

The Changeling.

By Travis Searls and Simon Watt

This is a story of a stamp that was chemically treated by individuals seeking to change its color, the aim being to sell examples of these on the philatelic market as a variety, thereby making a profit. More interestingly though, this is a tale of co-operation between philatelists and dealers in America and China to uncover the fraud.

As most readers will know, initially China did not recognize Manchukuo or the use of stamps from Manchukuo as postage. Chinese postmasters obliterated the “Manchukuo” inscription on the stamps and applied postage due, thus costing the sender triple. The Sino-Manchukuo agreement of 1934 stated that postage stamps from Manchukuo would not bear the name “Manchukuo”. Now showing only the official symbol of Manchukuo, a five pointed stylized orchid, these stamps came to be known as “China Mail.”

In April 1937, as a result of a postal rate increase, the Manchukuo Post Office issued a set of three new stamps based upon the China Mail designs. This was the fourth China Mail issue. The values were 2 ½ fen, 5 fen, and 13 fen. Scott numbers 112, 113 and 115 apply. The stamp we are concerned with is the 5f Black, Scott 113, issued on 22nd April, 1937. The chemical forgery had its color changed from black to a reddish brown, close to the color used for the 13 fen (see below).



Scott 112



Scott 113



Scott 115

Before we move on to discussing the changeling, we draw your attention to the Scott catalogue numbers. You will notice that the three stamps shown above are numbered 112, 113 and 115. So what happened to the Scott number 114?

The number 114 was assigned to the 8f stamp. Scott assumed that, as with previous China Mail issues, the set would contain four stamps. This was indeed the case, but instead of creating a new printing of the 8f, the existing 8f third China Mail stamp, issued in 1936, continued in use. When the error was discovered, number 114 was dropped from the catalogue and the gap in the numbering remains until this day.

Red-brown copies identical to the 5f black, Scott 113, began to appear on the philatelic market towards the end of 1937. Scott's very quickly found out about these stamps and decided the red-brown 5f represented a genuine new issue. They listed the new stamp in the January 1938 edition of Scott's

Monthly Journal, awarding it the catalogue number 120. It should be understood that in the 1930's and 40's there was much competition amongst the producers of stamp catalogues, all of them wanting to be the first to bring readers news of anything new.

MANCHUKUO.
Type of 1935.
1937 Wmkd. Characters. (242)
Perf. 12½.
120 . A10 5f red brown

Above is the entry from the January 1938 edition of Scott's Monthly Journal

First reports linked these questionable stamps a dealer in Tientsin and an example was said to have been sold for 500 francs. At this time, all known specimens appeared to be used copies with postmarks dated July 1937 and the town name unreadable. Specialist collectors were unconvinced. Examples of the 2f stamp of the previous China Mail issue had been subjected to chemical tampering, changing the color from yellow-green to light blue as noted in Alexander Schumann's book, *Special Catalogue of the Stamps of Manchoukuo, 1941*. Collectors were not going to be caught twice by the same scam.

The China Stamp Society had a dedicated Manchurian section in 1938 led by Major Elbridge Colby. Major Colby corresponded regularly with other collectors, writers and dealers, and it was not long before he started receiving letters voicing concerns about the authenticity of Scott 120.

Major Colby wrote an article in the China Clipper (Vol. II, #6, pages 5 & 6, Aug 1938) raising some of these doubts. Shortly after receiving the article from Major Colby, the editor of the China Clipper was contacted by a Society member claiming to have made a perfect reproduction of the 5f changeling using a "common substance". Nobody had been able to obtain any real information about the red-brown 5f. Collectors such as Mr B. Rio, a teacher based in Kirin, who had obtained a copy, felt that the stamp was genuine. The English firm, Stanley Gibbons thought it was most likely a fake. Opinion was divided.



Scott 120

This is a scan of a color changed 5 fen, taken from the collection of Maj. Elbridge Colby.

