

The Conservation Process of Textiles at the Kyushu National Museum

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Q. Selection and prioritization of artifacts for conservation

The criteria for selection are artifacts that are in poor condition and pose a danger of damage when they are handled. Particular priority is given to those that have frequent occasions of being utilized (exhibited).

There is no rule regarding the number of artifacts that may be selected for conservation per year.

Among the textile artifacts kept by Kyushu National Museum, the collection of textiles from India and Southeast Asia that was entrusted to the museum in 2006 included a large number of items and elicited concern about biological treatment since it was first received. Therefore, methods for their storage were examined in cooperation with staff members in charge of conservation and restoration from an early stage. In the following year, the purchasing procedure was set in motion and the collection became a part of the museum's holdings. Thus, from fiscal 2008, full-scale efforts were launched to verify the condition of the artifacts in the collection, and storage boxes were created in accordance with their shapes (Figs. 1 – 4) upon re-examining methods for their storage.

In performing conservation work, a conservation plan is first formulated based on a conditions assessment report of the artifact, in consultation between staff in charge of the artifact and staff in charge of conservation and restoration.

When purchasing a new artifact, its condition is taken into consideration with regard to whether it is in need of conservation, and if so, to what extent. In the case of our museum, the museum's entire collection is small compared to many other museums, so even artifacts that are in need of conservation are actively considered as potential purchases as long as their artistic value corresponds to the concept of the museum.

Q. Conservation budget

The conservation of not only textile artifacts but of all items kept by Kyushu National Museum is basically covered by the operating budget of the museum only.

Q. Members who engage in conservation planning

Conservation planning is performed by staff members in charge of textiles and staff members in charge of conservation and restoration at Kyushu National Museum.

Q. Conservation plan estimates

Conservation plan estimates are normally obtained from conservation contractors every year in September and October. An internal inspection conference is then held to gain a general perspective on conservation specifications and expenses while also examining the necessity of the conservation work. Thereafter, a Conservation Specifications Committee and a Conservation Contract Committee are convened. When the Conservation Contract Committee calls for a proposal competition, candidate contractors are selected by a Selection Committee after twenty days of public announcement and onsite explanatory meetings (Fig. 5).

Kyushu National Museum is probably unique in that it has a Conservation Specifications Committee. The committee discusses whether the conservation specifications are appropriate for the artifact in question and whether the expenses to be incurred are reasonable in reference to the specifications, by inviting outside experts who have long years of experience in the conservation business. The result of the discussion is conveyed to the Conservation Contract Committee, which then discusses how to go about concluding a contract.

There are several types of contracts: open tendering, proposal competition, negotiated contract through prior public invitation and negotiated contract (sole-source negotiated contract). Negotiated contracts are frequently employed in projects that are worth less than 1 million yen, and proposal competitions are frequently employed in all other projects. Even so, proposal competitions tend to be employed also for projects worth less than 1 million yen at present, in consideration of the possibility of finding contractors that propose better specifications and prices.

In proposal competitions, a Screening Committee conducts a preliminary screening of prospective tender participants. Additionally, an onsite explanatory meeting is held in which the tender participants are given the opportunity to examine the item in question, and based on this examination, they then create a proposal that includes a conservation plan and necessary budget.

Thereafter, the tender participant who has submitted the optimal proposal is selected to be the contract partner by the Contractor Selection Committee.

Q. Is basic information, such as dimensions and production technique, provided when requesting a conservation plan estimate?

Yes, such information is provided. Furthermore, the actual artifact in question is also shown to the tender participants.

Basically, however, no scientific analysis, such as fluorescent X-ray analysis, is carried out. This is fundamentally because conservation must fall within the scope of Japan's traditional techniques, which do not rely on scientific analyses.

Nevertheless, chemical analysis may be performed upon request and the relevant information provided.

Q. What specifications pertain specifically to the conservation of textile artifacts?

Basically, damaged parts and problems in terms of preservation are listed up, and conservation specifications are established in reference to this list. There are no conservation specifications solely for textile artifacts, but a conservation policy is decided based on information about the present state of the artifact (shape, dimensions, state of damage). Specifications for conservation include, for example, (1) observation and photos records of the artifact in its present state, (2) production and procurement of conservation materials, (3) specific conservation methods (details of materials and conservation methods for areas that need to be treated), and (4) conservation period and procedure.

At the specification stage, however, no mention is made regarding conservation materials, such as support fabrics and threads. Proposals regarding these materials are received during the actual process of conservation and decided upon mutual discussion. When selecting a support fabric or thread, no priority is necessarily given to either synthetic dye or natural dye. Dyes are selected from the perspective of how well they can adjust the color of the support fabric, minimize discoloring or color-running after conservation, and prevent any adverse impact on the artifact.

For example, for the conservation of a flower patterned purple weft ikat shawl with embroidery on both sides (kept by Kyushu National Museum), a synthetic dye was chosen for dyeing the support fabric (Figs. 6 – 8).

The color of support fabrics need to be adjusted so they do not stand out after conservation and do not detract from the appreciation of the artifact. Synthetic dyes make subtle color adjustments easier, and when a support fabric needs to be dyed in a dark color as in the case of the shawl, it minimizes damage to the fabric because it does not need to be over dyed many times. Moreover, compared to natural dyes, most synthetic dyes have a color fastness against rubbing. In the case of the shawl, synthetic dye was selected for its fastness and preservation property.

