Conclusion:

The legacies of protest

In the introduction of this thesis I posed the question: How did Japan navigate its way from the universalism of the 1950s to the cultural nationalism of the 1970s? How did we get from Astro Boy to Torasan? In the interim between these two symbols of national identity political upheaval and activism beset Japan. As I have illustrated, the cultures of protest were disparate, and awash with competing ideological and political goals. Nevertheless they were far more than simply reactionary movements defined in opposition to the state. A commitment to enacting a democratic Japan and shaping the character and scope of Japan’s postwar political, social and even cultural institutions brought the cultures of protest together. It is at the sites of political activism that we can decipher the traces of national identity linking Astro Boy and Torasan.

It is no coincidence that Tezuka Osamu stopped producing Astro Boy in 1968, at the height of student activism. The students had embraced the ideals of protest and activism that characterized the political terrain of the 1960s. They had also engaged the idea of democracy and, through struggle, fought to bring meaning to a democratic Japan. But they eschewed the idea of civil society, of a sphere through which to circumvent the auspices of the state and perform a democratic nation. The students thwarted the idea of the nation and its political and social institutions as the ideal informing political activism. They rejected the possibility of national society founded upon the performance of democracy. Thus, while the universal values that underpinned Astro Boy had been challenged throughout the 1960s, in 1968-69 they were, along with Maruyama Masao, Takeuchi Yoshimi and the notion of a democratic civil society, coming under attack.

The student activists of Zenkyōtō sought to transcend the nation, and disavow the notion of a civil society through which it had been played out. They not only criticized the progressive intellectuals, whom they thought had failed to
live by the democratic ideals that they espoused; they also eschewed the possibility of an active citizenry. Many activists saw themselves as representatives of ‘the people,’ but they certainly did not see themselves as representatives of a ‘civil society.’ ‘We had no idea of what lay ahead,’ writes Saishu Satoshi, ‘but we were certain that if we tied ourselves to any organizational pattern we would gradually become absorbed by it.’\(^2\) The theoretical philosophy that underpinned Zenkyōtō saw the students draw an irreparable distinction between protest and the nation.

Dislocating protest and activism from the society, and the articulation of a postwar national imaginary, opened up a conceptual site for cultural nationalism and notions of cultural essentialism. As I have indicated throughout my analysis, national identity does not simply exist or evolve, it is produced. National identity is dependent upon the act of imagination - the performance of its conceptual borders - for its very survival. Through the disavowal of the nation in the university struggle it did not cease to exist, the nation did not simply go away when the students ceased to engage its ideological frames of reference. The students did not transcend the nation by ‘dismantling the university,’ they simply relinquished control over its articulation. The futility of transcendence is no more apparent than in the notion of employment conversion, and the contemporary accounts of 1960s student activism that harp on the nostalgic memories of youth. ‘Return to the self,’ urged Oda Makoto in 1969, as if he had a premonition that the Zenkyōtō students, with whom he had protested throughout the 1960s, would one day rediscover their identity but not their political activism.\(^3\)

My criticism of Zenkyōtō here is that ultimately the notion of transcendence is just a form of self-deception. As many of the activists and intellectuals that I have discussed in this thesis lucidly point out, protest and activism was the

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foundation for national renewal, for imagining postwar society based upon, albeit amorphous, conceptions of modernity and democracy. After the experience of war and defeat, the nation mattered too much, and could not be caste off through spurious aspirations to transcendence.

Torasan, and the attendant notions of ‘cultural phantasm’ and enduring traditional practices, found his time-slot in the wake of a democratic social imaginary. Torasan emerged in the space left vacant by the transcendence of the student activists. This is not to say that Torasan could not have existed regardless of the student protest. Cultural nationalism almost certainly percolated throughout the 1960s and notions of essentialism informed the ideals of many intellectuals and writers of the period. Nevertheless the representation of ‘the people’ through cultural essentialism was only possible with the disavowal of a democratic citizenry, and the undermining of protest as a site at which to perform a postwar national imaginary. In the notion of ‘struggle’ modern Japan as protest and resistance, as peace and democracy, as internationalism, as the performance of its democratic citizens, was shaken like a massive earthquake and many searched the ruins for signs of an ancient, untouched and essential national identity.

Searching these ruins for evidence of agency, autonomy and activism is crucial to our understanding of Japan in the 1960s. Contemporary accounts of the era, which focus upon youth radicalism, on Japan ‘coming of age,’ take the political significance out of the period, blinding us to the centrality of protest to conceptions of a democratic Japan. The 1960s were certainly not an aberration or even an era of youth radicalism, it was a period of fundamental social reform. The 1960s were a period during which a commitment to national renewal was integrally entwined with activism and agency. Perhaps most importantly from today’s perspective, this commitment did have a lasting legacy. The apparent renewal of notions of cultural essentialism within the dominant discourses of the 1970s did not go untouched by the experience of the 1960s.

