

# Mastering Mounting



by  
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## Japanese Scroll Mounting: Part I

There was a recent discussion on the PPFA Hitchhikers e-mail forum over the handling, smoothing out of wrinkles, and mounting of Asian silk papers. Although I wrote an article in the February 2000 issue about wet mounting that touched on the topic of traditional Japanese mounting methods, I believe there is need to delve further into this topic.

During my trip to China last summer, I had the opportunity to discuss and observe the basics of traditional scroll mounting techniques firsthand. This is an art that takes many years to perfect

and should not be attempted without proper training.

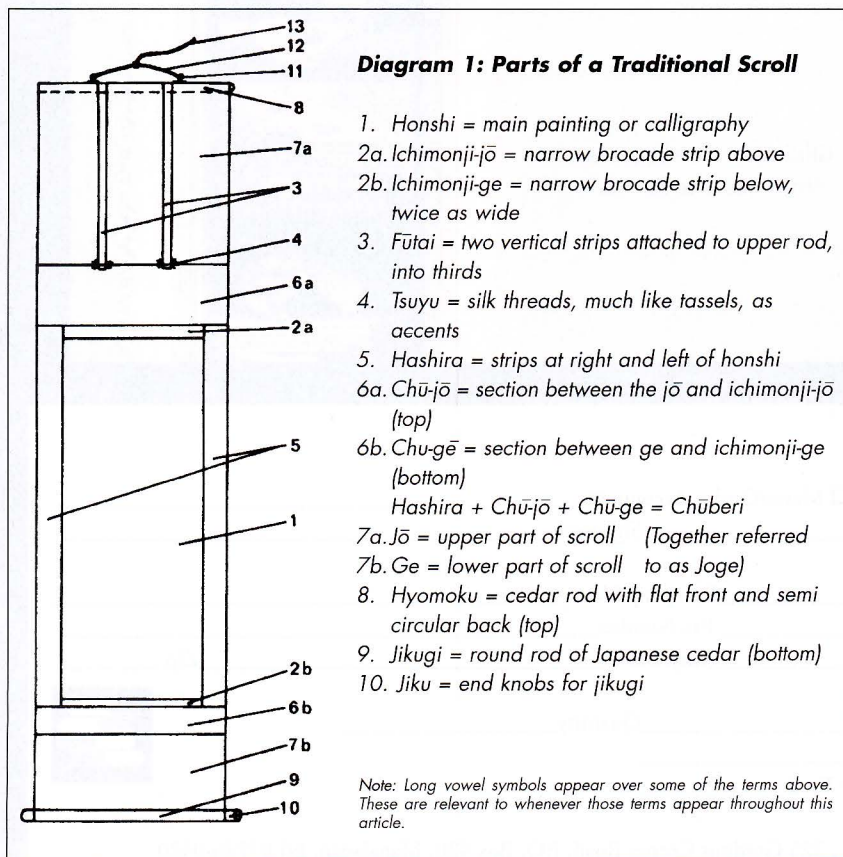
### West Appreciates East

There has been an increasing appreciation in the West of the paintings and calligraphy of East Asia, which has made us, as framers, need more information about mounting them as scrolls. In Japanese houses, a hanging scroll is used as decoration just as we use framed art. Occasionally these scrolls may be rolled up, returned to storage, or replaced by another—just as we might reframe something or purchase a new piece of art for our home. The art of mounting a displayed scroll is often evaluated and revered along with the painting itself, just as we hope our customers will do with our work.

Apart from aesthetic considerations, the basic technique of scroll mounting is considered fine art conservation. Most deterioration of scrolls, such as creasing and tears in the support, flaking of paint layers, or general lack of flatness, can be corrected and/or restored by remounting. A scroll conservator or specialist in the conservation of Oriental paintings would most likely be a master in scroll mounting.

### What To Do and When To Do It

The information presented in this two-part article is designed to inform you about mounting scrolls. The mounting





methods described have been highly abbreviated and should never be attempted without extensive specialized training by a master. I hope to introduce, inform, and educate you so you may better assist those who bring in their treasured Asian artifacts and collectibles. This information is not a substitute for years of training.

As always, the more you know and are able to discuss a technique or process with your customer, the more you prove yourself as a specialized professional. Knowing when not to undertake a project is every bit as important as when and how you should tackle one.

