

THE TYPE OF THE AKITA DOG: PAST, PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

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When asked to write mainly on the Akita dogs of the past, present and the future, and as I started to write, I began to realize the vastness of the subject, and it was difficult for me to know where to start. What shall I write about so that it would meet the aims of the editors, as well as receiving sympathetic and favorable responses from the readers and Akita dog lovers? These were some of the thoughts that went through my mind.

When did the past end and the present begin? And when is the future to start? Time flows by rapidly and does not know how to stop. The present is already about to be pushed into the past, for sure, and we may be already entering into the future. Such is the busy period of today.

Although I may stray at times from the subject of the title or may even repeat what others have written before, I would like to present my personal views here.

Before beginning my discussion of the Akita dogs of the past, present and the future in relation to the passage of time, I would like to touch on the ideal form or Type of the dog by referring to the Akita Dog Standard. Without a standard, one can be vague about the details of the Akita dog more than one wants to admit. The Akita Dog Standard is a brief outline which specifies how an Akita dog should be. There are three Akita Dog Standards: The Japanese Dog Preservation Club (Nippo), the Akita Dog Preservation Club (Akiho), and the Akita Dog Society (Akikyo). Each organization has its individual Akita Dog Standard. Nippo was established in May, 1928, and incorporated in March, 1932. Akiho was established in 1927 and incorporated in 1953. Akikyo was established in October, 1948, and incorporated in April, 1950. Therefore, the Nippo Standard is the oldest and with the prestige, I believe, which no one will deny as a fact. The Standards of Akiho and Akikyo are patterned after the Nippo Standard and are quite similar. Therefore, from a personal standpoint, I would like to refer to the Nippo Standard mostly in my discussion.

The Standard states that the general character and appearance of the Akita dog is that of braveness, simplicity of expression and of conduct with dignity. By general character, one is referring to the natural temperament of the Japanese dog which is full of the indwelling spirit and intelligence. By general appearance, one is referring to the facial features, body build, and movement. The soundness of spirit and the body are indivisible. Therefore, braveness, fullness of energy, gentle temperament, dignity, movement, adequate height and body type are necessary. However, sluggishness is not tolerated.

The general external appearance must clearly distinguish the male from the female. There must be balance of structure with muscular development. In the male, the height: length ratio is 100:110, while in the female, the length is a bit longer. The height of the male is from 64 to 70 cm (25.2 to 27.6 inches), and of the female from 58 to 64 cm (22.8 to 25.2 inches). The chest depth should be approximately one half of the height. The type of the Akita dog should not be permitted to go beyond the Standard. Of the many promising dogs that one sees, one should not ask whether a dog is of the past, present or of the future type, but one should consider whether the dog of that particular era conforms the closest to the Standard. However, depending on type of a particular era, it is a matter of fact that there will be a demand for a certain look, coat color, etc. which matches the popularity of that particular period, which is an unfortunate reality. At the same time, in spite of the fact that the Standards of Nippo, Akiho and Akikyo are quite similar, in reality, the results of the various dog shows have great differences, giving dog lovers in general the impression of a different breed or different type of dogs, which is very regrettable from the standpoint of improvement of the breed. To most people the Akita dog primarily is a dog to be admired (although some may strongly disagree with my personal opinion), and as a regular course of events in human society, there is the continuous desire to change. There is always the desire to improve the breed by continuous diligent effort to produce the champion dog of their dreams.

There is an old maxim which states that "History repeats itself," which is similar to "The present image is that of the past image, the past image is that of the future image." This can compare to a revolving lantern or one in which our minds do not know when to stop from a continuous searching around. There is an old proverb which states "By looking into the past, one gets to appreciate the new"

I believe that there is some significance when one looks at the esteem held for the Akita dogs of today and thinks of the champion dogs of the past. Among these, on the one hand, are those who will allow an extraordinary champion dog to dominate their life by praising it continuously, but is similar to the prosperous person who is bound to eventually decline, or to a bubble which eventually disappears, this has happened to many such champion dogs. On the other hand, there were champion dogs which were but shadowy figures in the background all through life, but with a strong background they passed on the hereditary line which is being revived among the numerous champion dogs of today. I believe that by knowing the past, one gets to know the present, which becomes the stage for the rapid progress of the future.

When one considers the Akita dogs of the past, one should become well acquainted with the Ichinoseki line and the Dewa line, which are the two main lineages of the many champion dogs. As mentioned previously, there have been many books written by many people on this subject. In order to avoid much repetition, I have decided to limit my discussion to those dogs that I have seen personally.

