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| The science-fiction films of postwar Japan have served as both an innocuous escape from reality and a commentary on the concerns of contemporary Japanese society: the threat of nuclear annihilation, environmental degradation, and Japan’s place in the world. The post-war rise of Science Fiction in Japan owes a great deal to special-effects master Tsuburaya Eiji. Tsuburaya began in the film industry in 1919, and developed a number of techniques in film processing, cinematography, costuming, and scale-models, all of which he used for the 1954 blockbuster from Toho Studios, *Gojira* (*Godzilla,* 1954*).* Along with a number of Godzilla sequels, Tsuburaya brought to life the stars of many other *kaijū eiga (*or, monster films) including Rodan (in *Sora no daikaiju Radon* [*Rodan! The Flying Monster!,* 1956]), Mothra (in *Mosura* [*Mothra,* 1961]), and Ghidorah (in *Sandaikaiju: Chikyu saidai no kessen* [*Three Giant Monsters: The Greatest Battle on Earth,* 1964]). Daiei, Nikkatsu, Shochiku, and Toei all produced their own *kaijū* films, with Daiei’s Gamera being perhaps the most famous character. Many of Tsuburaya’s Toho’s monster films were produced with an eye toward release in the American market, as were his sci-fi TV shows *Urutora Q* (*Ultra Q,* 1966), *Urutoraman* (*Ultraman,* 1966–67), and *Urutora sebun* (*Ultra Seven,* 1967–68). These influenced subsequent generations of live-action shows, including *Kamen raidaa* (*Kamen Rider,* 1971–73) and the *Suupaa sentai* series (*Power Rangers,* 1975–present). The destruction of Japan, a traumatic reiteration of the aftermath of World War II, continues to haunt the Japanese science-fiction film; in *Uchūjin Tokyo ni arawaru* (*Warning from Space,* 1956), aliens warn of a planet on a collision course with Earth, while in *Nihon chinbotsu* (*Japan Sinks,* 1973; remake 2006) Japan finds itself dependent on the rest of the world when the homeland sinks into the Japan Trench (a parody, *Nihon igai zenbu chinbotsu* [*Everything Other than Japan Sinks,* 2006], put Japan in the driver’s seat). In recent decades, science-fiction has been a dominant genre in Japanese anime; key works include the TV serials *Tetsuwan Atomu* (*Astro Boy, Tezuka Osamu* 1963–66) and *Mahha GoGoGo* (*Speed Racer,* 1967–68), *Uchu senkan Yamato* (*Space Battleship Yamato,* 1974), the *Gandamu* series franchise (*Gundam,* 1979–present), Otomo Katsuhiro’s *Akira* (1988), Oshii Mamoru’s *Kokaku kidotai* (*Ghost in the Shell,* 1995), the series *Shin seiki Evangerion* (*Neon Genesis Evangelion,* 1996–97), and Otomo’s steampunk effort, *Suchiimubooi* (*Steamboy,* 2004). |
| Further reading:  (Ragone) |