

Conservation Work at Toyo Bunko with Recollections of Bookbinding Room Operations*

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Introduction

Since April 2014, we have been involved in conservation work in the workroom belonging to the Library Department of Toyo Bunko (hereinafter “workroom”). Until March 2009, a bookbinding room was available for conservation work, in which such tasks were performed for the Library collection. Many of the tools and materials now used in the workroom date from that time. Currently (fiscal year (FY) 2017), three part-time staff work in the workroom, with each working two days per week. The two authors of this paper work on the same days, and one had worked previously in the bookbinding room. Here, we present an overview of work in the workroom, and also introduce some typical examples which represent a series of our work.¹ Recollections of the bookbinding room are also presented.

1. Work Overview

1-1. Overview of conservation work

Major tasks are collection condition surveys, making storage boxes, and collection treatment.

As for the flow of collection to the workroom, in some cases, we bring collection materials from the stack room based on a condition report form² or a list of materials to be displayed in the museum, while in other cases, persons in charge regarding specific related collection items visit us for consultation, or collection materials are brought in directly.

Regarding collection condition, we have books bound in Western and Japanese styles, and books bound using traditional Chinese bookbinding, handscrolls, unbound documents, and so on. Our task is to make storage boxes, to organize collection materials requiring similar work depending on their condition of treatment or their record types, and to execute the work accordingly. We also make pre-exhibition surveys of the condition of materials, as well as work incidental to these. Further, we make rough annual work plans for each bookbinding type (i.e., books bound in Western and Japanese styles, using traditional Chinese bookbinding, etc.).

1-2. The bookbinding room (from the late 1960s on)

In the former bookbinding room, we carried out collection condition surveys, construction of storage boxes, and conservation work. In the late 1960s, in addition to the types of collection materials listed above, combined binding (i.e., binding together into one unit) was frequently performed for Japanese and European-language magazines, professional bulletins, and so on. Gradually, greater emphasis was placed on collection conservation, with priority given to the repair of damaged items, and combined binding was shifted to an outside company. Much work was dedicated to the binding of photostat versions of the Dunhuang Manuscripts. While not directly related to the preservation of collection materials, Toyo Bunko's accounting documents were also bound in the bookbinding room.

In the beginning of the 1960s, most of the severely damaged books or storage boxes such as wrappers (*chitsu* 帙)³ were basically rebound or remade. As the present time (2020), we limit our work to minimum treatment to preserve the original as much as possible. In the past, work was recorded mostly in the form of work diaries; even when data sheets were made, they were not very detailed.

Collection materials were brought to the bookbinding room by persons in charge of inventory and browsing, or by the bookbinding room workers who by themselves entered the stack room to pick up the materials. The condition of collections was surveyed in the stack room, and records were kept according to the extent of degradation, classified as large, medium, and small damage amounts. Work was then performed on the basis of these records.

At FY end, work plans were created for the next FY. Based on work in the previous FY and condition surveys, and so on, work plans were made for Western- and Japanese-style bound books (including wrappers), traditional Chinese bookbinding (including wrappers), and unbound documents such as maps. The purpose of creating annual work plans was for improving work efficiency. In the past, workers in the bookbinding room would find and bring in collection materials from the stack room, or work would be performed whenever the materials were brought in by catalog or browsing staff. Thus, many different kinds of work were carried out, and work efficiency was poor. After implementation of annual planning, with the exception of extraordinary cases, relevant materials for which similar work was to be done were carried in accordance with the annual plan, which was announced to all workers in advance. With the plan, work materials could be procured in bulk when needed, and used accordingly. Ordinarily, at least two workers were placed in the bookbinding room, while other workers worked one or two days per week, doing work such as making storage boxes.

2. Examples of Conservation Work

Below, we introduce an overview of work performed previously in four cases.

2-1. Treatment of books bound in the Western style

Here, we introduce an example of treatment of material from the Morrison Collection.⁴

The Morrison Collection is mostly kept in Morrison's Stacks, which is part of the museum. This collection is frequently seen by museum visitors.

