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Furry Companions

Pets in Contemporary Japan

A hybrid *u:japan* lecture by Barbara Holthus

Thursday
2022-11-24
18³⁰~20⁰⁰



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The accelerated interest in pets in especially urban Japan has not started with the pandemic but certainly has been intensified by it. For more than two years, as anti-Covid measures, Japanese had been told to engage in

void in human-human interaction. While the U.S. and some European countries reported near-empty animal shelters in the early phase of the pandemic due to a sudden spike in people adopting an animal, Japanese animal shelters saw less of that – as Japanese remain more inclined to “shop” a new family member at a pet shop than adopt a shelter animal.

The growing popularity of pets, together with the accompanying normative, social, and legal changes regarding pet ownership within Japanese society are the focus of this presentation. Data comes from interviews with pet owners, pet-business owners, shelter organizations and their volunteers, from participant observation at pet-related public events, in pet shops and pet cafes, as well as from the analysis of publications by the Ministry of the Environment, the National Police Agency, but also from sources such as Instagram, YouTube, as well as manga and TV drama. This presentation tries to highlight the embeddedness and changing role of pets in Japanese society.



Barbara Holthus, PhD in Sociology, Univ. of Hawaii at Manoa, is deputy director at the German Institute for Japanese Studies in Tokyo. Her research is on Japanese families, demographic change, happiness and well-being, the Tokyo Olympics, and social movements. Currently she is writing a book on pets in Japan.

physical distancing and “self-restraint”. This has led to many people spending extended periods of time at home while less time with family and friends. In response, pets as “substitute” family members often helped to fill the

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