

IMPERIAL CHINESE CURRENCY OF THE TAI'PING REBELLION

PART I - EMPEROR HSIEN FENG'S MULTIPLE CASH COINS

Historical Background

The fifth emperor to succeed to the Ch'ing (Manchu) dynasty throne in the year 1851 was Hsien Feng. He couldn't have picked a worst time. China was on the brink of civil war, a conflict that lasted fifteen years and ultimately cost the lives of twenty million Chinese. Hsien Feng was eighteen years old at the time and totally unprepared to cope with the crisis. His success or failure would change the lives of the Chinese people for the next one hundred years.

His real name was Wen Tsung. In contrast to his predecessors, he used the reign title (nien hao) of "Hsien Feng" on all of his coins. Because of this, he is better known by his reign title than by his actual name. He was to rule China for a mere eleven years and die in exile in Jehol province at the age of thirty. When coming to power, he inherited an empire which was literally falling to pieces. During his reign, China was beset internally by the Tai'ping Rebellion and externally by wars with encroaching European powers. Hsien Feng had inherited a strong anti-foreign bias from his predecessors which did little to advance his governance. Resentment among the Chinese peasants against Manchu rule had been building up for some time.

In the meantime, a young Cantonese known as Hung Hsiu-ch'unan, from whom great things were expected, had failed to pass the required public civil service examinations. Upon a second attempt he was again rejected. This failure brought on a despondency bordering on madness. Hung began to have visions. While in this depressed state of mind he turned his attention to a group of Christian tracts which the Canton missionaries had earlier given to him. In these he discovered, what he believed to be, interpretations of his visions. The missionaries, in their wildest dreams, could not have realized how strong their influence would be. He soon convinced himself that he had been divinely chosen to bring a knowledge of the true God to his countrymen and save the Chinese people. Our self-appointed leader then began referring to himself as the "Second Son of God". His goal was to replace the miserable life the peasants endured with a "Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace". Great Peace, in Chinese, translates to "Tai'ping" - thus the movement got its name.

Gathering a following of other disaffected types, Hung set forth on his "God-given mission" to overthrow the Manchus, and to replace the Confucian and bureaucratic systems, while at the same time destroying China's ancient Buddhist and



Emperor Hsien Feng (1851-1861), sixth in the lineage of Ch'ing dynasty rulers. Hsien Feng figured prominently in the finances of China during the troubled times of the Tai'ping Rebellion, leaving a legacy for latter day numismatists.

Tao religions in favor of Christianity. All this occurred just as Hsien Feng was ascending to the imperial throne. Shortly thereafter this seething discontent was to break into open rebellion.

Hung proposed many reforms, the most important of which was land reform, which aimed at better balancing the agricultural population with available cropland, thereby winning over the support of the peasants. His movement called out for many other reforms to correct social injustices. Among these were the elimination of eunuchs which surrounded the Manchu court, women's rights, elimination of opium trafficking, overhaul of the tax system, and the outlawing of slavery.



Hung Hsin-ch'uan, the disturbed self appointed leader of the Tai'ping uprising. Believing himself to be the "Second Son of God", Hung ravaged China in the name of Christianity for fifteen years (1850-1865) bringing about one of the worst genocides the world had ever seen. Over twenty million people perished in the conflagration.

Huge numbers of peasants, seeing no chance to improve their lot as long as the Manchus remained in power, flocked to the ranks of the peasant army. Hung's rise to become the rebel king of half China has been likened by historians to that of Napoleon Bonaparte, Adolph Hitler and Joseph Stalin. Many of the same elements were there: the mysteries of chance, a background of social factors and unrest, his charisma with the masses, and a cadre of dedicated fanatical leaders to whom Hung was merely first among equals. The Tai'ping movement was highly motivated and highly organized.

Tai'ping followers lived by a strict code of ten commandments which had been set to poetry. Hung's followers were known as Brothers and Sisters and were commanded to live in total self-restraint and abstinence. Violators were beheaded. Soaring through central China, the movement quickly assumed crusading proportions taking on a combined militaristic, evangelical and patriotic character. Hung ruled this mass through four subordinates upon whom were bestowed the titles: King of the North, King of the East, King of the South and King of the West. These associates displayed remarkable competence. What they lacked in military training they made up in fierce determination on the battlefield.

