

CONSERVATION OF JAPANESE PAINTING IN THE WEST – CULTURAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Résumé Quelle est la responsabilité déontologique des conservateurs-restaurateurs et spécialistes dans leur approche d'intervention sur des œuvres issues d'un univers culturel différent du leur ? Paul Philippot souligne en 1985 : « la restauration, avant de devenir un problème technique, est d'abord un problème culturel. ». Peut-on parler de responsabilité culturelle essentielle dans le processus de conservation-restauration ? C'est ce à quoi tentera de répondre cet article, s'appuyant sur une pratique personnelle au sein de l'Hirayama Studio.

En dehors du Japon, le traitement des peintures japonaises n'a pas toujours impliqué les meilleures pratiques et le résultat a parfois affecté l'intégrité et la matérialité des objets. Les spécialistes et conservateurs-restaurateurs se doivent donc d'aborder ceux-ci en regard de leur culture. Cette prise de conscience a été partagée par de nombreux experts et conservateurs dans le passé, ce qui a conduit à des échanges internationaux et à la création d'ateliers de restauration comme le Hirayama Studio au British Museum. Cet atelier a été spécialement conçu pour le traitement des peintures asiatiques en pleine connaissance de leur culture. Les restaurateurs occidentaux y sont entièrement formés à la conservation japonaise et les restaurateurs japonais en visite sont invités à collaborer dans le traitement d'objets de leur propre sphère culturelle. Je suis moi-même formé, dans cet atelier, à une pratique de conservation différente de ma formation initiale en conservation-restauration des œuvres graphiques à l'université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne.

En plus des techniques et compétences nécessaires à la conservation des peintures japonaises, des codes de conduite et des règles ont été établies au niveau international, permettant d'encadrer les méthodes contemporaines. Une déontologie a été développée autour de valeurs telles que le concept d'authenticité dans le processus de conservation. C'est ainsi que la divergence mondiale dans la définition et l'application de ces valeurs a conduit l'UNESCO, l'ICCROM et l'ICOMOS à organiser à Nara, en 1994, une conférence dans le prolongement de la Charte de Venise de 1964, des échanges autour de la diversité culturelle et patrimoniale et la définition commune de valeurs et du concept d'authenticité.

De nos jours, l'approche occidentale de la conservation des peintures japonaises tend à intégrer la pratique traditionnelle, permettant une uniformité internationale de traitements et de résultats. Celle-ci a été rendue possible principalement grâce à la recherche académique, qui a conduit à des échanges internationaux à partir de la seconde moitié du XX^e siècle permettant d'aboutir à des règles clarifiées.

Seront développées dans cet article, les règles de conservation-restauration retenues au British Museum pour le traitement des œuvres.

Abstract This article discusses the responsibility Western conservators and custodians must face when working on objects from a different cultural context, as explained by Paul Philippot's 1985 statement in French that « *restoration before becoming a technical problem, is first and foremost a cultural problem* ».

The treatment of Japanese paintings outside Japan has not always involved best practice and the result has sometimes affected the integrity and materiality of the objects. The correct way forward is for custodians and conservators themselves to approach their objects together with their culture. This awareness has been shared by many experts and curators in the past, which led to international exchanges and the creation of dedicated conservation studios, such as the Hirayama Studio at the British Museum. This set-up was specifically designed for expert treatment of Japanese scrolls in full awareness and acknowledgment of their culture. Our Western conservators are fully trained in Japanese conservation while visiting Japanese conservators are invited to collaborate with us in the treatment of objects from their own cultural sphere. It is in this studio that I am being trained in a conservation practice different to my original training in paper conservation at the Sorbonne.

In addition to the specific techniques and skills needed for the conservation of Japanese paintings, general guidelines and rules have been set up internationally to underpin modern procedure. A deontology was developed about the application of values such as authenticity in the conservation process. However, worldwide divergence in the definition and application of those values led UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS to set up a conference in Nara in 1994, in continuance of the Venice Charter of 1964, to discuss cultural and heritage diversity, and define both the values and concept of authenticity.

Nowadays, the Western approach to the conservation of Japanese paintings strives to be the same as that applied in Japan itself, allowing a worldwide uniformity of treatment and result. This has come about over time, thanks primarily to academic research which has led to international exchanges from the second half of the 20th century, including the Nara conference in 1994, to end up with clarified rules. This article will describe these rules based on conservation treatments carried out at the British Museum in which I have myself participated.

