

A Comparative Study on the Image of Foxes in *Taiping Guangji* and *Konjaku Monogatarishu*

TONG Peiran

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

Foxes are highly representative supernatural entities in Sino-Japanese classical literature. This paper compares fox imagery in the Chinese *Taiping Guangji* and the Japanese *Konjaku Monogatarishu* to examine how both traditions depict otherworldly entities across three dimensions: inter-species romance, human-fox conflicts, and the construction of divinity. In *Taiping Guangji*, foxes are highly anthropomorphized and socialized; they mirror patriarchal ethics and integrate into secular bureaucracies. Conversely, foxes in *Konjaku Monogatarishu* retain their animalistic instincts on the margins of human society, often functioning as mediums to demonstrate Buddhist karmic retribution or highlight human dominance. This comparative analysis elucidates the distinct narrative trajectories of fox tales in China and Japan, enriching the cross-cultural study of otherworldly literature.

Keywords: *Taiping Guangji*, *Konjaku Monogatarishu*, fox imagery, Sino-Japanese comparison

Introduction

Foxes serve as a prominent otherworldly motif in Sino-Japanese classical literature. As vital repositories for these narratives, *Taiping Guangji* and *Konjaku Monogatarishu* share thematic frameworks like inter-species romance and supernatural trickery, yet diverge significantly in their narrative trajectories and degrees of anthropomorphism.

Extensive research in both Chinese and Japanese academia has explored the imagery of fox spirits within these anthologies. Focusing on *Taiping Guangji*, Hua Yan and Song Wenjing (2013) argue that the mid-Tang literati's shifting romantic pursuits prompted a transformation in the fox's traditional seductive image, driving a definitive transition from bestiality to humanity. Conversely, Yang Jun (2014) and Fu Zexi (2024) observe that foxes in *Konjaku Monogatarishu* lack this profound humanity, instead retaining strong animalistic instincts. Expanding on the Japanese context, Nakagawa Hazuki (2016) clarifies that the early emergence of the Japanese fox spirit was not driven by the introduction of Buddhism, but rather shaped by Chinese influences and the adaptation of indigenous folktales. Finally, from a cross-textual perspective, Zheng Yiming (2020) emphasizes that Chinese narratives of human-fox romance are primarily dictated by Confucian ideology and the literati's psychological projections.

This paper aims to contribute to this field by taking three dimensions—inter-species romance, human-fox conflicts, and the divinity of foxes—as analytical entry points. It examines the differentiated portrayals of similar fox tales in the two anthologies, aiming to uncover the underlying patriarchal ethics, concepts of power hierarchy, and religious and cultural backdrops of ancient Chinese and Japanese societies that they reflect.

Inter-species Romance

Stories of foxes transforming into humans are ubiquitous in both *Taiping Guangji* and *Konjaku Monogatarishu*. This section focuses on cross-species emotional bonds, examining the different aspirations and choices made by Chinese and Japanese fox-women when confronted with human families.

Inter-species Romance in *Taiping Guangji*

In the fox tales of *Taiping Guangji*, foxes often shed their bestial nature, striving for a personality that aligns with human moral and ethical codes in both behavioral logic and ideological realms. The narrative focus often centers on how foxes diligently play the role of “virtuous wives and good mothers” within human society, becoming concrete vessels for human joys, sorrows, and moral ethics.

This is exemplified in the tale of “Ji Zhen”¹. The fox-woman, Lady Li, marries Ji Zhen, living together for 20 years and bearing nine children. The core of the story lies in Lady Li’s genuine emotional expression on her deathbed. She pleads:

I have served you for twenty years without committing the slightest offense... I only hope that for the sake of our young children, you do not harbor hatred toward my withered bones, but allow my body to remain intact and be buried in the earth.

Her dying words contain only a profound attachment to her earthly family and deep concern for her children. Following her death, Ji Zhen “deeply mourned her, and conducted her funeral rites entirely in accordance with human customs”, and ultimately “bore no malice” toward her. The fox’s inner self has become completely “ethicized” and “humanized”, yet her physical body is doomed to remain shackled to her nature.

