

Introduction Moving Towards Crematorium as a Multi-Functioning Facility

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Most crematoriums in Japan have been managed publicly. The crematorium is considered as a necessity of life, and the fee is set as a non-profit service. The residents can cremate loved ones at a very reasonable price. Lately, with the increasing financial difficulties in every municipality, many crematoriums are reviewing basic operations. Others are expanding outsourcing all functions including management. Japanese crematoriums deal with financial difficulties by cutting costs, not by improving earning power.

The crematorium in Tromsø, Norway, is turned on only when certain number of bodies accumulate. As a result, the crematorium is in operation only half of the week. The facility actively promotes the annexed ceremony hall to be used for weddings when funerals are not held. They are improving financials by incorporating multipurpose use of the crematorium facility.

In Belgium and Holland, family members and the mourners gather after the farewell ceremony at the dining hall or café adjacent to the crematory premises. Such facilities are equipped with kitchen that can serve full course meals like a restaurant. Some crematoriums open their café to the community. Even during the Covid pandemic, the number of the mourners was not much affected. Restaurant and café business earn a large part of income for the crematoriums.

The Ohlsdorfer Cemetery in Hamburg, Germany, manages a café with an open terrace. The atmosphere is inviting not only to the mourners but also to any passers-by. One can see the menu displayed outside. Although it is managed by the crematorium, it is treated like any other café in the community.

In stark contrast, the Japanese crematoriums have been isolated from areas where people lead everyday life. They usually stand quietly at inconspicuous locations, dark and uninviting. In addition, a crematorium and a cemetery do not exist in the same premise, as is often the case in the Western countries. In rare cases in which

the two are located close to each other, the land is owned separately, and facilities are managed independently. It is because the law stipulates

crematoriums to have exclusive road into the crematorium if the two are to co-exist in the same premises. These legal requirements make it difficult to design a harmonious plan.

Incremental changes are happening over time in Japan. Today, we see crematoriums that house a charnel house. The fusion of the place of cremation and the place of rest is slowly occurring. There are newly built crematoriums that incorporate the surrounding space and taking in abundance of natural lighting. We do have a crematorium that is located right in the urban area nicely blending in with the atmosphere. Kitayama Ceremony Hall in the Matsudo-City Municipal Crematorium rents out the waiting room for purposes other than cremation/funeral services.

People's perception of death is slowly changing. A crematory in the city setting is accepted especially among the younger generation. Crematoriums must make efforts to alter their image and emphasize the user- and community-friendly facility that is essential to everyone's life. For crematoriums to be financially healthy, we need to change them to a multi-functional facility. Starting with the location and the design, crematoriums must adapt to multi-functional future.

We are all destined to die. We should not turn away from the crematorium-related issue as if it is nothing to do with oneself. We all need to think about it as our own issue. By doing so, I do believe the image of the crematorium will change for the better.

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