Mercantilism in a Japanese domain

The merchant origins of economic nationalism in 18th-century Tosa

Luke S. Roberts

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Introduction

The development of the modern nation-state of Japan is based, in part, upon common belief in and support of a nationally organized political economy. *Kokueki* thought as developed in Japanese domains in the eighteenth century was the origin of such belief. The word kokueki, meaning "prosperity of the country," was a neologism in eighteenth-century Japanese – the key term in a newly developing mercantilist economic thought and ideology (*kokueki shisō*) of many domainal states in Japan of the late Edo period. Because it was a proto-national vision of economic organization, kokueki played a highly influential role in the creation and development of the Meiji period (1868–1911) nation-state of Japan, and continues to resonate in modern times.

As this book will demonstrate, kokueki thought played importantly in the latter half of the Edo period, justifying a great proliferation of domainal economic initiatives. Tokushima domain became a famous producer of indigo, Aizu domain of lacquerware, and Matsue domain of ginseng during the eighteenth century, all revealing a high degree of domain government involvement in the development of these industries under the bannerhead "Prosperity of the Country." A key issue is that the "country" in each case referred to the domainal country (*ryōgoku*, *okuni*) and not to the whole of the Japanese archipelago. Japan was undergoing a process of linguistic and cultural unification in the Edo period, but the space of the archipelago included a collection of many states that were individually strengthening their nature as countries in the realm of economic policy. The situation in Japan is perhaps best imagined as roughly comparable to "Germany" or "Italy" at the beginning of the nineteenth century, culturally and to a degree politically unified, but not unified upon nationalist lines. More than 230 states existed within the larger polity of shogunal Japan. Kokueki thought developed out of the internal dynamic of the miniature "international" economic order within the Japanese islands. It represented a shift away from an economy of service structured primarily on a hierarchy of samurai households, toward a state legitimating itself through the protection and devel-

opment of the commercial economy of the territory enmeshed in intercountry trade.

This book will focus on the domain of Tosa, a large realm encompassing the southern half of the island of Shikoku, in order to explore the origins and development of kokueki thought and its political, social, and economic meanings. Scholars of kokueki thought to date have placed its origins in the 1760s and have argued that it was the invention of domain bureaucrats who were desperately trying to alleviate troubled finances by legitimating government intrusion into commercial activity. Domainal subjects are seen variously as beneficiaries or victims of this new thought and policy, but uniformly as recipients. Yet, this study of Tosa will show that kokueki thought originated much earlier than believed, in the 1730s, and that its primary exponents and developers in the mid-eighteenth century were merchants, not samurai bureaucrats. Merchants made frequent appeals to "the prosperity of the country" to justify the public value of their activity and thereby gain governmental support. The samurai bureaucrats learned and adopted kokueki thought in the late eighteenth century through dialogue with the merchants and adapted it to legitimize their changing role in the domainal commercial economy and to collect taxes therefrom. Samurai appropriation did not stop the dialogue. Thereafter, merchants, consumers, and to a lesser degree peasants continued to use kokueki ideologically to justify the public worth of their economic activity.

Kokueki *and nationalism*

The creation of kokueki mercantilist thought and its development into an ideology used by many domains in the latter half of the Edo period can be situated as an important topic of research for the understanding of the historic development of nationalism. When the islands of Japan were drawn into the world of nations at Western insistence, in 1853, when Commodore Perry appeared in Edo bay, the Japanese islands were nearly isolated from the world economic order. Overseas trade had flourished in Japan in the late sixteenth century and, despite the political effects of the so-called *sakoku* edicts of the 1630s, trade with China, Korea, the Dutch, and Southeast Asia continued to grow throughout the seventeenth century. A period of decline, however, can be traced to the early eighteenth century when mines in Japan began to produce less precious metal. Rather than developing new export items, the shogun of the time instead encouraged the production of import substitutes, such as fine silk and ginseng, thus bringing a steady decline in legal overseas trade from the beginning of the eighteenth century. After the early eighteenth century, trade was maintained primarily as a means of sustaining information networks and/or

political relations with the traditional trading partners.[1] This situation ended when Perry arrived, bearing miniature trains and telegraphs and a mission to force Japan to become part of a Western-led international economic order.[2]

