Chapter 1:

Imagining national identity

The power and efficacy of the nation as a foundation for political, social and cultural identity has been an enduring concern of scholars throughout the twentieth century.¹ The nation’s centrality to identity formation has been accepted, but accounting for the ways in which its discursive borders are conceived and articulated remains uncertain. In this chapter I will engage some of the primary ways in which nation formation, and the nation’s endurance as a frame for identity, has been considered. In many ways the overarching theories about identity formation are prone to abstraction, and often disguise the myriad ways in which identity is determined and contested. The question of who speaks for the nation is a concern that can only really be deciphered by turning to the particular temporal and spatial sites of its enunciation. The intellectual debates of the 1950s and 60s in Japan over autonomy and modernity provide us with one such intellectual and political arena through which to consider the competing ideas that underpin the efficacy and endurance of the nation in Japan.² The debates reveal that the continuing resonance of the nation as a basis for identity is founded not simply on the power or hegemony of the political elite but on the stories and ideals exposed in the nation’s various imaginings.


² In his book Dreams of Difference Kevin Doak turns to the notion of ‘ethnic nationalism’ as a basis for identity formation in Japan divorced from ‘official nationalism.’ It highlights the competing ways in which the nation is imagined as the basis of identity. See Kevin Doak, Dreams of Difference: The Japan Romantic School and the Crisis of Modernity, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1994, pp. xi-x1ii.
In this chapter I will explore the space that provocative intellectual and literary critic Yoshimoto Takaaki (1924-) and other intellectuals of the postwar period opened up for the formation and articulation of national identity. The ideas emanating from the leftist intellectual debates during this period reveal a fervent desire to shape the foundations of postwar national identity and direct the character of political renewal. In the 1950s and 1960s the work of Maruyama Masao, Takeuchi Yoshimi, Tsurumi Shunsuke, Oda Makoto and Yoshimoto Takaaki exemplified the centrality of modernity and autonomy to conceptions of the postwar national imaginary. The nation emerged as a discursive site in which visions of pluralism, agency, activism and resistance were brought to life.

**Who speaks for the nation?**

Histories of the 20th century are indelibly inscribed with the imprint of the nation and its imaginings. In Japan, the defense of nation and sovereignty led millions to their death in war; the nation’s boundaries have framed political, social and cultural institutions; and national histories have enveloped personal and communal memories. While the nation’s future longevity cannot be assured its centrality to the twentieth century is in little doubt.

A number of scholars have examined the continuing resonance of the nation’s political, social and cultural institutions and the way that its borders shape community and identity. They have turned to the institutions of the state in order to account for the power encased in its discursive borders. Scholars such as Weber, Hobsbawm, Gellner, and Breuilly have dislodged the nation from its

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3. The humanist and ‘internationalist’ intellectuals (otherwise known as ‘progressive’) referred to people such as Tsurumi Shunsuke, Maruyama Masao, Takeuchi Yoshimi, Fujita Shōzō, Kuno Osamu and Hashikawa Bunsō. They were the prominent liberal intellectuals of the period. Yoshimoto Takaaki, ‘Nihon no nashonarizumu,’ in Yoshimoto Takaaki (ed.), *Nashonarizumu*, Gendai Nihon Shisō Taikei, 5, Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo, 1964, pp. 7-55.

‘objective,’ essentialist foundations, and highlighted the contingency of its political construction.\(^5\) Challenging the representation of the nation as a pre-modern or ‘natural’ basis for identity, these scholars have highlighted the elemental role of political leaders in fashioning and in some cases imposing the conceptual and geographic boundaries of the nation. They have illustrated the ways in which industrialization, technological development, the centralization of power, and imperialism, have facilitated the formulation and dissemination of shared values, ethnic homogeneity and unbroken kinship lines, across a clearly delineated geographic terrain.

Nationalism has been deemed a crucial factor in this process. Theorists have shown that by making recourse to a shared history, a clear and traceable genealogy for the nation and its people, and a concurrent feeling of solidarity, political leaders have used nationalism in order to justify their authority, define and often extend the nation’s borders, and nurture a sense of identity in the territory over which they claim sovereignty. Nationalism operates as a tool through which a national identity is transmitted across time and space colonizing both the past and the future with identities that are in fact specific to the period in which they manifest themselves. Anthony Giddens goes so far as to suggest that through the ‘processes of allocation, delimitation, demarcation and administration’ it is the institutions of the modern state that underpin the continuing existence of the nation and its centrality to international politics (my emphasis).\(^6\)

Eric Hobsbawm accounts for the nation’s resilience as a basis for identity by highlighting the state’s ‘invention of tradition.’ Hobsbawm notes that in spite of recourse to the ‘remotest antiquity’ and ‘natural human communities’ that


pervades representations of the nation, it is an identity established and sustained by the ‘invention of tradition.’ The notion of ‘invented traditions’ refers to the way in which an ideological agenda is artificially linked to the past, and to the uses of ‘tradition’ within contemporary political discourse. Hobsbawm concurs with modernists such as Ernest Gellner stating that ‘nations as a natural god-given way of classifying men, as an inherent … political destiny are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures.’ In this sense nationalism operates like a photograph or museum piece - capturing people, places and ideas at a fixed moment and displaying them as evidence of an enduring culture and identity. The ability of leaders to control the past, to write history and invent tradition, greatly enhances the efficacy of the nation as a basis for identity.

One of the limitations of the term ‘invention’ is that it assumes a choice between the invention and authenticity of tradition and identity; it suggests that the nation threatens truth and that a genuine or real tradition exists and can be identified by an objective historian. Hobsbawm writes: ‘I cannot but add that no serious historian of nations and nationalism can be a committed political nationalist … nationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not so. As Renan said: “Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation.”’ In more recent discussion on the nation scholars have embraced the notion of ‘imagined communities’ and the ‘national phantasm’ in order to expose the myths that justify political authority, and account for the nation’s endurance as

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7 The ‘invention of tradition’ refers to more than simply nation formation though this is where it has often been employed. See Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (eds.), The Invention of Tradition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984.


9 Eric Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism, 12; Eric Hobsbawm, The Invention of Tradition.
a basis for identity formation and community. Benedict Anderson uses the term ‘imagined community’ thereby disavowing the instrumental connotations in the term ‘invention’ and allowing for a more complex and multifaceted understanding of national identity.

The notion of ‘imagined political communities’ goes some of the way to explain the conceptual strength of the nation in Japan. The ‘imagination’ of national identity has been inextricably linked to the process of modernity; its conceptual and geographic boundaries have been forged through the centralization of political institutions, technological developments, industrialization, and improved communications. Amino Yoshihiko indicates that prior to the nineteenth century the way in which people were conscious of the country name ‘Japan’ or their consciousness of a Japanese state was far from uniform. In fact even among officials the area that the name ‘Japan’ referred to was a limited area that did not extend over present day Japan. Likewise, Tessa Morris-Suzuki highlights the way in which the borders of Japan and the relationship between the ‘frontiers’ and the ‘centre’ were reconceptualized at this time and a diverse range of dialects, ideas and beliefs were enclosed within the idea of the new nation. In Japanese the term kokka (state) brings together the characters for family (ie) and nation (kuni); the state is linguistically depicted as the heir of the nation, the rightful sovereign. This

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linguistic construction of nation-state, *kokka*, highlights the instrumental nature of the state’s claim to sovereignty, its political manipulation of both nation and family. The government’s dissemination of information and education across its territorial domain (modernity) were just two of the means through which language, knowledge and culture came to be correlated with the nation.14

This process was aided by the strategic use of ‘tradition’ within the political discourse of the new leaders.15 After the Meiji Restoration of 1868 the new Meiji oligarchs justified their political authority and consolidated the conceptual and physical boundaries of their terrain through the national symbol of the Emperor. Under the ideological construct of *tennō-sei* (Emperor System) the Emperor’s theoretically absolute powers were to be exercised in his name by appointed officials rather than a disparate and geographically divided group of feudal retainers or hereditary nobles. While not being ‘restored’ to political power his position was instituted as a central source of legitimacy for the Meiji oligarchs, providing the ‘traditional’ legitimacy for their centralization of power and institutional reform. In the Meiji Constitution, promulgated in 1889, the centrality of the Emperor to the nation and state is made clear; the Emperor comes before the people not principally as ruler, but as the symbol of imperial lineage, stretching back beyond the modern nation-state to the time of the world’s creation. Thus the radical, or even revolutionary, changes that were occurring in the political arena occurred under the guise of continuity and tradition.16

The efficacy of the nation as a basis for communal identity in Japan has been facilitated by the power contained within its discursive borders. Both tradition and modernity were understood within the ideal of consolidating the nation’s

political strength and identity; nation formation denoted catching up with the West and retaining sovereignty from the colonial powers. The Meiji oligarchs were able to define modernity in such a way that helped to make their position synonymous with the strength of the nation and which also necessitated their existence as the facilitators of progress.

