



# A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHINA POST

中國郵政簡史



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# **A Brief History of China Post**

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## Development and Prospect of China Post

*Liu Liqing*

*Postmaster General of State Post Bureau, China*

There is a long history of China Post, with over 3,000 years of national post, over 500 years of private post and more than 100 years of contemporary national post. As a key national communication organization and basic industrial department of the modern society, post plays an important role in assurance of the smooth transmission of military and government instructions, maintenance of the unity of the nation and nationalities, promotion of the prosperity of economy, culture and science, as well as the progress of the society. Since the foundation of the People's Republic of China, the government has attached importance to the Post. The Post department made full use of the advantages of "Unity of Post and Telecommunications" and "Unity of Post and Newspapers & Periodicals Service", restoring and developing national post network and post offices, promoting wide-range services through hard work and self-reliance, which has promoted the steady and healthy development of China Post. Despite the interruptions and setbacks during the development, China Post has ensured the message-delivery of all departments of our party, government and national economy as well as people's requirements by relying on the socialist system and the diligence and hard work of our post workers.

Since 1978, the 3rd Plenary Meeting of 11th Session of Communist Party of China, reform and open up policy has been implemented in China, which has provided strong promotion and wide service market for the development of the post. By grasping this historical opportunity, China Post has made full use of its potentiality, strengthened its management, deepened its reform and increased its investment to construct post network, reconstructed and developed post offices in urban and rural areas, widely carried out mail cen-

ters system, developed post network, improved delivery efficiency, promoted mechanization and automation of delivery, carrying, loading/unloading. At the same time, constructing material delivery network by use of high technology of information industry. China Post vigorously promotes the construction of the integrated computer network with "Green Card "project, EMS inquiry, newspaper issue and delivery control as key projects, and widely uses computers in the production, management and service. China Post developed new services of postal savings, EMS, philately, commercial mail, e-mail, protocol service and all kinds of agent services as well as traditional services to meet the new requirements of market and life.

The growth rate of China Post has been exceeding that of national economy for over 10 years and has adapted to the requirements of economic development and reform. A modern post and communication network between urban and rural areas covering the whole nation and unifying the world with the capital as the center has been formed after 20 year's of development. The post network has become an important channel for information, merchandise and capital with qualitative leaping of network scale, technical level and service quality. The traditional post is being transformed to modern post.

Under the promotion of deepening reform policy, China Post has made a series of reform to its operation and management system. Post and telecommunications were divided and China State Post Bureau was established in 1998. The establishment of independent operation management system of China Post is in line with the reform and development trend of world post, accords with the actual situation of our post development, and benefits the production, management and service according to the economic laws of post. China Post is now in the critical moment of cross-century development, facing the great change of situation with rare opportunity as well as stern challenge. To meet the requirements of the new situation and market competition, China Post will further enforce its development and reform. Post network in the 21st century will be one with rational layout, advanced

technologies, scientific management and rapid delivery. In one or two decades, China Post will be equipped modern post network with rapid delivery, mechanized and automated operation, electronic operation of business, informational management, and diversified services. The overall level of the post will attain the advanced level in the world. To realize this development goal, the basic idea is to aim at service, meet the diversified, multi-level demands of the society, focus on operation to promote services, take management as measures to improve network operation efficiency, establish modern post management system with reform as motivation, improve network integratability on the basis of development, and foster qualified personnel. As long as we acquaint ourselves with current situation, grasp the opportunity, firm our faith and resolution, unity and cooperate to give full play of the functions and advantages of post network, work hard for the prosperity of our country, carry forward our good tradition of hard work, be frugal, be practical and realistic, carry on the working style of high quality and high efficiency, we'll be able to realize the short-term and long-term goals of post development. China Post is devoted to the development of all industries in China and the prosperity of world post in the new century.



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## Part I Ancient Post

China is one of the earliest countries in the world which set up organized communication, according to archaeological discoveries. There were some records of communication activities by the inscriptions on oracle bones of Yin-Shang Dynasty(14th~11th century B.C). So China Post communication has passed over 3,000 years development from Shang Dynasty to Qing Dynasty when the government set up modern post.

### Chapter 1 Origin and Development of Post

#### Section 1 Origin of Communication

Communication closely links to human activities. It appeared when there were human beings. In ancient times, humans delivered messages on purpose in hunting activities by means of calling, gesture and facial expression. With the evolution of human beings and the creation of language and characters, communication between humans was getting closer and closer. To deliver and save more complexed messages, human invented the message-delivery methods of knotting and curving.

