

Synopsis for: Development of Chinese Imperial Post Office 1897-99
Transformation from Customs Post Office

Mission statement: This exhibit shows the proper start of postal operations of the Chinese Imperial Post (CIP) Office, China's first national post office (PO), transforming from its forerunner, the Customs Post Office.

Importance: The exhibit is on the start of operations of the first "National" post office of China. No other exhibitor, at national or FIP level has attempted to show this subject.

Time Period: (Start) In *Postal Circular* no. 4 (1896, Dec 10), it was announced that the start of CIP would also include a change to a new postal currency (cents instead of candarins) on 1897 Jan 1st. The start was then rescheduled to Chinese New Year Day, Feb 2nd. It was changed again to Feb 20th. However, neither the stamps with the new currency nor the cancellators that were ordered from Japan had arrived. The stamps arrived and were put to use much later, on Oct 1st. The cancellators, which were commonly called the Large Circular Date Stamps (LCDS) were put to use only in July 1st for most offices and earlier in Peking and Shanghai. During this interim period, the new post office used many different strategies to manage. For example, they using existing "Customs" cancellators and scrambled to overprinted several different sets of stamps with the new currency as stop-gap measures. Therefore, it was when the new cancellators were put in use was when most earmarked this as the "proper" start of operation of CIP. The fact that only 30 cancellators, the Large Circular Date Stamp or LCDS, were ordered for the 30 main PO and sub-offices, was the crucial count of how many POs were in operations at the start of CIP. 3 of these POs did not start operation and their LCDS were never used.

(End) The logical end to this exhibit was the major expansion after mid-1899, where a new cancellators were locally made, commonly called the bilingual (bisected) marking or Small Circular Date Stamp (LCDS), as well as rectangular markings (so-called tombstones) and other branch office markings as the number of PO has expanded into several hundred from the original 25 main office and sub offices.

Treatment: Treatment of this exhibit follows the exact order of the main and sub offices, where it was called as "Postal Boundary" as listed in "*The Postal Guide*" 1899, which were the official PO rules and regulations that were enforced from the start of CIP in 1897. It listed the Head Office Peking first, then from north to central, from Chungking which was upstream Yangtze to downstream Shanghai, turning south through the coastal port cities. Those mail offices and sub-office that were not in operations after mid-1899 were not included, as it was passed the scope of this exhibit.

Inclusions: The story would not be complete without showing the fore-runners usages, the Customs Post items. Those POs that had a corresponding Customs PO (some did not) have usages shown. Each PO would then close with a Bilingual marking (ERD: 1899 May) which was the logical close to this exhibit as it was past the development period of CIP.

Markings shown: 1) Large Circular Date Stamps LCDS; 2) 6-bars locally made Pakua markings, a stop-gap measure and were not widely used and recorded for a short time only; 3) Bilingual PAID markings, research indicated that these were when stamps were not available; 4) Customs Mail Matter marking (official use); 5) the small "IPO tieprint" markings used to prevent the foreign PO from being stolen used after 1899 April; 6) locally made oval markings; 7) Shanghai Local Post marking, that was still operational during this period; 8) "R" and other registration markings (varies with POs); 9) "T" and other postage due markings; 10) the triple ring "Postage Paid" marking, Peking; 11) "Do not Demand, Do not Pay" instructional marking; 12) "Return to Sender" bilingual marking; Each PO then close with showing 13) Bilingual (bisect) markings after 1899 May. Forerunner are shown with 14) "Customs PO" markings and seal markings.

Usages: Besides registration and postage due usage are shown, since China was not a UPU member until 1914, all mail sent outside of China needed additional stamps of UPU countries and these were the "Combination covers". If the company or the individual had an account with CIP, then just a marking, e.g. LCDS, would be applied to indicate payment of internal postage and no additional Chinese stamps were necessary and these were the "Prepaid covers". Official covers were shown with Customs Mail Matter covers, which was abandoned after 1897. About 2/3 of the exhibit has covers/cards/wrappers showing combination or prepaid usages.

Rate: The CIP rate for internal/domestic rate for the entire period was 2 cents while the external rate was 10 cents for the basic ½ oz. unit. The printed matter rate for internal/domestic rate was 1 cent and the external rate was 2 cents. Registration was 5 cents for internal/domestic and 10 cents for external/foreign. Mail to Macau and Hong Kong were treated as internal/domestic rate, several are shown in this exhibit.

An exception was the rare "Winter Rate". A 12-cents (under ¼ oz.) and a 14-cents (under ½ oz.) Winter rate covers are shown used from the Peking Head Office. Reference is based on Postal History Society of China's *The Journal*, Vol 2, no. 1 (2002) and China Stamp Society's *China Clipper* Mar, 2016. Another exception was an interim 7 ½ cents rate and a 15 cents rate only recorded used from Chefoo PO (only 3 of each recorded).

