

Hyogushi (Scroll mounting)

Kozo Uchida

Sliding paper and *shoji* doors, hanging scrolls, folding screens: Intimately connected to Japanese lifestyles and cultural heritage



Profile ● Born in 1950. Third-generation owner of Uchida Hyoguten. Certified as a Traditional Craftspeople of Tokyo, 2002. Certified as a Traditional Craftsman by the Traditional Crafts Industry Promotion Association, 2025.
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A many-step process brings out the beauty of both space and artwork

Hyoso (mounting) is the art of turning calligraphy and paintings into hanging scrolls and folding screens, and of creating and repairing paper and *shoji* doors. Its artisans are called *kyoji*, meaning picture framers, or *hyogushi*: scroll mounters. The art of mounting was introduced to Japan with Buddhism from mainland China in ancient times and flourished in Kyoto. From the 1600s on, as cities expanded, it became an essential part of people's lives. The artisan district of Nihonbashi, at the center of Edo, had many mounters. Several still carry on this legacy. One is Uchida Hyogu-ten, which opened around 1902 in Kanda (now in Chiyoda-ku) and moved to its present location in 1909.

Owner Kozo Uchida says that when he was a child, as many as seven craftsmen

lived at the shop at times. He helped out in the workshop's corner with tasks like applying glue. He went on to university, but the student unrest and strikes of the time meant there were few classes, so he dropped out at age 19 to enter the family business. "Back in the day, this area had some 40 high-end traditional restaurants and many *geisha*," Mr. Uchida recalls. "We were always installing and replacing paper and *shoji* doors."

On the day of the interview, Mr. Uchida was repairing a scroll for the temporary alcove where the neighborhood's portable shrine is placed during the Kanda Festival. His hammer's rhythmic *ton-ton* echoed in the quiet.

Producing and repairing hanging scrolls involves several steps. The backing alone consists of four layers, including a thin paper,

reinforcing papers, and the paper that integrates the picture with the cloth. Between these steps, the cutting, glueing, and drying of cloth and paper continue. The artwork that Mr. Uchida is entrusted with making into hanging scrolls is often one-of-a-kind and irreplaceable, so failure is not an option. Many clients also rely on him to select the scrolls' fabric mounting: his design and color combinations enhance the beauty, but never overwhelm, the artwork itself.

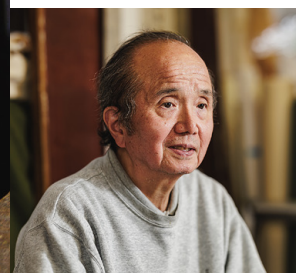
The workshop once bustled with live-in craftsmen, but now, it's just Mr. Uchida. "Few new homes today have *fusuma* or *shoji* sliding doors. But isn't it wonderfully relaxing when you encounter them, at an inn, say? I want to convey that sense of ease," he says.

"Do I have a successor?"



The amount and thickness of the glue varies by the material of the mounting. "The most critical aspect of my work is how I apply the glue," says Mr. Uchida.

he laughs. "My son quit his corporate job in his late twenties and said he wanted to do this work. He trained at another place and now has his own shop in Tokyo's Sumida-ku. I haven't seen it yet, though," he says off-handedly. But his voice is a mix of embarrassment and delight.



"*Shoji* screens are the hardest of all," Mr. Uchida explains. "People do repair the *shoji* in their own homes. But that's probably why a professional finish is so highly valued."

It is an array of skills that produces a truly relaxing space



Left: Various fabrics are used for mounting, including silk and fabrics woven with gold thread. Right: A few of Mr. Uchida's well-used tools. Some date back half a century to when he started this work; others were passed down from his predecessors.