

The Resources Committee Experiment:
The Rise and Fall of Cross-Ministerial Resource Governance in Japan

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Abstract

Sound natural resource management requires a *fit* between the problem and the institutional arrangement that has been put into place to address the problem. The aim of this paper is to re-examine the long-forgotten legacy of the Japanese Resources Committee (RC), a governmental experiment that enjoyed brief success in addressing resource challenges immediately after World War II². I will analyze the rise and fall of the RC by examining the functions, impacts, and philosophical ideals embraced by RC participants, investigating not only the factors behind the rise of this special institution but also those that contributed to its fall. The RC was created in the hope that human and institutional ingenuity could overcome the material challenges of devastated post-war Japan. Although the experiment took place 50 years ago and was short-lived, there are many lessons to learn from a contemporary perspective when an integrated approach to resource problems is much wanted than ever.

1. Introduction

Although the challenges thrust upon human society by nature—from the scarcity of specific natural resources to the deterioration of the environment in general—are essentially identical worldwide, tremendous diversity exists in the institutional responses to these challenges. Some countries are quick to respond, while others are much slower or fail to respond altogether; some countries respond in a systematic fashion by creating internal bodies to address those challenges, while others respond more on an *ad hoc* basis. While it is tempting to ask what brings about these differences, the answer is not immediately apparent. At the very least, we can

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² Saburo Ohkita, in his recollection of early institutionalization of resource issues, says: “The fact that organization like the Resources Committee was established within the Japanese government, where traditional conventions and short-sighted problem definition still prevailed, was itself an experiment” (Ohkita 1949: 316).

hypothesize that any kind of “success” in natural resource and environmental management requires a *fit* between the problem and the institutional arrangement that has been put into place to address the problem—this is precisely why a study of resource policy should expand its scope to that of “resource governance”, which emphasizes the *relationship* among actors and knowledge instead of a particular policy.

There are several possible obstacles for this “fit” to occur in the case of governmental response. First is a gap in speed—conditions of natural resources change rapidly and often unexpectedly, while institutional change happens much more slowly in bureaucracy, where various legal steps and administrative procedures must be completed prior to any kind of large-scale response. Second is a tendency to downplay socio-economic pretext in which a particular resource policy produce effects, possibly leading to unfeasible or socially unacceptable responses. Natural resources can easily be divided into sectors (e.g., water, forests, energy) that often render them “technical”; much effort, then, goes into the science and technology of resources as material objects, while the social and institutional foundations of those technologies are often left behind. Third is an entrenched bureaucratic sectionalism that resists efforts to derive a concerted response to resource problems on both social and environmental levels. These three forces work differently in different settings, creating a variety of institutional responses to natural resource issues.

The aim of this paper is to re-examine the long-forgotten legacy of the Japanese Resources Committee (later renamed the Resources Council), a governmental experiment that enjoyed brief success in addressing resource challenges immediately after World War II. I wish to examine the practical lessons and theoretical significance that can be derived from the story of the Resources Committee/Council (hereafter RC). From its establishment in 1947, I focus on RC activities mainly up to the early 1950s, a period I consider the most successful of long life of the RC that existed until the 1990s. Post-war Japan experienced severe food shortages, malnutrition, and deficiencies in raw materials not only due to damages suffered during the war but also to the trade embargo imposed by the Allied Powers, which strictly limited Japan’s import/export opportunities. The RC was initially part of the Economic Stabilization Board, a central planning agency mandated to reconstruct the war-torn economy from a short-term perspective. The RC came into being with strong support from the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the Supreme Commander

for the Allied Powers (SCAP) with an objective to develop long-term resource plans and provide policy advice to the Prime Minister.

Because the unprecedented need for integrated resource planning in post-war Japan was soon alleviated by the economic boom derived from the Korean War (1950-53) and US foreign assistance, the influence of the RC began to fade gradually in the late 1950s, and the significance of the committee had been almost completely forgotten by the public by the 1970s. Since around that time, “pollution” has become the dominating framework how Japanese people perceive nature-society interactions, replacing the more integrated perspective on “resources” that had been advocated by the RC.

