THE SHIFT TO DOMESTIC SUGAR AND THE IDEOLOGY OF ‘THE NATIONAL INTEREST’

Ochiai Kō*

This chapter is an introduction to the changes caused by shifting from imported sugar to domestically produced sugar in Japan in the latter part of the Tokugawa era (1600–1867). It also assesses the historical significance of this change in policy, especially regarding the ideology of ‘the national interest’ (kokueki 国益), and how this ideology was conceived by the Tokugawa shogunate, by leaders in the domains (han 藩), and by the general populace.

Kokueki shisō 国益思想, or the ideology of the national interest, refers to a system of thought that appeared around the mid eighteenth century and presaged the modern concept of the state economy. As opposed to the earlier feudal systems of economic thought from which it grew, it focused on reducing imports and actively encouraging domestic economic growth, and drew a close connection between enriching the population and enriching the state. Although modern terms like ‘citizen’ (kokumin 国民) were not yet in use, the seeds of the later idea of ‘citizen consciousness’ (kokumin ishiki 国民意識) can be discerned within this economic mindset. As will be discussed further in this paper, the rise of domestic sugar production is closely related to the formation of this conception of national interest.

Sugar was regarded as a luxury item, not as an essential, as was salt. For instance, in Kōeki kokusan kō 広益国産考 (Thoughts on the Broad Benefits of National Production, 1859), Ōkura Nagatsune 大蔵永常 (1768–?) said that

200 years ago sugar was only known to people of high rank. People of low rank never had a chance to see it.1

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1 Ōkura 1859. Ōkura was an agriculturalist in the second half of the Tokugawa era who researched and taught agricultural techniques during his travels around Japan.
In the early Tokugawa period, sugar was a medicine that was handled by medicine wholesalers (yakushu ton’ya 薬種問屋). Sugar production was nearly nonexistent in Japan, and almost all sugar was imported from overseas; the one, but minor, exception was brown sugar production in Satsuma domain (today’s Kagoshima prefecture).\(^2\)

Domestic cultivation and production of sugar began to increase in the eighteenth century, and in the first half of the nineteenth century became widespread in southwestern Honshu and in Kyushu, reflecting a shift toward domestic sugar production. Even though sugar was still a luxury item and Japan continued to import it, sugar had become widely known to the general population.

The domestic sugar policy not only influenced the development of cash crops, but also changed the economic thought held by the population and even affected the foundations of the shogunal government. In the following I will show the historical significance of these events.\(^3\)

### A. Sakoku, Seclusion Policies, and the Domestic Sugar Policy

Two related terms are now used to describe policies of protectionism during the Tokugawa era: sakoku 鎖国 and kaikin 海禁. Sakoku emphasizes isolation from other countries in terms of diplomatic relations and the closing of borders, whereas kaikin emphasizes prohibition against the free exchange of people and goods by sea. It is well known that the Tokugawa shogunate traded with China (Ming and Qing dynasties) and the Netherlands, as well as conducting diplomatic relations with Korea and the Ryukyu Kingdom (today’s Okinawa prefecture).\(^4\) In a sense, it is therefore inaccurate to say that the

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He wrote the piece toward the end of his life, and the manuscripts were published in 1844 (Tenpō 天保 period), after he had died.

\(^2\) Sugar produced in the Satsuma domain was mainly brown sugar. Later, as will be discussed below, white sugar began to be produced as well, first in Sanuki province and spreading throughout the country (especially western Japan) by the Bakumatsu period.

\(^3\) This research, while incorporating information on factors like currency changes, also draws on the conclusions of my earlier book; see Ochiai 2007.

\(^4\) The expression sakoku, referring to a government policy, conveys the erroneous idea that Japan was an isolated country, a country without international relations. But there were four ports open for trade with some countries, namely Matsumae for Ezo (today Hokkaido), Tsushima for Korea, Nagasaki for the Netherlands and China, and Satsuma for the Ryukyu Kingdom. See Arano 1992, Yamamoto 1995.