

Shoguns and Animals

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Japan was a closed country from the 1630s to 1850s, maintaining its national seclusion policy for over 200 years. During this time, almost all international trading was limited to Nagasaki. In the roughly 250-year era called the Edo Period (1603-1867), the head of the samurai government was referred to as a “Shogun.” In other words, the highest authority of the samurai government (called *Bakufu*) overseeing state affairs who resided at the Edo castle, which is now the Imperial Palace of Tokyo, was a shogun.

The Edo shogunate, or Tokugawa shogunate, began with Ieyasu Tokugawa who became the first Tokugawa shogun in 1603, and ended with the 15th shogun Yoshinobu Tokugawa. In 1653 when the end of the Edo Period was drawing near, a squadron of 4 ships from the United States with Commodore Perry on board arrived in the Port of Uraga near Yokohama, demanding the Edo government to end the national isolation policy and open its ports to foreign countries. Japan entered a tempestuous time after this event, and consequently the Edo government returned its authority to the then emperor in Kyoto in 1867. This marked the end of samurai rule that had lasted for about 700 years since the Kamakura Period. This was also when Edo was renamed Tokyo, and Japan opened its door to the world and started down the path toward modernization.

During the Edo Period, various animals were brought into Japan via Nagasaki from abroad, such as an ostrich (1658), canaries (1709), a crocodile (1780), an orangutan (1792), a white bear^{*1} (1799), and a lion (1865). Many of these animals were imported by foreign monarchs to be presented to a shogun.

A shogun who was fanatical about animal protection

In 1680, Tsunayoshi Tokugawa assumed the fifth shogunate and took charge of state affairs (Fig. 1). Tsunayoshi achieved considerable success as a shogun in terms of promoting agricultural administration, academic development, and in politics.

However, this shogun is most popular for issuing a series of civil/penal codes on animal protection from 1687 until 1709, which are collectively called the *Orders on Compassion for Living Things*. These animal welfare laws, which are so eccentric and unparalleled in world history, even allowed capital punishment for those who abused animals. They are considered evil laws that brought suffering to the public.

The main contents of the codes issued in 1687 when Tsunayoshi became a shogun are as follows.



Fig. 1 Tsunayoshi Tokugawa
(Courtesy of Hase Temple in Nara, Japan)

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^{*1} This could be a polar bear or an albino brown bear (identification unknown).

- When an abandoned child is found, someone in the vicinity should first take care of the child, and nurture the child or put the child up for adoption if someone is willing to adopt the child; do not immediately report to the authorities.
- When animals including birds appeared to have been hurt by humans are found, this should be reported to the authorities as before. There is no need to report a case of cannibalism or self-mutilation. They should be nurtured and returned to their owner if there is any.
- It is reportedly a common practice for people not to feed dogs with no owners because people assume that feeding them will make the person responsible for them as their pseudo-owner and could get the person into trouble. Such an act (of not feeding and therefore starving those animals) cannot be allowed, and one must ensure it will not happen in the future.
- A dog owner apparently reports the death of his/her animal to their superior. There is no such need from now on, unless there is an abnormality in the animal's death.
- It is important for humans to have compassion arising from a heart of mercy, not just for dogs but for all living things.

The text above shows that people commonly reported a case of an abandoned child to the authorities first to avoid getting involved, but Tsunayoshi ordered that priority be assigned to caring for an abandoned child to prevent starvation rather than filling out a report. This suggests that his *Orders on Compassion for Living Things* were intended not only to protect animals but also vulnerable humans.

Tsunayoshi continued to add more civil/penal codes one after another. For example, a weight limit for loads was set for working horses, having singing insects such as long-horned grasshoppers or pine crickets as pets was banned, and eventually the maximum sentence for animal abuse became capital punishment. Some examples of those who were punished under these civil/penal codes are as follows.

- A man who deserted a sick horse was exiled to a remote island.
- A public officer who threw a stone at a dove was exiled to a remote island.
- A villager who cut down a tree with a bird nest was punished.
- Local residents were forcibly evicted to make

space to build a large kennel facility.

- On the charge of being involved in a business of killing birds with firearms and selling them, 10 samurai-rank people including a constable of Osaka were ordered to commit suicide by *harakiri* and one received a death sentence.
- The announcement was made to award 30 *ryo* (roughly equivalent of \$30,000 USD today) for an informant on dog-killing.