Resumen ¿Cuál es la responsabilidad deontológica de los conservadores-restauradores y especialistas occidentales cuando trabajan sobre objetos provenientes de otros contextos culturales? Como lo dijo P. Philippot en francés en 1985: « la restauración, antes de ser un problema técnico, es sobre todo un problema cultural ». ¿Se puede hablar de responsabilidad cultural esencial en el proceso de conservación-restauración? Este artículo tratará de responder apoyándose en una experiencia personal en el Hirayama Studio.

El tratamiento de pinturas japonesas fuera del Japón no siempre fue efectuado de la mejor manera y a veces su resultado afectó la integridad y la materialidad de los objetos. Los especialistas y los conservadores-restauradores deben abordar estos en confrontación con su cultura. Esta concientización fue compartida por numerosos expertos y conservadores en el pasado, lo que llevó a intercambios internacionales y a la creación de talleres de restauración como el Hirayama Studio en el British Museum. Este taller fue concebido especialmente para el tratamiento de pinturas asiáticas en pleno conocimiento de su cultura. Los restauradores occidentales son formados a la conservación-restauración japonesa y los restauradores japoneses visitantes son invitados a colaborar al tratamiento de objetos de su esfera cultural. Yo mismo he sido formado en ese taller a una práctica diferente de mi formación inicial en conservación-restauración de documentos gráficos en la universidad Paris 1.

Además de las técnicas y competencias necesarias para la conservación de pinturas japonesas, códigos y reglas de conducta fueron elaborados a nivel internacional para encuadrar los métodos contemporáneos. Una deontología fue desarrollada a partir del concepto de autenticidad en el proceso de conservación. Es así que la divergencia mundial en la definición y la aplicación de estos valores condujo la UNESCO, el ICCROM y el ICOMOS a organizar en Nara, en 1994, una conferencia, que prolonga la Carta de Venecia de 1964, con intercambios sobre la diversidad cultural y patrimonial y la definición común de valores y del concepto de autenticidad. Hoy, el enfoque de la conservación japonesa tiende a integrar la práctica tradicional, permitiendo una uniformidad internacional en los tratamientos y en los resultados. Esto ha sido posible gracias a la investigación académica, que llevó a intercambios internacionales a partir de la segunda mitad del siglo XX, que llegaron a aclarar las reglas. Serán desarrolladas las reglas de conservación-restauración en uso en el British Museum para el tratamiento de las obras.

Mots-clés peintures japonaises, conservation, préservation, diversité, culture, responsabilité, British Museum

Introduction

In 1985, former director of ICCROM¹, Paul Philippot wrote that « *restoration, before becoming a technical problem, is first and foremost a cultural problem* » a statement applied to the field of conservation in the 1980s which still applies in 2021 (Philippot, 1985, p. 7).

This article discusses the responsibility of Western custodians and conservators in the British Museum and similar institutions, to adapt to the cultural diversity of objects from different cultures, including Japanese paintings. By learning about the paintings and pictorial tradition, original context of usage and the history and techniques of conservation, one can avoid inappropriate treatment, handling or exhibition.

The responsibility towards diversity in the conservation context must also focus on the methodology, values and concept applied in the process of conservation. Throughout the 20th century international conservation organisations have set up charters and guidelines to guarantee the safe preservation of cultural heritage. Worldwide consensus has not always been found – for example, authenticity and its varied interpretations have impacted decision-making in conservation depending on the countries, like Japan, and in this case, the conservation of Japanese paintings.

Since the 1960's, several invested researchers and conservators have worked together to bring an awareness to custodians as to cultural diversity, through courses, research projects and symposiums. Moreover, Japan has been willing to give its support to the conservation of Japanese paintings from overseas to guarantee the best conservation work for invaluable pieces, through a program developed in the 1990's and grants like the one financed by the Sumitomo Foundation.

International exchanges in the field have led to better practices in Western institutions but also have had an impact on practices in Japan. This sharing of knowledge is helping to improve best practices and to unify the conservation approach worldwide.

