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Book Review

[Rezension] Peter Baron: Probleme der japanischen Regionalpolitik - unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Entwicklung Hokkaidos. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973

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Reviews

The reviews in Internationales Asienforum try to give a brief evaluation of recent German publications

Peter Baron, Probleme der japanischen Regionalpolitik — unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Entwicklung Hokkaidos. (Schriften des Institutes für Asienkunde, Bd. 36). Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973, 139 pages, DM 44,—.

For several years the Volkswagen Foundation has sponsored research on East Asia; this book is one of the few examples of the successful accomplishment of the aim of that programme.

As a central issue is his study the author puts forward the hypothesis that a regional policy with the maximization of GNP as its goal cannot solve the various problems of a regionally unbalanced distribution of economic activities within a national economy.

Reviewing economic growth in Japan since the Meiji restoration, the initial part of the book shows the emergence of a highly unbalanced regional structure with an excessive congestion of economic activities in Middle Japan and more especially the Pacific coast. On the other hand, other regions among them Hokkaido, remained in a comparative state of underdevelopment. Among the early factors responsible for this structure the author sees the heavy concentration of public investment in Middle Japan, the income and capacity effects of which induced and aggravated depletion of the hinterland.

In the third and fourth part of the book, the aims and means of Japanese official regional policy are examined, starting from the early regional programmes prior to World War II and developing through several stages up to 1970/71. In spite of the formulation of different regional development strategies during these distinct stages, the basic objective has never been questioned. As the result of the author's investigation the concept of maximizing GNP at the expense of social goals emerges as the crucial problem of regional policy in Japan.

One chapter of the book is a case study on regional policy for Hokkaido, and especially the industrial complex of Tomakomai, which serves to illustrate the inadequacies of Japanese regional policy in so far as the priority given to national growth has undermined the development of the economically backward regions.

Having thus criticized growth policy, the author comes to the general conclusion that the unbalanced structure of modern economies should be considered, in principle, as irreversible and that in consequence governmental policy goals for regional policy should be redefined (p. 128). I ask myself what purpose such "redefinitions" of government policy goals serve, when, in fact, the structures are irreversible.

A solution to this seemingly contradictory statement would perhaps have been found, had the author given more thought to the relationships between government and private policy goals, especially on the matter of general and particular limits to balanced regional development in a capitalist market economy. This weakness, i.e. the lack of political economy in regional development, is, however, much more pronounced in most regional studies previously undertaken and should therefore not prevent critical scholars from reading this book dealing with the manifold problems of the most rapid growth process in history. The more so since this book, to my knowledge, is the first Western one on regional policy in Japan.

Unfortunately, and due to the long gestation period in book production, the Prime Minister's 1972 plan for remodeling the Japanese archipelago¹ is not discussed in this volume. Could

¹ Cf. the English version: Kakuei Tanaka, Building a New Japan. A Plan for Remodeling the Japanese Archipelago, The Simul Press, Tokyo 1973.

it be held that the fact that this plan has been in the meantime more or less put in jeopardy adduces proof of the author's proposition that in a modern economy unbalanced structures are, in principle, irreversible?

Udo Ernst Simonis