

The intellectual culture of postwar Japan and the 1968–1969 University of Tokyo struggles: Repositioning the self in postwar thought

Kersten, Rikki, author

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Abstrak

Japan's student-led protests of 1968–1969 resonated with similar movements around the world, particularly in their demand for individual autonomy and liberation from the burden of mature capitalism and the yoke of social regimentation. In the case of Japan, this movement also signified a major turning point in postwar intellectual culture. 1968 was when protesting youth led a critical rejection of the progressive intellectuals who had defined the substance of postwar Japanese democratic idealism. In intellectual terms, progressive thinkers were challenged from two directions: radicalism and conservatism. The confrontation between these three intellectual positions was dramatised in the movement that took place at the University of Tokyo. This article examines the experiences and responses of Maruyama Masao, Yoshimoto Takaaki (Rymei) and Hayashi Kentar during the course of the 1968–1969 protests at the University of Tokyo. I conclude that while 1968 heralded the end of progressive predominance, it confirmed the importance of ideas about the self in postwar intellectual life.