

Breeding Racism: The Imperial Battlefields of the “German” Shepherd Dog

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Abstract

During the first half of the twentieth century, the Shepherd Dog came to be strongly identified with Imperial and Nazi Germany, as well as with many other masters in the colonial world. Through its transnational diffusion after World War I, the breed became a pervasive symbol of imperial aggression and racist exploitation. The 1930s Japanese empire subtly Japanized the dogs who became an icon of the Imperial Army. How could a cultural construct so closely associated with Germany come to represent many different colonial regimes? Using Imperial Japan as a case study, this paper argues that this symbolic pliability is a derivative of the high functionality, wide adaptation, and conspicuous nature of the Shepherd Dog as protector, deterrent, and enforcer of social control. As a visible intermediary in hierarchal relationships between different human groups, the Shepherd Dog became a powerful metaphor of Nazi and colonial memories throughout much of the world.

Keywords

Shepherd dogs, Germany, Japan, fascism, imperialism, breed, race

Introduction

On April 22, 1899, in the southern German city of Stuttgart, Max von Stephanitz (1863-1936), a retired Prussian cavalry captain, and 10 associates founded what was to become the globe's largest dog breeding society of any breed of any species, the Verein für deutsche Schäferhunde (Society for the German Shepherd Dog). The establishment of the society, commonly known as the SV, marked the transformation of certain local sheepdogs into the “German” Shepherd Dog. Like other breeds, the “German” Shepherd is a relatively recent creation. Before 1899, various types of working canines could be found in central and northern Europe. This “polyglot mixture” was grouped under the generic heading of “sheepdogs” and other labels but was

not classified as a developed breed and exhibited considerable variation in physical form and color (Willis, 1991, p. 3). Until the establishment of the SV, these assorted dogs were little valued beyond their practical roles on farms as herders and guards. As elsewhere, the revaluation of local dogs and their identification with the nation-state emerged with the rise of nationalism and the growth of an urbanized, bourgeois middle class, whose members were nostalgic for the countryside.

In just a few decades of the SV's establishment, the breed became one of the world's most popular and numerous, a position it has maintained to this day. By 1923, the SV claimed 50,000 dues-paying members in more than 500 branches in Germany alone (Stephanitz, 1923). The popularity of the Shepherd breed spread far beyond Germany after World War I, during which many military organizations extensively employed the breed as army dogs.

In 1927, just a few years after the American Kennel Club recognized the breed, approximately one-third of the dogs registered by the organization were Shepherds (Jones, 1927). Likewise, the Alsatian—as the (British) Kennel Club insisted on calling the breed due to war-provoked anxiety against anything affiliated with Germany—became one of the most popular dogs in Britain during the 1920s. Thanks to global trade and imperial networks, the breed quickly spread beyond Western Europe and the United States as a favorite of colonial regimes and settlers in Africa and Asia.

Simultaneous to the actual employment of the dogs, Stephanitz and other fans of the breed often figuratively mobilized the Shepherd Dog. The most fundamental metaphorical manipulation of the dogs was part and parcel of their very identity—their codification as a recognized breed. Dogs who were deemed to be purebred (a nonhuman animal whose ancestors were thought to have conformed to breeding standards established later) and who corresponded in physical appearance and health to a prescribed criteria were imagined as possessing purity of blood. The ability to mold the bodies of animals through strict control over reproduction, the elimination of certain offspring, and the recording of bloodlines in pedigrees bolstered these illusions. Anthropologist Borneman (1988) has observed,

...breed, like race, is confused with and often considered a matter of genetics and biology, and not culture, and since biology is considered the ultimate arbiter of phenomenological disputes, the naturalness of this social order is never questioned (p. 48).

Indeed, people often do not recognize or forget that animal breeds, like human races, are contingent, constantly changing, culturally constructed categories that are inextricably interconnected to state formation, class structures, and national identities.

