

# The Akita Dogs Roots in Southern Akita

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

## Part V

### Translator's Comments

Don Lusk, the *Akita Journal* and the Akita dogs in the United States are mentioned here in Part 5.

I first met Don in 1973, I believe, at a dog show at the Brookside Park in Pasadena, California. We soon developed a common interest in the history of the Akita dog, of which very little is still known to us in the United States, owing mainly to lack of available translated Japanese dog literature and lack of communication with recognized Japanese dog authorities.

In an effort to fill those gaps, we worked together for several years by beginning with articles on the history of the development of Akita dog by Naoto Kajiwara from Osaka, one of the Akita dog historians, who is also a judge and a trustee of Akiho. Don and I met Mr. Kajiwara in Japan separately during our respective trips there.

With Mr. Kajiwara's permission, his articles on the history of the development of the Akita dog in the *Aiken Journal* were translated and presented in the *Akiho's Los Angeles Branch Newsletter* in the mid-1970s and in the *Akita Journal* during the late 1970s and early 1980s. These articles filled in many gaps in the history of the Akita dog found in our earlier American Akita dog literature.

Don made numerous trips to Japan in the late 1970s to attend the Akiho's headquarters shows that were held at different times throughout Japan, to observe some of the outstanding Akiho Akita dogs in Japan of that time. He also met the late Mr. Heihachi Hashimoto, owner of the famous Kongo-go, in Tokyo just before Mr. Hashimoto's passing away.

Some of Don's past activities with the Akita dog in the United States are: president of the Akita Club of America (ACA) from 1980 to 1981, past director, being on ethics, trial board and standards review of the ACA. He has judged at Akita matches in California, Arizona and Texas and sweepstakes classics at the national specialty. He was also the co-publisher and editor of the *Akita Journal*. He has written articles on the Akita dog in the U.S., Canada and Japan, and has presented slides and lecture on the Akita in the United States and Canada.

In Part 5, the panelists continue their discussions on head size, movement, size of dog, evaluation, etc They also present their opinions of the Akita dogs in the United States and candidly discuss the plus and minus points of the Dewa, Ichinoseki and Akita Nikkei lines in their attempts to improve and restore the Akita dog toward the Japanese dog standard.

**Reference:** Aiken Journal 231: 92-96, January, 1979.

**Okada:** Some dog breeders don't readily change to a new type of dog coming on the scene, and continue to breed their own type of dog. Our friend, Mr. Takamizawa, was such an example. Referring to his dog, he would say, "Look at Benkei's tremendous face! Look at his thick tail!" He held onto his convictions and enjoyed dog breeding in his own way. However, today almost everyone moves with the latest trend with no focalization often. Coat color is an example.

**Ishibashi:** Akita dogs had large skulls for a time only. The Great Dane and Akita dog have no great differences in skull size. Mr. Ishihara demonstrated this to me by comparing dog skulls. The Akita dog's large head may not necessarily be due to skull size, but to muscle, coat, etc. of the head. Even man, with a very large face, cannot run well. Body build and exercise are also important factors.

**Okada:** With improvements, we do not see as many Akita dogs with large skulls today. Akita dogs with large heads were compared in the past to the popular but difficult to raise Rancho Goldfish with the leonine head and frail body form.

**Komatsu:** Since the appearance of Tetsuyuki (see photographs in Part 3) and Kumomaru (see photographs in Part 3), we have not seen many dogs with massive heads in the Akiho shows. A massive head is often associated with an unbalanced body structure.

**Ohara:** A dog with a large skull does not run well.

**Ishibashi:** Akiho dogs of today run well because of their excellent body structure.

**Okada:** At the First Akikyo Show in Osaka years ago, Akikyo's reference dog, Bankomaru (see photograph in Part 2), climbed a high fence easily, but Akiho dogs from Osaka needed some assistance.

**Editor:** An article on obedience trials of Akita dogs appeared in a recent issue of The Akita Journal, published by Mr. Don Lusk (see photograph) of the United States. Training methods and the excellent structure and movement seen in many Akita dogs over there were discussed in detail. No mention was made of the Akita dog's face.

**Okada:** I'm not familiar with the bloodlines of the Akita dogs there.

**Editor:** Faces of Akita dogs there are generally of the Kongo line from the past. Therefore, the faces of the Akita dog there are not good. However, they have many Akita dogs with excellent body structure.

