

MY THOUGHTS ON THE AKITA DOG

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By Naoto Kajiwara

The History of The Akita Dog: The Edo Period (1617-1867) (Tokugawa Period)

Reliable information on Japanese dogs in the Tohoku Odate area from the Edo Period (1617-1867) are as scarce as the information from the Medieval Period. With the establishment of the feudal system and development of the region, hunting dogs were probably used as guard dogs. These dogs are believed to have become larger in later years.

Conditions in the Odate area during the Edo Period (1617-1867) will now be discussed. During the reign of **Shogun Hideyoshi Toyotomi**, the Hinai (Odate) and the Kazuno areas were divided into the Akita and Nambu territories with the border disputes still unsettled. The Hiyama area (City of Noshiro) was ruled by the Ando clan (later called the Akita clan), the Hinai district (Odate area) by the Asari clan and the Kazuno area by the Nambu clan. In the 5th year of Eiroku (1562), Ando of Noshiro invaded Asari of Odate and regained his territory. Asari joined the Nambu and Oura clans of Tsugaru to regain his territory from Ando. Nambu took advantage of Ando's internal problems by conducting continuous raids on the Odate area. To halt these raids, in April of the 17th year of Tensho (1589), Ando attacked the rebellious Asari in the Ogida Castle in Hinai and slew Asari.

After seizing Asari's territory, Ando then made plans to surround and invade the Nambu territory (Kazuno area). However, these border disputes remained unresolved even after the Dewa-kuni land survey around the 15th year of Tensho (1591), mentioned previously. Furthermore, the decisive battle of Sekigahara in the 5th year of Keicho (1600) which established the Tokugawa Shogun, had a significant effect on the daimyos (feudal lords) in the Odate area. The victorious new Shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa of the Sekigahara battle over the Hideyoshi family transferred some of the feudal lords of Akita, Tozawa, Rokugo and Hondo to Hitachi (ancient name for Ibaraki Prefecture). **Shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa**, also claimed the best portions of these conquered territories and transferred Yoshinobu Satake of Hitachi to the Akita-Kubota Castle.

During the Tokugawa Period (*Edo Period of 1617-1867*), border disputes remained unsettled between the Akita and Nambu clans in the Odate and Kazuno areas. The dispute was whether the mine was in Kazuno or Hinai territory, when the Nambu clan opened a mine at Numayama. This led to a battle in the 15th year of Keicho (1610) with heavy casualties on both sides.

Gold mines in Akazawa and Otsuzura in Akita territory and the gold mines of Shirane (Towada City) and Nishimachi (Osarizawa) in the Nambu territory were adjacent to each other. The enchanting lush forests of Nagakizawa also fueled these border disputes. Neither side conceded. The dispute was finally settled sixty seven years later in the 5th year of Empo (1677) by the bakufu (shogunate). Maps from the Genroku Period (1688-1703) do not show any changed boundaries and it was not until the Kyoho Period (1716-1735) that necessary corrections were made. [This information was obtained from the scholarly work, History of the Akita Prefecture by Yoshitaka Imamura, [1969, *Yamakawa Shuppansha, Tokyo, Japan*].

The Akita dog's ancestor is said to have possessed the "seishin" ("spirit"). The story of the **Roken Jinsha** (The Old Dog's Shrine located in Kazuhara in Odate) originated after the Keicho Period (1596-1611) and is believed to be related to these border disputes.

A hunter by the name of **Sadaroku** lived in Kusagi in Nambu territory (Oyu City in Kazuno-gun). In May of 1604 (9th year of Keicho), Sadaroku was granted a much needed hunting license on a scroll from the Nambu feudal lord, Nobunao Daizen. The exact date and generation of Sadaroku involved are not known. One day, Sadaroku went hunting, but forgot to take the important hunting license along with him. He unknowingly wandered into the neighboring territory, where he was arrested and imprisoned. He was eventually executed, in spite of his beloved dog Shiro's vain efforts to bring the hunting license from home on time. This story praises the dog's loyalty. However, different versions of the story exist, depending on the source of the story.

