

# 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 III

### Translator's Comments

Continuing the history of searching for pure Japanese dogs in Southern Akita to restore the Akita dog are the four well-known Akita dog panelists above with the moderator, Mr. Kaneharu Miyahara, who was the editor of the *Aiken Journal*, August 1978.

Again, the reader should be aware that much of this information is still new to most of us in the Akita dog world.

I am grateful to Mr. Miyahara for granting permission to present these series of articles. Thus, we may gain some historical perspectives in the development of the Akita dog by those involved in the process. Perhaps, this information may aid us to find the proper direction, as envisioned by the early well-informed Japanese Akita dog pioneers, in breeding our Akita dogs.

### Reference

Okada, M., Ishibashi, T., Komatsu, K., Ohara, R. and Miyahara, K. (Editor), "Searching for the Roots of the Akita Dog in Southern Akita (Part 3), *Aiken Journal* 229:74-78 (November) 1978.

**Okada:** Therefore, judging was not very consistent in those days.

**Ishibashi:** We had a few able leaders at that time. When Nippo was established just before the war, it was Mr. Hirokichi Saito (see photographs in Part II) for Japanese dogs. After the war, it was Mr. Katsusuke Ishihara (see Photograph in Part II) for the Akita dog. I believe Mr. Ishihara strongly influenced the direction toward Tamagumo (see photograph in Part I).

**Ohara:** Mr. Ishihara placed Tanihibiki (see photographs Parts I and II) first in the Sogo (Overall) class.

**Ishibashi:** At the Odate Headquarters Show, Tanihibiki was placed fifth in the Junyu\* (Good) class, and fifth in the Sogo (Overall) class at the Akikyo's Headquarters Show. These show results occurred within a week. Tamagumo was placed seventh in the Sogo class at that time.

**Okada:** With such wide discrepancies in judging between Akiho and Akikyo, one may ask, which organization was on the right path? The answer: Akiho also followed Tamagumo and Tanihibiki. Therefore, one could conclude that Mr. Ishihara was the true leader then.

**Ishibashi:** Yes. That has been confirmed by history.

**Okada:** The question is: Are any dogs from the popular lines of that period still with us today?

**Ishibashi:** An appreciation for the true Akita dog cannot be developed overnight without deep research and intelligent discussions. Studies into the Akita dog history take many years, and one cannot truly appreciate the true Akita dog by merely obtaining a famous Akita dog. Things are not that simple.

**Komatsu:** Dogs bred by many beginners have the appearance of amateurs, because their methods of selecting of dogs differ. Some well-informed breeders of the past produced types of dog based on their views. Today, many dog breeders produce dogs mainly to please buyers. Thus, the paths taken by breeders differ from one another.

**Ishibashi:** Newcomers into the breed should give due credit to our predecessors, whose encounters with many trials and putting forth of much effort eventually led to the progress of the Akita dog of today.

**Ohara:** I agree.

**Ishibashi:** A Meiyosho dog may be labeled as such-and-such line immediately. For example, if a dog called Taro wins the Meiyosho Award, his puppies are then from the Taro line. (laughter)

**Editor:** Information on the Akita dog pedigrees is scarce when compared to those available for other dog breeds.

**Ishibashi:** Almost no written records of Akita dogs are available.

**Okada:** Only a few data, such as the sketchy newspaper articles by Mr. Shigeie Izumi (see photograph in Part I) are available as references. Therefore, one may have to begin with the dogs in Sawauchi (in Iwate Prefecture).

**Editor:** This is the first time that I have ever heard of a Sawauchi dog.

**Okada:** The "roots" of the yellowish red coat with a white mask and white dogs originated at Sawauchi. Differences of opinions between those with the fighting dog type versus those with the matagi dog from the mountainous areas seem to begin at this point.

**Editor:** Would you say that the main line of today's Akita dogs came, without doubt, from the Ichinoseki line?

**Okada:** Mr. Ichinoseki was a wealthy landowner, who also had a home in Tokyo. He was one of the earlier directors of Nippo and was highly respected. However, he discontinued dog breeding temporarily because of the war. Previously, he had owned several dozen dogs at his estate. He had a well-planned breeding program, which resulted in the Ichinoseki line. He was indeed a great man.

**Ishibashi:** The Akita Nikkei line, which Mr. Kyono produced while we were under his tutelage was not as great. It originated from the matagi (hunting) dogs from Sawauchi. These hunting dogs, which were used to hunt rabbits and bears, became the foundation for the Akita Nikkei line.

