind, it's where our real education starts.

The Leading Out of the Soul

Divination has been called humanity's aboriginal religious and cultural practice. Its synchronistic style of creating meaning or significance mirrors the *hole* or lack in our lives, the "missing information" that connects us to the *(w)hole* (Briggs and Peat). It does this by offering a hidden language that opens us to the Others within ourselves and our world that are, in Jung's words, the architects of our dreams and symptoms. This old hidden language, now systematically excluded from our educational institutions, hospitals, businesses and psychologies is suffused with a sort of pre-rational verbal therapy. The symbols or markers of such a language "seek to produce and do in fact produce a real and effective change in the mind of one upon whom they act" (Lain Entralgo).

The Greeks called this effective change *psychogogia*, a leading-out or education of the soul. Its "silent voice" (Peek, *Sounds of Silence*) is, I would suggest, exactly what we must learn to hear again. It is precisely through this hidden language, this "ceremony of innocence" and the symbols it offers, that we can learn to be responsible, can respond once more to the beauty and the mystery of the world that surrounds us.

Here the practice of divination crosses into the zone of the uncanny, the Land of the Dead, linking us to an invisible community and a line of ancestors stretching back to the great Dream Animals and the Primal Images. When we engage in the performative linguistic act of divination the shift in our awareness it produces sends a wave towards the future and another towards the past. Past, present and future are bound together 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 that Jung called *synchronicity*, a mystery that is a healing of religious experience. By enacting a divination here and embracing its images as true symbols rather as moral allegories or literal predictions, we link our dreams and symptoms with a great tradition of wisdom that can unite the broken halves of our experience. We take in the world and the world takes us in. We heal the time, joining the present to past and future in a new and living relation. We enter the House of Dreams.

Doubling and the Magic of the Word

Zhouyi, the oldest part of the Classic of Change, was consciously designed to reflect the rites of passage that have characterized East Asian culture from Neolithic times, the deep sources of the wisdom of the East. It doubles the original ceremonies on sacred Rivers and Mountains and the archaic cults held at Earth Altars or raised earth platforms that let people talk to the spirits in its complex writing. The old places where our ancestors contacted the worlds of the spirit are doubled in the texts and “a human face floats up in an uncanny way, like an upturned mouth open to the Sky” (Davis).

The language developed to do this was deliberately created through a continual self-intensification or iterative duplication. It carries the implication that at some level the world itself is made a player. We cannot untangle ourselves from the language and we cannot untangle the language from the world. The text becomes a sort of Portable Altar. The words, the signifiers or markers in such a language become Gates or Symbols that connect us to the imaginal world in ever multiplying ways (Karcher, *Ta Chuan*).

Xiang or Symbols: The Inscapes of Change

The creation of this Portable Altar draws on a rich tradition of Neolithic art and mythology. The basic unit or process in this extended matrix of ritual meaning is the *xiang* or Symbol. It is repeated at every level of the composition, doubling and re-doubling, projecting and echoing itself in an endless fractal dance. It embodies

a creative genius or holographic modeling capacity (Davis) that expresses itself through a continual creation and breaking of symmetries.

A *Xiang* or Symbol is a kind of collage in which, at some mysterious point, the whole becomes more than the assemblage of its individual parts. The word *xiang* itself can be both a noun and a verb: Something can indeed *be* a *xiang* but we must also continually *make* it into a *xiang* by *xiang-ing* it. This seems to point at a particular kind of ongoing imaginal induction at its center, an ongoing dance of feedback and iteration

In Change, a *Xiang* combines linear diagrams, rich and allusive omen words (pictograms or ideograms) and an iterating chain of mythic associations that extends outwards in all directions like the ripples from a stone tossed into a pool of still water. Scholars have seen the doubling at the center of a *Xiang* as an image-concept that unites the two halves of the brain by participating simultaneously in their opposing forms of activity, making images and making thoughts (Helmut Wilhelm). The iterating chains of association, the ripples in the pond, set the image-concept moving through a whole set of polarities, deconstructing oppositions like subject and object, psyche and world, inside and outside, male and female, presence and absence, life and death.

