

Keio University Syllabus and Timetable

JAPANESE SCI-FI

Subtitle	From Origins to Current Trends Across Cultures & Media
Lecturer(s)	MUELLER, NICOLE M.
Credit(s)	2
Academic Year/Semester	2025 Spring (2nd Half)
Day/Period	Mon.1/Wed.1
Campus	Mita
Classroom	435
Registration Number	45234
Faculty/Graduate School	INTERNATIONAL CENTER
Year Level	2, 3, 4
Grade Type	S, A, B, C, D
K-Number	CIN-CO-00113-2-85
	<div>▼ Detail</div>

Course Contents/Objectives/Teaching Method/Intended Learning Outcome

In this class, we will explore the world of Japanese Science Fiction mainly from a literary point of view, but also include popcultural media such as anime and manga which oftentimes employ the same narratives and imaginaries and also have significantly contributed to Japanese Sci-Fi’s world renown. Tracing back the origins of Japanese Sci-Fi to ancient myths and early 20th century pioneers, we will then delve into the rich Sci-Fi scene that developed after the Postwar era, featuring Japan’s 'three greatest SciFi writers' and their longlasting impact. At the same time, we will focus on groundbreaking Sci-Fi works from Japanese popculture, contrast popular formats such as light novels and web novels with Sci-Fi elements in canonized authors’ works, and explore the multifaceted relationship between Japanese Sci-Fi and technological innovation. Moreover, we will take a look into Western sources of inspirations that have impacted Japanese Sci-Fi and critically examine Western, particularly cyberpunk stereotypes of Japan as a futuristic nation.

The main objectives of this class therefore are:

- Providing students with a comprehensive historical overview of the Japanese Sci-Fi scene, enabling them to identify influential narratives and imaginaries and situate them in a broader cultural context
- Providing insight into utopian and dystopian Sci-Fi imaginations, including their real-life impact
- Enabling students to actively and critically engage with literary and/or popcultural works through discussions, group work, oral presentations, and a written report submitted by the end of the term (this includes reading and discussing scholarly literature on the respective subject)

Active Learning Methods ⓘ [Description](#)

Presentations
Discussions, Debates
Group work

Preparatory Study

Reading the course material provided via the Keio University website in advance (one to two hours over the weekend for the two sessions in the following week); preparation of one presentation (including Powerpoint slides, total preparation time 4 to 5 hours) per semester.

Course Plan

Lesson 1

Introduction: What is Sci-Fi?
► Genre Definitions, common themes and tropes, introduction on the concepts of narratives and imaginaries
► Explanation of Course Plan, Thematic Focus, Evaluation Standards, etc.

Lesson 2

Origins of Japanese Sci-Fi: From Ancient Myth to Oshikawa Shunro and Unno Juza

Lesson 3

Abe Kōbō's 'Inter Ice Age 4' (1959) or the first Japanese Sci-Fi Novel translated into English ► Presentation topics: Tezuka Osamu's 'Astroboy' (1952-1968)

Lesson 4

The three Godfathers, pt. I: Hoshi Shin'ichi and Artificial Intelligence
► Presentation Topics: Kaijū and Tokusatsu Movies, Ultraman (1966-present)

Lesson 5

The three Godfathers, pt. II: Komatsu Sakyō, the Ōsaka Expo 1970, and Netflix
► Presentation Topics: The Anime Adaptation 'Nihon Chinbotsu 2020' (2020)

Lesson 6

The three Godfathers, pt. III: Tsutsui Yasutaka's 'The Girl Who Leapt Through Time' (1967) and 'Paprika' (1993)
► Presentation Topics: Anime Adaptation's of Tsutsui's Novels

Lesson 7

Japanese Sci-Fi Across Media
► Presentation Topics: 'Neon Genesis Evangelion' (1995-1996), 'Nauscaä' (1984), 'Urusei Yatsura 2: Beautiful Dreamer' (1984), Mecha Anime, etc. etc.

Lesson 8

Japanese Sci-Fi Across Cultures: From 'Neuromancer' to 'Ghost in the Shell' - and back
► Presentation Topics: Oshii Mamoru's 'Ghost in the Shell' (1995), Disney's 'Big Hero 6' (2014), 'Stray' (2022)

Lesson 9

Murakami Haruki's 'Kafka on the Shore' 2002: Between Sci-Fi and Surrealism
► Presentation Topics: Nihei Tsutomu's 'BLAME!' (1997-2003) and/or its Netflix Adaptation

Lesson 10

Imagining a New Social Order: Yoshinaga Fumi's 'Ōoku' (2004 - 2020)
► Presentation Topics: Gender in Sci-Fi, see for example Saitō Tamaki's 'Beautiful Fighting Girl' (2000)

Lesson 11

Project Itoh's Dystopias: 'Genocidal Organ' (2007) and 'Harmony' (2008)
► Presentation Topics: Sci-Fi-related Games, such as 'Final Fantasy' as an example for Dieselpunk

Lesson 12

Sci-Fi (only) for the Masses? Light Novels, Novelizations, Web Novels
► Presentation Topics: Sci-Fi-related Light Novel or Web Novel of your choosing

Lesson 13

Sci-Fi and Tech Imaginaries: The Case of 'Dennō Coil' (2007) and Augmented Reality
► Presentation Topics: Isekai Manga or Anime

Lesson 14

Fujii Taiyō: From 'Gene Mapper' (2012) to Sci-Fi Prototyping for Sony
► Presentation Topics: Makoto Shinkai's 'Kimi no na' (2016) or 'Tenki no Ko' (2019)

Other

Makeup Class

Method of Evaluation

- Attendance/Participation: 50 percent of final grade (attendance plus at least one meaningful contribution to the discussion per session)
- Short Oral Presentation on a given topic (10 minutes featuring powerpoint slides and including 10 minutes of Q&A afterwards, 1 presentation per student/semester): 25 percent of final grade
- Short Report on given topic (presentation topic), 3 to 5 pages, 2500 words maximum: 25 percent of final grade

Textbooks

none

Reference Books

PDF files of the relevant texts (excerpts from literary texts and related secondary literature) will be provided in advance via the Keio University website for all registered attendees. All texts will be discussed on the basis of their English translations, and the language of discussion will be English. However, native speakers of Japanese are encouraged to add to the discussion based on their knowledge of the respective Japanese source text.

Lecturer's Comments to Students

The primary objective of this course is to provide attendees with an overview of Japanese Sci-Fi in a historical perspective and to enable them to engage actively/critically with works of fiction. During the first half of each session I will present a summary and invite discussion on the respective topic, whereas during the latter half, two students will each do a 10 minute oral presentation. After each presentation, we will do a 10 minute Q&A (with the respective speaker being the expert on the subject) and discussion. You can freely chose the subject of your presentation as long as it meets the following conditions: It should be on a Sci-Fi-related fictional work (either literature, film, game, anime, or manga is fine), roughly fit into the historic scope of the respective session (so not everyone will be able to present on very recent subjects), refer to scholarly literature, and include an analysis not only on the themes, but also on literary or aesthetic, i.e. formal features. I have already included a few (by no means exhaustive) suggestions for presentation topics in the Course Plan and will explain further during the first session. I will provide feedback on the presentations and reports via email as well as in person (via zoom appointment) if you have further questions.

Question/Comments

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