

WARNING

by F. L. Korean

Stamps of North Korea Catalogue Prices published by China, N. Korea & U.S. SCOTT are extremely over-inflated!!!

"NOTHING, supposedly issued by the North Korea Stamp Corporation is worth more than one standard roll of U.S. toilet paper", says F. L. Korean.

A Report on (N.) Korean Philately
by: Shih Wai Zhong

A rough translation by Prof. P. Kevin MacKeown of an article
originally published in *Jiyou*, No. 1, 1996.
(Originally published in Chinese, in the People's Republic of China)

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EDITOR: Dr. Gary N. McLean.



The author, Shih Wai Zhong, was born in Shanghai in January, 1944, and is currently an associate researcher in the Academia Sinica's Natural Resources Research Council.

From 1993 to 1995 he served as a Secretary in the Chinese Embassy in (N.)Korea. A collector from childhood, in collecting he has emphasized research on the technology of postage stamps and has written over 100 articles on stamp collecting and published several books on the subject of stamp collecting. He is a member of the National Philatelic Association's Committee on Stamp Terminology and vice-chairman of the Peking Stamp Study Association Committee.

Preface:

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1. (North) Korean Stamp Issues.

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The Korean stamp issuing policy has two goals:

(1) Issues specifically for stamp collectors. For the most part the themes of these issues are topical, printing is of a high quality, and are almost always issued in conjunction with miniature sheets, sheetlets or small sheets, in some instances imperforate stamps, imperforate miniature sheets, etc. In the recent two years sets of miniature sheets alone have been issued (featuring one or several pieces), without the issue of accompanying individual stamps. Because of this the number of miniature sheets issued annually has soared. In 1992 a total of 32 pieces were issued (inclusive of sheetlets and small sheets); in 1993 the number was 45, and in 1994 the total exceeded 70.

(2) Issues for regular postal needs. The themes of these stamps are predominantly political. In 1994 the DPRK's great leader, chairman Kim Il Sung, died, an event of great import in Korean political life. In the same year, the event was commemorated by the issue of 6 miniature sheets and a sheetlet, while in 1995 the first anniversary of his death was marked by the issue of 5 miniature sheets and a sheetlet. What the author is at a loss to understand is why all these stamps were issued solely for collectors, they did not circulate in the country, and the great bulk of the population will never have seen them.

Stamps issued by Korea for general postal use are not very numerous, constituting only a small portion of the annual total issues. For example, of the 22 sets issued in 1992, only 3 sets were for general postal use; 9 of 28 sets issued in 1993, and only 9 of the 34 sets issued in 1994, fell into this category. Reckoned on the actual number of stamps, the proportion is even less because issues for general postal use are often single stamps, or two stamp sets.

The distinct difference in emphasis in the issue of Korean stamps means that there is a clear distinction in their printing. Philatelic issues do not enter into the internal postal system (apart from their use by foreigners). Moreover, of those stamps issued for regular internal postal use, some also have special prints to supply to collectors. The basic difference between the two are: those for collectors are on better quality paper, of white color and stiff texture; stamps for regular postal use are on relatively poor quality paper, thin and soft and yellowish.

In the recent two years (circa. 1995) there has been an improvement in the quality of paper in the internal issues, using the same paper as the philatelic issues so that it is not possible to tell from an individual stamp which category the issue falls into. However, full sheets of stamps do have differences, there being larger (7 x 7), and smaller sheets (7 x 3). Even where the sheet sizes are the same, issues for collectors may still have some differences.

Korean stamps are designed, printed and issued by the Korean Stamp Company of the Korean Post and Telegraphs branch. The Korean Stamp Company operates in a manner similar to our former stamp issuing bureau (the China Stamp Company); the stamp occasion, the design (stamps featuring top leaders excepted) are all decided by the Korean Stamp Company. This explains how in the 80's Korea became the only country in the world outside the British Commonwealth to issue stamps commemorating the wedding of Prince Charles.

