

MONEY OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVENLY PEACE

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Few people, if asked today, could identify the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace, tell you where it was located, or how or why it came into existence. The Kingdom of Heavenly Peace, sometimes referred to as the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace, started as a noble experiment with great promise, which soon turned into outright rebellion against Manchu rule in China. The movement went terribly wrong, ultimately claiming the lives of 25 million Chinese before government troops aided by Western forces restored order.

The Kingdom of Heavenly Peace was born out of an 1850 uprising known as the Taiping Rebellion, perhaps the most devastating period in China's long history. The rebellion took the Ch'ing dynasty to the brink of extinction. Lasting fifteen years, during which time China was torn by the world's bloodiest civil war, the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace boasted a full-grown independent government complete with an administrative bureaucracy, an enormous army and its own communal treasury. The horrific loss of life was primarily due to Taiping tactics. Since most engagements consisted of siege warfare against walled fortifications, the tactics employed called for surrounding the enemy in his walled city and letting starvation and disease take their course. If the fortification didn't surrender, it was so weakened that it could be easily vanquished.

The factors leading up to the rebellion centered upon social unrest. From time immemorial the Chinese peasant class had struggled to eke out a bare subsistence living, were suppressed by corrupt officials considering themselves the scholarly elite, and had no prospect of improving their lot in life. A number of factors came together in the mid 1840s that would soon change their lives dramatically.

At that time southern China, where the Taiping movement originated, had experienced repeated crop failures and flooding, making the lot of the peasant farmers even more arduous. Widespread homelessness was the result. As if this were not bad enough, the despised foreign "barbarians" were gaining a foothold along the coast in what had been, before the Opium War, an area closed to Westerners. And to make matters still worse, these "long hairs" had discovered the

immense profits that were to be made through the opium trade, caring little about addicting the peasant population in the process. Hung Hsiu-ch'uan, the founder of



Manchu Empire at the height of the Taiping insurgency (1855). Shaded area shows the maximum extent of Taiping conquest.

the Taiping movement, came from a humble peasant background and was only too aware of these conditions. Resentment among the peasants against the ruling Manchu class had been building up for some time. In 1850, seeing the government

weakened by the Opium War, the peasants seized upon the opportunity and amidst increasing economic distress launched their revolution. This rebellion differed from previous uprisings in that, in addition to the overthrow of the ruling power, it contained elements of social revolution as well. In their desire to overthrow the Manchus and reestablish Chinese rule over their land, they were later to practice a form of ethnic cleansing when defeating the enemy.



Hung Hsiu-ch'uan, the disturbed self-appointed leader of the Taiping uprising. Believing himself to be the "Second Son of God", Hung ravaged China in the name of Christianity for fifteen disastrous years.

Hung Hsiu Ch'uan, the self appointed leader of the insurrection, was an ex-school teacher and sometime fortune teller who held a grudge against the government for his four time failure to pass the coveted civil service examinations. Successfully passing these examinations was the only way a Chinese peasant could

escape poverty. Those who succeeded then became part of the Manchu bureaucracy, serving in the capacity of civil servants. Those who failed the final tests were barred from advancement forever. Hung was so dismayed by his failure that he fell ill, becoming delirious during which time he had visions of an old man who ordered him to kill demons on earth. Converted to Christianity by Canton missionaries some years earlier, Hung turned to religion. The missionaries, in their wildest dreams, could not have realized how strong their influence would be. Turning to the reading of Christian pamphlets and missionary tracts during convalescence, Hung became convinced that he was destined to save the Chinese people. About this time he began referring to himself as the “Second Son of God”, the younger brother of Jesus. He believed that God had given him the mission to destroy the demons mentioned in his vision. “Demons” in Hung’s mind equated to “Manchus”. His goal was to replace the miserable life the peasants endured with a “Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace”. The result would bring universal happiness. “Great Peace” in Chinese is translated as “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, while replacing the Confucian and bureaucratic systems in the process. China’s ancient Buddhist and Tao religions were to be abandoned in favor of Hung’s version of Christianity. Hung proposed many radical reforms, the most important of which aimed at better balancing the agricultural population with available farmland. By this means he was sure to win over the support of the depressed peasantry to his cause. Hung’s form of Chinese Christianity spread like wildfire among the dispossessed peasantry. Loyalty to the Taiping cause intensified, their numbers multiplied, and they began to enlarge their domain. Panic spread before them, as villagers feared impressment into Taiping work and military units and scholars recoiled from the thought of an ideology dictated by foreign gods, totalitarian rule, and able-bodied women. These Taiping armies were to sweep through province after province, defeating all the Manchu forces that emperor Hsien Feng could send to oppose them.

The Taiping movement called out for many other reforms aimed at correcting social injustices. Among these were the elimination of the eunuchs who surrounded the Manchu court, women’s rights, elimination of opium trafficking, overhaul of the tax system, outlawing of slavery and the cessation of the practice of foot-binding. The last of these evils (that of foot-binding) was a practice whereby the feet of young girls were bound together into a wedge – a beauty symbol of the times known as “lily feet” - which left women crippled for life. This cruel practice caused women to hobble when they walked. Confucianism stressed the inequality

of the sexes and taught that women should not have a will of their own. Consequently, almost all women in China endured the practice. Hung was a member of the minority Hakka tribe of Kwangsi, which was considered inferior and looked down upon by most Chinese. This was in part because Hakka women did not practice the custom of foot binding and consequently were considered ugly by Chinese men. This seemingly insignificant fact - women able to fight as equals alongside men - was to play a large part in the Taiping's initial success.



Foot binding was one of the evils the Taipings wished to eliminate. Infant Chinese girls had their feet bound so that their toes would grow together to form wedges known as “lily feet”, considered a beauty mark by Chinese men.

