



Stamp Booklets at the Agencies in China, 1904 to 1930

by Paul Campion

A stamp booklet for use in Hong Kong and at the Agencies was introduced on 1st January, 1904 and until 31st December, 1910 sales at the Agencies were combined with sales in Hong Kong for the purpose of reporting to London.

Use of the 'Imperial Penny Post Scheme' at the Agencies, however, generated significant losses for Hong Kong and on 1st January, 1911 London directly assumed the financial responsibility. In 1910, combined booklet sales were exactly 9,000: 2,717 sold at the Agencies (2.1% of Agency stamp sales) and 6,283 sold in Hong Kong (1.9% of Hong Kong stamp sales). After 1st January, 1911 booklets became unavailable at the Agencies and booklets sold in Hong Kong were amended to remove all reference to the Agencies.

There was, however, still demand for booklets at the Agencies and a request was made to London for new Agency booklets. The GPO London wrote to Hong Kong enquiring as to booklets in use there and in March 1912, the Hong Kong PMG sent an example of Hong Kong booklet SG SB4a to London; he explained that they were locally produced. Nothing further happened at that time.

The subject of Agency booklets next arose in 1916 when preparations were being made for the introduction of the 'CHINA' overprints. The GPO London said that there was a difficulty in producing booklets and that it would be preferable for them to be made in Hong Kong. The 'difficulty' was that booklets made in the UK, by De La Rue, were machine made and required a special set of printing plates, in a completely different format to normal sheet stamps; this was expensive and the additional cost could not be justified. As a result of the 1912 correspondence, the GPO London already knew that booklets being sold in Hong Kong were made locally from ordinary sheet stock and their suggestion was for a similar booklet to be made in Hong Kong, for use at the Agencies.

The GPO London wrote to Hong Kong proposing that the cover should show the Royal Coat of Arms and the title: "*British Post Office Agencies in China*" and that the booklets should contain: 16 at 4¢, 12 at 2¢ and 12 at 1¢ – as used in Hong Kong.

In reply the Hong Kong PMG proposed a revised format of: 8 at 2¢, 6 at 4¢ and 6 at 10¢ as this would be more useful given the postage rates at the Agencies, where there was also little use for 1¢ stamps; he further proposed a red cover for the booklets. This was agreed by London and from 1917 to 1922 an annual batch of 5,000 Agency booklets was produced in Hong Kong. Initially booklets contained the 1917 'multiple crown CA' watermark issue (SB1); in 1922 the 'script' watermark issue was used (SB2).

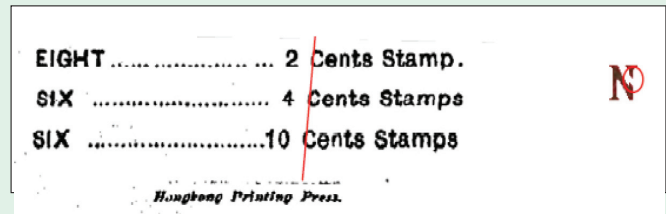
All Agency booklets were made using covers produced by 'Hongkong Printing Press'. The back cover showed: "RATES OF POSTAGE FOR LETTERS". The covers were always printed in black ink. The paper used for the covers was 'stiff wove' but there are some variations in the shade of red from batch to batch. Booklets were assembled by hand; the 3 panes of stamps were inter-leaved with 3 sheets of glassine and the booklets were stapled using a 5/8 inch wire-spool stapler (diameter 1/100 inch). Whilst the back covers of all booklets are identical, the front was adjusted for each batch.

SB1 Type 1 (1917 – 5,000 produced, 1 recorded example) has poor vertical alignment and omits the last “s” in the 2¢ description. [Note: break in ‘N’ of AGENCIES]:



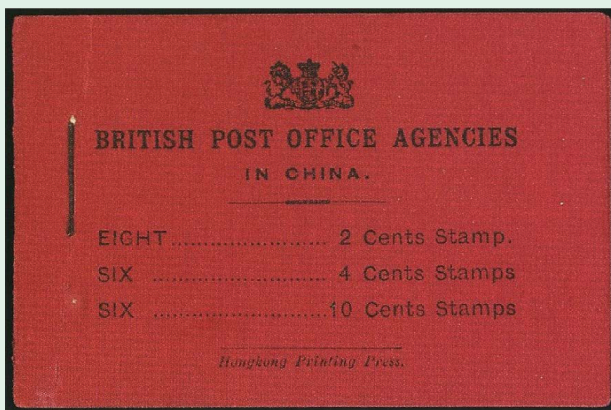
SB1 Type 1

Cavendish March 2004 (#488) ex. Richard Chan



SB1 Type 2 (1918 – 5,000 produced, 2 recorded examples) has improved alignment (the 2¢ and 4¢ lines were moved to the left and the spacing adjusted) but the “s” is still missing in the 2¢ description.

