The Concept of “Oya—Ko” (a non-blood parent-child) in Ancient Genealogies and Ancestral Worship
——In Pursuit of the Prototype of the Principle of Non-blood Relationship in “Ie” (family)——

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The first axiom of the traditional Japanese “Ie” (family) is the continuity of a successive line, and blood relationship is not necessarily regarded as important. A subordinate not related by blood is included in the family as “Ie-no-Ko” (child in family). The origin of the principle of non-blood relationship in the “Ie” traces back to the ancient Uji (Clan) and structural principles of the community on which was based the formation of the Uji. In ancient times, there extensively existed the concept of Oya-no-ko (child in lineage) in a non-blood parent-child relationship. A child related by blood was distinguished from the above, and was called “Umi-no-Ko” (child of birth). Before the end of the 7th century, each was described in different types of genealogy. Uji was originally a non-descent group, based on the concept of “Oya-no-Ko”. The “Oya” of the “Oya-no-Ko” indicated the heroic chief (ancestor), who was the symbol of the unification of the group; the “Ko” indicated a member of the group (Ujibito). Successive chiefs (Uji-no-kami) were considered as “Ko” of the previous chief, regardless of their blood relationship. Through a ceremony they renewed, that is, succeeded to, their spiritual power (the power to unify the group) from the previous chief, who was incorporated into the ancestors. “Umi-no-Ko”, on the other hand, only indicated a bilateral kinrelationship in the chain of parent-child relationships, and was the not structural principle of the group.

After the 8th or 9th century, the two types of genealogies gradually overlapped to establish a paternal genealogy, along with the transition of the “Uji” into a descent group. However, the inclusion of all group members as “Ko” under the control of the leader (Oya) was continued to the structural principle of the “Ie”, which was derived from the “Uji”. The “family ancestors”, meaning either only the first generation who established the “Ie”, or successive chiefs and their wives, are worshiped in line with the concept of the family line, not the biological blood relationship, and they are fused with Ta-no-Kami (God of the rice fields) — Yame-no-Kami (God of the mountains). Underlying this is a consistent view of the inpersonalized ancestors rooted in unity in the region (community), which existed before the appearance of the principle of kin. These days, due to the rapid disappearance of the concept of family lineage, the foundation of conventional ancestral worship are being rocked. By reviewing the underlying concept of the weakness of the blood relationship, and by regenerating it as a sense of community over and above the blood relationship, there may be found a new way of ancestral worship free from the framework of the “Ie”.

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