

# A Systematic Approach to Condition Assessment and Treatment of Chinese Handscrolls at Freer|Sackler

## Problem Identification

Identify condition problems and characterize the weaknesses in the overall structure of the handscroll. Poor housing and environmental conditions, the use of low-quality materials, and the unsuccessful integration by the mounter of the various complex components of the handscroll can lead to some of these common condition problems.



## Problem Ranking

Determine whether the scroll can be handled and displayed. Condition problems considered high priority are those when the stability of the media and flexibility of the support layers are compromised during handling or exhibition. Some minor problems are also considered high priority if continued use of the handscroll is anticipated because they will lead to further damage if left untreated.

## Prioritizing Treatment Solutions

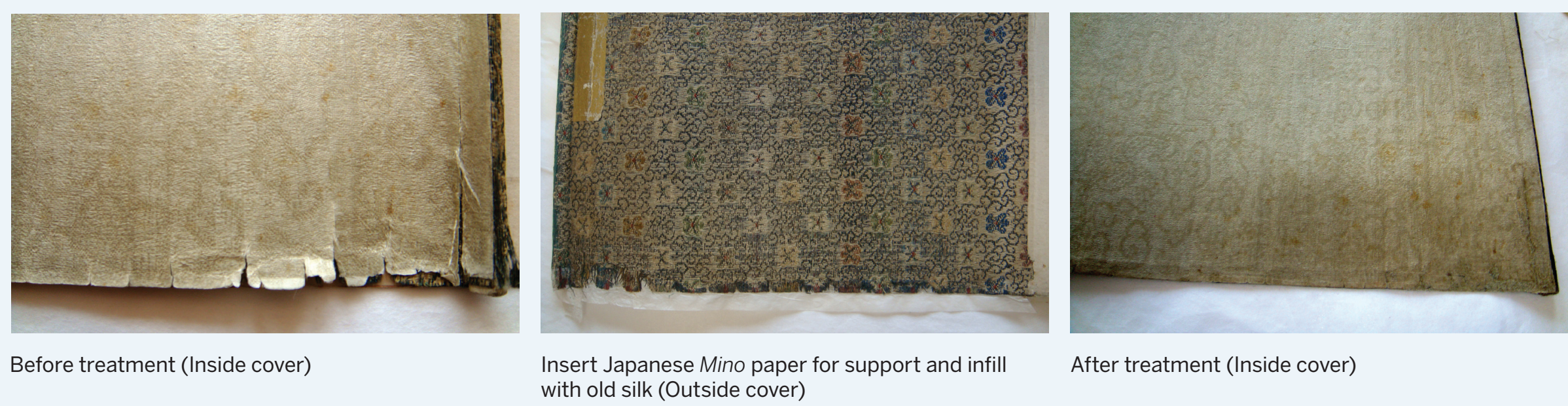
Treatment options reflect a balance between the needs of the handscroll and the resources available to the conservator. Because the handscroll is a complex structure and a very long object, time requirements for proper treatment, available working space and facilities, appropriate materials, and the expertise of specialists are all important factors that influence treatment decisions.

## Treatment Options

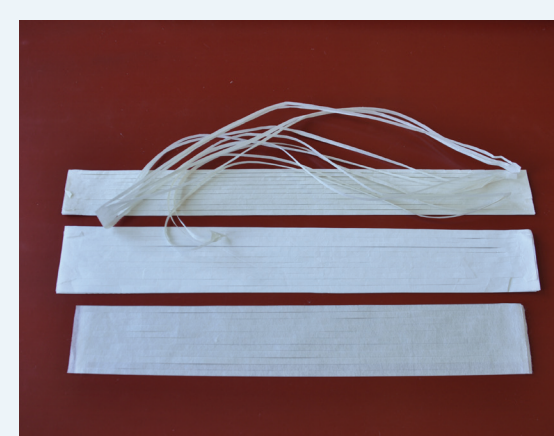
Conservation treatment of handscrolls can be classified into three categories: (1) minor treatment; (2) intermediate treatment including partial remounting; and (3) complete remounting. If possible, the least intrusive treatment should be chosen.

### MINOR TREATMENT

**REPAIR OF EDGE LOSSES AND TEARS** will reduce the risk of further damage to the handscroll during handling and exhibition.