TYPE OF THE PAST When I was a volunteer in organizing the Yamagata Branch of the Nippo Club in 1950, Mr. Hajime Watanabe, who was the judge at the First Branch Show, said in his opening speech, "As a point of reference, it is good to look at Kongo-Go of Tokyo," which I have not yet forgotten, as well as the deep impression that was made upon me when I actually saw Kongo-Go at the Nippo Headquarters Show. I was not alone in receiving such a strong impression.

Soon after the war, when the people in the rural areas began to breed Akita dogs, there was nothing more impressive on the younger people in that area than the image of Kongo-Go. As a rule, among the registered Akita dog membership, I believe, almost everyone is acquainted with the names of Kongo-Go or Goromaru-Go. Any publication pertaining to the Akita dog usually mentions Kongo-Go and Goromaru-Go with their respective photos, since these two dogs have played a large role in the Akita dog world.

At the Nippo dog shows, Mr. Heihachi Hashimoto's handling was so splendid that it literally looked as if man and dog were as one, and Kongo-Go, all the more, fascinated all of the spectators present. In those days when the Akita dog was not as well recognized, there were some Akita dog fans who exclaimed, "There was no Kongo before Kongo, there will be no Kongo after Kongo!" One would not deny the fact that Kongo became the cornerstone for the prosperity of today. Kongo-Go was born in 1947 at the Heirakudo Kennel at Odate City out of the so-called Dewa line's sire: Taishiyu-Go and dam: Tatemitsu-Go. As a wakainu (10-18 months of age) he was sold to Mr. Hashimoto and died in September, 1957 at Mr. Hashimoto's home, after receiving a life time of affectionate care and supervision from his owner. To those who were indifferent or had animosity toward the Akita dog, one glance at Kongo-Go caused many to change their opinions, at that moment, concerning the image of the Akita dog, Kongo-Go's unique appearance and style was highly appraised by the Nippo Club. His offsprings, namely, Shoryu-Go, Ryujo-Go, Bafu-Go, Kinho-Go and Kinsho-Go received the highest awards, thus creating for a time the Kongo Era, at which time it was said that anything other than Kongo-Go was not an Akita dog.

Above all things, Kincho-Go attained the highest awards in the Akiho and Akikyo Shows, with breeder Mrs. Hiroko Abe and handler Mr. Hashimoto, who together were an unbeatable team. The beginning of women handlers at the dog shows at this time will be regarded in history as a flower in blooming glory. There was no one as showy as the foregoing two people mentioned.

Another personality present at the Nippo Shows who cannot be forgotten is none other than Mr. Yugoro Izumi of Senko-en Kennel of Odate City. Being diametrically opposite to both Mr. Hashimoto and Mrs. Abe, Mr. Izumi proudly showed off his famous dogs one after the other, namely, Isumi No Kin-Go, Senzan-Go, Senko-Go, Isume No Nidai Kin-Go out of his kennel, which impressed many of us. Also the famous dogs of the two previously mentioned owners of Kongo-Go and Kincho-Go were diametrically opposite in features and style.

The above mentioned Kongo and Kincho lines and other dogs from the Izumi Koen Kennel were splendid spectacles at the Nippo Show being held in the middle of Tokyo with the modern city-like sense and mood.

Lurking in the shadows and gradually coming to the fore, as you know, was Goromaru-Go of Akita Prefecture. Goromaru-Go of the Ichinoseki line was born in January, 1948 in Futatsui Village, Akita Prefecture out of sire: Ichinoseki Goma-Go and dam: Futatsui Goma-Go. He was raised by Mr. Kichijiro Funakoshi of Akita City and died October, 1956 at the age of 9 years at Mr. Funakoshi's home. As you know, since Goromaru was an akagoma pinto (red sesame pinto), he was not regarded very highly in the dog shows. However, his reassuring looks, temperament, tight foreface, powerful tail curl, unapproachable majesticness and samurai-like appearance gradually began to be recognized. His offsprings consisted of Kiyohime-Go, Tanihibiki-Go, Tetsumaru-Go, Bankomaru-Go, Oryu-Go, Kunimaru-Go, Jiro-Go, Daiyasu-Go, Daio-Go, Kiyomaru-Go, Gorome-Go, and Haumi-Go. He was recognized by the Akikiyo club as a valuable stud dog, and his offsprings came to be praised in the Tokyo area.

