



Olfaction and Other Senses in Chinese Culture

A Comparative Analysis, with Special Attention to the Use of the Term *Xiang*

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ABSTRACT The article analyses information on religious elements in the representation of senses in literary sources of late imperial China. The Introduction presents psychological and social functions of olfaction with reference to China. The second part deals with the concepts of *xiang*, especially in the meaning of incense, but also the supernatural and symbolic aromas and the pollutant load of its antonym *chou*. The third part offers a survey of other bodily sensations in relation to religion.

KEYWORDS Olfaction, religion, incense, aroma, stench, ritual, worshipping

Introduction

This paper focuses on olfaction, and marginally on other senses in Chinese culture, to offer a documented overview of the ways in which senses directly or indirectly contribute to religious experiences. The main hypothesis at the basis of this inquiry is that bodily sensations are not limited to the ‘physical’ body but—through culture, beliefs, and imagery—extend to the entire personality, and beyond it, to social order. The article intends to verify this hypothesis in the Chinese context. Multifaceted religious experience is an example of this ‘extension’ of sensory perception toward supernatural powers and/or communion with other beings and the universe. [1]

Thus, the first purpose is to present and discuss a few selected cases concerning sensory experiences that are directly or indirectly related to religion. Examples will be analysed and organized according to the role they play in religious experience and, at the same time, in other aspects of social, cultural, and inner life. For an enquiry into the past we interrogate remaining traces, such as written sources, iconographic materials, musical compositions, traditional customs, and ceremonies. I chose literary texts as they are rich in descriptions of everyday life, with more details on emotions and sensorial perceptions than any official historical sources. If one does not enquire into any specific school of thought, literary works [2]

are even more reliable than religious and moral treaties. They reflect the feelings and mentality of the authors and readers of the time and offer a rather rich material of analysis. The study takes advantage of a textual analysis project on emotions and states of mind which I am conducting for late imperial China. Besides the specific religious vocabulary, the lexicon that, according to the context, may have religious implications reflects the entanglement of the sacred with the social and emotional spheres. In this perspective, the contribution will bring to light the overlapping of the religious realm with the broader social landscape and mentality. The material presented is not only useful from a linguistic point of view, but confirms the peculiar way beliefs are professed and religions are followed in traditional China. The syncretic attitude is particularly witnessed in literary sources.

Religion was not limited to the worshipping of some deities, but was framed in a holistic perception of the cosmos, from the microcosm of the body to the macrocosm of the universe; the ideas of nature, state, and the body were so interdependent that they are best considered a single complex (Sivin 1995, 5). Thus we cannot examine only some rituals to understand religious sentiments and practices. This is the reason why a lexical analysis of literary texts may contribute to understanding some aspects of the sensory dimension of Chinese religions. [3]

As individual religious experience cannot be separated from personal psyche and biography, so from an anthropological perspective the sacred is deeply intertwined with social and cultural elements. In fact, there are three fields in which a rich information can be collected from literary material: [4]

1. Everyday life and material culture; [5]
2. Everyday religious thought and practice and collective imagery;
3. Representations of everyday emotions and the sensory dimension.

The most lively and detailed descriptions of everyday life and of private history can be found in fiction. Novels and sometimes dramas and poems offer some aspects of life that no other sources can present. Thus, literary sources are precious sources on religious life, practices, attitudes and interreligious entanglement, contacts, and transfer. Many of the *xiaoshuo* stories present religious elements and witness popular beliefs.¹ A literary work is influenced [6]

1 The term *xiaoshuo* 小說 (lit.: small talk)—originally used in a derogatory way for a minor, unofficial, inferior discourse or history—means any kind of narrative fiction, from novels to short stories. This article mainly refers to the “Dream of the Red Mansion,” “JinPingMei,” the three collections (*Sanyan*) in vernacular and the “History of Love” by Feng Menglong, “Destiny of the Flowers in the Mirror,” “Unofficial History of the Forest of the Literati,” the *mirabilia* “Strange Tales from the Leisure Studio,” and “What the Master Would Not Discuss.” Other literary works examined here are the “Mountain Songs,” the drama “Peony Pavilion,” and “Remembrances of Zhang Dai’s Dreams.”

The “Dream of the Red Mansion,” *Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢, was composed in vernacular Chinese by Cao Xueqin in 80 chapters; in the middle of the eighteenth century, it circulated in manuscript copies with various titles until it was printed by Gao E in 1791, who added 40 chapters to complete the novel. It tells the story of the young unconventional protagonist Jia Baoyu, born with a magical piece of jade in his mouth, and his unlucky love with Lin Daiyu (Cao and E 1998).

“JinPingMei” 金瓶梅, also called “The Golden Lotus,” the name of the female protagonist, is the most famous erotic novel of the late Ming dynasty; composed in vernacular Chinese during the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644) and circulated in manuscript at the end of the sixteenth century, it was first printed in 1610. The most famous edition was published with commentaries by Zhang Zhupo in 1695 (Chongzhen 崇禎本 [±1600] 1990).

The *Sanyan* (三言, “Three Words”) are three collections of short stories in vulgar style edited by the writer Feng Menglong (1574–1646). The first compilation is the *Gujin Xiaoshuo* (古今小說, “Ancient and Modern Tales,” or *Yushi Mingyan* 喻世明言, “Stories to Enlighten the World”), published in 1620; it was followed by the *Jingshi Tongyan* (警世通言, “Common Words for Warning the World”), published in 1624, and by the *Xingshi hengyan* (醒世恒言, “Stories to Awaken the World”), published in 1627 (Feng 1991b, 1991a).

by one or more doctrines, even if it does not present a conscious and coherent system of thought. Some works, such as the “The Journey to the West,” *Xiyouji* 西遊記, are allegories of alchemic and Buddhist self-cultivation (Yu 1983, 202–30). The “Dream of the Red Mansion”, *Hongloumeng*, might be read as the path of the pilgrim’s progress. The “Destiny of the Flowers in the Mirror”, *Jinghuayuan* 鏡花緣, opens with the punishment of the Spirits of Flowers, banned to the world below to live as mortal girls. As other novels, it combines Confucian morality with Dao-Buddhist beliefs, so that “the great good is able to change the disaster into good fortune, and the great evil to change the good fortune into disaster” (天下事非大善不能轉禍為福，非大惡亦不能轉福為禍; Li [1828] 1979, 12:46).

Besides novels with a plot based on Buddhism or Daoism and poems inspired by them, generally speaking, the whole literary production is a treasure house of data on pluralistic religions that reflects a practical attitude in everyday life. Ideologies, theories, beliefs, and assumptions circulating among the population emerge as people’s simplified interpretation of them in narrative discourse. Novels let us understand what the educated strata and common people have filtered and reinterpreted regarding the theories elaborated by the great thinkers. It is sufficient to thumb through the “Dream of the Red Mansion,” or the “Unofficial History of the Forest of the Literati” to enter into the intellectual and religious world shared by the common people and the upper strata. Novels reveal a sense of the sacred among people, the different sense of identity built on more religious systems, the tolerance or intolerance of other beliefs. In particular, in the *zhiguai* genre 志怪 (accounts of anomalies), Buddhist and Daoist elements are often mixed with orthodox tradition, and the main dynamics of the stories lie in the constant rule of retribution, in this life or after, with an apparent acceptance of the supernatural and the presence of spirits, ghosts, and gods (Teiser 1995, 1996).² The encounter with the supernatural is often possible thanks to extreme mental conditions—possession, trance, coma—or oneiric status. Therefore, through the analysis of the development of the plot of tales, their language and their comparison, it is possible to understand many aspects of the holy and of a society’s popular religious world.

Novels, generally speaking, offer a description of the fundamental syncretic attitude of the Chinese population, the often proclaimed orthodox Confucianism notwithstanding, and it is not by chance that it is a melting pot of religious beliefs and practices, as in the couplet: “Born from an embryo, born from an egg, born from liquid and born from transformation, the cycle

The “History of Love,” *Qingshi Qingshileilie* 情史類略 (the full title being “The History of Love Categorization Sketch”), edited by Feng Menglong in 1630, is an anthology of short stories in classical Chinese, most of which are borrowed largely from previous collections, biographies, and historical works. Thanks to the encyclopaedic structure of the work, it is a precious documentation of the categorisations and representations of love of the time (Feng 1986).

“Destiny of the Flowers in the Mirror,” *Jinghuayuan* 鏡花緣, completed in 1827, is a novel in 100 chapters on the adventurous travels of Tang Ao and the merchant Lin. “Unofficial History of the Forest of the Literati,” *Rulinwaishi* 儒林外史, is a satirical novel on the life of scholars in vernacular style, completed in 1750. “Strange Tales from the Leisure Studio,” *LZZY* 聊齋誌異 (Pu [1679] 1978), and “What the Master Would Not Discuss,” *Zibuyu* 子不語 (Yuan 1993), are two collections of stories of the *mirabilia* genre, respectively composed by Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640–1715) and Yuan Mei 袁枚, (1716–1797).

The “Mountain Songs,” *Shan’ge* 山歌, is a collection of folk songs edited, rewritten, or created by Feng Menglong, mostly in the Suzhou dialect, aimed at “borrowing the true feelings of man and woman and uncovering the falseness of Confucianism” (Feng 1986). The drama “Peony Pavilion,” *Mudan’ting* 牡丹亭, written by the famous dramatist Tang Xianzu in 1598, extols the love story between Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei (Tang 1998). “Remembrances of Zhang Dai’s Dreams,” *Tao’an mengyi* 陶庵夢憶, is a collection of autobiographic records in the *biji* (筆記 “notebook”) style (Zhang 1982).

For references to ancient texts and Classics, if no mention is given of specific editions, see Chinese Text Project, online <http://ctext.org/> (last accessed November 19, 2019).

2 For Western literature see Todorov (1975).

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of birth is endless. The way of Heaven, the way of Earth, the way of humans and the way of ghosts, the ways are infinite” 胎生卵生濕生化生，生生不已；天道地道人道鬼道，道道無窮 (“Crane Carrying a Carriage” 仙鶴扛車 in Santangelo and Beiwen 2013, 444–45).³

In contrast to vernacular fiction, classical *xiaoshuo* present rich information on beliefs as well as interaction between supernatural and human worlds and respond to appeals for justice (Hammond 2008, 85–88). In the case of collections of stories such as *Zibuyu* or *Liaozhai zhiyi*, tales might come from different sources, and some of them are not the creative product of the author in the modern sense; thus, they may present contradictory attitudes. And yet, although the narrative discourse cannot be examined as a logical reflection of an author’s philosophical theory, it still testifies themes of the debates of the period as well as the author’s attitude toward everyday life and segments of reality. As literary sources are neither theoretical nor moral treaties, they are particularly suitable to discover the common acceptance of certain beliefs, of religious practices, and of longings for protection, transcendence, and consolatory answers, better than any other source.⁴ Moreover, several stories of *Zibuyu* witness the conflict between state control over the communication with spirits and local cults, telling cases of destruction of statues or temples of heterodox spirits by officials or common people.⁵

The first part of the paper is dedicated to a short presentation of olfaction in order to frame the meaning of odours in late imperial Chinese society. The main part focuses on the two Chinese antonyms *xiang* and *chou* and their polyvalence, from concrete to symbolic, religious, and vitalistic meanings.

Cultural Meanings of Odours

Whenever we react to a smell and evaluate it, this representation implies several elements constructed in our own culture and personal experiences, and above all associates this feeling with several other hints, values and disvalues, prejudices and memories.⁶ Henri Bergson emphasized the relation between beliefs, sensations, images, emotions, tendencies, intellectual functions, and will (1902, 529–33).⁷ The body is the means by which human beings

3 The story “Neither Buddha Nor the God of Literature Would Receive Him” 儒佛兩不收 of the same collection (*ZBY* 8) offers an unusual look at adhesion to two religions and religion identity: the protagonist, Yang Zhaonan, is devoted to both Confucianism and Buddhism; this was a very common phenomenon in China, but here it is sarcastically dealt with as a complicated affair. After death, Yang appears to his wife in a dream and confesses that, as a Confucian, he was examined by the God of Literature, who did not accept him, and then was refused by Buddha, too. Thus, the soul of Yang could not be classified and had no place to rest. Reincarnated as a boy, his option to be a Buddhist fails, too, for the inability to be vegetarian, and suffers from infantile convulsion. It seems that one cannot simultaneously be a good Buddhist and a good Confucian.

4 There are many studies on Chinese syncretism and on the practical interaction of the Tree Doctrines. See, for instance, Brook (1993, 13–44).

5 For instance, “Destruction of the Temple in Honour of Chen Youliang” 毀陳友諒廟 (*ZBY* 10), “Prince Lie Jie” 烈傑太子 (*ZBY* 3), “Wutong God Treated People Differently” 五通神因人而施 (*ZBY* 8). Only one story (“No Guandi Temple in Lü City” 呂城無關廟, *ZBY* 8) presents the victory of a locality god over any attempt to build a temple in honour of Guandi, as the latter was an historical enemy during the Three Kingdoms period. On the conflict between the hegemony of imperial control on the communication with spirits and local cults, see Goossaert (2009); Zito (1987, 333–71); Wang (2007); Zhao Xianhai (2002, 28–33); Zhao Kesheng and Yu Haiyong (2003, 146).

6 As Uri Almagor (1990, 253–74) notices, the olfactory system is directly and intimately tied to the part of our brain most involved with memory and emotion, and odour is often the mechanism which triggers (and leads to) changes in our moods, behaviour, and thoughts.

