

Exhibiting Postal Stationery of the Imperial China

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Summary

With regard to Chinese Postal Stationery, those of the Imperial China are considered classic which deserve our close attention and research.

This article aims to emphasize how to organize an exhibit of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China in terms of its philatelic importance, views from international jurors, its nature of scarcity and rich postal history characteristics.

Suggestions are made on how to select appropriate postal cards, letter sheets and postal stationery forerunners for a competitive exhibit. The author hopes that the article will be beneficial to interested collectors.

Foreword:

The thought of how to organize an exhibit of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China has always been in my mind. Through exhibitions and discussions with local and international jurors and specialists in this field, I eventually developed, in my own opinion, an appropriate way of building such an exhibit. I would like to share with you my viewpoints and your comments are more than welcomed.

1. The Importance of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China

There is no denying that the development of China's modern postal system is much later than that of Western countries, with its 1st Issue of postal cards coming into being in 1897. For this reason, postal stationery of the Imperial China was not considered as important as they should be over the years in the international arena. Furthermore, language barrier, culture differences, lack of knowledge of the postal history of the Imperial China are all significantly contributed to the unfavorable view of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China.

To prove that Postal Stationery of the Imperial China is important or not, an exhibitor should, in the first place, make his thought understood by others through appropriate methods. Besides, the most important point is to have self-confidence. We should first attach great importance to it and form excellent exhibits for international

exhibitions. The more exhibits for exhibitions, the more important they will become. China is one of the most influencing countries in the world. No one can deny the importance of any early postal items related to China. Postal Stationery of the Imperial China is the forerunner of a series of China postal stationery. Who can ignore its importance?

2. Different Viewpoints among Judges

Senior international judges tend to follow the philosophy they used to take for traditional philately when evaluating postal stationery exhibits. They first focus their attention on the study and research of printing types, overprinting types, proofs, trial, specimen and essay; then they turn to usages of these postal stationery. Too many used items in an exhibit would tend to lead judges to the wrong idea that the exhibit is a Postal History exhibit rather than a Postal Stationery one. Such exhibit will lose marks under Treatment criterion. Such viewpoints if applied to postal stationery issued by Western countries are quite appropriate; but I don't think they are equally applicable to an exhibit of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China. Since China issued its first official postal card in 1897, a total of only 4 issues of postal cards, with another 3 kinds of Reply Paid cards, has been produced till the end of the Imperial China; The so-called proof, trials, specimen and essay are really scare. How can an exhibit of 5 or 8 frames with so few materials available draw the attention of the judges?

Dr. Alan Huggins, the past president of the Royal Philatelic Society London and FIP Postal Stationery Commission once said that postal stationery items maintain not only the charms of traditional philately and postal history but also a unique characteristic, which is a philatelic class deserving our serious consideration. His statement has extended the horizon of postal stationery of the Imperial China, pointing out the direction on how to organize a Postal Stationery of the Imperial China. Postal stationery of the Imperial China was in use at the time when its National Post was in the orphanage stage and when the country was under the influence of Great Powers from Western countries. Under such circumstances, there were exceptional items carrying postal history significance. Including these items in an exhibit of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China is one of its features. The exhibit shows the greatest degree of advancement in terms of the material selected, demonstrating the difficulty in acquisition of these items, extending the depth of research. If only there are more exhibits in international exhibitions, chance are that there will be more exchanges of viewpoints with judges. Such contacts will probably make these features of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China well known to the

jurors; furthermore they may change their deep-rooted ideas and turn to accept them, making favorable evaluation of the exhibit.

3. Choosing Appropriate Materials

In judging a postal stationery exhibit, the jury will use the following criteria:

The importance of an exhibit which is determined by the overall significance of the subject to the field of postal stationery;

The difficulty in organizing the exhibit and its philatelic interest;

The completeness of the exhibit to the subject chosen and the correctness of choosing material;

The result of the detailed study of existing information and any research carried out by the exhibitor;

The condition and rarity of the exhibit;

The presentation whether to the best effect or not.

Hence, we have to take the above criteria into careful consideration, using appropriately selecting items for the exhibit. Appropriately including materials for an exhibit is the most influential point in forming an exhibit.

I personally believe that there are 3 kinds of materials which can form the composition of the exhibit of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China: There are: 1)Postal cards of the Imperial China, 2)Letter sheets of the Imperial China, 3)Forerunners of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China.

