National Postal Museum Opens “Pacific Exchange: China & U.S. Mail”

Exhibition Features Stamps and Mail Never Before on Display

The “Pacific Exchange: China & U.S. Mail” exhibition opened today in the Postmasters Gallery of the Smithsonian’s National Postal Museum. It tells the story of the Chinese and U.S. relationship through the unique lens of stamps and mail. U.S. artwork and die proofs related to China and the Lunar New Year are featured and organized into three thematic areas: commerce, culture and community. The sections about commerce and culture focus on the decades between 1860 and 1980; the section on community tells the story of Chinese Americans from the Gold Rush to today’s celebration of the Lunar New Year.

“We look forward to sharing, publicly for the first time, stunningly beautiful pieces from our international collection,” said Allen Kane, director of the museum. “This exhibition provides additional incentive for people around the world to want to visit our William H. Gross Stamp Gallery.”

The U.S. and China are the world’s largest economies, and they share a complicated history. In recent years, about 2½ million Chinese have become avid stamp collectors.

“Stamps and mail never before on public display will offer insight into the complex relationship between the two countries,” said Cheryl R. Ganz, exhibition curator. “Viewing this cultural exchange will offer a deeper understanding of each nation’s history and people in relationship to the other.”

Highlights of the exhibition include an 1849 letter to an American opium trader in Canton, very rare proofs of stamps from the China Bureau of Engraving and Printing (1912–1928), original artwork for U.S. Postal Service Lunar New Year postage stamps and the iconic map-design error of the People’s Republic of China, of which less than 10 are known to exist in private hands.

On Saturday, March 8, Ganz will give a talk and a curator-led tour of the exhibition. She will speak about China’s founding father Sun Yat-sen on American postage stamps at 2 p.m. in the
museum’s Byrne Education Loft, followed by a tour of the exhibition at approximately 2:45 p.m. Before and after the talk and tour, she will autograph copies of the exhibition catalog at the museum store from 1–1:45 p.m. and 4:15–5 p.m. The 50-page, full-color catalog is available for purchase for $14.95 in the museum store or online.

A special online version of the exhibit is available, featuring many of the items on exhibit, plus resources and additional images of archival artwork that shows how postage stamp designs evolved.

The National Postal Museum is devoted to presenting the colorful and engaging history of the nation’s mail service and showcasing one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of stamps and philatelic material in the world. It is located at 2 Massachusetts Avenue N.E., Washington, D.C., across from Union Station. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 25). For more information about the Smithsonian, call (202) 633-1000 or visit the museum website at www.postalmuseum.si.edu.

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