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THE ANCIENT COINAGE OF CHINA.

[PLATES XII, XIII.]

From the beginning of authentic history, the Chinese have had money. Inventors of printing, of the manufacture of silk, porcelain, and gunpowder, they were also the inventors of coined money. Their first money was, indeed, in the shape of gems or precious stones, and shells or cowries, which were strung together on a silken thread and sometimes fastened as ornaments on a warrior's helmet.¹ But, not only were the Chinese original in the coining of money, they were also the first numismatists. The earliest writers on Chinese coinage are Kuan Tzu (645 B. C.), one of the most renowned Chinese statesmen of antiquity,² and Chia I (200 B. C.), a celebrated scholar and privy counsellor to Han Wen Ti (179 B. C.), as well as a distinguished writer on Chinese finance. Quotations from the writings and a record of the opinions of these two men are given and commented upon in the great history of China written by Ma Tuan Lin (1245 A. D.).³ The oldest native catalogues of coins are one by an unknown author during the Sui dynasty (581–618 A. D.), and a book by Feng Yen of the Tang dynasty (618–905 A. D.). Only fragments of these books now remain. The oldest catalogue that has anything like completeness was compiled by Yang Hung Tsun, during the reign of Kao Tsung, the second Emperor of the Southern Sung dynasty (1127–1278 A. D.). The book was printed in the 19th year of this monarch's reign, and the exact date of its issue was August 1146 A. D. The title reads *Ch'uan Chih*, or a "Record of Coins." In the preface the author states that he has followed the stream of coin-history from the most ancient times to the present: and that he will give an account of all coins, heavy and light, large and small, of successive dynasties. He tells us also of the immense difficulties which he had to overcome: "flooded by water, scorched by heat, choked with dust," only faintly suggest the obstacles he has con-

¹ LEGGS, *Chinese Classics, Shih Ching*, vol. 4, p. 626.

² MAYERS, *Chinese Reader's Manual*, p. 243.

³ Ma Tuan Lin was a scholar of extensive learning the results of which are embodied in his great historical work. He lived in the troublous times just before the Mongol conquest, leaving his MS., which was published in 1319 A. D. by imperial command.

quered in the completion of his "Golden Work," which he brings to conclusion with great joy. He admits, as all must, that some inscriptions on ancient coins are unintelligible to him, and these undecipherable characters he dignifies with the names *Niao Wen*, "Bird Tracks," or *I Chih*, "Barbarian Branches." The most recent work of value was issued in the 15th year of Chien Lung (1751 A. D.). It was prepared by ten scholars selected by the Emperor himself, and is entitled *Ch'in Ting Ch'ien Lu*, or a "Record of Coins, prepared by imperial authority." The boards from which the work was printed were destroyed by the T'ai P'ing rebels in 1860, and the book was reissued in four volumes in 1876 by Li Kuei, a scholar who had travelled some in foreign countries. He claims to have had access to the imperial collection of coins in Peking and to have transcribed the inscriptions on all the coins recognized by the highest authorities. This work reaches in time only to the present dynasty, 1644 A. D. If his pretensions to accuracy were realized, this work would be a repertory of immense value to the student of Chinese numismatics. But, unfortunately for his claims, there are marked omissions of coins allowed by the highest foreign authority as well as by native writers. Notwithstanding the fact that Chinese libraries contain many books on coins, their lack of system and the habit they have of placing together coins of different dates and similar shape, and of altogether omitting the dates, though they give the material of which the coin is composed and its weight, make the use of their books very difficult for foreign students.

The foreign literature on the subject of Chinese numismatics is very limited. In 1852, Mr. John Williams read a paper before the Royal Numismatic Society entitled *An Epitome of Chinese Numismatics*. In June 1866, Mr. G. P. Upton of Chicago read a paper before the American Numismatic Society on the subject of Chinese currency. Both of these articles, if written at the present time, would need to be changed in several material respects. Two monographs on the coins of the Ta Ch'ing or the present dynasty have appeared in the transactions of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. One was prepared by the late Mr. Alexander Wylie of Shang Hai, and the later one by Dr. S. W. Bushell of the British Legation in Peking. In the case of such able Sinologues, there can be little question as to the accuracy of their dates and interpretations.

