Late in the rainy season, on July 12, 2007, the main hall of Kōsaiji, an Ōbaku Zen temple in eastern Tokyo, is overflowing with visitors. Temple patrons have come to attend the yearly *segakie*, a Buddhist ceremony commonly performed during the *obon* season to feed the hungry ghosts. Elderly couples, middle-aged women, and young families with children spill into the hallway and the spacious waiting room, where they can follow the ceremony on a large-screen plasma TV (figure 1). Overseas patrons halfway around the globe can watch a silent live stream of the ritual over the Internet on the temple’s website. Accompanied by a cymbal, the abbot and his assistants recite scriptures and incantations to consecrate stacks of miniature *tōba*, wooden tablets shaped like stupas inscribed with the names of the deceased. The crowd lines up in front of the main hall and huddles under canopies and umbrellas to seek shelter from the pouring rain. As they enter the main hall one by one, two clerics stamp the miniature *tōba* with a seal and read out loud the names of the deceased: “Okano Chocolate, Ozaka Pon, Kikuchi Pudding, Maruko Pyontan”—dogs, cats, rabbits, ferrets, hamsters, and birds. After picking up the *tōba* from the clerics, patrons offer incense and a short, silent prayer on behalf of their beloved pets at one of four censers in front of the altar. Then they leave the main hall to enter the columbaria in the basement and on the second floor. There some replace old cans of dog and cat food with new ones and install their *tōba* in small shelf units holding urns with the cremains of their pets. Others offer tangerines, water bottles, and treats and place their *tōba* beside a statue of the bodhisattva Kannon at a side altar. Whitish bone fragments shimmer through the glass cover at the foot of another Kannon statue on the altar that marks the collective ossuary as a camera mounted on the ceiling pans across the room and captures the activities for transmission on the Internet.

As illustrated by rituals such as these, the relationships that many con-
temporary Japanese have with their pets approximate those with human family members — even in death. However, the concept of the pet, particularly the idea that the pet is a family member, is largely a modern notion. Premodern Japanese textual sources do not distinguish pets from domestic animals in general. Despite the lack of a distinct term for pets, the premodern Japanese did keep animals for nonutilitarian purposes. From the beginnings of Japanese history through the early modern period, exotic animals such as parrots, peacocks, domesticated cats, and unusual breeds of dogs (including lapdogs and hunting dogs) were imported first from the Asian continent and later from Europe to serve as status symbols for the socioeconomic elites. However, pets were not nearly as common as today and were not widely regarded as family members. Instead, aesthetic concerns and collecting practices were more important factors. One of the earliest, if literary, examples of such practices is recounted in the Heian-period (795–1185) tale *Mushi mezuru himegimi* (The lady who admired vermin). The tale describes an unusual young girl who collects and studies
creatures such as caterpillars and snails, which are considered highly unattractive by everyone else. Her contemporaries are more interested in aesthetically pleasing animals, such as butterflies. The girl’s fascination with these animals is described as obsessive and shocking, yet her motivation is not all that different from that of her peers: she is an avid collector albeit seemingly of the wrong type of creatures.3

Other animals, such as birds and cats, also appear as pets of the nobility during the Heian period. The caging of small birds is well documented in Heian literature despite the fact that the practice of confining wild creatures was decried as cruel by contemporaries. For example, the Tale of Genji (early eleventh century) contains an episode about the young Murasaki, who is upset that a female servant released her sparrow from its cage and worries about its safety. Her grandmother, a Buddhist nun, chides her saying that caging living beings is an evil deed.4 Likewise, Sei Shōnagon (966–1017), an attendant serving Empress Teishi, mentions in her Pillow Book that a cat and a dog were kept and pampered at the court of Emperor Ichijō (r. 986–1011). The cat in question had been awarded noble rank and had been assigned a lady-in-waiting.5 The courtier Fujiwara no Sanesuke (957–1046) mentions in his diary, the Shōyūki, that when a palace cat gave birth on the nineteenth day of the ninth month of Chōtoku 5 (999), high-ranking dignitaries and court ladies, including Fujiwara no Michinaga (966–1028), Fujiwara no Akimitsu (944–1021), and Fujiwara no Senshi (963–1002), attended her birthing ceremony.6 Fujiwara no Yorinaga (1120–1156) notes in his diary, the Taiki, that Buddhist healing rituals were commissioned on behalf of a sick cat.7 However, we have no evidence that such affectionate, humanizing treatment of animals extended beyond the aristocracy and elite warriors through the medieval period. In this respect, Japan was not different from other places in the world. Katharine MacDonough argues that pet-keeping for companionship and prestige was popular in the courts of Europe before the practice spread to lower social classes. Royal pets were anthropomorphized and often granted status above that of lower-ranked humans.8 Ingvild Sælid Gilhus points out that evidence of pet-keeping among the Graeco-Roman elites of antiquity exists, but she prefers the term “personal animal.” Gilhus sees significant differences between these pets and their modern counterparts — particularly the lack of a pet industry and a sense of animal welfare.9 James Serpell notes that pet-keeping among the social elites has historically been singled out
as a symbol of decadence. Conversely, pet-keeping among the lower classes during the medieval period was often censored as a sign of witchcraft, with animal companions being seen as the witch’s familiar.10