Ultimately, the *Xiang* or Symbol becomes what chaos theorists call a Strange Attractor, a centrifugal configuration in our imagination something like an inner whirlpool that draws the oppositions in our experience down into the turbulent and fertile chaos below (Briggs and Peat). Each *Xiang* or Symbol opens a centrifugal pathway in the imagination, a pathway that leads to and from what Eastern Sages call the Source of Being, the *Dao* or Way. The deep centralizing power of this word magic is the very opposite of spin.

The Sacred Vessel

In Change the greatest of the Symbols or *Xiang*, the place where all the ripples and fractals seem to converge, is an imaginal artifact called 50 *Ding*, the image of a Sacred Vessel something like a Grail or an alchemical retort.



50 Vessel DING



The Way to the Source is open. Vessel creates Success.

You are involved in a deep shift in the way we collectively imagine things. You need to see deeply into what this means. Do not act things out. Contain and transform your problems through symbolic awareness. Security and a new beginning will come from this. It is the origin of great good fortune and meaningful events.



50 The Vessel

The old character shows the vessel used for the sacred meal that joins spirits and humans and a head filled with spirit. This new paradigm develops from establishing and stabilizing the dwelling (37).

Myths for Change: The Story of the Time

Ding is a ritual vessel that signifies connection with the spirit world and the Ancestors as the foundation of a dynasty or noble house. It means divination, divinatory incantations and submitting a question to the oracle, as well as the right moment to act (*shi*). *Ding* is an emblem of power, an alchemical cauldron suggesting cooking in a literal and spiritual sense. It offers nourishment to the warriors and sages and the sage-mind in all of us, brightening the eye and ear. It suggests a destiny conferred by Heaven that is also a duty, becoming a true and responsible individual. The Ding has roots in Neolithic worship of the dead. A skillfully and magically crafted ritual tool that releases the spirit, it is a symbol for the oracle itself, the Change, a part of high culture. It nourishes the sage-mind and opens the world of myth and the omen-animals through the act of high divination and the rites at the Ancestral Temple that it sponsors. In ancient times Yu the Great received the metals from the Nine Provinces and the magical animal symbols (*xiang*) from the Shepherds of the people. He cast the first *Ding*-Vessels at the foot of *Jingshan*, a sacred mountain. The Vessels showed which spirits were beneficent spirits and which were noxious, what opened the Way and what closed it. They united all the provinces, connecting the Above and the Below in the Mandate of Heaven.

This *Ding*, a highly crafted imaginal artifact, collects the deep Animal Powers of the psyche around a central Beast Face or Tiger's Mouth that we are invited to use, cooking our dilemmas and problems and thus opening ourselves to the

world of the spirits and the ancestors. My friend Scott Davis once wrote me about what he realized looking at a gorgeous old *Ding* in a Japanese museum: the animals on the *Ding* were arranged so that they literally passed in and out of the Beast Face, dancing not around the Vessel but through it in a consenting circle of sacrifice, death and re-emergence.

The *Ding* is the Symbol or *Xiang* of the language of Change itself; it “*xiangs*” whatever is put into it. And, by giving symbolic ground to the dance of what I call the Dream Animals it points at the change of heart that can occur as we entertain them and let *them* begin to educate *us*.

The Ritual World of Change: Reuniting the Old and the Young

The mythic structure seen in the Matrix of Change and epitomized in the *Ding* was used in the ancient world to give shape and meaning to individual experience by locating it in relation to the ritual progression of what we might call the Symbolic Life (Granet). It organizes the “markers that do work” (Davis), the Symbols that enact imaginal operations, into an ideal cultural life-span.

This Ritual World of Change seeks to organize life experiences, integrate the generations and investigate deep cultural changes, exploring the strategies that fail and those that succeed. It honors the educational process in a traditional culture: the care for the young, the importance of elders, the development of the inner life and the gradual and ever closer engagement with the King, symbol of a center of true spiritual power and worth.

