

[This is the first in a series of article prepared for the China Clipper, the magazine of the China Stamp Society. It appeared in the January 2009 issue. The second article appeared in the March 2009 issue and covered choosing a subject and exhibit presentation. These articles are intended to help a person begin exhibiting. Subsequent article will tell how to prepare a “title page” and how to prepare a “synopsis.”

The Society is also putting on seminars on Exhibiting Chinese Philately at APS AmeriStamp Expo/TEXPEX 2009, WESTPEX 2009, StampShow 2009 and BALPEX 2009.]

EXHIBITING CHINESE PHILATELY

H. James Maxwell

Philatelic exhibiting is the perfect step for those who have filled most of the spaces in their album and probably can't afford the stamps they are missing. I am one of those people. It allows you to take your collecting interest in a totally new direction. I never dreamed I could have so much fun with my stamps: creating nice pages, showing off my stamps to fellow collectors, and winning awards for doing so. It is indeed a great deal of fun and I am deeply indebted to Sam Chiu for encouraging me to get started. I hope these articles will encourage you to give it a try.

I have been collecting since the 1950s and always stood in awe of those that had the artistic skill to put together an exhibit. Personal computers have changed all that. Even a non-artistic person like myself can draw a perfectly straight line with Microsoft Publisher, the software that has changed everything and opened up the world of exhibiting to everyone – it is the answer to a beginning exhibitor's dreams. If you can imagine it, you can create it with MP.

I attempted my first exhibit in 2001 and since then have created seven exhibits. Three more are currently in the design stage. My exhibits include a rate study, “Rates During the Post-War Chinese National Currency Era” (a postal history exhibit that has received a US National Reserve Grand Award and an International Large Vermeil), a traditional exhibit of the Chinese National Currency stamps of 1945-8, a traditional exhibit of the WWII Chinese surcharge issues, a single frame exhibit of the three Silver Yuan commemoratives issued in 1949 and, my first exhibit, a single frame on China's 1939 commemoratives for the 150th anniversary of the US Constitution.

By way of explanation, a “traditional” exhibit is one that has as its subject the stamps – an issue, period, subject, etc. Examples include my exhibits of stamps issued during WWII and stamps issued during the CNC inflation of 1945-8. A traditional exhibit typically includes pre-production items such as drawings, essays, proofs, etc., varieties of the stamps, and items showing the use of the stamps such as used stamps and covers. This differs from a “postal history” exhibit that deals with the use of stamps, typically on cover, and emphasizes usages, rates, routes, markings and unusual or special uses. In this type of exhibit you must fully describe each cover and explain all postal and non-postal markings – basically telling the viewer “who, what, when, where, why and how.” Also there is the new “display class” which permits the inclusion of much more in the way of non-philatelic material, and the “thematic class” which centers around a particular theme or subject appearing on stamps. This is only the sketchiest of explanations and much more information on these and other types of exhibits is available in the literature described below.

Obviously, MP is capable of doing much more than creating a simple exhibit page, but you only have to learn how to do two things to get started making exhibit pages – using the “Rectangle Tool” and the “Text Frame Tool.” For my first attempt, I spent an hour reading a how-to book and then sat down at the computer and tried to create a page. The first of these two tools allows you to draw perfect boxes to position (and enclose) your stamps and covers on the page; the second allows you to place your text on the page. Presentation is very important. Don't be fooled by the assertion that presentation is only 5% of the judge's overall evaluation. That is what the Judges Manual says, but it simply is not so. Everyone would rather look at something that is more rather than less attractive. The Rectangle Tool enables you to get everything on the page straight and evenly spaced and to avoid what appears to me as stamps and

covers floating in midair. Although some might disagree, I find exhibits without boxes for the stamps and covers to look somehow unfinished, as if the exhibitor didn't want to put in the extra effort.

The Rectangle Tool also allows you to determine the thickness of the lines that form the box. You can make them anything from a "hairline" up to 10mm thick. I prefer the hairline for my boxes because it provides an attractive border for the item while not being obtrusive or distracting attention from the item. I use a 4mm line to tell the viewer and the judges which items are more important. Judges generally want you to draw attention to important items.

The Text Frame Tool allows you to create rectangular areas on the page for titles, headers, descriptions of the stamp or cover, and the like – anything involving text. When you are typing inside a Text Box you are using Microsoft Word. If you know how to use Word, you already know how to do everything inside a Text Box – it is that simple. You have the total flexibility of Word – font style, font size, spacing, right hand justification, centering, spelling, grammar checking, etc. Of course, the usual common sense applies - be very careful and do not rely upon Spell Check to do the work for you (remember, a Spell Check will not pick up when you type "for" as "fro" as both are correctly spelled words. Correct spelling and proper grammar are essential parts of presentation. Again, always remember that although the judges manual says presentation only counts 5 points out of a possible 100, don't believe it! Human nature being what it is, the better the appearance of your exhibit the more the judges will like it.