Likewise, in the world of academia, the notorious Minamata disease and other problems caused by 1950s industrial pollution triggered a surge in environmental studies in the 1970s, and the allocation of responsibilities in light of these problems became the focus of much debate. However, environmental social science in general, and environmental sociology in particular, has paid little attention to resource problems, and scholars of environmental politics have focused primarily on the innovative role of local governments in response to these problems, placing an implicit blame on the central government. Little analytical effort has been invested in the role of planning agencies or the way bureaucratic elites at the very center of policy making in Tokyo design institutional responses to natural resource problems.

To fill these gaps, this paper analyzes the rise and fall of the RC which was located at the very center of the government planning body. I will examine the functions, impacts, and philosophical ideals embraced by RC participants, investigating not only the factors behind the rise of this special institution but also those that contributed to its fall. Because the RC was short-lived and recorded documents are scattered, few systematic efforts to reflect on the committee’s achievements have been performed. This study is the culmination of 7 years of research to find those who worked in the RC in the 1940s and 50s, using primary source documents personally held by the individuals whom I was able to meet³ in addition to what was

³These individuals include Dr. Motosuke Ishii (1925-), Dr. Tohru Ishimitsu (1925-), Dr. Toshiro Kuroiwa (1926-), Dr. Hitoshi Sasao (1920-), Dr. Tomoji Ichinose (1923-), Mr. Sadao Matsumiya (n.a) among others. I also had the benefit of discovering personal documents of Dr. Koichi Aki at the Yokohama City Library, and those of Dr. Masamichi Royama at the special section of the Library of Congress in Tokyo. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all these people who were kind enough to share their experiences and documents.

available at various archives in Japan.

The first contribution of this paper, therefore, is the re-discovery of the RC's significance as a policy experiment in Japanese resource governance. One may well doubt the value of using Japan as a case to study resources planning—indeed, the worth of such a perspective certainly depends upon how Japan is characterized from a resource perspective. As we shall see, Japan has, in the past, been regarded as one of the world's most “resource poor” nations; however, whether a country's resources are considered “scarce” or “abundant” depends on the definition of “resource”, which is itself a function of both material and societal conditions. Tsuru, for example, defines the concept of “resource” as a “combined entity of natural and material with human and intellectual” (Tsuru 1958: 170). The implicit emphasis here is on the human aspect of resources, where even material-deficient Japan can hope for development and prosperity.

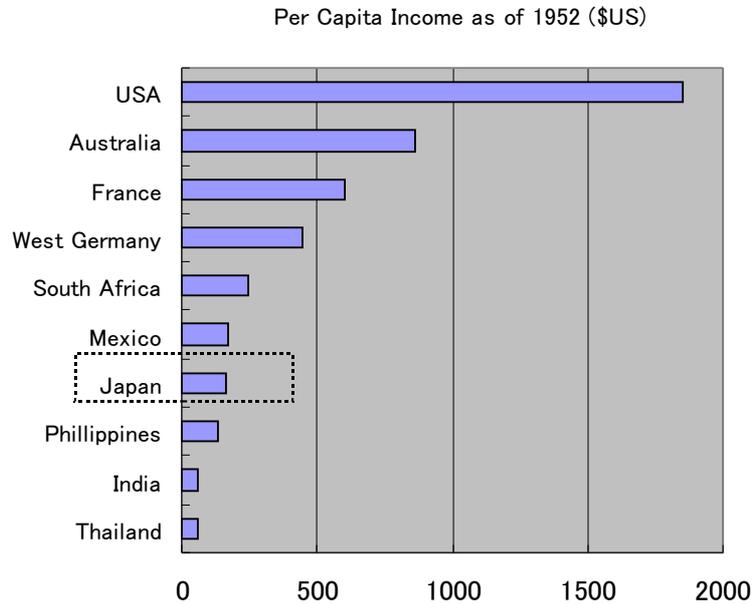
The RC was created in the hope that human and institutional ingenuity could overcome the material challenges of devastated post-war Japan. Previously, Japan lacked such an inter-ministerial institution for resources planning, particularly for the sake of public welfare. In this sense, the RC was an experiment, as many participants of the committee later reflected. Although the experiment was short-lived, there are many lessons to learn from a contemporary perspective where an integrated approach—not only in practice but in planning and policy—is necessary for the sustainability of mankind.

