

**CALL FOR PAPERS: DISSOLVING AGENTS AS TECHNOLOGIES OF TRANSFORMATION IN THE  
GLOBAL SOUTH**

Workshop, 10-11 July 2018

Department III, Artefacts, Action and Knowledge | Max Planck Institute for the History of Science  
Boltzmannstr. 22, 14195, Berlin, Germany

Conveners: Dagmar Schäfer (MPIWG, Germany), Annapurna Mamidipudi (Maastricht University, the Netherlands and MPIWG, Germany), and BuYun Chen (Swarthmore College, USA and MPIWG, Germany)

This interdisciplinary workshop interrogates the peripheral, intermediary, and ephemeral substances that have been critical to the historical formation of chemical technologies and the making of stable products across the Global South, broadly construed. With this workshop, we aim to begin a conversation among scholars who work across disciplines and regions in the Global South on: 1) how to investigate materials that are no longer present in surviving artifacts; and 2) how to recover the connected histories of knowledge and technology that underpinned their making. For example, how did the availability of mordants – a fixative necessary to bind natural dye to textile fibers – shape local textile dyeing knowledge and technologies? Did knowledge about and techniques of dyeing circulate alongside mordants? One of the most popular mordants found across Asia was alum: often mixed with other salts or lime, or dissolved directly in a water bath, it produced strong intermolecular bonds between the colorants and the fibers. Taking “mordanting” (“mordant” from the Latin *mordere*, meaning “to bite”) as our metaphor, we aim to shift attention in historical research on material and knowledge flows, global connections and scientific and technological change away from raw materials (conceived of as critical inputs) and commodities (produced as valuable outputs) towards the intermediary substances that were essential to the transformation of materials, as well as of scientific and technological knowledge. As materials, techniques, and practices were set in motion within regional and trans-regional networks, how were these materials and the technologies of their transformation mobilized, stabilized, and maintained across material and environment conditions? We ask further, where do we locate the materiality of knowledge production when the material, the substance, and the solution dissipate from the final product?

We welcome papers that present case studies drawn from the Global South and on chemical technologies such as leather tanning, fragrance distillation, metallurgy, dyeing and pigments, and the brewing of alcoholic beverages, among others. We also invite papers from material scientists on historical chemical technologies that highlight how testing for and analysis of chemical compounds can shed light on the material practices. The workshop will take place on **10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> July 2018**, at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, Germany.

Paper proposals – including a title, abstract (400 words max.), and a short CV (no more than 1 page) – may be submitted via the [online submission portal](#) by **31 January 2018**. Accepted contributions will be notified by **28 February 2018**. Please direct research related inquiries to Dr. BuYun Chen at [bchen@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de](mailto:bchen@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de). Accommodation will be provided for three days. Conference organization will provide up to ten travel stipends. Detailed information regarding travel booking and reimbursement will be given by MPIWG after the selection process is completed.

Keywords: History of Science & Technology & Medicine, Anthropology, Archaeology, Asian Studies, Latin American Studies, Middle East Studies, African Studies, Materials Science