Eagerly anticipating the departing wake of Perry's ships, representatives of numerous Western countries steamed into Japanese waters demanding inclusion in Japan's international trade and commerce. This series of events provoked a crisis in the legitimacy of the shogunate, which had based its legitimacy not on the control of international trade, but rather on its dominance of the protocol of international relations.[3] The Western nations forced their own protocol and vision of foreign relations upon the shogunate; a vision that, as symbolized by the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce with the United States in 1858, demanded that the management of commerce be the primary object of foreign relations. Because many domains had much experience in "internationally" organized commercial development, their leaders and merchants were better situated than the shogunate to appreciate and enact this new pattern of foreign relations.

The strongly mercantilist concepts that were part of kokueki thought possessed numerous similarities to the economic nationalisms of the nineteenth-century West. In 1868, when the shogunate was overthrown by a coalition of domains, leaders emerged from these realms to direct the creation of the new nation-state of Japan. Kokueki thought came to play a central role in conceptually organizing the development of this new nation as they strove to increase Japan's industrial and commercial potential.[4] Certainly, a key problem for understanding this transition is how the idea of kokueki, which was developed for a domainal state, came to be appropriated by the Meiji Japanese nation-state and, similarly, how a "domain" can create a "national" economic ideology. This issue seems more complicated than it really is because it involves certain historiographical silences created by the use of anachronistic terminology.

[1] My focus here is economic. Intellectually, study of Chinese culture and Western culture continued to grow in importance throughout the Edo period: Marius Jansen, *China in the Tokugawa World*; Donald Keene, *The Japanese Discovery of Europe, 1720–1830*.

[2] Ronald Toby, *State and Diplomacy*, which focuses upon earlier indigenous views of foreign policy rather than the late eighteenth-century view of "closed country" (itself inspired by Western conceptions), provides the best English language interpretation of foreign relations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

[3] Toby, *State and Diplomacy*.

[4] Thomas Smith, *Political Change and Industrial Development in Japan: Government Enterprise, 1868–1880*, provides the basic general survey of government economic policy during this period. Fujita Teiichirō has explored how *kokueki* thought was used extensively by a wide range of people in the early Meiji period in three articles beginning with the title "Meiji zenki no 'kokueki' shisō," and in "'Kyōkyūsha engi sōkō' no shōkai." Other commentators on early Meiji kokueki thought include Morikawa Hidemasa, *Nihongata keiei no genryū*.

Close scrutiny reveals that the basic terminology of the modern nation-state was created by domainal countries in the Edo period.

Various scholars have followed diverse threads into the tangled historical weave of modern nationalism. Research on the development of language, ethnicity, political organization, and culture emphasizes the fact that, nationalist claims to the contrary, these have only been woven together into a clearly national fabric over the past few centuries in even the oldest of modern nations.[5] Modern nations project their identities into the distant past, erasing previous forms of collective identity and consciousness from their memories. There exists also an extensive collection of pressures acting on historians of our own national era to write history that makes the modern nation the significant frame of reference.[6] Contemporary patterns of rhetoric arising from our national consciousness make it easy to subsume other forms of group identification into a modern national framework and thereby make it difficult for us to appreciate the centrality of other forms of consciousness to people of the past. Creating a common national heritage and forgetting an uncommon past are part of the continuous nationalist project of creating identification with the imagined community of the contemporary nation.

Currently, historians of Japan using Japanese terms enlist a wide range of anachronisms to describe the Edo period. Many of these reflect nationalist aspirations. Today Japan is the sole *kuni*, or "country," upon the archipelago. However, most uses of the term "kuni" (read *"koku"* in compound words) as applied to Japan are typically creations of the very late Edo period, words of uncommon usage in that era, or even Meiji period neologisms. Sakoku (meaning isolated country), *Nihon kokka* (state of Japan), *bakuhansei kokka* (*bakufu* domain state), *kokugaku* (national studies), *kokusei* (national governance), etc., are all terms used commonly by modern historians to inject the image of a multidimensional nation of Japan into our understanding of the Edo period.[7] Similarly, Meiji period terms such as *han* function to erase awareness that in the Edo period there were many kokka and kuni within the modern territory of Japan. Scholars of Japan writing in the English language have followed the Japanese lead and use the feudal term "domain" to describe the realms of the lords, and they use the terms "country," "state," and "nation" to describe the polity of the whole archipelago; these terms do not conflict with projecting the modern unity of Japan as a nation-state into the past.

