

Sugar Production and Trade in Dutch Colonial Taiwan*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Taiwan's sugar industry in the Dutch colonial era. Primary data on the Han population, area of cultivated land, sugar production and exports to markets around the world were extracted from original files of the Dutch East India Company. Analysis reveals that it was the demand from the Netherlands that motivated sugar production in Taiwan. However, following the end of the Brazilian rebellion in 1654, Amsterdam was glutted with sugar from Brazil, and the Dutch lost interest in sugar from the East Indies. Persia, Japan and China then became main markets for Taiwan's sugar. In the early period, the profit margin of Taiwan's sugar exports to the Netherlands exceeded 400%, much larger than that of spices or pepper. On the other hand, natural hazards in Taiwan caused large fluctuations in farmers' income. Even in the best years, a Taiwanese farmer earned less than one third of a Dutch hod carrier, though it far exceeded what their counterparts in China could make.

Keywords: Dutch Colonial Taiwan, Sugar in the Mid-17th Century, Cross-Country Income Comparison

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