

Overlooked members of the new Meiji Family: pet dogs and the age of modernity

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The transition of the family system from the feudal period into Meiji is particularly well researched from the point of view of changes in household composition, new authority relations between family members and the formal organization of family units.

There is, however, another clear distinction to most earlier forms of household membership: Dogs, occasional company animals in and around the house but mostly kept in neighbourhoods, start to become deeply loved and cherished members of the family, as is testified by depictions of families as well as the increasing publications of specialised pet care books.

The introduction of dogs as family pets is usually considered in the light of 'western' influence, where keeping dogs in family homes had rapidly become popular and a sign of modernity. The main question posed here is how dog keeping as a popular custom is informed on the one hand by older forms of pet keeping in the earlier Tokugawa period and on the

other hand obtains a new meaning and impetus from the spread of foreign customs and ideas of modern families and households. This presentation starts with the first pet manual for dogs published in Japan: Kenku yōchiku den (1842) 犬狗養畜伝 that seems to indicate that pet dog keeping as a popular custom began in the late Tokugawa period, and was not only an expensive elite pursuit relating to expensive foreign dogs (imported from Europe as well as China), but that keeping more ordinary Japanese dogs became popular among commoners as well.

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