Tsunayoshi particularly cherished dogs, as he was born in the year of the dog according to the Chinese zodiac calendar. During Tsunayoshi's rule, dog owners were punished if their dogs were injured. Many people deserted their dogs in fear of getting into trouble. In order to rescue these dogs, the Tokugawa government built 5 large-scale kennels in Edo to house and nurture stray dogs. Reportedly, the kennels occupied 93 hectares in total, and the total construction and annual feeding cost reached 170 million USD in today's currency to house 100,000 dogs; some records suggests as many as 200,000 dogs. The kennels received a benefit for each dog, commonly called the *Oinu-sama* (Mr. [or Sir] Dogs), in the amount equivalent to a man's salary, and the local towns were forced to partially cover the cost. When even that was insufficient to house all dogs, some farmers were designated as the *Oinu-sama* Staff to care for dogs at their homes. Naturally, the total cost of caring for dogs including their food exponentially increased, reaching as much as \$5 billion USD in today's currency, putting pressure on the Tokugawa government's finances.

The Tokugawa government called deserted



Fig. 2 Dog statues built to mark the area where kennels for stray dogs existed during the Edo Period
(Near the front gate of the Nakano City Hall, Tokyo)

or stray dogs “traveling dogs.” A fenced facility with kennels (called *Okakoi-ba*) to care for those traveling dogs emerged in the western area of Edo called Nakano village, which presumably housed about 100,000 dogs (Fig. 2). Increasing numbers of deserted dogs became a social problem, and they were transferred to those fenced kennels. Reportedly, the installation of such fenced kennels was based on one of the civil/penal codes contained in the *Orders on Compassion for Living Things*, and even registers for dogs were created in those years.

The Orders, however, were abolished by Tsunayoshi’s successor immediately after Tsunayoshi passed away. The fenced kennels were also abolished, but no record clearly states the fate of the housed dogs. On the other hand, there is a record of some kennel managers who spent 48 years to pay back the money they were provided to care for the dogs.

As eccentric as these Orders may be, it should be noted that a law on animal welfare already existed in Japan in the 17th century, when no other nation in the world implemented animal protection as such legal measures.

The shogun who ordered elephants from abroad

In 1716, the eighth shogun, Yoshimune Tokugawa, assumed the regime (Fig. 3). He was devoted to restoring the shogunate power, and implemented various projects such as government reforms through increased taxation and cost-cutting, pub-

lic administration including reclaiming land to expand farmlands, enacting statutes for civil/penal codes (*Kujigata Osadame-gaki*), and installing a comment box from the public (*meyasu-bako*) to collect public opinions. These efforts later earned him the title of “the restorer of the Edo government.”

Yoshimune allegedly had an enterprising and daring character and showed strong interest in things from overseas. Exotic rarities including animals and plants were imported to Nagasaki, which is located at the west end of Kyushu in the Japanese archipelago and was virtually the only contact point for international trading at the time. Merchants in Nagasaki would draw images of those rarities to take orders from the Tokugawa government. In 1728, in the 12th year of his reign, Yoshimune ordered the import of elephants. Some say that elephants were to satisfy his curiosity, while others say it was part of his efforts toward industrial development. In accordance with his order, 2 elephants were imported from Vietnam to Nagasaki by the merchant of Qing (China) (Fig. 4). This was a pair of elephants, but the female died in Nagasaki soon after arriving.

Live elephants had previously been to Japan; indeed, it was the fifth time that live elephants were brought over. The first one arrived in 1408 on a ship from Portugal (or Spain). One elephant, 2 pairs of peacocks, and a few other animals were offered to the samurai government of the time. The second arrival was in 1575, when a



Fig. 3 Yoshimune Tokugawa
(Courtesy of Hase Temple in Nara, Japan)

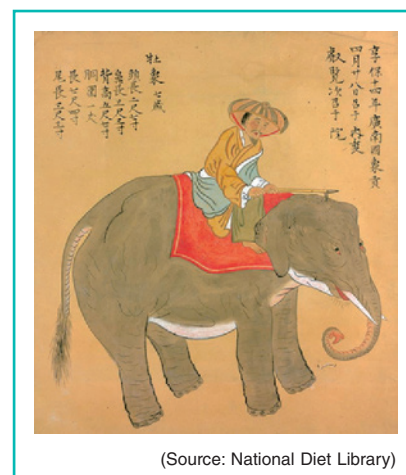


Fig. 4 The male elephant that was imported from Vietnam in 1728
(Source: National Diet Library)

ship from Ming (China) arrived in the Port of Hakata in Kyushu with an elephant and tigers. The third elephant in 1597 was a gift from a Luzon governor to Hideyoshi Toyotomi, the then ruler of Japan. It arrived in Osaka to be presented to Hideyoshi, and it was also later presented to the emperor of the time and then to the people of Kyoto. The fourth elephant from Vietnam in 1602 was a gift to Ieyasu Tokugawa, along with a tiger and 2 peacocks. Finally, the fifth case involves the elephants of 1728.