[5] E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 15–45.

[6] Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, pp. 27–33, 51–68. Indeed, for such reasons I could not escape having to put "Japan" into the title of this book.

[7] For the history of the word *"sakoku,"* see Toby, *State and Diplomacy*, pp. 11–22; for *"kokugaku,"* see Peter Nosco, *Remembering Paradise*, p. 94.

It is worth reviewing the political language of the Edo period to see from where the political terms of the Japanese nation-state emerged. In the Edo period, Japan was primarily known as the *tenka*, "all under heaven." This symbolized its unity under the imperial descendants of the heavenly sun.[8] The shogun based his authority on the pacification of the tenka by his conversion of all samurai into vassals or subvassals of his household.[9] The lordly vassals of the shogun each ruled their own domains (*ryōbun*) formally granted in fief from the shogun. The term kokka emerged primarily from rhetoric used within domains. Although the term sometimes conflated the person of the ruler and realm he ruled – typical for this era – the term kokka increasingly was used to refer to the domain and its ruling institutions.[10] A survey of mid-eighteenth-century writings of samurai in Tosa reveals to us that the domain was not only a kokka, it was ruled by a "lord of the country" (*kokushu*) whose holy mediation (*intoku*) directly brought the benefits of a Confucian heaven (*ten*) and the gods of the land and sky (*jingi*) to the people of the country (*kunitami*, *kokumin*). Tosa possessed a capital of the country (*kunimiyako*) and had its own distinctive country polity (*kokutai*).[11] It is of great significance that the new leaders of the Meiji Restoration forewent calling their government a tenka, and called it instead a kokka, and used such terms as kokumin, kokutai, and kokueki to describe the Japanese people, their distinctive national polity, and a major objective of their government. They were clearly adopting the political rhetoric of the domains as a model for creating a nation-state rather than the rhetoric of the shogunate.[12]

The word kuni, which in modern usage is limited to meaning "country," was used with a great variety of meanings in the Edo period. Historically, it was used to refer to Japan (*Wakoku*, *Nihonkoku*) from at least the sixth century when the rulers of Japan carried on political correspondence with the Tang and Sui of China and the Silla of Korea. Yet, at this time, "kuni" was not the monopoly of "Japan." Kuni was also used to refer to each of the sixty-six administrative districts (what are now called provinces) within Japan, each under the authority of an imperially appointed governor.[13] Much later, in the Edo period, people

[8] This point made by Fujita in *Kinsei keizai*, pp. 203–16, and artfully summarized by Miyamoto Mataji in Miyamoto Mataji, ed., *Kokka kanjōroku*, pp. 197–9.

[9] Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai*, pp. 151–63.

[10] It should be noted also that for many domains of preunification lineage, the notion of *kokka* historically preceded the creation of the Tokugawa shogunate. Katsumata Shizuo with Martin Collcutt, "The Development of Sengoku Law."

[11] I explore this issue in detail in "Tosa to ishin – 'kokka' no sōshitsu to 'chihō' no tanjō."

[12] This strain of my argument develops and expands on Albert Craig's description of the development of domain nationalism and its subsequent contribution to Japanese nationalism. *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration*, pp. 17–25, 143–64, 299–300, 358–9.