In Europe and North America, pet-keeping became commonplace among the middle class during the early modern period and into the nineteenth century. Keith Thomas has demonstrated the rise of pet-keeping in early modern England in the aftermath of the enlightenment.11 A greater sense of human control over nature allowed for the development of emotional attachment to pets, as Harriet Ritvo views it: “Once nature ceased to be a constant antagonist, it could be viewed with affection and even, as the scales tipped to the human side, with nostalgia.”12 Similarly, Kathleen Kete links the spread of pet-keeping in nineteenth-century France to the emergence of the bourgeoisie,13 while Katherine Grier documents the concurrent rise of pet-keeping and the development of a pet industry in the nineteenth century in the United States.14 In Japan, too, the keeping of pets — let alone the performance of familial life-cycle rituals — did not spread more widely until the early modern period. As Japan moved toward a more complex, protocapitalist economy, exotic animals were increasingly kept as pets and traded as commodities by members of various levels of society. Attractive pets included many small animals: colorful goldfish, exotic birds, fancy mice, cats, and lapdogs (chin). Exotic animals were imported via trade with the Dutch and Chinese, and some, especially large ones, became sideshow attractions and status symbols for the rich and powerful.15 Pet-keeping became even more diversified and pervasive in the modern era with the introduction of Western dog breeds and the rise of the middle class.16 The first modern Japanese term for “pet,” aigan dōbutsu (literally, “toy animal”), which suggests a valued possession that a human dotes on and keeps for play, was already in use in the early twentieth century.17 However, this term is rarely used colloquially today. The most commonly used term for a pet today is petto, a transliteration of the Western term, which became popular only in the postwar period.18

In contemporary Japan, however, pets are often thought of as family members. Pet-keeping gained wider popularity during the economic growth of the postwar period. Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, pets, especially dogs, were marketed as symbols of a middle-class lifestyle. In 1952, the Japan Kennel Club began to publish a monthly magazine titled Kateiken (Family dog). Mass media and advertisements closely linked dogs
to an ideal domesticity: a family consisting of the white-collar worker father, the stay-at-home mother, their children, and the family dog. Hence, there is also the term *katei dōbutsu* (literally, “family animal”) to denote a pet. According to several surveys conducted since 1979, pet owners increasingly view their pets as important to family life and to personal happiness. Pet owners attested to having pets because they and their families liked animals, because pets were entertaining and had a calming effect, because they helped teach children moral responsibility, and improved family relationships. Compared to 1979, fewer pet owners claimed purely utilitarian reasons (“pets are useful”) in 2004. The concept of pets as companions emerged in surveys only since 1989 and has been increasingly considered important by pet owners.

The commodification of pets exploded in the late twentieth century, but so did the notion that pets — particularly cats and dogs — are family members. In the 1990s, the Japanese pet industry expanded into a trillion-yen business, and current estimates place the number of pets above the number of children under the age of fifteen. According to a survey conducted in 2007, 70.3 percent of dog owners and 68.2 percent of cat owners stated that they viewed their pets as family members, children, or companions. Lately, popular publications on pets have begun to use the term *hanryo dōbutsu* or *konpanion animaru*, the latter a transliteration of “companion animal,” but usage of these terms is very limited. Contemporary pet owners tend to prefer an emotionally charged language when referring to their pets — especially dogs and cats. A common term is “our child” (*uchī no ko*, also *wa ga ko*), which indicates a close, familial relationship with the owner. Likewise, rather than the scientific-sounding “male” or “female” (*osu*, *mesu*), most Japanese use *otoko no ko* or *onna no ko* (boy, girl) colloquially to designate the sex of their pets. Similar developments have occurred in North America, which is also home to a profitable pet industry — most recently documented by Michael Schaffer’s journalistic *One Nation Under Dog* (2009) and historically analyzed by Katherine Grier in *Pets in America* (2006). Here too the emotional infatuation with pets has spurred new linguistic usages of familial terms of endearment [“mommy,” “daddy,” and “(fur) baby”] to designate human-pet relationships.