The confusion and conflation of breed and race are highlighted by the frequent interchangeable use of race, breed, and blood to refer to both human beings and nonhuman animals—especially during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Animal breeding, as historian De Cal (1992) has suggested, was connected to the development of political racism. Initially, the science of animal breeding was influenced by, and in turn shaped, class and status consciousness during the mid-nineteenth century. For example, stirpiculture—the production of animal stock by careful breeding—affected the Social Darwinian ideas of the “father of eugenics,” Francis Galton (1822-1911), a first cousin of Charles Darwin. Galton promoted the “judicious mating” of members of the middle classes and the learned professions and discouraged reproduction among the lower classes to improve the human race by genetic means. Gradually, though, as seen in the writings of German zoologist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) and biologist Alfred Ploetz (1860-1940), anxieties about preserving and improving national “racial hygiene” heightened and overlapped with class concerns (Burleigh & Wippermann, 1991). Perhaps nowhere were these latter fears more evident than in Stephanitz’s (1923) formulation of the pure “German” Shepherd Dog and in the racial policies of Hitler’s Third Reich.

Obsessions with purity of animal breed and blood were closely related to a desire to identify newly codified breeds as locally indigenous. As historian Ritvo (1987) has described in the Victorian British context, breeders often linked newly codified breeds with their place of origin, and such creatures sometimes served as a source of local pride. Enthusiasts sometimes identified certain breeds with the wider geographical and imagined community of the nation-state and elevated these animals as national symbols. Although many regions in Germany tout a local dog breed, and other breeds became associated with Deutschland in name—such as the Great Dane (*Deutsche Dogge*) and German Pincher, Setter, Pointer, and Schnauzer—the Deutsche Schäferhund’s connection to the nation-state is probably unsurpassed.

In addition to purity and place of origin, Stephanitz (1923) and other aficionados often asserted that the “German” Shepherd was especially endowed with certain exceptional characteristics such as loyalty and bravery. Canine lovers, it seems, constantly make such claims about dogs, whether individually or about an entire breed. Such declarations, though, were much more strident and frequent when they were being made about a breed that supposedly embodied the particular virtues of the nation and represented the state.

Yet even as Stephanitz (1923) and other enthusiasts defined the breed as distinctively German in blood, origin, and character, the dog became identified with many other regimes around the world through its pervasive deployment by other national militaries and colonial and domestic police agencies.

In almost all these contexts, the Shepherd Dog was venerated for purity of blood and identified as a loyal ally of those in power. The Shepherd's identity, then, was both extremely malleable but also very stable; the dog became associated with a number of different political regimes but for many of the same reasons—whether revered for supposed purity of blood, loyalty, and courage, or despised as a symbol of oppressive authority.

The “German” Shepherd as an agent and symbol of political racism and repression may be found in many, although not all, contexts. After contemplating the particular actual and symbolic use of canines in general and Shepherd Dogs specifically, this essay briefly examines the practical and metaphorical manipulation of the Shepherd Dog in Germany and then follows the dogs, both real and imagined, as they spread to the Japanese empire and elsewhere. An examination of the Shepherd Dog can expose how humans deploy other creatures to define, discipline, and enforce political and social boundaries between themselves and other members of their own species through both concrete and figurative methods. The Shepherd Dog provided people a powerful way to regulate human society, particularly in imperial and wartime contexts during the first half of the twentieth century, when notions of social, racial, and Darwinian species hierarchy were often important to the ideological mechanisms of control.

Why Dogs and Why the Shepherd Dog?

How did a creature who was so strongly associated with Germany and Nazism come to represent so many different political regimes? Such a myriad of identities is probably not possible for humans, or even for many other animals. Perhaps dogs are unique among nonhuman animals, and Shepherd Dogs are distinctive among canines.

As zoologist Serpell (1995) has written, no animal other than dogs, with the possible exception of apes, comes as close to people in affective terms, nor does any make a stronger claim to be treated as human. The dynamics and the degree of the relationship between humans and *Canis familiaris* vary according to time and place; however, in general, domesticated dogs, thanks to their long-standing and close ecological connection with people, occupy a singular space between human culture and the rest of the animal world. Among canines, the Shepherd Dog has long been a valuable assistant of humans as a herder of sheep and other livestock. In the twentieth century, as the tasks canines performed for humans multiplied, the Shepherd was often the first breed employed and is still one of the most widely employed. Such work as guiding the blind requires a high level of intelligence and even, to some degree, the

exercise of judgment. Given this relationship, it is perhaps not surprising that many people regard Shepherds as quasi-humans.

