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Agenda for Temple Management and Buddhism-related Businesses: Focusing on Monk Temp Services and Large Ossuaries

Hisato Nakamura^{*}

Abstract

In a previous article, the author examined the revitalization of Japanese temples, which are in a critical economic condition, from the perspective of management strategy. With the exception of prominent nationwide temples and tourist temples in metropolitan areas, temples are in a state of decline owing to a weakening Buddhist culture in metropolitan areas and low population density, among other causes. This paper, too, examines the rise of Buddhism-related businesses, focusing on the now common tombstone dealers and funeral parlors. Then, the status quo of monk temp services, which have a close relationship with funeral parlors and its brokers, is considered, as is the advent of large ossuaries offering burial storage, specifically the locker system and automated transportation system. Further, regarding the building of large ossuaries, the actual problems on the ground in metropolitan areas are clarified. Finally, the author offers his views on temple management and Buddhism-related businesses in general and suggests an optimal state of being.

Keywords: Temple Management, Buddhism-Related Business, Funeral Parlor, Monk Temp Service, Large Ossuary

1. Introduction

For some time now, Japan has been experiencing a declining birthrate, population aging, and a high mortality rate. According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare and Institute of Population Problems (National Social Security), the annual number of deaths is estimated at 1.6 million in 2030, compared with 710 thousand in 1970 and 1.2 million in 2015.

In these circumstances, the decreasing value attached to Buddhist culture and religious sentiment in Japan is being accompanied by an increase in the number of people with no religious affiliation at all. Further, as indicated in the previous issue (Volume 15), temples in Japan, other than those that are landmarks or tourist attractions, are experiencing a management crisis. In 2014, the Japan Creation Congress reported that 896 cities are unlikely to survive, and one study¹⁾ applied this estimate to religious corporations, indicating that only fewer than 60% of Buddhist and Shinto religious corporations are likely to last. This study positions the religious corporations that are located in cities that are unlikely to survive as “limited religious corporations” and emphasizes the need to urgently discuss matters such as the increasing polarization of the economy, the state of cultural property protection, countermeasures for the shortage of successors, and so on.

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However, even among religious corporations located in cities other than those that are unlikely to survive, the existence of many is threatened because of the decrease in the number of supporters and successors.

Against this background, the purpose of this paper is, first, to clarify the situation of Buddhism-related businesses, especially tombstone dealers, funeral parlors, and stone dealers, further examining their relationships with temples as well as the state of other middlemen, especially for information technology (IT)-based funeral businesses.

Second, in relation to the above, the recent “monk temp services,” including the ones with which temples are directly associated, are examined. Also examined is the construction and management of large ossuaries with mechanical burial storage systems, which have recently become popular in metropolitan areas, as well as what they signify. The paper concludes with the author’s views about some of the issues associated with temple management and Buddhism-related businesses.

2. Status quo of Buddhism-related businesses

There are various peripheral businesses related to temples. These include temple graveyards, cemeteries, ossuary services, monk temp services, tombstone dealers, funeral parlors, Buddhist altar fitting services, florists, catering, and so on. Here, the focus is on tombstone dealers and funeral parlors.

2-1 Tombstone dealers

It is said that one has a tendency to improve one’s grave as one becomes wealthier, with the erected year of each grave corresponding to the most prosperous time of each family (Inoue, 2010).

The prices of tombstones are not transparent. Tombstones can be purchased only by temples or tombstone dealers appointed by cemeteries, based on the “appointed tombstone dealer system.” Thus, the reliable principle of competition does not apply in this context.

Some temples lend their names to reliable tombstone dealers, and the graves are subdivided by the name of the temple. Such grave management contributes to the stability of temple management: tombstone sales create profits for the dealers while also increasing the number of supporting members for the temple. Usually, the graveyard is managed between temple and supporting members, while tombstones are dealt between the dealers and supporting members.

