

I CHING

The Oracle

Hexagram 63: Jì Jì. After the Ending



坎
Kǎn
Water



離
Lí
Fire



既濟

Jì Jì



水
Shui
Water

火
Huo
Fire

坎水既
上火濟
離既
下濟
第六十三卦：

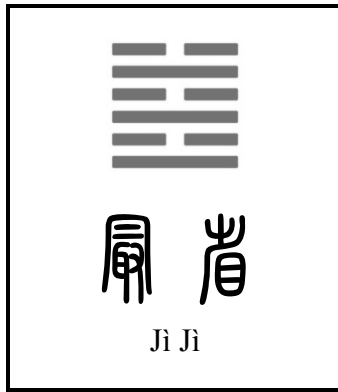
終初利亨
亂吉貞小
既濟：

而君既水象
豫子濟在曰
防以思火上
之患

The Oracle

Anticipate pitfalls before advancing. How might your actions affect others? A noble leader puts the people's welfare before self-interests. You have done what you have done. The matter now is what happens next. It is the time after an ending and at the start of a new beginning. Call upon the Illustrious Ancestor. When it comes to receiving favor from the Divine, the extravagance of your offerings does not matter; the sincerity of your heart and piety matter more.





坎水既濟 第六十三卦
 上火既濟
 離既濟
 下濟
 終亂 初吉 利貞 亨小
 既濟
 而君既濟 水火既濟
 豫子濟 防以思患
 象曰：水火既濟，君子以思患而豫防之。

**An auspicious omen for minor affairs. Gains to be had.
 At the inception, favorable proceedings. At its cessation, chaos, disorder, and unrest.**

Water atop Fire.

A kettle is burning over the stove. The result is steam: be cautious, as tensions abound.

Water over Fire is unstable for both. If the water in the kettle boils over, then the fire will be extinguished. If the fire burns for too long or the heat is too high, the water evaporates and vanishes. It is true that great energy is generated by Water over Fire, but it is still a hostile relationship.

Exercise caution.

The sage anticipates possible misfortunes and pitfalls before advancing, to best protect the people.

Think about the consequences that your actions may have for others, not just yourself. The endeavor you contemplate is indeed highly attractive to you, with great prospects for glory and success.

However, it creates a volatile environment that could have an adverse impact on those who depend on you. A noble leader puts the people's welfare before self-interests.

Ferrying relief across the river: it is the aftermath. You have crossed the great stream. The matter now is what happens next.

First Line

The journey is delayed.

A fox's tail gets wet. There is no blame.

無濡曳初
 咎其其九
 尾輪：



“曳其輪” (zuǐ qí lún) is more often translated to “the wheel drags behind.” The understood meaning is that road conditions cause a carriage to decelerate and slow the pace.

Then the scene jumps to the story of a fox crossing a stream, which the fox hoped would be shallow, but the actual depths result in the fox's tail getting wet.

This translation merges the figurative meaning of the first part with the parable of the fox so as to streamline the narrative.

The key point of the first line is an analogy. The first part of the analogy is the carriage that is forced by road conditions to cross a shallow stream, and in wading through the waters and mud, the wheel drags behind. The carriage is then compared to a fox wading through a stream getting its tail wet.

No major harms result. It is the lull after one chapter of your life has come to an end. A new one is about to begin. It is a period of transitions for you. Take it slow until you know where you want to go.

Transition periods are often difficult and riddled with minor obstacles, which is what you are currently experiencing.

Second Line

The woman laments the loss of her veil.

Do not give chase. In seven days, you will have it back.

七 勿 婦 六
日 逐 喪 二
得 其 ：



The purpose of the woman's veil is to preserve her modesty. To lose that veil and thus have her full face be exposed would be construed as a disgrace, but here, the Oracle instructs not to chase after the lost veil. What you feel you have lost is not really a loss.

An intention of yours that you had kept hidden is now exposed. Do not try to cover it up again or make excuses. Do nothing and respond gently.

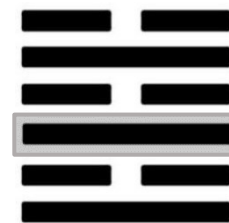
The exposure was necessary for the completion of a cycle in your life path. It is a point of new beginnings.

Third Line

Ancestor Wu Ding vanquishes the Guifang devils. It took three years to fully subdue them.

The unprincipled are inept at achieving such feats.

小 三 高 九
人 年 宗 三
勿 克 伐 ：



Expand your domain. Like Ancestor Wu Ding, it is a time for conquests.

After one conquest, another begins. The power accrued is so formidable that all oppositional forces are subdued.

In the matter at hand, the key to success is to call upon the greatest military and divinatory counsel you can, and that greatest counsel will come from one you may least expect.

Whom you keep as counsel is determinative of your likelihood of success. Surround yourself with people who support your ambitions.

If you are in the midst of an ambitious undertaking, give it three years' time for it to fully manifest as the victory you're seeking.

