History of the Army and Navy Cemetery System

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Cemeteries for army and navy soldiers were first built in Osaka in 1871 and then, together with the garrison system (army) and the naval barrack and naval station system (navy), were established all over the country. At first, they were called army and navy burial grounds (maisonchi) but the former came to be known since 1938 as the Army Cemetery (rikugun bochi) and the latter from an undetermined time as the Navy Funeral Place (kaigun sogijo). These cemeteries were originally for soldiers of the rank of noncommissioned private who died in peacetime but gradually came to be used to bury commissioned officers as well.

The Meiji Restoration government, with its unique army forces such as the Imperial Guards, found itself immediately faced with the problem of burying the dead from these troops. In the beginning the government's involvement was limited to supplying funeral and burial expenses but after 1871 established a system of building burial grounds for the military in various locations. This system was laid down as the "Burial Regulations" in 1873.

The history of this system can be divided into five periods as follows:

Period 1 (1869–1872), in which funeral and burial expenses only were provided for and some independent burial grounds were also founded.

Period 2 (1873–1897), in which burial regulations were established for both the army and the navy and specifications according to rank regarding the size of the cemetery, grave markers, etc. were established. This period also contained the two large wars, the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War, and wartime regulations were established to accommodate these wars.

Period 3 (1897–1938), in which the wartime regulations were integrated into a set of general burial regulations. However, the Russo-Japanese War, a large war, was followed by the Chinese-Japanese War and the people felt a stronger sense of purpose in honoring the Army Cemetery. In this period, the building of various constructions such as lanterns and water stands (mizubachi), which had been prohibited before this time, was permitted and the appearance of the cemetery took on a religious aspect.

Period 4 (1938–1945), the period of the Army Cemetery, in which individual graves were denied and communal burial towers introduced. All indication of individuality become invisible.

Period 5 (1945–present), in which the burial grounds are maintained by the private sector.