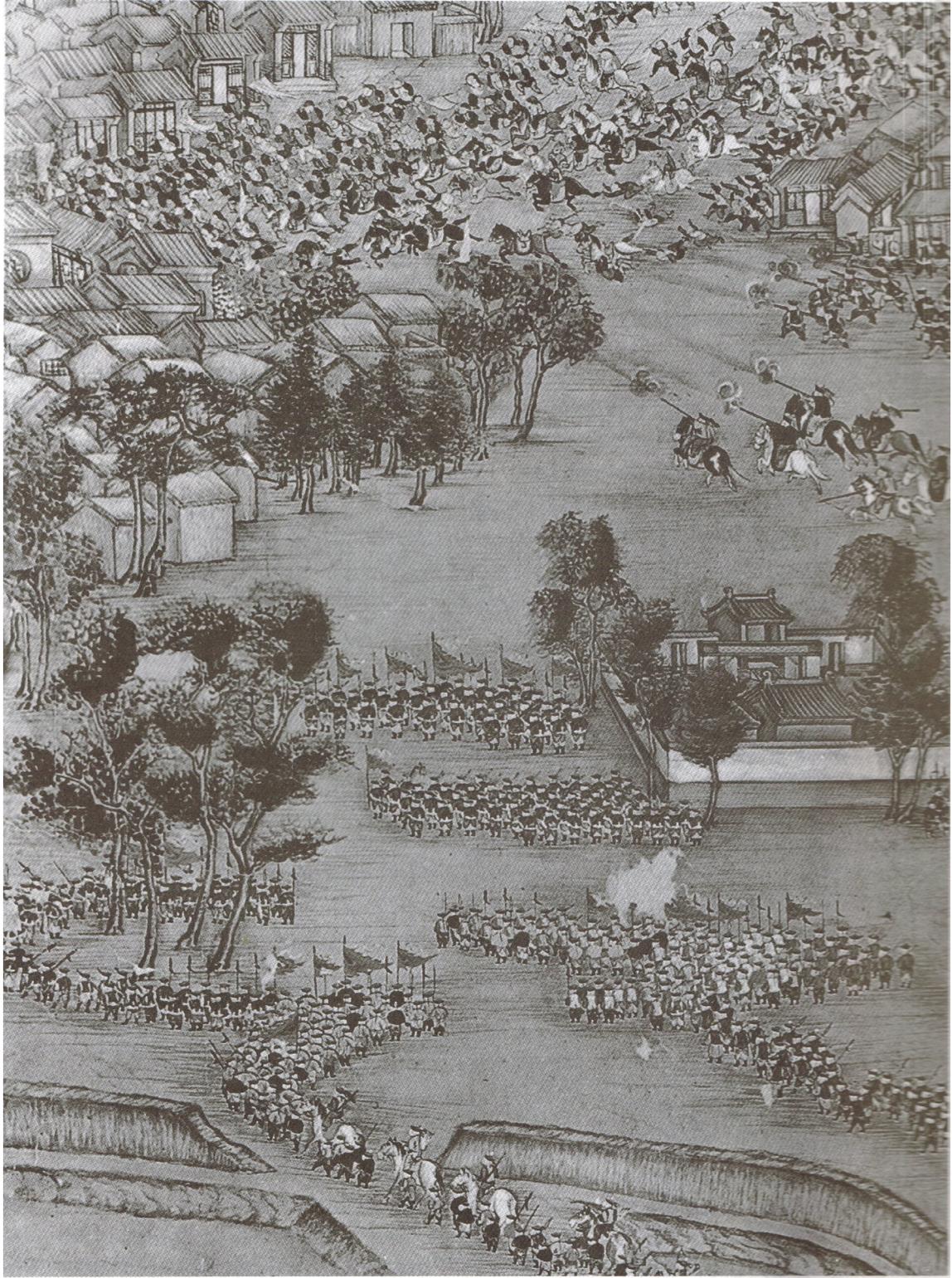
Adhering zealously to their cause, his followers became exemplary soldiers - well disciplined, loyal, and fierce in battle, certain that if they fell they would go straight to heaven. Rebel propagandists at the time circulated tracts which proclaimed:

“Our Heavenly King has received a divine commission to exterminate the Manchus utterly – men, women and children – with all idolaters, and to possess the empire as its true sovereign. For the empire and everything in it is his; its mountains and rivers, its broad lands and public treasuries; you and all that you have, your family. . . . and all your property. We command the services of all, and we take everything. All who resist us are rebels and idolatrous demons, and we kill them without sparing; but whoever acknowledges our Heavenly King and exerts himself in our service shall have full reward – due honor and station in the armies and court of the Heavenly Dynasty.” Thus, a primitive communistic society evolved not unlike those to follow in later years.

Sweeping north from Kwangsi province in July 1850 the Tai'pings overran city after city. Before it was all over fifteen years later the rebels had operated in sixteen of China's eighteen provinces and had ravaged six hundred of its walled cities. No mercy or quarter was given. One example of Tai'ping brutality concerns the ill-fated city of Hankow once visited by Marco Polo and described by him thus:

“Hangchow is the finest and most splendid city in the world with palaces, gardens and the mausoleums of art loving emperors; a city of lagoons, with a thousand bridges, three thousand public baths fed by warm springs, with streets brimming with turbulent life, as smooth as the floor of a ballroom and so wide that they could take nine coaches side by side.”

The cruel tide of Tai' ping conquest destroyed the greatness of Hangchow forever. In the spring of 1852 hordes of invading troops overwhelmed the place, reducing its walls, monuments and libraries to ashes. After burning the city to the ground the Tai'pings systematically murdered six hundred thousand people including all the Buddhists, Taoists, civil servants and bureaucrats they could find - in effect,



Tai'ping rebel forces routing the Imperial garrison from their fort at Tientsin.

everyone in their frenzied path. When the carnage was over, the remainder of the population perished from starvation and disease.

In the spring of 1853 the Tai' pings moved upon Nanking on the Yangtze River. The Manchu garrison there offered a feeble resistance. Twenty thousand Manchus were put to the sword, whereupon the Heavenly King declared the city to be his capital because of its strategic importance and location. Nanking was henceforth known as the Heavenly City. From Nanking, Hung's troops spread out across the fertile Yangtze valley holding on to this territory throughout the rebellion. Gathering the support of other restive elements including bandits, private armies, members of secret societies and other dissidents, his armies swelled to over three million fanatical supporters. When Nanking fell, the rebels seized huge stores of gold and silver belonging to the Manchu government, thereby enabling them to finance their revolution. It was said that the Tai' pings boasted a treasury six times that of the imperial government.

