

Opinion Survey on Review of Columbarium Policy

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region commissioned the Center for Communication Research of the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct an “Opinion Survey on Review of Columbarium Policy”. The opinion survey was conducted through telephone interview and 1 020 individuals aged 18 or above were successfully interviewed on 9th – 14th September 2010. The following summarises the major findings of the survey.

Overall Analysis

Overall Opinion on Columbarium Development

- 1.2 Nearly 70% (68.0%) of individuals aged 18 or above (of the general public) opined that all districts should collectively share the responsibility of developing columbarium facilities in Hong Kong, while about 25% (24.3%) thought that some districts should shoulder the burden themselves.
- 1.3 About 75% (74.4%) thought the major impact of columbarium facilities to the neighboring residents was “psychological impact”, followed by the impact on “property value”, which was chosen by nearly 40% (37.3%). Over 20% opted for “visual impact” (22.3%) and “environment” (21.9%), respectively. Below 10% (7.1%) chose “transportation”. Only 3.9% thought there was no impact.
- 1.4 Regarding the measures to relieve the shortage of niches, 65% (64.6%) supported promoting the scattering of cremains at sea or in Gardens of Remembrance. Over 25% (26.4%) opted for placing cremains in columbaria outside Hong Kong. About 15% opined that public niches should be switched from permanent purchase to leasing arrangements (15.5%) and time-limited public niches should be introduced (14.7%), respectively.
- 1.5 In general, over half (53.4%) strongly agreed / agreed to develop columbarium facilities in the districts where they were living, while 20% (19.9%) strongly disagreed / disagreed. Nearly 25%

(24.3%) were neutral. Moreover, a higher proportion of those who were living in New Territories (New Territories East: 63.1%; New Territories West: 56.8%) strongly agreed / agreed to develop columbarium facilities in their own districts, while a higher proportion of those who were living in Kowloon (Kowloon West: 31.2%; Kowloon East: 27.2%) strongly disagreed / disagreed.

Opinion on Public Columbaria

- 1.6 The public columbarium development was often met with local objection. 40% thought the best solution was to “proceed (with developing public columbarium facilities) as planned, but endeavour to ease the concern of the locals through mitigation measures” (40.4%) and to “continue to engage the local community until support is solicited” (39.5%), respectively. Over 15% (17.1%) regarded “shelving the plan and finding another site” as the best solution.
- 1.7 There had been suggestion for the Government to consider introducing an affordable management fee for new public niches. The purpose was not for revenue generation but to ensure effective use of the limited niche resources (“to ensure the niches serve their purpose as a place to pay respects to the deceased”). 65% (65.3%) strongly agreed / agreed with the proposal. Over 15% were neutral (15.6%) and strongly disagreed / disagreed with it (17.8%), respectively.

Opinion on Private Columbaria

- 1.8 The government suggested that a licensing scheme should be introduced to regulate private columbaria. Regarding the key aspects that the licensing scheme should regulate, over 70% (71.7%) opined that private columbaria should “cause no environmental nuisance”, while over 45% (46.0%) indicated that “the premises (for private columbarium use) should be authorised”. Over 30% (32.6%) expressed that the licensing scheme should regulate the “pricing and trade practices” of private columbaria and nearly 20% (18.4%) said “a Compensation Fund should be established”.
- 1.9 If the existing private columbaria could not comply with the proposed licensing scheme in future, about 35% (35.7%) thought the authority should “allow the operators to continue operation at

the existing location while making rectification within a certain period of time”. Nearly 30% (28.7%) indicated that the authority should “allow the operators to relocate the interred cremains to another appropriate location and continue operation there”. Besides, about 20% (20.9%) thought the authority should “stop their operation immediately, but the operators must ensure proper handling of interred cremains”. There was still 10% (9.7%) considering that “as long as there are interred cremains, the private columbaria concerned could be grandfathered”.

- 1.10 Some unauthorised columbaria might choose to cease business or were forbidden to operate. Regarding the measures to protect the consumers, over 75% (76.1%) considered that “new legislation should be introduced to impose sanctions against irresponsible operators”. Over 40% (42.0%) suggested that “the operators should be required to establish Compensation Fund”. Besides, over 10% (13.8%) were of the view to “resorting to the existing consumer protection measures”.
- 1.11 Nearly 90% (88.3%) strongly agreed / agreed that those who were going to purchase private niches had the responsibilities to understand the legality of the niches as well as the terms and conditions for consumer protection, while only 3.4% strongly disagreed / disagreed. Besides, below 10% (7.1%) were neutral.
- 1.12 Nearly 70% (69.3%) claimed that they or their relatives had not purchased private niches, while nearly 30% (28.9%) had. The reasons for the latter to purchase private niches were “free choice of niche location in private columbaria”, chosen by nearly 50% (46.6%, equivalent to 13.5% of the general public). Besides, about 35% opted for “long waiting time for public niches” (34.5%, equivalent to 10.0% of the general public) and “better service of private columbaria” (34.3%, equivalent to 9.9% of the general public), respectively. Only nearly 15% (16.4%, equivalent to 4.7% of the general public) chose “religious concerns”.

Practice of Grave Sweeping

- 1.13 80% (79.6%) had the practice of grave sweeping, while 20% (20.3%) did not have.

- 1.14 Over 55% (56.3%) of the general public usually paid respects to the ancestors in Ching Ming or Chung Yeung festivals only, while 6.6% on the dates of their deceased relatives' birth or death / in other occasions only. 16.7% usually paid respects to the ancestors on both Ching Ming or Chung Yeung festivals and the dates of their deceased relatives' birth or death / in other occasions. In other words, among those who had the practice of grave sweeping, over 90% (91.7%, equivalent to 72.9% of the general public) would pay respects to the ancestors in Ching Ming or Chung Yeung festivals. Also, nearly 20% (19.1%, equivalent to 15.2% of the general public) would pay respects to the ancestors on the dates of their deceased relatives' birth or death. 15% (15.1%, equivalent to 12.0% of the general public) would pay respects to the ancestors in other occasions.

Means of Handling Cremains

- 1.15 Nearly 60% (57.8%) had placed their relatives' cremains only in Hong Kong, while nearly 15% (14.0%) only in other places and 9% (8.6%) in both Hong Kong and other places. If the different groups were reorganised for analysis, over 65% (66.4%) had placed their relatives' cremains in Hong Kong, while nearly 20% (17.9%) in Mainland China and only about 5% (5.9%) in Macau / Taiwan / Overseas. Moreover, nearly 20% (19.3%) had not placed relatives' cremains in any place.
- 1.16 95% (94.7%) did not have relatives' cremains placed at home or scattered in Gardens of Remembrance or at sea. 2% had scattered their relatives' cremains in Gardens of Remembrance and at sea, respectively. Also, 1.0% had placed their relatives' cremains at home.