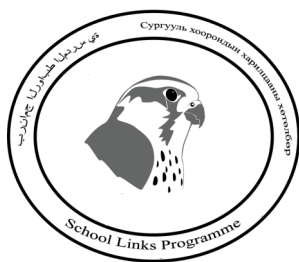
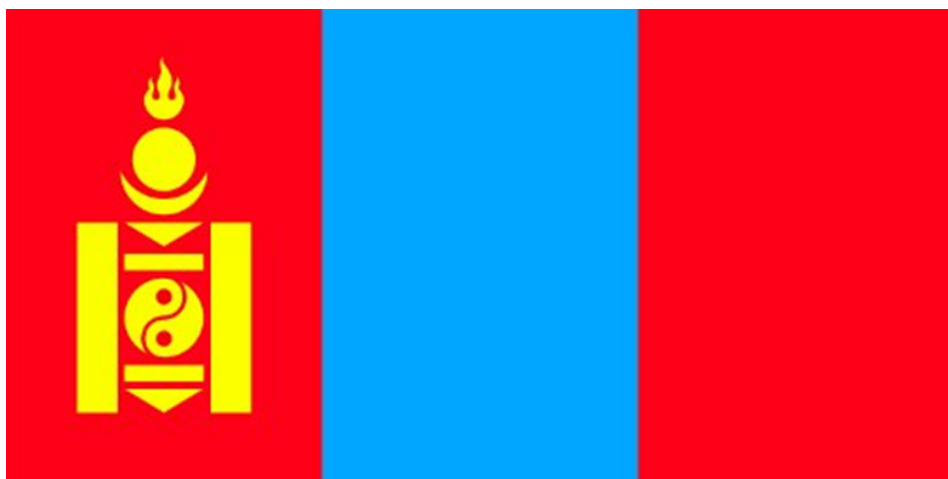


Fact Sheet



Mongolian Falconry



Flag

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.

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...”.

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 khaan. 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 Khaan's grandson Kublai khaan (1275-1292) and fulfilled many diplomatic missions and administrative missions under the Great Khaan. 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 Khaan 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 Khaan 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.