History and Transition of the Former Sanadayama Army Cemetery

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This paper deals with the history of the first army cemetery in Japan at Sanadayama and the transitions undergone at the cemetery after the Japanese army was abolished.

Chapter 1 presents an analysis of the circumstances surrounding the establishment of a burial ground for soldiers at Sanadayama in 1871 as part of an army-building strategy. On that occasion, a shrine dedicated to the spirits of the war dead (shokonsha) was also built on the same spot. After the Seinan War, however, a great memorial service (shokonsai) for those killed in the war was held in a location away from Sanadayama, in the site of Osaka Castle. Since then, Sanadayama came to be regarded as being specifically a burial ground and the cemetery itself expanded over time. Nevertheless, as the Russo-Japanese War brought about an unexpected rise in the number of war dead, the cemetery began to run out of room to build the type of graves it had been building until that point. Therefore, it is thought, that communal graves according to rank were introduced. Furthermore, when the Osaka City Sanadayama Elementary School was built using some of the land belonging to the Sanadayama Army Cemetery, not only were the graves in that region transferred to other locations but a large-scale renovation of the entire cemetery, it seems, was carried out as well. This is believed to have formed the basis of the appearance we see today.

Later on, as the “Fifteen-years War” broke out and the number of war dead increased even further, the remains of all of the deceased were buried in communal graves and individual graves were no longer used. These communal graves were not separated according to rank but gathered all the war dead under one grave. Still later, when it became popular to build a memorial monument for loyal war dead (chureito), a “provisional chureito” was built in wood at the Sanadayama Army Cemetery but the war situation intensified, preventing it from being rebuilt into a full-scale monument. The provisional monument serves as a repository containing the remains of over 43,000 people. Although the cemetery was struck by air raids, the repository was not burned and so the pre-war appearance was passed down to the post-war age.

Chapter 2 focuses on the religious services and care and maintenance of the former
Sanadayama Army Cemetery after the Department of the Army was abolished, analyzing the reasons why the appearance of the pre-war army cemetery has been preserved until now. The Osaka Foundation for the Preservation of Yasukuni Shrine was established in order to take charge of the religious services at Sanadayama. Special attention was paid to its transition.

At the same time, the paper also makes reference to the process of a completely unrelated incident introduced in an earlier study, where the crew of a US plane was killed by the military police at the Sanadayama Army Cemetery, just after the war. Additional reference is made to the significance of the research on the Cemetery began in the academic year of 1995 by the National Museum of Japanese History and of the preservation movement started on the initiative of the researchers.