

[Additional information is available on the Society's web site in the section titled "Exhibits." www.ChinaStampSociety.org During 2009 the Society has put on seminars on "Exhibiting For Beginners" at AmeriStamp/TEXPEX and WESTPEX and will do so at StampShow and BALPEX.]

EXHIBITING CHINESE PHILATELY III

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Assembling Material

In the last article I urged you to get started making pages! The last page you will want to make is your title page. Begin working with page number two. As you make pages, ideas will start to pop into your head and you will think of changes you want to make. Take time to study each page and make changes as time goes by. Save each page you create in a folder on your computer set up for the exhibit. Do not number pages at this point in time as you may want to change the sequence later. Use some other page naming technique such as Scott numbers for the stamps on the page or dates and categories of covers. You will find that new pages you want to create are similar to ones you have saved and you can simply make modifications to produce a new page. This greatly speeds up the page making process. Do not be in a hurry to mount any stamps and covers on pages. The text on the pages will no doubt change as you proceed to put together your exhibit and the title may also change, perhaps several times, before you are finished. Mounting things at this point will only make more work for you later when you have to take pages apart and put them together again. I know you want to see your first finished page, but be patient.

I create a three-ring binder for each exhibit as I start to accumulate the material. Note – I said, "accumulate." Prepare your book very early in the process. I currently have two books for future exhibits on which I am working. This enables you to spot holes in your exhibit because it forces you to think in terms of positioning the material on pages. Accumulating an exhibit on stock cards or in glassines in a shoebox will never give you this kind of feedback, and feedback is important, not only in making your exhibit as complete as possible but in stimulating your thought process and the design of your exhibit.

In a traditional exhibit the order of presentation of items (to the extent they are available and you have them) follows the sequence of events in the design, production and use of a stamp or set: original artwork, essays, die proofs, trial color proofs, plate proofs, specimens, special printings, shades, watermark and paper varieties, plate varieties, production varieties, postal markings (on and off cover) and usages on cover. In assembling a traditional exhibit items should be presented on the pages in this order. Postal history exhibits also have a sequence of presentation dictated by the subject of the exhibit. For example in a rate exhibit you would want to consider having for each rate period an ordinary letter, a registered letter, an acknowledgement of receipt (AR), a registered-express and an ordinary express. You may not want to put each of them in your exhibit, but when assembling the material you would want to put all that you have in your exhibit book and consider inclusion. Most importantly the exhibit book procedure shows you what you are missing so you can be on the lookout for it. I recently noticed I really needed a particular cover for one of my exhibits and started watching auctions to see if I could find one. As luck would have it I bought one in a recent Michael Roger's auction.

I assemble the materials in my exhibit book on Vario Stock Sheets, but there are other brands that are equally good. I think it is important to see the items completely and positioned the way I contemplate laying out the pages. This technique may enable you to see some postal marking that you have failed to explain in your text. It also gives you a mental image of how the finished page will look. If you have to crowd a set of stamps to get them on one row on the Vario page they are not going to look good on one row in your exhibit. You will find that this process of preliminarily laying out pages on Vario pages is extremely beneficial. Trying different layouts on these pages gives you a chance to experiment without committing to anything. It is much easier to move things around on Vario pages than to redo finished pages with items inside mounts. Vario pages come with different numbers of slots per page and are perfect to try out hypothetical layouts. I then put my most recent draft of each printed page just behind the Vario page that holds the material for that page.

At any point in time you can lay out a printed page, or sixteen printed pages, on a desk or table and position the stamps and covers on the page to see how it will all look together. Hugh Lawrence sets his pages in a row of four (the width of a frame row) on his fireplace mantle. Things always look different upright as opposed to laying flat on the floor or a table.

I bought a large sheet of white foam-core board and glued plastic slots (available from the APS) on it to resemble a frame of sixteen pages. That way I can position my pages on it and see how they will look in an upright position.

The Title Page

The first page of every exhibit is called the “title page.” It is important to understand the difference between a title page and a “synopsis.” A synopsis is a single page (can be front and back) submitted to the judges at the time you enter your exhibit in the show or exhibition. It is prepared for the judge’s eyes only and is intended as a way for you to tell the judges things about your exhibit that they should know in order to better evaluate your exhibit. The next article in this series will be on the synopsis page.

Unlike the synopsis, the title page is seen by all who view your exhibit. It is positioned in the upper left corner of the first frame. It is intended to create interest in your exhibit and does this by providing information to the viewers that makes them want to look carefully at the coming pages; in other words its purpose is to capture the viewer’s attention. Having said this, I will now discuss all the things that you might want to put in your title page and you will begin to see just how difficult it is to create one that conveys all the requisite information and still attracts interest. The title page shown with this article is from one of my exhibits and has received compliments from judges.

