

World of Stamps:

Island Communities: Japan, Part 1 of 4

by Geir Sør-Reime (*From Mekeel's & STAMPS May 13, 2011*)

Japan has an area of 146,000 square miles and a population of 127 million, the 10th largest in the world.

The history of Japan is long and complex, and we will concentrate on the philatelic history in this article, referring to political history when necessary.

Japan's first stamps were issued on April 20, 1871, and joined the Universal Postal Union in 1877. Before that date, European powers and the U.S. operated post-offices in Japan to handle overseas mail.

British post-offices operated in four ports (Hakodate, Hiogo—also known as Kobe—Nagasaki and Yokohama) from 1858, and from 1864 onwards, they were gradually supplied with Hong Kong stamps. The British post-offices closed in 1879.

France also operated a post-office in Yokohama with its own cancellers and using ordinary French stamps. It closed 1880.

The U.S. opened offices in Yokohama 1867, Nagasaki 1867, Hiogo (Kobe) 1867 and Hakodadi 1873. All U.S. offices closed December 31, 1874.



1958 Centenary of opening of ports of Yokohama, Nagasaki and Hakodate to foreign trade (#647)



Left: 1871 Dragons 48m (Sc. 1); right: 1872 Dragons, new currency, 1/2 s. (Sc. 5)



The first Japanese issues featured two dragons facing the figures of value in their design. These stamps exist printed on a number of paper varieties. The first issue was issued in 1871 in the currency of 100 Mon to 1 Sen. Already in 1872, these stamps were issued in the new currency of 100 Sen to 1 Yen, the currency used up till this day.



1994 Baron Hisoka Maejima and Japan's first stamps (Sc. 2402-05)

From 1994, the history of the Japanese postage-stamps was told on a series of stamps. The 1994 issue reproduced the first, Dragon series, and also portrayed Hisoka Maejima, the founder of the Japanese post-office. The second 1994 issue showed the Koban issue and the Italian printer Edoardo Chiossone. In 1995, the Silver Jubilee was reproduced on two stamps, as well as the two first air post stamps, and further more modern stamps. Already in August 1872, the latter issue was replaced by an issue in a completely new design, the so-called "Cherry Blossom" series.



1994 Japan Sc. 86 (on Sc. 2411)



1872-73 Cherry Blossoms, 1/2s. (Sc. 9)



From <http://www.philanippon.jp/>, top to bottom:

August 22, 1873 dispatched from U.S. Post Office in Yokohama to Alexandria, Virginia.

December 22, 1873, dispatched from French Post Office in Yokohama to Lyon, France;

December 17, 1873, dispatched from British Post Office in Yokohama to Scotland (Registered envelope)

With this issue, the famous chrysanthemum emblem, an element of all Japanese issues until 1947, was introduced.



1875 Birds (Sc. 50)

In 1876, an issue depicting birds was issued.

In 1878, the so-called “Koban” issue appeared. The name “Koban” refers to the circular centre which resembles an old Japanese gold coin known as Koban. These were additionally inscribed “Imperial Japanese Post” or “Japanese Empire”.

They are normally classed into Old Kubans, UPU Kubans and New Kubans. The first “Old” were issued May 17, 1876, with additional values added until 1879.

The “UPU” Koban were issued in 1883 to comply with the UPU color scheme.

The “New Koban” is a change of color of the remaining values of the “Old” and were issued 1888-93.



Kobans, left to right, 1879 “Old” (Sc. 69);
1883 UPU colors (Sc. 72); 1886-92 “New” (Sc. 78)

Japan’s first commemorative issue was made 1894 for the silver wedding of the Emperor. The second was issued 1896 to commemorate Japan’s victory in the war with China.



Left, 1894 Imperial Silver Wedding (Sc. 85); right, 1896 Sino-Japanese War commemoration, portraying General Kitashirakawa (Sc. 88)

A new definitive series called the “Kiku” or Chrysanthemum series was issued 1899.

In 1900, a single stamp was issued to commemorate the wedding of the Crown Prince. In 1905, a stamp commemorated the merger of the Japanese and the Korean posts.



Left to right, 1899 (Sc. 108) Chrysanthemum; 1900 Wedding of Crown-Prince Yoshihito and Princess Sakado (Sc. 109); 1905 unification of Korean and Japanese posts (Sc. 110)

The Japanese victory over Russia was also commemorated with two stamps in 1906. These commemorative stamps were only valid in Japan and to China and Korea.

Two 1908 stamps depicting the Empress were primarily used on telegraph and telephone forms.

In 1913, a new definitive series was issued, coinciding with the accession of Emperor Yoshihito. This is known as the “Tazawa” series, named after the designer, Masakoto Tazawa.