7 As far as sensations are concerned, Bergson states: “Il y a d’abord une croyance qui s’attache à la sensation. Elle dépend de l’intensité de cette sensation, de sa netteté, et aussi de la cohésion des éléments qui la composent. Elle est peut-être moins forte pour les sensations visuelles que pour les sensations tactiles,

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experience life, health, decadence and death, and perceive the external world. It is this structure that orients humans towards certain pleasures and pains. But the body is also a cultural construction itself, with its categories, boundaries, and representations. From a psychophysical perspective, physiological perceptions and reactions are closely related to the affective world: physical experiences involve the entire personality of the body. From an anthropological point of view, sensory experiences are deeply permeated by cultural constructions. Especially in Chinese culture, the somatisation of emotions is manifested not only in medical discourse but in many symbolic expressions in language (Santangelo and Middendorf 2006, 2–7, 41–63, 281–312). Religious and symbolic implications of olfaction have been studied less compared to other senses. For instance, the taste of food has been object of several research works, including from cognitive, symbolic, ritualistic, moral, and social status perspectives. Some of these studies may help us in analysing the meaning of odours for the analogies between taste and olfaction.⁸ Olfaction seems difficult to categorise, except for the dichotomy of ‘attractive’ or ‘repellent’ odours.⁹ It is not by chance that there are no ‘five smells,’ like “five colours” (*wuse* 五色), “five tastes” (*wuwei* 五味) or “five notes” (*wuyin* 五音). As Le Guérer notes, “[t]he olfactory sense is the prime means we employ for discriminating between the pleasant and the unpleasant, the known and the unknown. It can inspire either recognition or rejection” (quoted in Lai 2008, 186).¹⁰ Smells directly provoke our reaction, and thus are crucial in keeping boundaries between social groups; familiar smells connect to the old things of our childhood, and unfamiliar smells to strangers. Odours play an important role in human life and human relations, and thus may have significant effects concerning the religious and interreligious spheres.

By cultural mediation, the immediate physical reactivity of odours can be extended to objects or subjects we intend to venerate or exclude and avoid. This means that our ladder of values can be influenced, strengthened or symbolized by odours, and, vice versa, it can influence our perception of odours. Odours can become metaphors of strong feelings toward others or other groups. Closely involved with memory and emotion, odours are often mechanisms which trigger changes in moods, behaviour, and thoughts.¹¹ Odours cross various fields of human experience, from natural and physiological to social, from symbolic to religious levels.

If we consider the three main functions—as cognitive, semiotic, and ritual—all of them may concern the religious and interreligious spheres.

moins forte pour les sensations reçues passivement que pour les sensations que nous soulignons par des mouvements. Notre activité joue donc ici un rôle important, peut-être le rôle principal. Et il ne s’agit pas seulement de notre activité musculaire, mais de notre réaction générale à la sensation et de l’attitude que nous adoptons vis-à-vis d’elle” (1902, 530).

8 For social and cultural implications that might be analogous with odours, see also Korsmeyer (2005), with important contributions such as by Jack Goody and Pierre Bourdieu. On taste as an expression of morality and aesthetic refinement, see Garson (2007), a study conducted on Victorian novels.

9 There are several rival or complementary theories to explain the mechanism of odour perception and its classification in the brain (Necmi 1968). Smells are usually described as belonging to the subject or substance that produces them, ‘the smell of ...’ as if they have no self-existence. The scarce olfactory hierarchic categories and the difficulty of application of the prototypes for odours have been studied in some essays, see Dubois and Rouby (1997, 9–20, 1996), Holley (1999, 128–39). On olfactive vocabulary and related bibliography, see Manetta et al. (2007, 479–97).

10 For alien odours, see Paul Lai’s review (2008, 167–87) of the novel *Salt Fish Girl*. Lai explores the figure of the alien in snake, fruit, fish, and human forms: Miranda’s durian stink and Evie’s fishy scent challenge the modern deodorised world and interacts with the mythical figure of the snake-goddess Nüwa 女媧, reborn in a small Chinese village as a girl with a stink of fish.

11 Several studies have demonstrated that the olfactory system is directly tied to the part of brain most involved with memory and emotion. For a general survey of physio-psychological aspects of olfaction, see Engen (1982). On the complexity of this experience, see also Classen (1993); Smith (2007, 59–74);

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The *cognitive* dimension was strictly connected to the motivational dimension in the olfaction of animals for the necessary information and the consequent incitation of the fulfilment of the vital functions of nutrition,¹² reproduction, and avoiding dangers. In humans, this cognitive function remains but changes its fields of action, as the relation with the world has become increasingly mediated by symbolic systems. [14]

Sensorial sociology enquires into the function of natural or symbolic odours in classifying people, animals and plants, groups, space, and territory¹³ and in establishing group identity.¹⁴ Olfactory symbolism is used to express themes of identity and difference in diverse cultures, because body odours can differ from culture to culture. They can symbolise not only the qualities of others, but also the ability of the ‘Other’ to disrupt one’s order (Classen 1992, 160). Thus, the sensory function works as medium of intercultural, interethnic, or interreligious demarcation. For example, in China certain ‘barbarians’ were described starting from their bad odours, discrimination based on culture rather than religion. Typical in recent European history is the so-called “bourgeois deodorisation” and the contemporary odorisation of individuals (perfume industry). A further process is establishing a relation between the value system and olfactory symbolism, and attributing a moral hierarchy to different beings or conditions, such as illness and one’s life-cycle. Thus, odour may become one of the basic attributes for discrimination and for cultural identity: it transfers the ideological or social distinctions to a visceral level, often to physical repulsion. It is not by chance that moral symbolism is often expressed in terms of olfactory imagery.¹⁵ [15]

The *semiotic* function concerns the communication of messages and signs through odouriferous substances, such as incense for communicating with spirits or perfumes to attract a potential partner or establishing exchange relations with other persons and groups (see Sperber 1975; Gell 1977, 25–38; Hold and Schleidt 1977, 225–38; Howes 1986, 29–45). Smells may be used for defence, including repelling enemies, animals or, evil spirits. [16]

The *ritual* function is no less important and mainly responds to religious and aesthetic demands. It is connected to the two previous functions, linking odours with value orders and symbols.¹⁶ the sensorial dimension of rites is demonstrated by the importance of odours, sounds and colours in many ceremonies. Ritual is a performance that—with its symbolic bod- [17]

Almagor (1990, 253–74); Corbin (1986); Synnott and Yáñez (2003, 431–64); Vernet-Maury et al. (1999, 725–36).

12 A certain cognitive ability among hunters is mentioned in a story of *Zibuyu* (10:184, “King Yu’s Stele Swallows the Snakes” 禹王碑吞蛇): “There was a strange book handed down from my ancestors that taught us how to catch the wind and sniff (抓風嗅鼻) it in order to tell what kind of animal was approaching. I too learned such skills when I was young.” Contemporary neuro-gastronomy has demonstrated the fundamental role, in association with taste, of both orthonasal and especially retronasal odorant identification in the inhalation and exhalation phases (see Shepherd 2012).

13 See Largey and Watson (1972, 1021–24), Corbin (1986), and Jenner (2000).

14 On the anthropological perspective on self-representation, among numerous essays, see Müller et al. (2013), Lock (1993, 133–55), Kilp (2001, 197–222), Classen (1992, 133–66), and Schlicht et al. (2009, 687–709). There is a useful survey on different positions concerning the self, from those who negate its reality (Metzinger 2003) to those who assert a multiplicity of dimensions, including interpersonal, conceptual, remembered, and private ecological selves (Neisser 1988, 37–59). Others state it is a useful fiction (Dennett 1991) or a cultural construction (Markus and Kitayama 1998, 63–87). Starting from the hypothesis that the self-conscious cognitive system represents itself, the article deals with various levels of self-representation.

15 On physical and cultural elements (concerning interpersonal contamination and socio-moral violations) that elicit disgust, see the seven categories that include food, animals, body products, sexual deviance, body-envelope violations, poor hygiene, and contact with death (see Haidt et al. 1997, 107–31; Synnott 1991, 437–59, 1993). Worthy of notice is Wang Yangming (1472–1529), who explains his theory of the so-called unity of ‘knowledgeaction’ and innate conscience by the allegory of the man who, smelling a stink, immediately notices the disagreeable odour and simultaneously dislikes it and avoids it.

16 One may think of the *odor suavis* and *odor suavitatis* in theological discourse.

ily actions—aims at union with the sacred and enables participants to obtain special powers or revelation, and odours play an important role in this (Tambiah 1979, 113–69). In a state of contact with the Holy, besides *odor sanctitatis* and *dulcedo*, purification may be performed through odours in ritual and practical contexts.¹⁷ The fragrance believers perceive coming from the bodies of saints is a source of consolation, admiration, and surprise regarding their miraculous power and the presence of the divine. Thus, the *odor suavitatis eflagravit a corpore* (sweet smell coming from the body [of the ascetic Pelagius]) is often contrasted with the stench produced by sinners: the former is attractive while the latter is repellent.¹⁸ Like in the rich documentation collected about the European Middle Ages, perceptions of miraculous scents can be found in various cultures. In China, the use of aromas also accompanies rituals for various festivals, is blessed and auspicious for worshippers, and exalts their filial piety and fraternal engagement. In his mystical poems, the Chinese scholar Shao Yong 邵雍 (1012–1077) refers to “heavenly perfume,” *tianxiang* 天香, and to flowers’ perfume, a term we find again even in the *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (“Peony Pavilion”) by Tang Tianzu 湯顯祖 (1550–1616).¹⁹ Incense and other aromas are employed in rituals of transition, weddings, and funerals, or for generating special experiences (dreams, trance). Other smells are necessary in other ceremonies, such as exorcisms, *yan* 厭, to control or dismiss bad spirits using onions and garlic 以蔥蒜厭之 (see “Feng Shiyu Had a Light Body” 馮侍禦身輕, ZBY 21, 400). With the analogy of the so-called “moral tastes,” many of the above perfumes may be included in the category of ‘moral smells,’ a reliable sign of moral sensitivity, social and cultural quality, filial virtue, and ethical refinement.

Finally, healing and various kinds of aromatherapies are performed using curative smells or by creating a pleasant olfactory environment for the patient (see Classen, Howes, and Synnott 1994; Harvey 2006).²⁰ In Chinese traditional medical documents, smelling is suggested as a means of diagnosis (Cullen 2001, 297–323). Zibet, for instance, was supposed to have medical qualities, protect from pestilences and bad humours, and possess aphrodisiacal faculties. Every reader of the famous novel “The Dream of the Red Mansion” will remember the seductive environment of the Qing Keqing’s 秦氏 (可卿) room, before his sexual initiation, and the intoxicating perfume (*tianxiang xiren* 甜香襲人) that assailed Jia Baoyu’s 賈寶玉 nostrils (*Honglou meng*, 5:82 in Cao 1973, 1:126–127).

[18]

Xiang and Chou²¹

The fragrance of perfumes—especially incense—in China as well as in other societies from Antiquity onwards is associated with the Holy and used in ceremonies and rituals. It is not by chance that *xiang* 香, in Chinese, means both incense and perfume, a polysemous basic term which—according to the context—can be rendered as ‘incense,’ ‘fragrance,’ or ‘beauty.’

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17 On the use of balsams in Medieval Christianity, see Albert (1990).

18 Martin Roch’s essay (2009, 433–63) deals with the relation between emotion and sensorial perception in the case of “l’odeur de sainteté,” where the religious and emotional meanings are immortalized by the hagiographic reports.

19 Respectively the poems “Mudan yin” 牡丹吟 and “Jian nianlao fengchun shi” 箋年老逢春詩 (*Yichuan Jirang ji* 伊川擊壤集, quoted in Arrault 2002, 242–43).

20 See also <http://www.david-howes.com/senses/Consert-Odor.htm> (last accessed October 14, 2019).

21 The analysis of a concept elaborated in another culture incurs evident risks. In order to cope with some of them, it would be more productive to monitor its lexical fields in relation to the polarities of its category. For polarities and the major polar structures, see Benjamin Schwartz (1959, 50–62); Chenshan Tian (2005, 33–40); Cheng Chung-ying 成中英 (2006, 25–59).

Thus it is very significant as it is related to olfaction, and in most cases it concerns rituals and religious performances.²² I analysed about 300 samples, including significant compounds, collected from various sources—mainly literary works—of the last two Chinese dynasties (see Appendix). It is difficult to make a clear classification of the meanings of *xiang*, because their semantic values may overlap in various cases. Incense itself is not only a ritual tool but also contains the idea of perfume; similarly, the fragrance of flowers may be used as alluding to the beauty of a woman or as symbolism for beauty and love. Again, some terms that we might consider as metaphors for love in fact mean scent-fragrance or hint at female beauty. Thus, they may be translated either as symbolic or odour words, and their classification may change if we emphasise the alternative meaning. I analysed these cases by considering the main sense of a term in its concrete context.