Turning to the postwar period in Japan Marilyn Ivy uses Anderson’s notion of ‘imagined communities’ as a point of departure in order to account for the endurance of the nation as a basis for identity, and decipher the character of its imagination: the meanings attributed to tradition, modernity and culture after they are inscribed within the nation. Ivy draws attention to the ‘dominant discourses’ that resurrect tradition and cultural essence as a basis for national identity - the ‘neo-nativist phantasm – that emerged in the fixed temporal and spatial location of 1970s Japan.’ 17 As Ivy’s study illustrates, nostalgic references to ancient traditions and spiritual essence pervade contemporary critiques of national identity and operate to delineate the sites of difference between the ‘rational West’ and the ‘spiritual East.’ Ivy writes:

The hybrid realities of Japan today are contained within the dominant discourses on cultural purity and non-difference, and in nostalgic appeals to pre-modernity: what makes the Japanese so different from everyone else makes them identical to each other, what threatens that self sameness is often marked temporally as the intrusively modern, spatially as the foreign.18

Within these conceptions of identity the nation is left untouched by the vicissitudes of modernity (the everyday) and unhindered by the radical changes that it ushers in. Modernity, as a theoretical concern, is left hovering like the thick smog of a Tokyo summer, settling over the countryside (the nation) but not disrupting the daily life of its inhabitants - modernity did not disrupt the

17 Marilyn Ivy, Discourses of the Vanishing.
18 Marilyn Ivy, Discourses of the Vanishing, 9.
way in which Japan symbolically represented itself through national identity.\(^\text{19}\) In the words of Stephen Vlastos ‘Japanese society has been saturated with customs, values, and social relationships that organically link present generations of Japanese to past generations.’ \(^\text{20}\) The ‘discourse of the vanishing,’ the recourse to tradition in the face of its loss, highlights one of the ways in which the nation and its symbolic representation is determined, transmitted and consolidated through the strategic use of tradition, modernity, culture and history.

These studies have alerted us to the nation’s symbolic power and the political myths and ideals that are contained within its discursive formation. By turning to the particular of Japan in the 1970s Ivy skillfully critiques the ‘dominant discourses’ that underpin identity, and thereby partially accounts for the nation’s endurance in the twentieth century. Ivy shows the ways in which the nation inscribes understandings of Japan’s past, present and future.

In the 1950s and 1960s in Japan asking: Who speaks for the nation? reveals yet another basis for the nation’s endurance as a frame for community and identity. In postwar Japan, a period sometimes seen as devoid of national identity,\(^\text{21}\) a radically different conception of the nation emerged that was framed outside the state and its nostalgic appeals to tradition. Following the devastation of war and defeat, political activists and intellectuals on all sides of politics embraced the project of reconstruction and nation building. The institutions and conceptual tools that underpin national identity – the state, the


people, modernity and history – became the subject of intense debate and new
sites for the articulation of national identity emerged. While there were a
myriad competing visions and ideas about the future shape of the national
imaginary they invariably revolved around new conceptions of modernity and
autonomy that dislocated the centrality of the state to political practice and the
articulation of a national identity. Modernity and autonomy provided the
conceptual tools through which to re-inscribe the discursive space of the
postwar nation.

The formation of national identity in Japan has been based not just upon the
power of political leaders and their nostalgic recourse to ancient traditions, but
also upon the myriad competing voices vying to frame the postwar nation’s
discursive imagination. Espousing a position that seems, on the surface,
paradoxical, many looked towards the idea of a national community as the
frame of reference for notions of freedom and opportunity; political ideals
were both enclosed and exposed in the nation’s articulation.

**Society, state, modernity and the nation in postwar Japan**

In the aftermath of the Pacific War we find a number of contradictory ideas
and beliefs coalescing within intellectual and popular debates in Japan.
Informed by Marxism, and ‘internationalism’ intellectuals in postwar Japan,
remorseful of their collaboration with fascism and fearful of its reemergence
seemed to eschew all positive references to nationalism. Japanese aggression
in the Pacific War and the nationalism that underpinned the war effort led
many observers to view the articulation of a national identity with suspicion.
Expressions of nationalism, and visions of a national polity, had provided the
conceptual building blocks for Japanese fascism, thus postwar expressions of
nationalism were anxiously read in terms of authoritarianism and re-

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42; Yoshida Masatoshi, ‘Kindai teki kokkashugi no tōjō – Etō Jun ron,’ *Sengo Shisō ron*,
militarisation. Paradoxically this antipathy towards nationalism, a nationalism characterized by statism (kokkashugi) and political nationalism (kokuminshugi), brought the identity of the nation and its postwar imagining to the centre of intellectual debate.

One of the key points of contention in intellectual circles during the 1950s was the character and role of the state in determining the nature of postwar reconstruction, and the relationship between the state and society. In a climate of both hope for the future and personal regret, intellectuals and activists reflected upon the issues of complicity in war and personal responsibility and began to question the reason for their acquiescence in the ideological agenda of the state during the war. Reeling from this disastrous experience, intellectuals did more than simply criticize the ideological agenda of the government and its wartime forays into fascism; they attempted to renegotiate the boundaries of the state and redefine its relationship to the people.

Modernity was a key issue within these debates. Modernity generally refers to the process of economic development, capitalist industrialization, urbanization, developments in science and technology, and associated changes in identity and subjectivity. But as a mode of experience modernity is not reducible to the empirical domain. It is not a temporally determined state that countries strive towards. With reference to Japan Harry Harootunian employs the notion of ‘coeval modernity’ denoting the various interpretations and experiences of the modern trajectory, while also challenging the notions of a romanticized ‘alternative modernity.’ ‘What coeval suggests,’ writes Harootunian, ‘is contemporaneity yet the possibility of difference.’ Even as a conceptual marker modernity is determined differently by the range of individuals, groups

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22 Sebastian Conrad considers the impact of this perception upon historiography. ‘During the war,’ he writes, ‘many historians had stressed the unique character of history and had presented Japan as the geographical centre of its own hegemony. Now, after 1945, this Nipponcentric view was abandoned, and instead the plea for a universal and world-historical perspective was ubiquitous.’ Sebastian Conrad, ‘What time is Japan? Problems of comparative (intercultural) historiography,’ History and Theory, Vol. 38, No. 1, February 1999, 68.
and communities that bring it meaning. Modernity has been associated with developments in health, literacy and democracy, or conversely with imperialism, territorial expansion and capitalist colonization. The debates of the 1950s and 1960s reveal the competing understandings of modernity and its conceptualisation within the frame of Japan’s postwar identity.

As I noted in the Introduction, the apparent universality of Marxist theory and the concurrent promises of democratic reform ensured the centrality of Marxism to conceptions of modernity and autonomy. The commitment of many intellectuals to radical and progressive politics was entangled in what Maruyama Masao later called a ‘community of remorse.’ Marxism provided a conceptual tool through which to transcend the nation-state and locate Japan within the modern trajectory, an apparent escape hatch from Japan’s ‘feudal past.’ In this regard Marxist theory provided the *lingua franca* for intellectual debate and rapidly established itself as the academic orthodoxy in many university economics departments.

Marx’s notion of historical materialism and the attendant ideas on class were among the primary concerns within postwar debates. *Historical materialism* contends that class conflict and the basic trajectory of human history is accounted for by the advance of productive forces. These productive forces included not just the means of production (tools and machines etc) but also labour power – the skills, knowledge, experience and other human faculties.

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used in work. Historical materialism designated a view of the course of history that could be accounted for by the economic development of society, in the changes in the mode of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and in the struggle of these classes against one another. The mode of production of material life thereby conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general.\textsuperscript{26}

Both pre- and postwar Marxists grappled with this process and its interpretation in the Japanese context.\textsuperscript{27} Japan could certainly be considered within the framework of historical materialism but the question remained as to the stage of Japan’s evolutionary development, the maturity of its class-consciousness, and the character of Japan’s modernity. As in the 1920s and 1930s, the communists of the postwar years were broadly divided on this question between the Kōza and Rōnō schools.\textsuperscript{28} The schools differed over interpretations of Japanese history, the stage of Japan’s development on the timeline of historical materialism, and the style of activism that was required in Japan.

The split that emerged between the two schools over the issues of development, the state and capitalism in the postwar period is illuminating. First, the controversy directs us towards the significance placed upon figuring a modern postwar Japan within intellectual debates, of situating Japan in relation to international evolutionary trends. Second, the interpretations of Marxism and the re-framing of communist ideas in the context of postwar Japan highlights


\textsuperscript{28} The Kōza (feudalist) school pointed to the absolutist nature of the Japanese State, which had not been reformed in line with those of Western capitalist countries. In this reading Japan had to undergo a bourgeois revolution before a capitalist one could be initiated. According to the Rōnō (workers and peasants) school, the Meiji Restoration was basically a bourgeois revolution against absolutism, after which capitalist rather than feudal exploitation had been
the national concerns that underpinned intellectual inquiry. Intellectuals seemed to oscillate between the inevitability inherent in the theory of historical materialism and the need to foster autonomous political activism. With this in mind many intellectuals turned towards the humanism inherent in Marx’s earlier writings and the ideas about ‘civil society’ emanating from thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci in order to play down the inevitability of revolution and facilitate national political and social reform.\textsuperscript{29}

Japan was awash with competing interpretations of Marxism and the questioning of the inevitability that underpinned historical materialism. Emanating from the intellectual debates were not only notions of a social democracy pitted against capitalist democracy, but also interpretations of communist theory itself that touched upon the notion of autonomy. ‘The present stage of the democratic revolution is extremely odd,’ wrote member of the Rōnō faction, Yamakawa Hitoshi, ‘political authority has slipped from the hands of the ruling class, but it hangs suspended in midair because the new forces which must come to grips with it have yet to make their appearance.’\textsuperscript{30} This statement reveals that Yamakawa was keen to employ Marxist ideas but uncertain about the relationship between the Japanese people and the category of class.

Likewise people such as Umemoto Katsumi introduced the notion of subjectivity (shutaisei) into the law of historical materialism and substantially

\begin{footnotes}
\item[29] Gramsci reframed the Marxist notions of ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ by drawing attention to the political role of culture and ideology. Gramsci argues that all human beings have rational or intellectual capabilities though at a particular historical moment only some have an intellectual function in society. It is in this context that Gramsci redefines the state as a coercive force through which political society was able to garner the consent of civil society. Civil society is prone to the hegemonic power of the state. Antonio Gramsci, \textit{Selections from the Prison Notebooks}, Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds.), Lawrence and Wishart, New York, 1971, 263.
\end{footnotes}
rethought the existence of class as a direct corollary of productive forces. While he continued to frame his analysis within Marxist terminology, and a closed metahistorical system, Umemoto believed that Marxism was a ‘worldview’ rather than a science. He argued that revolution could not occur without a conscious decision and that the social change inherent in historical materialism could not disguise the existential concerns of human will. The work of Umemoto and Yamakawa points us to the notion of autonomy that was filtering through communist intellectual inquiry. They draw attention to ways in which the state was being marginalised within these debates and the importance of nurturing spheres of activism that could dislocate the political and intellectual hegemony of the state. As I will elucidate below, for intellectuals who were not beholden to the dictates of the Marxist theory and a communist party line this stress upon autonomy was even more pronounced.

