

Commodity distribution of seed oil and oilseed and the transformation of market regulation in late premodern urban Osaka

by *SHIMAZAKI Mio*

During its late premodern era, Osaka became a national center of seed oil and oilseed commodity distribution, and served as the primary supplier of retail seed oil to the massive consumer market in Edo. In regulating the seed oil market, the Tokugawa Bakufu adopted a dual policy: first, attempting to lower the price of seed oil by concentrating supply in Osaka; and secondly, working to guarantee a stable supply of low-priced oilseed to a group of officially sanctioned oil producers.

Seed oil producers and distributors were organized into licensed trade organizations in Meiwa 7 (1770) under the newly enacted Regulations for the Oil Trade (Aburakata Shiho 油方仕法), which prescribed who could supply the seed used for oil production. With the implementation of these regulations, a national distribution network centering on Osaka was for all intents and purposes established. The Meiwa 7 Regulations and the subsequent implementation of Revised Regulations Trade in Tempo 3 (1832) comprise the two major turning points in the history of seed oil market regulation.

Historians first began to focus on the heavily regulated market for seed oil in the 1950s, when the study of markets under the Tokugawa Bakufu rose to prominence. In particular, their research focused on examples of seed oil distribution in an effort to analyze the transformation and dissolution of the Bakufu system. However, this research tended to examine the problem of seed oil distribution only from the perspective of official policy. Consequently, it failed to sufficiently elucidate the specific characteristics of the various urban and rural groups that were involved in seed oil production and distribution, and thus inaccurately describe the late premodern seed oil market as one characterized by a clash between a dominant group of specially licensed urban merchants and an ever-increasing number of rural seed oil producers and

distributors who challenged their dominance.

In contrast, this article focuses on the late premodern Osaka-based oilseed distribution network. Through an examination of Bakufu directives (*machibure* 町触) issued by the Osaka Town Functionary (*Machibugyo* 町奉行) and the Preamble to the Licensed Trade Association List (*Kabu-Nakama Namaecho Maegaki* 株仲間名前帳前書), the author attempts to elucidate the structure of the Tokugawa-era oilseed market, with a theoretical focus on the mutually restrictive relationship between law and society.

The analysis has resulted in a number of conclusions. First, it has confirmed that early seventeenth-century oilseed wholesalers were little more than diversified wholesalers trading not only oilseed but also other grains and cereals. Secondly, the analysis demonstrates that the licenses granted to certain oilseed merchants by the Bakufu in Horeki 9 (1759) represents an important turning point in the history of the seed oil market, because it helped strengthen the efforts on the part of those merchants to establish trade associations.

Third, through a close examination of the aforementioned Preamble to the Licensed Trade Associations List, the author shows that the creation of licensed trade associations in Meiwa 7 neither granted privileges to all Osaka-based merchants and wholesalers involved in the seed oil and oilseed trade, nor did it result in the subordination of Settsu, Kawachi, Izumi-based seed oil producers to trade association merchants and wholesalers. Rather the Meiwa 7 act reflected policy ultimately designed to guarantee the Osaka Town Functionary control over a distribution network centering on Osaka.

Fourth, by tracing the development of unsanctioned oil producers in Western Japan, the author elucidates how the character of the official duties performed by oilseed wholesalers and the structure of their trade associations changed as a result of the call for seed oil self-sufficiency in Settsu, Kawachi, and Izumi Provinces. Finally, the author shows that while a deepening of the structural problems resulting from the content of the Meiwa 7 Regulations no doubt played a part in prompting the Revised Regulations of Tempo 3, the latter did not

completely abolish the special rights previously granted to licensed urban merchants. Rather, their intent was to rationalize distribution and reinvigorate the business activities of the various groups involved in the seed oil and oilseed trade.