Mr. Funakoshi, the handler of Goromaru-Go was definitely of the opposite type when compared to Mr. Hashimoto of Kongo-Go. Mr. Hashimoto's gaudy attire and gestures were of the modern big city type, while Mr. Funakoshi's resembled that of a village school-master, a serene handler with village school Stalin-like moustache which were loved by the dog world. Kongo-Go and Mr. Hashimoto, Goromaru-Go and Mr. Funakoshi; one of the Dewa line, the other of the Ichinoseki line respectively, two main currents of the big names will radiate brilliantly in one of the pages of the Akita dog history.

As I have mentioned several times before, times change continuously, and this is also applicable to the dog world. When looking from the Akita dog world of today, Kongo-Go and Goromaru-Go are considered by many already as dogs of the past. The extolled champion dogs of the present, no doubt, will also pass into the world of yesterday, Anyhow, are both Kongo-Go and Goromaru-Go are not champion dogs (distinguished dogs?) that once swept over the Akita dog world like a large lucky adventurer and deeply engraved in the memory of the Akita dog lovers?

The Dewa line was established by Nr. Yazaburo Ito of Odate City. Goma-Go, Aikoku-Go, Akagoro-Go, Akidate-Go, Dewa-Go, Dewawaka-Go, Taishyu-Go, and Kongo-Go were the succeeding generations. As Akita dogs, the body style and appearance were distinctly different from the Ichinoseki line. They were of large stately frame and volume, and as household dogs their temperament, as a rule, was easy going, good tempered and gentle with an appearance of strength. However, the Dewa line soon began to lose the value of its existence as a representative of the breed with the appearance of looseness of skin under the throat, loose and baggy lips, which led to a departure from the Japanese dog image.

One the other hand, the lineage of the Dewa line was divided into Dewawaka-Go and Raiden-Go. Raiden-Go, Daini Dewa-Go, Senko-Go and Shinko-Go were the succeeding generations.

It is not exaggeration to say that the Dewa line's brilliant splendor of a dream ended within one generation after Kongo-Go, and in the process of improving the Akita dog, the Dewa line is gradually disappearing.

TYPE OF THE PRESENT. As previously mentioned, it is difficult to determine when the past ends and the present begins. As a reference line, I shall use the champion dogs of the past several years to present my views.

As a pattern for the present type of Akita dog, I would like to refer to the much extolled Asumazakura-Go as the point of reference. Namely, Unjo-Go, Muchi-Go, Hachiman-Go, Asumazakura-Go, and Azumagumo-Go are the succeeding five generations of one series of a lineage which were awarded the Akiho's Meiyosho (Highest) award.

As a starting point of this lineage, Unjo-Go was highly praised even while a puppy as a champion-to-be, with adequate height, body volume, a majestic bearing, no crumbling of his structure in spite of his large size, and with balance of structure. Kiyohime-Go, out of sire: Goromaru-Go and dam: Chimpei, was considered a beautiful dog of the century and produced Muchi-Go.

Muchi-Go caused much excitement for a time by being regarded as the reappearance of Goromaru-Go because of his excellent features. However, in later years, the weakness of his hindlegs became evident in the show ring when used as a reference dog, and its also regrettable that this feature has appeared in his offspring.

Hachiman-Go was born out of sire: Muchi-Go and dam: Tsuruhime-Go, sire: Monjumaru and dam: Raigetsu-Go (sire: Senzan-Go and dam: Kiyohime-Go) His body was like that of a log with splendid form, his coat was a beautiful akagoma(red sesame). He also had a touch of short coat which was unconventional for a Ichinoseki line dog.

Azumazakura-Go was born out of sire: Hachiman-Go and dam: Tamakiyo-Go (sire: Tamagumo and dam: Akemi) . The appearance of Azumazakura-Go, a brindle, started the unprecedented brindle coat boom in the Akita dog world. Any brindle coat, whether it resembled the chimney sweep or dust, was valued highly.

Azumagumo-Go was born out of sire: Azumazakura-Go and dam: Tokyo Matsuda Kennel's Gyokurei-Go sire: Hachiman and dam: Meigyoku-Go. Azumazakura-Go's and Gyokurei-Go's sire was Hachiman-Go and the dam of both dogs, namely Tamakiyo-Go and Meigyoku-Go had the same dam. Therefore, Azumagumo-Go was produced from intentional inbreeding, and starting with Unjo-Go five generations of Meiyosho Awards were acquired until it ended at Azumagumo-Go.

