The Typology of Officers' Mess Halls in Japanese Military Heritage

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Abstract

With the buildings of the former Japanese Army facing the prospect of demolition, there are increasing calls for their historical significance to be assessed and for ways be found to reuse or preserve them. This is especially true of the officers' mess halls, the distinctive buildings that were most characteristic of Japanese military architecture. This thesis establishes mess hall typology.

1. The officers' mess hall first appeared in Meiji 19.
2. There was a standard mess hall layout.
3. Construction was initially funded by the government, but subsequent funding came from private sources.

Some mess halls were built in a special style or embellished differently to honor members of the imperial family visiting bases.

Keywords: army; military heritage; Officers' Mess halls; typology, imperial family

1. Introduction

Former Japanese Army buildings are still found throughout Japan, but their heritage value has not yet been sufficiently considered. Now that they are facing demolition, there are calls for their architecture to be historically assessed and for ways to be found to preserve them.

In this paper, the term "military heritage" refers to former military buildings or structures that have architectural or technical merit and deserve to be preserved. Various examples have been studied in order to assess the military architecture of the former Japanese Army. The headquarters, barracks, buildings for the imperial family and the organization of Army engineers have all been studied to some extent, although not officers' mess halls. The term "officers" refers to holders of the military rank of lieutenant or above; they were the only people allowed to use officers' mess halls. The officers' mess hall was also used to host important guests like members of the imperial family. Although there was a standard layout for the mess hall buildings, many had unique, custom-made features. By virtue of their architecture, officers' mess halls were some of the most ornamented buildings on military bases. The officers functioned as the central cadre of the modern military in Japan. It was therefore considered important for them to share an ideology and to spend considerable time together. To facilitate this, one mess hall per base became the standard.

At the end of the Meiji period, the Japanese Army comprised 16 divisions and 153 regiments. The number of divisions peaked at 355 during World War II. Following the war, military buildings were destroyed and only 19 former mess halls remain today (Ref. 1). Nine are now part of Ground Self-Defense Forces or Air Self-Defense Forces bases and are in good condition.

The existing archives were examined and five former mess halls, four owned by the Ground Self-Defense Forces and one by a municipality were visited. The five mess halls were those of the 20th Infantry Regiment in Fukuchiyama (Fig.1. and Ref. 2), the 9th Artillery in Kanazawa (Fig.2. and Ref. 3), the 21st Squadron in Okayama (Ref. 4), the 19th Artillery in Takada (Fig.3. and Ref. 5) and the 64th Infantry Regiment in Miyakonojo (Ref. 6). They were all built during the period of Army expansion during the First Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War. The fieldwork took place from 2003 to 2006 (Ref. 7).

This paper will examine the architecture of officers' mess halls, based on archival research and fieldwork, and will analyze their typology based on a study of their layout.
2. Origins and Development of Officers' Mess Halls

2.1 Origins

The Imperial Army, which introduced a modern military system during the Satsuma Rebellion, westernized the system and equipment, using the Prussian Army as a model, and worked to establish the officers as the central cadre. The construction of officers' mess halls was one tangible way of furthering this ideological system. Archival research showed that the mess hall of the 1st and 2nd Imperial Guard was built in 1886 (Meiji 19); the mess halls of the 16th Infantry Regiment in Shibata and the kyodo-dan (Ref. 8) in Kohnodai were built in the same year (Ref. 9). In the meantime, the garrison system had been rapidly introduced; there were six divisions and 24 infantry regiments (and two Imperial Infantry Guard regiments) in total in Japan in 1888 (Meiji 21). In 1890 (Meiji 23), the chief of the Army Office of Finance issued a notice (Ref. 10) that said that officers' mess halls would be built by the government and given to the officers. The officers' corps was responsible for subsequent maintenance and additional construction.

2.2 Mess Hall Plans

Officers' mess hall plans were found in documentation appended to The Grand Journal of Army. Particularly useful for this study were the plans of extant buildings that were inside the perimeter when the private buildings around officers' mess halls were incorporated into military assets in the mid-Taisho period. The 1:100-scale plans for the officers' mess halls of the 1st and 2nd Imperial Infantry of the Imperial Guard (Tokyo), the regiment and battalion of the 2nd Division (Sendai), the battalion of the 3rd Division (Nagoya) and the regiment and battalion of the 5th Division (Hiroshima) were found. In addition, other plans were uncovered in other documents, for a total of 22 plans for officers' mess halls that could be compared in this study.

