

The Era of the French Colonial Allegorical Group Type Indochina, The Indochinese Offices & Mixed Use From China

Indochina received its first definitive stamp issue, the Allegorical Group Type, in early 1893. The issue saw use until World War I. A full compliment of postal stationery (postal cards, letter cards and envelopes) was also created for this issue. This exhibit examines the use of this issue (stamps and postal stationery) from its inception in 1893. Indochina represents the most complex use of the Group Type of all of the French Colonies. This colony was divided into five provinces reflecting the evolution of French influence in the area. By 1893 this influence was well established in the coastal provinces of Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin, whereas the western provinces of Cambodia and Laos were still under development. In the late 1890's the issue was overprinted for use in the French Offices in China adding another dimension to the use of this important issue. Combination covers from China also resulted as China was not a member of the UPU. All of these areas of the use of the Group Type are examined in this exhibit, with important aspects of the nonuse of the issue (military franchise mail, *franchise militaire* mail, government franchise mail, etc.) also covered for the sake of completeness.

In 1893 fourteen values of the Group Type between 1c and 5F plus one overprint for use on parcel post mail arrived in Indochina. In 1900 the colors of five of these values were changed to conform to UPU requirements. In 1903 two overprints were created to fill a shortage of the commonly used lower values and an additional parcel post overprint was created. These stamps plus the compliment of postal stationery represent the totality of what was used in the colony. The extensive overprinting of this issue for philatelic purposes as done in colonies such as Guadeloupe and New Caledonia was not done in Indochina. The rate structure under which the issue was used under UPU auspices is relatively simple:

1c – Local printed matter

5c – Overseas printed matter and short message post cards (less than twelve words)

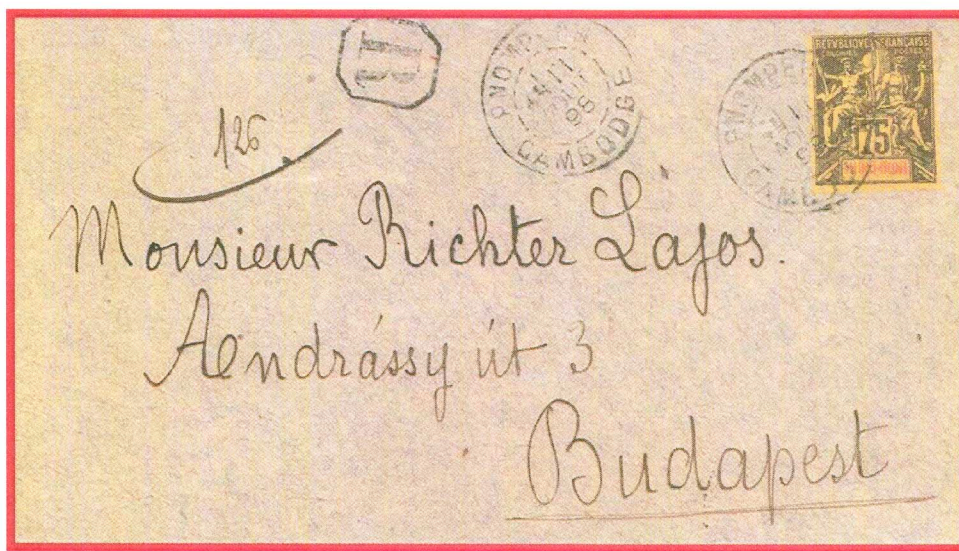
10c – Post cards (more than twelve words) and French Community beginning in late 1906

15c – Reduced military rate until 1899, local until 1906 and French Community from 1899 to 1906

25c – French Community until 1899 and overseas throughout the period

Registration was 25c and declared value letters included a charge for postage based on weight, 25c for registration and an additional charge for insurance based on the declared value. Weights for regular mail increased in increments of fifteen grams. Additional rates are discussed as encountered.