From the overall analysis, the most common meaning of *xiang*, in almost half of the analysed occurrences, is incense. In China, incense is variously composed of camphor, benzoin resins, sandalwood, and other vegetal scenting ingredients. Traditionally it is used in temples and other places of ceremony for worshipping divinities in honour of ancestors, or swearing fidelity, or for medical purposes. Incense is mostly used in shrines or in front of sacred images, the statue of Buddha, local divinities, the three gods Guan Yu 關羽 (Guandi 關帝), Zhang Fei 張飛 and Liu Bei 劉備 (for instance in ZBY 10:192, “Lü Mao Guai” 綠毛怪),²³ the gods in the netherworld, or the bodily remains of a deceased. “Burning incense every morning” (朝必香) expresses one’s mourning for somebody (see LZZY, 3:294, “Daughter of Mr. Lu” 魯公女). Burning incense is generally an expression of a straight and direct religious attitude, which respects a common and simple ritual accompanied by the gestures for worshipping the divinity. Picking up incense to burn it (拈香), offering (奉香火, 供香火, 進香, 上香), and burning incense (焚香, 燒香, 行香) are very common practices, as we can see even now in any Chinese temple. The first offering in the morning (上頭香) is particularly appreciated: “The incense offered when the rooster first crowed was considered the first incense” (以雞鳴時即上殿拍香者為頭香; ZBY 06:118, “Filial Daughter” 孝女); “determined to burn the first incense in the city god temple, [...] he lit the incense and bowed before the statue of the god (必欲到城隍廟燒頭香, [...] 點香下拜; ZBY 19:371, “Burning the First Incense” 燒頭香). It is the “incense in hand, while praying to the heaven (持香禱于天; ZBY 11:213, “Feng Shuike” 風水客), or “each monk venerated the Buddha with a stick of incense in his hands” (各持香一炷禮佛畢; ZBY 23:457, “Monks Shi Kui and Di Hui” 石揆諦暉); again “she closed the door to light joss sticks and sat down chanting Buddhist scriptures” (閉閣焚香, 坐誦佛經; JSTY 10:309); “he burned incense and kowtowed” (焚香叩頭; ZBY 5:087, “Wu Sanfu” 吳三複); “She burned some incense to bow and kowtow before the Buddha” (至佛前焚香叩拜; LZZY 12:1695, “Fang Wen Shu” 房文淑); “worshipping him with burning incense and burying him in Linggu Temple” (奉香火, 昇靈谷寺塔之; TAMY 1:1, “Bell Mount” 鐘山); “to bend knees before the image of the worshipped deity for the length of time burning a stick of incense. This was called ‘kneeling to incense’” (視香炷為度, 名曰跪香; LZZY 6:748, “Yun Cuixian” 雲翠仙).

Thus, burning incense accompanies prayers (焚香而祝; for instance LZZY 11:1470, “Qingwa Shen-Another” 青蛙神·又) and offerings: “I feel satisfied enough to burn the incense and make

22 According to the *Xiang cheng* 香乘 by Zhou Jiazhou 周嘉胄 (1582–1658), a common sentence says “burning incense repels evil” (燒香拒邪), and “aromatic gum resin (安息香, *Styrax*, benzoin or Persian incense) in the bedroom repels vapours with impure smells and polluted fogs” (安息膠香於寢所拒濁臭之氣卻邪穢之霧). See *Xiangcheng* 香乘, *juan* 11.

23 ‘Burning incense’ 燒香 is an important practice, together with ‘chanting incantations’ 念咒, ‘exorcising with the use of spells’ 厭以符咒, and ‘writing a spell and burning it’ 書符燒之, while ‘performing magic’ 作法, planchette divinations 扶乩, and other Daoist ceremonies (Santangelo and Beiwen 2013, 41–47).

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[21]

offering to” (焚香供之，足矣; *LZZY* 10:1315, “A Goddess” 神女), or “seeking divine guidance by drawing lots” (求籤). Not only common people but high officials, too, practiced such rituals, sometimes for themselves, sometimes as their official duty: “The provincial governor of Hunan used to worship Guandi with offerings. Every New Year’s Day, he would go to Guandi Temple to burn incense and pray to be told what the new year had in store for him” (湖南巡撫某，平時敬奉關帝。每元旦，先赴關廟行香求籤; *ZBY* 21:401, “The Edge of the Eighteenth Beach” 十八灘頭).

This ceremony may be accompanied by a purification act: “Suddenly one day, he got up early, burned incense and had a shower” (忽一日早起，焚香沐浴; *ZBY* 19:366, “Chen Zishan” 陳紫山); “promptly rinsing her hands, she walked in and burnt incense and worshipped Buddha” (忙盥手進去焚香拜佛; *HLM* 18:280). Often, paper money is burned at the same time: “she prepared offerings and burnt incense and paper money” (即具酒食、燒香紙; *ZBY* 03:045, “Scholar Qiu” 裘秀才). This action is an expression of an emotional engagement directed at worshipping a divinity or an ancestor. So it is used as a paradigm to signify total dedication to a person: “If I can live again, I will serve you respectfully as venerating Buddha with flowers and incenses” (倘得再生，香花供養有日耳; *LZZY*, 8:1041, “Zhong Sheng” 鍾生). [22]

In other cases, incense prepares and accompanies the solemnity of a promise, a pact, or an oath: “Youyu burned incense with Zeng brothers, and let them make a pledge” (友于乃與兄弟焚香約誓; *LZZY* 11:1585, “Zeng Youyu” 曾友于).²⁴ Incense is also the protagonist of any vow: “swearing to burn incense someday in the temple” (香願; *SG* 9:234); “to burn incense in fulfilment of vows” (還香願; *SG* 9:234). Burning incense also celebrates the solemn establishment of a special relation, pact of brotherhood, friendship, marriage, or any oath of alliance, as in “they burnt incense to become sworn brothers” (焚香為昆季之盟; *LZZY* 6:721, “Ma Jiepu” 馬介甫); “Panpan lighted a joss stick and swore to the heaven” (盼盼焚香指天誓; *JSTY* 10:304); “Don’t you remember the pledge of being together with each other forever at the time of our marriage?” (此時香火之誓，君寧不憶之耶?; *LZZY* 8:1116, “Lü Wubing” 呂無病). ‘Close friends’ is also rendered with “incense friends” (香火情; *ZBY* 07:130, “Li Zhuo” 李倬). Thus, the oath of eternal love or close engagement was always accompanied by this ceremony, which in fact was called “incense for the pact” (盟香; *MDT* 32:189). [23]

As any religious manifestation, burning incense can be more or less deeply felt, based on habit or on personal new experiences. It may aim at receiving a favour, as in the close contact between the devotee and the divinity (see *LZZY* 10:1320, “A Goddess” 神女). This act, which seems so exterior and repetitive, may include a personal inner relation with the supernatural. The religious bond between incense and religious spirit is internalised in a significant metaphorical sentence to express religiosity: “This offering of incense to Buddha burns in my heart, these waxen candle tears flow from my eyes as a libation to Heaven” (心香奉佛，淚燭澆天; *MDT* 25:152). We can say that the incense aroma gives the sensorial perception of the intense emotion felt during the religious ceremony. A well-known neo-Confucian glossary gives an exemplary description: “As the masses burn incense daily and pray to it, it acquires a spiritual power. The spiritual power is that of the creature itself and has nothing to do with spiritual beings” (衆人朝夕焚香禱祝，便會有靈。其靈乃此物之靈，非關那鬼神事; Ch’en 1986, 162). [24]

There is also an economic aspect of burning incense and religious devotion: the related [25]

24 Other examples where swearing or vowing are accompanied by burning incense are numerous. See, for instance, “The mother bade the two young women to burn incense and swear never to regret it” (母令姊妹焚香，各矢無悔詞; *LZZY* 11:1503, Chen Yunxi 陳雲熾).

monks' ability to attract devotees and the consequent growth (*sheng* 盛) and decline (*shuai* 衰) of temples is examined by Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1797), in his *Zibuyu* 子不語. He describes the increasing volume of business that follows a miraculous event, or the 'marketing' campaigns in the religious field. The practice of *xianghuo* is a symptom of the flourishing of a religious place (香火極盛) and is expressed by its financial fortune and fame.²⁵ Among these stories I will quote the following, "Poisoning a Man to Get Incense Offering," as it ingeniously illustrates some degenerations in such competitions:

A Daoist named Liao Ming of Hangzhou collected the money to build a statue of Guandi for the Guandi temple. On the day of the consecration ceremony, the pious men and women of the country all gathered in the temple to offer incense. Suddenly a rascal came and sat upright and unafraid beside the statue of Guandi. He pointed to the statue and insulted and abused it. All the people bitterly persuaded him not to do so, but the Daoist said: "Never mind, just leave him to himself. He would certainly receive his retribution." Not after long, the rascal fell down to the ground and shouting he had got a stomach-ache. He rolled about ceaselessly and died afterwards. Blood flowed out of his seven apertures in the head. The people were terrified, thinking that Guandi had shown his power. From then on, the burning incenses were ceaseless and the Daoist made a big fortune by it. Next year, as the members of the Daoist party quarrelled for the inequality between the shares of the money, someone of them reported what they had done to the government, saying: "Last year, it was the Daoist who bribed the rascal to ask him to insult the statue. The Daoist had asked the rascal to drink the poisonous wine at first while the rascal didn't know that." The government asked an official to dig out the rascal's corpse and found it was actually blue and black [which was the sign of the death by poison]. The Daoist was so sentenced to death and the burning incenses of Guandi temple also declined (Santangelo and Beiwen 2013, 727).

[26]

Concerning the economic aspects of religious practices and incense offering, sometimes a private villager may compete with temples and become rich: "The villagers began to worship it, calling it the 'powerful coffin'. Huo's 霍 family did collect the money that the villagers spent on incense offered up to the coffin, therefore amassing a large fortune" (材民奉之若狂，呼為“靈棺材”。霍家取香火錢，因以致富。; ZBY 12:234, "Deaf Ghost" 聾鬼). In the collection of love songs by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1646), two songs play on incense, joking about the relation between the hollow incense stand and the incense stick.²⁶

[27]

Finally, burning incense was also an act for high appreciation of something precious: "Returning home with his [precious] stone, Xing wrapped it in brocade and stored it in a chest. On the occasions when he took it out to appreciate it, he always lit rare incense first" (邢得石歸，裹以錦，藏櫃中，時出一賞，先焚異香而後出之。; LZZY 11:1577, "Shi Qingxu" 石清虛).

[28]

25 ZBY 03:050, "The Earth God Brings a Lawsuit" 土地神告狀; 07:136, "The Fox Spirit Who Pretended to Be Guanyin for Three Years" 狐仙冒充觀音三年; 08:151, "The Earth God Suffering Hunger" 土地受餓; 08:161, "Xiang Yu Shows His Power" 項王顯靈; 09:169, "Wronged Case of Putian" 莆田冤獄; 10:1306, "A Cloth Merchant" 布商; 12:234, "Deaf Ghost" 聾鬼; 13:249, "The God with the Ox Head" 牛頭大王; 14:264, "Poisoning a Man to Get Incense Offering" 鳩人取香火; 17:325, "Cool Old Man" 清涼老人; 18:336, "Bai Tiande" 白天德; 18:351, "The Stone Lion Begs for Help" 石獅求救命; 19:362, "Rabbit God" 兔兒神; 23:452, "Double Flower Temple" 雙花廟; 23:456, "Monks Shi Kui and Di Hui" 石揆諦暉.

26 The second song says: "My secret lover is like an incense stand: / Beautiful on the outside but hollow inside. / He is a red joss-stick and dives into my hole. / My eyes cloud over before the incense even begins to burn" (SG 6:152 A., see Ōki and Santangelo 2011, 234).

Whenever there is the need to attribute decorum and respectability to an act, incense is used, and it prepares and accompanies the solemnity of a promise, a pact, or an oath. Thus, burning incense also celebrates the solemn establishment of a special relation, pact of brotherhood, friendship, marriage, or any oath of alliance.

Moreover, a relatively large amount of fragrances were supposed to have a supernatural origin or were related to the sacred.²⁷ The most evident cases are the aromas which are given off by the body of a dead saint or sage: his/her virtue or spiritual excellence prevented the decomposition of the corpse and produced a celestial scent. This phenomenon, which is common to many cultures, is described in some Chinese stories.²⁸ [29]

Another important case of the connection between scent and the supernatural can be found in the cult of passions in literature through a kind of sublimation of desire. Fragrance may be sent out by a goddess or other supernatural powers.²⁹ In the drama “Peony Pavilion,” the sanctification of love passion let the loved Du Liniang 杜麗娘 take the place of a saint, and after she dies she is resurrected with her body intact and fragrant.³⁰ Here, love is intended as a religious experience. The atmosphere around her is influenced by this passion, and “heavenly fragrance,” *tianxiang*, is purposely evoked (“Heavenly fragrance blew from the highest heaven” 天香雲外吹; *MDT* 39:21, see also 50:273). Several female immortals in *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異 have a rare fragrance which derives from their supernatural condition; however, it is evident that at the same time their fragrance reflects the desire and admiration that they provoke in men who deal with them.³¹ This sacralisation of desire can also be found in the famous novel “The Dream of the Red Mansion,” where Lin Daiyu’s 林黛玉 aroma is perceived by Baoyu (聞見你的香氣); the subtle scent which emanates from her sleeve, her extraordinary and delicate fragrance (異香, 幽香), when inhaled, inebriates Baoyu’s soul, melting the marrow [30]

27 In Buddhism, for instance, the term *xiangxiang* 香象 “odorous elephant” or “bull elephant in musth” (Skt. Gandhahastin) is used as a metaphor to designate the pursuit of Buddhahood by a great bodhisattva (see Eichman 2018, 150).

28 See, for instance, *LZZY* 8:1117, “Lü Wubing” 呂無病: “One day Wang said that she would die on such and such a day, but Sun didn’t believe her. She prepared the coffin herself and on that day, she changed her clothes and went into the coffin, dead. Her face was as good as alive and an extraordinary fragrance filled the whole room. Only after she had been buried than the fragrance gradually disappeared” (一日曰: “妾某日當死。” 孫不信。婦自理葬具, 至日, 更衣入棺而卒。顏色如生, 異香滿室; 既斂, 香始漸滅。).

29 In the following example: “She got up to the bed and sat on An’s thigh, pressing her fingers on his temple. An felt that there were extraordinary fragrance of musk going through his nose to his bones” (乃登榻, 坐安股上, 以兩手爲按太陽穴。安覺腦麝奇香, 穿鼻沁骨。; *LZZY* 5:637, “Girl Hua” 花姑子).