4. Postal Cards of the Imperial China

Strictly speaking, among postal stationery of the Imperial China, only the officially issued postal cards fit into the FIP definition of postal stationery. The postal cards include the 1st Issue of 1897, the 2nd Issue of 1899, the 3rd Issue of 1907 and the 4th Issue of 1908, totaling 7 issues. There are another 5 overprinted postal cards with “SOLD IN BULK” in 1907 and those overprinted with “中華民國” in 1912. These postal cards are the main elements comprising the composition of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China exhibit.

4.1 Research on Printing Plates

Research on printing plates of the Postal Stationery of the Imperial China can be found on many philatelic publications. In spite of the joint efforts of many philatelists in the past, I believe there are still rooms for exhibitors to make far deeper research. If new findings on printing plates come out, they should be

exhibited through careful arrangement. Undoubtedly, with limited space available in an exhibit, key items should be on the Third Issue postal cards and reply paid cards. To illustrate the research on printing plates using scarce and rare materials will easily draw judges' attention.

4.2 Selection of Varieties

There are few recorded varieties of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China. The 3rd Issue Reply Paid Card, Folded at Right with approximately 10 postally used cards extant is the highlights of the exhibit. If one of the 2 recorded mints is exhibited (Fig. 1), it will surely become the most eye-catching item to judges and viewers. The 3rd Issue also has varieties of broken “清”, broken “郵” and broken “明”. They are scarce; some are much scarcer than those postally used Folded at Right. These items shown on pages should be rewarded.



Fig. 1 The 3rd Issue Reply Paid Card, Folded at Right Variety, Only 2 Mints Recorded.

4.3 Selection of proofs, Color Trials, Specimen and Essay

With regard to Postal Stationery of the Imperia China, including any of proofs, color trials, specimen and essay in an exhibit will have high degree of difficulty for an

exhibitor because very few of them are accessible. For the above items that are so far recorded are: the unique Specimen of Single card of Issue with brown “Waterlow & Sons Specimen” mark on lower part of right hand side; two black Essay of impression of 4th Issue (Fig. 2) and two color trials, one deep blue and the other with combination of deep blue, brown and brownish red. Imagine how few they are! Having any of them in an exhibit will be another big highlight.



Fig. 2 Black Die Proofs of 4th Issue,

As to essay, there are 7 or 8 recorded items which were designed by Robert Alexis de Villard in 1896 when he was then a stamp and graph designer of Customs Statistical Department, Shanghai (Fig. 3). Judging from the design of the essay, it is obvious that they were designed for the Imperial China short before the 1st Issue was released in 1897. Without doubt, these are appropriate items and highlight for an exhibit of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China.



Fig. 3 Unique, Essay for “UNION POSTALE UNIVERSELLE” 3 Cents Postal Card, Designed by Robert Alexis de Villard in 1896

4.4 Selection of Postally Used Cards

It is imperative to present some postally used cards with postal history significance in an exhibit of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China; otherwise it is by no means an excellent exhibit. This is what the Postal Stationery of the Imperial China makes itself so unique and where it will receive critiques from judges of international exhibitions. Much more efforts have to be made on write-up on pages so as to keep judges well informed.

The use of postally used cards on shown pages should be done through carefully selection to illustrate the exhibitor's philatelic knowledge, his depth research, the importance and rarity of the items.

4.4.1 Postal Rates

During the period of the Imperial China National Post, postal card rates were simple. It is not difficult to collect all of them. Comparatively, an intact Reply Paid Postal Cards are far more difficult. So are registered postal cards and intact registered Reply Paid Postal Cards. In comparison with other Issues, postally used 3rd Issue Postal cards are fewer. Much fewer are postally and registered 3rd issue, with only less than 10 items recorded, they are highlights of the exhibit.

Besides postal card rates, exceptional ones are appropriate materials for an exhibit. Some of these cards are scarce, adding points to the exhibit.