Some of the damaged books have large cracks in the spine, and the cover and pages of the others have become separated from the books. Books like these requiring special care due to damage are temporarily placed in an envelope made of acid-free paper and stored accordingly. Treatment has been carried out for materials of this nature in order to place them on stacking shelves such that their condition can be seen. Photos 1 through 4 are examples of this case.⁵

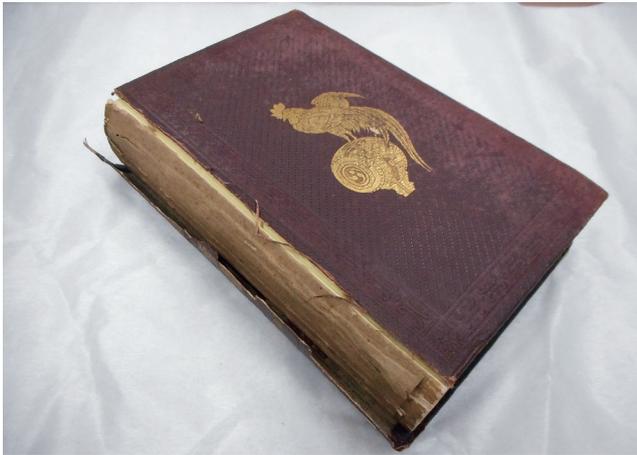


Photo 1. Pre-treatment. A portion of the spine is damaged.



Photo 2. Pre-treatment. This cover has become removed from the book.

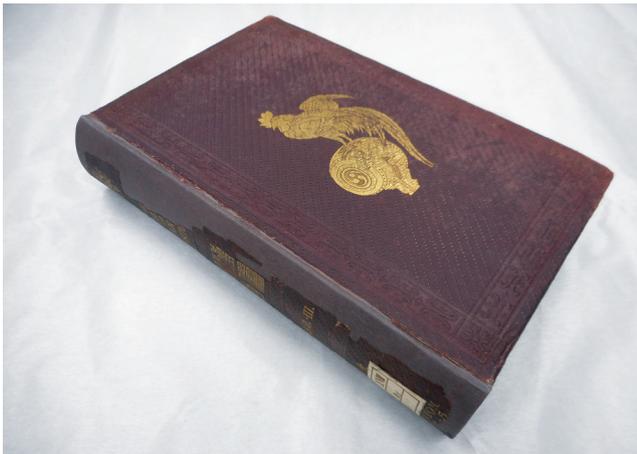


Photo 3. After treatment. Japanese paper was used to supplement and reinforce the spine.

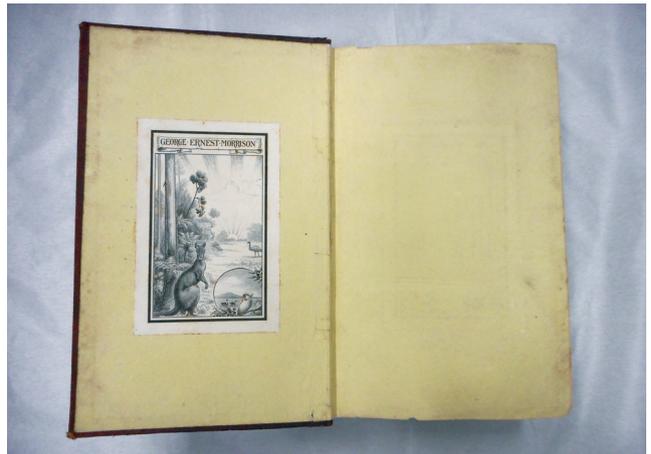


Photo 4. After treatment. The cover has been reattached to the main body of the book.

Since there was spine and cover damage, plus a separated cover, Japanese paper was used to cover these defective portions of the spine, and the cover was connected. However, a storage box is made for extremely damaged books that are considered too delicate for treatment.

2-2. Treatment of Japanese-style bound books and books with traditional Chinese bookbinding

Much of the work involved in treatment of Japanese-style bound books and books with traditional Chinese bookbinding involves rebinding of binding thread and repair of wrappers (Photos 5 through 10).

Binding thread faces to the outside, and in many cases, the lower portion of this thread is frayed away. There are some cases where binding is done with new thread to completely replace the old thread. In other cases, thread is added to the cut portion at bottom, and the book is rebound (Photos 5 and 6).⁶



Photo 5. Pre-treatment. The binding thread is cut and there is damage to the corner protector.