As Rikki Kersten notes, intellectuals took it upon themselves to define the agenda of the postwar period and bring their visions of modernity and autonomy to fruition. Prominent thinkers, Maruyama Masao, Takeuchi Yoshimi, Tsurumi Shunsuke, Oda Makoto and Yoshimoto Takaaki, held onto the belief that a national imaginary could be articulated outside the auspices of government policy in 1960s Japan. Through the work of these activists and intellectuals I will discuss the ways in which memories of war, modernity, society and nation, coalesced in a sense of national identity founded upon participation, activism, responsibility and protest. Examining these voices of the postwar nation reveals the various ways in which notions of autonomy and modernity facilitated the marginalisation of the state in the project of national identity formation.


32 Rikki Kersten, Democracy in Postwar Japan: Maruyama Masao and the Search for Autonomy, 133.
i. Maruyama Masao

In the 1950s and 1960s many intellectuals, reflecting upon their complicity with fascism and war, and on the experience of defeat, looked to the promulgation of the postwar constitution, drawn up under the US Occupation Forces, as a new beginning for Japan. Prominent political scientist Maruyama Masao (1914-1996) depicted defeat in the Pacific War as an indication of the nation’s social and political flaws, and the moral bankruptcy that had to be confronted as a national concern. He believed that society had been deceived by the state and led into a disastrous war. Maruyama characterized the existence of the Emperor in Japan - the notion of a traditional figure sustaining a modern political system - as an inhibitor to the project of modernity, and a reason for Japan’s anti-democratic, ‘feudal characteristics.’

For Maruyama postwar Japan was faced with the urgent task of attaining modernity and overcoming the political and social institutions that had curtailed its fulfillment. His stress on modernity was directed against the residues of feudalism and fascism that he identified in the Wartime State and thus the notion encompassed not just economic and political change, but also a radical re-evaluation of social institutions and practices.

Maruyama turned towards Japanese Enlightenment scholars such as Fukuzawa Yukichi in order to flesh out his understanding of the social condition of modernity and to argue that the pluralism inherent in modern subjectivity was an anti-authoritarian political strategy. Modernity represented a vehicle through which to transcend the political culture of wartime Japan and establish an open and plural society that was autonomous from the state.


35 Maruyama uses the Enlightenment term kaikoku, or ‘opening the country’ to elaborate his idea of an open and plural society. For critical studies of Maruyama Masao in English see
Maruyama moved from universal political philosophy to the particular of Japan, suggesting that to be modern was to exercise a transcendent, universal critical faculty in the context of a particular social/national totality. For Maruyama modernity was intimately tied to the idea of shutaisei, or modern subjectivity, and the universal ideal of democracy. Shutaisei is generally translated as subjectivity; subjecthood; independence; identity. But the term is more elusive than this simple translation.\(^{36}\) It was inaugurated by the Kyoto school philosophers in 1946 and identified closely with the Western intellectual discourse of individualism, democracy, liberalism and citizenship. Shutaisei represented a process of both self and national discovery, its attainment emerging as a goal of personal and political renewal. Rather than being a conspicuous trait of the Japanese, or simply a state of affairs, shutaisei was a concept that positioned Japan in relationship to the project of modernity and universal values.

For Maruyama, shutaisei was a mode of thought and a system of social and political relations that circumscribed all spheres of life. It required that the individual participate within political processes and reform of the everyday. Maruyama writes:

> One cannot facilely depend today on the value standard that was appropriate yesterday ... so one must constantly investigate the current situation in order to distinguish those elements that are more

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beneficial or more true … Human judgement progresses only under
the pressure of constant activity and tension.\textsuperscript{37}

In this sense Jurgen Habermas’s notion of ‘the public sphere’ – ‘a realm of our
social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed’\textsuperscript{38} –
elucidates a space in which thinkers such as Maruyama Masao, who decreed a
sense of nationality generated outside the purview of the state, might be
situated. Habermas writes:

A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every
conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public
body. They then behave neither like business or professional people
transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order
subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{39}

The public sphere represents an intellectual and political arena in which the
nation and its imaginings might be contested; a segment of society that
challenges the centrality of the state as the mastermind of national identity and
political formation. ‘The nation of citizens,’ writes Habermas, ‘does not derive
its identity from some common ethnic and cultural properties, but rather from
the praxis of citizens who actively exercise their civil rights.’\textsuperscript{40} This was
precisely the way in which Maruyama thought about the ‘modern subjectivity’
expressed through the notion of \textit{shutaisei}. Modernity was a condition that
required the flexibility and composure necessary to make appropriate value
choices in historically relative situations, to act as citizens.

As I indicated in the Introduction, the distinction between society and the state
emanating from Maruyama’s critique was ambiguous. \textit{Society} and the state are

\textsuperscript{37} Maruyama Masao, ‘Fukuzawa Yukichi no tetsugaku – toku ni sono jiji hihan to no kanren,’
Masao and the Incomplete Project of Modernity’, 129.

\textsuperscript{38} Jurgen Habermas, ‘The Public Sphere,’ \textit{New German Critique} 3, 1974, 49.

\textsuperscript{39} Jurgen Habermas, ‘The Public Sphere,’ 49.

\textsuperscript{40} Jurgen Habermas, ‘Citizenship and Nationality: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe,’
(April 1992) in Omar Dahbour & Micheline Ishay (eds.) \textit{The Nationalism Reader}, Humanities
not mutually exclusive entities or completely independent of each other. Nevertheless, society denoted a sphere of causal and moral self-sufficiency lying between the political and the personal, a social category that provided a foundation for moral judgement. While the state wielded power in the shaping of society and maintained control over some of the important mechanisms of the nation, society also exercised power in its shaping of the state. The debates over shutaisei were one of the means through which society – or a ‘public sphere’ coined by intellectuals – drew a schism between their representation of ‘the people’ and their understanding of the state in the 1950s and 1960s.

Within the notion of shutaisei Maruyama forged a vision of Japan’s postwar reconstruction which was inextricably tied to the particular political and social debates of the period. National identity and individual subjectivity were being negotiated not in relation to pre-existing traditions and institutions but according to contemporary political debate. His stress upon developing a free and autonomous sense of individual subjectivity was most apparent in the midst of the street demonstrations. During the Ampo demonstrations in July 1960 he made a plea to the people, writing:

> The way in which we think about politics is not as work carried out in unimaginably remote circles beyond the reach of ordinary people, by some eccentric breed apart; nor as if it involved abandoning our common everyday life and plunging into some totally separate world. Rather, it’s a matter of habit, of seeing politics as activity that, even if it makes up a rather small part of what we do, day in and day out, still occupies that place consistently, as part of carrying out the commonest of our social obligations … when politics is left to politicians and Dietmen – people whose purpose is politics per se, or to groups such as parties who approach it in the same way – from that moment democracy begins to die.41

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The reference here to the possible demise of democracy can also be read as the death of the postwar nation; for Maruyama the future of modern Japan was dependent upon the fulfillment of its democratic promise. The notion of shutaisei operated as an important template on which debates about modernity, democracy and nation were envisioned.

ii. Takeuchi Yoshimi

In the years after the Pacific War, China Scholar Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910-1977)\(^{42}\) challenged the critique of Maruyama and argued that the fascism of wartime Japan was not a hangover of pre-modern consciousness but a manifestation of political and social institutions born in modernity.\(^{43}\) According to Takeuchi it was not a matter of becoming modern so much as confronting the character of Japan’s existing modernity. For Takeuchi, the task facing Japan was to take control of modernity and find an indigenous basis from which to determine its parameters.

His disavowal of the Eurocentric conceptions of modernity and universalism saw him described variously as modernist and anti-modernist, nationalist and progressive. Yoshida Masatoshi notes: ‘Takeuchi’s writing represents a tireless and fundamental critique of Japan encompassing the process of modernization as well as cultural and intellectual characteristics. It could be said that his critique went so far as to shake the foundations of his own modernist position.’\(^{44}\) The importance of Takeuchi’s scholarship for my purposes is that, while he employs the idea of culture within conceptions of postwar national

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\(^{42}\) Takeuchi Yoshimi spent most of his life researching the politics and literature of China. He professed a love of Chinese culture and maintained an interest in China that informed his scholarship on Japan. During the 1940s Takeuchi supported the ideological justification of the Pacific War that espoused the liberation of China from Western imperialism. He was not opposed to the war effort and from December 1943 served in a railway guard unit in Central China. See, Lawrence Olson, ‘Takeuchi Yoshimi and the vision of a protest society in Japan,’ *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Summer 1981, 326.

identity, it was a reading of culture and nation located within, rather than outside, the experience of modernity. Through the notion an ‘Oriental modernity’ defined through resistance, Takeuchi turned to one of the tools of the states’ nationalist discourse – ideas about culture – in order to marginalise the state in the project of nation formation.

