Divination, Fate Manipulation and Protective Knowledge In and Around "The Wedding of the Duke of Zhou and Peach Blossom Girl", a Popular Myth of Late Imperial China

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Abstract: This chapter focuses on the depiction of mantic arts and fate in the popular late imperial popular myth The Wedding of the Duke of Zhou and the Peach Blossom Girl. After discussing the role of divination in vernacular (tongsu) narratives in general, it turns toward the particular plot that pits the magician Peach Blossom Girl (Taohua nü) against a diviner named Zhongong, 'Duke of Zhou', a reference to one of the most eminent and respected figure of Chinese culture. Peach Blossom Girl allows several people doomed to die by Zhongong to escape with their life. Angered and humiliated, Zhongong decides to get rid of his young opponent by asking her to marry into his household: he has secretly used beforehand all his divining science to choose the most inauspicious day and directions of space for the bridal cortege, hoping for Peach Blossom to fatefully perish. The girl, however, not only succeeds in avoiding the deadly trap, but eventually further humiliates and defeats Zhongong. In the end, both opponents resume their rightful place in the pantheon of divination deities as complementary figures impersonating yin-yang. By showing a lowly girl able to ward off and defeat an eminent diviner at every point of their struggle, reversing in the process what seemed to be fated deaths, the story turns cultural hierarchies on their head, and calls into question the immutable nature of fate. The editorial history of the tale also shows us that it was sometimes assimilated to therapeutical or exorcistic treatises, proving how vernacular narratives where used in late imperial China to expand and strengthen "serious" religious or therapeutic knowledge.

Keywords: divination, fate, magic, medicine, Chinese vernacular novels, Chinese theater, myth, folklore

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The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh attend the wedding of Alexandra Knatchbull and Thomas Hooper today at Romsey Abbey. Th Queen, wearing a peach floral dress and coat, waves as she enters Romsey Abbey this morning accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh. Prince Charles grips the hand of bride-to-be Alexandra Knatchbull as he leads her into Romsey Abbey prior to her wedding today. It is smiles all around for the happy couple Alexandra Knatchbull and Thomas Hooper as they lean in for a kiss after their wedding. Alexandra Knatchbull and Thomas Hooper enjoy a kiss as newlyweds after they get married at Romsey Abbey in Hampshire today. The imperial examination was a civil service examination system in Imperial China designed to select the best potential candidates to serve as administrative officials, for the purpose of recruiting them for the state’s bureaucracy. With the avowed purpose of testing and selecting candidates for merit, the examination system markedly influenced various aspects of society and culture in Imperial China, including Chinese mythology. The Duke of Zhou made a divination when selecting an ideal place for the eastern stronghold Chengzhou, the eventual Luoyang, Henan. Yet suggestions for policy making might come from all levels of the nobility and even from commoners, as the Shiji (4 Zhou benji) alleges. Such from the ranks of functionaries were common. Ji Gong Moufu (a posthumous honorific name actually meaning “counsellor-father”), for instance, voted against King Mu’s war against the Quanrong tribes. Rui Liangfu and the Duke of Shao criticized the military plans of King Li (r. 878-841).