

Festivals – Buddha’s Birthday

Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, was born in 565 BC and he reached *Nirvana* (a place of perfect peace and happiness) in 486 BC. His honorific title is Buddha Shakyamuni. He was the son of King Suddhodana of Kapilavastu, which was located in the north of the ancient India.

The Macao painter Sou Farong has created a set of stamps in the form of oil paintings to dedicate to the birth and the process of enlightenment of Buddha Shakyamuni. The color selection is quite a combination of Macao characteristics and the unique style commonly used in Tibetan *Thangkas*, representing an auspicious and festive atmosphere. Coupled with clear themes and rich imaginations, the vivid cartoonish characters will surely make the stamps very popular. The creation is not only a reflection of Buddhist doctrines, but also a very highly-artistic masterpiece.

There are two stamps in the set. The first stamp features the enlightenment of Buddha Shakyamuni. Facing the profoundly troubled problems of human beings in the secular world, such as birth, aging, sickness and death, the 29-year-old Siddhartha abandoned the throne, left the palace and his wife and son, then went to practice meditation, attempted to seek for the truth and liberation of life through asceticism, however, he found it impossible to reach emancipation. Then, after washing away the dust in the Nilian Chan river, he seated himself under a pipal tree (Bodhi tree called by later generations) and entered meditation. There after seven days and nights, he attained enlightenment to the true nature of life and the solution to the sufferings. In this painting, the enlightened Shakyamuni Buddha is sitting cross-legged on lotus petals against a background of maroon auspicious clouds, knotting the meditation seal. The five fingers of the right hand represent the five elements in the realm of Buddhism, and the five fingers of the left hand represent the five factors of consciousness in the realm of sentient beings, and the overlapping of his two hands represents the unification of Buddha and sentient beings. With thumb tips light touch, this gesture of meditation is called Dhyana mudra, symbolizing holding the infinite cosmic universe quietly and firmly, which is also called Cosmic Mudra. The second stamp features Buddha at birth. It shows the scene of the newborn Shakyamuni with right hand raised high pointing to the heaven and left hand pointing to the earth. The golden lotus flower on the green background highlights the new born Buddha with a smile, in the middle of the lotus flowers.

The souvenir sheet is based on the birth of Buddha Shakyamuni, with the background of the ashoka tree with blooming flowers and seven lotus flowers. According to legend recorded in “Middle-length Discourses” (Madhyama Agama), when the prince was born, the earth shook, the radiant lights shone in all corners of the world. The newborn Shakyamuni folded his hands together (Namaskara Mudra) and walked took seven steps, like miracles, under each step a white lotus flower was born. Then he looked around, raised his right hand and his left hand pointed to the earth said: “I am the honored one throughout heaven and earth; The three realms are all suffering, I shall be resigned to the situation.” At the moment, the holy music is everywhere, and flowers and sweet dew falling gently with the fragrant breeze. Since Shakyamuni was born on the eighth day of April, this day was regarded as Buddha's Birthday later. The stamps display the scene of the day of birth in which the Buddha pointed to heaven and earth.

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