

Japanese abhor the idea of putting an animal to sleep when it's badly injured, or terminally ill or when they can no longer keep it. Instead they either wait for it to die or take it to a distant mountain and abandon it because they don't want to live with the guilt of having taken responsibility for ending its life. Likewise they don't approve of spaying because it is interference with nature and the resulting puppies or kittens are dumped (often prettily wrapped up) on a road or mountain in the hope that someone will pick them up. The reality is of course different. They most likely die of exposure, hunger or are hit by passing traffic. Often a pet that they have neglected to take to a vet when it was ill because of the cost involved, will be given a lavish funeral, (as Mrs Abbott noted) as a kind of compensation.

Traditionally Japanese sit, eat and sleep on immaculately kept rice straw mats (tatami) which cover the floors of their houses. Their houses and gardens are usually smaller than ours and so often by necessity dogs have to be tied or kept in a very narrow space outside. This is alright as long as the dogs are regularly exercised but many are not. I've seen many which have never been off the chain in their lives. You'd have to hack through the chain or cut the collar to release them. You don't have to whip or beat an animal to be cruel, you can do it by slow neglect. Kennels which may have been adequate in the beginning fall apart and no one repairs them or become too small as the puppy grows; water bowls become grime-encrusted if not washed; nobody checks if the dog is tied exposed to the strong sun in summer or harsh winds in winter. One wonders why they keep a dog.

The reasons are manifold. The most common case is the children are besotted with a puppy. They love it and want it though the parents may have doubts. Like all kids enthusiasm wanes as quickly as it rises and parents seldom make their kids take responsibility for their pet. The sweet puppy becomes a nuisance and an unwanted toy. Another reason for having a dog is to establish your status. A dog is as much a symbol of success as an expensive car or a new house. Foreign pedigree dogs are very popular for this reason. Unfortunately fashions change and a change in dog is as common as a change in car. When people buy a fashionable breed like a St. Bernard, they often, strange to say, neglect to consider what size it will become or how expensive it will be to keep. Although an expensive pedigree pup may receive the best treatment in the world for a short period, in the end it may suffer the same fate as so many mongrels. Guard dogs are very popular in Japan although the crime rate is so low. In this case people make no pretense about keeping a pet but encourage the dog to be vicious. Japanese breeds are favoured but so are Alsations and Dobermans. Being chained and under-exercised they become really vicious which is why there are frequent cases of dogs breaking loose and biting people.