Another reason for the symbolic malleability of dogs is that they have often served as intermediaries between opposing human groups through the performance of such labor, especially military and police work (Lilly & Puckett, 1997). The Shepherd Dog, in particular, has often functioned as an agent of social control. Many trainers and handlers would likely agree the Shepherd is “best suited to all-purpose work,” because of the dog’s “good nose, quick ears, keen sight, tenacious persistence, and lively intelligence” (Chapman, 1960, p. 16). Since World War I, when military officials began to systematically mobilize dogs in large numbers, the Shepherd Dog probably has been the most widely represented in national and colonial armies. In the early twentieth century, the breed so dominated canine law enforcement ranks in the United States that it came to be referred to as simply the “Police Dog,” as underscored by Brockwell (1924) who dealt exclusively with the breed. On a private level, individual households and companies have so frequently employed the dogs as sentries that they are also often imagined as the stereotypical guard dog. Through these roles, the Shepherd Dog emerged as a prominent protector, deterrent, and enforcer of political and economic hierarchies.

A final reason for the figurative pliability of dogs is their tendency to roam ambiguously between culture and nature, within and beyond human control and across human-designated boundaries. Because of the attachment of dogs to humans, and vice-versa, the physical mobility of canines is particularly striking. Dogs often accompanied humans in public projects of empire building and colonial rule. This phenomenon, which I call the “colonial dog,” created a dynamic of real and symbolic violence that helped enable imperial dominion and was especially pervasive from the second half of the nineteenth century (Skabelund, 2005). Due to its unprecedented worldwide diffusion, the Shepherd Dog became the epitome of the colonial dog in the early twentieth century.

In short, the Shepherd breed became emblematic of authoritarian regimes because the dogs were highly functional, widely adapted, and extremely conspicuous in the maintenance of power. Like other animal symbols, canine metaphors and memories acquired their figurative power from the reality of individual dogs who interacted with humans in particular ways. At times, people have imagined the breed in ways related to their more benign roles—as herders and protectors of sheep and other livestock, as seeing-eye dogs, or as search-and-rescue dogs helping locate victims after disasters—such as the recovery effort in the wake of the World Trade Center collapse on September 11, 2001. However, humans, in subtle ways, have metaphorically mobilized these canines, too, for political purposes.

The Nationalization and Nazification of the Shepherd Dog

The enduring association of the Shepherd Dog with Germany and the Third Reich was largely the creation of Stephanitz, whose life spanned and views embraced the formation of the German Empire and the ascendancy of the Nazis. Stephanitz and his SV colleagues turned the Shepherd Dog into an exemplar of what he defined as the country's canine ideal temperamentally German, perfectly bred, unquestionably loyal, and fearless as a wolf. Moreover, as historians Wippermann and Berentzen (1999) have observed, Nazi admiration for—and extensive use of—the dogs as an instrument of National Socialist terror further transformed the breed, like the swastika and jackboots, into an icon readily identified in popular culture with Nazism.

Stephanitz's (1923) tremendous organizational and promotional talents were largely responsible for the SV's extraordinary growth. In 1901, the 37-year-old Stephanitz ascended to the presidency, a position he held until 1934, two years before his death. The same year he became SV president, Stephanitz supplied the movement with its bible, the two-volume *Der deutsche Schäferhund in Wort und Bild* (The German Shepherd in Word and Picture), which was republished in more than a dozen editions by 1914. The work was also published in several other languages, including English in 1923 and Japanese in the mid-1930s. By the 1920s, the once lowly sheepdog had achieved unimagined popularity.

At home or abroad, Stephanitz's (1923) message was the same: "Our Shepherd dog is a peculiar fellow and a genuine German withal" (p. 279). As indicated by the name of his organization—*Verein für deutsche Schäferhunde*—Stephanitz explicitly linked the dogs to the Fatherland and made them a proud symbol of Germany. He repeatedly emphasized that the Shepherd Dog reflected the character of the Volk because of an ancient and intimate relationship with Germans. The Shepherd was the "primeval Germanic dog," Stephanitz declared, and in

... time immemorial... the warlike proud German held in high esteem his courageous hunting comrade who helped him in his struggle with the rampaging wild-ox, the destructive boar and the greedy beast of prey. (pp. 196, 197)

Several scholars have noted that Stephanitz (1923) foreshadowed the racial theories of Hitler. Indeed, Stephanitz's quest to form a pure, healthy, strong, and standardized race of dogs anticipated and served to bolster Nazi racial policies (Wippermann & Berentzen, 1999). In early twentieth-century Germany, a number of advocates of eugenics and Aryan supremacy had backgrounds in zootechny or referenced animal breeding in their arguments for artificially improving human heredity. Stephanitz, too, bombastically applied

the principles of animal stripiculture to human racial politics, as evidenced by his declaration that “[w]e can compare our shepherd dog breed without exaggeration with the Human Race” (p. 383).

