

China - Switzerland Joint Issue

This is the short story of beautiful, but quite strange joint issues of two countries, separated not only by thousands of miles, but especially by their social and political choices. The date of issue was the 25th of November 1998, with a foreseen early sales from 11th of November 1998. In reality, the stamps were delivered with a delay of about three weeks, something unheard in the last decades in Switzerland (see below for a possible explanation).

The Swiss stamps have the values of 20c and 70c (1 Swiss Franc = 100c) and they were issues in minisheets of 4 pairs, with nice inscribed and decorative margins (see below the image of a half of a minisheet). The 20 c value represents the Bridge 24, that is situated at the West of the Five Pagodas Bridge, in the city of Yangzhou, of the Jiang Su Province. This stamps was designed by Mr. Xu Yan Bo of Jixian County, Hebei Province. On the 70 c stamp there is represented the Chillon Castle, situated near the Lake of Lemman (known also as the Lake of Geneva). It was build between the XI and the XIII centuries. This stamp was designed by the Swiss designer, Mrs. Bernadette Baltis and printed by the printing office of the Swiss Postal Services in Bern.

The Swiss sheet, with a value of only 90c (only a Swiss sheet was issued and its face value is unusual low - a quite positive thing) displays a very nice combination of the precedent two stamps. It was designed by Mr. Hansjoerg Anderegg and it was printed in Switzerland by the renown printing office Helio Courvoisier SA, La Chaux-de-Fonds.

Please note that these stamps, denominated as a Joint Issue, have as Chinese only the designer of one of the stamps. China issued other two stamps with the same design, but with values in Chinese currency. Even if the decision of the Swiss Postal Authorities is a wise one and prevents possible speculations (due to the different weights of Swiss and Chinese currencies), it shows the limits in the policy of issuing such a philatelic material. For more information about these limits and about the implied problems see below and on the next two pages.



The First Day Cover, on Silk Paper



A Half of the Minisheet



Special Fly Geneva - Beijing, 11/25/1998



Maxicard West Lake with the Bridge 24

Why were these stamps delivered with such a delay? A good question. The first indication could be already seen in the Magazine "La Loupe", issued by Swiss Postal Services in October 1998. On the image of the silk cover, with all four stamps (two Swiss and two Chinese) on it, the places of the Chinese stamps were empty, with a Chinese cancel over two gray rectangles. That gives an early indication of some problems with or at the Chinese Postal Authorities. When the stamps (together with other issues, foreseen to be delivered together) were finally delivered, the Swiss Post presented its excuses, speaking about unusual circumstances, a high demand and the decision to deliver all issues at once.

I suppose (and it should be taken as a supposition, but one that it is based on a long life experience of the author) that the Chinese authorities which deliver the approval for all printed matters (e.g. the censor of the press authority) for reasons known only by themselves (probably an unusual situation, eventually perceived as dangerous) delayed their approval.

An embarrassing coincidence is that these stamps appeared at the same time as the Swiss stamp dedicated to the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Declaration that, among others, explicitly prohibits the censorship.