

Thomas D. Clareson Award for Distinguished Service 2019



The Thomas D. Clareson Award for Distinguished Service is presented for outstanding service activities—promotion of SF teaching and study, editing, reviewing, editorial writing, publishing, organizing meetings, mentoring, and leadership in SF/fantasy organizations.

This year's awardee is Wu Yan of Southern University of Science and Technology in Guangdong, China.

Committee Statement

Pawel Frelik (chair), Veronica Hollinger, Sherryl Vint

WU Yan is professor and director of the Science and Human Imagination Research Center of the Southern University of Science and Technology in Shenzhen, China. He is China's leading voice in science-fiction theory and criticism, the first scholar in China to introduce courses in science fiction at the university level, and a tireless contributor to China's participation in the global science fiction community. He has been actively engaged in international collaborations and research projects for decades, including attending several SFRA conferences. He is also an award-winning science-fiction author, winner of both the Chinese Nebula Award and the Galaxy Award. From 2010 to 2017, he served as President of the World Chinese Science Fiction Association.

Wu Yan was based for many years at Beijing Normal University, where he began offering courses in science fiction in the early 1990s. He established both MA and PhD programs in science fiction before moving, nearly three decades later, to Shenzhen to establish the Science and Human Imagination Research Center.

Wu Yan's main works of sf theory and criticism include *Introduction to Science Fiction Literature* (2006), *Theory of Science Fiction Literature and Construction of Disciplinary Systems* (2008), *Science Fiction Literature Outline* (2011), *How to Read Science Fiction Literature* (2012), *Six Science Fiction Lectures* (2013), and *Meditations on Chinese Science Fiction Literature* (2020). In the past year alone, he published a new edition of *Meditations on Science Fiction Literature: Wu Yan's Academic Selection*; a children's sf novel called *China Orbit*; and a new edition of *Science Fiction Literature*

Outline. He is editor-in-chief of *The History of Chinese Science Fiction in the 20th Century* and of *Introduction to Historical Materials of Chinese Science Fiction in the 20th Century*. Incredibly, he has also found time to produce sf teaching materials for elementary and middle-school students, launching a program called “Science Fiction: Imagination and Scientific Innovation Training Course for Primary and Secondary School Students.”

Wu Yan’s passion for science fiction has resulted in many generous and productive international collaborations and exchanges. In 2013, for instance, he was the lead editor for a well-received special issue of *Science Fiction Studies* on Chinese science fiction; in 2016 he organized the “International Conference on Utopian and Science Fiction Studies” in Beijing, a wonderful two-day event that brought together scholars and writers from the US, Canada, China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Over the years, he has generously hosted international scholars in both Beijing and Shenzhen and he has mentored many young writers and academics who continue to extend his work.

It is impossible to think of anyone who has done more than Wu Yan to promote the field of international science-fiction scholarship. At this moment when the west is finally discovering the science-fiction writing of what he has called (after Brian Aldiss) “the Great Wall planet,” it is more than time to honor a decades-long career that has tirelessly promoted and expanded the reading, writing, teaching, and critical engagement with the field that we all love. We are honored in return to present this year’s Clareson Award for Distinguished Service to Professor Wu Yan.

Awardee Statement

Wu Yan

Southern University of Science and Technology / China

I’d like to thank the SFRA for giving me the Thomas D. Clareson Award in 2020.

In July 1983, while I was still in college, I met a delegation of American science-fiction writers in Shanghai. That year, the SFRA President, Elizabeth Anne Hull, visited China with Frederic Pohl, Roger Zelazny, William F. Wu, and Charles N. Brown of *Locus Magazine*. They were welcomed to Shanghai by the famous writer Ye Yonglie. I went along to listen to their conference, and I was profoundly moved by what I heard. At that time, we did not know that American writers were so

interested in science fiction. We tended to associate sf with the French (Jules Verne), the Russians (Alexandr Belyaev), and the British (Arthur Conan Doyle). That there were so many science-fiction writers in the US truly surprised me.

I have been an sf fan since I was very young. This might sound like nothing today, but at that time it was very difficult. I was only four years old when the Cultural Revolution began in 1966. During the next ten years, novels, popular science books, sf books, and even science textbooks were all banned from publication. Revolution was the most important thing. At that time I found old yellowed science-fiction books, some from the closed library where my father worked, others from the houses of my close friends. Secretly, I read these books and I fell in love with science fiction. After the Cultural Revolution, science fiction in China recovered and I was very excited. I wasn't only looking for books to read, but boldly I was also trying to write. I published my first sf book review in 1978 and my first short story in 1979.

