

Teacher's notes

Falconry in Mongolia

Student worksheet 3 (SW3) and slide 2

SW3 – world maps shows saker falcon breeding & wintering areas. Dark pink indicates where in the world saker falcons breed. Light pink shows where saker falcons can migrate to in the winter.

Answers for SW3 – is the first slide in Mongolia powerpoint

Mongolia flag: description, symbolism, meaning and origins

The Mongolia flag consists of 3 vertical coloured stripes: red, blue, red. Within the left-hand stripe is the Buddhist Soyombo symbol, which has become the national symbol of Mongolia. The Soyombo symbol and the colours of the flag manifests Mongolia's Buddhist heritage.



The **blue** symbolizes the colour of the land of the blue sky. It has Buddhist associations with the sky, purity and healing. Blue prayer flags are often left on buddhist ovoos throughout Mongolia. Visitors may be given a blue flag by a local, a special gesture meaning their prayers are with you.

The **red** symbolizes freedom and advancement. No doubt the communists were content to leave it on the Mongolia flag from 1920s to 1990s due to its associations with Socialism.

The Soyombo Symbol : The (gold) Soyombo symbol is the national emblem of Mongolia. It appears in the country's coat of arms.

Meanings: There is a surprising amount of variation in the interpretations of this symbol: every source seems to have its own spin on things. This is because the Soyombo symbol was created by a Buddhist lama over 300 years ago, and most religious scripts and records were burned during [Communist repressions](#), so it's impossible to reach a definitive answer.

The traditions of hunting with bird of Mongolians

Written by : D. Otgonsaikhan, vice- president of the Mongolian Falconry Association.

It is true that hunting was a priority of people from the prehistoric period. During ancient times peoples food, clothes and almost all of other necessary items would have been obtained only from hunting.

We can read in historical books how those first ancestors of human being and birds of prey originated from the Asian continent. Scientists argue that wide steppes and vast sand deserts are most suitable environment to develop the art of falconry.

Mongolian people since ancient times have been the historical tradition to worship, feed, and train to hunt and catch wild animals with splendid and powerful birds of use in the essentials of their lifestyle and there is a substantial possibility to conclude that this art had originated in Central Asia/Mongolia.

By the written works of scientists and travelers we can see that Mongolian ordinary people have obtained a major part of their foods through hunting and "...males haven't trouble for anything, they have made wars and hunts with falcon". Researchers have classified the concept hunting with birds of prey as "shuvuulakhui" or hunting with birds of prey and there are many facts, demonstrating that Mongolians are people with substantial systematic knowledge of falconry.

Ancient Mongolians used eagles, falcons and hawks to catch wild animals. Records show they used the eagles to hunt mammals such as wolf, fox, steppe fox, hair and other mammals, but falcons and hawks to hunt grouse, duck, goose and other birds.

In the medieval era, the hawk named "aksognkur" in Turkey, "sonkar" in Mongolian, "hai-ch'ing or "hai-tungch-ing" and as referred in historical sources, the fastest hunting birds are big falcons of few specs as white falcon (*Falco rusticolus*), ordinary falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), saker falcon (*Falco cherrug*), which have the capability to catch big water birds such as crane, goose, duck etc. These falcons have natural hunting skills, they are courageous and often catch animals bigger than themselves. It is common for a good trained saker falcon to catch a black tailed gazelle.

The white falcon was the worship of the ancient Mongolian "golden origin" or Khiad Borjigin tribe, which was written in the history of Butanchar – ancestor of the great Chinggis Khaan.

In the "Mongolian sacred history", article 63 referred: "...When Esukhey Baatar in companion of his son Temuugin has met Dai Setsen from the Khongirad, Dai Setsen said "Esukhey Khud! I've seen a prophet dream last night: A white falcon flew in with the sun and moon in its hands and step down on my hand. We are seeing sun and moon with our eyes. However, white falcon flew in with the sun and moon in its hands and step down on my hand! This is wonderful! I've told people of this amazing event. Esukhey Khud! You are come with your son! This is explanation of my dream. What is dream? There was worship of your Khiad Borjigin came in my dream!"

