Material Iron for Blacksmithing as seen in the
"Kaji-Reichō" of Shokenza in Miyako and Yaeyama

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This paper aims to outline through the smiths' organizations subject to the Royal Government, the processing of ironware in Okinawa.

The Royal Government established the Office of Blacksmiths at an early stage to have them process ironware. It also established smithies attached to each Magiri-Bansho to satisfy the demand for ironware. However, after the village blacksmith system was adopted under "Haneji-Shioki", the official smithies, such as of the office of Blacksmiths and attached to Shokenza of Miyako and Yaeyama existed in parallel with the village smithies. In this paper, the author intends to find out the technical nature, as it were, of the ironware culture in Okinawa, since village smiths, who were scattered throughout Okinawa until recent years, fundamentally took the techniques of these official smithies as their foundation to that extent and the two groups of smiths embodied a kind of division of work.

It cannot be said that there is necessarily enough data for the author's purpose; however, he has attempted to analyze the situation in Miyako and Yaeyama centering on the so-called "Kaji-Reichō" (example book for blacksmithing), which shows the sources of material iron and the characteristics of the preparation methods used in Okinawa. It was clarified here that, with regard to soft iron for blacksmithing, in addition to "Senwari-Tetsu" which was transported from the Japanese Mainland, scrap pig iron, such as old pots, and scrap forged iron, such as agricultural and shipping tools, were respectively recycled and used to supplement the lack of "Senwari-Tetsu". It was also found that, even after the recycling process, the iron obtained was not an homogeneous soft iron material, reflecting the original materials. Rather, it can be considered that the "Kaji-Reichō" was compiled reflecting this kind of compound material iron.

In the "Kaji-Reicho", in addition to these soft iron materials, methods for obtaining steel from pig iron are also described. Another characteristic of this area was the fact that the "ball steel" used on the main island of Japan was not used in Okinawa.