Regarding an analysis of tomb prices, there are four aspects: the price of the tombstone, the construction cost, the fee for keeping the grave permanently, and the maintenance charges. The fee for keeping the grave permanently ensures the right to use the land eternally. According to Mr. Kondou Inoue, who edited reports about tombstone dealers in metropolitan areas, the cost of tombstones is only 10–15% of the sales price. In the case of cemetery development, as the operating organization must be a nonprofit organization, the developers and stone dealers pay a commission to the temple to use the name. In this case, they can make a 40–50% profit, even after subtracting the costs associated with raw materials and development (Inoue, 2010).

2-2 Funeral parlors

In a short span of 10 years after World War II, funeral parlors rapidly progressed, and at present, given increasing urbanization and the nuclear family trend, funerals seem unimaginable without parlors. In this context, temples appear to be getting sidelined, as funerals were once their prerogative. At a wake

and funeral service, the monk behaves according to the program of the ceremony, which is arranged by the funeral parlor; after his role (chanting) is complete, he is dismissed like an ornament.

Regarding the donation, the chief mourner gives the amount to the funeral parlor, and the monk receives it after a deduction of 30–60%. In this sense, the temple has degraded itself to a lower position than the funeral parlor (Inoue, 2010).

Funeral parlors often take the initiative regarding all aspects of funerals, even bringing temples and hospitals within their sphere of influence. In most large-scale hospitals, funeral parlors are regular visitors, and in some cases, the parlors have business contact with them is said that parlors make large donations to hospitals, also paying tens of thousands of yen for one corpse (Inoue, 2010).

3. Monk temp business

This section examines both IT-based funeral services and temple-exclusive temp services.

3-1 IT-based funeral services

IT-based funeral services are a recent and growing phenomenon. While there are various companies in this general line of work, such as Minrebi, Uniquet Online, and Kamakura Shinsho, their specific businesses are different.

Minrebi, the pioneer in “monk delivery,” offers monk temp services on Amazon, allowing people to place orders to bring Buddhist monks for the memorial services they organize. The price is fixed (35 thousand yen except transportation fee and the service of providing a Buddhist name, for instance), and accounts can be settled by credit card. The monk delivery is, however, limited to memorial services that are booked in advance; therefore, it is not feasible for the wake or farewell ceremony, which are carried out immediately after death. Uniquet Online gets a good response as a small-scale funeral service that does not require an additional funeral fee. Kamakura Shinsho, listed in the first section of the Tokyo Stock Exchange, acts as an intermediary for customers throughout the process, dealing with funeral parlors, cemeteries, and graveyards and shopping for household Buddhist altar items on their behalf (Weekly Diamond, March 24, 2018).

While these IT-based funeral service companies have increasing sales volumes, there are problems in other aspects. For instance, when in 2015, Minrebi began the monk delivery service on Amazon, the All Japan Buddhist Association, a public utility foundation run by traditional Buddhist sects, announced a declaration of protest as follows: “We have been taking a stand against businesses that fix the price for donation, which is a religious action. The donation is not a compensation for the service. At the same time, a Buddhist name or posthumous name is not a merchant product. We cannot help doubt and be disappointed at Amazon’s attitude toward religion.” In March 2016, the Association further demanded the cancelation of “monk delivery”; however, this was directed not at Minrebi, the original seller, but at the Amazon headquarters.

According to a monk registered on Minrebi, the contract was not enough to lead a stable life as the take-home pay was insufficient. For each religious service, the monk received 15,000 yen including tax, but not transportation fee. Further, he stated that while waiting for requests from Minrebi, some monks work part-time jobs at pachinko shops (Weekly Diamond, March 24, 2018).

Further, in December 2017, the same business, “Aeon Life,” received an improvement action order from the Consumer’s Bureau for violation of the Law for the Prevention of Unreasonable Premiums and

Misrepresentation Concerning Products and Services. Despite the newspaper advertisement stating that there was “no additional charge,” there were, in fact, cases in which additional payment was required; thus, general consumers were being misled.

