

Making Available Local Industrial History and Memories: The Process of Archiving the Coal Mining Closure in Kushiro

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the progressive movement in Kushiro to archive coal mining industry related documents. In Kushiro, Taiheiyo Coal Mine was the last coal mine in Japan and currently its successor, Kushiro Coal Mine Company is the only operating mine in Japan. Facing Taiheiyo's closure in 2002, there were two significant archiving activities, which were urgent but also conducted systematically. First, the local government tried to collect the documents, materials and all miners' experiences and memories. In order to do this, three valuable inventory surveys were conducted. The second important archiving activity was the Taiheiyo's association of former management workers' voluntary collection of the documents. These were held by the Taiheiyo Company office and the Taiheiyo Labor Union office before they were to be destroyed. The association established *The Taiheiyo Coal Mining Archive* in the local elementary school. The special feature of this current archive is that it includes the documents of both the company and the union. This paper has two main areas of interests. First is the process of these two urgent yet systematic archiving activities. Second is characteristic of Kushiro's archiving activities with reference to the timing of the mine closure and the status as a city mine. These archives presently face the issue of privacy and the challenge of updating them. If this systematic archiving is complemented by various kinds of grassroots activities, it can be more valuable to social scientific studies. In the conclusion of this paper, I address the potential of the Kushiro archives to make an important contribution, highlighting the activities of miners' wives and the archiving of interview data concerning the last phase of the Japanese coal industry.

1. Introduction

At the end of January 2002, the Taiheiyo Coal Mine Co. Ltd., which was in Kushiro City, in the eastern part of Hokkaido, finally closed. This closure was the last under the Japanese government's coal policy. After the closure, Kushiro Coal Mine Co. Ltd., KCM, was established in order to take over from Taiheiyo Coal Mine. Presently, KCM is the only company that is producing coal in Japan through underground mining.

The main reason why Taiheiyo Coal Mine had managed to continue its operation was that it was the only coal mining company to succeed in shifting from the pre-modern labor management system to a modern system. In the 1960s Taiheiyo Coal Mine implemented significant reform in five areas – the status of employees, wages, labor-management relations, housing support and employee welfare – and as a result, the working conditions of mine workers were transformed into those similar to salaried workers. Also, their lifestyle became more like that of ordinary citizens. These changes were underpinned by the introduction of the mechanization of production by Taiheiyo Coal Mine, something companies in other industries also did.⁽¹⁾

Furthermore, there are other important characteristics which have to be recognized. One is the classification of coal-mining regions. Taiheiyo Coal Mine in Kushiro City was classified as a *city mine*, not just as a coalfield region. It meant that the coal industry was one of the core industries in Kushiro City, but that there were also other important industries, such as the paper industry and the marine product processing industry. In Japan, there was one other

(1) See Shimazaki, N., 2015.

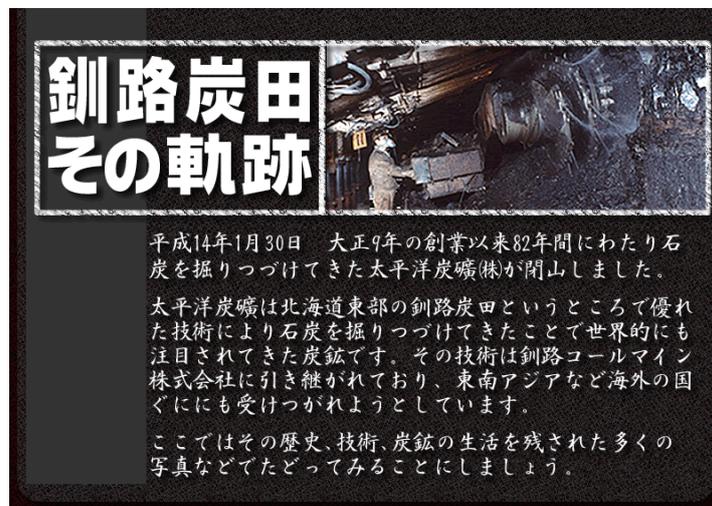
coal-mining region which could also be called a *city mine*. This was Omuta City, where Mitsui Miike Coal Mine was located, and which was the largest coalmine in Japan before its closure in 1997. The other three papers in this Special Issue address the case of Mitsui Miike Coal Mine.