Objects removed from their original cultural context

Japanese painting and tradition of mounting

Japanese paintings are composed of paper or silk substrate, on which is applied a sizing agent and a pictorial layer consisting of inorganic and organic pigments bound in animal glue. Painting is mainly applied on substrate but, sometimes, it is applied on the verso as well. This technique is mainly used on silk and is called *urazaishiki*. Although the substrate and pictorial layer define the painting itself such might be considered unfinished without at least one lining paper, adhered on the back using wheat starch paste.

Throughout its history, Japan has witnessed the evolution of painting practice and its use, and therefore the mounting of paintings as well. The mounting refers to the object that « hosts » a painting, and it can be divided in two main categories: scrolls and panels.

Scroll paintings are unrolled to be viewed or displayed and rolled up for storage. There are two types of scrolls. The handscroll can be compared to the Western codex, stories, calligraphy and painting. The handscroll has a horizontal format, traditionally enjoyed by one

¹ International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, created in 1956 and established in Italy in 1959 as the Rome Center.

person at a time, opening sections at shoulder width. The hanging scroll has a vertical format. Buddhist banners were the first to be displayed in this format, usually hung in temples for specific events or processions. The same format was then used for portrait paintings or any subject that suited to a vertical orientation and became a main element of Japanese domestic interior decoration, hanging in a dedicated alcove called a *tokonoma*. Themes depicted and mounted into hanging scrolls range from Buddhist representations to landscapes, portraits and nature. Such scrolls would be changed seasonally or hung for a specific occasion, which served to preserve their longevity.

The second category is paintings mounted onto panels: they can either be folding screens, sliding doors or single panels. Unlike scrolls, no unrolling is necessary to enjoy the painting. The folding screen needs to be unfolded and is used to partition and decorate rooms. Doors and single panels remain displayed permanently.

All mounted objects have a laminated structure consisting of several layers of paper linings to reinforce the painting itself and guarantee good dimensional stability. In addition, both hanging scrolls and folding screens have decorative mounting silks surrounding the painting. Unlike Western framed easel paintings which can easily be separated from their frames during conservation, Japanese paintings are intertwined with their mounts as one unified object. It is therefore impossible to remount a painting without interfering with both the mount and the painting unless the mount is cut off (**fig. 1**) (Masuda, Oryu, 1995, p. 159).



Figure 1 Example of Japanese paintings. Left, hanging scroll, *Portrait of young Prince Shotoku Taishi*, museum number : 1961,0408,0.1 ; top right, folding screen, *Landscape with peasants in houses, engaged in sericulture*, by Kano Yasunobu, registration number : 1881,1210,0.1573 ; bottom right, handscroll, *Earthly Paradise in Wuling* by Shibata Gito, registration number : 1985,1114,0.1.

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The styles of mount, for hanging scrolls especially, have evolved through the centuries alongside the practice of mounting. For example, a codification has been set-up for hanging scrolls according to the subjects depicted in the painting. This codification dictates the number of mounting silks, their style and proportions and other details.

The tradition of mounting paintings in Japan is centuries old. It is mentioned in a document of the *Shosoin*², and refers to practitioners mounting sutra³ scrolls, dyeing papers and joining sheets of paper into long rolls (Masuda, Oryu, 1995, p. 159). Initially, mounting work was carried out by monks, but by the 17th century it had evolved into an independent craft (Legroux, 2004, p. 58).

Until the second half of the 20th century, the art of mounting was transmitted from one master to their students. Like any craft in Western countries, it would take 10 years to gain the skills and experience necessary to work independently. However, increasingly through the 20th century to the present day, mounting knowledge has been passed on in more ways, through the establishment of academic courses, and studios dedicated to the conservation of Japanese cultural property.

Western historical restorations and technical or cultural misunderstandings

In 1853, Japan opened to the West after 200 years of closed borders. The commercial exchanges with Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch through the following years allowed Japanese art and crafts to be exported and enjoyed in Europe. Additionally, foreigners and collectors such as Charles Lang Freer, Emile Guimet and Professor William Anderson were able to enter Japan. Their collections became some of the biggest of Japanese paintings outside Japan.

In general, Japanese art became easier for Westerners to collect, and an increase in framing and restoration followed. We can assume that traditional Japanese methods of mounting were mostly unknown in Western countries in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Only a few examples can be related, like Hisajiro and Eisuke Miura, two brothers invited to Detroit by Charles Lang Freer, or Motokichi Tamura at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston or Urushibara Mokuchu at the British Museum (Kaladgew, Sotiras, 2017, p. 249-251; Kosek *et al.*, 2015, p. 25-43).

