

Implication of Japanese Hawks and Falconry Art

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[要旨]

近年、鷹や鷹狩を主題とする文化および美術への関心が、国際的に高まっている。芸術作品は、その国の文化を視覚的に表しているため、「美の外交官」とも呼ばれる。しかし、残念なことに、日本の鷹狩文化は海外に誤ったイメージが流布しているという問題がある。そこで、本稿では、日本の鷹と鷹狩の美術作品の主題と意味について考えてみることにした。鷹や鷹狩の絵画は、源氏物語や伊勢物語などの文学に登場する鷹狩の話、鷹狩の名所となった場所の記憶、あるいは英雄のシンボルとして制作されたのであった。絵画の裏側に潜む様々な物語を知ると、絵画の魅力が一層高まるかもしれない。

[Abstract]

In recent years, interest in culture and art about hawks and falconry has increased internationally. The art works is also called a “Beauty Diplomat” because it visually represents the culture of the country. However, unfortunately, the Japanese falconry culture has the problem that false images are disseminated overseas. Therefore, in this paper, I decided to consider the subject and meaning of Japanese hawks and falconry art works. The hawks and falconry paintings were created as stories of falconry appearing in literature such as The Tale of Genji and The Tales of Ise, memories of places that became famous for falconry, or symbols of heroes. Knowing the various stories behind the painting will make it even more attractive.

[Keywords:] Emperor, Samurai, Heroism, Deities and Buddha

Introduction

In recent years, culture and fine arts related to hawks and falconry are attracting international interest. In 2018, an exceptional work of 1,900 pages was published, compiling case examples of worldwide falconry cultures⁽¹⁾. Subsequently, in 2020, a book concerning global falconry art was also published⁽²⁾. The publication of these books demonstrates the world's enthusiasm towards falconry cultures/artworks, resulting from the fact that falconry was inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2010 following a joint application by 11 countries (As of 2020, 14 countries have joined, regretfully Japanese falconry has not done so to date due to various reasons).

Even so, Japanese hawks/falconry art is garnering a great deal of attention. In the spring of 2019, the McMullen Museum of Art, Boston, USA, held an exhibition entitled “Eaglemania: Collecting Japanese Art in Gilded Age America”, at which the highly sophisticated skills of Japanese art drew many people's attention. In addition, in the summer of 2019, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, USA, also organized a large-scale exhibition “The Life of Animals in Japanese Art”, exhibiting a number of Japanese artworks depicting hawks. Although the reason that American museums held the rather less-common

exhibitions may be due to interest in the eagle, an American symbol, it is significant that outside Japan, hawks artworks created in Japan were broadly and properly appreciated, because, as repeatedly stated in this collection of treatises, wrong impressions/misunderstanding about Japanese falconry skills and the meaning of rites is pervasive overseas.

In many cases, falcon/falconry art is categorized in such a simple manner that a painting depicting a hawks is a “hawks painting”, or that expressing falconry is a “falconry painting”, referring to hawks /falconry as a single motif. However, Japanese hawks/falconry paintings are accompanied by graceful classic stories and implications unique to Japan. This paper will discuss the true themes and implications behind the Japanese hawks /falconry artworks.

1. The Tale of Genji and Falconry Paintings

Many Japanese genre-paintings including falconry paintings are accompanied by a source story/authority. First of all, I would like to discuss the relationship between the Tale of Genji, the most famous story in Japan, and falconry paintings, taking one scene of the Tale as an example. Chapter 29 “Royal Outing” of the Tale of Genji has a scene of falconry. This chapter describes an episode in which Prince Hikaru Genji



Fig. 1. Falconry Painting, owned by Osaka Museum of History.