**Komatsu:** They seem earnest in studying the history of the Akita dog. They also have much knowledge on proper movement, realizing a dog that is unable to walk or run well is useless.

**Editor:** Akita dogs there are in the Working class. They believe that any dog without proper movement is useless.

### **Training Akita Dogs for the Military**

**Okada:** Some Akita dogs were trained for the military before the war. Their training was very vigorous and required going up and down the ladder. However, the angle of the front joint differed from that of the German Shepherd dog, and thus their internal organs were often traumatized.

**Ishibashi:** I have heard this often from Mr. Kyono, who was involved in that program.

**Okada:** Differences in angulation from that of the Shepherd dog provided no cushioning effect. Thus, they are unable to jump well. A marathoner, who is able to run more than 40 kilometers (25.2 miles) in two hours, could probably outrun the Akita dog.

**Komatsu:** Man is faster.

**Okada:** A ten-kilometer (6.25 miles) lap can be covered in about 30 minutes.

**Ishibashi:** Yes. The Akita dog is slower.

**Ohara:** Although the Akita dog may do well on a 100-meter dash, he has no endurance.

**Ishibashi:** The Akita dog was probably not a running dog from the beginning.

**Editor:** Some western hounds run very well.

**Ishibashi:** That is true. Japanese dogs do not run well, but are good mountain climbers.

**Ohara:** Western tracking dogs are great runners.

**Editor:** That is true of Afghans, Borzois and many others.

**Ohara:** Yes. Those dogs have great speed and endurance.

**Editor:** Afghans are said to have a speed of 40 kilometers (about 25 miles) per hour.

**Komatsu:** Therefore, a dog with a large skull and very wide chest is not a very good runner.

**Ishibashi:** A very wide chest can be detrimental. Mr. Ishihara said proper chest width should fit an adult fist between the front legs. I believe that a dog with legs perpendicular to the ground from the shoulders could run well.

**Editor:** However, many dogs had narrow chests until recently.

**Okada:** Dogs with very narrow chests are undesirable. This may be a common fault in certain dog breeds. A leg perpendicular to the ground is desirable. Dogs with legs like sticks from a straw rice bag, seen a few years ago, are poor runners. Earlier studies on Japanese dogs were based on horse anatomy. Later, the Shepherd dog anatomy was used as a reference.

**Editor:** True. Horse terminologies such as "kiko" are very difficult to understand. However, I believe that the Akita dog has been greatly improved.

**Ishibashi:** Akita dogs of today are very different from those of the past.

**Komatsu:** They have improved markedly.

**Ohara:** If any of our dogs in the headquarters shows today were shown at a dog show of about twenty to thirty years ago, people of that period would probably become envious.

**Editor:** Although one often hears of differences in judging, the trend has been an improvement in judging.

#### **Akita Dogs Weighing 16 Kan (60 kg., 140 lbs.), as much as a calf.**

**Okada:** Historically, the Akita dog is a mixed breed which must be "bred up." Our predecessors exerted much effort to improve before ruination. What we have today is a result of their efforts. However, occasionally one sees undesirable colors around the face and neck, referred to as "futoi sakuware" (wide blaze) or "kubikire" color (wide white color around the neck).

Although we regard the Akita dog as a large Japanese dog, merely being bulky is not appealing. Dogs that were two shaku five sun (75.8 cm, 30 inches) tall and weighing sixteen kan (60 kg., 140 lbs.) were seen in the past.

However, in 1955, when Mr. Hirokichi Saito (chairman of Nippo) asked Mr. Heihachi Hashimoto (owner of Kongo) in Tokyo and Mr. Ryonosuke Hiraizumi (judge of the 1970 L. A. Akiho Branch Show) in Odate to measure the height and weight of famous Akita dogs taller than a two shaku three sun (69.6cm, 27.4 inches), Mr. Saito noticed that these dogs had the strong "odor" (resemblance) of the Tosa fighting dog. Mr. Saito thus concluded that unless the Akita dog's upper limit was set at 27.4 inches, the appearance of the Japanese dog cannot be maintained.

**Editor:** Two handlers were often necessary to handle a very large dog in those days.

**Ishibashi:** True. A good example was Ryuo-go (see photograph). One was amazed at his size.

**Komatsu:** He weighed about 16 kan (60 kg., 140 lbs.).

**Okada:** As a lad, I first saw Ryuo-go when the dog was about six to ten months of age and I was amazed. He was indeed a "calf" with a red coat. (Laughter) I also recall seeing Oyashu-go, owned by Mr. Tadasuke Takahashi.

