JP

Japan

Blockchain Timestamping and Creative Work Protection

Legal framework, electronic evidence admissibility and blockchain recognition

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What is blockchain timestamping?

This guide presents the legal framework applicable in Japan to blockchain timestamping as proof of prior existence. It is aimed at creators, designers, developers and professionals seeking to understand the probative value of their Etch certificates.

Blockchain timestamping creates permanent, tamper-proof evidence that a document existed at a specific point in time. It does not grant intellectual property rights — but it proves prior existence with mathematical certainty.

How it works (simplified)

1. Digital fingerprint: Your file is converted into a unique 64-character code (SHA-256 hash) — mathematically unique to that exact file.

2. Permanent record: That fingerprint is inscribed on Ethereum, a public ledger maintained by thousands of computers worldwide. Once recorded, it cannot be altered or deleted.

3. Timestamp: The blockchain automatically records the exact date and time — publicly verifiable by anyone, at any time, for free.

4. Your certificate: You receive a ZIP containing the PDF certificate, metadata, and a link to the Ethereum transaction.

Legal framework in Japan

Japan has no specific blockchain evidence legislation — but this works in your favour. Japan was the first country in the world to establish a regulatory framework for crypto assets, and the government formally declared Web3 and blockchain a national strategic priority in 2022. Courts and institutions are increasingly receptive.

Copyright Act — Chosakukenho

Japan's Copyright Act protects original creative works automatically from the moment of creation — no registration, no formalities, no fees required. Japan has been party to the Berne Convention since 1899, and copyright protection lasts 70 years after the author's death.

Japanese law recognises strong moral rights (jinkaku-ken) — including the right to claim authorship (Article 19) and the right of integrity (Article 20). These rights are non-transferable and cannot be waived. While copyright exists automatically, proving when you created your work is a separate challenge — and this is exactly where blockchain timestamping helps.

Voluntary Registration — Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunka-cho)

Japan offers an optional copyright registration system through the Agency for Cultural Affairs. A registered work carries a legal presumption of authorship in court. Processing takes approximately one month. For software, registration is handled by SOFTIC and uniquely allows registration of the creation date itself.

Blockchain timestamping vs. formal registration

Formal registration: ~one month processing, fees of 3,000-18,000 JPY per work, carries legal presumption of authorship in court.

Blockchain timestamping: instant, ~330 JPY per anchoring, creates an immutable record on a public ledger independent of any government office. Ideal for creators who need proof before they are ready to register, or who produce work too frequently for registration to be practical.

The two approaches are complementary — not mutually exclusive.

Design Act — Isho-ho

Registered designs are protected for 25 years from the filing date. Unregistered designs may still be protected under the Unfair Competition Prevention Act (Fusei kyoso boshi-ho), which prohibits the sale of goods that imitate another person's configuration for three years after the original product's first sale in Japan.

For creators who have not yet formally registered their designs, a blockchain timestamp creates dated evidence of the design's existence — directly supporting a claim under the Unfair Competition Prevention Act if an imitating party cannot demonstrate independent development.

Electronic evidence in Japanese courts

Japan's Code of Civil Procedure was significantly amended in 2022, with e-filing introduced for civil litigation from 2023. Digital evidence is admissible when it meets standards of authenticity and relevance.

Positive signal — Blockchain evidence accepted in court

Japanese courts have accepted blockchain transaction data as evidence in criminal cases — notably in a ransomware prosecution where blockchain logs were deemed immutable and verifiable, linked via expert testimony to the defendant's digital wallet.

The principle extends to civil disputes: a verifiable on-chain timestamp, combined with expert confirmation that the hash matches your file, meets the authenticity standards Japanese courts require.

Japan as a blockchain-friendly jurisdiction

Japan was the first country to establish a regulatory framework for crypto assets. The LDP's Web3 White Papers (2023, 2024) explicitly encourage blockchain adoption across industries. In 2025, the Cabinet Office resolved to consider the legal reclassification of crypto assets as financial assets. This political context makes Japanese courts and institutions increasingly receptive to blockchain-based evidence.

Use cases for creators and professionals in Japan

Blockchain timestamping is particularly relevant for Japan's vibrant creative industries — fashion, textile design, illustration, photography, craft, and software development.

