

# THE AKITA DOG'S ROOTS IN SOUTHERN AKITA

As seen by Tamejiro Ishibashi, Kiyoshi Komatsu, Ryoichi Ohara, Mutsuo Okada and Kaneharu Miyahara (Editor of the *Aiken Journal*)

## Part I

### Translator's Comments

Besides Odate, Southern Akita is also known as the site of origin of the Akita dog, according to the discussion presented here.

Mr. Naoto Kajiwara, in part X on the history of the development of the Akita dog, mentions that "the success of the bloodlines of Goromaru-go and Tamagumo-go soon after the war was possible mainly due to breeding with some good bitches from Southern Akita." [Ref.: "My Thoughts on The Akita Dog (Part X)," *The Akita Journal* 6:18, (Summer) 1980].

In late 1978 and early 1979, a series of six very informative articles on "The Akita Dog's Roots in Southern Akita" based on a panel discussion by some well known Akita dog fanciers appeared in the *Aiken Journal*.

Mr. Kiyoshi Komatsu is a longtime Akita dog fancier and Akiho judge, who was the 1989 Winter Los Angeles Akiho Show judge.

Mr. Ryoichi Ohara is well known in Japanese Akita dog circles.

Mr. Tamejiro Ishibashi was involved with his kin and teacher, the late Mr. Hyoemon Kyono, in the restoration of the Akita dog. One of the most famous Akita dogs produced by Mr. Ishabashi is the brindle female, Daiunme-go, mother of many Japanese Akita dog champions. Mr. Ishibashi also obtained Nanun as a puppy from the breeding of Daiunme-go to Azumazakura-go. Nanun was then bred to Matorame (Makome) to produce the famous dogs, Kumomaru-go and Tetsuyuki-go. Mr. Ishibashi is also an Akikyo judge.

Mr. Mutsuo Okada has also been involved with the history and breeding of Akita dogs since his high school days with his mentor, the late Mr. Hyoemon Kyono. Mr. Okada is well known for his many detailed articles on the history of the Akita dog. He has recently written a book on the pedigrees of Akita dogs in Japan (*Akita Dog Pedigrees* (Keito Tokuhon, Akitainu) 147 pages, 1991, Seibundo Shinkosha Publishing Co. Ltd., Tokyo Japan). He is also the present vice chairman of Akikyo.

I first met Mr. Ishibashi and Mr. Okada in the fall of 1992 during my trip to Japan and they gave me much information on the Akita dog (See "Rambling through Japan, Fall 1992" *Akita World*, pages 87-108, January/February 1993).

Earlier in 1977,<sup>1</sup> I also met Mr. Kaneharu Miyahara at the former address of Shin Journal-sha office of the *Aiken Journal* in Tokyo. In 1979, he gave me permission to present these articles to the American Akita dog world.

In 1977, I also met and had lengthy discussions on the Akita dog with the late Mr. Katsusuke Ishihara of Akikyo in Tokyo. At that time, I was unaware of Mr. Ishihara's important role with Mr. Kyono in the restoration of the Akita dog. Only in recent years have I come to that realization, as I delved deeper into the Japanese Akita dog literature.

Mr. Kajiwara told me that Mr. Hyoemon Kyono passed away before Mr. Kajiwara was able to meet and interview him in Yuzawa. Therefore, the following six articles could supplement the information on the history of the development of the Akita dog in Mr. Naoto Kajiwara's book, *My Thoughts on The Akita Dog*.

The first two parts of "The Akita Dog's Roots in Southern Akita" first appeared in the Fall 1980 and Spring 1981 issues of the *Akita Journal* published by Mr. Don Lusk. Unfortunately, the *Akita Journal* ceased publication after 1981, without presenting all six parts.

Interestingly, Mr. Lusk and the *Akita Journal* are mentioned in the fifth part of the "Roots" articles, which will be presented later.

Additional photographs and information obtained since 1981 from other sources will also be presented here.

Much of the information on Japanese Akita dogs presented here may be new to many American and even to some Japanese Akita dog fans.

