

Alex Chengyu Fang  
François Thierry *Editors*

# The Language and Iconography of Chinese Charms

Deciphering a Past Belief System

 Springer

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Alex Chengyu Fang · François Thierry  
Editors

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*Editors*

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ISBN 978-981-10-1791-9      ISBN 978-981-10-1793-3 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1007/978-981-10-1793-3

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016947488

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# Foreword

François Thierry is an old friend of mine for over thirty years. He is a specialist in oriental numismatics. We first met in the reception room of the China Banknote Printing and Minting Company. Seeing him for the first time, I was instantly impressed by his outlook: clothed in denim, with a rucksack on his back, unshaven but his Western face looking incredibly smart. I was also quickly impressed by his understanding of ancient Chinese coins. Meeting for the first time, he raised the issue of the dating of the Wuzhu coins. At that time, not many people were interested in this topic, even within the community of Chinese numismatics in China. The young Western scholar was immensely interested and he was quick to learn. We became friends since then. He would bring me French wine or foie gras every time he visited Beijing, and we would have pleasant long discussions. He would also endeavour to be my interpreter during the international conferences or academic discussions.

Dr. Alex Fang is a professor at City University of Hong Kong. He was previously at University College London and interested in the collection and research in ancient Chinese coinage. He was a member of the Oriental Numismatic Society in London and gave invited talks on Chinese charms at the annual meetings of the Oriental Numismatic Society and the Royal Numismatic Society. In 2012, he received a fellowship from the E.S.G. Robinson Charitable Trust and worked at the Department of Coins and Medals of the British Museum, participating in their efforts to digitise the large collection of Chinese charms. Dr. Fang is also a founding member of the Chinese Society of Numismatic Charms and its standing vice president. I have heard about him and have read many of his publications on charms. I felt honoured to receive an invitation from him to write a preface for *The Language and Iconography of Chinese Charms* co-edited by him and Mr. Thierry. I am duly obliged and would do the little I can to promote this book.

14 July 2008 is a memorable day in the history of Chinese charms and its research. On this day, an exhibition of Chinese charms went public at City University of Hong Kong, a book, entitled *Chinese Charms: Art, Religion and Folk Belief*, authored by Dr. Fang, was published by the Commercial Press in Beijing, and an international forum on Chinese charms was held. This present volume contains the fruitful presentations at the forum.

Ancient Chinese coins can be divided into two major groups: official issues as formally circulated currencies and unofficial issues as coin-like charms, variously known as *ya sheng qian* 壓勝錢 amulets, *hua qian* 花錢 floral coins and *min su qian* 民俗錢 folk coins. The latter are called coins, but they did not perform any function as currency. In a cultural sense, they are derivatives of Chinese numismatic culture.

Chinese charms have a long history. Like metal coins, they were descendants of the commodity money performing a dual function as currencies and as utility objects. Cowrie shells, after acquiring their function as commodity money, continued as decorative objects. They were regarded at the same time as a charm to ensure smooth delivery of babies and were therefore widely stored in individual households. This specific use of cowrie shells in turn safeguarded their position as commodity money in the society at the time. In the way, this perhaps represents a first connection between currency and currency-related culture.

In early Chinese coinage dating back to around the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods, we often come across specimens inscribed with characters referring to sacrificial rites or auspicious expressions. For example, specimens of the spade money with a hollow handle, flat shoulder and round feet 平肩弧足空首布 often show characters denoting cattle and other entities, such as the co-occurrence of *mao* 卯 and *niu* 牛 “ox” and the co-occurrence of *mao* 卯 and *tian* 田 “fields”, evidently referring to their use as sacrificial goods during the hours of *mao*.<sup>1</sup> Specimens of the Qi knife money used in the Qi State 齊國, the Jimo Knife 即墨刀 and the Anyang Knife money 安陽刀 often show inscribed expressions such as *ri* 日 sun, *ji* 吉 luck, *da chang* 大昌 great prosperity, *bi feng* 辟封 protect fiefdom, *an bang* 安邦 pacify state and *da xing* 大行 great deed. Specimens of the knife money and the round coins used in the Yan State 燕國 are inscribed with the character *ji* 吉 luck. The *Ban liang* 半兩 coins issued by the Qin State 秦國 during the Warring States Period also exhibited a specimen inscribed the wealth-wishing expression *qian bei* 千貝 “a thousand shells”. These various findings are perhaps indications of a heritage of commodity money.

After the Qin and the Han dynasties, the culture of amuletic coins got markedly broadened, both in terms of types and in terms of content. Such coins came to be regarded as an independent group, that is, the unofficial issues. Nonetheless, the official issues and the unofficial issues are closely connected and I regard the coin-like charms as “half the sky” and “half the country” in the study of ancient Chinese coinage.

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<sup>1</sup>*Mao shi* 卯時, 5–7 in the morning.

Charms have many different shapes. In addition to the round shape with a square hole, we come across round shape with round hole, polygonal shape, knife shape, sword shape, spade shape, etc. We also see lock shape, pendent shape and tablet shape. These various shapes come from the different shapes of ancient coinage or are connected with wealth and longevity. As far as the decorative patterns are concerned, some have characters only, some have patterns only and some have both characters and decorative patterns. Technically, there are charms in open work, charms in high relief, charms in bas-relief and charms with hand engravings. The rich formal and semantic expressions found on such coins, culturally and artistically speaking, greatly complement and broaden the genre of official issues. But the minting material of coin charms, their layout and their minting technologies are almost identical to those of official issues. There are good reasons to believe that the best specimens of charms were nearly always made at government furnaces (*guan lu*; 官爐), what would be known as national mints nowadays, and thus represents the highest minting standards for coins at that time.

Coin charms vary in terms of their uses and functions. Typologically, we identify *gong yang qian* 供養錢 donation coins and *miao yu qian* 廟宇錢 temple coins specially produced for sacrificial and ceremonial purposes; *gong qian* 宮錢 palace coins made specifically for use within the imperial palace; *xin qian* 信錢 membership tokens used as membership badges within secret societies; *ya sheng qian* 厭勝錢 talismanic coins to protect households and government vaults against evil spirits; *xi qing qian* 喜慶錢 or *he sui qian* 賀歲錢 amuletic or celebratory coins to celebrate weddings, births and anniversaries; *ji yu qian* 吉語錢 coins of lucky expressions for well-wishing purposes; *qi qian* 棋錢 gaming tokens used during chess games; *jiu ling qian* 酒令錢 drinking game tokens and *da ma ge qian* 打馬格錢 *Dama* board game tokens; *ming qian* 冥錢 or *yi qian* 瘞錢 funeral coins, etc. They were related to wealth and protection and are therefore directly related to folk beliefs and native cultures.

We are now in an era of machine-milled coinage, but we still witness the coexistence of officially issued commemorative coins and commemorative medals as well as currency coins. In the way, the various names such as amulets, charms and commemorative medals are the result of differences in time and region. They all refer to the same group of artefacts that combine currencies and folk cultures together. A standardised name such as “folk coin” (民俗錢) might be used to cover them all.

For a long time in the area of ancient Chinese coinage, there is a general lack of interest in charms as a result of the traditional division between official issues and unofficial issues. Charms have not been accorded with the level of importance that they deserve in academic numismatic research. This said, the situation has greatly changed over the past ten years. The Chinese Association of Numismatic Charms has become a member of the Chinese Numismatic Society with an increasing number of collectors, researchers and forums devoted to charms resulting in an increased number of catalogues, monographs and articles of enormous width and depth. This current volume, edited by Dr. Alex Fang and Mr. François Thierry, is a good example of such efforts and devotion. I have no doubt that the collection of

articles here will play an instrumental role in the promotion and the eventual progress of the study of Chinese coin charms.

With this short foreword, I hereby salute the two scholars for their efforts and contributions.

Zhi-qiang Dai  
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# 序

法國的東方錢幣學家弗朗索瓦·蒂埃里是我三十多年的老朋友，我們初次見面是在中國印鈔造幣公司的會客室。第一次見面給我留下兩點印象深刻：一是他的形象。他穿一身牛仔服，挎一介雙肩背包，鬍子拉碴、不修邊幅的臉上，透著西方年青人的精明。二是他對中國古錢的理解。第一次見面，他居然提出了五銖錢斷代的問題，在當時，即使在中國的錢幣界，涉足這一專題的人也不多，他作為一個年青的西方學者居然提出這樣的專題，津津樂道，而且一點就通。從此，我們成了好朋友，他每次來京，都會帶來法國的葡萄酒或鵝肝醬，和我盡情暢談。遇到國際間的學術活動，他會給我做翻譯。

方稱宇博士是香港城市大學教授。此前，他任職於英國倫敦大學學院，本位研究之餘，注重中國古代錢幣的收集和研究，曾是英國東方錢幣學會的會員，多次應邀在英國東方錢幣學會和英國皇家錢幣學會作有關中國花錢的報告。2012年，他受聘為英國愛德華·羅賓遜爵士基金會研究員，在大英博物館幣章部進行館藏中國花錢的研究和電子化工作。方稱宇博士是中國民俗錢幣學會的主要發起人之一，並任該會常務副會長。我久仰其名，也讀過他的多篇大作，在他和蒂埃里先生合編的新著《中國花錢的文字和造像》即將面世之時，有幸收到他的來函，約我為之序，這是一件大好的事情，我當然應盡綿薄之力，為其鳴鑼開道。

2008年7月14日，在中國花錢研究史上是一個值得紀念的日子，這一天在香港城市大學舉辦了“中國花錢與傳統文化”展覽，同時出版方博士的大著《中國花錢與傳統文化》，並舉辦了中國花錢國際研討會。現在要和讀者見面的這本文集，便是在這次研討會的基礎上結出的碩果。

中國古錢可分為兩大類，一是“正用品”，即正式發行的貨幣；二是“非正用品”，即壓（厭）勝錢，亦稱花錢、民俗錢，它們被稱為“錢”，但不行使貨幣的職能，從文化意義上理解，應是貨幣文化的衍生物。

中國的壓勝錢源遠流長，它和金屬鑄幣應是誕生於同一母體——實物貨幣。實物貨幣是有兩重職能的，它既可以行使貨幣的職能，同時也保留著它原本具有的功能。海貝在中國古代取得實物貨幣職能以後，仍然可以作為裝飾品，甚至被視為可以保佑婦女順產的一種信物，所以海貝成為每個家庭必需的物件。這個意義，在當時社會，也確保了它的實物貨幣地位。這或許便是貨幣和貨幣文化衍生物的淵源和情結。

在中國早期(春秋戰國時期)的金屬鑄幣上,往往會鑄有一些和祭祀有關的用語或吉祥詞語。譬如:在平肩弧足空首布的銘文中,會有記牲畜等名物的文字,如從“卯”、從“牛”的組合字,從“卯”、從“田”的組合字等等,應是指卯時祭祀用的供物;齊刀、即墨刀、安陽刀的背面會鑄上“日”、“吉”、“大昌”、“辟封”、“安邦”、“太行”等吉語;燕刀、燕圓錢的背面會鑄有“吉”字;戰國秦“半兩”錢的背面也曾經發現過祈求財富的吉語“千貝”。這樣的現象或許是承繼於實物貨幣雙重職能的衣鉢。

到秦、漢以後,壓勝錢的文化有了明顯的發展,品種和涉及的內容都有拓寬,逐步形成了相對獨立的一支,即所謂的“非正用品”。然而,古錢中的“正用品”和“非正用品”一直相伴而行,所以我稱壓勝錢是中國古錢的“半壁天”,是古錢中的“半壁江山”。

壓勝錢的形制活潑多樣,它並不拘泥于方孔圓形的模式,還有圓孔圓形、多邊形、刀形、劍形、布形等等,還有長命鎖形、掛飾形、符牌形……。這些形制多數和歷代貨幣的器形相仿,或者和財富、長命有關。就紋飾而言,有只鑄文字的,有只鑄圖案的,也有圖文並茂的。鑄造工藝有鏤空的,高浮雕的,淺浮雕的,還有陰刻紋飾的。手法多樣,內容豐富,從文化、藝術的意義上講,是正用品的補充和延伸。但壓勝錢的取材幾乎和正用品一致,設計理念、工藝流程也和正用品大致相仿。壓勝錢中的精品,幾乎都出自“官爐”(也就是現在我們所謂的國家造幣廠),它們代表了那個時代錢幣鑄造的精華。

壓勝錢的性質和用途各不相同,有:為祭祀、禮儀活動鑄造的供養錢、廟宇錢,為皇室貴人專制的宮錢,為會、道組織專製的信錢,為鎮宅、鎮庫、鎮魔、壓邪專製的厭勝錢,為婚慶、產子、生日、做壽專製的喜慶賀歲錢,為科舉、討彩、祈福專製的吉語錢,為遊戲、行樂製作的棋錢、酒令錢、打馬格錢,還有為死者專製的冥錢、瘞錢等等。其內容不僅與錢財有關,與護身驅邪有關,更和信仰、理念等民俗、民族文化有關。

歷史進入機制幣的時代,到了近、現代,到了今天,仍然有正式發行的流通貨幣和不行使貨幣職能的紀念幣、紀念章、紀念張……同時並存,只是因為時代的變遷,區域的差異,給它們冠上了不同的名稱。所以壓勝錢也好,花錢也好,紀念章也好,其實都是貨幣文化和民俗文化相結合的產物,若要有個統稱,則呼之為“民俗錢”,或可一以貫之。

因為受“正用品”和“非正用品”的傳統觀念的影響,長期以來,中國的古錢收藏界對壓勝錢不夠重視,即使在學術界也沒有得到應有的地位。但近十年來,情況發生了很大的變化,中國民俗錢幣學會已經成為中國錢幣學會的團體會員,民俗錢幣的收藏、愛好者越來越多,有關民俗錢幣的專題研討活動越來越多,專譜、專著和專論也越來越多,研究的深度和廣度都在與日俱增。方稱宇博士、弗·蒂埃里先生的努力和貢獻,便是不爭的事實,他們編著的這部文集必將為普及、宣傳壓勝錢知識,推進壓勝錢的收藏和研究事業,發揮積極的作用。

謹以此文為引玉之篇,並謝先生之功德。

戴志強 乙未秋 字于北京續齋  
國家文物鑒定委員  
中國錢幣博物館首任館長

## Acknowledgements

It is almost exactly eight years since the International Symposium on Chinese Numismatic Charms took place on the campus of City University of Hong Kong on 14 July 2008, whose presentations are now collected and published in this volume. The Editors feel indebted to all those who endeavoured to contribute towards the event, including Prof. Jonathan Webster, Head of the Department of Chinese, Translation and Linguistics; Prof. Cheng Pei-kai 鄭培凱, Director of the Chinese Civilisation Centre; and Prof. Zhang Long-xi 張隆溪, Director of the Cross-Cultural Research Centre, without whose support the forum would not have taken place. The Editors also feel indebted to Prof. Qian Hou-sheng 錢厚生, Senior Editor at the Commercial Press Shanghai Office, who ensured the timely publication of *Chinese Charms: Art, Religion and Folk Belief* for dissemination at the conference and at a public exhibition of charms which took place at the same time.

Thanks also go to Mr. Philip Attwood, Keeper and Head of Department, and Dr. Helen Wang 王海嵐, curator of East Asian money, the Department of Coins and Medals, the British Museum for their support that enabled the completion of the volume. The Editors would like to extend their thanks to Dr. Cao Jing 曹競, associate professor, Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, and the following student translators for the translation of some of the chapters: Lou Jing 樓靜, Mao Yue-hao 毛越浩, Qin Hua 秦樺, Wang Chen-xu 王晨旭, Yao Wen-hao 么文浩 and Yu Yao-long 余躍龍. Dr. Dong Min 董敏, associate professor, Beijing Aeronautics and Astronautics University, provided secretarial support. Dr. Helen Wang, Dr. Cao Jing, Miss Elizabeth Fang 方定如 and Ms Wan Lan 萬嵐 kindly proofread an earlier draft. Heartfelt thanks also go to Ms Rebecca Zhu, editor at Springer, for her support and assistance throughout the preparation of the book.

Last but not least, this book would not have been possible without the generous fellowship received by Alex Fang in 2012 from the E.S.G. Robinson Charitable Trust. This book was additionally supported in part by grants received from the General Research Fund of the University Grant Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (Project No. CityU 142711) and City University of Hong Kong (Project Nos. 6354005, 7004491, 9618007, 7004333, 7004091, 9610283, 7002793, 9610226, 9041694 and 9610188).

Hong Kong  
Paris  
March 2016

Alex Chengyu Fang  
François Thierry



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# Editors and Contributors

## About the Editors

**Alex Chengyu Fang** 方稱宇 is an associate professor in linguistics at the Department of Linguistics and Translation, City University of Hong Kong. He is also an adjunct professor at the Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics. A national expert at the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) representing China on Technical Committee 37, he is an appointed expert member of the China National Technical Committee on Terminology for Standardisation. From 2016, he serves as a member of the Academic Committee of the Key Laboratory of Agricultural Biomedical Information of Hubei Province. He received his BA degree in English Language and Literature from the Guangzhou Institute of Foreign Languages and his Ph.D. degree in computational linguistics from University College London, where he was the deputy director of Survey of English Usage 1995–1996. He started studying Chinese coins and charms in 1995 while in London and travelled extensively in Europe, the USA and Asia in search of charms and related literature. Specialising in coin charms from the Tang and the Song dynasties, he is a co-founder and standing vice president of the China Association of Numismatic Charms, which is now a member of the Chinese Numismatic Society. In 2008, he sponsored the first public exhibition of Chinese charms and organised the first international symposium devoted to Chinese charms. In 2012, he was nominated as E.S.G. Robinson Fellow of the Department of Coins and Medals of the British Museum. He was invited to present his studies on Chinese charms at the Oriental Numismatic Society and the Royal Numismatic Society. He is the author of eight books including *Chinese Charms: Art, Religion and Folk Belief*, published by the Commercial Press in Beijing in 2008.

**François Thierry** 蒂埃里 was born in 1950 in Paris and, after secondary school in humanities, studied history and arts in university. He focused his research on the political history of the Late Ottoman Empire. Then, he travelled extensively in the Middle East, Caucasus and Soviet Central Asia in the late 1960s and in the 1970s. After he passed the Agrégation (the competitive examination conducted by State for

admission to posts on the teaching staff of Lycées and Universities) in 1977, he became teacher in Arts. At that time, he started to study Chinese language and history in Paris-7 University. In 1984, he was recruited by the Paris Mint Museum as research fellow for publishing the Far Eastern coins collection and the famous Treasure of the Emperors of Vietnam kept in that institution. In 1986, he entered the Coins Department of the French National Library as research fellow for the publication of a catalogue of Vietnamese coins. In 1989, he was appointed as a curator of Oriental coins. Since mid-1980s, he started to establish close ties with Chinese colleagues and especially with the China Numismatic Society. François Thierry published many catalogues, studies and papers on Chinese, Vietnamese and pre-Islamic Turkish coins and currency. Past chief curator in the Coins Department of the French National Library, he is a member of French Numismatic Society, the Royal Numismatic Society and the Hong Kong Numismatic Society. In 2006, he was awarded Medal of the Royal Numismatic Society for his scientific research.

## Contributors

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**Joe Cribb** is a numismatist, specialising in Asian coinages. He has specialist knowledge of all Asian coinages and, in recent years, has focussed on the pre-Islamic coinages of India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Kashmir and Afghanistan. He joined the Department of Coins and Medals, British Museum, in the early 1970s and was Keeper of the Department of Coins and Medals (2003–2010), before his retirement in 2010. He was the president of the Royal Numismatic Society (2005–9) and is a secretary general of the Oriental Numismatic Society

(2011–). He is particularly renowned for his research on the coins of the Kushan kings of ancient South and Central Asia (first to fourth centuries AD). He was presented with the Award of the Hirayama Silk Road Institute, Kamakura, 1997; the Medal of the Royal Numismatic Society, 1999; and the Huntington Medal of the American Numismatic Society in 2009. A volume of papers in his honour was presented to him upon his retirement from the British Museum. He is also a trustee of the Ditchling Museum and coordinator of the Eric Gill Society. He is the author of (with T. Francis) *Money Fun Book*, BM Press, London, 1986; (with I. Carradice and B. Cook) *The Coin Atlas*, London, Macdonald, London, 1990; *Eyewitness Guide: Money*, Dorling Kindersley, London, 1990 (revised edition, 2000); *Money in the Bank, an Illustrated Introduction to the Money Collection of The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation*, Spink & Son Ltd., London, 1987; *A Catalogue of Sycee in the British Museum, Chinese Silver Currency Ingots, c. 1750–1933*, British Museum Press, London 1992; *Ancient Indian Coins from the Chand Collection*, Rarities Ltd and Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore, 2003; (with M.N. Khan and E. Errington) *Coins from Kashmir Smast—New Numismatic Evidence*, Peshawar, 2008; *Magic Coins of Java, Bali and the Malay Peninsula, 13th century to 20th century—A Catalogue based on the Raffles Collection of Coin-shaped charms from Java in the British Museum*, BM Press, London, 1999; and (with R. Cribb) *Eric Gill and Ditchling: The Workshop Tradition*, Ditchling, 2007.

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*Pictures* (Hong Kong: Chunghwa Book Co HK., 2015). He is now working on his sixth monograph discussing the Sino-Japanese comparative philosophical and political thoughts. His teaching interests are Japanese culture and the history of Sino-Japanese relationship as well as the interaction of East Asian intellectual thoughts.



# Chapter 1

## Chinese Charms and the Iconographic Language of Good Luck and Heavenly Protection

Alex Chengyu Fang and François Thierry

### 1.1 Introduction

This volume is a collection of the papers read at an international symposium on Chinese numismatic charms, which was held 14–15 July 2008 in Hong Kong. The event was organised by the Department of Chinese, Translation and Linguistics and sponsored by the Chinese Civilisation Centre at City University of Hong Kong (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2).

Perhaps the very first international forum devoted to Chinese charms, this event was attended by over twenty participants from China, Hong Kong, France, Russia and the UK. The participants came from different backgrounds including archaeology, art history, religion, numismatics, linguistics, and regional culture. They presented papers on Chinese and East Asian charms from a variety of different perspectives including but not limited to numismatic, historical, linguistic, and religious discussions. These papers also formulate a coherent chronological representation of the metallic objects, starting from a chapter by Song Jie on the *liu bo* 六博 charms from the Han Dynasty, through to the chapters by Qi Dong-fang and Alex Fang on a group of coins and charms from the Tang Dynasty, and those by Joe Cribb, Geng Ji-peng, and Pei Yuan-bo on the charms from the Liao and the Song, before concluding with a chapter by Hu Jian about some of the highly decorative good-luck charms from the Qing and a chapter by François Thierry on a group of Taoist incantation charms. To complete the picture, this volume includes two additional chapters, one by Wang Xiao-lin and the other by Emmanuel Poisson, about some of the similar objects found in Vietnam and Japan, illustrating the

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**An International Symposium on Chinese Numismatic Charms**  
**In conjunction with Exhibition of Chinese Numismatic Charms**  
**(Chinese Civilisation Centre, City University of Hong Kong)**

**14 – 15 July 2008**



**Venue: G7619, Conference Room**  
**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Level 7**  
**Green Zone, Academic Building, City University of Hong Kong**

**Invited Speakers**

Vladimir A. Belyaev (Zenon N.S.P., Russia)  
 Alex Chengyu Fang (City University of Hong Kong)  
 Geng Ji-peng (Art Academy of Mianyang, China)  
 Emmanuel Poisson (Paris-Diderot University, France)  
 ●i Dong-fang (Peking University, China)  
 Sergey V. Sidorovich (Schüco International Moskau AG, Russia)  
 Francois Thierry (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, France)  
 Helen Wang (The British Museum)  
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Organized by

  中文・翻譯及語言學系  
 Department of Chinese,  
 Translation & Linguistics

**Fig. 1.1** A poster for the international symposium on Chinese numismatic charms, held 14–15 July 2008



Fig. 1.2 A poster for the exhibition of charms held 11 July–24 August 2008 in Hong Kong

presence as well as the influence of a recognisably identical tradition that was also ardently observed in the neighbouring countries of China. The Editors hope that such an array will serve to chart a clear path of development of charms for both serious and casual readers in Chinese numismatics and to highlight some of the major points of potential interest that will motivate further readings and studies.

As a matter of fact, the forum was a sister event of a public exhibition of Chinese charms that was held on the campus at City University of Hong Kong, 11 July–24 August 2008, based on the personal collection of Dr Alex Chengyu Fang and curated by The Chinese Civilisation Centre, City University of Hong Kong. Also the first of its kind, the exhibition received good public attention and was reported widely in local and national media, including *China Daily* and the *Ming Pao*. A book was published by the Commercial Press, Beijing at the same time to accompany the Exhibition and the Forum. Authored by Alex Fang, this book is entitled *Chinese Charms: Art, Religion, and Folk Belief (Zhong guo hua qian yu chuan tong wen hua 中國花錢與傳統文化)* which contains a pictorial listing of some 270 bronze charms in his collection divided into six sections: lucky expressions, coin inscriptions, zodiacal signs, openwork, unusual shapes and hanging plaques, and gods, demigods and auspicious animals. The book represents an attempt to reveal the profound cultural settings for Chinese charms through an extensive array of citations from ancient written documents that refer to the use of these objects or help understand the inscriptions and motifs found on them. The book is prefaced by Professor Peikai Cheng 鄭培凱, Director of the Chinese Civilisation Centre at CityU as well as Mr Joe Cribb, who was at the time Keeper of the Coin and Medal Department at the British Museum. The book was expertly reviewed by François Thierry, which is included in this volume as Chap. 10.

The three events listed above marked out the year 2008 as a true celebration of the study of Chinese charms, which is also evidenced through a tremendous public interest in these objects in China, where, following the pioneering efforts by numismatists and anthropologists in Europe, charms have come to be recognised as an important area for scholarly research and publications, instead of their more traditional place in the appendix of numismatic works. For example, in a recent book on Taoist relics, nine charms are listed in support of the discussions (Museum of Hubei Province 2012: 243–249). As yet another example of the recognition, Fang (2008) was cited as a major publication in Chinese numismatics in China. The year 2008 also witnessed the publication of a splendid volume on the same topic by François Thierry, curator at the Cabinet des Médailles, Bibliothèque nationale de France, entitled *Amulettes de Chine* following his other major exposition, *Amulettes de Chine et du Viet-Nam*, which was first published in 1987. It also coincided with the start of a pioneering effort led by Dr. Helen Wang, curator of East Asian coins at the Department of Coins and Medals of the British Museum, to digitize its extensive collection of some 1700 charms from China and its neighbouring countries, which represents a most valuable body of knowledge about Chinese charms not only through its large collection but also because of the meticulously recorded details for each piece regarding the name of the donator and the year of acquisition, information that has been regrettably not available in China.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Alex Fang was a Sir E.S.G Robinson Fellow and participated in this monumental work at the Depart of Coins and Medels of the British Museum in 2012.

## 1.2 Chinese Culture and Popular Belief Systems

As any cursory look at Chinese charms will quickly show, this group of objects represents a vast repertoire of cultural as well as numismatic discussions and entails a body of knowledge that circumscribes almost every aspect of the ancient Chinese society, most notably in terms of history, philosophical settings, religious beliefs and also folk practices. As we shall attempt to show in the rest of this chapter, these fascinating objects can be best understood from two aspects: function and philosophical definition. We shall illustrate that the fundamental functions relate to the two fundamental needs in ancient times to drive away evil spirits and to wish for good luck and abundant fortunes. While the former function was largely performed by Taoism and Buddhism as the two major religious forms, the function of wishing for good luck and abundant fortune was mostly facilitated through the Confucian doctrines that had for a long time defined the relationships between the individual, the family and the state. We shall highlight through this introductory chapter (along with the others in this volume) the major instruments, iconographic, linguistic as well as pictorial, that help to articulate the semantic content of these objects through symbols and allegories that combine to serve the precise, intended functions. As we shall aim to bring out, the charm itself is therefore an embodiment of a powerful language system that speaks about heavenly protections and blissful fortunes through its form, its content and its function.

Chinese culture is one of the few, including the Jewish and the Indian cultures, which has preserved a historical continuum with no real major break. It has not suffered any irreparable break that would have made old cultural references alien and foreign to today's population. One factor is that over the past several thousand years the Chinese language, despite its developments and changes, has remained the same or at least still intelligible. In Europe, Christianity and the great barbarian invasions have made a clean sweep of the foundations and manifestations of Greco-Roman culture which had been deeply embedded in society. Similarly, Islam destroyed the Persian Avestan culture and the Turkish culture swept away the Buddhist culture in Central Asia. Meanwhile, in Europe and the Middle East alike, new languages replaced the old, their alphabets substituting the previous, causing a break in the transmission of knowledge, mythologies, sciences and schools of thought, often violently opposed by the new monotheistic ideologies. It can be seen today that images and literary allusions that date back two or three thousand years are fully understood by the Chinese people, while the ability to understand Greco-Roman images or quotes requires special learning available to the better educated classes. Let us take a look at a simple example. The formulaic expression, *wan shou wu jiang* 萬壽無疆, or “Longevity of ten thousand years without boundary”, is commonly found today on porcelain or plastic dishes (Fig. 1.3) in many Chinese restaurants without any problem or difficulty to understand and yet it is actually taken from a poem in *Shi jing* 詩經, an ancient book that dates back to 1000–600 BC. Conversely, a vast majority of the European population will find themselves at a total loss with the famous Greek aphorism *γνωθι σεαυτόν*.



**Fig. 1.3** A porcelain dish inscribed *wan shou wu jiang* 萬壽無疆, or “Longevity of ten thousand years without boundary”, circa 1970s. ACF Collection



A continuum of cultural heritage has enabled ancient symbols, iconography, and linguistic expressions to live through the centuries and to serve today as popular vehicles of messages, wishes, fears and issues of interest to the man such as life, success, happiness, illness, misfortune, the future, death, eternity, etc. In China, and the Sinicised world including Korea, Vietnam and Japan, everything revolving around these issues is still largely preserved in frames and forms that are directly derived from the ancient culture and its evolution. Even Buddhism itself has been slid into this cultural mould, causing only violent but brief, manifestations of rejection.

In China, misfortunes such as illnesses, pains, failures or deaths are understood to be the result of evil influences, the work of demons and ghosts, or as the effect of bad winds and miasma, which occur especially during an adverse day, dusk or night, through fogs, and in specific places, such as mountains or abandoned old temples. In the same belief, to overcome those adverse influences, one should solicit the protection of supernatural beings with powers able enough to dominate and defeat these evil and demonic powers. These protective beings are gods and immortals, but also animals, sometimes even plants, and yet they are not the only means of protection: there are also prayers, orders, magical symbols, secret writings, etc. The sources of this protective power are therefore extremely varied and complex as found on protective amulets together. Having thus dismissed the misfortunes, one invariably tries to attract happiness. In China, real happiness is simple: it consists of three wishes and is tirelessly repeated over the centuries, namely, health, success and offspring. First mentioned by the feudal lord Hua in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, happiness is summarized as *san duo* 三多 “Three Abundances”:

abundance in longevity, abundance in wealth and abundance in male children.<sup>2</sup> However, while the protective amulets rely heavily on Taoist designs, amulets to wish happiness are much more marked by the doctrines of Confucius. Indeed, in China, happiness is not a personal issue; it is primarily a social thing that fits into a codified set that leaves little room for the individual as such. Being happy is always being happy with the others, such as family members, neighbours, superiors and inferiors; happiness is about adhering to the ethical obligations of an honest man, which include *ren* 仁 humanity, *yi* 義 justice, and *zhong* 忠 loyalty; it is about complying with *li* 禮 rites and about engaging in *xue* 學 scholarly studies, etc.

### 1.3 Coin-like Charms as Talismans and Amulets

To achieve these two goals of driving away demons and bringing in happiness, the Chinese have been using various objects such as mirrors, statues, pictures, writings on wood or paper and, of course, amulets. Amulets took many forms, and were made in varied materials such as wood, stone, paper, metal and glass. The genre of interest here consists of those amulets that are related in form to the world of coins. In Chinese numismatic books, these coin-like amulets are traditionally called *ya sheng qian* 壓勝錢, or “coins to suppress and defeat”, which refer to charms more in a talismanic sense. They are also called *ji xiang qian* 吉祥錢, or “coins of good luck” referring more to the amuletic meaning. Charms as a generic name for both talismans and amulets are traditionally regarded as coins in China because they were made of the same metal as coins and they generally have a shape identical to that of a standard coin: round with a central hole. Yet they are not exactly coins since their primary function was to bring protection and good luck to the owner instead of the monetary function that coins typically perform. Charms were retained and kept primarily as personal objects; as can be seen from the explicit inscription of a Taoist charm dated to the Song Dynasty (Fig. 1.12 in this chapter), they were either kept in the house or worn about the body. As a result, many of the existing specimens show signs of tear and wear and they are rarely found in burials or in large hoards as coins often are. In the few reported instances of findings in burials, they were more likely to be buried as personal objects of the deceased than as part of the funeral ritual. An exception, however, is to be found in specially made burial coins often in gold or in silver found in tombs dating from the Ming Dynasty.

While most of these objects have a coin-like form, the currency in China adopted many different forms and some are significantly varied, taking the form of farming tools such as spades or fighting weapons such as knives. The fact remains that numismatists have all ranked among the currencies what they call *qian* 錢, or “round coin”. Here, we come across yet another striking example of the cultural

<sup>2</sup> 《莊子·天地》：“堯觀乎華，華封人曰：‘嘻，聖人！請祝聖人，使聖人壽。’堯曰‘辭’。‘使聖人富。’堯曰‘辭’。‘使聖人多男子。’堯曰‘辭’。”

continuum mentioned earlier through the use of the same monetary form from 175 BC up to AD 1912. Indeed, after fumbling in the previous two centuries, Emperor Wendi 文帝 (179–157 BC) of the Han 漢 dynasty started a coin type named *Si zhu ban liang* 四銖半兩, which is a round coin with a square hole, bronze, with a weight of about 3.5 g and a diameter of 24–25 mm (Fig. 1.4). This type, *sapèque* in French and *cash* in English, subsequently created a norm for coins which, apart from a few minor modifications to the rims and inscriptions, continued to be used until the end of the Empire in the early 20th century. The currencies to follow, such as *wuzhu* 五銖 of the Han and *kaiyuan* 開元 of the Tang, kept to roughly the same metrological characteristics which allowed for circulation for centuries. Archaeological excavations typically find hoards containing coins of earlier dynasties; the Ming treasures, for example, are frequently composed of the currencies of the Tang or the Song. The round shape with a central square hole has naturally become a symbol of wealth and a sign of affluent living. However, while most amulets are in the shape of round coins, they are also found in the form of knives (*dao bi* 刀幣), and more rarely, in the form of spades (*bu bi* 布幣). The monetary knife is a double symbol of wealth and protection because it was an ancient coin and because it is a weapon: knife-shaped amulets are therefore often used to cast out demons. The type most commonly used for spades is the currency *Huo bu* 貨布 issued by Wang Mang 王莽 from the year AD 14 and up to AD 23. A gilt bronze amulet was discovered in the Tang necropolis Gaoyangyuan near Xi'an that takes the form of a *Huo bu* showing the five sons of King Wen (文王; 1152–1056 BC) of the Zhou (1046–256 BC). For more detailed descriptions of coins and charms from the Tang Dynasty, see Chaps. 3 and 4 in this volume.

If coins as a symbol of wealth have been used as an amulet, then some have been used for this function more often than others, depending on their inscriptions. The inscription *Tai ping tong bao* 太平通寶 seen on coins issued by Emperor Taizong of the Song, for example, can be read “Currency of the Great Peace” and thus understood as a desire for a happy future. The inscription *Da guan tong bao* 大觀通



Fig. 1.4 A coin type named *Si zhu ban liang* 四銖半兩, circa 175 BC





Fig. 1.5 A coin type named *Da guan tong bao* 大觀通寶. ACF Collection

寶 found on coins issued by Emperor Huizong 徽宗 of the Song (Fig. 1.5) can be understood as “Currency of the Great Design” or “Currency of the Grand Ideal” but *guan* is also the 20th of the 64 hexagrams of the *Yi jing* (易經; The Book of Yi) and identifies the ideal and correct state of the Empire, the perception of what is beyond the ordinary, the perception of the invisible, and the moment one enters the influx of hidden energies. The meaning then reads “the common perception of the invisible” and fits into the philosophical world of Taoism. The inscription of *Da ding tong bao* 大定通寶 issued by Emperor Shizong (世宗) of the Jin literally means “Currency of Great Stability”, which is also a wish for happiness. But in a Buddhist context, *ding* is the equivalent of *samadhi*, Sanskrit meaning the concentration of the mind, or calm concentration. *Da Ding* is therefore associated with the expression *Da Ding Zhi Bei* 大定智慧 “Great Insight, Wisdom, and Mercy”, which form the Three Virtues, or *san de* 三德, where a Buddha reaches enlightenment. Coins inscribed with *Da Ding* therefore had particular popularity in the Buddhist community and so we find many amulets with the inscription *Da ding tong bao*. The big coin *tai he zhongbao* 泰和重寶 issued by Emperor Zhangzong (章宗) of the Jin also lends support to numerous amulets, because *Tai He* means “supreme concord” or “supreme harmony”, which can also be interpreted as “prosperity and concord”. *Tai* is also the 11th of the 64 hexagrams of the Bagua (八卦; the Eight Trigrams). According to the exegesis of Yijing, “*tai* refers to a lucky and fortunate situation where the small go and big returns come.”<sup>3</sup> One could multiply the examples of monetary inscriptions that lend themselves to a rich polysemy.

A most interesting case can be found in the reign title of Zhengde 正德, during which time (AD 1506–1521) Emperor Wuzong 武宗 of the Ming Dynasty ruled the empire. Although Emperor Wuzong did not issue any currencies during his rule and therefore there is no officially issued coin carrying the inscriptions of *Zheng de tong bao* 正德通寶, or currencies of the Zhengde Reign, there is in existence a large

<sup>3</sup> 《易經·泰》：“泰，小往大來，吉亨，則是天地交而萬物通也。”



**Fig. 1.6** A *Zheng de tong bao* 正德通寶 charm with dragon and phoenix on the reverse. 18–19th Century. 48 mm in dia. ACF Collection

number of charms that purport to date back to the period because they bear the inscription *Zheng de tong bao*. See Fig. 1.6 for a specimen. This group is also extremely varied in sizes and types. A casual study can easily produce a list of over a hundred different types. It is also possible that many variations were produced in Vietnam. See Chap. 11 in this volume by Emmanuel Poisson on the Vietnamese charms in the French National Library. Explanations abound for the favoured use of this particular reign title on charms. A most obvious is the fact that the reign title is composed of the characters *zheng* 正, or *upright* and *de* 德, or *moral*, both of which refer to the qualities desirable of an educated person. It thus follows that such charms may have been given to male children to wish for their proper upbringing and eventual success.

In addition to the coins in circulation, there are specific currencies known as “coins of the imperial court”, or *gong ting qian* 宮廷錢, or simply 宮錢, issued by the court or the imperial palace. These coins played an important role as amulets, primarily because they came from the imperial palace. And this is the only identifiable group of charms that were officially issued.<sup>4</sup> Among the many types of *gongting qian*, the best known are those that were cast upon the change of sovereignty, which typically bear the reign title on the obverse, such as *qian long tong bao* 乾隆通寶, “the Circulating Treasure of Qianlong” (Fig. 1.7), and *dao guang tong bao* 道光通寶, “the Circulating Treasure of Daoguang”, and *Tian xia tai ping* 天下太平 on the reverse, meaning “peace under heaven”. According to *da qian tu lu* (《大錢圖錄》) by Bao Kang 鮑康 (AD 1810–1881), such coins were used in the imperial ancestral temple and were duly replaced when a new emperor

<sup>4</sup>There is now a consensus that, like coins, most of the charms in existence were issued by the government or at least they were officially sanctioned. A major reason for this belief is that bronze as a precious metal, which was used to make the coin-like charms, had always been strictly controlled by the central government. However, while this argument makes very good sense, so far there has been no written evidence in its support.



**Fig. 1.7** A *Tian xia tai ping* 天下太平 charm issued during the Qianlong Reign. 18th Century. 37 mm in dia. ACF Collection



**Fig. 1.8** A *Tian xia tai ping* 天下太平 charm with the eight tri-grams issued during the Daoguang Reign. 19th Century. 38 mm in dia. ACF Collection

came on the throne. Some years ago, the imperial palace in Beijing was being renovated and a box was found in the central spot on the spine of a roof. It contained, in addition to natural substances such as gold, silver and cinnabar, which were believed to possess exorcist power against evil spirits, a bronze coin inscribed *Tian xia tai ping* 天下太平 on the reverse and the Eight Trigrams on the reverse in a bid to protect the structure from the adverse impacts of natural elements such as wind and fire. Indeed, other similar imperial issues include those inscribed with a reign title and the eight trigrams with dynastic features attributable to the Daoguang 道光 (Fig. 1.8), Xianfeng 咸豐 and Guangxu 光緒 reigns.

Special charms were also made on anniversaries of the emperor. They are called the *wan shou qian* 萬壽錢 or “coins of the ten thousand life spans” and were cast on the occasion of the two great imperial birthdays, *da qing* 大慶, when the

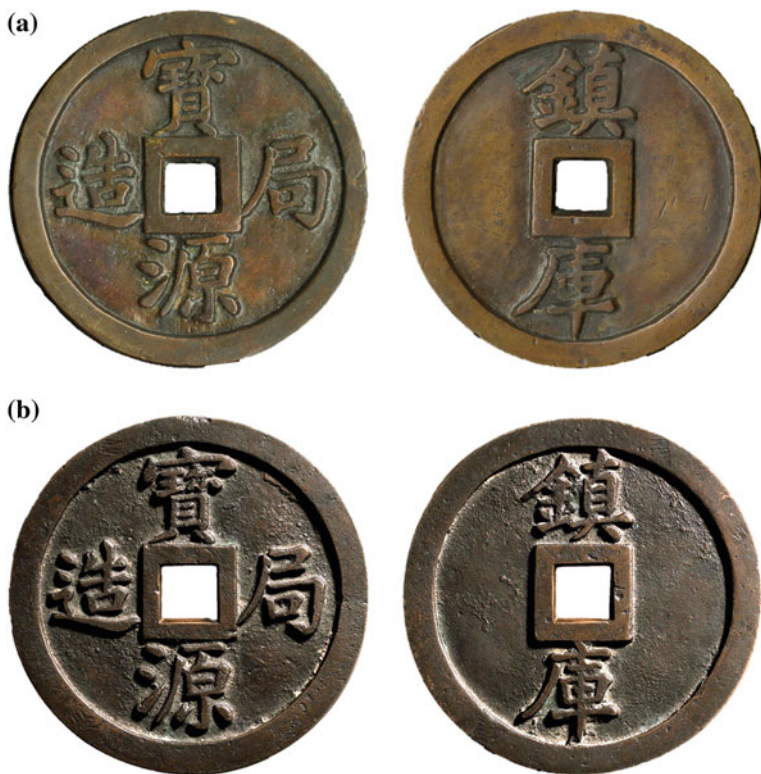
sovereign reached its twentieth or sixtieth year. But they were also made for birthdays (*shou qing* 壽慶) of prominent members of the imperial family such as the dowager empress. Nos 1 and 3 in Thierry (2008) are commonly taken to have been made for such occasions. Another important group of imperial issues includes charms of exceptional size and weight, commonly believed to have been cast as protectors of the imperial treasure vault. They are called *zhen ku qian* 鎮庫錢 “coins to protect the vault” or vault protectors. The Money Gallery at the British Museum has on display one such piece, which carries the inscriptions *bao yuan ju zao* 寶源局造, “produced by the Board of Works”,<sup>5</sup> on the obverse and *zhen ku* 鎮庫, “protect the vault”, on the reverse (Fig. 1.9a). This piece, BM Reg no: 1986-1-1-1, measures 110 mm in diameter and 11 mm in depth. Several other specimens are known to exist, one of which is on display in the China Numismatic Museum in Beijing. Another was auctioned in 2013 by China Guardian Auctions in its Spring Stamp and Coin Auction (Lot 151) for RMB2,530,000 (Fig. 1.9b). A third known specimen was in the collection of A.B. Coole 邱文明 (Coole 1963:57), measuring 105.7 mm if the size is accurately represented by the black-and-white photograph as claimed by the author. Coole (1963) is perhaps the earliest record of this particular type of vault protectors.

No 109 in Fang (2008: 152) represents yet another type. 226 g in weight, 61 mm in diameter and 11 mm in depth, this particular type is inscribed on the obverse *Tian xia tai ping* 天下太平, “peace under heaven”, with a blank obverse. This piece is dated to the Jiaqing 嘉慶 (AD 1796–1820) reign of the Qing Dynasty even though an explicit reference to this reign is missing from the inscriptions. As a matter of fact, the practice of casting vault protectors in the coin shape is exceedingly old and can be dated back to the pre-Song eras, as evidenced by a specimen inscribed with *Da tang zhen ku* 大唐鎮庫, “Vault Protector of the Great Tang”, which is believed to have been cast during the Zongbao 宗保 (AD 943–957) Reign of the Southern Tang Dynasty (南唐; AD 937–975). The same practice was also adopted by the Peaceful Heavenly Kingdom set up by Hong Xiu-quan 洪秀全 (AD 1814–1864) in the late Qing Dynasty. The money gallery at the Shanghai Museum has on display a couple of specimens which read *Tai ping tian guo* 太平天國, “peaceful heavenly kingdom”, on the obverse and *zhen ku* 鎮庫, “vault protector”, on the reverse. Such charms have time and again illustrated the continuum of a tradition that is pervasive and ubiquitous in nature.

This is exactly why we study charms, the coin-like objects that are not originally circulating currencies but used as talismans and amulets. Through their auspicious form and meaning, they transmit messages either to protect against demons or to attract happiness. Every element on them, including every character, every phrase, every object, every plant, and every animal, produces a precise sense, based on

<sup>5</sup>Along with *bao quan ju* 寶泉局, or the Board of Revenue, the Board of Works was one of the two central mints in Beijing for the casting of circulating coins in the Qing Dynasty. The administrative setup was inherited from the Ming Dynasty.





**Fig. 1.9** Vault protector coin inscribed *bao yuan ju zao* 寶源局造 “made by the Board of Works” on the obverse and *zhen ku* 鎮庫, “protect the vault” on the reverse. **a** Diam: 110 mm, BM Reg no: 1986-1-1-1. **b** Diam: 115.2 mm. Weight: 837.3 g. China Guardian Auctions 2013 Spring Stamp and Coin Auction, Lot 151

form, about a physical or therapeutic property, about a historical reference, about a literary allusion, about the iconography, and ultimately about any relationship between this object and its nature, through symbols, metaphors, riddles and homophones.

#### 1.4 Protection against Misfortunes

Humans have, since ancient times, used magic talismans against demons and evil spirits. One uses many deities, but paradoxically, it is not the great gods of the modern pantheon, such as Buddha and Guanyin, who are the most requested. Taoism has probably the strongest presence on charms of protection. To quote *The*

*Tao Gives Rise to Ten Thousand Things: Taoist Relics from the Chu Region* (Museum of Hubei Province 2012: 243),

In Taoist rites, bronze mirrors and coins are often used as ritual objects, mainly to exorcise and subdue evil spirits with incantations... Coins began to be used to ward off evil influences in Shang dynasty tombs. The practice became prevalent in the Han dynasty and later spread to other industries. For example, when a stove was opened, a warehouse completed, a birthday celebrated, a show put on, an oath made, a temple built, sacrifices offered, beams mounted, or a person interred, non-circulatory coins would be used. Besides the above-mentioned usage, they were also used for many other purposes, such as to pray for blessing, to entertain, to ward off the disasters of war.

Compared with amulets of other types, those bearing the image of a “god” tend to be rare, mostly dated to the Song period or older. The world of the supernatural deities of Chinese folk religion blends traces of ancient mythology and local cults as well as beliefs and rites of the three major spiritual traditions, Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, which offer the most effective relief. Typically, these guardian spirits are immortals or deities of popular Taoism such as *Zhen wu da di* 真武大帝 “The Grand God of True Warrior”, *Bao sheng da di* 保生大帝 “The Grand God of Life Protection”, *Tian hou* 天后 “The Heavenly Queen”, *Xi wang mu* 西王母 “The Queen Mother of the West”, *Tai shang lao jun* 太上老君 “Lord Laozi of the Great Monad”, *Huang da xian* 黃大仙 “The Great Immortal Huang”, etc. They also include historical figures with either real or legendary life accounts similar enough to highlight a heroic fight against fierce enemies. For example, *Jiang tai gong* 姜太公, advisor to King Wen of the Zhou Dynasty, who led the troops to victory during the Battle of Muye and caused the late Shang Dynasty to collapse, Li Guang 李廣, a famous general in the Western Han Dynasty, who staged victorious campaigns and defeated China’s greatest threat the Xiongnu, or Guan Yu 關羽, a brave and loyal general, who was defeated by treachery, are, among others, a few examples of valiant military strategists that the population have been traditionally taught as demon hunters and as dare-devil marshals commanding heavenly armies against



**Fig. 1.10** A charm depicting *Zhou Chu* slaying the dragon on the obverse. 9–12th Century. 52 mm in dia. ACF Collection

demonic enemies. Besides the military figures, other legendary names include Zhou Chu 周處 (Fig. 1.10), Zhong Kui 鍾馗, Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮, Lü Dong-bin 呂洞賓, or Zhang Dao-ling 張道陵, who either showed their strategic skills or demonstrated their magic capabilities to ward off evil spirits.

Furthermore, anthropomorphic deities include many animals, which are revered as powerful protectors. The oldest are perhaps the *si ling* 四靈 “the Four Spirits”, or *si shen* 四神, “the Four Gods”, which are the four supernatural animals that rule the four corners of the world: *zhu que* 朱雀 Red Bird, *xuan wu* 玄武 Black Warrior, *qing long* 青龍 (or *cang long* 蒼龍) Blue Dragon, and *bai hu* 白虎 White Tiger. These four supernatural animals represent the heavenly universe and are the protectors of the space assigned to them: the Red Bird is the Regent of the South, the Black Warrior the North, the Blue Dragon the East, and the White Tiger the West. The White Tiger is the only one of the four that continues to be used until today as a protective animal while the dragon later evolved into a larger and more complex role. For a more detailed discussion on this particular topic, see Chap. 4 in this volume by Alex Fang.

The image of the Five Venomous Animals (五毒) is effective against poisoning and poisons. Initially they included *xie* 蠍 the scorpion, *she* 蛇 snake, *wu gong* 蜈蚣 the centipede, *hui feng* 虻蜂 the wasp, and *yu* 蟻 a three-legged turtle which sent sandblasting to poison all those approaching it. The more or less mythical animals, *hui feng* and *yu*, are gradually replaced by *xi yi* 蜥蜴 the lizard and *qing wa* 青蛙 the green frog. In later images, the green frog is definitely replaced by the toad, and probably by iconographic attraction, it eventually changed into *chan* 蟾 the three-legged toad while the scorpion gives way to *zhi zhu* 蜘蛛 the spider. The White Tiger was considered a powerful opponent of the Five Venomous Animals and gradually it was integrated into the group as one of the Five Venomous so that later images are typically composed of the snake, the spider, the centipede, the toad and the tiger, or, as another variation, the snake, the spider, the lizard, the toad and



**Fig. 1.11** A charm showing the Five Venomous Animals on the reverse and a lucky expression *fu gui chang le* 富貴昌樂 on the obverse. 18–19th Century. 49 mm in dia. ACF Collection

the tiger. See Fig. 1.11 for a charm from the 18th or the 19th century, whose reverse features the Five Venomous Animals.

Some amulets are particularly aimed at individuals born in a specific year. They are called *shengxiao qian* 生肖錢, or zodiacal amulets that refer to the year of birth. The protection afforded is directly related to the animal of birth and the Stellar Officer of the Fundamental Destiny, *ben ming xing guan* 本命星官 or *ben ming yuan shen* 本命元神, who resides in the birth star of the person: the Chinese consider that the life of every man, including his conduct, his life span and his success, depends on the year of birth, which is governed by a particular star in the constellation of *bei dou* 北斗, “The Ladle of the North”, or the Big Dipper in English. In this constellation lies a heavenly star officer to watch over those who are born in that year. For example, a person born in 1998, or the year of *wu yin* 午寅 has the cyclical sign of *yin* 寅, the tiger, and the stellar official corresponding to *yin* is *lu cun xing* 祿存星, who runs the life of the person in question. These amulets, often beautiful old pieces, are usually decorated with a zodiac or birth animal with or without its cyclical inscription with the effigy of *Ben ming xing guan* accompanying the birth animal or sitting under an ancient pine tree. See Chap. 5 by Geng Ji-peng in this volume for a separate discussion related to this topic.

