

Japanese Falconry – History & Cultural Aspects

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Preface

While Japan lays itself off far eastern edge of Eurasia, it has kept cultural links with the continent, integrating foreign or universal elements with native tradition into an original unity. Falconry is no exception.

Origin of Falconry in Japan

As the surest evidence, archaeology tells us that, by 6th century, Japanese kings and lords began hawking. According to latest research (*Kaku 2004*), there have so far been found 6 falconer and 10 gamehawk “*haniwa*” figurines, which includes one National Important Cultural Property (The Museum Yamatobunkakan) and one Municipal Important Cultural Property (Ohta-shi Educational Committee) with their artistic and historical value. Interestingly, all have been found in either of two centers of falconry in later times. Two fragments of falconer *haniwa* were found on the *Imashiroduka* Mound, possibly the tomb of King *Ohto* (Emperor *Keitai*; reign 507-531), the founder of present dynasty. Some *haniwa* hawks have bell mounted on tail, which is universal method in east Asia and has survived as tradition also in Japan.

In written records, *Nihon Shoki*, the first official chronicle edited in 720A.D., dates the first hawking in Japan as of 355 A.D. According to the record, a prince from *Pekche* dynasty of Korean Peninsula trained an unfamiliar and mysterious bird named *kuchi* and King *Ohsazaki* (Emperor *Nintoku*; literal reign 313-399, often deemed nonexistent or dating down to early 5th century) enjoyed hawking with it, jessed and with bell mounted on tail. Afterwards, the king established the regime of state falconers. *Pekche* is a dynasty of Manchurian origin, with its culture greatly influenced by China. *Kuchi* is not ancient Korean word but of Turk, Tunguz or Chinese origin (*Shiratori 1926*). While *Shiratori* regarded *kuchi* as a gyrfalcon, I consider it be a Siberian goshawk (*Morimoto 2005*). Although the episode might be fiction, it does show Japanese falconry has bloomed on the Chino-Korean branch of the global falconry tree.

Harimanokuni Fudoki, a folklore book edited probably before 715 A.D., refers to the lost bell at hawking by Emperor *Honta*, who is considered as King *Homtawake* (Emperor *Oujin*; literal reign 270-310) in *Nihon Shoki*. This story has been often cited as earlier evidence of hawking, but the king is sometimes doubted of reality or deemed identical to King *Ohsazaki*.

Ancient Falconry (8-12th century)

Ancient hawking was done by riding armed falconers. The scene of hawking or departure therefor deeply impressed spectators (*Enomura 1993*). That is, hawking had symbolized and publicly demonstrated dominance over land and military power (*Matsumoto 2002*). So central rulers always tried to monopolize or even ban hawking through law and Buddhist ideology, while emerging local lords kept hawking in practice either through connection with those of influence (*Yumino 1978*) or through finding religious excuse in Shintoism. Tribute of good hawks worked as a ritual confirming clientelist relationship between upper power and lower rank nobility or local lords (*Akiyoshi 2004*). Interaction between the two lines of falconry, one in capital area, the other in the provinces, was a character in Japanese falconry history through early 17th century.

Under *Taihou Ryou* Codes (702) and *Yourou Ryou* Codes (718), *Houyoushi* or *Shutakashi* (Hawking Agency) was set under *Hyoubushou* (Ministry of Military Affairs) to serve for state

hawking. In later 9th century, *Shutakashi* was abolished, and *Kuroudodokoro* (Emperor's Chamber) got in charge of management of state hawks, with falconers from Guards serving. The regime, though getting nominal after 12th century, survived through Medieval times.

Among ancient hawking enthusiasts, known are remarkable emperors such as *Kanmu* (737-806; reign 781-806), *Saga* (786-842; reign 809-823), *Uda* (867-931; reign 887-897), *Daigo* (885-930; reign 897-930), *Ichijou* (980-1011; reign 986-1011), *Shirakawa* (1053-1129; reign 1072-1086), great poets such as *Ohtomo-no-Yakamochi* (716-785), *Ariwara-no-Narihira* (825-880), *Ariwara-no-Yukihira* (818-893), and grand generals such as *Sakanoue-no-Tamuramaro* (758-811) and *Minamoto-no-Mitsunaka* (912-997). The methods of falconry in central court had been kept by such nobility enthusiast and by limited expert families serving as state falconer.