Photo 6. After treatment. The binding has been repaired, and a new corner protector has been attached.



Photo 7. Pre-treatment. The string has broken, while the clasp is still attached.

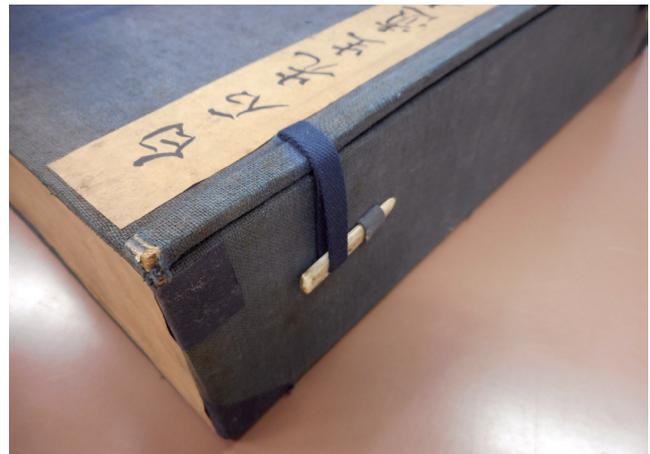


Photo 8. After treatment. A new string has been attached, with the original clasp.

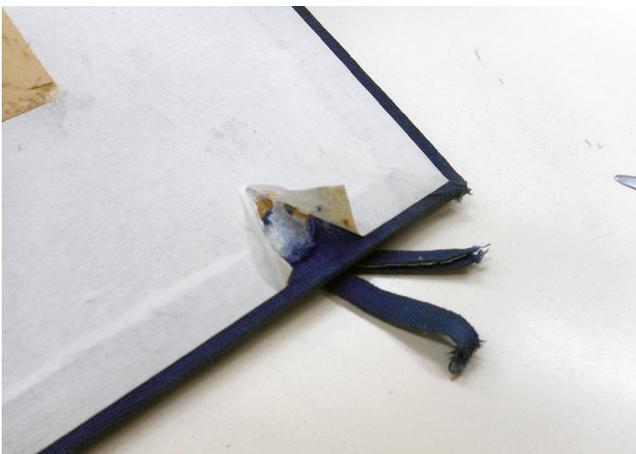


Photo 9. During treatment. The inner paper has been peeled off, and the cut string (ribbon) is removed.

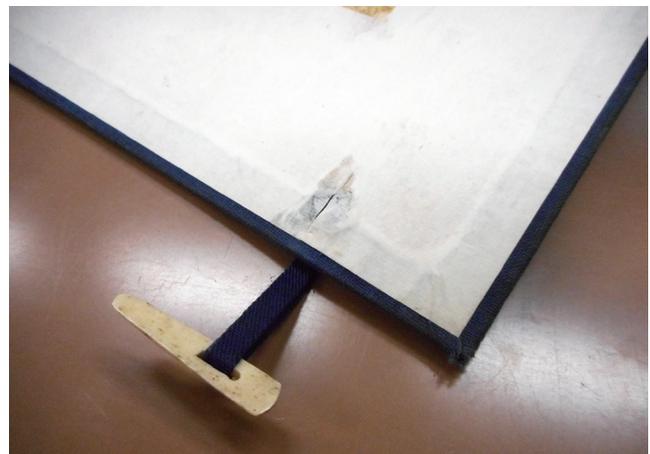


Photo 10. During treatment. A new string (ribbon) has been attached and pulled through the original clasp.

Wrapper damage has many forms. There may be damage to the clasp fastener (*kohaze* こはぜ), or ribbon portions may be cut. In addition there may be damage to corner folds, which may result in partial or complete separation of a wrapper's parts. In the stack room, one comes across books where a ribbon has been temporarily placed around the book to prevent removal (separation). In the case of clasp fastener damage, only a damaged portion is replaced with a new clasp, so that a wrapper can function as such (Photos 7 through 10).⁷

2-3. Treatment of hanging scrolls

Here, we introduce an example of temporary treatment of a hanging scroll in preparation for exhibition.

