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THE POSTOFFICE AND POSTAGE STAMPS OF CHINA.

In China the postal service is divided into two branches—one in the interests of the government, the other in the interests of the people; the first issues no postage stamps, the latter does, therefore I shall treat principally with the postoffice of the people, or local postoffice as it really is, and its stamps.

The Chinese postoffice is ancient. Marco Polo first described it in his voyage there. It probably existed before his visit, but his account is the first authentic one. I will not stop to give an account of its workings, as he describes it, so those of my readers wishing further information can do so by reading the great voyager's writings. I shall treat of the workings of the Chinese postal service of to-day.

The Chinese are rather slow in the advancement of their postal service, and until some years ago it remained about the same as it was at the time of the visit of Polo.

The government post is entirely under the control of the government, and is used for the conveyance of the "Imperial Gazettes, official notices of promotion, suspension, furlough, the formal announcements of names of candidates who have succeeded in gaining literary honors at Peking," and a hundred other things connected with official business. It is seldom used by the people at large, although persons having influence at court are at times permitted to do so.

The people's post is in the hands of "co-operative societies of letter carriers, who bear to and fro all the missives sent upon affairs of trade or family interest from Chinaman to Chinaman."

Each city has a certain number of licensed companies, and the companies of the different cities are in partner-

ship or communication one with the other, thus making a network of communication of a most efficient character, considering its materials. The people place great reliance upon these companies and large sums of money frequently are posted by them. Robberies at times occur, but not frequently, and the offenders are generally brought to bay. To show the workings of the companies we abstract the following description by a traveler of the one at Shanghai.

"Outside the small east gate of Shanghai, and in one of the most popular thoroughfares, stand the offices of a letter and parcel delivery company, called the Tienshun house. It transmits letters through four postal lines, connected with the first cities in the central provinces, Kiangnan, Kiangsi, Horan and Chihkiang, indirectly also, with the remote country parts in those directions. Each of these lines is served separately by its own particular firm; but the junction of the four at Shanghai is completed by the union of these four firms in a general partnership, limiting its own liabilities. Its mode of working will be understood by following it on any single line, say that which runs along the coast of Chihkiang, and extends to the Northeast corner of the Fokian province, a distance of not quite seven hundred miles. There are employed upon it sixteen postmen. The names of these are written in large characters upon a board hung up in the receiving house, and most of them are partners in the business. There are fixed days for the receipt of letters on this line, making about twenty post-days in the month. For each post-day one man is nominated as carrier, and his name is regularly advertised upon the letter board, one day at least previous to his departure."

Now, concerning the stamps of

these Chinese local posts. I will not consider here the stamps issued by Shanghai, and the other cities of China, as the number of them being more than space will allow, I shall have to note them at some future time. The stamps that I will consider are the Chinese stamps headed "China," that are in general use to-day all over the country, but whether the different companies are required by law to use these particular stamps (which seems to be the cause of their general use) I cannot say.

In April, 1883, I took the trouble to find out the meaning of the inscriptions on these stamps, and visited Wong Chin Foo, at that time editor of the *Chinese-American*, and Wah Sing, a Chinese tea merchant in Pell street. From the two men I procured the information that the Chinese characters in the upper corners in the one candarin meant the value which was in United States currency, "nearly a cent and a half." Those in the three candarin meant that the value of that stamp in United States money is five cents and the five candarin I found to be worth in our currency eight cents.

The characters on the right side of the stamps mean "Large country in China," those on the left, "Started from that country." The dragon in the centre of the stamps is far better looking than on some of the Shanghai, etc., stamps. These stamps first appeared in 1877.—*From The Gem.*

The postal authorities have issued a notification that the Direct Spanish Company's communication with Spain and places beyond is now restored.

Mr. Ph. Heinsberger, 151 Franklin Street and 89 Delancey Street, New York, is our authorized agent to receive advertisements and subscriptions.