These shifts in human-pet relationships have led the Japanese sociologist Ômura Eishô to coin the term “neofamilism” to describe the inclusion of nonhuman animals into the human family. Ômura links this growing
trend not only to the emergence of the nuclear family but also to the declining birthrate and the aging of society in late twentieth century Japan. The elders live longer and in separate households, whereas pets have become members of the family. Today, as in the past, notions of what constitutes a household directly influence who is included in family memorial rites. In a culture that values memorial rites, it seems logical that pets, as nonhuman family members, should also be included in such rites. Since the 1980s, the pet funeral industry has exploded to encompass an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 businesses. There are an estimated 600 to 900 pet cemeteries in Japan, about 120 of which are operated by Buddhist temples. Even pet cemeteries not operated by Buddhist temples usually have ties to Buddhist clerics who officiate during rituals on major holy days dedicated to the dead such as the equinoxes (higan) and festival of the dead (obon). Buddhist mortuary rites for pets have become an institutionalized practice. Such institutionalized ritual memorialization of pets also occurs in contemporary North America, but it is usually less linked to religious institutions. Instead, it takes place in the contexts of some 600 secular pet cemeteries, various kinds of self-help groups, and a wide array of New Age networks.

In the Japanese case, though predominantly set in a Buddhist context, various types of memorial rituals occur in multiple types of religious institutions. In Japanese, there are several terms to denote memorial rites in general, each with slightly different connotations but often used interchangeably. The two most common terms are kuyō and ireisai. Whereas the former has a stronger Buddhist nuance, the latter is used for either Buddhist or Shinto rites. Kuyō derives from a Buddhist term and is a translation of the Sanskrit term pūjā. It denotes a devotional offering presented to the Three Jewels (the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha). In Japan, the merit from such offerings is often dedicated to the spirits of the dead to honor them and to effect a better afterlife for the deceased. Kuyō rituals are closely related to ireisai, spirit propitiation rites, which, as the name suggests, are intended to propitiate the spirit of the deceased. In premodern Japan, spirit propitiation to avert spiritual harm by malevolent spirits (onryō) occurred within the combinative honji suijaku paradigm (according to which local divinities were interpreted as traces of universal Buddhist ones); therefore, they exist in both Buddhist and Shinto contexts today. In the late twentieth century, other terms, such as kanshasai (rite of
gratitude) or *kenkashiki* (flower-offering ceremony), occasionally designate memorial rituals in a secularized context, particularly at publicly funded educational and research institutions that seek to avoid the religious connotations of *kuyō* and *ireisai* in order to maintain a separation of religion and the state.28

Pet mortuary practices illustrate the ongoing changes in contemporary Japanese religions as they adapt to meet the changing needs of society. Some scholars of contemporary Japanese religion have argued that a declining birthrate and the graying of society has led to a preoccupation with posthumous matters and consequently a boom in memorial rituals (*kuyō būmu*).29 While the use of the term “boom” may be an overstatement — it usually is when used in the media to exaggerate a social phenomenon — it is fair to say that in the second half of the twentieth century the scope of memorial rites has been expanded to include a wide variety of beings and inanimate objects from *mizuko*30 and pets to eyeglasses and brassieres. Mortuary and memorial rites play an important role in contemporary Japanese religion, particularly Buddhism. Ancestral rites have a long history in Japan and other parts of East Asia, even in the pre-Buddhist period, but the strong focus on funerals and memorial services has been a distinguishing feature of Japanese Buddhism since the late seventeenth century with the development of the parish system (*danka seido*). In late modernity, as the ties between parish temples and parishioners have begun to erode with changing demographics, urbanization, and the development of a secular funeral industry, Buddhist temples have sought new ways in which to capitalize on their expertise in mortuary rites. Extending such rituals to *mizuko* and nonhuman beneficiaries has been one way to increase revenue for the temple while claiming continued relevance in their patrons’ lives.

