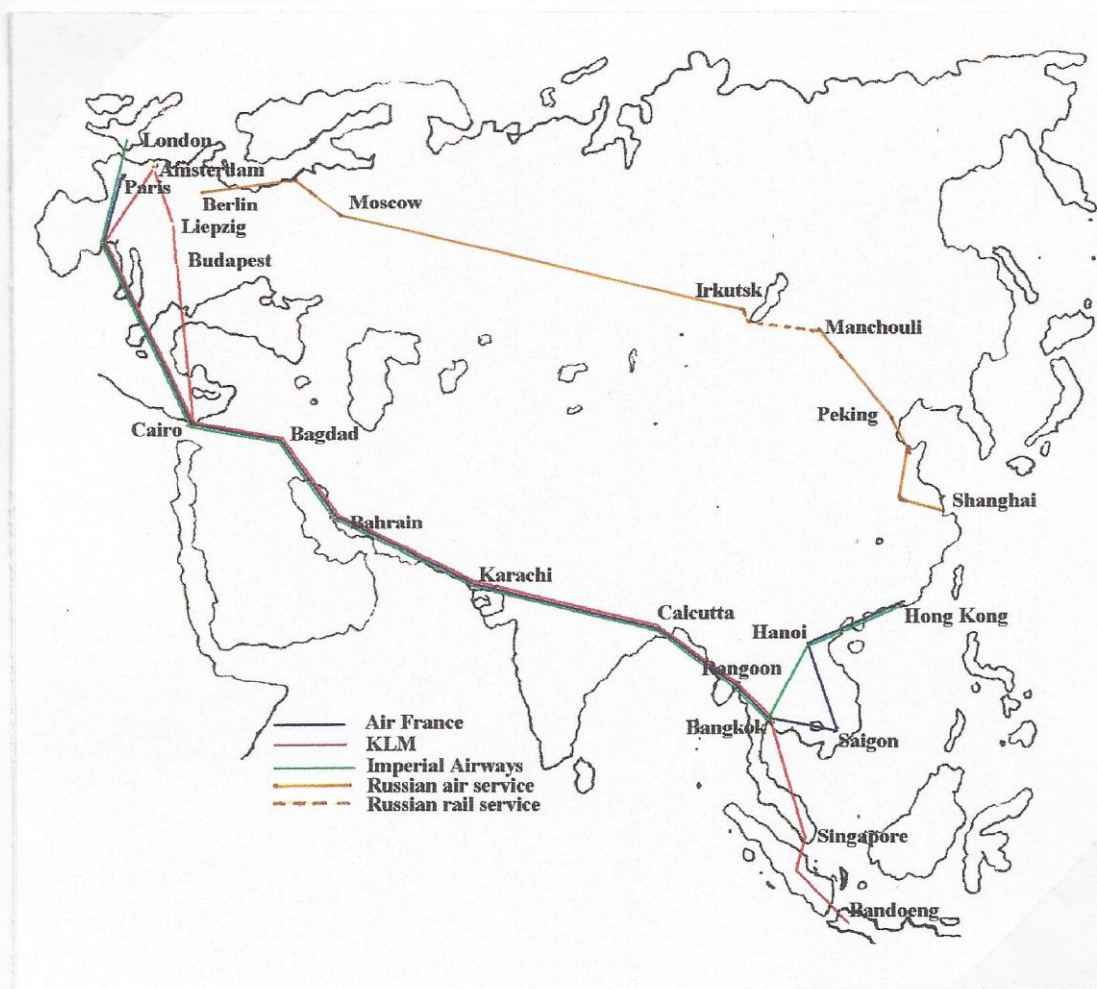


## Airmails from China to Europe in the 1930s

The development of airmail routes within China in the late 1920s and the commercial advantage to be gained from rapid communications between Europe and the Far East lead to rapid developments in International airmails. Countries with colonies or interests in the Far East were not slow to encourage their National airlines to cooperate with the Chinese.



This sketch map shows the KLM Dutch service from Bandoeng, Java to Amsterdam; the Russian service from Shanghai to Moscow, via Irkutsk and onto Berlin; the Air France service from Hong Kong to Paris via Hanoi and Saigon and the Imperial Airways service from Hong Kong to London. This route originally ran via Singapore and then via Bangkok. Internal Chinese feeder routes are not shown.

Rates varied according to the route and carrier chosen by the sender.

Covers showing these routes and rates will be shown.