***Aiken Journal* 227:60-64 (September) 1978 Symposium Searching for the Akita Dog's Roots in Southern Akita (Part I)**

**Panel: Matsuo Okada, Tamejiro Ishibashi, Kiyoshi Komatsu, Ryoichi Ohara and Kaneharu Miyahara(Editor of the *Aiken Journal*)**

**Editor:** The late Mr. Hyoemon Kyono here in Southern Akita, and was very active in the restoration of the Akita dog. He also started the Akita Nikkei line, which contributed much to the progress of the Akita dog. Southern Akita and Odate are considered as places of origin of the Akita dogs of today. It is indeed a real pleasure to have with us today, you gentlemen, who were intimately acquainted with Mr. Kyono, and I would like to learn some previously unknown historical facts so we can probe deeper into the study of the Akita dog.

Mr. Okada, you have done some extensive studies on the Akita dog from your earlier years. Many excellent foundation female dogs came from Southern Akita.

**Okada:** That is true. In the mid 1920's, Mr. Hirokichi (pen name: Hiroshi) Saito of Nippo stressed the importance of preserving Japanese dogs. Much has been written about the Akita dogs of that period that were affected by the popularity of dog fighting. The Akita dog was no match against the first Tosa fighting dog team that visited Akita. Mr. Komatsu was quite involved with this, and is well aware. The Akita dog had a good rushing start but had no endurance, whereas the Tosa fighting dog had resiliency and endurance. To overcome the weaknesses of the Akita dog, some Akita dogs were crossbred with the Tosa fighting dog. This resulted in the so-called "Shin" ("New") Akita dog of the Taisho Period (1912-1925.) Dogs with droopy ears, uncurled tail, short coat and boxy face, which were features of the Tosa fighting dog, were seen in the "New" Akita dogs in the Odate area.

The Tosa fighting dog was a product of much crossbreeding to produce a large powerful fighting dog. Thus, the bloodline of the Tosa fighting dog was introduced into the Akita dog, which resulted in the loss of the characteristic erect ears and curled tail of the Akita dog.

During the mid 1920's, a movement was started to designate the Akita dog as a natural monument. The first survey team from the Ministry of Education sent to Odate from Tokyo then was unable to find any suitable Akita dogs to be so designated as natural monuments. The Akita dog was not designated until 1931, when a second survey team led by Dr. Tokio Kaburagi was sent again by the Ministry of Education with the stipulation to "preserve with human efforts." Dr. Kaburagi designated the Akita dogs of that period so they could be restored. Thus, the Akita dog barely missed not being designated as a natural monument. Because of the designation, Mr. Shigeie Izumi of Odate, Mr. Yaichiro Tayama and a few others from nearby areas became much involved in the restoration of the Akita dog. Mr. Hirokichi Saito of Nippo and Mr. Hyoemon Kyono of Southern Akita, one of the officers of Nippo then, also became involved together.

Naturally, the topic of how to restore the "new" Akita dog to the original Japanese Akita dog was discussed. It was felt necessary to introduce the bloodlines of medium Japanese dogs with erect ears and curled tail. Thus, breeders in the Odate area used matagi dogs from the deep mountainous areas of the Aomori Region and Hokkaido dogs. In Southern Akita, Mr. Kyono started a bloodline which will be discussed later.

A photograph of a Hokkaido dog called Kimura's Kuro that lived in the Odate area is available. He was approximately one shaku eight sun (54.5 cm, 21.5 inches) tall with erect ears. He was bred to Oshinai (Osunai) to produce Saiken, which became the dam of the famous Tatsu (Tenryu). Tatsu-go was the offspring of Ichinoseki Tora-go and Saiken. Such was the trend in the Odate area.

Shortly before this, Nippo sent some people to comb the Yuzawa countryside for any surviving Japanese dogs in that area of Japan.

Mr. Shoichiro Miyamoto of Kakunodate would bring some excellent Akita dogs that he called the matagi (hunting) line from an undisclosed source. He would not reveal the source of the se dogs to Mr. Kyono or to Mr. Saito. Mr. Kyono, therefore, hired some hands to look for such dogs in the Tamagawa and the Hachimantai areas. This is confirmed by available records. However, these efforts were futile until Mr. Kyono came up with a new scheme. He hired a man to notify him as soon as a dog from Mr. Miyamoto arrived at the Kakunodate Railway Station and to trace the dog to the railway station whence the dog came. After several months of waiting, one day, the hired man notified Mr. Kyono that such a dog had arrived at the Kakunodate Station. The dog was traced to the Shizukuishi Station in Iwate as the point of origin.