Like memorial rites for *mizuko*, which emerged in the 1970s, pet mortuary rites provide a significant new source of income for Buddhist temples, which are grappling with profound changes in demographics and burial customs. With the weakening of temple-parish ties and the development of a commercial funeral industry, temples have had to develop new strategies. Urbanization, the increase in single and nuclear-family households, delays of marriage among both males and females, the falling birthrate and graying of society, the occult boom of the 1980s and early 1990s, the pet boom of the 1990s, the antireligious backlash in the wake of the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō incident, and the spread of pet loss counseling and the Internet
in the late 1990s have been contributing factors that led to the particular constellation of practices in contemporary Japan.

Given the ubiquity of pet mortuary rituals, it is surprising that they have not received more scholarly attention. My first encounter with pet memorial rites was personal rather than academic. In 1999, while I was a foreign researcher at the University of Tokyo, my parakeet, Homer, suffered sudden, inexplicable seizures. Homer was eventually euthanized after spending two weeks in an incubator at a veterinary clinic in Ebisu, Tokyo. The vet offered several options for the disposal of Homer’s body that included taking him home for burial or having him interred and memorialized at a group grave in a pet cemetery. The cemetery was run by Shinryōji, a Nichiren temple in Minami Shinagawa, which had an arrangement with the clinic. There, the vet assured me, Homer would be continually memorialized, and I would be able to visit freely. Out of a sense of novelty and curiosity, I opted to have Homer cremated and interred at Shinryōji. The fee for this service seemed minimal compared to the medical costs for Homer’s two-week terminal care at the animal hospital. I first visited Homer’s grave during my fieldwork on pet memorial rites in the summer of 2006. The collective pet ossuary at Jōnan Pet Cemetery is tucked away in a corner of Shinryōji’s temple precinct. The bouquets of fresh flowers on the ossuary, which also contains Homer’s cremains, indicate that it is well visited. The basement of the temple houses a pet crematorium, pet columbarium, and a small altar for pet funerals. The columbarium shelves are crowded with pet urns, pet memorial tablets (ihai), canned offerings, photos, and memorabilia. As many of my Japanese informants would say, Homer is not likely to feel lonely.

My second encounter was academic. In teaching a course on contemporary Japanese religions in 2006, I came across a brief reference to pet memorial rituals in an essay by Hoshino Eiki and Takeda Dōshō. In their conclusion to an article on memorial rites for mizuko,31 they referred briefly to pet memorial rites.32 My subsequent search for more literature on the topic yielded a few more article-length studies.33 Yet there seems to be disagreement among scholars about how to understand pet memorial rites. On the one hand, Hoshino and Takeda as well as Elizabeth Kenney stress the continuities with human mortuary rites. While Hoshino and Takeda see similarities with rites for mizuko and dolls (ningyō; literally, “human forms”), Kenney argues that they are similar to abbreviated
human mortuary rites. This argument points to the mimicry of human mortuary rites. On the other hand, Kimura Hiroshi, Matsuzaki Kenzō, Angelika Kretschmer, Elmer Veldkamp, and Nakamura Ikuo treat pet memorial rituals as a subset of animal memorial rituals (dōbutsu kuyō) and link them closely to memorial rites for plants and inanimate objects. The latter argument seems to be based on the fundamental assumption that the human world is distinct from the nonhuman world.

In contrast to the latter position, I argue that it is in fact the hybrid status of pet memorial rites — their liminal place between human and animal mortuary rites — that makes their study a compelling topic for inquiry. It is precisely the existence of the pet with its liminal, intimate place as a nonhuman animal within human society that challenges the boundaries between the species. It is this liminal, hybrid status that has led to ongoing debates about whether pet memorial rites are religious rituals or commercial enterprises, whether human and pet burial spaces should be distinct, and whether pet spirits can be vengeful or are always benevolent. These debates are not limited to the arena of Buddhist temples and pet cemeteries but have spilled into legal courts, the Internet, and publications by popular spiritualists and pet loss specialists.

