

Panel 29
Identities, Landscapes and the Anthropocene

**What is the Unnamable:
From Human Narrators and Nonhuman Narrators to Scale Narrators**

Zheng Jie
Guangdong University of Foreign Studies

As global ecological crises continue to escalate, the concept of scale has emerged as a pivotal focus in literary and cultural studies. James F. English and Ted Underwood assert that the intellectual history of literary studies is essentially a history of competing scales. Since 2010, ecological criticism has undergone a “scale turn,” which highlights the necessity of reimagining humanity through disparate and often incompatible scales, including human and geological dimensions (Dipesh Chakrabarty). In this context, integrating non-human narrators into ecological narratology becomes increasingly significant, particularly when examining their role in the expansion and transformation of scale within literary texts. Previous discussions of nonhuman narrators have primarily focused on categorizing their types and functions (Shang Biwu) or exploring their narrative roles in extending human experiences and projecting nonhuman perspectives (Lars Bernaerts et al.). This paper argues that nonhuman narrators not only create new spatiotemporal domains, thereby providing alternative possibilities for worldmaking, but also establish an array of distinct scales that diverges from the anthropocentric framework. Consequently, I propose the concept of “scale narrators” to differentiate them from anthropomorphized narrators. While both human and nonhuman narrators articulate actions involving humans and objects recognized by human cognition, “scale narrators” serve as narrative agents that critically question, transform, and reconstruct vital quantitative aspects of the anthropocene scale. This includes dimensions of time and space in a physical sense, historical trajectories of life, and the intricate relationships between humans and nonhumans. By foregrounding the role of “scale narrators,” this study seeks to enhance our understanding of ecological relationships and the positioning of humanity within these complex dynamics.

Biography

Zheng Jie is a Professor with the Faculty of English Language and Culture at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, China. She received her PhD from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Her research interests include drama and theatre studies, narrative studies and Ethical Literary Criticism. Email: zhengjie1997@hotmail.com