[13] The many uses of the term suggest that *kuni* meant a large territory under the control of a powerful but not neccessarily sovereign authority. The various kuni described in Japanese

referred to Japan as a kuni in contradistinction to culturally foreign countries and in reference to the religious territory of *shinkoku*, "the country of the gods," a mythicoreligious definition originating in the eighth-century text, the *Kojiki*. The former imperial provinces no longer had any administrations in the Edo period, but remained on the cultural map as commonly used definers of territorial regions called kuni (or synonymously *shū*). They nevertheless retained a minimal administrative validity, because when the shogun ordered population registers and maps to be made, he had them organized along the borders of the provincial kuni. This has been interpreted as important evidence of the shogun's styled role as a servant of the emperor, one important means by which he legitimated his authority. Kuni was also the most common term used for large domains such as Tosa. The domain of Tosa happens to be contiguous with the imperial province of Tosa, and one might argue that the prevalent use of the word kuni in Tosa rhetoric is little more than recognition of its boundary with the former imperial province. However, people within domains much smaller and much larger than former provinces also used the term kuni to refer to their domains.[14] In Edo period parlance, *takoku* meant a different domain or province, and *takoku no hito* meant a person from such a place. Today these words mean non-Japanese countries and people. In the Edo period, China, Korea, Holland, and the Ryūkyū kingdom (now part of Japan) were *ikoku*, which meant "different countries" or "strange countries." This denoted a conception of cultural difference, but takoku and ikoku were both variations of koku. In short, in the early modern period, the word kuni had many levels of meaning that varied according to the situation. (It is worth noting that this is roughly comparable to the multivariant use of the word "country" in premodern and early modern English.) Each kuni was construed by different characteristics, but no one kuni was more authentic than another.

This befit a time when "household" (*ie*) was a political unit of primary importance and "country" was not as politically potent a concept as it is today. However, under the cultural, economic, and military pressure of the West, the leaders of the Meiji Restoration unified the religious entity, the cultural entity, and the idea of a geopolitical country into a single nation-state. The significance of the new leaders' appropriation of the rhetoric of the domainal country is brought into higher relief when we consider the concerted erasure of real and

documents as existing on the Korean peninsula and in Japan changed with the changing configuration of the authority of elites.

[14] Examples of such usage in Uwajima domain and Yanagawa domain (both much smaller than provinces) can be found in Fujita Teiichiro, *Kinsei keizai shisō no kenkyū*, pp. 61–77, 123–5. The case of Morioka domain and other large domains having boundaries not contiguous with provinces is extensively and provocatively discussed in this light in Yokoyama Toshio, "'Han' kokka e no michi – shokoku fūkyō fure to tabinin."

rhetorical domainal nationalism that followed. One of the first actions of the new Meiji government was to rename all of the domains han, thus emphasizing their ultimate subordination to a national form of imperial rule. After the restoration the only publicly recognized kuni in Japan was to be Japan itself. This act of naming was one of the many steps the Meiji government made to promote a new national unity in its early unsettled years of development. In the face of persistent divisiveness along domainal and household boundaries the han were abolished in 1871, recreated into *ken*, and the ruling samurai households were disenfranchised. Following this, the geographical borders of most of these domains-cum-ken were redrawn and redrawn yet again, and their administrators (mostly former samurai) transferred throughout Japan in order to erase old loyalites to household and kuni.[15] The tradition, created out of the needs of the early Meiji state, still lives with us. It has affected not only our historical terminology, but also our historical perspective. Today Edo period domains are uniformly referred to in the historical literature as han. Han was a Chinese word never used officially in the early modern period to describe domains. Even its private use was rare until the arrival of Commodore Perry forced a new political agenda upon many samurai within Japan.

The interests involved in this linguistic change are evident even in the eighteenth century. Arai Hakuseki was the first person to apply the term han to the Japanese context, when he used it to mean domainal lords, thereby indicating that their function was to protect the shogun. Hakuseki was a famous eighteenth-century advocate of centralizing all ruling authority and ceremonial activity into the hands of the shogun.[16] Neither the imperial court nor independent domains were a vital part of his vision of shogunal rule. His thought and activity were thus threatening not only to the kuni of the domains, but also to the tenka of the imperial tradition. His choice of the word han fit with this approach, and in a sense, his vision was prophetic of what would happen to domains in the Meiji Restoration.