With few skilled mounters available, who were mainly working for important institutions or collectors, most of the Japanese paintings that came to the West were left to be preserved by restorers and curators, with, on the whole, little to no knowledge of, and, or lack of full appreciation of the mounting of pictorial art from Japan and how works were displayed originally. Moreover, it was hard to identify Japanese paintings according to Western art classification. Should a work be treated like an easel painting, or like a graphic art, given the extensive use of paper in the mount and painting substrate? This led to inappropriate treatments and methods of display, such as cutting off and disposing mounts to only keep the painting, application of varnishes, lining scrolls with canvas, and, finally, framing in wooden frames similarly to Western easel paintings (Illouz, 2017, p. 201).

The scrolls and folding screens were different to Western paintings, and collectors and restorers sometimes applied their knowledge indiscriminately based on their Western training and experience, so that they had to adapt the objects to what they knew and a different

² Imperial repository at *Todaiji* temple, Nara and dating from the 8th century.

³ Buddhists scriptures.

environment. This explains certain methods that today are considered bad practice, such as stretching scrolls on stretchers or strainers, displaying folding screens fully opened flat, with paintings attached to walls for extended periods. One must acknowledge the fact that similar treatments were taking place in Japan as well up to the beginning of the 20th century leading to common change of formats. However, such treatments were made with a deep knowledge of mounting and display of such paintings. Unfortunately, the inappropriate display of Japanese paintings does continue today in certain Western institutions. This is perhaps due to lack of resources rather than lack of knowledge, yet hand scrolls can still be seen, widely open without proper support, enhancing creases that could be avoided with appropriate treatment and display methods. Hanging scrolls have been seen displayed even with a weak mount, which could cause severe damage to the painting. If hanging scrolls are displayed or hung when their mount has been weakened and degraded with time, their own weight can cause severe damage to the painting itself as they are so bound together.

Object values: maintaining authenticity

Recognition of the need to protect cultural heritage became widely international from the late 19th to the early 20th century (ICCROM, 2009, p. 2). This happened in Japan following extensive destruction of temples between 1867 and 1874, and increasing Westernization during the Meiji period after 1868 (Scott, 2003, p. 346). In Europe people reacted against overzealous restorations and modifications of cultural monuments (Jokilehto, 2002, p. 137-212). Many countries defined and wrote into law the protection of their heritage, such as the Japanese Law 49, passed on June 5, 1897⁴. Cultural heritage was from then on defined as a common heritage of humanity and it was considered irreplaceable once destroyed. Monuments or any other objects were attributed values, either historic and or aesthetic/artistic.

International Charters were written on that basis like the Athens Charter in 1931, which established basic principles for an international code of practice for conservation. It was then reviewed in 1964 and approved by the newly founded ICOMOS⁵ in Venice. Among the modifications (like the necessity to have recourse to all the sciences and techniques to contribute to the study, and safeguarding that no distinction should be held between historical and artistic values), the word authenticity was used for the first time in the preamble: « *It is our duty to hand them [historic monuments] on in the full richness of their authenticity* ». Authenticity has been particularly used within the World Heritage Committee in the late 1970's because a « test of authenticity » was used to measure the essential truth of the values established (Larsen, 1995, p. XXXIII). Furthermore, originally used for the protection of historic monuments, the notion of authenticity became frequently used in the conservation field as « *the foundation stone of the methodology of the restoration* » according to Paul Philippot (Philippot, 1985, p. 9).

This affirmation, although true in most Western countries, was not shared internationally. Indeed, the term of authenticity was « *introduced without fanfare, without definition* » according to Herb Stovel in the preamble to the Venice Charter (Larsen, 1995, p. XXXIII) and revealed to be non-applicable or comprehensible in other countries like in Japan. In the case of Japan, the word « authentic » does not have a proper translation in Japanese, if not in other Asian languages (Ito, 1995, p. 35). In a world where the protection of cultural heritage has

⁴ First systematic law for the preservation of Japanese historical architecture and art.