### *Bibliography:*

- Pingwen Sieh & JL Blackburn: "Postage Rates of China 1867-1980", DG of Posts, Taipei, 1981  
JB MacDonald: "Airposts & Airstamps of China, 1920-1934", Hong Kong, 1942  
J Starr & SJ Mills: "The Chinese Air-Post 1920-1935", The Stowell Printing Co., Federalsburg, 1937

## Internal Air Service

Early Chinese domestic airmails were charged per "zone". Each zone was 1000km. This speeded up transmission within China, meaning a piece of mail may connect with the appropriate ship, but was considerably cheaper than paying the "all-up" air rates to Europe. Prior to 16<sup>th</sup> April 1931, the air fee had to be paid using special airmail stamps or the item was taxed. This process was often continued, although not compulsory.



This front shows the inscription "Air Mail to Shanghai". It was sent from Chungking to Kent on 19<sup>th</sup> December 1932. Thus only the domestic airpost fee was payable.

Rate:

International	25c	
Chungking-Shanghai	<u>30c</u>	(15c/zone, two zones)
	<u>55c</u>	

Equivalent air rates at the time:

Via Russia	\$2.25
Via France	\$3.65

## Internal Air Service

This method of speeding up mail transmission to Europe without entailing excessive costs was widely used.



This cover was sent from Chengtu to London on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1934. It is marked in manuscript "Air Mail to Shanghai" and a handstamp has been applied reading "AIRMAIL SERVICE IN CHINA ONLY". It is believed that this mark was applied in Shanghai to explain why the item had been forwarded by surface mail. Unusually the "Par Avion" label has not been deleted.

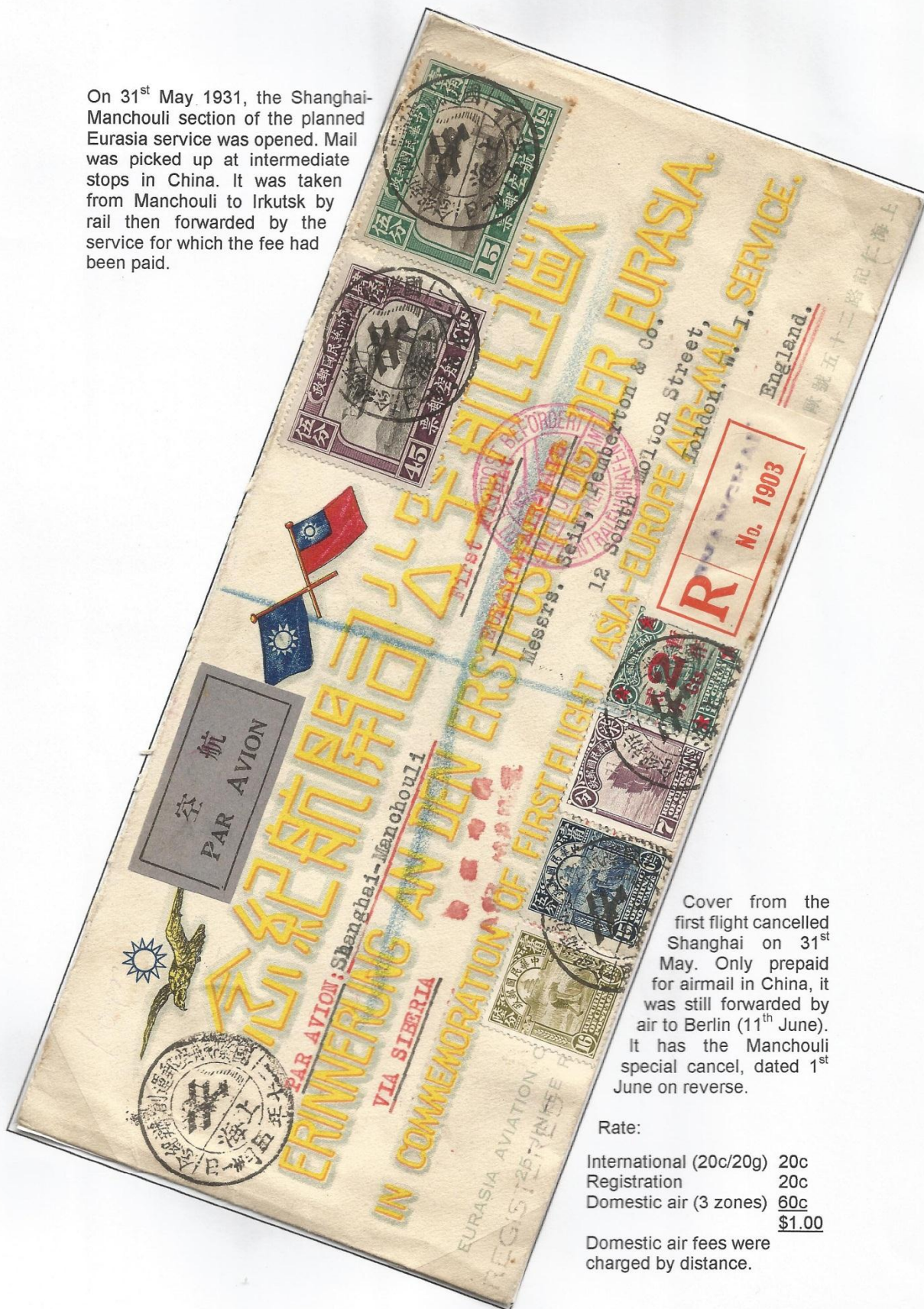
Rate:

International	25c	
Domestic air	<u>50c</u>	(25c/zone, two zones)
	<u>75c</u>	

Note that the stamps used are overprinted "Restricted for use in Szechwan Province". These were introduced to combat currency speculation due to the different value of the dollar in different parts of China.

## The Russian Service

On 31<sup>st</sup> May 1931, the Shanghai-Manchouli section of the planned Eurasia service was opened. Mail was picked up at intermediate stops in China. It was taken from Manchouli to Irkutsk by rail then forwarded by the service for which the fee had been paid.



Cover from the first flight cancelled Shanghai on 31<sup>st</sup> May. Only prepaid for airmail in China, it was still forwarded by air to Berlin (11<sup>th</sup> June). It has the Manchouli special cancel, dated 1<sup>st</sup> June on reverse.

### Rate:

International (20c/20g)	20c
Registration	20c
Domestic air (3 zones)	60c
	<u>\$1.00</u>

Domestic air fees were charged by distance.

## The Russian Service

This cover was also carried on the first flight, but is commercial rather than philatelic. It was posted in Peking, one of the intermediate stops, by a member of the British Legation Guard.



The correct fee was paid to ensure carriage by air all the way to destination. The marking "Par avion de Moscou à Könisberg" had to be applied for it to be flown into Germany. The service was cancelled on 2<sup>nd</sup> July and the whole route scrapped in November 1931.

Rate:

International	20c
Registration	20c
Peking-Manchouli (2 zones)	40c
Irkutsk-Moscow	80c
Moscow-London	60c
	<u>\$2.20</u>



Commemorative cancel:



"To Commemorate the Inauguration of International Airmail Service"  
 "Peking"  
 "20<sup>th</sup> year, 5<sup>th</sup> month, 31<sup>st</sup> day"

## The French Service

From 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1932, when the Shanghai - Manchouli flights ceased, mail was sent by steamer to connect with the French Saigon - Marseilles flights.

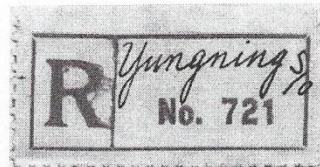


This cover was sent from Yungning (Nanning in Kwangsi in South China) to Essex on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1934. It is marked "registered airmail" and bears the registration label on reverse. A route-marking "Saigon - Marseille" is struck in black over the airmail etiquette. There are backstamps of Lungchow (12<sup>th</sup> Dec), Lang-son / Tonkin (13<sup>th</sup> Dec) and Hanoi R.P. / Tonkin (14<sup>th</sup> Dec).

### Rate:

International (25c/20g)	25c
Air France (69c/5g)	69c
Registration fee	25c
	<u>\$1.09</u>

(marked "5grs")



## The French Service

From January 1935, the line was extended to Hanoi.

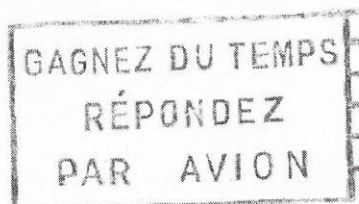
Mail from Yunnan province was then handled at Hanoi, whilst other mail continued to be sent to Saigon.