In addition to the gods or animals, protection power can be acquired by wearing amulets, signs, symbols, orders, or secret papers. On many amulets, often old, there are secret writings in the form of Taoist spells of plotted hermetic characters known as *fu* 符, or *fu lu* 符籙, which command a great protective power; however humans cannot understand the meaning but the demons can and they are terrified upon reading them. Many wearable pieces of great power have the inscription “order” (*ling* 令) or invocation (*zhou* 咒) from a high deity and commander to specifically cast out demons. The best known include those by *Tai Shang Laojun*, deified Laozi, and *Leiting*, the God of Thunder. An exceedingly rare specimen can be found in Fig. 1.12, which, on the obverse, portrays Zhen Wu on wavy waters holding a



**Fig. 1.12** A charm depicting Zhen Wu on the obverse and a Taoist incantation on the reverse. 13–15th Century. 79 mm in diam. ACF Collection



sword driving away demons. Its reverse is inscribed with the *Tai Shang* invocation (太上咒) which summons the power of the Supreme God to suppress demons:

太上咒曰：天圓地方，六律九章。符神到處，萬鬼滅亡。急急如律令。此符神從官三十五人。家藏佩帶，日誦七遍。

By the order of the Supreme God: The heaven is round and the earth is square. There exist six legal bindings and nine criminal regulations. Wherever this magic charm is presented, ten thousand demons will perish. By my legal order, be it so instantly. This magic charm commands thirty-five celestial officers. It should be kept in the house or worn about the body and the invocation should be cited daily for seven times.

See Chap. 10 by François Thierry in this volume for a more detailed discussion.

Finally, many amulets known with protective symbols are rooted in the popular religions, such as the True Image of the Five Peaks, *Wu yue zhen xing tu* 五嶽真形圖 (Fig. 1.13; see also No 74 in Thierry 1987), the Eight Trigrams, 八卦圖 *Ba gua tu* (No. 106 in Fang 2008) and *Tai ji* 太極. The motif of the Eight Trigrams in particular eventually became perhaps the most widely used on charms and continued to be seen even on contemporary productions. Comparatively speaking, Buddhist charms are perhaps the rarest. The commoner types include those inscribed with the six-character incantations *om mani padme hum* 唵嘛呢叭咪吽 and those inscribed with the four characters 阿彌陀佛, namely, Amitabha. Rarer



**Fig. 1.13** A charm inscribed *wu yue zhen xing tu* 五嶽真形圖 the True Image of the Five Peaks on the obverse and Taoist characters on the reverse. 15–18th Century. 87 mm in length and 49 mm in width. Wanxuanzhai Collection

types include a specimen which portrays the Buddha sitting in the middle flanked by Laozi of Taoism and Confucius of Confucianism. For unknown reasons, generally speaking, charms with Buddhist iconographies alone are exceedingly rare, adding to the understanding that any foreign introduction into China would eventually need to be adapted with some Chinese elements for it to be received and accepted. The Editors are glad to include Chap. 8 by Vladimir Belyaev and V. Sergey Sidorovich on bronze tokens issued by Buddhist temples in the Yuan Dynasty. They may have been initially made and issued as circulating currencies of purchasing power but got kept and worn as charms by believers because of the protective power imputed to them.

## 1.5 Wishing for Good Luck and Happiness

The Chinese had a variety of amulets, representing probably the largest genre, to wish happiness, success, and wealth to their parents, family members and friends. They are commonly called *ji yu qian* 吉語錢 or *ji xiang yu qian* 吉祥語錢, both meaning coins of lucky expressions, or *xi qing qian* 喜慶錢, auspicious and celebratory coins. Some of these charms bear an explicit message, such as:

長樂益壽延年貴富 *chang le yi shou yan nian gui fu*, “Perpetual joy, increased longevity, prolonged year, honors and riches”,  
 長命富貴金玉滿堂 *chang ming fu gui jin yu man tang*, “Long life, riches and honours; gold and jade fill your house”,  
 千祥雲集 *qian xiang yun ji*, “A thousand clouds of bliss accumulate”,  
 吉慶如意 *ji qing ru yi*, “Luck and celebration according to your wishes”, and  
 以介眉壽 *yi jie mei shou*, “May you live a long life”.

But what is more interesting about this group of charms is the fact that other forms of linguistic expressions are often used to convey these wishes. Chapter 9 by Hu Jian in this volume on lucky charms refers to two coins that employ linguistic riddles for the expression of meaning. Amongst the various methods, the commonest is perhaps the rebus based on homophony. The Chinese language practically allows for more than a variety of homophones, of which there are three major types: the perfect homophone, where both the sound and the tone are identical, for example, *yáng* 羊 “sheep”, and *yáng* 陽 “yang”, imperfect homophone, where the sound is the same but with different tones, for example, *zhu* 竹 “bamboo” and *zhù* 祝 “wish”, and finally the parallel homophone where two sounds are different but very similar without identical tones, for example, *qí* 騎 “ride” and *jí* 吉 “luck”. Let us bear in mind that pronunciations change over time and that what could be taken as homophones in ancient Chinese may not sound so today. We know, for example, many poems composed during the Tang Dynasty no longer rhyme perfectly when read in Mandarin Chinese nowadays because of the evolution of the phonetic system over the centuries. Luckily, rhyming dictionaries (*yun fu* 韻府) still exist



**Fig. 1.14** A double-coin charm inscribed with *Tong zhi tong bao* 同治通寶 on the obverse and *fu shou* 福壽 on the reverse. 19th Century. 50 mm in diam. ACF Collection

that spell out the pronunciation of specific characters and specify those they rhyme with.<sup>6</sup>

Among the most common homophones used in amulets, the following examples can be readily mentioned. The green lotus leaf, *qing lian* 青蓮, is homophone for *qing lian* 清廉 “integrity” and “incorruptible” to describe an official’s impeccable conduct, hence the use of the lotus leaf to convey the wish and desire for promotion.

The finger-citron, *fo shou gan* 佛手柑 or *fo shou* 佛手, literally meaning “Buddha’s hand”, is used as a homophone of *shou* 壽 longevity because we only keep the second character. But it also happens that the first character, *fo* 佛, is by itself similar to the pronunciation of *fu* 福 happiness. The finger-citron is therefore homophone for the expression *fu shou* 福壽 happiness and longevity. This way, a more complex pictorial composition consisting of a finger-citron and two coins alludes to the expression *fu shou shuang quan* 福壽雙全 “happiness and longevity both complete” since the two coins are pronounced as *shuang quan* 雙泉, which is homophone of *shuang quan* 雙全 “both complete”. Figure 1.14 is a more explicit version. The charm itself is composed of two overlapping coins, forming a visual pun of *shuang quan* 雙泉 double coins. The obverse of each of the two coins carries the reign title of *Tong zhi tong bao* 同治通寶 the Currency of the Tongzhi Reign. Their reverses are both inscribed with a lucky expression *fu shou* 福壽 fortune and longevity. The charm as a whole is therefore an expression of *fu shou shuang quan* 福壽雙全 complete with both fortune and longevity. With a sceptre added to the picture, which is homophone of *ru yi* 如意 “according to wishes”, a longer expression is created, i.e., *fu shou shuang quan ru yi* 福壽雙全如意, meaning “May happiness and longevity be both complete according to your wishes”.

<sup>6</sup>The earliest rhyming dictionary that exists today is *Yun fu qun yu* 韻府羣玉, which was compiled during the Song Dynasty by Yin You-yu 陰幼遇 (AD 1264-1331) and his father Yin Ying-meng 陰應夢 (AD 1224-1314 AD). This dictionary comprising twenty volumes is also an encyclopaedia with its entries arranged ontologically into, for example, locative names, plants, and animals.

Another common homophonic element is the paradise flycatcher, 綵帶鳥, which is pronounced *shou dai niao*. Since *shou* is homophone for longevity (壽) and *dai* for generation (代), this bird has come to be symbolic of the wish to obtain longevity for generations in the family. The cypress, *bai* 柏, is homophone for hundred (百); the persimmon, *shi* 柿, is homophone for business (事). The pictorial composition involving these two elements and the sceptre produces the phrase *bai shi ru yi* 百事如意, meaning “hundred businesses [accomplished] according to your wishes”. The lithophone, *qing* 磬, is homophone for “congratulations” (慶) and “heavenly favour”. The panther 豹 *bao* is homophonic of “announce” (報). The magpie, *xique* 喜鵲, contains the character *xi*, 喜 “happiness”. The two together would create a verbal pun of *bao xi* 報喜, meaning “announcement of happy news”.

The bat is yet another frequent item in the vocabulary of expressing luck and fortune. This mammal is pronounced *fu* 蝠 in Mandarin Chinese and is homophone to *fu* 福 happiness. It is sometimes portrayed flying towards the central square hole of a coin. Since the central hole is pronounced *qian yan* 錢眼, or “coin’s eye”, the two jointly produce the expression *fu zai yan qian* 福在眼前, meaning “happiness before my eyes”. A pictorial design, such as the one found in Fig. 1.15, often shows a scene of five bats flying around each other, expressing the wish for *wu fu* 五福, or Five Happinesses, namely, longevity, wealth, honour, peace and many children.

The image of a child riding on an elephant is pronounced *qi xiang* 騎象, which is taken to be homophonic of *ji xiang* 吉祥 luck and fortune. If the child additionally holds a sceptre in his hand, the scene creates the expression *ji xiang ru yi* 吉祥如意 “Luck and fortune according to my wishes”.

One could multiply the examples but these are just a few examples of the rich repertoire of homophones in the traditional expressions in China. Such a technique to combine objects and human figures to create auspicious expressions is commonly found not only on coin-like charms but throughout the Chinese folk art. It is a basic pictorial language appropriate and also effectively explicit in a society whose population is largely illiterate.



**Fig. 1.15** A charm depicting five bats on the reverse and *Tian xia ping* 天下平 on the obverse. 16–17th Century. 50 mm in diam. ACF Collection

But happiness is not limited only to the satisfaction of a materialistic nature. And this is where the fundamental influence of Confucianism has so strongly structured the Chinese culture and, in some way, ensured the survival of this ancient civilisation over the millennia. This philosophy is based on family harmony and it gives an idea of happiness that is achieved through being social. To be happy is to be happy in the company of people in different social relations: the dedication of the subject to the emperor is of the same nature and importance as that of the son to his father, and the behaviour of the emperor vis-à-vis his subjects should be that of a father for his son. In this ideal society everyone is judged by his conduct, behaviour that is learned by studying the Confucian Classics since early childhood, the best eventually reaching the highest echelons of society, not by birth but by their merits.

Many amulets reflect the Confucian vision of social success. There are those that express the wish for success in imperial examinations. Expressions include *lian zhong san yuan* 連中三元 “pass successively through three degrees and be the first”, *zhuang yuan ji di* 狀元及第 “Be the first in the examination”, and *bang yan ji di* 榜眼及第 “Be the second in the examination”. Sometimes the image of *Kui xing* 魁星, the guardian god of examinations, standing on the head of a dragon fish *ao* 鼇 is used alternatively to express the same wish. There are also charms to express the wishes of success in mandarin career. Expressions include *jun yi hou wang* 君宜侯王, “May you be Marquis or Prince”, *jue lu feng hou* 爵祿封侯, “Receive the rank, treatment and the title of Marquis”, *jia guan jin lu* 加官進祿, “Get promoted and receive increased salary”, and *lu wei gao sheng* 祿位高昇, “Get promoted to a high rank”.

Linguistic expressions on charms are not always so direct and straightforward. Sometimes, more complex expressions assume the form of poetic lines containing allegories that allude to a hidden and indirect message. Here is an example, which reads *chan gong dan gui piao xiang zao, kuai bing gao pan di yi zhi* 蟾宮丹桂飄香早, 快秉高攀第一枝. The two poetic lines here can be literarily translated as “The first fragrance of the purple cinnamon has arrived early from the Palace of the Toad; hurry up and climb up the highest branch!” The lines contain a series of allegories alluding to the need and the desire to seize the time, study hard and excel as the top winner in civil examinations. The reward for this effort would include an eternal life of happiness as well as a lady wife as beautiful as the fairy maiden living on the Moon, both alluded to through *the Palace of the Toad*, which symbolizes the Moon and which conjures up the image of *chang e* 嫦娥, a beautiful lady who rose to the Moon upon taking the elixir of eternal life, a fairy tale well remembered even today. The hidden message in the rather complex allegories here recalls a more explicit expression in two other popular poetic lines: *shu zhong zi you huang jin wu, shu zhong zi you yan ru yu* 書中自有黃金屋, 書中自有顏如玉—you will marry a beautiful girl from reading books and you will build a house of gold from reading books! As a matter of fact, the quotation here is taken from *A Poem to Promote Studying* (*Quan xue shi*; 勸學詩) written in a rather colloquial style by Emperor Zhenzong (宋真宗; AD 968–1022) of the Song Dynasty:



## 《勸學詩》

富家不用買良田，書中自有千鍾粟。  
 安居不用架高堂，書中自有黃金屋。  
 娶妻莫愁無良媒，書中有女顏如玉。  
 出門莫愁無人隨，書中車馬多如簇。  
 男兒欲遂平生志，五更勤向窗前讀。

You don't need to get rich through buying lands,  
 Since you will find a thousand bushels of millet in books.  
 You don't need to raise beams high in order to build a safe house,  
 Since you will construct a house of gold through reading books.  
 You don't need to worry about a matchmaker if you want to get married,  
 Since you will find a girl with complexion as pure as jade in books.  
 You don't need to worry about an entourage of attendants when going out,  
 Since you will find a whole fleet of horses and carriages in books.  
 If as a man you want to fulfill your dreams and ambitions in life,  
 Stay up and laboriously read as much as you can by the window.

The greatest joy and honour upon passing the imperial examinations are amply reflected on the charm in Fig. 1.16. The obverse shows the first-class winner riding on a horse under a canopy, accompanied by two attendants. The reverse carries two poetic lines: *yi se xing hua hong shi li, zhuang yuan gui qu ma ru fei* 一色杏花紅十里，狀元歸去馬如飛 “Amidst ten miles of red plum flowers, the first-class winner gallops home fast on a horse”. The specimen can be dated to the Yuan Dynasty (AD 1206–1368).



**Fig. 1.16** A charm depicting the top examination winner on the obverse with two poetic lines on the reverse. 13–14th Century. 58 mm in length and 41 mm in width. ACF Collection

Amulets within the Confucian tradition also make extensive use of the homophonic system mentioned above. The image of a monkey, *hou* 猴, climbing up a maple tree, *feng* 楓, produces the homophonic expression *feng hou* 封侯, “Receive the title of a marquis”. There is also a combination of bees, *feng* 蜂, with a monkey for the same puzzle, as is exemplified in Fig. 1.17, where a monkey is depicted holding a peach on the right of the central hole with a bee buzzing on the left side, striking home the wish for an imminent promotion and great longevity symbolized by the peach. A table vase, *ping* 瓶, a mouth organ, *sheng* 笙, and three halberds, *san ji* 三戟, form the expression *ping sheng san ji* 平昇三級, meaning “smoothly promoted by three ranks”. A heron, *yi lu* 一鷺, walking in a pond of lotus with ripe seeds, *lian ke* 蓮穎, forms the sentence *yi lu lian ke* 一路連科, meaning “passing the examinations in straight successions”. A heron walking in a bush of hibiscus, *rong hua* 蓉花, produces the verbal expression *yi lu rong hua* 一路榮華, meaning “glory all the way in my career”. The amaranth, pronounced *ji guan hua* 雞冠花 in Chinese, is symbolic of the meaning “extreme top official” since *ji guan* 雞冠 is homophonic of 極官, that is, top official.

But the social success through winning examinations and successive promotions in mandarin career must be accompanied by a family success traditionally modelled in China as a happy couple with many well-educated children and grand children. Hence there are numerous charms with expressions like *long feng cheng xiang* 龍鳳呈祥 “dragon and phoenix in full bliss”, which is an allusion to a happy marriage, *qi cai zi lu* 妻財子祿 “wife, wealth, children and official rank”, *fu qi xie lao* 夫妻偕老 “the husband and the wife reach old age together”, and *bai zi qian sun* 百子千孫, “one hundred sons and one thousand grandsons”.

Such intricate expressions of wish for happiness and good fortune, through auspicious iconography and verbal puns, are also found on a special group of objects known as *lou kong qian* 鏤空錢, or openwork charms, so called because of their ornamental or structural patterns formed of openings in the metal work.



**Fig. 1.17** A charm depicting a monkey and a bee on the obverse. 19th Century. 48 mm in diam. ACF Collection

Figure 1.18 is an example. Such charms typically show auspicious animals such as the phoenix and the dragon as well as flowers and plants such as the peony and the lotus that convey the quest for great wealth and social recognition. Here, explicit linguistic inscriptions in written characters are totally missing and yet the message is crystal clear, through a tradition of conventional expressions. The fish in Fig. 1.18, which is pronounced *yu*, instantly conjures up the idea of abundance, *yu* 餘, which is a homophone of fish. Along with the two lotus flowers, pronounced as *lian* 蓮 (lotus) loosely homophonic of *nian* 年 (year), the charm strikes up the expression of *nian nian you yu* 年年有餘 or “great abundance year after year”. Consider yet another example. Figure 1.19 shows two lions chasing an embroidered ball, which visually recalls the act of dancing lions as an celebratory event that typically happens on many a happy occasion in China such as the New Year or a wedding ceremony. At the same time, the embroidered ball is shaped like a coin, which is symbolic of wealth. The openwork pattern found on the charm therefore becomes symbolic and expressive of great happiness and great wealth. Another important feature found on both openwork charms here is the fact that the main motifs are portrayed in pairs like the two fish, two flowers and two lions. The notion of ‘double-ness’ here is invariably employed on Chinese charms as a general rule to represent a harmonious balance between the *yin* 陰 and the *yang* 陽 as the *dao* 道 or the way which necessarily leads towards a completeness and abundance that typically get wished for. Common designs of this kind include the double happiness, double dragons (Fig. 1.20), double phoenixes, the dragon and the phoenix, and double paradise flycatchers (Fig. 1.21), to name just a few.

Last but not least, it is worth pointing out that charms inscribed with lucky expressions may have a direct association with the currency system. There is a large group of charms inscribed with the expression *qian qiu wan sui* 千秋萬歲, or “one thousand autumns and ten thousand years”. They are commonly dated to the Liao Dynasty (AD 907–1125). Because of their large numbers and the varying sizes that apparently correspond to one-cash, five-cash, 10-cash and 50-cash coins in the

**Fig. 1.18** An openwork charm showing two fish swimming between lotus flowers. 10–14th Century. 50 mm in diam. ACF Collection





**Fig. 1.19** An openwork charm showing two lions chasing an embroidered ball. 10–14th Century. 44 mm in diam. ACF Collection



**Fig. 1.20** An openwork charm showing two dragons chasing an embroidered ball. 10–14th Century. 50 mm in diam. ACF Collection



**Fig. 1.21** An openwork charm showing two paradise flycatchers. 6–10th Century. 45 mm in diam. ACF Collection



currency system, it has been suggested recently that, despite their lucky expressions typical of charms, they might have been issued as circulating coins during the Liao. See Chap. 7 by Pei Yuan-bo in this volume for a more detailed discussion. While this hypothesis needs further deliberation and more documentary evidence from

written records and archaeological findings, it nonetheless highlights the thin borderline between charms and coins. Indeed, there are reports every now and then about charms being found amongst coin hoards, suggesting that charms were indeed mixed with coins by mistake or even intentionally either in storage or in circulation, or both.

## 1.6 Gaming Charms

Charms have been named variously as *ya sheng qian* 壓勝錢 and *ji xiang qian* 吉祥錢 according to their functions as we have previously seen. They are also known as *wan qian* 玩錢, which literarily means *play coins*, referring to the fact that some charms we see today were once used as gaming tokens. This group clearly suggests that charms were not simply worn about the body as mere symbols of celestial protection and abundant fortunes but some served practical purposes. According to the specimens that survive until today, we know that some charms pertain to recreational games and that some were actually used as gaming tokens. Chapter 2 by Song Jie in this volume refers to a rare group dated to the Han Dynasty in close association with the ancient board game of *liu bo* 六博. Auctions and the Internet in China have occasionally turned up pieces of different kinds from the Han that are associated with recreational activities according to their inscriptions. Broadly speaking, we identify three major games that would have involved the use of bronze tokens regarded as charms nowadays. They are horse charms, chess charms and drinking charms.

Horse charms, or *ma qian* 馬錢, refer to a group of coin-like tokens made and used specifically for a game that is called *da ma ge* 打馬格, or *beat horse squares*. Such tokens typically have the image of a horse on one side and the name of the horse on the other. The game was first recorded and described in *Da ma tu jing* 打馬圖經 *A Pictorial Guide to Da Ma*, written by Li Qing-zhao 李清照 (AD 1084–1155), a lady scholar, collector and poet during the Song dynasty. A board game especially for well-to-do ladies, the game had different versions but they invariably involved a number of players who had a fixed number of tokens of 20 or 50 each. A dice would be thrown and the pieces would be moved accordingly across the board consisting of squares. The objective of the game would be to reach the destination first. Figure 1.22 shows a Ming-version board for the *Da ma* 打馬 Game of Driving Horses, quoted from Lo (2007: 128). Figure 1.23 is a specimen of the horse coin inscribed *Fei huang* 飛黃 Flying Yellow. See Chap. 6 by Joe Cribb in this volume, which is a detailed analysis of an array of such tokens in the collection of the British Museum.

The second group is *xiang qi* 象棋, or Chinese chess, a board game involving two players that is very similar to the Western chess. Each player commands sixteen pieces, including one marshal (將; *jiang*), two guards (士; *shi*), two elephants (象; *xiang*), two chariots (車; *ju*), two horses (馬; *ma*), two cannons (炮; *pao*), and five soldiers (兵; *bing*). The objective of the game is to capture the opponent's marshal.



Fig. 1.22 A board for the game of *Da ma* 打馬 Driving Horses, in Li Qing-zhao 1598: 52a-b



Fig. 1.23 A horse charm inscribed *Fei huang* 飛黃 Flying Yellow, dating to 13th century. ACF Collection

The pieces are commonly made of wood or ivory. Those as charms are made of bronze instead, with the pictorial image on one side and its corresponding character on the other. They are normally dated to the Song dynasty although the game itself was referred to earlier in the Tang dynasty.

The third group covers a variety of bronze tokens known as *xuan xian qian* 選仙錢, immortal charms. They are of varying sizes and different shapes but a common feature is that they would invariably have the pictorial image of an immortal along



**Fig. 1.24** A charm depicting the Immortal in a Wine Pot. 13–15th Century. 38 mm in length and 33 mm in width. ACF Collection

with his name on one side and a poem about the immortal on the other. Because of this feature, such pieces are also known as *shi qian* 詩錢 or poem charms. It is not clear how the game was played exactly but, roughly speaking, according to *Gu quan hui* (古泉匯; A Compendium of Ancient Coins) written by Li Zuo-xian (李佐賢; AD 1807–1876), a numismatist in the Qing Dynasty, it was closely similar to the horse game, where the throwing of a dice would determine the movement of the tokens from lower ranks to higher ranks.<sup>7</sup> Figures 1.24 and 1.25 are a pair of specimens. Both are similar in size, measuring about 33 mm in diameter. Like coins, they are round in shape but, unlike coins, they do not have the typical square hole in the middle. There is also an additional loop on the top, suggesting that they were made for hanging about the body if so desired. The charm in Fig. 1.23 is named *hu zhong xian* 壺中仙 Immortal in the Wine Pot, with the image of an immortal bowing under a tree which has a hanging gourd containing wine. The poem on the other side reads,

《壺中仙》

有時壺內去，去即一千年。  
榮辱悲怯外，須知別有天。

I go and dwell in the wine pot sometimes,  
And each time for a thousand years.  
Glories, humiliations, sadnesses and fears apart,  
I transcend to the other world where blissful heaven is.

<sup>7</sup>李佐賢《古泉匯》：“選仙錢，非錢也。考《天香樓偶得》，今人集古仙作圖為博戲，用骰子比色，先為散仙，次升上洞，漸至蓬萊大羅等，列則眾仙慶賀。比色時則重緋，四為德，六與三為才，五與二為功，最下者為么（一）為過。有過者謫作采樵思凡，遇德復位。此戲北宋已有之，王珪《宮詞》‘盡日閑窗賭選仙’，即謂此也。”



**Fig. 1.25** A charm depicting the Drunken Immortal. 13–15th Century. 38 mm in length and 32 mm in width. ACF Collection

The other piece in Fig. 1.25 carries the image of the *zui xian* 醉仙, or the Drunken Immortal. Again, the other side is inscribed with a poem about him,

《醉仙》

笑傲詩千首，沉酣酒百杯。  
若無詩酒故，除是摘仙才。

Daringly I write a thousand poems  
While joyfully drinking a hundred cups of wine.  
Without wine and without poems,  
Only a banished god can do this fine.

It is also apparent from the two specimens above that such tokens are heavily vested with elements of immortality, longevity and happiness in life, which partially justifies their inclusion in charms proper. In a way, these gaming pieces are reminiscent of the transcendental power of Chinese culture which penetrates and often elevates even the most down-to-earth aspects of social life.

## 1.7 Conclusion

As we have attempted to show, the charm is typically a unification of many different functional elements including but not limited to protections against demons, wishes for good luck, protective zodiac symbols, images of divinity and religious invocations. As far as the owner was concerned, the charm is an object that brings positive energy for a multitude of unforeseen needs for protection and good luck.



As we have also attempted to show, this positive energy does not come from charms per se only but also from coins on a more general, wider scale. A string of cash could be coiled in the form of a dragon and the form itself, consisting of coins but not charms, would be seen to assume the extra power or to convey the intended wish. Similarly, coins could be strung together to form a sword-like shape and it is this shape that instantly assumes the power and energy needed to ward off demons and evil spirits. The Chinese charm itself is thus a micro-cosmos, so to speak, that is composed of substance (such as bronze), space (defined through its shape) and time (represented through the centuries of beliefs that it alludes to), which evolved over time and grew in terms of population and variety. We thus see Chinese amulets as objects that duly reflect the beliefs of the Chinese people, which are neatly organized in harmony through the integration of Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and ancient mythologies. These different streams are not religions at the beginning, since none of them is given as the speech by one God; they do not even raise the question of the existence of a God; they are not exclusive to each other and there is no religious bigotry, which explains that there is room for the coexistence of various deities from different pantheons. In order to meet the needs of devotion and mysticism of the population, Confucianism and Taoism gradually became a popular form of religion with a hierarchical pantheon directly inspired by the imperial bureaucracy. Only philosophical Buddhism arrived in China with a pantheon already established in India and Central Asia, but the Chinese subsequently enriched this pantheon with local beliefs and linguistic confusion. The three pantheons were then mixed to form the so-called Chinese folk religion, which was to amalgamate historical accounts, literary characters, fantasy stories, phenomena deification, and popular heroes to form a Chinese culture of diversified and yet well integrated beliefs beyond the level of religion. It is the study of this rich cultural corpus that can practically penetrate and account for the world of amulets. In doing this, then, by analyzing a simple small bronze object, you can take an ample taste of the flavour of Chinese culture. This is both surprising and exciting for the modern historian. It is clear that today in China, even after the hard years of the Cultural Revolution, under a self-proclaimed atheist system, the traditional symbols, linguistic expressions and the iconographic images still make good senses to the masses.

**Acknowledgments** The first author would like to thank Mr. Philip Attwood, Keeper and Head of Department, and Dr. Helen Wang, Curator of East Asian money, at the Department of Coins and Medals, the British Museum, for their support and encouragement in the preparation of this study. The writing of this chapter was supported in part by a fellowship which Alex Fang received in 2012 from the E.S.G. Robinson Charitable Trust. It was additionally supported in part by grants received from the General Research Fund of the University Grant Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (Project No. CityU 142711) and City University of Hong Kong (Project Nos. 6354005, 7004491, 9618007, 7004333, 7004091, 9610283, 7002793, 9610226, 9041694, and 9610188).

# Chapter 2

## Charms Decorated with *Liu bo* Patterns from the Han Dynasty

Jie Song

### 2.1 Introduction

Commonly known as *gui ju wen* 規矩紋 or the geometric pattern in China and the LTV pattern in Western countries, the decorative pattern is derived from an ancient Chinese board game called *liu bo* 六博 in the Pre-Qin and Han Dynasties. The board game is alternatively called *bo* 博, *lu bo* 陸博, or *liu bu* 六簿. The name *liu bo* is composed of *liu* 六, six, and *bo* 博, sticks. It is perhaps the earliest known board game in China with a complete set of rules and props. It is a gambling game with a unique status in Chinese gambling history; many gambling rules in later ages are still closely related to *liu bo*. The character *bo* 博 later came to be used to refer to different aspects of gambling such as *du bo* 賭博 (gambling), *bo cai* 博彩 (lottery), *bo ming* 博命 (life fighting), *bo tu* 博徒 (gambler), *bo de* 博得 (win) and so on. As far as we know based on excavated evidence, there are mainly five categories of physical data for *liu bo*, namely, the actual game board, depictions on stones and baked bricks, funerary models, bronze mirrors, and coin charms.

The exact starting date of *liu bo* remains uncertain. Existing written evidence indicates that it came into existence in as early as the Spring and Autumn Period (771–476 BC). In the wake of economic development, *liu bo* became a popular game and also a form of gambling among people in big cities during the Warring States Period (475–221 BC). The fact that it is mentioned in written works such as *The Songs of Chu*,<sup>1</sup> *Intrigues of the Warring States*,<sup>2</sup> and

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Translated by Yu Yao-long 余躍龍.

<sup>1</sup> 《楚辭·招魂》：“崑蔽象基，有六博些。分曹並進，道相迫些”。

<sup>2</sup> 《戰國策·齊策》：“臨淄之中七萬戶...甚富而實，其民無不吹竽鼓瑟，擊築彈琴，鬥雞走犬，六博蹋鞠者”。

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*The Analects of Confucius*<sup>3</sup> partly reflects its popularity during this early period in China. Later in the Qin and the Han dynasties, people played *liu bo* across all the classes of society. According to history, a eunuch named Lao Ai 嫪毐 serving in the court of the Qin Empire had a secret adulterous affair with the Queen Mother and was awarded the title of Marquis of Changxin 長信侯. One day, when drinking and playing *liu bo* with high-ranking courtiers, he got drunk and boasted of being the father in name (假父) of the First Emperor only to cause himself publicly torn apart by five carts at the order of the furious emperor.<sup>4</sup> During the Han Dynasty, Chen Sui 陳遂 from the area of Duling used to play *liu bo* and owed a lot of money to a man named Liu Xun 劉詢, who later became Emperor Xuan of Han 漢宣帝. After he became emperor, Liuxun appointed Chensui as the Chief Prefecture of Taiyuan and proclaimed in the imperial edict that he was appointed to the high position with an ample salary so that he could repay his debt!<sup>5</sup> According to *The Historical Records*, the fifth king of the Song State, Prince Ming of Song (*mingong* 宋縉公), once went hunting and played *liu bo* with a senior official named Nan Gong-wan 南宮萬. A dispute ensued and Nan Gong-wan crushed the king to death with the game board.<sup>6</sup> During the reign of Emperor Jing (188–141 BC) of the Han Dynasty, coincidentally, Liubi, the King of Wu, started a revolt against the emperor exactly because of a dispute over *liu bo*: His son went to the capital and had an audience with the Imperial Prince Liu Qi, who later became Emperor Jing. The two drank and played *liu bo* together. Again, a dispute ensued because his son did not abide by the rules and the Imperial Prince crushed him to death with the game board.<sup>7</sup> These incidents clearly reflect the upper-class aristocrats' obsession with the board game *liu bo*.

Perhaps as a result of this immense popularity, there were professional *liu bo* players in the Han Dynasty and they were called *bo tu* 博徒, or gambling thugs. *The Book of Later Han* contains a short biography about Xu Sheng-lou, who “gambled when young and cared nothing about his personal conduct”.<sup>8</sup> *A Doctrine on Salt and Iron* written by Huan Kuan 桓寬 during the Western Han period also mentions

<sup>3</sup> 《論語·陽貨》：“子曰：飽食終日，無所用心，難矣哉！不有博奕者乎？爲之，猶賢乎已。”

<sup>4</sup> 《說苑·正諫篇》：“秦始皇帝太后不謹，幸郎嫪毐，封以爲長信侯，爲生兩子，毐專國事，浸益驕奢，與侍中左右貴臣俱博飲，酒醉爭言而鬥，瞋目大叱曰：‘吾乃皇帝之假父也，囊人子何敢乃與我亢！’所與鬥者走行白皇帝，皇帝大怒，毐懼誅，因作亂，戰咸陽宮。毐敗，始皇乃取毐四肢車裂之，取其兩弟囊撲殺之...”

<sup>5</sup> 《漢書·遊俠傳》：“陳遵字孟公，杜陵人也。祖父遂，字長子，宣帝微時與有故，相隨博奕，數負進。及宣帝即位，用遂，稍遷至太原太守，乃賜遂璽書曰：‘制詔太原太守：官尊祿厚，可以償博進矣。妻君甯時在旁，知狀。’”

<sup>6</sup> 《史記·宋微子世家·第八》：“(宋濬公)十一年秋，濬公與南宮萬獵，因博爭行，濬公怒，辱之，曰：‘始吾敬若；今若，讐虜也’。萬有力，病此言，遂以局殺濬公于蒙澤”。

<sup>7</sup> 《史記·吳王濞列傳》：“孝文時，吳太子入見，得侍皇太子飲博。吳太子師傅皆楚人，輕悍，又素驕，博，爭道，不恭，皇太子引博局提吳太子，殺之”。

<sup>8</sup> 《後漢書·許升妻傳》：“升，少爲博徒，不理操行。”



that those who played *liu bo* and raced horses were all descendants of the rich.<sup>9</sup> In his *A Miscellany of the Western Capital*, Ge Hong 葛洪 (AD 284–364) of the Jin Dynasty referred to a man named Xu Bo-cang, who specialised in playing *liu bo* and even composed a rhyming song to teach the secrets of the game to children.<sup>10</sup> He also allegedly wrote *The Book of Liu bo*, which has now been lost but is nonetheless the first monograph on this game popular at the time of the Han Dynasty. Later changes took place regarding props and rules for the game. We now know of two major variants of *liu bo*: *da bo* 大博 the Greater Bo popular in Western Han and before and *xiao bo* 小博 the Lesser Bo popular in Eastern Han and later. The former involved the use of six dices while the latter only two. After the Eastern Han Dynasty, the game changed further during the ensuing Wei, Jin, and the Southern and Northern Dynasties. Only one dice was used eventually and the game lost favour to other newer and more entertaining games such as *wu mu* 五木, *wo shuo* 握槊 and *shuang lu* 雙陸 (backgammon). During the Southern and Northern Dynasty, the game of *liu bo* was dismissed as lacking in strategy and uninteresting.<sup>11</sup> As a result, *liu bo* virtually disappeared after the Sui and the Tang dynasties.

*Liu bo* was not only a popular form of entertainment but also a popular artistic theme. In addition to unearthed *liu bo* boards and terracotta *liu bo* players, we also see stone carvings (Figs. 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3), baked bricks and bronze mirrors (Fig. 2.4) all showing scenes of *liu bo* playing or decorative patterns found on the game board. A large number of unearthed pictorial bricks dating from the Han Dynasty have scenes of immortals engaged in the game. Ancient records mention immortals playing *liu bo*. According to *Han Fei-zi* 韓非子, King Zhao of the Qin State (325–251 BC) ordered his craftsman to climb Mount Hua with a scale ladder to make a set of *liu bo* chess pieces by using the hearts of pine and cypress trees, the sticks of *liu bo* measuring eight feet in length and the chess pieces measuring eight inches long. There he also had the message carved in stone that King Zhao of Qin once played *liu bo* with heavenly gods on Mount Hua.<sup>12</sup> Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty also purportedly played *liu bo* with immortals.<sup>13</sup> Cao Zhi 曹植, a famous poet and son of Cao Cao 曹操 during the Three Kingdoms Period once wrote, “The immortals grabbed the six pieces of *liu bo* tokens and started playing on the slopes of Mount Tai”.<sup>14</sup>

It is mentioned in an annotation of *The Songs of Chu* 楚辭注 that *liu bo* got its name from the casting of six dices and moving six chess pieces. As a game,

<sup>9</sup> 《鹽鐵論·授時》：“博戲馳逐之徒，皆富人子弟。”

<sup>10</sup> 《西京雜記》：“許博昌，安陵人也，善陸博，竇嬰好之，常與居處。其術曰：‘方畔揭道張，張畔捐道方；張突屈玄高，高玄屈突張。’三輔兒童皆誦之。”

<sup>11</sup> 《顏氏家訓·雜藝》：“數術短淺，不足可玩。”

<sup>12</sup> 《韓非子·外儲說左上》：“秦昭王令工施鉤梯而上華山，以松柏之心為博，箭長八尺，棋長八寸，而勒之曰：昭王嘗與天神博於此矣。”

<sup>13</sup> 《風俗通義·正失》：“武帝與仙人對博，棋沒石中。”

<sup>14</sup> 曹植《仙人篇》：“仙人攬六箸，對博泰山隅。”



Fig. 2.1 A stone carving of *liu bo* playing



Fig. 2.2 A stone carving of *liu bo* playing

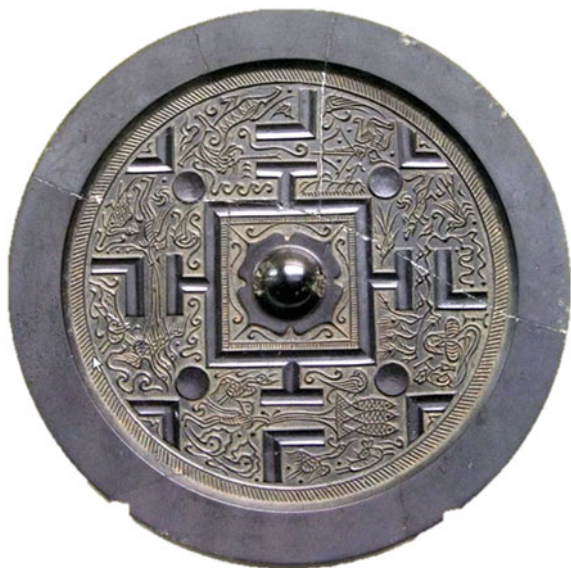
A complete set of *liu bo* contains a board, six black and six white game (chess) pieces, dices. The Lesser Bo requires to record players' winnings and losses. Figure 2.5 is a specimen excavated from Mawangdui 馬王堆 in Hunan Province in 1973, sporting one 18-sided wooden dice, 12 chess pieces in black and white, 42 wooden tokens, and an additional 20 pieces. The square board is also named *ju* 榻

**Fig. 2.3** A stone carving of *liu bo* playing



and most of the existent specimens are made from wooden boards. Exemplified by Fig. 2.6, it is divided into an inner district and an outer district. The inner district is a smallish square, each of the four walls flanked by a T-shaped design on the outside. The outer district is in the form of a large square, each of the four walls flanked by an L-shaped pattern on the inside. The four corners of the outer district are all marked by a V-shaped pattern, thus forming four smaller squares. The L, T, V patterns found on the board regulate the paths for the moving of the game pieces. Figure 2.7 is a more elaborated stone board excavated in 1974–1976 from Tomb 3 at Pingxiang, Hubei Province. This specimen is even older, dating to the Warring States Period.

**Fig. 2.4** A bronze mirror of *liu bo* game board patterns



**Fig. 2.5** A complete *liu bo* set, measuring 45 cm × 45 cm × 17 cm, excavated at Mawangdui, Hunan Province, in 1973



Interestingly, the *liu bo* game board pattern is also found on bronze coin charms. Figure 2.8 is one such specimen. It is inscribed *da quan wu shi* 大泉五十 or Big Cash Worth of 50 on the obverse, therefore dating it to as early as the Wang Mang (王莽) reign at the end of the Western Han period. Its reverse shows unmistakably the path patterns found on a *liu bo* game board. A remarkable feature of this coin is the fact that the obverse has four raised feet. As indicated in Fig. 2.9, if the coin is



**Fig. 2.6** The game board of the *liu bo* set excavated at Mawangdui, Hunan Province, in 1973



**Fig. 2.7** A stone *liu bo* game board dating from the Warring States Period, excavated from Tomb 3 at Pingxiang, Hubei Province, in 1974–1976



place flat with the reverse facing upwards, we would see a proper game board in front of our eyes!

The chess pieces are commonly made from wood, bone or ivory. Each player would have six, distinguished from each other through different colours, often black and white. Each set of six would have a larger piece, known as *xiao* 梟, or an eagle, representing a leader high in status or brave at war. The other five identical pieces are known as *san* 散, literally meaning *scattered* or *unorganized*, referring to *san zhu* 散卒, foot soldiers. The military system during the Warring States Period is



**Fig. 2.8** A bronze coin charm inscribed with *da quan wu shi* on the obverse and a *liu bo* game board on the reverse



**Fig. 2.9** The same bronze coin charm placed flat with the reverse facing upwards



**Fig. 2.10** A coin charm similar to Fig. 2.8 with 12 chess pieces on the reverse

such that each platoon would have five foot soldiers and one platoon leader, a total of six. From this, it is highly probable that *liu bo* is a game originated from war fighting. Figure 2.10 is another specimen of a coin charm, which, like Fig. 2.8, is similarly inscribed *da quan wu shi* on the obverse and the familiar *liu bo* board



Fig. 2.11 A coin charm showing *liu bo* pieces in different positions

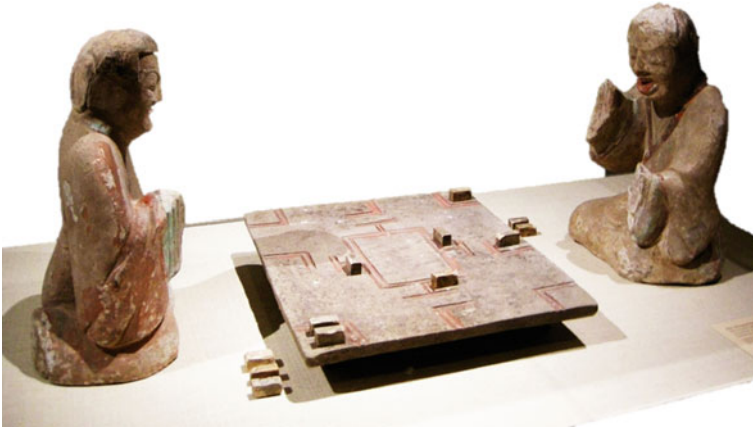
pattern on the reverse. Differently, however, it has 12 additional dots on the reverse, representing the six chess pieces on each opponent side, ready for a game to start.

The dice is called *zhu* 箸, also known as *tou zi* (投子 or 骰子) after the Tang Dynasty. According to what we now know, the dice has two different forms. One is the *zhu*, also called *jian* 箭 or arrow, which is semi-cylindrical in shape and therefore has two different sides when cast. The Major Bo uses six such dices, which produce different combinations when cast and the player moves the chess pieces accordingly. The other kind of dice is called *qiong*, written differently as 瓊 if made from jade or 茛 if made from wood, depending on its material. The *qiong* is very close to our dice nowadays. According to *Yan shi jia xun* 顏氏家訓, the *qiong* is mostly used in the Lesser Bo.<sup>15</sup>

Greater Bo was mostly played during and before the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 24). This game requires a board, chess pieces and the *zhu* or the dice. The objective is to kill the *xiao* or the platoon leader. The two layers move their chess pieces depending on the casting of the dice in turns. Good throws are called *gui cai* 貴采 a noble win, which allows for multiple moves. Other throws are called *za cai* 雜采 a mixed win, which allows for only a single move or no move at all. Through moving the chess pieces, the opponents attempt to encircle each other, taking out foot soldiers and the leader wherever possible. *Han fei-zi* 韓非子, an ancient work written during the Warring States Period, states that *liu bo* gamers prize their *xiao* or platoon leader and the winner must slay the opponent's *xiao*.<sup>16</sup> As far as this is concerned, the *liu bo* game is pretty much similar to the Chinese chess, which is still commonly played. Figure 2.11 is another coin charm inscribed with *Da quan wu shi*. Its obverse shows chess pieces in different positions across the board. Figure 2.12 shows a terracotta model of two players engaged in the *liu bo* game,

<sup>15</sup> 《顏氏家訓》：“古者大博則六箸，小博則二瓊。”

<sup>16</sup> 《韓非子》：“博者貴梟，勝者必殺梟。”



**Fig. 2.12** A terracotta model showing chess pieces in different positions



**Fig. 2.13** A coin charm showing board path patten in clockwise rotation

chess pieces visible in different strategic positions on the board. This model is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

While studying the *liu bo* game, I found that the paths on the game board are usually turned counterclockwise. On coin charms, however, some show a clockwise rotation, such as Figs. 2.13 and 2.14 in my collection. There are two possible explanations for this phenomenon. The first concerns an error in the making of the mould, which produces a mirror image on the coin charm. The second explanation comes from the possibility that these coin charms were made for eventual use in the tomb and the alteration was deliberately made for some marked difference from the real game.

The Minor Bo started to be popular during the Eastern Han Dynasty. It has a markedly different board pattern, comprising twelve horizontal lines with a river





**Fig. 2.14** A coin charm showing the *liu bo* game board pattern in clockwise rotation

(*shui* 水) between the two opponents, quite similar to *chu he han jie* 楚河漢界 the Chu River and the Han Boundary found on our contemporary Chinese chess board. Two different types of chess pieces were used. One included the six rectangular chess pieces but, unlike those used in the Greater Bo, these chess pieces were of the same size and any of the six could become a *xiao* or the platoon leader. The second type included *yu* 魚 fish, which is typically round in shape, one for each player. At the start of the game, the two chess pieces would be positioned on the twelve horizontal lines and the two fish would be placed in the river. The chess piece could be moved according to the throw of the dice and the one first to the destination would be erected upright and became a *xiao* or platoon leader. The *xiao* would then be able to get into the river to catch the fish, each time winning two tokens. A player won the game if he got all the six tokens from his opponent. We thus see that the Greater Bo and the Lesser Bo demonstrate considerable differences. The former aimed at killing the *xiao* or the platoon leader. The latter aimed at winning more tokens. A most significant similarity between the two versions is the use of the dice to determine the number of moves. Ban Gu 班固 in the Eastern Han Dynasty once commented that *liu bo* was determined by dice throwing without much in particular to do with tactic skills.<sup>17</sup> In 1972, a green-glazed pottery set of *liu bo* playing figurines was excavated from a tomb at Lingbao in Henan Province dated to the Eastern Han Dynasty (Figs. 2.15 and 2.16). Two players are seated on a mat facing each other. Between them, there is a rectangular tray with six sticks lined up on the one side and a *liu bo* board on the other. Six chess pieces can be seen on either side of the board with two round “fish” pieces in the middle. This ceramic model is completely in accordance with the descriptions found in *Gu bo jing* 古博經 the Book of Ancient Bo. I have not come across any coin charm related to the Lesser Bo so far.

<sup>17</sup>班固 《弈旨》：“博懸於投，不專在行。”

**Fig. 2.15** A green-glazed pottery set of *liu bo* game excavated at Lingbao, Henan Province, in 1972, now in the collection of Henan Museum



The *liu bo* board pattern is also frequently found on bronze mirrors dated to late Western Han and Eastern Han Dynasties. While they all use *liu bo* as the major decorative pattern, they can be additionally classified according to other thematic elements such as the four directional creatures,<sup>18</sup> birds and animals, geometric patterns and simplified *liu bo* patterns. Floral motifs and character inscriptions are also commonly found on such objects. Consider Fig. 2.16 in the collection of Henan Museum. It is richly inscribed with eight poetic lines comprising a total of 56 characters. The sixth line reads, “the *liu bo* game pattern is inscribed to suppress bad luck” (*ke lou bo ju qu bu xiang* 刻婁博局去不羊), suggesting that the *liu bo* pattern also possesses some evil suppressing power.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, a number of the coin charms in my collection also contain lucky inscriptions in addition to the *liu bo* pattern. One such example can be found in Fig. 2.17, which is additionally inscribed *da yi zi sun shou bi wang mu* 大宜子孫壽比王母 or *protection to sons and grandsons and longevity comparable to that of the Queen Mother* on the obverse and *le wu shi yi jiu shi* 樂無事宜酒食 or *happy to have nothing to do and suited for drink and food* on the reverse. To enhance its amuletic power, the coin is further decorated with stars, constellations, and a belt hook, symbols of heavenly protection, official honour and good luck. Figure 2.18 is similar; in addition to a standard coin inscription of *da quan wu shi* on the obverse and lucky inscriptions reading *da yi zi sun* 大宜子孫 or *great protection to sons*

<sup>18</sup>They include the Blue Dragon (*qing long* 青龍) guarding the East, the White Tiger (*bai hu* 白虎) guarding the West, the Vermilion Bird (*zhu que* 朱雀) guarding the South, and the Tortoise, with a snake coiled around its body, known as the Black Warrior (*xuan wu* 玄武), guarding the North. See also Chapter Six by Alex Fang.

<sup>19</sup>“新有善銅出丹陽，和以銀錫清且明。左龍右虎掌四彭，朱爵玄武順陰陽。八子九孫治中央，刻婁(婁)博局去不羊(祥)。家常大富宜君王，千秋萬歲樂未央”。



**Fig. 2.16** A bronze mirror with the *liu bo* pattern in the collection of Henan Museum



**Fig. 2.17** A *liu bo* coin charm with lucky inscriptions

and grandsons and *ri li* 日利 or *daily profit* on the reverse, it is lavishly decorated with fish for abundance, belt hooks for official rank and honour and stellar constellations for heavenly protection.

Coin charms with a *liu bo* board pattern could be dated to late Western Han Dynasty. Published rubbings include one in Fig. 2.19, which is inscribed with *Zhao xuan wu zhu* 昭宣五祝 on the obverse and *yi zi sun tuo shen shang* 宜子孙脱身易 or *protections to son and grandson and against bodily illnesses* on the reverse. Another piece, represented here in Fig. 2.20, is a *Wu zhu* coin with the *liu bo* pattern on the back. Its calligraphy and the dragon and the tiger on the obverse are reminiscent of a style that can be dated to early Eastern Han Dynasty. After all, coin



Fig. 2.18 A *liu bo* coin charm with lucky inscriptions

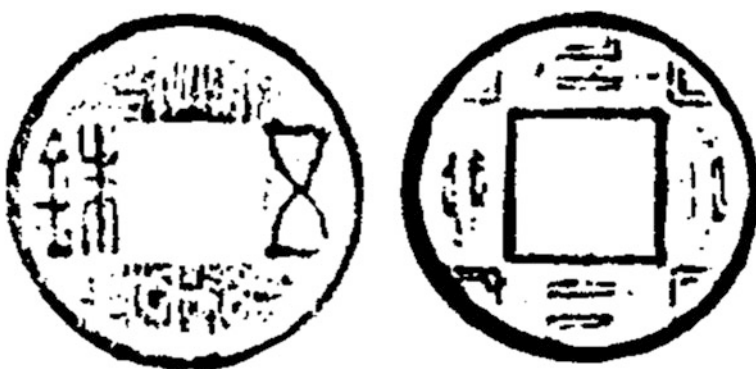


Fig. 2.19 A *liu bo* coin charm with lucky inscriptions

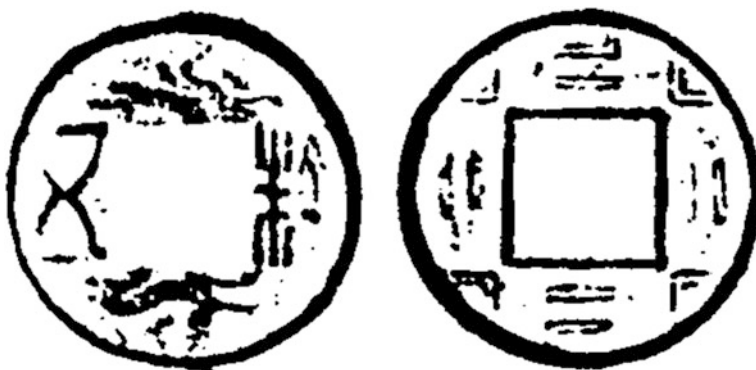


Fig. 2.20 A *liu bo* coin charm with dragon and tiger





Fig. 2.21 A *liu bo* coin charm with lucky inscriptions



Fig. 2.22 A *liu bo* coin charm with lucky inscriptions

charms from the Western Han period are extremely rare and pieces with a *liu bo* pattern are even rarer. The fact that they are commonly dated to the juncture between the Western and the Eastern Han Dynasties suggests the possibility that they might have to do with the divination practices popular during the reign of Wang Mang, which also receives evidence from the bronze mirrors with a *liu bo* pattern at roughly the same time. Coin charms from this period are mostly inscribed with *Da quan wu shi*, a standard inscription on coins first issued by Wang Mang in AD 7. Occasionally, the coin inscriptions are replaced with lucky expressions on some variants such as Fig. 2.21, where the original coin inscription is replaced with *da le wei yang* 大樂未央 or *everlasting happiness*, and Fig. 2.22, which is now inscribed with *da wu zi zi* 大毋子子 with an uncertain meaning. Other variants include one type of a pendant style, Fig. 2.23, which has a loop on top demonstrating an obvious function of hanging about the body. This particular piece is



**Fig. 2.23** A *liu bo* coin charm with lucky inscriptions



**Fig. 2.24** A *liu bo* coin charm with the coin inscription *Da quan wu shi*

inscribed *yi guan zhi* 宜官秩 or *suited for official rank* and decorated on the two sides with a belt hook and a cutting knife, expressing a desire for official status and promotion.