Scenario	What the timestamp proves	Stake
Textile & fabric patterns	Pattern files before sharing with manufacturers or clients	Design priority if producer copies the pattern
Fashion collections	Lookbook PDF or sketches before each season's presentation	Silhouette and combination priority
Craft & artisan work	Photos or technical drawings of original pieces	Protection against imitation on Rakuten, Base, Mercari
Cross-border sales (Japan + overseas)	One blockchain timestamp verifiable across all jurisdictions	International IP protection
Photography & illustration	Raw files or final exports before publication	Copyright — especially relevant as AI content becomes harder to distinguish
Source code / algorithm	Exact codebase state at a given date	Prior art vs competitor
Collaborations & commissions	Drafts and revision history at each stage	Clarifies who created what, and when

Practical workflow — preparing your file(s)

The file(s) you timestamp must be preserved exactly as anchored. Even changing one pixel or one character invalidates the proof.

Step	Action	Notes
1	Finalise your document	Make sure it is the version you want to protect — not a draft.
2	Prepare your file(s)	PDFs are stable. Word files modify their metadata when opened. For multiple files, drop them all at once — Etch will bundle them automatically. You may also ZIP them yourself if you prefer.
3	Name it clearly	E.g.: Tanaka_Collection_AW2026_FINAL_ANCHORED_2026-03-15.pdf
4	Make it read-only	Windows: right-click > Properties > Read-only. Mac: File > Get Info > Locked.
5	Timestamp it	Upload your file(s) to etchproof.eu — they never leave your browser, only their fingerprints are sent.
6	Store the ZIP	Keep your original file(s) and the proof ZIP together, in at least two locations.

File format stability

The hash changes if the file changes — even by a single bit. Always anchor the final version, in a format that does not modify itself when opened.

Format	Stability	Recommendation
PDF	**Ideal**	Stable when opened, universal, does not modify its metadata.
Plain text (.txt, .md)	**Ideal**	No hidden metadata, fully stable.
Source code	**Ideal**	Plain text, fully stable.
Video / Audio	Good	Stable if not re-encoded.
PNG / JPEG / WebP	Medium	EXIF metadata may change when re-saved. Make a dedicated copy.
SVG / AI / EPS	Medium	Stable if not re-saved in an editor.
PSD / Clip Studio	Medium	Stable if not re-saved. Also export a flattened PDF.
Word (.docx / .pages)	**Avoid**	Modifies metadata on every open — always export to PDF before anchoring.
Excel / Numbers	**Avoid**	Same issue as Word.

Important limitations — what timestamping does NOT do

It does NOT grant intellectual property rights. A timestamp proves existence, not ownership or authorship.

It does NOT prove you are the author. It proves you had the file at that date — additional evidence may still be needed.

It does NOT store your file(s). Only the fingerprint (hash) of each file is recorded. Without your original file(s), the proof is useless.

It does NOT automatically stop plagiarism or imitation. It provides the evidence to support your case.

The certificate alone is not sufficient. Verification requires both the certificate AND the original file(s).

IP strategy — where timestamping fits

Blockchain timestamping is the first layer of protection you can establish instantly. Here is how it fits into a broader IP strategy for a creator operating in Japan.

Stage	Recommended action	Tool
Creating — before sharing	Timestamp each version as you develop it.	Blockchain timestamp
Before presenting to clients or manufacturers	Timestamp the final file(s) you will share. Keep the originals.	Blockchain timestamp
High-value original works	Register with the Agency for Cultural Affairs for formal presumption of authorship.	ACA registration
Unique product designs	Consider Design Act registration for commercially important designs.	Japan Patent Office
New technical invention	Patent application, with blockchain timestamp to establish priority while pending.	Timestamp + JPO

Cost comparison

Blockchain timestamping offers permanent proof at a fraction of the cost of formal registration methods.

Methode	Cout approximatif	Duree
Blockchain timestamping (Etch)	~330 JPY (~2 EUR) per anchoring	Permanent
ACA copyright registration	3,000-18,000 JPY per work	Life + 70 years (~1 month processing)
Design registration (JPO)	16,000-50,000+ JPY per design	25 years (6-12 month processing)
Notarised declaration	11,000-55,000+ JPY	Permanent
Patent application	70,000-300,000+ JPY	20 years (18+ month processing)

How verification works

Anyone can verify your proof, at any time, for free — including Japanese courts, lawyers, and opposing parties:

- Calculate the SHA-256 hash of your original file using the verification tool at etchproof.eu.
- Look up the transaction on Etherscan.io — the public Ethereum blockchain explorer.
- Confirm that the hash in the blockchain matches your file's hash exactly.

For a multi-file bundle, each file can be verified individually using its own hash. The session hash (anchored on the blockchain) corresponds to the hash of the manifest listing all files.

Even if the Etch service were to cease operations, your proof remains permanently verifiable on the Ethereum blockchain — maintained by thousands of independent nodes worldwide, with no dependence on any company, government, or hardware.