Intrigued by the questions raised in the current literature on pet memorial rites and hoping to expand its scope, I began research on this topic in the spring of 2006. I had become convinced that because of their growing prevalence, pet memorial rites deserved a book-length study that placed them at the center. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Japan from 2006 to 2010. I surveyed thirty zoos and aquariums in the Kantō region about memorial rituals for their animals. Most important, I engaged in participant observation at over thirty pet cemeteries, most located in the Tokyo metropolitan area, which has the highest concentration of pet cemeteries. For comparative purposes, I also included several pet cemeteries in Aichi Prefecture, Kyoto, and in the Hokuriku region. I interviewed the cemetery management, surveyed the cemeteries, and attended collective monthly and annual pet memorial services as well as individual pet funerals. Whenever possible I interviewed the cemetery clients and temple patrons participating in collective or private ceremonies to gain insight into their perspectives.

Private pet funerals were not always easily accessible because of the intensely private and emotional nature of the rituals. Pet funerals generally
involve only the immediate family and are not openly advertised. Unlike human funerals, which usually have a public aspect that includes not only the nuclear family but also friends and coworkers, pet funerals are usually limited to the nuclear family. In this they somewhat resemble private, or literally “secret,” funerals (missō), which are open only to family members and close friends. In order to attend them, it was necessary to gain the cooperation of the cemetery and the bereaved family.

The attendance at collective ceremonies held on weekends reflected the demographics of contemporary Japan, including old and young, male and female, single and married. On weekdays, there were fewer families, young people, and men, likely a reflection of who could not attend because of school and work obligations. As a result, I interviewed more middle-aged to elderly women who attended the rituals on their own. This was not always only because they constituted the majority of the attendants but also because they were the most eager to talk to a foreign researcher. Couples and families were more difficult to engage in conversation. In addition, friends occasionally introduced me to informants whom I could then interview. Again, many of these were women of the baby-boomer generation. While this sample may not seem entirely representative of the overall Japanese demographic, it reflects trends in Japanese pet ownership. According to Japanese pet food industry data from 2003 to 2007, the largest number of pet owners were in their forties or older. According to data from the first eight months of Japan’s first pet loss support hotline in 1996, the average age of the callers was forty-seven. Ninety-four percent of the callers were women, 76 percent of whom were married. Of those about 75 percent were homemakers. This suggests that homemakers in midlife, who may be empty nesters and the main caregivers for pets, are the most deeply affected by losing a pet and therefore are also the demographic most likely to sponsor pet memorial rites.

In my quest to gain a fuller understanding of the culture industry of pet mortuary rites, I also followed developments in the print media and examined prescriptive literature instructing Japanese pet owners how to bury and memorialize their pets, Japanese pet loss literature, and court documents from legal cases involving pet cemeteries. Despite its inherent instability and transience, the Internet was a particularly important resource for monitoring marketing strategies and informal discussions. For the purposes of this book, I was more concerned with what Christopher
Helland has termed religion online (rather than “online religion”) or Anastasia Karaflogka has referred to as religion on cyberspace (rather than “religion in cyberspace”). In other words, I surveyed websites that provide information about pet memorial spaces that exist offline — such as the above-mentioned Kōsaiji, which broadcasts its pet memorial rituals on the Internet — rather than self-contained pet memorial sites that exist only on the Internet. The latter deserve more careful independent study that would exceed the scope of this volume. Many cemeteries and other pet funerary businesses use the Internet to advertise their services and to network with one another. Wherever possible, I verified the contents of the pet cemetery websites by personally visiting the cemeteries and interviewing the staff. In addition, Internet chat rooms provide forums for those who want to exchange information and opinions on issues concerning pet funerals and memorial rites. The postings are anonymous, the underlying demographics are difficult to assess, and verification of the contents is largely impossible; nevertheless, they provide a valuable resource for gaining insight into the discourse on pet mortuary rites in Japan. Shielded by the anonymity of a virtual identity, many Internet users are more willing to voice personal thoughts and opinions more freely than in direct conversation and in the somewhat normative environments of pet cemeteries.

Inspired by theories of human-animal relationships by cultural geographers, my analysis of these disparate sources centers around the question of space and place. In the following chapters, I discuss the necrogeography of the physical and mental landscapes that have produced the current configurations of pet memorial rites. I investigate what religious and intellectual traditions constructed animals as subjects of religious rituals and how pets have been subjected to inclusion or exclusion in the necral landscapes of contemporary Japan. What spatial arrangements do pet mortuary rituals produce that symbolize the relationships between human and nonhuman animals? What boundaries — physical, legal, and spiritual — do pet mortuary rites draw to contrast the species or cross to blur their differences? How do various kinds of animal mortuary rites symbolically reify the ontological distinctions between pets and other nonhuman animals?