The great kings have been brought such good falcons mostly from the Baigal lake, Manchuria, Far East, Korea and Bokhai. There is no doubt that white falcons were native in Mongolia. An Italian traveler Marko Polo wrote in his book "The various bizarres of the world", article 74 "... If you make a journey of four days you would reach a sea /North Ocean/... On of islands of the sea ... much more white falcons, so the king can have more than he wants..." As referred in the "Lu. Golden History", lords from Uigur and Khirgis, captured by Zuchi – old son of Chinggis Khan, were delivered to Chinggis Khan White falcons and hawks.

Falcons were given as gifts by the Hunn and Dunkhu nomadic tribes to other tribes and countries. Mongolians also took falcons as tax from defeated or captured tribes. In example, the "The Mongolian Sacred History" said in chapter 29 "... While they request for Bodonchar's hawk, he hadn't gave..." In the chapter of 239 "In the year of hare /1207/ "... When Zuchi has starts war against a oin ard /forest people/ , Bukha had gone as guide...and Zuchi's cavalry had reach to Shigdhis /Shishgid river/ through the territory of Tumen Oirad, the khirgis noyod /lords/ and oirad noyod have met the Zuchi's cavalry giving presents to Chinggis Khan with white falcons, white horses and black sables..."

The Korea dynasty existed from 918 to1392, paid huge taxes including Shon Koi Mae or falcons in very large numbers.

During the great Mongolian imperial time Russian taxes could be paid in falcons. A great number of taxes was paid with falcons to Mongolian imperators from Russia. The famous Russian traveler Afanasy Nikitin in his book about India referred to "... The carriages with white falcons, sent by the great tsar have waited tatarian envoy Shirvanshin Asanbek for two weeks and in the carriages were 90 white falcons...".

Also, in 1491 Russian tsar Ivan III signed an agreement with Tatarian khan Mengli-Girtei to add white falcons to tax payment. The latest evidence of such practices is in 1491 where six best white falcons were among the gifts given to Mongolian Bogd khan by Spafary.

Mongolians have used hawks and eagles in hunting. As referred in the "Mongolian Sacred History", Bodonchar –Munkhag, referred in the history as Mon khan - one of leaders of original Mongolian tribe from Three (Onon, Kherlen and Tuul) Rivers had lived in grass hut on the Baljun island of the Onon River because he was expelled by his brothers. Once, he has been seen with a grey hawk he had caught that was fed with black khur bird – he had caught with a snare made with long hairs from his horse to keep and feed it.

The Italian traveler Marko Polo wrote in his book "The various bizarre of the world", article 92 "... The great Khan also has many eagles having caught wolf, fox, gazelle, and deer. Those have sufficiently many numbers of varieties of wild animals. Eagles, which catch wolves, are biggest and powerful. There were not any wolves, which can be saved from their talons...".

During the great Mongolian empire, the hunting with birds of prey was ceased as one of main forms of life hood and was changed to the specific form of hunting activity, having a character of entertainment for Mongolian great khans and warriors. Great Chinggis Khan has an extraordinary knowledge on the hunting with birds (falconry) and he brought hunt activity to the high level of state activities. In his period hunting with bird of prey was closely connected to war and military structure and a white falcon was portrayed on the imperial army flag as the coat of arms.

After death of Chinggis khan and disunion of his great empire the tradition of hunting with birds of prey continued as heritage for a long time.