In a 1959 essay Takeuchi took the wartime debate ‘Overcoming Modernity’ as his point of departure in an effort to critique the fascism of wartime Japan and, in a sense, ‘overcome’ the problematic modernity that Japan had embraced. This symposium on modernity held in Tokyo in 1942 brought together prominent thinkers, critics and artists to access the meaning of modernization and how best Japan could resist the universalizing trajectory of modernity. The largely conservative thinkers had been concerned with how Japan might retain its technological achievements while at the same time preserving the irreducible cultural elements that made the Japanese distinctive. Discussing these debates, and Japan’s conceptual navigation of modernity, Harry Harootunian notes that within the ‘overcoming modernity’ discourses ‘modernism is reduced to a style and consigned to a moment in history, a moment which has now been “conquered” and condemned as a “cultural mistake.”’ Overcoming modernity was a notion akin to Chatterjee’s ‘anti-colonial nationalism,’ a conception that denoted a spiritual and cultural essence as the foundation for non-Western nationalism. The rightwing orientation of the wartime symposium provided Takeuchi, who was aligned

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44 Yoshida Masatoshi, Senō Shisōron, Seiōn Shoten, Tokyo, 1984, 70.
47 Harry Harootunian, ‘Visible Discourses/ Invisible Ideologies,’ in Masao Miyoshi & Harry Harootunian (eds.) Postmodernism and Japan, 66.
with many of the same anti-treaty struggle groups as Maruyama Masao, with a clever vehicle through which to problematise ideological distinctions and recast debates on modernity within, rather than outside conceptions of a non-Western national identity.49

In a similar vein to the participants in the symposium, Takeuchi sought to reassess and challenge a process that saw Japan ‘enslaved’ to the West through notions of modernity. But, he had no illusions of an untouched cultural essence through which to determine a national identity, seeking instead to enunciate a way of traversing and resisting Western modernization without denying its centrality to the politics and culture of the present. Takeuchi was critical of the prevalent belief that modernity was something that could be divorced from the national consciousness, and could exist without necessarily disturbing existing ‘feudal relationships’ (everyday life).50 In fact, Takeuchi believed that recourse to an untouched cultural identity was a stance that failed to heed the all-encompassing nature of modernization. His ‘anti-modernism’ differed substantially to the wartime conservatives participating in the Overcoming Modernity debates. Takeuchi emerged as a proponent of a kind of ‘oriental modernity.’ He was concerned with the intersection of particular cultural and social relations within the process of modernization.

In order to explicate his vision of a cultural identity that paid heed to the dictates of modernization, and challenged the agenda of the state, Takeuchi turned towards Chinese literary figure Lu Xun. He identified Lu Xun as the first Chinese writer of the modern era and saw in his writings an effort to locate China within a process of modernization that at once resisted the Western model and at the same time avoided recourse to reified cultural


49 Harry Harootunian calls Takeuchi’s essay a ‘palimpsest’ on the overcoming modernity debate; it represented an effort to recast the earlier debate and slightly subvert its significance and meaning. See Harry Harootunian, ‘Visible Discourses/Invisible Ideologies’, 75.
forms. He saw in Lu Xun’s China a capacity to adapt to and thus resist external pressures and transform the self in relation to those external factors. Takeuchi feared that a Japan unable to locate itself in the modern world would descend into meaninglessness. He writes:

The absence of resistance means that Japan is not oriental. At the same time the absence of a desire for self-preservation (no self) means that Japan is not European. That is to say that Japan is nothing.

This statement suggests the sense of urgency that underpinned Takeuchi’s critique of national identity formation. For Takeuchi, the very existence of ‘Japan’ rested upon its modern articulation. In the face of ‘meaninglessness,’ Takeuchi looked towards China and Lu Xun as an oriental model for modernization; China represented an alternative path towards modernization and the reconstruction of national identity.

Lu Xun’s resistance helped me to garner an understanding of my own feelings. My own thoughts about resistance stemmed from this. If I were asked, ‘What is resistance?’ The only answer I would have is, ‘It is what you find in Lu Xun.’ There is none (resistance) in Japan, or at least very little. And it is from this understanding that I have come to think about the comparison between Japanese modernity and Chinese modernity.

Takeuchi thereby enlisted a vision of oriental modernity that was driven by a spirit of independence and contained an inner logic of resistance. The spirit of a kind of radical democracy and the logic of its institutions remained at the very core of the modernization process, but in this critique the Western

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51 He identifies Lu Xun as the first Modern Chinese writer in ‘Chūgoku no kindai to Nihon no kindai: Lu Xun o te ga karitoshite,’ in Takeuchi Yoshimi, Nihon to Ajia: Takuechi Yoshimi Hyōronshū, Dai San Ken, Tokyo, 1966, 9.

52 Quoted in Yoshida Masatoshi, Sengo Shisaron, 68.

53 Takeuchi Yoshimi, ‘Chūgoku no kindai to Nihon no kindai,’ 24.
European notions of freedom and individualism were of limited usefulness in describing and inscribing the democratic modernization of the Orient. Takeuchi gave precedence to a notion that resistance and independence were the critical factors in the promulgation of a modern Eastern spirit.

Takeuchi emerged as one of the most forthright in enunciating a vision of the postwar nation and spelling out its political and cultural significance. In contrast to others he was not reticent about using the term ‘nationalism,’ and he was more than willing to describe himself as ‘Japanese.’ In this sense he provided a conceptual bridge between contemporary ‘universal’ perspectives filtering through the periodicals and journals, and the ideals of national reconstruction. Takeuchi lamented the fact that the term ‘minzoku,’ people or ethnie, had fallen from grace with postwar intellectuals. ‘From one angle,’ [he writes]

one can say that the psychology of avoiding confrontation with nationalism reveals insufficient consciousness of war responsibility - in other words, a lack of conscience, originating in a failure of courage. People are afraid of getting hurt, so they try to forget their blood-splattered nation. They hesitate to call themselves Japanese. But the blood won’t be washed away by forgetfulness.

Takeuchi draws attention to one of the crucial, if sometimes only implicit, issues of the period – the experience of a nation at war. The ultimate outcome of the Pacific War, whether it is cast as a victory for humanity or a demoralizing and all conquering defeat, remained an intensely national experience on all sides. In the war the figure of the enemy was an opposing

54 In the work of Takeuchi we discover the crucial role of nation formation, and the concurrent centralization of political institutions, to the fulfillment of ‘peoples rights,’ resistance and liberation. For Takeuchi Yoshimi there was clearly no liberation in disavowing the centrality of the nation. His ideas about Asian solidarity, liberation, internationalism and people’s rights were unavoidably transcribed within the discursive references of the nation and its imaginings. See, Yoshida Masatoshi, *Sengo Shisōron*, 1985; Miyake Yoshio, ‘Takeuchi ni okeru ‘kindai’ to ‘kindaihugi’ – Maruyama Masao to no hihaku o chūshin ni,’ *Gendai Nihon no Paburikku Firosōfi*, Yamawaki Naoshi et.al (eds.), Shinseisha, Tokyo, 1998, pp. 375-395.

55 Takeuchi Yoshimi, ‘Kindaihugi to minzoku no mondai,’ 28-29.
nation, social and political institutions were temporarily fixed around national
goals and mobilized to those ends, and the war effort impinged upon all
aspects of everyday life both on the homefront and in the colonies. Regardless
of political persuasion or antipathy to the ideology of the state, in war, the
nation came into focus as the axis around which society was ordered and
mobilized.

Japan was, of course, taken into war under the directives of a powerful military
government with an appetite for imperial expansion. The leaders were firmly
in control of the political and social agenda and aggressively stamped out
opposition to its ideological agenda. Nevertheless, the experience of war, the
way in which people comprehended and endured the war, the way in which
people rationalised war, were outside the purview of the military. The
experience of war on the homefront, and the significant ways in which it
impacted upon gender roles is testimony to the way in which the experience of
war impacted upon society in unforeseen ways.

In the aftermath of war the identity of the nation came into sharp relief and
could be considered in the same way that Vicki Kirby considers the identity of
the body in her article on essentialism. ‘Essentialism is not an entity that can
be identified and dissolved by saying yes or no to it,’ [writes Kirby]

   even if we were to grant that essentialism is unarguably wrong –
   morally, politically and logically – then we still haven’t addressed
   the ways in which its errors work; how essentialisms scriptures come
to matter, how they come to write/right themselves.

56 See for example Elise Tipton, The Japanese Police State: The Tokkō in Interwar Japan,
the Pacific War, Faber, London, 1986.
57 See for example Elise Tipton (ed.), Society and the State in Interwar Japan, Routledge,
58 Vicki Kirby, ‘Corpus delicti: the body at the scene of writing,’ Cartographies:
Poststructuralism and the Mapping of Bodies and Spaces, in Diprose, Rosalyn, & Ferrell,
Of course the nation and the body are certainly not interchangeable. As I have already indicated, the proposition that the nation has any objective basis of identification outside of its political imagining is itself contentious. 59 Nevertheless, as Kirby indicates, subjectivity cannot simply be unimagined or dissolved through denial; the body cannot easily be imagined outside its gendered self.