**Okada:** Instead of using the word foundation, one should say dogs from Sawauchi were used in the Akita Nikkei line to restore the Akita dog. In Odate, the Hokkaido and Aomori dogs were used for the same purpose.

**Editor:** But didn't the two groups consolidate?

**Okada:** That is true. Only the outstanding features of the Sawauchi dog, such as the yellow red with white mask with a white coat, has become common in Akita dogs today. One almost never sees those colors that range from the once popular black sesame to chocolate. History often runs its course in this way.

**Ishibashi:** Therefore, the origin of the popular yellowish red with white masks of today came from the Akita Nikkei line of Sawauchi Village. Dogs from this line are the winners in dog shows today.

**Komatsu:** Would you say that they came from the Akita Nikkei line and from Kiyohime's line?

**Okada:** Definitely. They were the foundation dogs of Akiho, such as Tetsuyuki (see photograph) and Kumomaru (see photograph).

**Ishibashi:** They were born here.

**Okada:** From Akikyo's viewpoint, Shinno-o (see photograph) came from this lineage. Tetsuyuki and Kumomaru were produced by Mr. Ohara from Nanun (see photograph) that came of Mr. Ishibashi's kennel.

**Editor:** Nanun came from Mr. Ishibashi's kennel. Could you tell us about his dam, Daiunme (see photograph) ?

**Okada:** Daiun's dam, Makome, was the daughter of Oshume. Oshume was the daughter of Akaishihime (see photograph in Part II). Oshume had a beautiful yellowish red coat and lived in Yuri. Her daughter was the beautiful Shinsachime (or Makome, or Masachime) (see photograph) with a yellowish red coat and white mask, Mr. Sasai of Ibaraki was able to obtain Makome through Mr. Kyono's influence.

**Ishibashi:** I took Makome to Sasai-san.

**Okada:** Yes. Shinsachime produced Daiun (see photograph), Daiun's daughter is Daiunme. Although a brindle, Daiunme had some strong genes for yellowish red with the white mask.

**Ishibashi:** Daiunme's dam was Kiyome (see photograph), Kiyohime's daughter.

**Okada:** Thus Daiunme's bloodline contains the Nikkei line's yellowish red and Kiyohime's yellowish red.

**Ishibashi:** In other words, a blending of the Nikkei and Taihei lines, which includes Goromaru and Tamagumo.

**Okada:** In spite of the brindle coat of Tamagumo.

**Komatsu:** White masks were always seen in litters of brindles.

**Ishibashi:** Yes. From a litter of six or seven, one or two white masks appeared for sure, from a brindle.

**Okada:** Akita dogs of today came from these bloodlines. Although Daiunme was born at Mr. Ishibashi's, she was moved, for various reasons, to Mr. Komatsu's kennel. Mr. Komatsu bred Daiunme with Azumazakura (see photograph). Through prior arrangement, Mr. Ishibashi had the pick of the litter, which was Nanun. Nanun became the sire of Tetsuyuki and Kumomaru.

**Ishibashi:** Nanun was born at the Iwamatsuso Kennel. I obtained this dog because I believed it was a fine dog. However, because of the severe winter in Yuzawawa, I had asked Mr. Sasai, who lived south in Ibaraki, where the climate was milder, to care for Nanun. Only half of it. (laughter) He consented.

**Komatsu:** Nanun placed second in the Yoken (6-10 month) class at the Akikyo show.

**Ohara:** Correct. Kitano-o (see photograph) placed first. Signals from the Hospital Bed Resulted in Tetsuyuki and Kumomaru.

**Ishibashi:** Ten months later, I went to see Nanun. He had grown. Mr. Ohara, my friend here, wanted to breed in a different direction. He was the leader of a group that favored the huge dog and, therefore, we made arrangements to do this. However, when the time came for Nanun to be evaluated by Mr. Ohara, Mr. Ohara was hospitalized due to a shoulder fracture sustained after falling from a roof. (laughter) He was quite weak, but wanted to see the dog, in order to make the final decision. We made arrangements to bring Nanun outside his hospital window one day at 2:00 p.m. Signals were prearranged to indicate yes or no. I brought the dog outside his hospital window. As I was loitering (laughter), he came to the hospital window, looked at the dog, and gave me the "okay" sign. Had he not given me the "okay" sign, Nanun would have gone elsewhere and Kumomaru or Tetsuyuki probably would not have been born. Therefore, that "okay" sign then was a very important signal for the Akita dogs of today. (laughter) Because of this signal, a great change occurred in the course of the Akita dog world. (laughter)

**Okada:** Kumomaru's dam came from Mr. Watanabe of Kawaguchi in Yuzawa, who had a bitch by the name of Matorame (or Makome) (see photograph), daughter of Rikimaru.