These proposals proved too bizarre and irrational for China's ruling class. Trouble started when Hung's supporters began to smash idols in village temples. The Manchu troops sent to quell these disturbances met with resistance and open rebellion followed. Before it was over, Hung came very close to toppling the Ch'ing dynasty.

Huge numbers of the impoverished consisting principally of ignorant unenlightened peasants from the interior, seeing no chance to improve their lives as

long as the Manchus retained power, flocked to the ranks of the rebel army. Hung's rise to become the rebel king of half of China has been likened by contemporary historians to that of Napoleon Bonaparte, Adolph Hitler and Josef Stalin. Many of the same elements were present: the mysteries of chance, a background of social unrest, his charisma with the masses, and a cadre of dedicated fanatical leaders among whom Hung was merely first among equals. Their movement was highly motivated and strictly organized along communal lines. Their communistic concept of state controlled common property was embodied in the Taiping catch phrase and slogan "Share Property in Common". Total dedication and organizational skill bound the diverse elements of their society into an army of a million peasants.

Hung's Taiping followers lived by a strict code of ten commandments which had been set to poetry. A primitive communistic society evolved, which was not unlike those to follow in later years. These devout adherents were known as Brothers and Sisters and were commanded to live in total self-restraint and abstinence. There was an absolute ban on alcohol, tobacco, gambling, prostitution and dancing. Serious 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 on whom he bestowed the titles: King of the North, King of the East, King of the South and King of the West. These associates displayed remarkable military competence, a dichotomy considering their prewar trades were that of charcoal maker, scholar, farmer and handyman. 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. Total equality was afforded each of the sexes. Men and women were segregated even to the point of organizing an all-woman's corps of one hundred thousand troops with their own regiments and separate barracks. Unhindered by bound feet, these soldiers were a welcome addition to Hung's army.

In July 1850 Hung ordered all God worshipers throughout Kwangsi to assemble at Chin-tien. Sweeping north from Kwangsi province the Taipings overran city after city in their quest to overthrow the Manchu dynasty. 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 good example of Taiping brutality concerns the ill-fated city of Hangchow 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 mausoleums of art loving emperors; a city of lagoons, with twelve 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 Taiping conquest destroyed the greatness of Hangchow forever. In the spring of 1852 hoards of invading Taiping soldiers overwhelmed the place, reducing its walls, monuments and libraries to ashes. After burning the city to the ground the Taipings systematically murdered six hundred thousand people including all the Buddhists, Taoists, civil servants and bureaucrats they could lay their hands on – in effect everyone in their frenzied path. When the carnage was over, the remainder of the population perished from starvation and disease. Those who still survived drowned themselves in the city’s canals and West Lake to avoid their inevitable fate.

By 1853 Hung’s ever expanding army had fought from Kwangsi in southern China north to Nanking, defeating the Manchu troops as they went. The Taipings selected Nanking as their seat of government, renaming it the “Heavenly Capital”. Hung established his headquarters there and declared himself emperor of the new Taiping dynasty. From Nanking, Hung’s armies spread out across the fertile Yangtze valley, holding onto this territory throughout the rebellion. Gathering the support of other restive elements including bandits, private armies, members of secret societies and other dissidents, his legions 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 Taipings boasted a treasury six times that of the imperial government.

At first foreigners were impressed with the Taiping movement, and who wouldn’t be considering that the rebels stood against all that sin and corruption! Britain, France and the United States adopted an official policy of watch and wait. Missionaries embraced the Taiping war on all things evil. When visiting Nanking they were taken by its order and cleanliness. An American Baptist missionary, the Reverend Isaachar Roberts, who Hung had known earlier through his proselytizing, was invited to come and live in Nanking. After repeated Taiping victories on the



Taiping forces routing the Imperial garrison from their fort at Tientsin.

battlefield, some governments entered into provisional diplomatic relations with the rebels. It was at this point that things began to fall apart.

The principal irritant was the Taiping stand on opium. In the past this lucrative traffic had been encouraged by Westerners as a way to reverse the negative balance of payments for the silks, porcelains, and tea eagerly sought by the West. Since opium trafficking had resulted in the addiction of millions of Chinese, Western missionaries were solidly behind Taiping efforts to eradicate it. Of course, all this flew in the face of the British merchant class who saw their lucrative profits endangered. On the opium issue the Taipings would not budge. The British began 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.

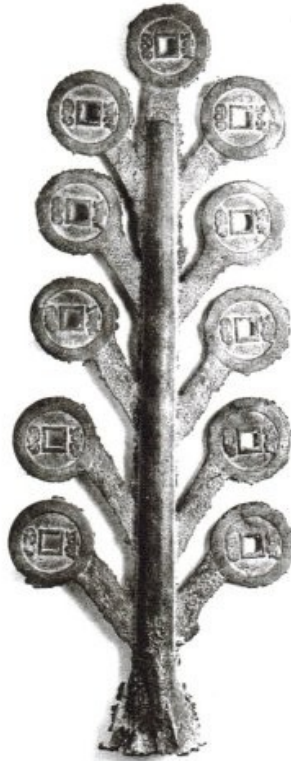
Other troubles began to surface from within. While demanding a celibate existence from his followers, Hung lived a very contrasting life of debauchery. He surrounded himself with harems and luxury. Even the missionaries commented upon the homosexuality practiced by the Taiping rulers. This more than anything else eroded the discipline of the army.

To make his dreams a reality, Hung had to first crush the Ch'ing dynasty into submission. The Taiping army was better organized and better disciplined than the government troops. At the height of their military success the Taipings marched to within eighty miles of the Manchu capital at Peking, forcing emperor Hsien Feng to flee in panic to his Summer Palace outside the city. Hastily rallied imperial forces and an especially severe northern winter saved the day. Realizing that they had everything to lose, the wealthy landowners and governmental officials firmly backed Manchu authority. Since the interests of the Taipings 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. Newly won treaty concessions stemming from the Second Opium War gave them a big stake in continuing to support Manchu rule. Re-equipped with modern arms, the imperial soldiers were now able to reverse the tide of battle. Loyal Chinese armies soon forced the Taipings to fall back upon their Heavenly Capital in Nanking.

