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An Attempt at a History of Mentality in Late Imperial China

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Abstract Some elements of Puritanism in Chinese tradition are obviously different from the well-known intellectual phenomenon in the West; in the Neo-Confucian ambit the key question concerns “order–disorder,” “harmony–disharmony” in society and inside one’s personality, rather than “sin” and “purity” in personal morality. Yet we also find that chastity is involved in the contrast between the two concepts of purity and pollution and the idea of “obscene” (meaning “inauspicious,” “ill-omened,” “profane”) allows us to uncover a darker side to sexual representation. Death seems another source of active or passive pollution: this effect occurs after contaminational contact with human or animal remains. Thus death is the source of “desecration,” or of “contamination,” especially when it is the consequence of violence. This means that in Chinese culture, a sense of impurity seems to be driven by the horror of death and the fear of being overwhelmed by the passion of love; respectively, thanatos and eros. Other topics may also be associated, such as mental insanity referring to what is different, abnormal, strange, and socially subversive. The clean–unclean distinction originally responded to a basic visceral feeling—horror and repulsion/disgust—that is typically associated with hygienic worries and matter that is perceived as repugnant and inedible. But these basic ideas seem to have been symbolically extended to cope with the subconscious and metaphysical spheres: the horror of death and the fear of being overwhelmed by passion, the mysteries which lie behind these emotions, and the attempt to sublimate such fears into an impulse to transcend the red dust of our limited existence.

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Historical works have different approaches and aims, and may focus on the events of long, middle or short periods of time relating to society, ideas, economy, etc. The aim that this historian is extremely interested in is the reconstruction of the representation of reality, especially the inner reality of society in a certain historical age. This is what is roughly referred to as “mentality.” This enquiry concentrates on the period from the 17th to the 18th century: it is a very significant period in Chinese history, as it corresponds to the maturity of imperial culture, and also occurs just at the beginning of the massive impact of Western influences, as well as the beginning of global history.

Owing to the demands of specific research, most of the selected sources are literary, as they are the richest sources for the representation of reality and imagery. Ordinary historical documentation, whose contents and aims are consciously written, throws relatively little light on psychological aspects; therefore it is necessary to search behind these sources in order to grasp the apparent “silence of what we call the collective mentality.” 1 In fact, this approach offers new interpretative patterns in the re-reading of documents that have already been studied, and also allows the use of materials that have until now been regarded as the territory of other disciplines—symbols and myths, iconography, songs, tales—to be considered historical sources.

In other words, the “history of mentality” does not ignore political and economic events, or social and institutional organization; it takes into account what is conscious and voluntary, ideological systems, and pre-eminent and recessive values. However, the object of an investigation into a history of mentality—in my opinion—is especially extended to also include the more or less unconscious sphere, the “currents of the deep” which govern the imagery of the members of a society without their awareness, collective sensitivity or conventional categories and definitions, i.e., the collective complex conscious-unconscious. 2 This field of observation covers feeling and reaction,

1 Dupront, 1969, 44–45.
2 I avoid the use of the terms “collective consciousness” and “collective unconscious,” because they remind us respectively of É. Durkheim’s concept of the shared beliefs and moral attitudes which operate as a unifying force within society by shaping beliefs and attitudes, and C. Jung’s notion of the collective memory of humanity, which consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, beyond the memory of experiences by particular persons in the past. The former stresses the role of the common consciousness in relation to the solidarity between the members of a society and the latter the inherited and archetypal. Other concepts are
attitudes, desires and abhorrence, moral, religious and aesthetic sensitivity, and the world of imagery: these elements form the mental sphere of a certain culture in a certain period, derived from the collective mentality but at the same time flowing into it and modifying it. They are based on everyday habits, on individual behaviour and emotional attitude; this field concerns dreams and nightmares, illusions and fears, ways of perceiving oneself and external reality. While once this field concerned pre-historical knowledge, today we can consider it a new way to write history. Therefore Huizinga’s sentence: “But before the [historical] knowledge of cultural life [in the late Middle Ages], the illusion itself, in which the contemporaries lived, keeps the value of truth,” considers these illusions basic elements in the history of the mankind in any particular period.

**Mental Structure**

What then, is mental structure? If we consider the concept of the mind-heart in Chinese culture, we cannot but recognize its holistic notion. One of the best definitions is, in my opinion, that given by Cheng Chung-ying who writes, “Mind is not simply an intellectual entity or a mechanism for thinking or reasoning. It is rather an inter-linked entity of sensibility, feeling, awareness, thinking and willing as testified by common experience of reflective subjectivity of the self identified as the ‘I’ […] If we take into consideration the sensate activity via various senses on the one hand and the volitive/purpositive decision-making power of the mind is in fact a matter of sense-feeling-thinking-willing in an internally and organically interrelated unity.
which can be self-reflectively testified again on the empirical grounds of the individual persons alone.” Sensitive and physical perceptions (gan 感) are not clearly separated from emotions (qing 情) or from abstract thoughts (si 思) and valuable wills (zhi 志). This concept is reminiscent of the clear description given by Gernet and is extremely close to Western modern philosophical studies that deny any borderline between “emotions,” “thoughts,” “fantasy” and “memory.” It also revalues not only the existentialist notion of “experience” (Erlebnis) but also the cognitive aspects of emotions, the thinking function, “thoughts somehow ‘felt’ in flushes, pulses, ‘movements’ of our livers, minds, hearts, stomachs, skin.”

For the concept of “mental structure” I have in mind the complex system of various cognitive and practical aspects of the “world of mind and body” in a certain civilization. They are reflected in the common manner people classify and judge, outside and beyond rational and conscious theories: the perception of the self, the sense of responsibility, health and illness concepts, belief systems, and the ladder of values, especially the imagery and representation of the inner reality, states of mind and sensations, all of which regulate the immediate perceptions of social subjects, and result from their unconscious incorporation of unknown determinations. Imagery and memory play an important role in this mental structure. Collective memory is understood as a social process of

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6 Gernet, 1985, 147. He emphasizes the different ideological assumptions in China and in the West about the concept of individual self-consciousness: “Not only was the substantial opposition between the soul and the body something quite unknown to the Chinese, all souls being, in their view, destined to be dissipated sooner or later, but so was the distinction, originally inseparable from it, between the sensible and the rational. The Chinese had never believed in the existence of a sovereign and independent faculty of reason in man. The concept of a soul endowed with reason and capable of acting freely for good or for evil, which is so fundamental to Christianity, was alien to them. They, on the contrary, associated the mind and the feelings, the heart and reason to the single concept of xin.”
7 Rosaldo, 1984, 143.
8 van Straten, 1983.
9 On sociological studies on collective beliefs, see Pareto, 1916, emphasizing the relation between the social diffusion of the religion and the social “feelings”; Lévy-Bruhl, 1922, postulates the persistence of magic beliefs. For an extension of the discourse to a comparison of the rationality of traditional “rites” and the rationality of modern “techniques,” see Durkheim, 1912. The importance of this element in Chinese cultural and intellectual history has been astutely laid out by Ge Zhaoguang (2000, 2006). More generally Ge reformulates the “compromise ideas” (“expediency” quan 权 meant behaving in daily life in a way practically fitting the situation, acceptable as long as one did not go too directly against moral principles. This kind of expediency is precisely what we call “compromise” (2006, 68) as symptoms of real changes in cultural history.
10 Le Goff, 1974.
exploitation of the past in order to reduce tensions and enforce group solidarity, but is also a social process in response to social rupture, the legacy of the past, and the intrusion of a traumatic past provoking tension in the community. It is clearly related to the personal and collective identity. Although the term “memory” is conventionally applied to those oral, ritual, and bodily practices of collective remembrance of the past, in fact it also includes unofficial, noninstitutionalized knowledge of the “collective memory.” It is also related to the more or less manipulated rewriting of the past, individual remembrance, collective memory, and narrative history, forces that interact and influence each other as different versions of the constructed and reconstructed, updated and invented past. Nora has extended the concept of collective memory to include the cultural legacy of symbols, values, rites, and local traditions. Thus, cultural memory can be understood in a broader context, a social understanding of events that is represented as memory, constructed by the sharing of others sets of images that have been passed down through the media of memory, and the transmission of meanings and values. “Imagery” is not only used to indicate aesthetic perspective in literary studies, but also connotes the accumulated notions and images at the background of any specific culture. Such notions and images are shared by most members of that society, and belong to a structured system of signifiers, whose internal relationship network are used to “map” the structure of other sets of relationships: the figurative representations of belief systems that explain both inner and outer phenomena, cultural conventions and representations of inner reality, and psychological or symbolic notions of truth unrelated to materialist or objectivist ideas. Thus, histories of “tears,” or “smells,” “mourning” and “fear” have already been elaborated for European history. But although the history of mentality is already an accepted sub-discipline, especially after the studies done in the ambit of Les Annales for

12 Halbwachs, 1980.
15 For an example of the debate on memory, see Lee Cheuk-Yin and Hsiung Ping-chuen eds., 2008.
16 I would like to mention two “classics” both of which are important contributions to this perspective, and that Michele Fatica correctly reminded me of: Marc Bloch, 1924 and Georges Lefebvre, 1932. The former deals with the belief that the prodigious power of the French and English Kings could recover the scrofula by the touch of their hands. The latter deals with the period July 20–Aug. 5, 1789 where panic and riots were caused by the spread of groundless rumours among the peasantry, alleging that the aristocracy had hired vagrants to prey on villages and protect the new harvest from peasants.
European Medieval and modern history, in China, however, we need to re-examine sources, and to prepare materials and tools which have not previously been utilized in this arena.

In the analysis of a certain period and a certain civilization, we notice that there are some common elements that are accepted and understood by the members of a society, notwithstanding different social positions and ideas. One of these elements is emotional dimension. Emotion is a “lived experience,” a personal, subjective, unique and unrepeatable experience (Erlebnis). Emotion is, however, also a kind of “language,” one that transmits a series of affective codes, allowing for interaction with the external world, and at the same time a re-negotiation of reciprocal positions in interpersonal relations. As a language, its external manifestation and traces can be the object of analysis and evaluation and can offer a basis for the understanding of the deep structures of a culture. It is a “constructed society” of symbolic rational and ethical elements, supplied by a cultural environment, and manifested through a language—a relatively coherent organization of concepts at the cognitive level.

But emotion is not only a personal experience nor does it belong only to the subject who feels it and reflects on it. It is not only the hidden and unique experience of our flux of consciousness, but it is also a language. Owing to the need for verbal communication and verification, the subject “translates” such inner experience into a “discourse” that can be read and understood by others. According to Rimé, “recalling” is a powerful process, expressed in confessions and rituals, requiring comfort from others, and communicated through art and rituals, requiring comfort from others, and communicated through art and rituals, requiring comfort from others, and communicated through art and rituals.

