

1



乾

QIÁN

STRONG ACTION

Strong action.

Strong action will be supremely blessed.

It is favorable to keep on.

Because it is made up entirely of solid, active lines, this hexagram represents pure strength and energy. The person it applies to is strong and should act. His symbol is a dragon, a creature the Chinese regarded as dangerously powerful but auspicious. In later times, the dragon became a symbol of the emperor. Here, however, it represents someone who is strong but only beginning his rise toward high rank.¹

Lines

first line/9 — The dragon remains underwater.
He must not act.

The dragon that remains underwater is someone strong whose time for action has not yet come. Dragons were believed to live underwater as the rulers of rivers and lakes. By leaping up into the sky, they brought rain for the crops. Although Chinese and Western dragons are similar in being powerful supernatural creatures, the moist benevolence of Chinese dragons is very much unlike Western dragons' fiery subterranean malevolence. This first line is at the bottom of the hexagram and therefore early in the development of the situation that the hexagram as a whole portrays.²

line two/9 — The dragon appears in the fields.
He should go to see someone big.

As soon as he emerges from his underwater home into the world of men, the dragon should immediately seek the help of someone greater than himself. Line two is the place of the subject, who needs his ruler's help.^{3, 4}

line three/9 — All day the lord is active,
At night he remains alert.
There is danger,
but he comes to no harm.

Constant energy and alertness protect him from harm. The "lord" and the "dragon" are the same person. Line three is the place of danger.⁵

line four/9 — If he leaps, he will land in a pool
And come to no harm.

If the dragon strives upward, he will find a comfortable place to land. This deep pool is a place of safety. It probably symbolizes a position at the ruler's court. Line four is the place of the high officer.

line five/9 — The dragon flies in the sky.
He should go to see someone big.

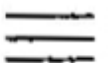
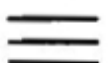
He cannot succeed on his own in these exalted regions and must find someone who can guide him. Line five is the place of the ruler, whom he seeks.³

top line/9 — The dragon reaches his limit.
Regret.

He would have been able to go farther if he had found someone to guide him. See line five. The top line of a hexagram often has to do with going too far.

all lines 9 — A band of dragons appears,
Among whom none is chief.
Auspicious.

He is one of a team of powerful equals. The "dragons" are the hexagram's six strong and active solid lines. Each of them is strong; together they are almost invincible. This is the only place in the *Changes* where equality is considered a good thing. Compare with Bǐ (8) ALLIANCE, top line: "An alliance with no head. Inauspicious."

STRUCTURE  乾 Qián Strong Action
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This hexagram is made up entirely of solid lines — symbols of strength, solidity, and action. The next hexagram KŪN (2) ACQUIESCENCE is made up entirely of broken lines, which symbolize the opposite but complementary qualities of weakness, acquiescence, and passivity.

SEQUENCE The *Changes* begins when its protagonist takes action. The second hexagram ACQUIESCENCE shows him becoming passive in order to consolidate his foothold in the world he has entered. His entire career, which approximates the rise to power of the Zhou (see Introduction), can be followed through the sequence of the hexagrams. This first hexagram, despite its strength, is only the beginning of that rise.

Notes

1. QIÁN — All the pronunciations in this book are given in modern standard Mandarin Chinese. The character 乾, which is used to write the name of the hexagram, contains the element 乾 “sun” and has the primary meaning “sun-dried.” This gives it connotations of hardness, brightness, and fiery heat.

2. “first line/9” — The 9 here and the 6 found in other hexagrams both have to do with divination practices. See Introduction, pages 7–8.

3. “someone big” (lines two and five) — Most traditional commentators see the dragon as the “someone big.”

4. “the place of the subject” (commentary on line two) — Each of the six possible places in a hexagram has its own characteristic range of meaning. Line two usually has to do with a subject or subordinate, line three with danger or misfortune, line five with the ruler, etc. For a complete outline, see Introduction, page 5.

5. “lord” (line three) — This is “lord” in the sense of “nobleman” rather than “ruler.” The word 君子 *jūnzǐ* “lord” is often translated “superior man,” but this is a meaning it was given later by Confucian commentators.