To make his dreams a reality, Hung first had to crush the Ch'ing dynasty into submission. To do this, an ill-fated plan was conceived to march north to capture the Manchu capital at Peking. There in 1855, the Tai'pings met with defeat. Hastily rallied imperial forces met the advancing armies eighty miles from Peking. Realizing that they had everything to lose, the wealthy landowners and government officials firmly backed Manchu authority. Since the interests of the Tai'pings ran counter to those of the foreigners, the Manchus picked up strange bedfellows. Britain, France and the United States had too much invested in the status-quo to lose. The lucrative treaty concessions, newly won from the Manchus after the two Opium Wars, gave them a big stake in supporting continued Manchu rule. The principal irritant for the foreigners was the Tai' ping stand on stamping out the opium traffic which was resulting in the addiction of millions of Chinese. On this issue the Tai'pings would not budge. After initially admiring Hung's virtuous causes, the British were beginning to have second thoughts - after all, it was easier and vastly more profitable to deal with a weak imperial government unwilling or unable to control the traffic. Re-equipped with modern arms, the imperial bannermen were now able to reverse the tide. With the help of a severe winter, loyal Chinese armies forced the Tai'ping army to return to Nanking without having accomplished its mission.

By 1857, imperial troops were drawing closer lines around the rebels, who were now losing rather than gaining ground. Hung then turned to a life of debauchery. While demanding a celibate existence from his followers, he surrounded himself with harems and luxury. This more than anything eroded the discipline of his army. A series of purges then took place in which the King of the North assassinated the King of the East. Infuriated, Hung then murdered the King of the North together with his generals. These



Manchu Empire at the height of the Tai'ping insurgency in 1855. Note the enclaves surrounding Shanghai and Fukien province from which Tseng Kuo-fan was eventually able to advance and crush the rebellion.

actions were later to be mirrored by the purges of Hitler and Stalin. Foreigners now completely turned away from the Tai' ping movement.

In 1860 the Tai'pings threatened to overrun Shanghai. Panic broke out in the International Settlement of the city. The Chinese authorities, desperate to defend the city, looked to the Western resident population to help defend it. A mercenary force of a few rag-tag Europeans and soldiers of fortune together with six thousand Chinese was hastily thrown together under the command of Frederick Ward, an American. Far from victorious in all their campaigns, they were nevertheless given the title "Ever Victorious Army" by the emperor for their defense of Shanghai. Ward was eventually killed while leading an assault upon Tai'ping fortifications at Ningpo.

After Ward was killed, an English adventurer took command of the army. This was none other than the future General Charles Gordon of Sudan fame who, as every English schoolboy could tell you, was later besieged in Khartoum and eventually butchered by the Mahdi's forces together with his entire garrison while British officialdom, wary of public opinion, hesitated time and time again to act in his relief. For an account of the Siege of Khartoum and the bank notes General Gordon created to alleviate the siege see my article *Siege Notes - Windows to the Past, Part II*.

Emperor Hsien Feng, by this time, had turned to a life of reversion, surrounded by an equally degraded clique. He was able to contribute little to the war effort but did, however, recognize that steps must be taken to raise money to support the imperial army. To this end he issued imperial memorials directing the minting of multiple cash coins and later was forced to relent to printing paper money again after a three hundred year absence due to the preceding Ming dynasty's inflationary disaster.

Finally an able general by the name of Tseng Kuo-fan was found who was capable of routing the Tai'ping from most of their fortresses. The pressure placed upon the Tai'ping "Heavenly Capital" at Nanking was so unbearable the rebels were forced to sortie on a large scale, thus relieving the siege. The brutal treatment given to the people at large who were unlucky enough to be in their path, was so great it turned the remainder of Hung's supporters away. The war dragged on in the Yangtze valley for another eleven years. Victory came slowly for the imperial forces as their armies had to cope with other rebellions in the empire as well. Nanking finally fell in July 1864. After fifteen years of struggle, trapped between armies both east and west, the peasant uprising collapsed. Hung met an ignoble end by committing suicide. The heads of the rebel leaders were chopped off, spiked onto poles and paraded about the country, finally to be sent in triumph to Peking.

For those interested in the currency of the Tai'pings, see my article *Money of the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace*.

The Evolution of Copper Cash Coins

The first Chinese money used in commercial transactions were cowrie shells. These came into everyday use as early as the sixteenth century B.C. These shells, originating in far off seas, were not native to China; hence they acquired a certain intrinsic value of their own. Because of their size they were vastly more popular than the animal hides and silk then used for barter. The cowries used in trade eventually evolved into bone and bronze replicas. It wasn't until the end of the Chou dynasty (1000-400 B.C.) that the first metal currency was developed. At this time the Chinese commenced coining miniature implements in copper. These "coins" resembled actual tools in everyday use; such as spades, hoes and knives. The spades evolved from

hollow-handled ones to the smaller *pu*, consisting of round-shouldered and square-foot varieties. Everyone, whether or not they could read or write, instantly recognized the inherent value of a spade. Reducing the spade to a miniature *pu*, representing the actual tool, not only made them convenient to carry, but greatly facilitated trade. It was now possible to place a value upon commodities: for example, 'ten spades or two hoes for a sheep', using these coins to purchase necessities.



The evolution of Chinese cash is represented here as shown in these examples. Bone cowrie shell at upper left, square footed *pu*, or spade, upper right; *Ming* knife at center, *pan-liang* of 8 shu lower left followed by a *wu-shu* center and finally the Yuan dynasty *k'ai-yuan*. This evolution took place over a thousand year period.

In time pu spades were supplanted by knife money. This form of coin was introduced by the kingdom of Ch'i (700 - 500 B.C.). The large *Ch'i* knives were seven inches long, often carrying inscriptions indicating their value. Later on, the smaller *Ming* knives made their appearance. (Note: Ming knives were named after the town in which they were made, not after the dynasty of the same name). Eventually Ming knives were supplanted by round coins with center holes known as *pan-liangs* which were to become the prototype of all coins to follow. It is said that the round coins with center holes - which were to become the standard coin for China for the next 2,000 years - evolved from the circular end of *Ch'i* knives, put there for the purpose of attaching the knives to the owner's belt. Spades and knives were replaced by round pan-liangs about the time of the unification of China under the Han dynasty (200 B.C.). The next coins to be developed were the *wu-shus* (5 shu) of the Warring States Period. Because the wu-shu's intrinsic value was the same as its face value, they became tremendously popular with all classes of society. Next came the *k'ai-yuan* of the Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D.). These were the first square-holed cash coins to contain four characters in the legend on their obverse – a practice followed when casting all subsequent Chinese coins. These coins were the first to carry the characters *yuan-pao* (principal treasure) and *t'ung-pao* (circulating treasure) which continued to be used on copper cash until the fall of the Ch'ing dynasty in 1911. Cast copper cash remained China's sole metallic money until supplanted by western style machine struck coins, which were first introduced to China in the 1890s.

