

Hawksbill Trade Revived? **Analysis of the Management System of Domestic "bekko" Trade in Japan**

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Introduction

"Bekko" is a shell of Hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). In Japan, "bekko" processing started to develop considerably as an industry in the middle of the 19th century. Products, which were originally intended mostly for tourists from abroad and export at that time, were eventually starting to be manufactured and distributed mainly for the domestic market.

In 1980, the Japanese government ratified Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) with a measure of reservation on "bekko". At the same time, though, the Japanese government effectuated a voluntary limitation of 30 tons as the quota for importation. But, as Japan kept hanging on to the reservation, the international criticism that Japan was abusing the reservation system grew. At the US-Japan negotiation on June 19, 1991, both governments came to an agreement with Japan's limiting the total amount of importation to 7.5 tons during an approximate period of a year and 5 months (from August, 1991 through December, 1992, to be exact), as an independent measures of the Japanese government, and banning of importation with an additional period of reservation for approximately 3 years. And then, the Japanese government lifted the reservation on "bekko" on July 29, 1994.

In December, 1991, as the Japanese government promised the lift of the reservation with a moratorium period to the US government, The Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), which has competence over "bekko" industry, obtained 954 million yens of "Bekko Industry Relief Plan Fund" as a supplementary budget of that fiscal year. In January of the following year (1992), MITI approved "bekko" industry's establishing a corporation called, Japan Bekko Association (JBA)-total assets of 898,434,003 yen, a public service corporation, as the recipient of this grant and to use it for operating fund. This association has received further grants allotted to MITI since.

As examples of the amount of grants that MITI has been providing as "Bekko Industry Relief Plan", 339,829,000 yen (the initial budget) was provided in the fiscal year 1997 and 311,932,000 yen (draft budget) in the fiscal year 1998.

The grant for the fiscal year 1998 included fund for "Dispatching Experts Abroad for the Purpose of Reopening International Ivory Trade, etc." (MITI: 1999)

And JBA executes the budget for "Ivory Industry Relief Plan Project", which is also a grant from MITI.

With these funds and organizational structure, "bekko" industry and Japanese government have been working on the projects in order to downlist Hawksbill turtles from Appendix I to Appendix II. Resource research project, which includes ecological and resource research of Hawksbill turtles in the Caribbean Sea and the north Australia waters, DNA identification of the Caribbean population, isotope analysis and heavy metal analysis for identifying patterns, identification of ages by annual rings of shells, is one of those projects.

And in 1996, a new project, "Project of Dispatching Personnel to Relevant International Organizations, etc", to send experts on CITES to related international organizations for lobbying was established. Furthermore,

"Project to investigate Details Concerning Sustainable Use of Wild Fauna and Flora" was newly established in 1999, which is supposed to investigate the actual conditions in the Caribbean Sea, and the waters of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. The true nature of this project would be of great interest to anyone concerned. "Bekko Industry Relief Project" originally included the support for "bekko" craftsmen in switching the use of "bekko" to alternative materials, but this was stopped at the end of fiscal year 1998 (Japan Bekko Association: 1999)

With all the above-mentioned activities for "smoothing the ground" going on, Cuba proposed downlisting of Hawksbill turtles in the appendixes at the 10th meeting of Conference of Parties of CITES but it was voted down. As a matter of form, the Japanese government was not involved in this proposal of downlisting, but the developments that have been being described in this report illustrate how much the Japanese government has actually been involved. And Cuba has submitted another proposal of downlisting of its population of Hawksbill turtle from Appendix I to Appendix II, which will be deliberated at COP 11 of CITES in April, 2000.

Summary

Shells of hawksbill turtle (called "bekko" in Japanese) have been worked on to make various items since the medieval times in Japan but it was in the middle of the 19th century when it began to get industrialized on a full scale.

Most of the products were for tourists from abroad and export at that time, but the sales target is now on the domestic market with chief products being various personal accessories and frames of glasses.

Japan had imported considerable amount of "bekko" before effectuating voluntary limitation of importation, which had preceded the lift of reservation of "bekko".

