

BRIEF HISTORY

Until the time when a Portuguese ship made a visit to this nation in the 16th century, the trading partners of Japan were confined to the area of South-East Asia. The ships engaged in the trade were served by pilots who mastered the arts of both terrestrial and celestial navigation, and they played a positive role in piloting vessels in an extensive sea area.

In the early part of the 17th century, Japan closed its doors to foreigners and entered a state of total national isolation which lasted for approximately 200 years. During this period, trade with overseas partners was completely suspended except on very special occasions.

Japan, however, emerged from isolation and resumed the state of free trade with foreign countries once again in the face of a strong demand by the Western Powers demonstrated by men-of-war and merchant vessels visiting Japan in the middle of the 19th century. Taking this opportunity, the Tokugawa Shogunate (the feudal government) decided to set up pilot teams in various regions of this nation.

During the infancy of the Japanese shipping industry in the eighteen-seventies, pilotage services were provided under free competition on a private business basis, because the provision of pilotage services had not been organized yet. Under such circumstances, every pilot was so eager to go further off-shore to capture incoming ships to offer a pilotage service in a highly competitive manner. Information suggests that distress accidents involving pilot boats frequently occurred in those days, particularly during the typhoon season.

Such overheated competition to provide pilotage services was often seen during the infancy of the provision of

pilotage services in Europe as well. The government of each country planned to modernize the system of pilotage services by establishing a pilotage association in which many pilots were adequately organized in an integrated manner. Japan was no exception, and one pilotage association for each pilotage district was organized. As a result, the provision of safe and functional pilotage services was initiated in a systematic way.

In 1876 the first Japanese Pilotage Regulations were set down. On the whole, these Regulations were modelled on the Merchant Shipping Act, 1854 of the United Kingdom.

Later on, in 1899, the Government of Japan promulgated the Pilotage Law as a consolidation of revised Pilotage Regulations which was attempted in an integrated effort to improve and reorganize those existing maritime laws to keep them up with the expansion of seaborne traffic. In these days, there were five pilotage districts served by fourteen pilots (of these, Japanese pilots accounted for only six persons).

After the termination of World War II, a variety of post-war transformations in the realm of legal systems were promoted by the Government of Japan under the doctrine of democracy, and the former Pilotage Law 1949 was enacted in such a socio-economic environment. The compulsory pilotage system was first introduced at that time.

In the beginning of 21st century, going along with the tide of deregulation, major parts of the Pilotage Law were revised in 2007, so that the approval system of fee and the grade (1st, 2nd and 3rd) system of license were introduced.