Another aspect related to postal rates is postage-due cards. There are fewer postage-due postal cards than registered cards as far as the Postal Stationery of the Imperial China is concerned. Intact postage-due Reply Paid Cards of 3rd Issue are even fewer, with only less than 5 items known so far; They are quite suitable for the exhibit. Other Issues with postage-due stamps and rare postal cancellations are also attractive items (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4 Hong Kong 2c Added on 1st Issue of Postal Card of the Imperial China, Sent from Kowloon in 1900 to Austria. Postage Short Paid with 5 Heller Taxed on Arrival

4.4.2 Postal Cancellations

The bountiful postal cancellations applied on Postal Cards of the Imperial China are another characteristic, which can hardly be seen in other countries. To choose the appropriate items with postal cancellations from these postally cards demonstrate the exhibitor's knowledge. Basically, special, rare cancellations and those carrying postal history significance are to be selected. Of course, the postal cancellations must be as clear as possible. The purpose of showing postal cancellations is to demonstrate the varieties of cancellations applied during the period when Chinese Imperial postal

cards were in use. For, The exhibitor needs to select few exceptional postal cancellations among identical ones, so as not to turn an exhibit of postal stationery into that of a postal history.

4.4.3 Postal Routes

Until the end of the Imperial China, the transportation network in China has not been well developed. Mail was carried through post offices to post office before it reached its destination. It was through these processes that postal route was recorded down. Interestingly, some places in China could only be reached via international route. Postal cards with such extraordinary significance, if clearly explained, on shown pages will be an eye catcher (Fig. 5). Special postal routes can be found on postally used cards.

In addition, postally used cards originated from far away provinces are also highlights. They are postal cards with Rare Origin. So are those sent to undeveloped countries or far away countries, postal cards with Rare Destination.



Fig.5 1904, the 1st Issue Postal Card Sent From Yunnanfu via Tengyueh, Bhamo, Bearing India Stamp, a Combination Postal Card

4.4.4 Up-rated and Combination Postal Cards

Postal cards up-rated or combined with stamps of alien post offices in China is another feature of Chinese Imperial Postal Cards. Before China was admitted to the UPU, outgoing mail from China was required to be franked with stamps of foreign countries so that it could be sent via alien post offices in China. Such combination postal cards are important items which mirror the development of China postal systems in the early period. Over the years, these postal cards are earnestly chased by collectors from home and abroad. They are inevitable items for an exhibit of Postal stationery of the Imperial China. An exhibit should contain rare combination postal cards or early combination samples. Including rare registered or acknowledged registered postal cards which were franked with many different stamps in an exhibit is a best choice. Combination postal cards with postage-due are rare and suitable for shown pages.

Chinese stamps added on up-rated Chinese Imperial postal cards range from the Dowagers, Red Revenues Surcharges, Small Dragons and those issued before March 31, 1914. If these postal cards are shown, the exhibitor should check whether the rates were correct, and whether they were applied postally when the stamps were available. A total of 2 or 3 up-rated postal cards are enough for the pages. Don't overuse them just because they are costly.

4.4.5 Other Materials with Interesting and Postal History Significance

Postal cards, with high philatelic interest or important postal history significance themselves like First Day Usage, or those used before they were officially issued should have a space on the pages. If the first day of the issuance of the postal stationery is unknown, the earliest recorded, or the early date can be exhibited. On the other hand, considering the valid period of the postal cards, the recorded latest or the latest usage can be chosen for pages. Emphasis should not be laid on those used long after their valid period expired.

Most of the Reply Paid cards of the Imperial China were separated as single postal cards; hence, intact Reply Paid cards are scarce, especially the 3rd Issue. Exhibitors should include these items with significance in the exhibit. On top of that, separated Reply Half identified from the postal cancellations as being sent back, are rare, no matter they are 2nd, 3rd, or 4th Issues, they are suitable items. Reply Paid card

in intact condition is even much scarcer (Fig. 6) is undoubtedly an attractive show piece.

Other postally used postal cards with such special characteristic as “returned to sender”, “postage restante”, “re-directed”, re-affixed stamps and PAQUEBOT usage are to be chosen for exhibit through careful arrangement.