Q. Conservation facility in Kyushu National Museum

Every year in December, the museum has conservation contractors submit an application for usage of the museum's conservation facility for the next fiscal year. Upon receiving these applications, the museum issues a public invitation for prior verification of tender participants, to verify whether there are any other contractors who wish to use the museum's facility. Following this, a member of a Conservation Facility Management Committee preferentially selects contractors who possess the largest number of conservation plans for artifacts including nationally designated properties (Fig. 9).

Q. Display fixtures

Both double and single hanging racks are used. When display fixtures were discussed during the museum's opening preparation, these racks were made to provide the greatest versatility as possible. The display stand is made of a base and a combination of height adjustment plate and top panel, so it

could be adjusted according to the artifact. The racks were made during the museum's opening preparation in reference to similar racks that were in use and were borrowed from Kyoto National Museum and Tokyo National Museum. At the discretion of the then-chief curator, matte acrylic was applied to the base of the racks. The double type is standard, but the single type could also be connected and used as a double rack. Collar supports were made in different sizes, but as each artifact varies in shape, a collar padding is made for each item if existing supports are not suitable. Sleeve rods are available in three lengths.

A mannequin had been used to exhibit kimonos in the past, but hanger racks are now normally used. Careful attention is paid to exhibit each item so that it can easily be viewed in its entirety. However, when exhibiting a large number of artifacts at once, relatively durable items are at times selected and exhibited three-dimensionally by creating a drape. When exhibiting the back side of an artifact, it is placed in a standalone display case so both the back and front sides can be viewed (Fig. 10).

Q. Behind-the-scenes tours

Many people tend to think that the museum's main function is to exhibit artifacts. Because of this, other aspects of the museum, such as collecting, managing and researching, tend to remain inconspicuous. Behind-the-scenes tours are offered to raise visitors' awareness of the fundamental objective of the museum, which is to convey its collection to the public through preservation, exhibition and conservation.

It is for this reason that glass walls and windows are used throughout the museum where possible during the museum's business hours, and even the storage is fitted with small windows that let visitors take a look inside, as a measure to "open up" the national museum and show how artifacts are stored.

* This paper is an elaboration of an interview survey that was carried out on July 21, 2017 (researchers: Shunsuke Nakayama, Riyo Kikuchi of the Tokyo National Institute for Cultural Properties).

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Fig. 1 A wrinkle that has formed at the border between the embroidered and non-embroidered areas



Fig. 2 Thin paper is applied to the border as a cushioning material and arranged so that the fabric does not wrinkle when rolled up



Fig. 3 The fabric is rolled around a core tube (7cm-diameter cylinder made of neutral paper)



Fig. 4 A holding device is created inside a box made of neutral paper so the rolled fabric can be stored in a suspended state

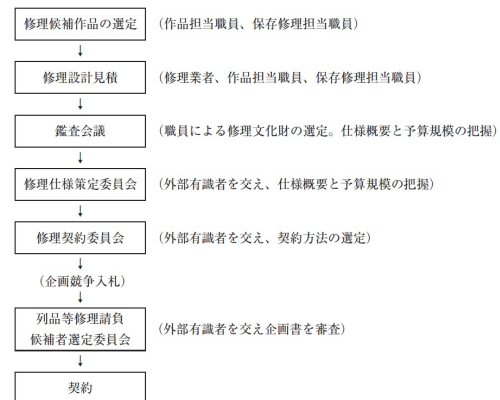


Fig. 5 Conservation decision-making process (in the case of proposal competition)

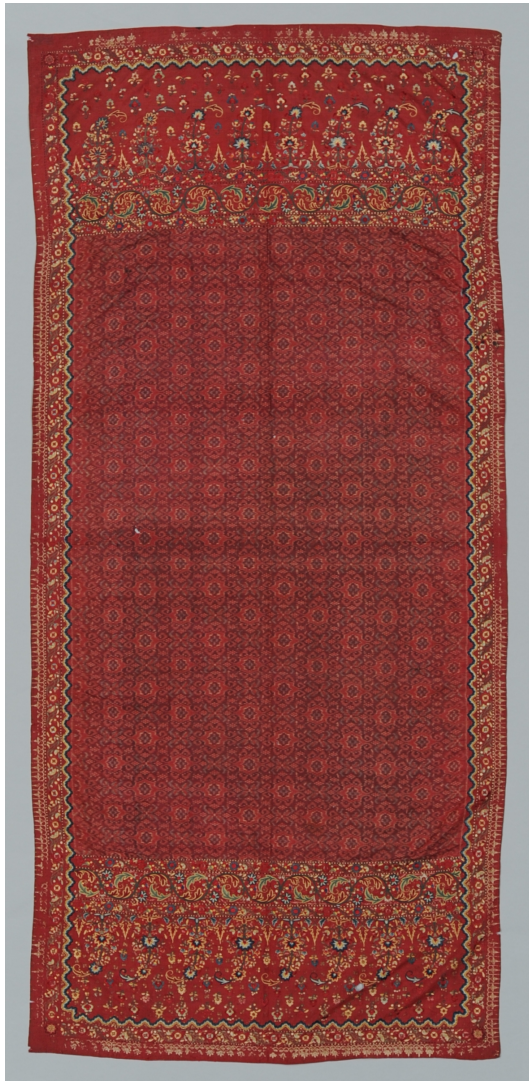


Fig. 6 Flower patterned purple weft ikat shawl with embroidery on both sides (kept by Kyushu National Museum) — After conservation



Fig. 7 After conservation from the back



Fig. 8 Dyeing the mending fabric



Fig. 9 Cultural property conservation and restoration facility in Kyushu National Museum



Fig. 10 Kyushu National Museum's Cultural Exchange Exhibition — Exhibition of textile artifacts