According to those from the Akita territory, the hunter was arrested at the Raiman Mountain Pass, located between the Kazuno and Sannohe districts (in Iwate Prefecture, Nambu territory) and imprisoned in the Sannohe Castle. In spite of his wife's efforts to have Shiro, the dog, deliver the scroll, containing the hunting license on time, Sadaroku was executed before Shiro delivered the scroll. Later, the hunter's widow and Shiro lived as exiles in Kuzuhara in Akita territory. Sympathetic villagers, upon learning of the plight of Shiro's efforts, built the Roken Jinsha (Old Dog's Shrine) at the dog's burial site.

The Nambu version is as follows: Sadaroku left his home in Kusagi to hunt in the mountains and valleys. He crossed over into Akita territory, where he was arrested, imprisoned and executed. His saddened companion dog, Shiro, went to the mountaintop and howled for many days and nights. An epidemic soon swept through the city thereafter. The frightened villagers invited Sadaroku's widow and dog, Shiro, to live in their village. After Shiro's death, his spirit was enshrined at the Roken Jinsha (Old Dog's Shrine).

Although one does not know which version is true, the tale of the "Old Dog's Shrine" points to the gravity of these border disputes that existed in that area.

Another story related to these border disputes is found in the *Akitaken-shi* (Akita Prefecture History). In the 16th year of Kanei (1639) the bakufu (shogunate) received reports of Christians hiding in mountains between the Akita and Nambu territories. Orders were sent out to both territories to find them. Three men from the Akita clan, Mataemon Nakata, Sanemon Azuchi and Yaemon Sugiyama, accompanied by twenty foot soldiers, went to meet members of the Nambu clan to set a date to hunt these Christians hiding in the mountains. The Akita force assumed the date was at noon on the 14th of December. However, the Nambu force wanted further discussions on the mountain hunting plan at noon on that day. This led to a dispute.

The Akita force started out on the night of the 13th, in order to be ready by the 14th, when a Nambu force of about 300 men rushed toward them. According to Nakata of the Akita clan, his men repelled the Nambu force with their spears.

The Nambu force tells a different story. On the evening of the 13th, a Nambu guard saw approximately four hundred strangers enter Ota Village (Town of Kosaka in Kazuno) in Nambu territory. This was promptly reported to Gonnosuke Kemauchi, who quickly sent three men, Genba Takechi, Gorogaemon Wada and Kahei Soba, with approximately fifty hunters to interrogate them on the whereabouts of the Christians. Without replying, these intruders began to attack with their spears and swords. The Nambu hunters repelled the intruders with poles, and the intruders fled without their spears.

This local dispute was finally settled by the shogunate. The Nambu side was at fault. The following year, the trio, including Takechi, were ordered to commit harakiri (*ritual suicide by disembowelment*). A year later, Nakata and his men from the Akita force were also ordered to commit harakiri after being accused of attacking with spears. Although the hunting dispute was resolved, border disputes remained unsettled.

Thus this dispute originated with the hunt for Christians in the town of Kosaka in Kazuno district near the borders. About fifty hunters were involved with samurais of the Nambu force. The story of the Old Dog's Shrine was also based on this border controversy.

Social and migratory conditions in Akita during the development of the mining industry will be discussed next. Mining flourished in Tohoku since ancient times. During the Medieval Period, this area was called "The Golden Highway!" Large quantities of gold and silver were mined. The Hiraizumi culture of Iwate is attributed to wealth that was acquired by the Fujiwara family from local mining. Mining in this area developed very rapidly soon after the transfer to this area of the feudal lord Satake. Some of the gold mines opened at that time were in Okuzu, Hayakuchi, Hinokinai and Sugizawa. Silver mines were at Mizusawa, Hachimori, Aniko, Hatake, Arakawa, Shinjo, Masuda and Innai. Gold mines were also located in Nambu territory in Shirane and Okizawa in the Kazuno district. The mine in Okizawa, located upstream of the Yoneshiro River, was discovered around 1200 years ago during the Wado Period (*in A.D. 708*) and reached its peak during the Keicho Period (1596-1611).