2. Resource Situation of Post-War Japan and the Rise of the Resource Committee

2-1 Economic Situation of Japan circa 1950

First, let us review some basic statistics. Although it is difficult to obtain any reliable numbers on the economic situation of Japan in 1945 and 1946, life expectancy at birth in 1947 was 50 for men and 53 for women (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2009). Engel's coefficient — percentage of expenditure on food which is a common indicator of poverty — was 60% as of 1948, meaning that most of the average person's income went to food. Even in 1952, when the Japanese economy began to recover from war damages, the country's per capita income was barely above that of the Philippines and less than that of Mexico.

Figure 1: Per capita Income as of 1952



Source: United Nations Statistical Reports

After the war, Japan lost nearly half of its former colonies, which had amounted to 45% of Japan's land area provided abundant raw materials and 30% of the labor population (RC, 1953). Japan was then forced to rely primarily on what was available in the four main islands of Honshu, Kyushu, Shikoku, and Hokkaido. *Postwar Reconstruction of the Japanese Economy*, drafted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated clearly that "Japan in the past always sought the solution to problems outside its national boundaries...efforts have not been fully exerted for the development of its own land" (Okita, 1992:162).

2-2 Development of the Resources Committee

Although pre-war Japan showed sporadic interest in the New Deal and integrated resources planning, which were emerging policy trends in the US, it was only after World War II that serious consideration was given to the translation of such ideas into Japanese contexts.

The key figure behind this process was Edward Ackerman, a Harvard geographer who came to Japan in 1946 as a technical advisor to the Natural Resources Section of the GHQ. Following his nation-wide survey of the resource situation in Japan, Ackerman came to the conclusion that Japan was not a resource poor country and that Japan could support its population if appropriate measures were taken. He claimed—contrary to the common understanding that recovery of the Japanese economy was almost impossible—that full utilization of science and technology, combined with the diligent character of the Japanese people, would allow sufficient economic recovery (Ackerman 1948).

Several young Japanese bureaucrats, including Saburo Ohkita, who later became Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Koichi Aki, a Professor of Civil Engineering at the University of Tokyo, responded to Ackerman’s promising declaration and become close enough with him to meet frequently at Ackerman’s office. Ackerman introduced these Japanese bureaucrats to the American-style National Resources Board and the importance of integrated planning in natural resources development. Ackerman’s followers became prominent figures in developing a basic plan to establish the RC. Along with Shigeto Tsuru, an economist who became the vice president of the Economic Stabilization Board, they formed a Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) study group to investigate the possibilities of implementing integrated development projects in Japan.

Table 1: Organizational Change in the Resources Committee/Resources Council

Organization Name	Year of Est. /Change	Host Organization	Secretariat
Resources Committee (<i>Shigen Inkai</i>)	1947.12.13	Economic Stabilization Board	Resources Committee Secretariat
Resources Council (<i>Shigen Chosakai</i>)	1949.6.1		
	1952.8.1	Prime Minister’s Office	
	1956.5.19	Science and Technology Agency	Resource Bureau, Science and Technology Agency
	1968.6.15		Planning Bureau, Science and Technology Agency

Source: Commentary Series on Government Committees, Office of the Prime Minister, Science and Technology Agency

Justifying the establishment of a new organization, however, was not easy, even amidst the chaos of post-war reconstruction. The basic plan drawn by Ohkita had to be approved by the GHQ as well as existing government agencies. The idea was to establish a long-term planning agency based on the maximum utilization of science

and technology while aiming to avoid duplicating the functions of existing agencies. The RC was anticipated to coordinate existing agencies with an independent capacity to conduct research and develop proposals. Intense discussion with existing agencies took place in early 1947, with the conclusion that the RC would concentrate on basic research and long-term planning to avoid conflict with present agencies⁴.