**Editor:** Isn't that where an airliner crashed?

**Okada:** Yes. In Waga-gun in Iwate, next to Senboku-gun in Akita. The point of origin was the Iwate Prefecture after all. Therefore, Mr. Kyono went to Shizukuishi just over the mountains from Akita. A photograph is available of that occasion. He went to the very large village of Sawauchi, known for folklores, and presumably the Nambu clan hideout in its day. Home in Nambu territory were of the Akita type. I had a teacher, Mr. Yasaburo Ikeda, who authored a book of essays entitled *Tare Ga Mi No Fuukei (Landscapes)*. One lengthy essay in this book says that the village of Sawauchi was a treasure house of folklores. Much of this essay pertains to matagi dogs. This village is the place of origin and treasure house of the so-called Tohoku line of matagi dog, such as Aka (Red) or Shiro (White). There was much traffic between the silver mines in this area and the Ani mine area located just over the mountains.

**Ishibashi:** That is correct.

**Okada:** Mr. Daijiro (Ojiro) Kobayashi, the mayor of Kamioani, told me that there was much contact with hunters from Ani. Mr. Hanjiro Takahashi of Sawauchi was the only one with electricity in his home then. He had a dog called Oyajiro, which was about one shaku nine sun (57.6 cm, 22.7 inches) tall. Mr. Kyono wanted and acquired this dog around 1934. It was Mr. Kyono who named the dog was considered as one of the important that dogs from that area. The same family of dogs were used by the well known hunter, Mr., Sentaro Takafuji from this area. Mr. Kyono paid a huge sum to obtain Oyajiro.

However, with the excitement of obtaining this dog, he unintentionally left his umbrella at the seller's home. Mr. Kyono, the wealthy large landowner, also had a dry goods business with the family name of Kyoya. His umbrella had his family label.

Mr. Miyamoto soon learned that Mr. Kyono had discovered his source of dog supply and had even purchased a dog there. Needless to say, personal relationships between Mr. Kyono and Mr. Miyamoto were not at best thereafter.

Thus, during the mid 1920s, the restoration of the Akita dog in Yuzawa area was started in this way, while those from Odate used medium Japanese dogs with erect ears and Hokkaido dogs to restore the "new" Akita dog toward a Japanese dog.

**Ishibashi:** Problems of the Akita dog as a natural monument mentioned by Mr. Okada could raise more questions, if mentioned in the Aiken Journal or other dog journals. Because of these problems, Mr. Kyono opposed the idea of the declaration of the Akita dog as a natural monument then. He stated, "Why not delay the declaration of the Akita dog as a natural monument until the dogs are more standardized. We may have problems if the dogs were designated now." Such statements made him very unpopular among Akita dog breeders from Odate, which was considered as the place of origin of the Akita dog. Why did Mr. Kyono, who is from Akita, oppose the designation of the Akita dog at to us today. In the case of the Akita dog, it is "preservation through the efforts by man." This means a continuous process of restoration is involved. A natural monument is not supposed to change its form, but for the Akita dog, it is a process of continuous improvement toward that of a Japanese dog.

**Okada:** I agree. Bloodlines of such dogs were used to gradually restore the form. However, it was very difficult to produce the form and character of a Japanese dog while trying to maintain the large size. The most outstanding dog then was Ichinoseki Tora-go, owned by Mr. Kuniro Ichinoseki. Ichinoseki Tora-go was a very large dog with droopy ears, uncurled tail and short brindle (tiger striped) coat. These predecessors believed then that there was no alternative but to use this dog to increase the size of the Akita dog. Mr. Saito of Nippo also held this view. Thus, although Ichinoseki Tora-go was not a good representative of the breed, he was used as a stud dog to increase the size of the Akita dog. This was the beginning of the Ichinoseki line. Since Odate was considered as the site of origin where Akita dogs are produced to be sold, this probably became one of their local business opportunities. However, our predecessors from Odate also put forth much effort to preserve the Akita dog until the war. Immediately after World War II, very few suitable dogs were available for breeding. The revival of the Akita dog was centered around the Odate area where only two dogs survived. The Akita Nikkei line was almost extinct by this time. This was just before the return of the Ichinoseki Goma line.