Similarly, in “Ren Shi”², the fox-woman Ren is molded into a paragon of moral and ethical practice. Faced with the violent coercion of the powerful aristocrat Wei Yin, Ren chooses to resist using human moral standards. With words blending emotion and reason, she not only protects herself but also reproaches and educates her aggressor. Furthermore, Ren remains unswervingly loyal to the impoverished and cowardly husband Zheng Liu, using her intellect to generate wealth for him. This steadfastness of “not changing one’s heart due to wealth or poverty” forms a sharp and ironic contrast to the prevailing social ethos of currying favor with the rich and powerful. The author, Shen Jiji, directly exalts Ren as a moral benchmark: “Facing violence without losing her chastity, and devoting herself to another unto death—even among women of today, there are those who cannot match her”. Even the emotions of animals can align with human morality. The well-rounded portrayal of Ren adds elements of tenacity, wit, and unwavering fidelity to the public’s perception of foxes, moving beyond mere lewdness and seduction.

¹ “Ji Zhen” (计真), in *Taiping Guangji* (Extensive Records of the Taiping Era), Vol. 453, Foxes VIII.

² “Ren Shi” (任氏) [The Story of Lady Ren], in *Taiping Guangji* (Extensive Records of the Taiping Era), Vol. 452, Foxes VI.

Moreover, foxes demonstrate a strong obsession with their human families. For instance, in “Li Nun”³, the ghost of a deceased fox returns not to haunt, but to condemn her former husband’s new wife (Lady Xiao) and demand that he fulfill his duty of raising their child. It is evident that in the tales of *Taiping Guangji*, foxes have completely integrated into the family and patriarchal order.

The inter-species romance tales in *Taiping Guangji*, the authors use nonhuman bodies to bear worldly joys and sorrows, employing the foxes’ devotion to satirize the fickleness of humans. Precisely because of their “nonhuman” label, the love, hatred, and partings these foxes experience as they cross class and species boundaries possess a more moving power than ordinary human tragedies.

Inter-species Romance in *Konjaku Monogatarishu*

Unions between humans and foxes in *Konjaku Monogatarishu* are often quite brief, and the fox-women’s motives largely stem from their primal nature. As Japanese scholar Nakamura Teiri points out in *Kitsune no Nihonshi* (A Japanese History of Foxes) (2017, p. 32), the foxes in *Konjaku Monogatarishu* lack divine majesty and often make no secret of their inherent weakness compared to humans. Although their purpose in transforming into women to approach men leans toward malice, it is not absolute. When faced with exposure or conflict, foxes frequently flee in panic (such as escaping by urinating) and rarely pose a fatal threat to humans.

In “The Tale of the Man Who Copied the Lotus Sutra to Save a Dead Yakan”,⁴ a fox-woman, knowing it would cost her life, still transforms into a beautiful woman to seduce a man she desires in front of the Suzaku Gate. The fox-woman in *Konjaku* appeals for religious salvation from the cycle of life and death following their intimacy: “It is certain that I will lose my life in your stead. Since this is so, please copy and offer the Lotus Sutra on my behalf to seek my salvation in the afterlife”. In the story’s conclusion, the man fulfills his promise by copying the scripture, enabling the fox-woman to be reborn in the Trayastrimsa heaven. This narrative device demonstrates that in Japanese Setsuwa literature, the ultimate destination for foxes is not the secular “family”, but the Buddhist “other shore” (Nirvana). The demise of the fox is intended to showcase the cross-species saving power of the Lotus Sutra; here, the fox acts as a “medium” for achieving religious merit and propagating doctrine.

Furthermore, when dealing with plots where foxes disguise themselves as human wives, *Konjaku Monogatarishu* often unabashedly reveals their vulgar bestial nature to draw a clear line between humans and monsters. For example, in “The Tale of the Fox Who Took the Form of a Man’s Wife and Came to His House”,⁵ a fox transforms into an exact replica of the man’s original wife and sneaks into his home. When the husband grows suspicious, draws his sword, and seizes her, “the wife suddenly expelled incredibly foul-smelling urine... and fled away yelping”.

Divergences in Inter-species Romance Narratives

In *Taiping Guangji*, foxes act as practitioners of human morality and ethics. The anthropomorphism of the fox is based on an identification with the traditional feudal patriarchal system and Confucian moral principles.

³ “Li Nun” (李 Nun), in *Taiping Guangji* (Extensive Records of the Taiping Era), Vol. 449, Foxes V.