3-2 Exclusive monk temp services by temples

Among the monk temp businesses, besides funeral parlors and IT-based funeral services, there are exclusive temple services, albeit limited. In the previous issue, we introduced Kenshouin Temple, affiliated with the Soudoushu sect in Kumagaya city, Saitama Pref. as an example of devotion to management reform. At the same temple, there exists a monk group called “Zenyukai” that has members of all religious sects, and which also runs a business that involves dispatching members to funerals or anniversary memorial services upon request on a national scale.

According to Mr. Hideki Hashimoto, the head priest of Kenshouin Temple, Zenyukai is meant to encourage horizontal mingling in the Buddhist world, which is vertically separated by various sects, and to assist young monks who are concerned about temple innovation and management. The purpose of this voluntary group is to offer them a place where they can discuss and study Buddhism beyond individual sects (Hashimoto, 2016).

Although these particular monk temp services have just begun, Hashimoto, the head priest, says he received support from a monk temp service in his youth, and he wishes to offer the same opportunity to young monks. He says that this introduction service is, to the last, monk exclusive one, and usually does not receive brokerage fee, and offers them to work at funerals or anniversary memorial services. However, when requested by funeral parlors, he used to pay margins.

He also says that Zenyukai now consists of 40 to 50 monks from various sects, all of whom seek to make the Buddhist world, which obstinately rejects change and retires into its shell, more open and enlightened.

Despite the All Japan Buddhist Association’s protests against Minrebi’s monk delivery service, the reality is that, even in traditional Buddhist temples, the monks offer similar services at a fixed price.

As stated in the previous issue, Mr. Hashimoto of Kenshouin Temple is a revolutionary head priest who has abolished the patron system, performing funeral ceremonies whenever requested by anyone, with a fixed donation. He is revolutionizing temple management based on common sense, saying that it is unreasonable to rely on the patron system and that in modern society, it is unacceptable for services not to have a clear fixed price (Religion Problem 14, Ogawa, pp.30-37).

Regarding Mr. Hashimoto’s temple management reforms, the question of opposition from neighboring temples and the Religious Headquarter of Soudoushu arises. Answering this question, Hashimoto explains that he received a warning letter from the chief of the First Temple Head Office of the Soudoushu religious group in Saitama Pref.

The letter stated, “Your temple treats the heart of memorial service lightly and disenchant the religious mind of patrons, so we will never admit your monk temp service,” adding, “If you don’t stop it, your behavior will become a breach of faith for us, so we inform you of this in advance and call it to your attention” (Religion Problems 14, p.37).

Mr. Kanta Ogawa, editor and publisher of the journal *Religion Problem*, who interviewed Mr. Hashimoto, mentions that this temple is managed by common sense thoughts and attitudes and furthermore, it is valuable not because the chief priest calls it a temple but because religious people

respectfully visit it where honorable priest lives (Religion Problem 14, p.37).

Moreover, Mr. Uryu, priest of the Sinshu Otani sect, once a dispatched monk, says the following, "There are still any number of religious performances which have substantially fixed prices. For instance, there is the charge of ossuaries. Moreover, the money paid to a higher religious organization by lower-class temples falls under 'donation,' though the amount of money is fixed in most cases. We have no option but to say it is a double standard, because they settle the fixed price for good things for them, but prohibit fixed price for performances like funerals, anniversary services, and Buddhist name presentations. Furthermore, such priests who are in charge of the director of the All Japan Buddhist Association belong to a distinguished temple since only they can, and have succeeded a number of patrons from parents; their sons can also inherit a great number of patrons, hence they are 'religion nobles,' and situated at the top layer of the differential structure of the Buddhist world. For such temples, it is not unusual to receive a large amount of donation for one's funeral." Thus, Mr. Uryu expounds that it is undesirable for them to settle the standard price of funerals (Religion Problem 14, Takuya Furukawa, a documentary writer, pp.54-55).

Mr. Tomomi Hatta of Uniquet Online, which, like Minrebi, offers fixed-price monk temp services online, mentions that in current Japanese society, it is almost impossible to find products and services without a clear price, and in such a society, many people do not know how to behave if, at the funeral, they are only told, "It depends on your goodwill" (Religion Problem 14, pp.24-26).