King Wu Ding and the Warrior Queen Fu Hao

The third line of Hexagram 63 references Emperor Wu Ding (1250–1192 BC) of the Shang dynasty, referred to as Ancestor Wu Ding. The specific name used in the statement is Gaozong 高宗, which is the temple name for King Wu Ding of the Shang.

Wu Ding led many military campaigns into foreign lands, such as the Yi, Qiang, and Ba kingdoms, to expand his dominion.

His favorite wife, Lady Fu Hao, was appointed a military general by Wu Ding, and who was also a high priestess. Lady Fu Hao led the oracle bone divinations for the court, an unusual privilege for a woman at the time. It would thus be highly unusual for a woman, a concubine, to be providing military or divinatory counsel.

Likewise, when the third line comes up in a reading, call upon an unusual person for service. You will find greater success in your endeavor that way. Do not go for the usual candidates.

Cultural Practice of Temple Names

The cultural practice of temple names is traced back to the Shang. A temple name was used posthumously in place of the ancestor's given name as a title of honor, and it was used during ancestor worship. King Wu Ding's temple name begins with the prefix “高” to indicate that he was a monarch being honored for a notable achievement. The highest honorific was the prefix “太” indicating the founder of a dynasty.

The “Guifang Devils”

The reference to the Guifang devils in the third line and later in Hexagram 64 in the fourth is a term used by the Shang to describe a clan that they often went to war with. They called that clan the Guifang, meaning “people of the devil lands.” The reference is to the historical wars fought between King Wu Ding of the Shang and the people from the region they called Guifang, the Devil Kingdom.¹ It took three years for the Shang to defeat Guifang.

¹ Yáng Shèngyǒng 楊勝勇, ed., *Military History of the Three Dynasties of China* 中國元古暨三代軍事史 (Beijing: 人民出版社 [People's Publishing House] Rénmín Chūbǎn Shè, 1994), vol. 3 of *The Hundred Volumes of the Complete History of China* 中國全史百卷本, 53.



Thus, “高宗伐鬼方” (Gāozōng fá Guǐ Fāng) translates to “Gaozong [Ancestor Wu Ding] defeats the Devil Territories.” When referring to people, it might be translated to the Guifang devils.

Using Hexagram 63 in Exorcism Rituals “Ancestor Gaozong Vanquishes the Demons”

高宗伐鬼方
高宗伐鬼方

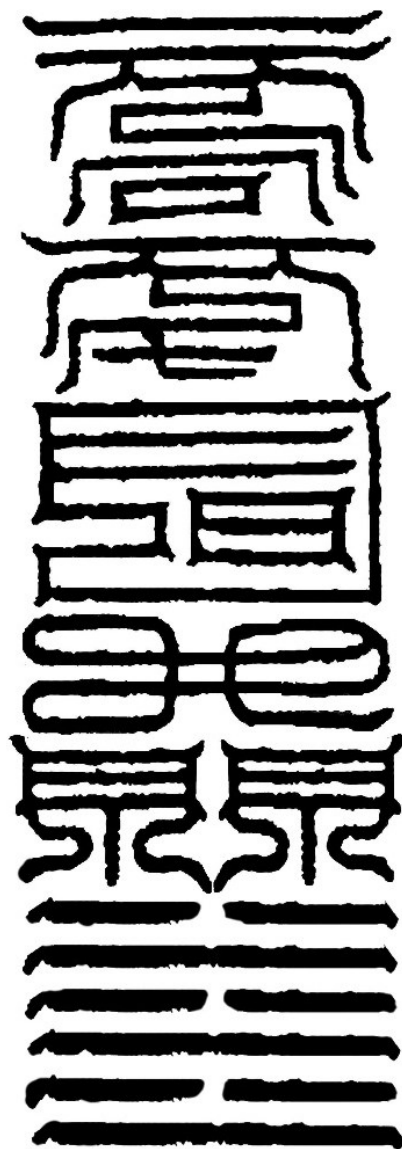
The word for vanquish “伐” (fá) used in the third line also happens to be a reference to the Three Stars, a constellation symbolic of the Three Stellar Gods that is often represented at the top of Taoist Fu talismans.²

Moreover, in Taoist traditions, martial arts and the military are connected to ritual magic and the mystical, such as the Lady of the Nine Heavens being a patron divinity that teaches both military strategy and occult practices.

Thus, the passage from the third line “高宗伐鬼方” can be repurposed and reinterpreted as “Ancestor Gaozong vanquishes the demon.” Repurposed, it becomes an incantation used for exorcising a ghost or demon.

A Fu talisman or sigil is crafted to petition Ancestor Gaozong. The incantation is recited in an exorcism ritual to call upon that ancestral power. The demon and exorcism connection continue when Thunder Rites are implied in the next reference to the “Guifang devils” in Hexagram 64, line 4.