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18 Lucien Febvre focuses on “sensitivity” or “mental” “tools,” “habits” and “needs,” and in his Problème de l’incroyance au XVIe siècle: Religion de Rabelais (Paris: Albin Michel, 1942), he makes an inventory of the conceptual categories which constitute the different supports for thinking: language, with its lexic and syntactic particularities: the tools and the languages available in the operation of knowledge: and finally the value attributed to each sense. Robert Mandrou (Introduction à la France moderne. Essay de psychologie historique, Paris: Albin Michel, 1961), moves further, and combines the study of these mental tools with that of the sensations and passions which make up mentality. Le Goff (La Nouvelle Histoire, Paris 1979) defines the history of mentality by stressing the elements of the routine unconscious that regulate the immediate perceptions of social subjects, and the collective and common manner of classifying and judging. He also focuses on the “currents of the deep” which govern the “collective unconscious” of the members of a society, independent of their awareness, Philippe Ariès’ contribution examines the analysis of “common feelings” or “general feelings” as the unconscious expression of collective sensitivity (Ariès, Essay sur l’histoire de la mort en occident du moyen age à nos jours, Paris: Seuil, 1975). Alphonse Dupont’s concept of historical psychology—the history of values, mentalities, forms, symbolics, myths—emphasizes the connections between intellectual history and “mentality” (Dupont, 1969).

19 On the concept of “lived experience” (Erlebnis), see Dilthey, 1992, 14–20, 75–100.
writing, allowing for the communication of our emotions to other people, thereby translating confused inner perceptions into words. This has also been termed “Social sharing” and explains why we want to communicate emotions. It is one of the aspects that render emotions a means of communication. In fact, “shared” emotions are signs that communicate information. This means that the manifestation and representation of emotions, in the form of myths and symbols, although belonging to the realm of inner consciousness, also constitute a “social phenomenon.” Thus, they are embedded in larger associate-cultural processes and reflect and influence society and civilizations, not only because they influence collective life in economic and political fields, but above all because they are themselves at the basis of a system of interpersonal communication.

In order to write a history of mentality different sources of official documents need to be used, as Huizinga observes in regard to the late European Middle Ages. He considers three forms of historical writings: chronicles, scientific history, and the history of the “passions” (strong emotions). “Today the scientific history of the Middle Ages, relying first and foremost on official documents versus the unreliability of the chronicles, occasionally runs the risk of neglecting the difference of tone between the life of the forgotten Middle Ages and that of our own days. The official documents rarely refer to the passions (excepting avarice and violence), but these passions do not help us to understand anything, if not linked to the whole passionate life.” Lucien Febvre adds: “contrary to what we think when we confuse them with simple automatic reactions to the external world, the emotions have a particular character which those concerned with the social life of their fellow men cannot abstract from.”

After Hobbes’s contribution on social processes, in the introductory part of Max Weber’s *The Fundamental Concepts of Sociology* we find a clear understanding of the role of emotions, and the awareness of the dangers of a “rationalistic preconception” of sociology; believing in the actual predominance

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20 Such motivations, which have been studied in the West in psychological, artistic and aesthetic functions, can also be observed in Chinese literature and historiography: from Sima Qian’s indignation (*fen* 愤) to Han Yu’s dissatisfaction (*buping* 不平) up to Liu E, who writes for those who “will weep with me and be sad with me.”

21 Huizinga, 1919, 10: “De hedendaagsche wetenschappelijke historie der middeleeuwen, die wegens de onbetrouwbaarheid der kronieken bij voorkeur zooveel mogelijk uit officieele oorkonden put, vervalt daardoor wel eens in een gevaarlijke fout. De oorkonden toonen ons weinig van het verschil in levensstroom, dat ons van die tijden scheidt. Zij doen ons het felle pathos van het middeleeuwse leven vergeten. Van al de hartstochten, die het kleuren, spreken de oorkonden doorgaans slechts van twee: de hebzucht en den strijdlust, maar deze zelf zijn in hun felheid niet te begrijpen buiten het verband met de algemene hartstochtelijkheid.”

22 Febvre, 1976, 124.
of rational elements in human life. In their attempts to understand social action, sociological researchers need not only a rationalistic method, but also an empathic (emotionally or artistically appreciative) interpretation, in order to grasp the emotional context in which the action took place, and how the action was actually influenced by irrational factors. In fact, in Weber’s system, attention is focused on religious feelings, as well as on aesthetic sentiments, moral judgments, value-rational beliefs, judgments of taste, “psychic” coercion, and the erotic sphere. The term “economic ethics” points to the practical impulses for action that are founded in the psychological and pragmatic contexts of religion. It is clear, for instance, how important the role of the state of mind is when classifying the four prototypes of social action orientation (traditional, emotional, value-rational, end-rational) or in the understanding of “social relationships.” A social relationship consists of a mutual orientation, of a probability, in some meaningfully understandable sense, of a course of social action.

Besides the pioneering work by the historians of the school of Annales, some other scholars, such as Anne Vincent-Buffault, Peter Stearns and Mark Knapp have also provided important contributions. We cannot forget, in regard to religious mentality, the input of Michel Voelle and above all Jean Delumeau with his classic works on “fear,” the emergence of a Western guilt culture in 13–18th centuries and the psychological and social effects of the Church’s

23 Weber (Basic Concept of Sociology) writes: “The more we ourselves are susceptible to them, the more readily can we emotionally participate in such reactions as anxiety, anger, ambition, envy, jealousy, love, enthusiasm, pride, vengefulness, loyalty, devotion, and appetites of all sorts, and thereby understand the irrational conduct which grows out of them. Such conduct is “irrational,” that is, from the point of view of the rational pursuit of a given end. Even when such emotions are completely inexperienced to the observer, he or she can still have a significant degree of empathic understanding of their meaning and can interpret intellectually their effects on the course of action and the selection of means.” See http://www.ne.jp/asahi/moriyuki/abukuma/index.htm (Weberian sociology of religion homepage), with Weber’s texts, some of them entirely revised by Moriyuki Abukuma. On the religious origins of revolutionary phenomena see van Kley, 1996; Berdjaev, 1976; Bianco, 1967, respectively for France, Russia and China.

24 Its content, in Weber’s words, “may be of the most varied nature; conflict, hostility, sexual attraction, friendship, loyalty, or economic exchange. It may involve the “fulfillment,” the deviation, or the violation of the terms of an agreement.... The meaning-content need not necessarily be the same for all individuals who are mutually oriented in a given social relationship; there need not in this sense be “reciprocity.” “Friendship,” “love,” “loyalty,” “contractual fidelity,” “national sentiment,” on one side, may well be faced with an entirely different attitude on the other.” It is thus possible to determine the relational and social values of affective life, and stress the interactive and communicative roles of emotions, not just their cognitive role.
insistence on the horror of sin and the obsession with damnation. Vovelle has demonstrated how collective imaginary interacts with religious doctrines, moral and political theories, social systems and technical progress.

The Analysis and Re-Analysis of Sources

Thus, an interdisciplinary approach and its comparative implications are the main features of this work, whose foci are mental states, emotions, collective imagery and their various representations. The object of this research is not the emotion itself, but the representation of specific emotions and states of mind; myths and symbols, observed through the medium of the communication process and the external descriptions that are available. Representations of states of mind offer hidden information on the concept of self, the ladder of values, and the deep structures of mentality and imagery within a certain society. This means that by studying emotions and symbols, we study a society and the inner structures of its cultural products.

In the analysis of these sources, we must consider all elements and information available in order to reconstruct the mentality and imagination of the time. In the evaluation of sources, we do not consider their reliability or their authorship, but rather their circulation and significance in the period. This reconstruction and evaluation must comprise an anthropological study of terms and expressions concerning the representation of emotions, states of mind, sensorial feelings and the inner world, on the basis of the collection, evaluation, presentation and critical analysis of various sources of Ming and Qing China (e.g., stories, novels, drama, annotations, diaries, poems, judicial reports, moral and philosophical essays). Some of this research confirms our hypothesis that there are some terms and expressions that apparently do not refer directly to emotions, but that nevertheless must be taken into consideration in order to understand the affective world of a certain society. It is impossible to establish a complete list of these categories that can be used universally for the analysis of any kinds of texts or literature. Many words can have an “affective” relevance if related to a specific situation or to shared experiences.

However, we can select specific categories of expressions that in general concern the affective sphere in an indirect way. These categories are as follows: “manifestations,” “symbolic descriptions,” “dispositions,” “set phrases,” “appellations,” “epithets,” “interjections,” “bodily sensations,” “causative terms.” Their analysis contributes to the understanding of the representation of

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emotions in a certain culture or a specific author. Even if we exclude purely behavioral and cognitive acts, such as thinking, talking, and learning—although a cognitive act absolutely without emotion is rare,26 in our experience, it is evident that any enquiry into the affective world cannot ignore several phenomena and elements that may be components, functions or manifestations of an emotional state.

The following examples may clarify our purposes and arguments. Upon finding the term *danu* 大怒 (incensed), we can have no doubts that it expresses an emotion, a strong aggressive reaction to some event or action considered offensive or erroneous. However, there are other terms that apparently do not have any relation with the affective world, or whose relationship is very weak or distant. In Chinese culture, on the contrary, these words always have strong emotional implications. Such kinds of words may occur in every culture. Moreover, we can also state that in every circle that shares some common experiences, special terms, which have no emotional meanings for external people, may recall particular situations and thus have an emotional impact.

For instance, *yuanfen* 缘分 (predestined affinity), the concept of “predestined unions,” can be traced back referentially to Buddhist reincarnation in later existences (overcoming death as Heaven’s will and the principle of retribution) and to marriage (the institution that socially sanctions an agreement between two families, but also love unions). At the same time, however, heavenly predestination is relevant from an ideological point of view, because it elevates love-passion to almost the same metaphysical level as the celestial principle, and reunion after death makes love’s power stand out above and beyond the brief course of human life. Thus, thanks to this aulic expression, the passion of love is considered to be beyond people’s overall control, because “fate is sealed by the heavens, and even feelings are imperceptibly influenced by it.” 27 Destiny provides lovers with a justification capable of undermining the severity of social norms,28 because the cycle of reincarnation is like the illusive fluctuation of

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26 Spencer, 1890.
27 In Feng Menglong, *Qingshi*, 2:66, and also 11:320, passions are likened to wind. See also Ximen’s blasphemous answer to his wife, when he states that anything can be bought with money, even the forgiveness of the gods, and that illicit and adulterous affairs in this life are the pre-arranged result of past lives, *JPM*, Chap. 57.
28 Beginning in the second millennium of the vulgar era, a woman’s prenuptial virginity in China was certainly a necessary requirement, since losing it was not only scandalous for the bride’s family, but it meant she also risked being repudiated and given back to her family. Even in cases when a young woman ran off with her lover to form a family with him, her status could not be higher than that of a concubine until a wedding took place with the proper rites and approval of both sets of parents. Moreover, for an unmarried woman, still dependent on her father, to run off was in many ways likened to a married woman fleeing her husband on
human existence.