The Manufacture of Copper Cash

Chinese coins were typically made by pouring molten metal into a mold or form. These molds contained a central channel, down which the molten metal flowed into branches, each one of which terminated in a coin. The molds were prepared using two halves which were clamped together, the molten metal being poured into the top. Once the metal had cooled the two halves were broken apart revealing a money “tree” with a cast coin at the end of each branch. The coins having been removed, the remainder of the tree went back into the melting pot to be recycled again and again.

Initially, the size of copper coins was dictated by law, with an effort made to adhere to weights approximating the relative intrinsic value of the coin. In time, however, as inflation reduced the value of the metal, coin size came to be dictated by convenience more than equivalent value. A good example of this were the multiple cash coins of emperor Hsien Feng. They were thick and heavy and did not preserve the intrinsic ratio of the value of the metal contained to the stated value of the coin.

The logic behind the use of the square center hole is interesting. The square hole is the result of the method of manufacture. These coins, when taken from the mold, were

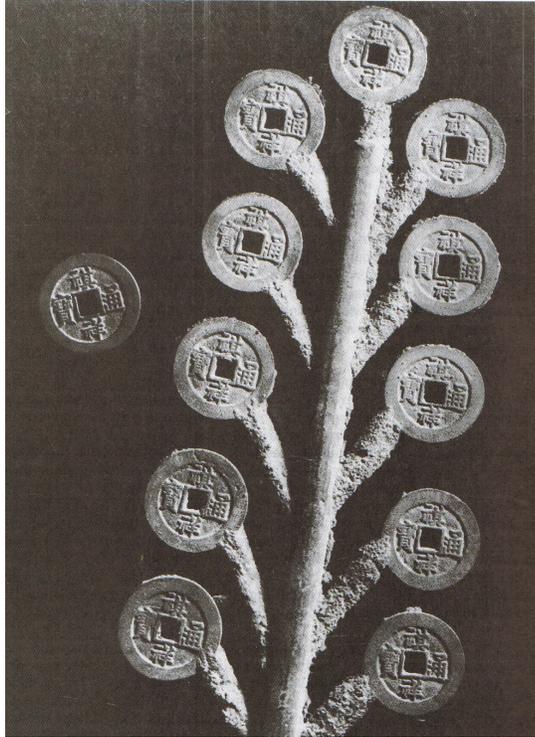
irregular in shape, containing rough metal projections where they had been attached to the tree. To remove this rough metal several hundred coins would be fitted onto a square metal bar, or chuck, which was then placed into a primitive lathe. While the lathe was being rotated the excess metal was removed by using a hand file. In this way many coins could be made perfectly round at once. Mint-masters used both copper and brass, or bronze, to cast their coins. Iron coins had first appeared earlier during the Sung dynasty and were again produced in large numbers during the reign of Hsien Feng in order to meet the production requirements necessitated by the Tai'ping rebellion.

The size of cast coins was, of course, determined by the mold. The common practice was to create molds utilizing officially prepared "mother" or "seed" coins, thus insuring coins of consistent size. Ch'ing one cash coins approximated in size a product somewhere between an United States nickel and a quarter. As inflation became an increasing problem, the size of the mother coin would be reduced, producing molds which turned out coins of uniformly smaller size.

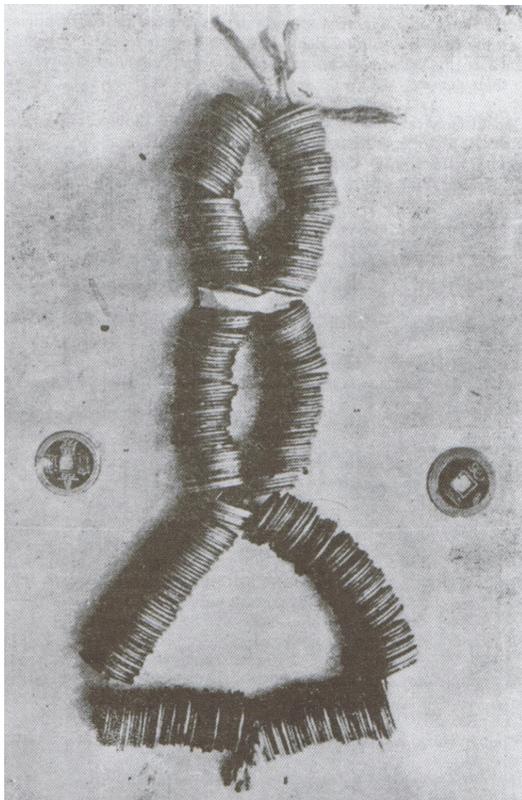
Inasmuch as one copper cash represented very little in value, they were strung together for convenience. Typically one hundred, five hundred or one thousand copper cash coins were tied together with string or strong cord for convenience of handling and to facilitate business transactions. As early as 700 A.D. One string of one thousand cash had the equivalent value of Chinese ounce of pure silver. One Chinese ounce was called a liang. The Chinese applied various terms to describe a string of cash coins. Among them were min, kwan, tiao and ch'uan. The latter two were still in use in the countryside when the Manchus were overthrown in 1911 and the Chinese Republic established.