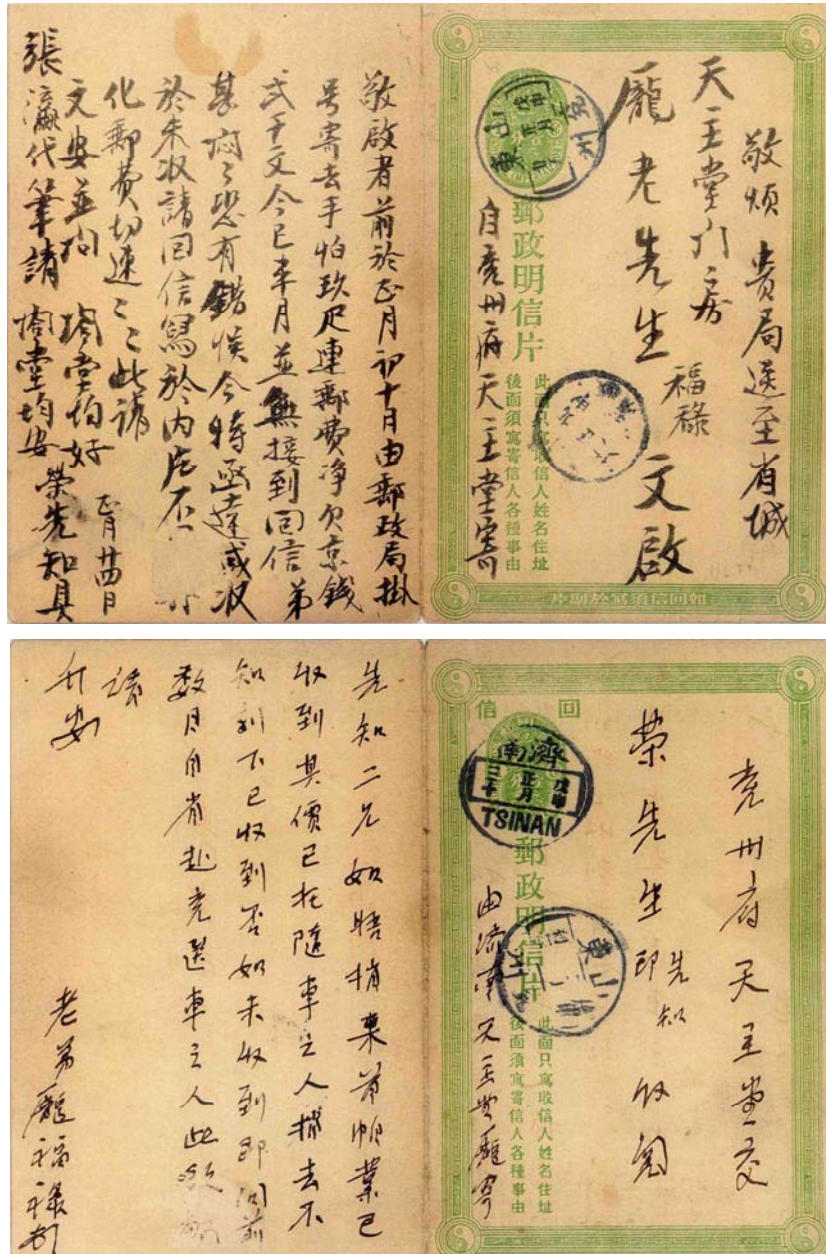


Fig. 6 1908, the 3rd Issue Reply Paid Card, “Message Half” Sent from Yanchow, to Tsinan, “Reply Half” Sent Back to Original Sender, the Only “Intact” Usage

4.4.6 Summary of Selection of Postally Used Cards

The key point in choosing appropriate postally used cards for an exhibit depend on exhibitor's knowledge of their real value in philately. Such knowledge is learned from every day's study and research of related postal history of the Imperial China.

The exhibitor should choose the best representative from those items with similar nature for a competitive exhibit. The best materials for postal cards are those with important significance in postal rates, postal cancellations, postal route and other important factors together. Duplication should be avoided so as not to be evaluated as not having enough materials for the exhibit or lack of philatelic knowledge. In principle, every item on the show pages is item with attached significance.

4.5 On Postal Service Card of the Imperial China

On Postal Service cards (Fig. 7) produced for the use of Government Departments only, are appropriate items as defined by the guidelines produced by the FIP.

