

Development of Chinese Imperial Post Office 1897-99

Transformation from Customs Post Office

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

Time Period and History: 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, but earlier for 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 postal historian earmarked this as the "proper" start of operation of CIP. The fact that only 30 cancellators, the 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. However, 3 of these PO did not open and their LCDS were never recorded used.

Inclusions: It would not be complete without showing the forerunners usages, the Customs Post items. For those POs that had a corresponding Customs PO, many of these are shown and each will close with an item with a Bilingual (bisected) CDS. This is the logical ending, as it was past the developmental period of CIP. Since after mid-1899, with the start of the Bilingual (bisected) markings there were the undated rectangular markings (so-called tombstones), other branch office, sub-office and postal drawer markings which showed the number of operating POs had exploded to several hundred from the original 25 main offices and sub offices.

Treatment: Exhibit follows the exact order of the main and sub offices, where it was called "Postal Boundary" in *The Postal Guide*, 1899, which was 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, and turning south through the coastal port cities. Those mail and sub offices that were not operational after mid-1899 were not included in exhibit.

Markings: Besides the LCDS, shown were the locally made 6-bars Pakua markings, which was a stop-gap measure and were not widely used but for a few months only. Bilingual PAID markings and Customs Mail Matter markings (official use) were also recorded, plus the small "IPO tieprint" markings recorded used after 1899 April. There were the locally made oval markings and others from sub-offices, as well as Shanghai

Local Post that was still operational during this period. Postage due, registration and instructional markings were also shown.

Usages: China was not a UPU member until 1914, all mail sent outside of China needed additional stamps from UPU countries and these were on the "Combination covers". If a company or an individual had an account with CIP, then just a marking, i.e. LCDS, would be applied to indicate payment of internal postage and no additional Chinese stamps were necessary and these were the "Prepaid covers".

Plan	
	Fore-runner: Robert Hart / Wen Pao Chu
1	Peking (Postal Boundary)
1a	suboffice: Paoting
2	Newchwang
3	Tientsin
3a	suboffice: Taku
4	Chefoo/Yentai
4a	suboffice: Tangchow
4b	suboffice: Wei Hai Wei
5	Chungking
6	Ichang
7	Shasi
8	Hankow
9	Kiukiang
10	Wuhu
11	Nanking
12	Chinkiang
12a	suboffice: Yangchow
12b	suboffice: Tsingkiangpu
13	Shanghai
13a	suboffice: Woosung
14	Soochow
15	Ningpo
16	Hangchow
17	Wenchow
18	Foochow
18a	suboffice: Pagoda Anchorage
19	Amoy
20	Swatow
21	Canton
22	Wuchow
23	Pakhoi
24	Kiungchow
25	Lungchow
	Epilog: Major Expansion after 1899

Reference: *The Postal Guide*, Director General of Post, China, 1899.