2. Kushiro's process of archiving coal mine closure

Facing Taiheiyo's closure in 2002, there were two significant archiving activities. These were urgent and had a sense of responsibility based on the important recognition that Taiheiyo's closure would be the last one in the coal mining industry in Japan. Therefore, Kushiro City and its citizens had to understand that this was a significant moment in the history of the region.⁽²⁾

First, the local government tried to collect the documents, materials and all miners' experiences and memories. At that time, Mr. Yusho Sato, who was the general manager of the Regional Material Reservation Division of Kushiro City, conducted the project "Archiving by former miners of coal mining experiences, materials and memories," using the government's emergency job creation subsidies for the financial year 2002. The project aimed to provide important work for redundant miners.⁽³⁾

Three valuable inventory surveys were conducted. The first was of all former Taiheiyo miners, which involved interviewing over 3,000 miners and asking about their experiences and memories of Taiheiyo. At present, this data is available for scientific analysis. The second was a survey of the documents, photos and materials concerning the coal mining industry, miners' jobs, and miners' family life, a collection that Kushiro citizens had been maintaining. The third was archiving all headlines and articles of the newspaper Hokkaido News concerning not only Taiheiyo Coal Mine but also the Japanese coal industry from 1942 to 2002. As a result, a total of 25,960 articles were archived. The archives of the second survey's photos and the newspaper headlines were published on DVD and on a website as "Kushiro Coalfield and its trajectory."



Picture 1. Website "Kushiro Coalfield and its trajectory"
<http://www.city.kushiro.lg.jp/www/common/003hp/home.html>

Concerning conducting these inventory surveys, Mr. Yusho Sato explained his strong feeling for being as rigorous as possible. "Facing closure, we decided to collect as many of people's experiences and memories as possible of those who worked for Taiheiyo, and to allocate the financial resources for doing this. It meant that this was an essential expense with the aim of archiving all experiences of those who had given so much of their lives to working in the mine."⁽⁴⁾ His remark clearly shows that Kushiro citizens had a respectful attitude to the coal mining industry of

(2) For details, see Shimazaki, N., 2014.

(3) Sato Y., 2004.

(4) Sato Y., Interview with Shimazaki, N., Kushiro, 30 August 2012.

their region.

The second archiving activity was the Taiheiyo's association of former management workers' voluntary collection of the documents belonging to the Taiheiyo Company office and the Taiheiyo Labor Union office before they were to be destroyed. It was also an urgent project. The key person was Mr. Fukio Sato, a former administrative staff member. Under his conduct the members worked on the archive without any compensation. In 2005 they established *The Taiheiyo Coal Mining Archive* in the local elementary school. In this archive, the documents were divided into 5 sections and 25 items, including about 600 pieces of the company's management documents and 700 pieces of the Union's documents which covered all records of labor-management negotiations during 59 years from the beginning to the end of the union. They contributed these archives to Kushiro City, and at the end of 2017 the archive moved to the Kushiro City Library, which had been renovated. The availability of this archive was expanded but there are other issues of privacy and clarification, which will be discussed later in this paper. Furthermore, the Taiheiyo's association of former management workers edited the "Chronology of Taiheiyo's 82 years," which was an official record of the history of Taiheiyo, covering even the final phase of the company's decline. Also, when it was dissolved, the union published its own history.



Picture 2. *The Taiheiyo Coal Mining Archive* (Photo by Shimazaki)

Kushiro's archiving case was clearly different from grassroots archives, which are the focus of this special issue. In Kushiro, facing Taiheiyo's closure, as described above, two urgent yet systematic archiving activities were soon done by the City and the association of former management workers. Some grassroots' archiving activities followed, enriching the total archives. For instance, the Kushiro City Museum held a "Speech session of mining experiences" in 2010, and again in 2011, where the conversation of a former company's officer and a former union's leader could be heard. This kind of public dialogue was very rare for the coal mining industry. Following these events, activities of collecting life histories have been continued by the museum, and academic research projects

conducted by JAFCOF⁽⁵⁾ and Waseda University students.

3. Characteristics of Kushiro's archiving activities: Timing of the mine closure

Considering Kushiro's case, the timing of the Taiheiyo closure in 2002 is important for two reasons. First, in 2002 the Kushiro archive was started quickly, in contrast to the failure to archive previous cases of closure.

In Japan, from the latter half of the 1950s many large-scale coal mines had closed in rapid succession. At that time, there was no idea that coal mining documents, experiences, and memories would be a valuable inheritance in the future. Usually, almost all materials and documents were destroyed without hesitation. Only those directly concerned with the coal industry and mining activities thought about archiving their own experiences at a grassroots level. Therefore, inevitably these activities were not systematic, and the contents depended on the archiver's sense of nostalgia and desire to collect memorabilia. As a result, almost all important documents, especially those concerning company management and union activity were destroyed soon after the closures.

