

**HUMA 2204**

## **JAPANESE SCIENCE FICTION**

Fall 2025

TTh 3:00 pm – 4:20 pm

Room 5403

### **INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

Baryon Tensor Posadas

Room 2355

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Recent scholarly writing on the genre of science fiction has noted the persistence of a colonial gaze in its imaginations of the future, taking such forms as the alien invasion story as a stand-in for race war narratives or journeys to lost worlds as extensions of colonial adventurism. Few studies, however, pay attention to the particular case of Japan, despite the fact that the imagination of “Japan” has frequently served as the focalizer of the fantasies of difference for a wide range of the texts in the genre while at once occupying the historical position of the only non-Western colonial empire. Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) had the consequence of wedding its nascent science fiction writing to a rhetoric of scientific nationalism, linking the genre to its rise as a modern colonial empire that could challenge the dominance of European imperial powers. In turn, this historical development prompted the reconsideration of Asia in the popular imagination of the West, fueling the proliferation of futuristic “yellow peril” narratives in such pre-war pulp fictions as Philip Francis Nowlan’s *Armageddon 2419* (1928) and Robert Heinlein’s *Sixth Column* (1941). This legacy would subsequently see a revival in the “techno-orientalist” images drawn from cyberpunk works such as Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982) and William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984) with the rise of Japan as an economic threat during the 1980s. Given this historical backdrop, it seems only apt to perform a cross-cultural investigation of how the fabric for imagining alternative futures is already enmeshed within imperial discourses and technologies of sovereignty.

This course articulates the significance of this doubled position that Japan occupies vis-à-vis the histories of empire by going beyond the examination of Japanese science fiction texts as particular national case studies read against an otherwise unexamined and predetermined conception of the science fiction genre (often defined in Eurocentric terms). Instead, it refracts the challenge of addressing the politics of futurity through the prism of Japan’s own status as the exemplary science-fictional space in the popular imagination. In other words, the challenge posed by this course is to conceive of science fiction as a critical practice that is in conversation with broader issues of colonial modernity, globalization, and cross-cultural studies by refracting the analysis through the prism of Japan. At its heart is the examination of a range of critical issues arising from the imbrication of science fiction with a range of key topics—the rise of a planetary consciousness in conjunction with imperial utopianism, the politics of the writing of alternate histories, constructions of race and gender in post-humanist discourse, translation and transnational fandom—with an eye towards posing new questions about the politics of futurity woven into the texture of the genre from a properly transnational perspective.

As all the texts will be made available in English translation, no prior Japanese language proficiency is required.

## CLASS FORMAT

To facilitate the active engagement of all in our discussions in class, we will make use of a quasi-seminar format. However, considering the size of our class, a seminar involving everyone at once would be unwieldy. For this reason, what we will do is divide the class into nine groups. Beginning in Week 3 (Sep 16 onwards, on the Tuesday session of each week, we will have a different group of 7-9 students sit in front of the class with the instructor and conduct a discussion, with the rest of the class occupying their usual seats as the audience. During these seminar sessions, the class is conducted as if it were small seminar, with the students engaging in a discussion of the assigned texts. Every week, a different set of students sit in front, with every student doing so once during the semester.

During the first two weeks of class, students are asked to sign up as a seminar participant for one of the sessions in the second part of term (between Weeks 3 and 12). Students may sign up for any session of their choosing, if space remains in the group.

## COURSE EVALUATION

Attendance and participation	20%
Seminar session	10%
Critical reflection x1	10%
Session review x1	10%
Midterm exam	25%
Final exam	25%

### Attendance and Participation

Attendance is mandatory and active participation in the discussions is expected. Please come to the class sessions having already read both the literary texts and the critical materials assigned for that session and be prepared to critically discuss them in class.

### Midterm Exam

For the midterm exam, your task is to produce an analysis of the key issues raised in the class up to that point about the broad challenge of how to approach Japanese science fiction as a field of study in response to one of several possible questions. Using the critical and theoretical readings as your point of departure, you will be asked to discuss key issues surrounding such topics as defining the genre of science fiction, or articulating the relationship between empire and the emergence of the science fiction genre, or the particular historical position that Japan occupies in the history of the science fiction genre.

(October 9)

### Critical Reflections

On the week wherein you are scheduled to participate in the seminar, you are required submit a 1-2 page (single-spaced) response one day before the session in question (due midnight one day before the assigned seminar session). In these critical reflections, students are asked to identify a key passage from one of the assigned readings and articulate its significance in relation to the primary text to be discussed that week. The purpose of these responses is to facilitate our subsequent discussions in class by serving as signposts and frames of reference.