Occasionally, we see coin charms with simplified or variant *liu bo* patterns. See Figs. 2.24, 2.25 and 2.26 in my collection. These were probably issued during the Wang Mang reign and the simplified patterns perhaps only serve a decorative function.

Figure 2.27 is a coin charm with variant *liu bo* pattern dating to the Eastern Han Dynasty. The obverse is decorated with stellar constellations in addition to a standard *Wu zhu* coin inscription. After the Eastern Han Dynasty, the *liu bo* pattern ceased to appear on coins. This is perhaps firstly because of the official restriction on the practice of divination and secondly because of other more popular games



**Fig. 2.25** A *liu bo* coin charm with the coin inscription *Da quan wu shi*



**Fig. 2.26** A *liu bo* coin charm with the coin inscription *Da quan wu shi*



**Fig. 2.27** A *liu bo* coin charm with the coin inscription *Wu zhu*

such as *chu pu* 樗蒲, *wu mu* 五木 and *shuang lu* 雙陸, which were newer, simpler and yet more exciting to play.

**Acknowledgments** The author would like to acknowledge the use of images from The Xin Kai Yuan Collectors' Net ([www.kyqs.cn](http://www.kyqs.cn)), CCTV (<http://www.cctv.com>), The Chinese Bronze Net ([www.bronzes.cn](http://www.bronzes.cn)) and Baidu ([www.baidu.com](http://www.baidu.com)).



## Chapter 3

# Not an Ordinary Hoard: The Coins in the Hejiacun Treasure

Dong-fang Qi

When money is issued by the state, it is closely associated with a particular historic and economic context. A change of dynasty can very quickly transform certain forms of money into cultural relics. Before the introduction of paper money and banks, money was made of precious materials, usually into beautiful forms. There was an aesthetic quality to money, and sometimes pieces would be removed from circulation as collectors' items. Removed from circulation, old forms of money convey aspects of earlier cultures. This is particularly true of archaeological finds, because the excavation context—details of the site, environment and associated objects—add enormously to their research value.

The Hejiacun Treasure, discovered in 1970, in Hejiacun 何家村 village, Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, is an extraordinary find, and quite unlike any other deposit of coins found in China. A total of 466 coins were found, representing 39 types, in gold, silver and bronze, ranging over 1230 years from the Spring and Autumn Period to the Tang dynasty. It also includes some Byzantine, Persian and Japanese coins (Chen 1984). The treasure came from a Tang dynasty site. But the coins included ancient coins as well as some Tang dynasty *Kai yuan tong bao* 開元通寶 coins made, unusually, in gold and silver. In terms of function, these were not ordinary coins in circulation. Why did the Hejiacun Treasure contain ancient coins, gold, and silver coins, and foreign coins? This is an interesting question, and speculative answers to date have suggested that this assemblage of coins might have belonged to a coin collector, or even a coin collector who had the capability and conditions for producing coins.

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The sheer variety of the coins collected suggests that the owner had intentionally selected different types, which would indeed be typical of a collector. But this does not explain the large number of gold and silver *Kai yuan tong bao* coins, which are in mint condition, with no traces of use or wear. Furthermore, the Hejiacun Treasure contains a large quantity of gold, silver, jade, agate, glass and crystal, as well as gems and medicines, indicating that owner of the Hejiacun Treasure could not have been a coin collector or a coin maker. So who did these antiques, valuable items and precious objects belong to? Before looking at the coins, it is essential that we understand the nature of the deposit.

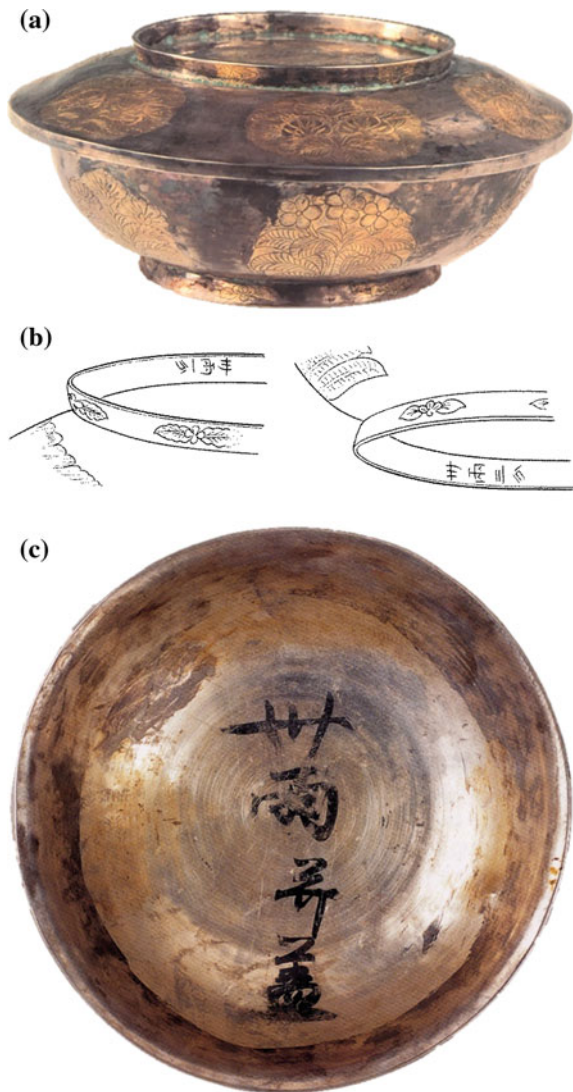
### 3.1 The Date, Site and Owner of the Hejiacun Treasure

For some time, it was thought that the Hejiacun Treasure was buried during the An Lushan 安祿山 Rebellion in AD 755, that the site was the residence of Li Shouli 李守禮, Prince of Bin 邠王, in Xinghuafang 興化坊 in Chang'an, and that the deposit belonged to him. In an earlier paper, I proved that this was not the case, on the grounds that some items in the Treasure postdated the An Lushan Rebellion, that the site was not Li Shouli's residence, and that the range of objects in the Treasure was too large for it to have belonged to him. I proposed that the site was the residence of Liu Zhen 劉震, tax officer (*zuyongshi* 租庸使), and that it was buried in 4th year of the Jianzhong era (AD 783) at the time of the rebellion of troops of Jingyuan 泾原, and that these objects had come from the central government's stores (Qi 2003).

Supporting evidence for my claim that the Hejiacun Treasure came from the central government's stores can be seen in the objects themselves. For example, there are no fewer than ten jade belts, all of different styles, yet a jade belt was a marker of rank in the Tang dynasty, and no individual would have owned ten belts. Then there is a silver bowl and its lid, with gilded floral decoration (Fig. 3.1), which has its weight incised on the base ("30 *liang* and 3 *fen*") and inside the lid ("30 *liang* and 1 *fen*"), and also has its weight handwritten in ink on the inside of the bowl ("30 *liang* with lid") and inside the lid ("30 *liang* with base"). The incised and handwritten inscriptions were recorded in different ways and give different weights. The incised inscriptions probably noted the weight of the vessels immediately after production, while the handwritten ones record their weight at the time they entered the stores. This vessel shows signs of wear (Qi and Shen 2003: 261) indicating that it was presented, or offered in tribute, to the court or emperor, and that when it was eventually collected in for the stores, it was weighed again and the weight was recorded in ink on the vessel. The discrepancy in the recorded weights can probably be explained by wear and tear.

There are handwritten inscriptions in ink on many of the gold and silver objects in the Hejiacun Treasure. The writing was done neatly and carefully, and is still clearly legible. In some cases the inscription also records objects that were placed in the vessels: for example, a silver ewer with a handle, decorated in a lotus pattern,

**Fig. 3.1** **a** The silver bowl and lid. **b** The incised inscriptions on the silver bowl and lid, recording the weight. **c** The handwritten inscription inside the silver bowl, recording the weight



bears an ink inscription listing 3 pieces of coral, 1 glass cup and bowl, 3 agate cups, 1 jade cup, 4 jade rings, and 16 pieces in glass. This shows that there was strict management of these objects, and that after they were registered in the stores, they were never used again. The Treasure also contains 22 silver cakes and 60 silver bars, including one dated 10th year of the Kaiyuan era (AD 783) (Fig. 3.2)—these were tax payments, some of which had never been touched since, and could only be items collected in the state's stores.

Items collected in the state's stores were valuable treasures. To later generations, they have not only an economic value, but also an even greater, cultural value.

**Fig. 3.2** Silver cake, used in tax payment, dated AD 783



Similarly, the coins found together with these priceless treasures must also be of exceptional significance. Close analysis of the coins indicates that: (1) for the ancient coins, there is generally one coin per historical period, (2) not all of the coins are of the highest quality, (3) not all of the coins were intended for circulation, and (4) there are some foreign coins. The coins in the Hejiacun Treasure can reveal important information about the historical incident.

### **3.2 The Cultural Significance of the Coins not Intended for Circulation**

As soon as an object is considered special, and collected, it becomes significant as historical culture. The 451 gold and silver coins (30 gold; 421 silver) in the Hejiacun Treasure are all well made, of high quality, with sharp inscriptions, just like the bronze *Kai yuan tong bao* coins from the best moulds. Detailed examination of the gold and silver *Kai yuan tong bao* coins in the Hejiacun Treasure revealed some very interesting results. The gold coins have a diameter of between 21.4 and 25 mm, are 1.5 mm thick, and weigh between 6.60 and 8.36 g. Five gold coins were analysed using a scanning electron microscope (SEM), looking at the metal content and surface structure. The gold content was different for each of the five coins: 81.6, 88.12, 90.64, 91.44 and 94.36 %, with some silver, copper and iron also present. In other words, the gold coins were not made at the same time. The silver *Kai yuan tong bao* coins have diameters ranging between 25 and 26 mm, are 2 mm thick, and weigh between 6.00 and 6.50 g. Shen Qin-yan 申秦雁 noted that the coins “appear to have been cast, that the surface shows no sign of having



Fig. 3.3 Five gold *Kai yuan tong bao* coins from the Hejiacun Treasure

been subsequently finished, or used, as though they have been in the stores since the day they were made, and by chance have been buried underground until now.” (Shen 2002).

Silver *Kai yuan tong bao* coins have been found at other sites (*ibid*), but gold *Kai yuan tong bao* coins were previously only known in the historical record. This is the first and only time that gold *Kai yuan tong bao* coins have discovered through archaeology (Fig. 3.3).

Despite their high value, there is no question of the gold *Kai yuan tong bao* coins having ever been used in the market or having entered circulation. They must have had another function, reflecting their particular cultural significance, and because they were objects of the palace or court, we can learn through them about social customs of that time. When the gold *Kai yuan tong bao* coins were discovered, they were contained within a silver medicine box, together with medical items, and personal accessories. A list of the contents was written on the inside and outside of the lid. The inscription on the outside consists of 23 characters arranged in four columns:

大粒光明砂一大斤。	Large pieces of cinnabar, 1 large <i>jin</i>
白瑪瑙鉸具一十五事,失玦。	White agate pieces, 15, missing <i>jue</i> (玦)
真黃錢卅。	Real yellow coins, 30





Fig. 3.4 The silver medicine box, showing the inscription on the lid

The inscription on the inside of the lid consists of 48 characters (Fig. 3.4):

大粒光明砂一大斤。	Large pieces of cinnabar, 1 large <i>jin</i>
白瑪瑙鉸具一十五事，失玦。	White agate pieces, 15, missing <i>jue</i> (玦)
真黃錢卅。	Real yellow coins, 30
黃小合子一，六兩一分，內有款，三兩強。	Small yellow box, 1, weighing 6 <i>liang</i> 1 <i>fen</i> , containing bran, weighing over 3 <i>liang</i>
釵釧十二枚，共七兩一分。	Hairpins and bracelets, 12 pieces, total 7 <i>liang</i> 1 <i>fen</i>

Matching the description on the lid to the contents of the box, we now know that gold coins were referred to in the Tang dynasty as “real yellow coins”, suggesting not only that they were not intended for circulation, but also that they probably had some other intended use.

The *Old Tang History* (*Jiu tang shu* 舊唐書) mentions that in the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, feasts were arranged above the Chengtian Gate (*Cheng tian men* 承天門) in Chang’an, during which gold coins were thrown down to the ground below.<sup>1</sup> These events, known as *Jin qian hui* 金錢會 “Gold Coin Feasts”,

<sup>1</sup> 《舊唐書·玄宗本紀》：先天二年（西元713年）九月乙卯，玄宗“宴王公百僚于承天門，令左右於樓下撒金錢，許中書門下五品以上官及諸司三品以上官爭拾之，仍賜物有差。”

were clearly important and it was an honour for officials to attend. Such feasts are also mentioned in literature. The Tang poet Du Fu 杜甫 (AD 712–770) described how drunkenness and beauty were side by side, like silk and harp, at Golden Coin Feasts.<sup>2</sup> A later Tang dynasty poet Zhang Hu 張祜 (AD 785–849) described how a woman, who had left the palace and spent twenty years among commoners, spoke often of the feasts and of people picking up gold coins at the foot of the Chengtian Gate.<sup>3</sup> The Golden Coin Feasts brought gold coins into the hands of the painted ladies at the palace, for whom they became exquisite playthings, with which to while away the time, as they waited to be called. “The concubines of the imperial court, each spring, would get together and toss gold coins for fun in a group of three to five persons, to relieve the loneliness and depression.”<sup>4</sup> The coin tossing game occasionally caught the attention of the emperor. The Yuan dynasty writer Luo Tian-xiang 駱天驤 (AD 13th century), citing a Tang dynasty work, wrote about the Tang Emperor Xuanzong and his concubines tossing down gold coins from the Hua E Tower (*Hua e lou* 花萼樓), seeing who could throw the furthest, and rewarding the winner with a gold cup. It was, he said, something that the street people still copied.<sup>5</sup> These sources not only tell us about how the games were played, they also tell us that the emperor himself joined in, that he was generous in giving out gold coins, and that the games spread from the palace to the ordinary people. However, it is unlikely that the commoners would have used gold coins when playing such games.

Gold coins were used for divination purposes. Wang Ren-yu 王仁裕 (AD 880–956) wrote that during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, concubines would toss coins to predict who would have the privilege of serving the emperor.<sup>6</sup> Ordinary people had a similar practice. Yu Hao 于皓 (late 8th–early 9th century) described a game in which a girl, when going to the river with friends, secretly tossed a gold coin, hoping that the one in her heart would return soon.<sup>7</sup>

Gold coins were used at the Baby Bath ceremony (*xi er* 洗兒) in the Tang imperial court. These took place three days, or one month, after the birth, and guests would bring gold and silver coins as gifts. One source records that on the birthday of An Lu-shan (安祿山), Emperor Xuanzong and Imperial Consort Yang (*Yang gui fei* 楊貴妃) made generous gifts of clothes, treasures, fine wine and food. Three days after his birthday, An Lu-shan was brought into her private quarters, where she

<sup>2</sup>杜甫：《曲江對雨》：“何時詔此金錢會，暫醉佳人錦瑟傍。”

<sup>3</sup>張祜：《退宮人》：“開元皇帝掌中憐，流落人間二十年。長說承天門上宴，百僚樓下拾金錢。”

<sup>4</sup>五代王仁裕《開元天寶遺事·卷二·戲擲金錢》：“內廷嬪妃，每至春時，各於禁中結伴，三人至五人擲金錢為戲，蓋孤悶無所譴也。”

<sup>5</sup>駱天驤《類編長安志》引《開元別記》：“明皇與妃子在花萼樓下擲金錢，以遠近為線，賽其元擲於地者，以金觥為賞，今裡巷猶效之。”

<sup>6</sup>王仁裕《開元天寶遺事·卷三》：“明皇未得妃子，宮中嬪妃輩，投金錢賭侍帝寢，以親者為勝，召入妃子，遂罷此戲。”

<sup>7</sup>于皓《江南曲》：“偶向江邊采白蘋，還隨女伴賽江神。眾中不敢分明語，暗擲金錢蔔遠人。”



wrapped him in swaddling clothes of brocade silk and embroidery and had the palace ladies carry him in a sedan chair. When the emperor heard the laughter and asked why, the palace ladies told him about the baby bath. The emperor went and saw it for himself. Delighted, he awarded Imperial Consort Yang gold and silver coins for the occasion.<sup>8</sup> The same event was also recorded in *An lu shan shi ji* 安祿山事迹 *Biographical Accounts of An Lu-shan* by Yao Ru-neng 姚汝能 of the Tang Dynasty. Han Wo 韓渥 of the Tang Dynasty wrote in *A Secret Record of the Imperial Court* (*Jin luan mi ji* 金鑾密記) that, in the second year of Tianfu era (AD 902), when Emperor Zhaozong of Tang was in Qizhou, on the third day after the birth of the princess, he “gave assorted fruits, coins, a silver lotus leaf seat, and gold and silver ingots for the Baby Bath ceremony”.<sup>9</sup>

At weddings in the Tang dynasty, the bride and groom would bow to each other and then sit next to each other on the edge of the bed. The ceremonial master would shower the canopied bed with gold and silver coins and brightly coloured fruits. This is known as *sa zhang* 撒帳 “Canopy Showering”. The gold and silver coins used at weddings were probably specially made, with auspicious inscriptions.<sup>10</sup> A catalogue of coins compiled by Hong Zun 洪遵 during the Song dynasty mentions a five-lobed coin charm for canopy showering (*sa zhang qian* 撒帳錢), measuring one *cun* in diameter and 6 *zhu* in weight, with the inscriptions *chang ming shou fu gui* 長命守富貴 *a long life of wealth and honour*. The same source also mentions the production of such coins in gold and silver specially for the wedding of an imperial princess during the Tang dynasty.<sup>11</sup>

The references in historical texts and literature to gold and silver coins used at the Golden Coin Feasts, in coin tossing games, at Baby Bath ceremonies, and for Canopy Showering do not explicitly say that these were “real yellow coins” (*zhen huang qian* 真黃錢) or *Kai yuan tong bao* coins made in gold and silver. However, the main coin type at that time was the *Kai yuan tong bao*, which was made in bronze, and as gold and silver coins of any other type were rare, it is likely that these special occasions used *Kai yuan tong bao* coins in gold and silver, or at least their substitutes in gold and silver. These events mostly took place in the palace during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, and it is not a coincidence for the gold and silver *Kai yuan tong bao* coins to appear in the Hejiacun Treasure, as most of the items in the Treasure are from the time of Xuanzong. There are no visible marks of wear on the gold and silver *Kai yuan tong bao* coins in the Treasure, suggesting that

<sup>8</sup> 《資治通鑒·卷二一六·唐天寶十載》：“祿山生日，上及貴妃賜衣服、寶器、酒饌甚厚。後三日，召祿山入禁中，貴妃以錦繡為大織襪，裹祿山，使宮人以采輿舁之。上聞後宮歡笑，問其故，左右以貴妃三日洗祿兒對。上自往觀之。喜，賜貴妃洗兒金銀錢。”

<sup>9</sup> 韓渥《金鑾密記》：天復二年（西元902年）唐昭宗在岐州時，皇女誕生三日，“賜洗兒果子、金銀錢、銀葉坐、金銀錠子。”

<sup>10</sup> 《唐會要·卷八十三·嫁娶·建中元年十一月十六日條》。

<sup>11</sup> 洪遵《泉志·卷十五·厭勝品》：“撒帳錢，舊譜曰：徑寸、重六銖、肉好，背面皆有周郭。其形五出，穿亦隨之，文曰：‘長命守富貴’；背面皆為五出，文若角錢狀。景龍中，中宗出降睿宗女荊山公主，特鑄此錢，用以撒帳，敕近臣及修文館學士拾錢，其銀錢則散貯絹中，金錢每十文即系一彩條。”



Fig. 3.5 Silver *Wado kaiho* coin, Japan (obverse and reverse)

they were obviously in the stores of the imperial palace or the central government. There is one bronze *Kai yuan tong bao* coin in the Treasure, which has the inscription on both sides, and this is exceptionally rare.

Sometimes coins have a collection value even when still in circulation, just like today's commemorative coins, for example, which are associated with special events. Although the gold and silver *Kai yuan tong bao* coins were not commemorative pieces, their high value and special intended functions lend added significance: Gold and silver coins made in the form of ordinary coins in circulation and used for purposes of celebrations, divinations, or protections have greatly influenced coin charms in later historical periods.

### 3.3 Foreign Coins and the Silk Road

Three types of foreign coins were found in the Hejiacun Treasure, including Japanese *Wado kaiho* 和同開珎 coins made in silver (5 pieces), Sasanian silver coin (one piece), and Byzantine gold coin (one piece).

Silver *Wado kaiho* coins are rare. Only 47 specimens have been unearthed in Japan (Shibata 2004), so the appearance of 5 specimens in China is highly significant (Fig. 3.5). Although the use of silver coins was banned in Japan in AD 683, the ban did not refer to *Wado kaiho* coins, which were first made in Japan in 1st year of the Kaiho era (AD 708). According to Record of Japan, the silver coins were issued in the 5th month in the summer during the first year of Kaiho era of Emperor Gemmei-tennō, which were subsequently abolished in the 8th month in the following year when bronze coins were issued.<sup>12</sup> They usually weigh about

<sup>12</sup> 《續日本記》：“元明天皇和銅元年二月，始置催鑄錢司。夏五月，始行銅（郭沫若雲：銀之誤）錢。秋七月，令近江國鑄銅錢，八月行銅錢。”“二年秋八月，廢銀錢，行銅錢。”

5–6 g, although the weight ranges from 3 to 7.21 g, and the silver *Wado kaiho* coin in the Hejiacun Treasure weighs 5.96 g, with a diameter of 23 mm. The inscription was originally read as 開珍 *dochin* (Ch. *kai zhen*) but since the early Meiji era it has been read as 開寶 *doho* (Ch. *kai bao*). Currently, the 同 is understood as 銅 *do* (Ch. *tong*, “copper”), and the 珍 as *chin* (Ch. *zhen*, “treasure”), where both are shortened forms, but the debate continues.

Guo Mo-ruo 郭沫若 (AD 1892–1978) hypothesised that these coins were brought to China in 716 by the seventh Japanese mission to Tang China. He believed that of the fourteen Japanese missions to Tang China, those pre- and post-dating Xuanzong could be eliminated from consideration, as could the four missions sent by the Tang court to Japan before and after the time of Xuanzong. The remaining possibilities were the seventh mission from Japan in 716 (4th year of Kaiyuan era), the eighth mission in 732 (20th year of Kaiyuan era), and the 9th mission in 750 (9th year of Tianbao era). Guo (1972) decided on 716, on the grounds that it was closest in time to the first issue of this coinage, because “newly minted coins stand out as special, but newly obsolete coins are widespread. Thus, it is possible that in 716 a large number were taken to China as tribute.” Guo’s theory was based on his belief that the Hejiacun Treasure was buried in the sixth month of 756 (15th year of Tianbao era), at the time of the flight to Sichuan during An Lu-shan’s rebellion. However, if the date of the deposit was indeed AD 783 (4th year of Jianzhong era), then the 10th Japanese mission in 759 (2nd year of Qianyuan era) and the Chinese mission to Japan during Suzong’s reign should be reconsidered. As a matter of fact, these two missions may hold a more likely key to the real date of the import. When the Japanese mission returned to Japan, sometimes a Tang official would travel with them. Although this did not seem to have happened in Xuanzong’s time, in 759 the tenth Japanese mission did return to Japan with a Tang escort.

*Wado kaiho* coins was produced at a time when Japan was advancing its laws and decrees, and their appearance reflects the economic and financial changes taking place at that time. The 47 silver specimens found in Japan were unearthed in 28 different locations, mainly in the Kinai region, centred around Yamato (known for its links with China in the Tang dynasty, and today’s Nara). The archaeological sites were all clearly dated to the 8th century and they were all associated with the elite in Japan (Shibata 2004).

The Japanese Missions to China would take grand gifts, but not likely foreign coins because such coins could not be circulated internationally. Therefore, the likelihood of them taking foreign coins to China was slim. However, the Chinese official escorting the Japanese mission back to Japan, finding himself in a foreign country, would find these silver coins interesting and precious, and as there were few things in Japan at that time that were worth exporting to China, probably took some home with him.

The Sasanian silver coin is from the reign of Khusrau II (AD 590–628), with a bust of the king on the obverse (Fig. 3.6), and the Zoroastrian fire altar flanked by attendants on the reverse. It weighs 3 g and is 31 mm in diameter.

**Fig. 3.6** Sasanian silver coin from the Hejiacun Treasure



Sasanian silver coins are not rare in Western Asia, and even in China, there have been over forty finds, yielding over 2000 specimens (Xia 1974). The contexts suggest that some were coins in circulation, and that others—unearthed in temples and tombs—were treasured as luxury goods or jewelry. There have been about a dozen finds of Sasanian silver coins in areas corresponding with Chang’an in the Tang dynasty (Jiang et al. 2008). One find, in the dagoba of the Zhixiang Temple 至相寺, consisted of seven coins—six coins of Khusrau II and one of Queen Boran (AD 630–631)—carefully placed in a large silver box (Zhu and Qin 1974). Most of the Sasanian silver coins unearthed in China are coins of Khusrau II (about 600 specimens). Known for his many attacks on Byzantium, and for seeking to extend his empire, he was considered a victorious ruler. He made important policies maintaining contact with the East, and made serious attempts to dominate and control the routes to China. To meet the needs of Silk Road trade, large numbers of silver coins were produced, and while the Sasanians enjoyed close economic exchange with China, Sasanian silver coins flowed east, hence the large number of coins of Khusrau that have been found in China. Khusrau II is mentioned in the History of the Sui Dynasty as *Ku sa he* 庫薩和, King of Persia, during the time of Emperor Yangdi 隋煬帝 (AD 604–618). A gold coin of Khusrau II was found in Xi’an, identical to the gold specimen found in Hejiacun, and a very rare find.

The Byzantine gold coin in the Hejiacun Treasure is one of Heraclius (AD 610–640) (Fig. 3.7). The obverse shows busts of Heraclius on the left and his son Heraclius Constantine on the right. On the reverse is a Christian cross and platform, with an inscription. It weighs 2 g and has a diameter of 20 mm.

Byzantium, or the Roman Empire in the East, is known in the Chinese records as *Fulin* 拂菻. In AD 395, the Roman Empire stretched eastwards across Europe, Asia and Africa, controlling these lands for almost a thousand years. Heraclius came to



Fig. 3.7 Byzantine gold coin from the Hejiacun Treasure

the throne in AD 610, and his gold coins also flowed into China. Historical documents record seven Byzantine embassies to Tang China. The mural “Respectful Guests” in the tomb of Prince Zhanghuai 章懷太子 at the Qianling Mausoleum is thought to depict among others an envoy from Byzantium.

Against the bigger background of the Silk Road, there were frequent commercial exchanges between Chinese and foreign traders. Sasanian silver coins and Byzantine gold coins functioned as an international currency in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Northwest China. Before the Tang dynasty, there were numerous small kingdoms in Northwest China, where Sasanian silver coins and Byzantine gold coins were used. These coins were also taken into inland China. However, they did not influence the monetary policies of the central government. The fact that such coins have mostly been found in Tang monasteries and tombs suggests that these foreign coins were collected and stored for precious metal. Many Sasanian silver coins were found on the eyes, or in the mouth, of the deceased in tombs, as burial pieces. Some foreign coins are pierced with a small hole, perhaps for wearing as a necklace or to decorate other objects. In these cases, the coins had undergone a change in function.

### 3.4 Coins of Earlier Times and Rarities

Over 30 coins of earlier times were found in the Hejiacun Treasure. The earliest piece is the bronze knife money with the inscription *Jie mo zhi fa hua* 節墨之法化 “legal currency of Jiemo” (Fig. 3.8). It weighs 56 g, and measures 188 mm in length, 2 mm in width and the ring has a diameter of 38 mm.

Jiemo 節墨 was a county in the state of Qi during the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BC). The *hua* 化 was a unit of currency, and the *fa hua* 法化 signified a standard cast coin of a legally determined currency. In the early period of the state of Qi state, metal money (knife money and round coins) were made in Linzi 臨淄,





**Fig. 3.8** Knife money from the Hejiacun Treasure



**Fig. 3.9** Spade money from the Hejiacun Treasure

Jiemo, Anyang 安陽, Tanbang 譚邦 and other large counties, with a variety of inscriptions. During the Warring States Period (475–221 BC) Qi standardized the inscription as *Qi fa hua* 齊法化 “legal currency of Qi”. Knife money inscribed *Jiemo zhi fa hua* are quite rare.

The Hejiacun Treasure also contained a piece of spade money, with the inscription *Jing yi jin* 京一𠄎斤 “Jing, 1 jin” (Fig. 3.9), where *Jing* is a place name, and *jin* is a weight unit of the Spring and Autumn, and Warring States periods. This piece weighs 12.5 g, and has a length of 55 mm and a width of 33 mm. Spade-money measured in 𠄎斤 was mainly cast by the state of Wei in the early to mid-Warring States period, and many pieces inscribed *yi jin* 一𠄎斤 “1 jin” have been unearthed.

Two very rare coins, which were made and issued in Northwest China, were found in the Hejiacun Treasure. Both coins were made in the Chinese tradition (cast

**Fig. 3.10** *Gao chang ji li* 高昌吉利 coin from the Hejiacun Treasure



in bronze, with a square hole and four-character inscription in Chinese), but were local issues. The first has the inscription *Liang zao xin quan* 凉造新泉 “new coin made by Liang”, made in the Former Liang 前梁 (AD 314–376) in today’s Gansu during the time of Zhang Gui 张軌 (AD 255–314). This coin-type is not recorded in historical texts, and is known only from archaeological excavations, hence exceptionally rare.

The second has the inscription *Gao chang ji li* 高昌吉利 “Gaochang, auspiciousness” (Fig. 3.10), where Gaochang was the name of a kingdom even further to the northwest near today’s Turfan. This coin weighs 10 g, is 26 mm in diameter, and 4 mm thick. *Gao chang ji li* coins are rare. They were initially believed to be issues of the Yuan dynasty but the archaeological evidence including the Hejiacun Treasure does not support this. The discovery of a specimen in Tomb 519 at the Astana cemetery, in Turfan, with an epitaph dated AD 642 (16th year of Zhenguan era) gives a more accurate date. The Kingdom of Gaochang was founded by the Qu clan (鞠氏) in the area of today’s Turfan in AD 497 (21st year of the Taihe era of the Northern Wei) and so this coin type was made by King Qu of Gaochang. Because of its weight (10 g) it is thought to be a commemorative coin, but would not necessarily preclude it from being a coin that was circulated.

The Hejiacun Treasure also contains six gilded *Huo bu* 貨布 “money spade” (Fig. 3.11). *Huo bu* was issued during Wang Mang’s Xin dynasty (AD 9–23), and many examples have been excavated, often weighing about 16 g. Wang Mang introduced many currency reforms with 28 different denominations in 6 different types. In terms of economy and currency reforms, Wang Mang was not successful but the variety of types and their distinctive appearances including beautiful calligraphy have attracted the attention of coin collectors ever since.



**Fig. 3.11** *Huo bu* 貨布 coin  
from the Hejiacun Treasure  
(13 g, 57 × 21 mm)



The gilded *Huo bu* coins in the Hejiacun Treasure are unusual. These coins were not usually gilded. The numismatist Shi Xiao-qun 詩小群 believes that they are copies made during the Tang dynasty. He observes that “these gilded *Huo bu* are smaller than Wang Mang’s *Huo bu*, the inscription is not sharp, and the weight is only 12–13 g. If they were made during the Xin dynasty, why would inferior pieces be selected for gilding? Moreover, this deposit also yielded an ungilded bronze *Huo bu*, also a *Da bu huang qian* 大布黃千 “large spade, gold 1000”. The ungilded *Huo bu* matches the Xin dynasty pieces, weighing 17 g, and measuring 59.5 mm in length and 23.5 mm across the shoulders, with a good, clear inscription—there is no doubt that this is a Xin dynasty piece. So it is quite possible that this Xin dynasty *Huo bu* was a “mother coin” used for making the gilded *Huo bu*. It is no surprise, so to speak, that six to seven hundred years after the Xin dynasty, when genuine *Huo bu* coins would have been precious and rare, some reproduction gilded *Huo bu* coins were made for people to admire and enjoy.” (Qi and Shen 2003: 237). However, a well-made gilded *Huo bu* was subsequently found together with a gilded *Qian feng quan bao* 乾封泉寶 coin in a Tang dynasty tomb, suggesting that it was a Xin dynasty *Huo bu* that had been gilded during the Tang dynasty (Xi’an Cultural Relics Administration 1991), which seems plausible.

Another gilded bronze piece in the Hejiacun Treasure has the inscription *Yong an wu nan* 永安五男 “Yong’an, five sons” on the obverse. On the obverse, four lines join the corners of the hole to the rim, creating four sections, each containing one of the Four Spirits (Fig. 3.12). This piece weighs 20 g and measures 38 mm in diameter and 2.8 mm in depth.



**Fig. 3.12** *Yong'an wu nan* 永安五男 charm with the Four Spirits on the reverse

The Yong'an part of the inscription led to a misidentification of this piece as a *Yong'an wu zhu* coin, made in AD 529 (2nd year of the Yong'an era), during the reign of Emperor Xiaozhuang 孝庄帝 of the Northern Wei. Later, the inscription was read as *wu nan* 五男 five sons rather than *Wu zhu* 五銖 the coin inscription, and its weight was noted. It does not match the basic criteria of the *Yong'an wu zhu* coins which usually weighed 3 g and had a diameter of 23 mm. It was then suggested that it might be a charm made during the Tang dynasty (Qi and Shen 2003: 238). Previously, only a few *Yong'an wu nan* charms were known. Then it turned out that Alex Chengyu Fang had one in his collection (cf. Chap. 7 in this volume) and had been collecting research materials. He pointed out that there were many varieties of this piece, believing that it first appeared “perhaps as early as the Northern and Southern Dynasties” (Fang 2008: 217; Chap. 4 in this volume). This seems reasonable given that the Hejiacun Treasure dates no later than the second half of the eighth century. This piece is different from other known *Yong'an wu nan* pieces because it has been gilded, and thus is very rare.

The collecting of coins as a hobby did not start in recent times. Ancient coins have been discovered in Tang dynasty tombs (Xi'an Cultural Relics Administration 1991) but the non-circulating coins found in the Hejiacun Treasure—the charms, foreign coins, and gold and silver coins—are worth thinking about. Whether they were specimens kept by the court, or rare collected pieces, or perhaps used in court activities, we cannot say for sure yet.

### 3.5 Other Pieces that Functioned as Money

In the early Tang dynasty, the tax system, known as the *Zu yong diao* system (租庸調制), allowed for taxes to be transmuted and paid in kind, such as grain and textiles. It was based on the Equal Field System (*Jun tian zhi* 均田制), and, following increasing land annexation, needed to be changed. According to the new



Fig. 3.13 Gold and silver ingots from the Hejiacun Treasure

system, for example, each adult should hand in two *dan* of grain as *Zu* (租), labour for 20 days as *Yong* (庸), and deliver two *zhang* of silk of three different grades each plus cloth and cotton as *Diao* (調).<sup>13</sup> In the Kaiyuan (AD 713–741) and Tianbao (AD 742–756) eras, the Tang government ruled that gold, silver, treasured goods and silks should be used for the *yongdiao* taxes, and that the textiles and other light goods should be transported to the state treasury in the capital.

In the Hejiacun Treasure there are 90 silver ingots: 8 silver bars (*yin ting* 銀錠), 22 silver cakes (*yin bing* 銀餅), and 60 silver plaques (*yin ban* 銀板) (Fig. 3.13). This unprecedented discovery surpassed the total number of similar finds previously known.<sup>14</sup> Some pieces had inscriptions, either incised or written in black ink, detailing the date, place, type of tax etc.

Four of the silver cakes have incised inscriptions. One of them weighs 422 g and measures 108 mm in diameter (Fig. 3.14). Its inscription states that it was paid in tax in Huaiji county in 722 (10th year of Kaiyuan) and gives three names associated

<sup>13</sup> 《新唐書·食貨志》：“租，每丁每年納粟二石或稻三石；調，隨鄉土所產，每丁每年納絹二匹，二丈，綿三兩，布加五分之一，麻三斤，非蠶鄉納銀十四兩；庸，每丁每年服役二十日，閏月加二日，如不服役，每日納絹三尺。”

<sup>14</sup> It is generally estimated that a total of 105 pieces of silver bars, cakes, and plaques have been found in 10 different locations across China. The Hejiacun Findings account for 85.71 % of the total find.

**Fig. 3.14** Silver cake from the Hejiacun Treasure



in the process including one official, one treasurer and one silversmith.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that this ingot has been repaired and the repair has affected the form of the silver cake. Indeed, the most important information about an ingot was its purity and weight, which meant it could be used in payment. It did not need to be of a particular shape, and the silver plug may have been added at the time the tax was paid, or when the weight was checked before it entered the stores.

Two other silver cakes also have incised inscriptions, describing them as 10-*liang* ingots paid in tax in Jian'an county in AD 731 (19th year of Kaiyuan era), and again naming people as the official, the treasurer and the silversmith (Figs. 3.14 and 3.15).<sup>16</sup> The fourth piece is incised with the same inscription, with the same official and the same treasurer but a different silversmith.

This was first ever discovery of silver cakes used in *Yong diao* payments. The Huaiji County is still called Huaiji in Guangdong province while Jian'an County is to the west of today's Huaiji county, both under Guangzhou on the Lingnan Circuit in the Tang Dynasty. During that time, Lingnan was an important source of income for silver and tributes. According to government record, there were 29 counties under the governance of Lingnan that submitted silver as tribute. These four pieces represent tax payments in kinds that were converted into silver, shaped into round cakes, and sent to the Treasury as tax silver. The *Tang liu dian* includes the regulation that all tax payments were to be taken first to the transport area, where weights and measurements would be checked, after which they were received in the stores. They were registered, with details of the prefectures and counties of origin,

<sup>15</sup>“懷集縣開十庸銀拾兩，專當官令王文樂、典陳友、匠高童。”

<sup>16</sup>“浚安縣開元十九年庸調銀拾兩，專知官彭崇嗣、典梁海、匠王定。”



**Fig. 3.15** Silver cake from the Hejiacun Treasure



the date, and quality of the goods received (coarse or fine, new or old).<sup>17</sup> The incised inscriptions on the silver cakes from Huaiji and Jian'an counties record the name of the county, the date, the provenance, weight, person responsible and details of the smith. In other words, the textual description is very similar to that on the cake ingot from Lingnan Circuit. The discovery of these pieces of tax-silver has provided evidence that tax payments in Lingnan were converted into silver, cast into cake ingots and sent to the state treasury, and their inscriptions confirm the place, people and date. The round mark of the slightly damaged silver ingot shown in Fig. 3.14 testifies the strict examination before registration and the revision of weight.

The Hejiacun Treasure also provided us for the first time with a silver ingot stored at the "Treasury of the Eastern Market" (Fig. 3.16). It has a rough surface, and an inscription written in ink that reads, "Treasury of the Eastern Market, Hao Jing, 52 *liang* 4 *fen*".<sup>18</sup>

There were two markets in Chang'an: the Eastern Market and the Western Market. Each market had two officials: a "capital city market officer" (*jing du shi ling* 京都市令) and a "controller of standards" (*ping zhun shu ling* 平准署令). The controller of standards was in charge of market and trade independent of interventions by the prime minister, selling all that were not in line with the need of

<sup>17</sup> 《唐六典·卷二十·左藏令務》：“凡天下賦調先於輸場，簡其合尺度斤兩者，卿及禦史監閱，然後納於庫藏。皆題以州縣年月，所以別粗良，辨新舊也。”

<sup>18</sup> “東市庫，郝景，五十二兩四錢。”

**Fig. 3.16** Silver cake ingot of the Treasury of the Eastern Market, Chang'an



official departments at due time, and even confiscating official belongings.<sup>19,20</sup> The silver ingot of the Treasury of the Eastern Market may have been a standard piece from the market, or perhaps a silver tax ingot made at *di dian* 邸店, a trade centre of commercial goods. Of the 60 silver bars, 56 were incised with the character *Chao* 朝 and some were also incised with inscriptions like *shi liang tai bei* 十两太北. It is likely that these were pieces from the Chaotang Store (*chao tang ku* 朝堂庫) in the Left Treasury (*zuo cang* 左藏).<sup>21</sup>

Coins are consumables that get constantly produced. At times when there is a change of dynasty or a new important economic policy, especially, existing coins are made obsolete or even destroyed. But owing to lavish burials in ancient times and the sudden need at turbulent times to conceal and bury treasures, coins are rediscovered by later generations. By then they have been stripped of their legally determined value, but have nonetheless become of special significance to collectors, continuing with and extending their cultural value. Even if in a poor condition or not extremely rare, coins possess a rich and priceless cultural content the moment they are associated with a special historical event, personage or background.

<sup>19</sup> 《唐兩京城坊考·卷三》：“四方珍奇，皆所積集。... 當中東市局，次東平准局。”

<sup>20</sup> 《舊唐書·職官志·三平准令條》：“平准令掌供官市易之事，丞為貳。凡百司不任用之物，則以時出貨，其沒官物亦如之”。

<sup>21</sup> 《唐六典》卷20：“左藏有東庫、西庫、朝堂庫”。



## Chapter 4

# The Language of Protective Power: Star Worship and the Four Spirits Charms

Alex Chengyu Fang

Star worship was widely practised in ancient China. The stars near the ecliptic and the equator were divided into twenty-eight constellations. Figure 4.1 is part of the earliest known painting of the constellations found in the Dunhuang Cave, now in the collection of the British Library, which is believed to have been produced “in the interval +649–684, at the beginning of the Tang dynasty, a period rich in significant works in astronomy” (Bonnet-Bidaud et al. 2009).

These constellations were later personified: they were given names, clothed in different official colours, and ranked as celestial officials for daily worship. Figure 4.2 shows part of a painting dated back to the early Tang period by Liang Ling-zhan 梁令瓚 (active in early 8th Century), which is named *Wu xing er shi ba xiu shen xing tu* 五星二十八宿神形圖 the Five Stars and Twenty Eight Constellations in the Form of Gods. A very fine and important early painting about the constellations, it depicts the stars and the constellations in human form as celestial gods. We see the Celestial God *Chen* 辰星神 riding on a phoenix.

During the reign of Zhen Zong 宋真宗 of the Song Dynasty (AD 1017–1021), Zhang Jun-fang 張君房 (active in early 11th Century) compiled a book entitled *Yun ji qi qian* 雲笈七籤, the twenty fourth volume of which is devoted to the constellations and carries detailed descriptions of the celestial gods:

Entourage One consists of gods of the *yang* and is governed by the Celestial God *Jiao* 角星神. Altogether, there are nine gods of the *yang*. Their family name is *Bin* 賓 and their given name is *Yuan-sheng* 遠生; they are closed in green and black and led by the Celestial God *Jiao*. Entourage Two consists of gods of the *yin* and is governed by the Celestial God *Kang*. Altogether, there are four gods of the *yin*; their family name is *Fu* 扶 and their given name is *Si-ma* 司馬. Their head is in the shape of a horse head with a red body. Closed in red and orange, they carry a sword and are led by the Celestial God *Kang* 亢星神.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>“甲從官，陽神也，角星神主之，陽神九人，姓賓名遠生，衣綠玄單衣，角星宿主之。乙從官，陰神也，亢星神主之，陰神四人，姓扶名司馬，馬頭赤身，衣赤緹單衣，帶劍，亢星神主之。”

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**Fig. 4.1** The oldest chart of constellations, from Dunhuang, Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907). Collection of the British Library Or:8210-S.3326

The worship served practical functions, which is well illustrated by Fig. 4.3, part of the Dunhuang findings now in the collection of the British Library. The painting, depicting a human figure kneeling in front of an official standing under the Dipper, is named *Ge xian gong li bei dou fa* 葛仙公禮北斗法 or “Ge Xian Gong Worshipping the Dipper”. Ge Xian Gong (Immortal Ge) refers to Ge Hong 葛洪 (AD 284–363), also known as Bao Pu-zi 抱樸子, an outstanding Taoist priest and alchemist in the Jin Dynasty 晉朝 (AD 265–420). According to legend, he became an immortal upon his success in producing elixir. According to the inscriptions in the painting, worshipping the Dipper every night will result in increased longevity and lengthened life span.<sup>2</sup> According to *Sou shen ji* (《搜神記》) by Gan Bao 干寶 in the Jin Dynasty, “the Southern Constellation is in charge of life and the Northern Constellation is in charge of death; once born, every person follows a path

<sup>2</sup>“昔葛仙公志必每夜頂禮北斗，延年益算。”



**Fig. 4.2** Details of the Five Stars and Twenty Eight Constellations in the Form of Gods by Liang Ling-zhan, early 8th Century. Collection of the Municipal Museum of Osaka

from the Southern Constellation to the Northern Constellation and should pray to the Northern Constellation for any wish.<sup>3</sup>”

The twenty eight constellations are divided into four groups, symbolized by the Red Bird 朱雀, the Black Warrior 玄武, the Blue Dragon 青龍 and the White Tiger 白虎, which are jointly known as the Four Spirits 四靈 or the Four Gods 四神. According to *Shang shu kao ling yao* 《尚書考靈曜》 compiled in the Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 25–220),

The twenty eight constellations represent the very essence of everything. The seven constellations in the East, including *Jiao, Kang, Di, Fang, Xin, Wei* and *Ji*, take the form of a dragon and hence ‘Blue Dragon on the left’. The seven to the South, including *Jing, Gui, Liu, Xing, Zhang, Yi* and *Zhen*, take the form of a bird and hence ‘Red Bird in Front’. The seven to the West, including *Kui, Lou, Wei, Mao, Bi, Zi* and *Can*, take the form of a tiger hence ‘White Tiger on the Right’. The seven to the North, including *Dou, Niu, Nü, Xu, Wei, Shi* and *Bi*, take the form of a turtle entwined with a snake, hence ‘Black Warrior at the Back’.<sup>4</sup>

We thus see that the Four Spirits not only have an intrinsic connection with the constellations but also relate to the perception of the universe in ancient China. The ancient Chinese believe there are five poles in the world: the East guarded by the Blue Dragon, the West guarded by the White Tiger, the South guarded by the Red

<sup>3</sup> 《搜神記·卷三》：“南斗注生，北斗注死，凡人受胎，皆從南斗 過北斗，所有祈求，皆向北斗。”

<sup>4</sup> “二十八宿，天元氣，萬物之精也。故東方角、亢、氐、房、心、尾、箕七宿，其形如龍，曰‘左青龍’。南方井、鬼、柳、星、張、翼、軫七宿，其形如鶉鳥，曰‘前朱雀’。西方奎、婁、胃、昂、畢、觜、參七宿，其形如虎，曰‘右白虎’。北方鬥、牛、女、虛、危、室、壁七宿，其形如龜蛇，曰‘後玄武’。”

**Fig. 4.3** Immortal Ge  
Worshipping the Dipper from  
Dunhuang, Tang Dynasty  
(AD 618–907). Collection of  
the British Library,  
Or.8210-S2404 Recto





Bird, the North guarded by the Black Warrior, and the Central Earth. Now, we also see that the five poles additionally correspond to the five elements: the East to Wood, the West to Metal, the South to Fire, the North to Water, and the Centre to Earth. The Four Spirits then at the same time symbolize the Five Phases (*wu xing*, 五行) and, through such an association, relate to the *yin* and *yang*. Indeed, according to Taoism, the Blue Dragon (the East) and the Red Bird (the South) represent the *yang* while the White Tiger (the West) and the Black Warrior (the North) the *yin*. The practice of alchemy in Daoism required the use of mercury and lead in order to produce the elixir to achieve immortality. The lead is symbolized by the White Tiger and the mercury is symbolized by the Blue Dragon, which transform into the *yin* and the *yang* needed for the production of material substances in the world. Figure 4.4 shows a stone sarcophagus from the Northern Wei period (AD 386–534). Its left and right panels show the carvings of the White Tiger and the Blue Dragon. More interestingly, the White Tiger has a female immortal, presumably the Queen Mother of the West (*xi wang mu* 西王母), on its back while the Blue Dragon has a male immortal, presumably the King Father of the East (*dong wang gong* 東王公) on its back, evidently suggesting in an unambiguous way their association with the *yin* and the *yang*. The fact that they appear as a major theme on the stone sarcophagus clearly suggests guidance, protection and eternity as the major functions of the Four Spirits.

As a figurative representation of a vast body of knowledge and associations, the Four Spirits are commonly found on a wide range of archaeologically excavated objects, including stone carvings, wall paintings and bronze mirrors. The most striking



**Fig. 4.4** The two side panels of a stone sarcophagus, detailing a female riding the White Tiger (*Bai hu* 白虎) and a male riding the Blue Dragon (*Qing long* 青龍), Northern Wei (AD 386–534). Private collection. Image from Little and Eichman (2000:130)

and best artistic rendition includes a set of four tiles shown in Fig. 4.5. Made of baked clay, the Four Spirits demonstrate skillful combination of strengths and fluid flow of the lines and can be held as a genuinely magnificent masterpiece from the Han Dynasty. They are now on display in the Historical Museum of Shaanxi Province.

In 1991, a wall painting of the Four Spirits was found in the tomb for the Queen of King Liangxiao 梁孝王 (?–144 BC) in the Western Han Dynasty. The site is situated in Mount Mangshan 芒山, Yongcheng 永城, Henan Province. Painted on the ceiling of the main burial chamber, the painting is the earliest known of the Four Spirits found in a tomb and was celebrated as one of the ten greatest archaeological discoveries in China in 1991 for its magnificent artistic value. The painting depicts a flying dragon over seven meters long, flanked by the Red Bird on the East and the White Tiger on the West, and richly decorated with floral patterns and clouds (Fig. 4.6). It is now in the collection of the Henan Province Museum.

A burial chamber located in the Zhangcun County 張村鎮 to the west of Dengzhou 鄧州 in Henan province was excavated in 1957. It was constructed with skilfully moulded bricks painted in different colours. These bricks in bas-relief



**Fig. 4.5** Four clay tiles of the Four Spirits, Han Dynasty (202 BC–AD 220), 155, 193, 187, 190 mm. Collection of the Historical Museum of Shaanxi Province





**Fig. 4.6** A flying dragon flanked by the Red Bird and the White Tiger amidst flowers and clouds



**Fig. 4.7** A colour painted brick in bas-relief showing *Xuan wu* 玄武 the Black Warrior dating to the Southern and Northern Dynasties (AD 386–589). Collection of the Henan Provincial MuseumHenan Provincial Museum

depict images of gods and fairies, exotic animals and foliage, and story scenes involving well known sages such as the Seven Hermits in the Bambook Grove 竹林七賢. The find also contains bricks showing striking images of the Four Spirits. Figure 4.7 is one of these, showing *Xuan wu* 玄武 the Black Warrior forcefully striding towards the left flanked by foliage on both sides. As a common practice that well extended into the Tang Dynasty, the Four Spirits were often painted on the inside of burial chambers as a form of protection for both the owner of the burial chamber and the descendents of the deceased.

The Four Spirits is also a frequent theme found on bronze mirrors. Figure 4.8 is a bronze mirror dating back to the Sui Dynasty (AD 518–619). The inner zone is divided into four sections depicting the Four Spirits. The outer zone is divided into twelve houses, each with a zodiacal animal, exemplifying an earliest connection between the

**Fig. 4.8** A bronze mirror with the Four Spirits in the inner zone and the twelve zodiac animals in the outer zone, 28.4 mm, Sui Dynasty (AD 581–619). Collection of Rietberg Museum, Zurich



Four Spirits and the twelve zodiac animals, again emphasising its folk function to provide protection against demons and evils and also to extend one's life span.