Some other instances:

• 骨肉 gurou (flesh and bones), used as a metaphor for kindred, blood relations;
• 嬰怨 guiyan (complaints of the boudoir), metaphor for female resentment of desertion;
• 赤颜 chiyan (with his face flushed), a term common in many languages; used to express the physiological manifestation of a strong emotion;
• 吼呼 wuhu (Alas), an interjection;
• 老蠢虫 lao chunchong (old idiot), one of the many appellations that denotes a negative or positive attitude;
• 可爱 ke’ai (lovely), what we call a causative term.

As the purpose of this article is mainly the reconstruction of the devices and tools used in late imperial China to represent the ‘inside’, emotions and states of mind and body, our main concern is to collect all terms and expressions that may give useful information on this complex topic. Thus, a specific database has been created in order to standardize work methods (selection and interpretation of data) as much as possible, and also to reduce subjective influences by asking the researcher to select and adduce the reasons for choices made. For this purpose an index has been prepared on the database cards, based on the empirical experience of previous work, in order to help the researcher textually analyze and collect useful information. This index covers various levels and aspects of the emotional spectrum, and it also constitutes a kind of scheme, listing elements that are more or less related with the affective world, with its multifarious psychophysical, cognitive, behavioural and motivational aspects.

whom she depended; it was considered a crime committed against the family and against the father/husband authority. Not surprisingly, one of the major debated questions in the May 4th Movement dealt with the love-marriage issue. Cf. Zhao Yuan, 1984.


The ratio of the database is embedded in the compilation of different categories that include not only pure emotional terms or words directly related to states of mind and sensations. As the perspective is focused on the representation of the inner world, the words and expressions which are selected must be considered in relation to affective and sensorial reactions and moods: items are first emotion words or are logically related to the affective world, even in cases when some of them are not necessarily emotions. Four devices are used in order to keep this criterion: (1) a hierarchical ladder of emotion categories, in three levels, from the more general and inclusive grouping to more specific and detailed; (2) the difference between words for emotions and words for states of mind and sensation also needs to be taken into consideration in order to frame a deeper picture according to our final aims; (3) although emotion and feeling terms are core elements of the model, words and expressions beyond pure
We have determined some categories that, in our experience, are practically useful for the capture of the requested information. Such categories have their own consistency, especially in their empirical function that allows us to reconstruct part of the representation of sensibilities, feelings, values and beliefs through images, symbols and memories of Ming and Qing culture. The selection of relevant expressions and terms has been conducted by a study group and then revised by another group, under my supervision.

The compilation of glossaries is a part of this opus. The lexicon includes words and expressions for emotions, for states of mind, and for sensorial perceptions, allusions and symbolic figures. Owing to their analogies, the partial overlapping of their meanings, and their interrelations, we have decided it is more useful to consider “mental,” “affective” and “sensory” categories. Some of the personality dimensions correspond to the personal descriptions, characters and attitudes of the traditional Chinese personality. Some actions, such as emotion-sensation terms have been taken into consideration: some of the words of the lexicon are not properly emotion-based, and the connection with a state of mind is indirect, and yet these words or expressions are important for our purposes, and (4) maintenance of the textual context in the records of data. We were inspired by various studies in psychological research, such as Marsella et al., 2000. This essay emphasizes the use of qualitative (ethnosemantic) methods in conjunction with quantitative methods. These ethnosemantic methods include: (1) the elicitation of all personality terms in the particular language; (2) the organization by research participants of the terms into naturally occurring structures; (3) the derivation of the meanings (e.g., spontaneous associations) of these structures, and (4) the linking of the terms to actual behaviours.

Some lexicographic studies in psycholinguistic research follow the method of the hierarchical cluster analysis of sorted terms, in order to build a comprehensive map of the emotions, on various levels. Usually they ask native speakers to identify the related terms, which are then ordered into horizontal and vertical clusters. An example of this is the study conducted by Jin Li, Wang Lianqin, and Kurt W. Fischer (2004). Authors asked native Chinese to re-elaborate a list of terms based on the primary Mandarin Chinese dictionary, adding other relevant terms, rating each word on a scale from 1 to 7. Next, they asked another group of Chinese to sort the terms into categories on the basis of their similarities. Finally, they analyzed their sorting using hierarchical cluster analysis, according to the prototype approach.

31 In Verene’s definition, “the sensibilities, feelings, metaphors, and memories upon which human culture rest” (Verene Donald Phillip, 1981, 40) are “the ultimate context within which any piece of conceptual reasoning is meaningful” (41). Varene’s intention is to look for “archaic human speech, which bursts forth from the human condition itself” (52–53). In this attempt to recollect fragments of cultural meanings, I try to avoid any “model” based on specific theories, such as psychoanalysis, and I also refer as much as possible to the contextual complex of conceptual meanings.

32 See also my recent volume Materials for an Anatomy of Personality in Late Imperial China (Leiden: Brill, 2010). The volume is a reflection on the concept of personality and its attributes, as it was perceived and presented in some representative sources in late imperial China, and it offers original materials on some aspects of the representation of personality traits in Chinese culture. It is an attempt to re-construct the main features that partially or totally describe the
prayer, contemplation, running, cursing, kowtowing, etc., may be so connected with an emotional state, because they are physiological manifestations, they belong to gestural expressions, or they are direct reactions.\textsuperscript{33} Gestural and physiological manifestations reflect the important functions of interpersonal communication and social relations,\textsuperscript{34} as well as the “signal” function.\textsuperscript{35} We have thus developed a list of categories that include various “families” of words for emotions, states of mind and sensations, from “mental” to “sensory.” What may seem an indiscriminate collection of heterogeneous expressions is in fact the result of a precise choice in relation to our purposes and is based on the specific experience of several years of work. Some of these words are not properly emotion-based, and the connection with state of mind is indirect, but they still have relevance and so are included in the database.

This approach, therefore, represents a relatively new attempt at understanding the “world of mind and body” of a certain civilization and period by means of a multi-focal and interdisciplinary method of reading and analyzing sources. It offers new interpretative patterns in re-reading documents that have already been studied: materials—such as philosophical essays, literary compositions or moral writings—that have until now been regarded as the territory of other disciplines, can hereafter be considered historical sources. The “objectivity and scientificity” of this approach is the same as other storiographical and anthropological works,

personality of individuals and characters in late imperial China through a variety of different documents. The judgments that are embedded in many descriptions contribute to the formulation of our image of ourselves and others. When we talk about personality we are referring to the representation and description of all characteristics of an individual, starting from the biological structure of the subject up to his or her cultural basis: it includes innate and acquired traits and habits, that are stable, or whose evolution and changes are very slow. Thus, the volume presents and discusses terms that express the propensity, inclinations, predispositions, and temperament of the subjects described in the examined sources in order to represent one’s or other’s self, as well as terms that describe or label a person, for the main qualities or defects of his personality.

We notice a convergence of literary, historiographical and philosophical materials in the privileged stereotypes in which people are classified: from the official biographies to the narrative characters, the images reflect exemplary or minatory models. However, it is noticeable that the variety and complexity of personages is more evident in literary creation. After a short survey of ideological Neo-Confucian perspectives, this work has analyzed literary, philosophical and historical sources, singling out the main features of concrete judgments and descriptions.

\textsuperscript{33} Many social acts, polite expressions, or conventional social actions have lost their original emotional meaning. We take them into consideration, anyway, for their “etymological” and social relevance. On the relationship between emotion-action, see Arnold, 1960; 1970; and Frjida, 1990.

\textsuperscript{34} Trevarthen, 1984.

\textsuperscript{35} Bühler, 1934.
whose inevitable distortions in motivations and focus have long been hotly debated by scholars.  

Literature is the main source of study for the representation of emotions, myths and allegories. I have exploited this type of source in my studies on the concept of “sin” and responsibility and the representation of love, destiny and retribution. Literary works are very useful, not only for their contents and descriptions, but also because emotion is difficult to objectively reproduce if not re-lived: one of the transmission channels is artistic intuition in the form of the author’s creation and its re-creation by people who enjoy it. As it has been pointed out in numerous sociological and literary studies, the semantics of passion work through literary channels to influence one’s individual sentimental education.

In more general terms, Chinese society elaborated a series of agencies that allowed the internalization of norms concerning the control of emotions and passions, on the one side, and the equation of “good sentiments” with innate or genuine human emotions. This collective “sentimental education” underwent thorough changes in course of time, especially at the end of Ming and Qing dynasties, with the “cult of passions (qing).”

The above text is dedicated to theoretical presentation. I now intend to exemplify some reflections on the history of mentality, with the following preliminary account of the perception of pure-impure/clean-dirty concepts in late imperial China.

What is “Clean” and “Dirty” in Everyday Life in Late Imperial China

An example of the research on the history of mentality concerns an investigation into the notions of “clean” and “dirty,” and “purity” and “impurity.” It is clear that a satisfactory enquiry would request both a long-term lexical work that should comparatively clarify these notions, and an examination of a large amount

36 I will not mention the debates on historicism and the fact that history is always “the history of present,” but I do recall James Clifford’s remarks on the necessary “fashions” and “makes up” of the described culture by any interpretative ethnographer. See James Clifford, “Introduction: Partial Truths,” in Clifford and Marcus eds., 1986, 6.

37 Literature enables us to identify and understand some of the positive and negative models in regard to ordinary men and women. In this respect, and especially in relation to the influence of literary “models” on the formation and intensity of desires, René Girard’s (1962, 1981) theory of the “mediator” is very useful: the object or target of man’s desire is created by a third party—the persuader, often created by fiction, as well as by advertising.

I limit myself to a very preliminary reflection, by analyzing just a few cases, starting with words that mean simply “cleanness” and “uncleanness.”

We can assume that, parallel to other cultures, in Chinese civilization the basic concepts indicate an evaluation of physical conditions and are extended into symbolic and moral levels. Our aim is to confirm the specific use of such notions in everyday life as well as their various applications to linguistic, religious, philosophical realities and how much this reflects the specificity of Chinese culture or the universal categories of human kind.

We can even find some elements of Puritanism in Chinese tradition, which are obviously different from the well-known intellectual phenomenon evident in the west. As is well known, the name “Puritan” refers to a group of English Protestants who in the 16th and 17th centuries advocated a strict religious discipline along with the simplification of the ceremonies and creeds of the Church of England. However religious groups with an analogous strict morality can be found in various phases of Christian history, for instance, by the middle of the twelfth century, the heretical sect of the Cathars, Greek *kathari* for “the Pure.