When the 1856 expedition to capture Peking failed, Hung recalled his principal lieutenants to Nanking. In the arguments which followed, Wei Chang-hui (the King of the North) assassinated the East King who had usurped Hung's role as "God's Second Son" in his absence. Over the next few days Wei slaughtered twenty thousand followers of the King of the East. Infuriated, Hung turned on Wei and murdered the King of the North together with his generals. These actions were

later to be mirrored in the purges of Hitler, Stalin and Saddam Hussein. Foreigners now turned away from Hung and his movement. The Reverend Roberts, after living several years in Nanking, finally left in disgust. Roberts proclaimed Hung to be crazy and his teachings “abominable in the eyes of God”.

To finance their revolution the Taipings set up their treasury with loot plundered from captured Ch’ing resources. Their financial system was based upon the same copper cash, which had been used in China since time immemorial. After overrunning the copper mines in Yunnan province, they commenced the manufacture of their own coins utilizing the production facilities of former imperial mints. Minting of copper cash continued throughout the next eleven years of the Heavenly Kingdom’s existence.



Cast bronze “money tree”, showing eleven yet to be finished coins.

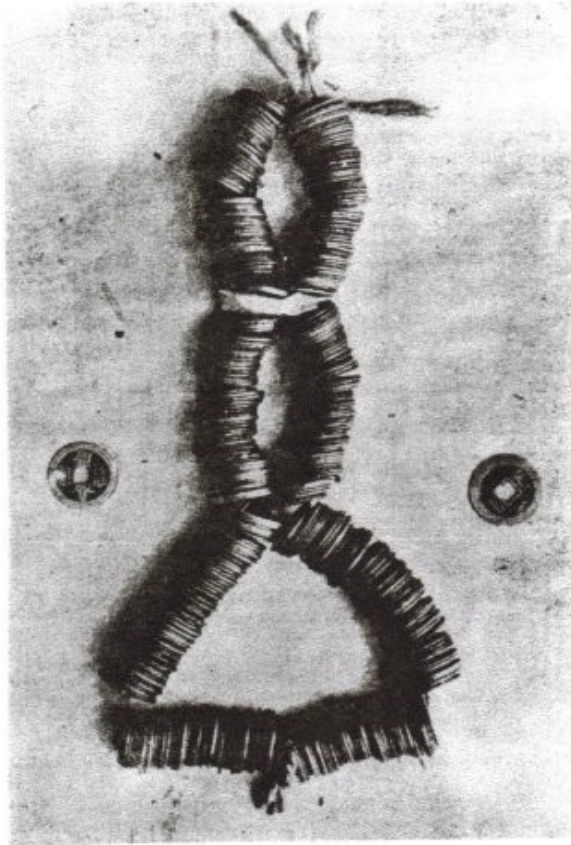
The treasury initially was a shoestring operation run by village pawnbrokers, as was the custom in rural China at that time. It wasn’t until the capture of Nanking and the setting up of the Taiping “Heavenly Capital” there in 1853 that adequate resources were obtained to finance the expanding revolution. This huge hoard of gold and silver, plundered from the Ch’ing treasure vaults in Nanking, was regularly augmented by assets captured from provincial treasuries as the Taiping

armies swept northward. In excess of 18 million additional silver taels were acquired along the route-of-march, enough to seemingly assure prosperity for the movement. Monies acquired in this way were held in a “common treasury” set aside for all believers. Theoretically, this money was to be equally shared - in conformance to the state’s communistic concept of common property. In other words, the state was to provide all items of subsistence in return for a man’s labor. In practice, it didn’t quite work out that way.

Up until 1861 the only central government coins manufactured were one cash pieces, one thousand of which constituted a “string”, the string being the equivalent of one “liang”, or ounce of pure silver. These coins were cast, rather than struck, utilizing clay molds. All Taiping coins have the characteristic square center hole. The typical brass cash coin consisted of fifty percent copper, forty percent zinc and the balance a combination of tin and lead. The clay molds contained a central channel, down which the molten metal flowed into branches, each one of which terminated in an unfinished coin. Once the metal had cooled, the two halves of the mold were broken apart revealing a “money tree” with a cast coin at the end of each branch. The coins were then broken off the tree for final processing. Since the resulting coins contained rough metal projections from the mold attachment, they were irregular in shape necessitating filing. To do this the coins were inserted onto a square chuck and placed into a primitive lathe. In this manner an entire string of a thousand coins could be rounded at the same time. While the lathe was being rotated the excess metal was removed using a hand file.

Since the intrinsic value of a single cash coin was so small, tying cash into strings was necessary to facilitate commerce. The typical string found throughout China contained 1,000 coins, while Manchurian practice called for 500. Only when a transaction was for less than a full string were the cash taken apart. The theoretical string containing 1,000 coins in reality contained as few as 990, the difference being the surcharge levied by the money-changers as compensation for the material (twine) and labor to produce it.

The first official coins of the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace were issued in 1853 after Hung’s conquering army had taken Nanking, making it their “Heavenly Capital”. These coins bore no marks indicating face value, and no dates. The coin’s obverse usually contained the four characters “T’ai P’ing Tien Kuo” (Kingdom of Heavenly Peace). They were popularly called Sheng Pao (variously translated as “holy money” or “sacred coinage”).