With this preliminary, we may now investigate, specifically, (1) the composition of Chinese coins; (2) the mode of their casting; (3) their inscriptions; (4) their shape.

1. *The composition of Chinese coins.* In general, it may be said that they are composed of an alloy of copper and lead or of copper and zinc: sometimes a little tin is added. The formula for the coins of the Sung dynasty (960–1278 A. D.) is as follows: copper, 50 parts; zinc, $41\frac{1}{2}$ parts; lead, $6\frac{1}{2}$ parts; tin, 2 parts; in a total of 100 parts. In the time of Ch'ien Lung (1770), the Mohammedan cities under Chinese rule were allowed to coin money on condition that one-twentieth of the whole issue be presented to the Emperor. These can be readily recognized, as they are composed of a reddish alloy, copper, 84 parts; lead, $34\frac{8}{10}$ parts; tin, $1\frac{8}{10}$ parts; in a total of 120 parts. The regulation weight would be 58 grains Troy, or $3\frac{7\frac{8}{10}}{100}$ grammes. But, in fact, many modern coins are under thirty grains in weight, and are frequently debased with iron. In times of special financial stress, coins composed entirely of iron have been issued, but they have never proved a great success.

2. *Mode of casting.* Chinese coins have always been cast, not struck. In ancient times, the moulds were made of stone. During the Tang dynasty (618–905 A. D.), a model of wax was made of the required shape: this model was then enclosed in an earthen matrix and was exposed to the action of heat: the wax melted and ran out of a hole left for the purpose, leaving a mould into which the molten alloy was poured. At the present time in Peking, the models are made of copper and then pressed into fine sand until there is a corresponding hollow, the sand being held in its place by wooden frames. Many coins can thus be cast at the same time. After being taken from the moulds, the coins are broken apart and are filed down to a certain degree of smoothness.⁴

3. *Inscriptions.* As the primitive mode of exchange was barter,⁵ so the first inscriptions on coins were the words or names of articles used in traffic: hence we have, as the first words cast on coins, the terms *Pu*, "Hempen Cloth;" *Pao*, "Precious Stones;" *Huo*, "Merchandise" in general; *Chin*, "Metal;" *Tao*, "Sword or Knife."

The first round money cast had no inscription whatever, and was called *Wu Tzu Ch'ien*, or "No-character-money." Following the mercantile coinage first used by Emperor Shen Nung (2700 B. C.), who first established fairs for the better exchange of commodities, we next find coins with symbolic figures on them. First in importance among

⁴ *Transactions of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. XVI.

⁵ W. C. PRIME, *History of Coinage*, p. 3.

these is the *Dragon*, symbol of imperial dignity, also of fertility and of creative energy. It wields the power of transformation and the gift of rendering one's self visible and invisible at pleasure. Next in importance as a symbolic figure is the *Kuei* or *Tortoise*; the tortoise owes its prominence in Chinese History to the fact that it was the "Divine Tortoise" which presented to the gaze of Yu the mystic writing whence he deciphered the basis of moral teaching. The presence of the tortoise even on coins is supposed to exercise an auspicious influence. The great system of the eight diagrams used in divination was derived from the angular figures on the back of the tortoise. Third in importance as a symbolic figure on coins is the *Horse*: he symbolizes the earth, and some secret affinity between them is supposed to exist.

