

人間之魅—— 漢唐之間「精魅」故事析論

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中國傳統社會所認知或建構的「鬼神世界」（或是所謂的「超自然世界」）中，除了有大家所習知的「天神」、「地祇」、「人鬼」之外，其實還有所謂的「魅」。而透過相關「語詞」的分析，我們發現，中國傳統社會對於「魅」的種種認知和觀念，基本上在先秦時期便已萌芽，到了兩漢時期，則更形成熟。三組最基本的概念和詞彙，亦即「魑魅」、「鬼魅」和「精魅」（老魅、物魅），也在這個時期出現，其意涵也大致確立。

基本上，「魅」是指某種「物怪」（非人類）；是罕見、神祕、怪異之「物」，而且是會帶來禍害、迷惑、疾病、災難、煩擾的「妖物」、「凶物」。不過，這三組概念，相互之間，也有一些明顯的差異，其中，最主要的有二點：

第一是關於魅的出沒之地。「魑魅」最早是在「異域」、「遠方」，後來則進入「中國」的山林川澤之地。「鬼魅」似乎也在荒遠、偏僻之處活動。但「精魅」則遍及各地，山林、原野、都市、鄉村、家室都有其形蹤。

第二是關於魅的形體。「魑魅」是有特定形體的「生物」，其形大都是動物（獸形）或人獸合體。「鬼魅」則是「無形」或能「隱形」之物，無特定形體可言。至於「精魅」則千變萬化，萬「物」（包括人）都能變成精魅，早期的觀念是以物化為「人形」為主，但後來則認為萬物之間都有可能互相轉化其形，而且能隱能見。這種差異，不僅僅是語詞之間在語義上的分殊，尚且牽涉到時代觀念的變遷。換句話說，大約到了東漢中晚期（西元第二世紀）以後，「精魅」的概念逐漸成為中國傳統社會對於魅的主流看法。

至於精魅是在什麼樣的情境下現形或變化，精魅如何侵擾或危害人類，什麼樣的「物」才會成為精魅這一類的問題，中國傳統文獻似乎從東漢末年開始才逐漸有比較具體的論述。因此，本文便以漢唐之際的「精魅」「故事」為主要根據，探討當時人如何建構「魅」的新形象。

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透過四十一則「精魅」故事的分析，我們發現，當時人認為，無論男女老少、貧富貴賤、士農工商，任何人隨時隨地都可能和精魅有所遭逢。精魅的原形則包括野生的獸類（狐、狸、鹿等）、蛇類、昆蟲（蚱蜢、蠍子）、水域的動物（鼉、龜、黿、鼈、獺、鯉魚等）、植物（大樹）、家中的牲畜（豬、雞、犬等）和日常用品（枕、屐等），幾乎任何有生命或無生命的「物」都可能因年代久遠或特質的稟賦、情境而變化成「魅」。甚至連「死人」也能化為「魅」。不過，仍以野生的動物佔絕大多數。

絕大多數精魅都可以變化成人形，甚至假冒某人所熟悉的親屬、配偶，但也有一些只能隱形而具有人的語言、飲食能力，或是具有人形但欠缺完整的人類器官。而無論精魅的原形與變形是什麼，和精魅遭逢之人，有一些毫髮未傷；有一些只受到輕微的驚嚇、迷惑或干擾；有一些會被截斷頭髮；有一些會受到魅惑而和精魅交歡，男性有時會因此「失精」而亡，女性則大多會因此生病，一般稱之為「病邪」、「魅病」。不過，也有一些男子和精魅產生「一夜情」，或是和它們寢處數月、數年之久，甚至讓精魅懷孕產子，本身卻不會受到任何損傷。事實上，在當時人的觀念中，人和仙、神、鬼也都可以有異性、異類之間的婚戀、性愛關係。

同時，他們也相信，即使精魅隨時隨地都可能現身害人，但是，一般人都可以使用一些尋常之「物」（如鏡子、火、犬、刀劍），令精魅現出原形或加以捕殺、逐離。此外，也可以向巫覡、術士、道士、僧人尋求救助，他們可以使用更複雜的法術（如卜筮、厭勝、符咒等）診察魅的原形並加以誅除。若被魅所害而生病，也可以尋求醫者的療治。

因此，純粹就精魅觀念來看，當時人對於「人外」(extra-human) 的世界顯得比前人更加恐懼，對於自己的感官經驗和其所及的世界也更欠缺自信。他們害怕一切陌生的、遙遠的異域、異物和異類，也懷疑所有熟悉的、周遭的人和物。換句話說，在他們的心靈中，任何生物和無生物都可能變成精魅，任何人都可能是精魅的化身。精魅與物怪所帶來的傷害不再只存在於荒野的山林和陌生的水域，危險的時刻也不再只限於昏暗和黑夜的場合。這種變化，或許可以稱之為精魅或凶惡的「人間化」或日常生活化。

不過，當時人面對這樣的精魅世界，也建構出一套防衛和對抗機制。他們相信，人的力量還是大於精魅，只需一些尋常的器物和方法就可以應付精魅，而且，各個宗教也提供了一些除魅之道，可以救助逢魅之人。因此，有些精魅不僅不曾對人造成任何傷害，反遭人類殺害。換句話說，精魅的世界也許變得比以前更恐怖，但人的武裝也比以前更精進，足以應付新的挑戰，可以馴服生活中的精魅。

關鍵詞：鬼神 宗教 魅 妖怪 故事

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Spirits among Humans: Tales of *Jingmei* (Fairies) in Early Medieval China

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Traditional Chinese society constructed a “spiritual” or “supernatural” world made up of “Heavenly Gods,” “Spirits of the Earth,” and “Human Ghosts.” In addition to these beings were also the so-called *mei* 魅, which are somewhat similar to the fairies or monsters in Western civilization. This philological study of terms associated with *mei* reveals that the notion of *mei* can be traced to pre-Qin 秦 China (pre-221 BC). Three basic terms referring to these beings emerged during the Han Dynasty (202 BC-AD 220), namely *chimei* 魑魅 (monster), *guimei* 鬼魅 (ghostly monster) and *jingmei* 精魅 (fairy), and it was during the Han Dynasty that the meanings of these terms reached maturity and became more firmly established.