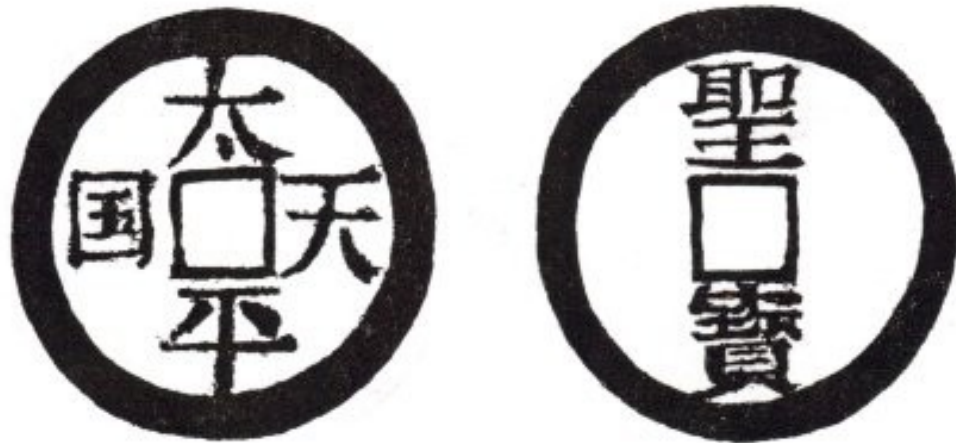
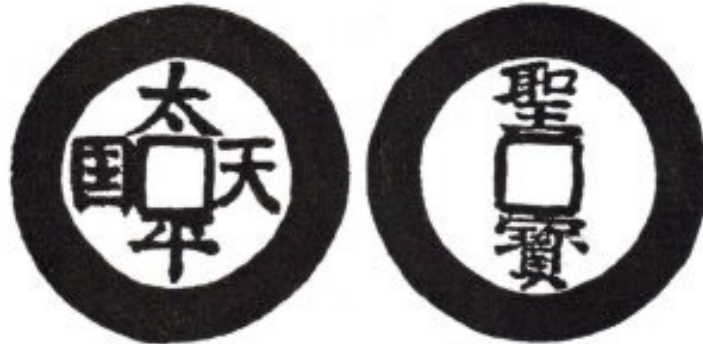
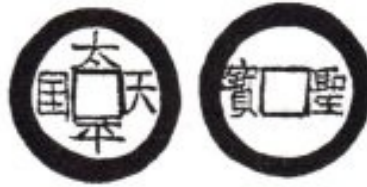
Two single cash coins shown beside a string of copper cash, called “ch'ien” in China and “tiao” in Manchuria. Pictured here is a Manchurian string containing 500 cash.

Since the central government did not issue standard patterns down to the local level, the coins in this series came in many varieties and sizes. Instead of using an official “mother coin” to guide them, the various mint masters took matters into their own hands, casting coins which followed their own inclinations. All one cash coins were made of copper, brass or bronze with the exception of one iron specimen which is known to exist.

I will attempt to list below the various types of one cash coins.

Government Issues

T'ai P'ing T'ien Kuo, (Kingdom of Heavenly Peace), (read top-bottom-right-left) with “Sheng Pao” (Sacred Coinage) on the reverse (read right-left), 25, 35 or 45mm. The 25mm coin is the Taiping coin found in most collections. Note that the character “Kuo” (Kingdom) found on Taiping coins differs from that usually encountered, due to religious interpretation.



The most commonly encountered Taiping coin is the “T'ai P'ing T'ien Kuo” (Kingdom of Heavenly Peace) one cash with “Sheng Pao” (holy coin) on the reverse. This type is found in a variety of sizes ranging from 25mm to 56mm. Some coins are found with narrow rims and others with wide ones. On some coins the “Sheng Pao” characters on the reverse are read top to bottom, while on others they are read right to left. These variants were due to a lack of central government control over the minting process, leaving each mint-master to his own inclinations.

Top coin: Narrow rims, “Sheng Pao” read right to left
Middle coin: Wide rims, “Sheng Pao” read top to bottom
Bottom coin: Large 55mm coin with uneven casting



(1)



(2)



(3)



(4)

Shown here are other Taiping coin types:

1. "Tai P'ing Sheng Pao" with "T'ien Kuo" reverse
2. "T'ien Kuo T'ai P'ing" with "Sheng Pao" reverse
3. "T'ien Kuo" obverse, "Sheng Pao" reverse
4. "T'ai P'ing" obverse, "Sheng Pao" reverse

Same coin with “T’ai P’ing T’ien Kuo” read right-left-top-bottom, 25mm. Reported by Lockwood.

Same coin with “Sheng Pao” on the reverse read from top to bottom. This copper coin was made in a variety of sizes ranging from 25mm to 35mm. The 35mm coin has wide rims. The same coin was minted in bronze in larger size format ranging from 38mm to a whopping 56mm. (cast with uneven relief). Both wide and narrow rims exist.

Same coin as 35mm T’ai P’ing Sheng Kuo with wide rims listed above, only iron.

T’ai P’ing Sheng Pao, (Sacred Coin of Great Peace), (read top-bottom-right-left) with “T’ien Kuo” (Heavenly Kingdom) on reverse (read right-left), 26mm.

T’ien Kuo T’ai P’ing, (Great Peace of the Heavenly Kingdom), (top-bottom-right-left) with “Sheng Pao” reverse, 25mm.

T’ien Kuo Sheng Pao, (Sacred Coinage of the Heavenly Kingdom), (top-bottom-right-left) with “T’ai P’ing” (Great Peace) reverse, 21-23mm.

T’ien Kuo, (Heavenly Kingdom) (top-bottom) with “Sheng Pao” reverse, 25mm. Cresswell states that this heavy coin circulated as ten cash, but I can find no corroboration elsewhere.

