

The Ding or Sacred Vessel as the Symbol of Change

We tend to underestimate, indeed can hardly understand the immense creative shaping power of the mythological imagination and its capacity to produce dynamic models of complex realities. Levi-Strauss described this modeling capacity through the figure of the *bricoleur*, one who picks among the rubble of traditional images and symbols, re-arranging them until a quantum change occurs. The quantum change is what the ancient smiths described as the melting of the metals and their re-casting into a dynamic new form, portrayed in Figures 49 and 50, Revolution and Casting the Vessel: *Ge Tian Ming*, “abolishing the old and establishing the new.”



The Way to the Source is open. Vessel creates Success.

You are involved in a deep shift in the way we collectively imagine things. You need to see deeply into what this means. Do not act things out. Contain and transform your problems through symbolic awareness. Security and a new beginning will come from this. It is the origin of great good fortune and meaningful events.



50 The Vessel

The old character shows the vessel used for the sacred meal that joins spirits and humans and a head filled with spirit. This new paradigm develops from establishing and stabilizing the dwelling (37).

Circle of Meanings

A major paradigm shift symbolized as a cast bronze cauldron used for the sacred meal that unites spirits, ancestors and noble people; hold, contain, transform,

transmute through symbolic imagination; high divinations, new spiritual paradigm and sign of blessing; establish, found, consecrate, found a noble house and line; secure, precious, well-grounded. Heart Theme: 43 Decide and part from the past.

Myths for Change: The Story of the Time

Ding is a ritual vessel that signifies connection with the spirit world and the Ancestors as the foundation of a dynasty or noble house. It means divination, divinatory incantations and submitting a question to the oracle, as well as the right moment to act (*shi*). *Ding* is an emblem of power, an alchemical cauldron suggesting cooking in a literal and spiritual sense. It offers nourishment to the warriors and sages and the sage-mind in all of us, brightening the eye and ear. It suggests a destiny conferred by Heaven that is also a duty, becoming a true and responsible individual. The *Ding* has roots in Neolithic worship of the dead. A skillfully and magically crafted ritual tool that releases the spirit, it is a symbol for the oracle itself, the Change, a part of high culture. It nourishes the sage-mind and opens the world of myth and the omen-animals through the act of high divination and the rites at the Ancestral Temple that it sponsors. In ancient times Yu the Great received the metals from the Nine Provinces and the magical animal symbols (*xiang*) from the Shepherds of the people. He cast the first *Ding*-Vessels at the foot of *Jingshan*, a sacred mountain. The Vessels showed which spirits were beneficent spirits and which were noxious, what opened the Way and what closed it. They united all the provinces, connecting the Above and the Below in the Mandate of Heaven.

This is a Realizing Figure, a key site on the Sacred Sickness Pathways that connect personal disorders with cultural change. It acts as a Transition from our empowerment in ritual and culture to the stage of the Symbolic Life when we must deal with the proper exercise of power and our responsibilities to the human community.

A Word-Fantasy

The word *Ding* connects with the word *xiang*, which means both a symbol and a sacrifice, a term used exclusively in Yi-divination. It also connects with *heng*, to fix or endure, to ripen or bring to maturity, success through a sacrifice, and the word *peng*, to cook or boil. *Ding* or Vessel is the symbol of a transformation or transmutation, a passage from one level to another, the transformation of the solid into the subtle body. It links a sacrificial offering – the *xiang* or symbolic sacrifice – with words that penetrate or pass through to the world of the spirits, connecting the act of divination with the sacred meal and the cult of the ancestors. It gives the ancestors the “subtle influences” that nourish them, thus connecting Heaven and Earth through the founding of a noble line. The *Ding* is the most refined expression of the two pillars of its culture, ancestral cult and the sacred meal, the passage from the raw to the cooked. It rectifies a situation,

settles a question, makes things stable, founds and establishes a real base. It sends messages that make us present in the invisible world.

The word also suggests the mound altars, temple enclosures and viewing towers where offerings and divinations were made that ensured benevolence of the spirits. It means to feast or enjoy, the enjoyment derived from divination, when the sacrifice is received and accepted. It is a beautiful gathering in a sacred place, a union in ritual, gathering with the ancestors and enjoying their blessings, an influence that extends to all the people. It collects images of fertility that culminate in jade, the essence of the blood transformed to a precious stone.

The Vessel opens the Way of the Realizing Person and is the vehicle through which this Way is accomplished and spread. In the Matrix it connects a primal experience of the spirit with the building pressures that lead to its emergence as a new order. It exchanges influence with 31:32 (Spirit influx at the Sacred Site and Fixing the Omen that is given) and is driven by 13:14 (Harmonizing the People and the Great Being that emerges). Center and threshold lines connect the theme and process with 17:18 (Following the Spirit to Renovate the Ancestral Images); 43:44 (Announcing the Omen and the entrance of the Lady of Fates); 55:56 (The New King who receives the Mandate and the Wandering Sage who circulates it through the Shadow Lands); and 63:64 (Burning Water and the final Crossings of the river of life and death).

When we actually look at a *Ding*, we see circles of Dream Animals dancing around and through the Vessel, all the omen animals carrying the message engraved in its center to the other world, nourishing the ancestors and establishing our presence there. We might think of Jung's famous reading when the Yi spoke of itself through the image of the vessel as a symbol of the sacred meal, high culture, a new paradigm and the place of divination in establishing it. We are the substance cooking in the Ding through the continual act and process of divination that transforms our everyday concerns.