Hokow (Yunnan) to London, dated 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1936, backstamped "Hanoi R.P." on the 10<sup>th</sup> and Paris on the 20<sup>th</sup>. The "Hanoi-Marseilles" marking has been amended in manuscript "Paris-Londres".

Rate: (0-5g letter)

International (25c/20g)	25c
Air to Marseilles (61c/5g)	61c
Air, Marseilles - London (17c/20g)	17c
	<u>\$1.03</u>

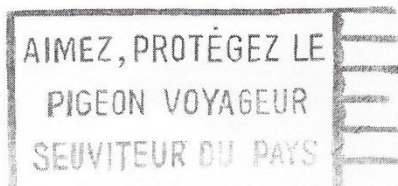


# The French Service

Later in 1936, the Southwestern Aviation Corporation teamed up with Air France to offer a service on the route from Canton to Hanoi to connect with the latter company's flights to France.



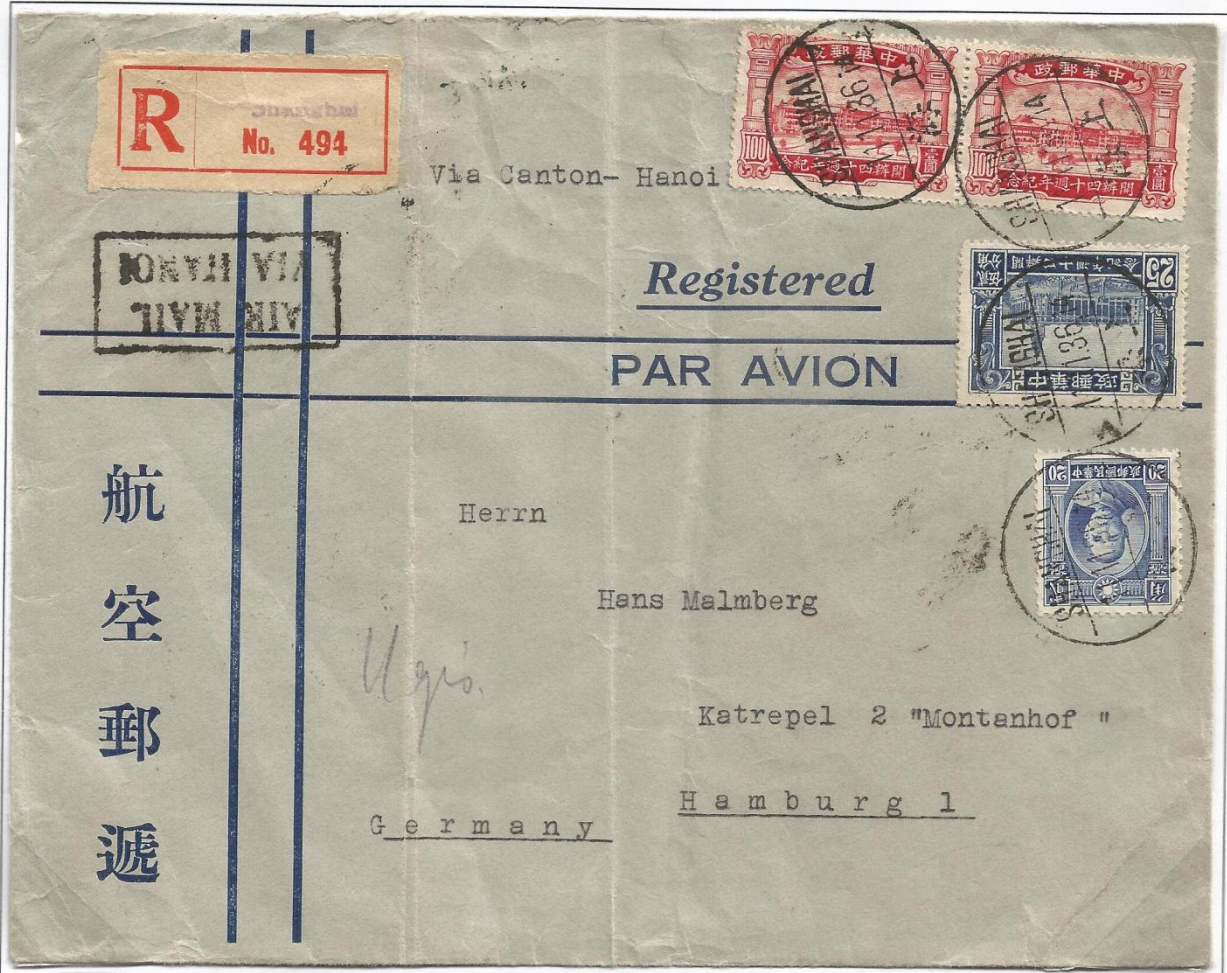
This first flight commemorative cover was sent on the 10<sup>th</sup> July from Canton and received in Marseilles on the 19<sup>th</sup>. The commemorative marking in the shape of a propeller reads "In commemoration of the first flight in the air service of the Southwest China Aviation Company between Canton and Hanoi".





