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In August 1940 Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yōsuke announced the intention of the government to establish a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," a new regional bloc of nations encompassing Japan (including the territories of Korea, Taiwan, and Sakhalin), China, Manchukuo, French Indochina, and the Dutch East Indies. The surrender of the Netherlands and France to Germany in the spring and summer of 1940 left the French and Dutch Asian colonies adrift. Anticipating a broadening of the war in Asia, Japanese naval and military leaders successfully pushed for a "move south" to establish bases for a new offensive against the Kuomintang government in Chungking and to secure access to the resources of Southeast Asia.

The announcement of a plan for a Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere can be viewed as an act of political cynicism and an attempt to recast imperialistic opportunism as an idealistic national mission. Foreign politicians and journalists at the time regarded the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere simply as a slogan to justify a new phase of expansion. It resembled an equally opportunistic slogan of the, "New

Order in East Asia" promulgated two years before, as the Japanese offensive slowed in China. It is a mistake, to dismiss the concept as cynical or hypocritical as it equally useful to think of it as a "dream" or a vision of the future as much as a rationale for the present.

It is notable how quickly the concept of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere was accepted as a national goal. By mid-1941 it was invoked in the secret discussions of the highest leadership of Japan as the touchstone of all policies. Major decisions were justified or rejected on the grounds of whether or not they would promote the establishment of the Co-Prosperity Sphere. There was no need for cynical rationalization in the secrecy of imperial conference chambers. This suggests that the concept spoke to a deeply felt need of the Japanese public and so did the response by the public that quickly embraced it as a national goal. For most Japanese at the time (especially the young and well educated) it was an exciting dream and even in the postwar period it has retained a special appeal for neo-nationalist ideologues like Ishihara Shintarō and Kobayashi Yoshinori.

Why was the Co-Prosperity Sphere accepted and internalized so quickly by the public and leaders of Japan? What was the basis for the appeal? One obvious answer is that the concept built on Pan-Asian notions of an "Asian community" that had become "common sense" in the Japanese political discourse in the early twentieth century.

At the intellectual roots of Japanese Pan-Asianism was a conviction that all the people of Asia were bound together by natural unity, affinity, and commonality. Initially the sense of commonality was extended to the immediate neighbors of Japan (Korea and China) that shared a common writing system, religious backgrounds, philosophical traditions, and common physical features. In the early years of the century Japanese advocates of expansion in Korea deployed concepts like *dōkon* (common roots), dōbun (common culture) and *dōshu* (common race), or *dōso* (common ancestors) to argue that it was "natural" to assimilate Koreans into the Japanese state.

Japanese Pan-Asianist thinkers also assumed that Japan (by proof of a successful modernization) had a natural role to play as the leader of Asia. They argued that the Japanese were obliged to carry "the yellow man's burden" uplifting beleaguered fellow Asians in colonial or semi-colonial countries. This could mean that Japan might serve a conduit or mediator for the introduction of modernity to the region, an argument often raised with respect to China; but it could also mean that Japan might protect fellow Asians by extending benevolent political control over them, an argument advanced to explain the annexation of Korea.

The concept of the Co-Prosperity Sphere as a regional political bloc led by Japan fit firmly into a long-standing Pan-Asian discourse. In the late 1930s the Shōwa Kenkyūkai (a group of prominent Japanese intellectuals, journalists, and bureaucrats) incorporated two basic Pan-Asian ideas, the cultural commonalities of Asian people with Japan as the natural regional leader and in the proposal for an "East Asian community" (*Tō-A kyōdōtai*). Royama Masamichi described it as "a community of destiny based on cooperative relations among the people of the region" that would be as historically significant as the Hellenistic culture created by the Greeks. The first Konoe cabinet translated the concept of an "East Asian community" into a vision of a "New Order in East Asia" as a regional political bloc (including Japan, China, and Manchukuo) organized to block the spread of Communism, promote regional economic cooperation, and create a "new East Asian culture" based on "Asian principles."

