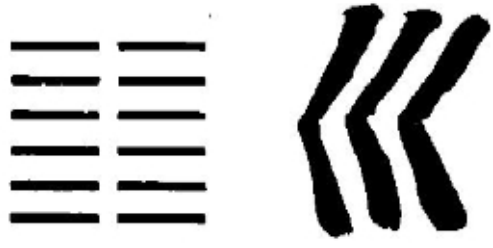


2



KŪN

ACQUIESCENCE

Acquiescence.

Acquiescence will be supremely blessed.

Continue docile as a mare.

If the lord makes a journey,

first he will lose his way,

then he will find a ruler.

Retreating gains friends,

advancing loses friends.

Staying at rest brings good fortune.

Inactivity, retreat, and obedience are three aspects of the meaning of this hexagram. Despite its negativity, it is among the greatest and most auspicious of all the hexagrams, "supremely blessed." Its subject need not be thought of as absolutely weak, since he is referred to as a "lord."^{1, 2}

Lines

first line/6 — — He treads on frost.
Solid ice is coming.

Winter approaches. Movement turns to immobility. QIÁN (1) STRONG ACTION turns to KŪN (2) ACQUIESCENCE. This lowest line is often associated with feet.

line two/6 — — He is dutiful and correct.
Though this does not support great deeds,
it is still favorable.

It is better to be a faithful follower than to attempt great deeds on one's own. Line two is the place of the subject, who dutifully obeys his ruler.^{3, 4}

line three/6 — — Though his brilliance is hidden,
 he may stay as he is.
 In the service of the king,
 though at first he gets nothing,
 in the end he will have success.

As the servant of a great ruler, at first he is given no chance to display his talents. In the end, however, he will demonstrate his ability and rise to high position, higher than he could have achieved on his own. Line three is the place of danger. The danger in passive acquiescence is that one may not get an opportunity to advance.⁵

line four/6 — — A closed quiver.
 No harm — no praise.

His talents remain unused, like arrows in a closed quiver. He avoids any chance of harm, but also misses any chance of winning praise and advancement. Line four is the place of the officer, who here remains inactive, either by choice or because his ruler makes no use of him.⁶

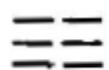

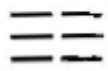

line five/6 — — Yellow skirt.
 Supremely auspicious.

Like a bright yellow skirt, he is brilliant but in a comparatively low position. Line five is the place of the ruler. The skirt symbolizes a king's chief minister. This is the height of the good fortune that can be achieved by acquiescence. The ruler is like the sun and bathes his minister in the yellow sunlight of his favor. The color yellow is associated with loyalty.⁷

top line/6 — — Streaming with blood,
 Dragons battle in the wilds.

Two great powers do battle. Neither one will escape harm. In this top line, acquiescence crosses over into activity again. A passive power becomes active. The top line of a hexagram has to do with conflict between subordinate and superior.⁸






all lines 6 — — It is favorable to remain just as one is.

STRUCTURE   Kūn Acquiescent
  Kūn Acquiescent

This hexagram is composed entirely of broken lines, which symbolize weakness, passivity, acceptance, obedience, and withdrawal.

SEQUENCE The active protagonist who entered the world in QIÁN (1) STRONG ACTION must attach himself acquiescently to a greater power if he is to get very far. These first two hexagrams are the positive and negative poles around which the field of the *Changes* is generated. STRONG ACTION is composed of solid, active lines and ACQUIESCENCE of broken, passive lines. All the rest of the hexagrams contain both kinds of lines and their meanings combine action and acquiescence.

Notes

1. KŪN — This hexagram is like water, which acquiescently follows the lay of the land. During the Han Dynasty (circa 200 B.C.–200 A.D.), the name of the hexagram was sometimes written with the character  or , which means “flowing water.” The character 坤 has been standard since at least the Han period. It contains the element 土 “earth” and the hexagram has therefore traditionally been associated with earth rather than water. I prefer  because line one refers indirectly to water, because forms of this character are used in the earliest surviving manuscripts, and because the figure  (“666” in ancient script) is the most ancient way of drawing the trigram .

2. “retreating,” “advancing” (opening text) — These are literally “southwest” and “northeast,” respectively. The Zhou had their home far to the southwest of the Shang capital of China. For them, to go northeast was to advance and to go southwest was to retreat.

3. “dutiful and correct” (line two) — These are literally “straight” 直 *zhí* and “square” 方 *fāng*. The words are probably derived from either tailoring or carpentry.

4. “does not support great deeds” (line two) — The basic meaning of the word 習 *xí* “support” is “repeat.” It was used in divination to refer to a second divination that supported the verdict of the first. The use of the word here is an indication that the ancient diviners who created the *Changes* may have divined each question more than once. Some sources suggest that three separate *Changes* divinations were made on each question, others that the *Changes* was used to confirm an earlier oracle bone divination (see Introduction, pages 7–8).

5. “brilliance” (line three) — The basic meaning of the word 章 *zhāng* is “bright pattern.” It is used to refer to talent or ability.

6. “quiver” (line four) — The type of quiver referred to is one made of cloth and was closed with a drawstring.

7. “Yellow skirt.” (line five) — Hsu (1984) suggests that *huáng* “yellow” 黃 should be read as 璜 *huáng* “jade pendant.” The line would then translate: “A skirt with jade pendants.” Members of the ruling classes often used to wear sets of jade pendants dangling on a cord from the sash at their waists. The *huáng* was a semicircular jade that was often the main piece of the set.

8. “streaming with blood” (top line) — The transmitted text has 玄黃 *xuān huáng* “black and yellow.” Traditional interpreters say this means that one dragon bleeds black and the other yellow. I follow Gao (1947) in reading the two characters as 洊潢 *xuànhuáng* “streaming,” “sweating profusely.”