

HEXAGRAM 51

CHÊN THUNDER¹



Component trigrams:

Below: CHÊN, thunder, movement, to sprout or quicken.

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TEXT Thunder—success! Thunder comes with a terrible noise, laughing and shouting in awesome glee and frightening people for a hundred miles around. The sacrificial wine is not spilt.²

COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT Thunder indicates success; its terrible roar is frightening, but this leads to happiness.³ It laughs and shouts in fearful glee, yet afterwards everything is in order. It frightens people for a hundred miles round, startling those afar and terrifying those close at hand. That the sacrificial wine is not spilt indicates that someone now appears who is capable of guarding the temple of the ancestors and the shrines of the harvest gods, one qualified to be the leader of the sacrifices.⁴

SYMBOL This hexagram symbolizes continuous thunder. The Superior Man in fear and trembling seeks to improve himself.

The Lines

9 FOR THE BOTTOM PLACE Thunder comes with a mighty roar which changes to noisy glee—good fortune! **COMMENTARY** Its frightening roar causes fear which leads to happiness;³ its noisy glee is followed by good order.

6 FOR THE SECOND PLACE Thunder approaches—trouble is at hand! Sadly he lets go of his valuables and (fleeing) sets foot among the nine hills.⁵ He should not search for them; in seven days he will regain them. **COMMENTARY** That the approach of thunder presages trouble is indicated by the position of this yielding line over a firm one.

6 FOR THE THIRD PLACE Thunderous impetuosity—to emulate it at this time will not give rise to harm.⁶ **COMMENTARY** Thunderous impetuosity is indicated by the unsuitable position of this line.

9 FOR THE FOURTH PLACE After the thunderstorm, the paths are muddy. **COMMENTARY** This implies muddled thinking.

6 FOR THE FIFTH PLACE Thunder comes and goes alternately—trouble is at hand! Careful thought will avert loss, but there are affairs needing attention. **COMMENTARY** The first sentence implies that danger threatens our activities. That affairs need our attention is indicated by this central line (of the upper trigram). There will be no important losses.

6 FOR THE TOP PLACE Thunder brings disorder and people stare about them in terror. Advancing at this time brings misfortune. The thunder affects not ourselves but our neighbours—no error.⁷ A marriage causes gossip. **COMMENTARY** That thunder brings disorder is indicated by the failure of the middle line (of the upper trigram) to win (supremacy over this top line). Although misfortune arises, we are not to blame. Fear of our neighbours makes us cautious.

NOTES (1) This hexagram, like the trigrams of which it is composed, symbolizes not just thunder, but the powerful natural forces which lead to the growth and fruition of everything. Such forces, though terrifying in their manifestations, are beneficial in their results—except when their activity is untimely. (2) This suggests that the holder of sacrificial vessel is not easily alarmed, or else that he is very wise and able to distinguish between the apparently dangerous and the really dangerous. (3) Fear is often a good mentor; by causing us to change our ways, it leads to happiness. (4) The ancient Chinese took these matters seriously. In modern parlance, we should say that someone appears who is capable of looking after and protecting those principles and objects which excite our deepest reverence. (5) The Chinese additional commentaries in my possession explain how 'the nine hills' is derived from the form of the hexagram, but they do not explain the symbolical significance of this phrase. (6) The Superior Man usually acts calmly and carefully, but there are times when impetuosity serves a good purpose or, at the very least, does no particular harm. (7) We are not to blame for the trouble afflicting them; but, as the commentary on this line indicates, they may think we are to blame and plan reprisals.