Same coin, 36-38mm, with large and small characters

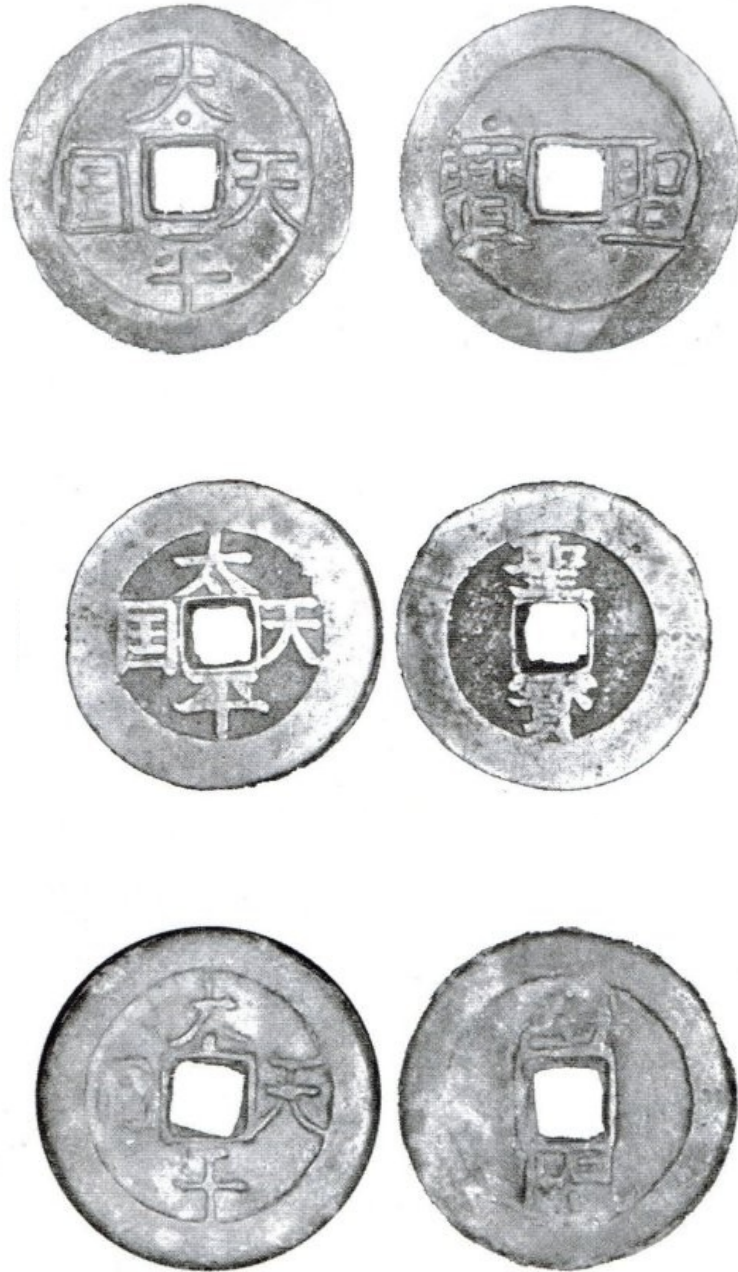
T’ai P’ing, (Great Peace) (read right-left) with Sheng Pao reverse, 24mm.

T’ai P’ing Cheng Pao, (True Coin of Great Peace), plain reverse. Perhaps the scarcest of the Taiping coins, the word “Cheng” for “true” as used here suggests that counterfeiting was a sufficient problem to warrant a new issue.

Coins Issued by Taiping Supporters and Military Units

A. Coins of the SMALL SWORD SOCIETY: (Shanghai religious group)

T’ai P’ing T’ung Pao, (Currency of the Taiping) with reverse containing a crescent above the center hole and character “Ming” below, 22mm.



T'ai P'ing cash coins: T'ai P'ing T'ien Kuo with "Sheng Pao" right to left, 42mm, narrow rims (above). T'ai P'ing T'ien Kuo with "Sheng Pao" top to bottom, 35mm, wide rims (center), and T'ai P'ing T'ien Kuo as above, 33mm, narrow rims (below).

Same coin with dot above hole, and crescent below on reverse.

Same coin with character “Wen” above on reverse.

Same coin as above, with “Wen” to the right of hole.



Some groups, sympathetic to the rebel cause, issued their own coins. Examples of these are coins of the Shanghai based Small Sword Society (left) and the Heaven and Earth Society of Chekiang (right).

B. Coins of the HEAVEN AND EARTH SOCIETY: (Chekiang)

Huang Ti T'ung Pao, (Currency of the Emperor) with character “Che” and “Pao” (right-left) for Chekiang mint on reverse, 23mm. There is a dichotomy here in that the character “Pao” is written in Manchu, the very language that the Heavenly Kingdom everywhere suppressed.

Same coin, 23mm, with character “Sheng” to right of hole, but written sideways.

K'ai Yuan T'ung Pao, reverse “Wu” above center hole, 24mm.

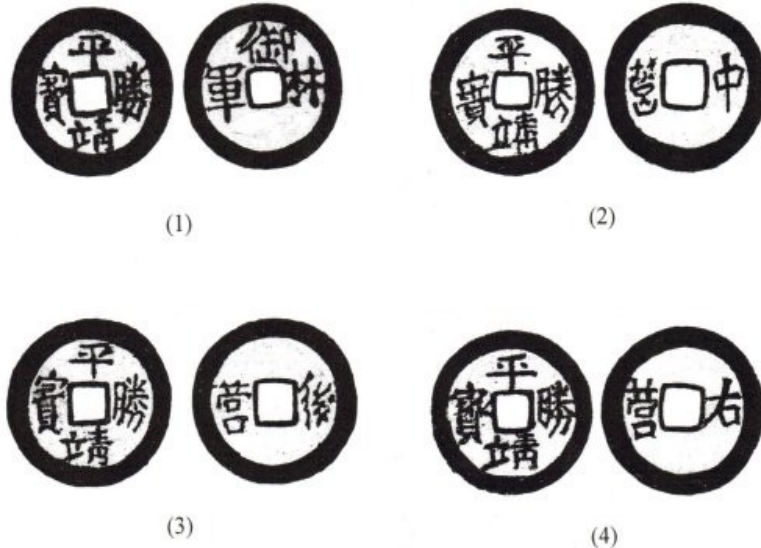
T'ien Ch'ao T'ung Pao, reverse “Yung” above center hole, 24mm.

