



ZHÈN

THUNDERBOLTS

Thunderbolts.

Blessed.

The crack of thunderbolts strikes terror,

But the terror turns to laughter and joy.

Thunderbolts shock a hundred miles,

But not one spoon of offering wine is lost.

A powerful force strikes like a shower of thunderbolts, but leaves joy and not destruction in its wake. This describes the aftermath of a conquest. The vassals of the defeated ruler are terrified, but the conqueror treats them well, allowing them to continue sacrificial offerings to the spirits of their ancestors.^{1, 2}

Lines

first line/9 ——— The crack of a thunderbolt strikes terror,
But the terror turns to laughter and joy.
Auspicious.

A powerful force strikes terror, but will leave happiness in its wake. This solid line (——) at the beginning of the trigram Zhèn ䷳ Thunderbolt symbolizes the moment when the thunderbolt strikes.

line two/6 — — Thunderbolts. Danger.
He loses his treasures
and flees to the high hills.
He must not go after them.
In seven days he will get them back.

When invaders come and seize his treasures, he flees. In due time, what he lost will be returned to him. He must wait passively until it is (passive line — —). Line two is the place of the subject or subordinate. He will get his treasures back when he comes to be a loyal subordinate of the invader.

line three/6 — — Thunderbolts boom,
Shocking him into flight.
He escapes disaster.

He gets away just in time. If he had waited until line four, it would have been too late.

line four/9 — A thunderbolt
drops him in the mud.

He does not flee in time and is struck down by the conqueror. This solid line at the beginning of the upper trigram Zhèn ䷳ Thunderbolt represents the moment when the thunderbolt strikes. Line four, coming just after the midpoint of the hexagram, sometimes has to do with being late. Mud is associated with rebellion. He is struck down because he seems to be resisting the conqueror.

line five/6 — — Thunderbolts fly
all around him.
There is danger,
But he loses none of his offering.

Though danger threatens, he continues imperturbably with the prescribed offerings to the spirits of his ancestors and comes to no harm.¹

top line/6 — — Thunderbolts make him tremble,
he stares at them in fright.
Marching to war would bring misfortune.
The thunderbolts are not for him
but for his neighbor.
He will not be harmed.
There are words about marriage.

Though danger threatens, he will be safe if he stays where he is. The “neighbor” is his erstwhile ruler, whom the conquering “thunderbolt” will destroy. The conqueror will then propose “marriage.” The top line of a hexagram is often concerned with actual and/or potential conflict. It also often deals with a new development from the

situation described in the rest of the hexagram. Here the new development is acceptance of a new ruler. This is referred to as "marriage."¹

STRUCTURE ☳ 震 Zhèn Thunderbolt
 ☳ 震 Zhèn Thunderbolt

Two thunderbolts. In each, the solid line (—) is like a bolt of lightning shooting quickly forward through the two weak lines (==).

SEQUENCE This hexagram begins a new part of the sequence. In GÉ (49) REVOLUTION and DǐNG (50) THE RITUAL CALDRON, the protagonist of the first part of the *Changes* reached his goal of power. The protagonist of the remaining fourteen hexagrams appears to be a vassal of the defeated Shang. He escapes harm in the conquest, gradually finds a place in the new order, then begins his own rise toward power. THUNDERBOLTS and its inverse GĒN (52) KEEP STILL show two possible reactions to the conquest: terror and cautious restraint.

Notes

1. THUNDERBOLTS — The Zhou conquerors and their allies descended on the Shang like thunderbolts, sweeping them from power. But they did not attempt the almost impossible task of conquering every nobleman connected with Shang. They left most lords on their lands, allowing them to continue sacrifices to their ancestors. The Zhou king's own relatives and supporters were enfeoffed with unoccupied lands between and around those of the Shang lords, where they acted as a buffer.

2. "a hundred miles" (opening text) — The mile referred to is the Chinese mile or 里 *lǐ*, which equals about one third of an English mile or one half of a kilometer.