2. The Sale and Distribution of Korean Stamps

Korean stamps have two completely different issuing purposes, and for this reason there are two distinct methods of marketing. Before talking of marketing, however, we must first introduce the internal currency situation in the country. At the present time, three distinct types of currency circulate: the ordinary people use ordinary Won. Then there is a currency exchangeable for US\$, Japanese yen, etc., printed in blue which we will call the blue won. One US\$ buys 1.98 blue won. In addition, there is a currency, not freely exchangeable against US dollars, etc., which is limited in use to the purchase of foreign goods. The bills are red so we'll call them red won [Translator: It's not clear how one acquires such currency.]

The distribution of those stamps issued specially for collectors is the responsibility of the Korean Stamp Company, internally and abroad. The Korean Stamp Company headquarters are located near Pyongyang's best hotel, the Korean. It holds a comprehensive supply of philatelic goods, and its principal clientele appears to be foreign collectors and tourists; blue won are used for all purchases, at a price of twice the stamps' face value [Translator: I presume he is referring to mint stamps.] At the same time some hotels have bookshops which sell stamps; they also require blue won. Also, in these shops, incomplete sets are sold at face value; the writer managed to put together some complete sets from such purchases.

In March, 1995, Korea carried out a major revision of the prices of stamps; the selling prices of stamps from before 1990 underwent a rather large adjustment. The item most affected was the 1985 Kim Il Sung Visits China miniature sheet (Figure 8). Its original price was 10 US cents. For a long time there was no supply; now it is reckoned at US\$140, a 1400 fold rise.

Stamps for postal use are distributed throughout the country by the Post Office's stamps division for all the post offices to sell. One can use ordinary money, or red won, for purchases at face value. Not many ordinary (regular) stamps are issued in Korea; one usually encounters commemorative stamps at the post office. The postal rates are simple; an internal letter costs 10 chon, with no distinction between local or otherwise, while a registered letter costs 40 chon. In a post office one can occasionally come across 10 chon stamps from commemorative sets originally issued for collectors. The selling price of the same stamp is either 10 chon or 20 blue chon, reflecting a potential 100% difference in price. For this reason the Korean government stipulates that foreigners in the country may not use ordinary currency, but must use red won or blue won.

3. The Philatelic Situation in (North) Korea

Korea has many philatelists. At times of new issues, one can see many citizens and students at the Pyongyang stamp shop buying stamps. Several years ago Pyongyang stamp shop had a clearance sale, the 1957 reprints of the early liberation period were sold at the low price of 50 chon (ordinary money) each, and were very quickly bought up by Korean collectors. Some collectors are very diligent; in the Korea stamp main shop, I have seen a middle-aged mid-manager in a skilled technology department who would spend many days copying the thick catalog during his breaks and enjoying it very much.

However, in Korea collectors can only buy that small category of commemorative stamps issued for ordinary use every year. The much larger category available for purchase only with foreign currency is totally inaccessible to the ordinary collector. Because the price of Korean stamps issued for collectors is very high—a typical new set, including a miniature sheet and sheetlet, will cost several US dollars or more. One can't easily compare the value of the Korean currency with the US dollar, but by a reasonable reckoning such a set of stamps would cost the equivalent of several months' to half a year's salary. Accordingly, with some exceptions, no Korean collector can acquire the large quantity of beautiful stamps issued every year especially for collectors. In addition, stamp exchange activity in Korea is quite rare; it is also not very practical for the ordinary collector to exchange with foreign collectors. The writer brought a quantity of Chinese stamps when he went to Korea in the hope of exchanging with some like minded collectors, hoping to buy some covers from the Liberation War period. This, however, was all in vain.

There is a national philatelic society in Korea, closely associated with the Korean Stamp Company. It doesn't have any headquarters of its own. They used to publish *Korean Stamps* in English mainly devoted to introducing Korean stamps. It published over 100 issues but has ceased publication. At present no stamp collectors' magazine or newspaper is published.

