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DǐNG

THE RITUAL CALDRON

The ritual caldron.
Supremely auspicious.
Blessed.

The *dǐng* is a heavy three- or four-legged caldron, usually made of gleaming bronze, in which sacrificial meats were cooked and offered to the spirits. Since it was used in state sacrifices, the *dǐng* is a symbol of the state and of the power of the king. The hexagram as a whole deals with the establishment of a new ruling regime.¹

Lines

first line/6 — — The caldron is turned upside down.
It is favorable to clear out a blockage.
There is no harm in taking a slave woman
for the sons she may bear.

The new regime must clear away the remnants of the old. It should retain only people who are of low rank and can be productive. The lowest line of a hexagram is associated with low status.²

line two/9 ——— The caldron is full.
“Our enemies are beset with afflictions
And cannot reach us.”
Auspicious.

Abundant offerings both obtain and demonstrate the blessings of the spirits. This line, in the middle of the inner trigram, represents the body of the *dǐng*. That it is a solid line suggests that the *dǐng* is full.

line three/9 ——— The handles of the caldron are torn away.
It cannot be used.
The fat pheasant meat in it is uneaten
And the caldron corrodes.
Regrets will end in good fortune.

Though the caldron's handles have been broken, they can be replaced. These handles represent the officers who are the means by which government is carried out. The officers of the old regime were removed in the revolution. Until they are replaced, the benefits of the new regime—its "fat pheasant meat"—cannot be enjoyed. Line three almost always involves some kind of adversity.

line four/9 ——— The caldron's leg breaks,
Spilling the duke's offering,
Sullyng the caldron's face.
Inauspicious.

A support of the new order fails. Line four is the place of the officer. One of the new regime's officers either fails in the task assigned to him or rebels, bringing shame on himself and on the regime.³

line five/6 — — The caldron's handles and carrying rod
are made of golden bronze.
It is favorable to persevere.




Since the caldron has strong handles and carrying rod, it can be put to use. The handles represent officers and the carrying rod the king. Line five is the place of the ruler. The handles of a *dǐng* were two solid metal loops sticking up from either side of its rim. In Chinese, they are called "ears." The *dǐng* was carried to and from the fire by a rod slipped through these ears.⁴

top line/9 ——— The caldron's carrying rod is made of jade.
Great good fortune.
Favorable to anything.

The jade carrying rod is a symbol of the king, who is strong enough to attempt any task. Jade's great value lies not only in its beauty and

hardness, but in its imperishability as well. Bronze corrodes, jade does not.

STRUCTURE  離 Luó Shining Light
 巽 Xùn Kneel in Submission

Subjects below kneel in submission (lower trigram ) to a shining ruler above (upper trigram ). The lines of the hexagram form the image of a *dǐng*: The two halves of the lowest line are feet (— —), the three solid lines above that are the *dǐng*'s body () , the two halves of the fifth line are handles (— —), and the solid line at the top is the carrying rod.

SEQUENCE In the last hexagram GÉ (49) REVOLUTION, an old regime was overthrown. In this one, a new regime is established. The two are the climax of the entire sequence of hexagrams. The *Changes*' protagonist finally reaches the pinnacle of power. The hexagrams that follow deal with his subjects' responses to their new ruler.

Notes

1. DǐNG— Making sacrifices to obtain the favor of the spirits was one of the most important functions of the state in ancient China. *Dǐng* and other sacrificial vessels were important religious objects, handed down from generation to generation, not only in the royal family but in every noble family. *Dǐng* were either round three-legged vessels or square four-legged ones, usually about 30 centimeters (a foot) high and wide. Many have been unearthed from ancient tombs and some of these are inscribed with long and circumstantial accounts of their origins. They were often cast for their owners from gifts of bronze made by the king.

2. "slave woman" (first line) — The *Changes* makes reference to several kinds of slaves. See TÚN (33) THE PIGLET, note 3.

3. line four — This line may refer to the rebellion of three Zhou princes that took place shortly after the conquest of Shang. During Shang, inheritance often passed from elder to younger brother rather than from father to son. When King Wu passed the throne to his young son King Cheng, making his brother, the Duke of Zhou, regent, these brothers rebelled in support of the Shang heir, Wugeng. They were ingloriously defeated by the Duke of Zhou and the remnants of the twice-defeated Shang were put under the rule of the Marquis of Kang, who was also a brother of the late king. See JÌN (35) ADVANCEMENT.

4. "golden" (line five) — In the Chinese text, this is simply "yellow." I call it "golden" because bronze had for the ancient Chinese many of the same connotations that gold has for us.