### ***Japanese Apprenticeship***

In Japan, training to be a mounter is by apprenticeship of ten to fifteen years. Historically, at the age of 10, a child would be sent to his master's studio to spend the first two to three years watching the master work. In another two to three years, he would be permitted to do very simple tasks such as joining backing sheets or cutting paper. Next he could actually back materials, and then finally mount a piece of art.

Today, a mounting student begins to study with a master after completing secondary school, but will still undergo 10 years of additional training to become a scroll mounter. Afterwards, personal experience, along with that training from the master, will make the student skilled at the art of mounting. Now consider for a moment how much time you might have spent reading, attending classes, or studying with a Western master to learn everything you need to know

about the skills of wet, spray, pressure-sensitive, and dry mounting.

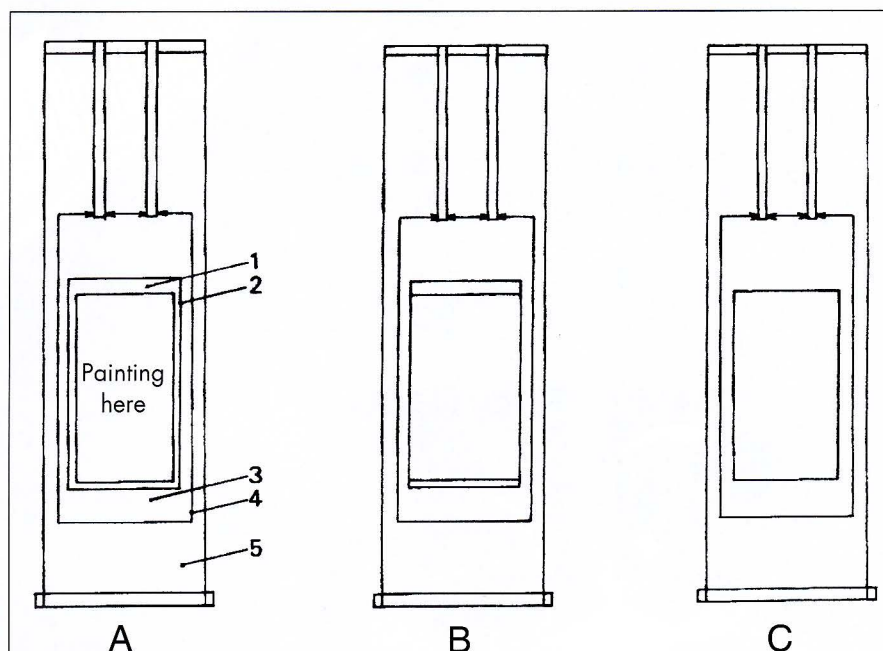
Apprenticeship in any art in Japan is rated as in any martial art by *ku* (color belt) and *dan*, the higher levels of black belt (first degree black belt, second degree black belt, etc.). So technically a master could hold a third degree black belt in scroll mounting. It's an interesting concept.

### ***Understanding the Parts of a Scroll***

There are very specific basic parts to a Japanese scroll. The *honshi* is the main body of art, the calligraphy or painting. The narrow strip of brocade placed immediately above the *honshi* is the *ichimonji-jo*, and is usually twice the width of the *ichimonji-ge* which is immediately below the art. The two decorative strips attached to the upper