The best description of the practice of stringing cash coins that I have found is contained in *Gutttag's Foreign Currency and Exchange Guide*, a compendium published in 1921 by the Gutttag Brothers of New York for businesses engaged in foreign exchange. It is well worth quoting here:

"CASH. This is a coin of copper or brass and is the common currency of the lower classes. These coins are strung into rolls, usually of 100, of which 10 rolls go to the "TIAO" or "STRING" of 1,000 cash. The coins are circular in shape and have a square hole in the center. Money-changers charge for the trouble of stringing the coins and also for the cost of the string by deducting a certain number of Cash from each roll. This rate of discount is fixed locally so that the Tiao, which consists of 1,000 Cash, may contain in one district 965 and in another 980 actual coins. The number of actual coins in a Tiao depends on the size and metal of the Cash in circulation which varies from province to province. These coins were introduced about the 12th Century B.C. and today it is not unusual to come across specimens which have been in circulation for nearly 1,000 years."



Cast bronze money “tree” and finished copper cash coin. Reign of emperor T'ung-chih (1862-1874).



Two cash coins beside a string of 400 cash, called ch'ien in China and “tiao” in Manchuria.

The Introduction of Multiple Cash Coins

When emperor Hsien Feng came to the throne in 1850 his one cash coins were produced by both government mints and most provinces. They represented the sole metallic currency of the masses. All this changed with the advent of war against the Tai'pings. During the Tai'ping Rebellion, Peking and north China - essentially all territory not occupied by the Tai'ping - had a currency of its own, greatly adding to the confusion when exchanging money. This came about as a result of increasing inflation and the war having cut off the supply of copper from Yunnan province. The government then began to cast multiple cash pieces to meet its financial needs. These coins were called "Big Cash" by the peasantry. Multiple cash coins were produced by the two government mints in Peking (the Board of Revenue and the Board of Public Works) as well as those provincial mints which had not been overrun by the Tai'pings. The principal denominations were 5, 10, 50, 100, 500 and 1000 cash, although the Board of Revenue did, initially, produce a 200 cash coin. In the provinces not all denominations were minted by all mints; rather the decision as to what denominations to issue in each province seemed to be left up to the discretion of the local mint-masters. These men had a better feel for local custom and the requirements of commerce in their districts. Only such denominations as suited the needs of the local population were put into production. Therefore, we find, in addition to the standard coinage, a great many unusual denominations appearing in these places. The traditional currency was now augmented by such strange multiple cash denominations as 4, 8, 20, 30, 40 and 80 cash as the imperial government inflated the money supply to pay for increased expenses incurred in putting down the Tai'pings. (See Table. 1).

These coins were cast using whatever metal was at hand, including iron. Most castings used molten brass, some copper (particularly the Sinkiang mints), and in one case coins were cast using zinc as the metal. Big cash coins of the Board of Revenue and Board of Public Works circulated throughout China while those of the provincial mints tended to circulate only within the province of origin. These mints set aside samples of the metal used in casting coins. They were retained by the Protector of the Treasury at the mint as evidence of true metallic content. These coin samples bore the rim inscription *Nei Ch'u Kung Feng* (I stay on the inside as honored evidence) on the reverse.



Mint sample containing the true metal composition of the Hupeh 50 cash coin. (Size reduced)

It is not possible to date multiple cash coins as to an actual year of issue. This is because Hsien Feng did not employ the *Nien Hao* system of dating coins, in which the reign year in which the coin was cast appeared on the reverse of the coin. When such a system was employed the actual year could be derived by adding the reign year to the known first year of the emperor's reign and then subtracting one year; e.g., Hsien Feng first year of reign = 1851 + 6th year = 1857 – 1 = 1856. Therefore the sixth year of Hsien Feng was 1856. This system was employed on his bank notes but not on coins. We can then only state with certainty when examining his coins that they were produced between the years 1851 and 1861. However, because of the inflation experienced during the war, we often have two coins of different sizes representing the same denomination. When this occurs the larger coins were the first coined while the smaller versions were produced after inflation had severely depreciated the currency. This occurred about 1855. Therefore, we can narrow the dating of some coins considerably, yet not achieve a definitive date for any single one.

During Hsien Feng's coinage three principal types of inscriptions appear on multiple cash. These are (1) *t'ung-pao* (circulating treasure), *yuan-pao* (principal treasure) and *chung-pao* (heavy money), in which the character *chung* appears in two differing styles. These are known to numismatists as Type "A", Type "B-1", Type "B-2" and Type "C" obverses.



The three Hsien Feng inscriptions which appear on multiple cash coins are shown above. On the left is a 20 cash *t'ung-pao* of Fukien, at center 100 cash *yuan-pao* of Szechuan and on the right a 50 cash *chung-pao* of the Board of Public Works. The inscriptions are read right to left.

The reverses display the value of the coin and the mint in which it was cast. There were two general issue mints, both located in the capital, Peking. The first of these was the *Hu Pu* mint, known as the Board of Revenue. The second mint was the *Kung Pu*, or Board of Public Works. Both mints issued multiple cash coins in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 50, 100, 500 and 1000 cash. In addition, the Board of Revenue initially produced a

200 cash piece, but it was soon dropped from production. Each province had its own mint and several had more than one. Chihli and Yunnan each had two, while the desert surrounding Sinkiang maintained mints in no less than six oasis locations. (See Table. 2).