Both Stephanitz (1923) and the Nazis were fascinated with wolves. Stephanitz boasted that the modern Shepherd was a descendent of an ancient medium-sized wolf (*Canis lupus*), who later evolved into the *Canis poutianini*, an intermediate form of a domesticated canine and a canine in the wild. Hitler and other Nazi leaders venerated the “German” Shepherd for the dog’s supposed wild, wolfish nature and continually appropriated lupines for symbolic purposes, referring to themselves as wolves and their various headquarters as lairs. As historian Sax (2000) has observed, the “Nazis were constantly invoking dogs and wolves for the qualities they wanted to cultivate: loyalty, fierceness, courage, obedience, and sometimes even cruelty” (pp. 75, 76). What Sax refers to generically as “dogs” can be replaced with “Shepherd Dogs,” because many Nazi elite made the breed their canine of choice. The relationship between the three—Nazis, lupines, and Shepherd Dogs—is aptly captured by the name Hitler gave the first “German” Shepherd he owned: Wolf.

Although Stephanitz (1923) argued that the breed had descended from the *Canis poutianini*, he did not pinpoint the origin of this ancient beast. After the Nazi’s rise to power, however, he emphasized that the Shepherd’s ancestors once dwelt in central Asia. In a 1935 letter to Saitō Hirokichi (1900-1964), the president of the Society for the Preservation of the Japanese Dog (*Nihon inu hozon kai*), he proposed that “Japanese” dogs and Shepherds were intimate siblings, because the dogs who moved eastward became “Japanese,” while those who went west became “German” Shepherds (Doitsu e). This theory provided a canine analog to Nazi doctrine that identified Nordic or Germanic peoples as the purest members of an Aryan race that once dwelt in central Asia.

The Shepherd Dog came to embody the paragon of loyalty and submission to a master. Stephanitz (1923) hailed the breed as human’s most loyal companion. He asserted that this ability was unique to the Shepherd breed.

It is wonderful how the dog... surrenders to him who carries the most weight in the house, i.e. the master, and that is the man, in spite of woman’s suffrage, and other and accordingly more potent reasons, especially woman’s wiles and woman’s love... He will only render obedience to the master of the house, for when a man is in the house, he only obeys the woman with reservations. (p. 225)

As underscored by this statement, Stephanitz (1923) regarded the model Shepherd Dog to be masculine, male-centered, and fiercely loyal. It was precisely the supposed devout dedication of the “German” Shepherd that

endeared the breed to National Socialist leaders, many of whom kept the dogs as pets. Hitler's adoration for his Shepherd bitch Blondie, who he professed was his most trusted companion, is well known, but a number of the Führer's top deputies also kept the dogs.

In addition to their supposed German character, purity, and loyalty, Stephanitz (1923) and the Nazis esteemed Shepherd Dogs for their purported unique endowment of courage. Bravery served as a codeword to describe the dogs' effective performance of tasks for their human masters, such as protecting them or controlling other people and animals. Stephanitz consistently sought to militarize the breed. He touted the animals as unrivaled in their ability to serve as police and army dogs and urged officials to deploy the breed at home and in Germany's overseas colonies. Ample photographic evidence from German possessions in Africa suggests that colonial officials and settlers followed Stephanitz's advice (Figure 1). Later, the Wehrmacht and Nazi paramilitary and police organizations extensively deployed Shepherds and other dogs in waging war and pursuing genocide. The Gestapo and SS systematically integrated guard dogs, the vast majority of whom were Shepherds, into the operations of prisoner of war and concentration camps and frequently employed canines to emotionally intimidate and physically abuse inmates.

