

success of adult literacy programmes. Chapter five demonstrates how from 1937–1945 the CCP in Shaanxi was relatively more successful than the KMT. While the overall success of the village winter schools still was limited, the exemplary cases that made it into the record demonstrate that for villagers becoming literate was not necessarily about becoming modern citizens, but more about redefining their relationship within their community. Moreover, these recorded cases of successful winter schools created a new narrative that would be relevant as it made its way through the political administration.

The book addresses scholars of 20th-century China and will be of interest to colleagues and students in cultural studies, book studies as well as intellectual history. *Beyond Citizenship* thus forms part of a growing body of literature that puts readers centre stage, demonstrating the impact of reading on individuals as well as on their larger social contexts, such as *The Cultural Sociology of Reading* (Thumala Olave [ed.], Palgrave, 2022), *The Edinburgh History of Reading* (Jonathan Rose [ed.], Edinburgh University Press, 2020), and the work of Joan Judge therein (“In search of the Chinese common reader: vernacular knowledge in an age of new media”). Written in a very accessible style, with concise summaries at the end of all chapters and a conclusion wrapping up the main points of the argument, the book, or its individual chapters, can easily be assigned as classroom reading.

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## Scents of China: A Modern History of Smell

Xuelei Huang. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. 297 pp. £30.00; \$39.99 (hbk). ISBN 9781009207041

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During the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic, anosmia – the partial or total loss of smell – was one of the more common markers of the virus. For some patients, such as chefs and sommeliers, who can spend years honing their sense of smell, this outcome could be professionally devastating, while for others the result was more likely a sudden focus on a realm of sensory experience that previously they may have largely taken for granted. While entire academic disciplines are devoted to the study of visual and auditory culture, comparatively less formal attention has been given to olfaction – even though it is well recognized that smell is of critical importance to many basic human activities, ranging from courtship to cuisine. Xuelei Huang’s elegant study attempts to address this scholarly deficit by considering some of the ways that odour has been represented and imagined in China from the late imperial period to the present. Through an engaging analysis of sources ranging from the classic 18th-century Chinese novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* to relatively unknown Western travelogues, Huang details how odour has helped mediate shifting perceptions of Chinese society by foreigners and Chinese alike.

As Huang notes in her preface, she began this project while based in Taipei’s Academia Sinica and then continued her research in the European cities of Nantes, Vienna, Heidelberg and Edinburgh. She observes that each of these sites has its own distinct “smellscape,” and one of the themes that runs through her project similarly involves how olfactory connotations are shaped



by perceived contrasts between familiar and unfamiliar settings. Huang completed the “final phase” of the project during the “strange ‘odourless’ time” of the pandemic – which is very fitting, given that her study forces the reader to imagine an eclectic array of odours that cannot be conveyed directly via the printed page of her volume itself (though this reviewer is intrigued by the possibility that the book might have been released in a “scratch-and-sniff” edition, allowing the reader to sample the various scents under consideration!).

*Scents of China* is composed of three parts, with each part being composed of two chapters. Part one, “A Sniff of China,” opens with a reflection on the various refined fragrances described in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, followed by an analysis of Western visitors’ complaints about China’s stench during the long 19th century. Although the emphasis on subtle, refined fragrances in *Dream of the Red Chamber* offers a stark contrast to Westerners’ complaints about the stench of China’s cities, it is also important to remember that the setting of *Dream of the Red Chamber* is an elite microcosm of Chinese society, which was undoubtedly quite different from the more heterogeneous urban environments that were the focus of contemporary Westerners’ critiques.

Part two, “Smellscapes in Flux,” discusses “deodorizing” campaigns in 19th- and 20th-century Shanghai, on one hand, and the importation into China of Western perfumes and other scented commodities during roughly the same period, on the other. The first chapter, on “deodorizing China,” focuses on three separate deodorizing campaigns, spearheaded by Chinese and foreign groups that each appealed to different sets of traditional Chinese and modern biomedical hygienic principles. The following chapter, on “re-perfuming China,” meanwhile, examines efforts not to eradicate unpleasant odours but rather to disguise them, with the underlying impetus being not hygienic but rather aesthetic. Through an analysis of several case studies, Huang details the shifting aesthetics and the capitalist underpinnings of the surge of Chinese interest in perfumes and fragrances at the turn of the 20th century, and she notes that whereas contemporary deodorizing efforts were focused on transforming space, corresponding interest in re-perfuming instead typically targeted the body itself.

