

Roots of the Akita Dog in Southern Akita

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

Part II

Translator's Comments

This series of six articles on the Akita dog history is based on a panel discussion by four well-known Akita dog fanciers of today. They were acquainted with some of the Akita dog and Japanese dog pioneers from Akiho, Akikyo and Nippo.

The purity of many Japanese dogs had been affected by crossbreeding with dogs brought from overseas. These pioneers often worked together to gather information to preserve and restore the Japanese dogs.

Mr. Kaneharu Miyahara, editor of the *Aiken Journal*, granted me permission in 1979 for these articles to be translated and presented to the American Akita dog world. However, owing to various circumstances, the entire series has not been presented until now.

Part II is now presented with additional photographs and data from other Japanese dog literature.

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Panel: Mutsuo Okada, Tamejiro Ishibashi, Kiyoshi Komatsu, Ryoichi Ohara and Kaneharu Miyahara.

Editor: Was Oyajiro a very large dog?

Okada: No. He was about 1 shaku 9 sun (57.6 cm, 22.7 inches) in height. As a medium Japanese dog, he was large.

Ishibashi: Mr. Kyono said that our goal was to obtain a large dog from a smaller dog, without altering from. By form, we are referring to facial features, eyes and coat texture. Although dogs may change from one period to another, our set goal has not changed.

Editor: Coat colors vary significantly and are not uniform.

Ishibashi: Are you referring only to the Akita dog? Mr. Kyono taught us that he was referring to all Japanese dogs. Some seem to separate the Akita dog from the medium and Shiba dogs. I believe that the medium dogs, the Shiba dog and the Akita dog are all Japanese dogs.

Editor: However, some believe that the Akita dog did not come from the medium dogs.

Ishibashi: The Akita dog went into a decline for a time. Ears became droopy, and the tail became straight. It must have been humiliating for them to use the Akita dogs as fighting dogs to make money and then be beaten by the Tosa fighting dog.

Editor: What type of Akita dog was there before the decline?

Ishibashi: The type of Akita dog we are trying to pursue.

Ohara: Some pure Japanese dogs were living in urban areas.

Ishibashi: The so-called regional dogs.

Editor: A type similar to the matagi dog.

Ishibashi: Yes. The same type as the matagi dog.

Okada: There were all kinds of matagi dogs. Not all were good. From the beginning, continuous efforts were made to produce not only the ideal Akita dog, but also the medium and small Japanese dogs. They were trying to obtain features such as "heavy but light in movement," "the form of a hunting dog," "like a famous sword," etc. The Akita dog

standard now has a written interpretation. Desirable dogs such as Oyajiro were used to essentially reach a height of about 2 shaku 2 sun or 2 sun and 5 bu (66.7 or 68.2 cm, 26.3 or 27.2 inches). When I asked for Mr. Ishihara's opinion on Oyajiro, he replied, "The space between the eyes is a bit too wide."

Komatsu: A picture of an Akita donated by Mr. Kyono is on display at the Akiho's headquarters.

Ishibashi: That type of dog is desirable. A three-year-old child seeing a neighbor's dog about 2 shaku (60.6 cm, 23.9 inches) tall may appear like a large bear to him.

Editor: One often hears stories that claim Akita dogs of the past were so large, they were able to carry a child on their back.

Ishibashi: That was not true.

Komatsu: Mr. Ishihara also agreed to that when I saw him recently. Such a story makes one believe that the dog was more than 1 shaku (30.3 cm, 12 inches) taller. (Laughter) 33 cm (13 inches) taller.

Ishibashi: The first large dog that I ever owned was a dog from Tokyo called "Riki." He was 1 shaku 9 sun (57.6 cm, 22.7 inches) tall and was a black offspring of Taishu. I often put my children, when they were very small, on the back of my dog. The child believed that he had ridden the dog himself. The child was able to ride on the back of the dog because an adult was holding the child. The child could not do it alone without help from the adult.

