

"Puppy Love"

Extract from article in Hong Kong China Daily on 05/05/2011

Dr Cynthia Smillie has seen firsthand the effects that too much pampering, dressing up and pushing around in prams can have on Hong Kong dogs.

"For one thing it changes the mindset of the owner and they stop treating their dog like a dog and start treating it like a baby or a doll," said Smillie.

"There are some toy breeds that have been purely bred for companionship and can adapt to this reasonably, but I think there are lots of dogs whose frustration levels are horrendous because of this type of treatment."

Smillie, who qualified as a veterinary behaviorist after spending 23 years as a vet in Hong Kong, said such activities in many cases hindered dog's natural behavior.

"Any species has its own behavioral needs, things it needs to express, but unfortunately, a lot of dogs in Hong Kong are never given the opportunity to do that," she said.

"When a dog is out for a walk it is not just for exercise, it is like us reading the daily newspaper. It satisfies a real need.

"Dogs naturally want to explore and sniff, they have a highly developed sense of smell and that is where they get all their information.

"Wheel them in a pram and you are denying them that. You are also increasing their risk of obesity and all the health issues that go with not exercising.

"They are also being denied the chance to interact with other dogs and then wondered why when they meet another dog they are absolutely terrified or try to bite them. There are lots of ramifications to how we treat these animals.

"Likewise, dressing a dog can cause discomfort and also pressure on the back of the neck caused by some clothes can make them feel threatened".

Smillie said the consequence of hindering natural behavior was frustration which in turn can cause behavioral problems such as aggression or destructive behavior.

One other issue of concern expressed by Smillie is people choosing dogs for their appearance or fashion value and as a result, opting for inappropriate breeds for Hong Kong's climate, small-living spaces, long working hours, and lack of space to exercise dogs.

"When I came to work in Hong Kong after studying, I couldn't believe how many huskies there were."

"People don't realize that although huskies are domesticated they have been bred a lot of years to do a specific job which is running many miles a day, pulling sledges. They have real high need for really active exercise so a stroll down Caine Road doesn't actually do it for them. "

Dr Smillie has a word of advice to offer anyone considering buying a dog.

"Look at your lifestyle, where you live, see how much time you have, then look into see what sort of breed may fit in with that."

"Think about what is going to be happening in your life and think is this the right time to get a dog. Above all don't get carried away with the latest fashion."