Route: Internal/domestic items usually had some kind of a transit marking on back. Shanghai was the most common transit mark on the back. The mail route was rather simple as Peking and Shanghai are the hubs and all mail routes radiated from these 2 centers. Yangtze mail were all linked by river boats from Chungking all the way downstream to Shanghai. External/foreign mail north of the Yangtze and those along the Yangtze usually went through the corresponding Foreign PO in Shanghai. British, French, German, Russian and US each had its PO set up at Shanghai. Mail south of Wenchow are usually recorded used in combination with Hong Kong stamps and these would go through Hong Kong. Exceptions to these will be highlighted (Note the 2 separate French and German prepaid items used from Swatow PO sent to Europe).

Research and Self-study: The exhibitor with a group of researcher started the "Postal History Society of China" or PHSoCh, and was the Editing Team Leader for its publication *The Journal* (APRL has copy). The exhibitor published the survey of the Large Circular Date Stamp (LCDS) or so-called Dollar Chop in *The Journal*, Vol 1, no. 4 (2002). The survey for the IPO Tieprints were published in *The Journal*, Vol 1, no. 2 (2001). The survey for the recorded covers of the Inspector General of Post, Robert Hart, was published in *The Journal*, Vol 1, no. 1 (2001). The survey for postage due covers was published in *The Journal* Vol 1, no. 3 (2002).

As a direct comparison of the exhibitor census/survey data versus published census/survey, a Hong Kong PH researcher published in his books on HK Queen Victoria stamp usages on "Combination covers used from Chefoo" as 3 only in his census/survey. The exhibitor's census/survey for the same combination covers stood currently at 118 (as of 2018 Dec)!

Rarity and Difficulty of Acquisition: Rare items will have rarity statement stated at the bottom of the item.

Besides those surveys conducted by the exhibitor (already stated above in Research and Self-study), for IPO Tieprint on covers, additional rarity ratings were from Patrick Pearson's 1991 updated of F.W. Webb's *The Philatelic and Postal History of Hong Kong and the Treaty Ports of China and Japan* and these would be worded as "less than 5 recorded". Additional rarity rating on the Bilingual PAID markings were from Jeffrey Schneider survey in *Asian Philatelist*, Vol 1, pg. 59-86 (2010). Additional rarity rating on Customs Mail Matter markings were from Jeffrey Schneider's survey in *Asian Philatelist*, Vol 4, pg. 34-70 (2013). Additional rarity rating on Winter covers were from Marc Symen's survey in *The Journal*, Vol 2, no 1, pg. 3-17 (2002) and *China Clipper* 2016.

Important Items: 1) The Large Dragon covers as forerunners: only 356 covers with China's first Customs Post Office stamp issue, the Large Dragons, are recorded by J.B. Whang in *A Comprehensive Illustration on Covers of Chinese Large Dragons*, 1997. Of the 9 cities/POs where these were recorded used (it is still debatable whether the Ichang covers are genuine), usage from 4 cities are shown by 5 covers from Peking, Tientsin, Chefoo (2 covers, showing both Customs and seal markings) and Chinkiang.

2) There are many Earliest Recorded Date and Latest Recorded Date usages throughout the exhibit according to different published census/surveys.

3) Customs PO as forerunners, all items from Ichang PO, Kiungchow PO (2 items) and Swatow PO are very rare (please read respective rarity statements based on survey on page)

4) LCDS, all items for Shasi PO, Lungchow PO (2 items), Kiungchow PO (2 items) and Hangchow PO are very rare (please read respective rarity statements based on survey on page)

5) Also, note special statements according to usages on rarity based on surveys, e.g. "only recorded prepaid on Hong Kong PS card (with this marking)" or "1 of 2 recorded combination cover with French stamps (with this marking)".

6) Only recorded where the Chinese Lunar Date and the Western Calendar date on CDS did not match on the LCDS on Chungking PO cover 1898 Aug 2 (2 covers). These are the only recorded items that have been recorded on all LCDS (Discovery by exhibitor)

7) 1 of 2 recorded where the year slug (should have been 25th year) was replaced by the month (first "Jin") only for Hankow PO Combination Postage Due item for 1899 Feb 18 (Discovery by exhibitor).

Condition: So-called "best possible" condition is not recorded on Chinese covers of this period. Average condition is the norm for PH items of this period from China.

References: (Primary) *The Postal Guide*, 1899, Director General of Post, China, Postal Publication, series no. 152, 1984.