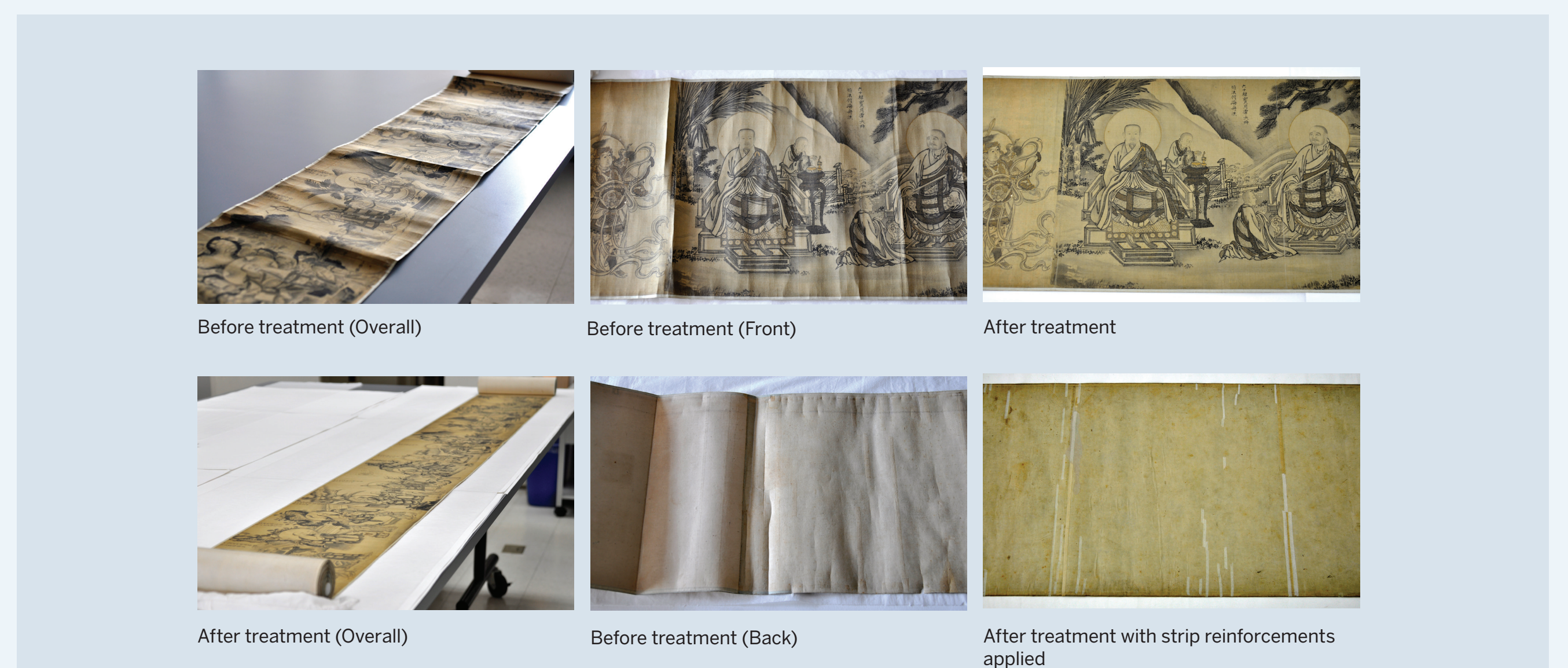
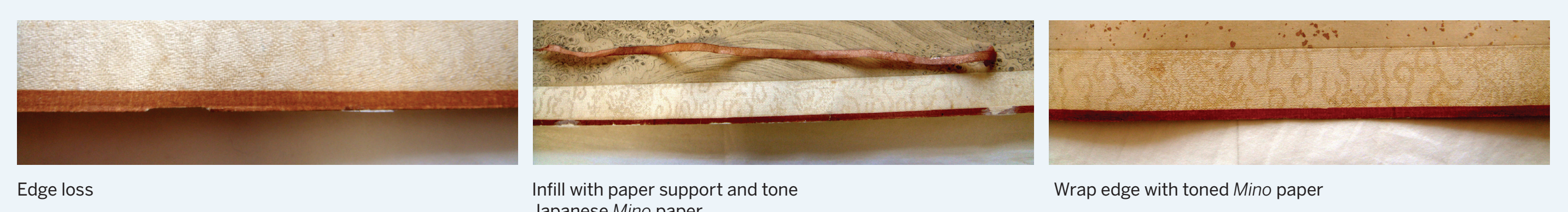
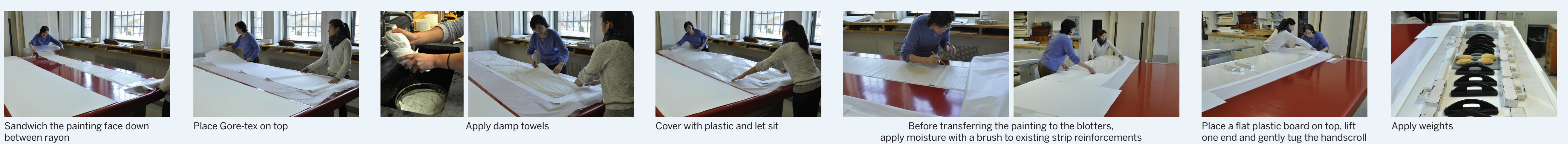