(Due one day before the assigned seminar session)

*No late critical reflections will be accepted.*

### Session Reviews

In addition to the critical reflection, students are also required to submit one 1-2 page (single-spaced) review of a discussion seminar other than the one in which you participate. In these reviews, students will provide a brief summary of the key points raised in the discussion, followed by further commentary and an articulation of their own perspectives on the topics at hand. As with the critical reflections above, these reviews should go beyond mere summaries to instead build upon the preceding discussions by raising further questions and inquiries or by highlighting relevant related critical issues. Students are free to choose which seminar sessions they wish to write their review on.

(Due one week after the seminar session reviewed)  
*No late session reviews will be accepted.*

### **Final Exam**

Similar to the midterm exam, for the final exam, students will be asked to select one question among a range of possible critical issues arising from the interface between science fiction and empire in the context of Japan. Topics of the exam can include such issues as the apocalyptic imagination in Japanese science fiction, the politics of utopian and dystopian imaginaries, technologies of the body, gender, and cyborg feminism, among others.

(November 27)

### **LIST OF FILMS/ANIMATIONS**

Honda Ishihiro, *Atragon*, 1963.  
Higuchi Shinji, *Sinking of Japan*, 2006.  
Yamaga Hiroyuki, *Royal Space Force: Wings of Honneamise*  
Dezaki Satoshi, *They were Eleven*, 1986  
Hosoda Mamoru, *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*, 2006  
Ishiguro Noburu, *Megazone 23*, 1985  
Oshii Mamoru, *Ghost in the Shell*, 1995.  
Makihara Ryōtarō, *Empire of Corpses*, 2015.  
Michael Arias, *Harmony*, 2015

All other materials referenced below will be made available on the course website.

## **SCHEDULE**

### **PART 1: EMERGENCE OF SCIENCE FICTION**

#### **Week 1            Introduction**

Sep 2            Orientation

Sep 4            Suvin, Darko. "Estrangement and Cognition." James E. Gunn and Matthew Candelaria, ed. *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction*. Scarecrow Press, 2005. 23-35.

Westfahl, Gary. "The True History of Science Fiction." *Mechanics of Wonder: The Creation of the Idea of Science Fiction*. Liverpool University Press, 1999. 1-36.

Rieder, John. "On Defining Science Fiction, or Not: Genre Theory, SF, and History." *Science Fictions and the Mass Cultural Genre System*. Wesleyan University Press, 2017. 13-31.

## **Week 2            SF, Nation, and Empire**

- Sep 9            Milner, Andrew. "Where was Science Fiction?" *Locating Science Fiction*. Liverpool University Press. 2012. 155-177.
- Rieder, John. "Introduction: The Colonial Gaze and the Frame of Science Fiction." *Colonialism and the emergence of science fiction*. Wesleyan University Press, 2008. 1-33.
- Sep 11            Sohn, Stephen Hong. "Introduction: Alien/Asian: Imagining the Racialized Future." *MELUS* 33, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 5-22.
- Mizuno, Hiromi. "The Mobilization of Wonder." *Science for the Empire: Scientific Nationalism in Modern Japan*. Stanford University Press, 2009. 143-172.

## **PART 2: POST-WAR JAPANESE SCIENCE FICTION FROM IMPERIALISM TO EMPIRE**

### **Week 3            Prewar/Postwar/Future War**

- Sep 16            Discuss: *Atragon*
- Schnellbacher, Thomas. "Has the Empire Sunk Yet? The Pacific in Japanese Science Fiction." *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams. Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. 27-46.
- Sep 18            Posadas, Baryon Tensor. "Japanese Science Fiction." In Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, and Sheryl Vint, eds. *The New Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 2024. 109-117.

### **Week 4            Aesthetics of Apocalypse**

- Sep 23            Discuss: *The Sinking of Japan*
- Langer, Jessica. "Three versions of Komatsu Sakyō's *Nihon chinbotsu* (Japan Sinks)." *Science Fiction Film and Television* 2, no. 1 (2009): 45-57.
- Sep 25            Kakoudaki, Despina. "Spectacles of History: Race Relations, Melodrama, and the Science Fiction/disaster Film." *Camera Obscura*, September 2002, 108-153.

### **Week 5            Other Histories**

- Sep 30            Discuss: *Royal Space Force: Wings of Honneamise*
- Lolli, D. The Film through the Archive and the Archive through the Film: History,

Technology and Progress in *Royal Space Force: The Wings of Honnêamise*. In M. Ishida, & J. Y. Kim (Eds.), *Archiving Movements: Short Essays on Materials of Anime and Visual Media* (2019). Niigata University. 17-24.

Oct 2 Csicsery-Ronay, Istvan. "Science Fiction and Empire." *Science Fiction Studies* 30, no. 2 (July 1, 2003): 231-45.

