

CHINESE CURRENCY

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Chinese Currency by J. Edkins

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J. EDKINS

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BY J. EDKINS, D.D.



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PREFACE.

The facts of this work have been collected from Chinese books and journals and from Customs' publications, and they have been as far as possible brought up to date. At present the Chinese are importing both gold and silver. In 1900, according to Mr. F. E. Taylor's very valuable report on trade, gold was imported from Japan because many rich Chinese wished for the most portable metal in case they needed to fly to a distance through the mischances of war. Silver was imported to the amount of fifteen million and a half taels. In addition to this sum, known from the Customs' books, there was an enormous import of British, French, and Mexican dollars, brought by the foreign armies which captured Tientsin and Peking. In Manchuria and Chihli dollars are now more plentiful than sycee. The circulation of foreign dollars in the north of China has increased so much as to help the people, in a considerable degree, to recover the commerce which was interrupted by the war of 1900, the year of cruel massacres and severe retribution.

The payment of heavy indemnities must greatly deplete the currency throughout China. The people will be compelled to increase their exports in order to adjust the balance of trade. The silver which leaves the country ought to come back in payments for exports. This is according to present appearances likely to occur. The country happily is resuming its usual state of tranquillity. The Boxer movement was abnormal. The people at large will soon return, where there have been rude disturbances, to the quiet pursuits of industry, and money will quickly come back to the cultivator, the weaver, and the trader.

Although this book is compiled from Chinese sources almost entirely, yet Chinese books are liable to errors. Dr. S. W. Bushell wrote me some years since in reference to so old and excellent an authority as the *Shi-ki* of Sz-ma-t sien, B. C. 100, that it has made a mistake in saying that coins of the Ts'in dynasty are without a legend. We have even coins in our collections with the inscriptions Pau-ho, Pau-sz-ho, Pan-lin-ho, which are referred with every probability to a yet older dynasty—the Chow.

In China ancient customs linger—as in the language and literature, so in the currency. Salt cakes, adds Dr. Bushell, are still in use as currency on the borders of Yünnan as they were in the days of Marco Polo. The stamped leather of the Han currency seems to prefigure a paper issue. The same may be said of seals—used in China for more than 2,000 years. The stamped bricks of the Babylonian mounds form a link in the chain of facts which show that civilized usages cannot die out. Primæval civilization develops new arts in every succeeding age, and the natural intelligence of the human mind, the gift of the Creator, aids in preventing the decay of our race, and in securing its perpetual progress towards the beautiful, the good, and the true.

In writing to Dr. Bushell I had referred to white money medals in use in the Han dynasty which could hardly enter into circulation as money, being so easily counterfeited. He agreed with that remark and said they were but tokens. He had an oblong specimen in his possession, with a horse in relief and made with very inferior alloy. Currency is a help to the interchange of commodities, and China has not been behind in the invention of convenient forms of money. Unfortunately China has fallen under the temptation to consume large quantities of a very expensive drug. The price of opium has risen on account of the change of Indian currency from silver to gold. The Chinese pay as much now for the Indian opium they buy

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as they did twenty years ago for a far less quantity. The abrupt change to gold monometallism in India has caused severe loss to China. This is shown in the following manner:—

In 1897 the statistics of the opium trade tell us that 27,000,000 taels of silver purchased 49,217 piculs of opium, and this was nearly the same as the amount spent by China in purchasing 74,000 piculs in 1887. Since the closing of the Indian mints to silver coinage the amount of that metal paid by China for Indian opium has increased. In 1898 the value of the import was Taels 29,000,000, yet the amount of opium purchased from India was only 49,785 piculs. In 1880 when the Chinese bought 71,654 piculs of foreign opium the cost was 32,344,628 Taels of silver. The effect of the change in Indian currency is to increase the burdens of China. In 1879 the import was 83,000 piculs, and the cost Taels 36,000,000. In 1899 and 1900 the import was 59,000 and 49,000 piculs and the cost 35,700,000 and 29,600,000 Taels. There was in the year 1899 a marked increase of the import at Shanghai, Chinkiang, and Canton. This was contemporaneous with an alarming advance in the quantity of the morphia import. These three cities enjoy great commercial prosperity. This fact is well established in the Customs' statistics. As the people become richer they indulge to a large extent in the opium vice. The advance in the import of morphia is a proof of the increase in the tyrannical sway of opium over the Chinese people. More persons every year are adopting the habit. The Customs' trade report says that the native crop has been deficient and that this is supposed to be the cause of the phenomenal growth of the foreign import. It seems, however, beyond reasonable doubt that more persons than ever are now falling into the temptation to smoke opium or to swallow morphia pills. The result must be increased drain of silver to pay for foreign opium, but each person who, induced by economy, exchanges opium for morphia, effects a saving of perhaps

25 %. Since morphia is more injurious than opium smoking, it is impossible at present to foresee the extent of social mischief it will occasion in future years. This may be so great as to check its destructive advance. Meanwhile there is no room for doubt that the sale of Indian opium is maintained, and with it the drain of silver caused by its higher price.

JOS. EDKINS,

PEKING, *April 24th, 1901.*



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