The first dog used was Raiden-go, the son of Dewa-go, from the Hanaoka mines near Odate. Raiden-go became the sire of Dainidewa-go and Tetsu (Kurogane) and other dogs. It is said that Dainidewa-go was bred as early as the ninth month by Mr. Yozaburo Ito, the founder of the Dewa line from Odate. Dainidewa-go was used widely as a stud dog and produced some outstanding dogs, beginning with Senko-go. This led to the golden age of the Dewa line.

In the Odate area, Datemitsu, owned by Mr. Eikichi Hiraizumi, produced Kongo-go. At the age of ten months, Kongo-go was sold to Mr. Heihachi Hashimoto of Tokyo, who swayed a generation of dog lovers in the Nippo shows. Thus, the so-called Dewa line consisted of Dewa, Raiden and Dewa's offspring, Dewawaka, whose offspring, Taishu, was bred to Datemitsu to produce Kongo-go of the Dewa line, which was very popular immediately after the war. Almost all of these dogs were dark brown with no white or red coats. Dogs of the Raiden line had short coats. However, the greater concerns then were whether the ears were standing or the tails were curled, instead of the purity of the dog, etc.

Ichinoseki Goma-go of Mr. Ichinoseki was not rated highly in Odate, due to weak hips. Thus, he was labeled as a dog with weak hips and his stud services were not well sought. And yet, the unexpected legendary dog, Goromaru was born out of him in 1948 (23rd year of Showa), and Tsukasa was born in 1949 (24th year of Showa) at the Sasatomi Kennel in Noshiro.

Reportedly, Tsukasa was Ichinoseki Goma-go's last offspring. The three main rivals then were:

1. Almost all of the famous Akita dogs from the Ichinoseki line from the Akita Central Branch in the Akita City area. The dogs were Goromaru and Tsukasa.
2. The Dewa and Raiden lines with the Ichinoseki line from Odate.
3. The Kongo line in the Tokyo area. I believe Mr. Komatsu has more specific details on this.

**Editor:** The name of Tsukasa is heard often and is highly regarded.

**Komatsu:** Yes. It was Goromaru and Tsukasa in the Akita City area.

**Editor:** Tsukasa is not known as well as Goromaru.

**Komatsu:** I believe, Tsukasa won at the Akiho's Sixth Headquarters Show.

**Okada:** At that show, Mr. Yozaburo Ito's Tetsu (Kurogane) was second, Hobun, third and Kincho, fourth.

**Komatsu:** That is correct. Mr. Funakoshi of Akita with Goromaru and Mr. Kurakichi Saito with Tsukasa were at the beginning of their golden ages. It would have been wise to have bred to each other's dogs at that time. However, opinionated dog owners had different ideas. Some said that Tsukasa "smelled" like a German Shepherd, while others said that Goromaru "smelled" like a Tosa fighting dog. (laughter) Both dogs became very well known and went their own ways.

Goromaru became very popular in spite of his pinto coat. Mr. Funakoshi should be given much credit for his ability. Pintos were not well accepted at dog shows then.

**Okada:** True. Pinto dogs were not well accepted in those days.

**Ishibashi:** At the Third Headquarters show, Goromaru started out in second place, but was gradually lowered to the fifth, seventh, (laughter) eighth, ninth to the twelfth place. (laughter) Although this dog was a good representative of the breed at that time, he was dropped to the twelfth place because of his pinto coat. When Mr. Kyuono, Mr. Funakoshi and I were en route home from Odate, Mr. Funakoshi asked Mr. Kyono to stop over at Akita City to discuss the results of the dog show. Mr. Funakoshi said, "How ridiculous it is to place a dog from second to the twelfth place. Why didn't they place him at the bottom from the beginning?" To this Mr. Kyono replied, "No. I disagree. The dog is a very good representative of the breed. Therefore, he was placed second at the beginning. He would be a great dog, if he were not a pinto." Then Mr. Funakoshi agreed wholeheartedly.