The Western Han dynasty (221–207 BC) text *Interpretations and Incantations of Celestials in the Zhouyi* (周易乾鑿度, Zhōuyì qián záo dù) from the *Yi wěi* 易緯 noted that Hexagram 63, Ji Ji, could be used to subdue ghosts and demons.³ Thus, there is a long history and precedent for using Hexagram 63 in exorcism rituals.



² benebell wen, *The Tao of Craft: Fu Talismans and Casting Sigils in the Eastern Esoteric Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2016), 90–91.

³ “Interpretations and Incantations of Celestials in the Zhouyi (周易乾鑿度, Zhōuyì Qián Záo Dù),” Chinese Text Project, ed. Donald Sturgeon, accessed May 23, 2022, <https://ctext.org/data/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=659075>.

Fourth Line

**Fine silks become rags.
Take caution throughout the day.**

終 繻 六
日 有 四
戒 衣 ；
衲



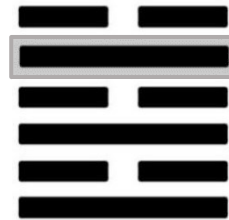
Every golden era must come to an end, and how it ends is dependent on the ruler. Here, “day” can be symbolic of an era or a chapter in your life path.

Although you are enjoying prosperity and good fortune, be cautious and stay modest. In spite of abundance, fruition, and a verdant, picturesque landscape in your current line of sight, there are elements of decay in the situation at hand.

Fifth Line

**The eastern neighbor slaughters oxen to
the gods.
And yet they do not receive the blessings
that the western neighbor receives.
The western neighbor need only make
small, simple sacrificial offerings.**

實 不 東 九
受 如 鄰 五
其 西 殺 ；
福 鄰 牛
之
禴
祭



When it comes to receiving favor from the Divine, the extravagance of your offerings does not matter. It is the sincerity of your heart and piety that matter more.

Happiness cannot be quantified. It is the quality that counts.

Ostentatious displays of your success will not bring joy.

Success in small, humble undertakings. Disappointments in extravagant ambitions.

The fifth line is a reference to the Shang practice of sacrificing animals to their gods and ancestors. They’re referred to as the eastern neighbor. Meanwhile the Zhou shifted the people away from animal sacrifice to what they deemed more civil forms of worship. The Zhou are the western neighbor.

Sixth Line

**A fox’s head gets wet.
Facing adversity and hardships.**

厲 濡 上
其 六
首 ；



A fox is crossing a stream, which the fox hoped would be shallow, but the actual depths result in the fox’s head getting wet. The obstacle faced is overwhelming.



Likewise, you've bitten off more than you can chew in your extravagant ambition for perfection. Perfection is the beginning of the defect.

The moral lesson of the sixth line position is to not strive to be the best, to not endeavor to outdo everyone else. Know your own limits. Ambition is encouraged, but it must be tempered with humility.

You might be in over your head.

Comparing Shang and Zhou Sacrificial Offerings

The Zhou dynasty marked a historic and enduring change to Chinese society, and one such shift was in the ritualized ways that gods were honored. The Shang were documented as engaging in human sacrifice to please their gods.⁴ The warrior queen Fu Hao led ceremonial rites involving human sacrifices and offerings of tiger heads.⁵ It is the Duke of Zhou who shifts the culture to a society of ritual and religious ceremony. Rather than use human sacrifice as the means to appeal to gods, the Zhou dynasty establishes the precedent of using rites, poetry, and songs.⁶

The Zhou venerated their gods and ancestors through ceremonies, poetry, and songs. Per the Book of Rites, a classical treatise dated to the Zhou dynasty on the rituals and etiquette of the Zhou, offerings to gods and ancestors could include cooked meals, incense, jade and precious stone tokens, and cups filled with spirits (alcohol).

⁴ For a rather gory example, during the Shang, as a sacrificial offering to the gods for rain, a female witch/shaman 女巫 (nǚ wū) would be stripped naked and violently burned under the scorching sun so that she would be rendered as red as possible, a form of offering called the Chì 赤. The hope was that the level of cruelty would cause the gods to mourn, cry a torrent of tears, and thus bring rain. From *Myths and Witchcraft of the Shang Dynasty* 商代的神話與巫術 by Chen Mengjia 陳夢家 (Yenching University: 燕京學報, 1936), 563-566.

⁵ "Shang Tomb of Fu Hao," A Visual Sourcebook of Chinese Civilization, edited by Patricia Buckley Ebrey, University of Washington, accessed May 14, 2022, <https://depts.washington.edu/chinaciv/archae/2fuhmain.htm>. Jacqueline Ball and Richard H. Levey, *Ancient China: Archaeology Unlocks the Secrets of China's Past* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2006): 22-23.

⁶ 陳鷺 (Chén Zhuó), Professor at Ocean University of China (中國海洋大學教授), January 8, 2021, 《法律讲堂》文史版系列节目《礼法印记》, CCTV, <https://tv.cctv.com/2021/01/08/ARTIK5IERLy9QDahKBLqa4bd210108.shtml>.