In the aftermath of the Pacific War the Japanese nation mattered too much, it had too many meanings that could not be cast off, that would come back to haunt if they were not recast and renegotiated within the postwar political culture. It is in this context – in the context of a nation’s defeat, the context of a nation grieving, and the context of shackled society finally released from its subjugation – that Takeuchi called for a new type of nationalism. Having just emerged from the experience of ‘total war,’ a simple denial of nation and identity was, for Takeuchi, ultimately just a form of self-deception. Noting agreement with a member of the Japan Romantic School (Nihon Roman-ha), Hayashi Fusao, Takeuchi wrote:

I believe that the aggressive aspect of the Greater East Asia War cannot be denied by any argument. But, by detesting the aggression so much, to reject as well the notion of Asian solidarity that was exposed through the form of aggression, is like throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Japanese would never be able to restore their sense of purpose.60

Takeuchi’s analysis saw him depart radically from the understanding of modernization developed by Maruyama. As noted earlier, Maruyama believed that the ultimate goal in postwar Japan was to overcome the feudal remnants that had distorted Japan’s development. Takeuchi on the other hand depicted


wartime fascism as the logic of a thoroughly modern Japanese state. Modernism and fascism were by no means mutually exclusive. In addition, Takeuchi rebutted Maruyama’s recourse to universal models of democracy and modernization turning instead to a vision of a ‘resistant oriental modernity.’ While there was clearly a radical departure between the two approaches, Yoshida Masatoshi indicates that Takeuchi was never in hostile opposition to his ‘modernist peers.’ In fact, there was an important point of confluence between the two and one that also emerged in the ideas emanating from groups such as the Science of Thought Study Group. Though radically different, Maruyama and Takeuchi both strove to de-centre the state in conceptions of national identity, and establish a viable link between the concepts of modernity and autonomy, and the idea of postwar Japan.

iii. Oda Makoto

Social commentator and novelist Oda Makoto (1932 -), like Takeuchi Yoshimi, was critical of the tendency to look towards Europe as the standard bearer of universal democracy. Oda was influenced by the international dimension of activism during the 1960s and his experience as a Fulbright Scholar at Harvard University in 1958-59. On his return to Japan Oda published Nandemo miteyarō (I’ll See It All), an account of his experience in America and subsequent travels through Europe and Asia. Oda Makoto was the major theoretician and organizer of Beheiren (Peace for Vietnam Citizens’ Committee), of which he was the Chair, and is best known as an activist and novelist rather than as an intellectual. Thus, it was through his activism that Oda sought to open up a space for Japanese modernity within a wider network of intertwining political ideas and practices. Modernity and democracy, for Oda, emerged as an ongoing process that all countries were negotiating rather a model that could be readily attained or instituted.

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61 Yoshida Masatoshi, Sengo Shiisōron, 70.
Most importantly for my purposes, Oda’s activism and ideas rested upon a depiction of institutionalized democracy – political practices grounded in the institutions of the state – as inherently flawed. It is in this regard that we can decipher the link between notions of autonomy and conceptions of national identity in his political activism. Oda looked outside the state in order to perform the precepts of a modern postwar Japan.

Homi Bhabha’s notion of ‘ambivalence’ is instructive when we consider Oda’s understanding of modernity. Bhabha employs the term ambivalence to tease out the points of rupture that exist in colonial relationships; the ambivalence between the Western fantasies of the Orient as outlined by Said and the various points at which the colonized reinterpret or challenge colonial directives. Bhabha questions the binaries that underpin Said’s account, notably that between the power of the colonizer and the powerlessness of the colonized.

The so-called ‘mimic man’ is one of the devices that Bhabha uses to problematise the dichotomy and explicate the points of resistance in the colonial world. Robert Young critiques the endeavor noting that through the ‘mimic man,’ ‘the familiar, transported to distant parts, becomes uncannily transformed, the imitation subverts the identity of that which is being represented, and the relation of power, if not altogether reversed, certainly begins to vacillate.’ In many ways the ‘mimic man’ blithely washes over the complexity of intercultural communication making it appear like a frontier that can be easily distinguished and critiqued. The ‘mimic man’ confines the colonized to a position outside the discursive frame of Western modernity; the colonized can only mimic the progenitors of modern subjectivities.

Nevertheless, the notion of ambivalence is useful with regard to Oda’s ideas in the way that he seeks to displace modernity from its origins, to dwell upon its

impact on the ‘everyday’ of contemporary Japan and to elucidate a non-Western reading of modernity. It is in this regard that Oda’s writing and activism is important. Oda articulates a notion of modernity that eschews its theoretical grounding outside lived experience; he arms himself with a notion of modernity that is determined outside the auspices of abstract political theory.  

In his 1964 article on intellectuals and modernity, Oda was critical of Japanese intellectuals who had turned to reified ideas about a Western European ‘universal’ as their model rather than recognizing the myriad possibilities, the varied and evolving models of modernity, and the possibility of locating an indigenous modernity. In his article ‘Anti-war intellectuals and Japanese modernization,’ Oda contrasts the Japanese approach to issues such as modernity with that of American and European scholars. He criticizes scholars in Europe for centring themselves within notions of ‘universalism’ while assuming ownership of its discursive tools. Oda sought to displace modernity from these ancient and geographically specific origins and define it as a process that did not, by definition exclude Japan and the rest of Asia. He sought to vitalize the notion of modernity and thus make the idea of a modern Japan possible.

The point that I welcome in the debate over modernity is that we Japanese (we are human, so it’s okay to say it [Japanese] in a big voice) are attempting to evaluate the achievements to date in a holistic and objective way, rather than through the wholesale classification of ideological blinkers. Through this evaluation [of

65 We are reminded here of the New Left slogan ‘the personal is political.’ Oda was informed by the ideas emanating from the United States and the activism of groups in the civil rights movement. Nevertheless, his conception of an autonomous subject was grounded in his experience in Japan.

modernity] a vision of future peaceful co-existence will undoubtedly begin to appear.\textsuperscript{67}

Oda may well have been alluding here to Takeuchi’s appeal to confront nationalism and define modernity and democracy in terms of Japan rather than abstract theories and distant models. These attempts to liberate the idea of modernity and render it accessible to the constructions of nation and identity outside the West also saw Oda challenge the notion that democracy was a wholesale import from the United States Occupation Forces. In his essay ‘The philosophy of meaningless death,’ Oda returns to his childhood in Osaka during the war and reflects upon his experience and thoughts during the final months of bombardment. At this time Oda was struck by the sense that, although the principle ‘private first’ (shijōkyō) was ushered in by the Occupation Forces, it simply solidified a sentiment that was already prevalent in the Japanese community. He also indicates that ideals emerging in the public domain – such as a democratic state (minshū kokka), a peaceful state (heiwa kokka), a cultural state (bunka kokka) and the construction of a free Japan (jiyūna Nihon o kenchiku suru) – were completely in keeping with the prioritization of the private over the public good.

Even at this time [the idea of] the private first was probably not borrowed. The best term to use here would be ‘naturalize.’ With the promulgation of the new constitution I was not struck with a deep sense that ‘my world had changed.’ In fact it struck me as commonsense. That is, I had already naturalized these things within me. I knew well before 1947 that the Emperor is a man, not a god; that war should be renounced; that every human is created equal; that freedom of speech must be preserved. That is to say, I had already naturalized these ideas within me.\textsuperscript{68}


Oda goes on to say that for his generation recollections of the postwar period do not conjure up memories of the new constitution’s promulgation and Japan’s democratization. The strongest memories are of the ‘reverse course’ in the United States policy towards Japan with the onset of the Cold War, the crackdown on the Japan Communist Party, and ‘February 1’ – the day that SCAP (Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers) banned the general strike in 1947. Oda’s strongest memories are of deception, and the ‘ambivalence’ of American democracy. 

Most informed Japanese remember the ban as a most shocking event because it marks the moment Occupation Authorities, not Japan’s newly constructed democratic state (minshū kokka Nihon no kensetsu), began to give priority to the public good (kōjōkyō). 

In several articles throughout the 1960s and 1970s Oda emphasized the importance of resistance, personal responsibility and autonomy in the quest to discover a modern Japan outside the state. It was an ideal that was closely tied to politics and activism in other industrializing countries and Oda invariably made reference to the United States in his critiques. Nevertheless, to Oda, modernity and democracy were essentially like a journey that each country had to embark upon and define in their own way.

iv. Tsurumi Shunsuke

Like Oda Makoto, Tsurumi Shunsuke (1922- ) drew upon experiences in America and departed significantly from the critique of Maruyama Masao and Takeuchi Yoshimi in his understanding of the relationship between society and the state. Tsurumi was ambivalent about the separation of society and state and critical of the corresponding notion that their wartime leaders had deceived the Japanese people. He believed that only when people take responsibility for the

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69 The ‘reverse course’ in the policy towards the Japan with the onset of the Cold War brought further efficacy to communist ideas and the activities of the JCP.
70 Oda Makoto, “‘Nanshi’ no shisō,” 22.
71 Oda indicates that one positive outcome of the Pacific War was that it brought independence to countries throughout Asia and Africa. He believed that these countries could also be seen as
political decisions of the past and play an active role in the mechanisms of the state, could they embrace a democratic future. Tsurumi lamented the fact that the Japanese people had enthusiastically condemned fascism in the immediate postwar years, expressed hope in the new Constitution, and rushed out to join the Communist Party, without taking responsibility for political decisions.72 ‘If, through political activism, the Japanese nation (kokumin) could have taken responsibility for the war,’ wrote Tsurumi in 1960, ‘the postwar period may have seen the formation of an independent Japan.’73 Tsurumi believed that, rather than embrace political change after the war, Japan had simply replaced the Emperor system with the authoritarian control of the US military.