⁴ “I Sukute Yakan Shisu Hokke o Utsusu Hito no Katarai” (為救野干死写法華人語) [The Tale of the Man Who Copied the Lotus Sutra to Save a Dead Yakan], in *Konjaku Monogatarishu* (Anthology of Tales From the Past), Vol. 14, Tale 5.

⁵ “Kitsune, Hito no Tsuma no Katachi ni Henzite Ie ni Kitaru Katarai” (狐、変人妻形来家語) [The Tale of the Fox Who Took the Form of a Man’s Wife and Came to His House], in *Konjaku Monogatarishu* (Anthology of Tales From the Past), Vol. 27, Tale 39.

Foxes play the roles of “virtuous wives and good mothers” within the family, sometimes even surpassing ordinary humans in their morality. The more a fox desires to completely integrate into the civilized order of humanity, the more the love, hatred, and separation it experiences across class and species boundaries provoke readers’ reflections on human nature and destiny. At this point, the fox is no longer merely a spirit; it becomes a concrete vessel bearing worldly joys and sorrows.

Conversely, human-fox unions in *Konjaku Monogatarishu* appear more primitive and transient, with the stories maintaining an insurmountable boundary between humans and natural otherworldly beings. The foxes in these tales are stripped of social and ethical attributes; their motives for approaching humans often stem from pure biological instinct and lust. When facing crises, the narratives unabashedly display the foxes’ coarse bestial nature after shedding their disguises. Such descriptions dispel the mystery and threat of traditional demons, heavily emphasizing the superior position humans occupy when confronting otherworldly creatures of nature.

Within the framework of “inter-species romance”, the core of *Taiping Guangji* gravitates toward the internal patriarchal ethics of human society, utilizing animal imagery as a mirror to reflect complex human nature and social realities. In contrast, *Konjaku Monogatarishu* retains the fox’s “bestiality”, depicting human-fox entanglements to manifest Buddhist magical power or to emphasize the fundamental divergence between humans and supernatural entities. This divergence illustrates the starkly different cultural psychologies and philosophical undertones of the two texts when handling otherworldly literary figures.

Human-Fox Conflicts

When foxes emerge as malicious entities clashing with humans, their representations in *Taiping Guangji* and *Konjaku Monogatarishu* are completely different. This section analyzes the power dynamics and narrative tension within these human-fox conflicts.

Human-Fox Conflicts in *Taiping Guangji*

In the fox tales recorded in *Taiping Guangji*, foxes possess extremely high intelligence, and their haunting and trickery are often destructive. They enter human lives in the form of traditional monsters, challenging and mocking human dignity, culture, and even authority.

In “Xue Kui”⁶, hounds are tools domesticated by humans to guard against and hunt foxes. The Xue family specifically borrows fierce dogs to prevent fox intrusions. Faced with human attempts to drive them away, the foxes show no fear. Instead, they use the hunting dogs as mounts, blatantly imitating the aristocratic game of polo from the Tang Dynasty. This absurd scenario illustrates the foxes’ provocation of human order.

In “Tang Canjun”⁷, the fox Zhao Menfu sits in a cherry tree in a human courtyard, eating cherries while verbally mocking Tang Canjun. When Tang Canjun spends a fortune hiring monks to set up an altar to catch the fox, the fox uses magic to transform. Upon the monks’ arrival, “Suddenly, five-colored clouds came from the west, arriving directly before Tang’s hall. Within sat a Buddha, dignified in appearance”. The fox accurately exploits the human psychology of revering deities and believing in Buddhism, seizing the opportunity to force the

⁶ “Xue Kui” (薛葵), in *Taiping Guangji* (Extensive Records of the Taiping Era), Vol. 453, Foxes VIII.

⁷ “Tang Canjun” (唐参军) [Military Administrator Tang], in *Taiping Guangji* (Extensive Records of the Taiping Era), Vol. 449, Foxes IV.

monks to break their vows by eating meat, easily playing humans and their religious precepts in the palm of its hand.

The foxes in *Taiping Guangji* also transgress the patriarchal ethics of traditional human society. In “Yan Jian”⁸, a fox infiltrates a human home, occupies the coffin of Yan Jian’s uncle, and, pretending to be the deceased, forbids the family from mourning. Simultaneously, it issues an eviction order to the nephew, Yan Jian, who is a court official. Finding themselves at a disadvantage in terms of intellect and cunning, humans tend to resort to exterminating the otherworldly beings as their form of counterattack. Once human dignity is provoked, humans will counterattack to defend their rights, thereby restoring normal social order and ensuring the peace of human life.

