

28

大過



(dà guò) Greatly Surpassing

Greatly surpassing. The ridgepole sags. It is good to have a place to go. Success.

- Six in the first place: For your mats, use white rushes. No blame.
- Nine in the second place: The withered poplar sends forth new shoots. An old man attains a wife. No action is unavailing.
- Nine in the third place: The ridgepole sags. Misfortune.
- Nine in the fourth place: The ridgepole sags: good fortune. But with harm, distress.
- Nine in the fifth place: The bitter poplar bears flowers. An older woman gains a noble husband. No blame, no praise.
- Six at the top: Crossing the river in its flood, your head is immersed. Misfortune, but no blame.

Image

A tree submerged in the lake: the image of surpassing. You should be fearless if you must stand alone, and without resentment if you must withdraw from the world.

This hexagram bears two physical images: one is natural, a tree submerged by a lake; the other is the ridgepole of the roof of a house, sagging because the weight of the roof has become too heavy to support. Both circumstances are potentially catastrophic. In the case of a tree submerged by a flood, it may recover if the waters recede quickly, without eroding the earth anchoring its roots. However, if the tree remains submerged for long, it will die. And even if the waters recede in time, the tree may have suffered damage from floating debris or, more seriously, from loosening of the earth around its roots. To recover from this excess of water, the tree could well use the care of a gardener, replacing lost soil, pruning away deadwood, and perhaps some healthy branches so that the roots have less demand on them, both as anchors and transmitters of nutrients.

Similarly, a sagging ridgepole is a symptom of a sick house needing remedial attention. A sudden heavy snowfall could spell disaster, with the ridgepole breaking under the weight, and the rafters falling in on the house. With the roof broken, a house cannot endure for long. However, if the ridgepole is supported with auxiliary timbers or the weight on the roof is lightened, the roof may endure intact for many years despite being bent out of shape.

In the human realm, the hexagram describes two other extremes: an older man and an older woman marrying apparently younger spouses. For the first situation, progeny are likely, which may be why the *Changes* see this as a positive situation. For the second, the marriage of an older woman, the oldest layer of the

Changes sees neither praise nor blame; neither good or bad fortune. Later commentaries condemn this situation, but the oldest layer does not.

Only two of the six lines relate to marriage. The image of the hexagram, as a whole, stresses the need for emotional equilibrium in those times when we must stand alone. Such times come to most of us, and need not engender anxiety. While standing alone is never comfortable, and our isolation may be unjust, we are reminded that this situation, like the flood submerging the tree, though overwhelming, may not last long. Once the crisis has passed, we may be able to recover and go on with our lives. In fact, some periods of isolation are normal parts of a principled life. As Confucius wrote, if the Way does not prevail, we should be ashamed to be honored and enriched. There are times when retreat and self-strengthening, even when forced upon us, are precisely what we need most.

Shaughnessy, 132–133, 312.

Lynn, 311–317

Wilhelm/Baynes, 111–114.