As a founder of the Science of Thought Group in 1946, Tsurumi Shunsuke was concerned with developing a basis from which to interact with the state through the auspices of personal autonomy and political awareness. The objective of the group was to promote cooperative academic projects among scholars from various disciplines and to encourage them to probe into the ideas and ways of the common people. It also represented a kind of diary of political beliefs, existing in order to ensure the independence of the intellectual from the state. In a recent interview with another member of the Science of Thought Group, Arai Naoyuki, Tsurumi discussed the openness that he was striving for in the Science of Thought publications, stating:

Initially the idea was to create a political philosophy journal (shisō zasshi) in which ideas could be informally discussed. In the 40 to 50 year period preceding the publication of Shisō no Kagaku Japan was engulfed in ignorance. In other words during the Meiji period we

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models of democracy and modernization but he invariably used the United States as his reference point. See, Oda Makoto, ‘Nihon no kindaika to chishikijin,’ 245-246.


had people like Karino Kōyoshi and Nakae Chōmin\textsuperscript{74} who clearly articulated their political philosophy, but after the Meiji period all this changed.\textsuperscript{75}

Tsurumi felt that Japanese intellectuals in the Taishō and Shōwa periods had been either reticent about articulating their anti-state ideals and beliefs, or in full support of the war effort. During the war the military leadership had co-opted the agenda of its opposition thereby rendering protest and defiance meaningless – it marginalised dissent by adopting the protest agenda and laying claim to the symbolic and practical authority that it often outwardly opposed. The imperial ideology of the Wartime State underpinned an aggressive military campaign in which ‘the people,’ the ‘one hundred million hearts beating as one,’ were depicted as a consensual community, the fabric of the nation, and inherently malleable to the agenda of the wartime leaders. As Louise Young notes,

> although opposition to the imperial project was often forcibly silenced or drowned out, more often it was co-opted. Persuaded that the new Empire had something to offer them, groups that had been indifferent or even hostile to expanding Japan’s position in North East China in the 1920s joined together to build Manchukuo in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{76}

One of the primary goals behind the Science of Thought Group was to avert the reemergence of this situation, to guard against the confluence of ideas and debates with the ideological agenda of the government. The Science of Thought Group was founded upon a distrust of the state and betrayed a fear that, like in wartime Japan, political, social and cultural pluralism may once

\textsuperscript{74} Nakae Chōmin was an important figure in the peoples rights movement of the Meiji period. He was a pacifist who believed that the universal spirit of human kind lay in liberty, popular sovereignty, and human rights and he denounced Western practices that violated those ideals. See, Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi (ed.), \textit{Modern Japanese Thought}, 7-10.

again be subsumed within the ideology of the political apparatus in postwar Japan.

One of the definitive works to emerge from the research group was Tenkō, a collaborative research project that analyzed the process of ‘ideological transformation’ or ‘apostasy’ in which communist intellectuals had changed their ideological beliefs to a stance that the government deemed appropriate in the 1930s. On this project Tsurumi writes:

> We define ideological transformation as a mutation in thought brought about by duress exerted by authority … In recording the ideological transformations that have occurred in modern Japan, we have found the state authority is the authority that has most frequently forced people to change ideologically.

The tenkō, ideological conversion, of communist intellectuals during the war, and the general silence that had struck opponents of the war effort, operated as an indictment upon Japanese intellectuals for which they had to make amends. The apparent lack of political courage and responsibility shown by the wartime tenkōsha (people committing tenkō) shadowed the postwar intellectuals like undercover police, watching their every step but also keeping them on edge, making sure that they remained true to their political commitments. In this sense Tsurumi’s understanding of social and individual autonomy revolved around actively voicing political concerns and confronting the agenda of the government. It was not simply about establishing independence from the state but actively engaging the institutions of the state.

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78 Shisō no Kagaku Kenkyukai (ed.), *Tenkō*, 2.
In Tsurumi’s view the most deplorable crime in postwar Japan was silence in a culture of political responsibility, participation and repentance.

v. Yoshimoto Takaaki

Yoshimoto Takaaki (1924- ) responded with contempt to the scholars that I have discussed above. He saw the very notion of ‘modern Japan’ as anachronistic and lamented the dominance of progressive thought within Japanese universities. Yoshimoto was one of the most influential social critics of the 1960s and even today manages to draw large crowds to his oratories throughout Japan.80 In the English-speaking world he is probably best known as the father of fiction writer Yoshimoto Banana but in 1960s Japan he was seen as one of the intellectual torchbearers for the New Left student movements. The playful exuberance of Yoshimoto’s writing, his eagerness to confront intellectual and political opponents and the vagueness of his political and cultural vision underpinned this popularity.

Yoshimoto’s hopes for postwar national reconstruction were founded upon a conception of ‘nativism’ (dochaku shugi) defined in opposition to the universal concerns of Maruyama Masao.81 Nevertheless, like his progressive peers Yoshimoto also opened up a space for the articulation of national identity founded upon activism, resistance and political agency.

In his essay, ‘About nationalism’ published in 1964, Yoshimoto challenged other prominent intellectuals by drawing attention to the ‘nationalism’ that underpinned their recourse to humanism and internationalism in the postwar period.82 In many ways drawing explicit attention to the national ideals that

80 See for example Mikami Osamu, 1960 nen Dai ron, Hiyosha, Tokyo, 2000. Mikami was a student at Waseda University and a member of Shagakudō (Socialist Student League) in the aftermath of the 1960 Ampo demonstrations. He notes the influence of Yoshimoto Takaaki and Tanigawa Gan on his intellectual and political thought.


underpinned the work of progressive intellectuals marked an effort to centre himself in political debate. By suggesting that universalism was in fact framed within the nation, rather than disavowing its discursive boundaries, Yoshimoto was able to contain his intellectual opponents, to critique them on his own political and philosophical ground – in relation to ‘the people’ and the nation. Lamenting a postwar climate of national self-loathing and uncertainty, Yoshimoto Takaaki writes:

> On the whole liberals, progressives, and “Marxists” have taken up the issues of imperialism, expansionism and xenophobia as the assumed basis of the Emperor System [the nation] and turned in disdain against nationalism. In opposing these things they speak of the modern Emperor System as completely bankrupt.

Writing in the aftermath of the Pacific War, Yoshimoto’s critique of other intellectuals is illustrative of the way in which the experience of war ushered in the re-articulation of identity in forms radically different to those of prewar Japan. Nevertheless, Yoshimoto remained committed to establishing a link between prewar and postwar conceptions of identity - retrieving a sense of national essence from the ruins of war.

Yoshimoto Takaaki vehemently opposed the military and the state of wartime Japan and sought to separate the state from conceptions of a national imaginary. In an essay on the state published in 1968, Yoshimoto indicated that ‘the masses’ justified the war effort not as a defence of the state but as a defence of the Emperor, the family and the nation. The people read the slogans of war such as ‘for the country’ (Okuni no tame) not in relation to political or spiritual authority, but in relation to community and identity. Yoshimoto believed that the agenda of the state in war represented the


84 Yoshimoto Takaaki, ‘Nihon no nashonarizumu,’ 7-8.
derailment of the nation, and the subversion of the Emperor as the embodiment of that nation. Thus, the stripping of the Emperor’s status as a divine entity during the Occupation period was irrelevant and did nothing to alter the position of the Emperor as the symbolic representative of the people, lineage and nation. He held onto a sense of national identity that rested upon the valorization of the Emperor System as the embodiment of everyday life, and a symbolic representative of the quintessential Japanese community.

Yoshimoto sought to circumvent the political agendas that overlay conceptions of nationality and ‘capture, from within the silence,’ the nationalism expressed through the ‘actual life experience of the masses.’ Yoshimoto was critical of many of the nationalist ideals that rested upon ideological values and ‘possibility’ (kanōsei), depicting them as a political ‘illusion’ that distorted an underlying national essence. His understanding of nation formation saw him acknowledge the modern genealogy of national political institutions but maintain a strong belief in the essential foundations of the nation. ‘When we speak of nationalism,’ [writes Yoshimoto],

we find its meaning clouded by disparate voices. Within the categories of sociology and political science, units that emerged with the evolution of world capitalist development and the formation of the modern state, the various symbols [of the nation] have been thought about from the standpoint of society and politics. It is a concept that accompanied modern capitalism.

But the term nationalism, when it is thought about from the position of ethnic groups, or states that came late on the world stage, it is mired in ideas about ethno-centrism (minzoku shijō shugi), xenophobia (haigai shugi), the principle of ethnic national independence and ethnic national revolution – the convoluted ideas

86 Yoshimoto Takaaki, ‘Nihon no nashonarizumu,’ 9.
of its many and varied exponents. In this regard it invariably has very little meaning whatsoever.\textsuperscript{87}

For Yoshimoto national identification was not an ideological position, it was something transmitted from the past and secured as a collective belonging, something reproduced in myriad imperceptible ways, grounded in everydayness and mundane experience. It is based on the ‘everyday,’ exaggerated and abstracted into symbolic references; ‘\textit{taishu no genzō},’ the reality of the masses.

It is in this context that Yoshimoto embraced the nation in postwar Japan and was critical of the agenda of the progressives who sought to impose ideological ideals such as democracy and Marxism (modernity), on the realities of everyday existence. ‘The philosophical discourse of postwar pragmatism,’ [writes Yoshimoto],

‘as symbolized by Tsurumi Shunsuke, is based firmly in the defeat of wartime modernism and has paid careful attention to the language of local customs/ folk beliefs (\textit{dozoku}). Nevertheless it has not retained the underlying meaning of these customs. In other words, while it (the language of postwar pragmatism) has engaged the prototype of local customs/ folk beliefs, it has not been able to capture the ambiguities of these beliefs. What has occurred is that the language of the masses (\textit{taishu}) has been haphazardly characterized as the philosophy of the masses (\textit{taishu teki na shisō}).’\textsuperscript{88}

Yoshimoto saw little reason to distinguish between the ideology of the state of wartime Japan and the modernist intellectuals of postwar Japan. Both, he believed ‘spoke in the third person’ with regard to the masses, lacked a deep understanding of the daily lives of the masses, and depicted the masses as pawns in a social experiment. Though the wartime leaders and postwar

\textsuperscript{87} Yoshimoto Takaaki, ‘Nihon no nashonarizumu,’ 7.

\textsuperscript{88} Yoshimoto Takaaki, ‘Jiritsu no shisōteki kyōten,’ \textit{Tembō}, March 1965, 15.
progressives were politically and ideologically at odds with one another, Yoshimoto indicated that the agenda of both saw the agency, or autonomy (jiritsu), of the masses taken away.

