Brief Description of Japanese Paper Conservation

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Mounting is a integral partner of the paintings and documents

SHOSOIN documents of 8th century describes the works of the mounter SOKOSHI (HYOGUSHI is the name present day) who dyes those papers for transcription of Buddhist text and assembles cover, text and wood core by pasting into a hand scroll of sutra.

Since then, mounter has been historically needed by Buddhist temples. It is fact that temple and shrine are still major customer of private mounter. On the other hand, since secular side had begun to put paintings in their living space for enriching daily life, mounter had broadened his work field for aristocracy and tradespeople.

For religious ceremony, priests appreciate the sublime for mounting, who required mounter to adopt the cloth of robe as borders of the paintings.

In order to use gorgeous cloth for mounting, selecting proper papers is important. The possibility of such selection has supported by the variety of paper supplied by many paper maker of every period in Japan.

The mounting of Japanese paintings is composed of lining and assembling parts by pasting. The paintings of Japan should hardly be displayed as it just painted it, should be mounted into certain type of format for display and storage, because the support for the paintings is silk or paper, which is not so strong as western linen canvas. Every century it involves remount, disassembling, relining and restoring the old scrolls fatigued.

The repetition of remounting and making of flexible structure for scrolls and books have brought the reversible way of remounting containing weak pasting.

We can find many examples of transformation of formats.

There is a hanging scroll of 15th century with ink painting on paper which had been executed on a folding fan. A Buddhist priest ordered to make up an hanging scroll with a painting which had been executed on a folding fan. The inscription on the paper surrounding the painting says that it was transformed to the hanging scroll from the folding fan cherished by his master.

The famous paintings of 16th century originally made as folding screens (artist: HASEGAWA-Tohaku) are now mounted as hanging scrolls. Japan has long history that a page of letters, book, hand scroll and fan have been re-mounted to a hanging scroll. This shows that appreciation of hanging scroll has long tradition in mentality of Japanese people.

It was fashion in Edo period to collect calligraphy fragments of scrolls and books and paste them on the pages of albums.

As described above mentioned situation, the basic technique of repairing and restoring are formed through the tradition of remounting.

Architectural situation provides spot for hanging scroll

In the history of Japanese architecture, appearance of TOKONOMA alcove in 15th century has given the paintings mounted in hanging scroll big advantages. The alcove is to be designed as main place in the room not only for guest but also for the master of the house. There should be decorated with hanging scroll at the
center and some artistic artifacts beside it. Hanging scroll had got good place to be put, and it become essential as a main decoration for providing the room authority to receive. Such objects is to be changed every occasion (e.g. welcoming guest, season and traditional event). As a result of the tradition, collection of hanging scroll and transformation of format have been popular among the upper class of Family.

**HYOGUSHI mounter combines mounting and restoration**

It is very well known fact that the Japanese historic paintings and documents are tightly integrated with its mounting. This fact provides traditional situation in Japan that conservation work is done at the mounting studios, and that restoration process is comprised in the mounting process.

The fact that restoration and mounting processes are not separatable each other in the works of studio, is a key to understand the situation of Japanese paper conservation.

Since the Meiji Restoration in late 19th century, many art works had been in the market and new type of art collector positively had remounted their collections. When poetry booklet were separated and a scroll was cut, they transformed many fragments into hanging scrolls. In some points, these remounting in these years has improved and developed repairing and lining technique.

Conservation of art works for museum collection become active after the world war two, especially after the establishment of the "Low for the Protection of Cultural Properties" in 1950. Then the respect for the original format of cultural property is recently strictly kept in case of restoration.

However even after the low was established, museums, except some national museums, do not settle own conservation section with own conservators inside. Almost of all the designated historical paintings and documents are treated in the studios of private sector which often use the space inside the museum. This may give improper outlook to the foreign visitor that the conservation studio settled inside the museum. There are now conservation centers attached to the Kyoto, Nara and Kyushu National Museum, but they are a kind of rental building for the conservation studios to provide safe space from disaster. Only Tokyo National Museum has set up the conservation section with conservators and scientists. But before the museum settled the conservation section, the National Archives and the National Diet Library have had own section for conservation of which the conservation staff demonstrate some of their conservation techniques at this conference.

The recent advancement of restoration is of refining each process and materials such as the process of removing old lining, fixing unstable colors, quality papers and paste. And invitation of conservation strategy which is improved by western countries is influencing to each laboratory and owners of the objects.

**Soft and porous**

These two words are the key to understand the technique developed in Japanese paper conservation.

When a sheet of Japanese hand made paper adheres to the other sheet, it does not need a layer of adhesive, they stick together at the millions of dots on the fibers of both sheets. The adhesive stays at those points, because the Japanese papers have very porous net work of fibers. Kozo fiber has a special character which shows good adhering effect.
So, in case of paper lining for mounting scroll. In order to obtain good adhesiveness in a good porous fibers network structure, Japanese mounter developed beating brush under the condition of very thin consistency of the paste.

Japanese mounter keeps porous structure in adhering papers, not to make up a solid of thick paper board.

**Adoption of Japanese paper and technique by foreign nations**

As an appropriate conservation resource, Japanese handmade paper has been remarked since the flood damage in Firenze in 1966.

The Japanese handmade paper is thin and flexible and pastes well to the western stiff paper document, and shows chemically medium to alkali side. This fact meets to the paper conservation policy.

Along with the paper, the conservation technique has been also noticed to use the paper.

Improvement is the result of problems, and it is the result of recognition and evaluation, and it is the tradition itself. So, Japanese paper conservation today is the result of accumulation of the tradition.