arranges for Tamakazura, his adopted daughter, to see Emperor Reizei on a royal outing for falconry to Oharano field, with the intention to induce Tamakazura to become the head of the Naishi-dokoro office (where the sacred mirror is enshrined in the imperial palace). (Incidentally, Emperor Reizei is officially a younger brother of Hikaru Genji; and is actually Hikaru's son with Fujitsubo.) The chapter "Royal Outing" describes the scene in December in which the Emperor goes to the suburb of Kyoto for falconry as a traditional event. Reviewing the scenes of the "Royal Outing" in the existing illustrations of the Tale of Genji, many depict a "horen", imperial carriage, and a scene of falconry painted together. Some motifs common to the falconry paintings explained in this paper are also seen around and about. Accordingly, it is highly probable that the Illustrations of the Tale of Genji influenced the formation of falconry paintings. In this chapter, I would like to discuss the effect by comparing the Illustrations of the Tale of Genji and falconry paintings.

The "folding screen with falconry painting" owned by Osaka Museum of History (Fig. 1; hereinafter "Osaka Museum Version") was produced in the Early 17th Century; and, IMAHASHI Riko indicates that this folding screen was created on the model of the Illustrations of the Tale of Genji⁽³⁾. The chapter "Royal Outing" describes:

"In the twelfth month of the year, there was a royal outing to the Oharano field. A huge crowd gathered to watch it. Likewise, the ladies of Rokujo set out in their carriages. Around six o'clock the Emperor's carriage left the palace, and, at Suzaku, it turned west on Gojo-oji street. Carriages of the spectators were jammed together, extending to the Katsura River."

Similar to the description of this scene, the painting of the Osaka Museum Version delineates a throng of spectators⁽⁴⁾. However, this version of the painting is characteristic in that only ox-drawn carriages, not generally used by the emperor, are depicted, and no "horen" imperial carriage appears, which requires further consideration in order to identify it with a scene of the Illustrations of the Tale of Genji.

The privately-owned "Folding Screens Depicting the Kasuga Wakakusa Festival and Falconry" (Fig. 2, hereinafter "privately-owned version") is an excellent work of the Early Modern Period depicted with refined brushwork, using many gold-leaf clouds and silver foils. The folding screen is rather small in size, measuring about 58 centimeters in height and 196 centimeters in width. The right-hand screen shows a scene of "Kasuga-Wakamiya Onmatsuri Festival" held at the Kasuga Grand Shrine in December; meanwhile, the left-hand screen shows a falconry scene. Although the reason for this combination of motifs is unclear, it is hypothesized that the motifs were combined simply because of their being a festival held in the same eleventh month of the lunar calendar⁽⁵⁾. The privately owned version and the Illustrations of the Tale of Genji, have much in common. I would like to cite two examples; "the Tekagami (a collection of calligraphy, fragmentary pieces of a writing written in ancient calligraphy) of the Tale of Genji, "Royal Outing 1" by 土佐光吉 TOSA Mitsuyoshi (Kuboso Memorial Museum of Arts, Izumi) as well as "Folding screen with the paintings of Tale of Genji" by TOSA Mitsuyoshi again, owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Both of these folding-screen paintings have a horen, imperial carriage, on the right-hand screen, understandably indicating that the motif is common to the royal outing paintings and the privately-owned