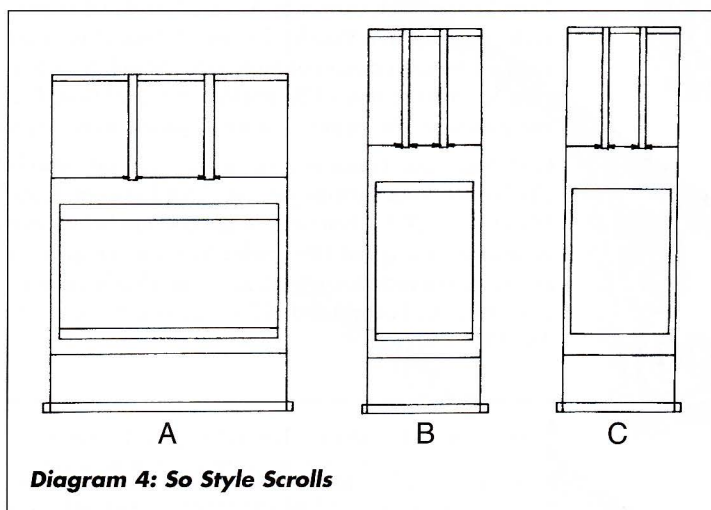
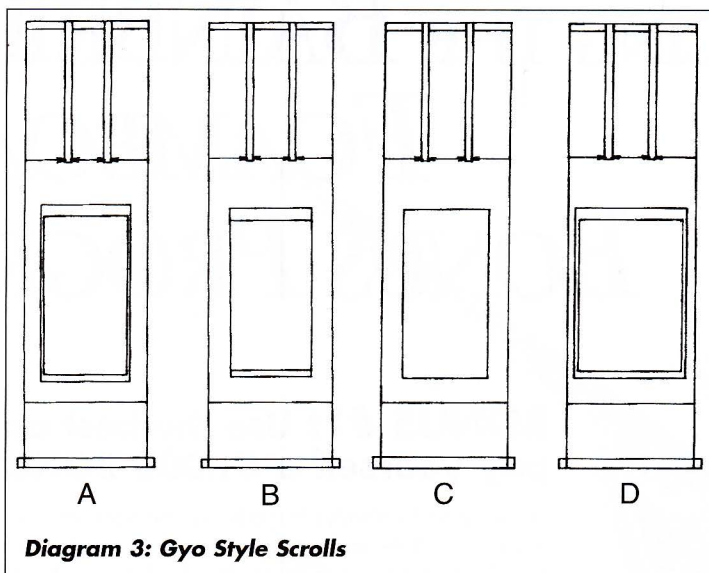


*Photo 1: This Gyo style scroll is traditionally used for mounting haiku, letters, and paintings of beauty. They may be either horizontal or long verticals. (See also Diagram 4A.) This example was shown at the recent Princeton Collection of Chinese Art exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY.*



**Diagram 2: Shin Style Scrolls**

1. The inner frame that surrounds the artwork (*honshi*) is the *ichimonji*.
2. Narrow white silk trim (*suji*) surrounding the above *honshi*
3. The *chuberi* which surrounds the above white *suji*
4. The violet-colored *suji* which surrounds the *chuberi*
5. The *soberi* which surrounds the above violet-colored *suji*



rod (hyomoku) is equal to, or slightly wider than, the ichimonji-ge—about  $\frac{1}{25}$  the total width of the scroll itself.

Jo is the upper part of the scroll and ge is the lower. The part between the jo (top of the scroll) and the ichimonji-jo is known as the chu-jo, and that between the ge (bottom of the scroll) and the ichimonji-ge is known as the chu-ge. Together these are called the chu, and are always the same fabric as the hashira to the right and left of the honshi. The fabric often used to decorate this is plain, light colored silk, shadow monochromatic brocade, or patterned silk.

The upper rod was traditionally made of bamboo, but cedar is often used today. It is flat at the front and semicircular at the back. The lower rod is wrapped with the same material as the ge, is round, and usually made of Japanese cedar. The Chinese prefer sandalwood because it does not absorb as much moisture as other kinds of wood and helps prevent insect damage. Decorative end knobs are added to the rods and can be made of ivory, lacquer, crystal, animal horn, metal, porcelain, or various kinds of wood.

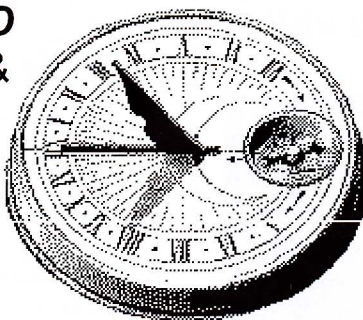
### ***History and Background***

The mounting technique was first introduced into Japan from China in the sixth century. Various techniques developed until the 16th century, by which time it was established as one of the most important arts. That is when the three basic hanging scroll styles were first established, the Shin, Gyo, and So types (see Photo 1 and Diagrams 2, 3, and 4).