Japan imported approximately 40 tons annually in the 1970s and continued to import approximately 30 tons annually in the 1980s even after ratifying CITES although effectuating reduction in amount as voluntary control.

Currently, the remaining stock of imported "bekko" is kept by manufacturers, and trade of raw materials is being done between those who are in the same business.

Finished products are distributed from the manufacturers to consumers through wholesalers and retailers by the particular distribution route for each category of products like frames of glasses or personal accessories. So, customers are able to purchase "bekko" products at various places including retail stores which specialize in selling "bekko" products, or glasses, or personal accessories, department stores, and souvenir stores at tourist spots, and also through mail-order catalogs.

Considering the amount of "bekko" imported in the past and the current condition on the distribution of "bekko" as well as smuggling of "bekko", each case of which involves a considerable amount of "bekko", and which is likely to continue in the future, we need to assume that the domestic demand of "bekko" is and will remain to be considerably high.

Reopening of international trade of "bekko" will also increase the possibility of its smuggling by reactivating Japan's domestic market for it. Should reopening occur, one of the essential anti-smuggling measures will be to prevent illegally imported "bekko" from mixing with domestically distributed one.

And, in order to secure this method, a thorough management system that covers all levels of distribution of "bekko", including manufacture, wholesale, and retail, needs to be established.

But the current management system for domestic trade of "bekko" covers only the trade of raw materials between manufactures. This system is unable to identify illegally imported "bekko", once it has been mixed with domestically distributed one, and exclude it from the market.

In conclusion, downlisting of hawksbill turtle leading resumption of trade "bekko" must be avoided.

Chapter 1. Trade and demand of “bekko” in Japan

1. Use of "bekko" in Japan

Shells of Hawksbill turtles are the only material to be used for "bekko" processing.

All Hawksbill turtles have the same number of shells; 5 pieces of shells are aligned in the center of their back, from the head to the tail, with 4 pieces aligned parallel on either side of them, and 23 pieces to make the circumference of a whole shell (Mainichi Newspaper:1996). The shell that is attached to the abdomen of a turtle can also be separated and used. Those various parts are respectively called, as raw materials for "bekko" processing, KORA (back shell), TSUME (nail shell), and HARAKO (abdominal shell).

Also, raw materials of "bekko" are graded according to their color and patterns.

A catalog for "bekko" frames of glasses describes that "bekko" with distinct marks is called "BARAFU", blackish in color with slightly unclear marks is called "CHUTORO KO", with a shade of orange and slightly unclear marks is called "JOTORO KO", and whitish-yellow in color with no marks is called "SHIROKO".

"SHIEOKO" is the most expensive and the prices go down in order of the description. Finer classification can be done according to colors and patterns. Also, "SHIROKO" is inside part-white in color- of the shell, which is close to the tail and is called TSUME (nail shell). (The Mainichi Newspaper Company:1996)

The thickest "bekko" is approximately 3 millimeters and the thinnest approximately 1 millimeter. So, in order to make products, "bekko" is processed with water and heat, which makes colloidal substance in "bekko" exude so a piece of "bekko" can be laid on top of another and this procedure can be repeated several times till the material to work on gets thick enough. In addition to this pasting, cutting and polishing are also parts of "bekko" processing. (Mainichi Newspaper:1996, excerpted from materials at the Museum of Japan Bekko Culture Material of Japan Bekko Association)

It is not known exactly when "bekko" processing started in Japan but it is of general understanding that it started during a period called Genroku Period (1688-1704) in the Edo Era. The center of "bekko" processing was Edo (Tokyo) and "bekko" was mostly processed as combs and hair ornaments for women. But they were luxuries and beyond the means of average citizens; they were favored by Daimyo(Japanese feudal lords)'s wife and high-class prostitutes. (JBA:1999)

Later in Meiji Era (1868-1912), rows of shops that sold "bekko" to people from abroad were built in Nagasaki, which is located in the north end of Kyushu Island. The chief products were cigarette cases, miniature warship models, boxes for miscellaneous items, combs, hair ornaments, and so on, to be sold to people from abroad. "Bekko" products from Japan were displayed at overseas exhibitions and it seems demand for "bekko" in abroad was very high during this period. (JBA:1999, etc.)

