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Title	Delicate Scents : The Emotional and Symbolic Role of Fragrance in Jiang Kui's Baishi Ci Poetry
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Citation	Journal of the Faculty of Humanities and Human Sciences, 20, 23-36
Issue Date	2025-02
DOI	https://doi.org/10.14943/jfhhs.20.23
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/94109
Type	departmental bulletin paper
File Information	05_ZHANG.pdf

Hokkaido University Collection of Scholarly and Academic Papers : HUSCAP

Journal of the Faculty of Humanities and Human Sciences, Hokkaido University
Vol. 20; pp. 23−36, February 2025

Delicate Scents: The Emotional and Symbolic Role of Fragrance in Jiang Kui's *Baishi Ci* Poetry

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Abstract: This article explores the cultural context of fragrance in classical Chinese literature, focusing on its symbolic significance during the Southern Song Dynasty. The introduction provides insights into the rich traditions and connotations of scent in Chinese literary and cultural practices.

Following this contextual framework, the article attempts a meticulous reading of selected poems from Jiang Kui's (姜夔) renowned collection, *Baishi Ci* to demonstrate Jiang Kui's sophisticated employment of fragrance as a poetic device and clarify how he weaves scent into the fabric of his verses to create layered meaning and evocative imagery. The discussion then explores the metaphorical depth of Jiang Kui's fragrance depictions to elucidate the complex web of associations and emotions conveyed through his olfactory imagery. This section investigates how Jiang Kui's use of fragrance resonates emotionally with readers, creating a sensory bridge between the physical world and the realm of feelings and memories.

In conclusion, this article offers the broader implications of Kui's innovative approach to fragrance imagery in the context of Chinese literary history.

1. Introduction and Literature Review

The depiction of fragrance in Chinese classical literature has long been a prominent motif, evoking a sense of elegance, spirituality, and emotional resonance. In works spanning various dynasties, fragrance has been associated with both physical and mental realms, symbolizing purity, nostalgia, and longing. During the Southern Song Dynasty, a period marked by political upheaval and cultural refinement, Jiang Kui (1155-1221?)[1] emerged as a distinguished poet. His Ci poetry, known as Baishi Ci (白石詞),

1 Jiang Kui, also known by his courtesy name Yaozhang (堯章) and art name Baishi Daoren (白石道人), was a prominent poet, composer, and literary theorist of the Southern Song Dynasty. He is best known for his contributions to Ci poetry, particularly for his highly refined and musical style, which combined aesthetic beauty with emotional depth. Jiang Kui's Ci poetry is acclaimed for its rich imagery and symbolic use of nature, especially the plum blossom or its fragrance, a frequent motif in his writing. The 13th-century Ci poet Zhang Yan (張炎) described Jiang Kui's poetic style as "clouds that leave or stay without a trace" (ZhangYan, *Ci Yuan,* People's Literature Publishing House, 1963, p. 136) emphasizing its clarity and ethereal quality.

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10.14943/jfhhs.20.23

showcases a unique, highly sophisticated use of fragrance imagery, setting his work apart from earlier poets.

Existing research provides important contexts and insights that inform the present study.

In *The Transformation of the Chinese Lyrical Tradition: Chiang K'uei and Southern Sung Tz'u Poetry* (1978), Shuen-fu Lin examines the forms and structures of Jiang Kui's Ci lyrics, revealing a tendency toward retreating to the object in Jiang's Yongwu Ci（詠物詞）which echoes the political and cultural milieu of the period. Zhao Xiaolan's *Jiang Kui and Southern Song Culture* explores Jiang Kui's artistic thoughts and the scholarly influences, introducing his literary and artistic creations and highlighting his position within Southern Song culture. Zhao approaches the subject from a historical perspective and based on empirical evidence from philology, the era's background through Jiang Kui's works.

In his article *A Commentary of 'Baishi Daoren Shishuo'* (1956), Jia Wenzhao classifies Jiang Kui's literary contributions, particularly his poetic theory, by analyzing the content of *Baishi Daoren Shishuo* and categorizing into ten distinct types. In *An Exploration of the Poetic Theories of Jiang Kui* (1992), Zhao Xiaolan primarily discusses the relationship between Jiang Kui's poetic views, theoretical framework, and creative works.

In a broader study of fragrance in literature, Yu Kanō analyzes the representations of fragrance in classical poetry from the Three Kingdoms and Western Jin periods in his work *The Poetics of Fragrance: Aromatic Expressions in the Poetry of the Three Kingdoms and the Western Jin.* By examining olfactory representations in poetry, such as female imagery and fragrant plants, he delves into the intrinsic meaning of the poems.[2] Regarding the study of fragrance in Jiang Kui's poetry, existing research primarily analyzes his works through the term "cold fragrance" found in Baishi Ci, focusing on the expressive techniques it embodies, as observed in Mo Yanmin's *The Ethereal Elegance of Cold Fragrance: An Exploration of Jiang Baishi's Ci* (1993) and Lin Jiarong's *Cold Fragrance in West Lake: A Study of Hangzhou Writing in Jiang Kui's Ci* (2011).