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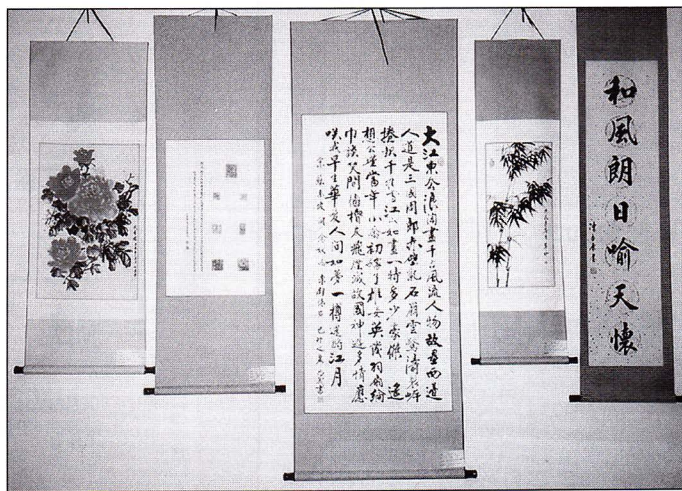
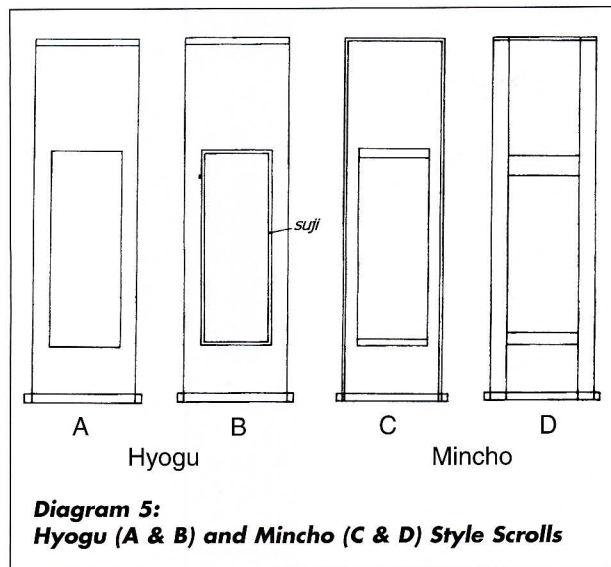


Photo 2: These contemporary scrolls are taken from an adult art class in Beijing, China. They showcase the more minimal Hyogu and Mincho style scrolls (Diagram 5) without fukuro trims at the top. Left to right, scrolls 1 and 4 are based on So style (Diagram 4C), while 2, 3, and 5 are Hyogu (Diagrams 5A and 5B).

Contemporary scrolls from the Hyogu and Mincho styles are less ornamented (see Diagram 5) by the elimination of upper decorative strips using a more basic approach (see Photo 2). These samples are taken from an adult education art class conducted in Beijing, China this past summer.

Historically, each owner of any scroll or document placed his cinnabar, vermilion, colored, inked seal, also known as a chop, at the beginning and often the end of the scroll (see Photo 3). This was meant to designate ownership, authority, and the longevity of reference and authenticity of that artwork or document. There are often numerous chops stacked in the margins, on the edged silk, and even infringing upon the art itself.

### ***Shin Style Scrolls: For Formal Presentations***

The most formal scroll styles are called Shin. There are subcategories, but the commonality is the suspended inner image (chuberi) with a completely surrounded outer frame (soberi). These are used for Buddhist paintings, and contain very specific thin, white, silk strips and plain, woven, violet (suji) between the larger outer frames for definition and contrast.

### ***Gyo Style Scrolls: The Most Common***

The Gyo style is the most common of mountings. The suspended scroll reaches edge to edge and the honshi is surrounded by ichimonji and chuberi frames, with the jo and ge added separately at the top and bottom. This style was used to display colored paintings of birds

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and flowers, warriors, Imperial autographs, Taoist figures, and Buddhist descriptions. Scroll B is the most commonly used contemporary design used today.

### ***So Scrolls: Informal and Versatile***

The So style is an informal mounting in which the hashira is extremely narrow. This is used mostly in ceremonial tea rooms, paintings of beauties, and short one or two line sentences and poems by monks and tea masters. More horizontal designs may also be applied to this format. Photo 1 shows an example of the scroll design in 4A.

### ***Hyogu and Mincho Style Scrolls***

Hyogu style scrolls have eliminated the ichimonji and chuberi so the

honshi (art) is directly on the soberi. A suji of woven silk is frequently inserted around the edges of the honshi as an accent. Styles A and B of Hyogu scrolls (see Diagram 5) are used for mounting landscape paintings, and birds and flowers with poetry. These are all done the basic Chinese techniques (see Photo 4).

Styles C and D of Mincho scrolls (see Diagram 5) popular during the Chinese Ming Dynasty and later in Japan. It showcases a narrow strip of silk along the outer left and right edges from top to bottom. Futai decorative strips are not used in this style.

