

Navigation and Commerce - Indochina's First Definitive Stamps

Over a century ago, in 1892, French Indochina received its first set of definitive stamps and associated stationery. This exhibit illustrates how the Navigation and Commerce issue served Indochina's postal needs for over a decade well until into the Twentieth Century.

The first part of the exhibit presents a discussion of how the Navigation and Commerce stamps came into being. Aspects of the design are noted using a proof printing. The basic stamps as well as varieties follow. Special printings for the 1900 Paris Exposition are notable. Displayed are printing registration varieties and color shades. Millesimes and Fournier forgeries portray other aspects of this issue.

Thereafter follows a demonstration of the breadth of postmarks that can be found on this issue. Highlighted here are complete sets showing uses from the principal cities of Indochina. Besides a comprehensive display of town cancels, also shown are maritime, railroad, military and foreign cancels.

The central part of the exhibit focuses on solitary usages of the stamps as well as combination usages. Each stamp is represented by a usage singly or in multiple. Covers demonstrate how combinations of stamps satisfied changes in postal rates. Rounding out the usages is a number of mixed franking covers.

To meet a shortage of common values, some stamps were revalued with overprints in 1903. A variety of singular and combined usages are shown.

Following the basic stamps is a presentation of every stationery item (postal cards, letter cards and envelopes) that was issued in conjunction with the stamps. Included are unused and used postal cards, letter cards and envelopes. Later in 1912, stationery items were overprinted. Though motivated largely by philatelic demand, a number of commercial usages are shown. Postal stationery was also overprinted for Indochina's auxiliary post office in Canton, China.

After the stationery is a presentation of the several values that were overprinted for parcel post purposes.

Lastly, stamps overprinted for use as tax stamps are shown.

Because the Navigation and Commerce series was the first definitive issue for Indochina, it had to serve all of the colony's postal needs. This comprehensive overview shows how this issue was used and reused to meet those needs.

Navigation and Commerce Design

The various Colonial General Issues, which bore the name of no specific colony, had been in use since 1859. Having one set of stamps for its far-flung colonies resulted in production and distribution advantages for France. By the early 1890s, French Colonies worldwide were using the Dubois French Colonial General Issues. During this period, monetary exchange rates made it profitable to buy stamps in one colony and sell them in another. The French government wanted to end the speculation based on its colonial postage stamps as the means of exchange. As a stopgap, the French government ordered its colonies to overprint their stamps with distinguishing markings. Recognizing that a longer term solution was required, the Ministry of Colonies ordered the preparation of separate issues for each colony. (The hope for an increased revenues from collectors was not a side issue in the decision to proceed.) The result was the Navigation and Commerce issue.

Alphee Dubois, who had designed and engraved the last colonial issue, was commissioned to paint the design and Louis-Eugene Mouchon prepared the master die. The design, following the tastes of the period, centered about two allegorical figures and was officially designated "Navigation and Commerce." The leftmost figure, a female was pictured holding the tiller of a ship and represented "Navigation." Opposing her was a male figure holding an overflowing cornucopia. The male represented "Commerce." The two are joined holding a staff in the center of the composition.

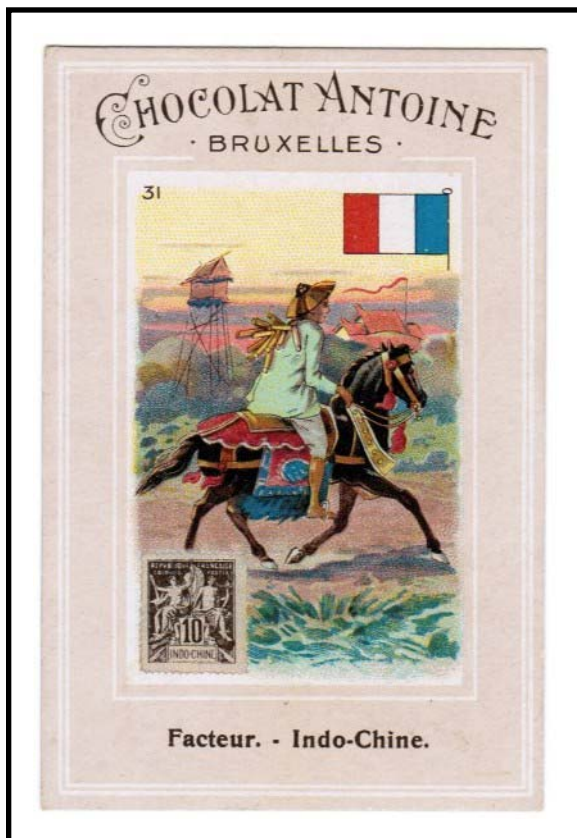


Proof of 10 centimes in red
lacking country inscription.

