

巻頭言

# 火葬場の一般化から次の時代へ 成熟社会における火葬場を考える

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## 見えにくい火葬場が抱える課題

火葬場は葬送を行なう場として、誰にも避けることのできない死に関わり、全ての人の生活に密着した施設であるが、日常生活とはかけ離れていることもあり、火葬場の現状や抱えている課題は見えにくいと思われる。

火葬料金は政策的な料金体系で、福祉の一環として無料または低廉な料金としている。

財政状況が厳しい中、建設に関して国からの直接の補助金が無く、建設費や維持管理運営費などの財源を自治体は独自に確保し、住民に対する火葬サービスを提供してきた。

しばらく続く死亡者数の増加への対応や、直葬・焼骨の扱いなど多様化する葬送に対する考えに対してどこまでサービスを提供していくか。今後のあり方が問われている。

## 火葬場の一般化から次の時代へ

人口減少社会に向かう中、多くの公共施設では合理化のもと整理統合が進んでいるが、火葬場は他の公共施設と違い、将来の死亡者数の増加に対応するため、機能の充実が求められている。しかし、火葬場建設の際に住民の理解を得るのは困難で、機能拡充の場合でも合意形成が難しい施設という特性がある。

しかし、火葬場を取り巻く状況は大きく変化してきている。住民参加の火葬場建設など、周辺住民も積極的にどうあるべきかといった意見を出

すようになり、建設に関わりを持つようになってきた。

他の公共施設と変わらない扱いがなされるようになるなど、火葬場は特殊なものではなくなってきた。火葬場が一般化してきたのだといえよう。

## 成熟社会における火葬場のあり方

火葬場は最後のお別れを行い、収骨を行うことによって、大切な人が亡くなったことを受入れる場所である。遺族への配慮が求められるが、効率優先のため処理場化する懸念もみられる。

住民からは、「従来の火葬場を避けるように、外から見えないようにして欲しい」といった考えではなく、「景観の良い場所で建設して欲しい」「その地域らしい火葬場をつくりたい」といった意見が出されるなど、自分たちが使う火葬場は、こうあって欲しいといった希望が語られるようになってきた。

成熟社会においては、情報も溢れている。火葬場を見る目も変わってきている。ただ施設が新しくなれば良いというものではない。

財政状況が厳しい中、火葬場に対する住民からの要望も増えている。要望に応えるためには、幅広い知識が必要で、設計者は豊かな空間をつくりあげるデザイン力も求められる。

火葬場はどうあるべきか、何よりも火葬場に対する作る側の意識改革が必要となる。

## Introduction



KASOUKEN

ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH INITIATIVES FOR CREMATION, FUNERAL AND CEMETERY STUDIES

Chairman **I T A R U T A K E D A**

### **Crematorium-related issues are difficult to identify**

Crematoriums facilitate funerals. The crematorium directly deals with death that is inevitable for each and all of us. It is inseparable from our lives, but because the crematorium is not a facility that we encounter every day, the issues and problems associated with it tend to be difficult to identify.

In Japan, cremation fees are regulated under government welfare policies and are set within an affordable range, in some cases close or equal to free. However, building the facility is a different story. The Japanese government does not have any financial assistance program for building crematoriums. Thus, local municipalities that have been in a tense economic situation for quite some time have been struggling to find ways to self-finance the cost of building and maintaining facilities in order to provide cremation services to their residents.

Japan has to face and accommodate the expected steady increase in the death rate for some time to come. Further, the recent rise of less conventional approaches regarding funerals, i.e., direct cremation and different ways to bury ashes, force us to seriously examine how far the authorities should go in adapting to such diversifying needs.

### **Crematoriums: Being accepted by the society**

As the population of Japan steadily declines, most of the public facilities are streamlined either by being reduced or combined. Unlike those facilities, there has been a growing need for expanding cremation capacity in order to meet the steady increase in the death rates that will continue in the foreseeable future. Ironically, it is the characteristic unique to crematory that it is difficult to get the consensus of nearby residents not only when building new ones, but also when expanding the capacity of the existing ones.

Recently, however, the situation surrounding building crematoriums is showing changes. There have been cases where residents participate in the process of getting new crematoriums built. Residents in such municipalities voluntarily and actively take part in crematory construction from the inception stage by

voicing wishes and demands as to how the new crematorium should be situated. It is fair to state that crematoriums are being more widely accepted by the society, and I perceive this change to be one of the elements unique to today's matured society.

### **Crematoriums in our matured society: Status quo and beyond**

At the crematorium, we accept the loss of someone special to us by bidding them a final farewell and putting the ashes in an urn. The facility, therefore, is required to be sensitive to the needs of the grieving families and friends. Keeping that in mind, we need to be careful not to make the crematorium a processing facility by blindly pursuing efficiency.

The changes in people's thinking are evident from requests and expectations voiced by them. It used to be that area residents wished to conceal the existence of the crematorium by demanding it not be visible from outside the premises. These days, we hear requests such as "We want it be built at a scenic place." or "We want a crematorium that is unique to our community." Indeed, the residents are voicing their wishes as to how the crematory they use should be designed.

How the crematorium is viewed is also changing. The growing trend for information disclosure and access to the internet have definitely contributed to accelerating this shift. However, just building another conventional facility is not the answer to all outstanding issues. Demands, requests and wishes of involved residents are growing while the financing remains as the major obstacle. Fulfilling residents' requests requires the builder to possess extensive knowledge and imagination. The ability of architects to design and create a comforting space is being continually tested. What is most important is a paradigm shift by those involved in building crematoriums. (訳 泉幸子)

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