C. Coins of Tai'ping MILITARY UNITS: (mintage date of coins cast for military coins believed to be 1857). All military coins bear four characters on the obverse as shown below:

平靖勝寶

These are read top-bottom-right-left. The characters “P'ing Ching Sheng Pao” translate to “Heavenly Peace Victory Money”. The reverses of this interesting

series pertain to the various units within the army. One can speculate that all reverse expressions relate to the same army location. It is reasonable to assume that this place is the Heavenly Capital at Nanking. When taken together they give us a good description of Tai'ping military organization.



Many Tai'ping military units cast their own coins. The “P'ing Ching Sheng Pao” series appears to have been issued for an entire army, with various coins designated for specific units; such as the imperial bodyguard, the left flank, right flank, reserves, etc. Shown here are coins indicated for use by (1) the “Yu Lin Chun” (Imperial Bodyguard), (2) the “Ching Ying” (Center Battalion), (3) the “Hou Ying” (Reserve Unit) and (4) the “Yu Ying (Right Flank).

P'ing Ching Sheng Pao, obverse, 26mm, with “Yu Lin Chun” reverse. These reverse characters translate to “imperial bodyguard”.

御林軍

Same coin, with “Ch'ang Sheng Chun” reverse, (read top-right-left), translation:

“long victorious army”, or “invincible army”.

長勝軍

Same coin, with “C'hien Ying” reverse, (read right-left); which when translated reads: “battalion in front”. Note: “Ying” may be variously translated as “camp”, “barracks”, “battalion”, etc.

前营

Same coin, with “Chung Ying” reverse, (read right-left); translation: “middle” or “Center” battalion.

中营

Same coin, with “Hou Ying” reverse, translation: “behind” or “after” - therefore “battalion reserves”.

後营

Same coin, with “Tso Ying” reverse; translation: “left” or “at the left side” - therefore “battalion on the left”.

左营

- Same coin, with “Yu Ying” reverse; translation: “right” or “at the right side” - therefore “battalion on the right”.

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右营

P'ing Ch'ing T'ung Pao, (read top-bottom-right-left), reverse “Chung” in seal writing at right, 23mm.

Note: Other Tai'ping military coins may exist.

Uncertain Issue

Nan Wang T'ung Pao, (Coinage of the Southern Prince), plain reverse. Because

“Nan Wang”, the Southern Prince was a title which Hung Hsui Ch'uan had bestowed upon himself, it is felt that this coin properly belongs to this series.

In the spring of 1860 Hung called a council of war to determine the future course the war would take on the battlefield. At that time the Ch'ing army

surrounded Nanking. The plan was to strike out from Nanking with two great pincers, one on either side of the Yangtze River. In this way the Tai'pings would control the river while at the same time relieving the pressure on Nanking and ultimately scattering the Ch'ing army, driving Manchu forces from central China. To make this plan work it was necessary to take the port of Shanghai. There they would secure needed supplies – including twenty armed river steamboats for use on the Yangtze – and establish friendly trading relations with the Westerners in the port, whom the Tai'pings saw as brother Christians.

As it turned out Hung went too far with his attack on Shanghai. He had badly misread the Westerners. Upon hearing of Hung's approach, panic broke out in the International Settlement. A mercenary force of a few rag-tag Europeans and soldiers of fortune, together with six thousand Chinese was hastily thrown together under command of an American daredevil named Frederick Ward. Desperate to defend Shanghai from the rapidly approaching Taipings, the local Chinese authorities looked to the Westerners to help defend the city. This idea was supported by the American ambassador, Anson Burlingame, the first United States minister to reside in Peking. Inasmuch as the United States was involved in its own civil war at the time, and as the other powers were unwilling to get bogged down in a lengthy struggle with the Taiping, the plan succeeded.

Up to this point the Western powers had been sympathetic to the Taiping movement. The concessions gained from the Manchus as a result of the Second Opium War, however, changed all this. Since a Taiping victory would threaten their newly won treaty gains, it was decided to back the Manchus to prevent the seizure of Shanghai. From the moment the West went to the aid of the Ch'ing dynasty, supplying them with modern weapons, ammunition, advisers and mercenaries, the Taiping cause was doomed.

Ward's command was known as the "Ever Victorious Army", a title bestowed upon it by Emperor Hsien Feng. Far from victorious in all their campaigns, the army did stop the Taipings from capturing Shanghai. When Ward was killed defending the city an English adventurer took command of the army. This was none other than the future English General Charles Gordon of Sudan fame. In later years "Chinese Gordon", as he had become known, found himself besieged at Khartoum and was butchered together with his entire garrison by another religious fanatic. (See my article in the January 2003 issue of *NI Bulletin* entitled "Siege Notes - Windows to the Past").

The Taiping belatedly tried to “Westernize” their rule, however, old traditions were too ingrained to permit radical change. The man behind this move was Hung Wen-kan, a younger relative of Hung Hsiu-ch’uan. In the early years of the revolution he had lived and worked in Hong Kong. There he became familiar with British colonial government administrative practices. Returning to Nanking he was enthusiastically received by the Heavenly King. Upon being appointed to the post of prime minister in 1859, Hung Wen-kan submitted a lengthy document entitled “A New Treatise on Aids to Administration”. In this document he called for a sweeping overhaul of the Taiping administrative system, which he presented to the Heavenly King. His visionary program called for the creation of a new legal and banking system, the creation of a postal service, newspapers, and the construction of highways and railroads in Taiping domains. Hung accepted these proposals as “proper and correct” with the exception of newspapers. He apparently felt newspapers were too radical an idea, instructing that they be delayed until after the demons were annihilated. Few steps were taken to implement these reforms with the exception of the overhaul of the banking system.