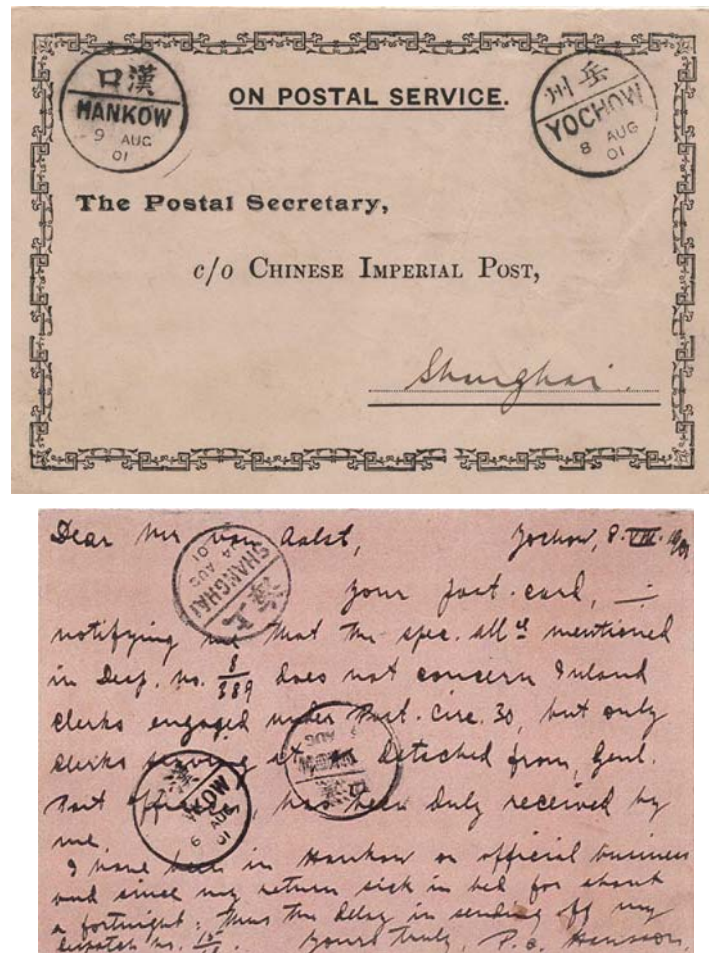


Fig. 7 Official Postcard “ON POSTAL SERVICE” Sent in 1901 from Yechow via Hankow to Shanghai ◦

On Postal Service Card of the Imperial China are hardly seen. And there has been little research on this topic. According to my personal research, there are at least two types known. Such material would of course be appropriately included in an exhibit of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China.

5. Letter Sheets of the Imperial China

An exhibit of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China with postal cards only, but without its Letter Sheets (Fig. 8, 9-1, 9-2) is incomplete. As regulated in the FIP rules, these non-denomination items are Formulas, without the purpose of pre-paying postage. Whether these items can be used or not are still open to debate.

