

## **Resentment: Reclaiming the Olfactory Sense in Contemporary Asian Diaspora Literature**

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This summer, I explored the olfactory sense as a mode of racial thinking in contemporary Asian diaspora literature. I was drawn to analyzing smell in terms of marginalization, namely, how scent itself is a denigrated sense that may also be weaponized to oppress. In particular, I studied how Asian bodies have been racialized in literature according to an often foul or erotic scent, reflecting boundary paranoia, sexualization, and an Orientalist attitude. However, I became fascinated by how contemporary Asian diaspora writers have reclaimed olfaction as a tool to address such racial/gendered othering and rethink the Asian body in their own terms. I label such reclaiming “resentment,” as these authors have developed a new way of smelling that “resents” the colonial and hegemonic representations of olfaction while uplifting the scents and senses of those on the margins. I'm especially interested in how scent functions in these reparative texts as a trope of migration, memory, disease, sexuality, and the nonhuman + extra-human.

To research this topic, I read a number of texts over the eight-week period. I began with a theoretical background on smell by reading Alain Corbin's *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the Social Imagination* and Jonathan Reinartz's *Past Scents: Historical Perspectives on Smell*. Next, I shifted to Orientalism in literature with Sax Rohmer's *The Insidious Dr. Fu-Manchu*, which reflects “yellow peril” ideology by constructing a hierarchy of scents and enforcing their containment. Hsuan Hsu's *The Smell of Risk: Environmental Disparities and Olfactory Aesthetics* discusses such olfactory Orientalism as well, but Hsu turns his attention to how contemporary Asian writers/artists have fought back against such practices, with a focus on the environment and ecological justice. I was inspired by this reparative turn, and implemented it into my own work, choosing to focus on the creative and healing stories that contemporary Asian diaspora literature offers. With that in mind, I spent the next weeks reading texts by contemporary Asian writers, including Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*, Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt*, Radhika Jha's *Smell*, Hong Ying's *Daughter of the River*, and Tanaïs's *In Sensorium: Notes for My People*. Each week, I met with my faculty mentor, Professor Belinda Kong, to discuss the readings and brainstorm how I could incorporate them into my argument. At the end of the summer, I also listened to a talk by Hsuan Hsu on “Smellscape, Distributed Memory, and Social Justice” at the Institute for Art and Olfaction in Los Angeles.

My goal is to turn this summer research into a senior honors project. I have outlined my research into three chapters on empire, ecological memory, and intersectional identity, respectively, and I began drafting the first chapter, “Salt: The Smelly Logic of Empire.” This summer research thus initiates a longer, more far-reaching probe into contemporary Asian diaspora literature. On a personal note, this project indulges my love of literature and aromas in a way that makes my heart (and nose) wonderfully happy. Thank you so much to the Goldsmith Adams Research Fund and the Office of Student Fellowships and Research for making this exploration possible. Finally, thank you to my mentor, Belinda, for all the encouragement, insights, and trust along the way.

**Faculty Mentor: Professor Belinda Kong**

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