

🏠 > UNESCO Heritage > Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

# Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Inscribed Korean Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

## Falconry, a living human heritage

### The Living Tradition of Falconry

Like a Flying Arrow the Falcon Snatches its Prey

Unlike other forms of hunting, falconry is an indirect method of hunting that uses a trained falcon. It involves domesticating a falcon so that it captures wild prey. In order to engage in falconry, the falcon must first be hunted and captured and then it must go through the process of being domesticated. Falconry's original purpose began with hunting, but after going through a long period of history, it also came to have the additional purpose of sport.

According to a record in "Biographies (Yeoljeon)" of the History of the Three Kingdoms (Samguk Sagi), King Jinpyeong (r. 579–632) of the Silla Kingdom became so enraptured by falconry that he neglected matters of state, and as a result the state official Kim Hu-jik requested that after his death, his body be buried by the roadside along King Jinpyeong's hunting route to make the king realize the error of his ways. This was because the king had lost himself to hunting. Falcon hunters often declare that, "The person who has never experienced the joy of capturing and domesticating a falcon cannot comprehend the feeling of accomplishment experienced when the falcon you have raised like it was your own child completes its first hunt. Falconry enables one to have a rapport with nature, and it is the best way to build great character."



In the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), falcons were distinguished into many kinds according to their quality, appearance, and their state of domestication: a smart falcon with white feathers was called songgolmae; a falcon with blue feathers was called haedongcheong; a falcon that was captured and domesticated before it was a year old was called a boramae; a sanjini was a falcon that had lived in the wild for several years; and a sujini was a falcon that had been domesticated for several years. At that time, Korea's falcons were called haedongcheong or haechong and were renowned as intrepid, excellent hunters.

A falcon used for hunting had a bell attached to its tail in addition to a falcon tag (sichimi) with the owner's name and address written on it. In Korean, the phrase "to remove the falcon tag (sichim-ireul tteda)" additionally means "to feign innocence." This double meaning comes from a story of a man who removed the tag from a falcon that had flown into his house and pretended to be its owner.

Once the falcon takes flight, the falconer begins the chase and follows the bird. If a falcon captures a pheasant and is allowed to eat until it is full, it will be not able to hunt again. At this crucial moment, the falconer has to be very careful. Usually after a falcon captures a pheasant and gains controls over it with its sharp claws, it begins to eat by tearing at the head and eyes with its beak. If the falcon is hastily pulled away from its prey, it can break into a violent rage that could result in its death. To minimize damage to the pheasant and prevent the falcon from eating its fill, there is no choice but to separate the pheasant from the falcon, but it must be stealthily stolen away; the falcon is then allowed to eat some part of the head or else the head of the prey has to be removed and given to the falcon.

The falcon has been a loyal hunter for the Korean people. As said above, the falcon does not hunt if it is not hungry. For thousands of years, however, it has offered up the pheasants it captured to people and yet, it still flies in the blue sky as it always has in pursuit of the pheasant. Due to this acquired nature, the falcon is recognized as a bird of great fidelity and

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