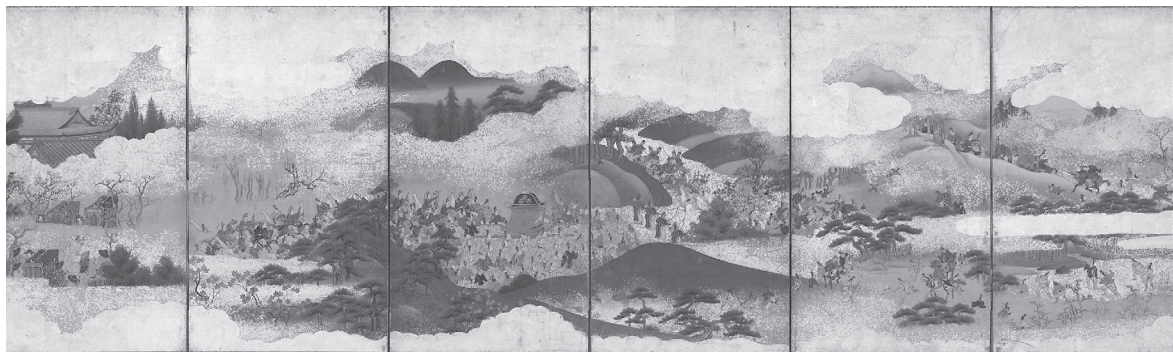


Fig. 2. Folding Screens Depicting the Kasuga Wakakusa Festival and Falconry, Private Collection.

version. In addition, “Scenes from the Tale of Genji” by 土佐光信 TOSA Mitsunobu (owned by Harvard University Art Museums, Fig. 3), shows a scene wherein an ox-drawn carriage stood alone after the crowd, described as “The carriages of the spectators were jammed together, extending to the Katsura River.” in the “Royal Outing” chapter, had gone. A similar motif is found on the sixth panel of the falconry painting in the privately-owned version. It is thus evident that the paintings of the “Royal Outing” chapter of the Tale of Genji and the privately-owned version feature mutual motifs. Furthermore, in addition to the ox-drawn carriages, the privately-owned version depicts other motifs including blue-colored “ho” (an outer robe as a court dress), reddish-brown dyed “shita-gasane”, etc., described in the Tale of Genji. Accordingly, it may be feasible that these painting were completed based on the Illustrations of the Tale of Genji.

It has also been inferred that in the Early Modern Period in which the Osaka Museum Version and the privately-owned version were created, especially within the period in which Emperor 後水尾天皇 Go-Mizunoo (1596-1680) was alive, the movement for the restoration of dynastic cultures arose⁽⁶⁾. Emperor Go-Mizunoo, who was deeply interested in “Yusoku-kojitsu” (lit. studies in usages and practices of the ancient court and military households), demonstrated his eagerness to restore the court council by writing “Calendar of Ancient Court Ceremonies”⁽⁷⁾. Furthermore, the emperor issued an imperial ordinance to create a “Picture Scroll of Calendar of Ancient Court Ceremonies” (“Sumiyoshi version”), focusing interest on the fine arts too. This indicates a high probability that Emperor Go-Mizunoo was also interested in the paintings of “Royal Outing” practiced by the ancient emperors and those of medieval “Royal Outing”. It is still unknown if and how Emperor Go-Mizunoo participated in the production of falconry paintings. Even so, the fact that many falconry



Fig. 3. Scenes from the Tale of Genji by TOSA Mitsunobu, owned by Harvard University Art Museums.

paintings were produced in the Early Modern Period when Emperor Go-Mizunoo lived may indicate the influence by the restoration movement of dynastic cultures at that time on the popularity of the falconry paintings.

2. The Tales of Ise and Falconry Paintings

The oldest surviving falconry painting in Japan is “Folding Screen with the Painting of Cherry-blossom Viewing and Falconry” said to be created by 雲谷等顔 UNKOKU Togan (owned by MOA Museum of Art, Fig. 4, hereinafter, “MOA version”). It is a genre-painting, on the left-hand screen of which falconry is depicted, and on the right-hand screen, cherry-blossom viewing is described. Considering the style of



Fig.4. Folding Screen with the Painting of Cherry-blossom Viewing and Falconry, created by UNKOKU Togan, owned by MOA Museum of Art.