The dream of a Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere expanded the idea of an "Asian community" beyond East Asia to the European colonies in Southeast Asia by adding a third element to the Pan-Asian vision. Since the people of Southeast and South Asia (a complex checkerboard of religions, languages, and ethnicities) had little in common with the Sinitic culture that linked the Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans, the Co-Prosperity Sphere redefined the "Asian community" as a region whose people had a common interest. It assumed that all the

people of Asia (including the Japanese) shared the common experience of confrontation with the West, and that all Asians had a common interest in expelling western domination and influence from the region. The dream of a Co-Prosperity Sphere was embraced not simply because it echoed Pan-Asianist "common sense." It also addressed problems that Japan faced in 1940 and offered a way of resolving them.

The dream provided the basis for a new sense of national identity that placed Japan at the forefront of history. For two generations, the Japanese had lived with a sense of national backwardness vis-à-vis the "civilized" West. Establishing a Co-Prosperity Sphere would allow the Japanese to leap into the vanguard of history. By the late 1930s many Japanese political, intellectual, and academic leaders were convinced that history had reached a major turning point. It is striking how often they spoke of the "world historical significance" of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. As crisis after crisis wracked the world after the crash of 1929, the international order created by the British, the Americans and the other western powers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century seemed to be crumbling.

The global economic crisis was evidence that classic liberal capitalism had collapsed. Even in western capitalist countries governments no longer relied on market forces to achieve prosperity and shifted to policies of economic intervention. Similarly a world trade system based on the ideology of "free trade" was being supplanted by protectionism, managed currencies, and rising national trade barriers as western countries sought to protect themselves from the effects of a world depression. At the same time the system of international collective security established at the Versailles Peace Conference (embodied in the League of Nations and the international disarmament treaties negotiated in the 1920s) was failing to assure international peace or to secure the rights of national self-determination.

Many Japanese viewed that the old world order dominated by the Anglo-American powers was destined to be supplanted by a "new world

order" created by a coalition of vanguard nations that included Japan, allies, and friendly nations in Europe. Japan was a leading nation that would usher in a "new epoch in the annals of humanity." When war with the United States and Allies broke out in 1941 the conflict was portrayed not as a contest over power and wealth but as a stage in a historical process leading to a new and more just international order.

The dream of the Co-Prosperity Sphere offered hope of resolving political and social conflicts at home. It was no coincidence that the promulgation of a "new order" in the world in 1940 was accompanied by the announcement of a domestic "new order" (*shintaisei*), the goal of which was to create a new sense of unity and national purpose that would dispel the conflict and social unrest generated by the "individualism" imported from the West. The ostensible purpose of the domestic "new order" was to enable Japan to pursue a "world historical mission" of building a Co-Prosperity Sphere but the latent purpose was to eliminate domestic liberal institutions, parliamentary politics, and competitive markets that were thought to weaken Japan.

The dream of the Co-Prosperity Sphere offered a way out of the economic impasse that Japan faced as a rapidly industrializing economy with a limited resource base and stressed the commonalities of economic interest among the people of Asia as much as the cultural commonalities as a vision of regional unity. It portrayed Japan (like the countries colonized the West), as a "have not" nation in a world economy dominated by the Anglo-American powers. The liberation of these colonies under Japanese guidance would lay the foundation for a new regional economic system, paralleling the "sterling bloc" in the British Empire or the "dollar bloc" in the Western Hemisphere. This regional economic system would be based on a reciprocal and symbiotic relationship between Japan and the areas under influence. It would permit the people of Asia to compete with western economies as they were not able to under colonial rule. Common economic policies, central planning for resource and industrial development, and a non-exploitative

relationship would serve the economic interests of the whole region, not just the Japanese.