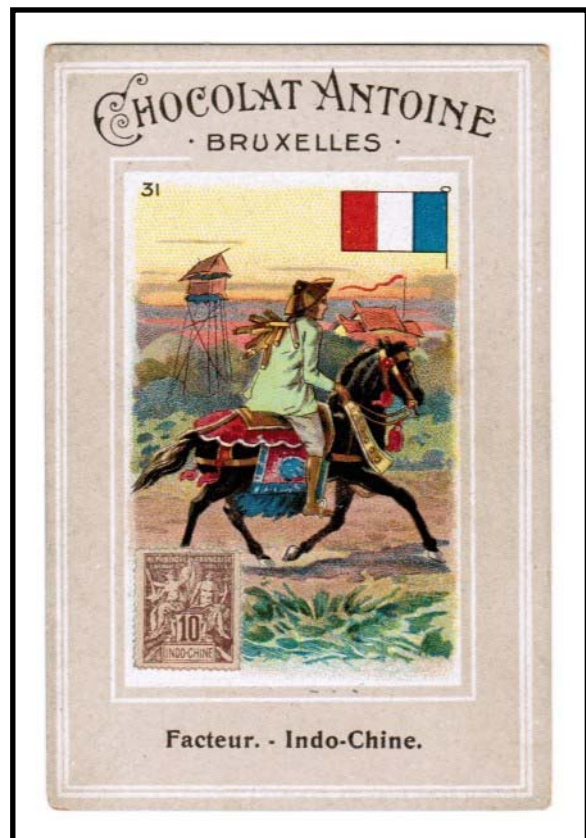
The stamps were released in November 1892. Initially, 18 colonies received their own stamps. Typically, each received thirteen stamps and eight pieces of postal stationery employing the current colors then in use in France. In 12 years, the original 18 colonies that had the Navigation and commerce stamps grew to 29 colonies because of name changes and geographical realignments. At the turn of the century, values of the original series were replaced by new colors to conform to guidelines established by the Universal Postal Union. Many, as in the case of Indochina, were later overprinted.

Navigation and Commerce Design

Over the time span of the definitive's service, Indochina had 19 different values based on denomination or color. The shade change for the 5-centime value occurred in 1899, following that of France where postal clerks complained that the former green gave a bluish cast under artificial light which was confused with the 15-centime value. The 10, 15, 25 and 50-centime denominations changed colors beginning in 1901 to comply with Universal Postal Union recommendations. Because of its flourishing commerce, Indochina was, in 1896, the first French colony to receive the 5 franc value.



Trading card from a chocolate company incorporating design of the 10 centimes value in the proper color (black).



Similar trading card incorporating design of the 10 centimes value in an incorrect color (brown).

Navigation and Commerce



Navigation and Commerce Pane of 1 centime

Navigation and Commerce stamps were printed in sheets of six panes of 5 stamps by 5 stamps. This example shows how the light blue background was applied as a block of color for the 1-centime value.



Navigation and Commerce Varieties



MISSING "I"



PARTIAL "I"



DOUBLE LEGEND



DOUBLE LEGEND



DOUBLE LEGEND



NORMAL
COLORS



COLORS OF
2 CENTIMES



NORMAL
COLORS

Navigation and Commerce Color Shades

Since the Navigation and Commerce issue was in use for a decade, many printings were required. Both the colors of the basic design as well as the background tints varied over time.



Navigation and Commerce Color Shades



The image displays a collection of 15 French colonial postage stamps from the Indo-China region, arranged in four rows. The stamps feature allegorical designs of figures holding flags and banners. The denominations are 5, 10, and 15 francs. The stamps are color-coded: green for 5 francs, blue for 10 francs, and red for 15 francs. The text "REPUBLIQUE FRANCAISE" and "INDO-CHINE" is visible on the stamps.

- Row 1 (Green):** Four 5-franc stamps.
- Row 2 (Blue):** Four 10-franc stamps.
- Row 3 (Red):** Three 10-franc stamps.
- Row 4 (Blue):** Three 15-franc stamps.



Navigation and Commerce
Color Shades



Navigation and Commerce Horizontal Printing Shifts

Since the inscription "INDO-CHINE" was printed separately, its position within the cartouche varies.



Navigation and Commerce Vertical Printing Shifts



Navigation and Commerce Vertical Printing Shifts



Navigation and Commerce Printing Shifts

Because the colony's name was printed separately on the Navigation and Commerce stamps, its location is sometimes shifted from the center of the panel.



Favor-cancelled 2-centime stamp with shifted legend on picture postcard

Navigation and Commerce “SPECIMEN” Cancellations

Members of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) were made aware of the postage stamps issued by other member countries by sharing copies of legitimate stamps. Participating members sent a set amount of each of its stamps to UPU Headquarters in Bern, Switzerland. The UPU, in turn, distributed three copies of each stamp to its member countries.