But, nowadays, products like various personal accessories and frames of glasses, along with watch bands, shoehorns, combs, and parts of Japanese musical instruments and so on are made mainly for the domestic market.

2. Importation of "bekko" into Japan

Between 1970 through 1979, the average amount of annual importation was 38,700kg. In 1980, voluntary control of limiting annual importation up to 30 tons was effectuated and the amount imported was kept within this limitation till 1986. (Milliken and Tokunaga, 1987) And the amount imported remained the same between 1987 through 1990. After that, the total amount of importation between August, 1991 through December 31, 1992 was within the agreed limitation of 7.5 tons. Then the importation was suspended and with the lift of the reservation, suspension has been in effect ever since. (See Table 1)

Table1 : Import volume of "bekko" between 1987-1999

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Import volume	29,808	29,614	25,513	21,755	10,197	7,492	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Figures compiled from Japan Custom's statistics

Since the voluntary limitation of import was effectuated in 1980, number of dealers who import "bekko" has reduced. As of 1985, approximately 20 companies imported "bekko", which handled 80 percent of the total amount of import. 7 organizations in "bekko" industry imported the rest of 20 % directly and provide it to manufacturers with a discount. (Milliken and Tokunaga: 1987)

3. Distribution system of "bekko" in Japan

(1) Manufacture

All raw materials of "bekko" have been imported and the remaining stock is kept by manufacturers. As of the end of July, 1995, those who reported as "bekko" manufacturers (who handle transferring of disjointed shells of Hawksbill turtles that have not made into finished products, to be precise) to Environment Agency were 234 and the amount of raw materials of disjointed shells that they had in stock was 188.4 tons. All the raw materials in stock were either disjointed pieces of shells or cut parts of those pieces.

Raw materials of "bekko" are transferred from manufacturers, who have them in stock, to other manufacturers, but no transfer is done in the form of a whole shell (called "MARUKO" in the business). This

is also indicated, as I will mention later in this report, by the fact that there was no registration of transfer of a whole shell as of June, 1997, although it is required by law to register each (whole) shell when it is transferred in the form of a whole shell. (TRAFFIC 1998)

Manufacturers, most of which are of small scale, gather in Tokyo area, which makes it one of the centers of "bekko" manufacturing. These manufacturers supply finished products to wholesalers, who take care of frames of glasses or personal accessories.

Manufacturers sometimes have their own shop for selling finished products, but the percentage of profit of manufacturers from this direct selling, except those who have a shop at famous tourist spots, does not seem to amount much.

Other center areas of "bekko" manufacturing include Nagasaki Pref. in Kyushu Island and Osaka in Kansai region. Nagasaki, in particular, relies great deal on tourism and "bekko" products such as personal accessories are a part of major source of income.



(2) Wholesale

Entirely separate distribution route has been developed for each category of finished products of "bekko", with the major distribution routes for personal accessories and for frames of glasses. And specialized wholesalers exist for each category of finished products.

The most important point here is the existence of wholesalers, who do not handle manufacturing but only deal with finished products, in the process of distribution.

Distribution of "bekko" frames of glasses is basically taken care of by wholesalers who deal with all products related to glasses. They buy "bekko" frames of glasses from manufacturers and sell them to opticians. It is not unusual that there exists another wholesaler (often privately managed) between wholesalers and retailers. And catalogs provided by wholesalers of glasses advertise a wide selection of "bekko" frames for glasses.

And, because of the expensiveness of the material and requirement of special skills for glueing a layer (piece) of shell on top of another, when "bekko" frames of glasses are broken, most consumers request for repair. When they do, the retail store whom a consumer has turned a pair of glasses to for repair will forward them to a wholesaler and the wholesaler, in turn, will request for repair to a manufacturer.

As to the distribution of "bekko" personal accessories, certain wholesalers buy them from manufacturers and sell them to department stores, retail stores specializing in accessories in general, or boutiques. Some of

them specialize in dealing with department stores and some with individual retail stores, which sell personal accessories. Some wholesalers in Tokyo hold annual exhibits with spot sale, which retailers handling personal accessories in Kanto region or Tokyo Area attend for purchase.

