

## *A Look Behind Your Favorite Local Pet Store.*

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Japan is the queen of booms.

From fashion trends, to games, to slang—things spread like wildfire here more than anywhere else. Now not that there's anything necessarily wrong with having the majority of the population jump mindlessly from bandwagon to bandwagon. It's just that sometimes, believe it or not, we don't really think our hobbies through.

So welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to an honest look behind your local pet store.

The Dachshund, Chihuahua and Toy poodle are the three most popular dog breeds in Japan. Of course by Dachshunds, Chihuahuas and Toy poodles, I am referring to the gentle, pretty, big eyed angels you see at the store, not what other genetically defective creatures arrive in that same litter. No, no— those are cast aside, euthanized, disposed of in masses.

It's easy, isn't it? Convenient, even, to buy a pet. You walk into a pet store with a crate and walk right back out with a puppy. Convenient! The problem here is that it shouldn't be. Buying an animal, treating it like the living thing that it is, shouldn't just be *convenient*. It's simply made to look like it is. And the reason? Industry. Money.

The Dachshunds, Chihuahuas, and Toy Poodles you fawn over through the glass at the pet store, they come from somewhere: a mom and a dad. Now *mom* and *dad* find their home in a cramped little cage, alongside many more, in a *puppy making factory*. These are what we call puppy mills.

Let's break down the process.

Say a company uses a Chihuahua in their TV campaign, or a celebrity posts a picture of their new Poodle. The public goes wild. Button nose, beady eyes, little paws— just perfect. And so the boom begins. The demand for the breed rises. The pet industry jumps on the trend, replicating exactly what the people want.

Now, creating more of the same product requires more of the same material, and in the pet industry this means inbreeding, where they repeatedly breed dogs carrying the 'desired' gene with their own offspring to enhance the 'desired' trait. When done with caution, inbreeding can be perfectly safe. High demands, however, come with the temptation to abuse. So people simply disregard caution in pursuit of quick, maximized profit. This is where 'trusted breeder' becomes 'puppy mill'.

And in said puppy mills is where the sick, disabled brothers and sisters of your new pet store pup are. The ones born with no nose, no eyes, a couple missing paws. Born with severe brain disorders, who run in circles all day. Born with the ultimate fate of cesarean section should they ever conceive puppies of their own, because their bodies are so unnaturally disproportionate, their own babies won't even fit through their birth canals. Some even make it a few years into a happy adoption before their genetic disorders act up and out of the blue,

they collapse into a seizure on the living room floor. And all because we think curly tails and little legs are *cute*.

It was around the Victorian era when owning certain breeds of dogs became an item of fashion. For a rich, fashionable woman in Victorian England, the companion pooch was an absolute necessity. It's where the term 'lapdog' came from. And from generation to generation, these trends grew.

Today, this industry is a whole *world*. And in this world, dogs are accessories. They're toys. Products. They are money and business and imports and exports. They are objects.

But on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 2017, California became the first American state to ban sales from puppy mills. In December of the same year, Australia limited the number of dogs breeders are allowed to keep. And this autumn, England proposed a ban on unethical third-party puppy and kitten sales. And Japan, well... we have a grand total of 4 officials monitoring all of 25,000 pet shops, breeders and kennels across the nation.

But before we all point accusatory fingers and gasp in horror, let's look at the logistics of this monstrosity. In 2015, Japan's pet market value was estimated at 1.4 trillion yen.

The ultimate solution here is of course, to educate the breeders and pass legislation against the unethical breeding of animals. But the problem here only really festers under those that enable it—that's us. If consumers didn't buy these dogs, breeders wouldn't breed them. They'd find another profession, and hopefully one that doesn't involve the pain and suffering of a living being. But wait, where do we get our dogs then, you ask? Why, kennels and shelters, of course. Where dogs yet again find their homes in cramped little cages. Only this time, we have the opportunity to free them.

Ladies and gentlemen, there's nothing necessarily wrong with bandwagons. But there are many things wrong with this one. Let the pet store boom be one bandwagon we abandon, and one we never hop back onto.