Upon receipt, it was possible for the three stamps to be distributed to different locations within the country. It appears that many countries had no need to further allocate their UPU samples. A clerk simply pasted them into a reference ledger. To prevent theft and reuse, the stamps were usually canceled in some way.

The examples shown here are from Indochina’s Navigation and Commerce series, the colony’s first definitive stamps. Each strip of three was affixed to a portion of paper and diagonally handstamped “SPECIMEN” with blue ink.



Navigation and Commerce Special Printing for Paris Exposition

The administration ordered special printings of current stamps for the Paris International Exposition of 1900. They were prepared on bristol card and imprinted with sepia dots which simulated perforations. Following the exposition the specimens were to be sent to the government archives.



Navigation and Commerce Special Printing for Paris Exposition



Navigation and Commerce
Special Printing for Paris Exposition
Blocks of Four



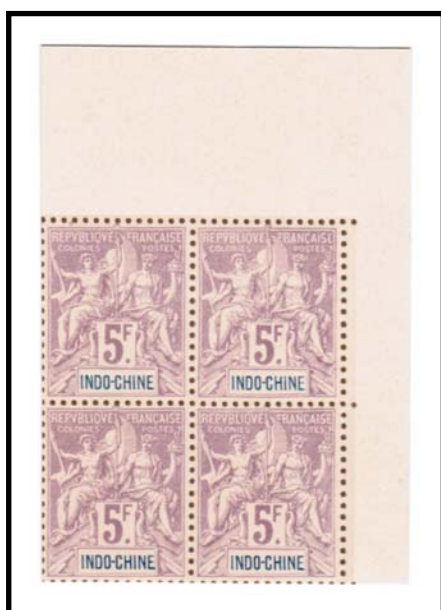
Navigation and Commerce
Special Printing for Paris Exposition
Blocks of Four



Navigation and Commerce
Special Printing for Paris Exposition
Blocks of Four



Navigation and Commerce
Special Printing for Paris Exposition
Blocks of Four



Navigation and Commerce Special Printing for Paris Exposition

The special printings were prepared in sheets of 25 (5x5) stamps. The year of original issue was printed beneath each pane. These bottom margin examples of the high values show the year of issue in black print.



Navigation and Commerce Proofs for Special Printing for Paris Exposition

These stamps were prepared from the plates for the special Paris Expo presentation printing. They must properly be regarded as a proof printing. Traces of the "simili-perforations" are visible on some stamps; most notably the 2, 4 and 30-centime values.



Navigation and Commerce Millesimes

For most printings, a single digit that represents the year of printing is presented in the center of the second row of each pane of Navigation and Commerce stamp. For instance, “3” signifies 1893, “4” signifies 1894, etc. The French term for the numeral is “millesime.”



Navigation and Commerce Millesimes



Navigation and Commerce Millesimes



Navigation and Commerce Millesimes



Navigation and Commerce Millesimes



Navigation and Commerce Millesimes



Navigation and Commerce
Millesimes



Navigation and Commerce Used Millesimes

Because a millesime occurs only once per pane of fifty stamps, used examples are correspondingly less common than regular used stamps.



Navigation and Commerce
Millesime Usage
Use of 25 centimes black

Mailed from the post office at Tchongking, this envelope bears a black 25-centime stamp with a marginal "5" inscription indicating that the stamp had come from the 1895 printing.



POSTAL MARKINGS
TCHONGKING 21 JUIL 04
REVERSE
HAN-KEOU-CHINE POSTE FRANCAISE 29 JUIL 04
MOUDON 8. IX. 04

Navigation and Commerce
Millesimes
Use of 75 centimes

A millesime pair of 75-centime values franked a registered mailing to France in 1903. Limited demand for the 75-centime denomination required printing only in the years 1892 and 1893. As indicated by the "3," these examples are from the 1893 printing.



POSTAL MARKINGS

CAP S^I JACQUES COCHINCHINE 10 JANV 03
framed R with manuscript registration number

REVERSE

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 30 JUIN 98
CAREASSONE AUDE 10-2 03

Navigation and Commerce Perfins



BC

Banque de l'indochine (Hanoi Branch)

Navigation and Commerce Forgeries

While the entire Navigation and Commerce series has been the target of forgers, the rare varieties are especially tempting for reproduction.



Modern forgery of inverted "INDO-CHINE"

Navigation and Commerce Fournier Facsimiles

Operating from Switzerland at the turn of the century, Fracois Fourier managed a thriving business which produced facsimiles of postage stamps. He regarded his work as objects d'art which he sold at low prices to collectors who could not afford the original stamps. When dealers began selling his stamps as genuine, he was renounced by the philatelic community. Though he continued to sell his wares through his own stamp journal, he never regained his lost respectability. He died around 1913.