4. Advent of large-scale ossuaries

Metropolitan areas such as Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, and Fukuoka have witnessed the sudden appearance of large-scale ossuaries. This section delves into this phenomenon.

4-1 Reality of the advent

Cancellation of the religious affiliation with a family temple in one's native place and reinterment at a new temple is known as "reburial" (Ukai, 2016). As the sites of placing ashes removed from the native place, large-scale ossuaries have recently been appearing in quick succession in metropolitan areas. It is said that the baby boomer generation, who moved to metropolitan areas from small farming villages, is at the forefront of this phenomenon. Among those people's way of thinking about the tomb, "perpetual services for the departed" are rapidly expanding.

The greatest feature of perpetual services for the departed is that they involve fewer hurdles in the process of coming into possession of a Buddhist tomb in three aspects: (1) religious sect is not relevant, (2) it is not necessary to become a patron of the temple, and (3) the charges are clearly stated (Ukai, 2016).

In perpetual services for the departed, the individual tomb is roughly divided into two categories: indoor and outdoor. The indoor type is represented by the ossuary style and usually involves a locker system. However, the aesthetics differ by geographical region. The style in Tokyo is rather simple and practical, but Fukuoka has many ossuaries in the altar style that include the statue, memorial tablet, altar, and so on. In Nagoya, ossuaries are quite individualistic and pretty gorgeous.

Table 1 Main recent mechanical ossuaries in Tokyo

Name of Ossuary	District	Period of Opening	Scale (Quotas)
Akasaka Jyouen	Minato-ku	April 2013	3,700
Shinjuku-Gyoenmae Seiryō	Shinjyuku-ku	May 2014	4,000
Agatsumabashi Tenku Ryouen	Sumida-ku	May 2016	4,500
Koishikawa Boryo	Bunkyo-ku	October 2016	6,600
Akasaka Hitotsugi Ryouen	Minato-ku	February 2017	8,000
Azabujyuban Yumemidou	Minato-ku	June 2017	5,000
Sennichiya Jyouen	Shinjuku-ku	September 2017	4,200
Kuramae Ryouen	Taitou-ku	October 2017	7,500
Tokyo Onrou Honkan	Arakawa-ku	November 2017	5,000
Meguro Gorou	Shinagawa-ku	January 2018	7,500
Ueno Sakura Jyouen	Taitou-ku	March 2018	4,500
Takara Ryouen	Sumida-ku	July 2018	4,157
Honkomagome Ryouen	Bunkyou-ku	December 2018	11,500

(Source) Ukai (2016) and Weekly Diamond, March 24, 2018

Instead of the locker system, mechanical ossuaries, encompassing an automatic transportation system, are now mainstream. The structure is similar to a multistory parking garage and an automatic warehouse. Table 1 shows the main recently opened mechanical ossuaries in Tokyo.

For instance, at six stories high, Shinjuku-Gyoenmae Seiryō looks like an elegant mansion. Further, it is situated in a convenient location, seven or eight minutes from the east exit of Shinjuku Station. It is managed by Taisouji Temple, Jyoudoshu, while the perpetual service sales are managed by Hasegawa, a company specializing in Buddhist altars and fittings. The third story onward is the ossuary facility; at each story, when visitors hold their memory cards up to the card reader, the door opens and the box of ashes with lithography appears after about one minute. The visitor's booth includes flowers and an electrothermal sensor stand; thus, there is no need for visitors to prepare anything. In addition, the facility is fully air conditioned and hygienic, and fancy chairs are arranged. All in all, it is a comfortable facility that elders can also visit regardless of the season. Despite its location in a Tokyo district with high roadside land prices, it is likely for contractor to use it with the cost less than one million yen.

Moreover, Akasaka Jyouen, an ossuary with an automatic transportation system constructed in 2013 and managed by Dentouin, Soudoushu (the main temple located in Kanazawa city, Ishikawa Pref.), stores the ashes of about 3,700 people.