expressing plants, mountains and people, the work is regarded as having been created by the Unkoku School. Despite the probability that UNKOKU Togan or 三谷等宿 MITANI Toshuku, painters of the Unkoku School in its foundation days, drew this painting, there are insufficient grounds to conclude who the painter was, due to the fact that no examples of genre-paintings by the Unkoku School have survived. Even so, the outstanding depicting talent seen in the painting convinces us that UNKOKU Togan, the founder of the Unkoku School, probably created this painting. For example, as can be seen in the fourth and sixth panels of the falconry scene, the expression of a three-dimensional effect of rocks produced by overpainting sumi-ink lines on a sharp triangle is common to that of “Folding Screen with the Paintings of Peacocks and Peonies” (created by UNKOKU Togan; owned by Toshun-ji Temple, Yamaguchi prefecture) as well as “Folding Screen with the Paintings of Landscape and Pavilion” (created by UNKOKU Togan; owned by the Kumaya Museum of Art, Yamaguchi prefecture), which indicates that the MOA

version is presumably a work of Togan⁽⁸⁾. Due to limitations of space, this paper focuses only on the falconry painting seen on the left-hand screen, omitting explanation about the right-hand screen painting of the cherry-blossom viewing. The falconry painting shows a scene in which a group of samurai are enjoying falconry under early plum blossoms in the field. In the lower part of the first panel, there is a sakayaki (shaved-forehead) man who has a small bamboo with leaves to which five small birds are tied; and, in the center between the first and second panels, a falconry-dog trainer unleashing a white dog is depicted. In the space ranging from the first to the fourth panels, boisterous actions for falconry are seen here and there; while, in the fifth and sixth panels, the peaceful scene of a house with a thatched roof and rolled-up bamboo blinds can be seen. This feeling is also reflected in the image of an old man sweeping a room with a bamboo broom, which may be a symbol of daily life.

That aside, the point that requires discussion here is the reason why cherry-blossom viewing and falconry were paired.

Although previous research indicates that the paintings of cherry-blossom viewing depict the Yoshino Mountains, the context of the pairing with falconry has not been discussed. I would like to express my opinion as to this point below.

Except for the MOA version, no other works combining cherry-blossom viewing with falconry have ever been found. Since ancient times, cherry-blossom viewing has always been associated with “Yoshino” in Japan for both cherry blossoms and as a subject of painting. If so, then, what kind of authority/source do falconry paintings have? Although the painting themes that feature falconry include “Royal Outing” and “the Illustrations of the Tale of Genji”, those works do not always depict noblemen. Although the “paintings of cherry-blossom viewing” (MOA version) features the Yoshino Mountains convincingly enough, the context in which it was paired with falconry still remains unknown.

Generally, as a common practice, falconry was held during winter. In consequence, many surviving falconry paintings express a sense of the winter season by depicting snowy mountains, etc. Unlike these, the falconry painting depicts plum blossoms, obviously indicating that falconry was practiced in the early spring, an unusual season to be associated with falconry. In other words, it can be found out that this work was created with a clear intention to combine falconry with spring season (cherry-blossom viewing). To interpret the context of the rare combination, I would like to consider some literary works describing cherry-blossom viewing and falconry being held at the same time.

Episode 82 “Nagisa Lodge” of “the Tales of Ise” includes a scene in which people are enjoying a waka poetry party in the midst of cherry-blossom viewing after having practiced falconry at the Katano moor (present-day Katano city, Osaka prefecture)⁽⁹⁾. The Tales of Ise is a story focusing on the theme of Japanese waka poems and love formed in the Heian Period, the main character of which is a nobleman suggestive of Ariwara no Narihira who actually existed in the Early Heian Period.

In addition, 新古今和歌集 *Shinkokin Wakashū* (lit. New Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems) includes the following poem of Fujiwara no Shunzei:

Will I ever see it just this way again?

A hunt for cherry blossoms on Katano Moor

Petals of snow scattering

In the first faint light of dawn⁽¹⁰⁾

As this poem describes, 交野 Katano had been known and painted as a spot for “cherry blossom hunting” in which excursions for cherry-blossom viewing and falconry are joined⁽¹¹⁾. Katano was painted on folding screens as a motif of Yamato-e paintings (traditional Japanese landscape or genre painting)⁽¹²⁾. Despite there being no surviving folding screens, waka poems that included references to such folding screens suggest their existence⁽¹³⁾.