Editor: This is similar to the story of a child riding on a very large dog such as the Saint Bernard. Therefore, a child would tend to believe the dog was very large.

Ishibashi: Clients at my store would often say, "To think that there was such a large dog." Dogs were allowed to roam at that time.

Komatsu: Even then, wasn't the largest dog about 1 shaku 8 or 9 sun (54.5 or 57.6 cm, 21.5 or 22.7 inches)?

Okada: No. At least 2 shaku (60.6 cm, 23.9 inches).

Ishibashi: No. I believe it was only about 1 shaku 9 sun (57.6 cm, 22.7 inches).

Editor: Some say many of the dogs were as tall as 2 shaku 3 sun (69.7 cm, 27.4 inches).

Komatsu: One often hears about the huge dog, Moku of Nakanotera. Some interpret 1 shaku 9 sun (57.6 cm, 23.9 inches) as 2 shaku 9 sun (87.9 cm, 34.6 inches), meaning he was taller than other dogs by about 30 cm (12 inches). (Laughter)

Ishibashi: Seniors who are familiar with Akita dog history are now about sixty to seventy years old. They saw the worst of the Akita dog's history and when the Akita dog was just beginning to improve.

Komatsu: A dog was a "champion" if it had erect ears and a curled tail in those days.

Ishibashi: True.

Okada: Some believed that Moku of Nakanotera was a good dog. Much traffic began to flow between Akita, Aomori and Hokkaido, when many young men left home to work in the herring fishing industry. Many Karafuto dogs were brought back then. These are the so-called northernmost large dogs. When Mr. Kyono was looking for dogs, he sent Mr. Ichiro Takahashi to Hokkaido and Karafuto (Southern Sakhalin). I have some photographs from that period. Karafuto dogs with short coats were brought back. Akita dogs were crossbred with these dogs, so that, for a while, some of these Karafuto dogs resembled Akita dogs. Photographs of Karafuto dogs of that era are not representative of their breed.

Komatsu: They do not appear to be true representatives of the Karafuto dog. We still see the long coats from time to time.

Okada: We are still not free from the problem of the long coat in the Akita dog, due to the bloodlines of the Karafuto dog.

The Akita dog also has bloodlines of the Tosa fighting dog, the Mastiff, the Pointer, the Bulldog and many others that were used to bring in the powerful features. For a time, Akita dogs in the Odate area are said to have disappeared completely.

Therefore, dogs in the deep mountainous areas were used to gradually restore the Akita dog.

Mr. Hirokichi Saito heard about the ancient Tsugaru dogs which lived in the nick of Aomori, while traveling through Hokkaido, Aomori and Karafuto in 1938 (thirteenth year of Showa). They were sold as Akita dogs to people outside the Aomori Prefecture. Therefore, immediately after the war, some medium and small Japanese dog breeders were very critical of this practice by some of the Akita dog breeders and said, "What would remain of the so-called Akita dogs, if bloodlines of the medium Japanese dogs, Karafuto dog and the Tosa fighting dog were removed from them?" Also, at one time, breeders of medium Japanese dogs in Nippo complained to judges that the Akita dog should not be in the Japanese dog category, and should be in a separate group.

The End of the "New" Akita Dog Period

Editor: Much credit goes to those whose efforts have resulted in the high quality Akita dogs of today.

Okada: I wrote in the *Aiken Journal* that that was quite an accomplishment. The so-called "new" Akita fighting dog champion, called "Gamata" (Champion Dateisami) was defeated by the Tosa fighting dog champion, Amagizan (or Amagi-yama) in the main bout. The time in minutes and seconds when Gamata yelped and lost the match was recorded in a telegram received by Mr., Kyono. This telegram is said to still exist. Even the "new" Akita dog champion seemed to be no match against a good Tosa fighting dog. Thus, the era of the "new" Akita dog came to an end.

Ishibashi: Yes. It ended that way. Didn't the telegram read, "Gamata eliminated"?