30 Meaningful are also the following passages: “(All): Elder master, tell us what does the consecrated vase represent, and what does the fading plum blossom represent? (Sister Stone): Within the hollow of this vase is held the mortal world. Her body is like the fading plum blossom, watered but without her roots, still brings a lingering fragrance to our senses. (All): Oh, young lady, may you accept this offering, your body will be cooled, and your soul will be fragrant. Will you be willing to return to this world, and live again in this canopy of plum blossoms?” ((眾) 老師兄, 你說淨瓶象什麼, 殘梅象什麼? (淨) 這瓶兒空象, 世界包藏。身似殘梅樣, 有水無根, 尚作余香想。(眾) 小姐, 你受此供呵, 教你肌膚涼, 魂魄香。肯回陽, 再住這梅花帳?; *MDT* 27:160); “(Liu helps Liniang up when he see her) (Liu): Ah, the lady is right here. An extraordinary fragrance greets me, her gentle posture is just as before. Oh heavens, you see, though lid be stained with clay, no ant has entered crack or crevice. These four pieces of splendid wood kept warm her delicate fragrance, carried her lovely form as a couch toward the Yellow Springs, and the rouge-like earth nourished her flower-like body.” ((生見旦扶介)(生) 咳, 小姐端然在此。異香襲人, 幽姿如故。天也, 你看正面上那些兒塵漬, 斜空處沒半米虻蚋。則他暖幽香四片斑爛木, 潤芳姿半榻黃泉路, 養花身五色燕支土。; *MDT* 35:202).

31 For instance: “One day Chang went walking. Deep in a grove he suddenly met her face to face. Fortunately no one else was there. In great happiness Chang threw himself to the ground before her. As she came close to help him up, he smelled a rare fragrance suffusing her body. He grasped her jade-liked wrist and pulled himself to his feet. The skin of her fingers had a soft sleekness that made his joints go limp.” (一日行去, 忽於深樹內觀面遇女郎, 幸無他人, 大喜投地。女郎近曳之, 忽聞異香竟體, 即以手握玉腕而起, 指膚軟膩, 使人骨節欲酥。; *LZZY* 10:1437, “Gejin” 葛巾).

of his bones (聞得一股幽香，卻是從黛玉袖中發出，聞之令人醉魂酥骨; *HLM*, 19:302). And again in the *Peony Pavilion*, when Liniang scattered the petals of plum flowers on the altar where the nun performed a ceremony for her, she said that in the small perfume of each petal her passions were mixed with the fragrance of the flowers: “To each fragrant petal cling myriad loving thoughts” (抵甚麼一點香銷萬點情; *MDT*, Act 27). Liniang appears to Liu Mengmei 柳夢梅 as the scented bloom under the dim moon (衝幽香一陣昏黃月; *MDT* 32:190–191; 35:202; 27:160), with her fresh fragrant flesh and skin (“My cold fragrant flesh has been warmed by your embraces” 俺冷香肌早偎的半熟。; *MDT* 32:191).

Thus, from the male author’s perspective, an aroma is fitting to symbolically contain a person’s erotic feelings. In a declaration of love, the suitor implores: “I wish I could transform into a butterfly, and fly to your skirt. It is sweet even I die if I can ever smell the remaining aroma of yours” (但願化為蝴蝶去，裙邊，一嗅餘香死亦甜; *LZZY* 9:1223, “A Girl of Weaving” 續女). Again, the identification of arousal with aroma can be seen in the same story: “When the old woman touched her arm, she felt her arm was as smooth as greases and a hot aroma was sprayed (熱香噴溢). As soon as the skin of the girl touched her, she felt a comfy experience of the skin.” Fairies, fox spirits, and female immortals in *Liaozhai zhiyi* have an extraordinary beauty and belong to a supernatural kind, and consequently they effuse a divine fragrance:

[31]

He then sat there quietly and noticed, however, that the room was fragrant with a delicious perfume; his viscera seemed to be removed from his body, by which his intellectual faculties were much increased; and every one of his veins and arteries could be easily daunted. [...] Shortly afterwards, while Jia was sitting there, a beautiful young girl came in, suffusing an exquisite musk fragrance around;³² and going up to the couch where Jia was, she bent over him and whispered, “Here I am.” Her breath was like the sweet odour of perfumes.³³

[32]

因即寂坐，但覺清香滿室，臟腑空明，脈絡皆可指數。... 又坐少時，一美人入，蘭麝撲人，悄然登榻，附耳小言曰：“我來矣。”一言之間，口脂散馥。(LZZY 10:1362, “Jia Fengzhi” 賈奉雉)

The last passage mentions three perfumes: the first is the pure scent of Daoist perfection (清香), while the second and third are the tempter fragrances coming from the body and the mouth of the beauty (蘭麝, 馥). These supernatural beings, in the fiction narration, seduce or attract the protagonists of the stories, and the aroma emitted by them is the sign of their non-human nature and of their seductive power. They may “exhale breath like orchid scent” (吹氣如蘭; *LZZY* 10: 1438, “Ge Jin” 葛巾),³⁴ diffuse wonderful and rare aromas (異香; *LZZY* 9:1264, “Princess Yunluo” 雲蘿公主), and “make their room fragrant with a delicious perfume” (清香滿室; *LZZY* 10:1362, “Jia Feng Zhi” 賈奉雉).³⁵ One can object that these attributes are created by the mere fantasy of the writer and do not belong to any religious belief. However, it is worthy of note that even in the imagery, scent acquires a supernatural aura of both sanctity and charm.

[33]

32 *Lanshe* 蘭麝. Orchid, *lanhua* 蘭花 and musk *shexiang* 麝香, the fragrance of female cosmetics.

33 Again the seductive effects of smell are reconfirmed here with the expression *kouzhi sanfu* 口脂散馥, the fragrance spread by the girl’s breath.

34 See also: “Her jade flesh was instantly revealed, and warm scent exuded from her. At the touch when they embraced, no breath no perspiration from her he sensed was not fragrant” (玉肌乍露，熱香四流，偎抱之間，覺鼻息汗熏，無氣不馥; 10:1439).

35 See also “When the girl took off her dress, the room was filled with an extraordinary aroma” (異香滿室; *LZZY* 9:1221, “A Girl of Weaving” 續女); “Her jade flesh was instantly revealed, and warm scent exuded from her” (*LZZY* 10:1439, “Ge Jin” 葛巾).

Sometimes fragrance is even specifically referred to as a part of a lady's body, like shoulders [34] (香肩; "The fragrance of my shoulders", *MDT* 12:66), breasts (香乳),³⁶ or cheeks (香腮; *LZZY* 8:1083, "Zhu Sheng" 褚生; *HLM* 26:397). As the female beauty in the writers' perception was related to love and sexuality, the bed of the loved girl is described as sweet-scented,³⁷ fragrant is the silk handkerchief given as a token of love (香羅帕; *JPM* 8:98), and fragrant is the mysterious and ineffable peak of love (美滿幽香), rain and clouds (雨香雲片; *MDT* 10:57), and the love dream (香夢),³⁸ as well as the soul of the maiden in love, or the loving souls (香魂).³⁹

Especially women used to apply perfumes to be more attractive and increase their charm.⁴⁰ [35] In fact, sometimes *xiang* is used as synonym of beauty.⁴¹ As it is said in the popular song edited by Feng Menglong, "Perfumes of her powder and rouge are so attractive; as if they were musk or orchid" (粉香脂氣，分明是麝蘭; *SG* 9:234). In fact, many references to aromas are symbolically used to hint at female beauty and its fragility (see "The perfume that vanishes" 香銷; *MDT* 28:167). Smell is not only an olfactive phenomenon but has a psychological dimension: "smiles emanate perfume" (笑生香; *MDT* 29:173–174). It is not surprising that the magical atmosphere of love passion is presented as the manifestation of a supernatural power. As I mentioned with regards to some descriptions of the supernatural aroma of a beauty, this olfactive property was often nothing but the reflection of the admirer's perception and infatuation, which can be summarised in the line composed by a lover "smelling the remaining aroma of yours" 嗅餘香, already mentioned.

The fragrance of various kinds of pleasant smells and perfumes occupies the second most frequent category of meanings of *xiang*.⁴² Here we should remark that some terms have a double valence, like plum or fading flowers with their original floral meaning and their allegoric reference to female beauty, or those about perfumes which have a supernatural valence. [36]

36 "The lady opened her silken gown, and uncovered her exquisite, flawless and fragrant breasts. He fondled and kissed them for a while" (婦人一面攤開羅衫，露出美玉無瑕、香馥馥的酥胸，緊就就的香乳。; *JPM* 19:237).

37 "The lady turned around and looked at her maid with a smile. Then she ordered Guo go to her bedroom where a bed-curtain adorned with tassels and embroideries were set, and the beddings were sweet-scented and silken." (女顧婢微笑，便命移席臥室。室中流蘇繡帳，衾褥香軟。; *LZZY*, 9:1279, "Tian Gong" 天宮).

38 "Then it was the sweetest moment that we knew perfect mystery of ineffable joy. And when my dream had reached the summit of delight, there came flower petals scattering down!" (好一會分明，美滿幽香不可言。夢到正好時節，甚花片兒掉下來也！; *MDT* 12:66). For the love dream, see *MDT* 27:160.

39 *MDT*, 12:67, 27:160, 28:167, 44:240, 54:296, 55:306. See also "The fragrance of the plum juice" (香生梅唾; *MDT*, 30:179).

40 For homoerotic practice, see "Imitating female fashions, both of them put on perfume, shaved their faces and wore short-sleeved gowns, to the point where it was hard to tell whether they were male or female" (*ZBY* 23:452, "Shuang Hua Miao" 雙花廟). See also the nickname 'Sweetie' (香憐; *HLM*, 9:156). In some way related to this is the habit of including *xiang* in female names, or adding *xiang* as a respect prefix in referring to a lady or a daughter. Daiyu calls her tears as "fragrant tears" 香痕 (*HLM* 34:505).

41 For instance, "delicate and fragrant" 嬌香 (*MDT* 20:110), "extraordinary fragrance" 驚香 (*MDT* 36:205), "ravishing beauty" 狂香 (*MDT* 28:169, quoting Han Yu 韓愈); "pure fragrance" 清香 (*SG* 10:245); "a hot aroma was sprayed". 熱香噴溢 (*LZZY* 9:1222, "A Girl of Weaving" 績女), "living pretty face" 生香面 (*MDT* 28:165); "her delicate face with a sleeping look" 睡搵香腮 (*JPM* 25:325); "her warm and fragrant body" 溫香 (*MDT* 53:287); "the hair fragrance" 髮甚香 (*ZBY* 14:268, "A Spirit Pretends to be People's Father" 怪詐人父); "tender, fragrant, beautiful and pure as jade" 溫香艷玉 (*MDT* 32:189); "to smell her aroma (to enjoy her beauty)" 聞香 (*LZZY* 9:1280, "Tian Gong" 天宮); "Whole-heartedly I shall appreciate all your beauty, your tenderness, your fragrance and your charm with my complete sincerity" (把他艷軟香嬌做意見耍; *MDT* 28:168). In a passage is mentioned the fragrance of the old water caltrop (沙角菱), but in fact female beauty is hinted (*SG* 4:104).

42 At the beginning of chapter 80 of *Honglou meng*, a discussion on the perception of flowers' perfumes witnesses the aesthetic enjoyment of flowers, their aromas together with the pure pleasure that derives from the contemplation of their beauty, the colours of the petals and leaves, the form of the branches and trunks (*HLM* 80:1035).

Sources mention all kinds of scents, especially from nature, flowers, and vegetables.⁴³ Some smells have special effects, like the aphrodisiac perfume used by Empress Wu (Wu Zetian 武則天),⁴⁴ the scenting bath with the seven aromas (七香湯) that will recover the resurrected Du Liniang (*MDT* 35:203), or the mentioned fragrant healing potions. Fragrance may be emitted by a god or goddess or other supernatural powers, as in the following examples:

The point of his clothes where they were beaten by the washing stick, was like brocade in bizarre red and had a rare fragrance (視衣上著杵處，異紅如錦，有奇香。; *LZZY* 12:1709, “A Beggar Immortal” 丐仙); [37]

Zhao went onto the sedan and it went much more quickly than a galloping horse. Soon they went into the hills and Zhao smelt a whiff of extraordinary fragrance that going through his bones (趙乘之，疾于奔馬。俄頃入山，但聞奇香沁骨。; *LZZY* 8:1148, “Lu Yaguan” 陸押官); [38]

Later [Yao] realised it was a dragon. The spots where [Yao]’s hands had touched the mucus gave off a fragrance that didn’t go away for several months. Whenever he picked medicinal herbs with his own hands, his patients would be cured immediately after taking the medicine (始知乃龍也。兩手觸涎處，香數月不散；以之撮藥，應手而愈。; *ZBY* 03:046, “A-Tai Who Touched the Dragon” 摸龍阿太). [39]

Finally, in many cases smell interacts with taste and is mainly associated with delicious foods, wine, and tea:⁴⁵ so, to say “his nostrils were still full of the smell of wine”, Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640–1715) combines palate and olfaction (鼻口醺醺).⁴⁶ Dishes may be the appetizing taros (熱芋甚香; *ZBY* 17:326, “Xu Yake” 徐崖客), roasted spare ribs (骨炙兒; *SG*, 5:128), delicious vegetarian noodles (素面; *ZBY* 18:348, “Borrowing the Silk Wadding for the Coffin” 借絲綿入殮), or more generally the sweet fragrance and tasty foods (香甜; *HLM*, 40:595, *SG*, 2:65), or the smell of meat dishes (肴香; *LZZY* 12:1708, “A Beggar Immortal” 丐仙). The fragrance of wine (酒香, 香甜, 芳香) is praised in many passages,⁴⁷ even the *vin brûlé* (煮酒; *TAMY* 7:42, “The Fishfarm of Pinshan Pavilion” 品山堂魚宕). For tea, a sophisticated competence is shown in the refined circles of Jiangnan, as documented by Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597–1684) in *Tao’an mengyi* 陶庵夢憶 (*Dream Reminiscence of Tao’an*).⁴⁸ Several metaphorical and idiomatic

43 See *HLM* 17:252; *TAMY* 7:42, “The Fishfarm of Pinshan Pavilion” 品山堂魚宕; 4:19 “Shelters along Qinghuai” 秦淮河房, and 8:47-48, “Fan Yulan” 范與蘭; *ZBY*: “Words of the Planchette” 乩言, 19:374, “Li Xiangjun Recommends the Examination Paper” 李香君薦卷, 3:60, “The Bodhisattva in Reply to A Prayer” 菩薩答拜, 21:419, “The Middle India” 中印度, 21:419; *SG* 4:103 and 5:137; *MDT* 15:82.