The documents give the size, layout and details of officers' mess halls and the plans, including general plot plans, more detailed plans and cross-sections (Sendai only), were appended in order to draw a clear distinction between the original and additions financed by the officers' corps, such as rooms for honored guests and small halls. These descriptions and plans are accurate, enabling the original layouts to be reconstructed. The dates of extensions are given in the documents, but the original construction dates were not found. Below, the features and construction dates of each mess hall are estimated in line with the formation of each regiment.

- The Imperial Guard

The Imperial Guard was formed in 1874 (Meiji 7), but two Guards' mess halls were built in 1886 (Meiji 19), as mentioned above. The plans differ, although the two buildings were adjacent to one another on the
grounds of the Imperial Palace. The reconstructed original plan of the 2nd Guard mess hall showed that it was bigger than the 1st Guard mess hall (Tables 1. and 2.).

- The 1st Division

  The general plot plans of the 1st Infantry Regiment mess hall in Tokyo (Table 3.) and the 2nd Infantry Regiment mess hall in Mito (Table 4.) were found in documents dating from the mid-20s of the Meiji period. The mess halls of these older regiments may have been built in 1886 (Meiji 19). The 4th Infantry Regiment's mess hall (Mito, Table 5.) was built in 1886 (Meiji 19), the year officers' mess halls were introduced. The other two (Tables 6. and 7.) were also built in the same year, because the regiments were formed in 1884 (Meiji 17). The Nagasaki Cannon Battalion (Table 20.) and the Sasebo Cannon Battalion (Table 21.), formed in 1908 (Meiji 41), belonged to the Headquarters of Forts and differed from other divisions. Their mess halls were rectangular and had additional facilities.

2.3 Comparison of Mess Plans

As a result, the above 22 mess halls — except the last two — show the architecture of the earliest officers' mess halls, when the ideology was first introduced. The typology is based on comparative studies.

- The Plan of Officers' Mess Halls in Infantry Regiments

  The officers' mess hall for infantry Regiments is bigger than other mess halls. Originally, they were 5 ken (9.091 meters) wide and 11 to 13 ken (20 to 23.6366 meters) long, with an area of 65 to 70 tsubo (Ref. 16, 214.5 to 231 meters, Ref. 17).

  The area of the 16th Infantry Regiment's mess hall in Shibata (Table 22.) is given as 69 tsubo, so that the average area is estimated to be 65 to 70 tsubo. The main uses of the rooms were dining and assembly.

  The exception was the 1st Imperial Guards, whose plan gives dimensions of 4 ken by 12 ken. The archive for the Department of Control of Imperial Guards of 1892 (Meiji 25) records that the 1st Imperial Guards' mess hall was smaller than the others and about 20 tsubo smaller than that of the 2nd Regiment (Ref. 20), providing proof of the size of this mess hall. The number of officers in an infantry regiment was about 70 when the division system was introduced. This was higher than in field artillery regiments or special technical regiments (cavalry, engineering and army services).

- The Mess Halls of Other Regiments

  Field artillery regiments included engineering and army services and were smaller than infantry and cavalry regiments. Battalions were of the same standard size in all divisions. Their mess hall was 3 to 4 ken wide, 9 to 12 ken long and had an area of 30 to 40 tsubo. The exception was the 5th Field Artillery Battalion's mess hall in Hiroshima, but it had a distinctive shape with an imposing entrance.

  Mess halls that were 4 ken wide were rectangular and 11 to 12 ken long. The mess halls of the 2nd Field
Artillery Regiment (Sendai), the 2nd Army Service Battalion (Sendai) and the 3rd Army Service Battalion (Nagoya) were built according to this plan. The 1st Imperial Guards also had this type of mess hall.

Mess halls that were 3 ken wide were either rectangular or L-shaped. Examples of the former include the 3rd Cavalry Regiment (Nagoya), the 2nd Engineering Battalion (Osaka). These plans indicate a length of 9 to 12 ken. The latter layout was seen only in the 5th Division, the 5th Cavalry Battalion, the 5th Engineering Battalion and the 5th Army Services Battalion. Some plans that reversed right and left were found, but the layout is basically the same.

