

The Hong Kong "China" Overprints

On Stamps and Stationery



Earliest known use of "CHINA" overprint

JA 2 17

(January 2 [partial numeral], 1917, Amoy)

The "China" overprints were issued January 1, 1917

The exhibit

This is a traditional exhibit of the stamps and postal stationery overprinted "China" for use in the Treaty Ports. The exhibit shows the different stamps, stationery, and varieties used at the Treaty Ports during this period. It shows usages by rates, providing specific examples. Finally, it illustrates representative usages from each of the Treaty Ports' post offices. The exhibit attempts to clarify and expand upon the body of knowledge previously known on this subject.

Background

During the early part of the 19th century, Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States attempted to increase trade with China. The currency used for the purchase of Chinese goods was, in many cases, opium. Attempts by the emperor to stop the opium trade led to the "Opium Wars."

After the war, in 1840-1841, Great Britain obtained commercial privileges, including the right to maintain a postal service in a number of Chinese ports. Beginning in 1862, the stamps of Hong Kong were used in these "Treaty Ports," and can be identified by their postal markings.

The overprints

In 1916 the British Post Offices in China began overprinting stamps and stationery for use in the Treaty Ports. This was done because the exchange rate difference between Hong Kong and the ports caused confusion and as well, was encouraging currency speculation.

An initial consignment of overprinted stamps and stationery was dispatched from De La Rue & Co., the printers in Great Britain, to Hong Kong on November 6, 1916 for use in the Treaty Ports effective January 1, 1917.

The Treaty Ports Post Offices

There were ten British Treaty Ports in China on January 1, 1917. They were Amoy, Canton, Chefoo, Foochow, Hankow, Hoihow, Ningpo, Shanghai, Swatow and Tientsin. These Treaty Port post offices closed November 30, 1922.

The British also leased Wei Hai Wei as a Naval base, which made it a British Colony and under British jurisdiction. The two offices at Wei Hai Wei — Liu Kung Tau and Port Edward — are listed with the Treaty Ports since "China" overprints were used at these post offices. Postal rates from these agencies differed from the remaining Treaty Ports because they used the military as opposed to UPU rates. The Wei Hai Wei post offices closed on September 30, 1930.

Exhibit Plan

1. The Overprinted Stamps
 - 1.1 Settings & Formats
 - 1.2. First Issue 1917 - 1921
 - 1.3. Second Issue 1922 - 1930
 - 1.4. Perfins
2. The Overprinted Postal Stationery
 - 2.1. Postal Cards & Wrapper
 - 2.2. Reply Cards
 - 2.3. Registered Envelopes
3. Usages by Rates
 - 3.1. Agency to Agency & Hong Kong
 - 3.2. Agency to China
 - 3.3. Foreign Destinations
4. Usages by Treaty Ports Post Offices
 - 4.1. Amoy
 - 4.2. Canton
 - 4.3. Chefoo
 - 4.4. Foochow
 - 4.5. Hankow
 - 4.6. Hoihow
 - 4.7. Ningpo
 - 4.8. Shanghai
 - 4.9. Swatow
 - 4.10. Tientsin
 - 4.11. Wei Hai Wei
5. Conclusion

Original research is shown in red boxes.

Items of significance are matted in red.