

“The Greater East Asia Land Development Program and the Construction in Wartime Japan of East and Southeast Asian Economic Zone”

Graduate School/Faculty of Arts and Letters
Tohoku University
ADACHI Hiroaki

In the 1940s, Japanese leaders tried to build an economic bloc by forming an exclusive regional zone with Japan as a leader in Asia. In this presentation, I will clarify the evolution of the economic bloc concept in Japan and its characteristics. I will explain what the plan became during the Asia-Pacific War and explain the processes by which it failed to be realized. Special focus will be placed on the Greater East Asia Land Development Program created by the Planning Board and on the reports of The Greater East Asia Construction Council, which was established as a council directly reporting to the Cabinet after the start of the Asia-Pacific War.

The Greater East Asia Land Development Program was a concrete plan for an economic bloc, with its setting of 15-year production targets and its allocation of industries and population to each region representing key elements of its character. The plan had three major features: 1. The scope of the region was divided into two stages, in the first stage it covered East and Southeast Asia, and in the second stage it included Australia and India. 2. Its purpose was to manage the heavy chemical industry, not only in mainland Japan, but also in Korea, Manchuria, and North China, where the plan called for increases in the production of heavy industries (steel, aluminum, etc.). 3. The plans for the reallocation of population outlined migration from agricultural areas to industrial areas, but concrete numerical values were not recorded for China and Manchuria. Additionally, the plan did not give sufficient consideration to the colonies of Korea and Taiwan.

The Planning Board insisted on incorporating the features of this plan into the report of the Greater East Asia Construction Council, but due to the opposition of other ministries, these were expressed only ambiguously. However, the Board subsequently devised new plans for a narrower area based on this plan and influenced concrete policies of Japanese government agencies throughout Asia.

In practice, these long-term plans were not implemented as a whole. The reason for this was the prioritization of the maintenance of the war economy for the immediate future due to a decline in transport capacity. In mid-1943, the Japanese government decided to abandon the implementation of long-term plans for the time being. Declining maritime transportation capacity in Japan divided economic exchange in various parts of Asia, leading to shortages and inflation in numerous regions and the failure of Japan's regional area concept.

408words