

Synopsis: Chefoo Local Post, China 1893-96

This exhibit shows the actual demand and need for postal services and stamps of the Chefoo Local Post by foreign residents in this north China port city and Treaty Port. It is a traditional exhibit, with the relevant postal history items used to support and illustrate this actual demand. The demand for these stamps was unprecedented with the original shipment quickly drying out and it spurred the need of new orders necessary to meet this demand as seen from the subsequent printings. The following will show that although several excellent researchers had studied and reported on the topic of Chefoo's Local Post, the exhibitor was faced with conflicting information supplied by these researchers and observations that could not be matched with the published information.

Importance

Chefoo was one of only five cities that the first stamps of China, the Large Dragons, were issued. Besides the capital of Beijing, its adjacent port city of Tientsin and the international post city of Shanghai, Chefoo ranked as the fourth most important city of China in a philatelic sense. In terms of importance in a Local Post context, it only ranked second to Shanghai Local Post, which had a head-start of nearly 30 years, before Chefoo Local Post's inception in June 1893. Stamps were subsequently issued in October 1893. Simply put, there were no other postal services available to the foreign residents that they could use or trust until 1897.

Besides the Shanghai Local Post, no exhibitor worldwide has dedicated a multi-frame exhibit for a single Local Post.

For the longest time, there had been a stigma attached to China's Local Post stamps. This was the thinking that these stamps were merely the work of a few enterprising individuals that were able to capitalize on these Local Post services to print stamps to make money from unsuspecting collectors. This is aggravated by the formation of the SSSS, the Society for the Suppression of the Speculative Stamps, which was formed in 1895-05-06 and was supported by RPSL and APS. The exhibitor is attempting, with this exhibit, to show that not all Local Post were the same and Chefoo's Local Post had an actual demand and need for its services. No other exhibitors have attempted to do this.

Treatment

Postal history items are used to support and illustrate that there was an actual demand for the postal service, and hence stamps, of the Chefoo Local Post. The exhibit started with the need of postal services from the foreign residents in Shanghai to the tiny foreign population that were staying in Chefoo when the Shanghai Local Post started to operate in the mid-1860's. There were no postal services available to these foreigners in China at the time. Even when the "trial" postal service started, which operated as a branch of China's Customs and was known as the Chinese Customs Post, but it must have questionable service when compared to the Shanghai Local Post for sending domestic mail between Chefoo and Shanghai or the other Treaty Ports of China. While past researchers seemed to indicate that there were only 2 ways of mail delivery between Chefoo and Shanghai, i.e. by the Shanghai Local Post or by the Chinese Customs Post, there was a third possible way. It was through agents not related to the Shanghai Local Post and these items' characteristic was it did not have markings of either the Shanghai Local Post or the Chinese Customs Post. Items of these 3 different forwarding mechanisms between Chefoo and Shanghai are shown in the exhibit.

Then postal history items with the first postal marking of the Chefoo Local Post are shown with the earliest recorded cover with a Chefoo marking and the content of the letter saying that it was the first batch of letters sent on 1893-06-05. Subsequently when the stamps were issued, the exhibit attempts to show each issue with in-depth study of die-settings for each value and printing, where possible. Several sheets are in exhibit to show printing stone differences, die settings, color difference, perforation difference, stamp size, etc. These are supported with usages. Then each of the Local Post cancellators are studied by the use of stamps and postal history items, including different ink usages. These were then supported with the other usages including registration, postage due (To-Pay) marking etc.

The exhibit ends at the end of 1896 with the closing of all Local Posts, when China's first national post, the Chinese Imperial Post), originally planned to start operations on New Year's Day in 1897. They declared all other postal systems in China unlawful, threatened these with fines when caught and ordered to close prior to 1897.

Not included are the so-called Postage Due overprints, as these were already shown as bogus items by official Local Post announcement when these first appeared.