The 7-year-old male elephant, which was still a juvenile, started the journey from Nagasaki to Edo (Tokyo) in March 1729, taking 2 months to reach Kyoto (about 600 km from Nagasaki). In Kyoto, it was presented to the emperor of the time. According to the records, the elephant walked on land but was carried on a ship to cross the straits along the way. The “Zo-shi (Record of the Elephant)” written in Edo describes its size: the head length was 81 cm, the nose length was 99 cm, the height of the back was 171 cm, the girth was 300 cm, and the torso length was 222 cm.

In those times, anyone who entered the palace to be seen by the emperor had to have a rank in the royal court. The elephant, which naturally lacked such a rank, was actually given a special court rank in haste so it could enter the palace and be seen by the emperor—quite an interesting historical episode. After Kyoto, the elephant arrived in Edo (Tokyo, about 400 km east) in May of the same year, marking the end of a 3-month journey of about 1,000 km (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5 Map of Japan
Locations of Nagasaki, Kyoto, and Edo (Tokyo)

Being welcomed by the Edo residents most enthusiastically, the elephant paraded the streets and was housed at the Hama-goten, a spacious property owned by the government that faced the ocean near the Edo castle. A few days later, Shogun Yoshimune summoned the elephant to the castle and met the animal in the front garden of the main hall room. The government continued caring for the elephant for over 10 years at the Hama-goten, and records show that Yoshimune enjoyed seeing the elephant occasionally at the castle.

The frequency of summoning the elephant then decreased, and finally the government announced that its patronage had been terminated. However, because no one was willing to take in the elephant, the animal was kept at the Hama-goten. Today, the daily requirement of an elephant diet consists of 10 kg of carrots, 0.6 kg of bread, 1 kg of onion, 100 kg of fresh grass, 25 kg of rice straws, 10 kg of hay, and 2 kg of herbivorous feed. We can only imagine the incredible cost of feeding this elephant in the Edo Period.

The Nakano village reappears in this story. The elephant was eventually handed over in 1741 to the chief of Nakano village, Uemon Horie, and a farmer, Gensuke, who had been carrying the animal's feed to the Hama-goten. By this time, the elephant was a fully grown adult. Gensuke built a pen for the elephant and started a show business using the elephant as the spectacle. He apparently made a lot of money taking advantage of this animal's rarity at that time, but things did not turn out the way he had hoped. The elephant died only a year later in 1742 at the age of 21, after becoming too weak from the cold and hunger. For an elephant, dying at 21 is very premature.

The government took custody of the dead elephant and kept its skin. The records indicate that Gensuke was given the skull, 2 tusks, and the trunk skin, which he reportedly used as show spectacles for a long time to earn money. Years later, when a monk at the Hosenji Temple in Nakano village heard about the elephant skull and tusks kept by Gensuke's offspring, the monk bought and stored them as the temple's unique treasure to lure visitors. However, except for a skull fragment, they were lost in a fire during World War II.

Summary

These 2 old tales both relate to animal handling. Although they have been passed down for over 300 years, it is likely that these stories represent the truth considering the records and documentation remaining today.

Recently, the World Medical Association and the World Veterinary Association have formed a partnership. Together, they are promoting the concept of “One Health,” which involves the close collaboration of human medicine and veterinary medicine as key to the successful control of infectious diseases and epidemics in the future.

Three-hundred years ago, the level of awareness of public health was low, and the level of technology in public health was marginal. If 100,000 stray dogs are collected in one place today, we will naturally become concerned about the spread of a zoonosis. Similarly, there is no way of telling what kind of disease could emerge among local people if an elephant walked down the same street as humans without the safeguard

of quarantine.

The first story is an extreme example of animal welfare. The second story also concerns animal dignity. Aiming for the successful joint collaboration of human medicine and veterinary medicine is one interpretation of the concept of One Health. However, we must never forget that the idea of One Health targets both humans and animals, and that the protection of human dignity and animal dignity lies at the very root of the idea.

That being said, I cannot help but wonder what happened to the great number of dogs after the reign of Shogun Tsunayoshi was over and those civil/penal codes were all banned in 1709, as described in the first story. And the elephant in the second story, having been removed from its homeland in Vietnam and spending 14 years in Japan as a show spectacle only to meet a premature death, certainly deserves a great deal of compassion, too.