Dai-Min Chiri no Zu 大明地理之圖⁸ is a hanging scroll comprised of four scroll parts, which are hung side-by-side to form a single map (Photo 11). Here, the paper on which the map was drawn and its mounting had tears, with lifting of paper and discoloration observed in some parts; a part of the paper had become delicate and fragile (Photos 13 and 15). There were also many creases and contortions seen on the paper on which the map was drawn. The dimensions of a single scroll part were approximately 1 m wide × 3 m high, meaning that there was no room enough on the work table in the workroom to spread out a scroll part completely. We therefore borrowed a large room in which we performed condition surveys and treatment work (Photo 12). In order to prevent the torn portions from tearing further in the future, Japanese paper was attached for reinforcement from the back (reverse) using wheat starch paste, and the lifted paper was flattened by applying paste (Photos 14 and 16).

At exhibition, we thought out some special methods for displaying the scroll in cooperation with staff of the Museum Department. Although the scroll was hanging on a wall, placed in the display case, its lower portion had to be placed on the floor of the case when exhibited owing to its length. To prevent weight load of the hanging scroll from causing damages to itself, a narrow black board with inconspicuous edges and 2–3 cm width was used to fix and stabilize it (Photos 17 and 18). During the nearly four-month exhibition period, we had observations made at regular intervals, and the exhibition supports were adjusted as necessary.



Photo 11. Dai-Min Chiri no Zu during exhibition.



Photo 12. View during condition survey and treatment work.



Photo 13. (Detail) Pre-treatment. Tear with lifted paper.



Photo 14. (Detail) After treatment. This has been reinforced from the back (reverse) side using Japanese paper.



Photo 15. (Detail) Pre-treatment. Lifted portion of the paper on which the map was drawn.



Photo 16. (Detail) After treatment. Paste was applied to secure the lifted portion.



Photo 17. (Detail) The hanging scroll was too long, with its bottom portion lying directly on the display case bottom.

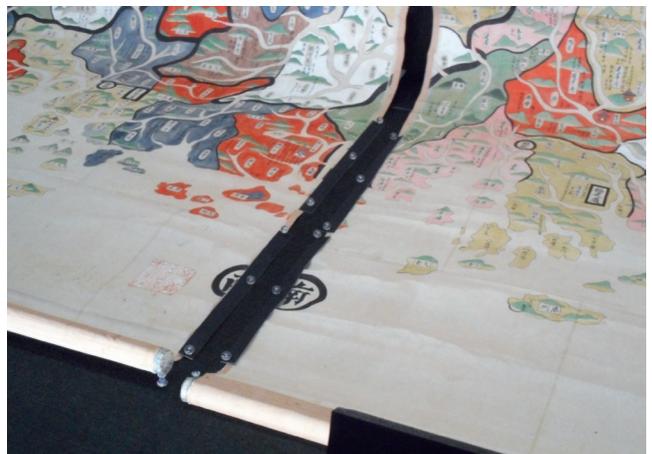


Photo 18. (Detail) To reduce distortion, folding, etc., the edges are pressed down using a narrow board.

2-4. Storage box-related work

In many cases, instead of repairing damage, we create storage boxes to preserve the materials properly. Showcased here is a case where supports were made for the storage box so as to provide extra safety for the material.

The Japanese portion of the Umehara Sueji Collection of archaeological source materials⁹ consists of numerous card-like items, on which photographs and drawings are pasted. Several tens of them, each sandwiched between folded cardboard, are laid together and stored in a box-like container. There are over one hundred of such boxes (Photo 19). In the inner portion of the box, there are strings attached on either side, which are used to fix and secure the items. When one wants to extract the items, there is little room to insert the hands so as to lift them (Photos 20 and 21). Thus, boards with strings on either side, which are attached at two points to form a circle shape and can serve as handles, are laid in some of the boxes. Pulling the strings raises the board with the items on so they can be removed from the box (Photos 22 and 23). On the other hand, previously there were boxes containing boards, to which strings on either side were attached at only one point, causing some instability when lifted. At this occasion, we either created new boards for lifting for boxes without them, or reattached strings of some boards at two points so that each respective string was formed into a circular shape. Some boxes had already been so full with materials that the lid could not be closed, and the volume became even larger with the additional boards for lifting. Thus, we ordered new acid-free paper conservation boxes from an outside supplier, with identical outer-size dimensions as the original boxes. Ensuring that the proper number of items were inserted within each box reduced the weight of the boxes, making these materials safer and easier to handle (Photos 24 through 26).

