



The green Dai Nippon overprint

by J.R. van Nieuwkerk

A green Dai Nippon overprint is mentioned in the philatelic literature of the Netherland Indies during the Japanese occupation, but few have actually seen it. It exists on a pair of the 5-cent Dancers, and in addition to being applied in the unusual color green, the overprint is vertical.

The overprint can be seen on a cover (above) in the Ricardo collection at the Museum voor Communicatie in The Hague. The letter was sent by the Singer Sewing Machine Company from Rantau Prapat to Kisaran on 12 December 1942, from where it was redirected to Tandjong Balei. There is much correspondence between the headquarters and affiliates of the Singer Sewing Machine Company that has survived the war, and this looks like a typical Singer letter.

As can be seen from the censorship tape on the left, the cover has been opened and examined. The two character censor mark Ken Etsu, and the pre-war cancel with Shōwa date 17.12.12 are correct for this period. The letter appears to be genuine, but how does one explain that this is the only example of the green Dai Nippon overprint found so far?

A few years ago when Tsuchiya Masayoshi visited the Netherlands, I arranged for him to see the Ricardo collection, and pointed the cover out to him. When I visited him a few months ago in Tōkyō, he told me that upon closer examination he had discovered some interesting things.

As shown at the right, the three kanji characters for Dai Nippon are different in the green overprint. Dai has become “Tai”, Ni became “tan” and is inverted, and “ppon” has become “shō”. Together they form “Taitanshō”, which has no textual meaning.

The Japanese army gave the order to overprint stamps in North Sumatra with Dai Nippon (meaning Great Japan) in December 1942. Hence, the green Dai Nippon overprint on the cover is one of the first such overprints. The individual who made it either did not know the correct kanji for Dai Nippon, or



intentionally used the wrong characters in an attempt to defy “Great Japan”.

The error (intentional or not) seems to have been discovered very quickly, and the overprint must have been used for only a very short period of time. That would be a plausible explanation of why we have so far found only one example of this overprint.

On the other hand, one cannot exclude the possibility that it is a forgery. However, the other aspects of the letter (cancellation, censor markings), even the type of envelope used by Singer for its correspondence, are genuine.

Many thanks to Mr. Tsuchiya for sharing his discovery and thoughts, the Museum voor Communicatie for use of its facilities and materials, and Ken Bryson for a fascinating lesson in the Japanese language. ■

