



FALL 2026 BROWN BAG TALK BY YUHENG KO

The Buried Lineage of Informational Writing: From Technical Manuals to Sci-Fi Poetics in *Ghost Blows Out the Light*

Chinese science fiction is often understood as a foreign “import,” prompting scholars to ask what makes it “Chinese.” Existing scholarship has largely approached this question through the intertwined histories of modern Chinese fiction, Western scientific discourse, and imperialism.

This talk traces a different, often marginalized lineage of *xiaoshuo* 小说: informational writings that record anomalies and transmit technical knowledge of occult arts (*fangshu* 方术). I examine the revival of this tradition in the internet novel series *Ghost Blows Out the Light* 鬼吹灯 (2006–2010), widely credited with creating the contemporary “grave-robbing” genre. *Ghost* draws on the ancient category of the “Laws of Shape” (*xingfa* 形法). It encompasses physiognomic readings of animals, objects, and spaces, interpreting physical structures to reveal hidden meaning.

Reading the novel alongside *Horse Physiognomy* from the Mawangdui excavated texts, I argue that this genealogical reconstruction allows us to rethink the relationship between science and fiction in contemporary China. Formally, the *Ghost* series dramatizes the interplay between metaphor and literalization by creatively expanding the technical language of Chinese geomancy (*fengshui*). Diegetically, it straddles modern scientific discourse and indigenous *fangshu*, ultimately contributing to a world-building that substantially evokes Chinese correlative cosmology in a modernized China.



November 12, 1:50-2:45PM
Conference Room, HMNSS 2412



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