Okada: Following this, the movement toward the restoration of the Akita dog began. Mayor Shigeie Izumi of Odate started a movement with Mr. Hirokichi Saito, and Mr. Tsuneji Iwahashi of Wakayama led a search of Japanese dogs. Earlier issues of the *Nippo Monthly Bulletin* show photographs of Japanese dogs of varying quality. Some of these dogs are questionable as Japanese dogs. Their places of origin are also mentioned. Any dog taller than 2 shaku (60.6 cm, 23.9 inches) were put into the large dog class. Sometimes a large dog from medium-sized parents was put into the large dog class.

Editor: There wasn't a medium group within the large dog class in those days.

Okada: Yes. That is true. Since this was a period of much confusion and lack of uniformity, the line was drawn tentatively at 2 shaku (60.6 cm, 23.9 inches). Any dog taller than 2 shaku was put into the large dog class. At that time, a medium black dog called Kappai (Katsuhira) became the sire of Mutsu, which won the Prefectural Governor's Award. Mutsu was handled by Mr. Takeo Sato at the Nippo's endurance race of 1935 (tenth year of Showa). The pedigree of Kappai is reported to show a mixture of the Ainu (Hokkaido dog) and a German Shepherd Dog. Large dogs were produced in this way during this period. Mutsu's pedigree is in the Dewa line.

Ishibashi: Such a pedigree is available for study. Medium dogs mentioned here refer to the matagi dogs (hunting dogs from the Tohoku area) and not to the medium Shikoku dogs of today.

Okada: Yes. We are referring to the Tohoku matagi dogs, which are larger than other medium Japanese dogs.

Ishibashi: These were the matagi hunting dogs. Otherwise, one was not able to increase the size of the Akita dog.

Okada: That is correct.

Ishibashi: Medium here refers to bloodlines of matagi dogs that increased the size of the medium dog. Mr. Kyono and some breeders from Odate use these dogs to produce the Akita dogs of today. Akita dogs of the past were not necessarily great dogs. One would like to believe that a great Akita dog lived in Odate in the distant past, but this is only a conjecture. Instead, dogs were bred gradually toward the Akita dogs of today. Therefore, I do not have any valid answer to the question, "Why is the pinto or the red brindle not acceptable?" It was a decision of those in charge who had a certain goal in mind at that time.

Some of the Accomplishments at Odate, the Place of Origin of the Akita Dog

Okada: The entry of the Tosa fighting dog bloodline nearly ruined the Akita dog breed. This is described in a book, *Inu no Machi, Odate wo Kataru (Stones of Dog City, Odate)* by Mr. Susumi Ono, who taught at the Odate Junior High School. The types of dogs found in Odate at that time, such as "a light red male dog with a height of 2 shaku (60.6 cm, 23.9 inches)," or "red ears," etc., are discussed.

People in Odate then began to breed and sell dogs. I believe that this led to the development of the Akita dog of today.

Ishibashi: Odate, the place of origin of the Akita dog.

Okada: Yes. I believe that those people should be given much credit.

Komatsu: And they worked quietly.

Okada: They tried producing dogs such as Dewa and many others. Many different types of puppies came from a given litter, due to lack of standardization. This was commonly seen soon after the war. Whenever a certain type of dog was popular, that dog was used widely as a stud to head in that direction, while the rest were ignored. The bloodline of the widely used dog then became established. Otherwise, many types of dogs are produced, such as those resembling the Tosa fighting dog or those resembling the matagi dog. During the period of popularity of the Dewa line, either black or black sesame (goma) were preferred. Red and white were not favored then. During the period of Goromaru, red with a black mask, a dash of white and black ears as seen on Tanihibiki were favored. This was the Ichinoseki line. Tanihibiki had a littermate called Tetsumaru, a white dog, a magnificent animal, even by today's standard. However, Tetsumaru was not evaluated highly in those days. One often wonders about the outcome, if they had leaned toward Tetsumaru then. The final outcome was probably influenced by the selection of bloodlines, such as those from Ani or from Mr. Kyono's dogs from Sawauchi mentioned before.

