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Japanese New Year's Cards

Dr. Satoru Takeuchi, Japan
With introduction by Martha Jane Zachert
& edits by Joseph Sullivan

The article "Chinese New Year Woodblock Prints (Nianhua)" that appeared in the January issue of Philateli-Graphics *reminded me of a series of unique Japanese New Year's cards sent to me annually for many years by my friend Dr. Satoru Takeuchi of Tsukuba-shi from Japan. His 2015 greeting is reproduced in Fig.1*

Each year, Satoru designs and produces a unique card that he mails to friends. The printing method is based on mimeography (very pre-desktop publishing), and following is the fascinating story of his production process (using mostly his words).

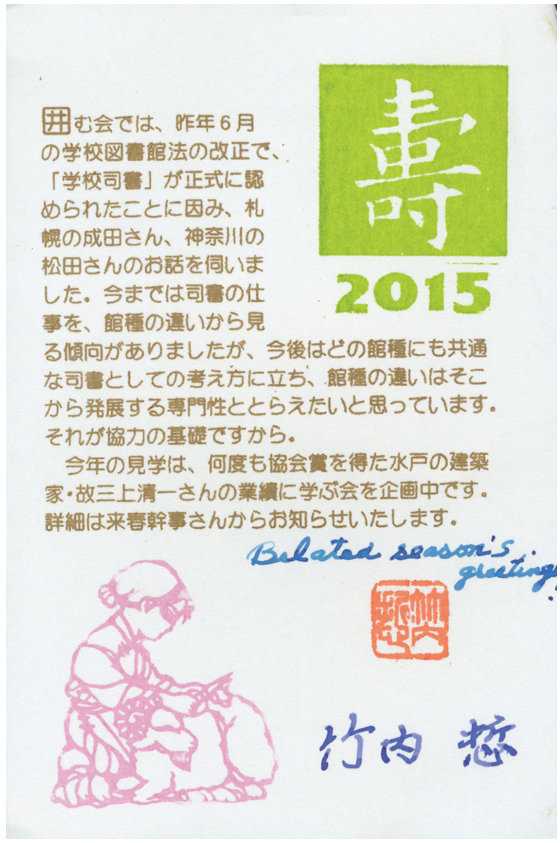

Fig. 1, Front of Satoru New Year's Card.

"The post cards I use are sold at post offices at the end of each year. The number at the bottom of the mailing side is a number for the annual lottery. Each year I buy 500 cards, but I have never won anything except a postage stamp year set—the smallest prize.

My method of printing is derived from the Mimeograph invented by Thomas Edison. He invented an electric stylus with a sharp needle that moved quickly in and out. He also invented a thin paper stencil. When something is drawn on the stencil, the pen makes tiny holes of the shape of the drawing or type. The stencil is set underneath the printing frame, and sheets of paper are set under the stencil. Printing ink is applied to the stencil surface using a roller. The ink passes through the small holes of the stencil, and prints a clear image of what was drawn on the stencil.

The system was imported into Japan in the late 19th century. The electric stylus was effective for reproducing Roman letters but was cumbersome for reproducing Chinese characters. Examine the top right corner of the message side of the 2015 card illustrated. Reversed out of the green block, you will find a Chinese character, 壽, which means a long life—an important ***cont. on page 29***

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traditional New Year greetings message. It has nine horizontal lines. There are no such complicated lines in the Roman alphabet. An artisan in Japan developed a solution. He invented a very finely engraved right angle iron mesh. Next he invented a stencil made of very thin Japanese paper with a paraffin coating. He also made a steel stylus. Placing the thin stencil on the iron mesh, he was able to make tiny holes on the stencil using the steel stylus. After that, printing is done the same way as using the Edison system. (In May 1965, I visited the headquarters of the A. B. Dick Company in Chicago, and saw the first model of the Edison system in their Exhibit Hall.)

At present, I do not use the iron mesh, the stencil or the steel stylus. First I prepare my design for the New Year's card using a collage of collected letters and designs. Earlier I had found the Chinese letter "書" in a text of calligraphy bought in China. I copy and pasted it into the design of my card.

When the various parts of my new design were collected and pasted on a sheet of paper, I put it in my "platemaking machine." It makes tiny holes into the new type stencil using thermo-electricity. After that I put various colors on the stencil, set it on the printing frame, and push it just like stamping. I can stamp 300 cards in an hour.

This has been a handy printing system for many years, but I cannot use it anymore because production of the ink, stencil, and some other materials has ceased—the result of widespread use of personal computers. With the end of production of these supplies, I will have to develop a new approach to printing my New Year cards."

Fig. 2, Back of the Satoru New Year's card.

Printing on Display at Europhilex

Larry Rosenblum

The Europe-centric international exhibition, London 2015 Europhilex, was held in May. The successful show, among other things, celebrated the 175th anniversary of the Penny Black.

There were two displays related to printing. One was the recently found printing plate for the legendary 1847 'Post Office' stamps of Mauritius. The other was the printing press used by noted forger Jean de Sperati, including a demonstration using 19th century printing plates.

As reported extensively in the philatelic press, the Mauritius plate (Fig. 1) was purchased by Maurice Burrus, who exhibited it in 1935. On his death, the plate went to his niece. She kept it out of sight (and apparently out of mind) until her death. The family didn't initially understand what the plate was. Having learned of its importance, they entrusted it to Swiss dealer David Feldman. With the agreement of the family, Feldman exhibited it at a booth co-sponsored by the British Library and The Royal Philatelic Society London (RPSL). ***cont. on page 30***

Fig. 1, The actual plate used to print the Mauritius 'Post Office' stamps of 1847 was on display for the first time in 80 years.