Basically, *mei* refers to a type of non-human monstrous creature; Regarded as “goblins” or “demons” that brought about accidents, confusion, illness, disasters, and disruption, these “beings” were seen as rare, mysterious, and strange. Yet the three concepts of *chimei*, *guimei*, and *jingmei* clearly differ.

Among these distinctions, two stand out as the most significant: first, the places in which the *mei* appeared, and second, the physical form that the *mei* adopted. *Chimei* were originally thought to have existed in “foreign lands” or “remote places,” and it was only later that they entered the mountains and rivers of “China” proper. *Guimei* seemed to linger in wild and remote places. *Jingmei*, however, were scattered about everywhere and could be found in forests, fields, cities, villages, and houses.

These three types of *mei* also took on different physical forms. *Chimei* were “creatures” with particular forms, mostly those of animals or creatures that were half-human and half-beast. *Guimei* were “invisible” beings or beings capable of remaining “invisible” without adopting a particular physical shape. *Jingmei* could assume all kinds of forms. Every “being” (including humans) could be transformed into *jingmei*. In early China it was believed that non-human beings could take on human form, but later it was thought that every “being” could assume any other form and could be visible or invisible. This

difference is not merely semantic but relates to the evolution of the very concept of *mei*. In China after the second century, the term *mei* gradually came to be used primarily to mean *jingmei*.

Only after the second century do traditional Chinese documents present more concrete descriptions of the circumstances under which *jingmei* revealed their original form or changed their form, of how they attacked or endangered humans, and of the types of “beings” that could become *jingmei*. This article intends to explore how people in early medieval China constructed this new image of *mei* based principally on the tales of *jingmei*.

Through an analysis of 41 *jingmei* tales, we discovered that in the Six Dynasties (3rd-6th centuries), people believed that anyone could encounter *jingmei* anywhere and at any time, regardless of gender, age, social class, and occupation. *Jingmei*'s original physical forms included wild beasts (foxes, wild cats and deer etc.), snakes, insects (grasshoppers, scorpions), aquatic creatures (water lizards, turtles, otters, carp etc.), plants (large trees), domestic animals (pigs, chicken and dogs etc.) and commonly used objects (pillows and wooden shoes). Any living or lifeless “being” could be transformed into *jingmei* under certain circumstances because of their age-old existence or natural talents. Even the dead could transform themselves into *jingmei*. The majority of *jingmei*, however, took the form of wild animals.

Most *jingmei* could transform into humans, and even assume the identity of a relative or partner. Some remained invisible, or could only speak a human language and eat like humans; others had human form but lacked certain body parts.

Some people who encountered *jingmei* were left entirely unharmed. Others were only frightened, confused or harassed. Some victims, however, had their hair chopped off, and others were lured into having sex with *jingmei*. In some cases men died because of “the loss of sperm.” Most women fell ill with what was generally called a “demonic illness” or a “fairy illness.” However, some men had “one-night stands” with *jingmei*, or slept with them for several months or years, and *jingmei* even became pregnant and had babies. According to the stories, they seemed to have been left unharmed. It is worth noting that in the Six Dynasties, people believed that humans could have loving or sexual relationships with *jingmei*, gods, or ghosts who were members of the opposite sex or of a different species.

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At the same time, however, *jingmei* also induced much fear, since people believed that *jingmei* could appear anywhere and at any time to harm humans. Luckily, ordinary people could use some commonly found objects—such as mirrors, fire, dogs, knives and swords—to force the spirits reveal their original forms, and exorcise and kill them. In addition, people could also seek the help of spiritual sources such as occult art practitioners, Taoist priests, or Buddhist monks. These spiritual experts could then employ more complicated occult arts—such as divination and incantations—to determine the original forms of the *jingmei* and kill them. If people were harmed by *jingmei* and became sick, they could go to see doctors for therapy.

An examination of the conception of *jingmei* in early medieval China reveals broader cultural and historical significance. People in early medieval China seemed to have a greater fear of the “extra-human” world when compared with their predecessors. They lacked confidence in their sensory experience and the world they encountered. They feared all strange and remote places, different beings, and different species. They also lived in doubt of their acquaintances and the objects around them: They believed that any living creature or lifeless being could transform into *jingmei* in human form. Unpredictability in everyday life increased since the threat of encountering *jingmei* could no longer be clearly delineated: *Jingmei* no longer only lurked in wild forests and strange waters, and moments of danger were no longer limited to darkness, dusk, and dawn. This change may perhaps be termed the “humanization” or “normalization” of the concept of *jingmei*.

Facing the world of *jingmei*, people in the Six Dynasties nevertheless constructed mechanisms to defend against and resist the interference of *jingmei*. They believed that the power which humans wielded was greater than that of the *jingmei*, and that by implementing commonly used objects and methods, *jingmei* could be driven away, exorcised, or eliminated. Moreover, *jingmei* could also be eliminated by religious means. Consequently, some *jingmei* which had never harmed people were killed by humans. Literary sources from early medieval China indicate that people believed that the unpredictability of encountering *jingmei* had rendered the world more ominous than in the past. However, equipped with more advanced weapons, they remained optimistic that they could meet these new challenges and keep *jingmei* at bay.

Keywords: spirits, *jingmei* (fairies), *mei*, monster, tales