Editor: Does the Akita Nikkei line run quite deeply?

Okada: Yes. Mr. Kyono was a large local landowner. He had about fifty dogs cared for by tenant farmers. Mr. Ishibashi knows the details.

Ishibashi: Mr. Kyono was a large landowner with about two hundred tenant farmers. Farmers interested in dogs were allowed to raise them. Therefore, Mr. Kyono was very well acquainted with his dogs nationwide. He supervised the breeding of dogs. Puppies from these breedings were then purchased by Mr. Kyono and distributed among his friends. All expenses were paid by Mr. Kyono. He had his own group and he did not need to rely on others. He always had at least fifty or more dogs available.

Okada: I have raised both large and medium dogs. Some large dogs from Odate and some dogs from Sawauchi were used in the restoration process. Many of these dogs were shot during the war. Only two dogs survived at Mr. Komatsu's in Yuri-gun. Mr. Kyono discontinued dog breeding immediately after the war, although he became a Nippo judge. He kept a white bitch.

Ishibashi: Soon after the war, he judged at a dog show in the Hibiya Park in Tokyo.

Okada: He judged two or three more times after that, but did not resume dog breeding then. A dog of the Akita Nikkei line that survived the war was Goma of Tamura, a beautiful dog with a sesame coat that I have seen personally. However, this dog was quite old by then.

Ishibashi: Yes. I do remember that dog.

Okada: I believe that dog was the sole survivor.

Ishibashi: No. There was Goma of Kanemata, a male.

Okada: I did not see that dog. Such dogs were used as guard dogs. But Mr. Kyono, whose dogs were killed during the war, had no interest in resuming his dog breeding program, until Mr. Kiyojiro (Seijiro) Sato came on the scene. Mr. Kyono's interest in Akita dogs was then rekindled. Mr. Ishibashi has written in detail about this in the *Aiken Journal* (December 1972 to April 1973).

Ishibashi: No doubt it was Mr. Sato who rekindled the fire under Mr. Kyono, so that Mr. Kyono again resumed his interest in the revival of the Akita dog. This resulted in some great achievements by the Akita Nikkei line.

One day, when taxicabs were not yet readily available, Mr. Sato phoned Mr. Komatsu and said, "Mr. Kyono wants you to get a car. He also wants extra hands, if it snows, and a car at any price." (Laughter) When a car was available, Mr. Katusuke Ishihara of Tokyo and Mr. Genzan Satoda of Kyoto accompanied Mr. Kyono, even if it meant shoveling snow, at time, to get through. (Laughter) Much money was spent to find dogs. The guide was Mr. Kiyojiro (Seijiro) Sato. Whenever Mr. Kyono would say, "Let's quit," Mr. Sato would say, "No. You can't quit now. The best dogs in the country are here, if we could find them!" Thus, the search continued, as long as a car was available.

Raising the Akita Dog on "Aogome" ("Green Rice")

Komatsu: Didn't Mr. Sato teach at the Takao Elementary School, a branch school located near the border between Yuri- and Okachi-gun? He was very fond of dogs and often visited Mr. Kyono. At that time, Mr. Kyono also had a man caring for his dogs.

Okada: Yes. A man by the name of Kinnosuke.

Ishibashi: Mr. Kinnosuke Fujisaki.

Komatsu: Mr. Sato is said to have obtained his first dog from Mr. Fujisaki. That is during Mr. Kyono's absence, when Mr. Kyono happened to be in Tokyo. (Laughter) This is probably how Mr. Sato had his beginning with dogs. He took his dog to his school, gathered "aogome" ("green rice") from his students to feed and raise his dog under the porch. (Laughter)

Editor: What is "aogome"?

Komatsu: Second grade rice.

Okada: Mr. Sato was quite a fellow! I should give him much credit for his efforts.

