

Presentation of a Bachelor thesis: “Chinese watercolor paintings on pith-paper”

Nanna Koch

The Royal Danish Academy of fine Arts, School of Conservation

In my thesis I am working with some Chinese watercolor paintings on pith-paper, also called rice-paper. I find the material very interesting and unconventional, it have been used as paper, but should be perceived more like tree or veneer. The name rice-paper is an very confusing common name, there have been, and there still is, a lot of misunderstanding about this material. It should be made clear that rice-paper is neither rice or paper, but a product of nature, the pith of the plant *Tetrapanax Papyferum*. The restoration- and conservation work of pith-paper presents a lot of problems. The material is very fragile and brittle, and because of its structure, pith-paper has an alarming sensitivity to moisture. Because of the damage on the paintings I have to give them a new support, to make them strong again, the question is how to treat the pith-paper without changing the translucent nature of the material, and how to treat it without destroy the very fragile cellulare structure.

I have made some experiments with adhesives, how the pithpaper react on lining and repairing. Because of the reactivity to moisture I have to think about the moisture in the form of adhesives and solutions. I have found that it was best to use water as solution, because of my results of alcohol solution (ethanol and acetone), both ethanol and acetone shrunk the material slightly. Water make it swelling, but when dry again, it came back to same condition. A high viscosities methylcellulose, Culminal 2000 5%, gave the best result. At last I have suggested some methods how to keep the paintings in the future.