The opening of these mines led to a rapid rise in immigration from other parts of the country. Among the immigrants were financiers, speculators, miners, metallurgical engineers, barbers, laborers, merchants, Buddhist priests, theater groups, prostitutes, etc. Readily available mine laborers were mostly unemployed vagrants and exiled Christians. Christians often came as displaced persons, who were arrested and executed when identified. In such an environment, unruly behavior increased and those in the nearby countryside began to feel insecure.

During this Edo Period (1615-1867), more than seventy riots occurred in this Akita territory, with two peak periods. One was during the Keicho (1596) and Genna (1615) Periods due to heavy opposition to the new Satake regime and the land survey. The other period was during the Temmei (1781) and Tempo Periods (1830) during periods of severe famine. The most severe famine of the 2nd year of Temmei (1783) was called the "Udoshi (Four year) Famine." About six thousand people starved to death in the Akita and Senboku areas. About a thousand of these victims were exiles.

Such social unrests caused local inhabitants to use guard dogs for personal security. Local hunters began to use their hunting dogs as guard dogs also.

Matagi dogs were excellent hunting dogs. However, their body forms began to change, as these dogs became guard dogs of people and homes. Above all, people wanted a larger dog with impressive features and began to produce larger sturdier dogs to guard the front gates. It is believed that these larger dogs became the foundations of the Akita dog.

Hunters in this area raised hunting dogs, while affluent farmers raised guard dogs. A very close relationship between man and dog was maintained for long periods from the Medieval to the Meiji (1867-1912) Periods.

However, some dog owners in the Odate area loved dog fighting, probably to evaluate the strength of the sturdier guard dogs.

Reportedly, wealthy farmers and families and some ordinary folk began to keep one or two fierce dogs. These dogs began to have distinct coat colors for generations, like a family crest. For example, colors such as "Adachi's white," "Benzosama's goma" or "Izumi's black" identified a family's dog color which may have been handed down for generations. After a festival, people often gathered at a given site for dog fighting.

A feudal lord of the Odate Castle, several generations down the Satake clan, reportedly enjoyed dog fighting. To raise the morale of his men, he frequently held matches in a corner of the castle grounds or near the main gate to raise the morale of his men. However, no such record of the foregoing story is available.

Outside of Tohoku, during the Edo Period (*Tokugawa Period of 1617-1867*), reportedly the First Tokugawa Shogun, Ieyasu, hunted with sixty or more Kara-inu (*imported dogs*). Building of dog fighting arenas by Motochika Chosokabe of Tosa (*Kochi in Shikoku*) is recorded. The ukiyoe (genre pictures), popular during the Edo Period, have as subjects many illustrations of pinto dogs. However, records related to the Akita dog from this period are very few.

The most significant period of the Tokugawa reign related to dogs was during the reign of the Fifth Tokugawa Shogun, Tsunayoshi. He was born in the year of the dog and carried his love for dogs to the extremes. He issued a decree of compassion for all living creatures, under which he enforced loving care for all dogs. Anyone disobeying this decree was heavily penalized. This resulted in the rapid increase of dogs in Edo (*old name for Tokyo*), so that 16,000 tsubos (*1 tsubo equals 36 square feet*) of dog shelters were built by May in Okubo and by November in Nakano in the 8th year of Genroku (1695). At one time, dog population in the city was said to have reached 100,000. Such an unreasonable decree and heavy oppression by the officials led to much suffering by the citizens of Edo. Tsunayoshi was given the uncomplimentary title of "Inu Shogun" ("Dog Shogun"), which is known to this day.

However, one fortunate outcome of this episode was the preservation of a dog registry called Kazukesho, a reference to coat colors of dogs of that period. The coat colors included: white, red, black, black brindle, brindle pinto, black pinto, reddish black and light red. In general, these terminologies seem to differ only slightly from those terminologies that are used today.