Archetypal psychologists describe this *cultural* connection between generations through what is called the dual archetype of the *Puer-Senex*. Acting through the process symbolized by the *Ding*, the Ritual Process in Change links the *Puer*, the Young Son in each of us who carries a spirit that is the futurity of culture and the *Senex*, the Old Man in each of us who represents its structures and tradition. It does this through an on-going induction into symbolic reality, an imaginal fertility created in and through the *Anima* or Soul.

In Change, this process revolves around the evolution of our Name, the Bright Omen (*Li*) or Mandate (*Ming*) that is given to each of us as we enter this world. It connects our potential Name to the ideal of the *Junzi*, the Noble One or Realizing Person who is committed to using Change to realize the Way or *Dao* in and through his or her own person, actualizing the ancestral potential that lies within the heart-mind (*xin*) of each of us.

Burning Water: the Inner Axis of Change

In Change, the Ancestral Potential in the heart and its realization are paradoxically symbolized as Burning Water. This mysterious and numinous *prima materia* images the passage across the great River of Life and Death that links all ends and all beginnings. It is described in the last figures of Change (63:64) as a *conjunctio*, a dangerous union of Fire and Water presided over by the Shape-shifter and Dream-maker par excellence, the Small Fox.

The Burning Water is both an imaginal fire-water distilled in the heart-mind and a literal dark wine used in rituals through which the Ancestors were embodied and made present to their descendants. It represents a radical fertility of the imagination created in and through the Soul or Anima that can link the *Puer* and the *Senex*, the archetypal Young Man and Old Man in each of us who symbolize the cultural link between the generations. This Burning Water must be handled carefully, created and nurtured within the individual. Without this soul-making, this careful containment and education, it can explode into the wounded longings, terrorism and fanatic activity of the unconnected young *Puer* or sink into the deep depressions, tyrannical ossification and bitter vengeance of the unconnected old *Senex*.

The *Kan-Li* Axis

The interiorizing or deepening of the Burning Water is achieved through setting up what is called the *Kan-Li* or Fire-Water Axis within the individual. This Axis, also called the Microcosmic Orbit, is a ritually controlled circulation of the light, a

process of integrating the various parts of the psyche. Its goal is to produce a true individual.

The *Kan-Li* Axis works through a continual making and breaking of symmetries or certainties within the individual. It connects the light of our awareness with the violent and un-lived passions of the shadows of the past. It is created by hidden Zones of Radical Transformation in the Matrix of Change, places that recharge experience with meaning and energy, and expresses itself through the Sacred Sickness Pathways that connect personal and cultural suffering. We can see it as something like a double ladder, a stairway for spirit beings, and the ritual process of ascent and descent on this stairway or ladder.

In this ritually controlled death and re-birth process the potential Bright Omen or Name (*Li*, Radiance or Fire) that can live in our hearts is continually brought up from then re-submerged in the Ghost River (*Kan*, Rushing Water), the dark stream of ghosts that flows through each of us. By ritually linking these two parts of the subtle body, the *Kan-Li* Axis allows the Burning Water to be slowly articulated, clarified and allowed to grow in the heart, actualizing the Ancestral Potential in and through the individual being.

This process is not ideology or religious belief but carefully controlled ritual experience. It is the place where fixed ideas and ideologies are changed, where we can work on them through access to what has been called the Dream-body or Dream-ego. In our terms, this is an embodied way of knowing that mirrors and unites what we call logical-analytical and intuitive-synthetic modes of intelligence, the two halves of our brain. It shifts the whole problem of our identity and our relation to culture into a liminal realm and works it there, rather than constructing more fundamentalisms or blowing up more buildings.

The Decades and the Magic of Ten

Enter the Decades, the repeating structural units of ten sequential hexagrams that represent an archaic shaping principle used to sculpt the deepest layers of the Classic of Change. The Decades offer a way of thinking about life and its

ritual or educative purpose based on the number *ten*, which has a special place in ancient eastern thought.