In the MOA version, both paintings of cherry-blossom viewing and falconry include plum blossoms, using the scenery of “spring” as a subject. The Tales of Ise portrays falconry being practiced in spring and cherry-blossom viewing being held after that. From this, it is quite likely that the MOA version was created based on the Tales of Ise. Nevertheless, the MOA version depicts only samurai-class people; and, no aristocrats can be found. If the work originated from the Tales of Ise, the characters should be court nobles. This may imply that the MOA version replaced Episode 82 “Nagisa Lodge” of “the Tales of Ise”, a motif of Yamato-e painting (traditional Japanese landscape or genre paintings), with a motif of Chinese painting.

3. Incarnation of Deities or Buddhas

In this chapter I will examine the implication of the paintings of hawk, putting falconry paintings aside for now; because, like the falconry paintings, hawk paintings do not simply depict hawks. Specifically, in Japan, falconry had been an authoritarian rite held only by a monarch. In some cases, however, Shinto shrines were exceptionally authorized to organize falconry. At that time, hawks were believed to be an incarnation of the Shinto deities or Buddhas. Although Japanese falconry was introduced from Central Asia via the Korean Peninsula, the recognition of the “Incarnation of Deities/Buddhas” is indigenous to Japan. For instance, 定家問答 *Teika Mondo* (lit. Teika Dialogues) that recorded questions and answers between 藤原定家 *Fujiwara no Teika* (1162-1241) and his son, 為家 *Tameie* (1198-1275) with regard to hawks has the following descriptions:

Question: Do white hawk exist in Japan?

Answer: No, they do not. White hawk come from Goryeo.

They are the incarnation of deities or Buddhas.

In addition, 慶蒙集 *Keimou-shū* (completed around 1654) describes hawks as an embodiment of *Acala* (*Acalanātha*) and *Vaisravana*. It is obviously difficult to know



Fig. 5. Hawk Painting by Ryofu, owned by Atsuta Jingu Shrine.

whether viewers of that time really regarded hawks as the incarnation of Shinto deities or Buddhas simply from the appearance of the paintings. Nonetheless, for example, a Chinese-style poem composed by 希世靈彦 KISEI Reigen, a Zen priest of the 15th century, provides an episode in which the Suwa Myōjin Deity appeared in a dream of 細川勝元 HOSOKAWA Katsumoto (a feudal lord, 1430-1473), and revealed to Katsumoto a divine revelation that a rare hawk would fly to him ⁽¹⁴⁾. When such a hawk actually flew to Katsumoto, he noticed that it was a prophetic dream, and had