Table 1. Hsien Feng Cash Coins Issued (1851-1861)

General Issues	Denominations of Multiple Cash Coins Issues							
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	1	5	10	50	100	200	500	1000
Board of Revenue	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Board of Public Works	x	x	x	x	x		x	x

Provincial Issues	Denominations of Multiple Cash Coins Issued												
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	1	4	5	8	10	20	30	40	50	80	100	500	1000
Chekiang	x				x	x	x	x	x		x		
Chihli(Chengde)	x		x		x				x		x		
Chihli (Paoting)	x				x				x		x		*
Fukien	x		x		x	x			x		x		
Honan	x				x				x		x	x	x
Hupeh	x		x		x				x		x		
Kansu	x		x		x				x		x	x	x
Kiangsi	x				x				x				
Kiangsu	x		x		x	x	x		x		x		
Kwangsi	x				x				x				
Kwangtung	x												
Kweichow	x				x				x				
Shansi	x				x								
Shensi	x				x				x		x	x	x
Sinkiang (Aksu)			x		x				x		x		
Sinkiang (Ili)	x	x			x				x		x		
Sinkiang (Kashgar mint)					x				x		x		

Sinkiang(Kuche)			x		x				x		x		
Sinkiang (Urumchi mint)				x	x				x	x	x		
Sinkiang (Yarkand mint)					x				x		x		
Szechuan	x				x				x		x		
Taiwan	x												
Yunnan (Yunnanfu mint)	x				x				x				
Yunnan Tungch'uan)	x				x								

- reported, unconfirmed

Occasionally one will find additional marks known as 'dot and crescents', or 'star and crescents' on the reverses of coins in this series. The dot is found in the upper right of the field, while the crescent appears at upper left. These symbols indicate that the coin was issued by *Ching Hui*, the Hereditary Prince of K'o Ch'in, for use in the area later known as Cochin -China, on China's southern border, now known as Viet Nam.



Two examples of “dot and crescent” coins. The star and crescents are found at the upper left and right above the center hole. These 500 and 100 cash coins were issued by the Board of Revenue for use in Cochin-China, now a part of Viet Nam.

Several other anomalies make this series fun to collect. The Board of Revenue and the mint in Fukien province, in an honest effort to equate the intrinsic value of the metal in the coin to its stated value, produced a 100 cash piece so large that it weighed 255.14grams (9 ounces), was 9mm thick and 70mm wide. It is needless to say, the



Shown actual size, these 100 cash coins were an experiment that did not work. Because the peasants felt cheated when the metal content of multiple cash coins did not equal the equivalent value of the metal contained in them, the Board of Public Works (left below) and Fukien province (lower right) attempted to right the wrong by issuing these huge coins. The public was still unhappy, as the sheer weight of the pieces precluded their utility as coins. Note the private “chop” marks on the rim.

largest of the multiple cash. They met with disfavor with the masses because of their weight and were soon dropped from production.

Another interesting deviation occurred when Fukien province added four characters to the rim of its 10, 20 and 50 cash coins in an attempt to make them more acceptable. These characters attested to the weight of the coin. Thus the 20 cash piece, or “value twenty” coin, read *chi-chung-yi-liang* meaning “weighing 1 tael”; and the fifty cash “2 taels five mace”. These are known as “official” marks as opposed to the occasional “private” marks, or chops, found in this series. In Shensi province the character *kuan* (official) was cast into the rims of 500 and 1000 cash.



Examples of rim weight marks added to cash coins. Fukien province, in an effort to make their coins more acceptable to the public, added the equivalent weights to its 10, 20 and 50 cash coins. At left may be seen the original pieces. The coins at right bear rim weights.

One also encounters in this series different size and weight coins for the same denomination. The original, larger sizes, were considerably reduced due to inflation as the rebellion wore on. As size and weight bear little relationship to value, having been

issued on different standards, one must rely on the stated denomination alone for identification purposes.

Varieties, other than size, also occur within the same denomination multiple cash coin. These differences concern the manner and position in which the denomination is depicted. By way of example, provincial coins depict the characters for “50” in three different ways: On Fukien coins we find the value 50 expressed with the character *wu* (five) above the center hole and the character *shyr* (ten) below. Kwangsi, Honan and other provinces display the denomination horizontally and positioned below the center hole. The third method, employed by the Chekiang mint displays the value 50 written vertically below the center hole.

Another deviation to be on the lookout out for are differences in rim width. These variants are not usually catalogued. The author has in his collection, by way of example, two 10 cash coins of Kiangsi, one with a wide rim measuring 5mm and the other with a narrower rim measuring 2mm. Significant differences in the depiction of the mint mark are also discernible on these coins.



A good example of the same coin, the 10 cash of Kiangsi province, which was cast with two different rim widths: one wide and one narrow. Close examination will also reveal obvious differences in the manner in which the mint marks are depicted.

While enjoying success initially, the Big cash quickly became very unpopular with the population for three reasons. Firstly, they weighed a “ton”, particularly the larger denominations. Secondly, (and it must be remembered that in China coins were considered a commodity, i.e., weighing so much brass, the value of which was pegged to the silver tael) their weight was disproportionate to their stated value. Therefore, since the coins nowhere approximated true stated value, people felt that they were being cheated by their government. Lastly, they were extensively counterfeited. The

counterfeiter's goal was to make a profit from the nominal value of the coins. It was not long before the coinage became so severely debased that the people refused to accept multiple cash in day to day transactions. Eventually only the ten cash pieces remained in circulation. Even so, these coins which had replaced the earlier coppers, circulated at the depreciated value of two cash. After the end of the rebellion and Hsien Feng's reign few multiple cash issues found their way into production.

Thus, in Peking and the surrounding area from the 1850s onward, a string of cash containing forty-nine or fifty coins passed for one thousand cash - one coin counting as two and the cash being the depreciated ten cash. Mathematically it worked out like this: $2 \times 10 \text{ cash value} \times 50 \text{ coins per string} = 1000$. This difference in reckoning affected only the nominal prices of goods and not their true exchange value, as a tael of silver in north China would exchange for twice the amount of cash as a tael from south China in order to compensate for the difference in reckoning.