**Okada:** Mr. Kyono and Mr. Katusuke Ishihara both agreed that Goromaru should be used as a foundation for the restoration of the Akita dog.

**Editor:** Wasn't Nippo the main Japanese dog organization then?

**Okada:** Yes. Before the war, Nippo was the prestigious Japanese dog organization and Akiho (Akitainu Hozonkai) was equivalent only to one of Nippo's Akita Branch. Therefore, Mr. Ichinoseki and Mr. Hiraizumi and many others from Akita showed their dogs in the Nippo Headquarters Shows in Tokyo, before the war. At that time, one could not promote his dog unless he entered it in the dog shows in Tokyo. Even after the war, Mr. Yozaburo Ito took his Tetsu-go (Kurogane-go) to the headquarters show at Odawara. Nippo always regarded the pinto as undesirable.

Hence, it was the Kongo line with Nippo. Kongo produced Kumaso and Bafu-go, two famous champions. This was soon followed by Shoryu and Kincho. Some in Odate and Tokyo questioned the quality of winners in the Nippo dog shows.

By chance, a dog called Arawashi, the sire of Tamagumo, was present. Arawashi had a quiet elegance and sobriety, and would probably still be popular today. However, this dog did not place at all in the Nippo Headquarters Show. One reason given was because of his round and light eyes. Other possible reasons were the faulty tail curl and the lack of massive appearance in Arawashi. Dogs of poorer quality were placed higher and some dog owners in the Tokyo area began to question that reasoning, and left Nippo to establish the Akitainu Kyokai (Akikyo) in 1949 (24th year of Showa). Reportedly, the Akitainu Hozonkai (Akiho) joined that movement with Akikyo at that time. Thus, Akikyo and Akiho started out as companion organizations.

**Ishibashi:** Some of the champion Akita dogs in the earlier Akikyo shows were sold at about 500,000 yen (\$1389 at 360 yen/\$1.00). The prestige of champions in the Akikyo show was very high. Thus, almost all of the better Akita dogs began to appear in the Tokyo Akikyo shows. I have been actively involved with Akikyo from my younger days because of its prestige.

**Okada:** Thus, they moved away from Nippo's large dog type. At that time, Mr. Tatsuo Nakajo of Nippo favored the Kongo and Kincho lines and eliminated the red and white Akita dogs. The Kongo's coat color was favored and much close linebreeding was done. Some breeders soon became tired of this routine and began to add the Ichinoseki line into their breeding. Many Akita dogs from Odate went to Tokyo and gradually to the Kansai (Kyoto-Osaka) areas. Meanwhile, a black brindle named Tamagumo was whelped. When Mr. Ishihara showed Tamagumo as a puppy to Mr. Kyono, Mr. Kyono stated that the coat quality was good.

Single layered short coat with sway backs in the Dewa and Kongo lines were very common then. Also, many dogs with straight backs such as Dainidewa had short coats. Weak backs were common in the Kongo line. Thus the Goromaru and Tamagumo lines were established to eliminate weak backs, improve coat quality to that of the level seen in Tamagumo, in order to restore the Akita dog to the Japanese dog. Coat color was not considered much at the this time. Soon, the famous Tanihibiki, son of Goromaru, came to Tokyo. This resulted in the popularity of the Tamagumo and Tanihibiki lines in the Tokyo area. Also, the well known Fakuho was produced some years later.

**Ishibashi:** Pintos were not rated highly by Akiho and Akikyo in those days.

**Editor:** However, pinto was included in the standard, even then.

**Ishibashi:** Yes. Goromaru was penalized then for being a pinto. At that time, Akiho did not also favor the red brindle, although many excellent dogs with that color were seen.

**Komatsu:** Such dogs were seen in Aomori.

**Ishibashi:** Yes. Excellent brindles were seen in Aomori and in Hiraka. But red brindles were not in favor for a time. However, since Goromaru was considered as a great dog in spite of his pinto coat, Mr. Hyoemon Kyono and Mr. Katsusuke Ishihara decided to use him as a stud dog to produce better Akita dogs.