**Ishibashi:** Oyashu-go was born earlier than Kongo.

**Okada:** He was obese, but not a very large dog. I saw him at a dog show at a park in Shinjuku in Tokyo. He was sitting on a mat with his leash tied to two stakes and labeled "Reference Dog: Oyashu-go." I was a mere lad then and he certainly appeared very large to me. He was a dog over two shaku (60.6 cm, 24 inches) tall. I have a photograph of him. At that time he appeared very large to me. Interesting memories. (Laughter)

**Ishibashi:** Terukaze (see photograph) was very large. So was Shoryu (see photograph in Part 1).

**Okada:** Shoryu-go was large. My impression of him changes as I look at his photograph from time to time. When he appeared fully grown at the age of two years, I said to myself, "He is a great dog, greater than his sire, Kongo. (Laughter) However, one's opinion changes after many years, depending on what one reads.

**Komatsu:** This can be of some concern.

**Okada:** You are right. During the postwar revival period, Akita dogs were scarce and every Akita dog looked good in those days.

**Komatsu:** In those days every Akita dog at the headquarters show appeared wonderful. (Laughter) However, as one looks back, much criticism of those dogs can be made.

**Ishibashi:** Show dog fanciers today are more analytical and critical. (Laughter)

**Editor:** Do you go to the Akiho shows often?

**Ishibashi:** Yes. I have shown my dogs at the headquarters shows. My Sei-go (Kiyoshi-go) became the foundation of the lefumi line.

**Editor:** Some Akita dogs become topics of conversation.

**Okada:** A living dog changes throughout the year. Pictures and stones do not. For example, the Asuka stage stone maintains its value because the stone does not change. However, a dog's value can change from its age and condition. A Meiyosho winner with poor care may change into a bad-looking dog. One may then ask, "Is this really a champion?" A judge may have erred in his earlier evaluation. Such is fate for animals.

**Ishibashi:** A dog may have looked good in the forenoon, but not so in the afternoon.

#### **Tokuyu and Meiyosho Soon After Birth**

**Komatsu:** One often refers to a puppy being in a Tokuyu or a Meiyosho category.

**Ishibashi:** Amusing.

**Komatsu:** This may be true of an experienced draftsman, but not so with animals. No such experts have yet been found in judging of thoroughbreds.

**Okada:** One may be able to judge by comparing.

**Komatsu:** One may be able to pick out the best of the litter. However, no matter how long one has been involved with dogs, I believe one cannot always pick a Meiyosho winner from a litter. Some claim this is possible after years of experience and research. I disagree.

**Editor:** Many make such claims.

**Komatsu:** The so-called experts. How can they make such claims?

**Okada:** Questions have been raised on certain Meiyosho dogs of the past. A dog that was not so evaluated then may be rated higher today.

**Komatsu:** An "outstanding" Akita dog with loose lips in later years may draw strong criticism and then be referred to as being similar to a St. Bernard or a deteriorating Akita dog. This is often seen in dogs at about four to five years of age with loosening of the face and lips. (Laughter) An agonizing sight to behold in such a dog to its dying day.

**Ishibashi:** A muscular dog may appear to be excellent, but may appear poor in its declining years. Such is the fate of some animals.

#### **Lips Should Be Tight**

**Okada:** One should use dogs from bloodlines with tight lips. Akikyo is very emphatic on this point. A dog with tight joints and lips all through life is desirable. Goromaru had quick movements and a strong character, which differed from other dogs. Goromaru's lips remained tight to the very end.

**Ishibashi:** Since hearing that animals should have tight lips, I once went to observe some bears with Mr. Tadamoto, the jeweler, and Mr. Takamizawa. Even large bears have tight lips. We carefully researched this matter and asked many questions on what we saw. Some may disagree, but I believe lips should be tight in the Akita dog.

**Komatsu:** I do not want a dog at my house with loose lips with its tongue hanging out to its dying day.

**Ishibashi:** Some of the outstanding dogs of the past had such features, when any Akita dog with erect ears and a curled tail were accepted. This was during the early Taisho period of course (1912-1925).

**Okada:** Dogs were gradually improved until just before the war and then one had to start all over after the war.

**Ishibashi:** The seniors tell us that Akita dogs then had massive heads. Akita dogs were then in the greatest state of decline. Their goal of producing better dogs led to the advancements of today and they plan to progress further in the future. Results of such planning are seen in some of the Akita dogs of today.

