
Summary of Articles

The Relationship between Soy-sauce Brewery Development and the Regional Characteristics of the Chikuhō Area (Fukuoka Prefecture) from the Meiji to Taishō Periods

Atsushi TANAKA

This paper considers the relationship between the soy-sauce brewing industry and the regional characteristics of the Chikuhō area of Fukuoka prefecture. In particular, the relationship between the soy-sauce and coal-mining industries is elucidated through an analysis of soy-sauce manufacturing processes and the development of soy-sauce sales channels in the area.

The Konomi family was both a brewer and a landlord in this region and offers a useful case study because of its connections with the coal-mining industry as a landlord.

In the early 20th century, the Konomi family began extensive improvements of its soy-sauce brewing operations, a process it completed in the mid-1910s with the manufacture and sale of a “high-quality soy-sauce.”

However, this “high-quality soy-sauce” was not popular among consumers at the time, and the new product did not lead to an increase in the Konomi family’s total sales. The reason for this was that the soy-sauce did not suit consumer tastes. In other words, the improvements that had been sought did not conform to the direction being taken by the “high-quality soy-sauce” that was in demand in the market.

The World War I years brought soaring prices of raw materials, including soybeans and wheat, and most brewers accordingly raised their soy-sauce prices. However, the Konomi brewery continued to keep its prices relatively low.

This choice was influenced by the demands made by coal miners during the 1918 “coal-miners’ rice riots” for price cuts in daily necessities. The class of coal miners that bought “the highest quality soy-sauce” tended to prefer a sweet and viscous variety like the double-brewed soy-sauce produced and consumed in northern Kyushu.

Konomi’s “high-quality soy-sauce” therefore met the demand of the coal miners, enabling the Konomi brewery to expand its operations.

This case suggests family’s that it was important for regional entrepreneurs to suit the commodities they produced to regional characteristics.