In the 1980s many coal mining museums were established in the former coal fields, for example the Yubari coal mine was museum established in 1980, and the Iwaki coal and fossil museum in the Joban coal field in 1984. However, these museums hoped to encourage regional revitalization, and not just systematically collect and archive coal mine documents and local experiences.

It was not surprising that the Taiheiyo miners in Kushiro had known about the previous failures to properly archive the closures. In particular, the Taiheiyo association of former management workers was strongly interested in the archive, and therefore members recognized the importance of starting their activity soon after the closure.

Furthermore, it is notable that in many former coal-producing countries, such as Germany and Great Britain, in the 1990s the industrial heritage movement occurred and resulted in the archiving of documents, materials, and people's memories. This movement developed in Japan at the end of the twentieth century.

The second characteristic of the timing of Taiheiyo's closure was that it was the last under the Japanese government's coal policy, which had continued for over 40 years. From 1997, when the largest coal mine in Japan, Mitsui Miike, closed, Taiheiyo and Kushiro citizens developed a sense of identity of Kushiro being the last coal mining town, and they were conscious of the fact that it would determine the fate of the Japanese coal industry. Therefore, when Taiheiyo's closure was decided, Kushiro City and its citizens particularly understood that this was a significant moment in the history of the region. As a result, the city encouraged urgent archiving activity.

At present, Kushiro is the only operating coal mining region in Japan, and therefore KCM represents the future of the Japanese coal industry. From 2019 the Kushiro Coal-fired Power Plant will start its operation. It means that local coal production for local consumption has finally become a reality. Consequently, Kushiro City will assume a heavy responsibility for archiving in the future.

4. Characteristics of Kushiro's archiving activities: Status as a city mine

Kushiro's archiving activities were also influenced by Taiheiyo being a *city mine*. There were two specific aspects of this. First, the socio-cultural characteristics of the town were determined by the sophisticated cultural movement of the coal mine company and miners themselves from the 1950s, which was the same in the case of Miike in Omuta. It resulted in citizens understanding the importance of archiving the experiences of their local industry.

In Miike, facing mine closure, the Omuta City Library started to archive. For instance, from the previous year, 1996, there had been already many newspaper and journal articles, books and television programs which featured the Miike closure. The library decided to collect all of these. The collecting of television programs on video was only possible at the time of production, but it successfully created an archive of these programs. Concerning company documents and union documents, the library formally asked the company and the three unions to contribute their documents at the time of the mine closure. However, the company and the Miike Staff Union refused, and only the Miike New Labor Union contributed its published documents to the library.⁽⁶⁾ Only the original Miike Labor

(5) JAFCOF, Japan Association for Study of Former Coal Fields, is a group of academic researchers of the coal industry.

Union, when it closed in 2007, contributed its documents to Kyushu University, its materials to the Omuta Coal Industry and Science Museum, and its books to the library.⁽⁷⁾

The second important aspect of a city mine was the company's welfare policy, such as a home ownership promotion system. In both the cases of Taiheiyo and Miike, the companies implemented this system, which aimed at helping employees to own assets, ensure stability in retirement, reduce staff turnover, and reduce the costs of maintaining company housing. Taiheiyo, in particular, designed this system in 1962, and it was the first and only example in the coal industry and was initiated earlier than in other industries. Miike followed this policy in 1973. By the end of the 1970s, almost 70% of Taiheiyo's miners had their own house, and they would stay in Kushiro after their retirement. Of course the creation of the association of former management workers was a result of this system.

Taiheiyo and Miike were both city mines that had the two specific characteristics referred to above. However, with regard to the archiving of coal mining closures, they demonstrated different approaches. Miike's archiving of company and union documents was more difficult than the case of Taiheiyo. Here it is important to explain the *path dependency* of Taiheiyo, especially when comparing its situation with Miike's difficulties.

First, Taiheiyo had the most advanced mechanization mining process, which enabled Taiheiyo and KCM to continue its operation to the present day. Naturally, it is valuable to archive Taiheiyo's long history of mechanization. In 2018 Shimazaki and her colleagues published "The History of Taiheiyo Coal Mine," commissioned by Kushiro City.⁽⁸⁾ The first volume has main chapters covering the 82 year history of both management and mining technology.