These wholesalers are grouped into two; those who deal personal accessories in general and those who specialize in certain materials. Latter deal in, besides "bekko", amber, coral, pearl, ivory, and so on, or just some of them. The fact that there is a business cooperation, which has been set up by dealers of amber and "bekko", shows that a lot of wholesalers deal in both amber and "bekko".

Also, personal accessories made to go with traditional Japanese clothes (e.g. KANZASHI-ornamental hairpins) and those to go with western-style clothes are sold to different wholesalers. This let different wholesalers get involved into different category of "bekko" products. One manufacturer sells personal accessories for western-style clothes to a relatively big-scale wholesaler, who takes care of personal accessories in general but sells those for traditional Japanese clothes to a retailer who specializes in them.

There are some wholesalers of personal accessories, who also retail them; they have exhibits with spot sale for a limited period of time at places like department stores.

(3) Retail

"Bekko" products are sold at retail stores specializing in "bekko", which are run by manufacturers, or at department stores all over Japan and so on. As to "bekko" frames for glasses (sometimes an order needs to be placed in advance to purchase them), they are usually purchased at opticians. Personal accessories made of "bekko" are sold at retail stores selling personal accessories for either traditional Japanese clothes or for western-style clothes, or at boutiques as well as at souvenir shops at tourist spots like Nagasaki, Okinawa, and Tokyo.



JWCS made inquiries to major department stores in and around Tokyo on the sales status of personal accessories made of "bekko" in Dec. 1999. Of 15 major department stores, 7 displayed and sold them on a permanent basis and 2 displayed and sold them on a limited period basis and the rest of 6 did not carry them at all. This means that 60 % of the department stores that JWCS checked sold personal accessories made of "bekko".

"Bekko" products can also be purchased through mail-order catalogs and on Internet.

Retail prices of "bekko" products vary according to the level of craftsmanship required, quality of the material, and the quantity of raw material used.

Frames of glasses, in particular, are very expensive as they are usually custom-made when "bekko" is used for all or most part of the frames.

See Table 2 for examples of retail prices for personal accessories for western-style clothes and for frames of glasses. The examples of retail prices are of Tokyo area.

The prices for personal accessories are from the price tags at retail stores specializing in "bekko" products, that are run by manufacturers in Tokyo and at department stores. And those for frames of glasses are from the price tags attached to ready-made frames at retail stores specializing in "bekko" products that are run by manufacturers.

Table2 : Retail Prices of "bekko" products

Products	Price (JPY)
pendant	20,000~120,000
brooch	2,500~28,000
cameo ("bekko" used only for frame)	200,000~500,000
earrings	5,000~18,000
choker	8,000~16,000
frames of glasses	35,000~350,000

(4) Organizations of dealers who deal in "bekko"

There are 7 organizations that are formed by manufacturers and distributors in "bekko" industry. They are all business cooperative associations; 3 are in Tokyo, 3 in Nagasaki, and 1 in Osaka. One of the associations based in Tokyo deals with personal accessories and cosmetics in general, and one of its departments deals in "bekko". One of the associations in Nagasaki deals in "bekko" and amber.

The director of the corporation, that is mentioned as the recipient of the grants from MITI at the beginning of this report, is customarily selected from the chief directors of these business cooperative associations. (NBA: 1999)

4. *Illegal international trade of "bekko" with Japan as the destination*

Recent illegal cases from the customs statistics

See Table 3 for the cases of "bekko" being illegally imported with the offending party receiving penalty based on administrative acts in accordance with the Customs Tariff Law. Among those cases, ones especially malicious were reported to the competent investigational agency. If the agency, upon completing

investigation, decides to prosecute a reported case, a criminal trial will be held.

Table3 : Numbers of Cases

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Penalty based on administrative acts					1
accusation	2		1	2	2
Total	2		1	2	3

See Table 4 for the contents of the cases in accordance with the Customs Tariff Law.