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39 Among the terms related to this topic, *ganjing* 干净 (clean) and *qing* 清 (pure) are the most relevant. Their antonyms, “filthy” and “obscenity,” (thus “abominable” in various meanings and levels) are *hui* 污, and its compounds, such as *wu* 污 (The Zhongwen Dacidian 中文大辞典 (The Great Chinese Dictionary) gives the following definition: *wu* 污, *buqingjie* 不清洁). Always occurring in the semantic field of “unclean” we have *zang* 脏, *aozao* 郢糟, *wochuo* 鄰糟 (Zibuyu 子不语 (What the Master would not discuss), hereafter *ZBY*, 17:324, *Biyan jiangui* 碧眼见鬼), and also *laza* 拉杂, *lada* 嘮喳 (*Shan’ge* The Mountain Songs), 5:139). *Lata* 遺拉拉, i.e. “rubbish” (*laji* 垃圾), “sloppy,” “filthy,” occurs quite frequently (*Shan’ge* 9:202, *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小说, 15). Of special interest is the use of *angzang* 肮脏 *fengchen angzang* 风尘肮脏, “the world of corruption and immorality” or “the filth of this world” (*HLM*, 5). This also refers to the polluting body of a menstruating woman: “Otherwise why men of dignity would tremble with fear in face of a dirty female body?” (*LZZY*, 6:731, *Ma Jiefu* 马介甫). Moreover, *lei* 累 can also be used to mean “moistened” “polluted,” like *zhan* 沾 and *wu* 污: “If a summer shirt becomes dirty, I can wash it thoroughly.” (*Shan’ge*, 1:24A); “But please do not move your hands and feet about, or we will get all dirty with my oil.” (*Shan’ge*, 5:116); “You will always make my whole body drip with sweat even if the weather is cold.” (*Shan’ge*, 6:150). Other terms can be synonyms, such as *wu* 污, which can be rendered, according to the context, as “dirty, filthy, foul, corrupt, defile, smear.” For a physical meaning, one can consult the following sentence in the *Rutil waishi* 儒林外史: the guest had soiled the floor of the studio with his muddy shoes, thus “the host loathed him for his filthiness and carelessness” (Chap. 55). *Wu* is used also for “to rape,” as in this case of necrophilia in the *ZBY*, 17:318, “Lei zhu Wang San” 雷诛王三: “After the burial, he tracked down the grave and dug up the coffin. When he opened the lid he found the body beneath to be still in perfect condition—it was almost as if she were still alive. He then removed her underclothes and had sex with the corpse. After the rape he filled his pockets with all her jewelry and pearls from the coffin and made off down the road.”
Ones,” regarded the Church as a corrupt institution, and tried to return to the original teaching of Christ—voluntary poverty, strict chastity, brotherly love, and ascetic life. Such movements often imply forms of intolerance and discrimination against those who are considered “impure.” Analogous phenomena can be found in many other cultures, but their manifestations are obviously different.

At the first glance, Neo-Confucianism should not have been influenced by such tendencies, according to its mundane perspective and moderate search for the Middle Way. In *Jinsilu* 近思录 (The record of recent thinking) we read “the good government must be ready to tolerate deserts and dirty (that is going out of cultivation).” However Neo-Confucianism was a synthesis of various doctrines, a large stream with various currents. Even if it never forgot social engagement, and moderate trends prevailed on the extreme currents, it is possible to trace back some Puritan tendencies even in this important philosophical trend.

A group of Neo-Confucian scholars, who came from the Zhedong School in Zhejiang at the beginning of the Ming era, was important to Neo-Confucianism as they contributed to the setting up of the ideological foundations of the new dynasty. Their ideas contributed to the formation of the autocratic political system of Late Imperial China. Among them were Song Lian 宋濂 (1310–1381), Liu Ji 刘基 (1311–1375), and Wang Yi 王袆 (1323–1374), the advisers of the first Ming Emperor, who emphasized the danger of evil in the world, and attributed major power to the political authorities in order to maintain order in society, and from this, contributed to the strengthening of Hongwu’s 洪武 autocracy. Wang Yi in *Zhici* 尻辞 expresses the feeling of pervasive evil, looming over both the individual and society:

> Man is born with his innate good nature. However, indulging in profit and desire, he changes completely, without being aware and complaining. […] If a mean man is tolerated within a group of gentlemen, seldom he will not spoil their accomplishments. Pillars and beams collapse for small worms and termites, while cattle and sheep are driven by tiny gnats and horseflies. Even a few bad individuals do fierce harm. Therefore, the duty of the state is to eliminate worthless persons, as a peasant uproots weeds, however small they are they must be uprooted!42

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40 Cf. Dardess, 1983.
41 See for example the passage in *Longmenzi ningdao ji* 龙门子凝道记, in Song Lian, 52:10b, where the predominance of evil over man is acknowledged.
For the Confucians, therefore, one of the main questions concerns the concept of “order-disorder,” “harmony-disharmony” in society, rather than “sin” and “purity” in sexual morality. And yet also chastity and sexual morality are involved, as we go into further later in this article. It is possible that Neo-Confucianism developed elements already evident in Chinese society that belonged to ancient Confucianism, Buddhism, and late Daoism practices. But we can see different kinds of Puritanism, as in some practices of Daoism, such as in the following teaching by a hermit in a story of Yuan Mei 袁枚:

Life originally comes out of void and vacancy. However, as we overindulge in eating, our bodies become heavy and clustered dirty parasites grow up in our stomach. We are so easy to be smoldered by phlegm. A person who wants to learn the Dao must first clear his mouth and purify his intestine. Without food, all the parasites inside the stomach will starve to death, and one will be washed out. Water is the first inborn vitality. At the beginning of the universe, water was the first, before the appearance of the five elements. So drinking water is the secret to becoming immortal. However, the water from the towns and cities is dirty and polluted and drinking such water will harm your spirit, so one must fetch the purest water in the mountain and swallow it slowly, so that a gurgling sound is produced in your throat. Then finally one spoon of water is enough for a day and a night. You live like this for one hundred and twenty years, and finally your body will become gradually so light and clean that you do not even need water. You can feed only on air and walk by riding the winds.

Here, the emphasis is in the effort to purify the body from all dirty things, including food, and to reduce all ailments until only pure water, or just air, is consumed, the mouth and stomach then also becoming pure. We can also see a contrast between the two concepts of purity and pollution: qing 清 vs. hui 秽, hui 浑.

The desire to distinguish the clean from the unclean responds to a basic...

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43 It would be worthwhile examining the relationship between concepts of purity and cleanness, on the one side, and those of ancient Daoism, expressed by terms like xu 虚 (emptiness), jing 静 (calmness) or ming 明 (clarity), on the other side.

44 The Chinese version is: 人生本自虚空而来，因食物过多，致身体坚重，腹中秽虫丛起，易生痰滞。学道者先清其口，再清其肠。饿死诸虫以荡涤之，水为先天第一真气。天地开辟时，未有五行先有水，故饮水为修仙要诀。但城市水浑，有累灵府，必取山中至清之水，徐徐而吞，使喉中喀喀有响，然后甘味才出。一勺水，可度一昼夜。如是一百二十年，身渐轻清，井水可辟，便服气御风而行矣。“Zhediexian” 折叠仙.
visceral feeling—horror and repulsion-disgust—that is typically associated with things that are perceived as repugnant, inedible, or infectious: waste products such as excrement, secretions from the human body, and decomposing flesh.\textsuperscript{45} But these basic ideas seem to have been universally extended into the symbolic level. In front of the “uncontaminated” the concepts of “foul” and “filth” are contrasted, thus “what is inspiring disgust,” the “obscene,” the “inauspicious” and even “ill-omened.” The oppositional concepts clean-dirty are evident in some antonyms, such as \textit{qing-zhuo} 清浊, both in physical and moral meanings. In the old Chinese poem quoted by Shen Fu 沈复 (1763–1810?), it is said: “When [water] is clean, I will wash my tassel, when it is muddy I will wash my feet.”\textsuperscript{46} Another example of this contrast can be found in the novel \textit{The Dream of the Red Chamber}: “You introduce this dirty thing to pollute this territory of pure and incontaminate maidens.”\textsuperscript{47} The same contrast is expressed by Pu Songling 蒲松龄 (1640–1715): “Who is pure keeps his own purity, while who is dreggy keeps his own foulness.”\textsuperscript{48}

In China the term \textit{zhuo} 浊 can be rendered as “muddy” for water or “dirty” for air, and is frequently used in philosophical discourse as a metaphor for the psychophysical energy (\textit{qi} 气) when it is turbid. Essays by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) and other Neo-Confucian thinkers resort to this dichotomy to interpret the differentiation of all the beings in the universe and to trace back the causes of evil in the world.\textsuperscript{49} The influences of such perspectives are also evident in the narrative production. In the \textit{Xiyoubu} 西游补 (Supplement to the \textit{Xiyouji}), Chap. 16, it is stated: “At the beginning of the universe, the clear essence moved upwards, while the impure essence downwards. And what was half pure half impure belongs to the middle part, and this is the human genre.”\textsuperscript{50}

Challenges to the absolute contrast between the two terms of this dyad can be found in some unorthodox writings in the late Ming period. They can be traced back to the Buddhist image of the lotus flower that is unsoiled by the mud from which it springs. The lotus flower is the symbolic image of holy and pure

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{45} In \textit{The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals}, Charles Darwin wrote that disgust refers to something revolting. According to Kristeva, the “abject” refers to human reaction, such as horror or vomit, to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other. The classical examples are the corpse that traumatically reminds us of our own materiality, the open wound, or feces. Kristeva, 1982.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{46} The Chinese version is: 清斯濯缨,浊斯濯足。Shen Fu, 1980.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{47} The Chinese version is: 引这浊物来污染这清净女儿之境。\textit{HLM}, 5:87.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{48} The Chinese version is: 清者自清,浊者自浊。\textit{LZZY}, 11: 1450, “Huang Ying” 黄英.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{49} See Santangelo, 1991; 1992.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{50} The Chinese version is: 天地初开，清者归于上，浊者归于下；有一种半清半浊归于中。}
personality, because even though it grows in the dirty mud it remains pure: in poetry it has become a metaphor for female beauty. The writers of the Taizhou movement, for instance Mei Dingzuo (1549–1615), played on this contrast of filth and purity, filthy mud and pure lotus, and paradoxically mixed the opposing terms, extolling the talent and virtues of courtesans.

Many other terms may be used in everyday life, such as clean (di 涤) and foul (hui 秽): “there are no dirty pots and cups, because [the owner of the tea house] washes them very often.” This ascetic sense of purity is certainly of Buddhist origin, as we find in several literary sources, such as “spotlessly clean,” and “untainted with evil thoughts or bad habits.” Of obvious Buddhist influence is also the contrast between purity and corruption in the world, with the comparison between “pure jade” and “mud”:

In the end, you will still be corrupted in the worldly dust against your wishes; just like a piece of spotless white jade which suffers the fate of falling into the mire!

