



I had the opportunity to join the UK tour this year and learned a lot from the experiences. It was a very useful and pleasant 12 days full of surprises and discoveries. We visited the Crufts Dog Show, where we saw plenty of people coming there with their dogs. Though the hall was too crowded for us to walk in a straight line, every dog looked dignified without any sign of fear. Both people and dogs were well-mannered and the atmosphere was very nice with no barks or bad smells. We came into contact with

quite a few dogs, taking photos of them. Most of them were well-socialized, very friendly, and properly trained. The owners were also extremely kind with nice smiles, and willingly allowed us to touch their dogs. They gladly consented to our request of taking photos of their dogs. They seemed to be proud of their dogs and trust them completely.

A lady with a Shiba dog said it was a very intelligent dog with good adaptability. She told us that a lot of Japanese thought the Shiba, though a Japanese breed, as an unfriendly dog hard to train and spoke better of other foreign breeds. In fact a great many Japanese people seem to prefer foreign breeds, or think they are more intelligent. But this owner highly admired the Shiba as a quite intelligent dog with a placid character. Indeed, many Shibas including her dog in the hall looked nice and gentle. They were all friendly both to people and other dogs unlike the image accepted in Japan. Probably Japanese tend to think less of the character of a dog being shaped by the surroundings or how it is kept than as its original nature. As a matter of fact, a dog kept with affection and socialized properly should be obedient and gentle, unless it has some mental disease caused by a hormone disorder. I believe that a dog's character is formed by its owner's attitude and its surroundings.

There were children taking part in flyball. Training their dogs by themselves, they were participating in the event with absolute confidence. The dogs, children, and the spectators were all having great fun together. The children cheered their dogs enthusiastically, and praised each dog, whether it won or not. To win is great, but it is not the single object. I think that the most important thing is to join in and enjoy the sport together. British people have been training their dogs and developing mutual understanding from childhood. They always encourage their dogs after trying so hard, even if they lose.

A Border-collie, which had been adopted from a shelter as a grown-up dog, took part in agility. According to the owner, any dog including his own, could develop its ability well enough to be an agility competitor at the Crufts, even if it did not have special training from young age. The owner family of the Border-collie were not professional trainers, but middle-aged ordinary people, who seemed to enjoy training their dog while getting exercise themselves. They were modest people, saying that they felt grateful to have got to know their dogs. They did not teach or demand anything from the dogs, but it was the dogs themselves that developed their abilities. I was happy to meet this nice couple who had such an affectionate relationship with their dogs.

At Crufts we learnt the sad facts about Greyhounds. There were several booths run by shelters for Greyhounds. We heard that many Greyhounds would be cast away when they could no longer win races. There seemed to be quite a few animal organizations that tried to rescue these dogs. Though Britain is a good place for animals to live in, it is also true that people there love races. Sad to say, it is always helpless animals that fall victim to the interest and amusement of some selfish people. Unlike Japan, however, there are a number of people

who try to help those animals in Britain. Since this attitude is understood and supported by the public, unlike in Japanese society, animals there are happier.

In Britain, dogs are allowed in buses, pubs, hotels, and other public facilities. How nice it would be if you could take your dog anywhere with you! To realize such a society, there must be well-socialized dogs and well-mannered owners. By contrast, it is regrettable to say that most owners and dogs in Japan have not reached a high enough standard to be accepted in public facilities. If there were more opportunities, however, for us to learn how to build up a society where people and dogs could get along together, I am sure the troubles would be reduced. As for training, in my opinion, the system in which dogs alone are taken to training schools is no good. It is owners that should learn first. The most important thing is for dogs and owners to have a good relationship. If you regard your pet as a family member, it helps you and your pet maintain closer relations.

Another impressive scene I noticed on this tour was how people walked their dogs in parks. In Britain dogs were walking free in parks. When several dogs happened to meet, they were friendly to one another, and their owners did not care at all. In Japan, by contrast, an owner with his dog would get nervous to see another dog unleashed coming up close, and the nervousness might transmit to his dog, leading to a vicious circle. How nice it would be if dogs could run around freely in spacious parks and greet other dogs! I could not but envy the favourable environment in Britain. Of course, young children and babies in buggies came to parks. Unlike Japan, children were not frightened of dogs, and dogs were not afraid of children at all. There was not a single child who screamed on seeing a dog or one who tried to chase after a dog. I also felt that the parents' attitudes were quite different. In Japan there are quite a few parents who try to keep their children away from dogs, or tell them that dogs could be dangerous. On the other hand, some parents do not care even if their children hold out their hands to a dog or chase after a dog screaming. That is why there are a number of dogs that fear and dislike children in Japan. Parents should teach their children how to approach unknown dogs; you must ask an owner if you may touch his/her dog first; then let the dog smell your fists and see how it goes. Children should be taught from a young age that every dog has a different character and its condition changes each day. In London parks, I saw a lot of people walking their dogs along with their babies in pushchairs. I felt extremely impressed with the ideal environment over there for both dogs and children.

Next, I should like to mention British animal shelters. I noticed there were two different points between their adoption system and ours. One was about the ownership of animals; at Wood Green Animal Shelters, the ownership belonged to the shelter even after the animal was adopted by someone. That meant they could make a follow-up survey easily and bring the animal back if they found some problems with the new home. What if Ark adopted that system? People may not want to adopt an animal from a shelter if there was too much interference. Some would insist on having complete rights to the animals they have paid for. At Wood Green nobody seemed to complain about that system. They did not want to be 'owners' because what they truly wished was well-being of animals. Before bringing an animal home, the adopter had to wait several days for home check and other arrangements. Here at Ark, people want to take their adopted animal home immediately. One reason may be due to the fact that in Japan you can buy an animal from a pet shop anytime and take it home right away.

Another difference I noticed was that aged animals are easily rehomed in British shelters. People seemed to think it was easier for them to look after animals for a period of three years or so rather than to care them for a longer period of ten years or more. I thought their view quite sensible --- good for both people and animals. How is it that in Japan, people prefer cute puppies or kittens? They want to keep their pets for many years, which, I think, is a self-centred attitude. Another impressive fact with British shelters was that handicapped animals were assured of rehoming. It was true that in some cases the decision to euthanize was made by veterinarians or animal behaviourists, but otherwise, all animals had a fair chance of rehoming regardless of their age or handicap. I truly hope that our society will one day become an ideal place where we will accept handicapped animals as individual characters and put more emphasis on QOL (quality of life) for each animal.