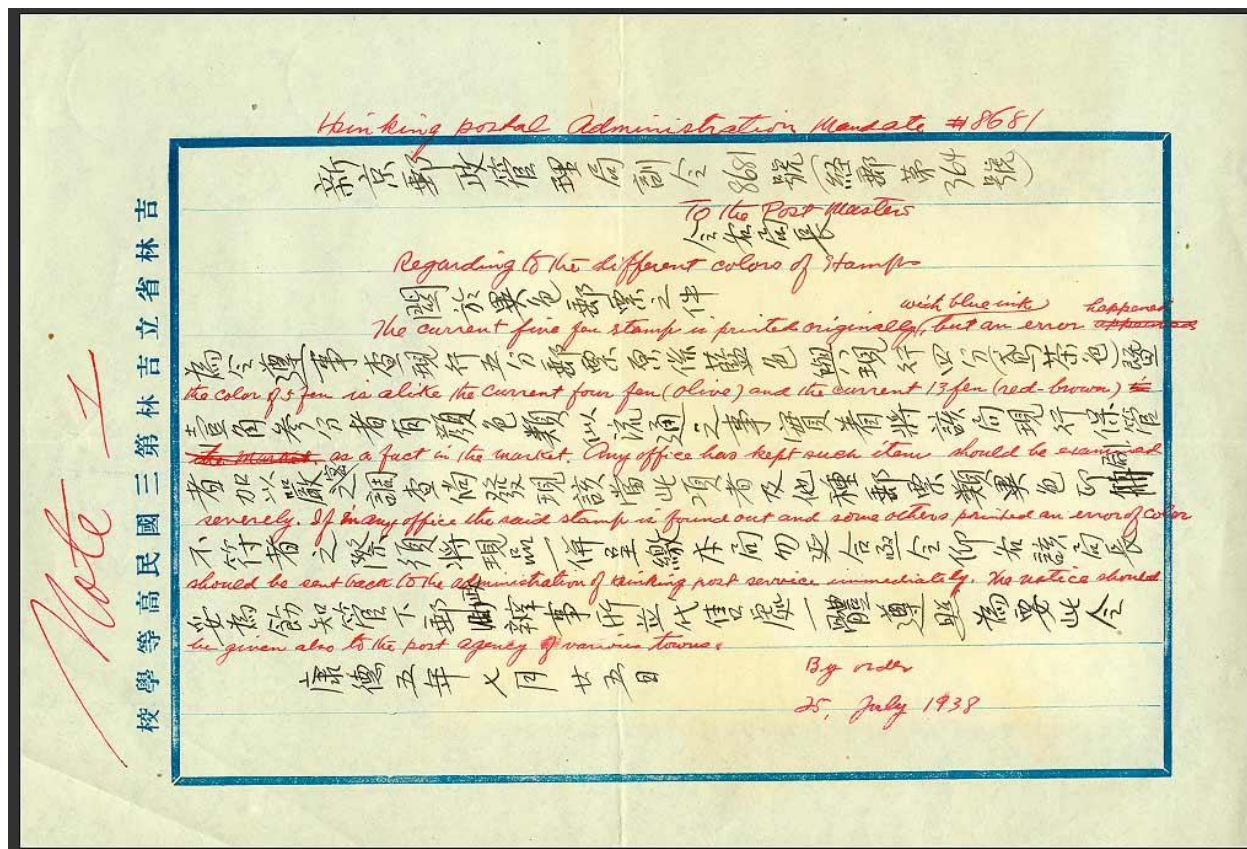
Roy Akagi, a respected author and collector, was at this time the New York representative of the South Manchurian Railway Company (SMR). He visited the SRM Headquarters in Dairen in early 1938 and then travelled on to Hsinking and Harbin. In the course of doing this, he made enquiries of the Manchukuo

post office asking if the ref-brown 5f was a new issue or a variety. Officials at the Post Office of Manchukuo assured Mr Akagi that the stamp had never been printed in brown.

On the basis of the color change experiment and the information supplied by Roy Akagi, Major Colby wrote to Mr Hugh M. Clark, the president of Scott Publications Inc., in July of 1938, to say that he was "firmly convinced the stamp was a fake".

On August 4th, 1938, Mr Clark replied to Major Colby's letter saying that he had also had a letters from Roy Akagi and from A. S. Yaroshevitch, a dealer in Harbin, both saying the same thing. In his reply Mr Clark writes "The experiments you showed me in your letter of 18th convinced me without a shadow of a doubt. I am keeping your letter with samples in our Reference Collection. The stamp is being omitted from the next catalogue. I am not even leaving it in Tentative Listings". Sadly this information arrived too late, as the 1939 catalogue had already gone to print. The stamp was deleted from later issues. This is why you will not find a number 120 in the Manchukuo section of today's Scott catalogue.

You might have thought the debate would end there, but no! Major Colby received a further letter from the Kirin academic Mr B. Rio. Included with this letter was what was reputed to be a transcript of Manchukuo Postal Administration Mandate #8681, issued on July, 25th, 1938.



This is a photograph of the translation sent by Mr Rio to Major Colby. The blue characters read "Kirin Provincial Third Higher Middle School" (吉林省立吉林第三国民高等学校). This is a transcript on school notepaper and not the original official postal document.

The translation reads as follows:

Hsinking Postal Administration Mandate No. 8681

To The Postmasters; Regarding the Different Colors of Stamps

The current five fen stamp is printed originally with blue ink, but an error happened, to the color of the 5 fen is alike the current four fen (olive) and the current 13 fen (red-brown) as a fact in the market.

Any office has kept such an item should be examined severely. If any office the said stamp is found out and some others printed an error color should be sent back to the administration of Hsinking post service immediately. The notice should be given also to the post agency in various towns.

By Order 25th July 1938

Shortly after receiving this information, Major Colby wrote another article for *The China Clipper* (Vol. III, #2, page 21, Dec 1938), informing members of this new development and printing a somewhat tidied and corrected version of the above text. The validity of the stamp was again disputed.

Akagi never doubted that the stamp was a changeling and was convinced that Mandate 8681 was simply an attempt by the Postal Authorities in Hsinking to find out what was happening, having been pestered by several overseas collectors. This view was supported by dealers such as Harry Tamer of New York and A. S. Yaroshevitch of Harbin, the publishers Scott, and Stanley Gibbons, and many of the philatelists of the China Stamp Society Manchurian Section. The main dissenter seems to have been Alexander Schumann who, on page 50 of his 1941 catalogue reprinted Mandate 8681 and stated that this was proof that the stamp was genuine (he may have changed his mind later).

In America and England, the collection of Manchukuo stamps came to a complete stop as a result of Pearl Harbor. Many dealers, such as Tamer and Schumann, issued their last catalogues in 1941 and many collectors sold their collections at this time. To collect the stamps of Japan or any of its satellites was considered unpatriotic.

Following the war, nothing of real significance seems to have been written about the philately of Manchukuo until Helen K Zirkle wrote her book *The Postage Stamps and Commemorative Cancellations of Manchoukuo*. By this time it seems to have been generally accepted that the red-brown 5f stamp, once known as Scott 120, was a chemical changeling.

As a footnote to the above, the authors of this article conducted a series of experiments to see if it was possible to reproduce the chemical change described above. The answer is that our test #96 produced a very satisfactory reproduction, and no, we are not going to tell you how we did it.



Test 96