The place is accessible from three Tokyo Metro stations; in particular, it is located only two or three minutes from Akasakamitsuke station. The building is barrier-free and the reception hall on the first floor, which is where the temple's office is situated, has the aesthetics of a hotel lobby. The second and third floors are occupied by a visitor's room; the fourth is a guest hall and guestroom; and the fifth is the inner temple and living quarters. The price of one quota is 1.5 million yen, except the annual preservation fee of eighteen thousand yen.

Alike in other large mechanical ossuaries, when visitors hold their memory cards up to the card reader, the tombstone (mortuary urn) carved with the family crest and the name of the departed is shown. It is unnecessary to prepare flower tributes and incense. As it is open until nine o'clock at night, people can worship at the ossuary even on their way home from work. "Whenever you visit, you can

meet your decent, it's another home" is the catchphrase of this ossuary. Hasegawa is in charge of the sales here too, and is strongly appealing the name of the place "Akasaka."

Speaking of Akasaka Jyouen, the ossuary has been encountering difficulties. In 2015, the Tokyo Metropolitan Office declared that "an ossuary that is not affiliated to a religious sect does not correspond to religious acts" and was demanded to pay about four million yen, including municipal government tax on real estate and city planning tax (Ukai, 2016). Dentouin appealed to the Tokyo District Court and asked to be exempted from the taxation, but it was not approved. The court clarified the following grounds for the decision: (1) the ossuary accepts many persons regardless of their religious sect, (2) Hasegawa, a private enterprise, is selling the quotas of the ossuary on consignment, (3) it rents the sub-temple inside the ossuary for a charge, where monks of other sects chant a sutra, and (4) it is collecting a large amount of ashes to make a profit.

Even so, as the large locker system ossuaries remain untaxed, it is unclear why these rules apply only to those ossuaries with automatic transportation systems.

For the municipal government tax on real estate and city planning tax on Akasaka Jyouen, there is a concern that this is also about to happen to the other large-scale mechanical ossuaries listed in Table 1.

The serious problem for Akasaka Jyouen, furthermore, is that the bigger mechanical ossuaries like Akasaka Hitotsugi Ryouen and Azabujyuban Yumemidou have been constructed nearby one after another. Especially, the former is managed by Itoku Temple, which belongs to the Shingonshu Chizan sect, generally known from old times as "Akasaka Fudou" called Fudou Myouou which means the God of Fire, the temple accommodates the ashes of more than 8,000 people, more than double Akasaka Jyouen's capacity. Nichiryoku, a large public cemetery corporation is in charge of the sales. In this way, at Minato-ku, Tokyo, the so-called "red ocean strategy," a reference to cut-throat competition, is developing in the ossuary business.

4-2 Background for the advent of large-scale ossuaries

After the year 2000, the number of individual-type tombs for perpetual services for the departed has remarkably increased. This is because the baby boomer generation has seriously started the preparation for their tombs. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the number of ossuary facilities in Japan has increased, from 10,975 in 1997 to 11,801 in 2007 and 12,440 in 2016. Especially, in Tokyo, the numbers increased from 259 in 1997 to 405 in 2016, and in Osaka from 139 to 261 for the same period.

The reasons for this spread of mechanical ossuaries are associated with both demand and supply. From the demand perspective, the advent of the mechanical ossuary corresponds to trends such as the gravitation of people toward cities, population aging, shortage of graveyards, and so on (Weekly Diamond, March 24, 2018).

At the same time, as mentioned above, the greatest attraction of large-scale ossuaries is the fact that obtaining a tomb becomes easier. When the people living in a city try to buy first their tombs, they may feel that the threshold is too high to select tombs, because once in Japan a person who is not a patron of a temple could not buy tomb.

Large-scale mechanical ossuaries, however, are often located in very convenient urban locations. The appeal is enhanced by the fact that visitors need not bring flowers or incense, and they are not responsible for cleaning.