When you have mastered creating pages with boxes and text, you will probably want to insert some images onto your pages. The first one I did was the *cheng* with separation found on the Peking Martyrs. Those of us exhibiting China are confronted with having to explain many things to American judges and often the best way to do this is with pictures. Sometimes even a side-by-side comparison serves well to make a point. Scans, pictures, drawings, etc. are simply copied and pasted into MP.

Now that I have hopefully convinced you that anyone can make exhibit pages using MP, we need to review some of the resources that are available to beginning exhibitors. There is an association known as the American Association of Philatelic Exhibitors. www.aape.org AAPE publishes a quarterly magazine, The Philatelic Exhibitor, that is filled with interesting articles, and offers a Critique Service for new exhibits. You send them a photocopy (probably best in color) of your exhibit and they send you back constructive suggestions. AAPE also sells pamphlets on preparing and judging different kinds of exhibits, which can be very helpful.

Randy Neil has also published an excellent book, The New Philatelic Exhibitors Handbook, that is a very useful guide to the "dos" and "don'ts" of exhibiting. I cannot recommend it too highly.

In addition, the APS publishes a guidebook for philatelic judges, How Exhibits are Judged, 5th edition, 2002, and its website offers other pamphlets on exhibiting including an interesting group of guidebooks for judges. Each stamp show will also have something in the way of rules or regulations defining what they will accept and an entry form for you to use to enter your exhibit.

Another important learning tool is to examine the exhibits at a stamp show after they have placed the ribbons on the exhibits designating the medal levels. You will want to emulate the ones that received Gold Medals. Exhibits at US National Shows (the APS "World Series of Philately" Shows) receive one of five medal level awards designated, from lowest to highest, Bronze, Silver-Bronze, Silver, Vermeil, and Gold. There are also numerous special awards given by the APS and other philatelic societies and organizations. The China Stamp Society gives out a First Time Exhibitor Award to the best exhibit by a new exhibitor at its National Convention. You will have a wonderful learning experience if you can attend the APS StampShow 2009 and look at the exhibits competing for the Champion of Champions. These are the exhibits that won the Grand Awards at the various World Series of Philately Shows during the immediately preceding year. You will be learning from the very best.

Another very important learning experience comes from attending the Exhibitor Critiques. Typically, ribbons designating the medal levels are affixed to the exhibits by Saturday morning and the actual medals and the special awards are handed out at an awards banquet Saturday evening. On Saturday afternoon there generally will be an Exhibitors' Critique where the jury of judges meets with the exhibitors that have attended the show and explains the basis of the medal award for each exhibit and

provides comments on how the exhibitor might improve the exhibit. I strongly recommend that you attend some of these critiques before you start preparing your first exhibit. You will learn a great deal about exhibiting generally and various things the judges expect to see in an exhibit. It will also acquaint you with the judging process, which can be frustrating or rewarding depending upon how the jury feels about your exhibit.

Probably of more immediate assistance is the friendly mentoring of someone with experience exhibiting. Fellow philatelists are always willing to help. In my case, Hugh Lawrence has been of invaluable assistance to me in developing my design concepts and helping me avoid numerous pitfalls.

Your next concern will be your printer. Exhibits are mounted on thick paper that is generally in the range of 80 to 110 pounds. If your printer cannot handle thick paper, there are several inexpensive laser printers on the market that can. I recommend a laser printer because the thick paper has a tendency to absorb the ink from an inkjet printer producing a line that appears blurred. I also suggest that you stay away from the new "bright" white papers as they tend to make philatelic items look dingy. Colored paper presents a wide range of difficulties (not the least of which is the strong aversion most judges have against it) and is probably best avoided. The standard 8½ x 11 inch page has universal acceptance even if you want to exhibit at an international show and is likely your best bet for most uses. This size does present some problems with large or oversize items such as #10 envelopes. Some people mount them vertically, some diagonally (LL to UR), and still others, like myself, try to avoid them if at all possible. Having paper specially cut to 1 1/3 width or double width can also solve this problem. A frame holds 16 standard pages in four rows of four: a 1 1/3 width page fits nicely three to a row and a double width page fits two to a row. Sleeves can be purchased for these unusual sizes.

Sleeves are the clear protectors used to enclose the finished page, both to protect the philatelic material and to give the pages stiffness so they will stand up straight in the frames. I use ones made by Atlantic Protective Pouches, of Toms River, New Jersey. **www.AtlanticProtectivePouches.com** I use the 4 mil because it is thicker and seems to work better. The 8¾ x 11¼ size comfortably holds a standard 8½ x 11 page. The Atlantic sleeves are made of archival grade (Mylar) polyester and are closed on three sides so you slide the page in from the top. With a little practice you can become proficient at doing this without bending pages or damaging philatelic items.

