



TANNU-TUVA STAMPS AND POSTAL HISTORY

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Cover image: The cover image shows Jo Bodeon, a back-roper in the mule room at Chace Cotton Mill. Burlington, Vermont. This and other similar images in this book were taken by Lewis W. Hine, in the period between 1908-1912. These images as well as social campaigns by many including Hine, helped to formulate America's anti-child labour laws.

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INTRODUCTION

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Tannu-Tuva

THE POSTAGE STAMPS OF TANNU TUVA form one of philately's curious byways, featuring quirky and colorful stamps, many of questionable validity, issued by an obscure country which held special fascination for young stamp collectors in the middle of the twentieth century.



Figure 1: RUSSIA TANNU TUVA Diamond shape stamp showing interior of tent.

Tannu Tuva was an autonomous region in central Asia between Russia and Mongolia, which in 1921, under Russian instigation, became the Tuvan People's Republic.



Figure 2: RUSSIA TANNU TUVA 1927
Mi 15-28 MLH USD50

A treaty between the Soviet Union and the Mongolian People's Republic in 1926 affirmed the country's independence, although no other countries formally recognized it. In 1944, it was annexed to the Soviet Union as part of the Tuvan Autonomous Oblast and in 1961 became the Tuva Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Its successor since 1992, the Tuvan Republic, is a member of the Russian Federation.

Stamps

Between 1926 and 1933, Tannu Tuva issued 38 postage stamps.[1] The first series depicted the Buddhist wheel of life with Mongolian writing and numerals only. Beginning in 1927, Tannu Tuva issued a series of color stamps with local scenes or a map of the country. These stamps were issued in several shapes, including rectangles, triangles and diamonds, and bore text in Mongolian and the words "TOUVA" and "postage". From 1934 to 1936, Tuva issued about 100 different postage stamps with exotic images of Tuvan life, including horse racing, nomadic battle scenes, and domestic animals including camels and oxen.[2]

These large format stamps came in a variety of shapes including diamonds, and were widely sold to collectors in canceled to order form.

These "stamps" were the brainchild of Bela Sekula, a promotor of philatelic "rarities", who in 1934 convinced the Tuvan and Soviet authorities to manufacture exotic stamps to sell to collectors.[2] They were in fact "designed in Moscow, printed in Moscow, franked in Moscow and sold abroad by a Moscow state trading firm to earn hard currency for Moscow." [3][4] Nor were all the images on the stamps accurate representations of Tuvan life. One of the stamps, for example, depicted a "camel racing locomotives along Tuva's nonexistent railway".[5]

The standing of the Tannu Tuva stamps has been controversial. Some catalogues list them as valid postage stamps (Yvert, Michel, Sanabria, and Whitfield King catalogues)[6] while the Scott and Stanley Gibbons catalogues do not recognize these as such.[7][8]

Some collectors contend that they did see at least some limited postal use.[6] Notwithstanding their questionable origins, these exotic stamps were popular with young collectors during the middle of the twentieth century. This is documented, for example, in Ralph Leighton's *Tuva or Bust!*, Richard Feynman's *Last Journey* (W. W. Norton 1991), where childhood memories of the colorful stamps of Tannu Tuva inspired Nobel prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman and the author on a quest, first to contact someone in Tuva, and then to actually visit the country. (Feynman died before achieving his goal, but Leighton ultimately reached Tuva.)[9] Leighton and Feynman's efforts rekindled an interest in Tuva and its stamps, which now are the subject of numerous websites.

Since the 1990s, numerous labels purporting to be postage stamps of Tuva have again appeared on the market. These have depicted a variety of unlikely Tuvan subjects, such as Bart Simpson, the Teletubbies and Led Zeppelin, and are all illegal stamps apparently manufactured in England and intended to deceive collectors.[10]

<http://www.tradewinds-co.com/ttpp/index.html>



Figure 3: 1442 31a 1932, Horseman, inverted blue surcharge 3k on 70k red and olive brown, right sheet margin copy, full OG, NH, VF, C.v. USD 600 130.00 raritan

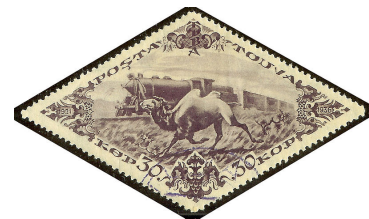


Figure 4: Tuva "stamp" (camel "racing" locomotive) 1936.



Figure 5: RUSSIA TANNU TUVA