44 See *ZBY* 24:489, “Two Accounts from the Secret Records of Konghe Residence” (控鶴監秘記二則): “The houses were painted by gold and the steps were made of white jade. The empress lit a stick of rare incense and put down the bed curtain decorated with pearls. She slept together with Changzong” (后熱奇香，擁真珠帳，幸昌宗。).

45 We find also the case *contra naturam*, due to the metamorphosis from human being to dog: “When he grew elder, seeing excretion he still knew it dirty; yet smelling it he felt it tasty. However, he was resolute not to eat such things. He had been a dog for a few years and was often so indignant that he wanted to die at once” (稍長，見便液，亦知穢；然嗅之而香，但立念不食耳。為犬經年，常忿欲死; *LZZY* 1:73, “San Sheng” 三生).

46 *LZZY* 5:621, “Fox in the Dream” 狐夢. Sweet and fragrant are combined in “There were many chestnuts and bamboo shoots on the peak or at the foot of the mountain, they were incomparably sweet and fragrant” (山上下多西栗、邊筍，甘芳無比; *TAMY* 2:12, “The Mountain Hut of Goulou” 岫嶠山房). *Xiang* may be used for taste as “roasted spare ribs grow in savor when you bite them” (骨炙兒牙得裏頭香; *SG* 5:128).

47 *TAMY* 5:28, “The Tangerines of Chen Family of Fanjiang” 樊江陳氏橘; *JSTY* 11:325; *LZZY* 12:1656, “Scholar Ji” 姬生; *LZZY* 7:914, “A Licentiate Guo” 郭秀才; *HLM* 18:278.

48 *TAMY* 2:10, “Biaosheng Monastery” 表勝庵; 3:14, “Orchid-Snow Tea” 蘭雪茶; 3:15-16, “The Tea of Master Min” 閔老子茶.

sentences demonstrate how the shift from literary to symbolic meaning is tiny. For instance, *xiangbobo* 香饅饅 literally means “fragrant cake,” and thus it is often used for a ‘favorite’ person. An analogous process has been seen for the symbolic use of olfactive terms for love and beauty.

In conclusion, we have seen some of *xiang*’s meanings: a) incense, b) perfume, c) symbolism for beauty and love. The most common is incense, which is used for religious purposes and ritual ceremonies, the worship of divinities and supernatural powers, or the funerary ceremonies for the deceased, an ancestor, or a revered saint. Incense also plays an important role in the rituals to solemnise a pledge, a pact of brotherhood, friendship, marriage, or any oath of alliance. Thus, incense is mainly the manifestation of a religious attitude, and can also be indicative of the charisma of a monk or a magician as well as the volume of affairs of a monastery: the efficacy in answering the requests of the devotees and the miraculous power (*ling* 靈) demonstrated by the divinity or the saint are proportional to the fame and wealth of the sacred place (see Santangelo and Beiwen 2013, 20–22). Moreover, a relatively large amount of fragrances are supposed to have a supernatural origin or to be related to the sacred. However, as in the “Peony Pavilion,” the sanctification of love passion let the loved Liniang’s body take the place of a saint’s relics, and thus she dies and is resurrected whole, and the mixture of the sacred and eroticism is expressed by “heavenly fragrance,” *tianxiang*. Analogously, several female immortals in *Liaozhai* have a rare fragrance which derives from their supernatural condition, while it is evident that their sweet smell reflects the desire and admiration that they provoke in their lovers or in men who deal with them. [41]

A few elements are very interesting for understanding religion in this context. Although religiosity in China is different from other areas, and the ritual aspects are often dominant, we can notice both inner fervour and a kind of personal relationship with gods and spirits. We can understand how the religious attitude is expressed in its consolatory function, devotion for begging favours, worshipping the supernatural entity, and concentrating on an act that is the manifestation of an inner state. The metaphor of incense burning in the heart (心香奉佛) expresses the deep attitude of the devotee. The ceremony centred on burning and offering incense is often accompanied by other acts, like purification, sacrifices, and prayers, and opens a special dimension in the inner experience of the devotee. Incense discloses the way of communication between a human being and the supernatural world: “If she is a goddess, then when I beg her for something and burn incense to beg for in a place with nobody else, she would know herself” (如其神，但有所須，無人處焚香以求，彼當自知; LZZY 10:1320, “A Goddess” 神女). This condition is so special and important that it is borrowed even for giving solemnity to a human pact or interrelation. [42]

In order to complete this part, I try to consider the religious or pseudo-religious elements of olfaction in relation to various kinds of odours: How is olfaction related to the sacred or supernatural located on the map of other olfactive experiences in Chinese imagery? Broadening the research to various terms on olfactory experience, including bad and good smells, I have selected about two hundred samples: *qi* 氣 is generally used as a neutral term for odour if not accompanied by attributes, while *xiang* 香 is used for pleasant aromas (90) and *chou* 臭 for disgusting stench (90). This confirms that the main and first distinction is between attractive and repulsive smells, on the basis of their hedonic valence, which is, however, twice moralised as sign of refined education and as final retribution.⁴⁹ [43]

49 For instance, Zhang Dai contrasts the stench of feces with the perfume of beauties: “Smoke is retribution for my eyes and feces for my nostrils—in revenge for the fragrant beauties [of my youth]” (*TAMY* 1, “Preface”

Consequently, our analysis of the pleasant aromas focuses, besides on the use of incense we have already examined, on the perfume of sandalwood (旃檀之氣) or a rare fragrantcy. They are clearly of supernatural origin and expression of sanctity: [44]

Three days before her death, she asked for a basin to wash her feet in. The slave girl fetched her the [usual] wooden basin. She told the girl: “Not that one. This time I will walk across lotus flowers. You must bring me the bronze basin which I use to wash my face.” After a while, the scent of sandalwood wafted through the air as she sat up cross-legged and passed away. Even though she was dead, the smell of sandalwood lingered for over three days and nights till it finally faded away (ZBY 21:410, “The Bodhisattva in Reply to A Prayer” 菩薩答拜). [45]

Suddenly, a rare fragrantcy came wafting out from Xiugu’s bedroom and blew straight out onto the street. The passersby [smelling it] became dazed and simply stood there staring at each other. Yan Hu learned of the strange phenomenon and placed foul things like dead cats and dogs outside Li’s house in order to overpower the flavour. However, the fragrance only grew stronger. A policeman working under the Chief of Police happened to pass by and [getting a whiff of it] sensed there was something strange about the scent. He inquired with the neighbour and found out that Xiugu had died with a grievance. Hence, he reported the case to the magistrate and Yan Hu was subsequently sentenced to death (ZBY 15:289, “Two Stories of Fragrance of Corpse” 尸香二則). [46]

This miraculous aroma may be a mysterious device which draws the attention of people or an official to discover and punish a crime.⁵⁰ In other examples, a fragrant potion has miraculous healing properties and the odour is still remarkable, even if maybe secondary in its medical effects: “Guo unclosed the pot and tried to have a smell, a piercing fragrance sent out. He drank the wine and suddenly he fell into a big stupor” (揭尊微嗅，冽香四射，遂飲之。忽大醉; LZZY 9:1278, “The Palace of Heaven” 天宮).⁵¹ The supernatural and sacred are also expressed in other olfactive experiences, like in the following examples: [47]

Wang kept the dragon’s claw, which was as big as a buffalo horn. It smelled like ambergris and whenever he hung it up, even the mosquitoes and flies would stay well clear if it (ZBY 9:181, “Daoist Lü Drives away the Dragon” 呂道人驅龍). [48]

Zhou walked so quickly across the yellow sand that her feet didn’t even touch the ground. She looked around: there was no one else there. She looked into the [49]

自序). The whole work smells the refined aromas of various kinds of tea and wine, flowers and delicacies. Exceptions in the natural perception of smells can be seen in two passages from “Peony Pavilion” (MDT 8:41) and from *Liaozhai* (LZZY 1:73, “Three Reincarnations” 三生). The former presents the possible change of the evaluation of smells under the subjective perspective, like the stench of manure (糞臭。父老呵，他却不知這糞是香的) or the aroma of rice and other food (饌玉炊金飽即妨。直到飢時聞飯過). The latter deals with the already mentioned case of the reincarnation of a man as a dog, with the consequent change in tastes (然嗅之而香). Finally, the wine has the most fragrant odour (JSTY 11:325) but may also leave a horrible smell (LZZY 6:868, “The Eighth Prince” 八大王).

50 It is interesting that the story ends with the decomposition of the corpse after the injustice is settled.

51 See also: “The old matron laughed, took the crock and left. The scholar found the potion fragrant and cooling; it did not at all seem to be poison. Soon he felt an expansiveness in his chest and a bracing clarity in his skull. A mellow feeling came over him, and he fell asleep. When he awoke, red sunlight filled his window” (嫗笑接甌而去。生覺藥氣香冷，似非毒者。俄覺肺膈寬舒，頭顱清爽，酣然睡去。既醒紅日滿窗。; LZZY 10:1437, “Gejin” 葛巾). Here the fragrance, besides its association with taste, also has medical effects.

distance and saw a house with walls that were all white. The house was very spacious and Zhou went in. Inside there was a table on which sat a stick of incense. The incense had five different colours and was as long as the arm of a steelyard. A flame was burning at its tip. [...] The old woman asked Zhou if she wanted to go back. She answered: “I most certainly want to return, but I can’t.” The old woman said: “Smell the incense, then you will go back home.” Zhou smelled the incense and it felt as if a rare fragrance were spreading throughout her brain. She woke up with a start to learn that she had been lying rigid on her bed for three days. Somebody who heard Zhou’s story said: “That incense is most likely the Soul-Returning Incense from Juku Mountain” (ZBY 19:361, “Soul Return Incense” 返魂香).⁵²

The Daoist then took some pills out of his bag and the strong aroma assailed Zhu’s nostrils. [...] The Daoist gave Zhu ten pellets of medicine and, before leaving, made an obeisance by cupping one hand in the other before his chest. Zhu’s whole family worshipped the pills as if they were gods and paid respects to them day and night (ZBY 3:061, “Daoist Comes to Fetch the Gourd” 道士取葫蘆).

[50]

Suddenly a servant came running in to say that, at that moment, the lake was a perfect mass of lotus flowers. Everyone was surprised and looked out of the window. Sure enough, they saw a boundless mass of green dotted here and there with lotus flowers. The thousands of flowers bloomed almost simultaneously. And in another minute the fragrant perfume of the flowers refreshed their brains through the icy wind. All the guests thought it was strange. The officials sent off servants in a boat to collect the lotus seeds. Though the men were seen to go deep into the mass of the flowers and row back, they returned empty-handed. On being questioned how it was, they said, “When we were rowing out, we saw the flowers were far away on the northern side. But as soon as we were approaching the northern shore, they had already shifted to the southern side.” The Daoist laughed and said: “These are visionary flowers in your visional dreams which have no real existence” (LZZY 4:0580, “Lotus Blossoming in the Winter” 寒月芙蓉).

[51]

In the first of the four quotations, the magic object smelled like ambergris 嗅作龍涎香, in the second it was a rare fragrance 異香 spreading throughout the protagonist’s brain. The strong aroma assailed Zhu’s nostrils 芬芳撲鼻 and the fragrance of the visionary lotus flowers, respectively in the third and fourth examples, are caused by the magic power of Daoist monks. If aroma assumes a supernatural dimension, it can be associated with the idea of immaculate

[52]

52 Some special aromas are traced back to legendary phenomena, such as the “resuscitating-the-dead incense”, *fanhunxiang* 返魂香, mentioned together with the geographical name of the place where it is supposed to be produced: “In the Western Ocean there is the Juku Continent. In the Shenwei area a big tree grows, which is similar to maple. The fragrance which emanates from its leaves can spread several hundred miles far. This tree is called ‘Soul Return Tree’ [...] This is a miraculous plant! Its fragrance can be felt several hundred miles far, and an inearthed corpse can perceive it, and soon come back to life” (聚窟洲在西海中。申未(來)洲上有大樹。與楓木相似，而葉香，聞數百里。名此為返魂樹。斯靈物也，香氣聞數百里，死屍在地，聞氣乃活。(《十洲記》)；*Taiping Guangji* 414:1). See also *Taiping Yulan* 太平御覽 j. 952, and *Xiangbenji* 香本紀, “Preface” 有序, in *Xiangyan congshu* 香豔叢書, wuji 五集 3:18 (1389). Now the term *fanhunxiang* is used for a medical plant, *Boswellia serrata* (Family: *Burseraceae*), a deciduous middle sized tree, which is mostly concentrated in tropical Asia and Africa. It has long been used in Ayurvedic medicine, and recommended for osteoarthritis, and juvenile rheumatoid arthritis.

purity, like the scent of incense that purifies the night,⁵³ or the chaste Buddhist relationship, “as a sweet and undefiled Buddhist companion” (香潔道伴; LZZY 11:1546, “Yue Zhong” 樂仲).

