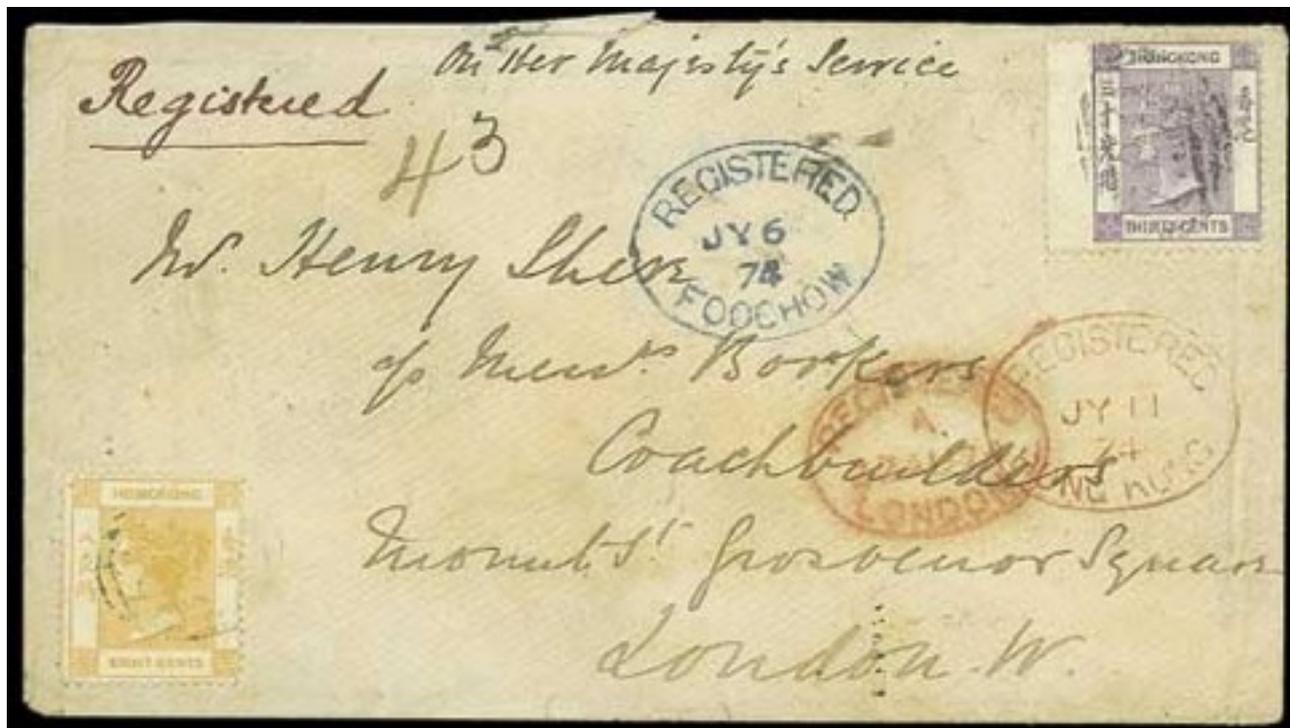


The "Unique" 1874 Foochow Oval Registered cover



The subject cover appeared in January 2008 Spink Hong Kong auction.

It is a most interesting item causing quite a lot of debate among HK collectors, local and overseas. Some collectors are doubtful of its authenticity whereas others and needless to say the successful phone bidder believe that it is *bona fide*. Spink auctioneer Neill Granger told us that the BPA experts had given the thumbs-up after seeing the cover.

Nevertheless, it is the first time known for oval registered marking struck in blue inking, at least in Hong Kong philately, instead of usual red inking.

The doubts regarding the cover's authenticity are summarized below: -

The First Doubt: The two "B62" strikes appear to be dissimilar

Rule of thumb #1: Cancels on stamps applied on the same cover have similar alignment and intensity of inking.