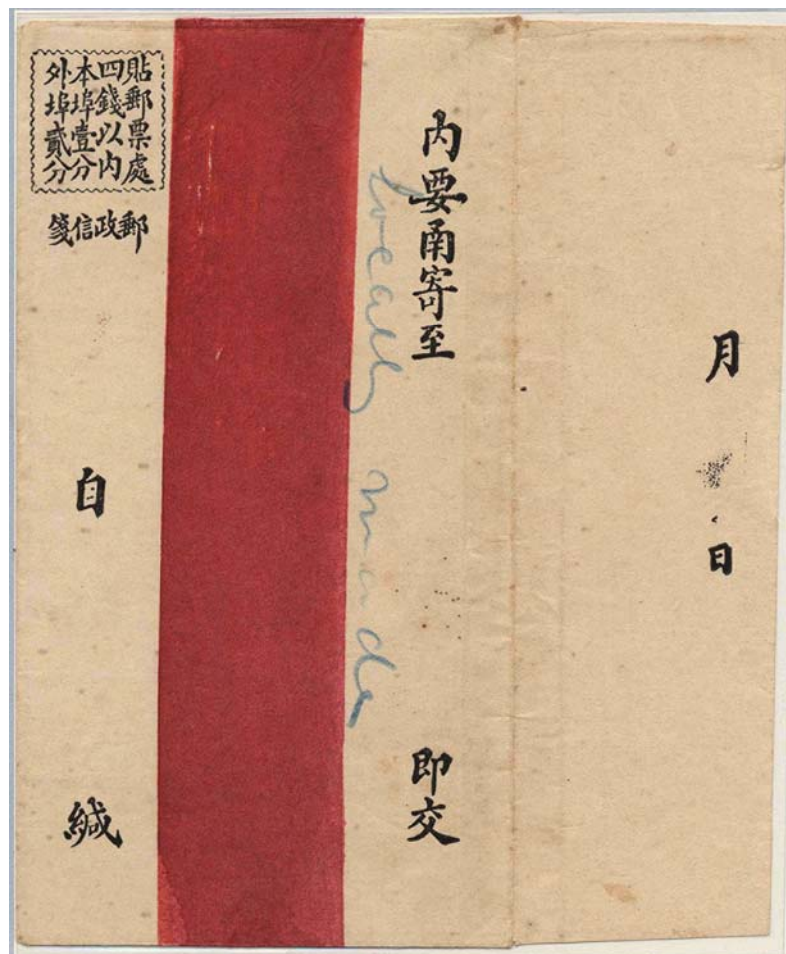


Fig. 8 The Only Recorded Unused 1st Issue Letter Sheet

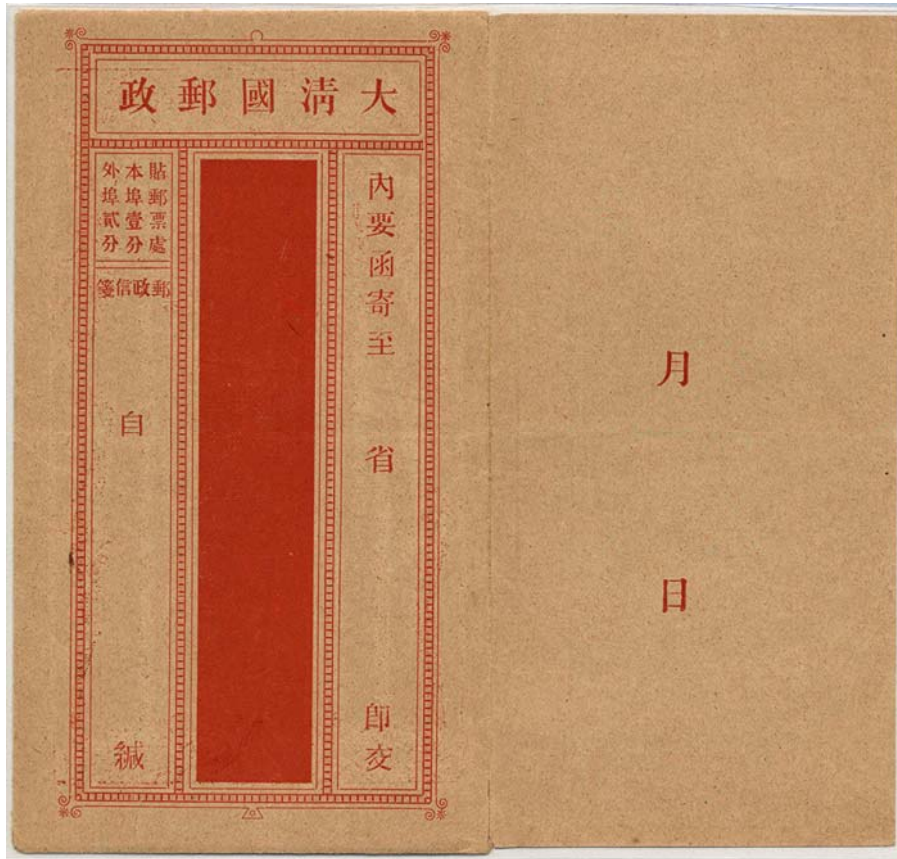


Fig. 9-1 Imperial Letter Sheet, Unissued Trial Print, Wide Type

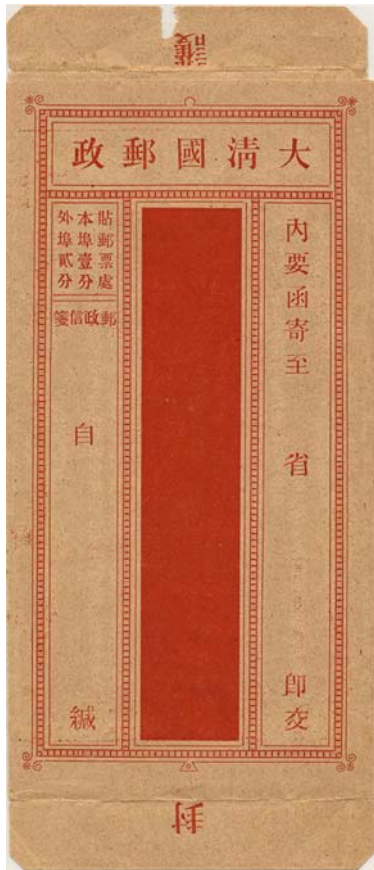


Fig. 9-2 Imperial Letter Sheet, Unissued Trial Print, Narrow Type

Letter Sheets of the Imperial China were officially sold throughout the whole China. They are the forerunners of the Postal Stationery. They are significantly important in the development of the Imperial China Postal Stationery. A total of approximately 70 letter sheets are recorded, including those kept in the museum. There are of high degree of difficulty in acquisition and making research on these items. It is under these special circumstances that I believe these items should be regarded as one of the postal stationery of the Imperial China, although their status is still debatable in accordance with the FIP rules.

To include these letter sheets in an exhibit, the exhibitor will put himself at risk in term of the result of the exhibitions. However, it is worth taking the risk. The Chinese collector should take the lead to promote these items; afterwards chances are that they can be understood, accepted and appreciated by other collectors.

6. Forerunners of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China

Prior to the existence of postal stationery, it is a fact that postcards were used for communications in China. Chinese Customs Post and later the National Post both

enforced postal cards rates, which were the same as or different for domestic letter rates. Card and sheets used at that time were so called pre-postal history cards and letter sheets in the philately community. One of the examples can be seen on (Fig. 10), showing domestic letter rates.



Fig. 10 1892 1 cent Hong Kong Postcard from Shanghai to Peking, 2 Canderins Of "Inland Postage" Charged