⁵ International Council of Monuments and Sites.

been growing with more charters, UNESCO's recommendations or standards, the notion of authenticity became a cultural problem. In Japan, like in many other non-Western countries, the preservation of cultural heritage has developed differently according to its traditions and customs. Even if the same historic and aesthetic values were cherished and protected, the understanding of authenticity led to a divergence between Western countries and others. One major and famous example is the Ise shrine, in Japan. The shrine has been reconstructed or repaired every twenty years, using the same techniques of fabrication since its first creation. The architecture remains the same, so even if the materiality is changed, the Japanese authorities consider that it keeps its significance and authenticity. This example doesn't fit well with the Western understanding of authenticity, which is to preserve as much of an artefact's original material as possible (Stovel, 1995, p. XXXV).

In the early 90's, the World Heritage Committee decided that the notion of authenticity needed further study due to the vagueness of the concept and the different cultural interpretations, leading to the joint conference of UNESCO, ICCROM ICOMOS and the government of Japan, in Nara in 1994. From then, considering the cultural context of a cultural heritage and its evolution, it was agreed that the notion of authenticity could be linked to many sources of information. In addition to the design, material and setting used previously by the World Heritage Committee, authenticity should be based also on form, substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location, spirit and feeling and other internal and external factors (Larsen, 1995, p. XI).

The editor of the post print of the Nara conference, Knut Einar Larsen, stated that the conference « *greatly benefited from being held in Japan, a culture often unfairly seen by the West as paying little or no respect to historic materials* » (Larsen, 1995, p. XII). Indeed, Japan had been criticized by the West on some of their conservation practices like rebuilding shrines. Similar critiques had also been made towards the conservation and remounting of Japanese paintings, due to the change of mounting silks and lining papers. Japanese shrines are rebuilt regularly for religious reasons, but religion is not part of the decision-making process for painting conservation. However, the preservation of traditions, skills, mounting materials, and related craftsmanship are some of the reasons that were brought forward. Those, of course, are central to the preservation of the painting itself.

How conservation treatment changes Japanese paintings

The cultural aspect of the conservation of Japanese paintings appears on two levels of any treatment. The first is when parts of the mounts are removed from the painting, questioning the values and authenticity applied to that part of the mount. The second one is when the conservator is choosing the new mount style, new silk brocade, colour of the lining paper and mounting parts to replace the ones removed previously.

In Japan, the authentic part of a painting is the pictorial layer (pigments and binder) and the primary paper or silk support (Kihara, 2011, p. E-15). The elements of the mount, even if physically and aesthetically intertwined with the painting, are secondary, serving to protect the painting, allowing the display and enhancing its aesthetics. Traditionally, in Japan, the mount is removed in the process of conservation-restoration because it is either damaged, out of fashion or its historical or aesthetical value is not considered significant enough. Further, it is often difficult and time consuming to reuse the old mounting silk for several reasons described below (Watanabe, 1995, p. 143).

Exactly as with the example of the *Ise* shrine mentioned previously, change of materiality in Japanese painting conservation, such as lining paper or mounting silk elements, has been misunderstood or misjudged by Westerners due to their different interpretation of the concept of authenticity.

On one hand, without knowing that a Japanese painting would have been remounted several times, a Westerner could have easily thought that a given mount was original and be unwilling to remove it. On the other hand, even if the mount was not original it could express the taste of a period, therefore having historical and aesthetic values to preserve. This is the case with the Anderson collection at the British Museum acquired by the British Museum in 1881 (Clark, 1993, p. 15-18). Most of the paintings have not been treated at the British Museum and so most scrolls still have mounts that date to the 19th century or earlier. Even though it is unlikely that many mounts would be original, they still document fashion and aesthetics of the Edo or early Meiji period. However, considering this, most Japanese conservators would argue that one must make a decision based on the « *highest priority from the standpoint of conservation* » (Watanabe, 1995, p. 145) which in every case is the pictorial layer and its support.

Change of mounting silk

In the case of the mounting silks, three possibilities are available to the conservator: preserving the current silk, reproducing the current silk, or replacing with a different silk.

Preserving the silk may be the best option if it carries high historical or aesthetic value. Re-using silk from an old mount can be problematic as it increases both difficulty and duration of the conservation process. The edges of scrolls that have been folded need to be folded again at the same area which can cause a weakness in the silk. To avoid this, edges can stay unfolded and consolidated but this will change the proportions of the mount. The silk can also get easily distorted with the application of water (Watanabe, 1995, p. 143). In some cases, mounter skills might not be advanced enough to conserve silks with embroideries or other specific techniques, and therefore may require expert treatment which can only be carried out by textile conservators.