**Ishibashi:** Rikimaru (see photograph) has the bloodline of Tetsumaru (littermate of Tanihibiki) (see photograph in Part II),

**Komatsu:** Therefore, Tanihibiki's bloodline is also included.

**Okada:** The bloodlines of Oshi and Jimnaku are also included.

**Ishibashi:** Matorame's dam, "Kabu," was purchased from Mr. Otsuki by Mr. Tadamoto (owner of Tamagumo) and several others, who pooled their money to form a kabushikikaisha (corporation). Thus, they named her "Kabu" (abbreviation for corporation), (Laughter) She was a very small dog.

**Komatsu:** She had a white coat.

**Ishibashi:** Matorame resulted from mating "Kabu" with Rikimaru.

**Komatsu:** Matorame became the dam of Kumomaru.

**Okada:** However, Mr. Watanabe was unable to keep her.

**Komatsu:** Almost all of Matorame's littermates died from distemper. I believe an excellent white female was in this litter.

**Ishibashi:** Yes. An excellent white dog. Mr. Watanabe said then, "I never saw distempers before." (laughter) "What do you mean, you never saw any distempers before? Distempers are scary," I replied. He asked, "Oh, is there such a thing?" (laughter) Meanwhile, all of his puppies developed distemper.

**Komatsu:** The parent dogs also developed distemper.

**Ishibashi:** Matorame was the only survivor.

**Okada:** Matorame was brought to Yuzawa and bred to Mr. Ohara's Nanun, which resulted in Tetsuyuki and Kumomaru. As you know, Kumomaru dominated the Akita dog world for a generation. Tetsuyuki became the foundation for Akiho's red coat.

**Ishibashi:** Yes. A foundation dog.

**Editor:** Outwardly, yes.

**Komatsu:** However, they are littermates.

**Ohara:** They were the topics of discussions at that time.

**Ishibashi:** Since Mr. Ohara and I were involved in breeding these dogs, I have no doubts in my mind. I was also raising Tamagumome (see photograph) at that time. She won the Meiyosho after going to Mr. Kimura's. Matorame and Tamagumome were always being compared.

**Komatsu:** Mr. Kyono told me to take Matorame. However, I preferred Tamagumome.

**Ishibashi:** Yes, Tamagumome was better.

**Komatsu:** But, I did not take her.

**Ishibashi:** Interestingly, better Akita dogs were produced from the less favored Matorame instead of Tamagumome.

**Editor:** One could conclude, therefore, that the producing of any outstanding or poor puppies is not necessarily limited to one dog.

**Ohara:** True. The right combination of hereditary factors is more important.

**Okada:** Luck is also needed, even with good dogs. However, Matorame produced better puppies.

**Komatsu:** Since going to Mr. Kimura's place, Tamagumome was bred, I believe, to Mr. Kanbe's Tetsu and became the foundation bitch for some outstanding brindles.

**Ishibashi:** That is correct. One group went in that direction. Later, one of the red brindles from there was sent to Morioka (in Iwate). Although someone said, "This red brindle is not bad," its foundation dog was Mr. Seiichi Kawahara's Daitenryu, which was obtained from me and sent to Mr. Kawadaya. Although Daitenryu's brindle coat was not outstanding, his face had its characteristic features.

**Editor:** Do many red brindles have good facial features?

**Ishibashi:** Not usually.

### **A Story Not Generally Known About Hakuho's Last Breeding**

**Okada:** Let us now discuss the white coat of Akikyo. Shinno-o's bloodline has dominated Akikyo recently. This bloodline also originated from the Nikkei line through Daisanshiranami (see photograph). Transportation system was poor then and it took eleven hours for one to reach Mr. Sato's home. I had him keep my bitch for ten days for breeding. Mr. Komatsu will be my witness to this. From this breeding, I was able to acquire and raise Hokutomimaru (see photograph) for a while. But since my career was just beginning, I sent Hokutomimaru to Kanagawa temporarily. He produced many white dogs. From these, Mr. Hideaki Dan selected a bitch with an excellent white coat called Hoppohime (see photograph), which was then raised by Mr. Hodojima. I believe, through Daisanshiranami and Hokutomimaru that the bloodline of the white coat from the ancient past was revived. All of these white dogs came from the red dogs. The litter was almost all white. The dam was red. I