This review of the existing literature underscores the importance of Jiang Kui's use of fragrance imagery and reveals several areas that require additional research. The current article aims to build upon this foundation by examining Jiang Kui's innovative and nuanced deployment of olfactory references in his Baishi Ci and the metaphorical richness and emotional resonance of his fragrance depictions. This article explores the multifaceted use of fragrance imagery in Jiang Kui's Baishi Ci. It examines how Jiang Kui employs fragrance to evoke a range of emotions and themes and clarifies the specific symbolic meanings that fragrance in his works. Analyzing various examples from Jiang Kui's poetry reveals how

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This description aligns with the Qing Dynasty scholar Shen Xianglong's（沈祥龍）comment on Ci poetry: "Ci poetry should be clear and ethereal... 'Clear' means untainted by worldly dust, 'ethereal' means not attached to form or appearance." (Shen Xianglong, *Lun Ci Sui Bi (Comment on Ci Poetry)*, Tang Guizhang, *Ci Hua Cong Bian*, Zhonghua Book Company, 1986, pp. 4046-4047). Shen's remark highlights two essential qualities of Ci poetry: clarity, referring to a purity free from mundane concerns, and ethereality, implying an intangible quality that transcends concrete descriptions. These attributes reflect an aesthetic ideal in Chinese poetry, particularly in Ci, that values subtlety, refinement, and a certain detachment from the material world. Such poetry aims to elevate the reader's mind beyond the ordinary and tangible, toward a more rarefied artistic experience, exemplifying the refined and transcendent nature of Jiang Kui's poetic style.

2 For further details, please refer to Zhang Jianglin's book review *The Expressive Power of 'Fragrance' in Poetry — Yu Kanō, The Poetics of Fragrance: Fragrance Expressions in Poetry of the Three Kingdoms and Western Jin*, published in *Tao Tie* (2021).

metaphorical depictions of fragrance are used to convey distinct feelings, moods, situations, and personal reflections.

2. The Cultural Background of Fragrance Imaginary

2.1 The Symbolic Significance of Fragrance in Classical Chinese Literature

Fragrance plays a crucial role in Chinese cultural and literary traditions. It has been associated physical substances such as plants and incense and profound spiritual and emotional experiences. Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism offer distinct perspectives on fragrance, deeply shaping its representation in classical Chinese literature.

In Confucian thought, fragrance symbolizes moral virtue and inner refinement. Incense and flowers with lasting fragrances, such as orchids or lotuses, are metaphors for the cultivated gentleman, whose integrity and virtue permeate society much like a fragrance permeates the air. This metaphor highlights the connection between the sensory experience of fragrance and intangible qualities of character and reputation.

Taoism connects fragrance with the natural world and the pursuit of harmony between humanity and nature. The ephemeral nature of scent, which arises and fades without a trace, mirrors the Daoist emphasis on transience and the flow of life. Fragrance in Daoist poetry often evokes a sense of quiet reflection, suggesting harmony with the fleeting and ethereal aspects of existence.

Buddhist traditions place spiritual emphasis on fragrance, associating it with enlightenment and purity. Burning incense in temples symbolizes prayer and purification of the mind, with rising smoke representing spiritual transcendence. In Buddhist poetry, fragrance is a metaphor for the fleeting nature of worldly attachment or an indicator of spiritual awakening.

The concept of syncretism between the three religions,[3] which refers to the integration of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, profoundly influenced Chinese literature during the Song Dynasty. This synthesis enriched literary themes and techniques, allowing writers to explore not only secular subjects but also philosophical, religious, and natural elements, enhancing the depth and breadth of their works. Poets and essayists were inspired by Daoist and Buddhist thought, often contemplating the meaning of life and the mystery of the universe, incorporating a transcendent perspective in their writings. Additionally, this integration fostered linguistic diversity, leading to new rhetorical styles and expressions and ultimately elevating the literary achievements of the Song Dynasty.

In poetry, fragrance takes on complex layers of meaning by drawing on these philosophical traditions. By the time of the Southern Song Dynasty, fragrance had become a highly refined poetic device used to evoke sensual beauty and deep emotional states. Jiang Kui's *Baishi Ci* builds upon these traditional meanings by introducing unique interpretations of scent. His portrayal of fragrance as a literary motif

3 The syncretism of China's Three Teachings refers to the historical integration of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism in Chinese intellectual and religious thought. This concept emerged during the Song Dynasty and gained prominence during the Ming Dynasty. Historical records indicate that scholars and religious practitioners of this period sought to demonstrate the fundamental compatibility of these distinct traditions despite their different origins and doctrinal emphases. This syncretic approach manifested in various forms of philosophical discourse, religious practice, and literary works, particularly evident in the writings of neo-Confucian scholars who incorporated Buddhist and Taoist concepts into their interpretations.

reflects a connection to earlier traditions and the distinct sensibilities of the Southern Song period marked by political fragmentation, cultural blending, and a heightened sense of aestheticism among the literati.

Therefore, fragrance became a means for expressing a range of emotions, from the ephemeral beauty of bygone days to the lingering feelings of loss and cherished memories of acquaintances. By incorporating this rich symbolic, Jiang Kui transforms the depiction of fragrance into a tool for sensory and emotional exploration.