These are various possible ways in which the dyad clean–dirty is expressed in Chinese language; and some specific terms will be examined here. In the examination of several concepts and feelings associated with the basic notions of the purity-impurity dyad, it seems that in some ways Chinese culture shares with other civilizations certain taboos concerning the basic poles of eros and thanatos.

*Xishengqing* (making pure and clean) can refer to mere social image, to one’s face in the community and social control of sexual behaviour. This type of interpretation can be well understood in a community where public image is fundamental to social and personal relations and where “face preservation” is a basic social factor. This is evident in the following popular song, collected by Feng Menglong:

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53 The Chinese version is: 良器以时涤。无秽器。
54 In the variant “六尘不染,” see *LZZY*, 7:1012, “Jin Heshang” 金和尚. Cf. Also “一尘全不染” in *XYJ*, 1.
55 The Chinese version is: 到头来，依旧是风尘肮脏违心愿；好一似，无暇白玉遭泥陷。

404  Paolo Santangelo
Also [Deception]
Since everyone says you and I secretly love each other.
We must find the chance to insult each other and *dispel the rumours*.
You raise your fist and say you will beat me.
I will curse Dongting Island, while pointing at Mount Wu.  

This predominant idea of cleanness is also recorded in another popular song:

Then she asks her lover to stroke her breast and eat cherries.
Eating cherries, talking of cherries. As he dislikes my fingers getting dirty,
I wash my hands in a gold bowl and a silver bowl.
and then I wipe them clean three times with a white silk handkerchief.  

Besides the physical disgust associated with material uncleanness, moral
disgust extends this repulsion metaphorically to what is considered morally
impure.

If we examine filthy (*hui* 罪) and its compounds, as well as the most typical
synonyms, we also discover a whole spectrum of various basic meanings and
logical associations: the filth of spoiled food and excrement becomes an allegory
for moral debasement and defilement—especially sexual taboos and
transgressions or befoulment of the sacredness of human remains—and their
social effects are reflected in lack of respect *zang* 脏 and the feeling of a sense
of inferiority.  

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56 The Chinese version is:  又 [瞒人]：人人说我与你有私情，寻场相骂洗身清，你便拔出子拳头只说打，我便手指子吴山骂洞庭。 *Shan’ge*, 1:27A.
58 *Zang* 脏 (dirty, filthy), is used here and recalls the same concepts of pollution and
desacralization: Showing the contempt of Jia Zheng toward his son Baoyu, “Do not
contaminate this floor with dirt by standing here, and do not contaminate this door of mine by
leaning against it!” (*仔细站脏了我这地，靠脏了我这门!*), *HLM*, 9:154. In *HLM* we have two
clear examples where *wuhui* “污秽” and *hui* “秽” are used respectively for “slander” and
“despise”: “make up stories to slander people” (*所以编出来污秽人家*), *HLM*, 54; “to consider
oneself as respectful as the Buddha and despise others looking down on them as manure” (*爱自己尊若菩萨，窥他人秽如粪土*), *HLM*, 79. See also the following combination that associates
disrespect with sullying: “He was full with rage, and went far to abuse you, humiliating you by
59 When the lack of respect is perceived subjectively and this connotation of “dirty” is
attributed to oneself, the subject thus feels shameful about himself (*只觉自惭形秽*). *Jinghuayuan* 镜花缘, Ch. 19; “In fact, he felt the consciousness of the foulness and corruption
Thus, I analysed the occurrences of *hui* 尻, alone or in compounds, and singled out some significant examples in *Zibuyu 子不语* (What the Master would not discuss), *Hongloumeng 红楼梦* (The dream of the Red Chamber), *Jinpinglei 金瓶梅* (The golden lotus), *Rulin waishi 儒林外史* (The literati’s unofficial history), *Fusheng liuji 浮生六记* (The floating life), *Tao’an mengyi 陶庵梦忆* (Remembrances of Zhang Dai’s dreams), some chapters of Pu Songling’s collection of short stories *Liaozhai zhiyi 聊斋志异* (Strange tales of Liaozhai), some of Feng Menglong’s 冯梦龙 works, especially his *Shan’ge 山歌* (Popular songs) and *Qingshi leilüe 情史类略* (Anatomy of love).

Several expressions denote these impure and dirty things (*aza* 腌臜, *huigu* 罾秽, *fuchou zhi wu* 腐臭之物, *fen* 粪). Dirt can be present in clothes, rooms, bodies. Thus *hui* can be rendered as just “dirty,” “rubbish” (*huini* 抗泥, *wuhui* 萩秽), of his own nature quite intolerable” (*果觉自形污秽不堪*), *HLM*, 5, 116. Sometimes, the sense of inadequacy is strengthened by the reflexive verb *zican* 自惭 (feeling ashamed), and the idea of pollution may be furthermore associated with the notion of the poor and dirty *maowu* 茅屋 (thatched cottage) and the *zaomei* 灶煤 (kitchen coal). Other examples: Ashamed for his physical inferiority, Lian wished to sleep under the bed (*生自惭形秽, 愿在下床*), *LZZY*, 2: 257–258, “Qiaoniang 巧娘”; Zhao was dreadfully ashamed of his poverty-stricken state, and afraid that his dirty room would spoil the young lady’s beautiful dress (*某自惭形秽, 又虑茅屋灶煤, 玷染华裳*), *LZZY*, 12: 1647, “Chu Suiliang 褚遂良.”

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60 *ZBY*, also known as *Xin Qixie 新齐谐* (New strange events), is a collection of tales by Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798), composed of 710 short stories, and distributed in 24 chapters. The edition used in this article is from Yuan Mei, 1993.
61 The text of *HLM* that is utilized here is the electronic text kindly provided by the Publisher Zhonghua shuju, thanks to the help of Prof. Guo Yingde, who cooperated in the textual analysis of the work.
62 As for the *JPM*, here the critical edition of “Xinke xiuxiang piping” (新刻绣像批评), Chongzhen ed. 褚植本 has been used.
64 See also Li Wai-ye, 1997, 46–73.
66 For his collections of short stories, the most widely consulted is *Gujin xiaoshuo 古今小说* (also *Yushi mingyan* 历世明言), 1621, hereafter *GJS*, *Xingshi jingyan 醒世恒言*, hereafter *XSJY*, and *Jingshi tongyan 醒世通言*, 1624, hereafter *JSTY*.
67 See also *Feng Menglong min'geji sanzhong zhujie*, *xia* 冯梦龙民歌集三种注解(下). The annotated and commented edition by Ōki Yasushi 大木康, 2003, with a Japanese translation, has been used for the revision of the electronic text (originally in simplified characters), and to number the songs.
68 Attributed to Feng Menglong, 1986.
(1) In regards to the imagined fear of dirtying clothes, the thief says: “I’m sure you don’t have the heart to dirty my shirt, do you?”
(2) “Dirty mud splashed and stained the witch’s face like a ghost.”

The analysis of the term *ganjing* 干净 in an “obscene book” like *Jinpingmei*, revealed that most of the occurrences (75%) maintained the basic physical sense of clean-filthy in a positive and negative function. Other examples dealt with hygiene and diet: “do not eat dirty things” (like pigs usually do). Moreover, it is suggested that gluttony may cause the growth of dirty parasites: “as we eat too much, our bodies become heavy and clustered dirty parasites grow up in our stomach. We are so easy to be smoldered by phlegm.” Thus, rich is the case of filthy and spoiled food or polluted water. Even more frequent are occurrences where filth is associated with human or animal excrement and waste fluids. In some sentences, the consequent evaluation of excrement as dirty is clear: respectively excrement is a filthy thing and urinating is dirty, therefore all excrement recalls a consciousness of being dirty. The dog is the exception that confirms the rule, as it has no stomach and thus is not aware of the foulness of its excrement, or the crazy man’s description, where dejections are mentioned as the opposite of clean things. In *Remembrances of Zhang Dai’s Dreams* 3:13 “Nanzhen qimeng” 南镇祈梦 (Dream prayer at Nanzhen), excrement is associated with bad omens, and in *Strange tales of Liaozhai*, 6:788, “Hudagu” 胡大姑 (Aunt Hu); 4:585, “Jiukuang” 酒狂 (Crazy about alcohol), throwing faeces and rubbish in the bowl is an evident act of revenge and spite.

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71 The Chinese version is: 秽泥乱坠,涂巫面如鬼。LZZY, 4:561, “Hu Si xianggong” 胡四相公.
72 For instance: “The old woman Wang puts the room in order, and waits for the visitors.” (王婆收拾房内干净, Ch. 3); “Wipe the table and make it clean.” (抹得桌子干净, Ch. 3); “To put in order and clean the Hibiscus Pavilion in the back yard” (收拾打扫后花园芙蓉亭干净, Ch. 10). The meaning may be extended, both literally and symbolically to “sweeping away,” “getting rid of,” “destroy evidences by fire,” and “eats up everything, with nothing left.” It is, therefore, not a huge leap to the logical connection between “making clean,” “removing dirt,” and “putting everything in order,” “prepare completely,” “clean and order,” “sweep away,” “get rid of,” in literal and symbolic extension.
74 The Chinese version is: 因食物过onio,致身体坚重,腹中秽虫丛起,易生痰滞。ZBY, 16:309, “Zhediexian” 折叠仙.
76 See the following examples: “Brothers Zhou Shifu and Zhou Shilu of Shilou County of Shanxi once fought with each other. Zhou Shilu pierced through his brother’s stomach with a knife and his gut flowed out in two *cun* (1*cun*=3.33cm). Later, as time went by, the wound on Zhou Shifu’s stomach coalesced like a mouth that could close and open. His gut hung out
of his body and he used a tin bowl to cover it. He also bound it with a belt and his excreta all
discharged from there. It went on like this for three years and Zhou Shifu died at last. The
day when he was dying, a ghost attached itself to a family member of Zhou and cursed the
brother, saying: “It was predestined fate that you would kill me, but it has happened several
years earlier than expected. Thus you have made me suffer from so many foul things” (山西
石楼县周世福、周世禄兄弟相斗, 刀戳兄腹, 肠出二寸。后日久, 肚上创平复如口, 能翕张, 肠
拖於外, 以锡碗覆之, 束以带, 大小便皆从此处出。如此三载余方死。死之日, 有鬼附家人身暨
周世福. Here, because all his excreta were discharged through his wound, this made his body
dirty and led him feel shame.

