Family Constitution and Ancestor Worship

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The present paper examines the rites of ancestor worship performed at the time of enactment of a family constitution and the articles regulating ancestor worship in the family constitution. This reflects the author's standpoint to discuss "the family, kinship and ancestor worship" by paying special attention to the events for ancestor worship and also by treating ancestor worship in terms of family constitution. Specific examples include family constitutions and rites of ancestor worship of Mitsui Family, Yasuda Family, Otani Family of Honganji Temple, Koyama Family in Komoro City, and Katakura Family.

The research findings are summarized as follows: (1) Legal and economic reforms since the early Meiji period stimulated internal momenta for the establishment of a family constitution, and the articles regarding family rules in the Peers Ordinance acted as its external momentum. (2) The objects of ancestor worship performed on the occasion of the enactment of a family constitution tended to concentrate on the founder or the first generation patriarch of the family. (3) A clan which carried out the rites of ancestor worship was hierarchally organized centering around the main family. (4) Ancestor worship legitimized hierarchically structured positions within the clan, and motivated members to make collective efforts for the prosperity of the group. The family constitution defined the target and method for collective endeavors and served to unify the clan.

The theme in double quotation marks at the opening of this summary has conventionally been studied with material facilities for ancestor worship as clues, for example, household Buddhist altars, memorial tablets housed in ancestral altars, graveyards, and so on. This paper, however, proposes to examine events for ancestor worship as a new technique, and attempts to test the validity of this method. Since the author takes up the question in terms of family constitutions, the enquiry is restricted to rich and powerful families which have kept a family constitution. For this very reason, it may be anticipated that this technique has the advantage to reveal certain latent aspects of "family, kinship and ancestor worship" in ordinary families. In this sense, further study is desired on the basis of an additional collection of family constitutions.