The title page gives the viewers the first impression they have of your exhibit. Some viewers look at each exhibit and start with each title page. Others merely walk down a row of exhibits until they see something that interests them and then go back and look at the title page. In either case the title page must concisely inform the viewer of the “what, when, where, how and why” of the exhibit and do it in such a way that the viewer will be interested enough to keep looking at the pages that follow. It must explain the purpose of the exhibit – what story is it trying to tell? Its explanation must be comprehensive but brief, leaving no doubt as to what is included and what is not. Basically, the title page should contain seven components: title, purpose, treatment, research/ knowledge, background, exhibit plan and, generally, a philatelic item.

To see what I mean by “concisely” you can examine the two paragraphs immediately under the table on the sample title page. Note how much information was crammed into two rather short paragraphs.

Title

Care must be taken in selecting a title for your exhibit. It must be a complete explanation of the subject and the scope of the exhibit, and this usually involves a concept of time or duration. If the title is “Chinese Airmails” the viewer and the judges are entitled to expect to see all the airmail issues from 1921 to date issued by the Republic of China, the Peoples Republic of China and the Republic of China Taiwan. If the subject is only the first three sets of airmails then the title should be something like “China’s First Three Airmail Issues” or “China’s Airmails: 1921-1937.” If the subject is commercial aviation during WWII then the title should reflect a limitation of 1937 (Japan’s invasion of China) to 1945. My example of a title page uses the concept of an “era” and goes on to define the era as the period from Oct. 1945 to Dec. 1948.

Time is not the only limiting factor. An exhibit can be of only a single issue, a type of stamp, a type of postal service, a category of cancellations, a particular geographic area, a subject or theme on stamps, postal rates, etc. The list goes on and on. The more creative you are about it, the better. Another of my exhibits is titled “Keeping Pace With Inflation: the Post-War Chinese National Currency Issues.” Hence it is limited to a group of stamp issues that appeared during a particular period of time and is, by implication, going to be exciting because the title uses the word “inflation,” a dramatic scenario in philately. The text goes on to explain which stamps are included and why they were issued. The title implies that inflation increased the burden of the postal authorities in issuing new stamps, which it did, and hints that the viewer will see an exhibit that begins with low denomination stamps (10¢) and ends

with high ones (\$5,000,000). This choice of wording for the title explains the nature of the story being told and also answers the question of why it is an important story – a philatelically significant story that needs to be told and is a good subject for an exhibit. It tells what the exhibit is about and the basic purpose of the exhibitor in creating the exhibit. A properly worded title explains the scope of the exhibit, the boundaries (its beginning and end), and why these are logical philatelic boundaries.

However, it is most important to remember that whatever your title implies will be in your exhibit must actually be there. Do not say, “Chinese Postage Dues 1904-1949” and then fail to include the 1944-5 issues.

Purpose

The first paragraph of text following the title must directly or implicitly inform the viewer of the type of exhibit (traditional, postal history, thematic, etc.), the purpose of the exhibit, and why it is philatelically important. Either the title or the initial text must make this perfectly clear to avoid any possible confusion. All too often exhibits are judged harshly because the judges were not told exactly what the exhibit will, and will not, show. Left to their own devices they can reach an incorrect conclusion. The paragraph should then go on to briefly give the viewer an overview of the exhibit and explain some aspect of the complexity of the exhibit that elevates it above the ordinary – justifying the exhibit.

Treatment

Depending upon the nature of the story being told it is often necessary to divide up the material into sections or chapters. Note the four sections I have created on the sample title page. For material to be worthy of being exhibited it must generally be complex. Breaking the story down into components makes it easier for the viewer, and the judges, to comprehend and digest the complexity. This also gives you an opportunity to reintroduce the drama at the beginning of each section/chapter with something that is of interest to the viewer. In my rate exhibit I begin each section with a rate table that shows the phenomenal rate increases during the period covered by the exhibit. This gives me an a logical way to divide up the material in the exhibit and also an opportunity to remind the viewer how dramatic the inflation-driven rate increases really were – hence justification for why the material is important enough to be the subject of an exhibit. Remember, in a 1940s rate exhibit most of the covers are not expensive, so I must emphasize research, complexity, worthiness of being an exhibit subject, excitement and drama.

