

Digitalizing “Scrolls” at the British Museum

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Research Background

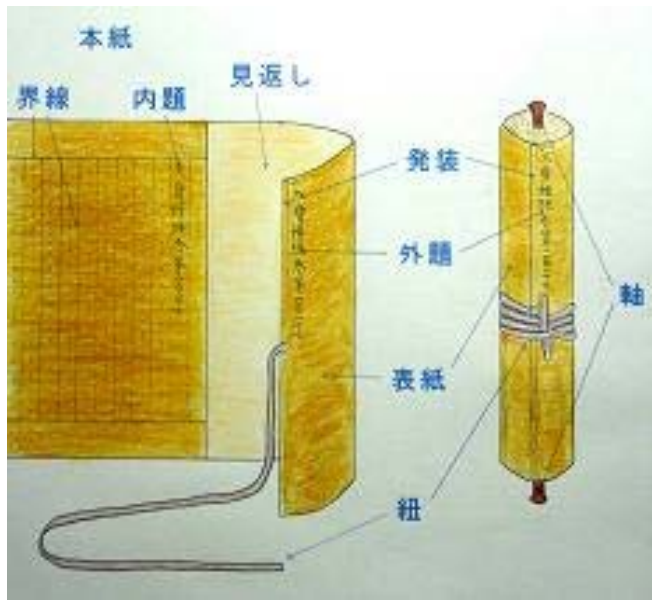
- Hokke-shu (法華宗): a Buddhist school established by the monk Nichiren in the 13th century, Japan.
- Art of Hokke-shu flourished throughout the Medieval and Premodern times.
- Focusing on the sacred objects and artists in the Edo period (1603-1867).

Purpose of Dispatches

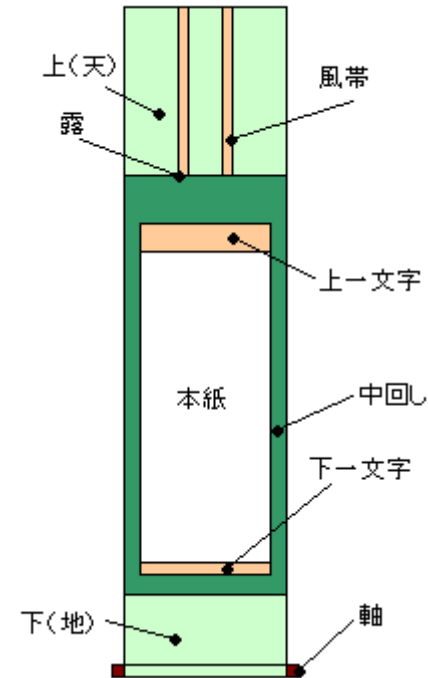
- Aug 26th–Nov 2nd, 2012
University of London (SOAS)
- Nov 15th, 2012–Jan 20th, 2013
University of London (SOAS)
- To collect materials at libraries and archives in UK which relate to the research topic.
- To photograph and digitalize paintings at the British Museum.

Outline of the Digitalizing Project

- Focusing on the format of “scroll”: hanging scroll (掛幅) and handscroll (巻物).



handscroll



hanging scroll

- Hanging scroll originally associated with the Buddhist context.
- Expanded into other themes, such as landscape, portrait and genre painting.

Tosa Mitsuoki, *Portrait of Nichiren*,
17th century, British Museum







Heike Nokyo,
12th century

- Handscroll also initially connected with Buddhism, particularly hand-copying of sutras (写経).
 - Many kinds of themes to appear.
- The format of “scroll” was space where the religious and secular contexts mingled together.

Why digitalizing scrolls?

- Process of unfolding and folding scrolls may cause damage to a scroll itself.
- High-resolution images can help a researcher to decide whether he or she really needs to examine an actual object.
- Protect cultural property by keeping the possibility of damage to a minimum.

Scrolls at the British Museum

- Contains more than 2000 scrolls.
- Hanging scroll and handscroll are stored together in the shelves.
- Classified by the size, but not by the subject.
- 500 scrolls had been photographed with the aid of ITP program in 2011.

How to Photograph Scrolls at BM?

- Difference between hanging scroll and handscroll: hanging scroll is a painting, while handscroll is more closely related to a book.
- Each scroll needs a different type of setting to photograph.
- For hanging scroll: uses zoom lens to deal with various sizes.
- For handscroll: uses macro lens to keep distortion to a minimum.



Whole



Detail



Textile

Achievements from the Dispatches

- More than 1500 scrolls have been photographed and digitalized.
- 95% of them are hanging scrolls, while 5% are hand scrolls.
- More than 15000 images taken.
- Some works are closely related to my research topic.

William Anderson (1842-1900)

- English Surgeon
- Stayed in Japan from 1873 to 1880 as a professor of anatomy and surgery at Imperial Naval Medical College (帝国海軍医学校).
- Collected various Japanese art.
- Published *The Pictorial Arts of Japan* in 1886.
- His collection purchased by the British Museum in 1881.

Arthur Morrison (1863-1945)

- British novelist; *A Child of the Jago* (1896), *The Hall in the Wall* (1902) etc...
- Collector of Japanese art.
- Published *The Painters of Japan* in 1911.
- Ukiyo-e prints purchased by the British Museum in 1906.
- Other paintings passed over to the British Museum in 1913.

Joint Workshop at SOAS

- With support from Centre for Study of Japanese Religions at SOAS, we organized the international joint workshop on 5th October, 2012.
- Under the title “Where Art Meets Rituals: Aesthetic and Religious Practices in Japan”, the presentations covered various themes, from the religious ceremonies to the tea jar procession.

Future Works

- Rest of works at the British Museum to be photographed by this summer.
- Add metadata to the image database at ARC.
- Write theses based on research at SOAS and the British Museum, and submit to academic journals.