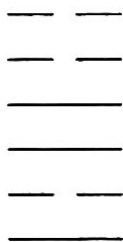


55 feng/thick



*Sacrifice.
The king is present.
Do not grieve.
Appropriate for the middle of the day.*

Base (9): Meeting the mistress of the house.
*For a ten-day week, NO MISFORTUNE.
Leaving
means receiving.*

(6) 2: Thick is the screen.
*Seeing the Plough at noon.
Departing brings risk of illness.
Sacrificing captives who plead submission.
AUSPICIOUS.*

(9) 3: Thick are the pennons.
*At noon faint light is made.
Breaking the right arm,
NO MISFORTUNE.*

(9) 4: Thick is the screen.
*Seeing the Plough at noon.
Meeting the master now.*

(6) 5: Though hindrance come,
*None will be glum.
Praise.
AUSPICIOUS.*

Top (6): Thick is the roof
*screening the house.
Peep through the door:
no one is there.
Not seen for several years.
DISASTROUS.*

(55) **thick**

The general picture of an empty house at noon is mingled with obscure astronomical references. An eclipse of the sun at the end of a Callipic cycle (see below, Note 2, 4, 5 and Top) might occasion such oracles. The whole set may be intended to convey two levels of meaning, and the following notes merely show something of the complexity of the subject. An empty house may be ominous and stars are always so. Double meanings appeal to soothsayers.

(Tag) *Feng* means 'abundant' or 'plenteous'. Since it is applied to a screen and a roof providing shade, 'thick' is used here as a synonym. *Feng* also occurs in bronze inscriptions as the name of a Zhou royal city (Shaughnessy *Sources of Early Zhou history* pages 78, 142, 323); and is the name of a sacrifice (D144).

(Hexagram statement) For the king's presence see Note 37:5.

(Hexagram statement, 2, 3 and 4) The word translated as 'middle of the day' may mean 'during the day' or even 'equinox'.

(Base) *Pei zhu* 'consort master' has been translated as 'one of equal rank with the master'. Gao sees it as meaning the master's consort or wife.

An augury for the ensuing ten-day 'week' (see Diagram 2) was routinely recorded in Shang plastromancy.

The rhyming observation occurs also at 60:5. 'Leaving' means 'departing' and the whole oracle means 'Setting forth will bring rewards.'

(2 and 4) The Plough is the English name for the seven stars near the Pole Star. The north American name, Dipper, is closer to the meaning of its Chinese name, but this makes no difference to its use in these oracles.

(2, 4, 5 and Top) Two words for 'screen' occur here, and both have astronomical secondary meanings.

Zhang 'screen' or 'barrier' (translated as 'hindrance' in Line 5) is also used for the recurring 19-year period (called an epact), when the phases of the moon recur on the same day of the month. For western astronomy the epact was reckoned in the fifth century BC by Meton of Athens, as the cycle of agreement between the lunar and solar cycles. The numbers 1 to 19 assigned to years within the epact are the Golden Numbers of western calendarists.

About a hundred years later, because the Metonic cycle was not exact, Kallippos of Kyzikos devised the 76-year cycle, four times as long, to

correct it. The Callippic cycle was also known to the Chinese, who called it *bu* (lines 2, 4 and Top), which, like *zhang*, means 'screen' or 'barrier'. Though the age of the Chinese terms is not known, it is thought that the Chinese were aware of the 19 and 76-year cycles as early as Shang times. Both words are probably used here as puns.

(3) Gao Heng's interpretation (G324) further shows the obscurity of these omens. He gives the meaning as: 'A big thatched house. Seeing a spirit at noon. Breaking one's right arm.' My translation takes *pei* 'darkened' (K501f) as a loan character for *pei* 'streamers' or pennons (K501d), which might be flown for many reasons, chiefly celebratory. This interpretation has the support of commentators; but Legge renders it with a single banner.

(5) Gao (G324) says: 'Coming to Shang, receiving gifts and praise.' Kunst (R349) says the oracle means that in the coming 19-year period (*zhang*, here translated as 'hindrance') there will be rejoicing and honour.

(Top) The thick roof is possibly thatched, but tiled roofs can have a very heavy bed of mud under the tiles.