Self-study/Knowledge

The exhibitor has been exhibiting Chefoo since 1997. The exhibit "China: Chefoo 1880-1911" is a FIP Gold medal at 8 frames. The exhibit "Chefoo & the other Large CDS of the Chinese Imperial Post" is a FIP Large vermeil medal at 8 frames. He has been collecting data on Chefoo continuous since the 1980's, before exhibiting the subject. The exhibitor's record of Chefoo's related philatelic data

is unparalleled. Just to illustrate, a philatelic writer in his so-called exhausted listing of Hong Kong Queen Victoria stamps used on covers/cards has a record of only 3 of these used from Chefoo. This exhibitor recorded 113 of the items used from Chefoo.

Of the following new findings, none of these findings have been reported or even hinted by any philatelic researchers or writers of China's Local Post, past or present.

- In some printings, the comb type perforations were allowed to deviate from the original 13 perf holes height of the stamp to 14 perf holes. The size of the stamp, measuring from the middle of the perf hole to the next row, was about 2.3 cm, for the 13 holes (normal) stamp height, to about 2.5 cm for the 14 holes (taller) variety. Note that no writer has ever written about perforation difference or size of the Chefoo Local Post stamps. This is still an on-going investigation.
- The exhibitor does not agree with the "historical" listing of the separation of a second and third printing. In fact, the exhibitor argues that these were from the same printing, which the exhibitor is calling this "subsequent printing". The so-called 1/2c and 5c (2 sheets shown), which were printed from the second (new) die, but these had reverse watermark, which was the hallmark of the first printing stamp. No postal history items could show the, 1/2c and 5c, were in fact released and used before the rest of the stamps from the so-called third printing. An additional inconsistency was the fact that Livingston listed the existence of the 1c printed from the second (new) die but with reversed watermark (one sheet shown). This was placed under the third printing as a variety only, but not grouped with the 1/2c and 5c to call these the "second" printing.
- All past writers and researchers were fixated on the transfer varieties of the die onto the printing stone only, but no one had ever investigated or illustrated the secondary transfer variety where the complete sheet were transferred onto a stone, resulting in a different stone altogether. The exhibitor calls to attention position 6 (first stamp on the left of the second row) for the 1/2c sheet on what Dougan called the "third stone, sheet setting B" to illustrate the point. 2 sheets of this so-called third stone, sheet setting B, are used to show that this is a totally new stone and/or printing. The additional flaw in position 6 was not present in the so-called third stone, setting A (2 sheets shown). Position 6 should have been strike from position F of the second die, which should also have been repeated at positions 16, 26, 36 of the same sheet. However, the additional flaw was not observed in these other positions. Furthermore, the printing quality is different from the sheets of setting A. The so-called setting B, besides having a darker color, was also printed with a heavier strike causing a less fine, but a coarser looking stamp. The exhibitor disagrees that this printing was from the third stone, but from an even later stone. This new stone used the complete sheet transfer reproduced and originated from the third stone, but had its own additional flaws. The CTO date of 1894-07-09 on these 2 sheets maybe secondary evidence that this printing arrived much later than the 1894 January date that the so-called second and third printings reached Chefoo.
- Several imperf varieties are unrecorded by both Dougan and Livingston and these are shown.
- Doubling varieties that have not recorded are shown. Perhaps the most important of which are in the doubling of the center die in the 20c high value. Neither Dougan nor Livingston have recorded doubling on the second or re-engraved die. The positional block of this doubling on the original center die is also from different positions as recorded by Livingston.
- From observation of usage date, scarcity, presence of used examples, printing quality, the difference in die and degradation of the die over time, the exhibitor has put forward the argument that a version of the postal stationery card and a wrapper were, in fact, trial printings. While none of this "trial printing" wrapper, which was printed on a thick card stock and different from the issued one, was recorded used, 3 of the "trial" postal stationery cards have been recorded used with 2 shown.

The exhibitor had also written the 5-part article "*The Paper Chase, Part 1, The Local Post*", published in "The Journal" of the Postal History Society of China between 2001 and 2004. In this series of articles, he tracked and commented on all 23 handbooks and catalogs on the subject of China's Local Post from as early as 1895 to 1989.