Descriptions of the aroma of charming and often supernatural girls have been examined as a symbol of their otherness and their seductive attraction to men. If these aromas, in many cases, can be called ‘smells of love,’ we can contrast them with the ‘smell of death,’ like the stink presented in a nightmare by Pu Songling: “The female ghost smelled the man’s face with her snout, including his cheek, nose, brows, forehead, everywhere. The man felt her mouth was as cold as ice, with her frozen breath penetrating up to his bones” (女子以喙嗅翁面，顴鼻眉額殆遍。覺喙冷如冰，氣寒透骨; LZZY 1:20, “Biting the Ghost” 咬鬼). [53]

Repulsive smells may derive from physical conditions, such as dirty or rotten foods, wounds and sickness,⁵⁴ feces, and a dirty environment.⁵⁵ Of more concern for the religious sphere are causes associated with the idea of death, such as cadavers, blood, ghosts, malevolent spirits, and animals, such as snakes. The common element of all stench cases is a kind of pollution, by polluted and polluting things, especially those that imply a metaphysical or magical significance.⁵⁶ We can see a few examples on disgusting stench from cadavers and blood:⁵⁷ [54]

Then Wang saw a lot of jumbled houses, which sent out a rotten stinking smell (穢臭熏人). When the ghost in the garden saw the light, they gathered around the light and all of them were headless or footless, which was too hard to endure to see. Wang turned around and wanted to go away, but he saw a cadaver lying under the wall. Having a close look, he found the flesh and blood of the cadaver was scattered about in a mess (LZZY 12:1685, “Jinse [Zither]” 錦瑟). [55]

The woman held something in her sleeve and before she entered, she drew it out and hid it under the doorstep. Chen was puzzled as to what she’d put there, and soon he discovered it was a bloodstained rope exuding a foul smell. Immediately, he realised that she must be the ghost of a woman who had hanged herself. He pulled out the rope, hid it in his shoes, and sat down again (ZBY 4:073, “Chen Qingke Pushes Away the Ghost by Breathing on it” 陳清恪公吹氣退鬼). [56]

He tripped and fell into a pool of water as hot and red as blood. It had a foul odour. (水紅熱如血，其氣甚腥; ZBY 19:370, “A Hunter from Daizhou” 代州獵戶). [57]

Grasping the ghost’s remains in his left hand, with his right hand he took a torch off one of his servants and set the silk floss on fire. As it crackled, fresh blood spurted out, letting off a foul smell that was almost unbearable. At dawn, Wang’s [58]

53 “The sounds of *Sheng* and *Huang* are echoing around the shrine in the breeze. The Rainbow Skirt hangs cold in the green mist. From the depth of the lotus pond, a scent of incense purifies the night. Mortals easily age, plans face many obstructions, and dreams can’t last long. What deep feelings of love one has had, now lie beneath three feet of soil. A slanting sun shines over the vacant ground” (MDT 33:195).

54 For instance ZBY 07:135, “Mr. Wu Didn’t Return” 吳生不歸. See the stink may emanate from a cankered body (LZZY 11:1560, “Wang Shi” 王十), from a sore (LZZY 12:1706, “A Beggar Immortal” 丐仙), and from bromhidrosis (LZZY 3:355, “Little Hair Bun” 小髻).

55 SG 1:29 (bad-smelling mud), ZBY 23:460, “The Tool of Love” 風流具 (dirty toilet); TAMY 3:15, “Yanghe Spring” 陽和泉 (feces).

56 On more details on pollution, filth and death, see Santangelo (2012, 442–48, 2015, 77–115; 2013, 1:127–140).

57 Other examples are the “unbearably foul smell of blood” 血臭不可耐 (ZBY 05:086, “King Wenxin” 文信王), or the stench of the dead 死人臭 (TAMY 7:38–39, “The Incense Market at Xihu” 西湖香市).

neighbours all crowded around in surprise, covering their noses to protect their nostrils from the stench. On the floor the blood was an inch thick, smelly and greasy like sticky rubber (ZBY 05:100, “Catching the Ghost” 捉鬼).

The second passage also evokes to the woman’s suicide, and, like all other examples, includes the presence of ghosts. In fact, in about twenty cases, ghosts and their stench (鬼氣; LZZY 12:1699, “Qin Hui” 秦檜), evil spirits, and animal-spirits bring an unbearable stink, which is not only a natural phenomenon but a sign of terrible pollution, a herald of disasters and death: [59]

Zhao Yiji said: “Each type of ghost has its own odour. Ghosts who died in water smell like mutton (羊臊氣). Ghosts who died on the shore smell like paper ash (紙灰氣). If earthlings get a whiff of these kinds of smells, they must stay well away” (ZBY 9:169, “Water Ghost Afraid of the Word ‘Clamour’ ” 水鬼畏囂字). [60]

The ghost was unable to reply and instead went straight up to Zhang, opened his mouth and breathed out onto him. Zhang felt a foul-smelling swirl of mist as cold as ice caress his face (一條冷氣如冰，臭不可耐; ZBY 16:303, “Crooked Mouth” 歪嘴先生). [61]

After midnight, he heard some footsteps and then he saw a woman dressed in red walk upstairs and into the room Lin was staying in. She bowed to the statue of the Buddha before turning to Lin and smiling. Lin was not fooled by her smile, and soon in fact the woman loosened her hair and opened her eyes wide. She walked straight towards Lin, about to attack him. Lin grabbed a tea table and threw it at her. The woman leaned to one side, dodging the table; then she reached out to take hold of Lin. He grasped the woman by the hands, which were as cold and hard as iron. The woman couldn’t move since Lin was holding onto her, so she breathed out towards him: the odour was unbearably foul 臭氣難耐. To avoid the smell, the only thing Lin could do was turn his head the other way [as she continued to breathe on him]. But he still held fast to the woman’s hands, not loosening his grip until the rooster crowed. At that point, the woman fell to the ground and Lin realised it was a stiff corpse (ZBY 23:450, “Ghost Blows Towards Someone, Making Their Head Crooked” 鬼吹頭彎). [62]

Usually the intrusion of death is accompanied by dangerous, noxious phenomena, such as a cold and evil wind (惡風, 陰風颯然),⁵⁸ or a foul smell: “At the second watch, the evil wind rustled and the lamplights turned greenish” (至二鼓，陰風颯然，燈火盡綠), or “They could all feel cold air blow across their faces. [...] a faint smell of sulphur rose out from the case” (面目模糊，冷氣襲人 [...] 有硫黃氣自匣中起), or again “hearing wind gusting up from under the bed” (聞床下颯然有聲; Zibuyu 1, “A Stone Box in Prison” 獄中石匣). [63]

Besides death, the repulsive odours may be associated with the discrimination of ‘the en- [64]

58 In *Zibuyu*, the phenomenon of cold wind is frequently described in relation to the presence of ghosts and other monsters: “The Assistant Minister felt a cold vapour travel through his five internal organs” (侍郎覺冷氣一條直逼五臟; “The Strange Dream of an Assistant Minister” 某侍郎異夢, 5); “A cold wind crept up to the bed-curtain” 冷氣漸逼 (“Cherry Tree Ghost” 櫻桃鬼, 6); “She opened her mouth and in Chen’s direction blew a gust of icy wind” (聳立張口吹陳，冷風一陣如冰; “Chen Qingke Pushes Away the Ghost by Breathing on It” 陳清恪公吹氣退鬼, 4); “A gust of evil wind blew” 陰風颯然 (“Ma Panpan” 馬盼盼, 2).

emy' or 'the other.' As the repulsion for spoiled food or excrement stink touches the vital drives, any association of puritanical worries with religious and racial elements may become an explosive, and effective tool for discrimination and persecution. The process of socialisation implies the internalisation of general categories, knowledge, and values. The role of odour as a marker of social identity and difference has been stressed for provoking affinities and antipathies as an important means of group preservation (Corbin quoted in Classen 1992, 133–66). The impact and effects of the odour-identity binomial is different in various cases, and a kind of quality leap happens when it is associated with the religious and medical experience: odour itself is not a direct cause of ethnic and religious discrimination, and it rather reflects habits acquired in the first part of life. It is rather a symptom of a mental and emotional attitude, but might become a deep stimulant of hate and intolerance when it is associated with fear or a sense of insecurity concerning health and vital safety. Historians have noticed religious persecution in the occasion of epidemics in Middle Age, and psychologists discuss the “behavioural immune system.”⁵⁹ In Europe, for instance, the so called *Foetor Judaicus*, a denigratory term for the supposedly unpleasant smell of Jews, was the slanderous epithet started by the Roman poet Martial (*Epigrams* 4, 4) and carried through the Middle Ages, accompanied by the legend on the dissemination of the cholera, up to the racist elaboration of the Theologian Johann Jacob Schudt (1664–1722).⁶⁰ Thus I think that the study of olfaction may be very important for understanding the phenomenon of religious and interreligious intolerance that involves deep feelings of health dangers together with the ‘absolute’ beliefs. For instance, in Italy some movements now play on such fears to instigate hostility against immigrants.

Worth of note regarding Chinese sources, the equivalents of ‘stinky’ are very common denigratory and insulting appellations for individuals as well as for groups especially in the category of nomadic ‘barbarians.’⁶¹ The contempt against them was often exemplified with the description of their stink, or of smelling of mutton (腥膻). Reflecting such ideas, in late Ming times, Tang Xianzu, in the 46 act of *Mudan ting*, is very clear in the laments of the official Du 杜 of the Song 宋 dynasty (960–1279), when differences in smells and foods are mentioned:

[65]

59 The “behavioural immune system” consists of psychological mechanisms that allow detecting the potentially infective presence of disease in other individuals and preventing contact with those objects and individuals; see Schaller and Lesley (2007, 293–307). For a modern case based on prejudices, see Dutta and Rao (2015, 36–47).

60 Largey and Watson (1972, 1021–34) also mention the moral pollution in Arthur Schopenhauer. For the “stench” of Africans, see Corbin, quoted in Classen (1992, 134). According to Howes and Lalonde, the symbolic importance of smell tends to increase when social boundaries are perceived as being threatened (1991, 125–35).

61 A tacit *conventio ad excludendum* can be inferred in the term *huchou* 狐臭 (variant 胡臭) as “fox stench” or “barbarian stench.” *Huchou* originally refers to a supposed disease, and first appeared in biological and medical textbooks in the early twentieth century, during the Republican era, when some Chinese sought to modernize traditional concepts by incorporating them in pseudoscientific terms. It can be traced back to “animal stink,” *chousao* 臭臊 from the “Core Classic of the Yellow Emperor,” *Huangdi neijing* 黄帝内经. According to the legend, the fox spirit, *hulijing*, sneaks into the lives of unsuspecting subjects in the guise of an innocent attractive maid, hiding the original stink, which eventually may be revealed. It combines the wild odour of the fox with its pollution tied to its nefarious aims to traffic in sex and death, with its double reference to “barbarians’ odour” and to the female “demonic allure.” For some literary examples, see “stinker slave” 臊奴 (*MDT* 47:253) or “stinking ruffian” 臭賊 (*SG* 8:227), 臭小厮 (*HLM* 56:861). However, the case of Emperor Qianlong’s fragrant Uyghur Muslim concubine, Xiangfei 香妃 seems to move into an opposite direction. The *xiang* in her name is not just given as a female name, but because her body was said to emit a mysterious fragrance without recourse to perfumes or powders. This legend witnesses the Qing tendency to exoticise the bodies of Uyghur women through body and smell (Millward 1994, 427–58; see also Zhu 2017, 159).

What purpose has Heaven in this when no light of sun moon or stars suffices to distinguish Chinese from Tartar but rank stanch [sic] of sheep and goat blows throughout mortal world [sic] and central lands are turned to a desert of yellow sand? 問天何意？有三光不辨華夷，把腥膻吹換人間，這望中原做了黃沙片地？⁶²

[66]

An aroma of incense expresses and induces the communion with the sacred, the solemnity of an important act; a stink may recall the netherworld and death or the Other, while another smell may recall life and love, resurrection and the fragrance of flowers, and is the sign of the incorruptibility of the body of the saint. These are a few examples of the representation of the senses in direct or indirect relation with the religious sphere, especially in the description of extreme experiences, but the penetrating power and emotional impact of odours, together with the association of smell, breath, and cosmic energy, allow scent to assume vital and religious values. Worthy of note is the syncretic attitude of the characters in novels and dramas, often influenced by popular beliefs of mixed Dao-Buddhist origin, with the exception of some references to olfaction and other senses specifically recalling the reincarnation doctrine and Buddhist festivals. Discrimination on the basis of olfaction marks rather a cultural identity toward the Other, ‘barbarians,’ or fear for pollution (death, sickness). Sensorial feelings, either imagined or not, take part in the virtual reality human beings share with other members of their community, and often become a language that communicates consolatory or alarming messages, self-identity, or aggressive emotions.