The exhibit begins with an examination of mail from the individual provinces with a strong emphasis on rare material from the smaller villages which abound in this colony. Postal stationery is not treated as a separate category, but included with the individual provinces as relevant. Key items are highlighted throughout the exhibit.



Double weight registered letter from Pnompenh, Cambodia (2 x 25c postage plus 25c registration) on August 11, 1898 posted to Budapest, Hungary where received on September 10, 1898. This letter shows the inverted **INDOCHINE** plate variety in the name tablet, and is the only recorded example on cover of the approximately twelve known.

COCHINCHINA

Of the five Indochinese provinces, that of Cochinchina (located on the southeast coast of the colony) was the most fully developed. French influence in this area seriously began in the early 1860's, and by the 1890's French commercial and postal and other governmental operations were well in place. Saigon was the capitol and principal commercial and government center of the province, and numerous small village offices had been established. French military occupation of the area was essentially complete, and an extensive military mail system had been established in support of the military.

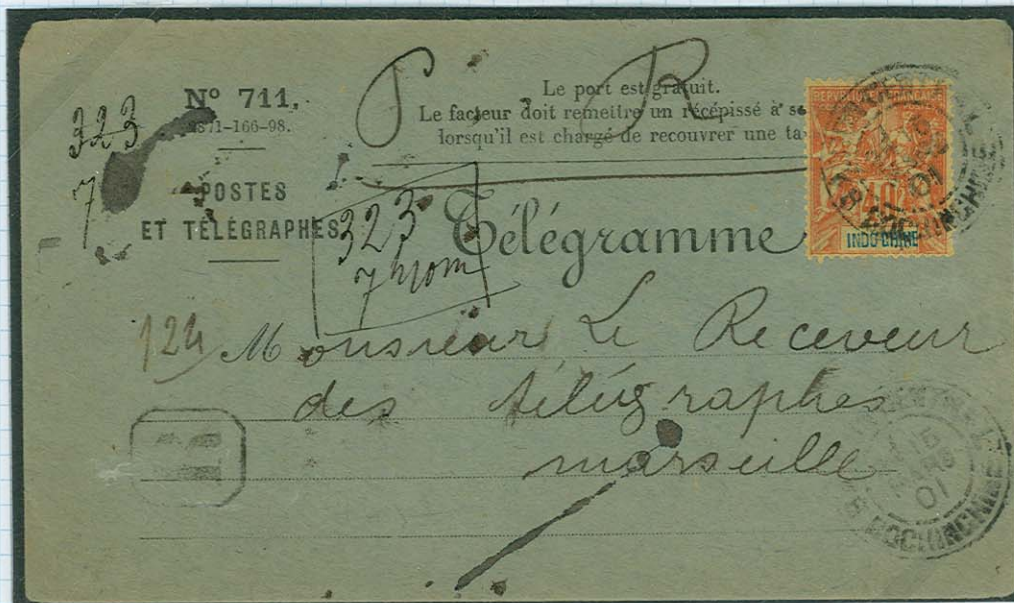
Saigon



Early double weight letter (2 x 25c) posted from the main office of Saigon-Central in January 1893 to Germany (note the Dubois Type and Group Type mixed franking), and triple weight registered letter (3 x 25c + 25c) posted from the Saigon-Port office to Denmark in 1899.

Saigon Telegram Letters

The principal colonies of Indochina, Madagascar and Senegal established telegram systems within the colonies to facilitate more rapid delivery of mail from the colony, particularly from internal small village offices. Messages would be telegraphed to the principal telegraph offices (i.e. Saigon for Indochina). Thereafter, telegram letters containing these messages would travel to France (typically Marseille or Bordeaux) at established rates via the normal French Packet services for delivery to the addressees.



Examples of telegram letters via Saigon and French Packet Line N illustrating one of the forms and an envelope used for this service from Cochinchina at prevailing French Community registered rates. The first was posted at 50c in January 1898 and the second at 40c in January 1899.

