GSAPS  THE SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS
JAPAN'S COAL POLICY IN THE EARLY 1930S
- An Analysis Based on Coal Conflicts among Japan, Taiwan and Northeast China -

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Before petroleum was widely used in the world, coal was the most important strategic resource for all countries. In the 1930s, many governments of major industrial countries started to intervene in the coal market. The focal question asked in this dissertation is: how and why did Japan adjust its coal policy among itself, its colony (Taiwan), and a region of influence (Northeast China, also known as Manchuria) in the early 1930s?

This research is an attempt at reviving interest in the study of the coal conflicts throughout the Empire of Japan in the early 1930s. In order to answer the focal question mentioned above, this study first reviews the historical background of the coal conflicts, paying close attention to two conflicts—Taiwan's coal industry crisis and Japan's coal conflict, and investigates the concerns of the decision makers on the coal policies which finally defined the conflicts.

Before the 1930s, the coal markets in Japan, Taiwan, and Northeast China were under the control of non-governmental and private institutions, such as enterprises groups. However, after 1934, it was gradually dominated by the Japanese government through coal restrictions and laws in these regions. The turning point for this transition of "coal policies" was the period of the coal conflicts which happened between Japan, Taiwan, and Northeast China in the early 1930s, in which the Japanese government was initially passively involved. Meanwhile, the early 1930s was also a turning point for the Empire of Japan. As the expansion of the Empire, Japan was planning to expand its economic bloc, in which Japan, Taiwan, Korea and Sakhalin were already included, to a bigger one, which would include Northeast China. During this era, how did the Japanese government coordinate and manage the conflicts between Japanese coal, Taiwanese coal and coal from Northeast China under the imperial strategy? It is worth examining not only because it reflected the relations between the coal industries of these regions, but also because it reveals the nature of Japan's coal policies during this era.

From the abundance of literature on the economic history of the Empire of Japan, most historians, such as Nakamura Satoru (2005) and Hori Kazuo (2004), mainly describe the Empire in the 1930s from the aspect of work division among different regions. In contrast to most previous studies that focus on the harmonious work division, only a few studies concentrate on the industrial conflicts within the Empire. Apart from the edited book entitled "The Coal Demand and Supply in Japan" that studies the Japanese coal industry, and the paper entitled "The Coal Mining Industry in Taiwan, Korea and Manchuria in the Japanese Colonial Era" written from the standpoint of Taiwan's coal industry, studies that focus specifically on the coal conflicts are relatively limited. In addition, previous studies do not analyze thoroughly the significant role of the Japanese government in the resolution of the coal conflicts. Thus, through systematic and detailed analyses of the coal conflicts in the early 1930s, this study attempts to explore how the Japanese government tried to create a balanced and harmonious relationship between Japanese coal, Taiwanese coal and coal from Northeast China during the transitional era.

Firstly, utilizing primary resources (documents, speeches, newspapers, and magazines) and secondary materials, including biographies and journal articles, this dissertation traces the history of how the two conflicts in Taiwan and in Japan were resolved by the intervention of the Japanese government. Based on this historical study, the process and the reasons for Japan to adjust its coal policy among itself, Taiwan and Northeast China in the early 1930s will be discussed in detail. Secondly, by comparing coal policies put forward in Taiwan and Japan, this study explores why the Japanese government put forward these two compromise policies in the same year. Thirdly, this study provides insights into the policy motivations behind Japan's coal policy not only from economic aspect, but also from political and military aspects.

While major industrial countries had already intervened in their coal market by the 1930s, Japan, which still relied on the market monopoly of coal cartels to restore order in the coal market environment, fell behind. As a result, when coal conflicts broke out in Taiwan and Japan in 1932 and negatively impacted the normal operations of the coal market throughout the Empire of Japan, the Japanese government had no choice but to intervene. In short, when the international relations and domestic situation altered dramatically in the early 1930s, Japan, as a newcomer of countries which intervened in the coal market, adjusted its coal policy from relying on a market monopoly mechanism (monopoly of coal cartels) to a governmental intervention mechanism. Therefore, based on the analyses of the coal conflicts between Japan, Taiwan and Northeast China, this study will explore the relationship between the adjustment of Japan's coal policy and the strategic concerns of the decision makers in the Japanese government in the early 1930s.

References