Human-Fox Conflicts in *Konjaku Monogatarishu*

When examining the concept of foxes in *Konjaku Monogatarishu*, Nakamura Teiri points out: “Even when foxes are recognized as possessing divinity or spiritual power, they lack majesty. They often make no secret of the fact that they are the weaker party compared to humans” (2017, p. 32).

In *Konjaku Monogatarishu*, the foxes’ haunting methods rely on brief illusions. These illusions, based on the natural environment, appear bizarre but are actually exceedingly fragile in the face of absolute human martial force. In “The Tale of the Fox Who Took the Form of a Woman and Met Harima no Yasutaka”⁹, the imperial guard Harima no Yasutaka unexpectedly encounters a fox attempting to seduce him with its beauty at the Banquet Pine Grove. When Yasutaka senses something is wrong and draws his sword, the fox, unlike those in *Taiping Guangji* that use treacherous magic and intellect to contend with humans, mercilessly sheds its mysterious monstrous disguise. Faced with a blade, the fox regresses from a human form to a beast relying on spraying foul excrement to survive. This extremely pathetic method of escape erases the oppressive terror that a demon should possess, downgrading its haunting behavior to a harmless farce.

Simultaneously, by depicting the psychological activities of the human warrior Yasutaka, the tale demonstrates the absolute superiority of humans in the conflict. After the fox fled, Yasutaka did not feel residual fear from encountering a monster; instead, he felt annoyance and regret: “I didn’t kill it because I thought it was human. If I had known it was a fox, I definitely would have killed it”.

Power Dynamics in Human-Fox Conflicts

Through the above examination of human-fox conflict plots, it becomes evident that *Taiping Guangji* and *Konjaku Monogatarishu* display different power contrasts when constructing these encounters.

In *Taiping Guangji*, the human-fox conflict is a contest between survival order and civilizational orthodoxy. The fox spirits in the stories possess extremely high intelligence and magical power. Not only can they easily toy with humans, but they also openly provoke human patriarchal etiquette and social authority. In this power dynamic, humans are at a disadvantage in battles of wits and confrontations. Therefore, the humans in *Taiping Guangji* must rely on profound Taoist magic or mobilize massive manpower and weaponry to exterminate the

⁸ “Yan Jian” (嚴諫), in *Taiping Guangji* (Extensive Records of the Taiping Era), Vol. 449, Foxes IV.

⁹ “Kitsune, Onna no Katachi ni Henzite Harima no Yasutaka ni Au Katarai” (狐変女形値播磨安高語) [The Tale of the Fox Who Took the Form of a Woman and Met Harima no Yasutaka], in *Konjaku Monogatarishu* (Anthology of Tales From the Past), Vol. 27, Tale 38.

evil spirits and restore normality. The foxes in *Taiping Guangji* are molded as challengers to the human social order.

In contrast, human-fox conflicts in *Konjaku Monogatarishu* manifest as a unidirectional suppression of otherworldly beings by humans. The text objectively removes the majesty and oppression of the fox spirit as a mysterious entity, downgrading it to a weakling capable only of relying on brief illusions or regressing to biological survival instincts in times of crisis. In such narratives, the haunting of foxes no longer poses a substantive threat to human social ethics and survival; it resembles a blustering farce. For example, Yasutaka's reaction to the fleeing fox is filled with the regret and confidence of "I would have easily killed it if I had known".

In *Taiping Guangji*, humans are always in a passive position during conflicts; the fox spirit is an amalgam of social anxiety, conflicts, and contradictions. However, in *Konjaku Monogatarishu*, the narrative grants humans absolute power overriding otherworldly beings, turning the human-fox dynamic from a life-and-death struggle into an avenue for humans (especially the rising Japanese samurai class) to manifest their martial valor.

The Divinity of Foxes

This section focuses on the divinity of foxes within the texts, tracing the logic of power construction for foxes in the two countries.

The Divinity of Foxes in *Taiping Guangji*

In the concepts presented by *Taiping Guangji*, the system of foxes is set against the backdrop of the Daoist immortal pantheon.

