

United States Postal Agency in China

During the period from late 1850's until World War II, the world's commercial powers would set up postal agencies in other nations to facilitate business. In most cases, stamps from the foreign nation would be overprinted with the host city of origin and sold locally so that mail could enter directly into the foreign nation's postal system.

From 1919-22, the United States Offices in China Shanghai issued special US stamps with surcharged values in local currency, valid to the amount of their original values for the prepayment of postage on mail dispatched from the US postal agency in Shanghai to addresses in the United States.

This series, "Offices in China" (18 stamps - Scott K series) offer both a history lesson and a collecting challenge. Why were these stamps issued?

These stamps are the product of the political unrest during the early formation of the Republic of China. The saga begins in 1908 when young government officials, military officers, and students began to advocate the overthrow of the ruling Qing Dynasty and the creation of a republic over frustration by the Qing court's resistance to reform and by China's weakness in dealings with foreign powers.



Scott 906

They were inspired by the revolutionary ideas of Sun Yat-sen. When Sun Yat-sen was asked by one of the leading revolutionary generals to what he ascribed the success, he said, *"To Christianity more than to any other single cause. Along with its ideals of religious freedom, and along with these it inculcates everywhere a doctrine of universal love and peace. These ideals appeal to the Chinese; they largely caused the Revolution, and they largely determined its peaceful character."*

The Wuchang Uprising revolutionary military uprising began on October 10, 1911 in Wuhan. The provisional government of the Republic of China was formed in Nanjing on March 12, 1912 with Sun Yat-sen as President, but Sun was forced to turn power over to Yuan Shikai, who commanded the New Army and was Prime Minister under the Qing government, as part of the agreement to let the last Qing monarch abdicate.

Over the next few years, Yuan proceeded to abolish the national and provincial assemblies, and declared himself emperor in late 1915. Yuan's imperial ambitions were fiercely opposed by his subordinates; faced with the prospect of rebellion, he abdicated in March 1916, and died in June of that year. His death left a political vacuum in China; the republican government was all but shattered. This ushered in the warlord era, during which much of the country was in chaos, ruled by shifting coalitions of competing provincial military leaders.

In 1919, the new, anti Sun, **May Fourth Movement** (later Communist) was formed as a response to the terms imposed on China by the Treaty of Versailles ending World War I, but quickly became the protest movement over the domestic situation in China. Its focus was on discrediting of liberal Western philosophy amongst Chinese intellectuals was leading to a more radical line of thought. This was the root cause for the irreconcilable conflict between the left and right in China that would dominate Chinese politics until this day. As a result of these "squabbles", the unified Chinese government postal services became nonexistent and necessitated additional fee/surcharge to ensure cost were paid to move the mail into the foreign nation's postal system.

In 1920, Sun established a revolutionary base in south China, and set out to reunite the nation. With Soviet assistance, he entered into an alliance with the fledgling Communist Party of China and by end of 1922, Sun had restored the Chinese postal system and the surcharge was removed. It should be noted that after Sun's death in 1925, one of his protégés, Chiang Kai-shek, seized control of the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) and succeeded in bringing most of south and central China under its rule.



Original 1919 issue – Scott K1-K16 (~\$1500.00)



Scott K17 Scott K18

1922 Issue (~\$450.00)