

08. A History of Human and Stray Cats Relations in Kyoto

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Cats are not punished by the law because it prescribes human acts. Thus, cats seem to live outside the law, even if they are called “domestic” or “house” cats. The most outlaw-like cat might be the stray because it does not have human owners. It lives outside houses, as cats did in the old days. However, the human society surrounding them has changed greatly. In this column, I briefly consider the history of human and stray cat relations in Kyoto.

Before 1971, there were few regulations concerning cats, so people released them onto the streets. However, in 1971, the relationship between humans and stray cats suddenly changed.

The Ordinance on Feeding and Control of Animals of Kyoto prefecture was enacted in 1971. It prohibited abandoning cats. Furthermore, it stipulated that Kyoto prefecture and Kyoto city should take custody of a cat upon request of its owner.

Two years later in 1973, the Law Concerning the Protection and Control of Animals was passed by the Japanese Parliament. In addition to abandonment, it also prohibited cruelty towards cats and it stipulates that local governments should take custody of a cat whose owner is unknown when so requested by its finder.

With these regulations, Kyoto cats began to be protected from human abuse and, at the same time, to be put to death by the hands of the local authorities.

In 2010, Kyoto city and Kyoto City Veterinary Medical Association began a joint enterprise called the Regional Cat Activity Support Project. This support makes it possible for a resident of Kyoto city to have stray cats spayed free of charge by applying to the city government. In this way this project began to care for stray cats based on rules well understood by the community.

In 2015, the Ordinance Concerning Manners toward the Symbiosis Between Humans and Animals of Kyoto City was enacted. This ordinance required all residents of Kyoto city to act properly with regard to animals (for example, by not feeding stray cats).

In Kyoto stray cats and human relations have changed greatly in these forty years. Stray cats are coming to live inside the law, as the local government has begun to control the human act of taking care of stray cats.