This system is built upon a clear "promotion mechanism". Volume 447 of *Taiping Guangji* opens by quoting the *Xuanzhongji* (Record of Mysteries): "At fifty years of age, a fox can transform into a woman. At a hundred, it becomes a beautiful maiden or a divine medium... At a thousand years, it communicates with heaven and becomes a celestial fox".¹⁰ This indicates the logic that Chinese fox spirits can attain divine status by "accumulating seniority" over long periods, a process identical to promotion within the human bureaucratic system.

Within this system, internal class divisions have emerged among the fox clan. In "Tang Canjun"¹¹, the fox spirit Zhao Menfu arrogantly declares the class disparity between himself and humans: "Although we are both foxes, I am a thousand years old. Foxes of a thousand years take the surnames Zhao and Zhang. Foxes of five hundred years take the surnames Bai and Kang". This privilege of being granted specific "surnames" based on years of cultivation illustrates that fox spirits have broken away from the disordered state of natural beasts, constructing a social hierarchy akin to human aristocratic clans. Meanwhile, high-ranking fox spirits absorb human culture. For instance, the fox spirit in Li Yuangong¹² is not only hired to teach humans "classics and history", but can also play *Guangling San*, a musical piece representing the highest refined taste of literati, putting on the grand airs of an orthodox intellectual elite.

¹⁰ "Shuo Hu" (说狐) [On Foxes], in *Taiping Guangji* (Extensive Records of the Taiping Era), Vol. 447, Foxes I.

¹¹ "Tang Canjun" (唐参军) [Military Administrator Tang], in *Taiping Guangji* (Extensive Records of the Taiping Era), Vol. 450, Foxes IV.

¹² "Li Yuangong" (李元恭), in *Taiping Guangji* (Extensive Records of the Taiping Era), Vol. 449, Foxes III.

Precisely because they possess a promotion mechanism, aristocratic classes, and profound cultural capital, it seems perfectly logical for Chinese fox spirits to hold actual power within the bureaucratic system. In “Li Lingxu”¹³, the fox spirit Hu Xuan openly serves as the “Provincial Governor of Yuzhou” in the human realm, and women of his clan are even “matched by the Heavenly Emperor to be the wife of General Heavenly Wolf”; his maidservant Jinhua can even mobilize three hundred “celestial soldiers” at any time to execute bandits. Even in “Zhangsun Wuji”¹⁴, when humans attempt to use deities to execute a haunting fox spirit, the Gods of the Five Sacred Mountains render the verdict: “Five strokes here equate to five hundred in the human realm, which is by no means a light punishment. Because the Heavenly Bureaucracy employs these beings, they must not be killed”. Due to their status of being “employed by the Heavenly Bureaucracy”, fox spirits even gain the privilege of exemption from the death penalty. The fox spirits in *Taiping Guangji*, relying on this “immortal bureaucratic genealogy”, possess a condescending majesty and confidence when facing humans.

The Divinity of Foxes in *Konjaku Monogatarishu*

Konjaku Monogatarishu displays a different philosophical undertone when handling the power and status of foxes. Under the influence of Buddhist karmic retribution, the foxes’ attempts to establish power hierarchies are viewed as an absurd “delusion”.

In “The Tale of the Indian Fox Who Claimed to Be the King of Beasts, Rode a Lion, and Died”,¹⁵ a fox, upon hearing the Buddhist doctrine that “one with an exalted mind can become the king of all things”, puts on a majestic front and bluffs. Consequently, the fox subjugates and rides fierce beasts like dogs, tigers, and elephants, eventually even riding on the head of the lion, the king of beasts. However, this hypocritical status built on external coercion is exceedingly fragile in the face of natural truth. When the lion lets out a roar, the self-proclaimed king of foxes is frightened, falls headlong, and dies. At the end of the tale, the compiler offers a judgment heavily imbued with Buddhist cautionary significance: “The same goes for humans; if it does not fit one’s status, it is better not to do excessively transgressive things”. Through this story, the compiler regards the fox’s desire to “climb upward and construct a power hierarchy” as a form of arrogance and delusion that will inevitably lead to destruction.

Although *Konjaku Monogatarishu* negates status-inconsistent class climbing, it still provides a path for fox spirits to attain divinity. In “The Tale of the Indian Fox Who Borrowed the Tiger’s Majesty, Was Punished, and Aroused the Bodhi Mind”,¹⁶ when a fox is chased by a tiger, falls into a deep well, and faces the desperate predicament of death, it lies at the bottom of the well, “contemplating the impermanence of worldly affairs, and arousing a thought of the Bodhicitta (the mind of enlightenment)”. This momentary thought causes the earth to tremble. Bodhisattva Manjusri and Indra descend, expressing their admiration for the fox and stating that upon its death, it will be bestowed the titles of Mahasarasvati and Prthivi.