Such abuse solidified the dogs' enduring identification with Nazi Germany. Sixty years after the end of World War II, the connection between the Shepherd Dog and the Third Reich might seem to be a thing of the past. The dogs, however, remain a resilient reminder of Nazi crimes. The association between National Socialism and the Shepherd Dog has been sustained by the repeated use of the canines in motion pictures and television, such as the popular American series "Hogan's Heroes," in which Allied POWs were held in the fictitious camp Stalag 13. A long-running joke on the program, which appeared weekly on the CBS network from 1965 to 1971—and for years after as reruns—was a Shepherd guard dog who treated prisoners fiercely when his SS master Captain Klink was present, but affectionately licked the face of the French prisoner LeBeau when Klink was not present. In this way, the sitcom served to remind viewers of the Shepherd breed's relationship to German National Socialism; yet, the sit-com presented this connection, as well as the Nazis in general, in a sanitized manner that avoided a serious consideration of the dogs' use and abuse.

In the Service of Many Masters

Even as the Shepherd Dog was closely identified with Germany and the Nazi regime, the breed became strongly associated with new masters around the



Figure 1. "Hauptmann a. D. Herrschel with his German Shepherd Wotan." In an August 1919 article published in the *SV Zeitung* newspaper, Herrschel recalled his memories of Wotan, who accompanied him for four years in German South-West Africa (Namibia). Herrschel likely named the dog after the Germanic god, Wotan, who is associated with qualities such as wisdom and war and who was popularized by Richard Wagner's epic musical dramas, *The Ring of the Nibelung*.

globe. SV official Joseph Schwabacher was not exaggerating when he boasted in his preface to the English-language translation of Stephanitz (1923) that "the German Shepherd dog[s] sterling qualities are winning him an ever-increasing chorus of approbation not only in his own land, but from all quarters of the globe" (p. iii). As national militaries and domestic and colonial police deployed Shepherds, the breed was frequently inscribed as a symbol of

repressive and racist state violence. This image resulted from the breed's conspicuous, pervasive, and effective use by military, colonial, and law enforcement officials.

Discussions about the Shepherd Dog in the Japanese empire during the 1930s and early 1940s were remarkably similar to those in Germany. In the Japanese metropole in the 1920s, the dogs were imagined as both German and Japanese. The breed was formally referred to in Japanese as the *Doitsu shepādo* and at times enthusiast magazines and children's books praised the dogs for their embodiment of German qualities. However, by the early 1930s, the *shepādo*, as the dog was commonly called, was often subtly Japanese and became an emblem of Japanese imperial-military might and manly courage in official and privately produced discourses. As in apartheid South Africa, Shepherd Dogs in Imperial Japan were figuratively mobilized alongside nationalized indigenous dogs, although the former were deployed for army and colonial police work to a much greater extent (Sittert & Swart, 2003; Skabelund, in press). As a result, the Shepherd, far more than native dogs, became an icon of Japanese power for both the rulers and the ruled.

Japanese military authorities and private individuals imported thousands of Shepherd Dogs during the interwar period. Spurred on by the alleged accomplishments of army dogs during the Great War, Japanese officials launched a small canine acquisition and training program. As a windfall of the conflict, the Imperial military gained access to a limited but valuable population of Shepherd Dogs in 1914 when Japan occupied the German-leased territories on the Shandong peninsula in China. Demand for military dogs eventually overwhelmed this and other sources in Asia. By the mid-1920s, Japanese government and private purchasing agents turned directly to Europe, especially Germany and organizations such as Stephanitz's Society for the German Shepherd Dog in an effort to procure premium purebred canines.

If Germany was the principal site for the acquisition of military dogs, the northeastern Chinese region of Manchuria became their imperial proving ground. The Japanese government placed the territory under its indirect control after the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. During the next quarter century, the government used the Kwantung Army and its colonial enterprise, the South Manchurian Railway, to extend its authority. On the Manchurian frontier, the development of army dogs flourished from the 1920s. In a canine sort of military-industrial complex, the Kwantung Army and South Manchuria Railway officials teamed with local Japanese settlers to import, breed, and raise dogs to patrol mines, railway stations, and tracks in order to protect what at the time was probably the world's largest coal-production and transportation system. On September 18, 1931, in an event that became

known as the Manchurian Incident, Kwantung officers used a staged explosion on a railway line as a ploy to launch an attack on the troops of the local warlord and quickly seize control of the entire region. In a few months Manchuria became Manchukuo, a Japanese puppet state. It was during that fighting that the alleged actions of two canines, Kongō and Nachi, made Shepherd Dogs famous throughout the Japanese empire. The messenger dogs, it was said, joined a battle and died after killing a number of enemy combatants.