Table4 : Contents of Cases

	Month, Year	Quantity (kg)	Value (yen)	Country of Origin	Port of Importation	Person/persons involved	Case history	Source
NO.1	Jan.1994	24	3,000,000 yen (US\$28,571)	Dominica	Narita Tokyo Airport	Two “bekko” traders in Nagasaki	Concealed “bekko”, bought at 5000 yen per kg in a hemp sack which were in a suitcase	The Ministry of Finance, TRAFFIC 1994
NO.2	Mar.1994	587		Dominica	Itami Airport (Osaka)	A Japanese man	Concealed “bekko”, in the center of boxes which claimed to carry “cow horns and hoofs”	The Ministry of Finance
NO.3	1996	115.3		Singapore				The Ministry of Finance
NO.4	Aug.1995 (decided in '97)	3,083.05		Indonesia	Osaka Minami port	A Japanese man	Concealed “bekko” in the middle of a container of coconut shells, claimed “coconut shells”	The Ministry of Finance
NO.5	Sept.1997	31.45		Singapore	Kansai International Airport	A Japanese man	Concealed “bekko” in a suitcase.	The Ministry of Finance
NO.6	Sept.1998	65.71		Singapore	Nagoya Airport	A dealer in miscellaneous import goods and four Singaporeans	A dealer in Nagasaki asked four Singaporeans to smuggle “bekko”. Each carried 15–18kg in their bags.	The Ministry of Finance, TRAFFIC 1999
NO.7	1998	9.72		Singapore				The Ministry of Finance
NO.8	Apr.1998	119.61		Singapore	Narita Tokyo Airport	A “bekko” trader in Nagasaki, his son and seven Singaporeans	A Japanese purchased “bekko” in Singapore and had seven Singaporeans carry it concealing in their suitcases.	The Ministry of Finance, TRAFFIC 1998

By examining the contents of the cases that have received penalty based on administrative acts, the following points will be noticed.

Number 1 is that illegal importation of "bekko" has been constantly in existence.

Number 2 is that, in many cases, the amount that was illegally imported was considerably large. Supposing a Hawksbill turtle produces approximately 1 kg of "bekko" (Milliken and Tokunaga 1987), the total amount of the illegally imported "bekko" equaled to, for example, with Case No.3, approximately 115 Hawksbill turtles, with Case No. 8 to 119 Hawksbill turtles, with Case No. 4 to 3,000 Hawksbill turtles.

Number 3 is that, with a lot of cases, domestic (Nagasaki) "bekko" dealers either directed or actually conducted the illegal importation.

Number 4 is that the illegal importation, which used to be directly from the country of origin, has started to originate from Singapore. This can be interpreted as one of the techniques of precaution for avoiding exposure of illegal trade of "bekko". This improvement in preparation is a sign that illegal trade of "bekko" will continue to be taken place.

5. Demand for "bekko" in Japan

As previously mentioned in this report, Japan imported almost 40 tons of "bekko" annually in the 1970s and approximately 30 tons annually in the 1980s even while effectuating voluntary control. "Bekko", which was imported during this period, is still in the distribution routes that have been described, and a lot of finished products are displayed at retail stores. On the other hand, cases of illegal importation continue to occur, with considerable amount of "bekko" illegally imported with each case, and it seems like this will continue to occur. The industry has had some evidence of being impacted of economical depression but there is no denying that the demand for a considerable amount of "bekko" still exists.

Chapter 2. Management system of domestic trade of "bekko" in Japan

1. Contents of the existing system

Trade of a whole shell of "bekko" is prohibited unless each shell is registered with the competent authority. When a registered whole shell is sold, the registration form has to be attached to it. But, as mentioned previously, raw material of "bekko" is never traded in this form (TRAFFIC 1998), this regulation has little significance as far as "bekko" concerns.

What really matters is managing trade of disjoined pieces of shells.

Trade of disjoined pieces of shells is not prohibited.

But dealers who transfer the ownership of disjoined pieces of shells of "bekko" (except in the form of finished products) to someone else have the following obligations, which are subject to punishment when violated as well as to onsite inspection by the government.