As an example, the mounting silk of Utamaro's painting *Standing Courtesan Reading a Letter* was reused in the process of conservation. The silk is a beautifully decorated kimono silk with strong aesthetic value (fig. 2) (Kusunoki *et al.*, 2021, p. 47-65).

Alternatively, the reproduction of high value silks is possible to ensure protection for a painting when previous silk can't be reused, as in the example of the hanging scroll depicting *Yuima Koji* (fig. 3).

Finally, silk can be replaced with a new silk considered appropriate by the collector or custodian. However, in both cases where silk is replaced, the old mounting silks should be preserved as part of the documentation of the conservation process, as stipulated in all conservation guidelines (ICOM, IIC, ECCO) (Sugiyama, 2014, p. 15).

Change of lining paper

With time the silk substrate of a painting can degrade and get darker. However, the lining paper is often visible through the open weave of the silk, so its colour has an impact on the visual aspect of the painting. The colour of the lining paper must be adjusted to match the



Figure 2 Kitagawa Utamaro, *Standing Courtesan Reading a Letter*, 1805-1806, ink and colour on paper, hanging scroll, mount 215,7 × 69,2 cm, painting 125,6 × 53,5 cm, museum number : 2014,3048.1, before (left) and after (right) conservation. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.



Figure 3 *Yuima Koji*, 15th century, ink and colour on silk, hanging scroll, mount 212 × 82 cm, painting 113.2 × 60 cm, museum number : 1881,1210,0.1207, before (left) and after (right) conservation.

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changing colour of the silk as it degrades. In the Edo period (1603-1867), many lining papers were dyed dark colour to make repairs on the silk substrate less visible (lowering the contrast). However, this had an impact on the aesthetic aspect of the painting and how it was perceived (fig. 4). Finally, paper used for linings deteriorates with time, often enhanced by the presence of alum in the sizing of the silk substrate or the oxidation caused by pigments such as malachite (Winter, 2008, p. 152). Therefore, lining paper must be removed and changed through the process of conservation, firstly to be able to add the proper colour for the first lining, and secondly to access and remove old repairs.



Figure 4 *Nehan-zu*, 15th century, ink and colour on silk, hanging scroll, mount 190 × 90 cm, painting 135 × 71,2 cm, museum number : 1913,0501,0.40, painting with only the old first lining (left) and the new first lining (right). © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

Another cultural aspect to consider in conservation applies specifically to remounting hanging scrolls. As Akiyoshi Watanabe explains, it is a « *mistake to think that restoration work can avoid influencing the expression of a piece* ». The conservator will have an impact on the final expression of the mounted painting by their choice of specific silks and arrangements which takes years of apprenticeship to grasp and understand rules and nuances.

In the specific case of hanging scrolls, several categories of mount style exist and are linked to the painting subjects. When remounting, the conservator must choose silks that will match the style and colours of the painting, for example particular floral patterns such as lotuses or peonies would be used for Buddhist paintings (Masuda, Oryu, 1995, p. 163). Even if the choice of silk is subjective and diverges from one studio to another in Japan, it would be rash to deny that mounters are subconsciously influenced by centuries of tradition and different colour codes created in the past and applied in Japanese art. Among those colour codes it is possible that the *ungen saishiki* (rainbow colouring dating from the 8th century) used as a decorative motif for Buddhist art might have inspired mounters in their choices. There is also the *kasane no irome*, a colour code for the proper combination in the costume of a court lady in the Heian period (794-1185), which would vary according to the season

and which was also applied in the mounting of painting (Yoshitaka, 2007, p. 75). Finally, the *gogyo shisou* (Five elements theory) in which the five elements are associated with seasons, directions, and colours, can guide the choice of appropriate silk colours. As an example, blue could be used for spring, red for summer, white for autumn and black for winter (Yoshitaka, 2007, p. 75).

Just as there are recommendations on what type of silks and colours should go with a specific painting, conversely, there are recommendations on what should not be used. Yoshitaka explains that the repetition of patterns between the painting and the silk is to be avoided, as with a wave pattern for example (Yoshitaka, 2007, p. 75).

Awareness of cultural diversity: dissemination of knowledge and scroll mounting skills

Specialists from the conservation field have been working together since the first half of the 20th century via international institutions like ICCROM, IIC⁶, ICOM⁷ to raise awareness of cultural diversity in the methodology and practice of conservation, and to set international charters to unify the practice.