**Week 6 Midterm Week**

Oct 7 NO CLASS

Oct 9 Midterm exam

**PART 3: CRITICAL UTOPIAS AND DYSTOPIAS**

**Week 7 Feminist Utopias, Queer Possibilities**

Oct 14 Discuss: *They were Eleven*

Sato Kumiko. "Science Fiction and *Shōjo Manga*: Androgyny Revisited" in "Culture of Desire and Technology: Postwar Literatures of Science Fiction in the United States and Japan." PhD Dissertation. Penn State University. 114-153.

Oct 16 Hollinger, Veronica. "(Re)Reading Queerly: Science Fiction, Feminism, and the Defamiliarization of Gender." *Science Fiction Studies* 26, no. 1 (1999): 23-40.

**Week 8 After the Future**

Oct 21 Discuss: *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*

Lee, Sung-Ae. "Adaptations of Time Travel Narratives in Japanese Multimedia: Nurturing Eudaimonia across Time and Space." *International Research in Children's Literature* 7, no. 2 (November 25, 2014): 136-51.

Oct 23 Burling, William J. "Reading Time: The Ideology of Time Travel in Science Fiction." *KronoScope* 6, no. 1 (April 2006): 5-30.

**Week 9 Techno-orientalism**

Oct 28 Discuss: *Megazone 23*

Moylan, Thomas. "The Critical Dystopia." *Scraps of The Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 2000. 183-202.

Oct 30 Canavan, Gerry. "Capital as Artificial Intelligence." *Journal of American Studies* 49, no. 4 (November 2015): 685-709.

## PART 4: TECHNOLOGIES OF THE BODY

### Week 10      Gendered Bodies

Nov 4            Discuss: *Ghost in the Shell*

Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. First Thus edition. New York: Routledge, 1990: 149-182.

Nov 6            Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. "Orienting the Future." *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics*. MIT Press, 2006. 171-246.

### Week 12      Discuss: *Harmony*

Nov 11           Thacker, Eugene. "Data Made Flesh: Biotechnology and the Discourse of the Posthuman." *Cultural Critique* 53, no. 1 (2003): 72-97.'

Nov 13           Savaedi, Fatemeh & Alavi Nia, Maryam (2021). me : Algorithmic Governmentality and the Notion of Subjectivity in Project Itoh's Harmony. *Journal of Science Fiction and Philosophy* 4:1-19.

### Week 11      From Cyborg to Zombie

Nov 18           Discuss: *Empire of Corpses*

Lauro, Sarah Juliet and Embry, Karen. "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism." Ed. Lauro, Sarah Juliet. *Zombie Theory: A Reader*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017. 395-412.

Nov 20           Posadas, Baryon Tensor. "Animated Bodies: Project Itoh and the Afterlives of Techno-orientalism." David Roh, Betsy Huang, Greta A. Niu, Christopher Fan, eds. *Techno-Orientalism 2.0: New Intersections and Interventions*. Rutgers University Press, 2025.

### Week 13      Conclusion

Nov 25           Jameson, Fredric. "Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future?." *Science Fiction Studies* 9, no. 2 (July 1, 1982): 147-58.

Nov 27           FINAL EXAM

## COURSE POLICIES

### Grading Policy

In this course, numeric percentile grades will be converted to letter grades using the following standard:

A+	97-100	Excellent Performance
A	93-96	
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	Good Performance
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	Satisfactory Performance
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D	60-69	Marginal Pass
F	0-59	Fail

### **Academic Integrity**

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology is a community designed for scholarship - for teaching, learning, and research. Academic integrity and honesty are critical values in upholding HKUST's reputation as a community of scholars and its claim to the "intellectual property" created by staff and students. All students who join HKUST are therefore committed to an [Academic Honor Code](#).

### **Course AI Policy**

The use of generative AI tools is not permitted in this course.

### **Communication and Feedback**

Under normal circumstances, assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission. Students who have further questions about the feedback including marks should consult the instructor within five working days after the feedback is received.

### **Special Educational Needs**

The University takes a proactive role in ensuring and cultivating a positive learning environment for students, where equal opportunities in academic and non-academic pursuits for each student are guaranteed.

The SEN Support under the Counseling and Wellness Center provides a wide range of support services and resources to ensure that all students have equality of opportunity, that they benefit equally from university life, and to cultivate a campus culture of inclusion.

If a student is diagnosed or suspects his/her difficulties are related to any type of SEN, he or she is strongly advised to self-identify and provide recent documentation of his or her SEN to SEN Support. Reasonable accommodations or adjustments will be worked out amongst student, instructor(s) and SEN Support. If SEN Support is not aware of a student's needs, please contact [sen@ust.hk](mailto:sen@ust.hk) to arrange a confidential discussion. All information is handled in the strictest confidence.