Second, Taiheiyo had a relatively unblemished history in terms of severe strikes and disasters. In Miike, the archiving activities were closely related to the two significant incidents of the Miike Strike in 1959-1960 and the Miike CO poisoning in 1963. Furthermore, Taiheiyo's labor union consisted of both management workers and miners. It is clear that these specific characteristics act as important factors in accelerating Kushiro's archiving activities.

Third, Taiheiyo was not a Zaibatsu type-company mine such as Miike Mitsui's mine. Also, Taiheiyo had only the Kushiro mine, that is "one company with only one mine." As described above, facing the Miike closure, the company refused to contribute their documents to the Omuta City Library, which was the usual policy of a Zaibatsu type company mine. As a result, it was difficult to archive systematically the closed mines' company management documents. In contrast, Kushiro City and the association of former management workers could get the company management documents soon after closure.

The above three characteristics of Taiheiyo's situation facilitated archiving activities. However, there was one point which inhibited the archiving process. It is that in Kushiro, after Taiheiyo's closure, the Kushiro Coal Mine Company took over Taiheiyo's mining equipment and continued mining as the only operating mine in Japan. For instance, the privacy issue is especially important in contrast to the archives' openness. Furthermore, over 15 years have passed since KCM started coal mining again and Kushiro citizens' interest has gradually died down. KCM's closure is inevitable, and if it occurs in the near future it will be genuinely the final closure of the coal industry in Japan. The archive will have to be updated and reconstructed at that time. However, it seems that it will be difficult to carry out archiving at that time in the same way as it was with Taiheiyo's closure in 2002.

5. Concluding remarks

On the process of archiving the coal mining closure in Kushiro, there were two systematic and urgent archiving activities. If this systematic archiving is complemented by various kinds of grassroots activities, it can be more valuable to social scientific studies. In conclusion, two cases of this complementary and systematic archiving were discussed. Both cases have been facilitated by academic research.

The first example is the peripheral grassroots activities of miners' wives, such as JAFCOF's rescue of the documents of the Miners' Wives Association. In 2012 Mrs. Kuniko Sato, who was the last chairperson of the Association

(6) Ohara, T., 2015.

(7) Shimazaki, N., 2018.

(8) Shimazaki, N., H. Nakazawa, T. Shimanishi and T. Ishikawa, 2018.

of Miners' Wives in Hokkaido, attended the Kushiro City Museum's event "Speech session of mining experiences," after long negotiation. For her, the activities as last chairperson were very difficult because they had a major effect on her life. However, her experiences are valuable to the next generation. After several interviews concerning her life history, she finally accepted the offer to attend the event. From that time, she has spoken openly about her unique experiences from the perspective of a coal miner's wife. She talked about the daily attitude which was typical of a miner's wife, for example, she would seek to stay home until her husband returned from the pit. Because, while miners were working underground, it was not sure what would happen to them. This custom reflected what her father, who was also a miner, used to tell her in her childhood.

She contributed the Association's documents, which totalled 20 boxes, to the museum. JAFCOF made an index of them. In addition, in 2013 JAFCOF held a meeting of former members of the Hokkaido Miners' Wives Association at Iwamisawa in Hokkaido. The five former chairpersons, including Mrs. Sato, all in their 70s and 80s, represented five different coal mines, and talked about their experiences. At the end of the meeting they sang the association's song as they used to do at the end of their daily meetings. This was the last time that all of them gathered together.



Picture 3. Meeting of former members of the Hokkaido Miners' Wives Association, 2013 (Photo by Shimazaki)

The peripheral activities around the coal mining industry, such as those of miners' wives, were more difficult to archive than miners' experiences. Because both miners and their wives thought that their experiences were just ordinary daily activities, they considered these were not valuable to record. Therefore, the grassroots archiving activities were particularly important.

The second example is the grassroots archiving activities concerning the last phase of the Japanese coal industry. This involves interviews with KCM staff and miners, who are the only remaining coal mine workers in Japan. From 2011, JAFCOF and Waseda University students have been annually visiting KCM and extending their fieldwork. Through this fieldwork, the KCM staff has become conscious of KCM's situation of being the last coal mine company in Japan. Furthermore, they have started to agree to cooperate in contributing some documents to the book of "The History of Taiheiyo Coal Mine," commissioned by Kushiro City. This movement may lead to avoiding problems referred to in this paper. It shows the potential of the Kushiro archives to make an important contribution to social scientific studies.

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