**Editor:** As one compares photographs of Akita dogs of the past, the dogs of today have moved closer to the standard.

**Ishibashi:** However, some still say that dogs of the past had some good points. I ask, "What were their good points?" I am referring to dogs of the late Taisho (1912- 1925) period, of course.

**Okada:** If one considers Goromaru as the ultimate, that person has stopped at Goromaru's level. The same applies to those who consider Tamagumo as the ultimate. These dogs had some good points not seen in Akita dogs today. However, they had some faults. Some good points of the past may have been lost and I would like to see them again. However, such a goal is often difficult to attain.

**Ishibashi:** True. To some a certain dog was the ultimate in its day. For example, Goromaru may have been ultimate in Goromaru's day, and one can say the same for such dogs from each generation. I can say this today, since Mr. Kichijiro (or Yoshijiro) Funakoshi, the owner of Goromaru, is no longer with us to become upset. Goromaru led to the improved Akita dogs of today.

**Komatsu:** Yes. Goromaru became the foundation of dogs that we praise today.

**Okada:** He was the ultimate in his day and left behind his good points for posterity. Although much could be said about Goromaru, he was not the ultimate.

**Ishibashi:** He had some desirable features not seen in Akita dogs of today.

**Okada:** That is true.

**Ishibashi:** On the other hand, many good features in the Akita dogs of today were not in Goromaru.

**Editor:** That may be true.

**Okada:** Another example is Kitano-o (see photograph and also in Part 3), which was awarded Akikyo's Kinsho (Gold Medal). If one considered Kitano-o as the ultimate, one's progress will have stopped at Kitano-o.

**Ishibashi:** Referring to Kitano-o's head, one is not necessarily limiting its comparison with those of other dogs. As more

puppies like Kitano-o are produced, one should pick out better puppies to compensate for Kitano-o's faults.

**Komatsu:** One should try to preserve the good points of a champion dog. For example, Goromaru's temperament.

**Okada:** It is a matter of choosing the right mate.

**Komatsu:** If one used only dogs of the Goromaru line, size would not increase and may also result in dogs with a fierce temperament.

**Ishibashi:** The barber from Rokugo City tried various breeding methods and ended with small dogs. That was very frustrating. Perhaps this was due to the inbreeding of Goromaru's last offspring's.

**Okada:** Better results came from Goromaru's breeding to yellow and red dogs with white masks and also to white dogs.

**Ishibashi:** In other words, bloodlines from the Matagi dogs were more successful.

**Komatsu:** That is true. Dogs bred with the Dewa line resulted in dogs with wrinkles.

**Ishibashi:** Dogs sold at low prices in those days eventually became the ancestors of the successful dogs of today.

**Okada:** However, favorable evaluation of heavy, large dogs in those days brought better prices. Some went so far as to say wrinkles added dignity to the Akita dog.

**Ishibashi:** Today, Goromaru's bloodline is carried by the Taihei and the Akita Nikkei lines.

**Komatsu:** The loose features were eliminated through these bloodlines.

**Ishibashi:** Thus, the Taihei and the Nikkei lines are very important. Much evidence supports this assumption.

**Okada:** If my memory is correct, when the Ichinoseki line's Satsuki-go (see photograph) was bred to those lines, the results were the undesirable Tosa Fighting dog type. Many recessive factors of each bloodline often, surfaced, depending on the breeding partner.

**Ishibashi:** Faulty high ears surface when the Iwate Matagi line becomes dominant. One must be aware of this fault in the Nikkei line.

**Komatsu:** When forward ear angulations are attained after correcting the high ears, the low neck angulation often surfaces.

**Editor:** Are we again seeing faulty ear angulations?

**Ishibashi:** Dogs with highly standing ears.

**Komatsu:** This is associated with faulty neck angulation.

**Ishibashi:** This results in dogs not raising their heads.

**Komatsu:** The neck becomes short. In some cases the neck becomes almost horizontal with the back.

**Okada:** A neck angle of 45 to 50 degrees from the side view is desirable. When neck angle is faulty, the amateur often tries to forcibly raise the neck with the leash. Similar to hanging the dog. (Laughter) The neck skin becomes gathered.

**Ishibashi:** Every bloodline has its faults. One must recognize these faults to further improve die Akita dog. (to be continued)

Translated by Tatsuo Kimura with the permission of Mr. Kaneharu Miyahara, editor of the Aiken Journal. (Akita World, May/June, 1995)

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