Paradoxically, it was the notion of jiritsu that also brought these intellectuals together. Yoshimoto, like the postwar progressives, believed in the importance of activism and anti-government radicalism. As one of the intellectual torchbearers for the student New Left groups, Yoshimoto was concerned with legitimating activism and legitimating it in terms of national identity and the spirit of the people. He criticized intellectuals such as Tsurumi Shunsuke as a ‘proponent of Americanism,’ and contended that Tsurumi concentrated too much on the ‘possibility’ (kanōsei) held within the spirit of the people rather than their actual life experience – the citizen was always in a state of becoming. In this sense Yoshimoto believed that the people were rendered powerless, devoid of the agency needed to alter their predicament and dependent upon the misplaced idealism of Tsurumi, and theorists on ‘civil society’ such as Kuno Osamu, for their voice. Yoshimoto suggested that while ‘the masses’ had reappeared within contemporary, progressive, understandings of national identity they had been included as the objects of history – pawns in political discourse - rather than its subjects.\(^9\)

The work of Maruyama, Takeuchi, Tsurumi and Oda highlights the significance of the postwar intellectual contribution in terms of shifting the sites at which the nation and its symbolic imaginings were determined and projected. These scholars and activists sought to shift the burden of responsibility to the people, to distance the government from the centre of political discourses. The progressives sought to engage Japan in the project of modernity at the rhetorical as well as experiential level, and Takeuchi and Oda sought to dislocate modernity from its anchor in Western philosophy. While

\(^9\) Yoshimoto Takaaki, ‘Nihon no nashonarizumu,’ 10-11.
Yoshimoto derided this endeavour as ‘deceptive,’ through his political philosophy he also articulated new sites for the expression, if not construction, of national identity.

The debates over shutaisei evince the fact that intellectuals were concerned with conceptions of modernity, rather than a reified and stable sense of ‘culture,’ in order to characterize a postwar Japanese identity.\(^{90}\) I contend that a notion of ‘modern Japan’ emerged as the foundation for the new conceptions of identity being articulated in the postwar ‘public sphere.’ Modern Japan referred to the confluence of modernity and autonomy with national identity; it referred to the discourses on nation and the representations of a national imaginary in which modernity and Japan were not depicted as antithetical. Modern Japan referred to the endeavor to move beyond an identity founded upon an unchanging cultural essence, reified traditions and ‘overcoming modernity’; it was about circumventing the idea of modernity as inherently foreign/Western by substituting indigenous representations of contemporary reality. Modern Japan sought national identity in contemporary politics, society and culture: in a conception of Japan as becoming, a national identity that was quite explicitly under construction.\(^{91}\)

**The nation and its histories**

In this political milieu Yoshimoto Takaaki published a series of essays on nationalism that historicized the slippage between the people and the state. In

\(^{90}\) Through an examination of European nationalism Glenda Sluga notes that the gendered nature of nationalism, the interplay between the politics of nationalism and conceptions of gender, ensures that culture is implicit within conceptions of national identity. The same can be said of ideas about ‘society’ and ‘modernity.’ The definitions attributed to these terms are not universal or divorced from the political and social space in which they are given meaning. All of these terms exist within a particular cultural environment. See, Glenda Sluga, ‘Identity, gender, and the history of European nations and nationalism,’ *Nations and Nationalism* 4 (1), 1998, pp. 87-111.

\(^{91}\) Morris Low has pointed out that even the state in Japan has sponsored expressions of national sentiment that disrupt the notion of a spiritual essence as the basis for national identity. He argues that through the Tokyo Olympics a national identity was created that married a uniquely Japanese conception of modernity and tradition into a fluid postwar identity. See, Morris Low, ‘Japan, Modernity and the Tokyo Olympics’, *Humanities Research*, Centre for Cross Cultural Research, Australian National University, No.2, 1999, pp. 33-52.
his exploration of the modern historiography of nationalism, published in 1964, Yoshimoto brought together the works that he believed captured the important historical evolution in the conceptualization of modern Japanese national identity. He collated the essays under the headings ‘Emotion’ (shinjō) and ‘Theory and Development’ (ronri to tenkai), rather than according to chronology, in an effort to bring to light the myriad voices speaking for the nation through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and their relationship to political authority and ‘the people.’

The compilation is illustrative of a wider trend during this period for intellectuals to draw attention to the traces of dissent, or the alternative conceptions of identity, in prewar Japan. Through the historiography of the 1960s and 1970s notions of active citizenship, protest, individual and village autonomy, and alternative conceptions of national identity, were inscribed into Tokugawa and Meiji histories.\(^92\) This is not to say that Yoshimoto, or other historians, were fabricating the past or inventing traditions, but it does suggest that the nation’s history is as contingent as the nation itself. It illustrates that the past is rendered meaningful through the present, and that the present in 1960s Japan - the visions of a postwar identity - were centred upon activism, political agency, protest and the performance of people’s rights.\(^93\)

It was of great regret to Yoshimoto Takaaki that the ideals of intellectuals such as Yanagita Kunio, Uchimura Kanzō, Kuga Katsunan and many of the prewar scholars appearing in his anthology on nationalism in 1964, were often dissolved within the nationalism of the state despite their often radical visions of the nation. He was concerned with returning historicity to modern Japan, and to unearth the alternative conceptions of national identity buried in the stories of wartime fascism. Thus, Yoshimoto’s project of displacing the


\(^{93}\) One could be lead to believe that ‘history repeats itself’ after reading the essays. But it would be more accurate to say that History, the accounts of the past, betray an understanding
centrality of the state from the imagination of a national imaginary was replicated in his collection of essays from prewar Japan.

The collection begins with essays from the nationalist debates of the 1880s when Japan was negotiating its relationship with the West and radically transforming its political and social institutions in order to assert its place on the world stage. An examination of these essays reveals that even at times during which the Japanese leaders exercised unprecedented coercion and control over the nation-state, and apparently garnered support for their political and ideological agenda, we find a polyphony of voices vying to challenge the state and determine the scope of national identity. The essays by Tokutomi Sōhō (1863-1957), Yamaji Aizan (1864-1917) and Kuga Katsunan (1857-1907) illuminate the various shades of nationalism that emerged during the Meiji period (1868-1912).  

Tokutomi Sōhō stressed the importance of embracing Western political ideas and founding a strong, militarist, nation-state and was alarmed that the project of nation formation was being superseded by the ‘vulgar pursuits’ of youth, business and love. In this regard Yoshimoto’s inclusion of Tokutomi is surprising, but can be explained by the ambiguous image of the state that emerges in his writing. While Tokutomi was supportive of a strong nation-state his characterization of the state’s lack of authority highlights the ambivalence of its national address. The bureaucratic state actually laid the ground for the emergence of an intellectual community that challenged its monopoly on power. In claiming the national interest as its source of authority of the present. History repeats itself only to the extent that writers of history look for the points of repetition – a self-reflective process of comparing and contrasting.


staking the survival of the nation on its sovereignty and violently repressing any opposition – the state defined itself as a vested interest in determining the national political agenda rather than the ultimate arbiter of the national identity. This rendering of the state as a vested interest in national affairs, rather than the representative of ‘family’ and ‘nation’ denoted in the term *kokka*, was a position that lent support to Yoshimoto Takaaki’s critique of the state in the 1960s, and his distinction between the nation and the state.

A second essay in the collection by *Seikyōsha* (Society for Political Education) member Kuga Katsunan, was more in line with Yoshimoto’s sense of the national imaginary. Like Yoshimoto Takaaki, Kuga Katsunan looked towards the everyday in order to secure a notion of collective belonging that had been transmitted from the past. He saw the national community as a product of shared habits, customs, dialects, song, dance, pastimes and shared geography. Thus, it was through the terrain of culture and ‘the people’ that they sought to animate the national identity; through a reading of the everyday, abstracted and exaggerated into the symbols that define the community. In this reading the nation emerges as an essential community existing regardless of the institutions of the state.

Many other activists in the 1960s turned to the writing of Uchimura Kanzō (1861-1930) and his reaction to the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 as an example of an intellectual fighting the state for an alternative vision of the nation. Uchimura showed initial support for the war with China in 1895, on the grounds of national ‘righteousness’ and ‘chivalry,’ but soon became disillusioned with the state as national figurehead and its motivations in war.

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96 Tokutomi’s essay supports Bernard Silberman’s suggestion that the state in prewar Japan, despite its vast police resources and commitment to authority, hierarchy and obedience actually facilitated competing interests, counter claims and conflict. ‘When the state,’ writes Silberman, ‘through its structural representation, the bureaucratic administration, enters into the process of organizing interests and ends up dominating those interests and transforming them into public ones, it appears as if the state were a competing interest group itself.’ Bernard Silberman, ‘The Bureaucratic State in Japan: The problem of authority and legitimacy,’ in Tetsuo Najita & Victor Koschmann, *Conflict in Modern Japanese History: The Neglected Tradition*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982, pp. 226-257.
Asserting a strong vision for modern Japan, Uchimura wrote: ‘Japan will wither away if it tries to Japanize the world, but if it tries to make itself more cosmopolitan, it will in the end become a great world power.’ In the early twentieth century his vision remained marginal but his writings became important reference points for the pacifists of the postwar period as the voice of a national identity.

In many ways these alternative conceptions of identity are also ‘contained’ within the often discriminatory imaginings of subjectivity. As Geoff Eley points out, even the nation’s most generous and inclusively democratic imaginings of national identity entail processes of protective and exclusionary positioning against others. Eley refers to these theoretical exclusions, of which gender is perhaps the most important, as the ‘negative codings’ that underpin conceptions of national identity. The institutionalization of inequality, the ‘negative coding’ implicit within conceptions of national identity, are illustrative of the way in which the nation’s symbolic parameters are often determined and defined on the basis of entrenched, or newly created notions of inclusion and exclusion.