[67]

Extended Survey to Other Bodily Sensations

And now a few comments on the entire spectrum of sensorial reactions analysed in the same literary sources. I have selected 2540 terms concerning sensory experiences, classified according to context. In every language, the lexicon of bodily sensations is rather rich, as it includes sensorial faculties (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching), their objects (sight, sounds, smells, tastes, pain, heat, pressure, etc.), as well as different physical conditions and other bodily feelings (wellbeing, tiredness, feeling (sexually) aroused, itchy, painful, sleepy, hungry, thirsty, deafened, warm, cold, etc.).⁶³

[68]

As I mentioned, physiological perceptions and reactions are closely related to the affective world: physical experiences involve the whole body-personality, as they are permeated by cultural constructions. Thus, physical pain is not just an ‘objective’ or ‘mechanical’ reaction of the human body or its parts: it was understood not only as a physical phenomenon, but also as involving the whole body-mind-heart system, while moral suffering was also related to the body. For instance, in Chinese, the notions ‘five viscera’ (*wuzang* 五臟) and ‘four limbs’ (*sizhi* 四肢) are more than just a rhetorical expression, as they maintain the relation between the state of mind and body. Cognitive factors involve the roles of values in the emotional process

[69]

62 Act 46 of *Mudanting* (Tang 1998, 258, transl. by Cyril Birch). Tang Xianzu in the same 46 act, quoting a line from the Tang poet Gao Pian 高駢, hints that the barbarians are so horrible that even animals avoid them: “No single bird flies in the thousands miles of sky on barbarian’s realm” (萬里胡天鳥不飛). In act 47, the Jin general is insulted with the denomination of *saozi* 臊子 ‘foul smell,’ ‘fetid thing.’

63 Psychologists consider bodily sensations as experiences due to stimulations of sensorial organs. They distinguish ‘general’ from ‘specific’ sensitivity, according to either its distribution in the whole body (“superficial”) or its concentration in certain organs (“deep”); see Schmidt (1978); Ludel (1978). Among physical feelings, specialists investigate, in particular, tactile perception for the sense of pressure, thermosception for the sense of heat, nociception for the sense of pain, and equilibrioception for the perception of balance. In our database, we collected a large quantity of examples from Ming and Qing sources concerning such concepts.

and in the evaluation and perception of bodily sensations. This meant that psychological and cultural factors are fundamental even in physical perceptions (Santangelo 2014, 36–52). In the Chinese language, *gan* 感 and *jue* 覺 as well as the modern compound *ganjue* 感覺 may be considered almost similar to “feeling,” making no distinction between mental and physical feelings.⁶⁴ Xunzi 荀子 (300–230 BC), in his contribution to understanding the basic functions of the sensory organs and sensation—which are considered as organs of appetite—states the close relation between *qing* and sensory feelings.⁶⁵ Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692) and Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777) have emphasized the unity of different functions in human beings. Wang Fuzhi, for instance, refers to senses and virtues as examples of the unity of the body:

Heaven creates human beings through the five phases of *yin* and *yang* energies. Then the principle is located in man, and concentrated as his human nature. Consequently, [through his senses] sounds and images, smells and tastes enrich man’s life, as well as the four cardinal virtues of humaneness, justice, ritual propriety, and wisdom correct his morality, so that everything is suitable to principle. If senses follow their way, they are not in contrast with cardinal virtues, and rather both mutually cooperate in the body (Wang 1975, 3:79).⁶⁶

[70]

天以其陰陽五行之氣生人，理即寓焉而凝之為性。故有聲色臭味以厚其生，有仁義禮智以正其德，莫非理之所宜。聲色臭味順其道，則與仁義禮智不相悖害，合兩者而互為體也。

Religious feelings are among the most common emotions. They cope with several spiritual needs, like the sense of justice, the search for inner or outer transcendence, and their social, ritualistic, consolatory, and aesthetical functions; they sublimate everyday worries and hopes, repentance and a sense of guilt with the worship of various divinities, fears of their malevolence or anger, supplication for help and protection. In the literary materials I have checked, I found little on sensations related to inter-religious as well as intra-religious relations. Something can be seen in the *zhiguai* 志怪 genre—narratives of strange phenomena—that uncovers many hidden experiences that are not reported in any other sources. Hallucinations, spirit possessions, and nightmares are all subconscious reactions that project inner contradictions into a supernatural world. In these extreme experiences, senses play an important role, as they seem to confirm the reality of the subjectivity of virtual impressions. The virtual reality and the extreme experiences represented in these tales often present bodily sensations that are caused by guilt and a sense of shame, religious beliefs in spirits and god, miracles, intimate relation, and communication with the holy world. Fear is one of the most frequent emotions, but effective sensations are felt, too.

[71]

I mentioned various cases of olfactory experiences, the fragrance emanated by supernatural beings, the body of saints, the sanctified and sublimated projections of one’s desires, as well as the stink of death produced by personages from the underworld. In a Daoist vision, a multisensorial experience is described: “Not long after, celestial music resounded in his ears and

[72]

64 *Ting* 聽 (lit.: listen; hear; obey) and *wen* 聞 (hear; smell) may be used for “feeling,” also as in “But suddenly she felt a slight gust of wind, and she felt chilled to the bones” (忽聽一陣微風，只覺侵肌透骨; *Honglou meng* 45:673).

65 As Nylan (2001, 94) notices, “Given that the evaluative impulses are endowed at birth, the self inevitably seeks that which it accounts as satisfaction, supplying what it perceives itself to lack. A human has no ‘value-free,’ ‘neutral’ response. Instead, a preliminary assessment of a particular phenomenon’s value to the self disposes the person to want to secure or to shun the phenomenon. These dispositions are classified by level of intensity: if a person finds a particular phenomenon pleasing, he/she may feel a liking or preference (*hao* 好) for it, a frisson of delight (*xi* 喜), or a more lasting sense of pleasure (*le* 樂). On the other hand, if the phenomenon fails to please, he/she may feel dislike or distaste (*wu* 惡), a spurt of anger (*nu* 怒), or a

an unusual fragrant scent wafted into his nose. Two cranes flew in carrying a crystal carriage in which sat a king, who looked like the Fragrant Boy in the drawings in the world of the living” (*Zibuyu* 7:132, “Crane Carrying a Carriage” 仙鶴扛車). Other hallucinatory experiences are the pain attributed to persecution by and the haunting of ghosts and evil spirits.

Besides all pains from supposed beatings and bad health caused by supernatural beings, [73] other sufferings can come from acute repentance and a sense of guilt. The somatisation of self-punishment is evident in this surrealistic passage from Pu Songling:

Once he recalled a meritorious deed, his heart was peaceful and clear; when a bad [74] action, he became regretful and worried, as if he were being put in a caldron with boiling oil. The suffering was unbearable and indescribable. He still remembered that when he was seven or eight, he once took a bird-nest and killed the squabs. Merely thinking of this act, his heart burnt with a hot tide of blood, and this feeling passed after a short moment. When finally all the deeds he had done in his life had passed through his thoughts, it was like the high tide was over.

如一善，則心中清淨寧帖；一惡，則懊惱煩燥，似油沸鼎中，其難堪之狀，口不能肖似之。猶憶七八歲時，曾採雀雛而斃之，只此一事，心頭熱血潮湧，食頃方過。直待平生所為，一一潮盡 (*Liaozhai zhiyi* 3:326, “Mr Tang” 湯公).

It is not by chance that these pains are very similar to the punishments in the Buddhist [75] Hells. Images and descriptions from temples and religious texts could help give shape to such sufferings.

Apparently, Yuan Mei—another famous writer of the same genre—is not a religious writer, [76] and, on the contrary, he is often irreverent and sarcastic with monks, people’s beliefs, and divinities. However, his stories move all around the “terrible mystery of the sacred.”⁶⁷ The

more profound and lasting sense of pain and loss (*ai* 哀). These six basic dispositions (*qing* 情), endowed at birth, represent the initial, unmediated inclinations to act.”

66 Wang Fuzhi’s thesis is framed in the long debate on the distinction or identity of the “ordering principle” (*li* 理) and “energy” (*qi* 氣), or an original moral and psychophysical nature.

67 For the concept of *mysterium tremendum*, see Otto (1923). In Otto’s analysis, the Holy fascinates and terrifies at the same time: “The daemonic-divine object may appear to the mind an object of horror and dread, but at the same time it is no less something that allures with a potent charm.” Yuan Mei deals with extraordinary and invisible powers and popular belief, and his recourse to hallucination, deliria, dreams, and ghosts is more than a narrative device, for he is well aware that this is the dark zone which is not a usual field of enquiry. The way Yuan Mei presents this anomalous dimension—either pathological or redemptive—in his stories is meaningful: it is in fact a religious experience, the “creatural” attitude, prophecy of death and salvation, that generates alarm and perturbation in the reader, stupor and estrangement for reconsidering reality. *Zibuyu*’s stories present how human life is full of portents and miracles, but also remind people that portents, miracles and premonitory dreams may be unreliable and misleading. Basically, the powers of ghosts and gods are dependent on human belief in order to have any effect. But because such feelings corresponded to the need of safety and consolation, these beliefs could not be suppressed by authority, as they would resurface again and again. Religious feelings appear in the indignation for a wrong to be redressed, in the sense of human weakness in the face of disasters, sickness, and death, in the fear of the unknown and of what lies ahead, and in the naïve hope that salvation can be obtained through somebody else. All these states of mind are tensions that come together to produce a powerful energetic effect. No matter how subjective these religious experiences may be, they are nonetheless a reality. In actual fact, beliefs and illusions are more real than we might like to think, and their impact on private and historical scenes is fundamental, even if their interpretation is not univocal. Moreover, beliefs and hopes do not need to be proved or disproved. We have no solid evidence whether or not Yuan Mei’s objective acceptance of credence was fundamentally based on his tolerance for human illusions and weaknesses. From a reading of his narrative work, it appears he was well aware of how individuals and societies were affected on a practical level by ideologies and beliefs: the consolidation of the empire and local communities, the mourning elaboration, as well as the justification of personal and social interactions through the manipulation of behaviour, memory, and feelings such as regrets and hopes.

mystery of pollution of death and sexuality recalls the profound religious and emotional meaning of mortuary rituals and sexual taboos. This attitude depends not only on the place and actions—netherworld and spirits—but on the questions and themes which are behind the plots. Religious phenomena start from a sense of inadequacy in the face of unpredictable changes, the search for protection, miracles, and consolation. They may also respond to forms of legitimation of power and social order. Even in Confucianism, there are several religious practices, such as the emperor's offerings at the Altar of Heaven to Heaven-God (*haotian shangdi* 昊天上帝拉), the imperial officer's sacrifices, the worship of Confucian sages held in Confucian Temples and academies, as well as the cult of ancestors at the family level. A popular religion dominant in traditional China syncretically consists of practical beliefs in a pantheon which includes animistic spirits of natural elements, Buddhist bodhisattvas, and Daoist saints.⁶⁸ This practical attitude of popular believers is mainly interested in the miraculous efficacy (*ling* 靈) of any power for help, healing, or imploring favours or male offspring. Individuals and organizations respond to these requests, satisfy them, canalise them, and exploit them. Monks, magicians, and fortune-tellers took such a function. As a scholar, Yuan Mei is sceptical regarding any supernatural phenomena and miracles,⁶⁹ and his stories present unreliability, corruption, and greed even in the netherworld and among spirits.⁷⁰ Yet he is conscious of the impossibility of repressing and eradicating beliefs, as they are born from the human condition. Furthermore, he does not deny the extraordinary powers that are produced by religious tensions.⁷¹

Various sensations are mentioned in the interaction with the supernatural world. We start with the feeling of *burning*: [77]

A Long was in coma and refused to eat. Han asked a witch⁷² to diagnose his disease. [78]

68 Many temples combine Buddhist deities and Daoist liturgy. Animal sacrifice is allowed in Confucian rites but forbidden by both Buddhist and Daoist doctrines. Each temple may contain several cults to different divinities. The most popular practices were held at the local temples in honour of heroic tutelary saints that fulfilled the function of territorial protection against demons who caused calamities and diseases, or that were dedicated to devoted to immortals who had cured the sick and the suffering (Meulenbeld 2012).

69 In one of his letters, he explicitly states his natural loathing for Buddhism, Daoism, and Neo-Confucian orthodoxy: 僕生性不喜佛、不喜仙、兼不喜理學。(Xiaocang shanfang chidu 小倉山房尺牘 7, “Da Xiang Jinmen” 答項金門; see also Gōyama 1990, 137). Notwithstanding his Buddhist influences (Huang 2009, 79–81), he is particularly critical of Buddhist theories and practices, as they do not appreciate the taste of life, do not understand the difference between life and death, are full of absurd superstitions (see Huang 2009, 138–40), and repress human desires. No less harsh is his criticism against Daoism as well as popular beliefs in spirits and other religious practices, such as magic arts, fortune-tellers, and geomantic performances for selecting gravesites (see Huang 2009, 140–42). He ridicules the Thunder God in *Stealing the Thunder God's Awl* (偷雷錐, 8) and *Deputy to the Thunder God* (署雷公, 5) and mocks credulity in *The Earth Goddess Blackmails People* (土地奶奶索詐, 7), where the wife of the locality god cheats people by frightening them in dreams in order to obtain sacrifices and devotional activities.

70 The netherworld mirrors the world of living people, with all vices and virtues, bribes and flattery, bureaucracy and imperfect administration of justice (see Hammond 2008, 90–94).

71 Yuan is convinced that the ultimate source of their power is actually the human mind, which is constantly looking for such interlocutors to project evil onto and seek protection and solace from: “However, the powers of ghosts and gods are dependent on human belief in order to have any effect” 然鬼神力量，終需恃人而行。(Nangnang 囊囊, 3). This is in conformity with the argument presented in the second part of one of his essays, that “Fake will not triumph on truth. Spirits and ghosts are born in human mind” 邪不胜正。神鬼生于人心。See *Suiyuan suibi* 隨園隨筆, “Jottings from the Garden of Contentment” 28:10 (Yuan 1995). More ambiguous is the position of Pu Songling, who is cautious with magicians and diviners, but firmly believes in universal justice and retribution. Even officials who publicly advocated the orthodoxy and supremacy of the Confucian tradition were often involved in Buddhist, Daoist, or local religious practices like most other people (Meulenbeld 2012, 136–37).

