

CFP: Speculative Fiction from Southeast Asia in the Twenty-first Century (MLA 2024)

We invite paper proposals for a non-guaranteed special session / panel jointly organized by the MLA Southeast Asia and Speculative Fiction Forums for the January 2024 Modern Language Association conference in Philadelphia. We seek papers about speculative fiction (broadly understood) by Southeast Asian authors, especially works published after 2000. Given Southeast Asia's linguistic diversity, we welcome papers about speculative fiction in languages other than English.

While Southeast Asian speculative fiction has witnessed a boom in the past two decades, academic scholarship has not kept pace with the vast output of creative writing from the region that falls under this literary umbrella. Journals such as *LONTAR* (2013-2018; ed. Jason Erik Lundberg), short-fiction anthologies such as *Alternative Alamat: Stories Inspired by Philippine Mythology* (2011; ed. Paolo Chikiamco), *Cyberpunk: Malaysia* (2015; ed. Zen Cho) and *Singa-Pura-Pura: Malay Speculative Fiction from Singapore* (2021; ed. Nazry Bahrawi), and single-author novels such as Nuraliah Norasid's *The Gatekeeper* (2016) and Joshua Kam's *How the Man in Green Saved Pahang, and Possibly the World* (2020) are evidence of the rich and varied speculative fiction written in Southeast Asia. Moreover, speculative comics such as Budjette Tan and Kajo Baldesimo's *Trese* (2005-) and Arnold Arre's *The Mythology Class* (1999) have obtained North American imprints, thus increasing their circulation outside Southeast Asia.

Our panel stresses the critical potential of speculative, non-mimetic narratives to create technoscientific or magical-fantastic worlds that represent and challenge social inequalities, prevailing cultural attitudes, and dominant power structures in Southeast Asia, whether in one country or in the larger region. As Sherryl Vint argues, speculative fiction "encourages examination of the irrational and affective dimensions of experience as well as logical extrapolation" from our current state of affairs; it "rethinks the discourses by which we understand commonplace reality" (*Science Fiction: A Guide to the Perplexed* 90). We hope this panel's attention to speculative cultural productions from Southeast Asia will illuminate alternative genealogies and sites for understanding speculative fiction beyond the Anglo-American frameworks in which this genre is often situated. With this in mind, we invite papers that critically discuss Southeast Asian speculative fiction in relation to any topics on the following (non-exhaustive) list:

- decoloniality / postcoloniality
- race and ethnonationalism
- gender and sexuality
- myth, spirituality, and religion
- class, labor, and wealth
- local, regional, and global politics
- migration and diaspora
- language, translation, and storytelling
- visual media and cross-media adaptation

Please send 250-word abstracts and current CV, as well as any questions, to Weihsin Gui (weihsing@ucr.edu) and Frances Tran (ftran@fsu.edu) by March 13, 2023. Please note that speakers whose papers are accepted for this session will need to become members of the Modern Language Association by April 7, 2023 in order to participate in the conference itself.