2.2 The Connection Between Fragrance and the Life of Literati in the Southern Song

Fragrance is central to a cultural system that emphasizes the sensory experience, and its cultural significance is rooted in its ability to connect deities and human senses. In the historical practice of Chinese incense culture, "fragrance" evolved from being limited to mere olfactory enjoyment to encompassing a broader spiritual dimension, integrating into aesthetic, philosophical, and religious practices. In ancient times, East Asian peoples already utilized incense in sacrificial rituals, as evidenced by the discovery of incense burners[4] at the remains of Liangzhu at Fuquan Mountain (福泉山良渚遺址). In pre-Qin classics such as *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* (山海經), *Shi Jing* (詩經), *and Li Sao* (離騷), fragrant plants frequently appear as cultural symbols, with the cultural meanings of fragrance deeply embedded in the fabric of ancient Chinese culture.

Fragrance played an essential role in daily lives and artistic expressions of the Southern Song literati, reflecting their refined tastes and intellectual pursuits. During this period, the literati, or scholar-officials, were political figures deeply immersed in cultural activities such as poetry, painting, calligraphy, and music. Fragrance, particularly in the form of incense, was integral to the cultivation of their aesthetic sensibilities, symbolizing a retreat from the external turmoil of the world into the inner sanctum of personal reflection and artistic creation.

The Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) was marked by a shift in political power, with the court relocating south following the Jin invasion of northern China. This period saw the rise of an introspective and elegant literary style, as the literati sought solace in artistic refinement amid the backdrop of political instability. Fragrance, as a symbol of the ephemeral and eternal, became a crucial element in their artistic expressions. In private gardens or literary gatherings, incense was burned to create an atmosphere of calm and contemplation, enhancing the connection between the sensory experience of scent and abstract thinking or emotional reflection.

For the literati, incense burning carried profound cultural and philosophical connotations. These actions often accompanied writing sessions, friend gatherings, or quiet moments of recollection.[5] Incense

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4 The Boshan Censer (博山爐) is a type of censer used in ancient China for burning incense. It first appeared during the Western Han Dynasty. Typically made of bronze or ceramic, the Boshan Censer is characterized by its mountain-shaped lid, symbolizing the legendary sacred mountains. The earliest reference to the Boshan Censer is found in the *Records of the Western Capital* (西京雜記), where in the first volume, it states: "Ding Huan, a skilled craftsman of Chang'an… also created a nine-tiered Boshan incense burner, engraved with extraordinary mythical birds and beasts..."

5 Song dynasty poet Su Shi (蘇軾, 1037-1101) frequently mentions burning incense, notably in Xiang Shuo (香說, About Incense), for example, during a moonlit gathering with friends. The Ming Dynasty *Xiang Sheng* (香乘, Vehicles of Fragrance) by Zhou Jiazhou (周嘉胄, 1582-1658) provides a comprehensive account of various incense types, their origins, and cultural significance, serving as one of the most authoritative texts on incense appreciation. Additionally, the Qing Dynasty writer Li Yu (李漁, 1610-1680) devoted an entire chapter to incense appreciation in *XianQing OuJi* (閒情偶寄), detailing the proper methods of burning incense during literary activities.

was believed to purify the air, sharpen the mind, and facilitate a deeper connection to the spiritual and artistic realms. Hence, fragrance became an integral part of the literati's self-cultivation, symbolizing a life dedicated to beauty, moral virtue, and intellectual integrity.

Jiang Kui was deeply influenced by this literati culture. His use of fragrance imagery in *Baishi Ci* reflects personal aesthetic preferences and broader cultural practice in which scent played a pivotal role in the artistic and emotional lives of the educated elite. The burning of incense and the appreciation of floral scents were both sensual experiences and facilitators of chronotope construction,[6] connecting the natural world to philosophical ideas and emotional states. In Jiang Kui's poetry, fragrance often signifies an elevated realm of thought and feeling that bridges the external world with the poet's inner emotional landscape.

Thus, in the Southern Song period, fragrance was more than a simple sensory pleasure; it was a vital component of the literati lifestyle, intertwined with the philosophical, aesthetic, and emotional frameworks shaping their literary production. Jiang Kui's innovative use of fragrance exemplifies how deeply scent was embedded in the cultural fabric, bridging the sensory experience and the rich intellectual and emotional lives of the Southern Song literati.

3. The Depiction and Emotional Resonance of Fragrance Imagery in Jiang Kui's Poetry

3.1 Fragrance as a Vehicle for Lost Time

In the late Tang Dynasty, Wen Tingyun (溫庭筠, 812?-866?) frequently incorporated depictions of fragrance into his Ci poetry. Unlike Jiang Kui, Wen's portrayals of scent demonstrate greater objectivity. Phrases such as "thin fragrant mist" and "lingering musk smoke" primarily describe the physical state of burning aromatics, emphasizing visual imagery and detailed observation. This approach is exemplified in his "*Pusaman* (菩薩蠻 夜來皓月才當午)[7]":

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6 In his literary analysis, Russian scholar Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895-1975) introduced the concept of the chronotope, a framework for understanding how literature interweaves the fundamental elements of time and space. For Bakhtin, the way stories unfold in literature reveals an inseparable connection between when and where events take place, with these dimensions jointly shaping narrative meaning. *Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel*, Bakhtin suggests, "In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history." *The Dialogic Imagination*, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, 1981, pp. 84-86.

