

LINCOLN LORE

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THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN—SUN YAT-SEN POSTAGE STAMP

The 5-cent, blue, commemorative postage stamp, first released at Denver, Colorado on Tuesday, July 7 might be designated as the most unusual United States adhesive which has thus far appeared. The fact that it establishes at least five precedents sets it apart as introducing a new epoch in philatelic history.

The basic design on the stamp is a contour of the map of China and superimposed upon it in the center of the design, the Chinese national symbol. Within the sun's circumference are the inscriptions in English, "July 7, 1937" and "July 7, 1942," between these two horizontal date lines is an inscription in Chinese characters which interpreted means, "Fight the War and Build the Country," Generalissimo Chiang K'ai-shek's war motto. Elliptical frames extending over the northwestern and the other over the northeastern sections of the map contains portraits of Abraham Lincoln and Sun Yat-sen respectively. An inscription under the former picture in English and under the latter in Chinese records Lincoln's quotation at Gettysburg, "Of the people, by the people, for the people." The stamp is arranged horizontally and is .84 x 1.44 inches and issued in sheets of 50 by the rotary process.

The five points in which its design differs from all former United States postage stamps might be roughly summarized in this manner: commemorating a foreign episode; utilizing the map of a foreign nation; featuring the symbol of a foreign land; displaying the portrait of a foreign ruler; and inscribing slogans in a foreign tongue.

Commemorating a Foreign Episode

The purpose of the stamp is commemorating five years of Chinese resistance to Japanese aggression. From a letter written by Postmaster General Frank C. Walker, addressed to Generalissimo Chiang K'ai-shek this excerpt was published in the *New York Times* of July 12, 1942:

"It is the purpose of this stamp to express the admiration of the United States for the courageous resistance of the Chinese nation to military aggression, and to focus attention upon the cause, to which we are jointly dedicated—that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

The date lines on the stamp indicate the origin and fifth anniversary of the Chinese government's struggle

against Japanese aggression. The stamp was first put on sale at Denver due to the fact that while visiting there on October 11, 1911 Dr. Sun Yat-sen was advised that his effort to free China had succeeded and he returned at once to accept the Presidency of the republic.

Utilizing the Map of a Foreign Nation

Possibly the first surprise which awaits one upon viewing the design is to observe a map of China serving as the background for a United States stamp. The *New York Times* of July 14 comments with respect to the basic design containing the map: "It presents for the first time on a United States adhesive a contour map of a foreign country." The fact that the denomination of the stamp is five cents, the price of postage for first class letters to China, implies that the stamp will be widely used on mail to people in Chinese territories.

Featuring the Symbol of a Foreign Land

Possibly the most drastic departure from the routine of stamp design is in using as the central theme of the design, a radiant sun, the symbol of the Chinese Empire which appears on the flag of China. Besides the political aspects involved in the use of the design some questions of religious symbolism are also involved.

Displaying the Portrait of a Foreign Ruler

Associated with Abraham Lincoln on the commemorative stamp is a portrait of Sun Yat-sen, founder of the Chinese republic and also its first President who passed away in 1925. The association of these two characters is timely, indeed, as Lincoln's political philosophy was undoubtedly the inspiration of Sun Yat-sen's ambitions for a new China. It is also well-known that Generalissimo Chiang K'ai-shek has always been a great admirer of Abraham Lincoln.

To this Chinese executive goes the honor of being the first foreign ruler to have his portrait displayed on a postage stamp of the United States of America.

Inscribing Slogans in a Foreign Tongue

In two instances Chinese ideographs are used to present, in one the motto of Chiang K'ai-shek, "Fight the War and Build the Country," and in the other the characters stand for a brief

excerpt from the address of Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg, "Of the people, by the people, for the people." With respect to this quotation there is some question whether or not it carries with it the idea which Lincoln hoped to emphasize. The emphasis in the arrangement of the quotation on the stamp apparently accentuates the three prepositions "of, by, and for" but most interpreters think of the phrase as *government of the people with equal emphasis on government and people, and then the minor emphasis on the prepositions "of, by and for" with major emphasis on the word "people" in each instance.*

There is an interesting letter in the files of the Lincoln National Life Foundation written on April 21, 1941 by Y. L. Lee, president of Lingnan University at Hong Kong. It was written in acknowledgment of the receipt of a facsimile of the Gettysburg address. It states, "I understand the reproduction is in Lincoln's own handwriting . . . it is a great speech and a classic in English literature. I am having it framed and it will be hung in some public place. In view of the strong trend towards democracy in China and toward the democracies in her foreign relations, this gift is very timely indeed."

Coin and Stamp Precedents

The use of Abraham Lincoln's picture on this stamp recalls the first attempt to place his portrait on an American coin in 1909. Then when no piece of money bore the likeness of an American statesman there was much prejudice shown against this innovation. The *New Orleans Picayune* stated, "The Republican institutions are toppling and our nation is about to become a monarchy. This new Lincoln cent may be said to mark the first visible and outward emblem of the transmogrification of the republic with an empire." The reaction of the *Richmond Times* follows, "No president, with the possible exception of Washington, occupies any such relation to the American people as justifies his being memorialized on their coins."

These reactions of two of the nation's outstanding daily papers toward placing the portrait of one of our own presidents on a coin are of interest, but it is doubtful if the five precedents established by the new 5-cent memorial stamp in 1942 will cause so much comment as did the one precedent introduced by the 1-cent memorial coin in 1909.