The Taiping government decided its new currency would be based upon the silver tael, paralleling the system then in use by the Manchus. It must be remembered that in China, the tael at that time was not considered a “coin”, rather a unit of weight representing one ounce of pure silver. Up to this point large transactions were accommodated through the use of silver ingots called “sycee” which ranged in size from one up to fifty ounces. To replace this cumbersome system the Taipings ordered their Nanking mint-masters to develop coins in tael denominations. Molds were made for $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ taels to be cast in silver and a 5 tael coin in gold. The coins characteristically had a square hole at the center with “T’ai P’ing” (top-bottom) on the obverse and “Sheng Pao” (top-bottom) reverse. Trial pieces for these coins were made, a few of which may be found in various collections, but it is doubtful that any real production found its way into general circulation.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Taiping finances was the introduction in 1861 of a paper currency denominated in taels. The Ch’ing emperor Hsien Feng had found it expedient to take this drastic step in 1850 when he re-introduced paper money to China as a means of financing the war. From the beginning of the war the Manchu “Ta Ch’ing Precious Notes” had to be forced upon the population as the Chinese of that time were completely distrustful of paper bank notes due to the uncontrolled inflation which had grown out of excessive issues of paper during Ming dynasty times. Consequently, China had not had a paper currency for nearly seven hundred years.



In 1860 the Taiping government belatedly tried to “Westernize” their administration, including the introduction of a standardized coinage. The new currency was to be based upon the silver tael. Trial pieces such as this silver ¼ tael “T'ien Kuo” were made, but in all probably didn't find their way into circulation.

Following the Manchu example, Hung ordered the printing of tael government banknotes. Since Nanking's print shops were staffed and equipped to produce tens of thousands of bibles espousing Hung's new form of Chinese Christianity, they were in all probability given this task as well. The revised Taiping bibles, by the way, were made in such quantities that there were enough for every leader down to the level of army sergeant, for use in indoctrinating troops.

Of the paper money, very little is known. Eduard Kann, an acknowledged Western authority on Chinese currency who lived in China and worked in the banking industry there, reported in his voluminous 1950s work *The History of Chinese Paper Money*, that he had seen a Taiping bank note while living and working there. This was a one tael note of the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace dated the eleventh year in the reign of Hung Hsiu-chuan (1861). The note was of contemporary design, i.e., similar in format to the Ta Ch'ing Precious Notes then in circulation outside the Taiping domain. They all conformed to the ancient Chinese method of producing banknotes from hand carved wooden blocks in a vertical format.

Kann describes the note he saw as follows:

“The frame of the note displays the usual two dragons striving for a fire ball. The note states in its upper part that it was issued by the order of the Heavenly King; in its lower space it reminds the populace of this fact and assures his subjects that the note was usable for purchases of commodities, as well as for the payment of taxes. It warns that forgers will be punished with severity in accordance with the law.”

Kann goes on to state that soldiers and officials were paid liberally with these notes, and that, due to their forced circulation, they were at all times depreciated and became valueless at the rebellion's inglorious end in 1864.

Until very recently no surviving examples of these notes were known to exist. In 1993, by an extreme stroke of good fortune, a one tael specimen of the same note described by Kann surfaced in a Singapore auction. From it a detailed description may be obtained. This unique note bears out the sketchy description of the one seen by Kann. The note measures an enormous 180 x 310mm overall. As with the Ch'ing Dynasty cash and Board of Revenue tael notes, it is uniface with a conspicuous lack of endorsements on its back. Manchu notes of the period circulated from hand to hand and were endorsed on the reverse with the seal of the pawnshop or money-lender to attest to the note's authenticity when presented for payment - much in the same way that coins were counter-stamped. Considered "communal" rather than "private" property by the Taiping, their notes lacked such endorsements.

The paper from which the note was made is heavy, soft and two-ply, and is probably bamboo. The color is tan. Upon this stock is printed the design, measuring 145 x 259mm, in black ink. The central rectangle is divided into three portions of text, the principal of which contains nine vertical columns of characters, the extreme left one containing the date.

As Eduard Kann reported, the 24mm wide border contains two dragons, a fire ball and a coral mountain rising from the sea. The coral mountain is a Chinese mystical symbol, which represents the universe. Not mentioned by Kann are two phoenixes, birds of immortality, which appear in the top border. Ancient legend holds that the phoenix's life span was five hundred years, after which it burned itself, rising again from the ashes to soar for another five centuries! On the extreme right edge of the note is found a counterfoil consisting of a vertical column of characters, a portion of which remained with the stub from which the banknote was cut. This practice served as a crude anti-counterfeiting device. When offered for redemption, the serially numbered note was compared to the stub, which, if matched proved the note to be genuine. If a particular note did not match up with the characters on the retained stub, it was counterfeit.



The one tael note of the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace, dated the eleventh year of the republic (1861).

Superimposed upon the whole is an oversize brown seal, measuring 108 x 108mm, containing the two large characters “chun” and “chih”, which is itself surrounded by a border of fire breathing dragons. When placed upon the note, the seal attested to its having been authorized for issue by imperial decree.

When translated, the central text reads: “Money of the Heavenly King” and “One ounce of silver”. A liberal translation of the nine columns of text reads:

“The Heavenly King, together with his people, subjects of Jesus Christ, authorizes this note for market transactions so that the people may enjoy their welfare and benefit from this. This note may be used for the purchase of commodities or in the payment of taxes. Anyone counterfeiting this note will be severely punished.”

Inasmuch as the text on the one tael note is written in formal Chinese, such as that employed in legal texts of the time, it may be helpful to include the formal version as well:

“The Heavenly King decrees: I order that all princes, holy generals and military leaders, all civil servants inside and outside the court take note that the emperor gives - in the name of Jesus, the Savior of the World - the knowledge that he (the emperor) orders the issue of one liang (tael) notes, also called “Bao-yin”. (These notes) shall circulate in commerce, (they) cannot be surpassed and shall bring good luck. (They) shall circulate anywhere under the heavens. Counterfeiters will be punished according to the holy royal law.”