Even from the supply perspective, the large-scale ossuary business has tremendous appeal. While only religious/public service corporations, besides the local government, can be involved in construction and management, private corporations begin collaborating with some temples and borrow the temples names in exchange for supporting construction costs. Among such corporations, both Hasegawa, a major dealer in Buddhist altars and fittings, and Nichiryoku, a major developer of graveyards and cemeteries, are becoming industry leaders, although real estate corporations and railway businesses have also been foraying into this field. It is said that Goldman Sachs, a foreign-affiliated company, has already dealt with several ossuaries (Weekly Diamond, March 24, 2018).

The earning structure is as follows. If the ossuary is built in a central metropolitan area, the price of one quota is about one million yen. Thus, for an ossuary that owns 5,000 quotas after completion of construction, the sales volume if all quotas are sold out amounts to about 5 billion yen.

Usually, the sales volume is divided by the temple and the sales company. As a result, the temple deals with the construction costs and interest rate and its profit, while the sales company deals with advertisement costs, labor costs, company profit, and so forth.

In most cases, even if the ossuary remains unsold, as the sales company guarantees sale, the temple receives a large amount of money with low risk. Furthermore, if the temple's patrons increase, income, such as from donation at Buddhist service, also increases. Further, temples can expect periodic income such as annual maintenance fees from ossuary contractors.

4-3 Agenda for large-scale ossuaries

Large-scale ossuaries are already showing signs of oversupply, and some have gone bankrupt. A case in point is Hachisu Ryouden, which was built in 2005 by Eiguh Temple belonging to the Jyodoshinshu Higashihonganji sect located in Arawa city, Fukui Pref. It was the first ossuary in Fukui Pref. with an automatic computer-controlled transportation system. In 2010, at the time of bankruptcy, against the storage capacity of 5,000 quotas, the number of contracts was approximately 60 quotas. The temple is now under reconstruction managerially. It is said that "from the beginning, a construction project jointly started with a certain construction company, and also a newly established limited liability company had been set up, which is in charge of operational practice for the ossuary. The temple had entrusted the company with all operations" (Religion Problem 12, pp.36-37).

Shuonin Temple, which was managing a large-scale ossuary, a building with five stories above and one below ground at Taihaku-ku, Sendai-city is another example of bankruptcy. The construction of the ossuary itself had been completed in 2001. It is said that they were extensively advertising it, including promotion by famous talents, but against the storage capacity of 3,000 quotas, the number of the contracts was fewer than 100 quotas. The temple could not pay the money to the construction company, so the company refused to deliver the ossuary. Even the people who had bought the fewer than 100 quotas engaged in a fierce dispute with the temple as they could not place their urns in the ossuary. In 2007, the ossuary opened, but the management condition had not improved, leading to bankruptcy. Shuonin no longer exists as a religious corporation (Religion Problem 12, p.38).

The common features of the bankruptcies in Hokuriku and Tohoku are as follows: (1) the ossuaries were not centrally located and (2) the temples heavily entrusted the operation of the ossuaries to the construction companies (contractor-oriented).

"In the past, they could sell it whenever they built it; however, at present, even in big cities, the sales

differ according to the facilities. The competition for users is becoming intense. For instance, temples put a large ad in the papers making use of flyers and famous talents, and invite customers for an ossuary tour and provide them with tradable coupons or gourmet foods (Weekly Diamond, March 24, 2018).” The greater their investment, the bigger their profit; thus, the scale of ossuary buildings is always increasing, with the emergence of facilities with more than 10,000 quotas, as shown in Table 1.

In this situation, problems emerge in various places. For instance, in Urayasu city, Chiba Pref, in the commercial district, next to an obstetrics clinic that has been running for more than 40 years, Senkouji Temple is planning to erect a five-story ossuary building, the same height as the clinic. The chief priest of the temple, located in the same city, has already conveyed his intentions to the director of the clinic. However, the director is not in agreement because the ossuary’s 23-meter wall will block all the clinic’s windows, in addition to the problem of the building’s sudden emergence next to the place where women give birth (Religion Problem 21, p.42.)

