

# Inter-Treaty Port postage rates by French Packet

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## Synopsis

法國郵輪在 1862 十二月間開辦香港至上海航線，與始同時載運郵件，本文由實寄封來探討法航開辦早期時運送商埠與商埠之間郵件的郵資變化。

The French Messageries Imperiales opened a Branch Line from Hong Kong to Shanghai in December 1862, this article making use of known covers to illustrate the postage rates of the Inter-Treaty Port mail carried by the French Packet.

My article 'Inter-Treaty Port Mail' published in the Hong Kong SAR Philatelic Journal No. 2 [1] briefly discussed the inter-Treaty Port postage rates of mail carried by French Packet. More examples are now known since I first wrote that article and I would like to take this opportunity to elaborate on this subject.

## Background

French interest in South-east Asia dated back to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century when the Compagnie Française des Indes was established to oversee French commerce with India, Eastern Africa, and other territories of the Indian Ocean and the East Indies. However, the British naval blockade of the French ports during the Napoleonic Wars at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century ruined French overseas trading activities. Following the end of the war, sporadic French religious missions were sent to China despite preaching was forbidden punishable by death. Renewal of French interest in China did not become apparent until the French Government opened a Consulate in Shanghai during the 1850s.

In order to protect the French settlement in Shanghai from the Taiping Rebellion in 1860, French Forces were sent to China. Military Mail at that time had to be carried by the British P&O mailboats since the French Messageries Imperiales did not operate a branch line to the Far East at that time. The French Military Post Office eventually closed in April 1862 after the departure of the French forces.

After the departure of the Military Post Office on 23 March 1862, the French Concession in Shanghai was left with no postal service of its own. Finally, after repeated petition from the local community, it was declared by French Post that as of 12 October 1862, a "Direction de Poste Francaise de Shanghae" be formed. The first Postmaster was Monsieur M. Champanhet who arrived in Shanghai on 19 December 1862

It was also announced in the Hong Kong Government Gazette on 8 November 1862 that the French Messageries Maritime was to introduce three shipping services to the Far East, namely, the Hong Kong - Marseilles via Saigon service (Ligne d'Indochine), the Galle - Calcutta service and the Hong Kong - Shanghai service. It was the latter that provided a French mail connection to Shanghai.

The monthly Hong Kong and Shanghai service was ran in the first few years by the French steamers *Hydaspe* and *Bourdonnais* with occasional assistance by other ships such as the *Kiangtse*, *Grenada*, *Lotus*, *Dumbarton* and even on occasions by the *Alphée* and *Dupleix* (of the Japan Branch line) when the regular ships broke down. This branch line became Ligne R in January 1867 and was eventually incorporated into the main Ligne N in October 1871.

Another branch line ran from Shanghai to Yokohama began in September 1865 and was run in the first two years by the French steamer *Dupleix*. This branch line was known as Ligne S from January 1867 and from 1869, it became a direct line that ran from Hong Kong to Yokohama. [2]

## Postage rates sent via French Post Office

Circular No. 270 (Bulletin des Postes No. 87 of November 1862) prescribed a postage rate of 60 centimes per 7.5 grams. (1/4 oz.) for a pre-paid letter and 15 centimes per 40 grams for a printed matter sent via the Shanghai French Post Office to French Indochina, French India and British possessions in Asia. This is so-called the "China Sea Rate" or "Tarif Mers de Chine" and this rate lasted until 31 March 1877. However, when the Shanghai - Japan line was inaugurated, Circular No. 400 (Bulletin des Postes No. 118 of 21 June 1865) prescribed a reduced postage rate of 50 centimes per 7.5 grams. (1/4 oz.) for a pre-paid letter and 10 centimes per 40 grams for a printed matter sent via the Shanghai French Post Office to Japan. An unpaid letter would be charged 70 centimes per 7.5 grams. (1/4 oz.) on arrival. This rate presumably ended when the service was stopped in 1869.

