

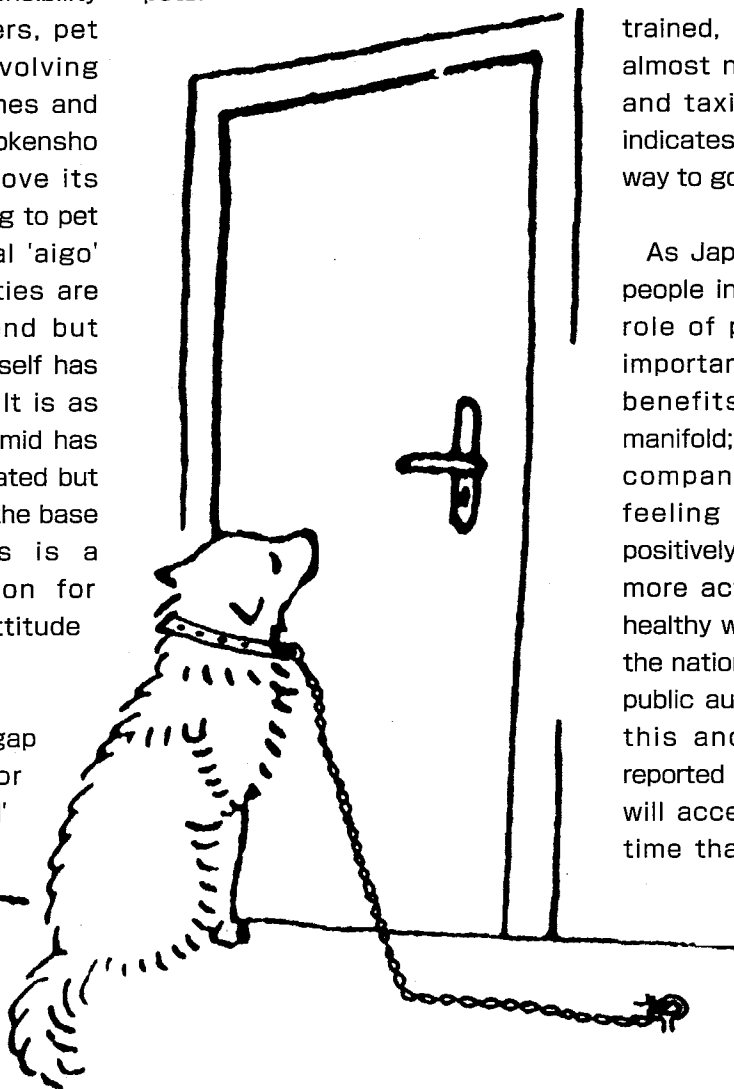
TIME FOR CHANGE

Ten years have passed since ARK came into existence. It is perhaps time to reflect what has changed or not changed, what has improved or not in Japan during these ten years.

Certainly there have been a lot of changes in attitudes towards the role of animals in this society. Overnight new roles have appeared; rescue dogs, therapy dogs, assistance dogs, pet bereavement counselling, rent-a-pet for people who need a pet for a few hours relaxation without the responsibility of owning one, pet sitters, pet activity programmes involving visits to old peoples' homes and hospitals, and even the hokensho has been trying to improve its image from one of pet killing to pet loving by creating animal 'aigo' centres. All these activities are signs of a positive trend but somehow animal welfare itself has been lost along the way. It is as though the top of the pyramid has been completed and decorated but there is no base. Because the base to all these activities is a fundamental compassion for animals and a positive attitude towards them.

There is an increasing gap between the old-style, or some might say 'traditional' way of keeping animals and the new-style 'modern' approach. The old-style norm is still to keep dogs chained outside, often in squalid conditions, fed scraps of left-overs and seldom walked which of course endorses the general public's view that dogs are dirty, noisy, dangerous and liable to bite, because this is what dogs really

become if kept in this way. New-style owners, on the other hand, take good care of their pets, paying attention to their health and diet and allowing them into their house like any other family member. This new-style trend has helped fuel a huge pet-related industry; special diet foods, pet fashions, resort hotels, boutiques and coffee shops catering for pets, activity clubs, and of course unfortunately on the negative side, unscrupulous breeders and pet shops cashing in on the latest fashion boom pets.



But although individual attitudes towards animals have changed in Japan, public attitudes remain anti-animal. Despite the billions of yen

spent on 'aigo' centres, abandoned pets are still collected like household garbage and killed in the most primitive and cruel ways imaginable by the hokensho all over the country. Many pet owners are forced to take their pets out for exercise in the middle of the night because dogs are banned in most public parks and because people are so dog-phobic. Mothers still warn their children, "be careful, the dog will bite" which only serves to endorse the child's fear of dogs. Dog owners often face verbal abuse if their dog, however well-trained, is let off the leash and almost no hotels, public building and taxis accept pets. All this indicates that there is still a long way to go.

As Japan's population ages and people increasingly live alone, the role of pets will become more important in people's lives. The benefits of keeping a pet are manifold; not only do they provide companionship and reduce a feeling of loneliness but they positively stimulate a person to be more active and therefore more healthy which in turn helps to keep the national health bill down. Slowly public authorities are waking up to this and only recently it was reported that some public housing will accept pets. However, it is time that people who don't like

animals should accept the fact that there are many other people who do and that pets make a valuable contribution to human society.

Without this change in attitude there can be no true animal welfare in this country.