Left to right: 1906 triumphal military review following victory in war with Russia (Sc. 111); 1908 Empress Jingo (Sc. 113); 1913 definitive (Sc. 125)

The coronation of the new emperor was commemorated with a set of four 1915 stamps, and in 1916, three stamps commemorated the nomination of Prince Hirohito as heir apparent. A 1919 set of four celebrated



Left to right: 1915 Coronation of Emperor Yoshihito (Sc. 149); 1916 designation of Hirohito as Crown-Prince (Sc. 152); (top right) 1919 Peace after WWI (Sc. 156); (bottom right), 1919 first flight between Tokyo and Osaka (Sc. C1)

peace after WWI, and in 1919, two overprints commemorated the first flight between Tokyo and Osaka.

In 1920, stamps were issued for the first national census and for the inauguration of the Meiji shrine, both of which were only valid for inland postage and to China.



Left, 1920 1st modern population census (Sc. 159)
Right, 1929 Consecration of the Meij Shrine (Sc. 161)

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Above left: 1921 50th anniversary of Japanese postal service (Sc. 164);

Above right: 1921 return of Crown Prince from Europe (Sc. 168)

Right: 1922 definitive Mount Fuji (Sc. 175a)

In 1921, stamps were issued for the 50th anniversary of the Imperial Japanese Post, and for the Crown Prince's journey to Europe, while three 1922 definitives featured Mt. Fuji.



1923 Visit of Crown Prince on Taiwan (Sc. 177)

Two 1923 stamps marked the Crown Prince's visit to Taiwan. This issue was only sold on Taiwan, but was valid for postage throughout Japan.

Due to an earthquake destroying the perforation machine, 1923 printings of the Tazawa series were issued imperforate and ungummed. A planned issue celebrating the wedding of Crown Prince Hirohito was cancelled for the same reason, although specimens that had already been sent to Micronesia were recalled and distributed at the actual wedding.



1923 provisionals issued imperforate after the earthquake in Yokohama (Sc. 182)



1924 Empress Jingo (Sc. 188)

A 1924 definitive stamp portrayed the Empress, and in 1925, four stamps were issued to commemorate the Imperial silver wedding.



1925 Silver Wedding commem (Sc. 193)



Unissued souvenir sheet prepared for the wedding of Crown Prince Hirohito, but cancelled due to the 1923 earthquake.



1925 definitive Mount Fuji (Sc. 194)

Three pictorial definitives were issued in 1926, and the same year, Crown Prince Hirohito became Emperor Hirohito, ruling until 1989.



1928 Coronation of Emperor Hirohito (Sc. 203)

His accession was celebrated with four 1927 stamps, and his coronation with four 1928 stamps.

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1934 Red Cross Congress, Sc. 214

Note-worthy pre-WWII Japanese stamps include the 1934 set of four for the International Red Cross conference in Tokyo, the



1935 visit of Emperor of



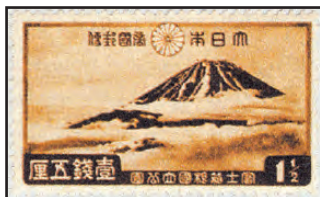
1936 30th anniversary of leased territory of

1935 set of four for the Emperor's visit to Manchukuo, the 1936 set of three for the 30th anniversary of the Japanese administration of the Kwantung peninsula



1940 2600th anniversary of founding of Japan (Sc. 295)

(with Port Arthur) in China, the 1939 set for the 75th anniversary Japanese membership of the International Red Cross, and the 1940 set for the 2600th anniversary of the Japanese empire. The Kwantung set was only sold in the Kwantung leased territory and in the South Manchurian Railway Zone.



1936 Fuji-Hakone National Park (Sc. 223)

The first of the annual New Year greeting stamps was issued



1935 first New Year greetings stamp, picturing Mt. Fuji



1937 definitive Mount Hodaka (Sc. 262)

A new definitive series was issued from 1937 onwards, featuring landscapes, prominent personalities.



1937 definitive, Kamatara Fujiwara (Sc. 274)

In 1942, two semi-postals celebrated the fall of



Left to right: 1942 semi-postal, plane over Japan Alps (Sc. B1); 1942 for 10th anniversary of Manchukuo (Sc. 343); 1942 definitive, Japanese pilot and flag (Sc. 336)



Singapore, four stamps celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo, a definitive series was devoted to the national defense program, and another semi-postal marked the 1st anniversary of the Great East Asian War.

After the war, a new definitive series was issued from 1946 onwards, at first with the Japanese characters for the country name read-



1942 semi-postal, Pearl Harbor under attack



Left, 1945 definitive (Sc. 353) characters right to left; right, 1946 (Sc. 363) characters left to right (arrows).

ing from right to left, from 1947 changed to reading from left to right. The inscription now reads 'Japanese Post' instead of 'Imperial Japanese Post'.