By the end of the primitive society, with the forming of tribes and countries, organized communication appeared, which was needed in tribal wars, flood harnessing and irrigation.

The Yin-Shang Dynasty was the economic development period of slavery society in China. Copper could be refined in large scale, cart and calendar had been invented, and agriculture production had been improved. From the unearthed inscriptions on oracle bones of the Yin Dynasty, it can be seen that between the capital and cities or between states there were main lines of



*Inscriptions on oracle bones, which recorded the delivery of border military information by beating drum in Yin-Shang Period*

communication, garrisons was constructed with wooden bars and walls. “羈 (Ji)” acted as the hotel, which provided condition for organized communication. There are some characters related to communication activities in 3 inscriptions in record. Mr Guo Moruo explained that the “婞 (Gu)” in the scription is “drum”, which belongs to hieroglyph (meaning someone on guard beside the drum), so “Gu” can be explained as a person responsible for communication who was sent by the border general to report to the King about the invasion of enemy, which evolved from the communication style of “drum-beating”. “逌 (zhi)” in the in-

scription frequently referred to communication organization and personnel with more substantial content. It is explained by Song Zhenhao, researcher of History Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, that “zhi” means courier and delivery of information to the King or the instruction from the King, it was also set up in tribes and manors of lords, the courier was taken with the King during inspections and hunting. Besides “Ji” used as his residence, meanwhile, special residences were established in places with “Zhi” to provide accommodation for the courier as well as for the King.

It can be seen from the frequent appearance of the characters describing communication and hotel in the inscriptions that, in Shang Dynasty, especially after 13th century B.C, organized communication network had been formed, creating the post system of message delivery by special persons in ancient China.

## Section 2 Origin and Characteristics of Post

According to the record in the inscriptions mentioned above, ancient China Post originated in the Yin-Shang Dynasty, prosperous in the Zhou Dynasty, popular in the Spring-Autumn and the Warring States Periods (770~221 B.C). Confucius said, “the propagation of moral is as rapid as post delivery”, which described the popularity of the post. Zhou Dynasty was the transition period of China from a slavery society to a feudal society. Communication in the Zhou Dynasty had been eventually developed to form its own characteristics at the same time of reform in social economy. There were two major communication modes: acoustic-optical communication mainly by drum and beacon-fire, and post delivery communication mainly by walking and carriage. The post delivery in Zhou Dynasty laid the foundation for the development and perfection of post in coming generations.

There were two kinds of delivery methods for the post delivery communication: delivery by courier, and relay delivery by several persons, the former used in general situation while the latter used for border communication. To meet communication requirements, all states set up special delivery organization ——post. “Post” was the communication organization for document and mail delivery as well as the inn of rest and merchandise transport for merchants and center of special envoys. Therefore the post has multiple functions of communication, reception and transportation. By then



*MengJiang Kettle, copper instrument of Chunqiu Period which recorded that the Qi Zhuangwang sent Tian to Zhou*



communication was mainly by carriage or riding. China is one of the earliest countries to use carts. In Zhou Dynasty, communication developed with wide-ranging ship and cart transportation. There were two kinds of delivery carts in communication: one was delivery cart, the other was “驛(Ri)” which was more splendid and used for higher-ranking persons in emergencies.

The delivery organization in the Zhou Dynasty was closely managed and divided into two kinds: routine and emergency, which were separately managed by special persons. In the Spring and Autumn period, each state had its own communication organization with different names: “遽 (Ju)” (meaning hurry) or “Post”. In the Warring States period, the delivery organizations were mainly “传 (Chuan)” with large one set up in the capital, and a rest place for the delivery person was set up at 10 to 20 km. The delivery organization and its management of Zhou Dynasty had greatly affected the post after Qin and Han.

In ancient times, the delivery person must have a tally, and riding time and number of the horses must be recorded. In the Zhou Dynasty, such a tally was called “Jie”. It was recorded that “Jie” included “Road Tally”, “Jade Tally” and “Gate Tally”. “Tiger Tally”, “Man Tally” and “Dragon Tally” were also used by all states according to different states and areas. The unearthed tally in Shou county of Anhui province was composed of two kinds: ship tally and cart tally, which were the water and land communication tallies issued by the King that regulated the route for carts and ships, and taxation could be exempted by the tally.

## Chapter 2 Post in the Qin, Han and Wei-Jin Period

### Section 1 Unification and Legislation of Post in the Qin Dynasty

With vast territory, the Qin Dynasty (221~207 B.C) set up enormous government organizations and took a series of important measures, such as con-