The Complete Collection of Tang Poems (*Quan tang shi*; 《全唐詩》) includes the following verse,<sup>5</sup> which would have been inscribed on the back of a bronze mirror similar to the one in Fig. 4.8:

《司馬承禎含象鑿文》

天地含象，  
日月貞明。  
寫規萬物，  
洞鑿百靈。  
青蓋作鏡大吉昌，  
巧工刊之成文章。  
左龍右虎辟不祥，  
朱鳥玄武順於旁，  
子孫富貴居中央。

*Inscriptions on a Mirror Produced by Sima Cheng-zhen*

Heaven and Earth contain images.

Sun and Moon provide pure lights.

Ten thousand objects are regulated through writing,

And one hundred spirits seen through this mirror.

<sup>5</sup> 《全唐詩·卷八七五·司馬承禎含象鑿文》

Made of fine bronze for great luck and good fortunes,  
 Which results from great craftsmanship with beautiful patterns.  
 Dragon on the left and Tiger on the right drive away evil spirits.  
 The Red Bird and the Black Warrior crouch on the sides.  
 In the centre resides our posterity of great wealth and honours.

It is worth noting that the verse is entitled *Si ma cheng zheng han xiang jian wen* 司馬承禎含象鑿文 “Inscriptions on a Mirror Made by Sima Cheng-zhen”. Sima Cheng-zhen 司馬承禎 (AD 647–753) was a revered Taoist priest, well received in the courts of Empress Wu Ze-tian 武則天 (AD 624–705), Emperor Ruizong 唐睿宗 (AD 662–716) and Emperor Xuanzong 唐玄宗 (AD 685–762) of the Tang dynasty. Also known as an expert in casting swords and mirrors, he presented his metal works including swords and mirrors to the imperial court and received great appreciation for their great quality as well as their Taoist connotations and hence protections. As indicated by the last three lines in the verse above, the function of the Four Spirits is to provide protection to the owner’s sons, grandsons and future generations.

The protective power and the life-prolonging function in order to ensure everlasting posterity therefore underlie the emergence of a group of coin-like charms with the Four Spirits, which, as we have previously seen, is commonly found from the Han Dynasty up to the Tang dynasty. The best known of this group rests with a type that has the inscription *yong an wu nan* 永安五男 or “eternal protection to five sons” on the obverse and the pictorial image of the Four Spirits on the reverse. This type has two variations in size. The larger-size variation is shown in Fig. 4.9, which is divided, as on bronze mirrors, into four sections by a dotted millet pattern known as *su wen* 粟紋. The obverse is inscribed with *yong an wu nan* 永安五男, read from the top to the bottom and then from the right to the left (t-b-r-l). The top section above the central square hole also contains a dot in relief representing the Sun and a crescent representing the Moon in addition to the character *yong*. The Four Spirits are shown on the back, with the Red Bird on top, the Black Warrior at the bottom, the Blue Dragon on the right, and the White Tiger on the left. A lovely and apparent ancient specimen, this piece has a pleasant reddish patina, suggesting it was at some stage painted over with cinnabar for enhanced protective power and then worn and handled over the centuries. Here we recall that the cinnabar is an important material for mercury extraction in Taoist alchemy, the purpose of which is to produce elixir to achieve immortality. The practice of painting over coin charms with cinnabar is fairly common and traces of cinnabar can be found on charms produced at the end of the Qing Dynasty in the early 20th century, suggesting a long continuous belief in the protective power of this particular substance. Thus this charm conveys an intensified message, through its inscription, the Four Spirits, the Sun and the Moon, and the cinnabar, that it prays for the everlasting peace and security as well as longevity for the family’s posterity protected through the powers from the guardian stars. Judging by its signs of tear and wear, especially around the rims of the inner hole, this piece would have been given to a child, who would wear it about the body and, in times of unidentifiable diseases, the cinnabar may have taken its medicinal



**Fig. 4.9** A charm with *yong an wu nan* 永安五男 on the obverse and the Four Spirits on the reverse, 54 mm, Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907). ACF Collection

effect on him. Or, as is explicitly indicated in the inscription on a Taoist charm (No 115 in Fang 2008: 164), such a piece could be hung about the house to provide protective power to the residents.

Guo (1998: 86) includes a piece, which, although smaller in size than the one in Fig. 4.9, is unusually decorated with additional stars. A similar piece can be found in Grundmann (2005) along with four other amulets with the Four Spirits. Another notable piece of the same type was published on the Internet around the year 2000. It was extremely rare in that each of the four sections is incised with three characters: the upper section is incised with *da fu gui* 大富貴 “great wealth and honour”, the lower section with *shou ming chang* 受命長 “long life span”, the left section with *duo nan nu* 多男女 “many male and female children”, the right quarter with three characters which are unfortunately illegible. Yet another notable piece was auctioned in Shanghai in the year 2001, which was fully gilded with twelve drilled holes around the outer rim, evidently for tussles, which are often found on Korean charms, or other attachments possibly made of jade or small objects. An exceedingly rare variation of this type, 50 cash in size, has the Four Spirits on both sides without the inscriptions. The author acquired such a piece many years ago from a long standing collector of charms on the west coast of the US, which had been in his collection for nearly 30 years. As shown in Fig. 4.10, this thick piece with green patina and occasional reddish rustic dots is cast in high relief and its diameter measures 5.3 cm.

The smaller type in this group is about 10-cash in size, measuring around 3.5 cm. Often with a darkish patina, these pieces appear to have been made of a metal that is either light red or white in colour. They appear to be rarer than the bigger type. There is only one such specimen in the author’s collection, shown in Fig. 4.11, which, like the bigger type, is divided into four sections on both sides by a millet pattern and has the same inscriptions in the seal script on the obverse. The reverse, however, is slightly different: the White Tiger, which is on the left on the





**Fig. 4.10** A charm with the Four Spirits on both sides, 53 mm, Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907). ACF Collection



**Fig. 4.11** A charm with *yong an wu nan* on the obverse and the Four Spirits on the reverse, 34 mm, Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907). ACF Collection

bigger type, is found on the right side; the Blue Dragon is accordingly swapped to the other side.

As with the dating of charms in general, the dating of this particular group of charms went through considerable debate. Sun Zhong-hui 孫仲匯, a prominent numismatist in China, was of the opinion that they could be dated to the Sui Dynasty 隋朝 (AD 581–619), at the latest. Guo Ruo-yu 郭若愚 believed that they were contemporary of the *yong an wu zhu* 永安五銖 coins cast during the Yong'an Reign (AD 528–530) of the Northern Wei period 北魏 (AD 386–534). A good majority of collectors in the early 2000s held the view that they were made between the Song Dynasty 宋朝 (AD 960–1279) or the Ming Dynasty 明朝 (AD 1368–1644). A decisive dating factor eventually came from a group of gold and silver objects excavated in Hejiacun 何家村 near Xi'an during 1970s. The treasure contained a gilded bronze specimen (Fig. 4.12; see also Fig. 3.12 in Chap. 3 in this



**Fig. 4.12** A charm with *yong an wu nan* 永安五男 on the obverse and the Four Spirits on the reverse, 33 mm, Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907). Collection of the Historical Museum of Shaanxi Province

volume), which is identical to the one in the author’s collection in Fig. 4.11. This charm is published in a volume dedicated to the Hejiacun Treasure, entitled *Hua wu da tang chun* 花舞大唐春 (Qi and Shen 2003: 238):

Round in shape, with four protruding patterned lines on both the obverse and the reverse. Inscriptions read *yong an wu nan*, in seal script, arranged in t-b-r-l fashion. The reverse is decorated with images of the Four Spirits. The whole piece is fully gilded. According to *A Record of Food and Moneys in A History of the Wei Dynasty*, coins inscribed with *yong an wu zhu* were cast in the second year of the Yong An Reign by Emperor Xiao Zhuang of the Northern Wei. The character *an* is simplified through making use of the lower rim of the central square hole. Measuring around 2.3 cm and weighing about 3 grams, this type of coin is occasionally found with four protruding lines on the back. The inscriptions show the reign title and also the value in weight. The gilded coin inscribed with *yong an wu nan* here was once dated to the Yong An Reign of the Northern Wei because of the characters *yong an* in the inscription. Now, judging by its physical features and its inscriptions, this coin is different in shape and weight. The character *an* is not simplified. The whole coin does not show agreement with the basic features of the *yong an wu zhu* coins minted in the Northern Wei period. If the two characters *yong an* should be taken to refer to the reign title, then it would make it difficult to interpret the meaning of the other two characters *wu nan*. If this coin is regarded as a charm, then its semantic meaning can be well understood. The images of the Four Spirits are also commonly used as a luck-wishing pattern. Thus, this coin should be regarded as a coin-like charm cast during the Tang Dynasty.

The same find also contains a gilded *Huo bu* 貨布, *ping shou bu* 平首布, knife money 刀幣, gold *Kai yuan tong bao* 開元通寶, *gao chang ji li* 高昌吉利 as well as gold and silver coins from Japan, Persia and ancient Rome. As far as this part is concerned, the unknown owner of the treasure may have been a coin collector and, judging from this possibility, the *yong an wu nan* specimen in question might still be dated to the Northern Wei period in 5th century with a lower time boundary set to the mid Tang in 7th century. Thus, while some specimens may have been made later, as charms were typically copied over and over again, it is fairly convincing to date this particular piece and other similar pieces to a period between the Sui and





**Fig. 4.13** A charm with the Four Spirits on both sides, 35 mm, North and South Dynasties (AD 420–589). ACF Collection

the Tang. The author's view is that the smaller type is earlier than the Tang and is copied during the Tang; the bigger type was made during a later period, probably during the Five Dynasties (AD 907–979).

Finally, there is a third type as shown in Fig. 4.13, a specimen in the author's collection. About the same size as the one in Fig. 4.11, it is decorated with the Four Spirits on both sides. Judging by its physical and stylistic features, this coin demonstrates a striking similarity with coins issued during the North and South period (南北朝; AD 420–589), especially with the type inscribed with *yong tong wan guo* 永通萬國 issued in AD 579 by Yuwen Yan 宇文弼, Emperor Jing 靜帝 of the Northern Zhou 北周 (AD 557–581). A variation of this type has the Four Spirits on the obverse with a blank reverse. This type, therefore, provides additional evidence to support the dating of *yong an wu nan* charms to an upper boundary of 5th century or thereafter.

After the Song, the Four Spirits practically disappeared as a theme on charms. A major reason is probably due to the gradually extensive use of the *yin yang* symbol and the eight trigrams as a reoccurring theme, whose fundamental function and symbolic meaning had by then replaced the Four Spirits. The same can be observed regarding the bronze mirror: The Four Spirits are more commonly found on mirrors dating from the Tang and earlier and they are hardly seen afterwards. This observation indirectly supports the dating of Four Spirits charms to the Tang or earlier. It also partially explains why the image of the eight trigrams as a protective symbol suddenly became so common on charms. Indeed, the Four Spirits are almost never found on charms dating from the Ming and the Qing, with perhaps only a couple of exceptions, one of which is shown in Fig. 4.14. This piece is inscribed *tian xian song zi* 天仙送子 “heavenly immortals bring male children”. Judging by its physical features, this piece was made during the early Qing period but, odd in an unusual way, this charm has the rare representation of the Four Spirits. Even rarer is the fact that the usual Black Warrior at the bottom on the



**Fig. 4.14** A charm with *tian xian song zi* 天仙送子 on the obverse and the Four Spirits on the reverse, 53 mm, Qing Dynasty (AD 1644–1911). ACF Collection

reverse has been replaced by an animal that resembles *qi lin* 麒麟 the unicorn, hence alluding to the auspicious expression *qi lin song zi* 麒麟送子 “the unicorn brings male children”. We are thus witnessing a classic example through this particular charm that illustrates the continuation of folk traditions with unavoidable changes and adaptations picked up on the way.

As a matter of fact, throughout the past two thousand years or so, charms have been continuously made, from as early as the Han dynasty or earlier, through the Tang and the Song until even today. Amongst the pieces that have survived until this day, the early pieces from the Han or the Wei can still be occasionally found while the majority date from the Ming and the Qing. In comparison, charms from the Tang dynasty are surprisingly few and extremely rare to find. Now, supported by the archaeological excavation at Hejiachun, we have the first-hand evidence that the *yong an wu nan* charm can be dated to the Tang dynasty or even earlier, which is an eye opener for the scientific dating of charms and for documented identification of charms from around the Tang period. Artistically speaking, the *yong an wu nan* charms are a masterpiece from that remote period as well as a most beautiful exemplar of coin-like charms in general.

**Acknowledgments** I would like to thank Mr. Philip Attwood, Keeper and Head of Department, and Dr. Helen Wang, Curator of East Asian money, at the Department of Coins and Medals, the British Museum, for their support and encouragement in the preparation of this study. The writing of this chapter was supported in part by a fellowship which Alex Fang received in 2012 from the E.S.G. Robinson Charitable Trust. It was additionally supported in part by grants received from the General Research Fund of the University Grant Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (Project No. CityU 142711) and City University of Hong Kong (Project Nos. 6354005, 7004491, 9618007, 7004333, 7004091, 9610283, 7002793, 9610226, 9041694, and 9610188). I am indebted to Dr Cecilia Cao and Miss Elizabeth Fang for comments on an earlier draft.

# Chapter 5

## Coin Charms Featuring Gods and Spirits during the Song and the Jin Dynasties

Ji-peng Geng

### 5.1 Introduction

The Tang dynasty (AD 618–907) canonised both Buddhism and Taoism. The Five Dynasties (AD 907–960) followed the same religious tradition, the only exception being Emperor Shizong (世宗) of the Posterior Zhou, who restricted the practice of religion. In the southwest, the Former (AD 907–925) and the Posterior (AD 934–965) Shu (前後蜀) mainly practised Taoism and the Southern Tang (AD 937–975) revered Buddhism. In the northeast, the Liao Dynasty (AD 907–1125) adopted Buddhism and Taoism in addition to a full-scale acceptance of the Han culture. The Five Dynasties therefore marks the start of a new era, when the literati, the social elite and government officials sought the Western Paradise and immortality to evade the wars and conflicts. During the Tang dynasty and before, most of the Taoist practitioners were either in favour of Taoism when young, or were descendants of aristocratic families, or were born to be different, or were guided by eminent priests and monks. Differently during the Five Dynasties, Taoist practitioners largely comprised Confucian scholars frustrated in officialdom or eccentrics of extraordinary talents shirking from the turbulent times. Taoism during the Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279) was venerated by Emperors Zhenzong (真宗), Huizong (徽宗) and Lizong (理宗), and, as a result, was widely practised across all social spectra. At the same time, however, the secularisation of Taoism and the trend to syncretism contributed towards a distraction of religious in-groups and gave rise to different schools of practice. The pursuit of Inner Alchemy (*nei dan* 内丹) instead of Outer Alchemy (*wai dan* 外丹), along with the reforms of Supernatural Talismans

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(*Fu lu pai* 符籙派) together with the popularity of Thunder Magic (*Lei fa* 雷法) provided two developmental alternatives to Taoism. In addition, there were also remarkable disputes amongst different Buddhist schools, most notably between Zen (禪宗) and Pure Land (淨土宗), with inevitable inner divergences and differences. In today's language, the dispute was between the elite culture and the mass culture despite a trend of their partial merger.

Coin charms were a product of the mass culture, associated with the Supernatural Talismans in Taoism, the Pure Land in Buddhism, and the mystic symbols core to Chinese traditional culture. The gods found on coin charms were derived from the concrete images readily recognisable from the elements mentioned above. The syncretism of the three religions (Fig. 5.1) integrating with the folk pragmatism directly resulted in the secularisation, and popularisation, of religious deity and mystic symbolism. The images in localised Buddhism were now combined with those in Taoism to create new gods. The Sinicised religions mentioned here refer to mysticism, Taoism, localised Buddhism and other quasi-religious practices. This fused state was duly reflected on coin charms bearing deity images of various kinds, collectively referred to as gods-and-spirits charms (神怪錢), which were largely based on Taoism and Taoist gods, combined with Taoist talismans and mystic symbols for the functions of the rogation for blessings and luck and the vanquishment of evil spirits and demons. This view is also supported in Fang (2008:6ff), which is held to be true of coin charms in general.

Although free from the discord times and wars in the Five Dynasties period, the Northern Song successively fought with Liao, Western Xia (AD 1038–1227), and Jin (AD 1115–1234). During these confrontations with formidable enemies, Taoist gods and spirits became a source of protective power and blissful comfort. On the one hand, the images were inherited from the Tang and the Five Dynasties based on drafts from the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220). On the other hand, a new series of gods and goddesses were created to address the contemporary needs. Legends about immortals, fairy tales and historical personage of high virtue were used as blue-prints, and contemporary costumes and props were used as artistic references.



**Fig. 5.1** A coin charm featuring images from different religions. Collection of Zhao Yang

The people in the sixteen prefectures in the You (幽州) and the Yun (雲州) areas, now adjacent to Beijing in Hebei province, used to suffer from a dilemma that they followed the tradition and customs of the Han culture but were politically ruled under the Liao Dynasty for quite a long time. Influenced by the Han Culture, the Liao dynasty emulated the laws and regulations of the Tang and the Song Dynasties and shared similar stylistic features on utensils with the Song but differed nonetheless in terms of faith and technology. After the invasion by the Jin, most of those living in the Central Plains remained more or less the same habits but were unavoidably influenced by the Jurchen invaders. This influence resulted in developments in two different directions: Jurchenlisation and anti-Jurchenlisation—as was the actual situation at that time of the history. The establishment of the Southern Song Dynasty prompted a new coalition between the cultures in Jiangsu and Zhejiang areas and the Central Plains, the former of which became a moral mainstream and resolutely improved the status of regional cultures. The history became complex due to the interaction among the endemic cultures, authorities, nations and denominations. However, material evidence can still conveniently manifest different typologies against a background of mass culture.

## 5.2 Religious Basis of Gods-and-Spirits Charms

Since its establishment, the emperors of the Northern Song Dynasty, especially Zhenzong and Huizong, respected Taoism. Zhenzong faked stories about the Book from Heaven and the arrival of the Holy Ancestor, and collated and compiled the Taoist scriptures. Huizong declared himself as a Taoist Emperor (教主道教皇帝), and promoted Shenxiao Taoism (Divine Empyrean; 神霄道教) by administrative decrees, while restricting the influence of Buddhism. These acts created a strong impact on the artistic themes related to gods and spirits. The worship of Taoism in the Liao and the Western Xia, under the influence of the Song, also provided for a favourable environment for their own Taoism activities. These political conditions exerted a tremendous impress on the development of Taoism which had an intrinsic connection with the folk belief in immortality. The emperors of the Southern Song and the Jin held a lukewarm attitude toward Taoism, with the exception of Emperor Lizong, and generally exercised strict administration out of the lesson of Huizong. Within the Jin territories, different Taoist sects emerged that emphasised the Inner Alchemy, including the Taiyi (Supreme Unity Sect; 太一道), the Dadao (Great Way; 大道教) and the Quanzhen (Complete Realisation Sect; 全真教), among which the Quanzhen Sect won the approval by the central government and attracted believers loyal to the Song. In the Southern Song territories, the Jindan Sect (Golden Alchemy; 金丹派) flourished, with emerging branches such as the Nanzong (南宗), the Qingwei Sect (Azure Tenuity; 清微宗), and the Jingming Sect (Pure Illumination; 淨明宗), all of which ensured the increasing popularity of

Taoist fast and offering rituals (*zhai jiao*; 齋醮) and ceremonies, and the Taoist rituals gained their popularity. These developments promoted the flourishing of gods-and-spirits charms among the masses. The booming Taoism and the pursuit of immortality made popular the gods and spirits from the Taoist pantheon, adding to the repertoire and imagination of artists and craftsmen.

Buddhism also flourished during this period and saw a fundamental interest in debates about Buddhism and Zen. Amongst the various sects, the Zen and the Pure Land became particularly influential. The former emphasised epiphany after an occasional mismatch between individual behaviour and spirit. Its intensification of thinking in terms of images formed an affinity with artistic conceptions in poetry and prose. However, this school did not deliver a sermon by written words; thus artworks created with a Zen mindset evaded explicit Buddhist elements but appeared secular and worldly. The Pure Land school advocated incantation of Buddha's name and greeting each other, amongst Buddhist believers, by Amitabha, while the belief in Arya Avalokiteshvara was more widely spread among common people. Coin charms of a Buddhist theme or character(s) took up only a small proportion, which was due to the Zen thought on the one hand, and, on the other, related to the view that Taoism cherished the present life while Buddhism anchored hope on the next one. In the Song Dynasty, most funerary objects were made of paper while coin charms were primarily held by the living. Hence very few charms feature Buddhist figures and, when they do, they are usually there to complement Taoist gods.

The popular gods and spirits themes found on charms during this period include mainly the Lords of the Root Destiny Stars (本命星官; Fig. 5.2), Celestial Master Zhang (張天師; Fig. 5.3), the Celestial Lord of Longevity and Life Protection

**Fig. 5.2** A coin charm featuring the image of the Lord of Root Destiny Star. Collection of Zhao Yang







**Fig. 5.3** A coin charm featuring the image of Celestial Master Zhang. Collection of Zhao Yang

**Fig. 5.4** A coin charm featuring the image of the Celestial Lord of Longevity and Life Protection. Collection of Zhao Yang



(長生保命天尊; Fig. 5.4), the Demon Slaying General (*zhan gui da jiang* 斬鬼大將; Fig. 5.5), Erlangshen (二郎神; Fig. 5.6), and the Perfect Warrior (Zhen wu 真武). The back side of the coin is usually decorated with the twelve zodiac signs, auspicious beasts, constellations, and various inscriptions. Taoist characters and spells are usually used alongside deity images.

The transformation and creation of gods in the Song Dynasty were closely linked with the political background; the worship of Taoism by the upper class promoted the popularization of Taoism among the lower and middle classes, who in turn influenced the governing hierarchy during the Southern Song and the Jin dynasties. The abundant use of coin charms by Taoists and other religious believers resulted in



Fig. 5.5 A coin charm featuring the Demon Slaying General. Collection of Zhao Yang



Fig. 5.6 A coin charm featuring the image of Erlangshen. Collection of Zhao Yang

some that displayed scenes of Taoist practice. The better known specimens include those showing alchemy furnaces and images of immortals such as the Queen Mother of the West and the Lord King of the East (Fig. 5.7), amidst the connection between coins and Taoism self-cultivation. With the clearer integration of the three religions, Emperor Lizong 理宗 of Song in particular encouraged a nationwide rational harmony between the three religions, coin charms appeared bearing the images of the Five Statues (五像), including Lord Laozi, two attending immortals, the Realised Person of the Azure Dragon (*qing long zhen jun*; 青龍真君), and the Realised Person of the White Tiger (*bai hu zhen jun*; 白虎真君). The other side of the coin typically bears the images of the Buddha and the four Bodhisattvas: Manjuist, Samantabhadra, Avalokitesvara, and Kshitigarbha. These religious themes are often additionally decorated with flowers, playing children and erotic images (*mixi*; 祕戲) both to alleviate the mysterious verve and to increase the secular feel. Fairy tales, such as the rhinoceros looking up at the Moon (*xi niu wang yue* 犀牛望月), goddess in the palace of the moon, and scenes of wild geese on the



**Fig. 5.7** A coin charm featuring the Queen Mother of the East and the Lord King of the East. Collection of Zhao Yang

sandbank, are more commonly used on coin charms dated to the Jin Dynasty, complemented with secular themes like playing children and auspicious four-character inscriptions.

Apart from cultural circumstances, the choice of a specific theme on gods-and-spirits coin charms was mainly determined by the functions of religious rituals. As one of the necessities in rituals, coins assumed a channeling role found in primitive witchcraft. Once such a role was generalized, these coins were unavoidably combined with mysterious images to serve specific religious functions. The process of syncretism contrasted with a reality of sprouting religious sects, which were closely associated with different regimes, regional cultures and national cultures. While it removed ethnic estrangements, the increasing influence of regional cultures nonetheless created stereotypes of different religious sects.

### 5.3 The Reference of Taoist Deities in Reality

Religion is closely linked with political regimes and it relies on them for advances and developments. The Tang Dynasty revered Taoism. Wu Dao-zi 吳道子, a contemporary painter, is best known for his paintings about religious Taoism. His *Procession of Immortals Paying Homage to the Primordial* (*Chao yuan tu* 朝元圖) portrays the Taoist gods given an audience and paying homage to *Yuan*, prime or primordial, which refers to the Tao. Copies of the painting were once displayed in the Laojun Abbey (老君廟) on Mount Beiyi 北邙山 in Luoyang and the Chaoyuan Pavilion of Homage (*Chao yuan ge* 朝元閣) in the Palace of Floriate Purity (華清宮) on Mount Li 驪山. Du Fu, a famous poet in the Tang Dynasty, once wrote about the painting in his poem *Visiting the Temple of the Dark Primordial Emperor in North Luoyang on a Winter's Day*:

Behold, painters!  
 No one else could portray this splendid scene:  
 Moving the universe to the wall,  
 Living the palace by nature.  
 On the murals presenting five sages,  
 With thousands of officials following.  
 Fair hair and fair crowns,  
 Up forward flying with flags.<sup>1</sup>

The five sages here refers to the five emperors before Xuanzong 玄宗 in the Tang Dynasty, namely, Gaozu 高祖, Taizong 太宗, Gaozong 高宗, Zhongzong 中宗 and Ruizong 睿宗, enshrined as the Five Sages in June of the eighth year of Tianbao era (AD 749) with an imperial epithet for Laozi.<sup>2</sup> The mural of *Five Sages* faded in Northern Song Dynasty, and Wu Zong-yuan 武宗元 painted 36 celestial gods here. “Wu Zongyuan once painted 36 celestial gods in the Palace of Supreme Purity in Luoyang, among which the god Chiming Yanghe resembled Taizong for he governed the empire in favour of *fire*. Emperor Zhenzong arrived at the Palace of Supreme Purity, when passing through Luoyang after offering sacrifices to the gods on the southern bank of the Fen River, and viewed the mural. Upon seeing the face, he was surprised, ‘This is exactly what my father looked like.’ Then, he had an altar set up and burned incense for worship. He gazed at the painting for quite a while and praised the master-hand of the painting. The Palace of Supreme Purity was the Temple of the Dark Primordial Emperor, where the painting of the Five Sages by Wu Dao-zi was displayed and extolled by Du Fu with the line ‘On the murals presenting five emperors, with thousands of officials following.’ The mural was deserted and damaged because of the extension of the palace and its gardens. Zongyuan brought it to life and restored the glory of Taizong, which is described by Zhang Wen-yi in his poem ‘once the emperor burnt incense here for the excellence of painting.’”<sup>3</sup> It is an ancient practice to paint immortals, Buddha and Bodhisattvas after the emperor in reality. For example, the Buddha statues in the Five Grottoes at Tanyao 曇耀 carved in the Northern Wei Dynasty resemble the images of five of the emperors of that period. During the Song and the Jin dynasties, not only the appearance of immortals was changed according to real individuals, but also new gods were created based on

<sup>1</sup>杜甫《冬月洛城北謁玄元皇帝廟》：“配極玄都閣，憑高禁禦長。守祧嚴具禮，掌節鎮非常。碧瓦初寒外，金莖一氣旁。山河扶繡戶，日月近雕梁。仙李蟠根大，猗蘭奕頁光。世家遺舊史，道德付今王。畫手看前輩，吳生遠擅場。森羅移地軸，妙手動宮牆。五聖聯龍袞，千官列雁行。冕旒俱秀髮，旌旆盡飛揚。翠柏深留景，紅梨迴得霜。風箏吹玉柱，露井凍銀床。身退卑周室，經傳拱漢皇。穀神如不死，養拙更何鄉。”

<sup>2</sup>《資治通鑒·卷二百一十六·唐紀三十二·玄宗八載（七四九）》：“天寶八載……六月，戊申，上聖祖號曰大道玄元皇帝，上高祖諡曰神堯大聖皇帝，太宗諡曰文武大聖皇帝，高宗諡曰天皇大聖皇帝，中宗諡曰孝和大聖皇帝，睿宗諡曰玄真大聖皇帝，寶太后以下皆加諡曰順聖皇后。”

<sup>3</sup>郭若虛《圖畫見聞志》：“武宗元，…嘗于洛都上清宮畫三十六天帝，其間亦明陽和天帝潛寫太宗禦容，以趙氏火德王天下故也。真宗祀汾陰，還經洛都，幸上清，曆覽繪壁。忽睹聖容，驚曰：此真先帝也。遂命設幾案焚香再拜，且歎其畫筆之神，佇立久之。上清宮，即唐玄元皇帝廟。舊有吳道子畫五聖圖，杜甫詩稱五聖聯龍袞，千官列雁行是也。後因廣增庭廡，畫壁遂廢。宗元復運神蹤，高紹前哲。張文懿有詩雲，曾此焚香動至尊。”

real people. Through a comparison between coin charms and the ritual system and clothing regulations documented in historical texts, we come to know that the images of gods and spirits were crafted accordingly.

The gods and spirits wear crowns of different specifications, including the Tongtian (通天冠), the Yuanyou (遠遊冠), the Jinxian (進賢冠), the Diaochan (貂蟬冠), the Daixiao (戴小冠), the Pibian (皮弁), and the Fengchi (鳳翅冠). There are also others of a peculiar style, which were mostly derived from those worn by warriors, as well as the Putou (幘頭), the Angular Putou (直角幘頭), the Crossed Putou (交腳幘頭), the domestic small crown (內戴小冠), and the Outer Putou (外罩幘頭) which resembled a cage hat. The Tongtian crown was worn by the emperor for court in the Song Dynasty,<sup>4</sup> different from the Mian (冕) which was for sacrificial rituals. There were 24 beams on the emperors' Tongtian crown. For immortals, the Tongtian crown was modified to show their distinguished status and also to show a difference from the emperor's version. The Yuanyou crown was for the crown prince.<sup>5</sup> The Jinxian crown had different versions, ranging from seven beams to two beams (Gao 2001: 210).<sup>6</sup> The Diaochan crown is similar to the Jinxian with different number of beams but different in that it additionally had a scarf along the back brim. The domestic small crown and the Pibian are mostly seen on immortals in martial attire.<sup>7</sup> Other immortals wore the gold crown (金冠), the lotus flower crown (蓮花冠), the star crown (星冠), the Five Sages crown (五老冠), and the crescent crown (月牙冠), all specially designed for Taoist priests (Min 2002: 23). Most of the crowns are Taoist, of a gradually developed stylistic feature which is unique to Daoism but which integrates many other elements (Gao 2001: 210). In addition, there also existed styles from the worldly officials and folks, such as wearing a crown with a hood outside, a small head kerchief (小巾), the Dongpo kerchief (東坡巾), the Haoran kerchief (浩然巾) and the square kerchief (方巾), which were typically worn by hermits and literati and which therefore illustrate their connection with Taoism at the time. Some immortals did not wear crowns or head kerchiefs but used headbands and hairpins only, exemplified by Zhen Wu 真武 who is typically portrayed as a Taoist priest in the process of performing a magic ritual. Female immortals shared the same make-ups with the common women with crowns decorated with auspicious birds and flowers or simply wore topknots of varying styles such as double-loop topknot (雙鬢髻), cloth-wrapped topknot (布包髻), lily topknot (百合髻), loose topknot (大盤髻), etc. Robes (袍), padded jackets (襖), upper garments (衫), belly gowns (袍肚), trousers (褲), short jackets (襦), vests (背子), skirts (裙), gowns (褂), and helmets and body armours were all

<sup>4</sup> 「元」 脫脫《宋史·卷一百五十一·志第一百四·輿服三·天子之服 皇太子附 后妃之服 命婦附》。

<sup>5</sup> 「元」 脫脫《宋史·卷一百五十一·志第一百四·輿服三·天子之服 皇太子附 后妃之服 命婦附》。

<sup>6</sup> 「明」 宋濂《元史·卷七十八·志第二十八·輿服一 儀衛附》。

<sup>7</sup> 「元」 脫脫 等撰：《宋史·卷一百五十二·志第一百五·輿服四·諸臣服上》。





**Fig. 5.8** A coin charm featuring a full set of twelve zodiacal animals on the reverse and turtle and crane on the obverse. Collection of Zhao Yang

revised according to the customs contemporary of the Song dynasty. The robe and the vest were especially common on images from the time.

Alchemy furnaces with three legs, canopies, fruit plates and weapons were based on reality and varied if necessary in order to match the personage and the scene. Besides, the zodiacal animals (Fig. 5.8) together with turtles, cranes, snakes, and wild geese (Fig. 5.9) were also realistically portrayed. It is not common to see images of half human and half beast on coin charms but they do turn up

**Fig. 5.9** A coin charm featuring wild geese. Collection of Zhao Yang



occasionally, especially in forms of the twelve zodiacal animals, the 60 Jiazi (甲子), and the 28 star constellations. We thus see that the gods and spirits on coin charms were modelled on real people and real life of the Song Dynasty. The images of gods and spirits created in the Liao, the Western Xia and the Jin dynasties and regions were primarily based upon those in the Song and so it is not surprising for them to directly borrow the Song images.

## 5.4 A Brief Exploration of the Identity of Gods and Spirits

Lords of the Root Destiny Stars (*ben ming xing guan* 本命星官) are also called *zhi xiu xing guan* 值宿星官 or Lords of the Natal Year Star. They fall into two groups. The first group includes the sixty star lords known as *liu shi yuan chen* 六十元辰 or the sixty Yuanchen. The second group includes Gods of the Twenty-eight Lunar Mansions (*er shi ba xing xiu* 二十八星宿; Zhang 2001: 279ff; Zhong 2001: 168), Sixiang (四象) or Guardians of the Four Directions (Zhang 2001: 273–278; Zhong 2001: 172ff), including the Azure Dragon (*Qing long* 青龍) in the East, the White Tiger (*Bai hu* 白虎) in the West, the Red Bird (*Zhu que* 朱雀) in the South, and the Dark Warrior (Xuan wu 玄武) in the North. The combination of the ten Heavenly Stems (*tian gan* 天干) and the twelve Terrestrial Branches (*di zhi* 地支) produces 60 permutations called the Sixty Jiazi (甲子) to designate time in cycles of sixty years. In the Taoist conception of Root Destiny (*ben ming* 本命), each of the sixty years had a patron lord of the root destiny year, who was referred to as *ben ming yuan chen* 本命元辰 or Lord of the Root Destiny Primordial Year (Zhang 2001: 299ff; Zhong 2001: 169). Their enshrining and worshipping would bring good luck for the year and this is still practised even today. On coin charms, the star lords or lords of the primordial year are represented by the zodiacal animal or the character. The twenty-eight lunar mansions were divided into four groups each with seven constellations, known variously as the Four Directions (*si xiang* 四象), the Four Beasts (*si shou* 四兽), the Four Dimensions (*si wei* 四维) and the Four Gods of Directions (*Si fang shen* 四方神). Religious Taoism adopted the astrological concept about the lunar mansions of constellations, deified them and allotted them with names and also distinct duties. Their images were employed on coin charms to conquer demons and to drive away evil spirits. After the Tang dynasty, their status within Taoism was raised significantly. During the Song and the Jin, Xuanwu received paramount importance and was featured independently with an obvious higher status than the other three (Fig. 5.10). Generally speaking, therefore, the first group features zodiacal signs and the second group is marked for its use of stars and constellations. The former was found throughout China and the latter mostly in regions governed by the Northern Song, the Southern Song and the Jin.

A common pictorial design contains trees, often pine and cypress, a fairy holding an offering tray, an elderly immortal sitting on a stone bed, a crane flying above, and a tortoise crawling on the ground (Fig. 5.11). The elderly immortal usually wears a gold crown in the form of a lotus with a hairpin styled like a cloud-shaped



**Fig. 5.10** A coin charm featuring the image of Xuanwu. Collection of Zhao Yang



**Fig. 5.11** A coin charm featuring an immortal under a tree together with an attendant, turtle and crane. Collection of Zhao Yang

sceptre, a long robe inside and a cloak made from crane feathers with buttons down the front outside holding a deer-tail whisk. Sometimes, it is a female immortal instead of a male one. This design obviously expresses a wish for longevity and prolonged years. The male immortal, I believe, refers to the Celestial Guardian of Longevity and Safety (長生保命天尊), or the Great South Pole Emperor of Longevity (南極長生大帝), one of the Four Assistants (*si yu* 四御) to the Three Pure Ones (*san qing* 三清), who had gained his popularity since the Tang Dynasty and was represented in the stone Taoist statues on Mount Heming 鶴鳴山 in Jiange 劍閣, Sichuan Province. As Taoism was highly revered during the Northern Song dynasty, Emperor Huizong proclaimed himself as the King of Divine Empyrean and Jade Purity (神霄玉清王) who had descended to the world and who was the Celestial Guardian of Longevity and Safety in another name. According to Volume 92 of the *Xu zi zhi tong jian* 續資治通鑑, he instructed the College of Taoist Archives (*Dao lu yuan* 道錄院) to confer him the title of The Patron Emperor of Daoism (*Jiao zhu dao jun huang di* 教主道君皇帝). As a result of this, the

Celestial Lord of Longevity and Life Protection was popularly worshipped, a folk practice that was continued well into the Southern Song and the Jin dynasties. Imaginably, the image of this Taoist god was created after Emperor Huizong, which carried with it immense political as well as religious significance.

The female adept in the pictorial design typically wore a Zhuima Topknot (墜馬髻; a hairstyle with a knot down at the shoulder level), dressed in a loose gown, both hands holding a tray with a birthday present on top. Her name is Magu 麻姑 the Hemp Lady. According to *The Biography of Immortals* (*Shen xian zhuan* 《神仙傳》) by Ge Hong in the Eastern Jin Dynasty (AD 317–420), she was the younger sister of the immortal Wang Fang-ping 王方平, who cultivated herself according to Taoist doctrine on Mount Guyu 姑餘, in the south east of Mozhou 牟州. According to another account by a Tang official and calligrapher Yan Zhen-qing 顏真卿 inscribed on a stone tablet known to this day as “An Account of Magu’s Adept Altar” (*Ma gu xian tan ji*, 麻姑仙壇記), she was a former maid in the Tang imperial palace, called Li Qiong-xian 黎瓊仙, and managed to achieve immortality in the Cave of Danxia Wanling 丹霞宛陵 on Mount Magu. Folk tales tell us that Magu offered birthday congratulations to the Queen Mother of the West with wine brewed from magic mushrooms at the bank of River Jiangzhu 絳洙河. Thus Magu was regarded as a symbol of longevity and good luck and commonly accompanied with red-crown cranes. The two coin charms here both feature a female adept, derived from the same legend of Magu sending good wishes on the birthday celebration of the Queen Mother. It appears later than the former and was widely popular after the Southern Song dynasty (Fig. 5.12).

**Fig. 5.12** A coin charm featuring Celestial Master Zhang driving away demons and evil spirits. Collection of Zhao Yang





Celestial Master Zhang (張天師 or 張天使) or the Celestial Master slaying demons (天師斬鬼) is another common theme. The Celestial Master is a generic name for Zhang Dao-ling, founder of the Five Rice Bushels Sect (五斗米道), and his descendant heirs but this title mostly refers to the first. Zhang Dao-ling founded the Five Rice Bushels Sect towards the end of the Han dynasty and claimed to be appointed as Celestial Master by the Supreme Lord Laozi (*Tai shang lao jun* 太上老君). Therefore the sect was also known as the Celestial Master Sect (天師道), which commanded 24 parishes headed by Yangping (陽平治) as the central parish. An official seal was carved with the inscription “The Seal of the Capital Parish Yang Ping” (*Yang ping zhi du gongyin* 陽平治都功印). The seal, double swords named *San wu zhan xie ci xiong jian* and a Taoist charm eventually became religious instruments representing the first Celestial Master, which “must not be passed to anyone outside the direct descendant sons and grandsons” (“紹吾之位,非吾家宗親子孫不傳。”). Zhang Ling passed the instruments to his son Zhang Heng 張衡, who then to Zhang Lu 張魯, and the fourth Celestial Master, Zhang Sheng 張盛, migrated from Hangzhong 漢中 in Shaanxi to Mount Longhu 龍虎山 in Jiangxi, where his descendants were all entitled Celestial Master (Zhang 2001: 355–358; Zhong 2001: 25ff and 27ff). The 30th Celestial Master, Zhang Ji-xian 張繼先 (AD 1092–1127), was favoured and trusted by Emperor Huizong of the Northern Song (Ren 2001:480). The 35th Celestial Master, Zhang Da-ke 張大可 (AD 1218–1262), was given an imperial audience with Emperor Lizong of the Southern Song and entrusted to be in charge of the three primary Daoist abbeys, namely, Mount Longhu, Mount Mao 茅山 and Mount Gezao 閣皂山, affirming the leading role of the Supreme Unity Sect on Mount Longhu in regions south of the Yangtze River (ibid: 493). The popularity of the Fulu Sect determined the use of the image of the Celestial Master on coin charms and made it one of the most common themes during the Song and the Jin periods.

The Demon Slaying General (斬鬼大將) is very similar to Celestial Master Zhang driving away evil spirits. There are nonetheless quite a few differences. The Celestial Master usually wears a crown while the General usually a helmet. The Celestial Master is dressed in both martial attire and Taoist robe while the General is dressed in martial attire only. In terms of the sources of their identity, the General is possibly originated from Celestial Master Zhang, Zhong Kui 鍾馗 (Zhang 2001: 487–489; Zhong 2001: 191ff), Mu Lian 目連 incarnated from Huang Cao 黃巢, Erlangshen 二郎神 (Zhang 2001: 467–471; Zhong 2001: 191ff), and Xuan Wu. Like Celestial Master Zhang and Xuan Wu, Erlangshen is also an important deity as an artistic theme often portrayed independently (Fig. 5.13). There are three possible sources of his origin, including Li Bing 李冰, Li Erlang 李二郎 son of Li Bing, and Zhao Li 趙昱. All these three characters share close links to water and the same hometown Shu 蜀. Both Li Bing and Zhao Yu once killed a dragon in the river. I believe the images of the deity on the coin charms matches closely that of Zhao Yu. During the Tianxi era of the Song 天禧 (AD 1017–1021), Xuan Wu received



**Fig. 5.13** A coin charm featuring Erlangshen.  
Collection of Zhao Yang



the title of the Realised Person and the Perfect Warrior of Numinous Retributions (*Zhen wu ling ying zhen jun* 真武靈應真君) and gradually became an important deity, who is always shown in loose long hair and in martial attire accompanied by a tortoise, a snake and stars. Because of his function and duty to remove demons and evil spirits, he is also often portrayed standing above demons and evil spirits. The image of Zhong Kui 鍾馗 was not yet widely used at the time. The occurrence of Mu Lian's image on coin charms may have to do with the popularity of a drama about Mu Lian at the time.

Apart from the several major images introduced above, we also see other deities from Buddhism (Fig. 5.14) and folklores but these will not be discussed here due to lack of space. In short, the Northern Song regions saw wide uses of the images of the Lord of Root Destiny Star, the Celestial Lord of Longevity and Life Protection, Celestial Master Zhang, the Demon Slaying General, Erlangshen, and Xuan Wu. The Southern Song saw the use of artistic themes related to syncretism and mixed religious traditions. The Jin saw a preferred use of Buddhist characters and the Queen Mother of the West as well as deities from a variety of different sources including the playing children, the unicorn looking up at the Moon and other folkloric characters. This period also saw widespread use of the twelve zodiacal animals and auspicious inscriptions.



**Fig. 5.14** A coin charm featuring deities from Buddhism. Collection of Zhao Yang

## 5.5 Significance and Functions of Inscriptions and Symbols

The first decorations on coins are inscriptions, the three light sources (Sun, Moon and stars) and some other simple symbols. Auspicious inscriptions have long been a major decoration found on coin charms. The Song and Jin Dynasty witnessed the universal use of written characters for good fortune (*fu* 福), longevity (*shou* 壽), happiness (*xi* 喜) and emolument (*lu* 祿). Most often, combinations of the written characters are used, such as *jia guan jin jue* 加官進爵 “may office and salary be bestowed upon you, *da ji li shi* 大吉利市 “great luck and good profit), *gui he qi shou* 龜鶴齊壽 “live as long as the tortoise and the crane”, *chang ming fu gui* 長命富貴 “longevity, wealth and honour” (Fig. 5.15), and so on, which are used



**Fig. 5.15** A coin charm inscribed “longevity, wealth and honour”. Collection of Zhao Yang

**Fig. 5.16** A coin charm featuring the image of Celestial Master Zhang together with descriptive inscriptions. Collection of Zhao Yang



together with images of gods and spirits to express wishes for longevity, good fortune, wealth and honor.

We also come across descriptive inscriptions such as *Zhang Tianshi* 張天師 “Celestial Master Zhang” (Fig. 5.16), *zhan gui da jiang* 斬鬼大將 “The Demon Slaying General”, *jiang jun* 將軍 “General”, which describe the figures on the coin charm. Additionally, we also see Taoist incantations such as the *Taishan*:

太上咒曰: *tai shang zou yue*,  
 天圓地方, *tian yuan di fang*,  
 六律九章, *liu lv jiu zhang*,  
 符神到處, *fu shen dao chu*,  
 萬鬼滅亡。 *wan gui mian wang*.  
 急急如律令, *ji ji ru lv ling*,  
 奉敕攝此符神靈。 *feng chi she ci fu shen ling*.

Such an incantation typically accompanies the image of Xuan Wu and Taoist characters of magic spell (Fig. 5.17). Occasionally, coin charms also bear chronological or value inscriptions. They are especially commonly found on charms produced during the Jin Dynasty.

The symbols, both concrete and abstract, conveyed mysterious cultural connotations, and were created with inherent mystery before written characters stemmed from them as carriers of fixed significance. The symbols retained their meaning and significance even after the start of the written language. They serve three major functions: as carriers of mysterious power in religion, as auspicious signs in folk customs, and as symbols of power controlled by the ruling class.

**Fig. 5.17** A coin charm featuring the Taishang incantation. Collection of Zhao Yang



**Fig. 5.18** A coin charm featuring Taoist magic talismans. Collection of Zhao Yang



The periods of the Song and the Jin witnessed the *interaction* of the first two in coexistence with the third. The symbols on gods-and-spirits coin charms have two major categories: for good fortune and for protection against evil spirits. Symbols such as the Eight Trigrams (*ba gua* 八卦), stars, the Four Gods (*si shen* 四神),



the Five Mountains (*wu yue* 五嶽), the Ten Heavenly Stems (*tian gan* 天干), the Twelve Zodiac Animals, the Twenty-eight star mansions, and the Twenty-four Lunar Seasonal Energy (*jie qi* 節氣) are both sacred religious symbols in Taoism and auspicious symbols in folk belief to ward off evil spirits and receive auspicious omens. There were four types of presentation for the Four Gods, the twelve zodiacs, the 28 constellations and the 60 Jiazi: as personified deities, in animal forms, in written characters and in abstract symbolic forms. The first two were concrete and the latter two were abstract. The abstract forms mostly involve star constellations and magic talismans. Coin charms typically combine the four different representational forms.

Taoist talismans (Fig. 5.18) and incantations create a sense of sacredness in the mind of the common believers and serve as an important form of protection in secretive rituals. While incantations are usually written in words, talismans are pictorial forms. Their origins and functions are described in the 7th volume of *Yun ji qi qian* 雲笈七籤, entitled *San dong jing jiao bu* 三洞經教部 or “Section on the Scriptural Teachings of the Three Caverns”.<sup>8</sup> Volume 25 discusses the essence of talismans and pictorial forms.<sup>9</sup> Although in a way pictorial images subsumed the magic talismans, if we agree that gods and spirits constitute a majority of the images, then perhaps the images and the magic talismans can be said to have given

<sup>8</sup> 「宋」張君房《雲笈七籤·卷七·三洞經教部》：“道門大論曰：一者陰陽初分，有三元五德八會之氣，以成飛天之書。後撰為八龍雲篆明光之章。陸先生解三才謂之三元。三元既立，五行鹹具。以五行為五位，三五和合，謂之八會，為眾書之文。又有八龍雲篆明光之章，自然飛玄之炁，接空成文，字方一丈，肇于諸天之內，生立一切也。按真誥，紫微夫人說：‘三元八會之書，建文章之祖。八龍雲篆，是根宗所起，有書之始也。’又雲：‘八龍是三才五行，形在既判之後。’赤書雲：‘靈寶赤書五篇出於原始之先。’即此而論，三元應非三才，五德應非五行也。此正應是三寶丈人之三氣，三氣自有五德耳。故九天生神章雲：‘天地萬化，自非三元所育，九氣所導，莫能生也。’又曰：‘三氣為天地之尊，九氣為萬物之根。’故知此三元在天地未開、三才未生之前也。宋法師解八會只是三氣五德。三元者：一曰混沌太無元，高上玉皇之氣；二曰赤混太無元，無上玉虛之氣；三曰冥寂玄通元，無上玉虛之氣。五德者，即三元所有。三五會即陰陽和。陰有少陰、太陰，陽有少陽、太陽，就和中之和，為五德也。篆者，撰也。撰集雲書，謂之雲篆。此即三元八會之文，八龍雲篆之章，皆是天書，三元八會之例是也。雲篆明光，則五符五勝之例是也。八會文本，凡一千一百九十字，五篇真文合六百六十八字，是三才之元根，生立天地，開化人神，萬物之由。故雲有天道、地道、神道、人道，此之謂也。玉訣雲，修用此法，五篇皆分字數，各有四條。一者主召九天上帝，校神仙圖籙，求仙致真之法。二者主召天宿星官，正天分度，保國寧民之道。三者攝製豐都六天之氣。四者勅命水帝，制召龍鳥也。其諸天內音，一天有八字三十二天合二百五十六字。論諸天度數期會，大聖真仙名諱位號，所治官府台城處所，神仙變化升降品次，眾魔種類，人鬼生死，轉輪因緣。其六十三字，是五方元精名號，服禦求仙、煉神化形、白日騰空之法。余一百二十二字闕無音解。二者演八會為龍鳳之文，謂之龍書。此下皆玄聖所述，以寫天文也。三者軒轅之時，倉頡仿龍鳳之勢，采鳥跡之文為古文，以代結繩，即古體也。四者周時史籀，變古文為大篆。五者秦時程邈，變大篆為小篆。六者盱陽變小篆為隸書。又雲：漢謂隸書曰佐書。或言程邈獄中所造，出於徒隸，故以隸為名。此即為六書也。”

<sup>9</sup> 「宋」張君房《雲笈七籤·卷七·符圖部》：“一切萬物，莫不以精氣為用。故二儀三景，皆以精氣行乎其中。萬物既有，亦以精氣行乎其中也。是則五行六物，莫不有精氣者也。以道之精氣，布之簡墨，會物之精氣，以卻邪偽，輔助正真，召會群靈，制禦生死，保持劫運，安鎮五方。然此符本於結空，太真仰寫天文，分置方位，區別圖像符書之異。符者，通取雲物星辰之勢。書者，別析音句銓量之旨。圖者，畫取靈變之狀。然符中有書，參似圖像。書中有圖，形聲並用。故有八體六文，更相發顯。”



rise to each other, making the major images more remarkable and easier for ordinary people to accept, thus narrowing the gaps between ethnic groups, geographical regions and political regimes, and alleviating the differences and conflicts between various religious sects. The explainability of written words and symbols and their potential ambiguity resulted in easier acceptance by believers through self-persuasion and self-interpretation with a more consolidated identity.

## 5.6 The Tendency of Merging Religious Sects and the Secularization of Religion

Emerging from the culture of the pre-Qin period, both Confucianism and Taoism blended with other cultural elements during their religious development while Buddhism went through a process of Sinicisation the moment it entered China. Social development provided a basis for the merging of the three religions, while a core reason can be found in cultural similarities and the convergence of the religious stereotypes, a process that was additionally promoted by the imperative support received from inside the religions. Early in the prophase of sinicised Buddhism and Taoism, historical personages such as Hui Si 慧思 and Tao Hong-jing 陶弘景, both of whom pursued Confucianism at the very beginning, initiated the worship of both Buddhism and Taoism. The combination of the three religions<sup>10</sup> was proposed early in the Tang Dynasty quite despite the fact that Taoism was regarded as a national religion, giving rise to a situation where the three religions were formally opposed to each other and yet mutually influencing each other. After the Five Dynasties, a large number of literati pursued Buddhism and Taoism absorbing elements from each other. As a result, the Song and the Jin saw the merging of these three religions from form to content. At that time, Zen had already evolved into a Buddhist denomination with a Taoist nature, and the Taoist Quanzhen Sect was a direct result from this tendency with principles and theories from the three religions. As a matter of fact, most other newly formed Taoist sects were the same. The reasons why Emperor Lizong highly recommended *Tai shang gan ying pian* 太上感應篇 the Supreme Highest Retribution Treatise included not only the idea of persuading people to do good deeds by karmas but also disseminated the Confucian ethical doctrines summarised as *San gang wu chang* (三綱五常) in a manner easy for ordinary people to comprehend. This specific event transmitted two messages: that syncretism had been completed from form to content by the time of the Southern Song and that the convergence of the three religions was recognized both in and outside the imperial court.