Three editions of a Korean stamp catalogue have been published. The latest, in 1993, featured all the stamps from 1946 in color, was produced on high quality paper, and sold for 16 blue won. Apart from this catalogue, Korean philatelic publications are limited to the Stamp Company's advanced notices of new issues, and irregularly published booklets introducing Korean stamps.

Authentic Korean philatelic items are commemorative prestamped postal envelopes and postcards. Every year, to celebrate national political events, as

well as certain international meetings and activities, Korea issues, in not very great numbers, several such envelopes and cards. The franked values are of three types; --10 chon (internal ordinary), --40 chon (internal registered) and --120 chon (international letter). The cost of the item is an extra 10 chon. From my observation the quantity of each item issued does not exceed several tens of thousands. These items, apart from a small number which feature foreign topics and are philatelically distributed, are all sold at post offices over the counter, and are very rapidly sold out. After being sold out they cannot be obtained anywhere. The Korea Stamp Company is the controlling department for issuing Korean stamps, but the writer could not find any records of the issue of this postal stationery; these cards and envelopes cannot be obtained from the company.

There are two places in Pyongyang where you can buy foreign stamps. Not shown here.

Finally let me record that, while working in Korea, I received many letters from collectors [Translator: from China] seeking introductions and exchange with Korean collectors. The above report may serve as an answer to these inquiries and serve as my excuse [Translator: for not responding].

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Extracted from My Journey to PHILAKOREA 2009 Gary N. McLean

North Korean Stamps



I went back to the Seoul Stamp Co. booth to see what I could find out about the North Korean stamps that they had on display. I found out that the 80% that I understood yesterday to be the price was actually the discount. So buyers could pick up "new, mint" stamps at only 20% of catalogue. The next question, of course, was which catalogue? The answer was the North Korean catalogue. I also asked the source of the North Korean stock, and his response was, "a friend."

The dealer and I were having quite a difficult time communicating, but there was a man who was looking through stock who started to talk with me. It turned out that he is a small-time dealer from China. So we began a conversation about his experiences with North Korean stamps. He had been to North Korea three times, and each time he was there he visited a post office. But all he could find were definitive stamps, and he was always accompanied by a North Korean official, so he was not able to ask any probing questions.

I asked him where he got his North Korean stamps, and his response was, "large dealers in Beijing." When I asked where they got them, he indicated that he did not know. He did say that the stamps were extremely cheap, and he is convinced that most of the stamps had never been outside of China, as the Chinese produce many of these stamps for North Korea. He also said that it was clear that the only outlet for the stamps was stamp collectors, as no one in

North Korea ever got to see or use them.

He also cautioned about the conversation I had had with the South Korean stamp dealer. He said that it was extremely tricky to convert from the North Korean currency as priced in their catalogue into "real" currencies. As a result, it can look like a good buy, but, in reality, the collector is over-paying for the stamps. He was very clear that there was little interest or demand for North Korean stamps in China.

North Korean postal history, according to him, was seldom seen in China. When I asked about counterfeit postal history or archived postal history coming out of North Korea, he claimed ignorance about both.

2009-SCOTT, North Korean stamp values

by: F. L. Korean

On February 27, 2009, I received the following e-mail:

Good evening,
 Just went on the Korea Stamp Society web site.
 I would very much appreciate if you could answer the following question:

 The 2009 Scott catalogue lists the following North Korean stamps
 2698-2701 at \$150
 And
 2702 at \$100.

 Are these stamps rare? What is the reason for the high catalogue value?

 Do you have the Michel catalogue value for them?

 Do you have any ideas of buy/sell prices.

 Your help would be very much appreciated.

 Thanks!