Figure 1 shows a letter prepaid 50 centimes by Empire 10c and 40c sent on 9 April 1867 via French Post Office Shanghai to Yokohama by French Packet Ligne S *Phase* which arrived at Yokohama on 13 April. At this time, the French Post Office was temporary housed in Isidolo Dell'Oro & Co. building because the original post office was burnt down by the fire of 26 November 1866. [3]

Figure 2 shows a letter sent unpaid from Shanghai on 9 January 1867 to Yokohama shortly after the November 1866 fire. *Alphee* arrived at Yokohama on 13 January. Ligne du Japon began servicing this route from 3 September 1865 and the name was changed to Ligne S in 1867. The letter was charged 14 decimes being a double-rate letter weighing below 15 grams. [3]

Figure 3 shows an example of the China Sea rate. The letter was sent from Hong Kong to Shanghai on 30 July 1866 by the French steamer *La Bourdonnais* on the Hong Kong – Shanghai line. It arrived at Shanghai on 3 August and it was charged 6 decimes (60 centimes) postage due. The large handstruck 6 appears to be unrecorded by previous researchers. This metal “tampon” must be specially made by Shanghai French Post Office intended for unpaid letter and this is the only recorded letter bearing this mark. [3], [4]

Figure 4 shows a later example of the 60 centimes rate applied on a letter from Shanghai to Saigon on 14 October 1875. It was sent by Ligne N *Djemnah* and arrived at Saigon on 24 October. [3]

Figure 5 shows a wrapper from Shanghai to Hong Kong dated 5 March 1875 by French Packet Ligne N *Ava*. 15 centimes per 40 grams printed matter rate. [3]



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



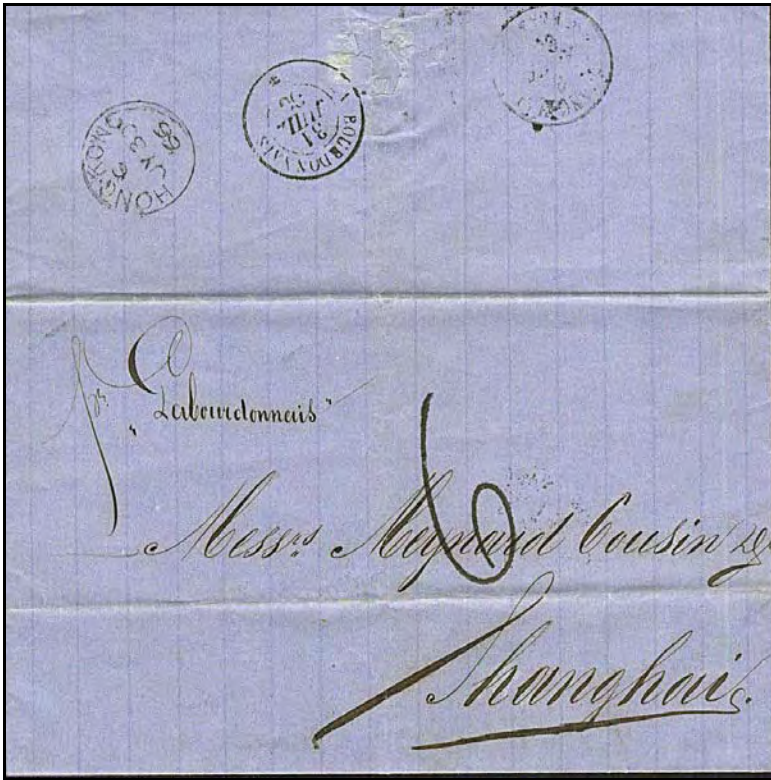


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

### Postage rates sent via British Post Office

The postage rate by French Packets sent via British Post Offices in Hong Kong, China (Shanghai), Indochina and Japan was 7d or 14c per quarter oz. announced on 1 August 1863 by Hong Kong Post Office.

The printed matter/newspaper rate carried by British Packet was 1d (2c) but there appears to be no reference to a printed matter rate sent by French Packet at this time and no examples have been seen by the author.

Fig. 6 shows a printed letter from Ningpo dated 10 February 1864 carried privately to Shanghai and sent via the British Post Office to Foochow. It was sent on the 21 February by the French steamer *Hydaspe* to Hong Kong and then by the British steamer *Formosa* on 1 March to Foochow. The letter was prepaid 11d at Shanghai which made up of 7d for a quarter oz. letter French Packet rate Shanghai to Hong Kong and 4d per half oz. British Packet rate Hong Kong to Foochow. This letter is the earliest and only recorded Inter-Treaty Port letter from Ningpo during the pre-stamp period carried by French Packet. [3]

Fig. 7 shows a letter from Hong Kong dated 24 September 1864 addressed to Captain of the ship 'David' at Saigon. The two Hong Kong stamps, QV12c and 2c paid for the 7d (14c) quarter oz. inter-port rate. The letter was carried by the French steamer *Cambodge* on the Indo-chine Line as indicated by the cachet POS. AN. V. SUEZ / PAQ. F. CAMBOD (Salles 1822). [4]