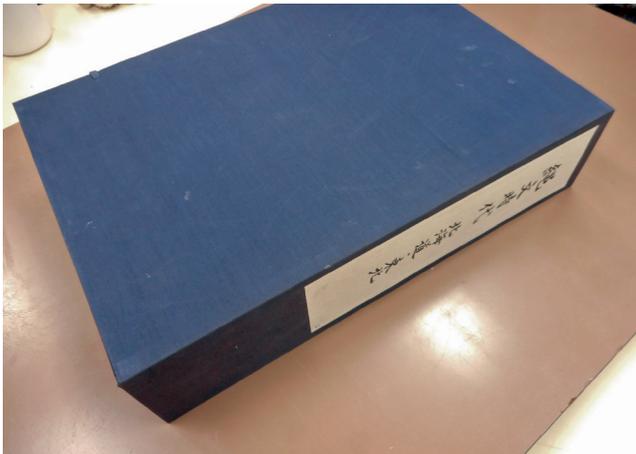


Photo 19. Exterior view of the storage box.



Photo 20. Interior before work performed. The items are secured in place with strings.

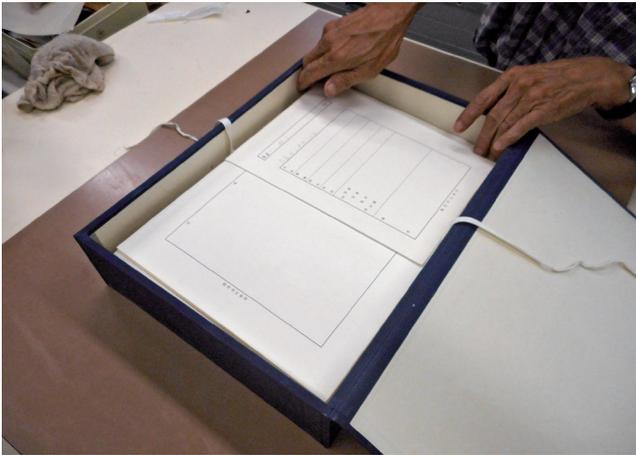


Photo 21. Before work performed. There is little room to insert hands into the box for item removal.



Photo 22. A board with string handles is added.

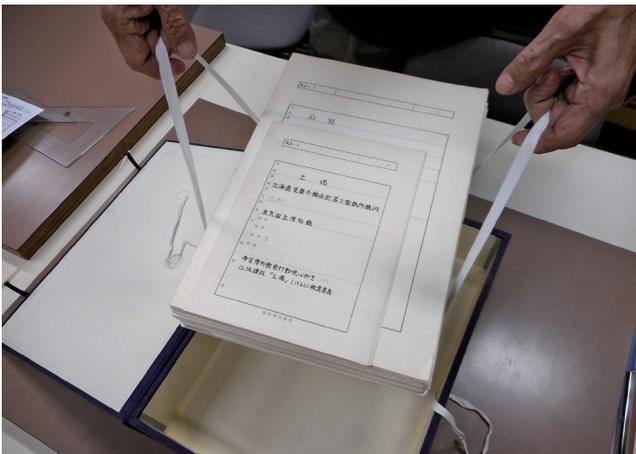


Photo 23. The documents are placed on the board with handles at either side, and removal and replacement of the items is performed.



Photo 24. After work performed. The board has been inserted in the storage box, and some documents have been removed for safer storage.

