



Affiliate 133

PHILATELI-GRAPHICS

QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE
GRAPHICS PHILATELY ASSOCIATION ISSN 9739-6198
Volume 29, Number 2 • Whole Number 115 • April 2007



The WADP Numbering System (WNS)

by Stanley Max

I want to encourage anyone interested in graphics philately, and philatelists in general, to familiarize themselves with and regularly use the WADP Numbering System (WNS), the stamp-identification system established by the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the World Association for the Development of Philately (WADP).

The UPU, headquartered in Bern, Switzerland, and now a specialized agency of the United Nations, was established in 1874 by international agreement to promote the free movement of postal communications among member states. Its website is www.upu.int.

The UPU established the WADP in 1997 to represent “all the major stakeholders in the philatelic industry” and to act “as a strategic forum and central point of reference for the exchange of any information on the numerous aspects of the development of philately.” WADP members include the UPU itself; the Fédération Internationale de Philatélie (International Federation of Philately, or FIP); the International Federation of Stamp Dealers Associations (IFSDA); the Association Internationale des Éditeurs de Catalogues de Timbres-Poste, d'Albums, et de Publications Philatéliques (International Association of Stamp Catalog Publishers, Albums, and Philatelic Publications, or ASCAT); the Association Internationale des Journalistes Philatéliques (International Association of Philatelic Journalists, or AIJP), and the International Confederation of the Printing and Allied Industries (INTERGRAF), which is a trade group representing the printing industry. The WADP secretariat is located at the UPU headquarters in Bern. Both the UPU and the WADP use French and English as their two official languages.

The UPU and the WADP “jointly conceived and developed the WADP Numbering System,” or WNS, which they initiated on 1

The World Association for the Development of Philately's (WADP) logo as it appears on its website



January 2002. Their aim was to create “a database of all authentic postage stamps issued by UPU member countries and territories on or after that date.” They wanted the WNS “to become the central point of reference against which stamp issues can be verified, supporting the legal philatelic market by endorsing those [genuine] stamps.” The URL for the English-language site is www.wnsstamps.ch/en/. For the French-language site, go to www.wnsstamps.ch/fr/.

As a byproduct of this laudable objective of insuring the legitimacy and authenticity of stamps, the WNS ends up providing other valuable benefits to the philatelic community. I do not believe that philatelists fully appreciate the importance of the WNS, and that they do not, therefore, avail themselves as much as they could of this wonderful asset. Let us review its worth.

- First, the WNS serves as an internationally uniform tool to identify stamps of recent issue—a valuable organizational device even beyond the goal of combating fraudulent stamps.
- Second, it is simple and straightforward to understand: “The WNS number comprises the ISO 3166 Alpha-2 country code (2 letters), a serial number (3 figures), and the year of issue (2 figures).” The WNS number, therefore, is always composed of eight characters, including a dot. The stamp numbered HK048.05 on the WNS website exemplifies its numbering system, where

♦HK stands for Hong Kong,

HK048.05

Country/Post	Hong Kong (China)
Date of Issue	18 August 2005
Primary theme	Literature, Press, and Comics (Printing)
Subject	Four Great Inventions of Ancient China—Printing
Width	45 mm
Height	28 mm
Denomination	2.40 HKD
Number in Set	4 (show set)
Layout/Format	Sheet of 25
Perforations	13.25 x 14.25
Stamp Issuing Authority	Hong Kong Post
Printer	Joh Enschedé Security Printers BV, The Netherlands



Click the stamp image to display the [full resolution version](#)

The HK\$2.40 value from this four-value set, seen above on the WENS web site, honors Bi Sheng and his invention of movable printing type about 1040 C.E. Bi Sheng's feat is described in *Meng Xi Bi Tan (Dream Stream Essays)* by Shen Kuo (1031-1095 C.E.), an eminent scientist of the Song Dynasty (960-1279 C.E.).

- ◆048 is the serial number, and
- ◆05 represents 2005 as the issue year.
- Third, the WNS website provides a clear and concise description of individual stamps, along with thumbnail, low-resolution, and high-resolution images of the stamp. On page 18 is pictured the entry for Hong Kong stamp, Scott 1150, the second in a set of four commemorating the “Great Inventions of China.”

This description of the stamp, its physical aspects, its subject area, and its printing history, along with the low-resolution image of the stamp, are succinct, but entirely adequate to identify and appreciate the stamp. Clicking on the low-resolution image brings up a high- or full-resolution image to your monitor, which is quite adequate for most publication purposes.

The final point is particularly important. The WNS website contains several indexes whereby the user can search for stamps in various fields:

- ◆WNS number,
- ◆Country or Post,
- ◆Date of Issue (using the year and/or month),
- ◆Primary Theme,
- ◆Occasionally a Sub-theme, and
- ◆Subject or Key Word.

One may list stamps in direct or reverse chronological order. When the user finds a stamp of interest using any one of these keys, the result contains a thumbnail image. The WNS website offers 48 primary themes, including, for example, **Literature, Press, and Comics**. If you click on that primary theme, five sub-themes appear: **Calligraphy, Comics, Newspapers & Journalists, Printing,** and

Writers. Further down the list of primary themes comes **Post & Philately** with its sub-themes of **Philatelic Exhibitions, Stamps on Stamps,** and **UPU Congress.** In short, these themes yield a categorized list of many broad collecting topics. The user can also type in a Subject or Key Word rather than selecting from the categorized list. The word **Philately**, for example, yields 8 pages of results.

One final point is worth mentioning. The WNS site is completely free and instantly available to any computer with internet access. To the Philatelist having whatever interest, the WNS website can yield a treasure trove of information and images. Since the WNS just began in 2002, however, it applies only to stamps issued since then, and only to those countries that are part of the organization. If you want information about a stamp issued by Bulgaria or Uruguay, for example,

the WNS website will not help you. Even with those caveats, since 2002 hundreds of beautiful postage stamps have been issued, and many stamps are therefore already available for review. Moreover, since the UPU and the WADP both strive to protect the legitimate philatelic community, I believe that it behooves us as philatelists to make use of their free and excellent product.

About the Author: Stanley Max, who has a master's degree in library science and a doctorate in history, has found quantitative studies a more suitable avenue as a career, and for the last ten years he has served as a lecturer in mathematics and statistics at the University of Southern Maine in Portland. He only recently became interested in philately, and did so as a result of the Inverted Jenny controversy that emerged during the November 2006 election. He is particularly interested in promoting the metric system in the United States, and was pleased to find that perforations are measured in metric units (the number of perforations per 20 millimeters). Stanley maintains a philatelic website at <http://www.metricphilatelist.net>.