Fig. 8 shows a 6 May 1873 letter from Yokohama to Hong Kong carried by French steamer *Menzaleh* to Hong Kong franked by Hong Kong QV 12c and 2c making up the 14c (7d) quarter oz. rate. [3]

Fig. 9 shows an 24 October 1874 letter originated from Hankow posted at Shanghai to Hong Kong carried by the French steamer *Iraouaddy* franked by Hong Kong QV 4c and 24c at the 28c (14d) rate for a letter up to half oz. This letter is also one of the three recorded letter bearing the 'Shanghae to Hong Kong' British marine sorter datestamp (Webb type 8) carried by French Packet. [3]

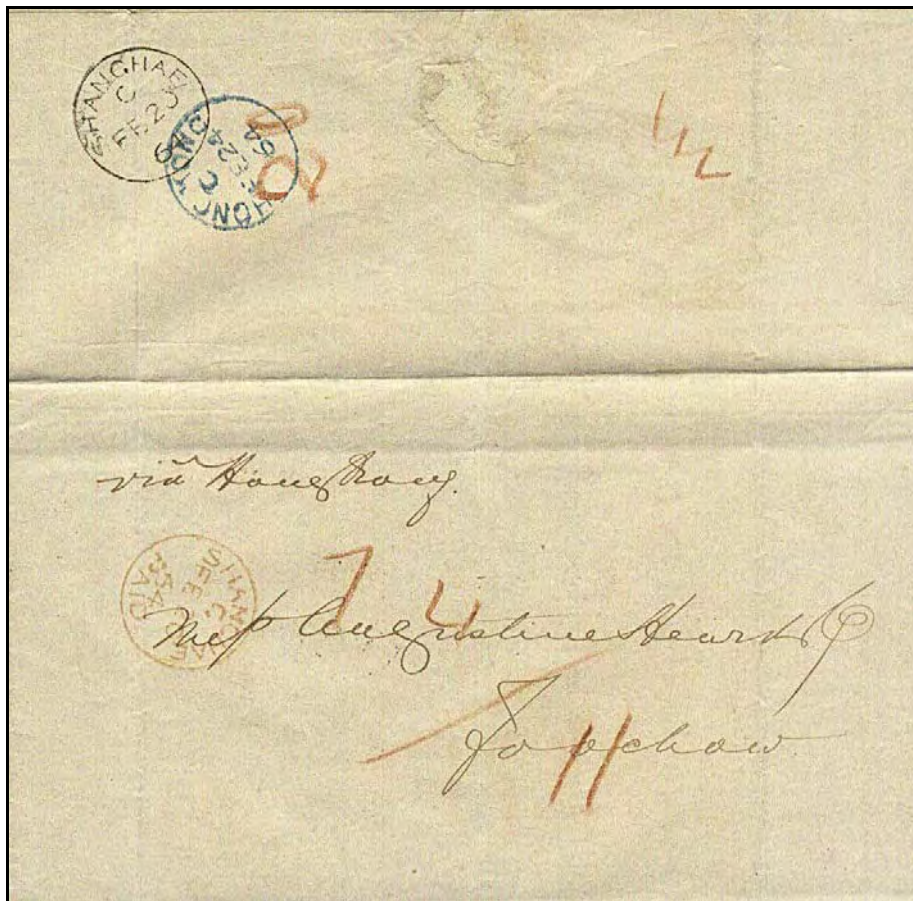


Fig. 6





Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

## **Conclusion**

Letters carried by the French mail between Asian ports are less common than those carried by British mail and there are several possible explanations:

1. The British postal service was well established and trusted by the merchants compared to the newly launched French postal service.
2. British Packet operated a bi-monthly service and the French only a monthly service.
3. Merchants might be deterred by the higher French Packet rate at that time - 7d per quarter oz. instead of 4d per half oz. by British Packet.
4. Most Inter-Treaty Port mails were sent by private ships and ships chartered by merchants for carrying merchandise. Postage for "privately" carried letters would be cheaper.

- End -

References: -

[1] Hong Kong SAR Philatelic Journal No. 2 published June 2000 Hong Kong

[2] Raymond Salles La Poste Maritime Française Tome V. Les Paquebots de L'extrême-Orient

[3] Material drawn from two exhibits of the author; 'Postal History of Hong Kong and the Treaty Ports' and 'The French Connection'

[4] Ex. the Berkinshaw-Smith French Maritime collection - Corinphila Zurich sale April 2006

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