Khubilai Khan (Kublai Khan, grandson of Chinggis Khan) of the great Mongolian Yuan dynasty continued the hunting tradition with birds for his mental and spiritual pleasure. Marko Polo noted in "The various bizarre of the world" that Khubilai khan "... goes to hunt followed by ten thousand bird keepers with five hundred falcons and simple eagles and brown head eagles. Also, goes to hunt water birds along the river basin with eagles. Khan doesn't keep too many peoples and birds in the same place. He deploys them in different places and hunters present the greater part of hunted birds to khan...". Further, "Khan goes with twenty best falcons and several lords and warriors of higher range for pleasure. Khan ascends in the Ger residence, harnessed several elephants and lords and warriors follows him. If they shout: "Great khan! Flock of cranes is coming" the khan will look at flock of great many cranes and free one of bird of prey. Freed falcon or eagle undoubtedly will catch a crane. So the great khan pleasures...".

Recently, Mongolian archeologists have found a head bone of hawk during an excavation of a grave from XVI century is the guarantee of the tradition that Mongolians have buried their khans and honored people together with their precious possesses and important domestic animals.

There is a tradition of Mongolians, which inherited to comparative late period such as selecting, catching, keeping, training and feeding of falcons, eagles and hawks. There were people with special duties to perform these activities, named as "Falconer", "eagler" and "hawker" and method and operation of hunting with birds have detailed order and have correspond to a particular season and characters of particular bird and special "language". For example, the linguistic work of several Mongolian science authors in 1746 "Dictionary of thirty six" has a special chapter named as "Hunting falcon and dog's entertainment". This chapter contains many Mongolian terms, connected to the custom of hunting with birds of prey. Therefore, we have an opportunity to analyze these terms in comparison to historical knowledge and etymology sources of ancient Mongolians to find some information on hunt with falcon and hawk .

The Kublai Khan Hunting Trip. – painting by Vadim Gorbатов – slide 8

Written by Alan Gates: www.eaglefalconer.com

Falconry flourished in Asia during this period and Kublai Khan left Cambaluc (Beijing) each March and travelled north east to go hunting accompanied by some 10,000 falconers and bird catchers as well as his soldiers, office bearer, bodyguards etc. numbering many thousands more.

The painting by Vadim Gorbатов shows Kublai Khan riding in his grand pavilion, which in turn is carried by four elephants. The Venetian traveller describes the pavilion as being provided with gold braid cloth on the inside and the outside as being covered with tiger skins. The Emperor, shown wearing a hermelin coat, travelled and hunted from his pavilion with a group of his favoured noblemen for diversion and good company. His favourite wives and his twelve best gyrfalcons were also present in then pavilion.

The riders beside the pavilion would inform the Great Khan of cranes or any other birds flying nearby, the pavilion curtain was raised and the gyrfalcons would be cast after them. Those in the pavilion would enjoy the long flight while remaining in comfort.

Marco Polo states that the Great Khan's 10,000 falconers were divided into groups of between one hundred and two hundred people and you can see other groups hunting in the distance. Closer into the foreground on the left, the hooded cheetahs show two different methods of being secured when not actively coursing their prey. A camel is shown transporting trained caracals in its panniers and Tasy dogs are first described here as an ancient form of Saluki and were normally included in hunting groups.

In front of the pavilion., the painting shows three kinds of horses, which are known to have been used by these horse dependant people, the Akhal Tekin, Mongolian and Arab. On the right hand side of the painting there is a typical Mongol nobleman with his peregrine falcon and a Chinese falconer with a saker falcon, both watching birds that are outside of the picture.

A Chinese falconer with his golden eagle transports his kill, a deer on the back of his horse and quite close to him ride falconers with the light coloured Albidus or Buteoides goshawks. Kites follow the hunting groups to feed on the rubbish that they leave behind while flocks of waterfowl are also on the wing from the near sky and into the horizon, offering the possibility of sport to the Kublai Khan's hunting parties.

Within the group of tents in the distance there is one flying a large flag. Marco Polo described this tent as a "lost property office" and should a person find any object but fail to report it here, he was considered a thief and punished accordingly if caught. Finally, at the centre bottom a falconer casts off a superb white gyrfalcon to join the other falcons already taking part in the hunt."