Emperor *Saga* ordered compilation of a falconry text named *Shinshuu Youkyou* (Newly Edited Hawk Canon) in 818, which relied on both practice and on prior Chinese falconry texts, and may be the oldest falconry book in the world as survived in complete. It covers management, training, hawking and raptor biomedicine, including plans for cautery. While *Shinshuu Youkyou* notes on use of *takatanuki*, Japanese counterpart of Arabic *mangalah*, no reference is yet made to *yegake* glove. With all often use of peregrines, mainstream of Japanese falconry has been goshawks and sparrowhawks since that time.

While Emperor *Saga* authored a Chinese poem on hawking as continental counterparts did in Tang period, hawking established itself as an independent theme for Japanese poem called *waka*. The 3 poems on falconry by *Ohtomo-no-Yakamochi* and 3 other ones on hawking in the anthology *Manyoushuu* (8th century) were followed by many poems in later official anthologies until the final banning of hawking for the court nobilities in early 17th century.

Great impression on public by state hawking was reflected in some chapters in classic novels: *Genji Stories* (around 1000) and *Ise Stories*. Many episodes on hawking can be also found in *Nihon Ryouiki* (8-9th century), *Ohkagami* (11-12th century), or *Konjaku Stories* (12th century). Artworks which may be related to hawking can be found among Shousouin Treasures in 8th century.

The importance of public demonstration in Japanese falconry created a tradition of beautiful costume and elaborate equipments. No hawking artifact of the time has survived, but we can imagine them from written records and paintings in later times, and still in use are the red silk leash, which is found in records in 10th century. The aesthetics in hawking equipments has also survived until now.

Developments in Medieval Times (12-16th century)

Medieval hawking were directly linked to struggles between sinking central nobilities (*kuge*) and emerging local warlords called *samurai* over title and interests in land where hawking field located (*Takebayashi 1982*). The sense of legitimacy and crisis on the side of central nobilities brought about systemization of falconry knowledge, oral secrets and ritual precedents. Thus a kind of falconry schools were formed by several families, among which the *Jimyouins* and the *Saionjis* left important falconry texts. On the other hand, among samurai in eastern Japan also emerged another line of falconry schools: *Nedzu*, *Seirai*, *Utsunomiya*, etc.

While the two stream had contacts since 12th century or before, they rapidly began to influence each other after *Ashikaga* Shogunate by eastern samurai settled in Kyoto (1336). Following texts by *Jimyouins* and the *Saionjis*, *Nedzu* and *Seirai* schools authored their own texts. In later works by court nobilities, in turn, found are many reference to the method or wording of eastern schools. One can also see some continental method from China, probably of Middle Eastern origin, such as sewing eyes of caught haggards or use of rotating block perch.

Saionji Sanekane (1248-1322), *Nijou Yoshimoto* (1320-1388) and *Konoe Ryuuzan* (1536-1612), who were nobilities of highest status and culture, each left a set of poems to remember knowledge on falconry, which poems has been widely respected beyond difference of schools.

As hawking became more and more popular, falconers had to justify themselves against Buddhist idea of banning kill. Adding to Buddhist reasoning, under the fusion of Buddhism and local Shintoism at that time, central nobilities resorted to *Hachiman* deity as guardian of hawking, and epigone of ancient expert falconers (the *Shimotsukenus* and the *Hatas*) found excuse in tribute of games to *Kamo* deity as holy dish. Similarly, samurai contributed their quarries to *Suwa* or *Futarasan* deity. Keeping steps with the interaction between falconry schools, *Suwa* cult gained popularity also among nobility falconers (*Nakazawa 2000*). Spells asking for good games or for recovering lost hawk came under such Shintoist cults.