- The Entrance Position

Originally, mess halls were built of wood and had a tile hipped roof. Hirairi style entrances (Ref. 21)

**Table 1. The 1st Imperial Guard**

| Construction date | Material | Layout | Size | Rooms |
|-------------------|----------|--------|------|-------|
| 1886 (M19)        | Wood     | L-shaped | 4 ken x 12 ken + additional part, rest area | - |

**Table 2. The 2nd Imperial Guard**

| Construction date | Material | Layout | Size | Rooms |
|-------------------|----------|--------|------|-------|
| 1886 (M19)        | Wood     | L-shaped | 4 ken x 12 ken + addition, rest area | - |

**Table 3. The 1st Infantry Regiment**

| Construction date | Material | Layout | Size | Rooms |
|-------------------|----------|--------|------|-------|
| 1886 (M19)        | Wood     | Rectangle + hirairi (Ref. 18) | 5 ken x 13 ken + entrance | - |

**Table 4. The 2nd Infantry Regiment**

| Construction date | Material | Layout | Size | Rooms |
|-------------------|----------|--------|------|-------|
| 1886 (M19)        | Wood     | Rectangle | 5 ken x 13 ken | - |

**Table 5. The 4th Infantry Regiment**

| Construction date | Material | Layout | Size | Rooms |
|-------------------|----------|--------|------|-------|
| 1886 (M19)        | Wood     | Rectangle + hirairi | 5 ken x 11 ken + entrance (3 ken x 3 ken) | - |

**Table 6. The 2nd Engineering Battalion**

| Construction date | Material | Layout | Size | Rooms |
|-------------------|----------|--------|------|-------|
| 1886 (M19)        | Wood     | Rectangle + hirairi | 11.5 ken x 3 ken + addition | - |

**Table 7. The 2nd Army Service Battalion**

| Construction date | Material | Layout | Size | Rooms |
|-------------------|----------|--------|------|-------|
| 1886 (M19)        | Wood     | Rectangle + addition | 4 ken x 12 ken + addition | - |

**Table 8. The 3rd Cavalry Regiment**

| Construction date | Material | Layout | Size | Rooms |
|-------------------|----------|--------|------|-------|
| 1886 (M19)        | Wood     | Rectangle + addition | 3 ken x 9 ken + addition | - |

**Table 9. The 3rd Army Service Battalion**

| Construction date | Material | Layout | Size | Rooms |
|-------------------|----------|--------|------|-------|
| 1886 (M19)        | Wood     | Rectangle + addition | About 5 ken x 12 ken + entrance | - |

**Table 10. The 10th Infantry Regiment**

| Construction date | Material | Layout | Size | Rooms |
|-------------------|----------|--------|------|-------|
| 1886 (M19)        | Wood     | Rectangle + tsunairi (Ref. 19) | - | - |

Engineering Battalion (Sendai) and the 4th Engineering Battalion (Osaka). These plans indicate a length of 9 to 12 ken. The latter layout was seen only in the 5th Division, the 5th Cavalry Battalion, the 5th Engineering Battalion and the 5th Army Services Battalion. Some plans that reversed right and left were found, but the layout is basically the same.

- The Entrance Position

Originally, mess halls were built of wood and had a tile hipped roof. Hirairi style entrances (Ref. 21)
were popular, but some were *tsumairi* style (Ref. 22). The 2nd Imperial Guards (Tokyo), the 10th Infantry Regiment (Okayama) and the 22nd Infantry Regiment (Matsuyama) correspond to this style, with a gabled entrance. A staircase leads inside from the mess hall entrance, and there was an anteroom 2 ken long (Table 14).

There were also mess halls with an entrance hall 3 ken wide by 3 ken long. The entrance was Japanese style and there was a room for guard soldiers inside. The mess halls of the 4th Infantry Regiment (Sendai),
the 21st Infantry Regiment (Hiroshima) and the 5th Field Artillery Regiment were of this type. The 16th Infantry Regiment in Shibata is also believed to have had the same type of mess hall, as indicated by the old plans and area. This is the typical style of the earliest mess halls (Table 5.).

- **Room Use**

  In addition to the public area of the mess hall, there were also a dining room and an assembly hall. In addition, VIP rooms, leisure rooms, libraries, roofed corridors and other structures were built using private funds. Extensions were of various types, including L-shaped and annexes.

**3. Study of Former Officers' Mess Halls from the Expansion Period**

**3.1 Research on Former Mess Halls**

The five sites are the 20th Infantry Regiment (Fukuchiyama), the 9th Field Artillery Regiment (Kanazawa), the 21st Cavalry Regiment (Okayama), the 19th Field Artillery Regiment (Takada) and the 64th Infantry Regiment (Miakonojo) mess halls.