The secularisation of religions had fully matured in the period of the Song and the Jin dynasties. Compared with the Ming and the Qing, the religions at this time

<sup>10</sup> 「唐」白居易《三教論衡》：“儒門釋教，虽名教則有异同，約義歸宗，彼此亦無差別。所謂同出而異名，殊途而同歸者也。”

still maintained a high standard when performing the rituals even though the same rituals were quickly becoming popularized at the time. On the coin charms, such a tendency was fully evidenced, where different dynastic features demonstrated different stylistic and aesthetic preferences as well as artistic themes. The gods and spirits were more focused on secular life through the expressed wish to achieve immortality. The frequent appearance of the young attendant by the side of the immortal is additional evidence in support of this change, who subsequently evolved into a symbol of good luck. The image of the young attendant, when interpreted culturally, had everything to do with the importance of labour force in a rural society and hence with the importance of births and posterity. The image therefore expresses an obvious wish to bring sons and grandsons to the family, striking home a sense of folkloric and religious convergence. The stories about the gods and spirits were largely adapted from literary works and folklores from earlier and contemporary times, marking the development of the civic culture. The legend about the unicorn looking up at the moon, for example, was first recorded in *Guan yin zi* 關尹子 faked in the Song dynasty. This legend then not only reflected the desire for immortality but also features of that time.

## 5.7 Conclusion

The cultural background of combining the three religions, the separation of regimes and the political situation of ethnic conflicts constituted the principal contradictions during the period of the Song and the Jin dynasties, which made it inevitable for regional cultures to be deeply effected. Four regional cultures could be identified, namely, the region south of the Yangtze River, the Central Plain, the sixteen states in the You and the Yun areas, and the north-east.

The cultural circle in regions south of the Yangtze River, outside the mainstream in the Northern Song Dynasty, was elevated naturally to form the core with the establishment of the Southern Song. For the tradition of worshipping the gods and spirits, the Taoist Fulu Sect continued its popularity among the masses after the Northern Song and even across a wide region. The inevitable localization during its transmission united all the branches under the same title, which was reflected by the designs of gods-and-spirits coin charms in the following four aspects of the same themes: the variety of images, the precise definition of contents, the exquisiteness of images and the unbalanced technical level. The culture in the Central Plain area experienced two periods; one was under the dominance of the Northern Song and the latter under the Jin. Taoism in the former period was stained with politics under the promotion by the government which paid more attention to achievements in culture and education based on the traditions of the Tang Dynasty. Besides, the economic development also contributed to the inevitable secularisation of religions. Here, the themes on the gods-and-spirits coin charms were normalized, elaborate and sacred-looking. The later successions of ruling regimes imposed no fundamental change on culture but the coin charms underwent two changes: the

highlighting of national flavour and the alleviation of normalisation. The national flavour does not refer to the Jurchen features but to the Han cultural features. The sixteen states in the You and the Yun areas were administered first by the Liao and then by the Jin and governed by the Northern Song only temporarily. However, people in this region shared similar habits and customs with those in the Central Plain area. The same phenomenon can be found on coin charms from the later period of the Central Plain culture; they were varied in themes, undefined in intended meaning, heavy in weight and simple in making. The culture in the northeastern area emphasized the ethnic cultures of the Liao and the Jin because of its geography. Its coin charms were found to have a preference for auspicious inscriptions along with images of gods and spirits. These charms show themes from Buddhist and Taoism but they rarely mixed each other. They tend to be comparatively rough in making but generous in materials and thus heavy generally speaking.

The separation of regimes inevitably hallmarked the cultures in the northern and the southern areas with political features during the period of the Song and the Jin dynasties. However, they nonetheless shared the same premise of cultural fusion despite the political and ethnic conflicts in culture. The coin charms flourished during this period and the blending of religious rituals into folk practices rendered special meanings to these coins. The gods-and-spirits coin charms brought religious sacredness into folkloric activities, which in turn gradually helped to lighten the sacred nature of religions.

## Chapter 6

# Horse Coins: Pieces for *Da ma*, the Chinese Board Game ‘Driving the Horses’

Joe Cribb

The pieces traditionally used to play the Chinese board game *da ma* 打馬 were shaped like Chinese coins. According to the Ming period (late sixteenth-century) version of this game (Fig. 1.22 in Chap. 1 in this volume), the pieces looked like contemporary square-holed bronze coins. This characteristic has ensured that many examples have survived to the present day. It has led to their preservation in large numbers by coin collectors, who call them *ma qian* 馬錢 horse coins; there are, for example, 125 specimens in the collection of the Department of Coins and Medals of the British Museum. This paper is intended to provide an introduction to horse coins and to examine the evidence they provide for the *da ma* game itself.

Lo’s version of the game (Lo 2007) states that each of the players has twenty horses, pieces in the shape of large coins, carved from rhinoceros horn or elephant ivory or cast from copper (Zhou 1940, vol. 22: 57–8). Their engraved designs should be a representation of a horse and its name. The rules also allow the players to use actual coins in the place of the horse-design pieces, but each player’s coins must be distinguishable by their inscriptions. It is suggested that large coins, value 2 or 3, could be used. Because of the horses depicted and named on them, they are popularly referred to in numismatic literature as *horse coins*.

The preface to the Ming description of the game refers to three versions of the game which require different numbers of horses. The twenty-horse game, the rules of which are described, is called *yi jing ma* 依經馬 Horses Following the Rule. A version with only ten horses led by a general is named as *guan xi ma* 關西馬 Horses West of the Pass. The third game, *xuan he ma* 宣和馬 Horses of the Xuanhe

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First published under the same title in Finkel (2007: 116–124) with minor editorial changes including the insertion of Chinese characters by the Editors.

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Period (AD 1119–1126), combines characteristics of both *yi jing ma* and *guan xi ma*, but there is no mention of the number of pieces.

The same information about the game and its pieces has also appeared in Chinese coin catalogues compiled in the nineteenth century. Like Andrew Lo's version, these references were drawn by the compilers of the coin catalogues from anthologies of early texts. One coin catalogue (Weng 1822, quoted at length by Ding 1938: 490–491; see Appendix for translation) also mentions a Song period version featuring fifty horses and another with fifty-four, both without any details. It is possible that this represents the total number of pieces used by all the players rather than those used by a single player.

The version presented by Lo is very similar to that presented in a recent Chinese coin book (Sun 1990: 81–89). Like Lo's game it is played by two to five players, each with twenty pieces, on a rectangular board with a 91-space track. Lo's version shows the track following around the edge of the board, like ludo, and ending with its last stretch in the centre, while in Sun's version the track crosses the board a row at a time, to and fro across a  $9 \times 10$  grid, like snakes and ladders, with the last space along one edge. In both cases the spaces are arranged in groups of eight separated by special spaces (stables, gates, bolt holes, etc.). Most of the spaces in the groups of eight contain a horse's name. The function of these names is not explained and it seems likely that they are a decorative feature, showing the names of famous horses like those on the pieces. Lo and Sun's version use the same horse names in the same sequence, but of the 74 horse names on the boards, only nine exact matches with the names on pieces have been recorded in this study.

A board with the ludo-type arrangement big enough to play on with three-cash sized pieces would have to be at least  $650 \times 650$  mm. A snakes and ladders-type board for the same pieces would need a smaller board of about  $350 \times 350$  mm. The ludo-type board, although less convenient in size, is probably more suitable for playing, because the rules demand that up to twenty pieces can sit on one space during the game and the ludo arrangement allows for expansion from the space into the empty centre of the board, whereas a snakes and ladders-type board would need the pieces to be piled up, with obvious instability.

No examples carved from horn or ivory have survived, but otherwise most of the surviving coin-shaped horse pieces conform to the regulations given in Andrew Lo's Ming description of the game. Although the pieces constitute the sole surviving tangible evidence of the game, they nevertheless provide only limited information about how the game was played.

Some interesting evidence does, however, survive in the considerable variation in the presentation of the horse designs and the horse names required by the regulations. There is also a wide range of piece sizes, and some departure from the normal characteristics of the coins they are modelled on. An examination of the range of examples does give some indication of the version of the game for which they were made and of how different players could distinguish their own pieces from those of their opponents. For example, the surviving horse pieces include a group of specimens on which the horse is ridden by an armed warrior, with inscriptions naming famous generals instead of horses. These could be general pieces,



needed to play the game *guan xi ma*, in which a general leads the team of ten horses.

The evidence presented here is drawn from the British Museum collection, from other public and private collections, and from coin catalogues (see Table 6.1). More than 800 examples have been recorded from published sources, and another 300 plus from the British Museum and other collections.

The survival of about 1100 specimens is distorted by the inclusion of many copies made after the game had gone out of vogue. The fabric of many of the surviving examples suggests that they are copies cast for collectors of coins and antiquities or for use as lucky coins. Some types are easily recognised as later

**Table 6.1** Numbers of examples of horse coins in published sources

<i>Chinese works</i>		
Ji 1751 (vol. 15, p. 140)	2	
Chu 1819 (vol. 16, p. 20)	8	(Fig. 6.17)
Feng 1821 (vol. 3, p. 12)	8	
Ni 1822 (vol. 21, p. 2)	14	
Zhang 1831 (vol. 20, pp. 709)	8	
Wang 1863 (vol. 12, nos 241–292)	52	
Li 1864 (part 4, vol. 12, pp. 1–15)	120	
Qin 1903 (vol. 8b, pp. 11–12)	10	
Ding 1938 (pp. 393–395)	33	(copies Wang 1863)
Chen c. 1985 (pp. 36–43, nos 126–194)	68	(copies Ding 1938)
Dai 1990 (vol. 2, pp. 457–484)	104	
Lu 1991 (pp. 494–572)	245	(copies Li 1864, Ding 1938 and Dai 1990)
Yu 1992 (pp. 390–443)	320	(copies Li 1864 Ding 1938 and Dai 1990)
Zhang 1992 (pp. 44–47, 121–123, 139, 140, 143, 144, nos 676–710, 832–869, 840, 874, 880)	43	
<i>Japanese works</i>		
Nakatani 1729 (pp. 8–9)	18	
Kuchiri 1798 (Sect. 9, pp. 8–11)	9	
Omura 1817	20	
Nakahashi 1916	14	(copies his 1916 listing)
Okudaira 1938 (pp. 104–114)	120	(copies Li 1864)
<i>Western works</i>		
de Chadoir 1842 (pls 42–3)	24	(copies Nakatani 1729 and Kuchiri 1798)
Schj�oth 1929 (p. 83, pl. 132, nos 120–28a)	10	
Lockhart 1895 (vol. 1, pp. 145–147, nos 1619–1645)	27	
Rommelts 1968 (pp. 17–88, 63–64, nos 68–80)	13	(copies part of Lockhart 1895)
Thierry 1987 (pp. 114–120, pls 67–71, nos 274–302)	29	

copies because of their poor definition (secondary castings) and frequent occurrence in coin collections; there are, for example, eleven specimens of the same type in the British Museum. Some copies in the British Museum were acquired in 1847 from a coin collection acquired in China in 1841, suggesting that the production of copies has been going on for a very long time. Some copies are so large that their use in a game seems unlikely (Fig. 6.16). There are also a few pieces with added suspension loops, suggesting that some copies were made for use as decorative pieces or as personal charms (it was common practice in China to make imitation coins for use as good luck or exorcism charms). The copies, both ornamental pieces and personal charms, can, however, still be of use in studying the original board-game pieces, because they were usually copied from actual pieces used for playing *da ma*.

The British Museum contains 125 specimens, with 62 different designs. The earliest acquisitions were a group of fifteen donated by a British naval officer called Forbes in 1847. He had acquired them at Amoy while serving during the Opium War in 1840–1841. In 1883, 22 more were acquired in the Gardner collection of Chinese coins and five in the Morse collections. The most important acquisition by the Museum is the twenty pieces purchased in 1884 from the collections of the Japanese prince, Masatsuna, *daimyo* of Tamba, as part of a collection of several thousand Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese coins. The importance of these latter examples is that they are all original Song-Ming period pieces acquired in Japan from sorted Chinese coins exported to Japan during the late Song to Ming (thirteenth–fifteenth centuries). Since 1971 another 70 pieces have been acquired from a variety of sources. There are 50 specimens in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

The accounts of the game as they survive suggest that there was only one instance—the general leading a team of horses—in which pieces need to be differentiated from each other. It can, however, be presumed that in a game played by up to five players there must have been some requirement for the players to distinguish their own pieces from those of their opponents. The pieces can be categorised according to the horse names and horse images on them, but it seems unlikely that players would find it easy to keep track of their pieces in this way with up to a hundred on the board at a time.

A further means of distinguishing the pieces, apart from the names and horse images, is discernible in the surviving examples, which can easily be divided into six main groups on the basis of the design constructions:

- (a) two groups with the horse on one side and a two-character inscription naming the horse on the other, distinguished from each other by the position of the characters: to right and left of the central hole on one group, and above and below on the other;
- (b) a third group also has a horse on one side with four characters identifying the horse on the other;
- (c) the fourth group has both a two-character horse name and the horse on the same side and a blank back;
- (d) a fifth has the same treatment as the fourth group, but on both sides;
- (e) the last group is miscellaneous, including horse pieces without horse names.

Sub-groups can also be readily distinguished by the style of the inscription, the diameter of the piece (denominations), the width of the rim etc. Similarly, three main groups and various sub-groups can also be distinguished among the general pieces, with horseman designs replacing the horse designs.

On the basis of the available specimens it has been possible to recognise a large number of possible sets. The method of recording these pieces in coin books by engravings copied from ink-rubbings introduces some elements of doubt about writing style, diameter, and rim width, so the following list cannot be considered conclusive. It is also difficult to separate copies from the originals on which they are based. If enough actual specimens could be examined, then metal analysis and the study of casting methods could make the categorisation more accurate. The list of potentially recognisable sets in Table 6.2 is intended as a broad guide to the information available from surviving records of pieces for this game.

**Table 6.2** Groups of horse and horseman coins

No.	Denom.	Approx.		Rec.	Notes
		Dia. (mm)	Border (mm)	Examples	
<b>Group 1: Horse/two-character name right-left</b>					
1.1	10 cash	35	1	6	(Fig. 6.1)
1.2	3 cash	31	2	9	
1.3	3 cash	30	3	2	Double rim (Fig. 6.2)
1.4	2 cash	28	2	6	
1.5	2 cash	28	2	10	(Set includes general, inscribed <i>jiang ma</i> )
1.6	1 cash	26	3	2	
1.7	1 cash	26	2	8	
1.8	1 cash	26	1	6	
1.9	1 cash	25	2	8	Seal script (Set includes general, inscribed <i>jiang ma</i> )
(Fourteen examples cannot be matched to sets)					
<b>Group 2: Horse/two-character name above-below</b>					
2.1	3 cash	30	2	5	
2.2	3 cash	30	1	4	Without hole
2.3	2 cash	28	2	4	
2.4	2 cash	28	2	9	
2.5	2 cash	28	1	4	Round hole
2.6	2 cash	27	2	12	(Fig. 6.3)
2.7	1 cash	26	1	18	
2.8	1 cash	23	1	4	
2.9	1 cash	23	1	3	Round hole

(Six examples cannot be matched to sets)

(continued)

**Table 6.2** (continued)

No.	Denom.	Approx.		Rec.	Notes
		Dia. (mm)	Border (mm)	Examples	
<b>Group 3A: Horse/four-character name</b>					
3.1	3 cash	31	3	6	Inscription, top right bottom left, ends <i>zhi ma</i>
3.2	2 cash	30	1	2	Inscription, top bottom right left, ends <i>zhi ma</i>
3.3	2 cash	29	3	4	Inscription ends <i>ma</i>
3.4	2 cash	29	2	4	Inscription ends <i>san qi</i> (Fig. 6.4)
3.5	2 cash	28	2	5	Inscription, to bottom right left, ends <i>zhi ma</i>
3.6	2 cash	27	1	3	Inscription ends <i>san qi</i>
3.7	1 cash	26	3	3	Inscription ends <i>ma</i>
3.8	1 cash	24	2	8	Inscription <i>zhi zheng tong bao</i> (from coin issued AD 1341–1368) (Fig. 6.17)
3.9	1 cash	22	2	2	Inscription, top bottom right left, ends <i>zhi ma</i>
3.10	1 cash	22	2	2	Inscription ends <i>san qi</i>
(Twenty-six examples cannot be matched to sets)					
<b>Group 3B: Horse with two-character name/four-character name</b>					
3.11	3 cash	34	3	5	Inscription <i>dao guang tong bao</i> , (from coin issued AD 1821–1850)
3.12	3 cash	30	2	3	(Fig. 6.5)
3.13	2 cash	28	2	5	
(Ten examples cannot be matched to sets) (Fig. 6.6)					
<b>Group 4: Horse with two-character name/blank</b>					
4.1	3 cash	31	3	8	
4.2	3 cash	31	3	3	
4.3	3 cash	31	1	6	
4.4	3 cash	30	1	8	(Fig. 6.7)
4.5	2 cash	28	2	6	
4.6	2 cash	27	3	13	
4.7	2 cash	27	2	3	
4.8	2 cash	27	1	8	Small characters
4.9	1 cash	26	1	9	All horses same, running to left
4.10	1 cash	25	3	9	(Includes general, inscribed <i>jiang ma</i> )
4.11	1 cash	25	2	6	Broad characters
4.12	1 cash	24	1	9	
(Thirteen examples cannot be matched to sets)					
<b>Group 5A: Horse with two-character name/as front</b>					
5.1	3 cash	33	3	5	
5.2	3 cash	30	3	10	
5.3	3 cash	30	1	7	(Fig. 6.8)
5.4	2 cash	27	1	3	All horses same, running to left
5.5	1 cash	25	1	8	

(continued)

**Table 6.2** (continued)

No.	Denom.	Approx.		Rec.	Notes
		Dia. (mm)	Border (mm)	Examples	
<b>Group 5B:</b> <i>Horse with two-character name/mirror version of front</i>					
5.6	2 cash	28	1	5	All horses same, running to left
(One example cannot be matched to sets)					
<b>Group 5C:</b> <i>Horse with two-character name/two-character name</i>					
5.7	2 cash	28	2	3	
(One example cannot be matched to sets)					
<b>Group 6:</b> <i>Horse with single character or without inscription</i>					
(Twenty examples cannot be matched to sets) (Figs. 6.9 and 6.10)					
<b>Group 7A:</b> <i>Horseman/two-character name above-below</i>					
7.1	3 cash	32	3	4	(Fig. 6.11)
7.2	3 cash	32	2	3	Inscription with <i>zhun</i> on left
7.3	3 cash	31	2	5	
7.4	2 cash	29	1	4	
7.5	2 cash	28	3	7	
7.6	2 cash	27	3	6	Image border 1 mm
7.7	1 cash	26	2	3	
7.8	1 cash	25	1	7	(Fig. 6.12)
(Two examples cannot be matched to sets)					
<b>Group 7B:</b> <i>Horseman/four-character name jiang below hole</i>					
7.9	3 cash	31	2	6	
7.10	3 cash	30	2	4	Inscription with <i>zhun</i> on left
7.11	2 cash	29	1	3	Man without horse
7.12	1 cash	26	2	3	
(Two examples cannot be matched to sets)					
<b>Group 7C:</b> <i>Horseman/four-character name</i>					
7.13	3 cash	31	2	7	
7.14	3 cash	29	2	3	Inscription with <i>zhi</i> below hole
7.15	2 cash	27	1	7	Inscription with <i>qi</i> on right (Figs. 6.13 and 6.14)
(Eight examples cannot be matched to sets)					
<b>Group 8:</b> <i>Horseman/two-character name</i>					
8.1	1 cash	24	1	5	
(Three examples cannot be matched to sets)					
<b>Group 9:</b> <i>Horseman with single character or without inscription</i>					
(Seven examples cannot be matched to sets)					

Unless otherwise indicated, the pieces recorded within each set are distinguished by the horse name and the posture of the horse depicted





**Fig. 6.1** *Qu huang* 渠黃 [Big Yellow] horse coin from set 1.1. The poor linear style of the horse suggests that this is a late copy. BM Gardner Collection 1883-8-2-3445; bronze, 34 mm, 2.25 g



**Fig. 6.2** *Han xue* 汗血 [Blood Sweater] horse coin from set 1.3. Song-Ming period piece collected in Japan. BM Tamba Collection 1884-5-11-2307; bronze, 31 mm, 7.24 g



**Fig. 6.3** *Yi feng* 遺風 [Wind Beater] horse coin from set 2.6. Song-Ming period piece. BM Gardner Collection 1183-8-2-3449; bronze, 28 mm, 8.67 g



**Fig. 6.4** *Qin jiang san qi* 秦將散騎 [Qin State General's Charger] horse coin from set 3.4. A Song-Ming period piece which has been worn during use as a coin, collected in Japan. BM Tamba Collection 1884-5-11-2394; bronze, 27 mm, 4.79 g



**Fig. 6.5** *Jue bo* 決波 [Wave Breaker]/*Zhen guan shi ji* 貞觀十驥 [The Ten Horses of the Zhenguan Period (AD 627–650)] horse coin from set 3.12. The casting technique and metal (brass was not used for coinage in China until the 16th century) show that this is a late copy. BM Morse Collection 1883-7-1-970; brass, 32 mm, 12.12 g

**Table 6.3** Number and quantity of sets

Number of pieces recorded in a set	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	12	13	18
Number of sets recorded	5	13	9	8	9	5	7	5	2	1	1	1

With at least 66 distinguishable sets available, the problem of players confusing their pieces with those of their opponents could easily be avoided, even if each of the five players used pieces of the same size (see Table 6.3).



**Fig. 6.6** *Hua liu* 騂騮 [Piebald]/*ba long zhi jun* 八龍之駿 [Steed from the Eight Dragons] unsetted horse coin of group 3B. *Hua liu* is one of the eight horses of King Mu. The casting technique and metal show that this is a late copy. BM Gardner Collection 1883-8-2-3442; brass, 33 mm, 10.26 g



**Fig. 6.7** *Nie ying* 躡影 [Shadow Stepper] horse coin from set 4.4. The casting technique and metal show that this is a late copy. BM Gardner Collection 1883-8-2-3448; brass, 30 mm, 6.27 g

The sets also yield some evidence for identifying the number of pieces normally used by each player. Lo’s version is for twenty pieces per player, but another frequently mentioned version has ten per player. Only three of the recorded sets are large enough to suggest that they originally contained more than ten pieces. The ten-piece version (perhaps also represented by the fifty-piece game, with ten horses each for five players) might, therefore, have been more common than the surviving





**Fig. 6.8** *Long ju* 龍駒 [Dragon Colt] horse coin from set 5.3. The weakness of detail suggests that this is a late copy. The back is cast upside down. BM 1983-3-13-282; bronze, 27 mm, 3.87 g



**Fig. 6.9** Nameless horse coin of group 6 with round hole. A Song-Ming period piece collected in Japan. BM Tamba Collection 1884-5-11-2262; bronze, 25 mm, 1.98 g



**Fig. 6.10** Nameless horse coin of group 6 with round hole. This piece has been pierced to be worn as a good luck charm. A Song-Ming period piece collected in Japan. BM Whyte Collection 1887-5-11-45; bronze, 23 mm, 2.31 g



**Fig. 6.11** *Wu jiang sun wu* 吳將孫武 [Sun Wu General of Wu State] general coin from set 7.6. A Song-Ming period piece collected in Japan. BM Tamba Collection 1884-5-11-2269; bronze, 29 mm, 4.61 g



**Fig. 6.12** *Yan jiang yue yi* 燕將樂毅 [Yue Yi General of Yan State] general coin from set 7.8. A Song-Ming period piece. BM Gardner Collection 1883-8-2-3455; bronze, 25 mm, 2.38 g



**Fig. 6.13** *Zhao qi te le* 趙騎特勒 [Qi Tele of Zhao State] general coin from set 7.15. A Song-Ming period piece collected in Japan. BM Tamba Collection 1884-5-11-2259; bronze, 27 mm, 3.62 g



**Fig. 6.14** Version of Fig. 6.13 with edge removed to make one-cash size for circulation as coin in Japan. BM Tamba Collection 1884-5-11-2288; bronze, 22 mm, 2.07 g

rules suggest. There are two sets containing ten, and five containing nine (suggesting that these sets may have originally been of ten pieces, or nine plus a general). One of the sets (3.12) also contains a piece with an inscription *Zhen guan shi ji* 貞觀十驥 the ten horses of the Zhenguan period (AD 627–650), which suggests that horses could be part of a set of ten.

Another group 3B piece has an inscription *ba long zhi jun* 八龍之駿 steed from the eight dragons. There is also a set (3.8) which appears to contain exactly eight pieces, because the set is represented by the same eight examples in Yu 1992 (nos 1778–1785) and in the British Museum collection. Six other recorded sets also contain eight pieces, although they may not be complete. It is therefore a possibility that there was an eight-piece version of the game no longer known from literary reports.

The names of the horses have also been analysed in order to identify sets of pieces. The most common names are those of the eight horses of Mu Wang 周穆王, king of Zhou (about 1001–946 BC). Ancient Chinese literature identifies these as two teams of draught horses, each four pulling a chariot. The names of these horses and others identified with historical or legendary horses have been discussed by Thierry 1991. An examination of the recorded larger sets suggest that these are not surviving sets consisting exclusively of the eight horses of Mu Wang, but one set (1.2) contains seven of Mu Wang's horses together with two other horses. It is possible that the complete set contained all eight of his horses, but with additional pieces. Set 1.5, with ten pieces, however, only contained four of Mu Wang's horses. Thierry 1991 has also discussed the horseman on the general pieces, identifying them as historical figures from the Warring States Period (475–221 BC) down to the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907).



The surviving general pieces seem to form sets like the horse pieces; it seems unlikely that they are individual general pieces added to a team of horses to play one of the versions, *guan xi ma* 關西馬, mentioned in the literature. There must be an undocumented version of *da ma* 打馬 in which the pieces were generals rather than horses, or the generals were replacements for horses in the normal game according to the personal choice of the players. The surviving sets suggest that the game *guan xi ma* 關西馬 was played with ordinary horse-design pieces, one of which was identified by its name as *jiang ma* 將馬 the general's horse. Examples of this have been recorded in sets 1.5, 1.9, and 4.10, respectively sets of ten, eight, and nine pieces, suggesting that a ten-piece set was the correct set with which to play *guan xi ma* 關西馬, as the literature asserts.

Some of the groups of pieces have a characteristic which could relate to playing methods. On one side they have a horse image and on the other an inscription naming the horse. It is possible that during the course of play the status of some pieces changed and they were turned over to indicate this? In Lo's version there are occasions when pieces cannot be captured or passed; perhaps this was how that change of role was recorded during play.

The literary references to the game all describe it as being popular during the Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279) and Lo's account of the game, from 1597, suggests that it remained in vogue through the Yuan Dynasty (AD 1271–1368) and Ming Dynasty (AD 1368–1644). The surviving pieces confirm this, as they closely resemble the official coins in production from 960 until 1520. Broad rims can be found on coins throughout this period, but the use of narrow borders on some pieces makes them resemble official coins in production from 1100. The three-cash denomination also matches the pieces to coins from about 1160. Some sets were made with inscriptions in



**Fig. 6.15** *Da ma* 大馬 [Big horse] horse coin of unique design without central hole and with blank reverse, probably pre-Song period, with clerk's script inscription. BM Gardner Collection 1883-8-2-3660; bronze, 29 mm, 7.35 g

the archaic seal script used on Song Dynasty coins from AD 1023 until 1194. Such comparisons can only be used very loosely, as the manufacturers of the *da ma* pieces did not have to observe the strict regulations under which the coin makers operated. Examples of pieces which can be certainly dated to the Song-Yuan-Ming period in the British Museum come from a group of coins acquired from a Japanese collection in 1884. This collection was assembled in Japan from Chinese coins exported to Japan before the end of the Ming Dynasty. Their casting techniques, weights, dimensions, and writing style are closely based on Song and Yuan period coins.

One piece in the British Museum (Fig. 6.15) is entirely different in design, lacking the central hole of the coins. Its horse image and horse name are both on the same side and its back is blank and smooth. The horse is drawn in a style associated with the pre-Song period; the inscription is also in an early style. A few other hole-less pieces, but with the name and the horse image on either side, have been recorded in the numismatic literature, but these have Song-style horse images and inscriptions. One set of pieces recorded in various sources and collections has a coin inscription of the nineteenth century (3.11). This could represent an attempt to revive the game or the use of horse coins as good luck pieces (Figs. 6.16, 6.17 and 6.18).

The purpose of this paper was to examine the pieces used in the game of *da ma* 打馬 to see if they could cast light on the game. The pieces copied three-, two-, or one-cash coins of the Song-Ming periods (960–1520), whereas the literary records refer only to copies of three- or two-cash sized pieces. They are decorated with

**Fig. 6.16** *Bei ri* 背日 [Away from the Sun], enlarged late copy of group 5 horse coin (back identical, not shown) for ornamental use. BM Denham Collection 1987-1-12-1; brass, 124 mm, 356.43 g





**Fig. 6.17** Set 3.8, eight horse coins inscribed with coin inscription *zhi zheng tong bao* 至正通寶 [Coin of Zhizheng period (1341–1368)]. Yuan-Ming period pieces. BM 1982-5-5-23 to 30; bronze  
**a** 24 mm, 4.90 g, **b** 24 mm, 5.50 g, **c** 24 mm, 5.49 g, **d** 24 mm, 5.07 g, **e** 24 mm, 5.21 g, **f** 24 mm, 6.02 g, **g** 24 mm, 5.28 g, **h** 24 mm, 4.41 g



Fig. 6.17 (continued)





Fig. 6.17 (continued)

horse images and horse names, as described in the literary accounts of the game. They confirm that the game was popular from the Song period until its rules were recorded in the sixteenth century. Only one piece suggests that the game could predate the Song Dynasty. The pieces were not normally distinguished in the game, even though they had different names. In the version called *guan xi ma* 關西馬, however, horse coins described as the ‘general’s horse’ in their inscriptions had a special role. The surviving general pieces were perhaps intended for another version of the game. Players could distinguish their own pieces from those of the other players through the recorded variations in design composition.



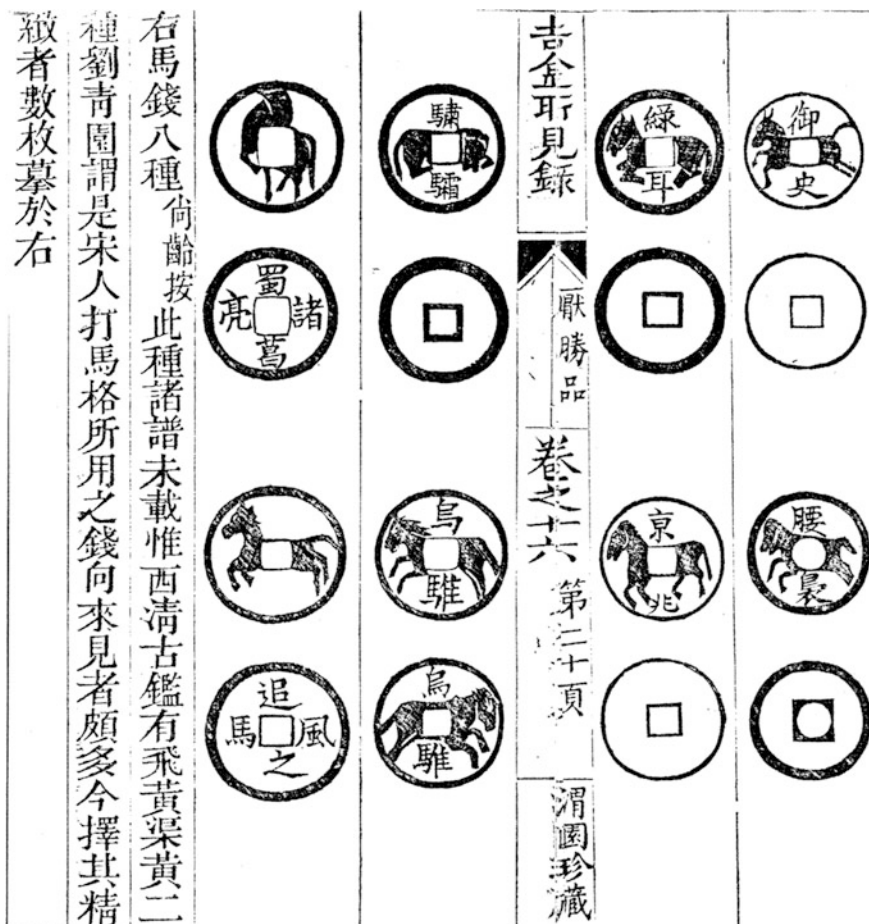


Fig. 6.18 A page from Chu 1819 showing eight horse coins

**Acknowledgments** I would like to thank Irving Finkel and Andrew Lo for their encouragement in the preparation of this study. I am also indebted to François Thierry, Curator of Oriental Coins in the Bibliothèque Nationale Paris, and my colleague Helen Wang, Curator of East Asian Coins in the British Museum, for their help and insights. Thanks also to my colleagues Annette Calton and Tony Hughes, to Alison Harry for her suggestion that the two-sided horse coins might have different roles in play according to the side visible, and to Chaz Howson for his excellent photographs.

## Appendix

Transition of the entry concerning horse coins from Weng 1822, as quoted by Ding 1938:

Chen Zhen-sun's (陳振孫) Song-period *Shu lu* (直齋書錄解題; Record of Books) explains: 'There is an anonymous volume *Da ma ge ju* (打馬格局; Driving the Horses, Board and Rules).' There is another volume by Zheng Yin-zi, which presents *Da ma tu shi* (打馬圖示; Illustrated Guide to Driving the Horses), a version using fifty horses. These is also the volume of Madame Li of Yi'an's poem *Da ma fu* (打馬賦; Ode to Driving the Horses), a version using twenty horses. He also says that these versions are not like the modern game, but are mostly like the ancient game *chu pu* (樗蒲).

Madame Li Qing-zhao 李清照 was a retired scholar who lived in Yi'an 宜安. She was married to Zhao Ming-cheng 趙明誠 and then to Zhang Ru-zhou 張汝舟. Her anthology is called *Shu yu ji* (漱玉集; Gargling Jade). In her poem *Da ma* there are the following sayings:

As *da ma* flourishes,  
So *chu pu* vanishes.  
A high class but very small way  
An elegant game for indoor play.

The *Yi wen lu* (History of Literature) in *Tong zhi* (通志; The Encyclopaedia) lists *Da ma ge* (打馬格; The Game of Driving the Horses) by Xie Jing-chu, *Da ma* (打馬; Driving the Horses) by Song Di (宋迪), *Da ma lu* (打馬錄; A Record of Driving Horses) by Li Yi'an (李宜安), and *Da ma tu shi* (打馬圖示; Illustrated Guide to Driving Horses) by Zheng Yin. So the game did not begin with Li Yi'an. The book *Yu zhi tang tan hui* (玉芝堂談薈; Collected Sayings of the Jade Mushroom Mansion) says the game of Driving the Horses no longer survives.

Li Yi'an's *Da ma tu xu* (打馬圖序; Illustrated Preface to Driving Horses) says: There are two versions of Driving Horses. One type has 1 general and 10 horses. It is called *Guan xi ma* (關西馬; Horses West of the Pass). The other version has no generals and twenty horses. It is called *Yi jing ma* (依經馬; Horses Following the Rules). Also during the Xuanhe period (AD 1119–1126) someone took both versions and combined them, adding some features while taking away others. This version is called *Xuan he ma* (宣和馬; Horses of the Xuanhe Period). Chen says this is not the version of the game known as *zhen kui* (Leader of the Guard). *Fei huang* (飛黃; Flying Yellow) and *Qu huang* (渠黃; Big Yellow) are names of horses; *Lian Po* 廉頗 and *Tian Chan* 田單 are names of generals.

*Shi wu gan zu* (事物紺珠; Purple Pearls of all Things) by Huang Yi-zheng (黃一正) in the Ming Dynasty says: Driving the Horses uses copper or ivory coin shaped pieces. Altogether there are 54 pieces, engraved on one face with the likeness of a horse. It uses a four-sided cloth board and the pieces are moved by the throw of dice.

# Chapter 7

## The Liao Dynasty Coins Inscribed 'Ten Thousand Years'

Yuan-bo Pei

### 7.1 Synopsis

In the spring the fourth year of the Tianyou 天佑 era of the Tang Dynasty (AD 907), in February, Yelv-Abaoji, prime minister of the Khitan Khanate, proclaimed himself emperor after holding a fire offering on an altar to worship heaven and the Khitan state was renamed the Great Khitan Empire with the title of *tian chao* 天朝 Heavenly Dynasty.<sup>1</sup> In commemoration, all court officials petitioned to their new emperor to accept the honorific title “Heavenly Emperor” and his wife, Shu Lvping 述律平, “Empress of Earth”. As another act of commemoration, the Emperor issued coins as national currency with the inscription of *Qian qiu wan sui* 千秋萬歲 “One Thousand Autumns and Ten Thousand Years”, commemorative coins inscribed in Khitan characters *Tian chao wan sui* 天朝萬歲 or “Ten Thousand Years to the Heavenly Empire”, and additionally coins inscribed in Chinese characters *Huang di wan sui* 皇帝萬歲 “Ten Thousand Years to the Emperor”, which were intended to convey his divine authority as emperor by Heaven’s mandate. The three groups of coins are commonly known as the *wan sui* coins minted by the Liao Emperor Taizu (遼太祖).

It was a unique event in Chinese history to issue three different currencies at the same time to mark the founding of a dynasty. This event indicates clearly that Emperor Taizu of the Liao was fully aware of the importance of currency as a national name card and duly anxious to extend a strong message of his authority. It

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Translated by Wang Chen-xu 王晨旭.

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<sup>1</sup>Although some experts in historical circles regard “Heavenly Dynasty” as the national title at that time, it was not generally accepted.

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is also evident from this event that he was under immense pressure that he received from the various political and clan circles. This event is therefore no coincidence but the result of a carefully planned political tact. The coin inscriptions for the three currencies are highly significant in themselves.

The inscription “Ten Thousand Years to the Heavenly Kingdom” extends the message that the old Tang dynasty had died and a new one by the Khitan was born like the rising sun to rule gloriously for ten thousand years. This message was intended for the different contemporary regimes and proclaimed the Khitan dynasty as one with the status and power above them. The message was strengthened through the choice of the Khitan language for the written inscriptions, which was derived from written Chinese characters through additions and omissions of component strokes.

The inscription “Ten Thousand Years to the Emperor” marked the end of the hereditary electoral system (世選制) and the start of a centralised system with imperial autocracy. It was also an admonishment to the aristocratic clans and families (皇族十帳), explicitly, that the throne was hereditary within the imperial family, not outside; a rule of ten thousand years could only be the result of the universal support received from the courtiers and any challenge to this hereditary system would be doomed to fail.

The inscription “One Thousand Autumns and Ten Thousand Years” was a distillation of the wishes and desires by Emperor Taizu expressed via the other two coin inscriptions. One thousand autumns and ten thousand years and an annexation and dominance of the world under heaven (千秋萬歲, 兼併天下), once famously said by Emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty 漢武帝,<sup>2</sup> would also be the inner desire of Emperor Taizu of the Liao. It was not only a wish for an everlasting rule of the Liao but also a desire on the part of the emperor to set up an enduring kingdom with the assistance from his closest courtiers like Yelv-Helu 耶律曷魯, Xiao Dilu 蕭敵魯, Kang Moji 康默記, Han Yanhui 韓延徽 and Han Zhigu 韓知古.

The three *wansui* currencies were therefore no portentous claim but represent a fundamental desire by the Khitan people to be politically independent and powerful after five hundred years of hardships and sufferings. They marked a historical journey from the Eight Ancient Tribes (古八族) through the humiliating Daheshi Alliance (大賀氏聯盟) and the numerous unrelenting fights by the Yao Nian Khan (遙辇汗國) to the Khitan Empire. They marked the continuous accumulation of political powers by Yelv family for seven generations to eventually dominate the world. The three *wansui* currencies represent a hefty political statement to the Khitan people and, indeed, also to all the peoples within the territory of China.

The three *wansui* coins are intricately intertwined with each other: the inscriptions are well connected to each other, and the metal used was also consistent across the three with similar designs and technical level, suggesting that they were made at the same time. Coin catalogues dating from the Song Dynasty, including *A Coin Catalogue of All Generations* (*Li dai quan pu* 歷代泉譜) compiled during the

<sup>2</sup>漢班固《漢書·武帝記》卷六。

Shaosheng 紹聖 era of the Northern Song by Li Xiao-mei 李孝美, *An Appended Catalogue of Coins* (*Xu qian pu* 續錢譜) by Dong Yu 董適 and *A Description of Coins* (*Quan zhi* 泉誌) by Hong Zun 洪遵 in the Southern Song dynasty, contain a descriptive record of the three coins or, to be exact, two coins since nobody could read the Khitan characters on the third which is traditionally recorded in the section of unknown coins in catalogues. These written sources prove that the three currencies were minted before the establishment of the Northern Song dynasty.

Five emperors ruled the Liao before the start of the Song, namely, Taizu 太祖, Taizong 太宗, Shizong 世宗, Muzong 穆宗, and Jingzong 景宗. Among them, only Taizu had all the necessary conditions, political, economic and social, to make the coins. And in the year AD 907 only, when the Liao Dynasty was first established: Starting in the 5th year of the Taizu era (AD 907), the imperial brothers started a rebellion until quashed in the 8th year (AD 914). The first batch of coins bearing the inscriptions of the reign title, Shence 神冊, were produced in the 1st year of the Shence era (AD 916). Such is history, which opened a very small time window for the specific person, Heavenly Emperor Yelv-Abaoji, the Greatest Holy Emperor and Founder of the Khitan Empire (契丹帝國開國皇帝大聖天皇帝耶律阿寶機), to have the opportunity to issue the three *wansui* currencies.

The language used for the inscriptions is in line with, and extended, the language used for coin inscriptions in the Southern and Northern dynasties as well as the Tang dynasty such as coins inscribed “Supreme Purity, Abundance, and Happiness” (*Tai qing feng le* 太清豐樂) and “Luck and Profit to Gaochang” (*Gao chang ji li* 高昌吉利; cf Fig. 3.10 in Chap. 3 by Qi Dong-fang of this volume). This suggests that the *wansui* coins were not too distant from these two and may well have been made in early Five Dynasties if not before, considering that before these two coins and after the mid-Five Dynasties, no other regime or dynasty used auspicious expressions as coin inscriptions, except the Khitan Empire. Some argue that the inscriptions on the *wansui* coins are very close to those used on coin-like charms and therefore they are likely to be charms, not currency coins. This view cannot be supported by knowledge about Khitan coins, Khitan history, and coin-like charms. Those of this view might have seen only one type in isolation or several specimens mixed with charms, which did not represent the full range of the *wansui* coins.

The argument of the *wansui* coins as currency is based on the fact that all the three types carry the formal features necessary for classical bronze coins: space created by the outer and the inner rims with a blank reverse or minimal decorative patterns, intrinsic values defined in terms of coin size (cash one, two, tree, five and ten) or denominations. Such a norm has never been observed on charms of the same type. The *wansui* coins, on the other hand, show different sizes ranging from one cash to 10 cash and denominations of one hundred, one thousand and ten thousand. The high-value nominations were typically found on coins during the periods of Wang Mang towards the end of the Western Han, the Five Dynasties, and the Xianfeng era of the Qing. Since the *wansui* coins cannot be related to Wang Mang or the Qing, it follows that they must have been produced during the Five



Dynasties. The hallmark of time cannot be removed by time and cannot be copied, as evidenced on the *wansui* coins.

The inscriptions found on the *wansui* coins have nothing to do with talismanic functions and they are fundamentally different from the lucky expressions found on charms. To start from *wansui* (萬歲; “ten thousand years”), which is common to the three types, this expression is no ordinary expression of blessing or luck wishing. Ever since 221 BC when the Emperor of Qin proclaimed himself the First Emperor (始皇帝), *wansui* has been exclusively used by court officials and subjects to address the emperor or religious deities. In my experience of coin collection over the past twenty or thirty years, I have never seen pre-Republic charms inscribed with this expression, which is found only on the *wansui* coins and some Korean coin charms such as Ten Thousand Years to the Emperor (*Huang di wan sui* 皇帝萬歲), Ten Thousand Years to the East Palace (*Dong gong wan sui* 東宮萬歲), Ten Thousand Years to the Sage Longevity (*Sheng shou wan sui* 聖壽萬歲). This observation strengthens the argument that the *wansui* coins are not charms but currencies with an auspicious expression that cannot be freely used.

Next, let us turn to the central words in the inscriptions, namely, “Heavenly Dynasty” (*Tian chao* 天朝), “Emperor” (*Huang di* 皇帝) and “Ten Thousand” (*Qian qiu* 千秋), which are even more distant from talismanic and lucky expressions. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the three words are expressions of extensive connotations pertaining to Khitan’s politics, history, regime and ethnicity. Heavenly Dynasty was the dynastic name chosen by Abaoji upon the establishment of the Liao in succession of the Tang dynasty, which had never been used before. Among the nine emperors of the Liao, seven used “Heavenly” (*Tian* 天) in their reign titles, revealing an almost undue obsession with the heavenly dynasty. The reverence of *Tian* or heaven defined the spiritual support that all the emperors in China’s history enlisted in order to safeguard their rule, but not as much as the Liao emperors did. This perhaps can be attributed to Khitan people’s devoted belief in Shamanism, a religion that is very much centred on the Heavenly Sun God. Ten Thousand Years to the Heavenly Dynasty thus can be interpreted in a way to pray for this Heavenly Sun God to rule for ever. When inscribed in the Khitan language, this expression carries with it a multitude of implications and religious connotations.

Next, emperor (*Huang di*, 皇帝). The Khitan emperor at the time was essentially different from the ethnic Han emperor in the Central Plain. The Han emperor would not need to say hurrah to himself, which duty was duly performed by his court officials and subjects, and hence no need to make coins with inscriptions in praise of himself, an act that would seem too deviant from what the protocols would allow. The first Khitan emperor, in contrast, did not enjoy the sort of superiority. Except for a very close core group comprising his henchmen and the brains who would woo him in this way, all the others, including his trusted Dieci clansmen (迭刺部), would not understand or tolerate such a wish in praise. They would not wish him ten thousand years of sovereignty but would want him out immediately. In order to break away with the hereditary electoral system adopted and practiced over the past 500 years, Abaoji could only beat the drum himself together with his trusted core

group through the making of the coins as a symbol of the new unitarian hereditary system.

The expression *qian qiu* 千秋 or “one thousand autumns” in Khitan referred specifically to the key court officials, who, together with the emperor, would contribute towards a “heavenly dynasty” that would rule for ten thousand years. *Qian qiu wan sui* is not exactly a lucky expression in Chinese but an euphemism for death. Tiles found in tombs dating to the Han dynasty are often inscribed with this expression indicating its associations with deaths and burials. The real meaning of the famous quote of Emperor Wudi of the Han (“One thousand autumns and ten thousand years and an annexation and dominance of the world under heaven”) is a vow by the emperor to fight to death in order to unite the country. Of course, in special circumstances, this expression can be interpreted auspiciously. For instance, during the reign of Emperor Taizong of the Tang, his court officials chanted *Zhu huang di qian qiu wan sui shou* 祝皇帝千秋萬歲壽! “Long live the Emperor for one thousand autumns and ten thousand years!” (Yi and Jia 1997). It has to be noted here that this expression was used in an auspicious sense only within non-Han ethnic groups or regimes (such as the Tang) as a prayer of blessings during a formal audience with the emperor. In *Qu qian da ji* 古錢大集 *A Big Compendium of Classical Coins*, its author Hua Guang-pu 華光譜 is of the view that both Liu Ren-gong 劉仁恭 in the northern region of Yan 燕 and Ma Ying 馬殷 from the southern region of Chu 楚 issued coins inscribed with *Qian qiu wan sui* (Hua 2001:855). This view is a only hypothesis that lacks support from historical documentation. Ma Ying was a closest ally of Abaoji and maintained frequent exchanges with the Liao. The discovery of *Qian qiu wan sui* coins in the area of Chu, now Hunan province, is normal and expected, just like the discovery in Hunan of the Khitan commemorative coins inscribed *Qian feng quan bao* 乾封泉寶 “Currency of Qianfeng” on the obverse and *Fu de chang shou* 福德長壽 “Fortune, Morality, and Longevity” on the reverse as well as coins inscribed *Qian yuan zhong bao* 乾元重寶 “Currency of the Qianyuan Reign”. Their discovery in Hunan cannot be used to argue that they were issued there. In the same way, the discovery of *Qian qiu wan sui* coins in Bianliang 汴梁, capital city of the Song, now Zhengzhou 鄭州, Henan province, cannot be taken to mean that the Song dynasty actually issued such coins. Similarly, the discovery of coins with the same inscription in Yan ruled by Liu Ren-gong is no evidence that he actually issued them. This is because the Yan region was ruled by the Liao since AD 936 and, even if discovered in his tomb, these coins were probably gifts, trade goods, or gambling tokens from the Liao.

Another reason for the *wansui* coins to be regarded as charms comes from the fact there exist a large number of charms of a deviant form, with the same inscription on the obverse and lucky expressions or decorative patterns on the reverse. The *wansui* coins account for only a small minority when mixed in charms and thus have drastically lost their identity as currency coins. A major purpose of the present chapter is to separate them out, away from charms, for proper research of this group for their accorded historical significance.

## 7.2 Coins Inscribed *Tian chao wan sui* in Khitan

The coins with the inscription *Tian chao wan sui* in Khitan, 天朝萬歲 in Chinese meaning “ten thousand years to the Heavenly Dynasty”, represent the first set of currency coins issued by the state with inscriptions in a minority language. They are at the same time the first set of currency coins issued to commemorate the setting up of a state as well as the first set of currency coins inscribed with the name of a national state.

The first *Tian chao wan sui* specimen, a silver ten-cash coin, was discovered in May 1977 in the excavation site of Shangjing 上京, capital of the Liao Dynasty. In the autumn of 1981, Liu Feng-zhu 劉鳳翥 and Wang Qing 王晴 first transliterated the inscriptions as *Tian chao wan shun* 天朝萬順 “ten thousand obedience to the Heavenly Dynasty” (Liu and Wang 1981). Later, Wei Yue-wang 衛月望, a numismatist, suggested that the inscriptions should read *Tian chao wan sui* 天朝萬歲 since the Khitan character for *sui* 歲 “year” when written in a mirrored form looks like the Khitan character for *shun* 順 “obedience” (Wei 1986). The new reading is in line with the habitual use of the expression in ancient times on important and solemn occasions, whose meaning is transparent to us even today, and therefore it was generally accepted and gradually replaced the earlier reading.

The discovery caused a lot of stir in the circles of numismatic research and historians engaged in Khitan research. From 1980s until June 2008, over a hundred articles had been published on this coin in national and international journals devoted to economics, numismatics and history, addressing issues related to its date of manufacturing, the person who issued it, its intended function, physical features, inscriptions, and the Khitan language. Though many of these articles were ground breaking, most of the articles, due to extremely limited literature and research about Khitan history and numismatics, could not offer convincing conclusions that would withstand subsequent challenges arising from historical research and archaeological findings.

Take as an example issues regarding the questions when it was made and who made it, one of the conclusions suggested that its date of manufacturing could only be postponed until after the Shengzong 聖宗 era, based on the assumption that it was hardly possible to make such coins given the resources available during the Shengzong reign (Tang 2001: 249). This conclusion failed to consider the fact that the three emperors after Shengzong all issued their own currency coins, in large quantities, inscribed with their own reign titles, in both *tong bao* and *yuan bao*, complete with five value grades. There would not be any need for them to issue another currency coin in such quantities. Consider the issues of intended function and physical features. It was concluded that “the *Tian chao wan sui* coin was not a currency coin based on the observation that no other currency coins have yet been discovered with inscriptions in the Khitan language” (ibid: 244). This conclusion did not address the fact that the *Tian chao wan sui* coins, like other currency coins, exist in different sizes corresponding to the five value grades. The same conclusion did not address the language issue fully and, following statements extracted from *A History of Liao* (*Liao shi* 《遼史》) that the emperor authorized the compilation

of Khitan character set in the first month of 5th year of the Shence era and that the character set was completed and approved for use in the nine month,<sup>3</sup> concluded that any currency coin inscribed in Khitan characters could only be dated until after 5th year of Shence (AD 920). It is difficult, if not impossible, to create a character set and promote it within eight months. We know for sure that the Jurchen character set took three years to compile, on the basis of Chinese characters and Khitan characters. The Western Xia character set took three years, also on the basis of Chinese and Khitan. The Bashpa script (八思巴文) took six years and Manchurian thirty years. Based on this knowledge, it would be too premature to take it for granted that Khitan characters were compiled and promoted within a matter of eight months to the effect that they were used extensively for documentation of government affairs, imperial orders, diplomatic communication and official decrees.