1947 promulgation of new constitution (Sc. 381)

The new, post-war constitution was marked with a pair of stamps in 1947. Later that year, the Chrysanthemum emblem was removed from Japanese stamps, and some of values of the 1945 and 1946 definitives were re-issued without the emblem. A new definitive series was introduced 1948.



1947 re-issued definitive without chrysanthemum emblem (Sc. 386)



1948 definitive, mailman (Sc. 434)

The pre-war New Year series was re-introduced in 1948, and the pre-war national park series was re-introduced in 1949.



1949 National Parks: Shinobu Village and Mt. Fuji



1959 Wedding of Crown Prince Akihito and Princess Michiko (Sc. 668)

1959 stamps were issued for the wedding of Crown Prince Akihito (the current Emperor of Japan, since 1989). A pair



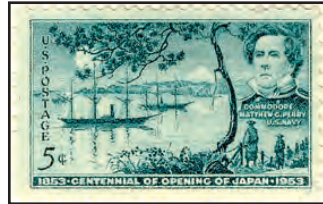
1960 for centenary of U.S.-Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce (Sc. 693)

of 1960 stamps was issued for the centenary of the Japan-U.S. friendship treaty, one of them showing President Buchanan and Japanese envoys, 1860.

Japan hosted the 1964 Olympic Games, and from 1961, stamps were issued to publicize the event. Another important 1964 event was the inauguration



Left, 1951 Signing of Peace Treaty (Sc. 546); right, U.S. 1953 issue for the centenary of the opening of



1961 Semi-postal for Tokyo 1964 Olympics (Sc. B12)

pic Games, and from 1961, stamps were issued to publicize the event. Another important 1964 event was the inauguration



1951 UPU 75th anniversary, (Sc. 553)

In 1951, a set of three stamps celebrated the signing of the peace treaty with the U.S., and the following year, two



1952 Nomination of Akihito as Heir Apparent, without "00" (Sc. 575)

stamps commemorated 75 years of Japanese membership in the Universal Postal Union. In 1952, the '00' was deleted from stamps, and some previous definitives were re-issued with the new way of denoting the denomination, but a new definitive series was also issued from that year on.

The 500th anniversary of Tokyo



New 1950 definitive (Sc. 509)

of the first high-speed train line, the Shinkansen trains.

From 1966 onwards, Japanese stamps have displayed the country name 'NIPPON' in Latin characters in addition to the Japanese inscriptions, and the definitive series was re-issued with the NIPPON inscription 1966-67.



1964, opening of Tokaido rail line (Sc. 826)



1968 definitive with "Nippon" inscription (Sc. 883A)

In 1968, a single stamp celebrated the return of the Bonin (Ogasawara) Islands to Japan, in 1972, another single stamp celebrated the return of the Ryukyu Islands, and in 1975, an Expo was held on Okinawa, again also marked with stamps (next page).



1968 Return of Bonin Islands to Japan (Sc. 955)



1956 500th anniversary of founding of Tokyo (Sc. 626)



1957 admission of Japan into the United Nations Organization (Sc. 634)



1972 for return of Ryukyu Islands to Japan (Sc. 1114)

was marked with a single 1956 stamp, a 1957 single marked Japan's admission into the United Nations Organization, and four

The 10th anniversary of the return of the Ryukyus was marked with a 1982



Above, 1975 for Oceanexpo 75 (Sc. 1216-18); right, 1992 for 20th anniversary of return of Ryukyu islands to Japan (Sc. 2133)

single, and in 1992 a single stamp was issued for the 20th anniversary.



Left, Emperor's limousine approaching Diet for 1946 proclamation of constitution; right, Prime Minister Yoshida signing Peace Treaty in San Francisco, September 8, 1951 (Sc. 2517a)



1970 for Expo 70 in Osaka (Sc. 1023)

stamps were issued both by Japan and lots of other countries. Both events were also included in the 1996 Postwar Era series.

The Golden Wedding anni-



The 1996 series "50th Years of Postwar Period" showed the 1946 proclamation of the Japanese constitution, the 1951 Peace Treaty and the 1972 return of the Ryukyus. The 25th anniversary was again celebrated with a

1997 single stamp, and in 2003, the 30th anniversary.

The 1970 World EXPO in Osaka was another event that not only resulted in new Japanese stamps, but also stamps from a number of countries throughout the world. 1972 the Winter Olympics were held in Sapporo and again,



1972 Winter Olympics, Sapporo (Sc. 1105)

versary of the Imperial couple was celebrated 1974 with two stamps (left, Sc. 1157a).