Finally, the dream of a Co-Prosperity Sphere was one that could be shared by indigenous elites in the regions under Japanese occupation. The Pan-Asian elements in the dream permitted the Japanese to reconcile local anti-colonial aspirations for national independence with the grand goal of Japanese regional hegemony. It held out the promise that the European colonial regimes in Southeast Asia would be supplanted by new liberated national regimes under the guidance of a benevolent and generous Japan. In this sense the Great East Asia War (announced after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941) was characterized as a "war of liberation" or a "war of racial awakening" or a "war of national emancipation" from the thrall of Anglo-American domination.

In the end the Co-Prosperity remained simply a dream. As a concept it suffered from considerable vagueness. Even after intensive debate and discussion, and even after the formation of a new ministry to attend to the development of the dream of an "Asian community" never crystallized into a workable program or provided a pattern for general policy in the occupied areas. More important, the imperial over-expansion by Japan, especially the advance into Southeast Asia and the entering into a war with the United States stripped the dream of any promise. The exigencies of war took precedence over the creation of a regional bloc based on "mutuality," "cooperation," "solidarity," "co-existence," and "co-prosperity." While Japanese officials took the idea of liberating Asia seriously, the most energy was directed toward keeping the military machine functioning. As the tide of war turned against Japan at the end of 1942, reality overwhelmed the dream.

From the outset economic policy for the region was based on military logistics not on the goal of mutual or cooperative development. here was a proliferation of plans for various parts of the regional bloc, but more often they were abandoned as wartime conditions changed. The main interest of the military and naval high commands was logistical

support for the Japanese fighting forces, which were ordered to live off the land. Japanese occupation troops competed with the local population for food supplies and other basic consumer goods and resources. The Japanese military commandeered what they needed, required forced deliveries at fixed prices, and paid for them with military script or nonconvertible bank notes. This disrupted undermined economic development in the Co-Prosperity Sphere and did not promote it.

The Japanese occupying forces everywhere in Asia proved to be at least as harsh and exploitative as the European colonists. As the war situation grew increasingly unfavorable to Japan, local Japanese authorities began to commandeer labor, luring, or dragooning battalions of *rōmusha* (essentially forced laborers) to build roads, construct airstrips, and lay railway lines for the war effort. These laborers worked under harsh conditions, under brutal supervision, often with barely enough to eat, let alone adequate medical care and other amenities. It has been estimated that perhaps 100,000 Burmese and Malay laborers died in the construction of the Burma-Siam Railway, the notorious "railway of death." The hundreds of thousands of Chinese and Korean *rōmusha* brought to wartime Japan to work in coal mines and factories were treated with similar brutality.

Despite a show of sympathy and support for local anti-colonial nationalists in Southeast Asia during the early stages of the war, the Japanese did little in the way of giving real independence to indigenous leaders. Japanese military forces found anti-colonial collaborators wherever they went but they made few lasting bonds with local populations. In Manchukuo and occupied China (where client regimes had been established) Japanese "advisors" were firmly in control of local administrative systems and the promises of independence made to Burma, the Philippines, and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) in 1942-1943, and to Indochina in 1945, went unfulfilled in practice.

The emptiness of these gestures toward independence was evident at the Greater East Asia Conference (*Dai Tō~A kaigi*) in November 1943.

While invitations had been made to leaders all over Asia, no representatives from Malaya or the Dutch East Indies attended. A decision had been made to treat them as Japanese territory whose natural resources were to be developed as rapidly as possible to supply metropolitan Japan. The leaders from Taiwan and Korea were not in attendance since the people of those countries (as subjects of the Japanese emperor) had lost any claim of "sovereign independence."

Finally, the war brought deep economic disruption in every part of the Co~Prosperity Sphere: chronic shortages of food, a lack of consumption goods, rampant inflation, black marketeering, hoarding, speculation, and widespread unemployment, both in the cities and countryside as production declined. While symptoms of economic deterioration varied in each country, no part of the empire escaped them. ew among those occupied regretted the departure of the Japanese when the occupation came to an end. By 1945 anti-Japanese resistance movements had emerged everywhere in Asia, perhaps with exception of the Dutch East Indies.