“One day, Xu urinated into the wine jar. Enraged, his sister-in-law abused him. Xu said: ‘It
is not a big deal since you can wash it.’ His sister-in-law said: ‘You peed in it and how can it be

The natural repulsion for excrement is well represented in the character who is
reincarnated into a dog, but still partially keeps human habits and tastes: “When he grew
older, seeing excretion he still knew it to be dirty; yet smelling it he felt it tasty. However, he
was resolute not to eat such things” (稍长, 见便液, 亦知秽; 然嗅之而香, 但立念不食耳) LZZY, 1:73, “Sansheng” 三生.

Different is the case of the “crazy monk” who can eat excrement, as his abnormal
behaviour has the value of a gong'an (koan) or other shocking practice in the illumination
process: “He was considered ‘to become a Buddha in this life.’ It is really a kind of extreme

“He seemed to be demented, eating dirty things and regarding it as delicious. When dogs
and sheep left their digested matter behind, he would bend over and eat it” (狗羊遗秽於前, 猱伏啖之) LZZY, 2:131, “Jin Shicheng” 金世成.

Those incompetent servants went to the small temple to borrow cooking utensils…. If
they did not get wine and meat, they would immediately shake their fists to beat the monks.
The monks suffered from it so much, but they could not work out a way to get rid of this
suffering, so they put the blame on the Xi Spring, and threw animal faeces into the spring (臧
获到庵借炊……无酒肉, 辄挥老拳。僧苦之。无计脱此苦, 乃罪泉, 投之刍秽) TAMY, 3:13, “Nan zhen qimeng” 南镇祈梦.

“The fox did not haunt others much but concentrated on Yue’s daughter-in-law. Her shoes,
stocks, hairpins and earrings were always found on the way and every time she had dinner,
dead rats or feces would be seen in her bowl” (狐不甚害他人。而专祟其子妇: 履袜簪珥, 往往
弃道上; 每食, 辄于粥碗中埋死鼠或粪秽) LZZY, 6:788, “Hu Daguo” 胡大姑.

“Faeces and urine was amongst the black water” (黑水半杂溲秽) LZZY, 4:585, “Jiukuang” 酒狂.
The sensory organs perceive this physical filth, especially the nose. Slightly less impressive are the sense of sight, but it can, however, warn against potential health dangers or just the offence to the aesthetical senses. Thus, the border between physical and spiritual filth is becoming fuzzy, as in some instances of dirty and nasty aspects.77

The olfactive function is particularly sensitive in warning a person to the presence of dirty and impure things, and several stereotyped expressions “臭秽狼籍不可闻”; “竟不可近”; “臭秽可憎”; “臭秽不可近” have been created to emphasize this phenomenon. Li Yu 李渔 is a very sensitive and refined writer, and he insists on the importance of good and bad smells in various passages. He advises women to wash their bodies with scented soap and to wash their mouth with fragrant tea. On the miraculous effects of the use of soap, with its delicate aroma, he mentions its property of wiping away filth, cleaning the dirty and maintaining perfume. Li reminds us that in case the woman’s body is polluted by any occasional filth or by foul odour, once she rubs her body with soap, every impurity is dashed away. In his reflections on habitat, he writes about “foul air” and recommends “[keeping the room clean] without nasty smell.”78 In another passage, Li Yu concludes his criticism against bound feet, stating that unbound feet are natural and easy for walking, not only nice to be seen but also without stink. Foot binding, on the contrary, was a forced and artificial practice, and thus it was the cause of bad smell. And again Li Yu explained that bound feet cannot be clean and that their bad smell troubles others; people are disturbed and hold their nose and knit their brows.79

What is obscene and repellent is often associated with other manifestations that hurt sensory organs, such as a bad smell, and this stink is associated with dejecta and rotten food or organic materials:80

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77 “I, as a humble secretary, went to visit him in a very nasty appearance. However, he hosted me, offering me accommodation and food without any difference. Thus, I greatly admire him” (余一书记往，颇秽恶，先生寢食之不异也，余深服之). TAMY, 1:5 “Ben Yunshi” 奔云石.

“Then, he thought that he was dressed in shabby clothes, pustular and purulent, and very dirty, so that he was ashamed to enter the village. So, in hesitation, he by and by approached his county” (又念败絮脓秽，无颜入里门，尚趑趄近邑间). LZZY, 3:432, “Pianpian” 翩翩.

“A man was coming, putting on a worn out hat and dragging clogs. His appearance was extremely ugly and dirty” (一人戴破帽，曳木屐而来，形状丑秽之极). Qingshi, 8:208, “Qi Raozhou nü” 齐饶州女.

78 Xianqing ouji 闲情偶寄, 4, “Jushi bu” 居室部, in Li Yu, Vol. 3, 164. See also “on the bad smell of the book that is so nasty that one holds his nose and poisons people” (未有不废卷掩鼻，而怪秽气熏人者也). “Ciqu bu” 词曲部, in Li Yu, Vol. 3, 27.


80 XYJ, 67. Chap. 67 and the following 68 insist on foul air.
The fragrance in the mouth changed into otter’s excrement, and immediately he felt its foulness.\(^{81}\)

Then Wang saw a lot of jumbled houses, which sent out a rotten stink so that no one could stand the smell.\(^{82}\)

Another instance refers to death, and from this we can start to see the relationship to pollution: the breath of ghosts and monsters is terribly foul and icy, like corpses. In the following passage, the impure smell of dead animals is contrasted with the pure fragrance from the body of the chaste girl:\(^{83}\)

Suddenly a strange fragrant odour came out from Xiugu’s bedroom and rushed directly towards the streets and lanes. All the passersby felt astonished and stood there staring at each other. Yan Hu knew that strange phenomenon and he put some dirty things, such as dead cats and dogs outside Li’s house to disturb that odor. However, the fragrance was even stronger.\(^{84}\)

Thus, human living beings can be distinguished from dead ghosts by their smell: Those who have no smell of foul air are human beings,\(^{85}\) while those belonging to the netherworld emanate a cold and unbearable stink.\(^{86}\) Obviously, the horrible smell of decomposition is associated with the idea of death. For

\(^{81}\) The Chinese version is: 口香即獭粪，顿觉臭秽。QSL, 21:718, “Tayao”獭妖.

\(^{82}\) The Chinese version is: 见屋宇错杂，秽臭熏人。LZZY, 12:1685, “Jinse”锦瑟, 484.

\(^{83}\) Smell, thus, is the most direct physical sign that distinguishes purity from filth: the holiness of an old lady is expressed in the sandalwood perfume that radiates from her corpse, even after her death: “The sandalwood smell wafted around from the air as she sat up cross-legged and passed away. Since she was dead, the sandalwood smell lingered for over three days and nights till it eventually faded away” (旃檀之气自空缭绕, 端坐跏趺而逝。逝后, 香三昼夜始散) ZBY, 21:410, “Pusa dabai”菩萨答拜.

\(^{84}\) The Chinese version is: 忽有异香从秀姑所卧处起,直达街巷,行路者皆愕眙相视。严虎知之, 取死猫死狗诸秽物罗置李门外, 以乱其气, 而其香愈盛。ZBY, 15:289, “Shixiang erze”尸香二则.

\(^{85}\) ZBY, 5, “Fuduan huwei”斧断狐尾 (Cut down the tail of the fox with an axe).

\(^{86}\) Bad smells associated with dirt occur in some other passages: “Then the people saw a broom binding under the abdomen of the buffalo that could not be untied. It sent out a fishy smell and the people were unable to get close” (腹下有敝帚紧系不解,腥秽难近), ZBY, 2:42, “Shuigui zhou”水鬼帚; “They found a thousand pieces of catkin in the wood: They were black or white and when people tried to touch them, they found they were smelly and dirty” (林莽间绵絮千余片,或青或白,触手腥秽), ZBY, 16:306, “Quhou”驱鲎; and on the corruption of death: “the corpse turned stinky and dirty,” ZBY, 21:400, “Jiangdu mouling”江都某令.

Furthermore, in another story it was reported “Every kind of ghost has a kind of smell. The ghosts who died in water have a smell like mutton. The ghosts who died on the shore have a smell like paper ash” (鬼有气息：水死之鬼羊臊气, 岸死之鬼纸灰气), ZBY, 9, “Shuigui wei xiao zi”水鬼畏嚣字. The smell of ashes is not related to the dead, but rather to the practice of burning papers when one wanted to communicate with the other world.
instance, the foul air of the dead is so strong that it penetrates into the viscera of people (when a corpse is burned, although its aspect was as bright as when the person was alive). Often, the stink of death is also associated with sickness and ulcers. Pollution is usually perceived for infections and similar sicknesses.

By extension, as it has been mentioned, the terms concerning dirt, excrement, foul things, and bad odours are used metaphorically in a large spectrum of meanings, from defilement and immoral behaviour to desecration, intruding into one’s privacy, or pollution from taboos or sexual debasement.

As in many other cultures, in Chinese civilization some aspects of purity are associated with sexual abstinence, the notion of “obscene” often has sexual connotations, and still retains the meaning of “inauspicious,” “ill-omened,” “profane,” when it comes to anything that is taboo. Any kind of adulteries and debauchery are obscene, as are lustful actions that cannot be mentioned, influenced by those women whose professions are either illegitimate or disreputable. Dirty and obscene is almost always connected with sexual practices, such as the lustful behaviour of a nun and the “dirty towel” related to sexual experiences and collected by the protagonist of a short story.

Puzzling is the case of pollution by blood. Blood is always considered something dirty. Is it because blood is a kind of outflow from the human body? I would think that blood has a special position in this imagery, as on the one side it is similar to menstruation, which is polluting par excellence, but generally it is related to violent death, and thus it is itself contaminated and filthy, such as “bringing some dirty blood.”

In fact, menses blood is called “dirty blood,” pregnant women’s and female’s urine are considered terribly polluting. A specific taboo is associated with women’s outflows and pregnancy, and most women’s urine and menses are regarded as dirty and polluting. Women’s bodies and outflow are often:

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87 *QSLL*, 20:668 “Mou Shumishi nü” 某枢密使女.
89 We can find similar nuances in some Chinese terms, such as *huì* 秽, *wū* 汚, *zāng* 脏, *chōu* 臭, and *xīng* 腥.
91 *JSTY*, 28.
92 On *huixue* 秽血 (menses blood) see: “The wife then pressed her hand on her stomach at once and her menses blood sprayed out” (即以手按其妇腹下, 秽血喷之). *ZBY*, 18:334, “Shan Niangniang” 山娘娘.
93 “I, with my pure body, was polluted by the foul air of the lying-in woman” (童真之身污产妇秽气). *ZBY*, 6:17, “Shenxingqi” 沈姓妻. On the association of pollution to childbearing, see Furth, 1987.
94 On the need to wash the placenta to avoid impurity and stupidity of the offspring: “When I
empowered of a desacralizing and polluting magic. The thunder god is particularly susceptible to being polluted and weakened by female contact. If a god or a ghost is stained by them, he will lose his power. So, in the tale “Leigong beiwu,”
urine seems to have so strong a polluting power that it can even affect gods: we can see how even the powerful god of thunder, who is so ready to punish sinners, after being polluted by an old woman, seems almost paralysed and needs a Daoist purification ceremony in order to be able to fly back to heaven. Women’s polluting properties are endowed with almost magic effects.