In 1967, Japan joined the Rome Centre and the same year, a working group set up within ICCROM met in Japan till 1969, to exchange about the conservation of painting, both Japanese and Western, with the common aim of understanding each other's practice and methodology. This could be seen as the beginning to an international exchange on this matter.

Following this, many publications and international symposiums were set up, not only in Japan but worldwide (fig. 5). These allowed specialists, conservators and scientists to share their work and thoughts, like those hosted by the Tobunken⁸ or the 1988 Kyoto Conference organised by the IIC. Courses organised by UNESCO/ICCROM, IADA⁹, Sorbonne University or Tobunken, gave the opportunity to conservators, historians, curators and scientists, to have a good understanding of conservation practices, traditions, and methods in Japan (fig. 6). Following such courses, participants were then able to apply remedial treatments to paintings, like reinforcements of creases, tears, pigment consolidation or changing hanging braids. It was clear those courses were not meant to train Western conservators to reach the level of their Japanese counterparts, for whom at least ten years of practice was needed to gain the skills and knowledge to remount paintings. However, organisers would hope that by setting up such courses, misunderstandings and inappropriate practices like those mentioned above would be avoided. The aim of such projects has been to enable Western conservators to recommend appropriate treatment for Japanese paintings and understand their own limitations.

Inevitably the time will arrive when a painting must be fully remounted. Some Western conservators have dedicated their whole careers to train as mounters, by working with and learning from Japanese colleagues. Any conservator would benefit from spending time in Japan to embrace its cultural diversity, enabling them to apply correct rules and customs when treating an object at their home institution. However, large collections of Japanese

⁶ International Institute for Conservation founded in 1950.

⁷ International Council of Museums created in 1946.

⁸ Tokyo Research Institute for cultural Properties, originally founded in 1930.

⁹ International Association of Book and paper Conservators founded on February 28, 1957.

