



# Death – A part of life – Part two

By Russ Allison CEO, The Necropolis, Springvale

*Above: Baoxing Funeral Home actively promotes its services through its brochure*

*Continued from the last edition of the AFDA Journal*

**As another joint business venture, this fully integrated funeral business provides 50,000 - 60,000 services per annum. On one site alone 200 staff service 22 funeral chapels. The company also operates crematoriums and bone ash cemeteries elsewhere in the city.**

When death occurs, the Shanghai public hospital system provides appropriate certification. The body is then transferred to the basement mortuary within this eleven-storey building. Stepping out of the elevator into the mortuary itself, one cannot help but be confronted by the sheer size of the operation. From the look on our interpreter's face it was clear that this was his first time in this lift as well!

Bank after bank of stainless steel individual mortuary fridge compartments provide storage for up to 200 bodies at a time. An adjacent preparation area has room to spare despite housing what looked like 150 Ferno Washington-style mortuary tray tables. Some occupants had been prepared already and were dressed in very colourful traditional regalia. Others had just been transferred into the room.

Elsewhere within the building there are numerous arrangement rooms, fully supported by technology. Family names are digitally displayed, welcoming mourners to the appropriate funeral rooms. Highly sophisticated merchandising techniques drive the presentation of everything from paper flower displays, burial garments, caskets, joss sticks and urns, to food and



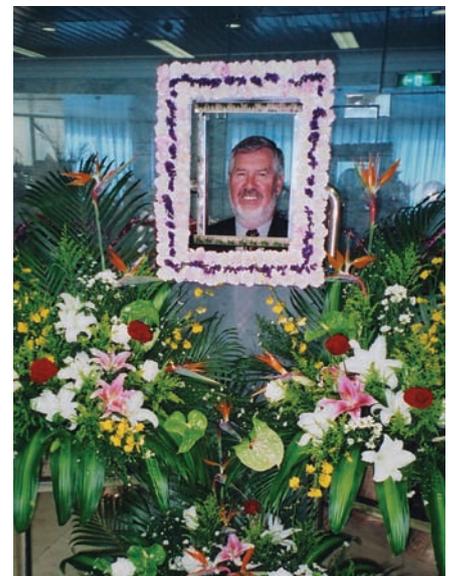
*Baoxing Funeral home provides an extensive range of mourning attire*

beverage facilities. The merchandise display included eight caskets, starting with laminated cardboard and a timber framed casket covered in bamboo slithers, then plywood, solid bamboo, and followed by solid timbers. Top of the display range was referred to as the "Lotus Casket" – quite different from the lotus style seen in Melbourne. Retailing for around A\$8500, it apparently accounts for 70 per cent of merchandise selection. Client families within Shanghai seemed more interested in caskets than those at Xuzhou. Nowhere in China did we see any coffins.

A number of comfortable refreshment rooms cater for families making funeral arrangements or for gatherings after the funeral service itself. In a number of locations within the building, automatic teller machines provide families with ready access to cash for settlement of accounts.

The funeral home also operates a number of crematoria around the city. The company and its facilities provide for interment of bone ash, full memorialisation – and even a boat with provision for scattering at sea.

The crematorium itself opened in 1994 and many of its 22 machines make use of the same removable hearth system we had witnessed at Xuzhou. The facility provides a comfortable waiting area for family and friends to relax after witnessing the charging of the cremator. Families usually wait for the furnace hearth to be made available with the cremated remains for sorting.



*Mr Brian Arnold, then Chairman of The Necropolis Trust, "tests" a rental floral arrangement*



Mr Song, Vice Director, Shanghai Funeral and Interment service centre pictured with rental floral arrangements

The Baoxing Funeral Home and its associated crematoria are highly geared up for merchandising and also for research. The various building foyers are adorned with a variety of publications promoting the services of the company and advocating the advantages of cremation memorialisation. It appears that memorials are usually on limited tenure (ten years) with the option of renewal on payment of an additional fee. Services are detailed on CD-ROM.

In travelling around China it was clear that whilst previous generations had often favoured burial, the pressures of space and expediency prompted the official stance on cremation. In the countryside, burials still seem to be occurring in the fields. This is most obvious – and also understandable – where cremation facilities are not readily available. Hillsides are frequently marked with curved-style burial monuments, now more familiar to us and frequently found within Australian cemeteries. Although not officially sanctioned, feng shui principles also permeate social custom and practice. Throughout China we marvelled at the propensity of a nation preparing itself to

become a “new” world superpower. China’s citizens are universally proud of Beijing’s successful bid for the Olympic Games and the country’s recent admission to the World Trade Organisation. Few had any knowledge of the events of September 11. Administrative systems are in place to ensure development of infrastructure and the current government is actively promoting “opening up doors” to the world.

This enlightened approach enabled us to actively research the layout and design of our proposed Asian cemetery at The Necropolis, Springvale. We came away highly appreciative of the warm welcome we received, convinced that our impending development will cater to the needs of our community. ■ AFDA Journal

**We appreciate the assistance we received from the City of Greater Dandenong, the Foreign Affairs Departments of Xuzhou and Beijing, Helen Lim, and from our architects, Argo Navis Pty Ltd in the planning and execution of this study tour and trade delegation.**



In Shanghai families select bone ash fragments directly from the removable cremator hearth



Shanghai Shi Yi Shan Bin Yi Crematorium and funeral parlour provides personalised calligraphy messages of condolence