The "B62" on the wing-margin 30c mauve is almost 90 degree to the "B62" on the 8c.

Rule of thumb #2: The cancel on stamps applied on the same cover should be the same type.

Although badly inked, the two strikes "B62" are dissimilar particularly the side curves distance of both strikes: 30c is with narrow distance of the two side curves; 8c is with wider spacing of the two side curves.

Conclusion: One or even both stamps might not belong to the cover.

The Second Doubt: FOOCHOW instead of FOOCHOWFOO

The wording of the Oval REGISTERED FOOCHOW datestamp.

Webb (p.246) mentioned this oval registered datestamp for FOOCHOWFOO was reported on one cover cancelled "F1" and he knew of another part strike on a loose adhesive. And yet, this example on cover shows the port name as "FOOCHOW", and not "FOOCHOWFOO".

Hong Kong introduced the system of registered of letters as early as in April 1857 (Proud's book p.182). HK became compulsory to use stamps in February 1864 and applicable to postal agencies in Treaty Ports of China in October 1865. As such, each treaty ports needed some sort of cancellations and then the well-known Treaty Ports Killers were therefore supplied in 1866 together with datestamps and other instructional markings e.g. MISSENT TO etc. It is probable that the oval registered markings were supplied to each Treaty Ports at that time as registered service would be extended to postal agencies in China.

The doubt comes here, if the oval registered markings were supplied in 1866, then it would only be logical that the spelling being FOOCHOWFOO similar to the first cds (Webb Type B) which appear on the back in blue dated 6-July-1874. The next FOOCHOW cds (Webb Type C) only appeared from 1894. Although the time for change of name from Foochowfoo to Foochow is unknown but surely there would be some sort of official announcement. Like Kiungchow changed name to Hoihow in July 1878 was in the Gazette.

The Third Doubt: Blue Inking for Registered Marking in 1870's

The third doubt would be the inking in blue; instead of in red for registration marking widely used in 1870's, both in HK and in Treaty Ports. Hard to understand why in this case, the Oval Registered Foochow is in blue and in the same blue as the FOOCHOWFOO backstamp unless both were forged cancels, then it would be easier

for the forger to use one ink instead of two. An American member told us that even before the availability of advance computer technology, a skill draftsman could duplicate a drawing (or cancel) to the finest detail. Hence creating a fake Foochowfoo c.d.s. is no problem, the only hurdle is how to make the inking match contemporary examples.

The Fourth Doubt: Dispatch Backstamp FOOCHOWFOO cds

The fourth doubt would be the dispatch FOOCHOWFOO backstamp. The Oval Registered Foochow Datestamp itself is already suffice to state the place of origin, why bother to backstamp it again? By reference to the well-known "D27" cover with Oval Registered Amoy Datestamp and the two "C1" covers with Oval Registered Canton Datestamp, all had no dispatch cds on cover back.

The Fifth Doubt: Stamps cancelled "B62" instead of "F1"

The fifth doubt would be the use of obliterator "B62" to cancel the stamps 30c and 8c in HK. The earliest record "F1" cover could be 1872 per Frank Drake article (HKPS Jn.6), eventhough, Orsetti et al suspect that the 1872 cover to be an entry error (HKSC J327/14 Oct. 2003) and the 1873 ex. Ishikawa cover turned out to be a fake (see HKPS website article), the pair of 13 June 1874 underpaid "F1" covers mentioned in HKPS NL March 2006/5 remain the earliest recorded. It would be surprising that the "F1" was not used to cancel the stamps in July 1874 when the "F1" was already taken into use one month earlier.

The Sixth Doubt: "On Her Majesty's Service"

The sixth doubt would be the inscription "On Her Majesty's Service". An overseas member pointed out that OHMS mail to the U.K. were usually found post-free. Why were stamps needed in this case?

Disclaimer: Information stated above only represents collective thoughts of those "Doubting Thomases". The Hong Kong Philatelic Society opinion regarding this cover is impartial.