Natural Resource Extraction in the New Frontier of Hokkaido 1868-1918

Thomas Wilson, ENVS 400, Spring 2012

Background

In 1868, the Meiji era began and the island of Hokkaido was officially claimed as part of Japan. This was in the context of Japan's most intense push for modernization in history. At the beginning of the Meiji era several foreign advisors were invited to help develop and modernize Japan, and this was particularly strong in Hokkaido which was the least developed of all the major islands. Hokkaido, to many Japanese was a frontier land, and the Japanese had been using the island as a trading outpost for centuries. But starting in the Meiji era natural resource extraction increased and many more industries emerged.

Fisheries

- •This is one of the oldest major industries in Hokkaido.
- •Herring, probably the most famous example were eaten and used for various products such as making fertilizer to increase yield in agriculture.
- •Herring fishing reached a climax at around the tum of the 20th century, and different kinds of fish were pursued further north and further from land.
- •Canning of fish and marine products increased during industrialization phase after Sino-Japanese war, which led to further exploitation of marine life.
- •In 1875, a person with knowledge about fisheries industries tells Horace Capron that sometimes 6,000 salmon or more are caught in a single net.
- •For about the first thirty years of the Meiji era the native Ainu were used as cheap labor, treated unfairly and even threatened by their Japanese supervisors.

Coal Mining

- •Conditions in coal mines were poor early on, and begin to improve in the early 20th century.
- •Especially early on, prisoners from local jails were forced to work in the mines.
- •Many people contracted illnesses due to the unclean conditions, poor air quality, very dark and very hot conditions. They were also paid poorly.
- •The most frequent accident in coal mines was collapse of the mines.
- •Hokkaido was one of the top producers of coal in all of Japan, supplying 14% of all of Japan's coal by the year 1917.

Focus Ouestions

•What role did Hokkaido play in the larger context of Japanese modernization and what effects did the American advisors have in developing Hokkaido?

Argument

Hokkaido was needed by the nation of Japan in its development and modernization due to the immense resources that it held.





Forestry

- •Large areas in Hokkaido were converted from forestlands into agricultural lands.
- •Increased settlement meant a stronger need for wood, and with the introduction of American and foreign architecture, more wood was needed to build these structures.
- •Forests in Japan, including Hokkaido were nationalized in the 1880's.
- •The main reason for this was to protect forests for current and future resource extraction.
- •Increased demand for wood products was also created when Japan went to war with China and Russia in 1894 and 1905 respectively.
- •With the expanding of the railroad system throughout Hokkaido and Japan more extraction was needed from Hokkaido forests.
- •With a quarter of the 20th century passed, Hokkaido had about 500 sawmills

Sources

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Agriculture

- •Significantly affected by American agriculture techniques, which arrived in many forms some of which were machinery, tools, and experimental farms and hordes of new crops like potatoes, com, beans, wheat, fruit etc.
- •Sapporo Agricultural College was one of the leading innovators in agriculture in Hokkaido.
- •Between 1886 and 1915 land opened to agriculture expanded from 104,000 ha to 424,000 ha.
- In 1918 Hokkaido also grew around 4,000,000 bushels of rice.

Cattle

- •Americans brought in hordes of livestock from the U.S. and started a cattle industry.
- •It was mostly this industry and development of Hokkaido that led to Edwin Dun's reaction to eliminate all wolves from Hokkaido because they were feeding on the cattle.
- •The meat industry had arrived in Hokkaido.
- •The growth of the cattle industry also contributed to an increase in the amount of fertilizer produced.

Conclusion

- •Not all of the resources that these industries supplied were equally demanded by the rest of Japan, however each industry made an important contribution to Hokkaido and the rest of Japan.
- •Hokkaido definitely eased the burden resource wise on Japan overall especially starting in the Meiji era. Especially in respect to fisheries, forestry coal mining and agriculture.
- •So in some ways yes Hokkaido was needed by Japan to reach the level of development that it did.

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