

6 訟 ䷅

(sòng) Strife

Strife. If you are sincere in your regrets, take the middle way, and you will have good fortune. If you persist to the end, you face disaster. You ought to seek the advice of someone greater than you are. Crossing the great river [attempting a major change] is ineffective.

- Six in the first place: If you do not prolong this dispute, petty people may talk, but in the end you will have good fortune.
- Nine in the second place: You cannot win this dispute. Return home and escape. [Even though your resources may be limited], to a city of [only] three hundred families, there will be no disaster.
- Six in the third place: Feeding on old virtues. If you persist, danger and good fortune. But the king's business will not be achieved. [matters affecting many people will come to nothing]

- **Nine in the fourth place:** Unsuccessful in strife. Turn back, submit to what is mandated. But if you change your aims and then persevere, good fortune.
- **Nine in the fifth place:** Strife at the source. Good fortune.
- **Nine at the top:** The belt of noble rank is bestowed, but in the end it is taken away three times in a single day.
You may seem the winner at first, but your reward will be taken back again and again.

Image

The sky with water pouring down: the image of strife. You should take on a new direction only after careful consideration of its beginnings.

When water gushes from the sky, it is not a good time to start building anything. In addition to the normal reasons for delaying building, in early China, great structures were built on foundations of tamped earth. Trying to gather soil, fill the form with it, and tamp it down would be impossible during a deluge, since the soil would turn into liquid mud. Trying to build something solid with materials that dissolve is as foolish as trying to achieve something significant in the middle of a dispute. This is a time to take shelter and cut your losses, not move ahead.

Living in a time of frequent warfare and political instability, the early Chinese were all too aware of the dangers of strife, and of the difficulties of avoiding it. For this reason, this hexagram emphasizes the dangers of contentiousness, and the fact that it is rarely productive and often destructive, even to those who seem at first

to triumph. It advises that you recognize when you have lost or are likely to lose, and to withdraw from the struggle even if small-minded people ridicule you for doing so. Only one of the six lines predicts a positive outcome, and that relates to difficulties associated with the source or beginnings; that is, with the most basic of issues, dealt with in the only timely manner, at the beginning. Thus, if you are planning a new venture and find basic disagreements on aims or methods with your colleagues, these need to be addressed lest these disagreements render all future efforts flawed. However, in almost every other situation, a time of strife is not auspicious, not a good time to try to move ahead, since almost any venture will fail under these conditions. You may need to wait, to seek some alternative to the one you are considering.

Shaughnessy, 46–47, 290.

Lynn, 170–177.

Wilhelm/Baynes, 28–31.