



A Story with a Wrinkle

Right from the beginning when I began selling my woodblock prints, back in 1989, I have been packaging them in special cases. Most printmakers sell their prints in 'loose' fashion, as they assume that the purchaser will be arranging to have them framed, but as I don't like seeing woodblock prints framed on a wall, I always include some kind of permanent package for them. This is usually a case or album cover, designed to hold a number of the prints and to keep them not just safe from damage, but attractively displayed.

To obtain these cases, I originally contracted with a maker who lived and worked in Tokyo. This man had a lot of experience at creating such packaging, and was used by most of the Tokyo woodblock print publishers as well as companies making such things as scrolls. There really isn't very much demand for this kind of thing, but what there was, he had pretty much locked up.

Year after year, I continued to place my case orders with him, but one day, I learned some bad news; he had become ill, and was closing his business. He could no longer produce cases for me (or anybody else).

As it happened, this event coincided with my plans for creating a new project, one that would involve a different type of case from those I had ordered before. I searched around Tokyo for another maker who could do the job, but found nobody. It was time to look farther afield. I did a bit of research on the 'net, and Sadao and I then jumped on a plane and headed for Hong Kong, where it seemed as though we might be able to find somebody.

As it turned out, we did find a suitable company, and I used them for not just that job, but other cases and packages I have needed in subsequent years. Their prices are very competitive, but I do have to mention that - when compared to a Japanese company - their final 'finishing' is not quite so well done.

I was reminded of this a couple of months ago, when I received an order for one of my 'back issue' print sets. Because the cases were empty when first shipped to me from Hong Kong, the maker filled them with temporary sheets of cardboard so that they would not be flattened during shipping. Each time I prepare a set for delivering to my collector, I toss out this cardboard and insert the print folders. But as I did so this time, I saw that the worker in Hong Kong had been careless when putting the cardboard into the case, and one of the closure ribbons had been caught underneath it and creased. It had been sitting there for more than five years, so would not now lay flat.

I couldn't send it out to my collector in this condition. These creases would have to be removed. But how?

And I remembered; many years ago when my daughters lived here with me, they used to use an iron. It must still be here somewhere. It took a bit of digging in the boxes in the basement, but I finally found it - an electric iron, with a couple of control dials, a plastic tank for water, and a few buttons on the handle. Just how difficult could this be ...?

I can imagine what you are guessing came next, but no - I neither burned a hole in the case, nor did I melt the ribbon. In fact, it ended up in perfect condition, beautifully smooth and flat.

But I have to tell you that it was the strangest feeling while ironing. I have no ironing board, so prepared a towel on the table. After the iron reached what seemed to be a suitable temperature, I tested it out on some other cloth, and as everything felt OK, I gently pressed it over the ribbon.

You know, it felt kind of pleasant! A nice warmth rose up from the towel, and the back and forth motion of the iron over the cloth was sort of soothing. Pressing the ribbon flat took only a moment of course, but once

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it was done, I wasn't quite ready just to pull the plug and pack it all away. I looked around to see what else I might press ...

So that's how - on one particular day some months back - all the towels in my kitchen and bathroom got to be so nice and flat!

Just that particular day? Well, yes. Although it was indeed a pleasant feeling to play with the warm iron for a few minutes, I do have a reputation as a bachelor to maintain, you know!

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