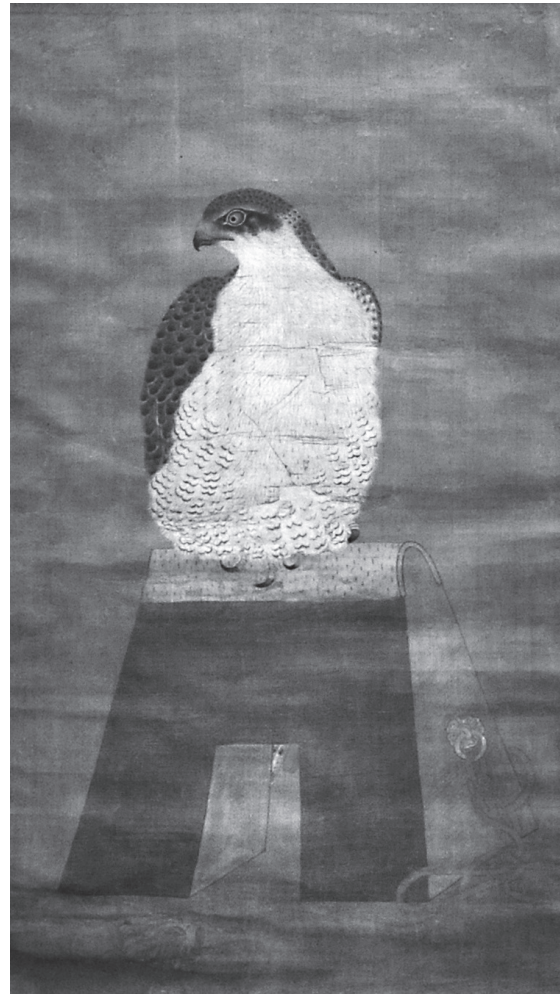


Fig. 6. Sparrowhawk Painting, owned by Atsuta Jingu Shrine.

a painter create a painting of the hawk. This episode illustrates a motivation of people of that time to depict a hawk painting: hawks were an incarnation of the Shinto deities (the Suwa Myōjin Deity, in this case).

In Japan, Shinto shrines are often dedicated with hawk paintings. This dedication may suggest that ancient people regarded hawks as messengers of the Shinto deities. Fig. 5 shows a painting by 量風 Ryofu whose career is full of unknowns. However, the note on the back of the painting shows that in July, 1525, a resident in the western district of the present-day Aichi prefecture named 安井彦三郎 YASUI Hikosaburo dedicated this painting to Atsuta Jingu Shrine. Although it is difficult to conclude that this painting was created by a painter with sufficient professional skills when observing the rather primitive style of depicting tree branches, the hawk painting is still valuable due to being able to prove the dating. On the contrary, despite being unknown in date, there is a Sparrowhawk painting, said to have been dedicated to Atsuta Jingu Shrine by a person named 粟田守隆 AWATA