was happy to think then that this was the revival of the old Nikkei line. At that time, an outstanding dog called Hakuho (see photograph) was almost ten years old. He produced only two outstanding dogs, called Ippo-go and Bangoku-go (Mangoku-go), in the same litter. Almost all of this litter had faulty ears. Therefore, I decided to breed him with white dogs of the Nikkei line. Hoppohime (see photograph) was bred to Hakuho (see photograph.). However, Hakuho was already up in years, had filariasis and was believed to be too old to breed. Mr. Kusaka, then president of Mitsui, was the owner of Hakuho. His son happened to be one of my students in kendo (wooden sword fencing), and I had him ask for his mother's permission to use Hakuho's services. Had she refused, we made plans to have him bring Hakuho in the middle of the night to the water purification plant near Mr. Kusaka's home to breed with Hoppohime. This was a game of stud service stealing, (laughter) However, our fears were unfounded. His mother gladly consented to make Hakuho available for his last breeding. Kitano-o (see photograph) was born out of this breeding. Everything went well for Kitano-o. When Kitano-o was shown as a puppy in the headquarters show, I asked Mr. Kyono for his opinion of the dog. I believed that it was a very good dog then, from the eye shape to everything else. However, Mr. Kyono stated that the head would become too large in time. In later years, the dog's head did enlarge and I had to agree with Mr. Kyono.

**Ishibashi:** We were also told by Mr. Kyono repeatedly that the head of Kitano-o was not a real head of a Japanese dog. We often get caught on the phrase, "The skull is large" in the Akita dog standard.

**Okada:** As a Soken (18-30 months of age), Kitano-o won the Ginsho (Silver Medal) of Akikyo twice. Later, he did not place in the Akikyo headquarters further training. I believe he was bred to Daiunhime on the day of his arrival.

**Komatsu:** He was bred to Tamagumome at first.

**Okada:** Oyajiro (see photograph), the sire of Shinno-o, was born when bred to Daiunhime.

**Editor:** The same name, Oyajiro, as the Oyajiro (see photographs of the first Oyajiro in Parts I and II) of the Taisho years (1912-1926) that belonged to Mr. Kyono.

**Okada:** That is correct. I said to myself, that Kiyoshi Komatsu certainly pulled a fast one by using the same name. Oyajiro was followed by Shino-o (see photograph). Shinno-o would not have been born if Kitano-o had not gone to Yuri then.

**Ishibashi:** I believe Kitano-o was obtained up by Mr. Komatsu, who is now an Akiho judge.

**Komatsu:** I bred Daiunme with Azumazakura (see photograph) first, then with Tanigumo (see photograph) second and then with Yama (see photograph) third.

**Ohara:** Kumohibiki (see photograph) was born from Tanigumo.

**Komatsu:** Yama was the last to be used. I bred Daiunme with many others, but none were satisfactory. A daughter of Azumagumo (see photograph), a daughter of Tanigumo and a daughter of Yama still live in my area. But no suitable males were available then for my breeding. At the Akikyo headquarters shows, I still noticed some outstanding features in Kitano-o (see photograph).

**Ishibashi:** True.

**Komatsu:** Since Kitano-o was not doing too well in dog shows, I would occasionally visit Mr. Aoki, who was, therefore, quite disappointed in his Kitano-o. I wanted to purchase this dog. (laughter) However, Mr. Aoki was a gem dealer with a fancy home, and I believed that I probably would not be able to afford his asking price. (laughter) Mr. Dan accompanied me that day. When I asked Mr. Aoki, as we sipped tea, about using Kitano-o stud services, he replied, "I am not showing him anymore. You can have him, Mr. Komatsu, if you want him. I don't want to be bothered anymore with bitches being sent here for breeding. I don't care anymore." So I took him home.

**Ohara:** After returning to Tokyo, Kitano-o won the Kinsho (Gold Medal).

**Komatsu:** True.

**Okada:** Oyajiro was born at Mr. Komatsu's place after breeding Kitano-o to Hakuho, and also to Oryu (see photograph). Goryu (see photograph) was produced from this breeding. Mr. Dan widely advertised Goryu. Mr. Komatsu used Goryu's line to eventually produce Goyu (see photograph), didn't he?

