



# CFP: OLFACTORY CULTURES OF ASIA

Olfactory Cultures of Asia is an innovative multi-disciplinary collection that explores the interconnections and disjunctures in Asian cultural histories of scent and how they resonate in contemporary arenas such as politics, religion, health, environmental discourse, and everyday life. Scent is uniquely powerful as an imposed marker of ethnic, gender, and class identities, but it can also overwhelm previously constructed boundaries and transform social-sensory realities, within contexts of environmental degradation, pathogen outbreaks, and racial politics.

Bringing together international scholars with deep knowledge of the region, this collection aims to examine the mechanics by which scent constitutes worlds, and in particular, how scent functions as a category of social and moral boundary-marking and boundary-breaching within, between, and beyond Asian societies.

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## **SUBMISSION DATES**

**ABSTRACTS: APRIL 30**  
**DECISIONS: MAY 15**  
**PAPERS: DECEMBER 1**

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Home to diverse olfactory cultures, Asia is transnationally connected in scent through histories of economic exchange via the spice road, through the diffusion of dharmic traditions and scientific knowledges, and through legacies of colonialization and their associated regimes of hygiene. With notable exceptions (e.g. Kalekin-Fishman & Low 2010; McHugh 2012), however, there has been very little analysis of sensoria in Asian contexts (Low 2019), and still less research devoted to olfaction. As Constance Classen et al. argue (1994), the Western hierarchy of the senses aligns visual and auditory modes with reason and rationality. In contrast, olfaction is dismissed; philosopher Immanuel Kant (1798) bemoaned that scent is the most ignoble of the senses, being “animalistic”, “fleeting”, and unworthy of cultivation. Interacting with the enduring frames of Orientalism, Western ocular-centrism has also aligned Asia and its peoples with more ‘debase’ or ‘primal’ senses (Scott 2011). This sensory stereotyping appears in persistent tropes about the sensuality of Asian cultures and ‘stinky’ Asian foods and bodies (for example, see Mallapragada 2016: 264 on curry).

This volume takes olfaction seriously and critically, in order to avoid essentializing its relationship to Asian societies, while engaging its full potential as an analytical frame and lived phenomenon. Scholars have begun dismantling ocular-centrism in the West, by examining the exact work of vision (Grasseni 2007) and its position in a multi-sensorial world (Howes 2019).

However, as sensory studies has grown into a distinct discipline, scholarship continues to reflect certain Western and English-language prejudices (Gould et al. 2019; Low 2019). By engaging with Asian sensory cosmologies, scholars can challenge preconceived ideas about what constitutes a sense or sensible phenomenon, as well as the relationship between sense, society, and history (Classen 1999).

Smell shapes individual, collective, and state-based memory, as well as discourses about heritage and power, informing but also unsettling official histories (Low 2010). As such, it suggests a pervasive and powerful intimacy which, analysed from sites of exchange, contributes to our understanding of the human condition, mobility, and inter-connection.

The editors welcome contributions from a range of disciplines, including anthropology, art history, economics, history, religious studies, media studies and from a range of locations within, between, or beyond, the Asian region. This edited collection aims to move beyond cursory treatments of the senses as cultural epiphenomena, or their dismissal as unreliable historical narrators. Therefore, contributions must engage with olfaction as a source of theoretical and methodological understanding. Contemporary ethnographic papers should be well-grounded in wider historical, economic, and political contexts of Asia.

A background image of wood chips, split into two vertical sections. The top section is a solid orange color, and the bottom section is a close-up of light brown wood chips.

# SUBMISSIONS

The volume will be edited by Hannah Gould and Gwyn McClelland.

Hannah Gould is a cultural anthropologist based at Melbourne University. Her research is primarily concerned with the transforming sensory and material cultures of death in Japan. Her work has been published in FOCAAL, Anthropology Quarterly, and Journal of Material Religion.

Gwyn McClelland is a historian based at Monash University. His work is focused on marginalization and the traumatic impacts of war. Gwyn won the 2019 John Legge Prize for best thesis in Asian Studies and his monograph, *Dangerous Memory in Nagasaki*, was published in 2019 with Routledge.

The authors are currently in discussion with the editors of a sensory studies book series at an academic publisher regarding the project.

## **Submission Guidelines**

Please include:

- Title of proposed chapter
- Abstract (maximum 350 words)
- Short Biography and CV (up to 4 pages)

Please email your submissions to Hannah Gould ([hannah.gould@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:hannah.gould@unimelb.edu.au)) and Gwyn McClelland ([gwynmcclelland@gmail.com](mailto:gwynmcclelland@gmail.com)).