This article compares official seals of Japan and China (the Sui and Tang Dynasties) in the eighth century to examine the impact of China on the introduction of official seals in the ritsuryo nation of Japan and the characteristics of Japanese official seals. The analysis reveals that although the official seal system of the ritsuryo nation of Japan was established under the influence of Sui/Tang official seals, in particular the direct influence of government office seals which were closely connected to the document administration, the Japanese system was characterized by the following points: the official seals of Japan were bigger than those of the Tang Dynasty and classified in detail by their size as well as the typeface and style of the characters on their face according to the level of government, and the classification was strictly adhered to. In addition, in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the imperial seal was not used when issuing general directives, and the seals of the 24 bureaus of the six ministries were affixed on documents sent to provinces in order to ensure implementation of approved documents and proper administrative procedures in each government office. On the other hand, in Japan, Nain, the imperial seal, was stamped on directives as a rule, and emphasis was placed on the direct control of the emperor over all documents issued by the central government. Moreover, in principle, provincial documents were affixed not by the provincial government and its subordinate governments but by the central and provincial governments. These findings indicate not only the practical functions of official seals in the document administration in ancient Japan but also the intention to use differences in the size of seals, the way of stamping them, and the typeface and style of characters on their face to express the Japanese ethnocentrism and symbolize the direct rule of the emperor and the ideal structure of the Japanese ritsuryo system based on a pyramid, centralized government organization led by the emperor.

Key words: Ancient seal, Japanese official seal, Chinese (Sui/Tang) official seal, Document administration, Shoso-in documents