After the war, despite the best efforts of the American occupation to expunge positive memories of the Co-Prosperity Sphere, the dream persisted at least among conservative politicians, intellectuals, and academics. Its most persuasive defender was Hayashi Fusao, who offered a positive evaluation of the Co-Prosperity Sphere in his 1963 *Dai tō-A koteiron*, which argued that the Great East Asia War was the culmination of a "Hundred Years War" against western aggression in Asia. Not only did this interpretation find support among the reading public, it was also voiced by prominent conservative politicians. In 1993, when Prime Minister Hosokawa publicly expressed the belief that Japan had brought "unbearable suffering" to the people of Asia and elsewhere through "national aggression and colonial domination," prominent LDP leaders like Nagano Shigeto, Sakurai Shin, and Hashimoto Ryūtarō countered with public statements that denied the war had been "an aggressive war" or reaffirmed it as a "war to liberate Asia."

What kept a positive memory of the dream alive among right-wing conservatives was a complex set of factors, a reluctance to come to terms with defeat and failure, a desire to make sense of the costly wartime sacrifices of the Japanese people, a feeling that Japan had once become a "victim" of outside forces beyond control, a desire to protect the memory of the war dead, resentment of American hegemony in postwar Asia, and electoral politics. At the same time during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the Japanese school curriculum in history did little to dispel the ignorance of young Japanese about how far the wartime dreams of an "Asian community" departed from the realities of war and occupation.

It would have been easier to exorcize the "dream" of the Co-Prosperity Sphere had the Japanese empire come to an end through an agonizing and violent process of decolonization as most European colonial empires did. If the Chinese, Koreans, Taiwanese, the Javans, and other occupied Asian people had thrown the Japanese out, it would have been easier for the Japanese to understand the failure of the "dream." But it was easier to perpetuate the illusion that the Japanese had been "liberators" during the war since the defeat of Japan came at the hands of the Americans and the Allies that were "white imperialists." The harsh realities of the Co-Prosperity Sphere often faded in public memory while memories of the dream were kept alive.

The Burmese nationalist leader U Nu who cooperated with the Japanese occupiers wrote in postwar memoirs that the case of Japan was "tragic." No other country he said, "had done so much to liberate Asia from white domination, yet no other nation has been so misunderstood by the very people it helped either to liberate or to set an example." Nu argued that the misunderstandings arose from the gap between Japanese intentions and Japanese behavior and the tragedy was that the brutality of the Japanese occupying forces undercut the feelings of "trust and gratitude" that many Asians felt toward Japan. Even two generations after the end of the war, this remains an enduring dilemma in Japanese relations with Asia.

A vocal minority in Japan still embrace the dream as a noble if unsuccessful effort at creating a new and more just order in Asia. This is not to say that the realities of the Co-Prosperity Sphere have been ignored or repressed. The defenders of the dream are counter-balanced by equally vocal critics of the war. Public opinion polls show that a majority of Japanese are well aware of the suffering that wartime Japan inflicted on neighbors. Exhibits at peace museums in Osaka, at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, or at the Hiroshima memorial museum display the brutal exploitation of other Asian people. While Japanese textbooks do not dwell on the harsh realities of the Co-Prosperity Sphere as do those in China and other parts of Asia, the damage done to other Asian people is recognized.

Nostalgia for the dream of the Co-Prosperity Sphere has persisted, and the continuing ambiguities in the Japanese public memory of the war continue to trouble relations with its neighbors. Wartime dreams lie just beneath the surface, like artillery shells left over from a long-ended battle, and when one detonates great damage is done to Japanese relations with its neighbors, who are skeptical that the dream was anything more than a cover for a rapacious and cruel expansionist policy. Finding a way of bridging this perception gap is a critical task for historians in all Asian countries, but it will not be an easy task to accomplish.