Sections or chapters sometimes give you an opportunity to have a beginning and an end in each section. This may give you an opportunity to repeat your story in each section. In my exhibit the phenomenal rate increases occur over the thirty-nine months covered by the exhibit, but with the exhibit divided into four sections I am able to repeat the story/concept of the exhibit four times, thus driving it home to the viewer.

The use of sections or chapters necessitates headings and subheadings on each page to tells the viewer where they are in the exhibit and hence where they are in the story being told. You can study the variety of uses of headings and subheadings in award-winning exhibits and see how headings have cleverly been used to move the viewer along from page to page, all the while keeping them curious about what is going to be presented next.

Previous articles have discussed the importance of presentation, but do not let your guard down on the title page. After all it is the one page in the exhibit that you are assured will get read.

Research & Knowledge

The difference between exhibiting and merely showing album pages lies in three essential elements: (1) research done to develop the story, (2) preparing text that demonstrates you have knowledge of the subject, and (3) imparting that knowledge to the viewer with the exhibit. While it is extremely important to cover these points in the text of your synopsis, they should also be touched upon on the title page. You should briefly explain your original research, how your knowledge is displayed in the exhibit, and discuss the importance of your research and knowledge. In the sample title page the four paragraphs above the cover are intended to serve this purpose while at the same time communicating to the viewers essential information they will need to understand the exhibit.

Background & History

One of the greatest pitfalls, and something that is frequently the subject of criticism, is too much discussion of background or history on the title page or in the exhibit. We are all confronted with the necessity to provide certain basic information to “set the stage,” so to speak, for the material being presented. In the critique of the first version of my first exhibit I had my head handed to me on a platter because I had a title page with four paragraphs of history and two paragraphs of philately. I quickly learned to write very concise, succinct paragraphs providing only the minimum of historical information necessary to set the stage for the story. China’s history has been very turbulent and many military, political and other events resulting from that turbulence have given rise to exciting philately. But remember, you are not writing a history book you are exhibiting philately.

Having said all this, it is still necessary to explain the background within which the stamps were issued or the covers transported – just remember to keep it brief. Basically the explanation should be confined to only that which is necessary to understand the story.

Exhibit Plan

The table appearing on the sample title page is an example of an exhibit plan. It works rather well to define the four sections, including the fourth section which has two subsections. If your exhibit is more complex, the table format becomes essential. I personally prefer this bullet or outline format because (1) it enables you to crowd a great deal of information into a relatively small space, (2) it enables you to visually display the treatment of the subject, and (3) it concisely shows how the story will unfold. It also resembles the “table of contents” of a book, which is the way people are used to having things presented to them. If your story is very complex and many sections have subsections it may be best to only list the sections on your title page and then have additional tables at the beginning of each section listing the subsections within that section. This way you manage to keep your title page simple and concise. The Dewey Decimal System works nicely to organize complexity. Sections or chapters lend themselves nicely to this bullet treatment, but not all stories do so. Sometimes it is necessary to use text to explain the exhibit plan. In any event it is absolutely essential to include the exhibit plan and, if it is text, to keep it brief.

Incidentally I always use wide margins on my title page and do not space between paragraphs. To break the page I use large paragraph indentations.

Philatelic Items

If space permits, the title page is a good place for an illustration or map that helps orient the viewer. Here is a place where using your imagination will be rewarded. When you study championship exhibits you will notice that almost without fail they have very creative title pages. If you work very hard to concisely write the text on your title page you should end up with enough space for something that will attract the viewer’s attention and thereby serve a very important purpose. The title page is a page of your exhibit – make use of it.

The title page can be used to display an important philatelic item, an item that will both command the attention of the viewer and the judges and, without too much explanation, be recognized as truly important philatelically. On the sample title page I show a cover paid at a rate that was in effect for only one day. In another of my exhibits I have two blocks of four of essays on my title page. Occasionally you will run across a judge that has a problem with including a philatelic item on the title page. Simply thank him for his comment and then ignore it.

You have to be careful not to move something up to the title page that will create a hole later on in your exhibit or detract from the story being told by being out of position. Also, the title page can be a good place for a prolog or an example of a forerunner.

The important point to remember is that “first impressions are lasting impressions” and no amount of time spent on your title page is too much time. The title page and the synopsis are the two pages you send in with your application to enter your exhibit in a show or exhibition. They are sent on to the judges to help them prepare to judge your exhibit and will no doubt be read by the judges in the privacy of their homes. These two items represent your sole opportunity to speak directly to the judges before they

evaluate your exhibit. Make the best possible use of this opportunity. The next article in this series will be on preparation of a synopsis. Happy exhibiting!