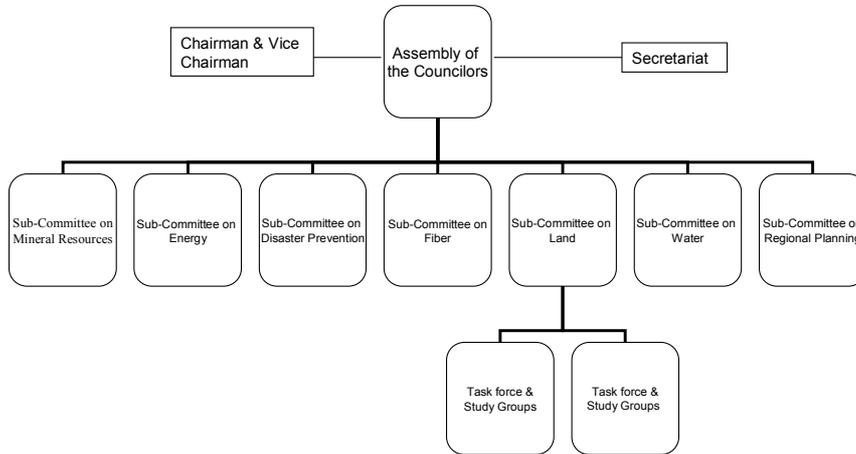
Discussion covered not only the outer boundaries of the RC's mandates and the legal procedures to authorize such an entity as a government body, but the constructive role that the RC could play, in filling the lacuna in between the ministries. Notable among the expected functions, as we shall discuss later, was the identification of a policy problem from a self-initiated interdisciplinary perspective. Unlike traditional ministries which were mostly occupied by problems that had been passively identified already, RC had the freedom to choose the problem based on their scientific research.

In the process of attempting to work closely with the various sections of the GHQ in the initiation period of RC, the definition of the term "resources" became problematic; as this subsequently determined the scope of the RC. While GHQ representatives argued that the RC should have a wider scope, including public works, human resources development, and overall economic planning functions like those played by the US National Resources Board, the GHQ's Japanese counterpart advocated limiting the scope of the RC to "natural" resources from a strictly technical perspective (RC 1948).

The RC consisted of no more than 20 committee members from resource-related agencies and representatives from academia. The committee was supported by roughly 700 specialized committee members who provided expert knowledge tailored to the issue at hand. The RC, under its 20 member overarching committee had sub-committees focusing on land, water, food, fibers, and energy issues. Sub-committees on hygiene, regional planning, and socio-economics were soon added; as the number of committees increased, the RC gradually became more comprehensive in its coverage.

⁴In addition to the Economic Stabilization Board, in which the RC was expected to be housed, consultations were made with agencies such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Education.

Figure1: Structure of the Resources Committee as of 1947



Source: A key to Japan's recovery : natural resources policy & the occupation (1985)

The main function of the RC was to provide recommendation to the Prime Minister—and later to the Minister of Science and Technology Agency—that ultimately materialized in actual government policies. Thus, one way to examine the RC's achievements is to examine these advisory statements and determine what impact they had on actual policy.

2-3 Highlights of Resources Committee's Policy Recommendations

Ohkita recalls that most of the counsel statements, which were the result of interdisciplinary efforts by the RC, were ahead of their time, often inviting outright objections or, at best, ignorance of the significance of the RC (Ohno, 2004:116).

The RC's primary function was to deliver recommendations, originally to the Prime Minister and then to the Minister of Science and Technology (the advisee became the Minister of Science and Technology Agency from 1956). The RC issued 16 recommendations and 24 reports before the establishment of the Science and Technology Agency (1956). Topics ranged from flooding prevention (1948) and prevention of water pollution (1951) to railway electrification (1949) and distribution of salt rations (1955)⁵. Many of these recommendations were utilized—though not always

⁵As one can see from the diversity of coverage, these topics were all connected under

completely—to enhance coordination among related agencies and enhance policy effectiveness. The recommendation on water pollution prevention in 1951 was among the most advanced of the time, appearing much earlier than the arrival of environmental movements in 1970s when pollution was recognized as a nation-wide issue. The recommendation included the establishment of interdisciplinary monitoring team both at the center and in 8 regions of Japan with the authority to enforce pollution standards⁶. Recommendation also contained precise scientific standards depending on the types of water and a proposal to establish a national institute on water quality science to respond to request by the public in measuring the level of pollution in each region.