This article applies the concept of chronotope to examine how Jiang Kui's poetry employs fragrance as a literary device that bridges temporal and spatial distances. A particular scent often serves as a catalyst, evoking memories of specific times or places, perhaps a cherished moment with a lover in a distant city. These olfactory descriptions act as narrative threads, guiding readers through the poet's emotions. Accordingly, Jiang Kui creates a dual perspective: readers simultaneously experience both the immediate sensations of the present and echoes of the past. This allows his audience to traverse between idyllic memories and present solitude within a single line. The resulting works achieve a remarkable synthesis, where fragrance becomes more than mere description—it transforms into a vehicle for emotional expression, binding time, space, and memory into a cohesive poetic whole.

7 Wen Tingyun・Wei Zhuang, Wen Tingyun Ci Ji・Wei Zhuang Ci Ji, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2019, p. 61. Original text in Chinese: "夜來皓月才當午，重簾悄悄無人語。深處麝煙長，臥時留薄妝。 當年還自惜，往事那堪憶。花露月明殘，錦衾知曉寒。" Translation by author.

Last night, the bright moon had just reached its zenith
Behind heavy curtains, silence prevailed; no voices could be heard.
Deep within, musk smoke lingered long,
And upon lying down, a faint trace of makeup was left.

Back then, she still cherished herself,
But now, how can she bear to recall those bygone days?
Flower dew fades in the bright moonlight,
While the brocade quilt senses the chill of dawn.

The word "deep" (深) in "lingering musk smoke deep inside" vividly captures the secluded tranquility of the boudoir and its separation from the external world. The term "lingering" (長) serves dual purposes: it objectively depicts the sustained burning of musk in the late hours while delicately portraying the languid ascent of smoke. Within the quiet chamber sheltered from external disturbances by heavy curtains, musk smoke rises steadily and persistently. As Chia-ying Yeh observes, these descriptions achieve "a painterly quality of objective artistry, employing terms such as 'rising,' 'straight,' and 'lingering' to masterfully depict the stillness of the air and the movement of smoke, exemplifying exquisite visual artistry."[8] This perception of lingering musk smoke emerges through the eyes of the chamber's sleepless occupant, whose wakeful contemplation transforms it into a visible manifestation of melancholy. The elongated trail of smoke appears to strive toward penetrating the curtains, reaching distant places of yearning, and thus embodying the external manifestation of inner emotional turbulence.

As the above examples demonstrate, Wen Tingyun often connects fragrance in his works to tangible objects or specific environmental settings. Several lines of poetry vividly illustrate this characteristic. For instance, "The scented silk sash still holds the red beans tied at our parting (羅帶惹香, 猶系別時紅豆)". Here, fragrance is tied to the physicality of the scented sash and symbolic red beans. Similarly, in "Fragrance rises from the jade censer, red candles weep, their flickering light illuminating the painted hall of autumn longing (玉爐香, 紅蠟淚, 偏照畫堂秋思)", the interplay between fragrance, visual elements, and emotional tone is apparent. Another example, "After the rain, the slanting sunlight falls; apricot blossoms scatter, leaving their fragrance lingering (雨後卻斜陽, 杏花零落香)", directly relates the scent to a natural setting. Finally, in "At dusk, the sorrowful cuckoo calls, while the early plum blossoms fill the mountain town with fragrance (暮天愁聽思歸樂, 早梅香滿山郭)", the mention of fragrance evokes a seasonal atmosphere. This close relationship between fragrance and concrete imagery reflects the early development of Ci poetry during the late Tang Dynasty, with its relatively narrow thematic scope.

In contrast, Jiang Kui reduces objective description and employs fragrance as a medium for memory evocation. Through the fragrance in the present moment, he summons emotions and memories associated with similar scents from the past, transforming it into a temporal-spatial bridge that connects the contemporary poet with people and events from earlier times. This technique creates an immersive experience and highlights the insurmountable temporal-spatial distance, exemplifying Jiang's characteristic indirect and metaphorical writing style.

8 Chia-ying Yeh, *Jialing Discourse on Ci series*, Peking University Press, 2008, p. 66.

Jiang Kui's use of fragrance imagery in Baishi Ci is one of the most distinctive aspects of his poetic style. Jiang Kui infuses his poetry with layers of symbolic meaning. This section examines key works from Baishi Ci, analyzing how fragrance shapes the tone, themes, and emotions of the poems. The analysis begins with the poem titled "*The Sound of a Flute Playing under the Moon* (月下笛).[9]"

I drank alcoholic beverages with a guest,
the plum blossoms have faded, through the night wind and rain arrived.
A solitary bird murmurs to itself,
pecking at the flower's fragrant heart, then flies over the wall.
The spring clothes are all tailored from her slender, graceful hands.
The clothes are still adorned with fuzzy threads and a faint scent.
I sigh at the jade hairpin and the plum blossoms, as if it's swept away,
The decorated gates are tightly closed, and there is no way to see her again.