Ishibashi: During the war, he saw to it that the dog was fed. After things settled down after the war, he wrote a letter to Mr. Kyono stating, "I have a dog from your bloodline that I have carefully kept for you." Naturally, Mr. Kyono became quite interested and came to see this dog. "No doubt about it," was his reply, meaning it was indeed a dog from his line. Akaishihime and Kanpamame (Kamihamame) are said to have been produced from breeding this dog. These two bitches survived.

Komatsu: Kanpamame (Kamihamame) was bred to Goromaru by Mr. Kyono.

Ishibashi: Bankomaru resulted from this breeding.

Ohara: Didn't they use Kincho at the beginning?

Ishibashi: Oshu came from this breeding.

Komatsu: Yes, and Oshume, too.

During the second heat, Kanpamame (Kamihamame) was bred to Goromaru. Bankomaru and Hachishio resulted from this breeding. From Akaishihime came Oryu, Oretsu and Oshun. Oryu and Bankomaru had black masks. However, the rest of the litter did not have any black masks.

Ishibashi: Those without black masks are called "gyaku" ("reverse") masks.

Komatsu: Since this was a period of popularity of the black masks, Oryu and Bankomaru competed for the Akikyo's Gold Medal for three years. Both eventually won the Gold Medal. The Yuri Kennel and the Akita Nikkei line were very popular at this time.

Ishibashi: This was the period when the Akita Nikkei line again took the limelight.

Komatsu: This bloodline did not affect Akiho in Akita, since they had many red dogs with white masks also in those days. Almost all of the champions at that time were black sesame with black masks, which is the opposite of today's trends.

Okada: The choice of dogs has completely changed. According to Mr. Kyono and from our observations of the dogs from Sawauchi, the yellowish red and white masks are considered the Japanese dog prototype. When one looks at any Japanese dog, whether they be medium or small, none have black masks within the pure breeds. However, the Akita dog with a history of much crossbreeding, has the black mask. Therefore, when Bankomaru won the Gold Medal, I went to the Akikyo headquarters and asked Mr. Ishihara, "I presume Bankomaru's form was good." Mr. Ishihara replied, "Yes. However, if one could remove the black mask, the Akita dog would be much more improved." Thus, I came to strongly realize the necessity of removing the black mask in our future dogs. I am now highly motivated to produce the pure breed with yellowish red and white masks.

Ishibashi: When Bankomaru appeared, Mr. Ishihara had already decided that the black mask should be eliminated.

Okada: That is true. At that time, no one questioned Bankomaru's number one position.

Ishibashi: We who were uninformed believed that the black mask was necessary on the Akita dog.

Okada: Therefore, although Oryu's name was on the list at dog shows of that period, the white mask of that period on Oshun had an entirely different face.

Komatsu: Oretsu also had many of the essential features of a Japanese dog.

Ishibashi: Too much attention was focused on a dog's rank in the show ring. Unfortunately, more attention was focused on the higher price asked for dogs with black masks. Good dogs were thus neglected.

Editor: Would you say that before the crossbreeding of the Akita dogs, no black masks were among the Akita dogs?

Okada: Pure Japanese dogs had no black masks. Black masks came from the Tosa fighting dog.

Ishibashi: Black masks are traced back to the Tosa fighting dog.

Okada: No black masks were seen in the pure Shikoku, Kishu, Shiba and Tohoku matagi dogs of the past.

Ishibashi: Therefore, we are now referring to the mask on the large Japanese dog.

Ohara: At that time, Mr. Komatsu from Honjo had a bitch with no mask from Mr. Kyono's line. Because she had no mask, it is said that Mr. Kichijiro Funakoshi, who owned Goromaru, refused to breed her to Goromaru at first.

Komatsu: Two dogs of entirely different types.

Okada: Dogs with very large heads and boxy faces were selling well in those days.