Ching Wang, 25th Emperor of the Chou dynasty (544 B. C.), was the first who coined round money with inscriptions. The words *Huo Pu*, "merchandise" and "cloth," formed the inscription. It is not till the year 633 A. D. that coins always have inscriptions which give the name of the reign in which they were minted, and that the exact date of the coins can be accurately ascertained. It is necessary to observe here that each Emperor has two official designations, by either of which he may be known in Chinese writings. One designation is called the *Miao Hao* or temple title, the name by which he will be known in the Hall of Ancestors. The other is the *Nien Hao* or year title, the name of the epoch or period. Every Emperor has one *Miao Hao*, but oftentimes each Emperor has several *Nien Hao*. After any special event of great political significance a new *Nien Hao* will be assumed, one Emperor having as many as nine *Nien Hao* in one reign. The *Nien Hao* is the usual inscription upon the flat round coins, and from this can be known the Emperor and the date of the issue of the coin. Thus, Jen Tsung (Sung dynasty 1023 A. D.) has the following *Nien Hao* or year-titles: *Tien Sheng*, assumed 1032 A. D. (PLATE XII-1); *Ming Tao*, (PL. XII-2); *Ching Yu*, ass. 1034 (PL. XII-3); *Tao Yuan*, ass. 1038; *Ch'ing Li*, ass. 1041; *Huang Yu*, ass. 1049; *Chih Ho*, ass. 1054 (PL. XII-4); *Chia Yu*, ass. 1056 (PL. XII-5). There is one *Nien Hao* for which we have no corresponding coin. When a new *Nien Hao* was assumed, new coins were issued to celebrate the event. But inscriptions were not confined to the obverse: on the reverse, especially of modern coins, may be found characters or numerals which indicate either the city where the coin was issued or the number in the order of its issue.

4. *Shape of Chinese coins.* Chinese coins have been issued in almost all conceivable shapes. As cloth and gems and grain were the first articles of barter, so the first coins corresponded or were supposed to correspond in shape to the things to be exchanged. Hence the oldest-known money is called *Pu* money and is shaped like a bale of cloth or, as some say, like a dress (PL. XIII-1, 2). Contemporaneous with the *Pu* coins, were coins shaped like mining tools called "Spade Cash" (PL. XIII-3). In peculiarity of form, next come the sword or knife cash. The oldest of this shape in the collection from which these coins were taken were exhumed near Peking and belonged to the time of the Lieh Kuo or feudal states during the dynasty of the Chou, 1122-249 B. C. (PL. XIII-4, 5). These two belong to the State called *Ch'ao*, which had its location about 100 miles northwest of Peking. The backs are straight like a razor, and can be easily distinguished from those with bent backs and of larger size which were issued by Han Wu Ti, 140-86 B. C. (PL. XIII-6, 7). Wang Mang⁶ (9-23 A. D.) sought to restore the coinage of the ancients, and so issued *Pu* and *Tao*, "cloth" and "sword," coins of various sizes and shapes (PL. XIII-8, 9, 10, 11). It is impossible to be absolutely certain whether some of these coins belong to this more recent issue, or are of a more ancient date, the shape and material of the two periods being the same.

But the favorite shape for Chinese money is the round flat coin with a square hole in the centre. These have passed through various transformations. First, as before stated, there was no inscription whatever, both sides were blank, and hence it was called "No-character" or "Empty money" (PL. XII-6). The first inscriptions were the char-

⁶ Wang Mang was a celebrated name in Chinese history. He lived from 33 B. C. to 23 A. D. Though reckoned among the legitimate monarchs of China, he is usually called "The Usurper." He was a man of great intellectual power, and in early life passed rapidly from one post of honor to another—when only 27 years old, he was created Generalissimo of the forces. In 2 B. C., on the death of the Emperor Ai Ti, he was installed as Regent by the Empress. He aimed to be a reformer, and made many innovations in the laws and the system of government. He restored the coinage of the ancients, made many new varieties of coins, and improved the coinage by having values stamped upon the money, as, for example, PL. XIII-10 reads *Chi Tao Wu Pai*, or "The Chi sword, value 500." This sword is only half the thickness of XIII-11, which has a value of 1000 small cash.

PL. XIII-8, 9 are a modification of the very ancient forms XIII-1, 2; and are inscribed *Huo Ch'uan*, "merchandise currency."

