

## The 'King of Chinese Stamps'

Generations of Chinese stamp collectors cherished Red Revenue Stamps converted in 1897 by overprints to Postage Stamps with five denominations from 1 cent to \$ 5 Dollars. Their attractive bright red colour traditionally symbolizing good luck. The rarest of these issues being the iconic 'Red Revenue - Small 1 Dollar' overprint. The 'Red Revenue - Small 1 Dollar' ranks amongst the most important stamps of the world, commonly called the 'King of Chinese Postage Stamps'. Only 32 examples are recorded to date!

## History of the Chinese Postal Organisation



*Sir Robert Hart*

In 1860 a Maritime Customs Service was established to collect import and export revenues on goods arriving or leaving the Chinese Treaty Ports which were open to foreign trade. A regular service to carry instructions from the head office in Shanghai to the various ports was soon organized by a newly formed Postal Department within the Customs, letters were also accepted from the public. On the initiative of Sir Robert Hart the issue of three "adhesive" postage stamps with face values in Candarin of silver was decided upon. This mail service, under the auspices of Sir Robert Hart, was strictly organized and independently operated by the Customs with the stamps first issued in July, 1878.

## From a 'Customs Post Department' to 'Chinese Imperial Post'

The interior of China was not served by the 'Customs Post'. The foundation of the 'Chinese Imperial Post' was initiated to take over official charge of the Posts throughout the Empire from January 1897. China also intended to become member of the Universal Postal Union and only the official Government could be admitted as a member. Li Hung Chang, the Viceroy of Nanking, played a lead role in inducing the Emperor Kwang Hsu to sign the edict for the establishment of the Imperial Post by explaining how much profit was derived by Great Britain, the United States and other countries from their postal services.



*Customs House Shanghai*

## Change of Postal Currency

Once the Government took official charge of the Post Office, the business and thus the need for large quantities of stamps grew rapidly. With the change from the Customs Post to 'Chinese Imperial Post' a change in the postal currency was required, from Candarin to the Internationally accepted (Mexican) silver dollar. For the new postal currency a new series of stamps was ordered from Japan. However production and delivery was delayed. Therefore it was decided that the remaining stocks of the existing stamps should be provisionally surcharged with new values in cents and dollars. Two types of surcharges were applied: 'Small figures of value' and later 'Large figures of value'. The Chinese characters are exactly the same, only the numerals of value are much larger and thicker in the second type of surcharge.

## Unissued 3 cents Revenue Stamp Surcharged for Postal duty

Due to the limited stock of existing Postage stamps to be surcharged it was decided to surcharge a quantity of 600'000 copies of the unissued 3 cents Revenue stamps already received from Britain, printed by Waterlow & Sons, in London. These revenue stamps were very skilfully produced and printed in a bright red colour. The surcharges were applied by the Statistical Department of the Customs and partly by a foreign printing establishment of Shanghai. With the provisional 'Small 1 Dollar' surcharge only very few panes of 25 of the 'Red Revenue' stamps were overprinted as the Post Office considered the overprint too small for the high value. The 'King of Chinese Postage Stamps' was born!



Arthur J. Hind



Adolphus Diercking



Josiah K. Lilly Jr.



2398

Gibbons

Start price in CHF    Start price approx. €

**2398** "Small Dollar" 1897 (Jan): Red Revenue \$ 1 on 3 c. deep red, with stop after dollar, the famous unused example, centred slightly to left of outstanding fresh colour and delightful appearance, fresh and very fine with merest trace of three iron spots on the large part original gum. A truly exceptional example of this iconic stamp, a great rarity with just 32 unused examples recorded, many of the 32 have faults and staining whilst this is in wondrously fresh condition, being number 13 on the Kwang-sheng Huang listing (1983) and with excellent previous provenance. Signed Holcombe. Cert. Sven Erik Beckeman (1993) Chan 86/ Michel 33/I = € 800'000/Scott 83 = \$ 900'000/Gi = £ 850'000.

This magnificent stamp is number 13 in the Huang Kuang Sheng treatise on the "Small One Dollar" and corresponds to reference 'III-5' in "The Revenue Surcharges of China 1897", Volume I, published by the Directorate General of Posts, Ministry of Communications of the Republic of China (1984); in this reference the Small One Dollars are split into three Types, this being 'Type III' with the overprint partly struck over 'REVENUE' at base, illustration number 5 on page 38. The original listing was done by the Chan catalogue in 1947 (page 50-51), where this stamp is listed as number 6 of the 23 then known examples; at this date Diercking owned seven of the 23 recorded examples. Whilst the catalogue listing follows the order by value, it should be noted that the Small One Dollar was the first of the 3 c. Red Revenues to be overprinted with 'Equivalent to One Dollar'. After a small number had been surcharged it was felt that the value indicated was too small for a high value stamp and the decision was made to use larger characters to indicate the value.

*Provenance: Collection Arthur J. Hind, Harmers, London, May 20, 1935, lot 133.*

*Collection A. Diercking of Shanghai, Harmers, London, 5-6 November 1956 lot 212*

*Collection Josiah K. Lilly, Siegel, New York, 4-5 December 1968, lot 460;*

*Collection 'Ming' Part II, Corinphila sale 79, 29 September, 1988, lot 4244.*

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\* **300'000** (€255'000)