The great difficulty with which day to day business was conducted can best be summarized by the following priceless quotation which appeared in a newspaper account published in the *North-China Herald*. The poor devil who wrote it was obviously experienced in these matters and on the verge of pulling his hair out in frustration! It certainly highlights the forlorn hope felt by foreigners when attempting to conduct business in the Middle Kingdom.

“The subject of Chinese currency demands not a brief paragraph but a comprehensive essay, or rather a volume. These chaotic eccentricities would drive any occidental nation to madness in a single generation, or more probably such gigantic evils would speedily work their own cure. In speaking of the disregard of currency we have mentioned a few of the more prominent annoyances. One hundred cash are not 100 and one thousand cash are not 1000, but some other and totally uncertain number, to be ascertained only by experience. In wide regions of the empire, 1 cash counts for 2, that is, it does so in numbers above 20, so that when one hears that he is to be paid 500 cash he understands that he will receive 250 pieces, less the local abatement, which perpetually shifts in different places. There is a constant inter-mixture of small and spurious cash, leading to inevitable disputes between dealers in any commodity. At regular intervals, local magistrates become impressed with the evil of this abasement of the currency, and issue stern proclamations against it. This gives the swarm of underlings in the magistrates yamen (office) an opportunity to levy squeezes on all the cash shops in the district, and to make the transaction of all business more or less difficult. Prices at once rise to meet the temporary necessity for pure cash. As soon as the paying ore in this vein is exhausted, and it is not worked to any extent, the bad

cash returns, but prices do not fall. Thus the irrepressible law by which the worst currency drives out the better, is never for an instant suspended. The condition of the cash becomes worse and worse until, as in some parts of the Province of Honan, everyone goes to market with two entirely distinct sets of cash, one of which is the ordinary mixture of good and bad, and the other is composed exclusively counterfeit pieces. Certain articles are paid for with the spurious cash only. But in regard to other commodities this is a matter of special bargain, and accordingly there is for those articles a double market price. That enormous losses must result from such a state of things is to any Westerner obvious at a glance, although the Chinese are so accustomed to inconveniences of this sort that they seem almost unconscious of their existence, and the evils are felt only as the pressure of the atmosphere is felt. Chinese cash is emphatically "filthy lucre". It cannot be handled without contamination. The strings of 500 or 1,000 (nominal) pieces are exceedingly liable to break, which involves great trouble in recounting and retying. There is no uniformity of weight in the current copper cash, but all is bulky and heavy. Cash to the value of a Mexican dollar weighs not less than eight pounds avoirdupois. A few hundred cash are all that anyone can carry about in the little bags which are suspended for this purpose from the girdle. If it is the desire to use a larger sum, then transportation becomes a serious matter. The losses in transactions in ingots of sycee are always great, and the person who uses them is inevitably cheated both in buying and in selling. If he employs the bills of cash shops, the difficulty is not greatly relieved, since those of one region are either wholly uncurrent in another region not so far away, or will be taken only at a heavy discount, while the person who at last takes them to be redeemed has in prospect a certain battle with the harpies of the shop by which the bills were issued as to the quality of the cash which is to be paid for them. Under these grave disabilities the wonder is that the Chinese are able to do any business at all; and yet, as we daily perceive, they are so accustomed to these annoyances, that their burden appears scarcely felt, and the only serious complaint on this score comes from the foreigners."

A few mints produced patterns for coins which never went into circulation. These included the Board of Public Works which cast a 4 cash piece in brass and a large 100 cash coin with a center round hole. Several mints in Sinkiang province also produced pattern coins.



1000 cash coins were issued by only five mints. Shown here are those produced by the Board of Revenue and Kansu mints. (Actual size 63mm).

As mentioned above, the counterfeiting of multiple cash was a constant problem. This is one reason these coins were so unpopular with the masses. It is very difficult to identify a well made counterfeit. Many collections today (including mine) undoubtedly contain contemporary counterfeits of which the owner is unaware. The most knowledgeable experts often cannot tell the difference with certainty. I have adopted the attitude: if it was good enough to fool the Chinese in 1851-1861 it is good enough to have a place in my own collection.

Not so with modern day counterfeits, however. Unfortunately many of these have appeared on the market in the last fifty years. Their only purpose is to fool and cheat the numismatist out of his hard-earned hobby money. Therefore, one must exercise a high degree of awareness when offered these pieces. The best defense is knowledge and experience. Often coins are cast in metals in which they were not originally made. Good counterfeits often are better made than the originals! Pay particular attention to the background into which the characters are cast. Counterfeits often display a uniformity and evenness in the sand casting which does not appear in the original. Poorly made copies of multiple cash are often so crude as to not fool any but the rank beginner. Often, counterfeiters will apply a patina to make the coin appear old. These can be very convincing; however, with patience and enough experience one can usually tell the difference. It is wise to familiarize yourself with file marks and know from which provincial mints to expect to see these and from which you will not. Another dead give-away is the mold in which they were cast. Often we find that modern day counterfeits contain impurities and air bubbles in the casting which did not appear in the originals.



Provincial mint 10 cash coins. From upper left to lower right: Shensi, Kansu, Hupeh, Shansi, Szechuan, Chihli (Paoting), Yunnan (Yunnanfu), Yunnan (Tungch'uan), Kiangsu, Kwangsi, Honan and Kweichow. The sole iron coin in the group is the Paoting 10 cash. All others were cast in brass. The purpose of the inverted crescent on the Hupeh specimen (upper right field) is unknown to the author.