No reliable data is available on the outcomes of these dogs from the "Dog Shogun" era. However, the following interesting article is found in Inu Koza: Nihoninu (Lectures on Japanese dogs):

"During the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), pine trees were planted near the moat of the Edo Castle. The citizens of Edo were not allowed in this area. This led to large numbers of stray dogs in this area, especially in the vicinity of Ochanomizu, which had an embankment that made it very difficult to approach the area. Stray dogs, therefore, hid there during the day and roamed the city at night to look for food. The approach between Surugadai and Yotsuyamitsuke had lush growths of bamboos and other trees, where such stray dogs were seen occasionally during the day. These dogs were called the 'dote-inu' ('embankment dogs') by the local people..

Japanese dog packs ranging from two to thirty dogs were seen at times. Their coats were mostly white, black and pinto. Their tails drooped, but were curled and raised when attacking other dogs at night. These were powerful looking dogs and weighed 8 to 9 kan (*1 kan = 8 1/3 lbs., 67 to 75 lbs.*)"

It is not known if these stray dogs were descended from dogs of the "Dog Shogun" Tsunayoshi. These dogs are reported to have lived in central Edo as late as the 27 and 28th years of Meiji (1893 and 1894), and one may not be able to deny that these dogs were totally unrelated to dogs from the time of Kamakura's Takatoki Hojo and Tsunayoshi Tokugawa of Edo's shogunate. These events occurred in the Kanto area after the central government was established during the Keicho Period (1596-1611). It is believed that bloodlines of these dogs remained in the Kanto area, and were propagated nationwide.

Odate Castle was occupied by a feudal lord and family of the Satake clan that were transferred to Akita from Hitachi (*ancient name for Ibaraki Prefecture*) about 360 years ago. Dogs accompanying these people may have been related to the dogs in Kamakura. During the Edo Period (1617-1867), when the system of alternating the daimyo's residence was in effect, traffic to and from Edo to these local areas increased. Since Edo was the seat of government and culture then, movement of culture, people and animals occurred and this probably resulted in some crossbreeding of the dogs.

Referring to crossbreeding, the Akita dog may have descended from northern dogs of ancient times. Traffic increased between the Tohoku and Hokkaido areas. A gradual increase in the migration of Japanese from the Tohoku area across the straits to Hokkaido occurred during the Kamakura (1185-1382) to the Muromachi (1392-1573) Periods.

Thus, Hokkaido came under Japanese domination in the Matsumae, Hakodate and Esashi areas. During the middle of the 15th century Abe Ando of the Akita clan of Tsugaru was invaded by Yoshimasa Nambu. Abe Ando fled to Hokkaido via the port of Tomihama in Tsugaru. He later recrossed the straits with his troops to enter Noshiro, and became the feudal lord of Akita. Continuous traffic has existed between northern Akita and Hokkaido since that time.

The Hokkaido area was named Matsumae during the Edo Period (1617-1867). The Matsumae clan was established there, and controlled the southern part of the Oshima Peninsula. Merchants in the nearby bay area were contracted by the Matsumae clan to seek trade with the Ainus. However, this led to a gradual oppression of the Ainus, both politically and economically. In the 9th year of Kambun (1669), the Ainus, led by their chief Shakushain, revolted by attacking nineteen Japanese ships and killing 270 persons. This incident illustrates that much traffic between Hokkaido and the main islands of Japan was already in effect. Therefore, it is possible that, for several hundred years, dogs from Hokkaido and northern dogs from Karafuto (*Sakhalin*), were brought to Japan.

The following story is related to the Akita dog after it was declared a natural monument to preserve Japanese dogs. Many Japanese dogs are said to have been brought to the Odate region from Hokkaido. Some say that these were distinctly Hokkaido dogs. However, some elders of the Odate area, well informed on the pedigree of the Akita dog, say that these were not Hokkaido dogs, but were the original Akita (Odate) dogs brought back to northern Akita by settlers who had moved to Hokkaido for a time.

In summary, owing to changing times, Akita dogs during the Edo Period became guard dogs as well as maintaining their primary role as hunting dogs. Continuous border disputes, insurrections and other unstable social conditions caused such changes. This resulted in the Akita dog changing into a larger dog. The development of this region was accompanied by incoming immigrants with different dog breeds which were probably crossbred to some Akita dogs to produce larger dogs.

Note: **Bold** types and *italics* were supplied by the translator.
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