Popularity of hawking had footprints on abundant fine arts and literature. *Kasuga Gongen Kenki E* (Illustrated Miracle Story of *Kasuga* Deity; Imperial Collection), contributed by *Saionji Kimihira* (1264-1315), one of greatest falconer at the time, vividly shows falconry by court nobilities. A hawking scene by riding samurai can be seen in *Rikudouzu* (Six Transmigrated Worlds; Shoujuu Raigouji Temple; National Treasure). *Ippen Shounin Eden* (Illustrated Biography of St. *Ippen*; Kankikouji Temple; National Treasure) and *Jizouzoushi* (Book on *Ksitigarbha*; Tokyo National Museum) depicts perched goshawk at home of samurai. *Obusuma Saburou Ekotoba* (Illustrated Story on *Obusuma Saburou*; Tokyo National Museum; National Important Cultural Property) narrated a vision of a carried hawk as symbolizing the soul of a samurai. In *Uesugi-bon Rakuchuu Rakugaizu Byoubu* (Uesugi version of the Folding Screen on the Scene within and out of Kyoto; Yonazawa Municipal Uesugi Museum; National Treasure), you can find hawking parties around Kyoto in 16th century.

Influenced by imported paintings of a perched hawk from *Yuan* or *Ming* of China, hawk portrait became a genre of art in 16th century (*Ohsawa 2003*), in form of hanging scrolls, folding screens or sliding door paintings. From hawk portraits, we can draw various information. For example, *igiri*, the leather strips connecting the jesses with toes, was of Chinese or Manchurian origin, as often seen on portraits of Siberian goshawks.

In closing of Medieval Times, Japan had a great civil war. There came great warlords who loved hawking. *Asakura Norikage* (1477-1555) even tried and succeeded in captive breeding of goshawks. *Oda Nobunaga* (1534-1582), the hegemon who nearly conquered most part of the country, invented a way of approaching games behind a horse loaded bundled twigs. The final victor and founder of a new shogunate, *Tokugawa Ieyasu* (1542-1616) can be called the most enthusiastic falconer in Japanese history.

Falconry under Tokugawa Shogunate (17-19th century)

Tokugawa Ieyasu banned hawking by *kuge* nobilities and formed a nationwide hierarchic and clientelist falconry system for upper samurai under *Tokugawa* Shogunate, working also as ruling mechanism over villages in hawking field (*Nezaki 1999*). He also employed falconers of varying schools, whereas he himself studied falconry tradition under *Konoe Ryuuzan*. In terms of both regime and methods, the two lines of falconry, for nobilities and *samurai*, were integrated into one.

While hawking had been temporally (1693-1709) banned on national basis by the humane shogun *Tsunayosi*, *Tokugawa Yoshimune* (1684-1751), the eighth shogun and reformer, revived falconry by shogunate. He also studied classic texts and foreign arts, authoring an work for crane hawking. His collection of falconry classics are now archived in National Archives of Japan and the Imperial Household Agency.

Tokugawa Ieyasu was deified after death, and in the cult of his shrine, *Toushouguu*, falconers

served the festival parade. To *Hachimanguu* or *Toushouguu* shrines, painted hawks on panel were contributed, among which ones in *Senba Toushouguu* and *Iino Hachimanguu* have been registered as Prefectural Important Cultural Property. One can find hawk relieves on many shrines built in Tokugawa period.

Hawking scene of the era can be seen on many painted scrolls and folding screens. Above all, *Hanami Takagarizu Byoubu* by *Unkoku Tougan* (Folding Screen of Cherry Blossom Seeing and Hawking; MOA Museum of Art; National Important Cultural Property) and *Takagarizu Byoubu* by *Kusumi Morikage* (Folding Screen of Hawking; Nitto Boseki Co.,Ltd. Collection) show you the hawking style in early 17th century. As war tactics had been shifted from calvary to battalions on foot, costumes and swords for samurai had changed according thereto. So did hawking. Riding on hawking field had disappeared except for hawking with sparrowhawks. And admiration for “cast and catch in short distance” parallels aesthetics in sword maneuver called *iai*, a demonstrative art in peace time.

