SANKIN KOTAI SYSTEM OF JAPAN IN EDO ERA:
THE PROCESS, TARGET AND MECHANISM

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In the political structure of the Japanese feudalism of Edo era, sankin kotai is a Tokugawa bakufu’s essential policy aiming at seizing political power, controlling daimyo’s activities by which, at the same time, affirming the daimyo’s loyalty towards shogunate. During more than two centuries, Bakuhan taisei system, in which sankin kotai, had seen numerous changes but shoguns had been always trying to maintain domestic stability and their own political status. In Edo time, bakufu could establish their power upon local daimyo from which they built up the "lord-vassal" relationship that was very typical in Japan.

Tracing back to the history of Edo era, we can see a great deal of deep effects sankin kotai had in Japanese economic and social life. To comply with this system, almost all daimyo had to mobilize large human and financial resources. Sankin kotai system decreased economic potential of many localities. However, in assembling a mass of daimyo and bushi in Edo, it also produced necessary motive forces to the development of commercial economy, handicraft, monetary exchange and trade and cultural exchange. Therefore, should an intensive study on sankin kotai system be considered as one of the keys to understanding and explaining the political nature of the Edo administration, a combined power decentralizing-centralizing mechanism, as well as important economic and social changes of Japan of this time.

By implementing the sankin kotai, Bakufu basically, as they could concentrate power, reduced the autonomy of many daimyo with their trend of decentralized lordship. Besides, sankin kotai also “nationalized” the style of living and thinking of local administrators and gave them more profound and comprehensive understandings about national sovereignty and consciousness. From such economic and social environment, a staff of experienced and wide-visioned administrators appeared and they themselves played then a key role in the rising of the Japanese nation in the mid-nineteenth century.