- **The 20th Infantry Regiment (Fukuchiyama, Kyoto)**

  This structure was originally the officers' mess hall of the 20th Infantry Regiment, which was moved from Osaka at the time bases were established in 1898 (Meiji 31). It was requisitioned by the U.S. Army after World War II and was later used as a cafeteria for a teacher's college. It was then owned by the National Police Reserve from 1950 (Showa 25) before coming under the aegis of the Self-Defense Army. It is used as Shoko-kan, the base's publicity museum.

  The wooden building is 5 ken wide and 19 ken long. The entrance is in the center. It has a British bond brick base, exterior walls clad with German clapboard and a hipped roof. The exterior design differs from other mess halls built in the same period because a terrace was added on the west side during the Showa period, before the last war, and the southwest window was altered to be of Showa modernist design (Fig.5.).

- **The 21st Cavalry Regiment (Okayama, Okayama)**

  The mess hall was built when the 15th Division settled in Okayama in 1907 (Meiji 40). The division was disbanded when the Army's powers were reined in in 1925 (Taisho 14) and the mess hall was requisitioned by the city. It was relocated to its present site in 1929 (Showa 4) and used as a town hall. It has a British bond brick base and a hipped roof. It is 5 ken wide by 16 ken long, but may have undergone substantial changes when relocated. Although other mess halls had hirairi style entrances, this one was tsumairi style and may have been changed to fit the new site.

- **The 19th Field Artillery Regiment (Joetsu, Niigata)**

  It is believed that the mess hall was built in 1908 (Meiji 41) when the 19th Field Artillery Regiment, which was created in 1905 (Meiji 38) during the Russo-Japanese War, returned to Takada. After World War II, the Self-Defense Forces owned the mess hall and some alterations were performed in 1962 (Showa 37). It became a folk museum in 1992 (Heisei 4). It is 5 ken wide by 18.5 ken long, made of wood, has a British bond brick base, exterior walls clad with German clapboard and a hipped roof.

  The exterior of the mess hall is virtually unchanged. A study of the attic indicated that the arrangement of the rooms had not been changed (Fig.4.).

- **The 6th Field Artillery Regiment (Kanazawa, Ishikawa)**

  The mess hall was built when the regiment settled in a suburb of Kanazawa, at the same time as the 9th Division was transferred to Kanazawa Castle in 1898 (Meiji 31). It was requisitioned by U.S. Army after World War II for a time and was later used as a cafeteria for a teacher's college. It was then owned by the National Police Reserve from 1950 (Showa 25) before coming under the aegis of the Self-Defense Army. It is used as Shoko-kan, the base's publicity museum.

  The wooden building is 5 ken wide and 19 ken long. The entrance is in the center. It has a British bond brick base, exterior walls clad with German clapboard and a hipped roof. The exterior design differs from other mess halls built in the same period because a terrace was added on the west side during the Showa period, before the last war, and the southwest window was altered to be of Showa modernist design (Fig.5.).
used as an assembly hall for senior officers of the Self-Defense Forces.

It is 5 ken wide by 22.5 ken long with a terrace in front. A 3.5 ken addition was built on the west side as a VIP room for the Emperor's visit in 1935 (Showa 10) (Fig.7.).

3.2 Comparison of Plans

The five mess halls ranges were built between 1898 (Meiji 31) and 1910 (Meiji 43), but all date from the military expansion period of the Sino-Japanese War and Russo-Japanese War. Many barracks and mess halls were built across Japan during this period.

- Infantry, field artillery and technical regiments had very similar officers' mess halls (Ref. 23).
- The mess was 5 ken wide and 18 to 21 ken long.
- The basic entrance was hirairi style, giving onto a central corridor. There was an assembly hall on one side of the corridor and another corridor and rooms on the other side.
- The base of the mess halls was brick, except at Miyakonojo.
- There was a garden in front of or behind the mess hall.

4. Typology of Officers' Mess Halls
4.1 Chronological Changes

The following chronological changes to mess halls were identified from the study of archives and extant structures.

1) Origins: Government-Funded Construction

The first officers' mess halls were built in 1886 (Meiji 19), modeled after the Prussian system. Each regiment (battalion in the engineering services) had a mess hall, which originally was small. The dining room was the main room of the building and a leisure room and library were placed on the other side of corridor. The rectangular mess hall was 5 ken wide by 11 to 13 ken long for infantry and field artillery regiments. There were two types of entrance: hirairi style and tsumairi style (Ref. 24), and the architectural design was Japanese.