“The filthy body of the woman” is one of the most explicit misogynistic manifestations: “Does not the wife who has the smell of cosmetics have an invisibly awesome power? It is not surprising that magic and sexuality are interrelated with good and evil. Thus, the ceremony for rain is addressed to the lustful Bei Comet Goddess who can make clouds and rains come into being. As a man of his time, Yuan Mei also reflected similar fears and taboos about sexual matters, which are evident in many of his tales. In some cases he uses the terms *hui* 糟, “filthy” and *wu* 污 “defile” or “polluted,” attesting to the common attitude toward sexual taboos and transgressions, even if such episodes are probably ironically told by the author. Yuan Mei talks of “the obscene stories concerning Wu Zetian” and incestuous sex relations.

Also in Buddhist scriptures and commentaries, a specific impurity is attributed to women whose *wulou* 五漏 (five impurities, contrasted with the “seven treasures” *qibao* 七宝) are traced back to female vices and sins, such as jealousy, vanity, deceit, and sexual desire.

Desires, dreams and affairs can also be obscene (*huixie* 亵秽). Jianhui 奸秽 can also be rendered as “debauchery,” as it is often related to adultery and moral
transgressions, as in “indulging in immoral and abominable behaviour,”\textsuperscript{100} or “Polluted by adultery, his or her flesh would not be eaten even by jackals and tigers.”\textsuperscript{101}

Clear sexual connotations (besides the turning of the erotic dream of Baoyu into a nightmare), are evident in the four episodes in \textit{The Dream of the Red Chamber}, where the concepts of “impure, corrupt and dirty” are relevant: both the “dirty thing” and obscenities are all related to sexual experiences; the expression “filthy Tang and stinking Han” is quoted, and also “filthy and stinking” is used to refer to amorous affairs. Finally in the last sentence “rancid,” “stinking,” and “dirty and stinking,” is used to imply profligate companions.\textsuperscript{102}

Sexual transgressions are also represented as “pollution” and “corruption,” by the verbs \textit{ran} 染, and \textit{wu} 污. In a song collected by Feng Menglong, \textit{ran} can be rendered as “to commit adultery,” and the God of Flowers in the \textit{Peony Pavilion} resorts to \textit{wu} when talking about the love encounter of Liu Mengmei and Du Liniang.\textsuperscript{103}

It is interesting to note that one of the categories of “love” in Feng Menglong’s \textit{Qingshi} is “Qinghui” 情秽, which can be literally rendered as “abominably in love,” in association with the ideas of “abnormal” and “pervasive.”\textsuperscript{104} It is dealt

\textsuperscript{100} \textit{QSLL}, 17:507, “Beiqi Wucheng huanghou Hushi” 北齐武成皇后胡氏.

\textsuperscript{101} The Chinese version is: 人非兽而实兽,奸秽淫腥,肉不食于豺虎. \textit{LZZY}, 1:50, “Quanjian” 且奸.

\textsuperscript{102} (1) [After waking up from his erotic dream] Baoyu shyly begged his maid saying: “Please, dear sister, do not tell anyone.” Xiren was embarrassed, but smiled and asked: “What kind of stories did you dream? And where do all these dirty things come from?” (宝玉含羞央道: “好姐姐,千万别告诉别人.” 袭人含羞笑问道: “你梦见什么故事了?是哪里流出来的那些脏东西?”). \textit{HLM}, 6:111.

(2) Worse, there is another kind of erotic and romantic literature, which, being full of obscenities, easily ruins youth (更有一种风月笔墨,其淫秽污臭,最易坏人子弟). \textit{HLM}, 1.

(3) Since ancient times on, even the Han and Tang dynasties were called “filthy Tang and stinking Han” to say nothing of families like ours! Which household has not its own share of amorous affairs? (从古至今,连汉朝和唐朝,人还说“脏唐臭汉”,何况咱们这宗人家!谁家没风流事?). \textit{HLM}, 63:966.

(4) All day long, go slyly engaged in extramarital sex and adulterous actions, dragging indiscriminately into your rooms, foul and filthy people? (成日家偷鸡摸狗,腥的臭的,都拉了你屋里去). In another edition, 騒 is replaced by 腥. \textit{HLM}, 44:662.

\textsuperscript{103} The husband of the older sister forces his sister-in-law to commit adultery with him. The whole bed is covered with chaff [wives] as if someone has been sieving rice with the pillow. She says to him: As there is no way to dye over black with another colour, I am not allowed to commit adultery with you. But you have the brazen dough-like face, like a dumpling which is not steamed well because of its thick skin (姐夫强横了要偷阿姨,好像个枕头边筛米满床粞, 阿姨道姐夫呀,皂色上还覆教我无染处,馄饨弗熟你再有介一副厚面皮). \textit{Shan ge}, 4:107B.

\textsuperscript{104} See also the second Preface to \textit{Qingshi}, where we can read that the “chapters on ‘perversion’ and ‘vulnerability’ suffocate the reader’s lust.”
with in chapter 17 and includes 37 items distributed into four sections (gongye 宮掖 “palace apartments”; qili 戚里 “imperial relatives by marriage”; qiyan 奇 淫 “abnormal sex perversion”; zayin 杂淫 “various perversions”). Its meaning therefore ranges from “indulgent licentiousness” to “odd obscenities.” In his commentary Feng Menglong warns those who commit odd lustful behaviour that they will necessarily encounter unexpected disasters. Furthermore, in two comments in Chapter 21 on “monsters in love,” he distinguishes the category of Qinghui from that of “monsters” by expressly mentioning the Empress Wu: She was a bewitching fox, and yet she was abnormal. In fact “Wu Zhao was a woman, but became Emperor, and when she became old, still performed lustful behaviour. Although we can consider her as a monster, she has been already included among the ‘perverted.’ Alas! Her ambitious schemes were a hundred times greater than those of men. So she cannot be considered just as a monster: to be a monster is not so bad as to be ‘perverted’!” It means that “perversion” is not only an abnormal behaviour in the sexual field, but implies a social imprint, as it refers to conduct which is against “normal” or “proper” status and condition: a woman becoming Emperor, like a man, and an old woman acting like youth.

Thus, yinhui 淫秽 (obscenities), and huiku秽污 (profanation, pollution) are used also in Qingshi for two cases of corpse desacration through necrophilia: these episodes happened in the Han period, and were committed by robbers or rebels who opened the tombs to take the jewelry and then performed obscene acts with the corpse that was well preserved. In contrast, adultery of a woman with a dog is mentioned by Pu Songling as an extreme case of profligacy and immoral pollution, rather than a perversion such as bestiality: “Human beings are not beasts, but can really become beasts. Polluted by such horrible adultery, his or her flesh would not be eaten even by jackals and tigers.”

As we mentioned, Yuan Mei talks of the “obscenity” of many sexual affairs, and incestuous relations: obscene are “the stories concerning Wu Zetian,” “words pronounced while having sexual intercourse,” and punishments are deserved for lust: “According to the law, the sodomite must put dirt into his mouth and be

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105 QSLL, 17:536.
106 QSLL, 21:755.
107 QSLL, 21:695.
108 QSLL, 17:535.
109 LZZY, 1:50, “Quanjian” 犬奸.
110 Jiaogou huiyu 交媾秽语 (obscene words pronounced while having sexual intercourse). A bride of the Sun family of Linping County was haunted by a ghost and she claimed she was “Madam Mountain.” She liked to paint her face and wear colourful clothes. She also hugged her husband in the daytime and said some obscene words, which might be said in the course of making love (临平孙姓者新妇为魅所凭,自称“山娘娘”, 喜敷粉着艳衣, 日抱其夫作交媾秽语). ZBY, 18:334, “Shanniangniang” 山娘娘. See also item 2, a, “Obscene and dirty words.”
flogged one hundred times.” 111

Another aspect concerning the concept of the pure-impure and the related sense of horror can be found in the grotesqueness of the sexual body and the sinister presentation of sexual transgressions, sexual taboos and the obscene descriptions concerning Empress Wu. Some horrid scenes transmit to the reader anxiety and terror rather than the joyful and innocent image of sex.

In the following example—although not associated with sexuality but related to genitals—the male organ of the imperial doctor for its conformation is considered unclean: “So I often felt unclean”112

From the examination of these expressions, including ideas of pollution or filth, we discover a dark side to sexual representation. It seems that the sexual sphere is not considered so “natural,” as in Gaozi’s famous sentence “Appetite for food and desire for sex are part of human nature.” Eberhard noticed the sense of uncleanness of bodily functions and sex, as well as several sexual taboos,113 and Hsü stated that “sex is considered unclean, and women carry the burden of this uncleanness.”114 Therefore, if in Chinese culture the dichotomy between spiritual and physical love is not as important as in the West, the discrimination against sensual love appears in forms that are often different from the western tradition. The principle of the metaphysics of love, which we find in rare works such as the The Dream of the Red Chamber or in dramas of the “talent and beauty” type, is certainly different from that which developed in Europe, and which began with the Platonic treatment.115 Much of Chinese puritanism seems to be linked to hygiene and social concerns.

Sexual taboos and transgressions, women’s body and outflows, are often empowered of a desacralizing and polluting magic. Although Yuan Mei relates such episodes and portents with an ironic smile, in fact he reports stories that would have been circulated in his time, and that might surprise or excite the readers. In regards to more detailed cases concerning the interrelation of sexual matters and the concept of impurity, the previous part of this article offers several examples.