- *obligation to report business (name, address, and name and location of the transferring facility needs to be reported)
- *obligation to obtain information on whom the transfer has acquired "bekko" from at each transaction
- *obligation to record and to keep the details of a transaction in the transaction ledger

Since the above requirements are not applicable to dealers who transfer finished products, the regulations apply only to manufacturers.

2. Problems with the existing system

(1) Management system does not cover transfer of finished products

The existing system manages only transfer of raw materials of "bekko" between manufacturers.

Once a manufacturer has turned raw materials of "bekko" into finished products, they are considered "consumed by the processor". According to "The guideline on applications for registration, etc." issued by MITI, when this happens, the entry "consumed by the processor" is made in the party of transfer column of a transaction ledger along with the quantity of "bekko" used to create the finished products and how much is currently left in stock, after deducting what's just been used. This makes it impossible to keep record of the actual transferees of finished products produced by manufacturers or the correct quantity of finished

products; there is always a discrepancy between quantity of raw materials used and that of finished products as miscellaneous unusable pieces, which are thrown away, are created in the process.

(2) The existing system does not cover trade at wholesale and retail levels

Those who deal only in finished products, in other words, wholesalers and retailers, who are not involved in manufacturing, are completely excluded from the realm of the management system.

As described in Chapter 1, some finished products are sold to consumers directly from manufacturers. But these are more of exceptions than not, and most finished products go through various levels of distribution process till they get to the final purchasers. It has also been mentioned that there are dealers in the distribution process, who deal only in finished products without being involved in manufacturing.

"Bekko" frames of glasses, for example, are sold from manufacturers to wholesalers, including major ones, who specialize in glasses and related products, and from them to retailers (sometimes, there are also middle wholesalers that are privately managed between wholesalers and retailers), and finally reach consumers through retailers. So it is essential, in order to prevent smuggled "bekko" from being mixed with domestically distributed one, to establish a thorough management system that covers all levels of distribution including manufacture, wholesale, and retail. It is a matter of great seriousness that the management system does not cover trade at wholesale and retail levels.

(3) Concerning the points described in the proposal submitted from Cuba for downlisting Hawksbill turtle from Appendix I to Appendix II (Prop.11.41)

Cuban Prop.11.41 states as below;

Current domestic controls over Eimbricata shell trade in Japan are focussed on the manufacturers and artisans dealing with raw shell, and not on the retail consumers of finished products. There is a practical reason for this. The crafting of items involves the fusing together of selected pieces individual shell, from different turtles, with different color patterns, to form a matrix is then cut and crafted into individual items, with inlays of other materials, and many of the final products are small and for the purposes of law enforcement cannot be readily identified back to an individual turtle or even shell plate.(C.4.1.2)

But the purpose of the management system for domestic trade is not to make it possible to identify each raw material by glancing the products but to be able to determine the origin of raw materials of any finished product so as to be able to tell whether a finished product has been made from smuggled raw materials.

This purpose of the management system can be achieved by keeping accurate records of exact quantity of raw materials (shells) used and of the origin of these materials on manufacturing process, establishing an effective system to check these records against finished products (for example, making it mandatory to attach some kind of indication to them for identification purpose), and making this check system consistent through all levels of distribution process, including wholesale and retail levels.

The points described in Prop.11.41 only mean that it requires some efforts to keep records of the origin of raw materials as they are usually originated from various origins.

Conclusion

Resumption of international trade of "bekko" will increase the chance of illegal trade by activating the domestic market for "bekko". In that case, preventing smuggled "bekko" from being mixed with domestically distributed ones is one of essential methods of deterrence against illegal importation.

But the existing management system for domestic trade of "bekko" controls trade of raw materials between manufacturers only. It is impossible to identify smuggled "bekko" if it is mixed with domestically distributed one and remove it from the domestic market.

In conclusion, downlisting of hawksbill turtle leading resumption of trade "bekko" must be avoided.

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Trade in Japan ” April 2000**

Japan Wildlife Conservation Society (JWCS)

JWCS is an organization that was established to study the philosophy needed for real conservation of wildlife and recommend the practical theory and solution for specific issues both domestically and internationally.

Under the objective, **JWCS** is conducting study, investigation, lobbying and campaign for public awareness.

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