Those of us doing postal history or traditional exhibits with covers are blessed with the vertical domestic covers used in China. Few countries in the world provide the exhibitor with this wonderful anomaly. In a postal history exhibit they allow you to avoid the monotonous appearance of rows of pages each with two horizontal covers lined up giving the appearance of "railroad tracks." We can eliminate or ameliorate this problem with our ability to mix in vertical domestic covers.

In a postal history exhibit I usually try to get two covers on a page, with only the most important covers mounted one to a page. One to a page is also a subtle way of directing the viewer and the judges to the important covers. Some domestic vertical covers are quite large and it is not possible to get two on a page without overlapping them. I find overlapping acceptable so long as it does not obscure any important markings or other features of the covers. Also, in a traditional exhibit, these vertical covers give you an opportunity to display stamps to the right or left of a cover rather than always above or below a horizontal cover.

To mount covers I use STIKeese VPD corner mounts, which, unfortunately, are no longer made. Several other companies, however, manufacture small, unobtrusive clear corner mounts that do quite nicely.

For stamp mounts I use Scott Mounts, but there are others on the market that work just as well. The choice of clear mounts or ones with black backgrounds depends upon the nature of the material. I have been known to mix the two in a traditional exhibit where I used clear mounts throughout but black ones to show paper characteristics or the difference between large hole and small hole perforation. If you plan to ship your exhibit to out-of-town shows it is better to use mounts with closed tops. It is an axiom of Murphy's Law that UPS and the USPS will, if at all possible, manage to dislodge your stamps from their mounts. You will also need a good mount cutter. As I will explain over and over I am a member of the

school of thought that neatness and good presentation will earn you a one level increase in the medal level you are awarded.

Some exhibitors mat their stamps and covers. I prefer not to, but the choice is yours. Matting involves bordering your stamps or covers with a colored paper to frame the philatelic item. Also it is possible to double mat your items using two different colors of paper. Matting sets off the philatelic material and using a different color can give you a way to highlight the more important items for the viewer and the judges. I think the decision of whether or not to mat should be subject to the “Three Judge Rule” which will be covered later.

I would say that the best place to start as a beginning exhibitor is with a single-frame exhibit. The single-frame was originally conceived as an entry-level exhibit but has since evolved to the point where a strict rule on content is currently being applied. This new rule requires that the exhibit must exhaust the subject completely. In other words, if the subject itself and the variety of material available on that subject could make up multiple frames, then it is not an appropriate subject for a single-frame exhibit. In spite of this I still recommend starting with a single-frame because your first exhibit is going to be a learning experience and may not do particularly well award-wise. Why start with a massive multi-frame exhibit only to have the judges say you have committed some fatal error and must redo all of your pages? It is a lot easier to redo a 16-page single-frame than an 80- to 160-page multi-frame exhibit. As a practical matter you will probably be redoing your first exhibit, at least to some extent. My first exhibit was a single-frame and won a Silver Medal the first time out. I made the changes suggested and the next time it received a Vermeil. I again made the changes and, at the next show, it was awarded a Gold. Most importantly, with a single-frame exhibit you are given a detailed score sheet explaining the specific shortcomings of the exhibit – a form of instant feedback. This will contain constructive criticism that will be helpful to you in deciding how to change and improve your exhibit. In this respect a single-frame is a great way to get your feet wet exhibiting and also a good way to try out a new exhibit or an unusual concept for an exhibit. Be prepared, however, to get knocked down one medal level if the subject could have been done in more than one frame.

Exhibits of two to four frames are in “Never-Never Land,” and are verboten. When you move on to a multi-frame it should be in the range of five to ten frames. When you first show an exhibit in an international stamp show you are limited to five frames; once it has achieved an International Large Vermeil you are permitted, although no longer required, to increase the size of that exhibit to eight frames.

Oh yes, I promised to tell you about my Three Judge Rule. It is simply this: never do anything to your exhibit a judge says you should do until you have heard the same suggestion from at least three judges. My approach to this is simple, when a judge says “do such and such,” I wait until after the critique and privately run the suggestion by other judges asking what they think. This procedure takes personalities and the bandwagon effect out of the process and I find it works nicely. Also, as a matter of protocol, I generally avoid discussing my exhibit with any of the judges prior to their deciding upon awards unless they specifically ask me a question. Several times prior to learning the Three Judge Rule I hurried home after a show and made a change suggested by one judge only to have the jury at the next show tell me to change it back. This simple rule will definitely make your life easier.