Other materials which can be assembled into the exhibit are those issued by Shanghai Local Post. No one can deny that Shanghai Local Post released the first postcard in China as early as 1874 (Fig. 11). Before that time, there was a GB 1/2 P Victoria Postcard Embossed “Shanghai Local Post Office”, the Temporary Issue extant (Fig. 12). Those stamps and postal stationery can be regarded as “Chinese” or not is still arguable among philatelists and historians. But their existence in China proper justifies that before Imperial China issued its first postal stationery, there has been an established postal system operating in China, producing postal stationery for the purpose of public communications.



Fig. 11 The Earliest Recorded Usage (10 Dec. 1874) of the 1st Stamped Postcard Issued by Shanghai Local Post

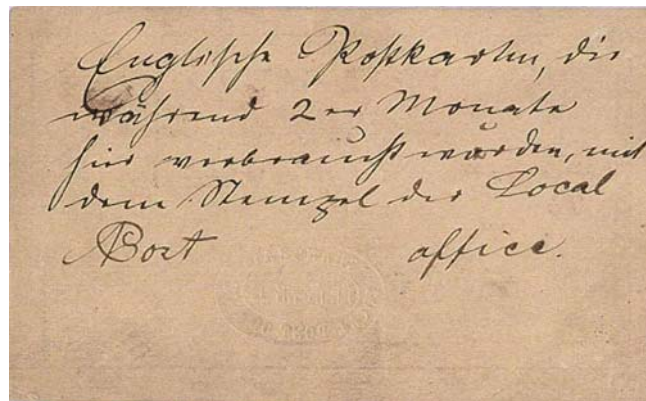


Fig. 12 The Earliest Pattern of Postcard Known in China, GB 1/2 P Victoria Postcard Embossed “Shanghai Local Post Office”, the Temporary Issue

In my opinion, selecting some postal stationery forerunners and early postal stationery of Shanghai Local Post helps explain the background of the issuance of Postal Stationery of the Imperial China.

Conclusions

In fact, any exhibitor is perfectly free to build and develop an exhibit in any way he considers appropriate. My statement above is entirely my own opinions. But for a competitive exhibit, I suggest that the exhibitor should first familiarizes himself with FIP regulations to get hold of the fundamentals of how to organize an exhibit, how to choose appropriate materials and how judges evaluate the exhibit.

On title page there should be clear definition of your theme chosen and a brief

description of the arrangement of your items. All items on pages are arranged in concert with the chosen theme. No fake or forged items are allowed.

The Postal Stationery of the Imperial China has its own significance. An exhibit of this nature differs itself from that of most Western countries. I firmly believe, through philatelic exhibitions, seminars, articles on magazines and international exchanges, Postal Stationery of the Imperial China will eventually gain its importance it deserves.

© **Main Consulted Literature:**

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