A Study of Flood Control Administration and Civil Engineering Bureaucrats in the Transitional Period from Early Modern to Modern Times: The Department of Water Resources Management of the Shizuoka Domain and Other Relevant Organizations

HIGUCHI Takehiko

In the Edo Shogunate Government, the Kanjō-sho (Treasury Department), led by the Kanjō-bugyō (Chief Treasurer), was responsible for flood control administration in the shogunal demesnes. Under the control of the Department, the low-ranking government officials called Fushin-yaku were in charge of construction works for disaster prevention and rehabilitation. They seem to have consisted not only of engineers but also of administrative officials who only supervised farmers engaged in construction works.

After the Meiji Restoration, the Government of Japan set up departments in charge of civil engineering and construction, such as Chika-shi, Doboku-shi, Doboku-ryō, and Doboku-kyoku, under the supervision of the Kaikei-kan (Ministry of Accountant), Minbu-shō (Ministry of Public Affairs), Kōbu-shō (Ministry of Public Works), Ōkura-shō (Ministry of Finance), and Naimu-shō (Ministry of Home Affairs) to enhance flood control. Moreover, the Meiji Government strived to adopt new technologies from the West. In the meantime, some of the low-ranking government officials who had worked as Fushin-yaku in the Edo period continued to engage in flood control projects in prefectures under the direct control of the new Meiji Government, which indicates the retention of human resources at the field level even after the regime change.

The Shizuoka Domain, established for the ex-shogun who was demoted to a daimyo with revenues of 700,000 koku, set up the department of water resources management (originally named as Suiri-rotei-kakari, later renamed as Suiri-gunsei-kakari, and then renamed again as Suiri-koorikata-kakari) under the local government to enhance flood control since there were large rivers within the territory, such as the Fuji, Abe, Ō, and Tenryū Rivers. Though in the domain, technocrats only built simple wood, bamboo and/or stone structures for flood prevention, such as those called jakago, daiseigyū, and ushiwaku, by using traditional techniques similar to those used in early modern times, and seem to have strived for modernization. This is also illustrated by the fact that the department of water resources management not only consisted of government officials who had engaged in public affairs for years under the Edo Shogunate Government, such as Fushin-yaku and other officials of the Kanjō-sho, but also hired as senior officials those who had learned Western scientific knowledge and skills to become naval officers.
Around the time of haihan-chiken (the abolition of feudal domains and the establishment of prefectures), most officials of the Shizuoka Domain were assimilated into the Meiji Government. Some of those who had worked for the department of water resources management were appointed as civil engineering/flood control administrators at the central and prefectural governments. Meanwhile, among the ex-shogunate officials and the Shizuoka Government who had learned Western arithmetic knowledge and measurement skills in the Numazu Military Academy established by the Shizuoka Domain, some young officials served as engineers at the Doboku-ryō (Department of Civil Engineering), working with foreign specialists employed by the Government of Japan. Moreover, some of the students graduating from the academy and going on to the Imperial College of Engineering to further their education became professional civil engineers.

Thus, the shogunate flood control administrators equipped with traditional engineering techniques and the shogunate naval officers armed with modern Western scientific knowledge were merged together in the Shizuoka Domain. After working for the department of water resources management or studying in the Numazu Military Academy, they were assimilated into the Meiji Government. Then, despite the change of generations and the turnover of personnel, their knowledge and skills were transferred to civil engineering bureaucrats and engineers in charge of truly modern flood control.

Key words: Fushin-yaku, Western science, ex-shogunate officials, bureaucracy, technocrat