Xun, ten, shows the shape of a life and the shape of the completed periods within it. With the root “sun” or “day” it points at the ten-day week, oldest mythic method of describing time. It means loyal, faithful, universal, distributed equally. It describes a time when the King makes a tour of the Boundaries and his Diviners look into the spirit worlds to contact with the ghosts and spirits that would influence the next period.

Each Decade enacts a complete round, a birth, death and re-birth ordeal that is simultaneously a personal narrative, a reorganization of the central nervous system, an evolution of culture and an experience of the continuous act of creation. The images in a Decade can place you in the psychic terrain of the Ritual Education.

Themes of the Decades

Each Decade has a basic developmental task or theme associated with it.

First Half of Life: *The Hero's Journey*

First Decade (1-10, childhood) is an intensely self-contained time when the child seeks to imagine a world in which to discover an identity.

Second Decade (11-20, the Teens) is a series of struggles with the relation between group and individual identity, sexuality and an emerging personal destiny or mission.

Third Decade (21-30, the 20's) contains the first great Male and Female Initiations where our adult Name and identity are first roused and fixed. It begins the search for an image of the deeper Self.

Second Half of Life: *Facing the Gods*

Fourth Decade (31-40, the 30's) consists of the heroic struggles to found a dwelling, family and career. It is a grueling stage with little transcendental help or relief, a sort of dark night of the soul that pulls up past experiences and links them with future transitions,

Fifth Decade (41-50, the 40's) represents the emergence from the wilderness into higher levels of culture and empowerment in society, conferring new ritual status and power on the now fully individualized being.

The Sixth Decade (51-60, the 50's) confronts the proper exercise of power and our responsibilities to the human community, releasing and fulfilling our potential for present good and re-orienting us towards the great passage across the river of life and death.

The Crossings (61-64) are a coda and a linking of cycles. They represent a birth into the life of the spirit, the passage across the River of Life and Death and a link to the new generations to come.

Structure of the Decades

Structurally, a Decade is composed of two sets of Fives that mirror each other in various ways. There are five Pairs of hexagrams within each Decade, each one a dialogue between the primal powers of Inspiration and Realization. Each different Pair occupies one of five numerical Positions with an individual Decade that have thematic meanings of their own.

The Axis and Gate: 1:2 Position changes the energy level of the psyche and provides key images of a new configuration of the world of the Four Directions. It is like a set of doors swinging open and closed through which we emerge from liminality and are oriented to a new stage of life.

The Approach 3:4 Position is a place where identity is re-organized and personal energies mobilized, a continual process that alternates between rousing and limiting, containment and breakthrough, protection and challenge.

The Royal Center 5:6 Position represents the experience of the numinous attraction and power of the King and High Culture. It is the Decade's centralizing power, a place where we seek audience, are recognized and charged with a Mission.

The Mission 7:8 Position represents a mandate from the Center that can lead to a change of state. It is a struggle, an ordeal that must be faced or a challenge that must be confronted.

The Transition or Liminal Zone 9:10 Position is a passage between stages that opens the world of the ghosts and spirits. It dissolves an old identity after it has served its purpose and releases the unformed yet numinous potential of the new.

The Hidden Dynamic of the Decades

A Decade portrays a chapter in the ideal ritual course of the Symbolic course as a sequence of experiences: Emergence through the Gates, an Approach to, an Experience of and Mission from the numinous Royal Center of Power and High

Culture and the dissolution of old identity and Liminal Passage to a new Stage of Life. These meanings are a story that is told and re-told in different keys in the different Decades.

The Decades as a whole set the stage on which the Rituals of developing an individual identity and relating it to the Ancestral foundation of life take place. They structure the process of accumulating *De* or actualizing power, the power and virtue that stabilizes the heart-mind and lets an individual become who they are truly meant to be. They are a ritual playing field where beginnings and endings are continually separating and re-converging, the spiralling steps of the process that Jung called *individuation*.

