

Relationships towards animals in Japan

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The relationships that people have with other animals are important in determining how they will behave to animals. In order to investigate these, a series of interviews were conducted in July-August 1998 in Japan. Both city (N=50) and country (N=50) pet owners, farmers (N=50), people without pets in the city (N=50) and the country (N=50), and veterinarians (N=8), were surveyed. The response rates were still 60-70% for the groups, except for the veterinarians, who were not so keen to answer the survey. Most who refused did not have time to do the survey.

Of the farmers, 62% were cow farmers, 24% pig farmers and 14% were chicken farmers. Overall the groups were of similar gender ratios with 36% female, and 41% were under 30 years, but only 8% were over 50 years old. Comparisons were made within these groups, especially looking at the animals mentioned. There was no general difference found between people in Fukushima, Ibaraki and Kagoshima, though the response rates were higher in Kagoshima because of knowledge of local dialect, which is more common among country people.

Current relationships with animals

We found that the relationships depend on the familiarity with individuals and species in general, and the perceived functions and roles of the animals. When asked what are the most familiar kinds of animals, overall 41% said dogs, 23% cats, 13% cows, 6% birds, 5% pigs, 4% chickens, 3% fish, 2% tortoise, with 2% other mammals and 1% beetles. The length of time people had with the animal, personal age and characteristics and the groups of persons are shown in Table 1. The relationship should depend on the length of time they have spent together. Those who had animals were asked how long they had had the relationship, and no farmers had been with animals for less than 2 years, and 84% had been with animals more than ten years. They viewed the question in terms of the species, but pet owners interpreted it more as individuals. Among pet owners, 11% had that animal less than 1 year and 11% had had the animal more than 5 years, with most people in between.

When asked what feelings they had, as shown here, there were a variety of relationships, as shown in Figure 1. The most common ones were making products (farmers), see so many around myself (mainly those who did not have pets), and that animals are cute or pretty (mainly pet owners). However, all farmers mentioned animals make products, not seen in other groups.

Table 1: Current animal relationships

[illegible]

Up to 20	12	9	0	0	38	22	7
20-29	36	40	13	8	38	11	20
30-39	32	28	27	67	25	56	33
40-49	15	19	37	17	0	0	27
50+	5	5	23	8	0	11	13
Female	44	62	23	42	12	22	33
Group							
City pet owner	30	19	0	0	38	0	13
Country pet • c	28	22	0	0	25	0	0
Farmer	0	0	97	100	0	78	0
Vets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Country - no pet	22	29	0	0	12	0	47
Cities - no pet	21	29	3	0	25	22	40

Table 2: Why I like or dislike the animals (%)

Products are useful	19
Cute	14
Behaviour	11
At ease with me	7
Listens to me / Obedient	2
Talk with it	2
Family	9

Looks like a human	2
Naive / Silly	1
Small	2
Movement	4
Other (positive)	10
Bitten by it	1
Foraging in rubbish	2
Dirty / Smelly	7
Disturbs	2
Negative	5
Not stated	16

Table 3: Future animals by current animal relationships (%)

Current:	Dogs	Cats	Cows	Pig	Fish	Chicken	Birds
N	105	58	32	12	8	9	15
In the future the animal I would like to have a relationship to is:							
Dog	62	33	73	30	29	43	33
Cat	20	55	18	50	0	14	33
Monkey	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Hamster	1	0	0	0	0	14	0
Cow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pig	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Horse	2	0	5	0	0	14	0
Rabbit	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fox	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Squirrel	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
...mammal	3	2	0	0	14	14	8
Tortoise	1	0	5	0	0	0	0
Iguana	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gold/tropical fish	2	4	0	10	14	0	0
...fish	2	0	0	0	43	0	8
Chicken	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bird	1	2	0	10	0	0	17

Like or dislike of animals

A fundamental question for the relationship is a feeling of dislike or like. Overall, 50% said they liked the animals, 16% said they disliked and 35% said they do not feel anything. Significantly more people who did not own pets said they disliked animals (34% of non-pet owners, compared to 4% of pet owners and 2% of farmers, and no veterinarian said they disliked animals). It is interesting that many farmers did not say that they liked or disliked the animals, saying they have no feeling, especially all the pig farmers and most cow farmers. Those who felt something to chickens, disliked them. Some of these people were temporary workers, who did not own the animals but moved around farms. Farmers may see animals more in terms of money, and this would be interesting to compare overseas also.

The reasons given in open comments were placed into categories for analysis, and these are shown in table 2. A diverse range of feelings was seen, in addition to the predominant response, which was cute or pretty (see list of comments below). The most common reasons for dislike were because they were dirty or smelly (17 persons), noisy (5 persons), foraging in the trash (4 persons) and other reasons like general dislike (16 persons), with 14 choosing each of cats and dogs, and 6 choosing birds.

Future relationships with animals

People were also asked what types of animals they would like to have a relationship with in the future, and why they want to. This is shown in the next slide, depending on the animals they were in relationships with now. The popular animals were similar to the ones they have, with 49% saying dogs, 29% cats, other mammals were mentioned by 8%, with horses another 2% (no one had a horse). Fish increased to 6%, while 2% chose birds, and 1% mentioned iguanas. No one mentioned pigs or cows!

55% of the cat owners said they wanted a cat, and 50% of the pig owners, but only 20% of the dog owners, 18% of the cow owners, 14% of the chicken owners. The bird owners were split

33% each for dogs and cats. 56% of the fish owners wanted another fish, with more preferring a cat. These data suggested that people continue to prefer the same pet as they have. The main stated reasons for the choice were cute (23%), and 34% said because they like them very much.

Conclusions

This survey was interesting to find a range of comments people had, and also that most people were willing to talk about their animals. Animals are an important part of our community. There have been several surveys of bioethics which have indirectly looked at attitudes towards animals in Japan.

Animals were mentioned by less than 10% of respondents to the International Bioethics Survey in Japan in 1993 as part of an image of nature, with only a few more mentioning animals in images of life (Macer, 1994). However, 80% agreed with a statement that animals have rights that people should not violate. Among high school teachers there appears to be less concern about animal rights in Japan than in Australia or New Zealand, however, there are still a similar number of people who show some general concern (Tsuzuki et al. 1998; Macer, 1998). Thus, the idea of relationships may be a more useful word to explore the ways that people view animals.

Different animals are viewed in different ways as shown by field observations and analysis of the comments made about animals in the surveys above (Macer & Yokoyama, 1998; Tsuzuki et al. 1998). The survey presented here may allow exploration of the ways different people view animals in their life. We would suggest a need for deeper study of the particular groups that responded to the survey here, and tracing out the ideas that form attitudes towards different animals in different circumstances, and of different species. There are clear differences in the way farm animals are viewed by farmers, and by others. A number of people personified animals, something which we think is quite familiar to many people, not only those who have pets. Observation of relationships is continuing in ongoing research to explore this in more detail.

References

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