The *hommage* to classic hawking in ancient period can be seen in a lot of pictures of riding nobility falconers in painted scrolls of classic stories or temple history, such as *Isemonogatari Emaki* (Illustrated Scroll of Ise Stories; Saiguu Historical Museum) or *Kajuji Engi Emaki* (Illustrated Scroll of History of Kajuji Temple; Kajuji Temple).

The hawk portraits in *Tokugawa* period evolved from stereotypes into personal portraits to memorize ones hawks, which was a phenomenon probably unique to East Asia, reflecting great affection of shoguns and lords to hawking partners.

Most of traditional hawking equipments as survived so far are devised or refined during *Tokugawa* period. Those shown in “*Nippon*” (1832) by Philipp Franz von Siebold are almost identical not only to the collection in the Tokugawa Art Museum but also to current types.

The political effect of falconry was partly supported by interests in hawking and game hawks among common ranks. A popular *rakugo*, oral comic story, was on hawking by a *shogun*, and some proverbs came from falconry. “Able hawk hides her talons” reminds you of a relaxed hawk on perch. Some *Ukiyoe* prints by *Katsushika Hokusai* depict falconers or hawks.

Management and training of hawks were done by hereditary falconers, who were lower rank samurai. Current surviving falconry schools are their descendants in terms of methods.

The rigid regulations, including prohibition on hunting by commons, over villages in hawking field contributed to conservancy of bird. *Kamoike*, the ponds with stretching creeks to lure fed ducks, devised and built in early 19th century for easy hawking, were in fact paradise for waterfowls.

Falconry in Modern Times

Through Meiji Revolution (1868), the hawking regime under *Tokugawa* Shogunate wholly collapsed, with hereditary falconers losing their job. Falconry, monopoly of which had been shaken at the dusk of Shogunate, was legally released to any people. The publication of *Ehon Takakagami* (Illustrated Hawk Canon; 1863 and 1879) by *Kawanabe Kyosai* can be understood in this context.

Some ex-lords, *Ikeda*, *Date* or *Kuroda*, employed former hereditary falconers to keep traditional hawking. They built and kept *kamoike* for netting and hawking. As their hawking inspired Emperor *Meiji*, the Imperial Household Ministry, as part of the policy to preserve restructured tradition, also employed former hereditary falconers and their sons as imperial falconers. The Ministry also published a large volume of study on hawking of Japan and Korea, then Japanese domain (*Kunaishou Shikibushoku* 1931). Imperial falconers kept hawking with goshawks and peregrines. One can see some western elements in the whistle for peregrines and falconer uniforms.

Hawking by ex-governor families had been already in wane in early 20th century. Due to restructure after World War II, the Imperial Household Agency also ceased actual hawking, with the post of falconers left nominal, who are in charge of netting now. No effort have been made on government level to preserve hawking since then.

On the other hand, retired imperial falconers, such as *Murakoshi Sentarou* before World War II and *Hanami Kaoru* after WWII, disclosed their methods to public enthusiasts. The former's art is *Yoshida* school, a derivative school of medieval *Nedzu* school, and the latter method call oneself as *Suwa* school succeeded by the *Kobayashis*, a hereditary falconer family. Most of current falconers in Japan, more or less, derive from either line. Recently western methods and scientific knowledge has also been introduced and assimilated, as was in ancient and medieval times. Japanese falconry is now kept by such individual efforts, part of which are organized in around 10 clubs or circles, according to school or region.