Saigon
Postal Stationery
Unusual Usages



Five centime postal stationery stamp cut-out used to prepay the printed matter rate (visiting cards, printed invitations, New Year's greetings, etc.) on a 1904 small envelope from Saigon to Tan-an. Reply portion of a send-reply combination post card properly sent from Zurich on April 27, 1900 to Saigon arriving on May 30th. Full non-commercial message on reverse. Both represent exceptional postal stationery items for this or any French Colony.

Saigon
Unusual Destinations
Luxembourg
Turkey



Post cards at the 10c rate from Saigon in 1897 and 1904 to Echternach, Luxembourg via Luxembourg-Gare (railroad station) and Monastir, Turkey via Suez and Salonika.

Saigon
Unusual Destinations
Luxembourg
Netherlands Indies



Letter posted from Saigon on June 2, 1897 to Diekirch, Luxembourg at the 25c overseas rate arriving on June 25th, plus a double weight registered letter posted from Saigon on June 24, 1901 (datestamp error – July in lieu of June) via Singapore to Tandjong-Poera, Dutch Indies arriving on July 28th.

Saigon
Reduced French Community Rates



Beginning in 1906 the rate within the French community was reduced to 10c per fifteen grams. This rate is illustrated by the 1912 revaluation of the 15c envelope as used from Saigon. Beginning in 1899 the French Community rate was lowered from 25c to 15c per fifteen grams. Shown are a registered letter franked at the 40c rate with a combination of Group and Grasset types, and a triple weight letter (3 x 15c) with a rare colonial APRE LE DÉPART (Too Late) handstamp used as an obliterator.

Saigon
Upated Stationery



Postal stationery items uprated to the 25c international UPU rate with additional Group Type stamps to Montreal, Canada; Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany; and Buchsweiler, Alsace. All items are with receivers and the letter cards have full messages.

Saigon
Registered Letters
Trouvé a la Boite



Apparent French Community registered letter at the 40c rate posted from Saigon on August 16, 1900 that was misplaced/lost in a mail box and received the rare colonial **Trouvé a la Boite** (Found in the Box) handstamp, though not a boxed R to denote registered mail since there was no manuscript notation. Below, a double weight registered letter to Germany franked with a single 75c stamp.

Saigon
Cancelled in France



On rare occasions mail would make it out of Indochina without stamps being properly cancelled. Cancellations were applied on initial arrival in France as shown by the items above which received the railroad cancellations: **MODANE A MACON** and **A PARIS A MONT CENIS** on crossing into France. A Saigon origin is presumed for both based on the dateline and photo for the former and return address for the latter.

**Saigon
Printed Matter
with postage due**



Unusual 1c printed matter wrapper with 60c postage due. At first appearance this seems excessive. The most likely explanation is that this item was at the top of a number of identical overweight printed matter pieces being delivered to various members of the judiciary at the same address in the court building in Saigon, and the 60c due was for the for the entire stack.

**Saigon
Railroad Posting**



Letter to France posted at the 25c UPU rate on the Mytho A Saigon rail line showing the datestamp of that line.