111 ZBY, 6, “Changshu Chengsheng” 常熟程生.
112 ZBY, 24:488, “Konghejian miji erze” 控鹤监秘记二则.
Categories that are closely related to ideas of moral filth are contamination and desecration, and these are mainly concerned with the guidelines concerning special places and care for the dead. Desecration and profanation are violations of sacred concepts, such as religious places or corpses. It may also concern the sacredness of temples and religious places, as in: “This is the place of Buddha, and cannot be contaminated.”\textsuperscript{116}

Death pollution can be active or passive: this effect occurs either in the case of profanation of a corpse or a skeleton, or of contamination from contact with human or animal remains. A case of contamination, by touching the body of a dead monster, is presented in the \textit{Xiyouji}: “That idiot of Bajie did not worry about getting dirty, and just grabbed the corpse of the monster by its tail, and dragged it.”\textsuperscript{117}

Here too death is the source of “desecration,” or of “contamination,” especially when it is the consequence of violence. In some of Yuan Mei’s stories, the presence of ghosts is recurrent in places that had been battle fields centuries before, and where the memory of blood and suffering seems unforgettable, even for the unaware traveler. In another story edited by Feng Menglong, it is warned, “contaminating the sky with the foul of murderous atmosphere [excessive killing] is against the heavenly Way, which loves life.”\textsuperscript{118}

In Chinese literary sources, the most common case concerns the violation of human remains. Thus, this phenomenon may take the form of desacralization of the human remains, but also the consequent pollution by something impure, such as is related to the underworld or female outflows. Even in conduct of rituals, it is sufficient to unluckily and unwillingly move a tombstone or damage an urn.\textsuperscript{119} Particularly dangerous is disrespect or any involuntary damage to skeletons, corpses or bones of human beings. This provokes the angry reactions of the earthly souls, the energy that remains when the body is at rest.\textsuperscript{120}

Besides the dangers coming from the sexual sphere, another source of pollution derives from contact with death. If we consider everyday life and the syncretistic world of beliefs, the concepts of pureness and impureness become more and more complex. We find a multifarious image, especially in literary works, particularly in symbolic and fantastic imagery. In the Gothic tales by Yuan Mei, the underworld, or the world of darkness, is always behind the world of

\begin{itemize}
\item[116] The Chinese version is: \textit{这里是佛地, 不可污秽.} \textit{JSTY, 13.}
\item[117] The Chinese version is: \textit{那呆子不嫌秽污, 一把揪住尾子, 拖拖扯扯.} \textit{XYJ, 79}
\item[118] The Chinese version is: \textit{杀气秽空, 殊非天道好生之意.} \textit{GJXS, 13.}
\item[119] See for instance \textit{ZBY, 2, “Suanming xiansheng gui” 算命先生鬼.}
\item[120] On trampling on the grave (践踏污秽, 秽杂), Cf. \textit{ZBY, 4:70, “Yesheng qi” 叶生妻; ZBY, 23:466, “Raozhoufu muyou” 饶州府幕友.}
\end{itemize}
mortals, and human beings can be easily infected by it, catching some disease, becoming polluted or possessed by spirits (weisui 为祟, zuosui 作祟, yansui 魇祟, mi 迷, ju 据, ping 凭, mei 媚, guhuo 蛊惑, xiangchan 相缠), or obtaining special powers. It seems that death is a kind of universal epidemic that easily infects living beings. The most danger lies in disrespecting or, worse, desecrating human skeletons, corpses or bones, provoking an angry reaction from ghosts.\textsuperscript{121} Only magicians, like Daoist monks, using Daoist spells and Buddhist sutras, are able to cope with such underground forces and compete with them, or exorcise demons.\textsuperscript{122}

In Chinese civilization, we can also observe the ceremonial acts employed in an attempt to reestablish lost purity in relation to the “sacred” and the social and cultural realm. A well-known practice concerned self-purification techniques, which can be considered to lie somewhere between purification rituals and self-perfection training, and was derived from Daoist discipline. In fact sorcery, demonic magic, and all black arts are themselves usually considered borderline between life and death, legitimate and illegal, safe and dangerous. The “demonic other” is inside everyone. The dual soul discourse—the coexistence of the good heavenly soul and the evil earthly soul—expresses the dark and dangerous potentiality in every being, evidenced by the contamination of death. At the end of a tale on two friends, in the moment of farewell of the dead friend, his progressive transformation into a terrifying and horrible corpse demonstrates the total change of personality. The author explains this phenomenon as follows:

The heavenly soul of man is virtuous while his earthly soul is evil. The former is intelligent while the latter is obtuse. When the dead first came, his intelligence was still intact, so the earthly soul could be attached to the heavenly soul and move [together]; when the body left, its worry had been removed, so the soul dispersed and the spirit was at a standstill. When the heavenly soul left and his worry was resolved, the heavenly soul dissolved while the earthly soul remained. Until the heavenly soul stayed, he kept his human personality; but when it left, he lost his human personality. The body-moving and shadow-walking in this world are all done by earthly souls, and only men of the Way can control their earthly souls.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{121} See for instance \textit{ZBY}, 18:339, “Daojia you quangufa” 道家有全骨法.
\textsuperscript{122} See for instance \textit{ZBY}, 16:309, “Zhediexian” 折叠仙.
\textsuperscript{123} The Chinese version is: 人之魂善而魄恶, 人之魂灵而魄愚。其始来也, 一灵不泯, 魄附魂以行; 其既去也, 心事既毕, 魂一散而魄滞。魂在, 则其人也; 魂去, 则非其人也。世之移尸走影, 皆魄为之, 惟有道之人为能制魄。\textit{ZBY}, 1, “Nanchang shiren” 南昌士人.
The fear of contamination by dead people is remarked upon in another description of the consequences of eating ghosts’ food; the story “Ghosts’ market,” where the warm noodles and rice bought at the night market (of ghosts) are finally transformed in disgusting animals. The market looked like any other night market, and in the shops one could see “the food was cooked and the noodle, rice and steaming food were all steaming hot.” As the main progenitor felt hungry, he bought some food that he eats very quickly. But some hours later, “He suddenly felt uncomfortable in his body. He bent down and vomited, and then he found what he had vomited was jumping and squirming on the ground. He fixed his eyes on that, and found it was a toad entangled with many earthworms. He felt very disgusted, but there was nothing else wrong. Several years later, he died.” Vomit is the most immediate and visceral expression of disgust, and it is itself a bodily defence used to expel something noxious. Even if Yuan Mei’s words allow us to doubt that his death—as it happened several years later—was really related to that night (maybe it was only a nightmare), still the memory of the disgusting metamorphosis of the food reminds us of the obscenity of death.

The world of living beings and the world of death are again contrasted in the Qingshi. Xiehui 邪秽 is the dark and malignant side of the world, which is related to death, evil and ghosts.

Human beings belong to the luxuriant pure yang, while ghosts belong to the foul and evil of the dark yin. Now, you live together with the demons and monsters of the netherworld and do not know, you lodge in the same place with dirty and evil things and do not realize it. One day, when your vital spirit will be exhausted, disasters will arrive.

Thus, this short survey can explain how, from the clean-dirty dyad which is used in everyday life for physical matters, and reflects hygienic worries against infection and the like, these concepts are symbolically extended to engage with the subconscious and metaphysical spheres, the horror of death and the fear of being overwhelmed by passions, the mysteries which are behind them, and to sublimate such fears into an impulse to transcend the red dust of our limited existence. This process is almost “universal” or at least can be found in many

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cultures. What is peculiar to each culture is the manner and the occurrences of
the nuances of meanings around these basic concepts, as well as their
connections with other basic notions.

The meaning and functions of the concept of “purity” is delimited by its basic
antonym, “impure,” such as qing 清 and zhuo 浊, di 涕 and hui 污, wuran 污染
and ganjing 干净. In China, as in other societies, the notions of pure-impure
and clean-dirty are very common in everyday life, covering many different fields,
from physical to symbolic and ritual meanings. The perception is, however,
different from other cultures, especially in their symbolic uses and many
peculiarities are often related to a different concept of “holy” and a vastly
dissimilar religious approach. The notion of “desecration” that is often involved,
implies ideas of “holiness” and “sacredness,” but they do not completely
correspond to Western equivalents. Even the concept of material and physical
purity is influenced by the above attitudes. Sexual abstention is praised, not on
the basis of spirit-matter dichotomy, but rather in the function of gender roles,
longevity and the pursuit of self-perfection for males, and chastity for females.
From the examination of these expressions, which include ideas of pollution or
filth, we discover a dark side to sexual representation. This is especially true of
those literary sources that go beyond the conscious representation of reality, for
instance fiction on strange and unusual phenomena and on the spirit-man relation,
both of which offer interesting insights into the inner world. Here taboo and
“visceral” feelings are less obscured than elsewhere. The complexity of these
interactions makes generalizations difficult, as exemplified in Yuan Mei’s
perception, as it appears in Zibuyu. The ambiguity of his position, at least in our
contemporary perspective, is evident in his support of a free sexual life on the
one side, and in the dark and fearful aspects related to sex, which emerge in his
stories on the other side. Thus, it seems that the sexual sphere is not considered
“natural” as in Gaozi’s famous sentence “Appetite for food and desire for sex are
part of human nature.”

Also in Chinese culture, a sense of impurity seems to be driven by the horror
of death and the fear of being overwhelmed by passion. Behind the concepts
singled out in the course of this survey, it is possible to trace back the extreme
terms for human life, death and [sexual] love. Other topics may also be
associated with it, like mental insanity referring to what is different, abnormal,
strange, and socially subversive. Chinese culture shares with other civilizations
some taboos concerning the basic poles of eros and thanatos. Also in Chinese

126 Eberhard noticed the sense of uncleanliness of bodily functions and sex, as well as several
taboo on sex, and Hsiu stated that “sex is considered unclean, and women carry the burden of
this uncleanliness.”
civilization the final reality—birth and life are themselves pollution and yet pollution should be controlled—is clearly perceived, even if the prevailing attitude is Apollinean way to deal with this awareness.

As in many other cultures, in Chinese civilization some aspects of purity and sexual restraint are bound, the notion of “obscene” often has sexual connotations and still retains such meanings as “inauspicious,” “ill-omened,” and “profane” concerning anything that is taboo. Terms like hui秽 thus are used alone or in compounds for what provokes refusal and repulsion, like the spoiled food and excrement, but can be metaphorically extended to obscene behaviour, or can designate dirty words, as well as a disrespectful attitude and a sense of inferiority. Comparing the occurrences of antonyms, corresponding to the notions of pure-impure, clean-dirty, the meanings and associations become clearer: the filth of spoiled food and excrements (huiwu秽物) becomes allegory for moral debasement and defilement (yinhui淫秽)—especially sexual taboos and transgressions or profanation of the sacrality of human remains—and its social effects are reflected in a lack of respect (huini秽溺) and a sense of inferiority (xinghui形秽).

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Abbreviations

FSLJ: Fusheng liuji 浮生六记 (The floating life)
GJXS: Gujin xiaoshuo 古今小说 (Ancient and modern tales)
HLM: Hongloumeng 红楼梦 (The dream of the Red Chamber)
JPM: Jinpingmei 金瓶梅 (The golden lotus)
JSTY: Jingshi tongyan 警世通言 (Common words for warning the world)
LZZY: Liaozhai zhiyi 聊斋志异 (Strange tales of Liaozhai)
QSLI: Qingshi leilüe 情史类略 (Anatomy of love)
RLWS: Rulin waishi 儒林外史 (The literati’s unofficial history)
TAMY: Tao an mengyi 陶庵梦忆 (Remembrances of Zhang Dai’s dreams)
XSHY: Xingshi hengyan 醒世恒言 (Constant words for waking the world)
XYJ: Xiyouji 西游记 (Record of a Journey to the West)
ZBY: Zibuyu 子不语 (What the Master would not discuss)

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