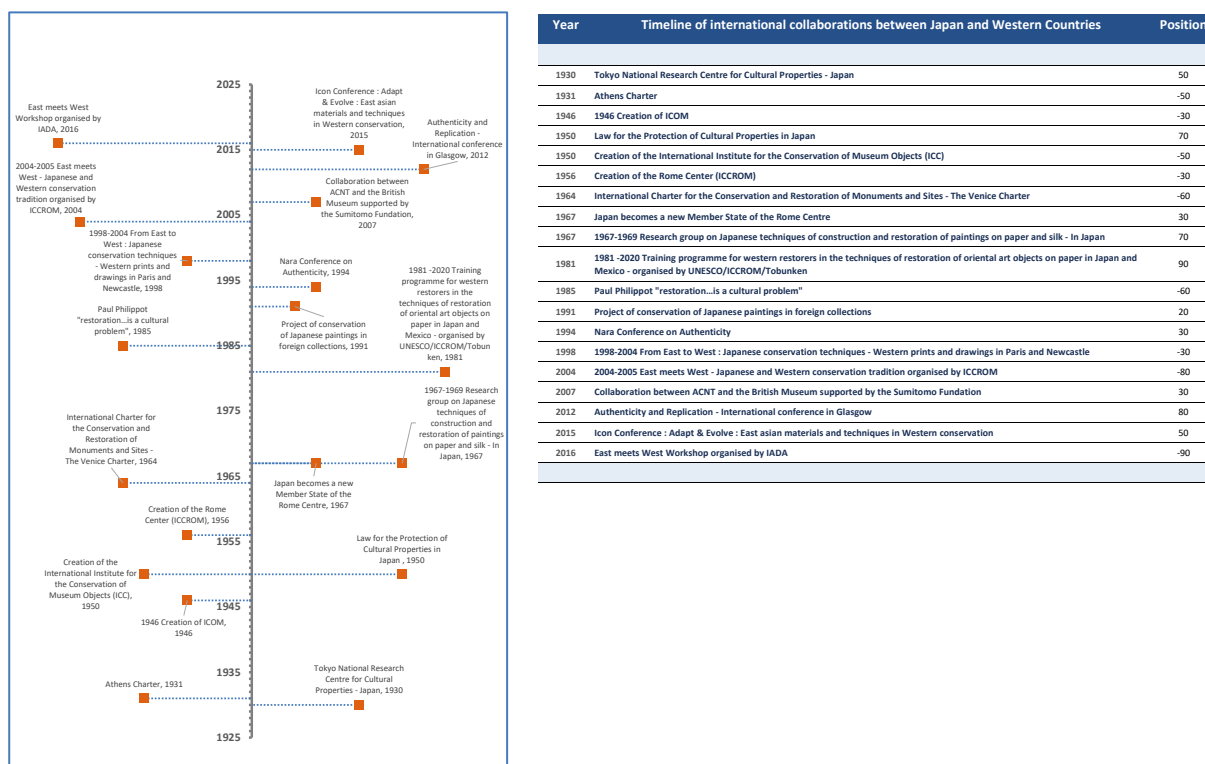


Figure 5 Timeline of International Collaborations between Japan and Western Countries.
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Figure 6 Japanese Paper Course 2019, Ms. Atsuko Takase and Mr. Atsushi Ogasawara demonstrating the making of a handscroll to the participants. © Image provided by Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties (TOBUNKEN).

paintings are scarce around the world and only the main collections and few private studios could benefit from this process, leaving smaller collections without the possibility of having their objects treated by trained specialists.

In order to have a better idea of collections overseas and to promote proper treatment, the Japanese government set up the Joint Council for the Conservation and Restoration of Ancient Japanese Art Works in Foreign Collections in 1991 through the Agency for Cultural Affairs. Paintings in collections outside Japan were assessed and, in most cases, sent to Japan to be treated and analysed before being returned to their owners (Miwa, 1995, p. 227-235). However, in some cases, due to the vulnerability of the painting to humidity changes during transport the treatment had to be carried out in the home institution, so temporary studios were set up to allow visiting conservators to work on site (Nakayama, 2011, p. E-83-E91).

The conservation of Japanese paintings is time consuming and requires handmade Japanese materials which also add to the cost of treatment. In the continuity of the overseas project, Mr Ikuo Hirayama and the Sumitomo Foundation have financially assisted overseas conservation studios to support their projects. Mr Ikuo Hirayama financed setting up a large conservation studio at the British Museum in 1994, known as the Hirayama Studio, dedicated to the conservation of Eastern pictorial art on paper and silk. He also set up the Hirayama Program at the Freer Gallery to train conservators to become scroll mounters. The Sumitomo Foundation has developed a grant programme to fund projects related to the protection, preservation and restoration of Cultural Properties outside Japan. Several institutions in America and Europe have benefitted from this grant, including the British Museum, for which the collaboration is ongoing since 2007 alongside the Association for Conservation of National Treasures (ACNT) from Japan.

In recent decades, international collaborations also had an impact on traditional Japanese practices in Japan and in Western countries like the UK. The Sumitomo Projects at the British Museum allowed conservators from Japan and the British Museum to work together, including textile conservators. This had an impact on the decision making, where more options were considered and developed for the conservation and reuse of mounting silks (Kusunoki *et al.*, 2021, p. 47-65) (Sugiyama, 2014, p. 17).

Conclusion

As Paul Philippot stated in 1985, the process of conservation is indeed a cultural problem, especially when working on an object in a different cultural sphere than the object's origin. In this case, conservators and custodians have a responsibility to learn about the pictorial, mounting and preservation traditions of Japanese paintings. This is compulsory to avoid the application of generic practices and a biased point of view. Such knowledge will eventually, through collaborations, lead to innovation as well. Even if this statement can seem obvious to most of the professionals in our field, inappropriate treatments and display referred to in this article still take place and for many reasons this should not be acceptable henceforth.

Specialists from Japan and the West have provided numerous conferences, courses, publications, and videos accessible to all – to inform, train and allow conservation treatment, display and handling. Moreover, international institutions have, and continue to work hard together, to set up charters and other conservation guidelines, creating a strong common foundation for conservation practice. This is designed to give sufficient knowledge to Westerners, to

comprehend and treat Japanese paintings but also to establish common ground for best practice.

Courses, exchanges and shared projects like the Sumitomo Project at the British Museum give the opportunity for both conservators from Japan and from the museum to share their skills. These exchanges have triggered modifications in traditional practices in Japan, such as a better consideration for reusing mounting silks.

Finally, it is by acknowledging cultural diversity in the field of conservation that we can avoid a culturally biased vision and also improve care and treatment practices worldwide.

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