Navigation and Commerce Fournier Facsimiles



NEW VALUE OVERPRINTS



PARCEL POST OVERPRINT



Navigation and Commerce
Fournier Facsimiles
Blocks of Four



Navigation and Commerce
Fournier Facsimiles
Blocks of Four



Navigation and Commerce
Fournier Facsimiles
Blocks of Four



Navigation and Commerce
Fournier Facsimiles
Block of 75 centimes

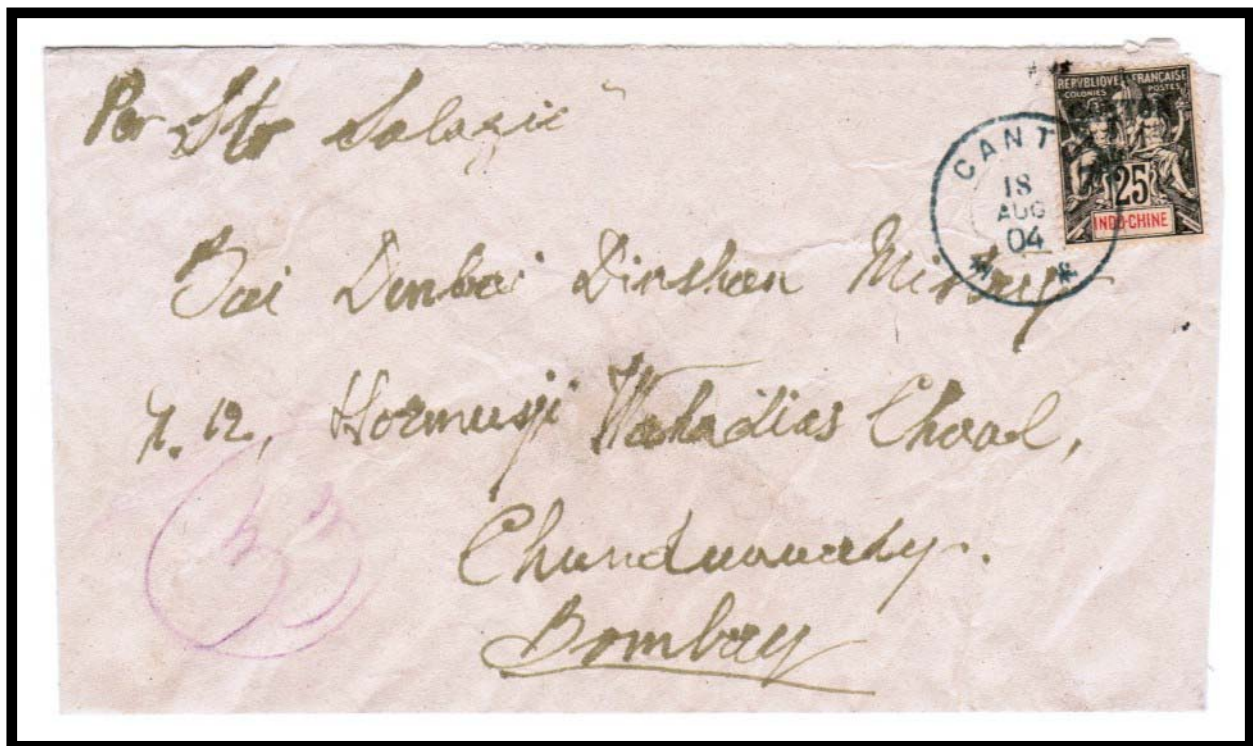


Navigation and Commerce
Fournier Facsimiles
Block of 5 francs



Navigation and Commerce
Use of 25 cents black Fournier Facsimile

This mailing has a number of problems that indicate it was fabricated to fool unsuspecting collectors. For one, the stamp is a Fournier facsimile. However, it has been modified with an overprint of much lesser quality than Fournier's work. The postmark from the Indochinese post office at Canton indicates the date with an English abbreviation for the month of August, rather than the French equivalent.



POSTAL MARKINGS
CANTON 18 AUG 04
REVERSE
FORT-BOMBAY 22 SE.04

Navigation and Commerce Use of Fournier Facsimiles

That the post office did not question the extremely late usage of Navigation and Commerce stamps on this cover is notable enough. The fact that all of the values are Fournier facsimiles makes the usage exceptional.



POSTAL MARKINGS

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 18 4 39

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE AVR 39

REVERSE

SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 18 4 39

Navigation and Commerce
Offices in China
Canton

The Canton post office favor-canceled a pane of twenty-five 1-centime Navigation and Commerce stamps.