The transition to creating the new nation-state was modeled partially on domain experience, but ultimately destroyed the domains themselves. The fledgling Meiji administration immediately began legitimating itself with the same domain-produced combination of ideology centered on the lord and on the economic country, only the lord was the emperor and the country was Japan. This link had not previously been important for Japan as a whole. Japan ceased being the tenka, "all under heaven," and became the kokka, a nation among nations. The object of service became the country of Japan and the

[15] Matsuo Masahito, *Haihan chiken.*

[16] Kate Nakai, *Shogunal Politics: Arai Hakuseki and the Premises of Tokugawa Rule*, pp. 135, 141–7, 235–6.

emperor, whom the leaders came in time to associate with the essence of national structure and identity, the kokutai.[17] The former kokka within Japan disappeared not only in reality but, to a large degree, from historical memory, an excellent illustration of Ernest Renan's oft-cited statement, "Well, the essence of a nation is that all of its individuals have much in common, and also that they have forgotten many things. . . . Forgetting and – I'll even add – historical error is a factor in the formation of a nation."[18]

The points with regard to language that I have made thus far are significant not only for our understanding of the lineage of some threads of Meiji nationalist rhetoric, but also for our understanding of the nature of Edo period politics. I feel that the word kuni when referring to domains is sometimes, if not always, best translated as "country" because of the protonational significance of domainal political identities.[19] I will use "domain" as a translation for ryōbun, and "household" as a translation of ie and *kachū*. I will follow received practice in calling Tosa a domain when I do not wish to emphasise the protonational characteristics, and use the term domainal country when I wish to highlight the protonational characteristics of what I am talking about. This may be inconsistent, but faithfully reflects the fact that the people of the day were inconsistent as well, and I hope by my usage to highlight the developing nature of domainal politics within the Edo period. I have two objections to the use of the word han: The first, as described above, is that it makes us that much less sensitive to the emerging "countryness" of many of the large domains. One might argue that the scholars who use the term *han kokka* have overcome this limitation, which is somewhat true. However, I still do not like the term, not only because of its anachronism, but because – and this is my second objection to the use of the term han – the term unifies the rule of the lord's household and the rule of the domain, where they were not neatly unified in their day. A distinguishable dynamic of Edo period domainal politics emerges from the complex interplay between notions of household and country.

[17] Carol Gluck analyzes the complicated process leading to the eventual unification of the emperor with the *kokutai*, *Japan's Modern Myths*, pp. 36–7, 120–7.

[18] Ernest Renan, *Oeuvres Complètes de Ernest Renan*, tome 1, pp. 891–2. "L'oublie et je dirai même l'erreur historique, sont un facteur de la formation d'une nation. . . . Or l'essence d'une nation est ce que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses" [My translation]. I have inverted the order of the two phrases in the original for rhetorical effect.

[19] I shy away from translating the term kuni into "nation" or "national," which I prefer to regard as a distinctly modern weave of ethnic, linguistic, and political-economic beliefs. Notions of ethnic and linguistic difference were not of great political importance to domainal countries. Rather, these elements took on growing importance in the eighteenth century to the notion of Japan. Harry Harootunian, *Things Seen and Unseen*. It is unfortunate, and a source of great consternation to me, that the English word "country" has no adjectival form. This has led me to use reluctantly the term "international economy" and "economic nationalism" with the understanding that the meanings are strictly limited to political economic relations and thought.

Han kokka is sufficient to describe a conflict of interest between domain and shogun, but it encourages us to ignore the very real occasions of conflict of interest hidden behind usage of the rhetoric of service to the lord's household or service to the domainal country, two fundamentally different notions of political economy. This conflict is what structures the present book's narrative about the development of kokueki thought.

Benedict Anderson has argued in *Imagined Communities* that an important element of modern nationalism is the widespread imagining of a common national community enabled and encouraged by the spread of print culture.[20] The growing influence from the early seventeenth century of a printing industry centered in Osaka, Kyoto, and Edo can indeed be related to the development of a strong Japanese cultural identity in the Edo period.[21] The great elaboration of the rhetoric of cultural difference defining Japaneseness that we find in the Edo period undoubtedly owes itself to the spread of print culture and played an important role in later Meiji nationalism.[22] However, I will argue in this book that the economic imagination, the imagining of a nationally organized political economy, is also a key element of modern nationalism. The creation of kokueki thought in domains in the eighteenth century and its emergence into public rhetoric represented the beginning of a key shift away from an economic vision based upon service between heads of households, where relationships between the ruling samurai lords functioned as the primary legitimating structure of economic activity. Kokueki thought imagined that the commercial economy of a political territory was indeed worth sacrificing self-interest for, a symbol of the public good more immediately relevant to merchant interests than samurai interests.[23] In so arguing, I am adapting Anderson's emphasis on the creation of (following Duara's criticisms I feel "expansion of" is the better way to interpret the change) a form of collective consciousness originating in the development of an "international" capitalist economy.[24] By emphasizing the economic imagination, I hope to add a new dimension to the discussion of the development of nationalism. This book will pose a critique of modern nationalism by focusing

[20] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism.*

[21] Henry D. Smith, II, "The History of the Book in Edo and Paris."

