

Lower Yellow River and Storehouse Circuit Expenses in the Yongzheng and Qianlong Reigns of the Qing Dynasty

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Abstract

In studies on the financial history of the Qing dynasty, the field of river engineering expenses has long been overlooked. And in their research on the history of river engineering, authors have consistently focused on such aspects as river management, river flood prevention, and river engineering design, with relatively little attention placed on the financial side of river management. Although much research has been accumulated in discussing local channel officials, the one in charge of river engineering finances, the Storehouse Circuit Intendant, is only briefly introduced.

The lower reaches of the Yellow River include the site of prefecture of Huaian and Yangzhou in Jiangsu Province, where the Yellow and Huai River channels converge. It also features the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, essential for shipping grain, and was a center for saltworks tax revenue. It therefore goes without saying that this area became a major financial center for the country, so keeping these transport lines flowing and stabilizing the river channel became an important focus of water management on the part of the Qing government. Due to the large amount of resources and funds invested in it, the lower reaches of the Yellow River Storehouse Circuit Intendant emerge to take charge of the financial aspect of grain and money passing through the area. In the financial history of river engineering in the lower reaches of the Yellow River during the Qing dynasty, this official played a decisive and crucial role.

The present study focuses on the lower reaches of the Yellow River in the Jiangsu area in discussing the responsibilities of the Storehouse Circuit Intendant and issues related to the financial management of expenses for the lower reaches of the Yellow River. In addition to an introduction and conclusion, the body of the study includes the following sections: 1) the contents and responsibilities of the Lower Yellow River Canal Storehouse Circuit Intendant, 2) a review of abuses in managing the Yellow

River and reformation of the Grand Canal Storehouse Circuit, and 3) the contents and changes that took place in revenues and expenditures in Grand Canal Storehouse Circuit finances. Finally, the study points out that the third decade of the Qianlong emperor's reign (ca. 1755-1765) saw the government reorganize finances for the lower Yellow River, bringing temporary stabilization to finances for river engineering in the following decade or two. However, after the 45th year of Qianlong's reign (1780), disasters brought by flooding on the Yellow River once again became a drain on resources for what had once been a stable financial situation that emerged for the lower reaches of the Yellow River.

Keywords: Qing dynasty, Jiangnan, lower reaches of the Yellow River, river flood prevention, history of river engineering, river channel construction, finances, Grand Canal Storehouse Circuit

(Translated by Donald E. Brix)