

THE INTERNATIONAL AEROGRAMMES OF CHINA

(1948-1949)

In August, 1947, the U.S. Postal Department notified the Chinese government of the introduction of Air Letters and their usage for overseas mail commencing from April 29, 1947. On March, 1948, the Directorate General of Posts formally announced to all postal districts that an International Air Letter service would also be introduced in China.

Since the period of usage of the Air Letters was less than two years, the entire subject can only really be depicted within the context of a one-frame exhibit. Despite these constraints, this represents a fascinating field of study from both the airmail and postal history perspectives; particularly given the many changes in postal rates due to the rampant inflation of the Nationalist currency, which necessitated the Chinese Nationalist Currency (CNC), and the latter subsequently replaced by the Silver Yuan (SY) currency on May 1, 1949.

A limited number of air letter sheets were printed by the Postal Supply Department in Shanghai and distributed to the districts on April 7, 1948, with official sales beginning from April 15, 1948. The following regulations were applied uniquely to their issue:

- (1) Initially, Air Letters may be sent only to six countries: Great Britain, U.S.A., Canada, India, Philippines, and Australia;
- (2) Air Letter sheets are sold at cost price. Upon issue, this was CNC\$5,000 per piece. G\$0.30 from November 25, 1948, G\$1.00 from January 6, 1949, G\$5.00 from February 16, 1949, and untraceable thereafter due to a lack of information and the chaotic times;
- (3) The ordinary postage and air surcharge cannot be paid (franked) by more than four stamps on each Air Letter;
- (4) It is not permitted to enclose anything therein;
- (5) Air Letters cannot be registered.

This exhibit is divided into two sections:

Part I (P. 2-4)

This depicts the three different issues and how to distinguish them.

Part II (P.5-16)

This illustrates the multitude of changes in the postal rates. Prior to their issue, the sum of ordinary postage and air surcharge for each Air Letter was fixed at CNC\$35,000 on March 29, 1948, and then raised to CNC\$45,000 on April 5. When the Air Letter sheets were eventually placed on sale on April 15, the rate was further increased to CNC\$55,000. Since then, the postal rates were revised eighteen times in about one year. The shortest period for any single postal rate was six days. Nearly all of the nineteen different postal rates which are obtainable during the tumultuous times prior to the end of the nationalist rule are contained in this exhibit.