The disclosure of falconry methods among lower samurai and upper farmers gave rise to another line of falconry: folk austringers who flied mountain hawkeagles in snow mountains of northeastern provinces. Socio-economic change after World War II made an end to such hawking as subsistence. The last few hawkeagle austringers, *Tsuchida Rin'nosuke* (1896-1974), *Takeda Uichirou* (1915-1992), and *Kutsuzawa Asaji* (1896-1983), attracted public interest for the dying tradition, and many non-fiction books, novels, films or *manga* comics were made on them. A TV documentary film, "An Old Man and a Hawk" won Eurovision Grand Prix in documentary division of Cannes Film Festival in 1962, and National Museum of Japanese History made a film record, "*Ou-u no Takatsukai*" (Austringer of Northeastern Province). Now survives only one austringer keeping the unique style.

Current Situation

After temporally under a hunting license system during 1892-1901, hawking has been excluded from tax-bearing statutory hunting methods, and has been legal but without express reference specifically to hawking in relevant laws. With late *Kutsuzawa Asaji* as the only exception, no falconer has been nominated intangible cultural property holder, on either national or local level. While the number of active falconers has recently increased up to around 180, it is still small, and not a few public misunderstand that hawking has been exterminated in Japan, or even that it be illegal under current law.

While falconry is well respected among general public as traditional arts, it is not always linked to public recognition of hawking as is, which is now done by falconers in western hunting costume inevitably under unfavorable field condition of present times, with management and training of hawks also adapted to modern life, but with the philosophy and aesthetics of traditional falconry still surviving. We must enhance public relations and make up this recognition gap, to prevent possible motion on the side of anti-falconry people that falconry be only kept for amusing public on demonstration by fliers in apparently traditional costume, with active falconers forbidden from hawking in field.

A national birdwatcher society intends to legislatively eliminate falconry through banning of hawking under hunting law on the one hand, and through prohibition on import and flight of foreign species or subspecies by listing as illegal alien species. To counter such motion, major hawking clubs and some individual falconers formed National Conference for Japanese Falconry as a lobbying unit (*National Conference for Japanese Falconry 2005*).

Some falconers, to enhance public recognition of falconry, actively involve themselves in scientific research of raptors or rehabilitation of injured hawks. Japan Raptor Research offered blood samples of goshawk subspecies from various origin for DNA analysis and comparison with Japanese

subspecies by Forestry and Forest Products Research Institute. *Hatano Ikuya* has made research on cryopreserve of goshawk spermatozoa. The Japanese Falconers' Association has held seminars for veterinarians and rehabilitators.

In past few years, several books on hawking in specific periods have been published, and one or two museum exhibitions on hawking have been held annually. In 2005, Edo Tokyo Museum and Tokugawa Memorial Foundation jointly held one in January, and Tokyo National Museum will have another in October. Nevertheless, study of falconry history in Japan is still in cradle phase. *Minoura Yoshihiro* cooperates with Chukyo University in decrypting and noting a classic falconry text. More collaboration among academic experts and falconers is necessary.

Japanese museums and libraries own many arts and books on hawking or falconry. As for books, most of them have been bibliographed but not in complete. Making database of arts is yet to come. While collections in public or in private institution are accessible to the public, those in personal properties are with risk of lost. Those of high cultural value sometimes appear in antiques market, and pass to unknown people out of academic or falconer society.

Closure

Falconry is a special relationships among man, raptor and nature, supported by systematic methods and time-honored wisdoms, which have been succeeded and enhanced by respective local cultures and mutually exchanged through the history of mankind.

Japanese falconry has been closely linked to socio-political regime of respective times, and occupied integral part of classic literature and art of the islands, producing abundant masterpieces. For study and understanding of such times by current and following generation, falconry as alive is indispensable. Japanese Falconry has unique elements in equipments and handling ways created in more than fourteen centuries' history, as well as universal characters. The skill on crafting equipment and handling hawks, as *chaine operatoire*, can be only handed down in face-to-face relationships, and vulnerable to lost unless younger generation participates under public recognition.

Similar consideration shall apply to falconry in other part of the globe. As such, global falconry culture as a whole deserves nomination as Intangible Cultural Heritage, I believe.

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