 Sincerely,

So I put-up my 2008-SCOTT CD, and looked-up the stamps; then I scanned 2007-N. Korea catalogue:

2697 A1268 80ch multicolored 3.50 .90

PHILATELIA '87 (Koin) and 750th Anniv. Berlin — A1267

Designs: 10ch, Victory Column; 20ch, Reichstag (horiz.); 30ch, Pfaueninsel Castle; 40ch, Charlottenburg Castle (horiz.).
 No. 2706: 80ch, Olympic Stadium.

1987, Nov. 5 **Perf. 12**
 2698-2701 A1267 Set of 4 150.00
Souvenir Sheet
Perf. 11½x12
 2702 A1267 80ch multicolored 100.00


2754-2758 국제우표전람회 《필라델피아 87》
 International Stamp Exhibition "Philatelia '87"

November 5, Juche 76 (1987). 30x48 mm, 78x94 mm (s/s). Offset. 11.75x12. Kim Hui Won

2754 승리탑 Victory Column (10 jon)	10.00	1.70
2755 국회의사당 Reichstag (20 jon)	17.50	3.30
2756 공작섬사원 Peacock's Island Castle (30 jon)	25.00	5.00
2757 차를로텐부르크사원 Charlottenburg Castle (40 jon)	32.00	21.00
2758 1936년올림픽경기장 Olympic Stadium in 1936 (80 jon, s/s)	50.00	12.50
2754-2757 Stamps 4	1.00	76.10 27.90
2758 Souvenir sheet 1	0.80	50.00 12.50

Then I scanned my 1999-MICHEL; and went online to download Stanely Gibbons On-line:

1987, 5. Nov. 750 Jahre Berlin; Internationale Briefmarkenausstellung PHILATELIA '87, Köln. Odr.; gez. K 12.



2884.	10 Ch. mehrfarbig	ecv	1.20	—,40
2885.	20 Ch. mfg. (Reichstagsgebäude, w)	ecw	2.—	—,60
2886.	30 Ch. mfg. (Schloß auf der Pfaueninsel, s)	ecx	3.—	—,90
2887.	40 Ch. mfg. (Schloß Charlottenburg, w)	ecy	3.50	1.20
	Satzpreis (4 W.)		9.50	3.—

Blockausgabe, gez. Ks 11 1/2:12

2888.	80 Ch. mfg. (Olympiastadion, w)	ecz	—	—
	Block 227 (77:94 mm)	eda	9.—	3.—

1987

N 2734	10ch. Type 920	£0.40	£0.10
N 2735	20ch. Reichstag (horiz)	£0.70	£0.20
N 2736	30ch. Pfaueninsel Castle	£1.00	£0.30
N 2737	40ch. Charlottenburg Castle (horiz)	£1.25	£0.40
MSN2738	77x94 mm. 80ch. Olympic stadium (horiz)	£3.00	£1.00

After doing all my research, I sent the following e-mail:

Pierre,

Even though I don't care for anything coming from North Korea, I had to be nice to you "Tar-heel"; I lived at Ft.Bragg/Fayetteville 1985-1992.

In summary:
Received an e-mail from Pierre questioning the valuation of 4 stamps, and 1 Souvenir Sheet listed in 2009-SCOTT Catalogue's North Korea.

Stamps were issued November 18, 1987.

- 2007-N. Korean Stamp Catalogue# 2754-58; Euros.
- 1999- MICHEL, Vol. 9# 2884-88; DM
- 2009-SCOTT, Vol. 4# 2698-2702; \$
- 2004-Stanley Gibbons-online# N2734-MSN2738; BP

I have 2008-SCOTT, Vol. 4-CD: Sc# 2698-2701 Set of 4 \$150.00
Sc# 2702 S/S \$100.00

In my mind, there is no greater indication that SCOTT has extremely over-evaluated these stamps, than George's website: <http://www.allkor.netfirms.com/> (Formerly listed by MICHEL#; now SCOTT#)
George's sell price is: CALL ME.

Even though the mintage of these stamps is unkown, if I had to take a guess, I'd say that SCOTT has over-evalusted Sc# 2698-2702, by 90-95%.
See-ya,

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