However, we should not limit our scope to the output of the RC—the process by which this output was achieved is equally valuable, particularly since many of the RC's recommendations faced objections from existing ministries and thus were never implemented. Ohkita recalls, for example, that recommendations on railway electrification, intended to reduce coal consumption, met with much resistance from the coal industry, which was the main supplier of raw material to the railways (Ohno, 2004: 116). In addition, the far-sighted recommendation on water pollution (1951) that we highlighted above was heavily criticized by industries that preferred to give priority to economic growth⁷.

In contrast, the RC's emphasis on agenda-setting can be easily highlighted. Reflecting on his working experience at the RC from its very beginning, Ishii recalls the importance of methodological self-awareness in *taking up* an issue to be studied. "Resource problems" penetrate diverse sectors and disciplines, requiring a democratic selection of what problems to address and how. Reference material on Issue Selection

the theme of "resources." Takahashi, recalling Aki's lecture at the University of Tokyo in his student days, says, "Professor Aki encouraged students to find connections among apparently disparate topics such as water conservation, railway and nylon. I think he wanted students to think by themselves about what the connections might be. After all, research on resources is about finding connections among apparently unrelated topics under the objective of nation-building" (Takahashi 2005: 34).

⁶ The recommendation included an interesting observation on why this kind of regulation never materialized in Japan despite apparent problems of pollution in various parts of Japan. Among many reasons, the recommendation points out that "since Japan had not been a democratic country before, outcries of farmers and fishermen were never heard of" (RC 1952).

⁷ RC kept on publishing far-sighted recommendations and reports covering far-sighted topics such as Conservation of Tropical Forest, and CO₂ and Climate Change both published in 1984.

(RC, 1952b) gives us an idea on the criteria used by the RC to narrow its focus. The main steps in issue selection were 1) examination of the issue's relevance to the economic and material needs of the population; 2) studying the conditions and utilization of existing resources; and 3) development of integrated planning options weighing the costs and benefits of each (RC, 1952b). Of course, choosing the "right" problem does not guarantee that policy will have a positive impact; in fact, it was not always in the RC's best interest to directly apply its proposals.

Kuroiwa, a scholar who was involved with the RC in the early 1950s, argues that an *indirect* connection with policy making was a virtue, not a limitation, of the RC (Kuroiwa, 1982: iii). He says:

The results of our research were reflected in the policies and administration indirectly through recommendations to existing state agencies, yet it was up to these agencies how exactly they wished to adapt our recommendations to the actual policies. This way of connecting with policies may seem rather remote and shorthanded, but I believe it had a merit of its own. If recommendations were translated directly into policies, the RC would have been more reserved in what they would recommend—just as any other existing agency would. Because the RC's policy influence was only indirect influence, it was dare to put forth recommendations based on what was believed to be a correct argument, not bounded by time constraints.

Many of the recommendations put forward in the early years of the RC were, viewed from a contemporary perspective, ahead of their time. However, as we shall discuss later, the RC was effective in its role as an informer of policy debates by proposing *alternatives* instead of merely serving to extend existing policies of the time. The RC's achievements, therefore, should not be evaluated based only on how many of its recommendations were actually utilized.

3. Institutional Foundation of the Resources Committee

3-1 Individual Factors

The RC's unusual administrative effort toward integration requires explanation. Ishii highlights three distinctive characteristics that functioned as critical motivators of RC activities. First is the strong support from the Natural Resource Section of the GHQ,

particularly in introducing “New Deal” ideas to Japanese policy makers. This was important in any attempt to introduce policy change under occupational control. Second is that, unlike most mainstream ministries—which were made up of “law graduates” (primarily from the University of Tokyo)—key figures in the RC were people trained in technical areas such as engineering, physical geography, and forestry. In many ways, these individuals saw the RC as an opportunity to gain some of the political weight long held solely by law graduates. The third factor is that many RC members had “continental experience” working in mainland China and other parts of Asia; in other words, they had a sense of what is necessary in the field.

