The Bodies of Soldiers and Memorial Services for Dead Soldiers

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How people die, how their bodies are treated and processed, and how and by whom the remains are cared for are issues of great concern for many Japanese to this day. Even while they are still alive, people make a general projection about how and by whom their bodies will be treated after their death and where their remains will be placed afterwards. The Japanese often believe that one's identity in life continues to exist in the body, and even the remains, of the deceased. Therefore, one's "whereabouts" after death, which is associated with the confirmation of one's social identity, is a matter of serious interest to both individuals and groups at every level of society. The Japanese perception regarding the "existence of the dead" relates to both physical and spiritual aspects and the two are inseparable. Many people believe to this day that it is only after a person's body is treated with due ceremony after death that his or her spirit becomes "qualified as a spirit of a dead person." Therefore, the treatment of the bodies of the dead has commanded careful attention, as has the religious services conducted for the spirits of such people.

As the bodies and lives of the modern Japanese soldiers came to be completely controlled by the state, one could say that the actual details of the treatment of the soldiers' bodies after death and the ceremonies for their spirits represent the country's views on issues such as whether the soldiers still belong to the state even after their deaths, whether they belong to their families or whether they are "shared" between the two and how these views were accepted by individuals, families, and the people of Japan in general.

How one views the existence of the dead shows, at the same time, how one perceives the relationship between the body and the spirit of the dead. This paper focuses on the treatment of bodies in discussing how the state of Japan, from its very foundation and its establishment of the army, had the intention of keeping both the bodies and the spirits of its soldiers under its control and dominance even after their deaths.