Finally, part three, “A Whiff of Alterity,” opens with a chapter focusing on discourses of smell in early-20th-century Chinese literature, including works by authors associated with the May Fourth and the New Perceptionist movements, followed by another chapter examining olfactory concerns in a set of mid-century Maoist writings and practices. The first chapter looks specifically at a group of early 20th-century Chinese authors whom Huang proposes can be considered “olfactophilic,” which is to say, uncommonly focused on eroticized olfactory stimuli, and Huang argues that this pattern of olfactophilia in early 20th-century literature corresponded to “a paradigm shift in bodily/sensorial relations to selfhood” during that period (p. 190). In the following chapter, meanwhile, the author examines the inverse phenomenon wherein Mao Zedong, in his writings, continually seeded his writings with a set of scatological references that, Huang argues, was part of Mao’s “strategy of intimacy” and was designed to underscore his perceived affinity with the common people.

Although Huang’s primary interest, in this study, involves the ways in which odours can come to acquire different sociocultural associations, she nevertheless opens with a detailed discussion of the neurological basis of olfaction. She observes that, in humans, “the olfactory pathway is the most direct of any sensory system, but its simplicity is deceptive,” because, “at the cortical level, [olfactory] information is distributed widely and irregularly” (p. 7) (in contrast to visual information). This combination of the direct indexicality of olfactory input and the “messy, individualized, impromptu” nature of neural patterns associated with the processing of olfactory stimuli means that it is relatively easy for olfactory stimuli to come to acquire different associations and significances, in a complex process that continually “[re]tunes neurons culturally and aesthetically” (p. 34). A key objective of Huang’s study, accordingly, is to unpack the significances of different olfactory discourses, to consider how they correspond to broader sociocultural, political, economic, biomedical, and aesthetic transformations in China during the period in question.

In his 1931 essay “A Short History of Photography,” Walter Benjamin famously suggested that one function of the photograph is that it frequently reveals a side of reality that we see but do not consciously register – a phenomenon that Benjamin dubbed the optical unconscious. One way of approaching Huang’s *Scents of China* would be to see it as doing for scent what Benjamin’s camera does for sight, detailing the underlying significance of the world of scent that we perceive but often do not consciously appreciate. The volume, in other words, seeks to reveal and make sense of modern China’s olfactory unconscious.

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## Digital Transnationalism: Chinese-Language Media in Australia

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*Digital Transnationalism* draws on findings and analysis published by its two authors, Wanning Sun and Haiqing Yu, in several earlier journal articles, along with additional data, to present a coherent perspective on the national identity of first-generation mainland Chinese who have arrived in Australia since the 1980s, as seen through their use of networked digital communication media, particularly Weixin.

The authors highlight three factors as the contexts of their book: the global geopolitical reconfiguration that accompanies China’s rise; China’s insistence on inserting itself into the transnational Chinese sphere; and the intensification of anti-Chinese discourses in Australia. They argue that these contexts have fostered a simplistic misconception that overemphasizes media control and censorship in the operation of Chinese digital media in Australia. The book aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the issue.

To do this, the authors analyse the content published on Weixin subscription accounts targeting Mandarin Chinese speakers in Australia. They conducted a case study of the most popular Weixin account in Australia, *Sydney Today*, and observed the flow of content between selected Weixin “self-media” accounts and other social media platforms. The authors also observed, as participants, the role of Weixin for Mandarin-speakers in Australia during the 2019 Australian federal election and COVID-19.

Given the contexts highlighted by the authors, their book makes a timely contribution to this under-researched area by responding to concerns about China’s potential influence among the Chinese diaspora through Weixin. The data reported succeeds in painting a picture of differences in national identification among the Mandarin-speaking community in Australia and a landscape of variation among Weixin subscription accounts targeting them. The authors highlight the agency of Mandarin speakers in Australia, suggesting that their identity is not a matter of either Chinese or Australian, but something in between. They acknowledge censorship and surveillance by the Chinese state but emphasize the profit motive in the operation of Chinese digital media in Australia and stress that their “compliance is more a business decision than a result of political coercion” (p. 70). This argument makes sense, as studies have shown that the Chinese state has found new ways to tame the market, and there are many examples of political distortions of commercial