**STRIP REINFORCEMENTS** are used to stabilize creases and minor tears. Different thicknesses of Chinese *Xuan* paper and Japanese *Mino* paper are pasted and applied to the crease or tear on the backside of the handscroll. Successful strip reinforcements depend upon the conservator's



skillful use of the appropriate papers and paste consistency, otherwise these repairs may cause additional damage.

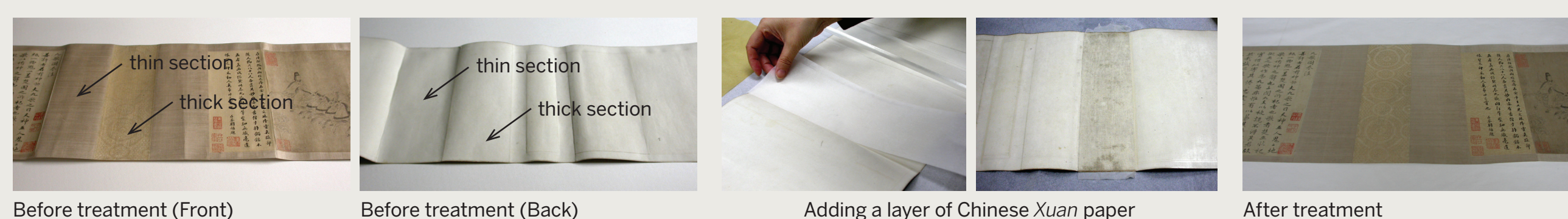
**HUMIDIFYING AND FLATTENING** handscrolls under weight can help to address undulations in the scroll, make the scroll more flexible, even out areas where strip repairs were applied, and restore bonding strength between the mounting layers by softening and reactivating the paste.



*Patriarchs of Chan Buddhism* (F1909.229) was in fair condition except for several vertical creases that repeat across the length of the handscroll. It required treatment for safe exhibition, but frequent handling or further display after exhibition was unlikely. Given the long length of the painting, the fairly stable condition of the primary support, time constraints, and expected infrequent handling and display, minor treatment was the most appropriate treatment solution. Strip reinforcements were applied to creases and the painting humidified and flattened under weight.

### INTERMEDIATE TREATMENT

**PARTIAL REMOUNTING** includes compensating for unevenness and imbalance in the mounting structure, reusing or replacing cover silks, and repairing major tears. Partial remounting requires the skills used to remount old paintings and should be carried out by a trained specialist.



This painting shows imbalance in the mounting structure with some sections being thinner than others. Chinese *Xuan* paper was added to the thin sections to balance the structure.



A worn cover was separated from the painting, the losses were infilled using old repair silk, the cover relined, and reattached to the painting.

*Map of the Yellow River* (F1990.220) had a large tear that made handling unsafe. Partial remounting was carried out instead of complete remounting because of the painting's overall good condition and to preserve the thickly applied green and blue paint that could be easily disturbed during complete remounting. Treatment included removing the backing layers around the area of the tear using localized application of water, mending the break, integrating new backing papers, and overall humidification and flattening.