In 8 A. D., Wang Mang declared himself Emperor. He rapidly degenerated in character and influence, committing deeds of violence which have made his name execrable in history. He was finally torn in pieces by the soldiery, 23 A. D.

acters *Huo* and *Pu*, issued by Ching Wang 544 B. C. The next inscription indicated the weight of the coin, as *Pan Liang*, or half-ounce coins. Then there were coins of two, three, four, five or eight *Chu* in weight (PL. XII-7, 8, 9, 10).⁷ Then, the weight-inscription being dropped, the *Nien Hao* was inscribed on the obverse, the reverse being blank. The next addition was a numeral character on the reverse indicating the first, second, or third issue; or a character indicating the provincial city where the issue was made. During the Yuan dynasty (1206-1344 A. D.), Mongol characters are on some of the coins (PL. XII-11).⁸ In the present dynasty (1644 A. D.), on the obverse are Chinese characters, usually four in number, representing the Nien Hao and the words *Chung Pao*, or *Tung Pao*, or *Yuan Pao*, meaning respectively "heavy," "universal," "large currency." On the reverse are Manchu characters, the right-hand character giving the first syllable of the city where minted, the character at the left of the hole being the word for "currency."

Beside coins with these regular inscriptions, there are coins with curious devices on obverse or reverse or both: *Goose-eye-money*; so light that it is supposed not to sink in water: *Dragon-eye-money* (PL. XII-12, 13): *Constellation-money*; coins with seven stars united, representing Ursa Major; sometimes having a tortoise and sword in the field of the coin (PL. XII-14): *Zodiac-money* (Du Halde calls them superstitious coins); coins with the twelve signs of the zodiac and twelve earth-stems, used in divination (PL. XII-15): *Lotus-root-money* (PL. XII-16): *Prayer-coins*; round money with the characters *Wu Nan Erh Nu*, prayer for five sons and two daughters, the ideal Chinese family (PL. XII-17); *Chang Ming Fu Kuei*, prayer for long life, wealth, and honor (PL. XII-18); *Tien Hsia Tai Ting*, coins issued at the beginning of each reign and at each change of Nien Hao, with a prayer that the State may have peace and harmony (PL. XII-19).

Ancient Chinese coins are found in the *débris* of extinct cities: they

⁷ 1 *Chu* equalled 100 grains of millet in weight.

⁸ The Mongol dynasty was the first to issue paper money, called by native writers "flying paper" or "convenience money." Kublai Khan, the first Emperor really settled upon the throne, was so pleased with this method of supporting his government, that, by an overissue of paper, he ruined the business of the country, brought on great financial disaster, and ultimately the overthrow of his government. See a full account in Marco Polo.

The translation of the characters on PL. XII-11 is "Great Yuan dynasty current coin."

are also exhumed from graves: from time immemorial it has been the custom on building a temple, or any building in the imperial ground, to put a box of ancient coins in the wall under the roof. This corresponds to our custom of putting a box containing various articles in the foundation or under the corner-stone of our public buildings; a custom, in fact, that was common to all nations of antiquity. Among the Chinese, even now, ancient coins are supposed to add sanctity to the tomb, and to give a more friendly admittance to the owner into the realm of the blest. Though these coins have lost any definite financial value that they once had, yet they are put to constant use as charms worn by young children or by wives who are anxious for sons. They have a use in native materia medica; some of the most rare, ground to powder and mixed with other ingredients, being given as a panacea for human ills.

The fact that the Chinese Emperor has within the last few months established a foreign mint in the city of Canton will bring to an end the hap-hazard coining of imperfect money. If he follows the example of the Japanese Emperor, he will call in the imperfect coinage of the past and present, and will re-issue it with new patterns and with new inscriptions. As ancient coins are extremely rare and valuable in Japan, so in China the securing of these ancient coins will without doubt grow more difficult with every succeeding year.

W. S. AMENT,
Missionary to China.

[N. B. During his residence of many years in China, the Rev. W. S. Ament has made a large and extremely interesting collection of Chinese coins, comprising over 1200 varieties. It is quite possible that some institution might prevail upon him to part with it before his return to China. The collection contains also Japanese, Korean and Anamese coins. Communications may be addressed to the Managing Editor of the Journal.]



ANCIENT CHINESE COINS

