

Sayamaike Reservoir

Japan's oldest reservoir constructed 1,400 years ago, and its irrigation system

The Sayamaike Reservoir was constructed about 1,400 years ago by the order of the Emperor of the time, who said, "There is a shortage of water in Sayama area, which is likely to pose an obstacle to farming. Dig more ponds to promote agricultural development". This event is recorded in the oldest history book in Japan. The Sayamaike Reservoir, which is the oldest artificial reservoir in Japan, and whose irrigation system have been used for a very long time, has been rehabilitated and modernized repeatedly since its operation. It is still in use as an agricultural water system. Many of the technologies adopted for the reservoir construction were brought from the Korean Peninsula, and technologies brought from China were also used in the renovation work carried out about 800 years ago. As such, the reservoir is a valuable heritage constituting evidence of technology exchange and transmission in East Asia region in that period.

The history of the Sayamaike Reservoir irrigation system, dating as far back as 1,400 years, mirrors that of the development and renovation of irrigation systems in Japan. When a large-scale renovation was carried out recently, traces of past renovation works, including 57 pieces of wooden sluices, were found in the dam body. In the Sayamaike Historical Museum located on the edge of the reservoir, people can learn how the reservoir and its irrigation system have changed through many renovations over the period of 1,400 years. In particular, the museum exhibits a cross-sectional surface of the dam body which shows the history of renovation, as well as articles which have been unearthed, so people can see the historical transition of renovation and technological development.

In the 1600s, in order to ensure functional distribution of water to its beneficiary area from the Sayamaike Reservoir, the management of the reservoir, irrigation canals, and other small reservoirs located along those canals were systemized. Its management records for 400 years since then have been preserved. At present, the land improvement district is responsible for managing and maintaining this system.

Further, the 57 pieces of wooden sluices excavated from the dam body is going to be designated as a nationally important cultural property, thus there is no doubt the system is recognized as an extremely important cultural heritage.

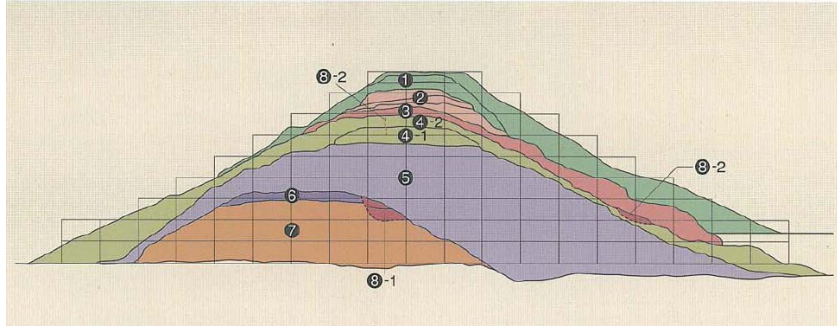


Sayamaike reservoir from the sky

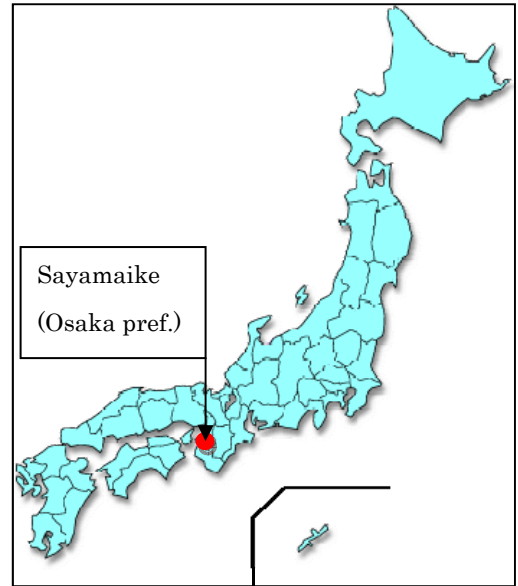


Trace of repeated renovation (found wooden sluices)

(Upper: Edo period (after 1600s) Under: Nara period (nearly 8th Century))



History of renovations and upgrades during 1,400 years



Location in Japan