

EXHIBITING – WE ARE ALREADY HALF WAY THERE

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We all know that exhibiting can be hard work. It requires knowledge, time, perseverance and some skill. We all know it requires skills we don't have. But is what we 'know' really true? I think not. Indeed, I think that most members of CSS are halfway or more to exhibiting and don't realize it. Consider the required elements::

Knowledge – If we didn't have knowledge or want more knowledge of Chinese stamps and postal history, we wouldn't be reading and continuing our collecting.

Time – we spend time on our stamps already. More of a good thing can't be bad.

Perseverance – If we didn't have perseverance, we wouldn't be collecting China. There are easier areas, but we didn't choose them.

Skill – Organized philately, unintentionally, makes exhibiting sound hard by talking a lot about graphic design, typography, fonts, graphics, preparing a synopsis, paper stock, how to make illustrations, and a dozen other things that would scare anyone. There is only one thing essential to preparing an exhibit and most of us do it already: we tell a story with our stamps. The rest is trivial in comparison.

When we show our stamps to our family and friends, do we hand them our stamps and let them look by themselves? Or do we try to tell them which stamps are which, how they are different from others that appear the same and the history of the period in which they were issued? Usually we describe them, even if briefly, to tell the story of the stamps and their context.

Chinese stamps are complicated. They have secret marks, many surcharges and overprints – some of which have subtle variations – and different types of paper and perforations. I believe it is more often the case than not, that we have notes on stock pages or album pages that distinguish between stamps that would otherwise be confused with each other. If we haven't done it for ourselves, we've done for our heirs who, when they need to handle our collection, will know what our collection is instead of being in the unenviable position of offering a "bunch of stamps that my dad said were good" to a dealer.

Those parts: the story, the explanation, the labelling, and the explanatory illustrations and pictures (even if only scans from a catalog), that we already have portions of on our album pages, are all the essential elements for an exhibit. We've got all the pieces.

Conceptually, it may be as simple as this: Transcribe what we tell people, combine it with our labels and illustrations and we already have an excellent first draft of an exhibit.

Perhaps think of it this way: if we weren't in the room with our friends and family to tell them about our stamps and covers and they wanted to see (and enjoy) your collection, what information would they need? Most of us already have it, even if it is slightly disorganized.

If this is the case, a first set of exhibit pages may only require organizing the information we already have. And, as an added benefit, by describing what is on our pages we may substantially increase the value of our collections. When our heirs wish to sell; identified items reach a higher sales price than unidentified items. Unidentified items may not even sell, who would want to buy an album or stock book of unidentified stamps?



Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure 1 shows an attractive set of stamps. Without any context provided, it may be hard to remember exactly what they are or to fully appreciate them. Figure 2 shows the same stamps with a bit of description; it makes a world of difference. If we were to add a title to the group of stamps describing these as prepared for temporary use as a 5-cent stamp in West Anhui Liberated Area, it would be even easier to understand why these stamps were prepared and how they were used. We might do even better. We might want to describe which currency was being used. We all have different ways of approaching our collections and we all have different thoughts about what information about our stamps is important. None of the different approaches or different relative importance attached to the descriptive information we provide is wrong. What we want to do is right for us.

October 10, 1945—Allied Victory Commemoratives



Figure 3

Figure 3 is another example: a nicely laid out set of stamps on an album page. Our enjoyment of our material may be enhanced if we add a rate table. It can certainly make understanding the postage on a cover easier to understand. It does not have to be large; it can be tiny. See Figure 4. The items shown in the Figure 3 album page have been transformed into a more exciting and useful album page which could serve equally well as the first draft of an exhibit page with a tiny rate table, information about the stamp itself and a description of the secret marks. In Figure 5 the album/exhibit page has been further enhanced by showing the secret marks in addition to describing them.



Figure 4



Figure 5

Let's look at another example. Some collectors like to collect varieties. Figure 6 shows a portion of a page with imperforate varieties and misplaced colors. Yet, it's hard to know what each stamp is. Figure 7 is the same page with descriptive text. It's not only easy to know what each variety is, but the use of a caption allows the viewer to know where to look to actually see the variety (e.g. Imperforate At Left).



Figure 6



Figure 7

Even if we choose to postpone exhibiting, the techniques used by exhibitors can provide added enjoyment for us and for others who see our collections. It may be a small step to add explanatory items to the relevant pages in an album to add to our enjoyment when we look at what we have. And should we decide we want to try to exhibit, we've got a giant head start on the process.

That's what exhibiting is about: sharing our material and the contextual information about it to show what we have and so others can learn, enjoy and appreciate our collection. The only competition in exhibiting is with our selves; exhibits are not compared to each other when judges look at them. Exhibits, like our collections, are measured against the standards we set for ourselves.

Comments or questions are welcomed.