In the history of nationalism identified by Yoshimoto the terms ethnicity, race and nation, and the fabric of nationalism in Japan remain conflated within the same tropes of authenticity that legitimated the Wartime State. The possibility of reconfiguring identity in any substantive way was constantly undermined by the legitimating claims of official ideology. The subject of the national

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imaginary - its gender, ethnicity and religion – was not challenged within the essays by Kuga, Tokutomi and Yoshimoto. Nevertheless, in spite of the subjective curtailments implicit in the essays, they illustrate the various conceptions of national identity and the competing and sometimes contradictory understandings of modernity, culture, the state and tradition contained/exposed within it. As noted by Kevin Doak in his discussion of the term *minzoku* (ethnic nation) in the Taisho period, ethnic identity cannot simply be equated with the nationalism of the government for it provided ‘a remarkable degree of flexibility and change in practice and in political value.’

The essays collected by Yoshimoto reveal that during the Meiji period the nation, in all its guises, emerged as the subjective basis from which to challenge the political ideology, the xenophobic nationalism of the ruling elite. The nation was deemed the basic building block for liberation and citizenship, as well as the militarist ambitions of the right in Japan. In drawing attention to the voices of identity often lost in the nationalism of wartime Japan, Yoshimoto Takaaki was attempting to liberate the nation’s History from the state, to unearth the discursive sites of nationalist resistance that could be excavated from the ruins of the state’s ultra-nationalist excursions. He was representative of his postwar generation of intellectuals who were searching to dislodge their national ideals from the pervasive Japanese state and decipher an acceptable basis upon which to locate their politics. They signify hope in the nation at a time when culture, tradition, society and the state were considered with uncertainty and trepidation.

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*mother”?”* in Andrew Gordon (ed.), *Postwar Japan as History*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993, pp. 293-324.

Performing the national identity

The 1960s manifestation of modern Japan – a national identity construed within the politics of the present and a vision of the nation’s modern future - featured protest, resistance, activism and political responsibility. For progressive intellectuals the notion of civil society was conceptualized as the forum through which to contest a sense of national belonging and frame the parameters of the postwar nation. In some respects the work of Yoshimoto Takaaki operated in the same discursive sphere. Yoshimoto saw little reason to distinguish between the agenda of the state and the politics of postwar progressives – they both overlay everyday life (culture) with ideological and political ideals. Nevertheless, through the idea of *jiritsu* (agency; autonomy) founded in the everyday life of the masses, Yoshimoto also sought to shift the production and articulation of a national imaginary from the nationalism of the state to that of an active ‘public sphere.’ It is perhaps for this reason that literary critic Katō Shūichi speaks of the 1960s as ‘the age of intellectuals’[^101^] - it was a period in which the ‘public sphere’ came to the fore and thought, theory and identity seemed to coalesce in a nation defined by autonomy. In this intellectual climate it seems odd that we would look towards the government, rightwing ideologues or ‘nationalists’ as the transmitters and disseminators of national identity. Through the intellectual voices of the 1950s and 1960s the conceptual ground had been established for the articulation of a national imaginary elsewhere.

The conceptual distance that postwar intellectuals established between society and the state during this period reveals the contingency, the instability, of ‘the people’ as a conceptual tool in the imagination of national identity. As noted by Dipesh Chakrabarty, within the ‘carnivaleque aspects of democracy’ - in

political activism, rebellions or even sporting events - the nation is ‘performed,’ and the people become the ‘subjects’ in a process of the nation’s articulation.\textsuperscript{102} Through the conceptualisation of a social sphere divorced from the state, intellectuals such as Yoshimoto and Takeuchi opened up a site through which to perform ‘national identity’ outside the auspices of the state and its institutional apparatus. The conceptual realignment of ‘the people’ as autonomous citizens in the postwar period saw them discover a voice in the politics of a nation dislocated from the state; in 1960s Japan the national trajectories, the project of national reconstruction, was articulated on the margins.

The varied and sometimes competing ideas about resistance, agency, activism and civil society that I have identified in this chapter were brought to life in the protest of the decade. The voices of postwar reconstruction and social renewal, ushered in a vision of autonomy that was partially realised during the 1960s. Protest had been a feature of the political landscape since the Occupation period but it was not until 1960 that the visions of people such as Maruyama Masao and Takeuchi Yoshimi, as well as many other intellectuals and activists keen on establishing autonomous activism, gained a foothold outside the auspices of the major opposition parties.\textsuperscript{103} During this period the concepts of \textit{shimin undō} (citizens’ activism), \textit{jūmin undō} (local activism), \textit{gakusei undō} (student activism) became the frames in which ‘the people’ of postwar Japan were represented. Thus the marginalisation of the state by the postwar intellectuals and activists greatly impinged upon its influence over the character and shape of the national identity.


\textsuperscript{103} Such intellectuals include, Oda Makoto, Kuno Osamu, Tsurumi Shunsuke, Takabatake Michitoshi, Hidaka Rokurō, Ōzawa Shinichirō, Shimizu Ikutarō, and Yoshimoto Takaaki. Many were also members of the Shisō no Kagaku Kenkyukai.
Expressions of national identity, visions of a nation, revealed in the essays compiled by Yoshimoto Takaaki in 1964 and his critique of the progressive intellectuals, highlights the limited range of voices that are usually exposed through the discursive space of the nation and its symbolic imaginings. The postwar political debates on ‘the people,’ modernity, the state and the nation, suggests that there are various sites at which national identity is contested. There are sites at which the state struggles with a discordant reality in the imagination of the nation: the everyday practices of a local community, regional festivals, new technologies, even sporting events or the Olympics Opening Ceremony, are sites at which counter narratives and anti-state forms of national expression are evinced. After the ruptures of war and defeat the sites of the nation’s articulation had shifted. National identity was being imagined within ideas about modernity and autonomy; the national identity was being imagined on the margins.

It begs the question of whether performance (resistance) defined as a stable identity – political practice as a symbol of nation - can maintain its political (radical) value and efficacy in the politics of the present. It is a paradox that hints towards the possibility that it too could be displaced as the foundation for national identity, and that a new site for the articulation of national identity would emerge. The confluence of protest and nation exemplifies the fluidity of nationality and the contingency of its discursive references; definitions of modernity, culture, the state and ‘the people,’ are prone to the competing voices that bring them meaning.

Conclusion

The debates about nation formation and its imagination, evident in the intellectual debates of the 1950s and 60s and the essays collected by Yoshimoto Takaaki, have highlighted the fluidity and instability of the nation and the way in which it is imagined. They thereby destabilize the European theories on nation formation that emphasize the instrumental nature of the nation’s construction. While these theories have alerted us to the nation’s immense power as a discursive formation, to the centrality of the state, modernity and the people, to the formation of national identity, they seldom
acknowledge the competing voices in the nation’s imagination, and its ambivalent foundations. The contingency of the nation and its history has been skillfully articulated, but rather than liberating the histories and identities of the nation its identity is often buried in the authority of the bureaucratic apparatus, the violence of the state, the cultural illusions of political leaders, or their claims to authentic tradition. The continuing resonance of the nation as a basis for identity is founded not simply on the invented traditions of its political elite but on the stories and ideals exposed in the nation’s various imaginings.¹⁰⁴

The author of a recent publication on Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo - the shrine that pays homage to Japan’s war dead and has become the playground of the far Right – succinctly articulates the limits of deconstructing the past and focusing solely on the ‘inventedness’ of identity.¹⁰⁵ In a prologue titled ‘When a shrine to the war dead changes into a car park’ Tsubouchi Yūzō outlines the competing histories that are bound in the Shrine and expresses his desire to tell the stories of Yasukuni rather than simply highlight the political myths that it has come to represent, the contingency of its identity. Tsubouchi effectively circumvents the binaries of tradition and modernity; authenticity and invention. He teases out the ambiguity and fluidity of identity rather than simply deconstructing its invention; to rescue Yasukuni from the black buses that gather in the forecourt and, through their presence/presents, erase the alternative histories. There is a point at which the nation begins to exist independently of the political practices that originally formed it. The nation is more than simply a rhetorical device – a ‘fabricated tradition’ - it is the vessel

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¹⁰⁴ Simon Schama’s work is instructive in this regard. Rather than deconstructing myths and legends – representations of people and places – as the lies that justify political authority Schama identifies the ‘rich deposits of myths, memories and obsessions’ that pervade Western conceptualizations of the landscape. The search for truth, the disavowal of fabrication and the rejection of nation as an acceptable basis for community and identity can blind us to the complex and sometimes contradictory ways in which identity is imagined and contested. Simon Schama, Landscape and Memory, HarperCollins, London, 1995, 14.

¹⁰⁵ Tsubouchi Yūzō, Yasukuni, Shinchōsha, Tokyo, 1998.
of stories, histories and cultures that are more than just the empty signifiers of authoritarian political discourse.

The fluidity and ambiguity that underpins the subjectivity of the modern nation brings us to the problem of just how to understand its discursive formation. Where do we locate its theoretical enunciation? Why do we privilege the hegemony of the state and nationalism in its symbolic imagining? Who actually speaks for the nation?

As Miyake Yoshio points out, to ignore the ‘nationalist’ in Japan is to pave over a myriad of competing visions and ideas that were bound up within the ideal of nation. National identities are inherently unstable; they are prone to the whims of disparate groups and ideas; the nation is mobilized in a multiple of contradictory and anomalous ways; and the histories of nations are in fact as contingent as the nations themselves. As Prasenjit Duara lucidly points out ‘in the place of the harmonized, monologic voice of the Nation, we find a polyphony of voices, overlapping and crisscrossing; contradictory and ambiguous; opposing, affirming, and negotiating their views of nation.’

Through the re-conceptualisation of modernity, the state, the people and history, progressives were also endeavouring to embody a new national identity in postwar Japan; through their visions of political renewal and reconstruction protest emerged as a site at which to shape the character of Japan’s postwar nationality.

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