

FEATURES OF THE NATIVE JAPANESE DOGS THE LARGE TYPE AKITA DOG

By HYOEMON KYOUNO

Although writing is not one of my favorite pastimes, I found it difficult to turn down an earnest request by the editor of the Aiken No Tomo magazine to write about the large Japanese dog. Some of my comments may be controversial.

The large Japanese dog we see today have improved much in quality and size. Their numbers have also increased. Those who can recall the Akita dogs of the past will be surprised to see the progress that has been made. It seems like a different world today when one looks at the Japanese dogs that are shown today when compared to those of about seventeen to eighteen years ago.

Large Japanese dogs continue to make greater improvements than the medium and small Japanese dogs.

No large Japanese dogs that we see today that are within the Japanese dog standard were seen before the Meiji Period (1868-1912). Such a statement may seem dogmatic, but the reports of Japanese archeologists and scientists who have studied dog skeletons seem to bear this out. Almost no fossils of large dogs have been found in the shell mounds or caves in our country.

I am now past forty and have been involved with dogs all of my life. After acquiring a house around 1819 (8th year of Taishou), I was able to find two dogs in Northern Akita after a long search throughout that prefecture. The height of these dogs were about 1 shaku 8 to 9 sun (*approximately 54.5 to 57.6 cm or 21.5 to 22.7 inches*). I believe these were some excellent examples of pure Japanese dogs of that time.

Because of my great interest in dogs from my childhood days, I believe that I am very familiar with dogs than most of the people that I know. As far as I can recall, I have never seen any Japanese dogs that were more than 2 shaku (*approximately 60.0 cm or 23.9 inches*) tall in those days.

What I remember are based on the few data that I had on hand during the early 1900s. Almost all of the dogs of that period were about the size of the medium Japanese dog in the Japanese dog standard of today. Medium dogs in those days were similar to the medium dogs that are seen occasionally in the Touhoku area today. They were heavier in appearance and were about 1 shaku 7 or 8 sun (*approximately 51.5 to 54.5 cm or 20.3 to 21.5 inches*) in height. They were used as fighting dogs in Oudate in Northern Akita which was the center of such a sport. This led to the demand for more powerful, larger and heavier fighting dogs. These fighting dogs were soon much larger than the dog in the standard that was created later for the large Japanese dog.

Tosa fighting dogs of that time were better fighters and much larger than the Japanese dogs. In order to gain a competitive edge, many owners of the Japanese fighting dogs began to crossbreed their dogs to the Tosa fighting dogs. Soon there emerged the so-called "Shin Akita" ("*New Akita*"). Droopy ears began to replace stranding ears that are seen in Japanese dogs. The ear tips also began to lean backwards. The excellent coat of the Japanese dog remained stiff but became short. Body size increased and became heavy and loose in appearance. The muzzle became squarish. The lips became loose and droopy. Behavior of the Japanese dog also changed. Other faults not seen in medium dogs also began to appear in these large dogs.

Furthermore, as traffic to Hokkaidou and Karafuto (*Sakhalin*) increased, some crossbreeding may have occurred with the Akita dog. Although the influence of the Karafuto dog's bloodline was not as significant as that of the Tosa fighting dog, the long coat seen in the Karafuto dog continues to plague the Akita dog to this day. When Karafuto became a Japanese territory (*after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904*), many fishermen from Akita began to travel to Karafuto due to the large fishing industry there.

One cannot deny that an unknown number of the large type Japanese dog, the Akita dog, became the crossbred type and many of these types of dogs not seen elsewhere began to be seen in certain areas around Oudate. It was only within the past twenty-five years that the Akita dog caught the attention of

certain interested individuals and earnest efforts were initiated by them to restore the Akita dog. This resulted in the golden era of the large Japanese dog that we see today (1953).

We can still see the effects of crossbreeding today that was unavoidable then historically. However, the Akita dog that originated in Akita has been included among the important three size classifications of the Japanese dogs.

Akita dogs used as fighting dogs were bred to improve for fighting. However, they had been used earlier as hunting dogs. They had magnificent muscular bodies as fighting dogs.

The *juukou* (*composure and dignity*) with *miriyoku* (*charm*) mentioned in the large dog standard was not seen in these large ferocious dogs. A dog with a gentle temperament, on the other hand, can be an ideal companion for man. As working dogs they could be put to many uses including as guard dogs. However, their temperament seems somewhat inferior to that of medium dogs. One should keep in mind that in order to improve the temperament the most important principle is in the careful selection of a stud dog.

I would like to see the height of the Akita dog increased. Many of these dogs also need more powerful looking legs. Large Japanese dogs of today seem to have legs that are narrow in proportion to their bodies.

In general, large Japanese dogs of today seem lighter and lacking muscularity. This may be due to changes in methods of breeding which may have been unavoidable. We should strive to produce a huge dog with much bone, but not as heavy as that of a sumo wrestler, but more like that of the man in judo.

We should strive to produce a larger dog. When we look at the dog standards for large dogs such as for the Mastiff, Great Dane or the St. Bernard, all of these dogs are expected to be at least 2 shaku 5 sun (*approximately 75.8 cm or 29.8 inches*) or more for the male and 2 shaku 2 sun and 5 bu (*approximately 68.2 cm or 26.8 inches*) for the female in height. As long as we call it a large type Japanese dog, we should have a large dog that is up to the world's standards in size. Therefore, I am wondering if the large dog should be placed in a separate category from the medium dogs.

The large Japanese dog should have a large solid body with a manner of *juukou* (*composure and dignity*), standing ears and a curled tail. These dogs should be courageous and loyal to their master. As guard dogs, they should be observant and quiet, which is unlike many dogs of foreign breeds, until danger threatens the household. During such a crisis the large Japanese dog should be able to defend the household in a courageous manner. Furthermore, as seen in the Arctic dogs, they should have the ability to find their way home over unfamiliar routes over a distance of at least five to ten ri (*approximately 12 to 24 miles. 1 ri = 2.44 miles*). They can be used also as work dogs, depending on their capabilities. By nature, they tend to be very fastidious and would not relieve themselves until they are let out of their kennel.

The large Japanese dogs with their excellent structure and abilities have become popular today (1953) because of the foregoing features. Breeders are benefiting from this present popularity.

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Words with (*italics*) within parentheses by the translator, Tatsuo Kimura.
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