Ishibashi: Large dogs with large skulls and ravenous appetites were valued more highly. (Laughter) Heavier dogs brought better prices. (Laughter) If the dog weighed 2 kan 500 momme (9.3 kilograms, 20.46 pounds) at two months of age, they were sold for 50,000 yen (\$139 at 360 yen/\$1.00). (Laughter) Thus, genuine Japanese dogs were reduced to "skin and bones." (Laughter)

Okada: Therefore, when Mr. Ishihara placed Kiyohime in the best of show category at that time, almost everyone was shocked because Kiyohime was yellowish red and had a white mask.

Editor: Where did Kiyohime come from?

Ishibashi: From Senboku, out of an Iwate matagi dog line.

Komatsu: A dog from the Taihei line.

Ishibashi: That is correct. Dogs of the Taihei line do not have a large skull.

What is the Dog from the Taihei Line?

Editor: What is the Taihei line?

Ishibashi: They came from Taihei-go of Mr. Masutaro Ito of Kiyomizu Village in Senboku-gun. Taihei was born immediately after the war. His dam was Datenohana. She often slept in front of the liquor store called Datenohana. The ancestry of this dog is unknown. Mr. Ito remembers from his childhood that hunters from the mountains of the Tohoku area often came to his home, were formally entertained and lodged for the night. This was also the home of the village mayor, and these hunters probably stayed there quite often. Matagi dog bloodlines from a wide geographical area were probably introduced at this time.

Okada: When Mr. Ishihara placed Kiyohime in first place, those so accustomed to only dogs of the Kongo line type said that Kiyohime had a foxy face. However, even in her twilight years, her standing figure was still something to behold. Second place went to Okan-go with a black mask.

Ishibashi: Kiyohime was, indeed, a true Japanese dog of that time.

Okada: Much was said during Kiyohime's debut. She became the foundation bitch for the Akiho dogs of today. Would you agree?

Ishibashi: I agree.

Okada: However, the good features of Kiyohime completely disappeared for a while, and other undesirable features were admired.

Komatsu: If Kiyohime entered in today's Akiho shows, she certainly would win a Tokuyu Award.*

Okada: Some of the popular Akiho dogs of that period, dogs such as Muchi and Hachiman did not resemble Kiyohime.

Ishibashi: Kiyohime was placed only in the Junyu* class during her first showing and did not win a Tokuyu. And yet, she later won the Prime Minister's Award.

Komatsu: Many outstanding foundation bitches were in the same situation. Azumazakura's dam, Tamakiyo, was placed in the Junyu class at the beginning. However, she eventually won a Tokuyu Award. Even by today's standard, she will probably again win a Tokuyu Award.

Ishibashi: Many judges try to predict a puppy's outcome based on its appearance in the show ring. Kiyohime, when young, was thin and light in appearance and was placed in the Junyu class. However, she revealed no judge can accurately predict the final outcome of a dog except by observing a dog's development from time to time.

Okada: That is probably correct.

Ishibashi: The one who observed this carefully was Mr. Ishihara.

Komatsu: For example, Tanihibiki was placed fifth in the Junyu class as a younger dog at the Akiho show. Mr. Kichijiro Funakoshi was mortified. However, Tanihibiki was placed fifth in the Overall class at the Akikyo Headquarters Show soon thereafter. As a mature dog, he placed first in the Akiho show. Tamagumo was also placed in the Junyu class in the Nippo show. Kiyohime was also put into the Junyu class in the Akiho show.

Ohara: Tamakiyo was also put into the Junyu class.

Ishibashi: Tamakiyo, Azumazakura's dam, was a very good dog.

Okada: Going from the Junyu to the highest Meiyosho Award suddenly means that judging is not well-organized.

*Akiho's grading and awards: 1. Tokuyu (Superior), 2. Yushu (Excellent), 3. Junyu (Good), 4. Nintei (Satisfactory), 5. Shikkaku (Disqualification).

References

1. *Aiken Journal* 228:68-72, (October) 1978.

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