

MY THOUGHTS ON THE AKITA DOG
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Preface

More than forty years have gone by since the Akita dog was declared as a natural monument on September 1931 (6th year of Showa). Prior to that time, the Odate dog (also known as the Kazuno dog), which was known solely among a certain group of dog lovers in Akita in the Tohoku area, had its name changed to the Akita dog after it was designated as one of the natural monuments. The goal is to restore and preserve these dogs toward the original state of purity as a breed.

As one of the incentives, the educational committees from various prefectures began to award called the Yuryokensho (*Dog of Excellence Award*) to dogs that met this criteria. In 1953 (28th year of Showa) the name of the award was changed to be called the Yuryo Nihonkensho (*Japanese Dog of Excellence Award*). The Akitainu Hozonkai (*Akiho*) was established by a certain faction of dog lovers in the city of Odate. Odate was considered to be the place of origin of the Akita dog. Later, this organization underwent reorganization and was given full recognition. The Nipponinu Hozonkai (*Nippo*) that was established in 1928 (2nd year of Showa) accepted the Akita dog to be included in the large Japanese dog group.

When the first step toward the restoration was believed to have been taken, the sudden outbreak of World War Two in 1941 (16th year of Showa) created a gap for a time. However, soon after the war, the stabilization of social conditions saw a rapid revival of the Akita dog. In Tokyo, the Akitainu Kyokai (*Akikyō*) was established in 1948 (23rd year of Showa). In the city of Odate, the Akitainu Hozonkyokai (*Akihokyo*) was established. In order to expand, both organizations established branches in various areas, and each has held spring and fall shows in order to increase their memberships nationwide.

With the coming and going of these dog organizations, a significant swinging of the pendulum accompanied the search for the true quality of the Akita dog. However, the quality of the Akita dog in temperament and body form have improved, and its great popularity is said to have removed some of the limitations that were imposed on the preservation process in the past.

Because of this, it has been said that the awarding of the Yuryo Nihonkensho, which was the only incentive provided by the Japanese government, was transferred from the Ministry of Education to the Agency for Cultural Affairs, interrupted for a while and finally abolished about four years ago. However, this has not hindered the overall development of the Akita dog, and the number of registered dogs within the various dog organizations have increased yearly. This has also increased the number of dogs shown at the dog shows.

Although this may seem as if the restoration and preservation of the natural monument, the Akita dog, have been accomplished, could this be true? I am of the opinion that we are at a point in time in the Akita dog world, when we must carefully continue to carry on our studies. Although the external appearance of the Akita dogs may appear as they do today, the essential features, which are internal, are just as important and much more of that aspect need to be studied.

First of all, there is the lack of unity pertaining to the Akita dog standard so that one could say that the Akita dog is a distinct dog breed. Even now, various Akita dog organizations have their individual standards, and undoubtedly, the evaluations of dogs at the dog shows are diverse. The well informed who are no longer in office, have repeatedly called for unification of the standard. However, those who are in office in each of the dog organizations have their own interpretations and the getting together of these intellectuals seem impossible. However, if the Akita dog is of one breed that originated from the same region, unless one is unified in concept, the true Akita dog will never be known. The Akita dog standard may be interpreted differently by different individuals in the same organization. This could lead to different views and interpretations of the standard with great fluctuations in the ranking of the show dogs. Even now, demands for more uniformity in judging are strong in some of the dog organizations.

The Akita dogs of today have improved markedly in the essential qualities and appearance, when compared to those dogs during the time of designation of the Akita dog as a natural monument and the time shortly after the war. However, when it comes to the extent of uniformity, much remains to be done. For example, in referring to coat color, brindles should produce brindles, red produce red and unless this is attained, one cannot say that uniformity has been attained, let alone, the essential features will also be lacking uniformity.

This is due to the state of flux in the transition and development of the Akita dog after the middle of the Meiji Period (1868-1912) and also after the designation of the Akita dog as a natural monument, as well as to inadequate clarification of factual findings from time to time. This was the basis for much confusion. One extreme example is the topic of how long the Akita dog may have lived in the Odate area, with various opinions on the ancient, Meiji and postwar periods. Even opinions on the goal of the preservation of the natural monument based on important historical developments are not in total agreement today.

With such a situation today, the discontinuation of the of the awards is regrettable and leaves much uncertainty for the future.

During the past period of decline to the periods of revival, regional and hunting dogs inhabited the remote mountain areas on the outskirts of the prefecture of Akita going which goes back to ancient times. Although dogs from these regions facilitated the road toward restoration of the Japanese dogs until now, due to the gradual development of this region, regions of difficult access in the past have begun to vanish and I believe that, because of this, the pure bloodlines of such dogs will not survive. Thus, if in the future, should the Akita dog go into a decline due to confusion, restoration will become more and more difficult and one may not be able to see the classical Akita dog as a natural monument. Also, in any dog breed, a golden age is invariably followed by a period of decline. The Akita dog of the past also experienced this decline many times. Furthermore, at the present time, I have heard that demands for puppies from a very successful show dog that commands a hefty price have begun to decline two to three years prior to the peak of popularity of that dog. Some worry that this may be an omen of the decline of that dog.

As I pondered over the present situation, I began to develop the idea of leaving behind some of my thoughts. When I began to raise Akita dogs more than twenty years ago, I came to the realization that my favorite pastime is the Akita dog, aside from interest in my occupation. Thus I embarked on the course of writing these articles with some boldness on my part. A dog owner with only a superficial knowledge may unlikely be able to present an absolute conclusions. As my guidelines, I have used references from our predecessors and stories that have been passed on down through the generations. I have also written about my many years of personal experiences as the bases of my studies. This is not to say that all of what I have written are entirely sound or correct. However, I would ask the reader to acknowledge that these are the results for my studies and interpretations.

Furthermore, if this work of mine would be of some contribution in the future as a reference, this would be an unexpected joy for me as an author.

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