

Imperial Japanese Goals

The **Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere** was an imperial concept created and promulgated for occupied Asian populations during 1930-45 by the Empire of Japan. It extended greater than East Asia and promoted the cultural and economic unity of Northeast Asians, Southeast Asians, South Asians and Oceanians. It also declared the intention to create a self-sufficient "bloc of Asian nations led by the Japanese and free of Western powers".

The intent and practical implementation of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere varied widely depending on the group and government department involved. Policy theorists who conceived it, as well as the vast majority of the Japanese population at large, largely saw it for its pan-Asian ideals of freedom and independence from Western colonial oppression. In practice, however, it was frequently corrupted by militarists and nationalists, who saw an effective policy vehicle through which to strengthen Japan's position and advance its dominance within Asia. The latter approach was reflected in a policy document released by Japan's Ministry of Health and Welfare, *An Investigation of Global Policy with the Yamato Race as Nucleus*, which laid out the central position of Japan within the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, and promoted the idea of Japanese superiority over other Asians.



History

The concept of a unified East Asia took form based on an Imperial Japanese Army concept that originated with General Hachirō Arita, an army ideologist who served as Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1936 to 1940. The Japanese Army said the new Japanese empire was an Asian equivalent of the Monroe Doctrine, especially with the Roosevelt Corollary. The regions of Asia, it was argued, were as essential to Japan as Latin America was to the United States.^[16]

The Japanese Foreign Minister Yōsuke Matsuoka formally announced the idea of the Co-Prosperity Sphere on 1 August 1940, in a press interview, but it had existed in other forms for many years. Leaders in Japan had long had an interest in the idea. The outbreak of World War II fighting in Europe had given the Japanese an opportunity to demand the withdrawal of support from China in the name of "Asia for Asiatics", with the European powers unable to effectively retaliate. Many of the other nations within the boundaries of the sphere were under colonial rule and elements of their population were sympathetic to Japan (as in the case of Indonesia), occupied by Japan in the early phases of the war and reformed under puppet governments, or already under Japan's control at the outset (as in the case of Manchukuo). These factors helped make the formation of the sphere, while lacking any real authority or joint power, come together without much difficulty.

As part of its war drive, Japanese propaganda included phrases like "Asia for the Asiatics!" and talked about the perceived need to liberate Asian countries from imperialist powers. The failure to win the Second Sino-Japanese War 1937-1941 (-1945) was blamed on British and American exploitation of Southeast Asian colonies, even though the Chinese received far more assistance from the Soviet Union. In some cases local people welcomed Japanese troops when they invaded, driving out British, French, and other governments and military forces. In general, however, the subsequent pragmatism and brutality of the Japanese military, particularly in China, led to people of the occupied areas regarding the new Japanese imperialists as much worse than the Western imperialists. The Japanese government directed that local economies be managed

strictly for the production of raw war materials for the Japanese; a cabinet member declared, "There are no restrictions. They are enemy possessions. We can take them, do anything we want."

An Investigation of Global Policy with the Yamato Race as Nucleus — a secret document completed in 1943 for high-ranking government use — laid out that Japan, as the originators and strongest military power within the region, would naturally take the superior position within the Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, with the other nations under Japan's umbrella of protection.

China and other Asian nations, on their own, were regarded as too weak and lacking in unity to be treated as fully equal partners, and this in any case would not have been in Japan's self-interest. The booklet *Read This and the War is Won*—for the Japanese army—presented colonialism as an oppressive group of colonists living in luxury by burdening Asians. Since racial ties of blood connected other Asians to the Japanese, and Asians had been weakened by colonialism, it was Japan's self-appointed role to "make men of them again" and liberate them from their western oppressors.

From the Japanese point of view, one common principal reason stood behind both forming the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and initiating war with the Allies: Chinese markets. Japan wanted their "paramount relations" in regard to Chinese markets acknowledged by the U.S. government. The U.S., recognizing the abundance of potential wealth in these markets, refused to let the Japanese have an advantage in selling to China. In an attempt to give Japan a formal advantage over the Chinese markets, the Japanese Imperial regime first invaded China and later launched the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

According to Foreign Minister Shigenori Tōgō (in office 1941-1942 and 1945), should Japan be successful in creating this sphere, it would emerge as the leader of Eastern Asia, and the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere would be synonymous with the Japanese Empire.