**Editor:** Either called Goyu or Shingoyu (see photograph).

**Ohara:** Yes. The so-called red dogs of Akikyo.

**Editor:** They were excellent dogs,

**Komatsu:** Therefore, I believe in bloodlines. We had our eyes on Hakuho, Hoppohime, as mentioned by Mr. Okada and Hokutomimaru's litters. No correlation may exist necessarily between champion dogs and an excellent bloodline. By strengthening our bloodline, we could eventually eliminate certain undesirable features of Hakuho's bloodline.

**Ishibashi:** Hakuho had a large head by today's standards.

**Editor:** I thought large heads in that range were desirable.

**Okada:** It was unusual for that period. Today, such questions are not raised.

**Komatsu:** That dog probably fitted the standard.

**Ishibashi:** I am not sure which is preferable. If one is referring to a large size in flowers such as the buttercup for example, the buttercup may be acceptable to some. However, lovely wild chrysanthemums may also be acceptable to others. It is a matter of preference.

**Editor:** Doesn't the standard state: "The skull is large"?

**Okada:** You are referring to the Akiho Standard. This is not found in the Akikyo Standard.

**Editor:** I see.

**Okada:** This is where the difference lies.

**Ishibashi:** The dog begins to change with a large skull.

**Komatsu:** Not only the skull.

**Ishibashi:** True. The entire head, including changes in the face and form.

**Editor:** The shape of the eyes, also.

**Ishibashi:** The eyes, body build and movements all change. A complete change can occur with a large skull. Originally, all dogs were probably the same.

**Okada:** The ancestor dogs were the same.

**Ishibashi:** True. One can divide a litter into those puppies with large skulls and those without.

**Okada:** For example, when Tamagumo was bred to a female called Akemi, the litter had all females.

**Komatsu:** Tamakiyo and Tamame were among them.

**Okada:** Tamagumo was used by Akiho as a foundation dog to move toward a certain direction. Akikyo took Tamagumo's bloodline and concentrated on white coats. Some of the desirable black brindles from Akikyo had prominent foreheads.

Many dogs also had missing teeth. However, many excellent brindles were produced. Many white dogs had excellent foreheads. Therefore, under the guidance of Mr. Ishihara, Akikyo used Tamagumo's bloodline to move toward the white coat, while Akiho used Tamagumo as a foundation dog to favor the large head.

**Ishibashi:** Tamakiyo did not have a large skull.

**Okada:** Akemi produced many puppies. However, the Tamakiyo type was not promoted and preference was given toward large and powerful dogs. Tamakiyo was rated only as a Junyu (Good) at the dog show.

**Ishibashi:** Ultimately, dogs with large skulls were selected. These became the foundation of Akiho beginning with Unjyo (see photograph). Unjyo's dam, Wakasa (see photograph), was a fine dog and favored highly by Akikyo.

**Okada:** Unjyo's sire, Go-go (see photograph), Go-go's sire, Hakko (Hatsuko) (see photograph), a pinto, and his sire, Hamakaze-go (see photograph) are all large and powerful looking dogs.

**Ishibashi:** I also believe Goromaru (see photograph) and Kiyohime (see photograph), both of Unjyo's bloodline, are large and powerful looking also.

**Okada:** Yes, indeed. Therefore, by certain selections, dogs can change by the third generation. Only recently did the black, masks disappear rapidly. It seems no black masks are seen today. Although Akikyo once used black masks, no one shows such dogs today. Akiho does not even mention the black, mask.

**Ishibashi:** Pinto is not a disqualifying color, but almost no one shows them.

**Okada:** Pintos were used widely for a time. Although not necessarily related to faded red to brindle. More recently, red with the white mask has come into vogue. Trends do occur.

\* Five different grades of judging at Akiho: Tokuyu (Superior), Yushu (Excellent), Junyu (Good), Nintei (Satisfactory), Shikkaku (Disqualification).

"Akiho Meiyosho - Awarded to dogs and bitches at headquarters sponsored bitches having achieved the grade of Tokuyu, and considered as having extra special qualities."

## References

1. *Aiken Journal* 229:74-78 (November) 1978.
2. *The Akiho Manual*, August 1970, Los Angeles Akiho Branch, p. 6.
3. 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, January/February 1995)

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