In 1974, when the Vietnam War appeared to be coming to an end, Beheiren disbanded. Beheiren had not altered Japan’s policy on the Vietnam War and it had not threatened the relationship between Japan and the United States.
Nevertheless, Beheiren had altered the character of leftwing activism in Japan and had challenged the framework of Japan’s political culture. While protest did, in many ways, turn in on itself towards the end of the 1960s, there were also ideas and identities that survived the final curtain call of 1970 Ampo. In fact, Torasan himself embodies many of the ideals that emerged within the community-based activism of the period.

There are many spheres through which we can identify the centrality of community based activism to post-1960s Japan. The election of independent and leftwing candidates in local elections is perhaps the most conspicuous example in the late 1990s but even the campaigns of the conservative government betray an awareness of the power of the local community. The *furusato zukuri* (making the hometown) campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s saw the national government try to co-opt the romantic nostalgia for village life. The campaign could, in some ways be read with a degree of scepticism or even trepidation, but it should not be forgotten that the village of the 1970s had returned to the map of the nation through the imagination of activists and progressive historians. The village was first re-imagined in the postwar period not via the nationalist ideals of the right, or the ideological agenda of industry, but through the notions of activism and autonomy implicit within the protest movements of the 1960s.

Well before the government espied the romance of the village, intellectuals and activists were discussing the potential of ‘residents activism.’ ‘What does the village mean for people’s activism? The foundation of Japan’s revolutionary front,’ chimed a publication titled ‘Citizen.’ And ‘Discussing residents movements, government, autonomy and solidarity: What can residents movements achieve?’ These were just some of the debates filtering through the journals of the 1970s. In the wake of a government with a national vision, or a people with an interest in national politics, the local seems to have held its efficacy as a site for political identification and a powerful basis for political activism in post-1960s Japan.
The international agenda and the ‘citizens’ activism’ (*shimin undō*) discussed in Chapter Four, also played a critical role and provided new sites through which Japan’s democratic ideals and identities could be performed. The idea of citizens’ activism (*shimin undō*) that manifested itself in the activism of Beheiren did not survive long after the 1960s. The term ‘shimin’ (citizen) seems to have been caught in the web of time, and lost much of its efficacy as a basis for activism. What is perhaps most important about the term, and Beheiren’s use of it, was the displacement of the United States as the bastion of democracy and its dismissal as an unproblematic model for Japan’s modern trajectory. Beheiren facilitated new relationships with the United States and opened up new spheres for communication. The relationship between the two governments has remained, on the surface, relatively strong, but the Japanese representations of the US were radically rethought during the 1960s. With the shifting perceptions of America, the meanings attached to modernity and democracy radically changed and gave impetus to the efforts to rethink democracy and citizenship in relation to the nation, rather than abstract political models.

Clearly the legacy of protest cannot be overlooked. Protest provided the foundation for democratic practice, a means through which to embody democracy in the wake of responsive and representative political institutions, and it altered the character of Japan’s democracy. Nevertheless, as I indicated in the Introduction, I did not set out to answer the question: *Is Japan democratic?* My purpose has been to expose the sites at which identity has been envisaged outside the notions of reified traditions. The gaze of scholars in both Japanese studies and postcolonial studies more generally seems almost fixed on cultural nationalism in discussions of non-western national identity and politics. The very possibility of a modern subjectivity as the basis of identity is precluded by the search for difference and for sites of resistance in the non-Western world. Culture, as an imagined space untouched by the modern West, is widely understood to be the site at which the non-western

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world articulates its national identity. Cultural nationalism seems to have blinded us to the possibility of a national identity projected outside the parameters of culture and tradition, and has precluded the possibility of a modern Japan emerging within discourses on national identity.

Analysis of national identity that focuses upon the power of state discourses and rightwing nationalist conceptions of identity have paved over the more inclusive ideas about nationality. They have also engendered a fear of nationalism’s resurgence in Japan that fails to heed the myriad competing conceptions of national identity that have coalesced in the ideas about autonomy. An understanding of the Japanese nation as the sole terrain of the political right has ensured that with every new rightwing publication in Japan the alarm bells begin to ring. In the meantime many other voices of the nation go unnoticed.

By focusing on the confluence of protest and the nation, on the performance of a postwar Japan, I have endeavored to return historicity to conceptions of national identity. I have drawn attention to the voices of postwar Japan that are all too often silenced by the fear of nationalism’s resurgence; the voices swept aside, marginalised or subsumed within histories of the nation-state. These are the stories of a national identity produced not through the nostalgia for an untouched essence or distinct cultural practices, but through visions of a politically active citizenry. In the 1960s notions of agency, activism and autonomy emerged as the conceptual foundation for the enactment of democracy and the imagination of the postwar national identity.