The French Service

11g cover from Shanghai to Hamburg dated 11<sup>th</sup> November 1936. On reverse there are receiving marks of Marseille-Gare on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and Hamburg on 26<sup>th</sup>. Correctly marked "Air Mail Via Hanoi".



Rate: (10-15g letter)

International (25c/20g)	25c
Registration	25c
French rate (65c/5g)	\$1.95
	<u>\$2.45</u>



The Fortieth Anniversary of the Postal Service commemoratives have been used, issued on 10<sup>th</sup> October.

## The French Service

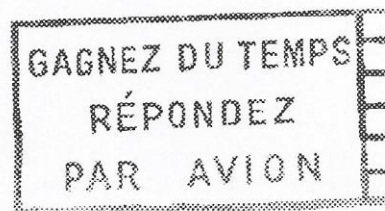
The option to use surface mail to connect with an east-west air-route was available.



Here the cover was sent from Shanghai on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1937. It was marked "via Hanoi" and "per S/S Tjisaroea". There are transit marks of Canton on reverse, both dated 5<sup>th</sup> September and a Paris transit mark dated 18<sup>th</sup> September.

### Rate:

International:	25c/20g	25c
Air France:	65c/5g	65c
		<u>90c</u>



## The French Service

The Chinese usually tried their best to comply with the sender's instructions. It is unusual to find mail matter that has been rerouted.

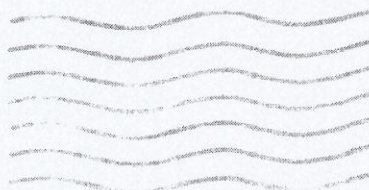


This cover from His-chou in West Yunnan to the U.K. is dated 9<sup>th</sup> December 1939. It is marked "via Kunming and Rangoon" and should have been carried by the National Airlines service to Burma, then onto destination by Imperial Airways. The route instructions were over stamped "Hanoi" which was the exchange office, for Yunnan mail only, with France for the Hanoi-Marseilles route.

The reason for this rerouting is not clear but it may be due to uncertainties with the service due to Britain's entry into the war with Germany. That this rerouting actually took place is confirmed by a Marseilles backstamp dated 22<sup>nd</sup> December.

The rate for either service was the same at this stage:

International	50c
Air surcharge	<u>\$2.00</u>
	<u>\$2.50</u>

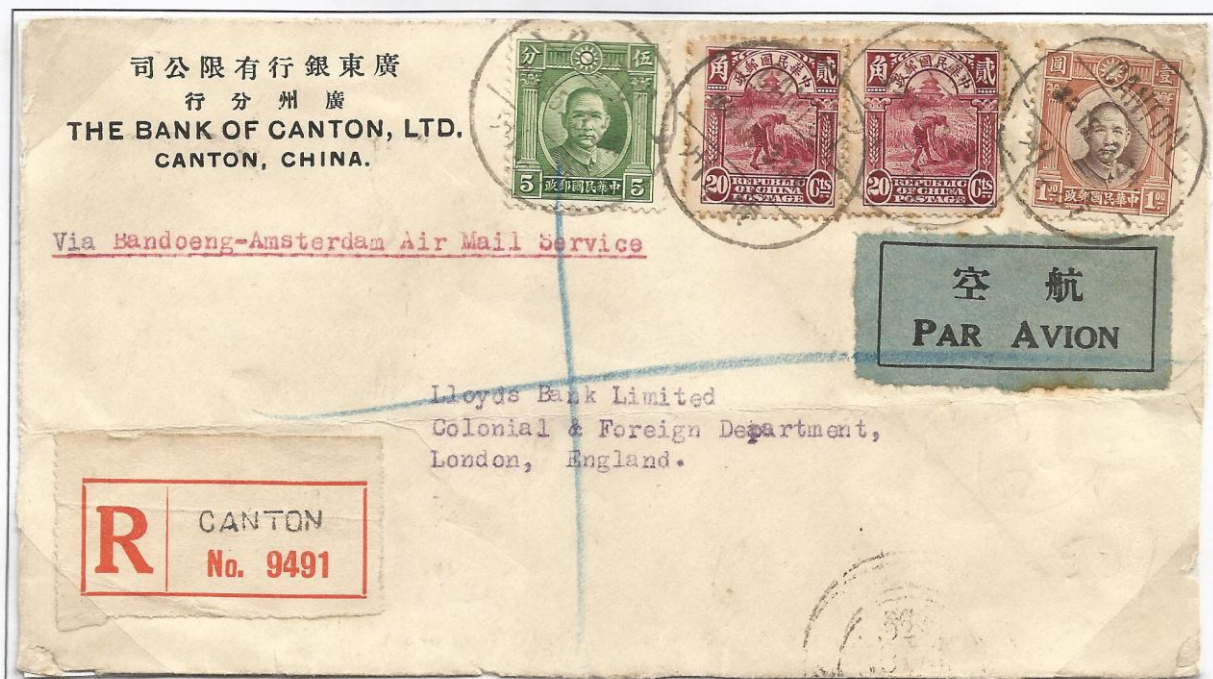


## The Dutch Service

The service from the Dutch East Indies to Amsterdam was used by the Chinese Post Office for the transmission of mail to Europe from August 1933. Mail was sent by steamer to Singapore to connect with the weekly flight from Bandoeng to Amsterdam.



Above: 14<sup>th</sup> Nov 1933, per SS Comorin to Singapore. Below: 15<sup>th</sup> March 1934, backstamped Singapore (20<sup>th</sup> March) and London (31<sup>st</sup> March).



The air supplement was 47c/5g, so a 5-10g letter was \$1.19, registered 25c extra.

## The Dutch Service

In summer months the European end of the route called at Budapest/Bratislava and Halle/Leipzig whilst in the winter Rome/Naples then Marseilles was used.



This example was posted in Canton on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1934. It bears transit marks on reverse of Canton, Budapest (1<sup>st</sup> August), Vienna (twice on 1<sup>st</sup> August) and Innsbruck (2<sup>nd</sup> August). It was readdressed at some point to Amsterdam and then, presumably returned to the sender, whose return address is given as Haslemere in Surrey. There is no clear evidence where it went after being marked "Non réclamé" and "-1.SEP.1934", having not been called for in Innsbruck. No other transit marks show that the mail was dropped in Budapest on its flight to Amsterdam.

**Rate:** (marked "14gms" on front and "\$1.60" on reverse).

International:	\$0.25	\$0.25
Air:	\$0.45/5g	\$1.35
		\$1.60

This air supplement applied to mail for the Netherlands. Hungary was 42c/5g, Germany 44c/5g - Austria was not listed in the rate tables.

\$1.60



## The British Service

The Imperial Air Lines (IAL) route to India was extended to Singapore on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1933 and was used by the Chinese from 19<sup>th</sup> May 1934. From the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1935, all mail originating in China was handled by IAL from Singapore unless marked "By KLM" for the Dutch service.

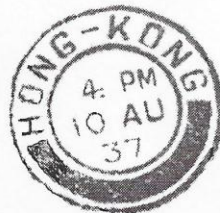


7<sup>th</sup> August 1937

Shanghai to Hong Kong by surface mail, then from Hong Kong (10<sup>th</sup> August) to London by air via Singapore.