Chapter 1 gives a brief historical overview and discourse analysis of animals in premodern Japanese myth, folklore, and religion, which should dispel any notion that the Japanese were particularly unique — or free from cross-cultural and interreligious influences — in their relationships with
animals. Premodern Japanese attitudes toward animals were strongly influenced by the cultures of the Asian continent. Premodern Japanese notions incorporated terminologies and taxonomies from China, which in turn were shaped by pre-Buddhist Chinese thought and Buddhist cosmology derived from the Indian subcontinent. With the influx of Western science during the early modern and modern periods, the Japanese adopted Western classification systems and practices regarding animals. This amalgam of indigenous, continental Asian, and Western views toward animals informs contemporary Japanese views of animals and influences the development of the mortuary culture for pets.

Chapter 2 discusses the modern history of animal mortuary and propitiatory rites in Japan — excluding, for the moment, memorial rites for pets. Modern animal memorial rituals have been nostalgically constructed as continual embodiments of Japanese tradition and respect for the natural world, but I argue that they are in fact a response to modernity with its inherent commodification and consumption of animals. The proliferation of memorial rites for animals is closely linked to the development of a modern military, industrialized whaling and fishing as well as other food industries, and modern educational and research facilities that rely on killing or commodifying large numbers of animals. Most contemporary animal memorial rituals are sponsored by corporations, professional associations, and research and educational institutions. The language of corporate memorial rituals emphasizes animal sacrifice for the prosperity and health of the nation. Therefore, they serve to legitimate the consumption of animals rather than critique it.

Chapter 3 investigates legal controversies surrounding the taxation of pet memorial rites. The 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system by Aum Shinrikyō, a new religious movement, had a profound effect on religious organizations. In an effort to establish tighter state control, new measures called for greater transparency regarding the assets and income of religious institutions. As a result, pet memorial rituals have also come under scrutiny. Between 2005 and 2008, two different regional courts in Nagoya and Tokyo, respectively, wrangled with the decision whether pet memorial rituals were religious activities and thus tax-exempt — each reaching opposite conclusions. The cases challenged the legal boundaries of religion and demonstrate the deeply rooted public discontent with the perceived tax privileges of religious corporations under the current tax law.
They also highlight the perceived differences between pet memorial rites on the one hand and memorial rites for other animals and for inanimate objects on the other.

Chapter 4 examines the necrogeography of mortuary spaces for pets. Cemeteries often mirror social practices and boundaries among the living such as ethnic, racial, or economic segregation. Boundaries in the necral landscape are observed even more strictly when it comes to pets. They are usually buried in places distinct from human mortuary spaces. As spaces for humans and their pets converge in contemporary Japan, spatial boundaries are drawn in mortuary practices to reinforce differences between the species. While pet owners may seek a high degree of humanization, ritualists and fellow cemetery clients nevertheless insist on maintaining boundaries between human and nonhuman animals. This process of spatial amalgamation, differentiation, and negotiation places pets in a marginal position as liminal, temporary family members even after death.

Chapter 5 traces the ongoing debate about the posthumous fate of animal spirits, which has been influenced by animistic, Buddhist, Christian, and spiritualist notions of the next life. During the occult boom of the 1990s, spiritualists initially marketed pet memorial rites as means to propitiate potentially vengeful spirits. More recently, with the global influence of pet loss literature, the spirits of pets have been constructed as faithful companions and protective spirits. Pets have emerged as liminal beings whose significance after death revolves around their relationship with the owners — in this life and the next.

The theme of this book might raise several questions. Why focus on pets and not animals in general? Since the 1980s, an increasing number of studies in Japanese history, literature, folklore, and anthropology have challenged an exclusively anthropocentric worldview and begun to reevaluate human-animal relationships. Similar to studies on animals in the West, much of this work has focused on human-wildlife relationships. Academic studies on the relationships between humans and domestic animals, let alone pets, are still few in number. As Erica Fudge points out, scholars have historically ignored pets (even more so than other animals) because they have considered them inauthentic animals. In other words, pets are inauthentic because they are perceived as too cultured and too unnatural. They are thus not worthy of serious scholarly inquiry. The tendency to trivialize pets and pet-keeping has also been demonstrated by
James Serpell, who notes that pet-keeping is often constructed as wasteful while human-pet relationships are often depicted as surrogates for lacking human relationships. However, as Fudge and Serpell have shown, pets are particularly interesting subjects of inquiry because they challenge our assumptions of what it means to be uniquely human and how we view nonhuman animals other than through a purely utilitarian lens. To this we might add Katherine Grier’s observation “that pet keeping is worth long, careful study simply because of its ubiquity today.”