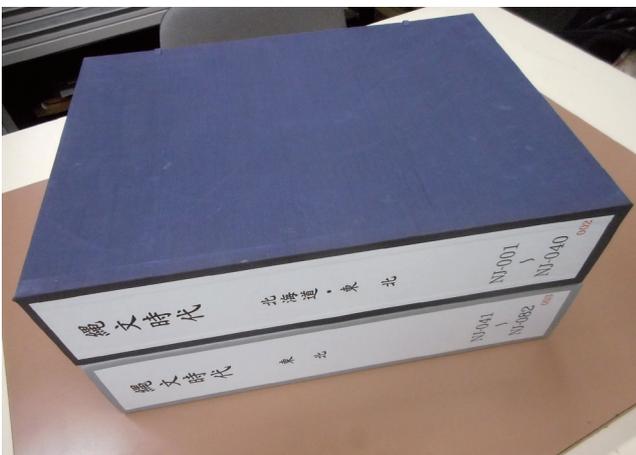


Photo 25. New boxes have been made with the same size dimensions.

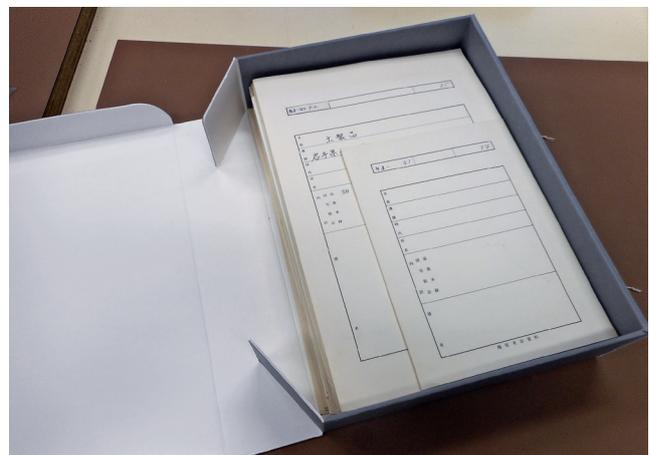


Photo 26. The newly made storage boxes allow documents to be removed from the side.

Conclusion

A simple overview was presented regarding conservation work beginning from April 2014. Examples of commonly performed work were shown, including treatment of books bound in Western and Japanese style, books bound in traditional Chinese bookbinding, and handscrolls, as well as the preparation of supports for storage boxes. Our aim was to showcase some of the types of conservation work we currently carry out. None of this work could be completed without the cooperation and assistance of all related and involved persons. We would like to use this opportunity to express our deep gratitude for their assistance. We have also used this paper as a chance to introduce some recollections of work we had previously performed in the era when we had a bookbinding room.

We will continue to execute our work in the workroom belonging to the Library Department, to ensure the safe and secure use and preservation of collections for browsing and display, both today and for the coming generations.

Notes

- (1) A case of other work performed in the workroom belonging to the Library Department is found in Tamura's article in the current issue.
- (2) A report form that is currently used in Toyo Bunko for recording such information concerning the materials as discoveries of damage. These forms are found in the stack room and some other places. After being filled out by the person who made the discovery, it is checked by the person in charge of the catalog, and is then stored in the workroom.
- (3) A type of container used for the preservation of Japanese-style bound books and books with traditional Chinese bookbinding. Four sides of the books are wrapped in a cylindrical form, while there are some with the upper and lower (two) sides uncovered.
- (4) A collection consisting of approximately 24,000 European books, artworks, pamphlets, and so on, regarding East Asia, collected by George Ernest Morrison in Beijing. These were purchased by Iwasaki Hisaya 岩崎久弥, the founder of Toyo Bunko.
- (5) Chinese and Japanese Repository of Facts and Events in Science, History and Art, Vols. II and III (Call number: XVIII-B-d-32).
- (6) *Tōbaé, Journal Satirique* 1 (Call number: XVII-11-d-71).
- (7) *Hakuseki Isho* 白石遺書 (Call number: 貴三-M-a-4).
- (8) Dai-Min Chiri no Zu (Call number: 貴XI-6-B-12). Exhibited on the occasion of "Toyo Bunko World Map Exhibition: Blaeu's Maps as Seen in Vermeer's Works" (2015/04/22–2015/08/09).
- (9) These are source materials on the archaeology of each Asian country collected by Dr. Umehara Sueji 梅原末治.

Reference URL

Toyo Bunko website:

<http://www.toyo-bunko.or.jp/> (last referenced 2018/01/18)

Toyo Bunko Umehara Sueji Collection of archaeological source materials:

Image database http://124.33.215.236/umehara2008/ume_query.html (last referenced 2018/01/18)