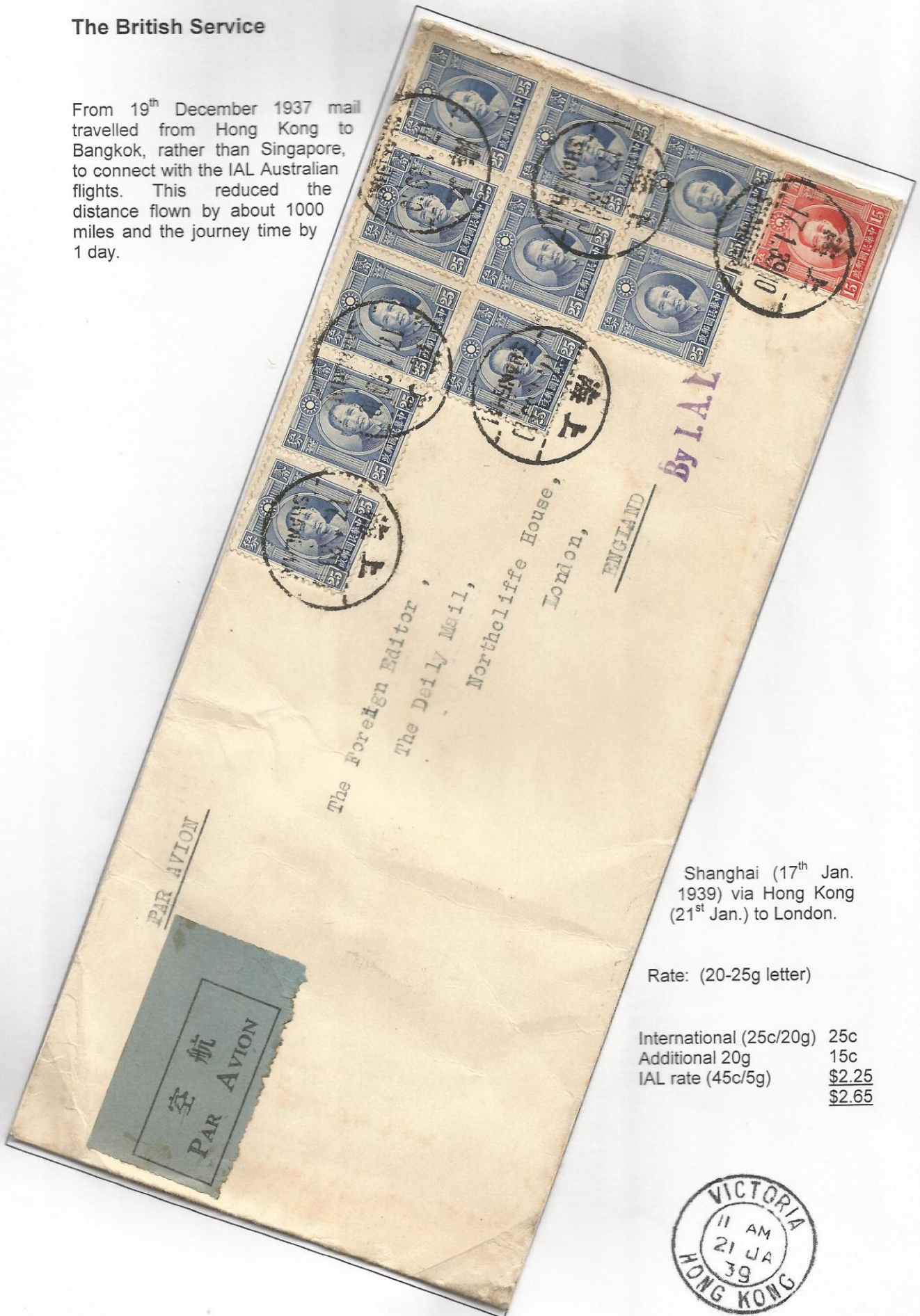
Rate: (10-15g letter)

International (25c/20g)	25c
IAL rate (55c/5g)	<u>\$1.65</u>
	<u>\$1.90</u>



## The British Service

From 19<sup>th</sup> December 1937 mail travelled from Hong Kong to Bangkok, rather than Singapore, to connect with the IAL Australian flights. This reduced the distance flown by about 1000 miles and the journey time by 1 day.



Shanghai (17<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1939) via Hong Kong (21<sup>st</sup> Jan.) to London.

Rate: (20-25g letter)

International (25c/20g)	25c
Additional 20g	15c
IAL rate (45c/5g)	<u>\$2.25</u>
	<u>\$2.65</u>



## The British Service

Airmails sent from inland China had to be carried to the exchange office where they could connect with the foreign flights to Europe. The internal air charge was added to both the international surface rate and the rate applicable for carriage abroad.



29<sup>th</sup> May, 1938

This cover was sent from Hankow and was carried by air in China to Hong Kong (30<sup>th</sup> May), where it joined the Imperial Airways Service.

Rate: (marked 17g)

International (25c/20g)	25c
Domestic air (25c/5g)	75c
IAL rate (45c/5g)	<u>\$1.35</u>
	<u>\$2.35</u>



With the outbreak of World War II in Europe in 1939, routes changed rapidly and many air services were abandoned or routed via the USA.