The Emperor's tour of the U.S. was marked with two 1975

stamps, and two 1976 stamps celebrated the Emperor's golden accession anniversary, and two 1986 stamps his



1975 for visit of Emperor Hirohito and Empress Nagako to the US (Sc. 1234a)



1976 50th anniversary of Emperor's Accession (Sc. 1267)

60th accession anniversary.

The coronation of Emperor Akihito was marked with two 1990 stamps. In 1993, three stamps and a souvenir sheet



1986 60th accession anniversary of Emperor Hirohito (Sc. 1671)



1990 Installation of Emperor Akihito (Sc. 2072)



1993 wedding of Crown Prince Naruhito and Mrs Masako Owada (Sc. 2200)



1999 for 10th accession anniversary of Emperor Akihito (Sc. 2720)

were issued for the wedding of Crown Prince Naruhito. The 10th accession

anniversary of Emperor Akihito was marked with two 1999 stamps. In 2009, two stamps commemorated the 15th wedding anniversary of the Crown Prince and another the 20th anniversary of the coronation of Emperor Akihito.



2009 for 15th wedding anniversary of Crown Prince Naruhito (Sc. 3110)



2009 for 20th anniversary of Coronation of Emperor Akihito

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1976 Sumo wrestler (Sc. 1336)

Japanese Sumo wrestling has become a popular TV sport in recent years. Between 1978 and 1979 Japan issued a number of stamps depicting traditional wrestling scenes.

The 450th anniversary of the arrival of the Portuguese in Japan was marked with two 1993 stamps.



1993, Arrival of the Portuguese, on a folding screen, c. 1560-

onwards, annual series have promoted the Japanese cartoons, the Manga stories.

A special

2004 Science and Technology sheet 1 showing several Manga characters

1995 issue was the three stamps for the end of WWII and for the prayers for peace in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The Kyoto



Above, 1997 Kyoto conference (Sc. 2598-99), woodprints: Mother Sea, Mother Earth; right, 1998 Olympics card, Ice Hockey

conference on climate change was honored with a pair of 1997 stamps.

Again in 1998, Winter Olympics were held in Japan, this time in Nagano, and naturally, several stamps were issued for this event.

Like the US, the



Japanese post-office from 1999 onwards issued a number of stamps entitled the 20th century and showing important events and personalities of the last century.



Left, Sc. 2689, 20th Century sheet 3, 1914-1920; below, Sc. 2818-19, 2002 World Cup Soccer Championships



1995 50th Anniversary of end of WWII, Sc. 2489-91, left to right: Children and peace dove; Peace dove; stained glass window and earth from space

A big event for Japan was the 2002 Football World Cup, held in Japan and Korea, with several stamp issues from both countries. The 50th anniversary of the San Francisco Peace Treaty was also commemorated with a 2001 stamp.

In 2009, a number of stamps commemorated the 150th anniversary of the opening of Japanese ports to foreigners, some of these stamps showed early and current views



2001, 50th Anniversary or San Francisco peace treaty, Sc. 2790



2009, Sc. 3122, views of Hakodate harbor

of Nagasaki, Yokohama and Hakodate harbors.



Left, 1957 Philately Week (Sc. 641); right 1984 International Letter Writing Week (Sc. 1586)

Japanese paintings have regularly occurred on the annual stamps for the Philately Week (portraits mainly) and for the International Letter Writing Week.

Since 1950, special souvenir sheets have been issued with the New Year stamp and offered as a prize in the New Year Lottery. These were not for sale, but are valid for postage.



From 1989 onwards, the Japanese Post started issuing regional stamps, stamps with motifs from specific prefectures and only sold in that prefecture, but valid for postage throughout

1989 regional issue for Okinawa (Ryukyus) (Sc. Z3)



1990 New Year Lottery stamp with lottery ticket (Sc. 2001)



1991 Regional issue, Japanese pears (Totori) (Sc. Z108)

stamped by enterprises to reduce the selling price. Also a number of pre-



stamped picture post cards have been issued, and since 1949, aerogrammes have also appeared regularly. At times, pre-stamped envelopes, letter-cards and newspaper wrappers have

Above, 1987 aerogramme left, 1990s "Echo" card (postal card with ad, sold at a discounted price)

Japan. The country name is written in Italics on these regional issues, to distinguish them from the national issues. The first prefecture stamp for Okinawa prefecture (Ryukyu Islands) was issued 1989. In 1990, stamps were issued for all 47 prefectures, each showing the regional flower of the prefecture.

Japan has issued a huge number of postal stationery items. Postal cards were issued from 1873 onwards. Today, annual series of New Year Lottery cards, Summer Lottery cards, and the Day of the Old and Handicapped are issued, as are so-called Echo cards, which are postal cards sponsored by enterprises to reduce the selling price. Also a number of pre-