During the 15-year Asia-Pacific War—which began with the Manchurian Incident—the Japanese military deployed army dogs, most of whom were Shepherds, in vast numbers for a wide array of tasks. Japanese historians calculate that the army possessed a force of approximately 10,000 military dogs by 1944, whom they used as messengers, sentries, draft animals, trackers, and patrol auxiliaries (Hara & Yasuoka, 1997). This statistic, however, does not include canines in the employ of the navy, constabulary, colonial police forces, or organizations such as the South Manchurian Railroad. Military authorities preferred three Western breeds—“German” Shepherds, Doberman Pinschers, and Airedale Terriers, in that order—but probably more than 90% of all army dogs were Shepherds (Imagawa, 1996). As a result, the *gunken* (army dog) was widely equated with the *shepādo*.

Due in part to this prominent role, the Shepherd Dog gained a significant following on the home islands, in Manchuria, and throughout the Japanese empire. In 1928, a group of private citizens had formed the Japan Shepherd Club (*Nihon shepādo kurabu*, or NSC). Three years later, army officials, dissatisfied with NSC leaders' lack of enthusiasm for developing dogs for military use, founded a new group, the Imperial Army-Dog Association (*Teikoku gun'yōken kyōkai*, or KV). This new organization quickly eclipsed the power of any other group and established branches throughout the metropole and empire. Although *shepādo* was not part of the group's name, the KV was overwhelmingly devoted to the breed. The insignia of the society's monthly magazine, *Teikoku inu* (Imperial Dog) featured the figure of a Shepherd, and KV officials were responsible for the translation and publication of Stephanitz (1923) in the mid-1930s. In his short forward to the Japanese edition, Stephanitz (1934-1936) declared, “I wish our German Shepherd dog an unblemished future in his new homeland in the Far East” (p. 1)—an accomplishment the breed was well on the way to achieving, especially in the growing Japanese imperium.

The popularity of the Shepherd was not limited to dues-paying members of clubs dedicated to the breed. Among the wider population, the dog was more popular than even native “Japanese” dogs. Many aficionados of “Japanese” dogs expressed deep respect for the “German” Shepherd; some, such as Saitō,

the head of the Society for the Preservation of the Japanese Dog, were also members of the KV. The unadulterated pedigree and fierce, wolfish character and powerful physique of the Shepherd Dog served as a benchmark for “Japanese” breeds. Saitō, who readily agreed with Stephanitz’s theory linking “German” Shepherds and “Japanese” dogs to central Asia, considered the two breeds to be closely related siblings, and therefore the purest and finest canines in the world. These supposed canine ties contributed to cultural connections that linked the two countries well before Japan and Germany became formal allies in 1936.

While there may be many similarities in the actual and figurative deployment of dogs in Germany and Japan, discussions about animal breeding had far less impact on racial policies in the latter country. Unlike in Germany, the crossover between animal breeders and the relatively weak Japanese eugenics movement was negligible, and any concern with human purity in the writings of canine enthusiasts was far more muted and implicit. That said, the rhetoric of dog enthusiasts in Japan, like those in Germany, clearly fed into wider social concerns about racial identity—just as canine terminology helped to shape larger discussions of race.

The story of Nachi and Kongō’s purported exploits during the Manchurian Incident was primarily responsible for popularizing military dogs in general and the Shepherd breed specifically throughout the Japanese empire. Although the tale is almost unknown today, it captured public attention at the time of its emergence and was retold in primary school textbooks, popular children’s magazines, and public statuary. In short, these two “German” Shepherds became celebrated as models of loyalty, bravery, and as essentially Japanese. During the fighting that erupted after the staged railway explosion, Nachi and Kongō, as well as a third dog, Merī (Mary), were lost while working as messengers. A letter written in the following month by their handler, Captain Itakura Itaru, recounted that a search after the battle had turned up two canine corpses, who were identified as Nachi and Merī. Kongō’s body was never found, but Nachi and Merī received a small memorial service and burial. When Itakura was mortally wounded in an attack two months later, he reportedly asked his company commander to watch over the dogs’ graves (*Itakuru Itaru*, 1931).