I stand still, lost in thought at the place we once strolled.
Only the willows where horses were once tied remain,
and the parrot still remembers its master.
Awakened from a dream of Yangzhou,
Where have the colorful clouds flown?
I must ask the swallows in the beams,
Are the poets and dancers of that time still around?
How could I have known that, in the end, I would miss the chance,
Letting my youthful years slip away in vain?

"*The Sound of a Flute Playing under the Moon*" employs rich imagery, such as "plum blossoms," "wind and rain," and "jade hairpin," evoking a sense of beauty and transience that highlights the fleeting nature of time and relationships, suggesting that the past is both cherished and unreachable. The tone reflects nostalgia and melancholy, with phrases such as "I sigh" and "lost in thought" conveying a deep sense of longing and regret. The poet's reflections on youthful years slipping away evoke universal themes of loss and passage of time. Nature plays a crucial role in the poem, as references to "willows" and "swallows" serve not only as a backdrop but also as symbols of continuity and change, reflecting the poet's internal state. The parrot that "still remembers its master" adds a layer of sentimentality, emphasizing the past bonds. Additionally, the mention of Yangzhou, a historically important cultural center, enriches the poem's context, grounding the personal experience within a broader cultural and historical narrative and inviting readers to consider the significance of place in shaping memory and identity. Du Mu (杜牧)'s "Dreams about Yangzhou" is rooted in his romantic escapades, taking its name from his poem "To dispel the sorrows of the heart (遣懷)"[10]:

9 Jiang Kui, Chen Shuliang, Jiang Baishi Ci Jian Zhu, Zhonghua Book Company, 2009, pp. 203-204. Original text in Chinese: "與客攜壺，梅花過了，夜來風雨。幽禽自語。啄香心，度牆去。春衣都是柔荑剪，尚沾惹，殘茸半縷。悵玉鈿似掃，朱門深閉，再見無路。 凝佇，曾游處。但系馬垂楊，認郎鸚鵡。揚州夢覺，彩雲飛過何許？多情須倩梁間燕，問吟袖弓腰在否？怎知道，誤了人，年少自恁虛度。" Translation by author.

In disarray, I travel through Jiangnan with alcohol.
Parting from the slender dancer, I can no longer witness that graceful performance,
After ten years, I awaken from my dreams about Yangzhou,
Gained the name of a libertine in the brothels.

The poem, imbued with a fragrance of beauty and indulgence, subtly expresses the poet's frustration over his unfulfilled ambitions while lamenting the reckless pursuits of his past. Since its inception, the poem has been widely referenced, appearing in novels, operas, and various other texts. The story of Du Mu's "dreams about Yangzhou," characterized by the themes of talented poets and beautiful dancer, has deeply resonated with subsequent generations. It has been shaped and embellished by countless literary figures, evolving into a well-known idiom with profound connotations, where "dreams about Yangzhou" have come to signify the "splendor of love and pleasure." Jiang Kui, reflecting on Du Mu's aspirations for extraordinary achievements, recognizes the bitter reality of wasted time and unfulfilled dreams, which evokes a deep sense of regret and melancholy. This sentiment is poignantly echoed in his poetry.

In the poem "*The Sound of a Flute Playing under the Moon,*" the fragrance is alluded to twice. The first instance describes a bird pecking at a flower's fragrant heart and then flying over the courtyard wall, suggesting that it, like the poet, feels a deep reluctance to part with the fallen blossoms of spring. The poet's return to this familiar place after many years evokes memories of loss, as both the flowers and the bird have vanished, stirring a sense of nostalgia buried in his heart. By referring to the flower as a "fragrant heart," the poet indirectly conveys that the lingering scent, which left a profound impression in his memory, has also disappeared along with the bird that has flown away. The poem then naturally transitions to the spring clothes the poet wears, still adorned with threads—remnants of a garment once lovingly sewn by a woman who perhaps infused it with her delicate fragrance, now also absent. The fallen flowers resemble a jade hairpin worn by a woman, while the once-open door remains closed, leaving the poet unable to see the beloved from his memories again. Neither representation of fragrance is direct; instead, they are subtle and indirect, eloquently expressing the poet's sense of reminiscence.

3.2 Fragrance, Melancholy, and Separation

Fragrance also becomes a metaphor for emotional separation. In "*Spanning a Mountain Stream* (蘇山溪 題錢氏溪月),[11]" Jiang Kui uses the imagery of willow fluff to express the sorrow of parting. Catkins, blown chaotically by the wind and scattered across the ground, evoke a sense of disorder and helplessness that often accompanies farewells. Just as the wind carries away the delicate catkins, leaving them to cling to the grass and flowers in abandonment, a sense of separation and loss in human relationships is similarly unavoidable and left untended. This natural image subtly mirrors the emotional turmoil and uncontrollable nature of departure, enhancing the melancholic tone of the poem.