Why issues of place and space? Animal geography has become a burgeoning field of study. According to Glen Elder, Jennifer Wolch, and Jody Emel, “animal practices are extraordinarily powerful as a basis for creating difference and hence rationalization. This is because they serve as defining moments in the social construction of the human-animal divide.” Some animals such as “apes, pets and revered species” cross this boundary and “become positioned on the human side.” Because of their liminal and hybrid status between humans and nonhuman animals, pets can serve as a particularly fruitful topic of inquiry in delineating how cultures construct boundaries between the species. Through their reliance on anthropomorphism human-pet relationships continually contest these boundaries.

Pets are liminal beings that oscillate between human and nonhuman animal spaces, or are, in Edmund Leach’s parlance, “man-animals.” They live in the human home and with the human family in spaces from which other nonhuman animals are barred. On the one hand, they allow their owners to construct an image of domesticity in which humans are secure and in control. On the other hand, their presence challenges ontological boundaries between the species. Thinking with pets thus means thinking about boundaries and other spatial implications of human-pet relationships.

Why study pets from the perspective of religious studies? Cultural geographer Chris Philo has called for more scholarship “on the insertion of animals into folklore, religious belief, and cosmology, those symbolic sites through which societies think their own existence and formulate codes of practice accordingly.” According to Philo, animal geography can benefit from investigating these issues and gain an understanding of how humans constructed animals “as one thing rather than another . . . and then subjected [them] to related socio-spatial practices of inclusion or exclusion.” Unfortunately, the study of animals is still marginal to religious studies. Even though in recent years several works have questioned this status,
Introduction

Religion, particularly in the Abrahamic context, is often thought to have a human focus: it is about the human encounter with the supernatural other. This monograph thus challenges common assumptions about religious ritual practice. In the case of Japanese mortuary rites that were previously intended mostly for humans, religion’s reach has been expanded to include animals, an indication that human-animal relationships are undergoing a significant shift. So to study these practices is to raise fundamental questions about the nature of a religious practice and even what it means to be human.

Yet why study dead pets rather than living ones? Although the scholarly literature on human-animal relationships has been growing in the fields of psychology, anthropology, philosophy, cultural geography, and literature in the past thirty years, there have been very few studies on the rites used to bury and commemorate companion animals. Fudge notes that “there are stories we want to hear and there are stories we want to ignore and the tale of the lost dog is in the latter category.”53 Perhaps we also want to ignore the tale of the dead dog even though it is very revealing. As Foucault has suggested, cemeteries are heterotopias that are shaped by the conventions of the world of the living.54 Thus by studying the landscape of the dead we can gain insight into the social norms of the living, perhaps more dramatically so because the boundaries are defamiliarized and thus made more clearly visible than in the everyday world.

Furthermore, human responses to pet death also raise questions about animals and personhood. In his classic *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets* (1984), Yi-Fu Tuan cites Konrad Lorenz in arguing that pets are expendable and replaceable: pets have less individuality than humans, thus the experience of their loss is less devastating and lasting. Another pet of the same species or breed can easily fill the void created by the loss.55 Much has changed since Lorenz’s *Man Meets Dog* (*So kam der Mensch auf den Hund*; 1950) and Tuan’s classic. A growing literature on pet loss now recognizes that pet death can be devastating—particularly so because pet death is trivialized by larger society. Recent scholarship on human-animal relationships also recognizes that animals can have more individuality, even personhood, than previously thought. In *Animals in Person*, John Knight explains humans are commonly thought to be the only species that can claim personhood. Humans are individuals while nonhuman animals are thought of collectively, in the abstract and as beings
that can be easily substituted. However, once humans engage in close contact with nonhuman animals they begin to perceive them as individuals.\(^5\)

Pets in particular are given individualized status by their owners. They do not simply represent a species or a breed but an individual, personalized being. They have names, recognizable character traits, preferences, and life stories — that can be remembered and memorialized. Yet, before we can begin to understand contemporary pet memorial rites in Japan, we need to examine the historical background on animals in Japan’s religious traditions and the historical development of animal memorial rites in general — the topics of the following two chapters.