Following Azumagumo-Go, the Meiyosho was awarded to closely related Tenkuni-Go (sire: Tengai , dam: Shiragiku), Kumohibiki-Go (sire: Tanigume, dam: Daiunme), Bankomaru-Go (sire: Azumazakura, dam: Daiunme) Tamazakura-Go (sire: Minozakura, dam: Marihime) and Kumomaru-Go (sire: Nanun, dam: Makome) in succession.

Since the Meiyosho was awarded to Bankomaru-Go and Kumohibiki-Go, there have been dogs awarded the Meiyosho

with bloodlines from the Akikyo line, and more recently, there have been much intermingling of the Akikyo and Akiho bloodlines as if one had released a dam of water. As mentioned previously, Goromaru-Go produced Tanihibiki-Go which

produced Tanigume-Go , out of dam: Jurome, then Rikimaru-Go and to Rikigume-Go. The above mentioned Kumohibiki-Go and Bankomaru Go's dam: Daiunme's sire is Daiun-Go , and dam is Kiyome-Go , and both are offsprings of Tamagumo-Go. Therefore, with the overlapping of the bloodlines of Goromaru-Go and Tamakume-Go, it was possible to create a blending of the bloodlines.

Kumomaru-Go (sire: Nanun , dam: Makome) and littermate Tetsuyuki-Go of Kyouonso Kennel are out of sire: Nanun-Go which is out of sire Azumazakura-Go and dam: Daiunme-Go. The dam: Makome is out of sire: Rikimaru-Go and dam: Tamahime-go. Therefore, the style of the Akita dogs active at the present time come mostly from Tamagumo-Go as a starting point, followed by Meigyoku, Tamakiyo, Tamame-Go as female Littermates, and Unjo-Go as a starting point

with the Azumazakura and Azumagume line and the Goromaru, Tanihibiki and Tanigume line seem to be combined.

TYPE OF THE FUTURE. Until now, I have mentioned the lineage which started immediately after the war as a starting point for discussion of the dogs of the past, and by using the champion dogs of the past several years as a reference point to discuss the present type of dogs. What type of dog should we consider as the ideal dog for the future, and in what direction should one go, is probably a very difficult question to answer. One should strive to create a dog that possesses the body type and temperament that is pointed out in the Akita Dog Standard. In order to enable one to

obtain some definite idea of what an ideal Akita dog is, the Nippo Club judges have prepared a guide with diagrams pertaining to body balance (proper proportion of various parts of the body, for example, the heights length ratio, the height; chest depth ratio, chest circumference and width, also the front, middle and rear body ratios) which are to be compared. When looking at the so-called winning dogs at the headquarters shows of the various organizations in the past and the present, dogs that are excessively heavy, as well as those that lack chest depth and width, which appears as a sham of the medium sized dog (the majority of the dogs in the medium size category appearing in the Nippo Shows do conform to the ideal body type as set by the Standard), dogs lacking the look of braveness, stops that are too deep or too shallow which leads to lack of dignity and detracts from the appearance of a Japanese dog, can be seen here and there.

In reference to the coat color, there are those without distinctness which distracts from the esthetic value, while on the other hand, there are those that are gaudy and fluffy, which depart from the feeling of simplicity as indicated in the Standard, and this is indeed regrettable. If I may give my personal opinion, the body type seen in winning dogs lack conduct and composure. In spite of the emphasis on structure, there is lack of chest depth and width; the head appears light; there appears to be no stop; in the mature dog the facial features often seem to lack the appearance of the big type dog. In reference to the coat color, instead of looking only to the brindle color for lack of distinctness, should not one also exclude other colors which are not distinct? (At the present time, one group is considering switching over to

the red coat). In reference to the temperament, one sees dogs lacking the braveness, the calmness and the beauty of spirit desired in the Japanese dogs, I personally prefer to see the large, Akita dog-like, easy going, heavier, and good natured dog.

There is a maxim that is commonly used in the animal husbandry world which says, "A champion horse's offspring is not necessarily a champion horse, but a champion horse invariably comes from a champion horse." If we were to adopt this to our dog world, one may say, "A champion dog's offspring is not necessarily a champion dog, but a champion dog invariably comes from a champion dog." I believe that such a rule should be our most important guide in the improvement of our dogs in the future. By considering the effects of heredity, by accepting the opinions and suggestions of the predecessors and pioneers humbly, and by carefully removing or weeding out the bad factors, the future of the Akita dog should develop for the better. By becoming well acquainted with the Akita Dog Standard, and by not following the fleeting popularity of a given period, nor blindly following others, but by mutually working together in harmony in order to achieve the creation of the ideal Akita dog, and to enable one to show that Akita dog to the world is my heart's earnest desire.

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