

# Not Just Japan: Asian Science Fiction and Fantasy

A few pointers for this panel.

## Definitions

We are probably going to start our discussion with works that fall close to Western definitions of "science fiction" and "fantasy", but we plan to branch out from there.

We don't want to restrict ourselves to the written word. Movies, manhua/manga/manhwa/comics and other media are fine.

We aren't going to treat religious texts as fantasy, at least not right away, because doing so can easily be culturally insensitive. However, many of the works we're going to talk about will be grounded in certain religions or myth traditions, so we may want to delve into the topic anyway.

## Issues

The first order of business is to introduce a slew of cool works to you, but along the way, we've got a lot of issues we'd like to discuss. What follows is just a sample; we're sure more will come up.

- Accessibility of knowledge and cultural appropriation: This will probably be an overarching issue for the panel, one we will come back to a lot.
- A related topic is translation. Are we only talking about works in translation? Not everyone wants to learn another language just to open their SF&F horizons – but learning another language is a very good thing. What about English works translated into Asian languages? There's a lot of SF&F translated into Chinese, for example.
- Accessibility (or deniability of such) as privilege; culturally-based definitions of genres; and whatever else we think of.
- What issues that will affect Asia (global warming, globalization, etc.) is Asian SF&F dealing with?
- How are Asian creators redefining their own genres?
- What genres exist in Asian literatures, and how closely do they map to Western ones?
- If I consider ghosts, *qi* or reincarnation to be natural and you don't, and I create a work based on my beliefs, who gets to decide if it is fantasy or not?

## Bibliography

Some initial listings; we're sure to think of many more.

### Works from India & South Asian

*The Beast With Nine Billion Feet* by Anil Menon.

Forthcoming from Zubaan books by Anil Menon (who also has short stories published, including one at Strange Horizons).

*The Calcutta Chromosome* by Amitav Ghosh. Won the Arthur C. Clarke Award.

*Diary of a Space Traveler* by Satyajit Ray. Translated from the Bengali. The great film director also wrote YA SF featuring the adventures and eccentricities of Professor Shonku.

"Early Bengali Science Fiction" by Amardeep Singh. A blog post that introduces the topic. Online at <http://www.lehigh.edu/~amsp/2006/05/early-bengali-science-fiction.html>.

*Generation 14* by Priya Sarukkai Chhabri. A novel about a clone in a far future where memory and sexuality are forbidden; but this clone remembers. Just out from Zubaan books in New Delhi. Online: [http://www.zubaanbooks.com/zubaan\\_books\\_details.asp?BookID=116](http://www.zubaanbooks.com/zubaan_books_details.asp?BookID=116).

*The Kathasaritsagara* or *Ocean of Streams of stories*. An 11th century collection of fables, fairy tales and legends.

*Kleptomania* by Manjula Padmanabhan. Published by Penguin India, this story collection includes three SF stories; author has also written a play, *Harvest*, that is science-fictional.

*The Mahabharata*. One of the world's longest epic poems, this contains stories within stories but is mostly about a great battle between the five Pandava brothers and their hundred throne-usurping cousins, the Kauravas.

*Mosquito and Other Stories* by Premendra Mitra. Translated from the Bengali, this collection of short fiction from the 1940's or so features this great Bengali writer's best SF work. Introducing Ghanada, an older man living in a Kolkata hostelry who regales his young fellow tenants with his adventures on far off worlds. Tongue-in-cheek and compelling.

*Panchatantra* tales. Mostly animal folktales, very ancient.

*The Ramayana*. An ancient epic poem on the adventures of Rama, an avatar of the god Vishnu.

*A Shadow in Eternity* and *The Key of Chaos* by Payal Dhar. YA fantasy novels about a girl called Maya who discovers that she has an important role to play in an alternate world. Again from Zubaan books.

*Tales of the Future* by Jayant Narlikar. Translated from the Marathi. Short stories from India's premier astrophysicist.

*The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet and other stories* by Vandana Singh. Story collection forthcoming from Zubaan and Penguin India; most of these stories were published in anthologies and magazines in the US and UK. Author's website at <http://users.rcn.com/singhvan/>.

*Younguncle Comes to Town* by Vandana Singh. From Zubaan in India and Viking in the US. Stories of an eccentric uncle and his nieces and nephew combating various forms of injustice with the help of animals and ghosts.

*Younguncle in the Himalayas* by Vandana Singh. From Zubaan. Novel in which the mundane and supernatural come together against the backdrop of a rundown hotel in the Himalayas.

#### **Works from Korea**

2009: *Lost Memories*. An alternate history/uchronia movie set in a Korea that never gained independence from Japan.

*The Host* 괴물. A movie in which a large mutated monster plagues a family in Seoul.

*Lineage II*. One of the most successful MMORPGs ever.

#### **Works from China, Taiwan & Hong Kong**

2046. Directed by Wong Kar-Wai. An SF movie that's SF in a general sense; part of the movie takes place in the future. In typical Wong style, the movie is very dreamy, ethereal and subtle.

*The Bride with White Hair* 白髮魔女傳. A movie, described by the director as a retelling of the Romeo and Juliet story.

*The City Trilogy*, by Chang Hsi-Kuo. Composed of three books: *Five Jade Disks*, *Defenders of the Dragon City* and *Tale of a Feather*. An epic tale dealing with oppression, racism, revenge and war.

*Fantasy Foundation* 奇幻基地. A web forum for people who are into fantasy, including reading, writing, RPGs and many other aspects. Online at <http://www.ffoundation.com.tw/modules/news/>.

"Gaming in Taiwan", by Rachel Kronick. An increasingly out-of-date set of links and resources for RPGs and other gaming in Taiwan. Online at <http://www.jiawen.net/gamingintaiwan.html>.

*Membrane* 膜, by Ji Dawei 紀大偉. A novel in which not much happens; includes a lot of discussion of gender, plastic surgery and the nature of identity.

*Nine Life Man* 九命人 and *Long Life Man* 久命人 by A Tui 阿推. A pair of manhua, lovingly drawn, about a man living sometime in the future who is sentenced by God to have nine lives. Very strange, funny and good.

"Science Fiction, Globalization, and the People's Republic of China", by Lavie Tidhar. Discusses the history of SF in mainland China, including what topics are taboo and general market conditions. Online at <http://www.concatenation.org/articles/sf-china.html>.

*Science Fiction World* 科幻世界. A magazine that carries original SF&F, translations, letters, etc. In print, and online at <http://www.sfw-cd.com/> (with an English site at <http://en.sfw-cd.com/index.html>). Also has a great online shop.

Anything by Ni Kuang 倪匡. He writes all kinds of things: short stories with a Fortean bent (ghosts, UFOs, etc.), wuxia stories, adventure stories, erotica, etc. There are dozens of volumes of his collected works.

#### **Other notes**

"[Wiscon 2008] Not Just Japan: Asian Science Fiction and Fantasy". Yoon Ha Lee's very good write-up of the panel. Online at <http://yhlee.livejournal.com/1141868.html>.

"Asian SF/F (not Japan)" by Joyce Tsai. Joyce's LJ post in preparation for this panel. Includes tons of great suggestions and discussion in the comments. Online at <http://oyceter.livejournal.com/744610.html>