**Carp/Koi History**

By Ray Jordan, AKCA Candidate

Reprinted with author permission. Original post from [NI Board](http://members4.boardhost.com/koimag/) 12/22/05

No written history was kept of the early development of colored carp. Oral history is sketchy and often has many different variations on how specific varieties of koi were developed.   I have been working for much of this year to try and piece together some of the pieces of the koi history puzzle. I am posting a short version here to ask for additional sources of information and clues to continue my research.   That said here is the current short version of koi history that I have been able to confirm or at least is told the majority of the time and rings most true to my ear. I hope some of you will be able to point me towards some new/additional evidence. I have a large collection of photos I have found as well and would welcome any additional sources of early koi history type photos.  It is believed that the common river carp originated in the middle east and was traded and carried father and farther from it’s original location because of it’s ability to survive in many different types of climates and water conditions. Common river carp have been raised for food for thousands of years. River carp sometimes have natural mutations of colors including spots or bellies that are red, brown, grey, light blue/grey, light yellow, and tortoiseshell. Carp farmers all over the world would have seen these same mutations but only in the Niigata area of Japan were carp developed and refined successfully by selective breeding to eventually become what we know today as living jewels (koi).   It is believed carp first came to Japan by way of China about 400 years ago. Likely the remoteness of the mountainous Niigata area and especially in their harsh winters, with up to 20 ft of accumulated snow, inspired these home bound villagers to find something beautiful to occupy their minds. Winters were so harsh that some carp had to be brought into temporary ponds inside their small home to survive. It is incredible to think that some bored rice/carp farmer gazing at some of his pet magoi with a few red or gold spots started thinking “I can breed Spot and Speckles and create a new type of colorful carp and then sell for lots of Yen.” Imagine what he would think if he could return today and see how popular and beautiful and expensive some of the descendents of his pet fish experiment had become.   Some of the earliest accidental occurring types of colored carp seen were Magoi (large black wild carp) with red bellies. From these early colored carp came three types of “different magoi.” Finally three separate branches of koi genealogy emerged.   It is believed that Magoi & Hi-goi and crosses produced “black based” koi. Early on Hi (red) and Ki (yellow) bekkos (with black tortoise shell markings). From darker asagi’s came Goshiki’s and later Koromo’s, Aka and Ki Matsuba’s. Karasu (All black), Hageshiro (black with white fins) and Matsukawa-bake. Black with changeable white pattern.   From lighter blue based asagi’s came white based koi including Taki-asagi that eventually produced the first Kohaku. About 1830- Taki-asagi pairings produced a few white carp with red spots. These were the first colored carp to be called Kohaku (Red & White) and were the early ancestors of the modern Kohaku which is still the most popular koi kept today. In the late 1800’s There were a few unique red & white fish produced from breeding Taki Asagi’s. These were to become the ancestors of today’s most popular koi variety the Kohaku. In 1889 Kunizo Hiroi (Gosuke) bred a female carp that was white with a red head to a male carp with a red cherry blossom pattern to produce the 1st modern kohaku. Kohaku’s were bred with Goshiki – Asagi and or Hi Bekko’s to produce the first “old style” Sankes and also shiro bekkos. In the post Russo Japan boom years the koi market exploded and prices soared to the point the sale of koi were banned for awhile. But like our own prohibition the koi black market thrived and after a few years the sale of koi was “permitted” and taxed again. Imagine after the fall harvest groups of rustic Niigata carp/koi farmers celebrating in Ojita City with pockets bulging with yen made by selling their “colored” carp. Must have been quite a celebration.   In 1917 a Niigata koi farmer, Elizaburo Hoshino, bred a special male kohaku with female Ai Goromo with just a few spots of sumi netting to produce the 1st Taisho sanke (modern type)   About the same time Ki bekko’s were bred with magoi to produce the first Ki Utsuri. Ki Utsuri also produced Hi and Shiro Utsuri and finally Hi and/or Ki Utsuri and Kohaku or Red & White Kawarigoi bred by Jukichi Hoshino (Shiro-bei) produced the first “orginal style” Showa that looked somewhat like Hi/Ki utsuri in the early 20th century. These early showas had goshiki like(greyish) shiro and striped fins. Next change was accomplished by breeding to asagi which helped produce motoguro marked fins. In 1964 Tomiji Kobayashi crossed a Male Yogozen Kahaku with a female showa to produce a new style showa with a large crimson red pattern. It also had a brighter white ground without netting. Deep wrapping sumi that forms motoguro and a zig zag pattern on head.   There were three additional major steps in the development of the modern koi we see today. First, German carp, which were scale less, and tan colored were introduced into Japan in 1904. Some early crosses with Asagi produced Shusui, Chagoi, and Kumonryu. Most types of koi bred today have had a doitsu version produced. Some popular varieties such as kujaku were actually first produced in the doitsu form and later crossed with scaled koi to develop into the form and pattern we know today.   Second, in 1921, Sawata Aoki heard the story of a special carp with streaks of gold on it’s dorsal fin had been caught in the river near Hirose village about 30 kilometers away. Sawata felt compelled to walk to the area and see this carp. It was a black magoi with a shine at the base of it’s dorsal fin. He bought it for a high price and took it home. After he allowed it to grow large he bred it keeping only the very few babies that had any golden shine. Over the next 25 years he produced koi there were more and more metallic - Kin Kabuto, Gin Kabuto, Kinbo and Sakin. In 1946 Sawata spent a small fortune, 60 yen, to buy a famous female koi of the shiro-fuji (White with shiny silvery head) type which he crossed with his own most improved metallic offspring. This was at the end of World War II and times were very hard. There was no money to buy food for the koi fry so he would catch insects all day and chew them into tiny bits to feed his fry. The people of his village believed he was crazy. By the end of the summer there were two koi out of this group that had a shining gold sheen all over their bodies and they were also twice the size of their brothers and sisters. These were the original ogon koi (metallic golden scaled dark koi). Can there be any doubt that the special care and devotion shown by Sawata to his creations has produced generations of ogon koi that seem to be more easily tamed than any other type of koi. Sadly Sawata never benefited from his creation. He spent everything he had and he and his family lived in rags to produce a few 1st ogons. Later other breeders like Takehira Hoshide would acquire his ogon offspring and develop more refined brightly colored Yambuki’s (gold) and Platinum’s (silver). The first of these 2nd generation ogons sold for huge sums of money. Ogons are the basis for creating all the metallic types of koi we see today. Including Kin Showa, Kujaku, Hariwake, Yamato Nishiki, and Kikiuryus.   Third, in Hiroshima (Southern Japan) about 1920 some magoi were discovered that had scales along their backs that sparkled like diamonds. Many attempts were made to breed these magoi with diamond type scales first called “Dia Ginrin” to get baby koi with these types of scales all over the body. Then these Dia Ginrin koi were bred to popular types of koi. About 1950 the first kinginrin kohaku appeared. Some of these first Dia Kohaku’s sold for $30,000 in the 1950’s. Dia Ginrin is more commonly called Hiroshima ginrin today. Several other types of gin rin have been developed including Tama also called pearl gin, beta gin, and kado also called “edge” gin. It is amazing to think that in a little over 100 years all the 100+ named varieties we know today were developed. Most since World War II when almost all koi were lost in Japan due to lack of food and orders from the military to forfeit all carp to be eaten. Fortunately the core koi brood stock was hidden in secluded Shinto temple ponds. After the war the survivors were recovered and breeding began again. But that is another story entirely.