Ever since the early years of the Republican era in 1920s, large numbers of coins with have been continually discovered, either excavated or in private collections, from areas and regions that used to be ruled by the Khitan. Their inscriptions in Khitan characters include *Xiao quan zhi yi* 小泉值一, *Da quan wu shi* 大泉五十, *Da quan wu zhu* 大泉五銖, *Wan tie quan huo* 萬貼泉貨, *Kai yuan tong bao* 開元通寶, etc. Their findings unambiguously evidence that in as early as the Khitan khanate era, in an area where Khitan people lived, there existed a written language that was recognized and used in everyday living. The written language corresponds to a “minority writing” (*hu shu* 胡書) mentioned in *A Collection of Major Texts about the Five Dynasties* (*Wu dai hui yao* 《五代會要》), according to which a writing system was created by the Han Chinese in the Khitan areas through adding or omitting strokes from Chinese characters.<sup>4</sup> The writing system mentioned here would comprise the early Khitan characters used as a basis for the Khitan character set authorized by Abaoji in 5th year of the Shence era. It is reasonable to believe that the various coins mentioned just now are inscribed with the early Khitan characters collectively known as *hu shu* or minority writing.

The belief above is helpful and instrumental in explanations of Khitan expressions, such as the word Khitan, and Khitan characters, such as *tian* “heaven” in *tian chao* “heavenly dynasty”. *Qi dan* 契丹, the Chinese word for Khitan, was initially transliterated from Khitan speech and, when translated into Chinese characters from the *hu shu* or minority writing, unavoidably show changes in written order, syllables, word structure and semantic meaning. The single, bi-syllabic word Khitan in the Khitan language is translated into a compound word *qi dan* 契丹 in Chinese comprising two characters for the two syllables, which arguably can be analysed to contain an internal structure where the word-initial *qi* 契 is subordinate to the word-final *dan* 丹. It is therefore understandable that when Abaoji renamed the Bohai State (*Bo hai guo* 渤海國), the new name *Dong dan guo* 東丹國 or “Dongdan State” literally refers to a state to the east of Khitan. This analysis was

<sup>3</sup> 《遼史》：“(神冊)五年春正月乙丑，始制契丹大字。”“九月壬寅，大字成，詔頒行之。”

<sup>4</sup> 《五代會要·卷二十九》：“契丹本無文紀，唯刻木為信，漢人陷蕃者以隸書之半，就加增減，撰為胡書。”

ardently opposed by historians on the grounds that *A History of the Liao Dynasty* did not explicitly mention that the character *dan* 丹 in the compound word *dong dan* 東丹 referred to *qi dan* 契丹 or Khitan (Liu 1991).

*Tian* in *Tian chao wan sui* in early Khitan or *Hushu* is written as 天 “heaven” over 土 “earth”. *Tian* in the authorized set is written as 八 “eight” over 大 “big”. The two characters are different in terms of form, meaning, and structure. The authorized character *tian* is mono-syllabic, referring to “sky above land”. The early Khitan character *tian* is bi-syllabic with two different semantic meanings referring to the Shamanistic notion of a “Celestial Kingdom” where the Sun God and the Moon Goddess reside in addition to the more common meaning of the sky above land. The *tian chao wan sui* coin issued by Abaoji uses *tian* for both meanings, referring to both the celestial kingdom above earth and the heavenly dynasty under the sky where the Sun (the Emperor) and the Moon (the Empress) rule. The use of the Hushu character on coins specially issued to commemorate the beginning of a dynasty definitely serves a political purpose to unite the Khitan people and expresses a wish to establish a national identity.

The *tian chao wan sui* coins were well made to a standard specification, with an overall rough style when compared with coins made in the Central Plain areas. They were made from gold, silver and bronze from moulds of the same specification. The bronze coins were used as currency. The gold and silver coins were used for trading with the West and as rewards. The Khitan inscriptions are of a calligraphic style combining the regular script (*kai shu* 楷書) and the clerical script (*li shu* 隸書), arranged in a variety of different ways including t-r-b-l, t-r-b-l, r-t-b-l, and t-r-l-b, manifesting a free and unbound style typical of the period. So far, a total of six value grades have been found:

Value	Size (mm)	Weight (g)	Note
One cash	24–25.5	3–4	Maximally 5 specimens in collection
Two cash	27–28.5	6–9	Maximally 5 specimens in collection, including two specimens published in <i>inner Mongolian finance: a special issue of coins</i>
Three cash	29–32	9–15	10–20 specimens in collection
Fve cash	33–38	12–29	20–50 specimens in collection
Ten cash	38–44	19–35	Several hundred specimens in collection
?	60–62	70–90	About 10 specimens in collection

About 30 silver 10-cash specimens have been found so far. The gold coins include 1-cash, 2-cash and 10-cash, one specimen of each type (Figs. 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5 and 7.6).





Fig. 7.1 One-cash currency coin inscribed *Tian chao wan sui* in Khitan



Fig. 7.2 Large three-cash currency coin inscribed *Tian chao wan sui* in Khitan



Fig. 7.3 Large five-cash currency coin inscribed *Tian chao wan sui* in Khitan



Fig. 7.4 Large ten-cash currency coin inscribed *Tian chao wan sui* in Khitan



Fig. 7.5 Ten-cash currency coin inscribed *Tian chao wan sui* in Khitan



Fig. 7.6 Exceptionally large cash currency coin inscribed *Tian chao wan sui* in Khitan

### 7.3 Coins Inscribed *Huang di wan sui* in Chinese

The coins inscribed *Huang di wan sui* 皇帝萬歲 or “Ten thousand years to the emperor” are the first in China to use a direct reference to the emperor as coin inscriptions. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, this coin intended to highlight the end of the more traditional hereditary electoral system and the start of a new hereditary system whereby the throne would be succeeded by Abaoji’s direct descendants and nobody else. The new system and especially the glory of the hereditary emperor prompted rebellions by his own brothers including Dieci 迭剌 led by Abaoji’s uncle Xiadi 轄底 with the assistance of the Arch Shaman, Shen Sugu 神速姑, who had previously helped Abaoji to ascend to the throne. The rebellion, which was crushed relentlessly by Abaoji, is well documented in *A History of the Liao Dynasty* (《遼史》).

Again, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, Abaoji was deeply appreciative of the importance of the loyalty to him by his court officials and fully understood that ten thousand years to the dynasty and to the emperor would be duly dependent on “one thousand autumns”, an expression found on the *qian qiu wan sui* coins referring to key court officials, which is also found on coins inscribed *Zhong chen qian qiu* 重臣千秋 or “one thousand years to the important court official”. At the same time, he was deeply appreciative of the importance of loyalty and filiality from his family members and descendants, hence the inscription of *zhong xiao chuan jia* 忠孝傳家 or “loyalty and filiality passing down in family” on the reverse of some of the *huang di wan sui* coins, to admonish them for their utmost devotion to the state, the dynasty and the emperor.

The *huang di wan sui* coins are found to be inscribed in both the regular script and the seal script, each script demonstrating a rich variety of calligraphic styles. The seal script includes *miu zhuan* 繆篆, *jin jian zhuan* 金剪篆, and *yu zhu zhuan* 玉筋篆. The regular script demonstrates a calligraphic style typical of the Tang era, reminiscent of the hands by calligraphers like Yan Zhen-qing 顏真卿 and Liu Gong-quan 柳公權. Some have the inscriptions of *zhong chen qian qiu* 重臣千秋 “One thousand years to the key court official” or *zhong xiao chuan jia* 忠孝傳家 or “Loyalty and filiality passing down in the family” on the reverse while some others are decorated on the back with one moon, two moons or plain on the back. The one moon refers to the Empress Mother and the two moons refer to the Empress Mother and the Empress. The inscriptions are read t-l-b-r, t-r-b-l, t-b-r-l, etc. in a variety of different ways unique of early Khitan coins. The minting materials include raw copper, reddish copper and bronze. The coins are of a regular shape but with differences in wide outer rim and narrow inner rim, narrow outer rim and wide inner rim, narrow rims on the obverse and wide rims on the reverse, and double outer rims. These coins give an impression of being rough, heavy and unconstrained.

So far, specimens have been found of different sizes equivalent to one cash, two cash, three cash, five cash, and ten cash. Some others are of an exceptionally large size. Those smaller than cash five are particularly rare, with only two specimens of one cash, one specimen of two cash. Three cash coins are scarce; five cash coins are relatively common; ten cash are many. Large ten-cash coins are scarce. There is only one specimen of exceptionally large size.

Value	Size (mm)	Weight (g)	Note
One cash	23–24.5	3.8–4.3	2 specimens found in collection
Two cash	28.2	6.4	1 specimen found in collection
Three cash	29–34	9–18	Scarce. Some specimens are particularly thick, 5 mm, weighing 28–32 g
Five cash	35–38	15–21	Common
Ten cash	39–42	22–26	Many
?	48–52	42–44	
?	52–55	44–50	
?	92.5	157.6	1 specimen in collection

As commemorative currency, the *Huang di wan sui* coins are exceedingly rare. While most are found in personal collections, some may be found in private or government treasures buried under earth (Figs. 7.7, 7.8, 7.9, 7.10, 7.11, 7.12, 7.13 and 7.14).



**Fig. 7.7** Exceptionally small currency coin inscribed *Huang di wan sui* 皇帝萬歲



**Fig. 7.8** Half-cash currency coin inscribed *Huang di wan sui* 皇帝萬歲 on the obverse and *zhong chen qian qiu* 重臣千秋 on the reverse



**Fig. 7.9** One-cash currency coin inscribed *Huang di wan sui* 皇帝萬歲 on the obverse and *zhong chen qian qiu* 重臣千秋 on the reverse



**Fig. 7.10** Five-cash currency coin inscribed *Huang di wan sui* 皇帝萬歲 on the obverse and double crescents on the reverse





Fig. 7.11 Ten-cash currency coin inscribed *Huang di wan sui* 皇帝萬歲 on the obverse



Fig. 7.12 One-hundred-cash currency coin inscribed *Huang di wan sui* 皇帝萬歲 on the obverse



Fig. 7.13 One-hundred-cash currency coin inscribed *Huang di wan sui* 皇帝萬歲 on the obverse and *zhong chen qian qiu* 重臣千秋 on the reverse



**Fig. 7.14** Exceptionally large vault protector coin inscribed *Huang di wan sui* 皇帝萬歲 on the obverse and a crescent on the reverse

#### 7.4 Coins Inscribed *Qian qiu wan sui* in Hushu

Coins inscribed *Qian qiu wan sui* 千秋萬歲 “One thousand autumns and ten thousand years” are the only currency in Chinese coin history that contains lucky inscriptions only. Inscribed in both Khitan and Chinese, the *Qian qiu wan sui* coins circulated for more than two hundred years, like the *Ban liang* (半兩), *Wu zhu* (五銖) and *Kai yuan tong bao* (開元通寶) coins. Those discussed in this Chapter relate to currency coins only and do not include any with the same inscription but not for currency use. The coins with the *wan sui* inscriptions not for currency use but as palace issues and charms warrant a separate study.

The meaning of *Qian qiu wan sui* has been explored earlier in this chapter, which expresses the wish for the Khitan Empire to last for ever. More importantly, it expresses the understanding that for an everlasting dynasty there needed to be a close collaborative relationship between the ten-thousand-year Emperor and his one-thousand-year court officials. The Small Goose Pagoda (*Xiao yan ta* 小雁塔) in Xi’an, built in the Mingchan era (AD 1190–1196) of the Jin Dynasty, houses an iron bell with the following inscriptions:

皇帝萬歲, *Huang di wan sui*, “Ten thousand years to the Emperor”

臣佐千秋, *Chen zuo qian qiu*, “One thousand years to the Court Official”

國太民安, *Guo tai min an*, “Peace to the Nation and Security to the people”

法輪長轉, *Fa lun chang zhuan*, “The wheel of the dharma turns for ever”

These inscriptions above are a best illustration of the true meaning of “One thousand autumns and ten thousand years”.

Nowadays, no one is opposed to the idea that the *Qian qiu wan sui* coins were made during the early period of Khitan but there are divided opinions regarding when exactly they were made, who made them, whether they were currency coins

and whether they represent the same family of coins with different styles and specifications.

Regarding the first question who made these coins, there would be no doubt that Abaoji made them in the first month of AD 907 when he ascended to the throne. A direct support of this view comes from the inscription in Khitan. We identify two different styles for the Khitan inscriptions. The first is unconstrained with twisted strokes while the second is more regulated and smoothed. The former would be what was mentioned in *A Collection of Texts about the Five Dynasties* as *hu shu* or minority writing (Cf Footnote 5 in this Chapter). This calligraphic style is different from the authorized Khitan character set published in 9th month of 5th year of the Shence era. The *Hushu*, despite its twisted strokes, essentially is still Chinese albeit changed with added or omitted strokes. The Khitan characters, however much they look like Chinese characters, are not Chinese and therefore cannot be easily recognized. This difference can be evidenced through the Khitan inscriptions of a type of *Qian qiu wan sui* coins which additionally have an explicit date referring to the Tianxian (天顯) era. Coins with an inscriptional style similar to this group of coins would be issued after 5th year of Shence. Those with a different and older style would be issued before.

As is clearly recorded in numismatic books, during the eras of Shence 神冊, Tianzan 天贊, and Tianxian 天顯, Abaoji respectively issued coins inscribed with these era titles. If these with era titles were indeed currency coins, there would be no need to issue *Qian qiu wan sui* coins and there would be no coins inscribed *Qian qiu wan sui* in Khitan characters with a specific reference to the Tianxian era. The matter of fact is that the *Qian qiu wan sui* coins were not only issued during the Tianxian era, they were issued in AD 1098, that is, 4th year of the Shouchang 壽昌 era of Emperor Daozong 遼道宗 or 5th year of the Shaosheng 紹聖 era of the Northern Song, 191 years after 1st year of Taizu 遼太祖, when Li Xiao-mei 李孝美, a numismatist active at the time, wrote that these coins were offered every year by foreign missions as tributes and could be acquired frequently through trades.<sup>5</sup> If *Qian qiu wan sui* coins could be acquired easily through trades, it is easy to conclude that they were produced in quantities and served as currency coins towards the end of the Daozong era.

From the observations above based on historical evidence, we draw the conclusion that only Emperor Taizu Abaoji could have issued *Qian qiu wan sui* coins in *hu shu* before 5th year of the Shence era and, considering his urgent political needs for such coins in AD 907 when proclaimed emperor, that Abaoji was the first to have issued such coins starting in AD 907.

Economically, Abaoji inherited the currency system of the Tang dynasty and, on the basis of a combined system of currency and silk, practised a more flexible currency system that involved the use of silk, cattle, grains, precious metals and bronze coins. This system, which uses bronze coins as a standard for value calculation of payment in kinds and precious metals including gold and silver,

<sup>5</sup>李孝美《歷代錢譜》：“常歲虜使入貢，人多博易得耳。”

succeeded in value equation between multiple currencies. The circulation of the *Kai yuan tong bao* 開元通寶 coins issued in the Tang dynasty for over three hundred years non-stop gave ideas to Abaoji to issue currency coins which would circulate for ever, which would contribute towards the stability of the currency system, and which would educate the future generations, maintain a sound relationship between the emperor and his officials, and guarantee loyalty and filiality, for the ultimate purpose of an everlasting Khitan empire. The *qian qiu wan sui* coins were thus issued as the only legal currency throughout the Khitan Empire.

The eight successive emperors after Taizu observed Abaoji’s practice and continued to issue coins of the same inscription, a fact partly evidenced through Li Xiao-mei’s description. The coins were issued by the nine Khitan emperors for over two hundred years and, due to changes of time, environment, economy and politics, and even personal preferences by the emperor, naturally exhibited a variety of different physical features, specifications, and calligraphic styles. These, of course, refer to *qian qiu wan sui* currency coins meeting judgement requirements in terms of sizes and value grades, which need to be distinguished from other coins with the same inscription produced as charms (民俗錢), palace coins (宮錢), temple tokens (供養錢) and diplomatic gifts to foreign regimes (聘享錢).

As currency, the *qian qiu wan sui* coins have inscriptions in both Khitan and Chinese characters to cater for uses in different regions amongst both Khitan and Chinese communities. The use of *Hushu*, invented by the Han Chinese in Liao territories, suited both communities. Calligraphically, the inscriptions in Chinese are of a style that combines both the regular script and the clerical script, a style that the Khitan people were traditionally used to and preferred, reflecting an aesthetic tradition appropriate of a period of change covering the end of the Tang dynasty, the Five Dynasties and the Northern Song dynasty. Additionally, we have also seen *qian qiu wan sui* coins inscribed in the seal script.

Technically speaking, the earlier of these currency coins look rough and unconstrained, thick and heavy, made from raw copper, the inner rim often with protruding corners (決文). The mid-period coins, mostly made from bronze, look more regulated and smoothed, with solemn outer and inner rims. The late issues are generally made from a “Khitan bronze”, thin and flimsy in shape, and of a coarse fabrication. Most of the existing specimens have a plain reverse and a small number are decorated with a Sun and Moon pattern. So far, nine value grades have been identified for them.

Value	Size (mm)	Weight (g)	Note
Half cash	8–18	1.5–3	
One cash	22–25.5	3.5–6	
Two cash	26–30	8–15	
Three cash	30–36	12–25	
Five cash	36–38	18–28	

(continued)

(continued)

Value	Size (mm)	Weight (g)	Note
Ten cash	39–44	25–43	
100 cash	44–53	35–58	
1000 cash	55–70	60–85	
10,000 cash	70–150	100–256	

A stone coin with the same inscription was found in about 2007 in Heilongjiang province, measuring 1.5 m in diameter, and 160 kg in weight. It was probably used as a vault protector (*Zhen ku qian* 鎮庫錢) (Figs. 7.15, 7.16, 7.17, 7.18, 7.19, 7.20, 7.21, 7.22, 7.23, 7.24, 7.25 and 7.26).



**Fig. 7.15** Exceptionally small one-cash currency coin inscribed *Qian qiu wan sui* 千秋萬歲 in Khitan on the obverse



**Fig. 7.16** Exceptionally small one-cash currency coin inscribed *Qian qiu wan sui* 千秋萬歲 in Khitan on the obverse





Fig. 7.17 One-cash currency coin inscribed *Qian qiu wan sui* 千秋萬歲 in Khitan on the obverse



Fig. 7.18 One-cash currency coin inscribed *Qian qiu wan sui* 千秋萬歲 in Khitan on the obverse



Fig. 7.19 One-cash currency coin inscribed *Qian qiu wan sui* 千秋萬歲 in Khitan on the obverse



Fig. 7.20 One-cash currency coin inscribed *Qian qiu wan sui* 千秋萬歲 in Khitan on the obverse



Fig. 7.21 One-cash currency coin inscribed *Qian qiu wan sui* 千秋萬歲 in Khitan on the obverse



Fig. 7.22 One-cash currency coin inscribed *Qian qiu wan sui* 千秋萬歲 in Khitan on the obverse



**Fig. 7.23** Three-cash currency coin inscribed *Qian qiu wan sui* 千秋萬歲 in Khitan on the obverse



**Fig. 7.24** Three-cash currency coin inscribed *Qian qiu wan sui* 千秋萬歲 in Khitan on the obverse



**Fig. 7.25** Ten-cash currency coin inscribed *Qian qiu wan sui* 千秋萬歲 in Khitan on the obverse



Fig. 7.26 Ten-cash currency coin inscribed *Qian qiu wan sui* 千秋萬歲 in Khitan on the obverse

## 7.5 Conclusions

The three sets of currency coins with the inscription of wan sui are not only the most important coins issued by the Khitan Empire. They also represent a very significant event in Chinese coin history. An in-depth research in this group of coins will help to shed new and interesting light on the study of Khitan coins and further develop the relatively young research area in Khitan history.

To study Khitan coins properly, one should not look at this group from a Han Chinese oriented perspective on Chinese coins. The reason is simple. The two peoples are very different in terms of history, ways of thinking, and religious beliefs. They also witnessed different production methods, different geographical environments, and different living conditions, as well as different cultures, folk practices and political systems. It is thus important to see the Khitan coins as a necessarily different product of an era of change from a hereditary electoral system to a hereditary imperial system where and when the coins were seen both as currency and as tokens of political messages. The Chinese empire in the Central Plain area had been ruled under a totalitarian regime ever since the First Emperor of Qin united the warring states, where the sort of awkward relationship between the gerontocratic council of elders and the Khan was practically unheard of, and where currency coins were mostly seen to be about economy but not so much about politics. It is all too easy for the Han Chinese numismatists to question whether the economically backward Khitan empire had the resources to produce currency coins and whether it was practically possible to issue three currencies at the same time.

The matter of fact is that, around the time of its establishment, the Khitan Empire enjoyed an economy stronger than any of the states during the Five Dynasties, with a vast territory a booming economy. In AD 902, Emperor Taizu Abaoji led a punitive expedition of 400,000 troops to the Dai Bei 代北 area in the north of the present-day Shanxi 山西 and Hebei 河北 provinces. According to the military system at the time in Khitan, as recorded in A History of the Liao, each troop is



equipped with three horses, two servants, nine sets of body armour made of iron, a full set of horse bridles complete with leather and iron armour for the horse, four bows with 400 arrows, plus a range of other weaponries and personal utilities, all to be prepared by the troop himself.<sup>6</sup> At that time, only the Khitan Empire had so strong an economy to support such a huge army. As another example, in AD 905, Abaoji swore with General Li Ke-yong 李克用 as brothers and gave him ten thousand cattle including horses, cows and sheep. Such an expensive present could not be afforded without a vast wealth in his control. During the 218 years between 1st year of the Taizu era in AD 907 and 5th year of the Baoda 保大 era in AD 1125, the Khitan Empire did not experience any major inflation with soaring prices.

It is difficult to construct a full picture about Khitan, due to the scanty written sources about this empire. For this reason, an objective perspective is needed in the study of its history in general and its coins in particular. One needs to approach these numismatic objects in an eye, a way of thinking, and a political and economic stance appropriate of that specific period of history and of that specific people. The present chapter is only a cursory touch on coins issued in the Liao dynasty. Many of the views adopted here are results of logic reasoning and lack supporting evidence from historical texts especially about the political and economic situations surrounding the issuance of the currency coins inscribed *Tian chao wan sui*, *Huang di wan sui*, and *Qian qiu wan sui*.

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<sup>6</sup> 《遼史·兵衛志》：“每正軍一名，馬三匹，打草谷、守營鋪家丁各一人。人鐵甲九事，馬韉轡，馬甲皮鐵，弓四箭四百，長短槍，骨朶、斧鉞、小旗、錘錐、火刀石、馬盂、炒一斗、炒袋、搭毛人傘各一，縻馬繩二百尺，皆自備。”



# Chapter 8

## Temple Coins of the Yuan Dynasty

Vladimir A. Belyaev and Sergey V. Sidorovich

Before the consideration of the temple coins of the Yuan dynasty, it is worthwhile to understand the role of temples and monasteries in the social and economic life of China during the Mongol reign, when, as a result of the toleration of the Mongol rulers, Buddhism received the widest dissemination and essential support from the state. The Great Qa'än Khubilai,<sup>1</sup> whose Tibetan confessor was a Phags-pa lama,<sup>2</sup> favoured Tibetan Buddhism as an ideal tool for the realisation of his political aims. The positions of Phags-pa lama at Mongol court became especially strong with the enthronement of Khubilai. In AD 1260, Phags-pa lama received the title of Imperial Preceptor<sup>3</sup> and at the beginning of the next year was endowed with power over all Buddhist clergy.

Undoubtedly, the Khubilai patronage over Buddhism provided vigorous support of the government by the clergy. Thus a foundation was laid down for the strong alliance between the state and the temple. Those in the highest strata of clergy were high ranking officials at the imperial court and in some cases even married Mongol princesses. For example, “the ‘Phags-pa lama’s younger brother married a Mongol princess, as did his nephew and, later, one of his grandnephews.” (Rossabi 1988: 143). Temples were granted essential tax indulgences; also they received spacious chapter lands and sizable donations in the form of money (Haenisch 1940).<sup>4</sup> In 1261, for example, Khubilai granted 500 *qing* (頃) of lands (about 8500 acres) to

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<sup>1</sup>Khubilai 忽必烈, the fifth Khagan of the Mongol Empire, and the founder of the Yuan Dynasty in China, reigning AD 1260–1294.

<sup>2</sup>Tibetan name of lama was Blo-gros rGyal-mtshan, while ‘Phags-pa was a title (or variants such as hP’ags-pa, hPhags-pa, Phags-pa) which means “Reverend Lama”.

<sup>3</sup>*Guo shi* 國師. See *Yuan shi* 元史 *History of Yuan*. Beijing, 1976 (hereafter YS). Ch. 202.

<sup>4</sup>About the preferential certificates engraved on stone steles, see Zograf (1984).

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two Buddhist temples,<sup>5</sup> and in the next year donated 15,000 *liang* 兩 of silver (about 560 kg) to another temple for a 7-day religious ceremony.<sup>6</sup> Lavish donations to monasteries and temples were continued during the reigns of succeeding emperors. The model of relations between the State and the Church, laid down by Khubilai, continued to function, bringing prejudice to the economy of the church.

In the Yuan dynasty, masses of people left their homes to join monasteries and temples. According to *Yuan shi*, in AD 1291, there were 213,148 monks in the state.<sup>7</sup> Such a huge number can be explained exactly by the economic privileges that the state granted to religious institutes. The number of clergymen continued to rise, despite the fact that to become a monk one would have to purchase a special permission called *du die* 度牒. For example, in AD 1334, one *du die* cost the amount of 50 strings of cash in paper money.<sup>8</sup> However, we also know of gratuitous giving out of *du die*: in AD 1331 because of the drought in the provinces of Jiangsu 江蘇, Zhejiang 浙江 and Jiangxi 江西, more than 850,000 households were starved. Alongside other measures, the emperor approved the request of dignitaries of the Imperial Secretariat for giving out 10,000 *du die* to the starving.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that Zhu Yuan-zhang 朱元璋, founder of the Ming dynasty, was also among those who took monastic vows; the sole purpose was to escape death of starvation after the pestilence brought about by the drought in AD 1344, when he lost most of his relatives (Wu 2000: 4–14).

Researchers have pointed out that activities of city temples and monasteries were not solely religious. Besides revenues from the leasing of lands, monasteries and temples obtained incomes from market trade, money lending, lotteries etc. Monasteries served as money exchangers and pawn shops, accommodated with loans and so on (Yang 1950). In addition, primary sources of revenue for such religious institutions included donations, in money and goods. Thus monasteries and temples were powerful economic and social centres, which received huge donations and massive privileges from the state. They owned huge amounts of funds, sometimes exceeding the reserves of the state treasury. It is known that Yuan emperors resorted to the use of these funds for resolving urgent state affairs. In return, using their strong influence on the populace, religious institutions managed to become the basis and the conductors of the Mongol emperors' policies.

Besides donations from the state, considerable proceeds of the revenues of the monasteries and temples were brought in by the parish. Those were natural products, goods and, of course, money. For donations, along with paper money and silver ingots, circulation coins were used. At the same time, temples issued special "temple" (or "sacrificial") coins, usually of a small diameter (10–18 mm), which were sold to the parish. The money obtained as offerings and as income from sale of

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<sup>5</sup>YS. Ch. 4.

<sup>6</sup>YS. Ch. 5.

<sup>7</sup>YS. Ch. 16.

<sup>8</sup>YS. Ch. 38.

<sup>9</sup>YS. Ch. 35.

temple coins also formed part of the temple revenue. It is a notorious fact that in some periods of the Yuan dynasty official coins were not issued for decades, and the circulation of coins was prohibited. Moreover, from time to time during special campaigns copper and bronze utensils were seized from citizens<sup>10</sup> while the casting of temple coins continued without a break during the reigns of all the Yuan emperors. The state even supplied copper to monasteries for the manufacturing of various religious utensils.<sup>11</sup> Prof. Sun Zhong-hui, in his study of temple coins (Sun 1993: 243), has written the following,

There were own melting workshops attached to monasteries and temples, which cast bells, religious utensils, etc. The same workshops cast temple donation coins. As far as casting technologies of coins were concerned, they were not up to the same level of the official mints. These coins are very coarse and most of the time it is difficult to read the legends of such temple coins.

Sacrificial money, *gong yang qian* 供養錢, literally “coins for offering”, are also named *miao yu qian* 廟宇錢 “temple coins” and, according to their specific usage, some are also called *fo zang qian* 佛臟錢 “coins from the Buddha’s inside”. Believers threw coins to the pedestals of statues or put them inside the statues through specially made holes.

Yuan temple coins occupy a special place in Chinese numismatics. These coins are included in catalogues along with official coins of the Yuan dynasty. It is worth noting that temple coins of other dynasties usually are not treated in the same way. To quote Prof. Sun Zhong-hui (*ibid*: 242) again,

Buddhist institutes of the Yuan dynasty significantly differed from the similar institutes of other Chinese dynasties such as the Tang and the Song since they were part of the official ruling organs. For all that the highest clergy were not monks or hermits. On the contrary they consisted of officials who took direct participation in the activities of the state and the government. Hence sacrificial temple coins cast during the reigns of the Yuan dynasty differed from the privately cast coins and should be considered as official coins.

However, it is hard to agree with this statement. His conclusion is based on the closest interaction between the state and the temple. However, we believe that this reason is still not strong enough for the statement above. It is necessary to proceed from the usage of temple coins and official coins. Official coins were introduced into circulation “in support of paper money” after monetary reforms in AD 1309 and AD 1350. For that purpose, according to the decree, special offices were opened, responsible for the issue of coins. Thus official coins issued independently from the place of issue followed the official standard in design, metric data and metal content. Moreover, the circulation of official coins was decreed by the state.

The fast devaluation of paper money led to the hoarding of copper coins by the populace (Franke 1949: 91), which eventually caused the acceleration of inflation and hence the cancellation of coin minting. Thus, official coins of the Yuan dynasty had very short periods of circulation. In contrast, temple coins were issued during

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<sup>10</sup>YS. Ch. 11.

<sup>11</sup>YS. Ch. 27.

**Table 8.1** Alloy content of the temple coins of AD 1297–1368

Zeno #	Coin	Cu	Pb	Sn	Zn	Other	Notes
4434	<i>Da de tong bao</i> 大德通寶	>75	5–10	8–12	–	As < 0.6, Sb	Figure 8.3*
7622	<i>Huang qing yuan bao</i> 皇慶元寶	85–90	2–3	2–3	6–10	Sb, Bi	Figure 8.4
4429	<i>Zhi zhi tong bao</i> 至治通寶	90–95	1–2	<1	5–10	As, Ag, Bi	
3233	<i>Zhi zhi yuan nian</i> 至治元年	>70	8–12	8–12	–	As < 0.5, Ag-traces	Figure 8.7
4427	<i>Tai ding yuan bao</i> 泰定元寶	>80	4–8	1–2	4–8	Sb < 0.5	
4425	<i>Yuan tong yuan bao</i> 元統元寶	80–90	3–6	8–12	2–4	Ag, As, Sb, Bi	
3232	<i>Zhi yuan tong bao</i> 至元通寶	77–84	3–6	12–16	Zn < 1	Sb < 1, As traces, Ag traces	
4437	<i>Zhi yuan tong bao</i> 至元通寶	80–90	8–12	1–3	1–3	Fe = 1, As, Sb	*
4436	<i>Zhi zheng/Mu qing yin bao</i> 至正/穆清銀寶	90–95	1–3	2–4	3–6	As, Ag, Bi	*

Note:

1. The image and metric data of the coin can be found in the numismatic on-line database ZENO. RU (<http://zeno.ru>)
2. Coins, marked with \* are covered with a layer of the patina. During the analysis of the coin surface, the content of lead and tin usually yielded overrated results in comparison with content of the metal body

the whole period of the Yuan dynasty. The large numbers of potential “mints” (in AD 1330 there were 367 Buddhist temples in the Empire)<sup>12</sup> and the absence of standardisation in the production of coins (in terms of metric data and coin inscriptions) contributed to the irregularity of temple coins. Moreover, temple coins were intended for selling to the parish, which used these coins for offerings, and thus had a different purpose in comparison with official coins issued for circulation. Without doubts, monks profited from temple coins and this is the main purpose of their issuance.

Table 8.1 presents the results of the XRF-analysis of the alloy content of different temple coins. It is a well known fact that until the beginning of the 16th century Chinese coins were cast from lead-tin bronze (Cowell et al. 2005: 65). However, the results of the analysis of 9 temple coins show the presence of zinc in different degrees, which clearly shows that the metal of some of these issues is brass. At the same time, we see that traditional metals such as copper, lead and tin were added to alloy in occasional ratios.

<sup>12</sup>YS. Ch. 34.

The data about the lead and tin ratio in Table 8.1 does not contradict the information from historical sources about the campaigns of confiscating bronze utensils from the population, which began during the reign of Khubilai in 1280s.<sup>13</sup> However, the presence of zinc in the alloy constitutes a very notable fact and possible reasons for it should be specially discussed.

Despite the active use of brass for coinage at the beginning of 16th century, the zinc-copper alloy was known in China much earlier: the first mentions can be dated to the third century. It is worth noting that brass (鑰石 *tou shi*) is often mentioned in Taoist books (Zhou 2002: 413). For a long period, at least for the beginning of the 10th century, brass was considered a precious metal, next to gold and silver. According to the decree of the Tang period, which regulated the clothes of officials, the officials of the 5th rank and higher should wear gold buckles, 6th and 7th ranks silver buckles, 8th and 9th ranks—*tou shi* buckles (ibid: 415). From the beginning of 11th century, the method of producing brass by cementation became known to the common people (ibid: 429), which affected its value. However, it still remained much more valuable than copper. Sources cite that brass, which is similar to gold in colour but cheaper in value, was widely used for the production of Buddhist statues, vessels and other religious utensils. Thus melting workshops in temples (or workshops hired by temples) used copper received from the state for the production of brass to be used for such statues and utensils. According to our metal analysis, temple coins may have used scrap metal and brass in arbitrary proportions. This further suggests that in comparison with state mints, melting workshops in temples did not have strict regulations of the metal content in the development of their casting technologies.

By taking into account the information mentioned above, we conclude that temple coins cannot be considered as official coins.

Temple coins are a special kind of religious goods, which were produced on the temple premises (and probably by temple's order in workshops outside) for selling to the parish to serve their religious needs. Temple coins, unlike coins for circulation, could only be used for offerings inside the temple. Believers prayed in honour of deities, the emperor and members of his family, as well as for themselves and for their own relatives. They made offerings to temples and specific deities. Most probably, different purposes of donations and different notable events were the reasons of the diversity in the types and the legends of temple coins. The legend on temple coins can imitate the legend of official coins. One type of legend can group temple coins that were generic in terms of use and could be used as offering for any occasion. Another type can include a specific period through the use of the reign title with a serial number of the year or through cyclical date. Most likely, such issues marked some important event such as the enthronement, the birth of heir, the death of Emperor, etc. Some coins bear the name of the temple, which is interesting for the identification of the place of issue for the coins. A large group of temple coins can be considered as charms or amulets (花錢 *hua qian*) because they

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<sup>13</sup>YS. Ch. 11.





**Fig. 8.1** *Zhi yuan tong bao* 至元通寶. W = 2.2 g, D = 14.3 mm. Zeno 75257 (image courtesy of Gilbert Tan, Singapore)



**Fig. 8.2** *Yuan zhen tong bao* 元貞通寶. W = 1.32 g, D = 14.2 mm. Zeno 7504

bear different auspicious legends or zodiacal symbols. And of course, mixed types also exist, which adds to the difficulty in the classification of temple coins.

Here are some examples of the Yuan temple coins with reign titles in the legend. Coin images are presented in the scale 2:1 (Fig. 8.1).

The inscription is written in the Mongol square phags-pa script (八思巴文). The script was developed by Phags-pa lama in AD 1269. The legend of the coin refers to the Zhiyuan era 至元 (AD 1264–1295) of Emperor Khubilai (*Shi zu* 世祖). The first official coins with legend written in phags-pa script were cast in AD 1285. This temple coin imitates the type of the official coin and thus should be issued in the period AD 1285–1295 (Fig. 8.2).

Cast during the Yuanzhen era 元貞 (AD 1295–1297) of Emperor Chengzong 成宗. The coin duplicates the legend of the very rare coin issued in these years.

Issued in the Dade era 大德 (AD 1297–1308) during the reign of Emperor Chengzong.



**Fig. 8.3** *Da de tong bao* 大德通寶. W = 2.23 g, D = 15.6–16.0 mm. Zeno 4434



**Fig. 8.4** *Huang qing yuan bao* 皇慶元寶. W = 2.03 g, D = 15.3 mm. Zeno 7622

Cast in the Huangqing era (AD 1312–1315) during the reign of Emperor Renzong 仁宗 (Fig. 8.5).

Cast in the Zhizhi era (AD 1321–1323) during the reign of Emperor Yingzong 英宗.

Besides reign titles, coin legends can bear the specific date given as a regnal year, or as a cyclical date. Usually such a date is related to some important event—ascension on the throne, birth of heir, passing away of the Emperor’s family member, etc. For example, consider coins *Zhi zhi yuan nian* 至治元年, the first year of the Zhizhi period, 1321, in Figs. 8.6 and 8.7.

Some coins bear the name of the temple or shrine, which refers us to the specific place. A good example of this type is represented by the coin with the inscription *Zhi zheng/sheng shou wan an* 至正/聖壽萬安 (Fig. 8.8).

The coin was cast during the Zhizheng period 至正 (AD 1341–1368) of Emperor Shundi 順帝. On the reverse is written the name of the temple *Da sheng*



**Fig. 8.5** *Zhi zhi yuan bao* 至治元寶. W = 2.23 g, D = 17.0 mm. Zeno 62783



**Fig. 8.6** *Zhi zhi yuan nian* 至治元年. W = 1.76 g, D = 14.9–15.3 mm. Zeno 21312



**Fig. 8.7** *Zhi zhi yuan nian* 至治元年. W = 1.55 g, D = 14.7 mm. Zeno 3233



Fig. 8.8 *Zhi zheng/sheng shou wan an* 至正/聖壽萬安. W = 2.29 g, D = 17.1 mm. Zeno 9859

*shou wan an* 大聖壽萬安 built during the Mongol rule in the Yuan capital Dadu 大都.<sup>14</sup> Two more coins which cite the name of this temple—*sheng shou wan an/mu qing* 聖壽萬安/穆清 and *mu qing wan an* 穆清萬安—were mentioned by Prof. Sun Zhong-hui (Sun 1993: 246). *Mu qing* can be translated as “peacefully auspicious”.<sup>15</sup> Three more specific types of coins with expression *mu qing* in the legend are also known: *Zhi zheng/Mu qing tong bao* 至正/穆清銅寶 (Fig. 8.9), *Zhi zheng/Mu qing yin bao* 至正/穆清銀寶 (Fig. 8.10) and *Zhi zheng/Mu qing jin bao* 至正/穆清金寶 (Fig. 8.11). Based on legends of these coins, we can conclude that *mu qing* in the legend of all the above mentioned temple coins is not simply auspicious expression but name of some object or place.

According to Prof. Sun Zhong-hui, *Mu qing* is the name of a shrine in the temple *Da sheng shou wan an* although the source of information about this particular shrine is unfortunately not provided. He concludes that coins inscribed *mu qing wan an* and *Zhi zheng/Mu qing tong bao* also were related to this temple. This view sounds plausible. All the mentioned coins are close in style, with intersecting legends and so it can be suggested that the time and the place of issue are the same, most probably in the temple *Da sheng shou wan an*.

At the same time, we did find that the name *Mu qing* was assigned to the observatory in Shangdu, summer capital of Mongol emperors (元上都穆清閣) (Belyaev and Sidorovich 2007). The observatory was built during the Khubilai reign with the help of Islamic astronomers, who were invited from the famous observatory in Maragha (Iranian Azerbaijan). According to A History of Yuan, the

<sup>14</sup>In the very beginning of the Yuan dynasty during 1271–1279 on the site of an old ruinous Liao pagoda was built a white pagoda in Nepal style. Around this pagoda between AD 1279 and AD 1288 was built the temple *Da sheng shou wan an* 大聖壽萬安. See von Franz (1984), Chan (1991) and Franke (1994) for more details about the history and activity of the temple.

<sup>15</sup>The dictionary *Han yu da ci dian* 《漢語大詞典》 A Big Dictionary of Chinese describes 穆清 as 太平祥和, i.e., “peacefully auspicious”. The expression *tian xia mu qing* 天下穆清 has about the same meaning as the famous *Tian xia tai ping* 天下太平 (“the whole world at peace”).





**Fig. 8.9** *Zhi zheng/Mu qing tong bao* 至正/穆清銅寶. W = 3.2 g, D = 20.0–20.2 mm. Zeno 99419 (Image source: [http://www.hxgqw.com/hxgq/show/goods\\_14608.html](http://www.hxgqw.com/hxgq/show/goods_14608.html). First sold at the auction in Japan in 2006 (日本東京拍賣, 2006-06-10). Listed again for sale at the Japanese on-line auction [www.auction-net.com](http://www.auction-net.com), 19th Coin Auction, 10.06.2012, lot#727.)



**Fig. 8.10** *Zhi zheng/Mu qing yin bao* 至正/穆清銀寶. W = 2.5 g, D = 17.0 mm. Zeno 94655 (Image source: [http://www.hxgqw.com/hxgq/show/goods\\_17592.html](http://www.hxgqw.com/hxgq/show/goods_17592.html). Offered for sale at the on-line auction in China, 華夏古泉網 *Huaxia guquan wang* (Ancient Chinese money website) 2011-01-10.)

observatory in Shangdu was destroyed by fire and restored again in the 13th year of Zhizheng (AD 1353).<sup>16</sup> Thus it is also possible that coins bearing the inscription *mu qing* were related to this specific event. Some indirect evidence in support of this view is the fact that this temple participated in state activities during the Yuan dynasty (von Franz 1984: 38ff).

According to an article in the Chinese periodic magazine *Shoucang* 收藏 “Collection”, 2001, #107, the coin in Fig. 8.11 was found in July 1999 near Taxicun 塔西村 village, Chifeng 赤峰 area, Inner Mongolia, about 0.5 km from the

<sup>16</sup>YS. Ch. 43.





Fig. 8.11 *Zhi zheng/Mu qing jin bao* 至正/穆清金寶. W = 6.2 g, D = 17.4 mm. Zeno 79962



Fig. 8.12 *Gong yang zhu fo* 供養諸佛. W = 1.3 g, D = 14.2 mm. Zeno 13144

Qingzhou White Pagoda 慶州白塔 built in the Liao Dynasty by the rural inhabitants while digging a well. It was in the collection of late Mr. He Si-qin 何斯欽, Chifeng, Inner Mongolia. The image here was taken from Zhou (2003: 295 and 347).

A lot of temple coins have legends which bear the names of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas etc., undoubtedly used during public prayers and offerings to specific deities. An example of such a type can be found in the coin with the legend *gong yang zhu fo* (供養諸佛, Offering to All Buddhas). See Fig. 8.12.

Figure 8.13 is one more coin from the same group as the above with the legend *xiang hua gong yang* 香花供養 offering of incense and flowers).

The very large group of temple coins with the characteristics of the amulet or charm represents the most widespread among temple coins probably because they were not connected by the legend with any specific reign title and thus were cast over a longer period. Since reign titles are absent in the legend of such charms, they



**Fig. 8.13** *Xiang hua gong yang* 香花供養. W = 0.94 g, D = 14.1 mm. Zeno 7512



**Fig. 8.14** *Chou* 丑 and Ox/Sword and Ursa Major constellation. W = 2.3 g, D = 17.3 mm. Zeno 7688

are usually described as issued in the Song-Yuan period. One of the examples is the charm presented on the Fig. 8.14.

On the obverse, the character on top of the central square hole reads *chou* 丑, the second of the twelve Earthly Branches which are used in the Chinese system for reckoning time. The Ox depicted at the bottom of the obverse is the Chinese zodiac animal corresponding to *chou*. Usually such charms refers to people born in the year of the given animal. The reverse contains symbols of the Northern Heaven including the seven stars of the Ursa Major constellation (Big Dipper, *bei dou* 北斗) and the Sword, which also represents the Cygnus constellation (Maeder 2011). In Chinese mythology, these symbols provide protection again evil influences.

There are also a large number of temple coins whose legends represent combinations of the types listed above. As examples, we describe two more coins. The first is a temple coin inscribed *zhi shun ren shen* 至順壬申 with two characters *hu sheng* 护聖 on the reverse. The year *ren shen* 壬申 of the Zhishun 至順 era



**Fig. 8.15** *Zhi yuan wu yin/xiang dian* 至元戊寅/香殿. W = 3.43 g, D = 18.0 mm. Zeno 3325

corresponds to the year AD 1332. The two characters *hu sheng* 护聖 are abbreviated from the temple name *Da cheng tian hu sheng si* 大承天护聖寺, built in AD 1329. The temple was located on the eastern slopes of Mount Yuquanshan 玉泉山. It was peculiarly favoured by Yuan Emperors, which was evidenced by huge donations, paid in kinds as well as in money.<sup>17</sup> In AD 1332, Emperor Wenzong 文宗 died, whose ceremonial prayer was performed in the temple *Da cheng tian hu sheng si*. (Sun 1993: 246ff). It is highly probable that this coin has a direct relation to the noted mourning ceremony.

The second is a coin inscribed *Zhi yuan wu yin* 至元戊寅 with two characters *xiang dian* 香殿 on the reverse (Fig. 8.15). Schlösser (1935: 44) and Prof. Sun Zhong-hui suggested that it was cast in AD 1338, which corresponds to the 4th year of the Zhiyuan period of Emperor Shundi. Taking into account the workmanship and calligraphy peculiarities, the coin should be issued during the second year of the Zhiyuan era meanwhile causes of issue remains unclear. Prof. Sun Zhong-hui also offered another possible date for this coin, suggesting that this coin was cast during the first year of the Zhiyuan era (Sun 1993: 247ff).

There are many combinations of coin legends types. Temple coins, of course, occupy a special place in the Chinese numismatics. While working on a catalogue of the temple coins of the Yuan dynasty, we do hope that future studies on this topic will help to restore this insufficiently explored page of the Celestial Empire numismatics.

<sup>17</sup>YS. Ch. 33, 34.

## Chapter 9

# Lucky Charms from the Ming and the Qing Dynasties

Jian Hu

Popular in ancient China, Chinese numismatic charms were first called *Yan sheng qian* 厭勝錢 talismanic charms, meaning to curse (*yan* 厭) on the evil spirits so as to crush (*sheng* 勝) them, and later started to bear the meaning of inviting good fortune and warding off evil spirits. Today, Chinese charms are often called flower coins (*hua qian* 花錢). The making of flower coins first appeared in the Western Han Dynasty and flourished during the Ming and Qing Dynasties in terms of both quantity and quality. It would be safe to say that flower coins, to some extent, reflect the folk customs of its era and the spiritual pursuit of the people as well. Therefore, collecting and studying the ancient Chinese charms also provide a way to explore the spiritual world of our forefathers.

*Ji yu qian* 吉語錢 good-luck charms, the most important category of the Chinese charms, refer to those with auspicious inscriptions, expressing the meaning of happiness, luck, and good fortune. The ancient Chinese believe in the efficacy of auspicious wording that could bring good luck to them and their family, and therefore *ji yu* coins were also called *Kou cai qian* 口彩錢 coins of verbal pun. Common inscriptions include the following exemplar phrases which show the pursuit by ancient Chinese for happiness.

龜鶴齊壽龜鶴齊壽 *gui he qi shou*, “Live as long as the tortoise and the crane”,

金玉滿堂金玉滿堂 *jing yu man tang*, “May gold and jade fill your house”,

長命富貴長命富貴 *chang ming fu gui*, “Longevity, wealth and honor”,

福如東海福如東海 *fu ru dong hai*, “Fortune as vast as the East Ocean”,

壽比南山壽比南山 *shou bi nan shan*, “Longevity as great as the South Mountain”,

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福壽康寧福壽康寧 *fu shou kang ning*, “Wealth, longevity, health and tranquility”,  
 平安吉慶平安吉慶 *ping an ji qing*, “Peace, joy, and happiness”,  
 福祿壽喜福祿壽喜 *fu lu shou xi*, “Good fortune, emolument, longevity and happiness”,  
 招財進寶招財進寶 *zhao cai jin bao*, “Attract wealth and invite treasure”,  
 福祿雙全福祿雙全 *fu lu shuang quan*, “Happiness and longevity both complete”,  
 狀元及第狀元及第 *zhuang yuan ji di*, “Come out first in the highest civil examinations”,  
 五子登科五子登科 *wu zi deng ke*, “May your five sons achieve great success in the imperial examinations”, and  
 驅邪降福驅邪降福 *qu xie jiang fu*, “Expel evil and send down good fortune”, etc.

The early inscriptions on good-luck charms are comparatively monotonous and mainly about exorcism. During the Ming Dynasty when zinc was introduced into the casting of the charms, the change in raw material from bronze to brass made the charms more aesthetic and durable. More and more people became interested in charms, and new official mints were set up, which made it possible to cast charms in large numbers. As a result, the good-luck charms were greatly developed during this period and left us with a wonderful spiritual wealth with their unique cultural and social connotations. Next we are going to take a close look at the main characteristics of the good-luck charms of this period.

## 9.1 Significant Regional Characteristics

Official coin mints were widely set up throughout China during the Qing Dynasty. Due to the diversity in the quality of copper and in the casting technique, the shape and structure of the charms from different places differed, which resulted in the regional characteristics of the charms. The most well-known regions are Jiangsu 江蘇, Zhejiang 浙江, Guizhou 貴州, Yunnan 雲南, Sichuan 四川, Fujian 福建, Guangdong 廣東, etc. Since the ancient charms bear significant regional characteristics, we can have a better understanding of the value and spiritual pursuit of the local people according to their particular auspicious words. For example, the auspicious words of the Jiangsu and Zhejiang charms are usually “Come out first in the highest civil examinations (*zhuang yuan ji di* 狀元及第)” or “To be first in civil examinations at the provincial, national and palace levels (*lian zhong san yuan* 連中三元)”. It shows that people in Jiangsu and Zhejiang put a high value on fame and reputation, which is also evidenced in the fact that most of the Top Three in the imperial examination came from Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Meanwhile, charms from Yunnan and Guizhou are often inscribed with phrases such as “Filial piety, fraternal love, loyalty and faithfulness (*xiao ti zhong xin* 孝悌忠信)” and “Show one’s purpose



of life by simple living (*dan bo ming zhi* 澹泊明志)”, which show that people in these two places pay more attention to righteousness and faith than to profits.

- 1.1 Most Jiangsu charms (蘇爐) are skillfully cast with characters clear and neat. Since the Jiangsu charms were most cast by official mints, they are generally in similar size and pretty exquisite and majestic. Because they were cast in mass quantity and therefore easy to collect, Jiangsu charms have been the most popular charms among collectors for a long time (Figs. 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 9.4, 9.5 and 9.6).
- 1.2 Different from charms manufactured in Jiangsu, Zhejiang charms (浙爐) are often richer in content and with a variety of styles of calligraphy, which looks more delicate. A small number of these charms are difficult to find and to collect. Besides, the local economy is well developed and the local collectors focus on collecting these local charms, and therefore, the Zhejiang charms are becoming the new favourite among collectors (Figs. 9.7, 9.8, 9.9, 9.10, 9.11 and 9.12).