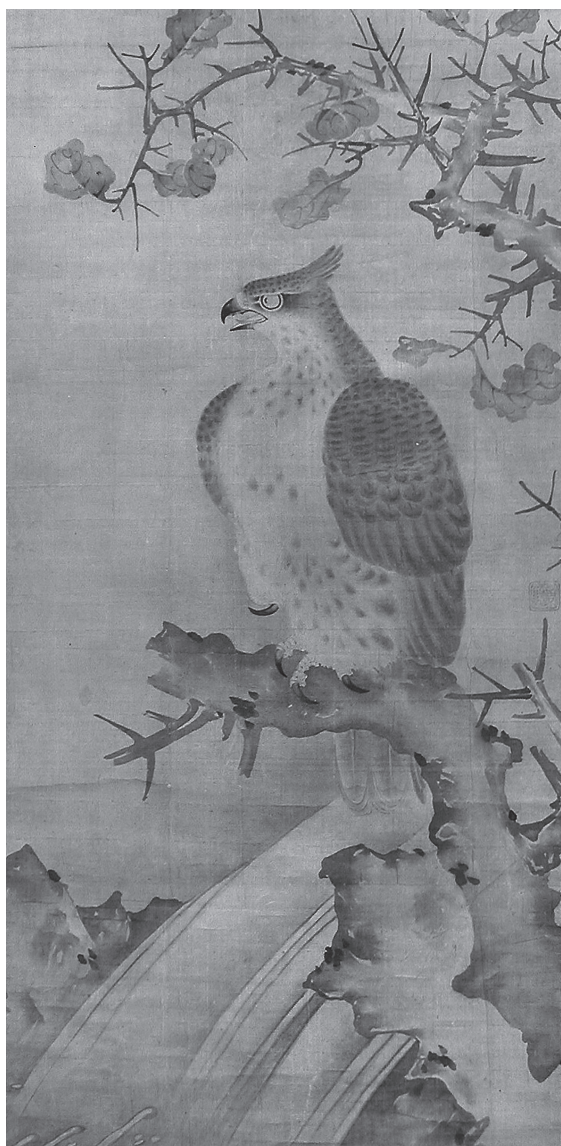


Fig. 7. Hawk-eagle Painting, by SESSON Syukei, owned by Ryusyo-ji Temple

Moritaka, worth paying attention to as an artwork created by a painter with high skills (Fig.6). The painted bird looks a sparrow hawk that has orange-colored, thin horizontal stripes on its cheeks. Shoden Eigen-in Temple in Kyoto city owns another hawk painting similar to this that is said to have been introduced from Joseon Dynasty (Korea). Considering that multiple similar works were imported to Medieval Japan, the existence of the hawk paintings from the Joseon Dynasty cannot be disregarded in researching the development of hawk paintings in Japan. The dedication of such hawk paintings to Shinto shrines may suggest that there is an underlying connection between hawk and Shinto deities/Buddhas. At any rate, a white hawk as depicted in this work would have been worshipped like a deity itself.

4. Symbol of Heroes

Hawk s had been a symbol of power in Japan, the background of which includes not only the image as the symbol of the ruling class but also that Japan belongs to the cultural sphere of Chinese characters⁽¹⁵⁾. In some cases, East Asian paintings traditionally have a poem written in Chinese characters on the upper part. Some of the Chinese-style poems dedicated to hawk paintings write that the hawk is a symbol of heroes. One of the reasons originated simply from homonyms in Chinese characters; that is, the term “hero” is “英雄 (yīng xiong)” in Chinese, and the term “hawk” is “鷹 (yīng)”. The first Chinese character “英 (yīng)” of the term “英雄 (hero)” is pronounced the same as the term “鷹 (yīng)”. (Soug, 2009). Likewise, the latter Chinese character “雄 (xiong)” of the term “英雄 (yīng xiong)” has the same sound as that of “bear”, which is “熊 (xiong)” in Chinese. Accordingly, hawk-eagle (“bear-eagle 熊鷹” in Chinese) is regarded as a very bird embodying a hero. Furthermore, a Chinese poem says that the crest of the hawk-eagle is the hero’s emblem. Fig. 7 is a painting of a hawk-eagle drawn in the 16th century. 雪村周継 SESSON Syukei, the painter of this work created many hawk-eagle paintings, expressing the crest impressively and symbolically. This idea based on homonyms regarding hawk s was introduced from China to Korea and Japan. In Japan, the idea was generalized after the 15th century, when Chinese literature became popular, causing a boom in hawk paintings among samurai, the ruling class. Interestingly, such hawk paintings were drawn not only by professional painters but by feudal lords themselves, and used as gifts among the feudal lords. A hawk painting was customarily presented from a lower class lord to an upper class lord as a sign of respect. It may be said that the characteristic thought structure and subsequent phenomenon based on homonyms is inherent in East Asia, the cultural sphere of Chinese characters.

Conclusion

In many countries, raptors have been a symbol of power and a major theme of artwork⁽¹⁶⁾. ODA Nobunaga is one of the most famous feudal lords in Japan (incidentally, the feudal lords were the powerful landowners in those days). About 1569, Nobunaga obtained a folding screen with a painting of a

hawk from Honno-ji Temple. He highly appreciated the screen as an excellent decoration for his residence. It was almost certainly a hawk painting that Nobunaga praised. The historical descriptions suggest that hawk s have a special significance in themes of artworks in 16th century Japan. Nobunaga may have seen a painting similar to Fig. 8 owned by the Tokyo National Museum. This painting depicts a hawk breeding room located within a samurai's residence. Eyas (baby hawks captured from a nest) are also shown in the painting, indicating that the painting may conceivably be the oldest record of the artificial rearing of hawks.

The paintings of hawk s and falconry have been created based on episodes written in the literary works including the Tale of Genji, Tales of Ise, etc. related to falconry, memories of locations for falconry, and the symbolism of heroes. Although it is difficult to understand the deep thoughts lying beneath the surface of the paintings by simply seeing them, reading various stories and episodes hidden in the back of the paintings will facilitate us to increasingly grasp the attractiveness of the paintings.

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