¹³ “Li Lingxu” (李令绪), in *Taiping Guangji* (Extensive Records of the Taiping Era), Vol. 453, Foxes VII.

¹⁴ “Zhangsun Wuji” (长孙无忌), in *Taiping Guangji* (Extensive Records of the Taiping Era), Vol. 447, Foxes I.

¹⁵ “Tenjiku no kitsune jisho juo shishi ni nortē shisuru katarai” (天竺狐自称獸王乘師子死語) [The Tale of the Indian Fox Who Claimed to Be the King of Beasts, Rode a Lion, and Died], in *Konjaku Monogatarishu* (Anthology of Tales From the Past), Vol. 5, Tale 20.

¹⁶ “Tenjiku no kitsune tora no i o karite semerare bodaishin o hossuru katarai” (天竺狐借虎威被責発菩提心語) [The Tale of the Indian Fox Who Borrowed the Tiger’s Majesty, Was Punished, and Aroused the Bodhi Mind], in *Konjaku Monogatarishu* (Anthology of Tales From the Past), Vol. 5, Tale 21.

These two tales from the Tenjiku (India) section perfectly illustrate the characterization of the fox's divine status in *Konjaku Monogatarishu*: Otherworldly beings attempting to imitate class structures are absurd and pathetic. Only by shedding the desire for secular power and "arousing the Bodhicitta" through Buddhism can they achieve salvation, truly transcend their species, and obtain divine status.

The Logic of Divinity Construction

Through the review of the divine status of foxes in the anthologies of both countries, it is evident that *Taiping Guangji* and *Konjaku Monogatarishu* follow two different sets of logic when endowing otherworldly beings with "divinity": The former leans toward the institutional, while the latter leans toward the idealistic and spiritual.

The divinity of foxes in *Taiping Guangji* is essentially a projection of secular society and the Daoist immortal genealogy into the Zhiguai world. Attaining divinity requires hard power, such as the accumulation of lengthy seniority and profound cultural capital. Foxes not only join aristocratic clans and seize official positions but are even formally incorporated into the Heavenly Court system. The rules for elevation are an imitation of the traditional bureaucratic order, reflecting the contemporary society's pursuit of orthodox status within the system.

Steeped in a profound Buddhist view of karma, *Konjaku Monogatarishu* strips otherworldly beings of their class veneer. The fox's attempts to construct power hierarchies through external appearances or by imitating humans are illusory "transgressions" that will inevitably invite destruction. Foxes acquiring divinity no longer rely on accumulating seniority or institutional promotion; here, only by letting go of delusions regarding worldly power can they truly cross the barriers of status under the Dharma.

Taiping Guangji tends to incorporate the unknown into the known, using the imperial system and bureaucratic networks to govern otherworldly beings. In contrast, *Konjaku Monogatarishu* uses the absurd behaviors and sudden spiritual enlightenment of these beings to awaken people to the emptiness of worldly classes, ultimately subjugating all supernatural powers under the edification of Buddhist truth.

Conclusion

In the narratives concerning inter-species romance, human-fox conflicts, and the divinity of foxes, *Taiping Guangji* and *Konjaku Monogatarishu* exhibit distinctly different narrative trajectories and philosophical undertones. This divergence is not accidental; rather, it is the projection of the social structures and religious beliefs of different eras in China and Japan onto Zhiguai and Setsuwa literature.

The foxes in *Taiping Guangji* serve as "socialized" mirrors. They actively embrace human civilization, morality, and bureaucratic order, reflecting ancient society's confidence in its order and its reflections on human nature. In contrast, the foxes in *Konjaku Monogatarishu* act as "religious" and "naturalized" mediums; they are either tools for demonstrating Buddhist karmic retribution or weaklings used to highlight human martial valor. Comparing these two anthologies not only clarifies the evolution of fox literature in China and Japan but also profoundly reveals the fundamentally different concepts held by the two ancient nations when navigating the relationships between "humans and otherworldly beings" and "the secular and the sacred".

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