Fig. 9.1 *Lian zhong san yuan* 連中三元



Fig. 9.2 *Wu zi deng ke* 五子登科



Fig. 9.3 *Zhuang yuan ji di* 狀元及第



Fig. 9.4 *Zhao cai li shi* 招財利市



Fig. 9.5 *Ping an ji qing* 平安吉慶



Fig. 9.6 *Jin yu man tang chang ming fu gui* 金玉滿堂 長命富貴



Fig. 9.7 *Yi jie jing fu yi er shi jia* 以介景福 宜爾室家



Fig. 9.8 *Tian guan ci fu fu gui shuang quan* 天官賜福 富貴雙全





Fig. 9.9 *Tong qing qian qiu hua feng san zhu* 同慶千秋 華封三祝



Fig. 9.10 *Xi de lin er* 喜得麟兒



Fig. 9.11 *Bai nian he he wan shi heng tong* 百年和合 萬事亨通



Fig. 9.12 *Ji qing* 吉磬

- 1.3 Jiangxi charms (贛爐) constitute one of the hottest topics recently. It should be pointed out that people used to classify Chinese charms only into two categories (i.e. Jiangsu charms and Guizhou charms), which indicates that the classification was not strictly based on the regional features due to limited information. Yet, it seems indisputable that there exist a large number of Jiangxi charms. Dexing 德興 in Jiangxi is the copper capital of China and charms have been cast there since the Han Dynasty, booming during the Song Dynasty (Xu 2006). Based on the inscriptional features and casting techniques of the Chang Mint of the Xianfeng era (咸豐昌局) we can tell that Jiangxi charms are consistent in preciseness and refines. The so-called Jiangsu round-hole good-luck charms (蘇爐圓孔吉祥錢) were also mainly cast in Jiangxi. We now classify these round-hole coins as Jiangxi charms, but more evidence is still needed to verify if their features are truly the features of Jiangxi charms (Figs. 9.13, 9.14, 9.15, 9.16, 9.17 and 9.18).



Fig. 9.13 *Qu xie jiang fu* 驅邪降福





**Fig. 9.14** *Lian ke ji di yi pin dang chao* 連科及第一品當朝



**Fig. 9.15** *Wei shan zui le du shu geng jia* 為善最樂 讀書更佳



**Fig. 9.16** *Wu zi deng ke zhuang yuan ji di* 五子登科 狀元及第



Fig. 9.17 *Shou* 壽



Fig. 9.18 *Ming deng jin bang wei lie san tai* 名登三榜 位列三台

- 1.4 Yunnan 雲南 and Guizhou 貴州 are rich in copper and also productive of charms. The Yunnan and Guizhou charms (雲貴爐) share a similar style, and come in different sizes since they were cast by both official and private mints. It should be mentioned that due to the fact that private mints were quite common then (Qian 1984), some of the charms are poorly made. Nevertheless, the Yunnan and Guizhou charms carry rich connotations, and often come in sets with unique features, which would be a good choice for collectors who favour sets of charms as a series (Figs. 9.19, 9.20, 9.21, 9.22, 9.23, 9.24, 9.25 and 9.26).
- 1.5 The charms made in Sichuan (川爐) are mainly in sets of several coins, exquisite and delicate. They feature quite outstanding among all the charms. Since people in Sichuan put much more attention to “set coins” (套子錢 where charms were strung together in the proper order) than to the ordinary charms, there is not a great variety of Sichuan charms. In spite of this, when Sichuan people applied some of the techniques in the casting of set coins to the casting of charms, the well-made charms are very attractive and hard to resist. For example, the famous set coins of “The Four Gentlemen”, including four



Fig. 9.19 *Tian bu ai bao* 天不愛道



Fig. 9.20 *Dan bo ming zhi* 澹泊明志



Fig. 9.21 *Shan yu ren tong* 善與人同





Fig. 9.22 *Fu fu qi mei* 夫婦齊眉



Fig. 9.23 *Bai sui zhuang rong xiu dao yang shou* 百歲壯容 修道養壽



Fig. 9.24 *Ren yi lian chi xiao ti zhong xin* 仁義廉恥 孝悌忠信



Fig. 9.25 *Jin yan shen xing ren yi li zhi xin* 謹言慎行 仁義禮知信



Fig. 9.26 *Yi jia yi shi yi nan duo shou duo fu duo qing* 宜家宜室宜男 多壽多福多慶

different types of plants, namely, plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum, were cast in Sichuan. They contain not only the images of the “Four Gentlemen” but also four poems dedicated to the four plants written in four different styles of calligraphy, which made them especially sought after. The Sichuan charms might have had the opportunity to replace the Jiangsu and Zhejiang charms as the best charms in China if there were more Sichuan charms as good as the “Four Gentlemen” set (Figs. 9.27, 9.28, 9.29 and 9.30).

- 1.6 Hunan charms (湘爐) were once classified as Guizhou charms, and were not recognized as an independent category until recently. People now consider square-hole coins and round-hole coins with folk images on them as Hunan charms. However, the square-hole coins are similar in terms of their stylistic feature to Xianfeng coins made by Hubei Baowu Mint (湖北寶武局), which calls for further research (Figs. 9.31, 9.32 and 9.33).
- 1.7 Guangdong charms (粵爐) are usually small and easy to wear. Most of the Guangdong charms are good-luck charms with a diameter of 25 mm. It should be pointed out that most of these charms are not very thick, and that some





**Fig. 9.27** *Er jin wei wen he geng shi xian xiang bai hua tou shang kai* 而今未問和羹事，先向百花頭上開



**Fig. 9.28** *Yu ji yi zhi jie dao yuan lu han xiang leng dao ru jin* 欲寄一枝嗟道遠，露寒香冷到如今



**Fig. 9.29** *Ming nian zai you xin sheng sun shi xue long sun rao feng chi* 明年再有新生笋，十六龍孫繞鳳池



Fig. 9.30 *Mo xian lao pu qiu rong dan wei you huang hua wan jie xiang* 莫嫌老圃秋容淡，唯有黃花晚節香



Fig. 9.31 *Dui jin ji yu li she da chuan* 堆金積玉 利涉大川



Fig. 9.32 *Chun qiu guang jing jin yu man tang* 春秋光景 金玉滿堂



**Fig. 9.33** *De zhong zi sheng rong zhi bai shi hao xin yi pian zi gui sun rong* 德重滋身 榮枝百世  
好心一片 子貴孫榮



**Fig. 9.34** *Fu lu yong zhen shou ru song bai* 福祿永貞 壽如松柏

made out of the same mould would vary in thickness and were crudely cast. The charm inscribed *shui lu ping an* 水陸平安 “may you have a peaceful journal by land and water” is a case in point. There are also charms with inscriptions on the obverse and characters on the reverse, such as the charm inscribed *Guang xu tong bao/ding cai gui shou* 光緒/丁財貴壽 “Guangxu currency/son, wealth, honour, and longevity”). There also exist some Guangdong charms of large size or images, but they are never mainstream. The majority of Guangdong charms we see today were cast in late Qing dynasty. Since machine casting was first introduced in Guangdong province, some Guangdong charms often give the first impression of having been milled by machines, and the part without inscriptions usually has the pattern of pearls. They are seldom seen in other regions for the reason that people in other place are not fond of their small size. So it is very convenient for us to identify these charms according to the place where they were found (Figs. 9.34 and 9.35).





**Fig. 9.35** *Tian xia tai ping chang ming fu gui* 天下太平 長命富貴

- 1.8 Fujian charms (閩爐) are known for their delicate style and nice calligraphy. With an exquisite workmanship, Fujian charms are often cast with flowers, and the set of twenty provincial coin mint names is most famous. In addition, the famous “Zhengde set coins” often originated from Fujian (Figs. 9.36, 9.37, 9.38 and 9.39).
- 1.9 Beijing charms (京爐), cast in the capital city of China, are known for their exquisite workmanship. To be more specific, the holes in the middle are often



**Fig. 9.36** *Xuan tian shang di yuan shan zu miao* 玄天上帝 元山祖廟



Fig. 9.37 *Shang liao qian sha chu xing da ji* 上樑遣煞 出行大吉



Fig. 9.38 *Zheng de tong bao* 正德通寶



Fig. 9.39 *San yuan ji di wu zi deng ke* 三元及第 五子登科



well-made, with an arched inner rim. This group is best represented by the extremely sought-after set of eight large charms with inscriptions in the clerical script (Figs. 9.40, 9.41, 9.42, 9.43, 9.44, 9.45, 9.46 and 9.47).



Fig. 9.40 *Di de ru tian chen xin si shui* 帝德如天 臣心似水



Fig. 9.41 *Chun wang zheng yue tian zi wan nian* 春王正月 天子萬年



Fig. 9.42 *Guang qi duo fu jia guo gan dong* 廣祈多福 家國幹棟



Fig. 9.43 *Wei shan zui le du shu geng jia* 為善最樂 讀書更佳



Fig. 9.44 *Rong sui ri shang dong jing jie ji* 榮綏日上 動靜皆吉



Fig. 9.45 *Tian yu jue fu qi de nai chang* 天與厥福 其德乃昌



Fig. 9.46 *Jun ming chen liang feng nian da you* 君明臣良 豐年大有



Fig. 9.47 *Zhi ri gao sheng fu sui zai er* 指日高昇 福隨在邇

## 9.2 Lucky Charms as Carrier of Cultural Inheritance

Good-luck charms from the Ming and the Qing dynasties carry traditional Chinese culture, inscribed with quotations ranging from the *Shi jing* 詩經 *The Book of Songs*, the *Shang shu* 尚書 *The Book of Documents*, the *I Ching* 易經 *The Book of Changes* to ancient philosophers as well as Tang and Song poems. Therefore, collecting ancient Chinese charms can help us learn the essence of traditional Chinese culture. The significance of Ming and Qing charms goes beyond the auspicious inscriptions to keep off evil spirits and wish for good fortune; they also reveal the magnificence of traditional sinology and offer the key to the exploration of the spiritual world of Chinese ancestors (Figs. 9.48, 9.49, 9.50, 9.51, 9.52, 9.53, 9.54, 9.55, 9.56, 9.57 and 9.58).





Fig. 9.48 *Kong meng yi feng jing xi zi zhi* 孔孟遺風 敬惜字紙



Fig. 9.49 *Li si ying qing qin se you zhi* 蠡斯衍慶 琴瑟友之



Fig. 9.50 *Ze bai si nan shang liang qian sha* 則百斯男 上樑遺煞



Fig. 9.51 *Dao gui lv xin bao shu shou zhen* 蹈規履信 抱淑守真



Fig. 9.52 *Shou tian bai lu xi er fan xi* 受天百祿 錫爾繁禧



Fig. 9.53 *Xing ren yi shi cun zhong xiao xin* 行仁義事 存忠孝心





**Fig. 9.54** *Shi shu jiao zi zhong xiao chuan jia yi yi ye ji jin fei bao* 詩書教子 忠孝傳家 一藝遺業 積金非寶



**Fig. 9.55** *Ren xin wei bao wei shan wei bao* 仁親為寶 唯善為寶



**Fig. 9.56** *Kan gen zhen xun li kun dui qian* 坎艮震巽離坤兌乾



Fig. 9.57 *Fei li wu yan fei li wu dong* 非禮勿言 非禮勿動



Fig. 9.58 *Zhen ji hua ren zhong xiao you ti* 正己化人 忠孝友悌

Confucian, Buddhism and Taoism are the three major religious beliefs of ancient China. With the introduction of Buddhism, the three major beliefs were constantly in severe conflicts and reconciliations at the same time. Although Buddhism and Taoism are incompatible with each other, they share the same position in the civilians' heart. The Qing dynasty had a high degree of tolerance towards religions and, as a result, there appeared numerous charms with auspicious expressions from Buddhism and Taoism, which now have been a focus of specialized collection (Figs. 9.59, 9.60, 9.61, 9.62, 9.63 and 9.64).

Poem coins and riddle coins are also wonderful works of this era. What have been found from private collections include charms with enlightening poems (神智體詩文 *Shen zhi ti*), palindrome poems (回文詩 *Hui wen shi*) and frequently quoted rhesis. Next we will mainly introduce two main types, viz. *Shenzhiti poem* charms (enlightening poem charms) and Double-side riddle charms.



Fig. 9.59 *Nan wu a mi tuo fo an ma ni ba me hong* 南無阿彌陀佛 唵嘛呢叭咪吽



Fig. 9.60 *Xun li kun dui* 巽離坤兌



Fig. 9.61 *Nan wu a mi tuo fo an ma ni ba me hong* 南無阿彌陀佛 唵嘛呢叭咪吽





**Fig. 9.62** *Lei ting lei ting sha gui xiang jing zhan yao bi xie yong bao shen qing feng tai shang lao jun ji ji ru lv ling chi qian kan gen zhen xun li kun dui* 雷霆雷霆 杀鬼降精 斩妖辟邪 永保神 清 奉太上老君 急急如律令 敕 乾坎艮震巽离坤兑



**Fig. 9.63** *Lei ting sha gui xiang jing tai shang lao jun ji ji ru ling chi ling* 雷霆 杀鬼降精 太上老君 急急如律令 敕令



**Fig. 9.64** *An ma ni ba me hong qian kan gen zhen xun li kun dui* 唵嘛呢叭咪吽 乾坎艮震巽离坤兑

### 9.2.1 *Shenzhiti Poem Charms*

*Shen zhi ti* poems 神智體詩, or enlightening poems, are also called *Xing yi* poems 形意詩 or *Mi xiang* poems 迷象詩. The understanding of such riddle-like poems depends on the reading of the structure and meaning of the words. A common way to solve the riddle is to interpret the size of the characters, the number of strokes, the position, and the space between two characters, which actually could enlighten the mind of people.

The obverse of the coin charm in Fig. 9.65 is an example. There are 13 characters written in a variety of different directions and shapes. They would translate into a full poem of four lines with seven characters each:

夜长横枕意心歪 Long night, a crosswise pillow, and a slanting heart,

月斜三更門半開 A tilted moon at 3 *geng* (midnight) and a half-open door

望斷肝腸無人來 Heart is broken and nobody comes

短命到今無口信 Short life until today no message received,

The deciphering of the obverse into a poem like the above depends on the shape of the characters represented below in Fig. 9.66.



Fig. 9.65 The obverse of the coin charm

夜長意，月斜門。命今信，望斷木。

Fig. 9.66 A coin charm with a poem on the obverse and a riddle on the reverse



## 9.2.2 Double-Sided Riddle Charms

The obverse of the coin charm in Fig. 9.67 contains a riddle in the form of a four-line poem, which reads:

一母所生六个人 One mother gave birth to six children,  
 二个旗下四个民 Two banners and four civilians,  
 方圆不占一寸地 The square occupies less than one inch,  
 走遍天下不让人 Walk through the world without humility

The answer to the riddle, a Qing dynasty cash coin. The first two sentences refer to the six characters found on the two sides of a Qing dynasty cash coin, two written in Manchu script and the other four as Chinese characters. The hole was also made like a coin on purpose.

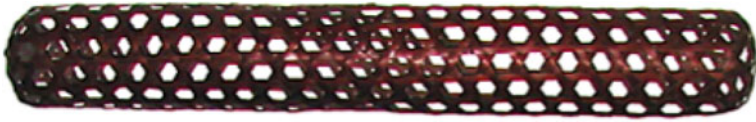
The reverse of the same coin charm in Fig. 9.67 contains a second riddle, also in the form of a four-line poem:

有眼無珠却是空 Empty eye without eyeball,  
 夫妻情同意不同 The couple live together without love,  
 秋前使待奴身去 By autumn the wife would leave,  
 荷花出水再相逢 And she returns when the lotus blooms again

The answer? Bamboo wife (竹夫人 *Zhu fu ren*). Then what is bamboo wife? Not many people know the answer nowadays. In fact, the bamboo-wife is a traditional device people use to enjoy a cool sleep on a hot summer night. It is a long, rounded hollow cage made of bamboos with numerous holes on it (Fig. 9.68). In ancient times,



Fig. 9.67 A coin charm with a riddle on both sides



**Fig. 9.68** The bamboo wife

when people were sleeping on their bamboo mats, they would cling to the bamboo-wife which is hollow inside to ensure ventilation and to stop sweating. It is called bamboo-wife for the reasons that it was made of bamboo and people sleep with it..

### 9.3 Exquisite Calligraphy

The Chinese calligraphy is the only form of art that is developed from the written characters in the world. Good-luck charms were greatly popular during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, partly due to the calligraphy they carry: In order to commemorate some special events, people would invite learned scholars or authoritative officials for their calligraphy as inscriptions on personalized good-luck charms (Figs. 9.69, 9.70, 9.71, 9.72, 9.73, 9.74, 9.75, 9.76 and 9.77).



**Fig. 9.69** *Chang geng lang jian wen qu xing hui* 長庚朗鑒 文曲星輝



**Fig. 9.70** *Zheng da guang ming yan nian yi shou* 正大光明 延年益壽

**Fig. 9.71** *Yu ji yi zhi jie dao yuan lu han xiang leng dao ru jin* 欲寄一枝嗟道遠，露寒香冷到如今





**Fig. 9.72** *Mo xian lao pu qiu rong dan wei you huang hua wan jie xiang* 莫嫌老圃秋容淡, 唯有黃花晚節香



**Fig. 9.73** *Yuan heng li zhen fu lu shou xi* 元亨利貞 福祿壽喜

**Fig. 9.74** *Rong hua fu gui* 榮  
華富貴



**Fig. 9.75** *Bao he tai he* 保合  
太和





**Fig. 9.76** *San yuan ji di* 三元及第  
元及第



**Fig. 9.77** *Ren gong ze shou*  
人恭則壽



#### 9.4 A Broad Variety of Set Coins

Set coins were cast in large numbers in different regions during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Sichuan “Four Gentlemen” coin set (四君子錢) and the Beijing clerical script coin set mentioned earlier are two outstanding examples. Moreover, Guizhou boasts a wide range of set coins, with no fewer than ten different sets, and each set

contains a different number of charms, ranging from two to eight or even over a hundred. They have brought great joy and challenges to the collectors (Figs. 9.78, 9.79, 9.80, 9.81, 9.82, 9.83, 9.84, 9.85, 9.86, 9.87, 9.88, 9.89, 9.90 and 9.91).



**Fig. 9.78** *Hai guo sui yu yue* 海關隨魚躍



**Fig. 9.79** *Tian kong ren niao fei* 天空任鳥飛



**Fig. 9.80** *Han zhu chuan mei* 含珠川媚



Fig. 9.81 *Yun yu shan hui* 韞玉山輝



Fig. 9.82 *Ba xian san yuan* 八仙三元



Fig. 9.83 *Wan shou wu jiang chang ming fu gui* 萬壽無疆長命富貴





Fig. 9.84 *Wan fu lai chao* 萬福來朝



Fig. 9.85 *Bai lu shi he* 百祿是荷



Fig. 9.86 *Yi yuan fu shi* 一元復始

Fig. 9.87 *Fu* 福



Fig. 9.88 *Lu* 祿





**Fig. 9.89** *Shou* 壽**Fig. 9.90** *Xi* 喜

**Fig. 9.91** *Gui* 貴

The Ming and Qing Dynasties are regarded as a glorious time for good-luck charms. Although what we have discussed here is still insufficient to reveal their true brilliance, we have come to realize that these charms could bring us joy, and more importantly, inspire us and offer the opportunity to communicate with the ancient people and to understand traditional cultures.

## Chapter 10

# Writing against Evil: Epigraphy on Chinese *Ya guai* Charms

François Thierry

For years, in both Chinese and Japanese numismatic literature, charms have been classified according to their function. In the early period, the two main categories were the *ji yu zhu pin* 吉語諸品 objects with lucky sentences and the *ya sheng zhu pin* 厭勝諸品 objects for domination and victory (QDQL: XV–XVI). At the end of the 18th century, Kuchiki Ryukyo 朽木龍橋 adopted the word *ya sheng pin* 厭勝品 for all types of charms even for those bearing lucky words as *jin yu man tang* 金玉滿堂 or *chang ming fu gui* 長命富貴 (Wakan: IX-X-XI); that use has been agreed on by almost all Far Eastern numismatists. From the middle of the 19th century, Chinese numismatists, such as Wang Xi-qi 王錫榮 or Li Zuo-xian 李佐賢, started to make a more precise classification of charms (*ya sheng qian*) according to their use or their religious signification. Li Zuo-xian, for example, gave six groups of *ya sheng*: the *ya sheng zheng pin* 厭勝正品 true domination and victory charms (Li 1864: zhen-IV-V), *ya sheng ji yu* 厭勝吉語 *ya sheng* with lucky sentences (Li 1864: zhen-VI-VII), *ya sheng sheng xiao* 厭勝生肖 *ya sheng* of birth animal (Li 1864: zhen-VIII-IX), [*ya sheng*] *shen sheng xian fo* 神聖仙佛 *ya sheng* with spirits, immortals and Buddha (Li 1864: zhen-X), [*yasheng*] *wu zi hua wen* 無字花紋 *ya sheng* with pattern designs but without inscriptions (Li 1864: zhen-XI), and *da ma ge qian* 打馬格錢 horse coins (Li 1864: zhen-XII). In recent times, progressively, the word *ya sheng qian* 厭勝錢 for “charms” has been replaced by the word *hua qian* 花錢. The use of the word *ya sheng qian* is now restricted to the “true *ya sheng qian*” or *ya guai qian* 厭怪錢 coins for triumph over devil. This category is one of the most interesting in Chinese numismatics but these *ya guai qian* cannot be clearly understood and analysed without a special knowledge of Chinese culture and of the religious system of China. The goal of these objects is to protect human beings from the ill-fated influence of miasmas and from the attacks of the evil; charms can drive away and destroy the devils and other creatures of the *Yin* World.

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There are many different types of *Yin* creatures. Firstly, the demons and devils, *gui* 鬼 or *mo gui* 魔鬼, monsters *guai* 怪, *gui mei* 鬼魅, and a lot of specific names for every kind of demons.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the demoniac processes, or entities without material form, closer to a fog or a wind than to a human being, or an animal, or a vegetal: the *xie* (邪, pestilences), or *e* (惡, miasmas), or *gui yu* (鬼魘, bad winds). The abnormal form of somebody or something is the indication of his demoniac nature and this type of entities is called *yao* 妖 or *yao mo* 妖魔. Thirdly, ghosts and spectres are the tangible form of the souls of people dead without sepultures or whose mourning rites have not been performed, *jing* 精 or *shen* 神 or *gui shen* 鬼神, or *gui hun* 鬼魂. At least, some human activities or animal dangers are considered as the outward sign of a demoniac attack: the poisoning by sorcerers, *wu gu* 巫蠱, or the venom of some animals, *du* 毒. As a consequence of the number of the threats, people were in search of many powerful charms.

Therefore, there exist many different types of *ya guai qian* that could be classified according to their iconography and epigraphy. The charms of the Five Venoms (*wu du qian* 五毒錢; cf Fig. 1.11), the charms of the True Image of the Five Peaks (*Wu yue zhen xing tu qian* 五嶽真形錢; cf Fig. 1.13), the Heavenly Master charms (*Tian shi qian* 天師錢), the Dark Warrior charms (*Xuan wu qian* 玄武錢), the Eight Trigrams charms (*Ba gua tu qian* 八卦圖錢), the Four Supernatural charms (*Si ling qian* 四靈錢; cf Chap. 4), the Precious Sword charms (*Bao jian qian* 寶劍錢), the Invocation charms (*Zhou qian* 咒錢), the Seven Lights charms (*Qi guang qian* 七光錢), etc. are among the most popular charms used in the war against the devils and the pestilences. But what I would like to study here is the peculiar importance of the written charms, those bearing no image (on one side or on two sides) but only characters, sentences, phrases, orders or invocations.

In many cultures, the word, or the parole, is the main way for appropriate communication with gods, for worshiping spirits or for asking for help against devils. In other cultures, images, statues or paintings are an absolute necessity in the religious performances and in different cults. But it is well known that in China, in both political and religious universe, the writing has a peculiar place, going beyond the simple meaning of the characters. The intrinsic power of both the character(s) and its drawing is used in the fight against evil and devil exactly as a symbol and a performance. The power of the writings is clearly based not only on the meaning of the characters, but on the shape of the lines: these charms have been used by many illiterate people who cannot read the invocation or the sentence as a prayer. On several charms the text comprises some erroneous characters or is written in special script and thus is hard to decipher, but its power is beyond this wrong or special writing, beyond the true meaning. On the other hand, even well educated people could not understand the secret meaning of the Taoist characters (*fu*'s 符), but they are convinced of the power of those figures.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See, for many examples, the radical *gui* 鬼 in Chinese dictionaries.

<sup>2</sup>Here (and in this paper) we have to understand "Taoism" ("Taoist", etc.) as its popular religious form, *dao jiao* 道教, which is very different from the Taoist philosophy, *dao jia* 道家.

I propose to divide the writings on charms into five main groups, the invocations, *zhou* 咒,<sup>3</sup> the orders, *ling* 令, the sentences, *ci* 詞, the Taoist characters, *fu* 符, and the single character, *zi* 字. These five groups should not be considered as basic elements for a new classification of the *ya guai qian*, for the following reasons. Firstly, these writings are not exclusive of each other: there are sentences with *fu*, or *zhou* with *fu*. Secondly, among the *ya guai qian* there are many charms bearing writings beside images or symbols like the True Image of the Five Peaks or the Five Venoms or Zhong Kui... At least, there are many charms of other categories, like zodiacal charms (*sheng xiao qian* 生肖錢) for example, on which we find protective writings and especially *fu*. But this classification allows me to present these writings and their signification in a relatively structured point of view.

## 10.1 Invocations

Strictly speaking, there are only two true common invocations (*zhou* 咒).<sup>4</sup> Invocations are less religious texts than orders or commands: the word *zhou* is mentioned only in the *Tai shang zhou* 太上咒, but on all we find a specific vocabulary including the words *ling* 令 or *ling chi* 令敕 and often the formula 急急如律令. The expression *Lei ting zhou* 雷霆咒, *Tian gang zhou* 天罡咒, and *Sheng qing zhou* 神清咒 have been later introduced by the numismatists, not by the issuers. Although some orders were used as verbal charm, it is more appropriate to make a distinction between true *zhou* and *ling*.

The first spell is the *Tai shang zhou*:

*Tai Shang zhou yue*: “*Ci fu shen cong guan sanshiwu ren. Tian yuan di fang, liu lü jiu zhang, fu shen dao chu wan gui mie wang!*” *Ji ji ru lü ling!*

太上咒曰：“此符神從官三十五人。天圓地方，六律九章，符神到處，萬鬼滅亡。”急急如律令。

The *Taishang* Invocation says: “The divine spirit of this *fu* proceeds from the 35 people of the Offices. Heaven is round and Earth is square. By the Nine Chapters of the Six Rules, let the spirit of the *fu* penetrate everywhere and destroy all the Devils!” Let His Order be carried out immediately! (Fig. 10.1)

There are many variants of this invocation such as

<sup>3</sup>The word *zhou* 咒 meaning “invocation” or “spell” is said to be another form of 呪, and a variant of *zhu* 祝. The use of the radical “mouth” in the first two words clearly introduces the idea of a prayer.

<sup>4</sup>We can find other texts, sometimes very long, melting orders and references to powerful charms, like, for example, the inscription in the so-called *zhong shen qian* 眾神錢 (Lu 1991: 478), or that of the Xuanwu *da qian* quoted by Kuchiki Ryukyo (Kuchiki 1798: IX.2, 6b–7a); this inscription of 102 characters is a long version closer to a Taoist esoteric text than a spell. But here I would like to study the writings of common charms, not those of unique pieces.





**Fig. 10.1** Incantation of *Tai shang* charm, Song. Ø 62 mm (Thierry 2008: 134)

*Tai Shang zhou yue*: “Tian yuan di fang, liu lü jiu zhang, fu shen dao chu wan gui mie wang!” *Ji ji ru lu ling! Feng chi she ci fu shen ling!*

太上咒曰：“天圓地方，六律九章，符神到處，萬鬼滅亡。”急急如律令。奉敕攝此符神靈。(Thierry 2008: 137),

and

*Tai Shang zhou yue*: “Tian yuan di fang, liu lü jiu zhang, fu shen dao chu wan gui mie wang!” *Ji ji ru lü ling! Chi!*

太上咒：“天元地方，六律九章，符神到處，萬鬼滅亡”急急如律令。敕！(Fig. 10.2).

A precise analysis of this text shows us a peculiar perspective of the essential characteristics of the Taoist esoterism:<sup>5</sup> the reference to *Tai shang lao jun* 太上老君 as the author of the invocation, the presentation of Heaven and Earth as a specific and complementary couple, the mention of heavenly rules whose numerals, 6 and 9, are clearly connected with the *Yin yang* theory,<sup>6</sup> the word *ling* 靈 in one version, and naturally the appearance of a true Taoist *fu* beside the invocation. Sometimes, the invocation is delimited by a square, a clear reference to the shape of the Earth,

<sup>5</sup>We have to note that the Taoist pantheon is very complex because there are different versions of the hierarchy and different identifications of gods and spirits. There exists no unified tradition as in Roman Catholic pantheon: between different books in Taoist literature, encyclopaedias and Taoist studies such as the *Dao jiao yuan shen qi* 道教授神契, *Shi er zhen jun zhuan* 十二真君傳, *Yun ji qi qian* 雲笈七籤, *Tai ping guang ji* 太平廣記, *Tai ping yu lan* (太平御覽, juan 659–679), *Li dai shen xian tong jian* 歷代神仙通鑑, *Gu jin tu shu ji cheng* 古今圖書集成, etc. There are several versions of a same fact, of a same god or spirit story and of his hierarchical level (see Zong and Liu 1987). Therefore, the analysis of the charm texts or pictures is often very difficult. Moreover, in many cases, the issuers of charms mingled different traditions with erroneous versions of the Taoist pantheon, local beliefs and cults.

<sup>6</sup>In the Yijing divination method called *Wen wang ke* 文王課 Divination of King Wen, 6 and 9 are the sole mutable numerals: 6 corresponds to a mutable *yin* stroke that could be changed to a *yang* stroke; 9 corresponds to a mutable *yang* stroke that could be changed to *yin* stroke.



Fig. 10.2 Incantation of Taishang charm, Qing. Ø 42 mm (Wanxuanzhai 103)

exactly as the round shape of the charm and its hole is the symbol of Heaven. Here, the context is clearly Taoist and if we find mention of a specific group of officials (官三十五人), of the “Nine Chapters of the Six Rules” and of the formula “*Ji ji ru li ling!*”, these elements are formal loans from Han Bureaucracy (漢律). It is indeed well known that the Taoist Church was imitating Imperial Hierarchy of the Later Han Dynasty. The *Tai shang zhou* is more deeply influenced by the religious system of ancient China and specially by Taoism than the other so-called invocations. This analysis is reinforced by a unique charm published by Dr. Alex Fang Chengyu (Fang 2008: no 115; also Fig. 1.12). On this charm, the *Tai shang zhou*,

太上咒曰：“此符神從官三十五人。天圓地方，六律九章，符神到處，萬鬼滅亡。”急急如律令。

is followed by the instruction *jia cang pei dai, ri song qi bian* 家藏佩帶，日誦七遍 “keep [it] in house or wear [it], every day recite seven times”. This phrase has been added to the original *Tai shang zhou* as a ritual method for using the charm. In this case, but only for people able to read Chinese characters, this charm is bearing a text to be recited, in the same way as a sheet of paper or a religious book.

The second *zhou* is very different, and strictly speaking it is a *zhu* 祝, not a *zhou* 咒, although the meaning of the two words is very close. The charm of the “Secret Invocation of the Six *Jia*” (*Liu jia mi zhu* 六甲祕祝) is quite different from *Taishang* Invocation charms (Fig. 10.3).<sup>7</sup> The obverse of the charm bears an inscription of nine characters disposed clockwise around the hole, *lin bing dou zhe jie zhen lie zai qian* (臨兵闘者皆陣列在前, those who are going to fight should

<sup>7</sup>The Six *Jia* are the six possible combinations of the ten *gan* (十干 or 天干) and the twelve *zhi* (十二支 or 地支) in a complete cycle of sixty years: *jia zi* 甲子, *jia xu* 甲戌, *jia shen* 甲申, *jia wu* 甲午, *jia chen* 甲辰 and *jia yin* 甲寅. This group of Six *Jia* is considered as a great protection for a long time and there are numerous “*Liu jia*” charms, some of them with *fu*’s: like the *Liu jia yin yang fu* 六甲陰陽符, said to be given by Li Dong 李東 in 322 to Xu Mi 許謐 (AD 303–373), the famous Taoist master who is said to have collected the texts of the *Zhen gao* (真告), and the *Liu jia tong ling fu* 六甲通靈符 in ten *juan* quoted by Ge Hong (Strickmann 1981: 143; BPZ: XIX, 335).



**Fig. 10.3** Invocation of the *Six Jia* charm, early Qing. Ø 67,3 mm (Wanxuanzhai 120)

place this [incantation] before them!); this text can be found in the *Bao pu zi nei bian* by Ge Hong, a Taoist philosopher of the early 4th century.<sup>8</sup> Ge Hong said,

When penetrating into mountains, the person needs to know the Secret Invocation of the *Six Jia*. That says, “those who are going to fight, should place this [invocation] before them!” This group of nine characters constitutes a mysterious invocation and there is nothing that it could not drive away. (BPZ: XVII, 303).

This text is not an order or a command. It has no specific meaning for protection or fighting as the Taishang Invocation, but is only a direction for use. That is different from the direction of use (家藏佩帶, 日誦七遍) placed after the Taishang Invocation: in this case, the worshipper can recite the Taishang’s text of the invocation, but the *Six Jia* Invocation is only to be worn.

To a certain extent, some Buddhist prayers or spells could be classified in this group. The two main Buddhist writings on *ya guai* charms are the classical dhāraṇī’s *An mami bani hong* 唵麻彌叭呢吽, or *An dane mami bami hong* 唵旦叻嘛呢叭迷吽, Chinese transcriptions of *Om mani padme hum*, “Ó! To take refuge in the Lotus!” (Fig. 10.4) and *Nan wu a mi tuo fo* 南无阿彌陀佛, Chinese transcription of the Sanskrit prayer *Namah Amithāba*, “Venerate Amithāba”. Sometimes, we find only *A mi tuo fo* 阿彌陀佛, the Chinese name of Amithāba (Figs. 10.9 and 10.17).

## 10.2 Orders

Orders could be either recited or not. According to Ge Hong, the writing is powerful enough for repulsing dangerous creatures and devils. When Taoist priests had to travel in mountains, they wore a seal bearing the *Huang shen yue zhang* 黃神越

<sup>8</sup>In the *Bao pu zi*, the text is slightly different: 臨兵闘者皆陣列前行。



Fig. 10.4 Buddhist Dhāraṇī charm, late Qing. H. 56 mm (Wanxuanzhai 49)

章 the Yellow Spirit's Writing to Surmount, a special text in 120 characters, and with this seal

they made impression on clay when they halted and neither tigers or wolves could approach on any side nearer than 100 paces. [...] Thus, wearing this seal on their belt, they can travel in mountains and forests without fearing tigers or wolves. But [this text] does not only drive tigers and wolves away: if in mountains or on the bank of rivers or in temples, there are bad spirits eating blood having the power of making good or evil, when these creatures obstructed the way, using a clay print of the seal [the travelers] would make the spirits powerless. (BPZ: XVII, 313)

The most popular and thus the most common order on charms is the *Tai shang lao jun* Order to *Leiting*:<sup>9</sup>

*Lei ting lei ting, ba bu, zhu gui, xiang jing, zhan yao, pi xie, yong bao shen qing. Feng tai shang lao jun, ji ji ru lü ling. Chi. Zhen ren fu xing.*

雷霆雷霆，八部，誅鬼，降精，斬妖，辟邪，永保神清。奉太上老君，急急如律令，敕。真人府行。

<sup>9</sup>*Leiting* 雷霆, or *Leizu* 雷祖, is the God of Thunder. He was considered as the chief of the Heavenly Armies in the war against devils and evil. The 24th of the 6th month, Leiting's birthday, was a great festival in ancient China. On that day, people were asking for exorcisms and charms.



Fig. 10.5 *Leiting* Order charm, early Qing. Ø 44 mm (Thierry 2008: 149)

Leiting! Leiting! Your Eight Divisions<sup>10</sup> have to punish devils, to subjugate ghosts, to behead monsters, to drive pestilences away and to protect for eternity the Divine Purity! Receive this Order from *Taishang Laojun*! Let His Order be carried out immediately! Urgent Order! Sent by the True Men Staff.

There are numerous more or less abridged variations of this text:

*Lei ting lei ting, sha gui, xiang jing, zhan yao, pi xie, yong bao shen qing. Feng tai shang lao jun, ji ru lu ling. Chi. Zhen ren fu xing.*

雷霆、雷霆、殺鬼、降精、斬妖、辟邪、永保神清。奉太上老君、急、如律令。敕。真人府行。(Fig. 10.5)

*Lei ting, lei ting, sha gui, xiang jing, zhan yao, pi xie, yong bao shen qing. Feng tai shang lao jun, ji ru lu ling. Chi!*

雷霆、殺鬼、降精、斬妖、辟邪、永保神清。奉太上老君、急、如律令。敕!(Fig. 10.6)

*Lei zou, sha gui, xiang jing, zhan yao, chu xie, yong bao shen qing! Feng tai shang lao jun. Ji ji zhi ling!*

雷走、殺鬼、降精、斬妖、出邪、永保神清。奉太上老君急濟之令。(Fig. 10.7)

*Lei ting lei ting! Sha gui zhan yao chu jing! Feng tai shang lao jun. Ji ji ru lu ling! Chi!*

雷霆、殺鬼、斬妖、除精。奉太上老君急、如律令。敕。

<sup>10</sup>*Bu* 部 is difficult to translate in this occurrence. It cannot be “minister”, because during Han period, the Nine Ministers were called *Jiu qing* 九卿 and the use of the words *liu bu* 六部 for the Six Boards date from the Sui dynasty. Therefore, in a pseudo-Han text, we have to search for another meaning. According to reliable works, during the Han dynasty, *bu* or *bu qu* 部曲 was the name of a campaigning army division (*Gu dai han yu ci dian* 《古代漢語詞典》; Hucker 1985: 390–391). It is possible *ba bu* is a Taoist version of *ba zuo* 八座, “Eight Executives”, an unofficial reference of the seats of authority occupied by the eight highest persons of the central government (Hucker 1985: 360).





Fig. 10.6 *Leiting* Order charm, early Qing. Ø 44,6 mm (Wanxuanzhai 91)



Fig. 10.7 *Leiting* Order charm, Qing. Ø 60,7 mm (Wanxuanzhai 107)

In a different version, the same order does not emanate from *Taishang Laojun*, but from the Great True Man, *Da zhen ren*:

*Lei ting lei ting, sha gui xiang jing, zhan yao pi xie, yong bao zhen zhai chang ning! Feng da zhen ren! Ji ji ru lü ling! Chi!*

雷霆、殺鬼、降精、斬妖、辟邪、永保、鎮宅、長寧。奉大真人 急、如律令敕。  
(Fig. 10.8)

There are several very abridged versions of the Order to *Leiting* like

*Lei ting lei ting! Sha gui xiang jing! Tai shang lao jun! Ji ji ru lü ling.*

雷霆、殺鬼降精，太上老君，急、如律令。(Thierry 1987: no 101)

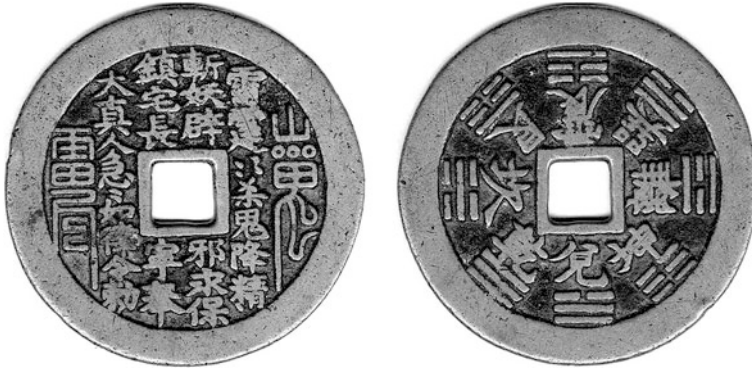


Fig. 10.8 *Leiting* Order charm, Qing. Ø 45 mm (Wanxuanzhai 99)

or a very short version on a small charm bearing on the obverse the character *lei* 雷 repeated five times and on the reverse the formula *chi ling* 敕令 (Thierry 1987: 116).<sup>11</sup>

The vocabulary of the order is very repressive: *zhu*, “to punish”, *sha*, “to kill”, *xiang*, “to subjugate”, *pi*, “to drive away”, *zhen*, “to behead”, etc. The formula *ji ru lu ling*, *chi* comes from the official style of the Imperial Decrees in the Han dynasty bureaucracy.<sup>12</sup> This ideological origin is reinforced by the mention of three levels of hierarchy, *Taishang Laojun*, Heavenly Division under *Leiting*’s Command, and *Zhenren* Staff,<sup>13</sup> which is a mirror of real administrative levels, the Han Emperor, the Imperial Armies and the executive judicial headquarters. This order clearly reproduces an imperial legal edict for a campaign against highwaymen bands or rebels hordes.

In *Taishang* Order, there is no religious consideration: the ideological field of the text is less religious than political, because the devils and ghosts are considered as Hell soldiers provoking disturbance in the Heavenly Harmony, exactly in the same way rebel troops or barbarian invaders are the enemies of the Imperial Harmony. This is a major difference from the invocations.

<sup>11</sup>There is a variant of the version “雷震、雷霆、杀鬼降精、斩妖辟邪、永保神清。奉太上老君、急、如律令敕。真人府行。” with many erroneous characters that are very difficult to decipher. Moreover, some characters are confused, 今 for 令, 付 for 府, 請 for 清; some others are forgotten (Thierry 1987: 98). Therefore, this charm could not be used for recitation.

<sup>12</sup>The use of the word *feng* 奉 belongs to the same ideological universe: *feng shang yu* 奉上諭 means “to receive the edict from the Emperor”.

<sup>13</sup>During the Han period, *fu* 府 is an office commonly appended as a suffix to official titles, usually of dignitaries, to designate their work places and in addition the staff of personnel that served them (Hucker 1985: 216).

There are a couple of orders, in some degree comparable to the *dui lian* 對聯. They include *Tian gang ling* 天罡令 Order to *Tiangang*,<sup>14</sup> and the *Shen qing ling* 神清令, Order to *Shenqing*.<sup>15</sup> The two orders are written on a single charm, one on each of the two sides, with four pseudo-*fu*'s (GJQL: XXIII, 3ab; Li 1864: zhen-X, 6ab; Lu ZH: 472–473; Fang 2008: no 41).<sup>16</sup> Li Zuo-xian gives this piece the name of *Tian gang fu zhou qian* 天罡符咒錢 Charm of the Invocation of the *fu* of *Tiangang*. However, the *fu*'s on this charm are not true Taoist *fu*'s but later pseudo-*fu*. Wang Xi-qi gives them the name *Tian gang qian* 天罡錢 (Wang 1863: XII, 23ab), as in the *Qin ding qian lu*, but there is not only the Order to *Tiangang* on the charm, but two different ones on it. On the other hand, there is no reason to call these writings “*zhou*”.

The Order to *Tiangang* says,

*Tian gang tian gang! Zhan xie mie wang! Wu you ling jian, zhan gui bu cun! Ji ji ru lu ling!  
Shang qing she!*

天罡, 天罡, 斬邪滅亡。 吾有令劍, 斬鬼不存。 急急如律令, 上清攝。

<sup>14</sup>The identification of *Tian gang* is very difficult because there are many assertions. (1) *Gang* could be the name of four of the seven stars of the Dipper, forming the bushel properly (*dou* 斗); each of these stars is the residence of one of the Four Heavenly Divine Kings, *Si tian sheng wang* 四天神王, or 四大天王, or 四大金剛; but in many sources these four stars are called *Xuan ji* 玗璣 or 璇璣 or *Kui* 魁. (2) *Gang* could be the three stars of the handle (柄) of the Dipper; but in many sources these stars are called *Yu heng* 玉衡. (3) *Tian gang* could be a popular name of the Dipper (Ursa Major, the *Beidou*). (4) According to other sources, the character *gang* 罡 could be a later form of *gang* 綱) and *tian gang* 天綱, in Taoist books, is the Heavenly Net from which nothing or nobody could escape (Laozi 1981: LXXIII; BPZ: XIV, 257).

<sup>15</sup>*Shen qing* means “Purity of Gods”, or “Divine Purity”. It is possible to consider these two characters as an abridged form of *Shen san qing* 神三清 the Divine Three Purities, that is, the three Taoist heavens and their gods, *Yuan shi tian zun* 元始天尊, *Tai shang dao jun* 太上道君 and *Tai shang lao jun* 太上老君. In that case, the author of the order could be the Jade Emperor who is living in the Dipper, the *Bei dou* 北斗.

<sup>16</sup>We do not know which side is the obverse and which one is the reverse. From Li Zuo-xian onwards, the numismatic tradition considers the side with *Tiangang* Order as the obverse, but Li gave no proof for his assertion; he probably followed a long tradition without critical intellect (see Liang et al. 1751: XVI, 7ab). Before him, Ni Mo had been more careful in saying, “Right, a *qian* measuring 2 *cun* 7 *fen*; on both sides at left and right there are *fu*, at the top a text saying, ‘Tiangang! Tiangang! Behead the pestilences and exterminate them! I have given Sword the Order to behead the devils until the last one!’ below a text saying, ‘Let His Order be carried out immediately! Let *Shang Qing* assist!’, on the other side, at the top a text saying ‘Divine Purity! Divine Purity! Catch the devils, subjugate the monsters! These *fu*'s are always penetrating and destroying the devils until the last one! Let His Order be carried out immediately! Let *Lei [gong]*'s Killer-ghosts assist!’. A name is ‘coin with *fu*'s [*fu lu qian* 符籙錢]” (GJQL: XXIII, 3ab).

Tiangang! Tiangang! Behead the pestilences and terminate them! I have give Sword the Order to behead the devils until the last one! Let His Order be carried out immediately! Let *Shang Qing*<sup>17</sup> assist!

The Order to *Shenqing* says,

*Shen qing shen qing! Zhuo gui jiang yao! Ci fu dao chu, mie gui bu cun! Ji ji ru lü ling! Lei sha she.*

神清, 神清, 捉鬼, 降妖。此符到處, 滅鬼不存。急急如律令, 雷煞攝。

Divine Purity! Divine Purity! Catch the devils, subjugate the monsters! These *fu*'s are always penetrating and destroying the devils until the last one! Let His Order be carried out immediately! Let *Lei[gong]*'s Killer-ghosts assist!

In these texts, both *Tiangang* and *Shenqing*, as *Leiting* in the previous order, are not the authors of the text, but the recipients, the subordinates in charge of repression. It is not said who the issuer is. Thus, it would be very interesting to know the exact meaning of “吾有令劍...”, firstly for the identity of *wu* and secondly for the origin of the sword.<sup>18</sup> This supreme authority (*wu* 吾) is probably very high, because the order concerns not only *Tiangang* and *Shenqing*, but also *Shang Qing* and the troops of *Leiting*: *wu* probably refers to *Yu Huang*, or *Yu huang shang di* 玉皇上帝 the Supreme God of the Heavenly Hierarchy in the popular Taoist belief: according to the *Liao zhai zhi yi* 聊齋志異, “天上有玉帝, 地下有皇帝”, “in the Heaven is the Jade Emperor, on Earth is the August Emperor” (Zong-Liu: 35). But the images of *Yu Huang* never show the Jade Emperor wearing a sword. The seven stars of *Beidou* are often associated with a sword (or two swords). But “*wu*” seems to give his order to the [Precious?] Sword as an independant spirit. It may be possible to connect this sword with that of *Xi Wangmu* 西王母 the Queen Mother of Western Countries and great protectress of human beings, whose magic sword was named *Fen ying* 分影 “driving the shades of the night away”.

In fact, this double order is more repressive than the Order to *Leiting*: there is no mention of official bodies as *bu* 部 division, or even *fu* 府 bureau, which are the mark of a legal decision; here, it is only a proscription edict. To a certain extent, these commands are killing orders without any judicial foundation.

The last order appears in an abridged form. Several charms bear the short inscription *Jiang jun jian* 將軍箭 Arrows of the General (Fig. 10.9), which is a

<sup>17</sup>*Shang Qing* 上清 is one of the *San Qing*, the “Three Purities”. The *Shang Qing*, “Supreme Purity”, is the domain of the Supreme Lord of Tao, *Tai shang dao jun* 太上道君, or *Ling bao jun* 靈寶君 Lord of Precious Spirit, or *Ling bao tian zun* 靈寶天尊 Heavenly Venerable of Precious Spirit. In certain traditions, *Shang Qing* (with the name of *Tai shang yu huang tian zun*) is *Yu Huang*, the Jade Emperor (Zong and Liu 1987: 28–29). On the other hand, the *Shang Qing* School is one of the two Taoist traditions which proclaimed that writings have a peculiar preeminence and an intrinsic authority. The *Shang Qing* corpus was presented to the Liang court in 517 by Tao Hong-jing as a symbol of the Heavenly Mandate of the Liang imperial house (Kubo 1989: 94–96, 100–103; Little 2000: 229–231; Mollier 2003: 407).

<sup>18</sup>“I have given [Precious] Sword the Order...”, or “I have given my sword the Order...”, or “I have given your sword the Order...”.



Fig. 10.9 Li Guang Order charm, Qing. H. 62,2 mm (Wanxuanzhai 104)

reduced version of the command *Chi ling Li Guang jiang jun jian zai ci* 敕令李廣將軍箭在此 It is ordered to General Li Guang to shoot his arrows here! (De Groot 1892: IV, 1045). Li Guang (?–119 BC)<sup>19</sup> was a famous general who fought the Xiongnu and inflicted bloody defeats on them during Han Wudi's reign; the faithful General has been divinized as a powerful killer of devils because the demoniac armies are assimilated to the barbarous Xiongnu of the past ages. It is supposed that this order emanates from a Taoist divinity or from the Heavenly Emperor exactly as a real command probably sent by Han Wudi to Li Guang. It is interesting to note that the name of Li Guang is not mentioned.

### 10.3 Sentences or Phrases

Sentences or phrases are the main form of writing on *yaguai* charms; generally speaking, the four characters are dispatched as on the common coins, top, below, right and left. We have prayers or callings for help, abridged versions of longer text, or warnings.

The most common are the callings to help or to destroy, and this type of writing dates back several centuries, to the Han period. Archaeological discoveries prove

<sup>19</sup>The Xiongnu called him “the Flying General of the Han” because he used with a very high military artfulness the rapidity of the cavalry.





Fig. 10.10 Five Venoms charm, late Qing. Ø 44.7 mm (Thierry 2008: 158)

that some charms with the obverse inscription *chu xiong qu yang* 除凶去央 suppress ill omens and move away calamities!<sup>20</sup> and on the reverse *bi bing mo dang* 辟兵莫當 drive away the soldiers, not to face them, could be dated as early as the Western Han Dynasty (Sun and Liu 1985: 183–184; Li 1864: zhen-VI, 1ab; Thierry 2008: nos 171–172). There are many varieties of texts in two or four characters. I only give a few examples:

- *pi xie* 辟邪 drive pestilences away (Thierry 2008: no 103),
- *qu xie pi e* 驅邪辟惡 expel pestilences and drive evil away (Fig. 10.10),
- *zhan yao fu xie* 斬妖伏邪 behead monsters and repulse pestilences (Thierry 2008: no 155),
- *zhan xie zhi gui* 斬邪治鬼 suppress pestilences and control the devils (Thierry 1987: no 117),
- *zhan gui da jiang* 斬鬼大將 the Great General who beheads devils (Li 1864: zhen-X, 8b), and
- *zhu shen hui bi* 諸神迴避 all the spectres have to move aside (Fig. 10.11).

The structure of these inscriptions is generally based on two parts of two characters giving a great possibility of numerous combinations relatively repetitive.

As a protection against devils and miasmas, there is the threat of the acme of the Yang, the middle of the fifth day of the fifth lunar month written on charms: *wu ri wu shi* 五日午時 at midday of the 5th day, or *wu yue wu ri wu shi* 五月五日午時 at midday of the 5th day of the 5th month (Fig. 10.12). This moment, called *chun yang* 純陽 or “perfect yang”, is the most appropriate in the year for killing and destroying the devils and other ghosts and for fighting Evil in general: both masters of Tao and monks are preparing talismans, charms and magic mixtures and

<sup>20</sup>The character *yang* 央 is an abbreviation for *yang* 殃.



Fig. 10.11 Dragon Tiger Fighting charm, early Qing. Ø 46,2 mm (Wanxuanzhai 1)



Fig. 10.12 Five Venoms charm, late Qing. Ø 27,4 mm (Thierry 2008: 154)

performing apotropaic ceremonies at that moment when the power of the *Yang* is at its greatest force and the *Yin* at its lowest. The *Bao pu zi*, for example, says,

When the moment of fighting, usually, one prays carefully, or one places on his heart a red magical *fu* made at the fifth day of the fifth lunar month ... (BPZ: XV, 270)

In this case, the writing directly aims at the evil forces.