**Okada:** Goromaru did not resemble Ichinoseki Goma-go, his sire at all.

**Ishibashi:** That is true.

**Okada:** Should one ask why such an outstanding dog came out of Ichinoseki Goma-go, one should look at the dam's line which came from Ani. Goromaru-go's grandfather was Ichinoseki Aka-go, commonly known as Aka-go. Aka-go was not friendly to everyone and was occasionally confined. However, he was probably a magnificent animal. His dam, Aka of Numadate, was bred to a brindle, which resulted in Ichinoseki Aka-go. According to Mr. Ishihara, the Goromaru line is a revival of Ichinoseki Aka-go. Therefore, stud dogs such as Ichinoseki Goma or Ichinoseki Tora have in their bloodline from the dam's side, the bloodline of regional dogs or the matagi dogs. Thus, Goromaru, as a son of Ichinoseki Goma, had a solid tight body with a strong temperament. The pedigree of the dam shows bloodlines of dogs owned by Mr. Ozawa of Ani. I met Mr. Ozawa many year's ago and obtained much information from him. Mr. Ozawa is related to Mr. Daijiro (Ojiro) Kobayashi (mentioned earlier in our discussion) and to Mr. Ichinoseki. Thus, many female dogs from this area were taken to the home of Mr. Ichinoseki, who had stud dogs.

**Ishibashi:** Mr. Ichinoseki was a man of society.

**Okada:** Many sought the stud services of Mr. Ichinoseki's dogs. Their puppies came from some promising collateral bloodlines. Arawashi and Goromaru are examples of these breedings.

**Ishibashi:** True. Although Goromaru was a pinto, one can see why he produced puppies of the Japanese dog type. Mr. Funakoshi and I traveled together quite often. Mr. Funakoshi often said, "I worry about how Arawashi and Goromaru are being used in Tokyo. Why don't we send more of Goromaru's puppies to Tokyo before they become too well established there." (laughter) This was true.

**Okada:** Mr. Giusuke Yamamoto (1973 L. A. Akiho Show judge) was one of those earlier breeders who brought back Tamagumo's bloodline to Akita. So did Mr. Komatsu. Tamagumo was given only a Junyu (Good) Grade at the Nippo show.

**Ishibashi:** True. It was through Mr. Kyono's efforts that one was able to obtain Tamagumo from Tokyo.

**Komatsu:** Tamagumo, which did not win at all in the Nippo show, won Akiho's fourth Meiyosho award.

**Okada:** Just before this time, the majority of Akita dog breeders left Nippo. Akikyo and Akiho then joined forces.

**Komatsu:** I believe that Mr. Ishihara's influence in Akiho was very strong at that time. The first winner from Tokyo was Kincho. Two out of the four winners were from Tokyo.

**Ishibashi:** Mr. Ishihara had much influence at that time. Although unable to enter his dogs in his own Akikyo show, he was able to enter his dogs in the Akiho shows.

**Komatsu:** Was not Mr. Ishihara one of the very few capable of evaluating Akita dogs in those days?

**Ishibashi:** I believe it was Mr. Ishihara's influence that brought Tamagumo to the Akiho headquarters show in Odate.

Although some say that the Akikyo dogs resemble a deer with skin and bones, this is not true. On the other hand, "the magnificent Akita dog with the massive head," which is so popular is uninteresting. The true Japanese dog type may appear somewhat smaller, quiet and gentle. Some questions were raised about this.

**Komatsu:** However, Tamayu became the champion of both Akikyo and Akiho.

**Editor:** Would you say that this was when the evaluations of dogs by Akikyo and Akiho were nearly the same?

**Komatsu:** That may have been true then. However, perhaps Mr. Ishihara did not want to continue that trend for fear of being absorbed into the larger dog organization. It seems that he moved toward the direction of purifying and purifying of the Akita dog again.

## References

1. Aiken Journal 227:60-64, (September) 1978.
2. Other references are listed under some of the photographs.

Translated by Tatsuo Kimura with the permission of Mr. Kaneharu Miyahara, editor of the Aiken Journal (Akita World, July/August 1994)

<http://www.northlandakitas.com>

<http://www.deltasteamway.com>