10 Peng Dingqiu (彭定求), eds., Quan Tang Shi (Complete Tang Poems), vol. 524, Zhonghua Book Company, 1960. Originally compiled in 1706 during the Kangxi reign. Original text in Chinese: "落魄江南載酒行，楚腰纖細掌中輕。十年一覺揚州夢，贏得青樓薄幸名。" Translation by author.

11 Jiang Baishi Ci Jian Zhu, pp. 277-278. Original text in Chinese: "與鷗為客，綠野留吟屐。兩行柳垂陰，是當日，仙翁手植。一亭寂寞，煙外帶愁橫。荷苒苒，展涼雲，橫臥虹千尺。 才因老盡，秀句君休覓。萬綠正迷人，更愁入，山陽夜笛。百年心事，惟有玉闌知，吟未了，放船回，月下空相憶。" Translation by author.

Dwelling among the gulls, my footsteps linger in the verdant fields.
Two rows of willows cast their shade, once planted by an immortal hand.
A lonely pavilion, veiled in mist, stretches forth its melancholy shadow.
Lotus leaves gently unfurl, cooling clouds extend,
While a rainbow lies stretched across the heavens.

With talents now faded, no fine verses remain to be sought.
Amidst the sea of endless green, my heart wanders astray,
Haunted by the sorrow of the flute from Shanyang echoing through the night.
A hundred years of unvoiced musings,
Only the jade balustrade understands.
Before the verse is complete, I turn my boat back,
Beneath the moon, I am left with empty longings.

The lingering scent of the willow catkins symbolizes the emotional chasm between the poet and his beloved. While present, this fragrance acts as a bittersweet reminder of what has been lost, accentuating the seemingly unbridgeable distance between them. Much like the poet's yearning, this scent persists even in the absence of the beloved, creating a palpable emotional tension that permeates the poem.

These fragrant catkins become indelible anchors of the poets' memories. With each passing late spring, the delicate scent and sight of willow catkins floating gracefully through the air instantly transport the poet to cherished moments shared with his loved one. The enduring nature of this fragrance underscores the inescapability of memory and the emotional turmoil that accompanies it. As time marches on, the scent remains steadfast, mirroring the poet's unresolved feelings.

Jiang Kui employs this subtle yet powerful imagery of fragrance to enhance the theme of separation, emphasizing the profound depth of his emotional attachment. By utilizing scent as a representation of this persistent emotional presence, he captures the essence of love's bittersweet nature and its exquisite beauty, intertwined with the ache of longing. This delicate balance between joy and sorrow and presence and absence is beautifully encapsulated in the ephemeral yet enduring willow catkins' fragrance.

Unlike the fleeting scent in the previous poem, *"The Sound of a Flute Playing under the Moon,"* this fragrance is enduring, almost haunting, as it lingers in the poet's mind, reminding him of the emotional pain caused by separation. The fragrance here symbolizes the inescapable emotional burden that such memories bring.

This poem not only features evocative descriptions of fragrance but also alludes to a captivating literary anecdote, enriching its overall meaning and depth. According to a well-known legend from the Tang Dynasty, during Emperor Xuanzong's reign, the imperial harem was home to numerous palace maidens. The maidens of the Shangyang Palace（上陽宮）developed a poignant custom to express their hidden affections; they would inscribe poems on vibrant red leaves and cast them into the palace's flowing waters, letting their sentiments drift with the current.

This touching tale is preserved in "*Ben Shi Shi*（本事詩）[12]" by renowned Tang poet Meng Qi（孟棨）.

12 Meng Qi（孟棨）, Ben Shi Shi (Poems of Original Events), Zhonghua Book Company, 2014, pp14-15.

The account revolves around an intriguing episode involving Gu Kuang（顧況）and his three fellow poets. While visiting Luoyang, the group leisurely seated by the flowing water in the Imperial Flower Garden. It was here that Gu Kuang made a remarkable discovery, a large red leaf bearing an inscribed poem:

Once I enter the deep palace,
I see no spring year after year.
I casually inscribe on a leaf,
Sending it to my beloved.[13]

Moved by this poignant expression, Gu Kuang returned the following day and penned his own verse on a leaf and set it adrift:

As flowers fall, the oriole in the deep palace also mourns.
The maidens of Shangyang Palace are heartbroken.
The eastern waters flow freely through the imperial city;
Who is to receive the poem inscribed on the leaf?[14]

The story takes an unexpected turn more than ten days later when a visitor to the garden, in search of spring landscapes, stumbles upon another leaf bearing a poem. This leaf found its way back to Gu Kuang, carrying the words.

A leaf inscribed with poetry has left the palace,
Who will respond with heartfelt verses?
I sigh that I cannot compare to the leaf adrift in the waves,
Swaying with spring as it journeys on.[15]

This enchanting anecdote, woven into the fabric of the poem, adds layers of meaning to the central themes of longing, separation, and the enduring power of poetic expressions.