According to Urayasu city’s regulations, there is no rule against the construction of temples and ossuary buildings in the commercial district. Further, as ossuaries are not the same as graveyards, neighbors’ approval is not required for their construction.

Subsequently, the director of the clinic and surrounding residents carried out a signature campaign against the construction of the ossuary and submitted 7,000 signatures collected over one month to the city hall. The city hall, however, refused to stop the construction.

Then, the residents sought an explanatory meeting against Senkouji Temple. It is said that the explanatory meeting was thrown into confusion from the beginning because of the absence of the chief priest, with a person who was introduced as the representative of the temple’s patrons answering the residents’ questions. In addition, it is supposed to be partial reason the participants of the meeting could not understand well, because the temple did not have a close relationship with the neighbors. It was not a religious corporation, which has been serving for a long time in the area (Religion Problem 21, p.45).

Finally, the temple’s application was approved, and construction began in November 2017, due to be completed in February 2019. The director of the obstetrics clinic sought a provisional disposition to suspend the construction while the temple took some necessary measures, because the vibrations from the construction work could cause problems in the case of sudden childbirth or a surgical operation. The court is still screening the application.

Another issue is related to Houtokuin, a religious corporation situated at Higashi Mukoujima, Sumida-ku, Tokyo, which is relatively close to Urayasu. They are planning to construct a three-story ossuary that can store up 4,157 quotas (Religion Problem 21, p.45).

If we turn our eyes to the west, there are ossuary-related disputes in the Osaka area, too; residents of Kadoma city, Yodogawa-ku initiated proceedings for the cancelation of the construction of a 6,000 quotas automatic transportation-style ossuary planned by Houzouji Temple, a religious corporation of Shingonshu Kokubunji sect. Osaka District Court granted permission, though the residents initiated proceedings for cancellation.

Also, in Otsu city, Shiga Pref., the city denied the application of Jyonenji Temple of Jyodoshu, which has an over 400-year history, to convert a building on a detached property nearby into an ossuary, for the reason that the residents were opposing it and the building was not in accordance with religious sentiment. Jyonenji Temple fiercely protested this as mayoral abuse of discretionary power, and sought a reversal of the decision in 2016 (Religion Problem 21, p.45).

As for this dispute, the temple held an explanatory meeting in March 2015. People expressed opinions such as they found the idea of ashes in the vicinity and how the deceased might have met their end unpleasant. The temple's response was to highlight the fact that there were many other temples and graveyards nearby, stating "We cannot understand the opposition only toward the ossuary of our temple, which has special religious sentiment." The central branch of the Otsu City Buddhism Association, composed of 13 local temples beyond their sects, is initiating proceedings against the court decision, with their statements to support the ossuary establishment.

In each place, ossuaries have experienced different problems. The basic issue is whether or not the project is being implemented by a pure religious corporation. Even in instances when the projects were managed by temples, the activities were not religious but profit-making ones.

Another cause of trouble is the lack of uniform nationwide regulations regarding ossuary construction. Cities, towns, and villages have their own approval processes, which are not standardized.

Furthermore, the bankruptcy of sales companies needs to be considered. In the case of large-scale mechanical ossuaries, temples often consign the sales to construction companies with which they share cooperative relationships. If the company has financial issues because of a managerial slump, a great risk may arise. In the case of ossuaries, as one company is often contracted for construction, the user (purchaser) suffers the damage directly.

At last, in November 2017, an ossuary named the "joint tomb" was completed at Tsukiji Honganji Temple in Chuo-ku, Tokyo; this is under the direct control of Honganji of the Jyodoshinshu sect. This large-scale ossuary occupies 253m² underground, with a capacity of about 24,000 ashes in the individual section and another 24,000 in the joint section.

This ossuary is not a joint venture with a profit-making company but directly managed by Tsukiji Honganji Temple. The worship space is dedicated to an image of the Amitabha Tathagata (Amida Nyorai). This ossuary does not have an automatic transportation system where visitors can be face to face with the ashes of the departed and burn incense for them.