Perhaps we can add a fourth factor: the spiritual power of an ideal shared among RC members. This ideal was to follow the rules of nature, an idea not alien to Japanese tradition but one that went largely unspoken until the TVA was introduced to Japan. Below, we shall examine this aspect in detail.

3-2 The Unifying Idea: “Conservation” and Inter-Ministerial Niches

In this section, we step back and treat the RC as a symbolic manifestation of a particular idea—i.e., resource conservation—that created a sense of unity among RC members. We pay specific attention to how this idea, which originated in the US, was transformed to fit the Japanese context.

The post-war activities of the RC do not indicate a complete absence of centralized resources planning in pre-war Japan. Tracing the idea of “conservation” allows us to trace trends in basic ideas concerning resources. Even before World War II, the concept of “conservation”, imported from the US, was given special meaning in the Japanese context. Unlike resource-rich countries like the US, where the key challenge was to protect existing resources from rapid exploitation, Japan, a “resource poor” nation, needed to nurture existing resources and explore further potential with much reliance on technological advancement. In Japan, pre-war integration based on the concept of conservation was heavily biased towards military mobilization.

The post-war re-definition of “resource conservation” made a democratic turn to include “service to the people” as the primary objective of conservation practices. RC report No. 19, which was devoted to an effort to obtain a general picture of resource situations and prospects as of 1960, divided the definition of “resource conservation” into three levels:

the narrowest definition equalizes conservation with disaster prevention, including earthquakes, erosion and pollution of various kinds; a broader definition includes the intensification of resource use and elimination of natural disasters; and the broadest definition (closest to its original meaning in English) includes not only the development and further exploration of the resource base, but also enhancement of cultural and human resources, rationalization of resource use and consumption, and total coordination among different resource uses under a system of integrated planning.

3-3 The Resources Committee as a Balancing Force

Perhaps the most important feature of this multi-level definition is the “coordination among contested uses of one type of resource and among various types of resources” (RC, 1961). The practical contribution of the RC was not only to develop a plan to optimize particular resource uses but to retain a balance among different resources that otherwise may lose balance and invite disasters of various kinds. From the very inception of the RC, resource development and utilization were examined in sequence—from production to consumption—with due regard to the trade-offs inherent in other potential uses. Exclusive emphasis on a single dimension often invites irreversible costs, such as natural disasters and the overexploitation of exhaustible resources. For this reason, the RC’s view of development *as* conservation is important.

To push this idea is to move towards administrative integration as well. The scientific aspect of water resources, for example, was divided: the meteorological office was responsible for rainfall and evaporation, while river flow data were collected by the Ministry of Construction and Electricity Companies. River basin development requires collaboration with experts on physics, chemistry, engineering, biology, forestry, and land use, to name a few; however, no platform was available to encourage the collaboration of these diverse fields. Of course, collaboration inevitably results in each government agency attempting to defend its own interests; this is why so many apparently rational RC proposals were either opposed outright or neglected and stifled. The mood of the 1950s was clearly one of economic growth and development, whatever the cost might be.

It was against these backdrops that RC re-confirmed the importance of integration around 1952. In the “3 Year Review” of the activities of RC, there was a recognition that each sub-committee was acting on its own without much effort to integrate each

other (RC, 1951). Also, there was concern on too much bias towards natural scientific studies that had not consideration for socio-economic dimensions that would make the study practically feasible. It was in 1952 when RC decided to add a sub-committee on socio-economics, the task of which was to integrate science based recommendations applicable on the ground.