3.3 Fragrance and the Turmoil of the Dynasty

Another way in which Jiang Kui evokes melancholy through fragrance is by connecting scent to the disarray of one's homeland. In poems such as "*The Chant of Jade Tower*（翠樓吟）,[16]" the delicate scent of the plum blossoms in the midst of winter carries both beauty and quiet sadness. The blossoms, resilient to the harsh winter cold, embody the persistence of beauty while their fragrance reveals the fragility of life,

13 Original text in Chinese: "一入深宮裏，年年不見春。聊題一片葉，寄與有情人。" Translation by author.
14 Original text in Chinese: "花落深宮鶯亦悲，上陽宮女斷腸時。帝城不禁東流水，葉上題詩欲寄誰？" Translation by author.
15 Original text in Chinese: "一葉題詩出禁城，誰人酬和獨含情？自嗟不及波中葉，蕩漾乘春取次行。" Translation by author.
16 Jiang Baishi Ci Jian Zhu, pp39-40. Original text in Chinese: "月冷龍沙，塵清虎落，今年漢酺初賜。新翻胡部曲，聽氈幕元戎歌吹。層樓高峙。看檻曲縈紅，檐牙飛翠。人姝麗，粉香吹下，夜寒風細。 此地，宜有詞仙，擁素雲黃鶴，與君遊戲。玉梯凝望久，嘆芳草萋萋千里。天涯情味。仗酒祓清愁，花銷英氣。西山外，晚來還卷，一簾秋霽。" Translation by author.

which, like the season, is subject to change and decline.

In the cold moonlight over the windswept sands of the frontier,
The dust settles, and the bamboo fences surrounding the city stand in silence.
This year, the court has begun to reward with wine and merriment.
New melodies from the northern frontier are played,
and the clear sounds of song can be heard from the general's tent.
The towers stand high,
Viewing the red curves of the balustrade and the green eaves that fly.
The dancers are graceful,
A subtle fragrance wafts from her body.
while the night grows cold, and the wind is gentle.

In this place, there ought to be an immortal of poetry,
Carrying white clouds and the yellow crane,
Enjoying a lively game with friends atop the tower, watching the moon.
Gazing intently at the stairs a long time, sighing for the fragrant grass,
Lush and green for thousands of miles.
The feelings of love at the farthest corners of the world.
The wandering traveler adrift at the farthest corners of the world,
who knows the solitude and suffering in their heart?
Relying on wine to dispel the chill of sorrow,
Letting the flowers consume the heroic spirit.
Beyond the Western Mountains,
As evening comes, the twilight once again unfolds,
revealing the beauty after an autumn rain.

This poem was composed to commemorate the completion of the Anyuan Tower (安遠樓). The first seven lines paint a vivid scene, as the poet describes the tower's landscape, beginning with an overview of its overall structure before delving into its intricate details. The verse then portrays the graceful dance of performers and the fragrance they emit, echoing the earlier mention of the "song" and depicting the grandeur of the feast within the tower. These elements evoke a warm atmosphere of peace and prosperity. Despite the cold night, a gentle breeze allows the scent symbolizing this harmonious era to gradually diffuse in the tranquil environment.

As the poem unfolds, Jiang Kui suggests that such a beautiful setting should be graced by an "immortal of poetry," who rides on white clouds and yellow cranes to inscribe celebratory verses, enjoying a joyous communion of immortals and mortals. The focus then shifts to the poet's personal experiences atop the tower. Surprisingly, the completion of "Anyuan Tower" does not bring about the expected joy of a prosperous era; instead, it evokes emptiness and loneliness. The poet finds himself lingering over the cup of wine, appreciating the beauty of flowers and moonlight to alleviate his idle sorrows and a sense of wasted time.

The poem concludes with a description of a serene twilight after the rain, imbuing the verses with

subtle melancholy. Subsequent references to fragrance relate to fragrant grass and flowers. However, in classical Chinese literature, fragrant grass often represents social desolation and decline. What should be beautiful, fragrant, and uplifting flowers are reduced to mere playthings that dispel loneliness and dull ambition. Hence, the beauty and fragrance of the flowers fail to embody worthwhile attributes, contrasting sharply with the poet's feelings of inability to serve his country and his sorrow over a fractured homeland.

This poem creates a contrasting environment by depicting fragrance in the first half and deliberately omitting it in the second half. The warm atmosphere portrayed initially is in stark contrast to the subsequent desolation. The poem also compares the past and the present, fiction and reality, warmth and sorrow, and ambition and unfulfilled aspirations, as well as achievements and the inability to serve one's own country. Such contrasts not only highlight the poet's nostalgia for a beautiful past but also express his sense of helplessness and loss in the face of reality.

In the early Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), Yan Shu (晏殊, 991-1055), known as the "Prime Minister of Peace," flourished in an era of unprecedented prosperity, a historical context markedly different from the turbulent times Jiang Kui would later experience. While Yan's Ci poetry exhibits similar qualities of refinement and tranquility, the representation of the fragrance culture primarily in some of Yan Shu's poems centers on its use in celebrations, along with depictions of incense burning during literary gatherings and daily household life. Yan Shu seldom reveals strong personal emotions in his work. Instead, he demonstrates keen observational skills and a calm, balanced perspective on life through meticulous and subtle portrayals. His poetry excels in capturing images of wealth and refined sorrow yet avoids the crudeness of simply listing opulent objects such as pearls and gold. Rather, it conveys elegance and charm through delicate and graceful imagery. This fragrance culture reflects not only the luxurious lives of the literati in an era of prosperity but also their understated aesthetic sensibilities. For instance, in his poem *Silk-Washing Stream* (浣溪沙 宿酒才醒厭玉卮), he notes[17]:

The remnants of last night's wine make the jade cup unwelcome.
Aloeswood incense grows cold, too idle to perfume clothes.
The first plum blossoms unfurl by the sunlit branches.
After the lingering snow melts into quiet solitude,
The spring breeze stirs faintly, about to arrive.
The small screen lies idle; painted curtains hang low.