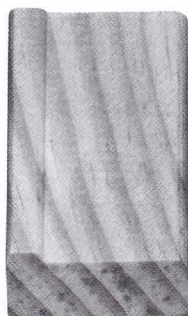
Style C is used for paintings of landscapes, bamboo and stones, birds and flowers, ink paintings, and Chinese poetry or characters. Style D has broader strips of silk material at the edges



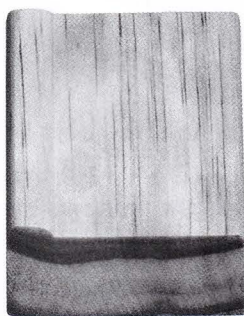
Photo 3: The addition of each owner's seal to the beginning and/or end of a scroll was used to designate ownership, authority, and authenticity of the artwork or document. There are often numerous chops stacked in the margins, on the edged silk, and even infringing upon the art itself. This antique scroll was seen in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY.

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with the joge the same width as the honshi. When this occurs, the suji is often inserted between them. This style is used for mounting narrow, oblong paintings usually of orchids, bamboo and stones, and Sumi paintings, as well as for paintings in pairs.

### Scroll Calculations

Measurements of the parts of the scroll (see Diagram 1) are calculated in relation to the honshi (art-work) in order to have the most pleasing proportions. Although current scroll mounters often slightly modify the standards to suit their own tastes, the original standards were set during the Tokugawa period and are best exemplified by the gyo scroll styling shown in Diagram 3B.

First, the ichimonji-jo is estab-

lished to be visually most pleasing in comparison to the honshi. Then the chu-jo is four times that height, with the jo being three times the height of the chu-jo. The ichimonji-ge, chu-ge, and ge are then exactly half of the upper jo dimensions. Today, the lower portions may be slightly more than half the upper dimensions. The width of the hashira is slightly less than half the height of the chu-jo, and the width of the futai equals the ichimonji-ge.

### The Rest of the Story...

Now that we've seen the basic concepts, next month in "Part Two: The Rest Of The Story," I'll examine the yellow belt version of scroll mounting. Consider yourself to be 10 years old and ready to absorb whatever you can, even if it's only to realize that this is a form of

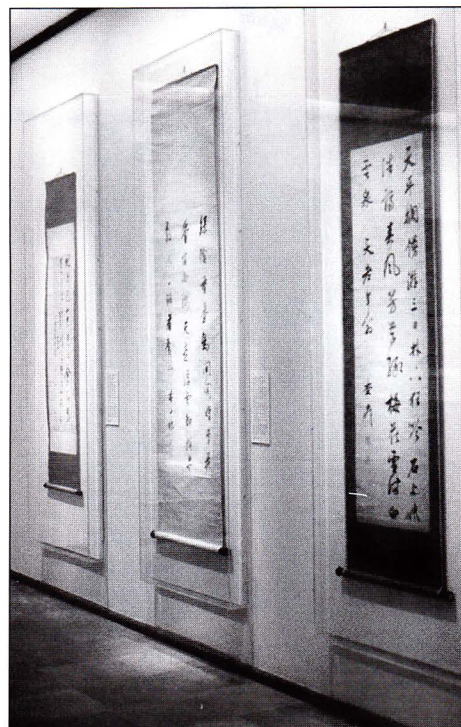
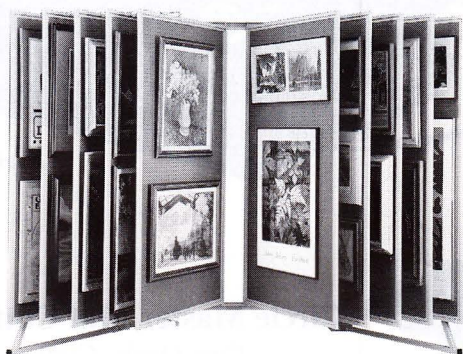


Photo 4: Acrylic boxes display antique scrolls in their naturally designed presentation. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY.

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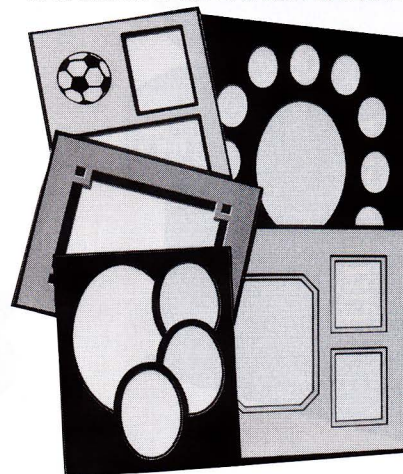
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