The witch said: 'Fetch the magistrate's red brush used in interrogation and write the character 'zheng' [right] on the patient's heart, and the character 'dao' [knife] on his neck, then two 'huo' [fire] on his palms. He will be saved then.' Han did as taught. When he wrote till the character 'huo,' A-Long opened his eyes and shouted out: 'Don't burn me! I will leave.' From then on, the monster didn't appear again. 阿龍癡迷不食，韓氏召女巫診之。巫曰：“取縣官堂上朱筆，在病者心上書一‘正’字，頸上書一‘刀’字，兩手書兩‘火’字，便可救也。”韓氏如其言。書至左手“火”字，阿龍張目大叫曰：“勿燒我！我即去可也。”自此怪遂絕 (Zibuyu 1, “A Long” 阿龍).

A sense of *suffocation* may be attributed to a ghost's persecution: “After Du died, he attached his soul to his wife's body. Every time the woman wanted to eat, he would throttle her throat, cry sadly and say: 'Against my will!'” 工部卒後，附魂于夫人之體，每食，必扼其喉，悲啼曰：“舍不得。(Zibuyu 1, “Master Du of the Ministry of Public Works” 杜工部).

And again, obsession with sexuality can be felt as a sorrowful experience of persecution by a devil, as it is presented in many stories by elements that reflect conscious and unconscious taboos: A girl in the neighbourhood was haunted by a monster. The monster looked hideous and wicked and was flocky all over its body, part of which seemed to be covered in feathers. Every time it had sex with the girl, the girl would feel an unbearable pain in her private parts and so she would plead for sparing her life (Zibuyu 3, “Nangnang” 囊囊). For another woman who was the tormented victim of rape by a monster, there were obviously neither natural feelings nor pleasure, but only pain and terror: “A monster that looks like a black sheep comes to my room every night. It speaks like a human being. Its penis is like a hairy bodkin and when it makes love to me, it's excruciating.” 夜有怪，狀如黑羊，能作人語。陽具如毛錐，痛不可當。(Zibuyu 19:363, “Yumei” 玉梅).

However, pain and tumescence may be the correct heavenly punishment for a corrupt official:

Less than a decade later, the magistrate was transferred to Songjiang. One day, he was sitting in his office having lunch. His servant watched a young man enter through the window, went straight for the magistrate and slapped his back three times before fleeing. Soon the magistrate felt a sharp pain in his back and stopped eating. His back had swollen out about a foot, in the shape of two mounds divided by a small crevice, just like buttocks.

。未十年，令遷守松江，坐公館，方午餐，其僕見一少年從窗外入，以手拍其背者三，遂呼背痛不食。已而背腫尺許，中有界溝，如兩臀然。(Zibuyu 16, “Quan Gu” 全姑).

In contrast, a magic pill may cure a long-time disease and finally stop an old, frequent pain. Zhou had eaten an iron needle by mistake in his youth and he thus often felt a faint pain in his stomach. When he swallowed the pill, the pain went away (Zibuyu 8, “Mysterious Lady in the Ninth Heaven” 九天玄女).

Conclusion

As the article concerns religion and sensory perception, I could mention only a small part of examples concerning the encounter with the 'supernatural' presented in late imperial Chinese

72 The *wu* 巫, or a kind of shaman, from ancient China, has magic abilities to remove evils, and also medical powers. On the multi-dimensional and cross-cultural dimension of *wu*, see Yen Ping-chiu (1990, 85–124).

fiction. Numerous cases where odours accompany a religious experience are not limited to the encounter with the supernatural but include tales that concern love feelings and other individual or social acts which are performed with sacral and solemn devotion, with a kind of religious attitude. The first part of the essay dealt with the universal phenomenon of olfaction and some specific aspects within the Chinese culture. In the next part, I focused on the emblematic term of *xiang*, its concrete meaning of incense, then of perfume and other symbolic extensions, its use and various semantic implications, and its collocation in the dialectical relation of the two polarities of fragrance and stink. The reader who had the patience to follow the dispersive path of this paper might agree with the *leitmotiv* that any religion with its many beliefs and myths cannot but recall other religions and be linked with them. Moreover, the sacred is never cultivated as a pure entity, but it is deeply rooted in cultures and in the vitality of bodies. The section dedicated to the analysis of *xiang* is an attempt to offer the kaleidoscopic manifestation of the sacred, from material culture to the social dimension and vital drives. Following the contradictory, complex variety of meanings, references, implicit and explicit hints, as well as double entendres may seem to distract from the focus on religion but, in fact, helps to better understand the concrete location of the holy in the contemporaries' mentality. Finally, I presented some examples of other sensorial feelings involved in religious beliefs and practices.

The article is based on reading representative literary works and a short analysis of specific terms. The lexicon offers concrete examples of the perceptions of sensory organs through the various modulations of the use of words related to them. Olfaction and other faculties are not limited to a physical reaction concerning bodily organs. The physical reaction activates emotions and intentions, or it is also provoked by passions and desires. This survey may appear dispersive and maybe some analyses deserved a closer attention, but this is a preliminary approach attempting to stress the broad implications of bodily feelings that link olfactory and other sensory organs to the highest symbols: the religious sphere is variegated, beliefs and doctrines are often combined, and they are rooted in the mystery of life and death.

[85]

Abbreviations

GJXS: *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小說 (*Yushimingyan* 喻世明言), "Ancient and Modern Tales"

HLM: *Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢, "The Dream of the Red Mansion"

JPM: *JinPingMei* 金瓶梅, "The Golden Lotus"

JSTY: *Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言, "Common Words for Warning the World"

LZZY: *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異, "Strange Tales from the Leisure Studio"

MDT: *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭, "The Peony Pavilion"

QS: *Qingshi Qingshileili* 情史類略, "History of Love"

SG: *Shan'ge* 山歌, "Mountain Songs"

TAMI: *Tao'an mengyi* 陶庵夢憶, "Remembrances of Zhang Dai's Dreams"

ZBY: *Zibuyu* 子不語, "What the Master Would Not Discuss"

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Appendix

Terms and expressions including *xiang*

香	45
[奉/供] 香火 [錢/情/緣/之誓]	32
[沐手] 焚香 [沐浴/拜佛]	27
燒 [頭] 香 [紙]	27
異香 [撲鼻/蓬勃]	19
進 [頭] 香	13
行香	9
香魂	6
香氣 [酷烈/逼人]	5
拈香 [拜佛]	5
[美滿] 幽香	4
偷香竊玉/竊玉偷香/偷 [韓掾之] 香	4
奇香 [沁骨]	4
香願/還香願	4
香甜/香甘	4
持香	4
[睡搵] 香腮 [帶赤]	3
憐香惜玉/惜玉憐香	3
溫香 [艷玉]	2
香潔	2
香軟	2
上 [頭] 香	2
清香	2
天香	2
熱香 [噴溢]	2
分香賣履/賣履分香	2
粉香脂氣/脂香酒氣	2
盟香	2
餘香/作餘香想	2
點香	2
荷香	2
爰香	1
暗香	1
一瓣之香	1
雨香雲片	1
香羅帕	1
狂香	1
驚香	1
香醇醇	1
香花供養	1
香滑	1
香痕	1

Terms and expressions including <i>xiang</i>	
香魂	1
香臭	1
香生梅唾	1
香美	1
香菱	1
香風洋溢	1
香撲烈	1
香盆	1
香盟	1
香冷	1
香憐	1
香夢	1
香洌	1
香艷	1
香銷	1
香閨女	1
香馥馥	1
撮土為香	1
七香	1
拾翠尋香	1
笑生香	1
色聲香味	1
心香	1
生香面	1
朝必香	1
頂香	1
頭香	1
肉香	1
粉蝶探香	1
芳香射鼻	1
悶香	1
洌香四射	1
嗅之而香	1
嬌香	1
熏香	1
跪香	1
Total	291ⁱ

i The list includes all terms. In the same cell, all compounds and variants of the basic term (in bold) are combined. This list is based on Chinese characters and compounds.

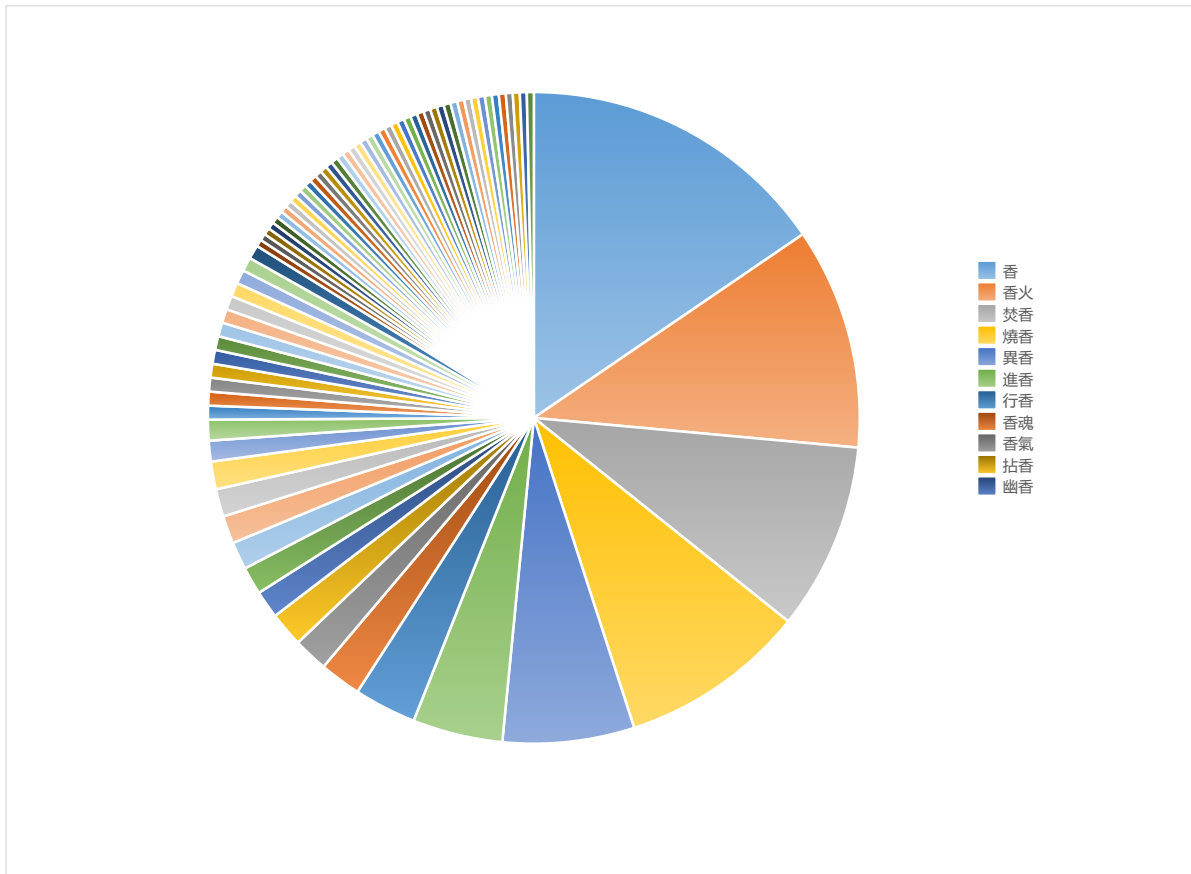


Figure 1 Terms and expressions including *xiang*

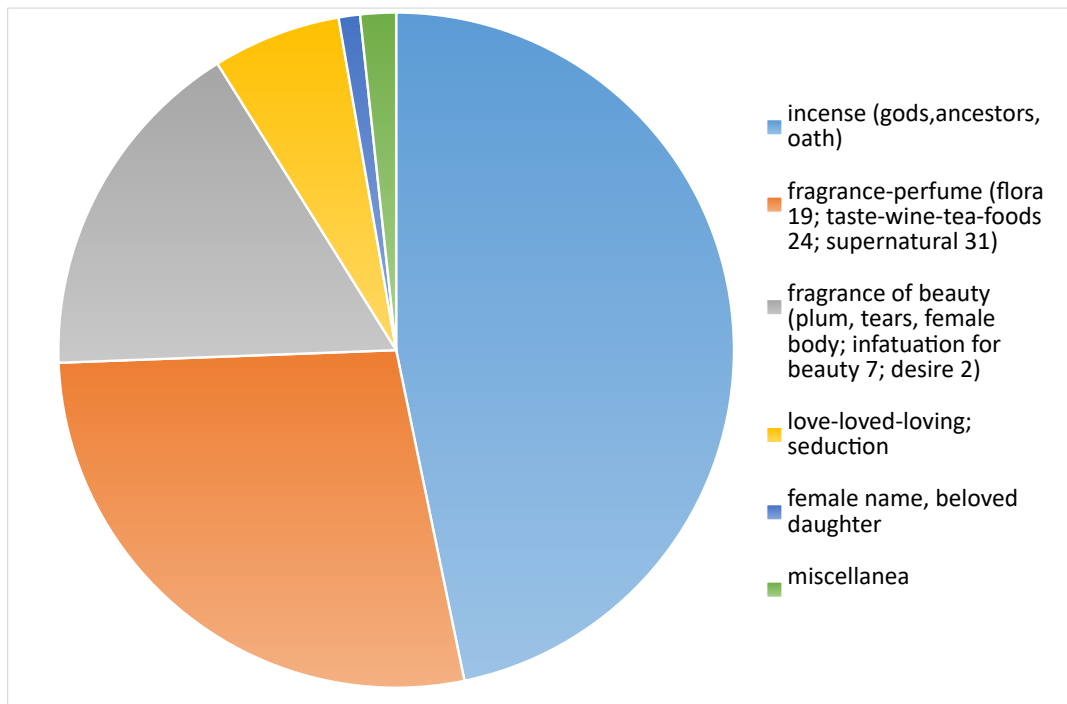


Figure 2 English equivalents