Images such as jade cups, aloeswood incense, early plum blossoms, small screens, and painted curtains signify wealth, yet the descriptions remain subtle, never appearing overwrought. Yan Shu's concept of "wealth" transcends material luxury, emphasizing elegance and noble spirit. His poetry seeks a higher realm, moving beyond mere surface-level affluence.

Aloeswood, a rare and costly item, was a privilege of the wealthy. However, Yan Shu's understated depiction relegates it to the background, enhancing the poem's refined charm. The "coldness" of the incense may imply that it burned out after being used for sleeping the previous night or that the character,

17 Yan Shu, Yan Shu Ci Ji, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2019, p. 47. Original text in Chinese: "宿酒才醒厭玉卮，水沉香冷懶熏衣。早梅先綻日邊枝。 寒雪寂寥初散後，春風悠揚欲來時。小屏閒放畫簾垂。" Translation by author.

feeling languid, neglected to replenish the censer. The cold incense intertwines with the character's idleness, evoking serene stillness and emotional solitude. These depictions reveal the social status of the figures portrayed, as well as the poet's pursuit of a spiritual elegance removed from the mundane.

The key distinction between Yan Shu's depiction of fragrance and that of Jiang Kui lies in their approaches to scent. Although Shu portrays fragrance as part of the background, it remains an objective element of the depicted scene. By describing this background, the poet subtly illuminates the psychological dimensions of the characters. In contrast to Jiang Kui's treatment, however, these olfactory elements do not transcend their immediate temporal-spatial context to function as chronotopes; instead, they remain firmly anchored within the specific scene portrayed.

Through these examples, Jiang Kui demonstrates his masterful use of fragrance as a literary device employing it to express a range of emotions and themes. Regardless of whether it evokes nostalgia, love, or resilience, Jiang Kui's fragrance imagery is never static; it shifts according to the poem's emotional and thematic demands. Each instance of scent draws the reader into the sensory world of the verse, simultaneously providing insight into the poet's inner emotional landscape. By analyzing these works, we realize that Jiang Kui's use of fragrance imagery is not merely decorative; rather, it is an essential tool for emotional and thematic exploration.

Conclusion

Jiang Kui's poetry intricately weaves fragrance imagery into a rich tapestry of emotional experiences, revealing his profound understanding of human complexity. Although melancholy recurs as the central theme, the scent serves a broader purpose by exploring joy, yearning, spiritual reflection, and inner turmoil. Fragrance symbolizes emotional closeness and elicits feelings of intimacy, capturing moments of shared beauty and connection. Even transiently, these moments resonate deeply, emphasizing the significance of presence in personal relationships.

Jiang Kui's treatment of fragrance reflects the complex cultural milieu of the Southern Song Dynasty, a period marked by political upheaval and a heightened focus on aesthetic refinement among the literati. His poetry demonstrates how fragrance can serve as a powerful means for expressing a wide range of emotions and ideas, from nostalgia and loss to spiritual transcendence and moral virtue. By interweaving scent with other sensory experiences and abstract concepts, Jiang Kui creates a multi-layered poetic landscape that invites readers into a rich world of sensory and emotional exploration. Compared to his counterparts from the late Tang and Northern Song Dynasties, Jiang Kui employs fragrance in a distinctively innovative manner; rather than being mere descriptive elements, scents in his poetry function as emotional catalysts that transcend temporal and spatial boundaries. By transforming fragrance into a bridge between different moments and places, Jiang creates a unique poetic realm in which the past and present and here and there converge through the olfactory experience.

Jiang Kui also employs fragrance to articulate inner emotional conflicts, contrasting the delicacy of scent with the intensity of his feelings. The juxtaposition of beauty and fragility in his work reflects a nuanced emotional landscape that allows readers to engage with the complexities of joy, sadness, and unresolved tension. Ultimately, fragrance in Jiang Kui's poetry transcends mere sensory details, emerging as a central element in his expression. Drawing on the multifaceted nature of scent, he reveals the fleeting and often contradictory essence of human emotions, enriching the emotional and intellectual

depth of his work.

Future research should compare Jiang Kui's poetic depictions of fragrances with those of other poets of the Song Dynasty. This comparative analysis could clarify the position and significance of fragrance imagery within Jiang Kui's Baishi Ci collection and situate it more clearly within the broader literary context of the period.

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Acknowledgment

This work was partially supported by Graduate Grant Program of Graduate School of Humanities and Human Sciences, Hokkaido University, awarded to T. H.