As core philosophy, RC consistently emphasized the importance of “capturing the reality.” This emphasis was partly in reaction to the pre-war dogmatic planning which had almost no empirical justification, but it was also a way to integrate, through following the laws of nature, otherwise fragmented ministries. To capture the reality is to understand the workings of nature, and devise technology and institutions appropriate to conserve its unity (otherwise, disasters or environmental problems will occur). Instead of relying on “judgments” by the higher authority when in need of inter-sectoral coordination, RC sought answers in nature how best to integrate human society to fit them.

4. The Fall of the Resource Committee: Institutional and Intellectual

4-1 Driving Force Behind the “Fall”

In 1968, the Resource Bureau, which took responsibility for all the administrative work in the Science and Technology Agency, was abolished, and mandates were spread to Department of Resources under the Planning Bureau in the same agency. This department was then downgraded to an office in 1986, and the RC itself became one of the sub-committees under the Council of Science, Technology and Academics in 2001.

If the RC played such an important role, why did it fade so quickly? We can identify several reasons for this, with many related factors. First, traditional ministries, after recovering from war damages, re-claimed their ministerial turf, displacing the RC from its niche. Second, new government agencies such as the Land Agency (1974), Resource and Energy Agency (1973), and Environment Agency (1971) were subsequently established to take over the responsibilities formerly under the control of the RC. Third and perhaps most importantly, the resource environment of Japan changed drastically during the 1950s, from reliance on domestic raw materials to an import-oriented economy backed by strong growth (averaging 11% between 1947 and 1955).

Perhaps the most critical factor was what Ohkita calls the “fading of the reformist spirit” as Japan gained political independence from the US (Ohkita, 1952). Ohkita observes that, despite proactive initiatives from the RC to the traditional ministries, the opposite approach from the ministries to take advantage of the RC was weak. Ohkita notes that the passionate spirit to reform traditional decision-making, which was a joint product of GHQ and the young bureaucrats under US control, gradually reverted to the old style by 1952. In a general sense, the relationship between science and administration was guided by the “political mood of the time”.

4-2 Parallel Decline in Resource Study

It is interesting that, as resource policies faded with the economic growth of Japan, there was a parallel decline in the academic interest in resources. Several young staff at the RC secretariat later worked at universities in order to become engaged in education on natural resources planning and policy, particularly in the field of geography. However, study on natural resources gradually receded as a major topic and became incorporated into the general field of regional planning and development (Sato 2009b). Beginning in the 1970s, environmental studies began to attract the attention of more researchers, and natural resources ceased to be a prime topic for social scientists, even within geography, and the RC had either been completely forgotten or remembered only as an aberration unrelated to present-day policy questions.

4-3 Primacy of the “Particular”

One implicit feature of the way the RC carried out its policy advocacy may have affected the sustainability of the institution, which in turn provides one explanation for the eventual collapse of the RC experiment. This is the emphasis on specificity or giving priority to a particular context instead of striving for a universally applicable “model” such as that forwarded by the TVA (Lilienthal, 1944).

The distinctive quality of the RC lay in its scope, which allowed interdisciplinary and inter-ministerial discussion on possible ways resources (both human and natural) could be combined. Such combination depends upon location, politics, available capital and

technology. Aki, a water resources expert who was one of the founding fathers of the RC and acted as its secretary general in its early years, writes in his book on rivers about the importance of paying attention to *specifics* within the totality of its existence: “Rivers are real existence that possess unique qualities; they are the expression of an accumulation of interactions between water, land, and human interventions...I wish to analyze the specific qualities and explore the reality of them in order to achieve universal understanding of what rivers are” (Aki, 1951:1). The dynamism of rivers can only be captured from experienced insight; not by science alone. To emphasize the specifics, as Aki does, is to move away from universally applicable models.

We find an interesting record of a discussion between Saburo Ohkita, Shigeto Tsuru, and Koichi Aki with Ackerman on the transferability of American TVA experiences to Japan (Sato, 2009a). Agreeing with Ackerman, who denied the possibility of direct replication of the TVA model, Tsuru emphasized the importance of Japan developing its own model, saying:

The best we can do is to take a concrete case and study it to discover its problems, find out what factors that are hampering effective utilization of resources in that region, and then conduct research on how best to overcome those challenges. It is not a question of replicating the TVA model (Secretariat of TVA Discussion Group 1949: 46).

