



歸妹

GUĪ MÈI

A MAIDEN MARRIES

A maiden marries.
Marching to war brings misfortune.
It is not favorable.

It is favorable to advance humbly and peacefully, like a young girl going to be married. It is not favorable to advance boldly, as if to war. The texts of the lines tell the story of a girl who is married as a lowly concubine but rises to the high position of full wife.

Lines

first line/9 — The maiden marries as a concubine.
Though she walks with a limp,
It is auspicious for her to march forth.

Being concubine rather than full wife is a deficiency like lameness, but in this case the deficiency is an advantage. Only someone in a low position like that of concubine can advance unopposed. The lowest line of a hexagram symbolizes low position.¹

line two/9 — She sees dimly.
It is favorable for her to remain in seclusion.

Since she cannot see what lies ahead, she should stay where she is and not marry. Line two, in the middle of the inner trigram, often has to do with being inside of something—in this case, a maiden's home.

line three/6 — — The maiden marries as principal wife—
She is sent back to return as a concubine.

Ambition leads to a fall. Rather than trying to start at the top, one must start at the bottom and work upward. Line three often refers to someone who overreaches himself.¹

line four/9 ——— The maiden's marriage is delayed.
A late marriage comes in its time.

Line four often speaks of delay. In this case, the delay is auspicious. The solid line (——) and active upper trigram Zhèn ䷲ Thunderbolt both suggest action.

line five/6 — — When King Diyi gave his sister in marriage,
One of the concubines was more beautiful
than the lady bride.
The moon comes full.
Supremely auspicious.

In time, the humble concubine will be exalted. Her moon will swell from new to full. Diyi was the second-last Shang king of China. It is said that he gave two successive lords of Zhou brides from the royal clans. The lord of Zhou rose to be an important vassal of the king, just as the concubine here rises to become principal wife. Line five is the place of the ruler. The receptive broken line (— —) shows the lord of Zhou receiving the king's gift and the concubine receiving the lord of Zhou's favor. Compare TÀI (11) FLOWING, line five.^{1, 2}

top line/6 — — The bride offers a box
that is empty.
The groom sacrifices a sheep
that does not bleed.
Unfavorable.

Marriage is no longer favorable. The bride is barren and the groom has no seed. The box and the sheep were religious offerings made as part of the ancient wedding ceremony.

STRUCTURE ䷲ 震 Zhèn Thunderbolt (rush forward)
䷵ 兌 Duì Stand Straight (break free, step forward)

The concubine stands up from low position (lower trigram ䷵) and rushes forward into high position (upper trigram ䷲).

SEQUENCE This hexagram and its inverse, the previous hexagram **JIÀN** (53) **GRADUAL ADVANCE**, show a subject of the defeated Shang finding a place in the new order. In **GRADUAL ADVANCE**, he submits and rises step by step. In **A MAIDEN MARRIES**, he starts in a low position and is elevated to a high one.

Notes

1. "concubine" (first line, lines three and five) — When a woman went to be married, she was accompanied by a train of bridesmaids and bridesmen, some of whom would remain with her as servants or companions for herself and her new husband. The women were called 娣 *dì* "younger sisters." This is the word translated "concubine."

2. "sister" (line five) — The word 妹 *mèi* "sister" refers specifically to a younger sister. In fact, however, the woman referred to here was probably a distant cousin of the king, rather than his sister. In Shang times, all members of a family in the same generation were thought of as brothers and sisters.