Difficulty of Acquisition

While single stamps are easily accessible, the survival of large blocks and sheets, due to climate and aging, are rare, the reasons will be discussed below under Condition. The lack of sheets or large multiples of the stamps from the original printing have been well documented. Dougan was unable to propose a die arrangement for the 5c sheet as no sheets have been recorded, not even a suggestion of a possible setting from blocks or even a pair. This exhibit has shown a block of 2 rows of 5, which show, from left to right, die A to E, for both rows, which seemed to suggest that this was the setting for the rest of the sheet of all 8 rows. Dougan for every other printings and values had shown some sort of a die setting, even if it is data from blocks or even pairs. The absence of large multiples or sheets might also be from the fact that the original issues were quickly consumed and separated into single

stamps for use and for distribution, which is different from the later issues where sheets were scarce, but not rare and complete sheets even with CTO existed (2 shown).

- The black die proof of the 2c from second die and the 15c imperf in issue color and watermarked paper are the only ones the exhibitor has recorded.

Perhaps the most difficulty in acquisition was the postal history items, in particularly, those showing commercial or personal usage and not philatelically contrived. Increasingly in difficult are the following:

- With Chefoo Local Post wax seal (1 recorded, shown), this was the one Dougan described in detail just before the end of the chapter, but with no illustrations. Dougan also stated that Amoy Local Post has the only other Local Post wax seal
- Postage due items with "To-Pay" marking (5 recorded, 2 shown), Oldfield and Dougan had recorded only 1 item
- PAID marking without frames (6 recorded, 4 shown), Dougan illustrated only 1 item
- PAID marking with frames (15 recorded, 9 in collection, not all shown), Dougan illustrated 2 items, one of these is in exhibit
- Chefoo Local Post Bilingual Marking on "non-philatelic" items (7 recorded, 6 in collection, not all shown). Not accounted for is a batch of red band covers, written in Chinese, with this marking and all of these were cancelled on 1893-10-12. The exhibitor is proposing that these were from the "first day of issue to the general public" and these were, in fact, First Day Covers, even though an item was recorded with stamps on 1893-10-06, where it was most likely sent by PO official before the actual issue day to the public.
- Registered items (18 recorded, 11 in collection, not all shown), Dougan illustrated 2 items, one of these is in exhibit
- Combination usages with stamps from other countries, with US (6 recorded, 1 shown), Hong Kong (10 recorded, 2 shown) and German (27 recorded, 6 in collection, not all shown).

Condition

Mint Chefoo Local Post stamps suffered from the common problem of drying with the gum shriveling and cracking under different humidity condition and age. Many of the large multiples of stamps will self-destroy by cracking into smaller multiples and full sheets have been observed to curl up into the shape of a drinking straw. Those stamps that remained in China, Hong Kong and in countries with high heat and humidity have been aged and browned more severely. Postal history items shared the same aging condition from humidity which is normal for Chinese covers from this period. Pristine condition does not exist, unless these were on well-kept CTO items that had not gone through the mail.

Items of significance

- Un-adopted colored and white paper samples with printer's watermark, including one un-watermarked sample on card stock
- Black die proof of the 2 cents from the second stone (already mentioned above)
- Imperf proof of the 15 cents high value in issue color on watermark paper, with the added feature of the center design shifting to left (already mentioned above)
- Earliest recorded cover sent by Chefoo LP: 1893-06-05 cover to Shanghai with content
- Earliest recorded cover with Chefoo Local post stamp used in combination with foreign stamp: 1893-10-20 cover to German in combination with German stamp. Cover also has the added features of being the latest recorded use of the Chefoo bilingual marking and it is also the only recorded combination item used with this marking, the Chefoo Local Post bilingual marking.
- 2 of 5 recorded To-Pay (postage due) items (already mentioned above)
- Unrecorded ½ cent wrapper printed on thick card stock. Exhibitor proposed that these were from the trial printing, as it has a different die design than the issued examples, no record of a used item and the printing was immaculate
- ½ cent postal stationery card with spiral in frames. Exhibitor proposed that these were from the trial printing. 2 of 4 recorded of this card used are shown

References

The Shanghai Postal System, The Stamps and Postal History, Charles W. Dougan, APS, 1981. Chapter on Chefoo Local Post also listed William Fletcher as the first co-author besides Charles Dougan.

Catalog of The Shanghai Postal System, The second and revised edition of the catalog originally published by L.F. Livingston, Wei-Liang Chow, 1990.