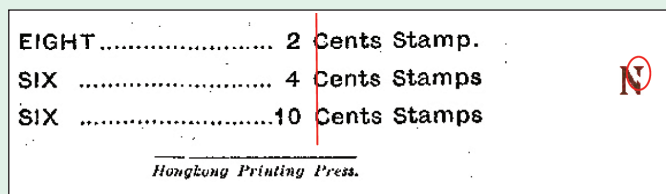
[Note: break in ‘N’ of AGENCIES as Type 1]:



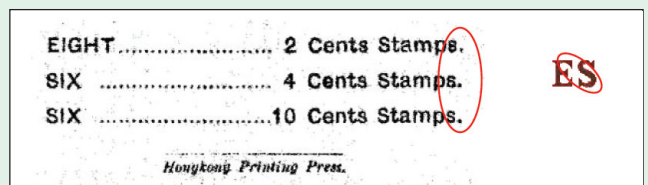
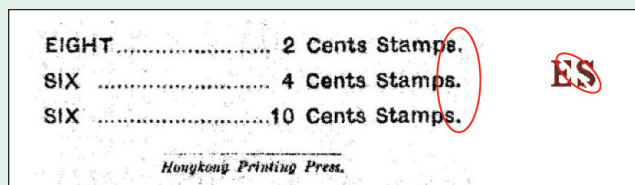
SB1 Type 2

Spink Hong Kong 2001 (#2227), 2002 (#1612) and 2003 (#1184)

[Note: the illustrated booklet contained stamps from the 1922 issue and is therefore SB2 Type 2 (see below) but as the covers are identical and I do not have a good image of SB1 Type 2, I have used this image to illustrate the cover.]



SB1 Type 3 (1919-21 – 15,000 produced, 5 recorded examples) “Stamp.” became “Stamps.” and full stops were added on the 4¢ and 10¢ lines. [Notes: i) break in ‘N’ as Type 1; ii) breaks in ‘ES’ of AGENCIES; iii) the right edge of the ‘S’ of AGENCIES and the added full stops have perfect vertical alignment; iv) varieties of Type 3 exist: the Coat of Arms was moved to the left by 0.7mm and the printer’s name was adjusted; whilst such varieties allow each batch to be identified, they are not as immediately obvious as the differences illustrated here]: -



SB1 Type 3



SB1 Type 4
Spink 2003 (#1183)

SB1 Type 4 (1922 – 1 recorded example). The broken 'N', 'E' and 'S' of 'AGENCIES' were all replaced.

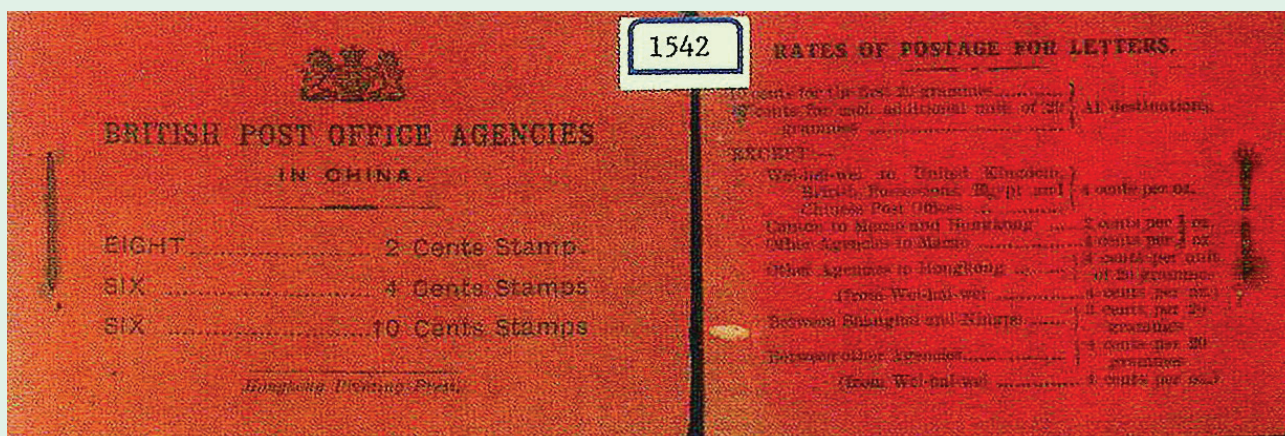
[Note: the new 'S' protrudes 0.5mm beyond a vertical line drawn through the full stops after 'Stamps']

SB2 Type 1 (1922 – 2 recorded examples). This is exactly the same cover as SB1 Type 4 but contains the 1922 'script' issue stamps.

The watermark had no significance in making up a booklet; all that mattered was that it contained the correct number of stamps. It is likely that 5,000 booklets were made up in 1922 containing either issue; the number of each issue is not known. It is even possible that a single booklet might have contained both issues (but none has ever been reported).

The 'script' issue stamps were only available from 1st March, 1922 and by November 1922 Hongkong Printing Press had been replaced by Ye Olde Printerie as printers of booklet covers. Thus the batch of 5,000 booklets produced in 1922 (SB1 Type 4 and SB2 Type 1 combined) must have been produced between these dates.

SB2 Type 2 (1922 – 3 recorded examples). The 1918 (SB1 Type 2) cover is known containing the 1922 'script' issue stamps with 4 interleaving panes. The circumstances surrounding this issue and how many booklets were produced, are not known. All that can be said is that, for some reason, a number of 1918 booklet covers were printed but not used in 1918, and, in 1922 or later, these covers were used to produce additional booklets.



SB2 Type 2
Unitric July 2013 (#1542)

Whilst the exact annual sales numbers of Agency booklets is not known, it is likely that all SB1 type booklets were sold (at the rate of 2% of stamp sales 1917-22, approximately 27,000 booklets would have been sold during the period). Following the closure of all other Agencies on 30th November, 1922, unsold booklets were returned to Hong Kong and later sent to the Wei-hai-wei offices. Sales of both types of SB2 were, most likely, less than 5,000 and were predominantly issued at the Wei-hai-wei offices, which closed on 30th September, 1930. No new booklet covers were printed after 1922.

	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Stamp sales at Agencies:	188,974	167,615	193,062	237,583	275,767	262,655
Stamp sales at Wei-hai-wei (included above):	1921 – \$11,287 and 1922 – \$12,635.					

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