Information on Mongolian Falconry

Written by Shijirmaa Damdinsuren

Mongolians trained such raptors as kestrel, falcon and eagle for hunting from ancient times. Mongolians respected and worshiped to strength, agility and bravery of those birds and made them symbols of ancient Mongolian tribes. Cavaliers of Attila Khaan of Hun Empire used shields with image of falcon. (Secret history of Mongols, Mongolia Green network)

Chinggis khaan belongs to the Khiad Borjigon tribe. This tribe is considered the tribe, which keeps the Golden Lineage of Royal Mongols. Representatives of Khiad Borjigon tribe, including Chinggis Khaan ruled over the Mongolian Empire for more than 350 years. Coat of Arms of this tribe was a White Falcon. This Coat of Arms certainly flew over Mongol warriors, who established and ruled the largest land empire in history. An archaeology team, which made excavations of a burial site of 13th century nobleman in Sukhbaatar aimag, discovered a belt with silver decorations with falcons. (Secret history of Mongols, Mongolia Green network)

Chinggis khaan praised one of his six Ministers and close friend Boorchii in the Secret history of Mongols. He praised the best quality of Boorchii as brave and decisive as falcon. (Secret History of Mongols)

It was described in the history that Chinggis Khan and his sons Ogodei and Tsagadai used birds for hunting and received hunting birds as gifts from foreign countries. It was recorded that Mongolian Bogd Lama received a white falcon from Russian Tsar as a gift in 1675. (sonin.mn)

It is said that falcon hunting was so popular and well developed in times of Mongolian Yuan dynasty and there were 10000 falconers serving Kublai Khan. Unfortunately, there is no document giving number of falcons trained by each falconer. Hunting birds were trained and tagged with silver ring with name and address of the noblemen. (Nomad Green) That is why it was thought that experience of bird ringing was first invented in Mongolia. (Mongolia Yellow Pages)

A monument to Marco Polo, who has a falcon on his right shoulder, was erected in December last year in downtown Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Marco Polo spent 17 years of his life in the palace of Chinggis Khan's grandson Kublai Khan (1275-1292) and fulfilled many diplomatic missions and administrative missions under the Great Khan. Mongolians believe that Marco Polo was a historian who introduced culture, traditions and values of Mongols for the first time to the Western World. In his Books of the Marvels of the World (this book was told by Marco Polo but written down by Rustichello da Pisa), he described that Mongolian Great Khan sent special messengers to Arctic regions to capture white falcons. Marco Polo wrote that there was an island where white falcons were found in abundance and the Khan ordered to capture as many birds from there as he wished. (sonin.mn)

Falconry in Mongolia today

Eagle Hunting, one of the most dramatic and primal relationships between man and beast is alive and well today in the remote mountains of western Mongolia, Bayan-Ulgii aimag. Falconry developed in Central Asia and for centuries, ethnic Kazakh men have hunted from horseback with trained golden eagles, the largest and most powerful of raptors. Fox, rabbit and even wolf are hunted for their fur and for the challenge they present, pursued across the snowy mountains and steppes.

In winter western Mongolia is VERY COLD. Day time temperatures are nearly always below freezing, often below zero. The Kazakhs only hunt with their eagles during winter, when the pelts of the rabbits, red fox and wolf are at their most luxuriant. Hunting with eagles is an ancient sport. It reminds us of how close, until recent history, man was with both nature and animals. This tradition, lost in many parts of the world, is enjoying a resurgence of interest among the Kazakhs and has spread to other ethnic groups who once hunted with raptors but lost the knowledge.

See

<http://www.youtube.com/embed/-Y3DI0BGfww>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=aEnSPYsiikY>

Acknowledgements Many thanks to ;

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Alan Gates : www.eaglehunter.com

Narbek Khasim : Kazakh eagle hunter.

Shijirmaa Daminsuren : IWC General Manager Mongolia.

Ramsay James : Substantial films www.substantialfilms.co.uk