2) Transition Period: Privately-Funded Alterations

The Army expanded in the mid-20s of the Meiji period and regiments and divisions were enlarged. The original government-funded messes were small, so VIP rooms for officers and generals and assembly halls were built using private funds contributed by officers.

3) Stable Period: Larger Buildings

As the period of military expansion began with Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars and the government funded the construction of larger mess halls to accommodate more officers, the infantry, field artillery, cavalry, engineering and army services all had the same type of mess hall: a rectangle 5 ken wide by 18 to 21 ken long. Hirairi style entrances became the standard, and the hall and other rooms were located on the opposite side of the central corridor.

5. Conclusion

The study of post-Meiji military heritage has only recently begun, but some structures and archives are still extant. This paper focused on Meiji period structures, analyzing the origins of officers' mess halls, architectural features, changing layout and alterations. The mess halls in each regiment and battalion of the seven divisions across Japan were built by the government and subsequently maintained by the officers. With the formation of additional divisions and larger numbers of offices, the mess halls became too small and many alterations were undertaken, paid for out of the officers' reserve fund.

The standard layout comprised an assembly hall, a dining room, a leisure room and a library. The plumbing for a toilet was installed in an annex. A VIP room for guests was added beside the assembly hall.
Early mess halls followed a standard plan, and the engineering regiments were in charge initially. Beginning in the 30s of the Meiji period, the temporary department of engineers took over. As the number of officers increased, the area of the mess hall increased from 40 or 50 tsubo to 120 tsubo over a period of ten years and a rectangular layout became the standard.

References
1) From interviews conducted with members of the Ground Self-Defense Forces, Air Self-Defense Forces and the organizations concerned.
2) The building is located on a Ground Self-Defense Forces base in Fukuchiyama.
3) The building is located on a Ground Self-Defense Forces base in Kanazawa.
4) Shinno town hall, in Shinno, Tsushima, Okayama-shi, Okayama Prefecture.
5) The building is located on a Ground Self-Defense Forces base in Takada.
6) The building is located on a Ground Self-Defense Forces base in Miyakonojo.
7) In September 2003 in Kanazawa, February 2004 in Miyakonojo, April 2004 in Takada, December 2004 in Fukuchiyama and November 2006 in Okayama.
8) The organization that trained Army officers from 1871 to 1899.
9) JACAR (Japan Center for Asian Historical Records of National Archives) Ref. C07060207300 (1886), p.1-2.
10) JACAR Ref. C06081054100 (1890), pp.1-2.
11) Nogi, Maresuke. (1912) The Instructions of Disciplines, Yoshikawa-Kobun-kan, p.150.
12) The Regulations of Military Administration cover the duties of officers under a colonel and life on a military base. They were written in 1888 (Meiji 21) and revised in 1908 (Meiji 41), 1923 (Taisho 12) and 1934 (Showa 9). The outline has not changed since the Meiji period. This paper refers to the 1923 (Taisho 12) and 1934 (Showa 9) versions.
13) JACAR Ref. C07050032500 (1888), pp.1-2.
14) Ken is a unit of length formerly used in Japan. 1 ken equals 1.8182 meters.
15) The basis of organization in the Army was the chindai, or garrison, which consisted of two regiments. Chindais were replaced by divisions in 1888.

Additional notes:
16) Tsubo is a unit of area. 1 tsubo = 3.306 square meters.
17) JACAR Ref. A03023143300 (1875), pp.1-2.
18) Hirairi is the shape of a building whose entrance is constructed parallel to the ridge of the roof.
19) Tsumairi is the shape of a building whose entrance is in one of the gable ends.
20) JACAR Ref. C02031768000 (1914), pp.1-2.
21) The entrance to a building constructed parallel to the ridge of the roof, usually on the long side of the building.
22) The entrance of a building in one of the gable ends, constructed in a way that the line of approach was parallel to the ridge of the roof.
23) A document of a mess hall of the 17th Army Services Regiment (Okayama) was found. The mess hall was built of wood and had a hipped roof.
24) The 22nd Infantry Regiment, the 11th Infantry Regiment and the 2nd Imperial Guards have tsumairi style entrances.

Figs.3., 4. and 5. by Yoshiyuki Sato; Figs.11. and 13. by Naoto Takizawa; Figs.12. and 14. by the author.