[22] Mitani Hiroshi, *Meiji ishin to nashonarizumu*, pp. 5–34; David Howell, "Ainu Ethnicity and the Boundaries of the Early Modern Japanese State"; Ronald Toby, "The Carnival of the Aliens: Korean Embassies in Edo Period Art and Popular Culture."

[23] It is in their bureaucratic identity as officials of the state that samurai come to appropriate kokueki thought. Their appropriation of kokueki thought is a key stage in making it a successful ideology.

[24] I find Anderson's book (as extraordinarily insightful as it is and as deeply instructive to me as it has been) curiously silent on economic relations and thought. This is all the more perplexing because Anderson highlights Marxist historiography and relies upon the notion of print capitalism. Prasenjit Duara's criticisms can be found in *Rescuing History From the Nation*, pp. 52–6.

on kokueki as a historically contingent rhetorical strategy for asserting the public worth of private trade.

I have thus far used the modern Japanese state and nationalism as a frame of reference for viewing kokueki thought. This is legitimate because kokueki thought was appropriated by creators of the early Meiji state. They saw the relevance of domainal kokueki to their predicament, while transforming the scale of its rhetoric to the young nation-state of Japan in its international context. However, the origins of kokueki thought can only be understood in its eighteenth-century context. We can understand the needs and responses that are the origins of kokueki thought only with a "thick description" of the politics, economics, and various ideologies of the eighteenth-century domain as a frame of reference. Therefore, this study will primarily emphasize the rapidly changing contexts of the eighteenth-century domain, while occasionally making reference to the issues of the growth of nationalism, which is the larger narrative into which this study fits.

The appearance of kokueki thought marked an important ideological shift in eighteenth-century Japanese domains. The increasing use of kokueki thought within domain state governments carried important political implications, because it facilitated a shift from a lord-centered toward a country-centered political imagination. Expounders of working for the "prosperity of the (domainal) country" through the support of export industry and commerce were subtly redefining what was considered the public good and what the purpose of government should be. Before the invention of the rhetoric of kokueki in the early eighteenth century, the dominant samurai discourse defined an activity, including economic activity, as public by linking it to the lord of the domain. Traditionally defined, service (*goyō*) and faithful duty (*hōkō*) to one's lord were public (*kō*) actions, and actions not for the benefit of one's lord were private (*shi*), and all private actions were tinged with selfishness (*shii*).[25] A daimyo served the shogunal house, defined as kō, and daimyo retainers served the daimyo house, defining it as kō, and members of a retainer's house served

[25] This can be seen in the fact that the term *kō* or *oyake* can mean both "public authority" and "the lord." My thinking owes much to Aruga Kizaemon's exploration of the concept of kō in *Aruga Kizaemon chosaku shū*, vol. 4, pp. 179–283. In the English literature, I have found Mary Elizabeth Berry's "Public Peace and Private Attachment: The Goals and Conduct of Early Modern Power in Early Modern Japan" and most especially Mark Ravina's "State Building and Political Economy in Early Modern Japan" to be superb discussions of the complex net of coexisting notions of public authority. Ravina's forthcoming book, *Land and Lordship in Early Modern Japan* should further develop this discussion. Because we continue to depend upon the concept of "state," we have yet to develop a satisfactory appreciation of the nonterritorial nature of public authority embodied in the concept of household. Eiko Ikegami's *The Taming of the Samurai*, pp. 164–71 presents a nonterritorial approach to public authority that deserves further exploration. I also find Mary Berry's close analysis of changing notions of political space in *The Culture of Civil War in Kyoto* to be promising.