The point was not to import a successful example of “integrated planning” from one country to another, but to begin research at a specific local site, build on it and then apply advanced models like that of the TVA as reference points to make sure relevant issues have been addressed in the project area. Because the RC was composed of practical technicians, they were interested in the particular context where problems and solutions are played out on the ground. As Aki mentioned above, this orientation was not in contradiction with the pursuit of universality; however, the primacy of the “particular,” without an explicit marketable model, made the significance of the RC hard to be understood and defended.

5. Conclusion

What lessons for present and future environmental policies can be extracted from the RC experience? Before answering this question, we should be reminded that the RC was seen as an “experiment” even among those who lived to see it at its height. The RC was born from a demonstrated ideal that linked resource conservation with public welfare, something that had never been imagined in pre-war Japanese policy. However, such ideals require institutional mechanisms to produce effective results. The paradox is that, by the time institutionalization was ready begin operation, administrative integration was almost impossible due to entrenched fragmentation even within the RC sub-committees. The RC saw brief success and a proper “fit” in its early years, not simply due to sound planning but because post-war Japan did not have the luxury for overlap, fragmentation and redundancy in resource administration. Members of the RC, who were mostly technical experts, tried to distance themselves from overly dogmatic plans, choosing instead to pursue the “unity of nature,” following whatever requirements that unity might demand from society. This was the only way, according to the RC leaders of the time, for Japan to survive materially and achieve a balanced economy.

This unique context aside, there are still lessons that can be drawn from the RC experiment. First, from a strategic point of view, the location of the RC’s institutional setting was exactly right. The strength of the RC was that it had the mandate to spotlight and focus on resource problems with its own initiative and research capacity, over which none of the traditional ministries had exclusive jurisdiction. The RC found its role in addressing issues that tend to invite diverse framings and perspectives. Focusing on long-term questions also largely freed the RC from contemporary trends in policy politics.

The second lesson is the importance of paying careful attention to the way issues are selected. Because of its rather unstable institutional status, the RC was forced to choose target issues carefully. This tradition, perhaps unintentionally, fostered the democratic vitality of the organization. Agenda-setting is almost like creating a work of art—after a painting is done, commentators can explain how it may have been painted differently, compare it to other works, or may even be able to create a copy. However, to create such a piece to begin with has a value that cannot be matched by these subsequent activities. This analogy can be applied to the act of putting an issue on the table *as an issue* from the start. This act of “problem locating” is particularly commendable in a bureaucracy where many policy questions are routinely defined and

processed at each ministerial convention.

Perhaps what the RC did was provide a platform for the formulation of a pre-analytic vision in the face of uncertain and unprecedented challenges in resource governance, a vital step that must precede any kind of disciplinary/analytic work. Schumpeter aptly observes:

In practice we all start our own research from the work of our predecessors, that is, we hardly ever start from scratch. But suppose we did start from scratch, what are the steps we should have to take? Obviously, in order to be able to posit ourselves any problems at all, we should first have to visualize a distinct set of coherent phenomena as a worth-while object of our analytic efforts. In other words, analytic effort is of necessity preceded by a preanalytic cognitive act that supplies the raw material for the analytic effort (Schumpeter 1954: 41).

RC was not merely an inter-ministerial coordination body. It set its own research agenda based on a pre-analytic interdisciplinary discussion to formulate policy recommendation; by doing so, it attempted to demonstrate the gap (or the unfit) that existed between the prevalent institutional set-up and the nature of the problem. Because of this, RC's recommendations were not easily adopted by the ministries wanting to contain the problems within their own turf; but because of this, the RC played distinctive role in the history of resources planning in post-war Japan.

The RC represents only a single case; however, as we know from the history of great scientific discoveries like those of Galileo, one experiment can make a critical difference. It is how we make use of the lessons learned from that experiment, rather than the quantity of its readily apparent results, that truly determines its impact on the course of history.

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