This scene of a master following his dogs to the grave caught the attention of the mass media, which became a “cheering gallery” for the army in northern China after the Manchurian Invasion (Young, 1998, p. 72). The story was first spread widely by newspapers and magazines and then preserved in more enduring ways. On July 7, 1933, military and civil leaders gathered in Itakura’s hometown to dedicate the “Monument to the Loyal Dogs,” a statue of a

life-sized Shepherd that represented the dogs. Political and military dignitaries, such as Army Minister Araki Sadao (1877-1966), who was also president of the KV, and more than 2000 primary and secondary school students, who performed a song praising “Nachi and Kongō’s war feat,” participated in the service (Minami, 1992).

Children throughout the archipelago soon learned of Nachi and Kongō’s alleged courage and fidelity when the Ministry of Education included “The Exploits of Dogs” (*Inu no tegara*) in the basic language textbook for fourth-year students in 1933. Textbook authors rendered the story in the following manner:

It was the first night of the Manchurian Incident. Two military dogs, Kongō and Nachi, who accompanied our army and served as messengers, were caught in the midst of a severe attack and rushed ahead of our soldiers. They leapt into a swarm of enemy soldiers and with desperate courage bit the enemy one after another.

At the end of the brutal battle, the enemy had fled from its positions. In the first light of dawn, the Rising Sun glittered high above. Thundering shouts of *banzai* rang through heaven and earth, but where were Kongō and Nachi? When called, they did not come.

The chief handler of the dogs searched vigilantly for them. Finally, their whereabouts were discovered. They lay in the midst of many dead soldiers strewn about. The dogs had received several bullets, and soaked with blood they were dead. A closer examination of their mouths revealed the shreds of the enemy’s uniforms that they had fiercely bitten. The soldiers who saw this spontaneously began to cry.

Kongō and Nachi were the first to receive an honorific collar that can be considered the military dog’s equivalent of the Order of the Golden Kite (Kaigo, Ishikawa, & Ishikawa, 1962).

While elements of the story were accurate—the dogs were indeed the inspiration for and first recipients of—a new medal honoring military animals—the textbook tale took tremendous liberties with the account provided by Itakura. In his letter soon after the incident, which was published in the NSC’s newsletter, Itakura did not mention that the dogs had attacked, and apparently killed, enemy soldiers (Imagawa, 1996); these details, and perhaps others, were complete fabrications.

Another fiction that appeared in the story was the names of the dogs whom the soldiers discovered. In the primer, it was no longer Nachi and Meri who were found dead but Nachi and Kongō. Meri, in fact, had entirely disappeared from the story. The substitution of Kongō for Meri, a Japanese name instead of a Western one, effectively Japanized the dog. It is difficult to know for sure whether the switch was intentional or not, but certainly it made sense when one considers that children were the story’s primary audience. Children prob-

ably knew that Nachi and Kongō were the names of holy Shinto religious sites as well as Imperial navy ships. Moreover, a familiar Japanese name probably carried more emotional weight for youngsters than a foreign moniker.

If the rationale for the replacement of Meri by Kongō was uncertain, the intent of the Ministry of Education in including the story in the curriculum was not. In an accompanying instruction manual, Ministry bureaucrat Miyagawa Kikuyoshi (1935) encouraged teachers to “focus on the glorious exploits of the military dogs and to read with appreciation this inspirational deed performed to an incomparably heroic end.” If teachers did so, he continued, they would “nourish in students” minds absolute martial spirit and a love for the nation.” In this way, Miyagawa (1891-1951) elevated Shepherd Dogs as exhibiting character traits that Japanese children ought to emulate, hailing them rather extravagantly as the “essential expression of the Yamato spirit, the exemplars of repaying accumulated debt, the incarnation of dauntless courage whose loyalty and bravery rank with the Imperial soldier, and which would even make a fierce god weep” (p. 405).