Though the linear story line runs through each Decade, its hidden inner process is continually doubling back on itself to point at a mysterious center whose circumference is nowhere and whose center is everywhere. A Decade is, to quote W.B. Yeats again, like “a Great Egg that turns itself inside out without breaking its shell.”

The Dream Animals and the Sacred Sickness Pathways

When we look deep into the old mirror-language of the Change to see this whole ritual process at work, the *Shan Miao* or Beast-face appears, with the Dream Animals – Dragon, Mare or Horse Mother, Tiger, Elephant, Grey Rat, Small Fox, Calling Crane, Numinous Turtle, the host of pigs, cattle, fishes and birds – dancing around and through it.

These Animal Powers are theriomorphic forms of the Ancestors potentiated by the inner accumulation of *De*, power and virtue. Clustering around what has been called the Nocturnal Goddess, the Queen Mother of the West or Lady of the Beasts who presides over the Realm of the Dead, they roam through the Decades in secret ways, embodying the ritual of initiation by acting out an eternal myth of the goings and comings (*wang lai*) from the beginning of things. They represent a powerful energy and link between the worlds that operates directly on the Dream

Body or Subtle Body from which our conscious identity grows and on which it depends for its existence.

In Change, these Animal Powers work on and through what I call the Sacred Sickness Pathways, sets of interconnected symbols, imaginal landscapes and twists of language that give us access to the deep healing processes of the psyche. As the Dream Animals move on these Pathways, they become an interface between the Land of the Dead and the Human World, the All-under-Heaven, mediating the dangerous passion-bodies (*gui*) of newly departed beings and fixing (*heng*) their spirit into the form of a beneficent Ancestor (*shen*).

The Animal Powers or Dream Animals do this by offering their potent *Xiang* or symbols as imaginal operations or rituals that act as alternatives to conventional truths. They guide and focus psychic energy or libido directly on the *Gu*, the institutionalised corruption that we each carry, the rage, pain and longing that clusters around the inner images of our Fathers and our Mothers. They dissolve the corrupted face of the civilized to reveal the Bright Omen (*Li*) hidden beneath.

By connecting our individual suffering with something greater, interiorizing it, deepening it and offering a ritual alternative to literal acting-out, these Dream Animals and the Sacred Sickness Pathways on which they move open a liminal space where violent emotional states are turned into psychic awareness. This represents a divination system's power to profoundly change awareness and, by doing so, to renew the time.

The Imaginal Menagerie

The goal or ideal of the old ritual education or ceremony of innocence seen deep in the mirror of Change was to lead its users out of the caves of their personal suffering by initiating them into the mysteries through which they could fulfill their potential and live up to their Name, becoming in their turn ancestors full of blessings. By entering on the Sacred Sickness Pathways and being educated by the Dream Animals they were given license to be dead. Their personal Name and the experience it represented became an Ancestral Name, a Vessel suitable to be

used by children and grandchildren to feed the ancestors and insure the fertility of their culture.

Now, this is a far cry from what we currently see as the philosophy or the use of education. Our collectivized goals, our cultural institutions and our public language no longer reflect these markers that do work or the inner transformation and intergenerational connection they represent. But we may, individually and in small groups, be able to re-activate them. Through the use of Change as a real Portable Altar and an induction into the great myth-world it doubles and re-doubles we may be able to give them a place in our heart-mind once again. We might call the Dream Animals and open the Sacred Sickness Pathways that bring us out of the caves of our personal suffering that we so cling to in these days of spin.

Hopefully, this can be another step in that cultural project articulated so long ago in a great time of troubles much like our own: “To raise Change into awareness and set it out for the people to use – that we call the Great Enterprise” (Karcher, *Ta Chuan*). Perhaps we can, to paraphrase Jung and Wilhelm’s famous parable of the little old man who brought the rain to a drought stricken village in northern China simply by putting himself back in harmony with the Dao, set the Burning Water circulating again, not through our activism but through the profound change of heart symbolized by the Sacred Vessel, the *Ding*.

Perhaps this is where our real education starts.

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