

The roles of “*wazamae*” and social status
in the Tokugawa Bakufu’s appointment of naval officers

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When selecting capable personnel to man its Army and Navy, both of which were founded during the last years of that regime, the attribute known as “*wazamae*” 業前, meaning certain rare and desirable skills, was a key point for the Tokugawa Bakufu. Although there has been previous research on personnel selection, an analysis of the actual situation, particularly actual cases among the lower ranks, has been lacking due to limited historical materials. Furthermore, the situation of the Navy is not as well understood as that of the Army. Therefore, in this article, the author examines the actual conditions under which naval officers were appointed by utilizing the documents formerly stored in *tamonyagura* 多聞櫓 (the battlement enclosures) of Edo Castle.

The article begins with an analysis of the changes that took place in the posts held by naval officers and the way in which appointments were made according to their social status. Methods differing from the norm were adopted in the case of lower ranking officers, putting great emphasis on “*wazamae*”, regardless of individual social or family status and hereditary stipend. These methods made it possible for capable people to play important roles in the Navy, while minimizing changes in social status and expenditures. However, the Navy was not satisfied with these methods and attempted to grant social status and privileges appropriate to their officers’ “*wazamae*” and assigned duties.

Next, the author considers the ideas of both the Navy and the Bakufu’s central authority during the Keio 慶応 era (1865-68) concerning “*meshidashi*” 召出 (lit. to summon; but also meaning to grant fiefs or stipends as reward for being taken into the service of the shogun) held by the sons and brothers of direct Bakufu retainers and indirect vassals (*baishin* 陪臣) demonstrating exceptional “*wazamae*”. Despite the Navy’s hope to employ their new

personnel selection method, an obstacle existed based on the principle that the recipient of such a fief or stipend served the shogun as the head of a “family” in accordance with that family’s status and hereditary stipend. Therefore, while the Navy continued to request that their officers receive *meshidashi*, the grants were controlled by the Bakufu’s central authority, in particular, through restrictions against forming branches of direct retainer families. This occurred against a backdrop of the expansion of departments requiring “*wazamae*” and the establishment of shared precedents regarding appointments and promotions.

Finally, the author takes up reforms in the naval officer personnel system carried out after the battle of Toba-Fushimi. Although the reforms were epoch-making in basing appointments upon “*wazamae*” rather than family status, the gap between the treatment of the heads of direct retainer families and that of other members was not easily bridged. Even after the reforms at the end of the Tokugawa period dismantled Japan’s premodern military system, the warrior class continued to exist firmly upon the basis of the traditional “*ie*” 家 (family) institution.