Why did the first class temple build a large-scale ossuary at Tsukiji, Chuo-ku? As Yuugen Yasunaga, director of religious affairs, explains, "It is for the sake of increasing the number of believers in Buddhism as a result of allowing the metropolitans to make use of it." Certainly, the Jyodoshinshu sect is a large one, but its activity is mainly centered around Nishihongannji Temple, Kyoto in western Japan. The temple does not have many temples and believers in eastern Japan.

The temple is also providing new services with arrangements for personal belongings like money, real estate, and stocks while alive, Buddhist memorial service consultation, preparation of written will, inherited property, and support with making a life plan and detailing personal history.

Yasunaga, director of religious affairs says, "We made this joint tomb in order to engage in missionary work; the main purpose is not to sell the quotas." At the explanatory meeting, he said, "We are pleased to say this is a temple and you hereafter have a relationship with our temple and Jyodoshinshu, and the joint tomb is the token of it."

He also said, "We do not care about your past religious sect, but once you have a relationship with Tsukiji Honganji, we wish you to live with the teaching of Jyodoshinshu."

Higashihonganji asks people who bought the joint tomb to become members of an organization called "Tsukiji Honganji Club." They say that the temple is the place to learn about Buddhism, and there are plans to conduct sermon meetings regarding Buddhist matters or religious classes. As stated above,

support such as an arrangement while alive and Buddhist memorial service consultation are a part of the activities of this club (Religion Problem 21, pp.20-29).

Conclusion

For the All Japan Buddhist Association's sales suspension notice to Amazon, which handles IT-based funeral businesses such as Minrebi, there may be pros and cons. Certainly, from the Buddhist standpoint, it is clear that, "A donation is not compensation for the service" or "a posthumous name or Buddhist name is not a commodity."

However, among the public, the common sentiment is contradictory to this, such as "It is actually the priests of existing temples who turn religion into a business," or "What's wrong with a cheap and clear charge? The only ones making noise are the high-income priests and their subordinates, who cannot make a profit if the price were settled." In fact, the Association does not offer any alternative plan for those who wish to make use of monk temp services, including those offered by Amazon (Religion Problem 14).

To give opponents a better understanding of our value, we need to demonstrate our value in a language that is understandable to them (Matsumoto, 2010).

There are also those who agree with the All Japan Buddhist Association. They say, "Is the priest a commodity?" or "I am against buying the ticket because I cannot imagine who comes and whether he is a priest," or "Donation is a religious offering for the priest. So, it's ridiculous to take a kickback from the donation."

What we can see from this case is the existence of two diametrically opposed ways of thinking in the funeral business world. While one perspective concerns the provision of cheap and easily accessible services to users, the other concerns demanding slightly higher prices to maintain a certain degree of service quality in funeral and anniversary memorial service.

Regarding the management of large-scale ossuaries, it is important to focus on the following two items. First, they must be built at a convenient central location in the city and second, the matter must not be left entirely in the hands of those in the field of construction and management. However, given the large number of ossuaries already in existence in metropolitan regions, proximity to transportation is no longer the key to success. It is important not to leave the matter in full measure to dealers; however, the alliance may not function well if the temple views the dealer as evil. At the moment, temple managements need to calmly reflect on why they entered into the alliance at all. It is only because a profit-making company is making use of the temple's status as a religious corporation to get approval to construct the ossuary from the administration.

Looking at the matter from a different angle, "It will be necessary to think about why we construct tombs and hold memorial services. If we categorize the tomb as an ordinary commodity, it will fall into a very risky situation and lose the essence of a memorial service for a dead person. Sound judgment from the religious perspective will lead to the perfect memorial service where we extend our thanks to our ancestors and meditate them who are connected to ourselves"(Ukai, 2016). Those words are really worth listening to.

Note

1) A study by Prof. Kenji Ishii, Kokugakuin University, made clear that in the cities that are unlikely to

survive, only 35% of religious corporations (62,971; including 24,700 Buddhist corporations) can survive.

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