The money changer lived by his wits. His tools were the scale, trays of coins and silver shoes, or sycee, one of which may be seen on the balance pan. Sometimes the scales held a secret. Doing business here was definitely a matter of caveat emptor!

Any denomination multiple cash coin which is not found in Table 1 may be considered a fantasy issue. Therefore denominations such as 90, 300, 400, 700 and 5000 cash, which occasionally surface, are all bogus pieces made to fool the collector or the uninitiated. Some of these examples are no less than bizarre. For example, I have in my collection a 100 cash coin of Shantung province, a province which did not exist or have a mint in the 1850s!

Table 2. Multiple Cash Mint Mark Identifier

Board of Revenue		Kweichow	
Board of Public Works		Shansi	
Chekiang		Shensi	
Chihli (Chengde mint)		Sinkiang (Aksu mint)	
Chihli (Paoting)		Sinkiang (Ili mint)	
Fukien		Sinkiang (Kashgar mint)	
Honan		Sinkiang (Kuche mint)	
Hupeh		Sinkiang (Urumchi mint)	
Kansu		Sinkiang (Yarkand mint)	
Kiangsi		Szechuan	
Kiangsu		Taiwan	
Kwangsi		Yunnan (Yunnanfu mint)	
Kwangtung		Yunnan (Tungch'uan mint)	



Fantasy multiple cash can take on bizarre characteristics! At upper left is a poorly made 40 cash coin of the Board of Revenue, a denomination which the mint did not produce. Note the fake patina on this coin. Upper right: a 200 cash of the *Hu Pu* mint made of pot metal. At lower left is a 50 cash of Fukien with rim weights, correct in all respects except for its Tungch'uan mint-mark from Yunnan! Lastly, is my favorite fantasy coin: a 100 cash bearing the mint-mark of Shantung, a province that did not exist at the time!

Occasionally one will run across a multiple cash piece which has been fashioned into an amulet by adding engraving to the standard coin. These can be beautifully executed in endless symmetric designs, the larger pieces being quite impressive.



Amulet depicting dragons striving for a pearl which has been created by engraving the rims of an obsolete 10 cash piece of the Kiangsu mint.

Our discussion of multiple cash would not be complete without mention of several other comparisons, which is what makes this series so fascinating to me. They can best be explained by the captions under the illustrations below.



Two 10 cash coins of the Board of Revenue. The left coin was cast in brass, while the one on the right was made of iron. Iron coins increasingly became more plentiful as the rebellion dragged on, creating shortages of tin and copper from which to cast coins.



Four multiple cash coins of Sinkiang Province. Left to right: 10 cash of the Urumchi mint in brass, a copper 50 cash copper piece of the Yarkand mint, a 100 cash copper piece from Aksu, and a 100 cash coin of the Ili mint. The latter coin was broken from its tree at the eleven o'clock position and, as seen by the rough unfilled edges, was never finished for circulation.



Multiple cash were sometimes cast in unusual denominations. The provincial mints often deviated from the standard 10, 50, 100, 500 and 1000 cash pieces to include other denominations which reflected local commercial practice. Seen here are a 4 cash of Ili, 5 cash of the Board of Public Works, an 8 cash coin of Urumchi, two 20 cash pieces which depict the value “20” in two different styles (Chekiang and Kiangsu) and, finally, a 30 cash of Kiangsu. For a listing of all denominations issued in this series see Table 1.

Finally, I must mention that occasionally a multiple cash coin will turn up which had not previously been listed. Such a coin is the 5 cash iron coin of Kansu province. I recently obtained one. It looks authentic to me. It is definitely made of iron and is magnetic. My coin has rough mold edges which have not been filed. This leaves me to believe that the coin was cast in iron instead of brass as an experiment, or perhaps it was an innocent error which was caught in the production process. In any event, it definitely never made it to circulation. The question is, was this an officially sanctioned issue, or just a mistake? We will probably never know.

While the imperial government was busy fighting the Tai'pings, another major threat arose. This crisis stemmed from the trade privileges which had been granted to the British by the Treaty of Nanking (1842) following the First Opium War. The British and French saw the Chinese concessions as inadequate and continued to press for more open ports through which to conduct foreign trade. The emperor was unshakable in his

resolve to oppose the “foreign devils”. With sufficient troubles already on hand, one would think that he would be slow to provoke further anxiety, but such was not the case. After Hsien Feng refused to negotiate with the foreigners, British and French forces occupied Canton after an attempt had been made to rid China of all foreigners once and for all. This refusal to yield to foreign pressure brought about the unusual situation in which China found itself at war with the very country which had come to its aid in suppressing the Tai'ping rebels!

A second treaty was concluded in 1858 which granted further concessions to England including the right to have a diplomatic representative in residence in Peking and permission to trade along the inland waterways of China. When Hsien Feng refused to ratify the treaty, a joint Anglo-French force advanced upon Peking. Attacking overland with over 20,000 troops they bypassed the heavily fortified Taku forts throwing Peking into panic. Peking lay at the mercy of the foreigners. The emperor hastily fled to neighboring Jehol province. Punitive action became necessary after a number of captured allied prisoners were inhumanely tortured. Orders were given to burn the emperor's Summer Palace in retaliation. In Hsien Feng's absence his ministers signed the Peking Convention signaling China's acceptance of foreign demands, thus ending the Second Opium War.

With such a crushing burden on its treasury, the Chinese government saw that it could no longer support two wars simultaneously with multiple cash coins alone. Therefore, the emperor ordered the resumption of paper money issues after an absence of 300 years. The preceding Ming dynasty's abuse of paper money emissions had led to such gross inflation that the money became worthless to the point that no one would accept it in payment for goods or services. Of course, the imperial government would have to find a way to force the new emissions of cash and tael notes upon the public. How this was accomplished will be explained in Parts II and III of this article.

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