Although its effect on children was unclear, the tale of Kongō and Nachi inspired private publishers, textbook authors, screenwriters, and composers to issue a steady stream of stories and songs about dogs and other animals in the service of the military during the 1930s and 1940s (Figure 2). Almost without fail, the dogs featured were *shepādo*, which were presented as martial, masculine, and quintessentially Japanese. The “German” Shepherd was transformed into a sign of Japanese bravery, and used to conjure up visions of human and canine battlefield heroism for boys and domestic sacrifice for girls.

As in other imperial contexts, army dogs in the Japanese empire were often used to magnify the martial power and authority of their masters—both military and civilian. Although their conduct was not as systematic or as brutal as the SS or Gestapo, the Japanese military police, or Kenpeitai, routinely used canines to intimidate imperial subjects. As in the metropole, many Japanese residents in the empire kept dogs, primarily Shepherds, as guards and companions. The dogs lent them and their homes an air of authority, in part as a result of the canine’s conditioned hostility for the colonized.

In post-World War II Asia as in Europe, a strong association between the Shepherd Dog and foreign aggression persists in areas once controlled by Japan. Many older Koreans, for example, despise the breed as a symbol of Japan’s four-decade colonization of the peninsula. Several Chinese films produced during the 1960s suggested that Japanese officers tried to compensate for their small stature with the massive animals. And at least two historical museums in northeast China prominently house large statues of fierce-looking “Japanese” Shepherd Dogs, which were said to eat the intestines of their



Figure 2. Kongō and Nachi leading Imperial Army charge against fleeing Nationalist Chinese soldiers. Like other retellings of the purported heroics of the dogs, this illustration takes great liberties with the original story told by the dog's handler. According to his tale, the dogs were running a message rather than at the head of an attack. Moreover, during the Manchurian Incident the Japanese military battled the troops of a local Chinese warlord rather than Nationalist forces, who, not incidentally, were Japan's primary opponent in 1939 when this image was published. From the monthly (November 1939) children's magazine *Kindābukku* 11(11): 7-8, Don Cohn collection, New York City.

Chinese victims. Such legacies of Japanese imperialism and wartime behavior lingered, not only as memories and physical scars but also in the form of semi-wild beasts. In their final days in power, Japanese officials and colonizers unleashed army dogs in occupied areas such as Hong Kong and Manchuria, and for a time these feral animals continued to terrorize post-colonial peoples (Snow, 2003).

Conclusion

This paper has pursued the tracks of the "German" Shepherd Dog as a way of shedding light on the dynamics of fascism and imperialism in the twentieth century. Its history reveals a complicated configuration of relationships among

humans, dogs, political structures, and the language of nationalism and racial identity. Although the bulk of evidence presented derives from the specific experiences of Germany and Japan, it is clear that similar patterns emerged in other contexts as well. Other European colonists deployed the breed extensively in their imperial holdings in Africa and Asia. In civil-rights era southern United States and apartheid South Africa, police agencies frequently used the dogs to suppress black protests and preserve white power. Militaries, including the U.S. army during the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, mobilized Shepherd Dogs for a wide variety of tasks. More recently, the deployment of military dogs, who were widely identified as Shepherd Dogs, in the torture of prisoners by U.S. soldiers at the Abu Ghraib detention center in Iraq has further contributed to the image of the breed as a symbol of foreign oppression and violence. As a conspicuous medium in hierarchal relations between different human groups, the Shepherd Dog continues to shoulder the notoriety created by human abuses.

The history of the “German” Shepherd also reveals how notions of animal breeds and human races, and therefore “breedism” and “racism,” are interconnected. Both breedism and racism assume that there is a necessary link between biological character and behavior and an inherent inequality among the human races and among animal breeds. Such ideas led to paralleled stereotyping, discrimination, eugenic measures to promote and prevent reproduction, and to the elimination of individual humans and animals who were classified to be of an “inferior” or “mixed-” breed or race. Although animal breeds may have become more of a distinct physical reality than human races because of intensive human control over animal reproduction, both breed and race are primarily creations of the human mind. Perhaps progress toward the eradication of breedism and racism can be achieved through a greater recognition of the constructed nature and artificiality of breed and race and the cruelty these ideas have inflicted—and continue to exact—on people and other animals.

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