A Study of "Josō" Ancestry in Sword Inscriptions: One Perspective on the Formation of the Imperial Line Based on Clan Genealogy

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In order to advance criticism of the Kojiki and the Nihon Shoki and research on the Japanese imperial line based on metal and stone inscriptions, a comprehensive study of the concepts incorporated in the inscription materials and texts that includes genealogical consciousness of clan genealogy is required. With this in mind, the author made a study of the inscription on the Inariyama sword, the oldest extant clan genealogy, and examined the significance of carving a genealogy on a sword by looking at the notion of josō (ancestry), presumed to be important in the context of the composition of the inscription, and the changes to this notion that took place over time.

The study revealed the following four findings. Firstly, as a transcription of forebears that is different to "shiso" (primogenitor), "josō" comprises ancestors seen as having started genealogies when they inherited a certain status before the end of the 7th century. The shift from "josō" to "shiso" occurred around the time of the compilation of the Nihon Shoki. Secondly, there is a problem with interpreting an inscribed sword solely based on the reasoning that it was a gift from a person of higher status to a person of lower status. The Inariyama sword inscription is a valuable resource that affords a glimpse into the world of the autogenous genealogical tradition of a clan whose authority comes from their "josō." Thirdly, as noted in the lines marking the inlay in the Shichishito (seven-pronged sword), the shape and magical power of the sword is inseparable from the contents of the inscription. If we see the act of carving a genealogy on the ridgeline of the blade of the sword as analogous to a myth on the point of the blade of a spirit sword recognizing the authority of heaven, or to a straight line above the central names in a linear genealogy from a later period, the inscription has significance in terms of religious beliefs. Fourthly, if one considers the genealogy on the Inariyama sword from the perspective of a mythological view of genealogy, the part where generic clan chief names are named with the place name and honorific title can be seen as a substitute for an actual alliance (lateral contiguity) between contemporary clan groups by a linear list of ancestor's names (clan history). This is a completely different genealogical concept to patrilineal genealogy based on a chronological bloodline of grandfather, father and son.

The author then discusses the switch made from the end of the 7th century through to the
beginning of the 8th century to the concept of a chronological direct bloodline through the creation of an imperial line that transcends the conceptual world common to persons of chiefly rank. The author also discusses the establishment of a "beginning" in historical consciousness and the "posture" of facing the past through ancestry.

Key words: Inariyama sword inscription, clan genealogy, imperial line, inscribed sword, "josō" (ancestry)