As with Kann’s sighting, this note is dated the first month of the eleventh year (January 1861) of the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace. The note’s well circulated appearance bears testimony to its use.

So, we now know with certainty that the Taiping rebels resorted to the use of paper money, as well as coins, to finance their genocidal war against the Manchu “devils”. Since a one tael note does exist, so must have other denominations, but until one of these notes comes to light the matter will remain one of speculation.

As we have seen, a few Taiping army military units issued their own coins. Apparently some military units may also have issued their own banknotes. One unusual fifteen cash note, believed to be a military issue, measures 4 x 4 3/8 inches, has no printing on it but, instead, contains fifteen overlapping impressions of the

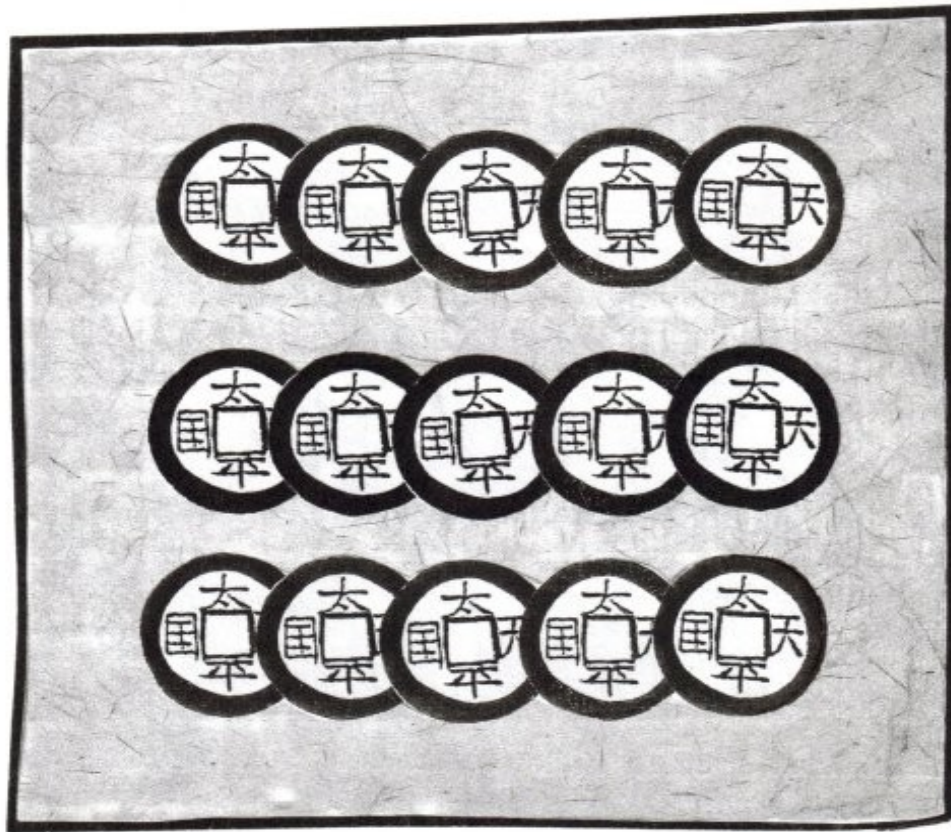
“T'ai P'ing T'ien Kuo” coin in dry seals. Their square centers have been punched out of white, watermarked rice paper with imbedded threads. The watermark consists of parallel dark lines laid 7/16th of an inch apart. The note when discovered was accompanied by a yellowed memorandum written by Dr. Choy Lee Ling of Tinghai, Chekiang. His note reads: “This (banknote) was used during the Taiping rebellion at Yanchow, Sinkiang province”. I must state, however, that my hypothesis is based solely upon Dr. Choy's say-so. It is also possible the note is a piece of joss (hell note) as has been suggested by several experts. It has long been the practice among the Chinese to burn joss at the funeral of family members as a mark of respect and filial piety and to ensure the departed's financial independence in the afterworld. More research in the area of Taiping military notes is required.

In addition, there exists an article in Chinese by one Wang Ning entitled “Investigating the Cloth Money Issued by Zong Ling Tang of Ge Lao Hu”. I have not seen the article, but this suggests that additional issues were put into circulation by local commanders to circulate at the local level.

After their defeat at Shanghai, the Taiping rebellion dragged on in the Yangtze valley for another four 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 enemies both East and West, the peasant uprising collapsed. Hung met an ignoble end at his own hands, by committing suicide. When the imperial troops entered Nanking only a handful of the 100,000 rebel “true believers” surrendered, the remainder committed genocide. The heads of the rebel leaders were chopped off, spiked onto poles, paraded about the country, finally to be sent in triumph to Peking.

The rebellion had left most of the country ravaged. The Ch'ing victory did nothing to ease the grinding poverty which plagued the peasants; rather, taxes became more onerous than before. Under a succession of weak and ineffective Manchu Emperors social reforms were postponed indefinitely. It was not until after the turn of the century, in 1911, that Sun Yat Sen's republican revolution finally brought a measure of relief to the long suffering Chinese people.

I would like to thank Erwin Beyer of Grafschaft-Vettelhoven, Germany for assistance rendered in translating both Chinese coins and bank notes while I was preparing this article.



A fifteen cash note of a Taiping military unit. This note depicts fifteen impressions of overlapping “T'ai P'ing T'ien Kuo” coins in dry seal relief (shown here in facisimile). The center holes of the “coins” were punched out of the paper upon which the impressions had been made. A most unusual bank note!



Year 5 (1855) "Ta Ch'ing Pao Ch'ao" 500 cash note of the Chinese Empire. This note was issued by Ch'ing dynasty emperor Hsien Feng as a means of financing the war and to pay troops fighting the Tai'ping Rebels.

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