But the development of science fiction in China has been very uneven. When the wave was rising, everyone chased it; but during periods of criticism such books could not be published. It was only in 1991 that my first collection of stories was published. At the same time, at Beijing Normal University I introduced China's first university-level sf course in Chinese, titled "Science Fiction Review and Research." During the next 29 years, I developed my undergraduate courses into Masters and PhD programs. In 2017, I left Beijing Normal University and established the Science and Human Imagination Research Center in Shenzhen's Southern University of Science and Technology; it focuses on the development of imaginative psychology, future exploration, and science-fiction works. This year (2020) my publications have included my collection, *Meditations on Science Fiction Literature: Wu Yan's Academic Selection*; a children's sf novel called *China Orbit*; and a new edition of *Science Fiction Literature Outline*. I am also editor-in-chief of *The History of Chinese Science Fiction in the 20th Century* and of *Introduction to Historical Materials of Chinese Science Fiction in the 20th Century*. I have also been producing sf teaching materials for elementary and middle-school students. Science-fiction creation, research, and promotion has become my life's career.

The SFRA is no stranger to me. In 1994, while I was a visiting scholar at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, Elizabeth Hull invited me to attend the SFRA conference in Arlington Heights. In 2001, I participated again at SFRA, this time in Schenectady, New York. I still remember a panel at the 1994 meeting devoted to

teaching science fiction. Upon arrival, the host asked everyone to make their syllabi available to everyone else. After I submitted mine, I received dozens of different syllabi from other teachers. The content and methods of the lectures were very inspiring. I have even contributed to the *SFRA Newsletter* in the past.

For me, the SFRA is not only a source of new ideas, but it is also the home of researchers from all over the world. Through SFRA I have met many colleagues, including Veronica Hollinger, James Gunn, Takayuki Tatsumi, Janice Bogstad, and scholars from Denmark, Russia, Israel, and elsewhere. The SFRA directory is also my important assistant. In December 2016, with the help of the SFRA Directory, I invited international scholars to Beijing to commemorate the 500th anniversary of More's *Utopia* at the International Symposium on Utopian and Science Fiction Literature.

I would like in particular to thank Professor Hull. If it weren't for our meeting in 1983, my connection with the SFRA would not have happened so early. Since then we have met on many occasions and in many locations around the world. I remember she and Fred Pohl also brought Jack Williamson, David Brin, Suzy McKee Charnas, and other writers to China. I also want to thank the late Charles Brown, founder of *Locus* magazine. He often invited me to contribute articles to *Locus* and had always wanted me to visit his Oakland office. I also thank Veronica Hollinger, a long-time friend and my co-editor for the 2013 special issue of *Science Fiction Studies* on Chinese science fiction. I'd like to thank the writer David Brin as well. Every time he comes to China, I invite him to meet with local writers and to give lectures to my students. It was he who recommended that I meet Sherryl Vint at UC, Riverside and Sheldon Brown at UC, San Diego. Last year, I invited Professor Vint to visit China, not only to give lectures at Southern University of Science and Technology in Shenzhen, but also to introduce new developments in science fiction to students of sf writing at Tsinghua University in Beijing. Professor Brown contributed his art to the exhibit I curated for the 2019 Bi-city Biennale of Urbanism and Architecture in Shenzhen. Thanks to his excellent work, and the work of many others from both China and abroad, my exhibit, *Nine Cities, Ten Thousand Kinds of Futures*, won the biennial jury award.

It has been an honor to live for the past forty years in an academic world of mutual exchange and cooperation. I am honored to be a member of SFRA, an organization that belongs to the whole world. I believe that my Clareson Award will contribute to

the increasing interest in science fiction among writers, researchers, educators, and promoters in China. It will encourage more people to participate in the work and in the spirit of science fiction.

On the occasion of this award, please allow me to wish all members of the association good health. My very best wishes to the SFRA.

Bio

Wu Yan is professor and director of the Science and Human Imagination Research Center of the Southern University of Science and Technology in Shenzhen, China. He began writing science fiction in 1978. His novels include *Spiritual Exploration* (1994), *The Sixth Day of Life and Death* (1994), and *China Orbit* (2020); his short stories include “Iceberg Adventure” (1979), “The Abyss of Gravity” (1981), “The Last Case of the Interstellar Police” (1991) “Mouse Pad” (2001), and “Print a New World” (2013). His main works of science-fiction theory and criticism include *Introduction to Science Fiction Literature* (2006), *Theory of Science Fiction Literature and Construction of Disciplinary Systems* (2008), *Science Fiction Literature Outline* (2011), *How to Read Science Fiction Literature* (2012), *Six Science Fiction Lectures* (2013), and *Meditations on Chinese Science Fiction Literature* (2020). In 2019, Wu Yan was co-curator of the “Science Fiction Ascending City Section” at the 8th Intercity Biennale of Urbanism and Architecture (Shenzhen), with Meng Jianmin and Fabio Cavallucci. With Chen Yu, he co-curated *Nine Cities, Ten Thousand Kinds of Futures*, which won the biennale jury award (the Organizing Committee Award). As a pioneer of science-fiction education in China, he introduced his first undergraduate sf course at Beijing Normal University in 1991, and the university has offered a PhD program in science fiction since 2015. In 2017, Professor Wu established the Research Center for Science and Human Imagination at Shenzhen’s Southern University of Science and Technology. In 2020, he launched the program, “Science Fiction: Imagination and Scientific Innovation Training Course for Primary and Secondary School Students.” He recently delivered science-fiction courses to more than 10 million elementary and middle-school students simultaneously through the Xueersi Online platform.