Report: A Personal Discovery

by Kenneth Bryson
Being the ISJP Librarian offers a unique benefit along with its duties, namely access to the wealth of reference material that ISJP has collected over the years – sometimes I feel like Ali Baba in the bandits’ cave. As a small-time collector myself, I have taken advantage of this opportunity from time to time when considering a purchase or evaluating and organizing my collection. The references in the library were most helpful recently when an item came across on an auction site that raised my eyebrows a bit. This item, illustrated here as Figure 1, is an early postal stationery item called yūbin hagaki in Japanese, a term customarily translated in ISJP publications as “postcard”. More specifically, this item is a futatsu ori hagaki or “double folded postcard”, the Japanese philatelic term for this early type which resembles a folded letter sheet rather than being printed on cardstock.

This postcard is cancelled with a Large Place Name “Inspected” marking (Chimei-iri がた kansazumi in, abbreviated hereafter as “KSZ”) (a) of Imazu, now Ōmi Imazu 近江今津, on the west bank of Lake Biwa about 60 kilometers north of Kyōto, and a Fancy or Irregular postmark (Futōitsu-in (b) of the same town, struck in vermilion, with a hand-written mailing date of 24 June (c) also in vermilion ink. On the reverse is a double-ring dated receiver of Saikyō 西京 (d) (the name used postally for Kyōto 京都 during the first years of modern mail service), legible as 25 June, Meiji 7 (1874). The sender is one Inoue Uhei 井上宇兵衛 (e) in Imazu (written 今 in kanji and katakana); the addressee is a Funada Yasuke 船田弥助 at the corner of Nijō 二条 and Muromachi 室町 streets in Saikyō (g).

I have researched this item in various references in the JP library, on the Internet and in my own book collection, including the full range of JP back issues. The postmark date for a KSZ of Imazu on this item is earlier than any that I have been able to find in the references, as set out further below. I will not go into detail about the origins and history of these postcards, as this has been done exhaustively in JP Volumes 13, 21 and 28, except to say that the present item, listed in the JSCA Specialized Catalogue as PC4, is the short-lived type with the yūbin hagaki(2) imprint on the face which was issued between December 1873 and February 1874, and replaced with a revised face design in April 1874. A short article discussing the basic characteristics of the KSZ and Fancy marks can be found at JP 58/100.

It may help, however, to place Imazu historically and geographically in context here with the status of the mail delivery system in Japan in the early years of the Meiji period. The Meiji government, having established a modern postal system in 1871 by replacing the old private courier companies and post stations with its own communication department and post offices, began its first national mail delivery route by following the old east-west Tōkaidō road connecting Tōkyō (formerly Edo) to Saikyō and farther west to Ōsaka. Branch routes were gradually added, working off the Tōkaidō post stations, as the postal system expanded. The Imazu post office was established in February 1872 on the branch mail route going northward along the west shore of Lake Biwa, connecting to the main Tōkaidō route at Ōtsu (see the attached map diagram at Figure 2), one post station away from Saikyō.

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1 The old province of Ōmi is now Shiga Prefecture, comprising a land area surrounding Lake Biwa, the largest freshwater lake in Japan.
2 The imprint reads 郵便はがき, without the vocalization marking on the character は indicating that it is to be pronounced “ga” が rather than “ka”. This older writing practice (which can also be seen in the return address of this card) was superseded with the advent of orthographic standardization in Meiji times but remained unchanged on postcard imprints until 1933.

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I have so far located examples of the Fancy Postmark and KSZ cancellation for Imazu in the following sources:

1. Yoshida Toshikazu, *Meiji Shonen no Yūbin Keshin* (Postmarks of the Early Meiji Era, 1959), item number 297: Fancy Postmark with handwritten date 10 November on article addressed to Saikyō; item number 298: the accompanying KSZ Cancellation, on folded letter sheet (Figure 3).

2. Nakagawa Tioiti (Chōichi), *Shoki Keshiin Shūsei* (Early Cancellations Collected), June 1966: (a) Fancy Postmark only, dated 7.10.18 (18 October 1874), reference Kojima VI-10; (b) Fancy Postmark dated 7.11.10 (10 November 1874) and KSZ Cancellation, reference Yoshida, 297 and 298 (Figure 4).

3. Nakagawa Tioiti (Chōichi), *Keshiin to Entaiya* (Cancels and Covers), Vol. 27 No. 2, June 1970, Page 28, Item 12: KSZ on folded post card from Imazu to Kyōto; Fancy Postmark in vermilion dated 27 July, Saikyō receiver dated 28 July. In the collection of the Communications Museum (Teishin Hakubutsukan, now the Postal Museum), Tōkyō (Figure 5).

4. Yamazaki Yoshiyuki, *Yūbin Keshiin Hyakka Jiten* (Encyclopedia of Japanese Postmarks), Narumi, 2007, Page 32: Imazu Large Place Name Cancellation, (a) 7.7.27 (27 July 1874, Communications Museum); (b) 7.11.10 (10 November 1874, Yoshida, 297) (Figure 6). Page 115, Fancy Postmark, dated 18 October (Figure 7). Yamazaki does not cite a source for the Imazu Fancy Postmark dated 18 October, but it seems likely to be the item of the same date recorded in the Nakagawa publications cited above. The two KSZ cancels are apparently the same examples recorded in Nakagawa. Yamazaki’s citation of Yoshida 297 actually refers to the Fancy Postmark rather than KSZ Cancellation.

5. Japanese Postmarks Editing Committee, *Nihon Yūbin-in Handobukku* (Handbook of Japanese Postmarks), 2008: no KSZ cancel for Imazu is listed; a Fancy Postmark of Imazu, dated 13 May (Figure 8), is illustrated on page 32. No source is cited for this example.

I have been unable to find an illustration of a cover or card bearing either this KSZ or Fancy Postmark. However, in the inventory database from a Research Report of the Postal Museum in Tōkyō I found a listing of the 27 July 1874 folded postcard that is mentioned in a number of the references cited above. Shown below at Figure 9 is an excerpt from the database report with the item in question highlighted and annotated with translations. It can be seen that the sender, return address, and addressee of the Postal Museum item all appear to be identical to those on the one in my possession mailed on 24 June 1874.

At this point, all I can report is that I seem to have made a lucky discovery. I would like to share this find with JP readers in an effort to see if others have seen a similar example that has not been listed in the cited references. I wish also to express my thanks to ISJP Director Florian Eichhorn for his review and expert advice in the preparation of this report.
Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9