

Problems of Taiwan's National Forest Management in the Early Post-war Period: A Case Study on the Institutions Regulating Lumbering in National Forests (1945-1956)

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ABSTRACT

In the early post-war period, Taiwan's national forest management faced a crisis of the "imbalance between reforestation and lumbering" with forest protection often not being realized. The area of idle woodlands had been about one million hectares. For this situation, "the ambiguousness of forest administration and production" was the explanation widely accepted. This article first challenges the explanation, then focuses on the institutions regulating lumbering in the national forests, and investigates their interactions and articulations. The author also provides an alternative explanatory framework and uncovers the relationships within the forest environmental and socio-economic changes during that time.

Classified by the attributes of managers, the institutions regulating lumbering in Taiwan's national forests could be divided into government- and private-managed ones and their origins could be traced to the Japanese colonial rule. When Taiwan was returned to the Republic of China, the Forest Bureau, which was later replaced by the Taiwan Forest Administration (TFA) in 1947, took over the high-valued and stocked coniferous woodlands managed previously by both the Government-General of Taiwan and Japanese capitalists and then divided these lands into six government-managed lumbering grounds, with the Forestry Bureau monopolizing most of the timber market. Consequently, the situation of private-managed lumbering industries was similar to that during the Japanese colonial rule. Their lumbering was restricted to the low-valued and stocked hardwoods under the supervision of the forest administration. However, the market for fuel wood was almost wholly monopolized by these lumbering capitalists.

In the early post-war period, demand for railroad sleeper cars, timber, and fuel wood kept rising. As a main timber provider, the TFA could not meet these demands, because of the high costs of operations, the simplicity of the categories of wood it

provided, and the inefficiency of management. The “institution for allocation and selling” was designed to alleviate this urgent situation. However, the operation of this institution was impacted by serious inflation, multiple structures of the timber market, and an unlimited demand for the wood by military agencies, resulting in that the running of government-managed lumbering grounds turned into a serious predicament. In this context, on the one hand, the state not only recognized the permits for lumbering acquired in the Japanese colonial rule of those private-managed lumbering capitalists, but also continued and consolidated their special positions by new institutions. The goals of the state were to integrate capitalists’ capacities so as to satisfy the rising and various demands, increase state revenues, thus compensating the deficits resulted from the allocation and selling of timber and providing finances to reforestation. On the other hand, in practice, these articulations facilitated capitalists’ capital accumulations accidentally and extracted society’s economic surpluses to support the production and reproduction of public-operated enterprises and military agencies. Moreover, the capacity of the state to reforest the lumbered woodlands was weakened, while rising prices of timber and fuel wood prompted people to fell trees illegally. Government- and private-managed lumbering industries were in fact often the main causes of forest destruction. Consequently, both society and the forest environment paid a heavy price for the resulting chaos during the early post-war period.

Keywords: national forests, forest management, lumbering industry, forest history