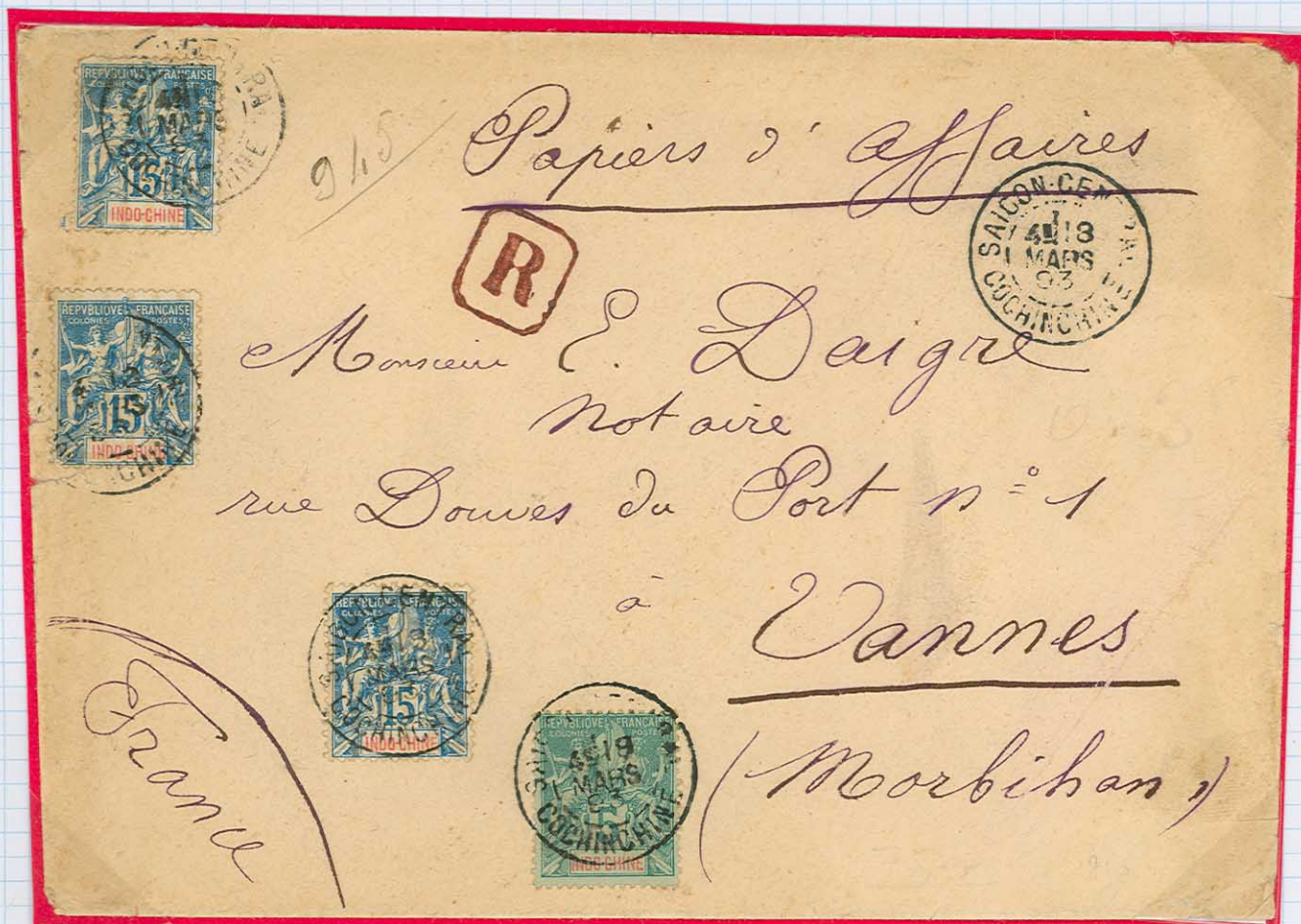
Saigon
Registered mail to
Pnompenh, Cambodia



Postal stationery items sent from Saigon in 1897 uprated to registered French Community rates of 40c and 55c (double weight) with Group Type and Dubois Type stamps posted to Pnompenh, Cambodia.

Saigon
Printed Matter & Law of June 1856
Registered Business Papers

Seemingly normal 5c printed matter envelope from Saigon to Hatien in 1900, which on examination at Hatien was found to be in violation of **Art. 9 de la loi du 25 juin 1856**. It contained additional writing on the printed matter and there were five or more examples arriving from this correspondence at Hatien. The penalty was severe: each item was treated as an unpaid local letter and due 30c in lieu of the 15c local rate which was doubled to 60c per item. This example is possibly the only recorded example of the application of this obscure law in any of the French Colonies.



Registered business papers rate (**Papiers d'affaires**) of 50c (25c registration and 25c postage on a weight of 100 – 125g) from Saigon to France in 1893. These low rates were created to support French business interests. Since these envelopes/wrappers were not saved, this is an extremely rare rate. The exhibitor is award of but two examples of this type of rate franked with Indochina Group Type.