Several writings are the developed variant of a short sentence. We have seen before the sentence of four characters 諸神迴避. Although it is often used in correlation with Lü Dong-pin, there is also a developed form of nine characters: *Jiang tai gong zai ci zhu shen hui bi* 姜太公在此 諸神迴避 High Duke Jiang is here and all the spectres have to move aside (Fig. 10.13). *Jiang Tai Gong* (also known as Jiang Zi-ya) was well known as adviser to generals of King Wen of the Zhou dynasty. Later he became the founder of the Yan 燕 State in the northeast of ancient China and subjugated the northern barbarians to the Zhou Dynasty. By a phenomenon of identification of the barbarians as devils, Jiang became a fighter of



Fig. 10.13 *Jiang tai gong* charm, Qing. H. 64,2 mm (Wanxuanzhai 112)

devils and hence a protective spirit. There is another famous sentence that Chinese people put on walls for driving *gui* away: *Jiang tai gong zai ci, bai wu jin ji* 姜太公在此，百無禁忌 High Duke Jiang is here and there is nothing to fear (Day 1974: 49; Zong-Liu: 530).

#### 10.4 The *fu*'s

In the Taoist tradition, the *fu*'s 符 or *fu lu* 符籙, are secret characters or messages and seals. The way of writing is clearly an imitation of the ancient seal script, *zhuān shū* 篆書, and more particularly the “Nine Wrinkles Seal Script”, *jiu die zhuān* 九疊篆. In this script, often used in the engraving of seals, the character is very difficult to read because the strokes are completely distorted. Therefore, the deciphering is hard and needs specialised knowledge. The Taoist *fu*'s are not intelligible but for the recipient, spirits, gods, immortals, devils, ghosts, etc.

As esoteric seal, the *fu* is indispensable in a command, because “an order without a seal is exactly as an army without a commander”. But in general, *fu*'s are secret message for apotropaic purposes. In the Taoist tradition, it is said that in AD 141, Taishang Laojun visited Zhang Dao-ling, the Heavenly Master, and gave him 24 chapters of text comprising numerous *fu*'s against devils and pestilences and a lot of long-life methods; Zhang integrated this divine revelation in his *Tai ping dong ji jing* 太平洞極經. The use of *fu*'s during the Eastern Han Dynasty is clearly proved

by the story of Fei Chang-fang 費長房, a person who was in search of immortality and Taoist supernatural powers. One day, Fei met an old man who ‘made for him a *fu* and said: “with this [*fu*], you will subdue all the devils and spirits on Earth”’ (又爲作一符, 曰: 以此主地上鬼神). After that, he used his *fu* against devils and pestilences in many occasions; but later having lost his *fu* he was attacked and killed by a devils’ horde (FAN 1987: LXXXIIb, 2743–2745; Ngô 1976: 128–134). Since that time, many Taoist masters and scholars, like Ge Hong,<sup>21</sup> Tao Hong-jing, Sun Si-miao or Lin Ling-su, have written books with numerous *fu*.<sup>22</sup> For the readers, those graphs cannot be understood and these authors only give the purpose and the direction for use.

On the charms, we find true Taoist *fu*’s only on the oldest pieces;<sup>23</sup> on the later ones (Ming and Qing period), there are mainly pseudo-*fu*’s, that is, Chinese characters imitating the shape of the *fu*’s. The old *Tai shang zhou* charms (Fig. 10.1) bear clearly a true *fu* either on one side beside the invocation, or on the other side beside the image of the Black Warrior according to Song Huizong’s vision.<sup>24</sup> On later pieces, the invocation is flanked by two pseudo-*fu*’s and the true *fu* is written on the other side (Fig. 10.2). This esoteric graphic of Taoist origin is therefore not decipherable.

Another kind of *fu* is the *hu tou fu* 虎頭符, *fu* with tiger head, the characters of which are very close to the *jiu die zhuan* (Fig. 10.16). On the top of the vertical *fu*, there is a tiger mask, an association very dangerous for the devils, because, in addition of the power of the *fu*, the tiger is said to eat several thousands of devils, ghosts or monsters every day (Maspero 1971: 132; Yuan 1985: 302–303). The reverse of *Xuan wu* charms (玄武錢) often bears *hu tou fu* (Fang 2008: no 114; Thierry 2008: no 165). On the other hand, this type of *fu*’s is very frequent on *Ben ming xing guan* 本命星官 or *xing shen*, 星神 zodiacal charms (Thierry 1987: no 23; Fang 2008: nos 148–159, 163–170; Thierry 2008: nos 56 and 60).

There is a very interesting charm bearing two true *fu*’s with the phrase *ci fu ya guai* 此符壓怪 this *fu* represses monsters (Fig. 10.14). The two types of writing on this piece are intended for the devils and for the wearers: four Chinese characters are an explanation of the power of the *fu*’s, and the *fu*’s have to be read by the devils and monsters. See Fig. 10.15 for a similar piece.

<sup>21</sup>In his *Bao pu zi*, Ge Hong not only presents several *ru shan fu* 入山符, *fu* for entering mountains but gives an impressive list of books of *fu* amongst them the *ya guai fu* 壓怪符 in ten *juan* and the *Liu jia tong ling fu* 六甲通靈符 in ten *juan*, too (BPZ: XIX, 335).

<sup>22</sup>All the *fu*’s do not stem from the Taoist tradition; there are several Buddhist small compendia of *fu*’s like, for example, the *Fo shuo qi qian fo shen fu jing* 佛說七千佛神符經 (Mollier 2003: 410).

<sup>23</sup>Or on later overcast charms.

<sup>24</sup>*Xuan wu da di* 玄武大帝, the Great Emperor of the Black Warrior or *Zhen wu da di* 真武大帝, is well known in his Song iconography, especially designed by Emperor Huizong after *Xuan wu da di* made a mystic apparition in the imperial palace. He is also known as *Xuan tian shang di* 玄天上帝 Superior Emperor of the Dark Heaven or *Yuan tian shang di* 元天上帝, after the character *Xuan* was forbidden because the personal name of the Qing emperor Shengzong (Kang Xi 康熙) was *Xuan-ye* 玄燁.



Fig. 10.14 *Ci fu ya guai* charm, early Qing. Ø 45 mm (Wanxuanzhai 118)



Fig. 10.15 Leiting Order charm, Qing. Ø 47 mm (Wanxuanzhai 121)

## 10.5 Single Character

There are not many single characters used on charms as a way of repulsing or terrifying devils and ghosts. We come across the character *lei* 雷, which is the name of Lei Ting 雷霆, the famous devil slayer, the God of Thunder and the chief of the heavenly armies specifically involved in the war against evil spirits. His name in single character, repeated five times, is considered as fearsome enough to drive all devils or ghosts away (Thierry 1987: no 116). It is very interesting to note that the characters of the name of other devil killers, especially Zhong Kui, are not used, although the images of Zhong Kui or Lü Dong-bin are very popular as charm against devils.

In some charms, immortals or spirits carry a flag bearing the single character *ling* 令 that is the flag of a commander of Heaven Armies and that should be understood as a direct threat against devils and ghosts (Fig. 10.11).



But the most interesting single character is clearly 讐 *qi*; this character appears isolated with *fu*'s (Fig. 10.16) or in combination with *liang* 兩 double or two beside other writings, mostly Buddhist dhāraṇi's (Figs. 10.4 and 10.17). The meaning of *ji*, as given in *Kang xi zi dian* 康熙字典 *The Kangxi Dictionary*, is the following:

*When a human being is dying, he became a gui 鬼 who frightens the people seeing it; when a gui is dying, he becomes a qi 讐 of whom gui's are very afraid. Therefore if that character written in seal script is put on above doors, the evil activities of gui are without effect in an area of a thousand li.*



Fig. 10.16 *Ji* character charm, Tang. Ø 53,8 mm (Wanxuanzhai 86)



Fig. 10.17 Buddhist charm, early Qing. H. 56,8 mm (Wanxuanzhai 102)

## 10.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, beyond the main purpose of driving away and killing devils and pestilences, the use of writings on *ya guai qian* is, paradoxically, a means to give devils some human qualities such as the ability to read a text or a sentence and capacity to understand its meaning, even written in seal script or in secret Taoist script. On the other hand, we learn with these inscriptions that devils and ghosts are mortal creatures and therefore, in a certain way, they are less dangerous than Christian, Islamic or Animist devils, vampires, djins, devils, Satan, etc. which are immortal entities.

Charms bearing invocations, sentences or *fu*'s show the cultural importance of the writing in Chinese ancient society, and the specific power of the script. It is not a fact without significance that in China calligraphy has been the most appreciated and the first of the arts. To paint is above all to write; even written in *cao shu*, characters are not decipherable but give a message. Although Taoist religion (*dao jiao* 道教) was very far from and sometimes antagonistic with Confucianism and its cult of literature, the ignorant mass of believers was very respectful to all forms of writing. And probably, the fact that they could not understand the writing on the charms is a supplementary argument for their conviction of the power of writing charms. Such apotropaic charms were sufficiently effective, written characters on them being not merely graphical inanimate lines, but living entities essentially endowed with powerful faculties of producing the effect they say. The character *qi* (氣), for example, is not only a character, but it is a *qi* properly, or more precisely a part of the spirit of the *qi*. Writing does not express ideas. It is those ideas.

# Chapter 11

## The Vietnamese Charms in the Department of Coins and Medals of the French National Library

Emmanuel Poisson

Although there are charms made of wood, paper, cloth, etc., this paper will deal with coin-shaped charms, *ya sheng qian* 厭勝錢 coins for submission of and triumph over demons. Traditionally, Chinese researchers present them in the final chapters of numismatic books or in their supplements. They are essentially a subject of numismatic study. It means researchers give weight, size, metal features and a brief description, without analysis of images or symbols. This type of work has been carried on by Westerners, as Lockhart (1895) in *The Currency of the Far East* or Schjöth (1929) in *Chinese Currency*, who give sylloge with an explanation from time to time. The first significant attempt in the numismatic field is the thematic analysis of charms made by Cai (1973) at the end of his *Study on Ancient Chinese Coins*. The author tries to classify the charms according to their use and their origin but his book has no illustrations.

Following on from this initial work, François Thierry published *Amulettes de Chine et du Viêt Nam* (Thierry 1987) and *Amulettes de Chine* (Thierry 2008). Instead of giving a model in which the charms operate as an illustration of a thesis, he presented, analyzed and classified an important set of charms from several public and private collections. The use of charms is immemorial. They originated when men faced with nature, discovered the two major fundamental anguishes—the extinction of human species and the extinction of the individual. The extinction of the human species is the lack of women or the lack of men, stopping fertility. The extinction of the individual means the individual is unable to maintain subsistence and his defence against nature or other human groups. Around these fears, religious, ritual and social conceptions took shape gradually.

The charms can be gathered according to the types of concerns to which they respond and in the way of expressing them. They belong to two main categories, “attract happiness” and “remove the evil”. It is necessary to distinguish charms with

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an individual function from charms with a social function. In the first type, we will distinguish two sub-types: religious charms including Buddhist charms *Phật hiệu tiền* 佛號錢 and Catholic charms which appeared in Vietnam in the nineteenth century, and zodiacal charms including charms with zodiacal signs (*sinh tiếu tiền*, 生肖錢) and coins of the fundamental destiny (*bổn mệnh tiền*, 本命錢). The second type includes charms with a social function. While religious and zodiacal charms are very much influenced by Buddhism and Taoism, charms with a social function belong to the Confucian universe. Their subjects are longevity, family, honours and success.

Next, I will introduce the Vietnamese charms of the Department of Coins and Medals of the French National Library.

Figure 11.1: [Bronze, Ø 42 mm; 23.70 g. Thierry 2001: N°553] Buddhist charm bearing on the obverse a *dhârani* in corrupted Sanskrit characters, *Om hrī tram hūm*, invocation to Çakyamuni (*hrī*). The rim is overengraved. The word *dhârani* (*zong chi* 總持) derives from a Sanskrit root which means to hold or maintain. Some researchers suggest that it is generally understood as a mnemonic device which encapsulates the meaning of a section or chapter of a sutra. Dharanis are also considered to protect the one who chants them from malign influences and calamities. The distinction between dharani and mantra is a difficult one to make]. On the obverse the field is squared. On the reverse, one can read *Hūm phat svāhā*. It is a Buddhist invocation; similar rim (edge), without square pattern. This charm dates from the eighteenth century. Its decoding is a thorny problem because Sanskrit syllables are written in a totally corrupted style (siddham). Lacroix gave an incoherent interpretation of this inscription: *Ni bát hồng lam. An hạc di hồng* means “(May) the bad fate be driven by the monk” (Lacroix 1900: N°393). The decoding by Francois Thierry is based upon handbooks of *dhârani* published in the Taishō Daizōkyō (1960–1967) and elements in Dumoutier (Dumoutier 1904: 32, 39). He suggests cross-wise for what seems to be the obverse since the letter *Om* (唵, top) opens many *dhârani*, and since the fourth letter *hūm* (𑖕, left) is the final letter of many *dhârani*. *Hrī* 訶哩 is perfectly identifiable and refers to Çakyamuni or Amithaba. For the reverse we can read C, D, A and B since the vertical formula *svāhā* 娑縛訶, perfectly clear here, close many *dhârani*s. For example, one can read this formula in *dhârani* engraved during the second half of 9th century on small stone columns in Hoa Lư 花𤄎, a former capital of Vietnam (Phan 1998: 61, 63, 65, 67).

Figure 11.2: *Minh Mạng thông bảo* 明命通寶 [Copper, Ø 41; 14.28 g. Thierry 1987: N°1896]. At the periphery, one can see two dragons around the pearl. Reverse: phú thọ đa nam 富壽多男 “Wealth, longevity, and abundant male posterity” decorated with foliage. It is interesting to compare this charm with Fig. 11.3 produced during Minh Mạng 明命, the second Emperor of the Nguyễn 阮 dynasty [Brass, Ø 23; 2.30 g; Thierry 1987: N°1196]. See also the donation coin (Fig. 11.4) cast during Thiệu Trị 紹治, the third Emperor of the Nguyễn dynasty [Silver, Ø 30; 5.92 g; Thierry 1987 N°1635].

Figure 11.5: *Minh Mạng thông bảo* 明命通寶 [Brass, Ø 41.4 mm; 12.92 g. Thierry 2001: N°401]. This charm is a copy (late 19th century) with rough strokes.



Fig. 11.1 A Buddhist charm



Fig. 11.2 Minh Mạng thông bảo



Fig. 11.3 Minh Mạng thông bảo





Fig. 11.4 Thiệu Trị thông bảo



Fig. 11.5 Minh Mạng thông bảo

Figure 11.6: *Châu nguyên thông bảo* 周元通寶 [Brass, Ø 42.6, 21.90 g. Thierry 1987: N°1897]. Reverse: blank. The coins of Emperor Taizu (太祖) (AD 951–954) of Later Zhou 後周 (AD 951–960), which bore this inscription, were casted with metal from the Buddhist statues and objects requisitioned by the authorities in pagodas and monasteries, but thus have acquired the value of a charm: carrying them ensured for the mother the birth of a boy. That is why they were manufactured in China and Vietnam until early twentieth century. This charm can be dated from the second half of the eighteenth or the early nineteenth century.

Figure 11.7: *Châu nguyên thông bảo* 周元通寶 [Brass, Ø 22, 2.26 g. Thierry 1987: N°1142]. Reverse: character *chính* 正. This character *chính* 正 seems inspired by that of the coins of Lê Chiêu Thống 黎昭統 (AD 1781–1788). This coin dates from the end of the 18th century.

Figure 11.8: *Châu nguyên thông bảo* 周元通寶 [Brass, Ø 54.4, 87.75 g. Thierry 1987: N°1901]. Reverse: crescent moon. Same period as the previous charm. Higher module and weight. It is probably a copy because the inscription is rougher.



Fig. 11.6 Châu nguyên thông bảo



Fig. 11.7 Châu nguyên thông bảo



Fig. 11.8 Châu nguyên thông bảo



**Fig. 11.9** Châu nguyên thông bảo

Figure 11.9: *Châu nguyên thông bảo* 周元通寶 [Brass, Ø 45.5, 37.7 g. Thierry 1987: N°1902]. Reverse: moon and sun. Same period as the previous charms. The difference between this charm and charm number 6 is that the vertical stroke of the component *thổ* 土 of the character *châu* 周 was extended.

Figure 11.10: *Châu nguyên thông bảo* 周元通寶 [Brass, Ø 39, 23.04 g. Thierry 1987: N°1903]. Reverse: blank. This charm has partially preserved the original style in *ba fen*. Same period as the previous charms.

Figure 11.11: *Phú quý khang ninh* 富貴康寧 [Brass, Ø 48; 35.01 g. Thierry 1987: N°1904]. “Wealth and honours, health”; hammered background. Reverse: turtles, two herons holding up their beaks, one sceptre, the other a water lily; at the bottom, a bride basket; a groove in the rim. One must read this charm by homophony: water lily (*he* 荷) means *concord* (*he* 和), bride basket (*he* 盒) corresponds to *union* (*he* 合) and the sceptre, *ru yi* (如意), means “according to your wishes”. Therefore we obtain: “Perfect concord according to your wishes”. It is interesting to note that this meaning is understood in the case of this Vietnamese



**Fig. 11.10** Châu nguyên thông bảo





Fig. 11.11 Phú quý khang ninh

charm although these homophonies do not exist in Vietnamese: pronunciation: 荷 is *hà*, 和 is *hòa*, 盒 is *hạp* and 合 is *hợp*. This wish (*Phú quý khang ninh*) is associated with the idea of social success, because heron in Chinese 鷺 (*lu*) is homophone of wages 祿 (*lu*) of civil servants. The charm is stylistically close to some big Cảnh Hưng 景興 (AD 1740–1786) coins, especially those bearing on the reverse the inscription *bình nam* 平南, i.e., “South pacified”. These coins were issued in 1774, to celebrate the victory of the army of the lord Trịnh Sâm 鄭森 over the Tây Sơn 西山 rebellion. See Fig. 11.12 [Brass. Ø 41.2, 22.15 g. Thierry 1987 N°816] and Fig. 11.13 [Brass. Ø 36, 17.45 g. Thierry 1987 N°817]. So the charm in Fig. 11.11 can be dated from the same period.

Figure 11.14: *Phú quý khang ninh* 富貴康寧 [Brass. Ø 40.2, 29.48 g. Thierry 1987: N°1905]. Reverse: Similar to the previous one, but the water lily was replaced by the *Tai ji* 太極, the figure symbolizing the complementarity of *yin* and *yang*. This charm dates from Cảnh Hưng period.



Fig. 11.12 Cảnh Hưng thông báo



Fig. 11.13 Cảnh Hưng thông bảo



Fig. 11.14 Phú quý Khang Ninh

Figure 11.15: *Phú quý Khang Ninh* 富貴康寧 [Bronze. Ø 47.8. 26.33 g. Thierry 1987: N°1906]. Reverse: *thọ* 壽 “longevity”. The calligraphy of this charm is close to the calligraphy of the coins of the Cảnh Hưng era. See Fig. 11.16 [Brass. Ø 38.6, 23.46 g. Thierry 1987 N°914. Reverse: *nguyên* 元. The character *nguyên* 元 means the cycle of cosmic evolution that counts 129,600 years, after which everything is absorbed by the chaos from which emerges the matter, for the same period]. See also Fig. 11.17 [Brass. Ø 42, 34.93 g. Thierry 1987 N°917. Reverse: *nhất lượng* — 一两 one lượng. The weigh of these coins never reach a lượng (about 38 g); this inscription must be understood as an indication of value: a lượng consisting of ten tiền 錢, about 3.8 g, it is supposed to be 10 coins whose legal weight is 1 tiền].

Figure 11.18: *Vạn thọ thông bảo* 萬壽通寶 [Brass. Ø 42. 28.29 g. Thierry 1987: N°1907], “current coin for 10 000 longevity”. Reverse: Two dragons. Schroeder rank this coin in the “uncertain coins” but it is indeed a charm, whose style is quite close to large coins of Cảnh Hưng (Schroeder 1905: N°589). These coins have been probably issued at the time of the sixtieth birthday of the Emperor Lê Hiến Tông 黎





Fig. 11.15 Phú quý khang ninh



Fig. 11.16 Cảnh Hưng thông bảo



Fig. 11.17 Cảnh Hưng thông bảo



Fig. 11.18 Vạn thọ thông bảo



Fig. 11.19 Chính đức thông bảo

显宗 (AD 1740–1786). The name of the sixtieth birthday is “celebration of the 10,000-[year] longevity (*vạn thọ tiết* 萬壽節)”.

Figure 11.19: *Chính đức thông bảo* 正德通寶 [Brass. Ø 33. 8.9 g. Thierry 1987: N°1908], “current coin of the *Chính đức* era”. Reverse: Dragon and phoenix. Emperor Ming Wuzong 明武宗 (AD 1505–1521), whose reign title was Zheng De (vn. *Chính đức* 正德), has not issued coins, but the meaning of his *nian hao* 年號 reign title has allowed its use for many charms: *Zheng De* means “irreproachable virtue” or “maintain the virtue”, which is one of three occupations of the good sovereign (Shujing: I.3.35). This double meaning gives to this charm additional efficiency. The dragon and the phoenix (*long feng/long phương* 龍鳳) are the symbol of the harmonious and united couple. These coins used to be offered for weddings both in China and Vietnam.

Figure 11.20: [Brass. Ø 57.5, 47.13 g. Thierry 1987: N°1929]. Phoenix and dragon around the pearl, at the centre Thọ 壽 “longevity”. 19th century.



**Fig. 11.20** A charm with phoenix and dragon around the pearl



**Fig. 11.21** A copy of Fig. 11.20 cast in brass

Figure 11.21: [Brass. 52.31 g. Thierry 1987 N°1930] Copy cast in brass and not bronze. Dragon and pearl on the left side are far less delicate than the previous one.

The Vietnamese charms of the Department of Coins and Medals of the French National Library are worthy of note because they are representative of the importance of the cultural exchanges between China and Vietnam throughout history.

# Chapter 12

## Fuhonsen Coins and the Ancient Japanese Theology

Xiao-lin Wang

### 12.1 The Exorcism Charms of Ancient East Asia

In January 1999, coins bearing the inscription of Fuhong (富本錢) were unearthed in the Asuka Pool (飛鳥池) excavation site in Nara, which were made around AD 680 by the mint institutions directly affiliated to the government. Once reported, the news aroused keen interest amongst experts, scholars and ancient history enthusiasts. A discussion of the Fuhonsen soon ensued among scholars. Among them, Higashino and Yamao did their research respectively from the perspective of the nature and historical significance of this group of coins. Higashino attributed Fuhonsen coins as exorcism charms (东野治之 1999) while Yamao focused on the relations between the casting background and politics, who held that the Fuhonsen coins not only marked the emergence of public power in ancient Japan but also subverted a few common understandings about Japanese monetary history: that the earliest Japanese coin is the 和同开珎 minted by the government around AD 680, that the Fuhonsen coin is a charm for sacrificial purposes made during the Nara Period, and that bronze coins were minted after AD 683 (山尾幸久 1999). Since the author's research interests are mainly in the religious thought of ancient Japan which often requires excavated objects as research evidence, the excavation of the Fuhonsen coins provided us with clues about ancient Japanese belief system if coin charms are seen as objects used in exorcist exercises in ancient Japan.

The exact starting point of the concept "exorcism charm" cannot be pinpointed right now. But other than being used in average business activities, it appeared that coins were commonly used as a means of requiem and exorcism in ancient religious

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**Fig. 12.1** Fuhonsen coins.  
Image from Wikipedia  
([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor\\_Tenmu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor_Tenmu), accessed on  
20 August 2015)



ceremonies. For example, over 90 *Wu zhu* (五銖) coins from the Southern Liang Dynasty of China were unearthed in the joint burial tomb of the Muryeong of Baekje (武寧王; AD 6th century) and his Princess on the Korean Peninsula. The Fuhonsen coins had been previously found in Japan. In as early as 1950s, they were excavated from Tomb No.1 (dated to AD 7th century) in Takamori-machi, Nagano Prefecture (东野治之 2004) (Fig. 12.1).

Judging by these, it was not uncommon for coins to be used as exorcism charms in Eastern Asia. Based on our understanding of the later, more varied and more colourful charms, Taoism appears to be a major basis and motivation for their production and use. The seven-star pattern on the Fuhonsen coins may also represent the Big Dipper. Then, we are naturally led to a question about the significance of the Fuhonsen coins in ancient Japanese religious activities.

## 12.2 Charm Worship in Ancient Japan

It is not easy to answer the question since, although we have concluded that the Fuhonsen coins first appeared in the seventh century AD in Japan, there is no mention of the coins in ancient literature except *Japanese and Chinese Ancient and Modern Coins* 和漢古今泉貨鑒 published in AD 1798, namely, 10th year of the Kansei 寛政 era during the Edo 江戸 period. Not only that, there is very little about coin charms in general as exorcism objects in the extant ancient archives. How are we to explain this phenomenon?



Large numbers of records of all kinds about exorcism instruments can be found in Japanese history books, such as combs, mirrors, swords, jades, and amulets. Perhaps, we may find some clues to answer the question through analyzing the nature of these exorcism objects.

*Combs (Kushi 梳子)*

The comb is quite commonly seen in ancient people's daily life. Apart from its practical use, the comb is often regarded as a part of the owner's body, which could be presented as a gift to show inseparable closeness with each other or as the avatar of the deceased in sacrificial rituals. For instance, Japan's earliest historical document, the "Kojiki" (古事記 or "An Account of Ancient Stories"), mentions the comb as the incarnation of one's self:<sup>1</sup>

The boat was going up from there to cross Zoushui Sea when the god of the ferry stopped it with waves. Then Queen Dijubi risked her life, "I would sacrifice for the prince so that he can finish his mission." She spread eight straw mats, eight leather mats and eight silk mats onto the waves and sat on them. The storms ceased to allow the boat to go in. The queen sang:

"The tall and towered wilderness in Xiangmu Kingdom  
The burning flame  
In which  
I miss my husband!"

After seven days, the queen's comb floated to the beach, which was placed in the tomb.

Many examples can be found in the *waka* 和歌 about the comb as the incarnation of the dead, which, however, will not be listed here.

*The three magic instruments: mirror, sword and jade.*

We next turn to the relation between charm worship in ancient Japan and the three magic instruments, including the mirror, the sword and the jade. Archaeologists have proved that these three items came from China long ago. These three items occupied an important position in Taoist rituals and soon merged with Japan's Shinto rituals. With the continuous expansion of the power of the emperor, these items eventually combined with the birth myth of the emperor's family to become a symbol of the divine power of the emperor. Even today, these three items are still deemed the most precious national treasure above the existence of the whole nation.

However, even before the emperor family's reunification of Japan, the mirror, sword and the jade had become important magic instruments used in Shinto rituals by powerful family clans. For example, in the 17th volume of *Nihon Shoki* 日本書

<sup>1</sup> 《古事記》：自其入幸、渡走水海之時、其渡神與浪、回船不得進渡。爾其後、名弟橘比賣命白之、妾易禦子而入海中。禦子者、所遣之政遂應覆奏。將入海時、以菅迭八重、皮迭八重、迭八重、敷於波上而、下坐其上。於是其暴浪自伏、禦船得進。爾其後歌曰、佐泥佐斯佐賀牟能袁怒邇毛由流肥能本那迦邇多知弓門比斯岐美波母故、七日之後、其後禦櫛依於海邊。乃取其櫛、作禦陵而治置也。

紀 *A Written Record of Japan* that dates to the same era as the *Kojiki*, accounts can be found about the three previous items being surrendered by the original owners and presented to the emperor during his fight to reunite Japan.<sup>2</sup>

However, in addition to a symbol of the divine power of the emperor, it is worth noting that the three artifacts transformed into an incarnation function similar to the comb when mixed with Japanese traditional beliefs. The following *waka* is included in Volume 12 of *Manyōshū* 萬葉集:

This mirror is an incarnation of my humble self  
Do not worry; you can see me whenever you want to

Seen as the incarnation of the presenter, the mirror in the *waka* also expresses the connotation of “seeing my face in the mirror whenever you want to”. Commonly seen in ancient poems about mirrors, this concept is deemed as a beautiful example of combining Taoism and Japanese belief in indigenous magic instruments.

### *Talisman*

In ancient Japan, the use of talismans was similarly practiced as in other Eastern Asian countries. Often, these talismans were made from wood, shaped in human-form figurines. Magic spells were written on them in Chinese characters to achieve the purpose prayed for. Amulets with a strong Taoist flavour were unearthed from the Heijo 平城 site from the Nara period, where were extremely similar to the evil suppressing peach wood amulets unearthed in Mawangdui 馬王堆 (Fig. 12.2).

However, it is interesting to notice that, like coin charms, amulets such as these enjoy much less frequency of occurrence than the comb and the three magic instruments. Especially in the literature, they are almost traceless. Only in the *Wamyo Ruijusho* 倭名类聚抄 compiled in the mid Heian 平安 Dynasty (AD 10th century) can one see some mention like the following passage about “paper coin”:

【紙錢】新樂府云、神之來兮風飄々、紙錢動兮錦傘搖。紙錢俗云賀美勢迹、一云勢迹賀太。○新樂府載在白氏文集第三四卷、此所引黑潭龍詩句、下總本无注紙錢二字。广本同。恐非是。按阴阳寮式有錢形、盖是。今伊勢神宮河原祓用錢切币、佛家祭诸天用紙錢。

The explanation of “paper coin” is first of all based on Chinese literature and then supplemented with *Kagami* and *Kaga*, which indicates that the “paper coin” used as a talismanic object in ancient Japanese sacrificial rituals might have originated from China.

Comparing the frequency of occurrence of those six talismanic objects in ancient Japanese literature, you can find that the comb and the three magic instruments are

<sup>2</sup> 《日本書紀-卷十七》：“二月辛卯朔甲午、大伴金村大連、乃跪上天子鏡、劍、璽符再拜。男大跡天皇謝曰、子民治國重事也。寡人不才、不足以稱。願請、回慮擇賢者。寡人不敢當。大伴大連、伏地固請。男大跡天皇、西向讓者三。南向讓者再。大伴大連等皆曰、臣伏計之、大王子民治國、最宜稱。臣等、為宗廟社稷、計不敢忽。”又案紫伊觀縣主祖五十跡手、聞天皇之行、拔取五百枝賢木、立於船舳、上枝掛八尺瓊、中枝掛白銅鏡、下枝掛十握劍、參迎於穴門引嶋而獻之。因以奏言、臣敢所以獻是物者、天皇如八尺瓊之幻以曲妙禦宇、且如白銅鏡以分明看行山川海原、乃提是十握劍平天下矣。”

**Fig. 12.2** Wooden figurines unearthed at the Heijo site



far more frequent than amulets and coins. I speculated that this phenomenon is perhaps related to the ancient Japanese belief patterns. As we all know, the ancient Japanese Shinto animistic beliefs hold that everything has a soul. The things that are close to the human body or daily life are often regarded as part of their own body or life. This is a phenomenon common to early human societies (Fraser “The Golden Bough”). Therefore, talismanic objects, like the comb and the three magic instruments, regardless of their origin, are easily accepted by the Japanese. On the contrary, in comparison, the wooden figurines appeared abstract because of the Chinese characters; the coins would look foreign because of their commercial nature. Neither of the two were very popular in ancient Japan probably because the incompatibility between the indigenous animistic beliefs and the abstract nature of written Chinese characters and the symbolic meaning of coins. In fact, compared to the Chinese, the Japanese have always preferred the practical function of Chinese characters to their potentials in conjuring magic power.

### 12.3 From National Ritual to Folk Customs

The historical status of Taoism in Japan can also explain why magic spells and coins did not receive a wide popularity.

There is a taboo within academic circles regarding the question why Taoism did not manage to set up a sacrificial systematic as a result of Sino-Japanese cultural

exchange. Those who believe in a Japan-centric cultural tradition tend to adopt the view that there is no connection between Japanese culture and Taoism, a view which was dominant within the Japanese academia until 1970s. Later, together with a gradually relaxed academic environment, more and more scholars started to explore the possible relations between the origin of Japanese culture and Taoism. Among them, the most influential include Koji Tominaga and Fukui.

The relationship between Taoism and Japanese culture can be seen from three levels: ideological, institutional, and folkloric. The first two are interrelated to each other. Since its import into Japan, Taoism was partly accepted for those parts related to the *Yin yang* theory and its calendric science. However, its ideological principles were not recognized because of the differences between the two countries in terms of family-based institutions and social formations. Regarding this issue, there have been extensive analyses by scholars such as Zhu (2007),<sup>3</sup> who appears to have offered a convincing reason to explain why Taoism never really took off in Japan. The same perspective seems to offer clues about the Fuhonsen coin. Judging by its name, Fuhong in the coin inscriptions seems to express the meaning of “the root of wealth” or “the source of wealth”. The two characters, decorated by the seven stars of the Big Dipper, reveal a strong Taoist influence to create a typical Taoist value judgement for the pursuit of personal wellbeing, running against a Japanese society which emphasizes the common wellbeing and collective will. As Higashino (1999) pointed out, this is exactly why Japanese currency and economic system was so backward to the effect that even when used as charms coins were restricted to a limited scope of influence. This is why the Fuhonsen coins have been unearthed mostly around the capital and on the burial grounds of a few powerful clans.

Another reason why Taoism was not positively advocated in ancient Japanese political systems is that the Mikado-centred state-and-religion integrated system was built on the basis of Taoism itself. For example, in addition to the Taoist spell instruments like mirrors, swords and jades being worshipped as the “divine body” by the imperial family, titles like the Mikado (天皇; the Heavenly Emperor) and *Ying* the Realised Person (瀛真人) derive from Taoist literature. In this regard, Koji Tominaga has conducted a lot of research which will not be repeated here. In other words, since Shintoism is inextricably associated with Taoism from the concept to the organisational structure and since the core values of Shinto lie in an emphasis on

<sup>3</sup>大化革新後，積極輸入中國學術思想。『大寶令』規定中務省下置陰陽寮，設陰陽師，陰陽博士，陰陽生。陰陽生的教科書，包括『周易』、『新撰陰陽書』、『黃帝金匱』、『五行大義』等。於是和道教糾纏不清的陰陽五行思想，漸在日本流行。奈良時代，由於日唐交通頻繁，唐朝特別崇奉道教，日本自不免受到刺激，所以老莊神仙思想也會引起相當的共鳴。……不過因為當時日本入唐留學的，不外學生和僧侶，前者崇奉儒教，後者崇奉佛教，對於道教都無好感。當初參與制訂學校律令的清安，受等人，都是僧侶出身，所以唐朝大學課程規定必修老子，日本大學卻取消了老子；而且應試文章，必須表示重儒輕道，才有錄取的可能，如葛井廣成的對策文云：“玄以獨善為宗，無愛敬之心，棄父背君；儒以兼濟為本，別尊卑之序，致身盡命。”（『經國集』，『群書類叢』125）下毛蟲麻呂德對策文雲：“玄涉清虛，契歸於獨善；儒報旋折，理資於兼濟。”（『經國集』，『群書類叢』125）又留唐學生吉備真備著『私教類聚』第十四列舉戒法三十八項，第三項便是“仙道不用”，也明白表示排斥道教的態度。雖然如此，卻仍不能抹去道教的影響。

collectivism, the intention to distinguish the two led to the results mentioned just now (Koji 1992). This distinction eventually resulted in the exclusive use of the mirror, the sword and the jade by the imperial family as a symbol of their divine privilege and a mostly popular use of Taoist spells and charms.

Nevertheless, traces of the use of coins can still be found in records about national sacrificial rituals in ancient Japan. For example, *Wamyo Ruijusho* cited that the Onmyoryou 陰陽寮 and the Grand Ise Shrine 伊勢神宮 used “paper coins” in their sacrifices. The so-called *Onmyoryou* is an ancient Japanese administrative institution specializing in Taoist sacrificial rituals. The *Engishiki* (『延喜式』), a collection of legal acts compiled in the 10th century AD mentions the following about the Three *Yuan* Sacrifice 三元祭:

In front of the nine shrines  
Incense three liang, paper three hundred sheets, paper coins nine thousand, fruits five bushels...<sup>4</sup>

The Three Yuan Sacrifice was administered by the Onmyoryou as part of the New Year celebration every year, where the paper coins played an important role amongst the sacrificial goods. However, they were promiscuously missing in other sacrificial rituals recorded in the same collection, where silvery human figures and golden swords were used instead as sacrificial goods to worship the Supreme Heavenly Emperor (皇天上帝) and other Taoist deities.<sup>5</sup>

However, as noted by the Japanese scholar Syuuichi Murayama (1994), the Onmyodo rituals, closely related to the Taoist sacrifice, were essentially performed as ceremonies within the imperial palace before the Middle Age and, as a result of the decline of Mikado’s theocracy and the rise of secular regimes, quickly became popularised across Japan. During the secular regime of the Edo period in the 16th century, especially, sacrificial rituals originated from Taoism became common amongst the populace, ranging from staying up late in groups in celebration of the Gengshen (守庚申) to divination for personal matters, demonstrating particular attraction and interest to the common. In state-sponsored festivals related to the Onmyodo, there began to be a diversity of sacrificial goods, including bronze coins as a symbol of good luck.

For example, in the Oration for the Heaven and Hell Festival 天曹地府祭 in AD 1556, sacrificial goods were imbecuously grouped and itemised and their quantities recorded:

谨奉请南斗好星君具官来下就座

谨奉请北斗七星君来下就座

.....

<sup>4</sup> 『延喜式』：神座九前，名香三両、纸三百张。钱形九千文料。菓子五升.....。

<sup>5</sup> 『延喜式』：谨请、皇天上帝、三极大君、日月星辰、八方诸神、司命司籍、左东王父、右西王母、五方五帝、四时四气、捧以银人、请除祸灾。捧以金刀、请延帝祚。呪曰、东至扶桑、西至虞渊、南至炎光、北至弱水。千城百国、精治万歳、万歳万歳。



謹シテ重ネテ啓ス、在座天地水官冥官、曹府本命星官、既ニ降臨ヲ垂レ所獻ヲ尚饗シ、已ニ鳴息ニ沐シ、更ニ余力ヲ誇リ、当ニ三宮主者ニ願クハ福寿ヲ増シテ曆数ニ題シ、黒簿ヲ削リテ生名ヲ上セ災ヲ使シ、九地禍ヲ銷シ、大陰ヲ減シ、常ニ福祐ヲ蒙リ、永ク利貞ヲ尅シ、家番鬼賊病厄永ク銷シ遠ク除カン、謹シテ啓ス、再拜。

重ネテ啓ス、諸神君等ニ啓曰ス、事畢リテ宜シク将月ヲ祝シ、別ニ更ニ珍羞ナク、敢テ神久ク留ラズ、殊ニ侍從ニ任セ、排馬・銭財・疋帛・鞍馬・勇奴、諸神各人状ニ依リ、爰ニ使者ヲ領シ般運監蔵、付庫一人分明ナリ、請フ失措セザランコトヲ、謹シテ啓ス、再拜、

銀錢二十貫文 白絹十疋 鞍馬一疋 勇奴三人 奉上天曹官

銀錢二十貫文 白絹十疋 鞍馬一疋 勇奴三人 奉上地府君

銀錢二十貫文 白絹十疋 鞍馬一疋

銀錢二十貫文 白絹十疋 鞍馬一疋 勇奴三人 奉上天曹官

銀錢二十貫文 白絹十疋 鞍馬一疋 勇奴三人 奉上北帝大王

銀錢二十貫文 白絹十疋 鞍馬一疋 勇奴三人 奉上五道大王

……

We see from the oration that silver and bronze coins were used as part of the sacrificial goods. We also see that the oration is much more extended in terms of length and content than that used for the Englishiki ceremonies, which suggests that Taoist practices were taking deeper roots in Japan and that the ceremonies were gradually enriched over time.

## 12.4 Conclusion

The relation between the Fuhonsen coins was discussed in this chapter and, due to the lack of relevant historical documentation, all the discussions could only stay on a hypothetical level. Here, I tentatively draw the following conclusions.

The centralized state of ancient Japan mainly worshipped Buddhism; elements of Taoism were embedded and integrated in the Shinto belief system. Therefore, in addition to the three divine artifacts including the mirror, the sword and the jade, the Fuhonsen coins as a curse instrument with a strong Taoist flavour failed to become popularised in ancient times, especially among the common people. However, once introduced into Japan, it would be preserved as a tradition. For example, the secular regimes during the Edo period led to the plebification of Onmyodo and exorcism charms including the Fuhonsen coins quickly became popular in the Japanese society. The aforementioned *Japanese Ancient and Modern Coin Catalogue* is an example. Another interesting instance closely related to exorcism charms can be found in a popular TV series in late 1980s named *The Power of the Coin* 錢形兵次. In the TV series, a policeman in Edo always used a bronze coin in fighting to subdue the suspect. There was a line of special significance:

No evil can escape the magic of this coin!

It is evident that the coin bears a lot of incantation power in the consciousness of the Japanese. This example shows that twelve hundred years ago, although not occupying a central position in the belief system of the ancient Japanese people, the Fuhonsen coins eventually blossomed and enriched the contents of Japanese curse instruments with the rise of the civilian culture and the popularity of folk beliefs after all these years. Despite their limited number of unearthed specimens, the Fuhonsen coin has come to reflect the characters of ancient Japanese belief system and their gradual changes.

## Chapter 13

# A Book Review of *Chinese Charms: Art, Religion and Folk Belief*

François Thierry

Alex Fang has worked for about ten years on Chinese numismatics and he specialises in the study of Chinese amulets. Between 14th and 15th July 2008, in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of City University of Hong Kong, he organized an international symposium entitled “Chinese Numismatic Charms”, whose proceedings are being printed. With this book, he presents to us the result of his work, by placing these objects in their social and religious context. The work is not only one of very great quality but also of a serious scientific content. The iconography is rich, abundant and of a rare quality. The iconography is extremely varied, since in addition to the amulets themselves, one finds there points of comparison or illustration of a demonstration generally completely convincing, paintings and frescos, ritual objects, statues, stampings of steles, etc. The Author divides his work into seven chapters: an introduction to the numismatics of the amulets, the amulets with the wishes of happiness, the amulets with monetary inscriptions, the amulets with divinities and spirits, the zodiac amulets, the amulets of particular form and the openwork amulets. The bibliography, exclusively in Chinese, is a little disappointing; one regrets not finding there, among other works,

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Fang, Alex Chengyu 方稱宇. 2008. *Zhong guo hua qian yu chuan tong wen hua* 中國花錢與傳統文化 *Chinese Charms: Art, Religion and Folk Belief* (Bilingual Edition). Beijing: The Commercial Press.

François Thierry.

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neither James H. Stewart Lockhart (*The Currency of the Farther East, Glover Collection*, 3 volumes, Hong Kong/Noronha, 1895–1907), nor Henry Alexander Ramsden (*Chinese Openwork Amulet Coins*, Yokohama 1911), nor *Chinese Charms and Amulets*, J. Mevius, Amsterdam 1968, by A. A. Remmelts.<sup>1</sup> There is at the end of the volume an excellent and extremely useful index (pp. 383–393).

The Introduction to numismatics of amulets (pp. 1–21), which one will consider it regrettable that it was not translated into English, exposes the arguments who justifies the classification chosen by the Author and presents thoroughly the bonds which link these coins with the currency, with the religions and currents of thought of old China. With the part devoted to the amulets of good omen, *ji yu qian* 吉語錢 (pp. 23–119), begins the catalogue itself of the 272 amulets in the collection of the author, chosen with particular cares. The presentation is perfect, the illustrations are increased at approximately 170 %, the diameter is given, the inscriptions is given in characters, transcribed in *pinyin*, and translated into English; a small text (in Chinese) gives the explanations necessary to the comprehension of the objects. The part concerning the amulets with monetary inscriptions, *qian wen qian* 錢文錢 (pp. 121–153), comprises mainly currencies of the dynasty Qing (AD 1644–1911). The chapter of the amulets to the protective gods, demigods and animals, *shen xian rui shou qian* 神仙瑞獸錢 (pp. 155–217), presents amulets bearing invocations to Taishang Laojun, amulets with Buddhist scenes and amulets with constellations and the Four Fabulous Animals. The zodiac amulets, *sheng xiao qian* 生肖錢 (pp. 219–311), constitute a large part of the Author’s collection; it mostly consists of old coins of a great interest, which are of a large variety and which often concern different cultural universes. The Author gives for example (No 216) the explanation of the Buddhist scene which I was not able to identify (Thierry 2008: No 31): it is the repentance in front of the Buddha of a raksha devourer of children. The part “Hanging Plates and Charms of Unusual Shapes”, *gua pai yu yi xing qian* 挂牌與異形錢 (pp. 313–347), contains extremely interesting objects but the criterion of classification chosen, the form, makes several amulets somewhat “exiled” out of the chapters where they would have found their place: No 217 with the inscription *zhao cai jin bao* 招財進寶, “Which invites wealth and which brings in treasures” had obviously its place in the part “amulets of good omen”; the same remark can apply to Nos 228 and 234, which all carry wishes of longevity, richness and happiness; in the same way, Nos 219 and 237, which represent Zhong Kui and the Five Poisons, should have appeared among “the amulets to the protective gods, demigods and animals”. Lastly, the Author presents a very beautiful series of openwork amulets, *lou kong qian* 鏤空錢 (pp. 349–381), which are mostly old and rare coins.

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<sup>1</sup>The Author mentions other books in the text, but not given in the Bibliography.

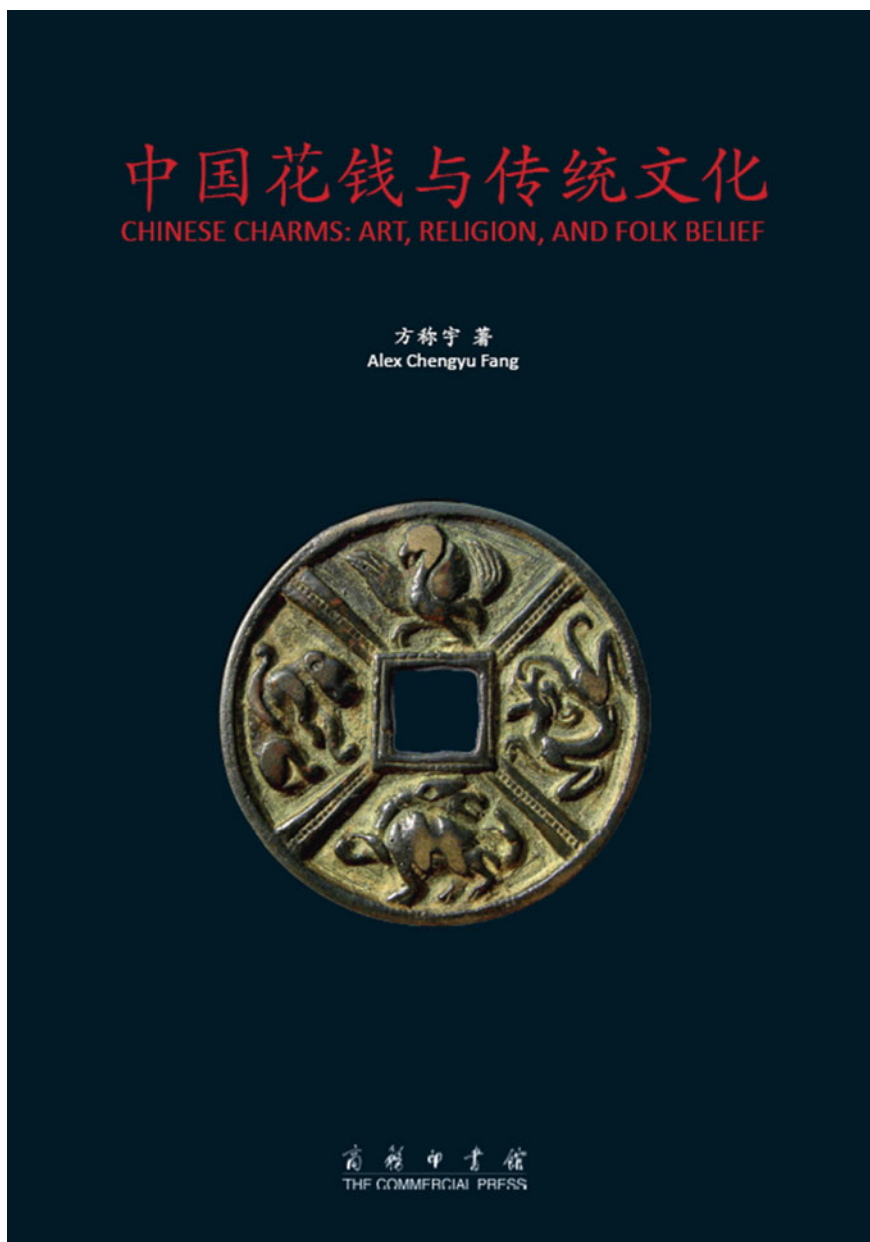
For all these amulets, the presentation is of an exceptional quality and the data and provided explanations precise and convincing. I would have, to tell the truth, few criticisms to be formulated and if, for certain parts, I diverge in interpretation from the Author a little complex iconography, like, for example, on the identity of the central figure of No 212 (No 86 in the Catalogue of National Library of France), I must say objectively that in many cases I am unable to slice who is wrong and who is right. On the other hand, certain points cause interrogations and corrections. For No 22, the identification of the reverse is partially erroneous: the two “bats” are vajra (Diamond Thunderbolt) of Tibetan Lamaism; the two “stags” are the gazelles of Mrigadāva, the “Park with the gazelles” of Vanarasi, place of the first preaching of the Buddha (Thierry 1987: No 129). Concerning the reverse of No 179, the Author writes “Four characters of the Taoist magic script; meaning unknown”, but in fact only the *fu* (Taoist magic script) on the left and on the right are illegible; vertically, one reads *chi gui* 𪛗鬼 perfectly. *Chi* is explained as follows in the Kang Xi Dictionary: “When a man dies, it becomes a ghost, *gui* 鬼, which frightens people who see it; when a ghost dies, it becomes a *chi* 𪛗 which is extremely dreaded by the ghosts. If thus this character writes into sigillary is stuck above doors, the actions of all the demons are without effect in a radius of thousand li: this is why it is called the *fu* driving ghosts away” (Thierry 1987: No 86). For No 190, the Author writes “Taoist magic script and five characters of unknown meaning”, 長生天蓋中; in fact, there is on the top the representation of the *fu* of the constellation *Hua gai* 華蓋, in lower part, the inscription *Chang sheng jiao [Hua] gai zhong* 長生交蓋中, “Long life together in [Hua]gai” (Thierry 1987: No 90).

In certain cases, the Author could have developed the explanations a little better. If one considers the example of No 53, which the Author analyses “Harmony thus, doubles happiness and treasures, 和合雙喜”, the rebus is incompletely given and especially *he* is not explained; there is the outgoing water lily of the box of marriage, the two spiders, an ingot with the brush and the sceptre, that is to say 荷盒雙蟾筆錠如意 which is read *he he shuang xi bi ding ruyi*, homophone of 和合雙喜必定如意, “harmony and harmony, double happiness inevitably according to your desires”. Here, the legend provided by the Author does not make it possible to seize all the juice of the message and especially the importance of the play of the production of direction. Lastly, one will note among the pieces *Tai he zhong bao* of Jin a false strange good (No 83) manufactured by moulding the right of an authentic part and while placing to the reverse four young rabbits moulded from small plates of the art of the steppes dating from the early second century AD.



The weak point of the work comes mainly from the classification which the Author has adopted: it does not take again traditional classifications (according to the destination and typology), nor classifications in popular use in China (according to the number of characters to the right, the presence of characters to the right and the reverse, the presence or not of an iconography, etc.), but it mixes several criteria, the iconography, the use and the destination and the form. So the classification is a little vague. One finds thus among the pieces of “good omen” pieces for driving ghosts away (Nos 40 and 41) which have the same function absolutely as those placed among the “amulets with the protective gods, demigods and animals”; the Buddhist pieces are separated, like No 44 with *Om mane padme hum* and No 216 with the repentance of the raksha; pieces of the Five Poisonous are placed among the pieces of “good omen” (Nos 45–49, 59 and 65) and in the group of “amulets with unusual form” (No 237). Why all aren’t the amulets with the Four Fabulous Animals, *si ling* 四靈 (Nos 1, 2, 144, 145), gathered in the chapter of the “amulets to the protective gods, demigods and animals”? One finds in the “amulets with monetary inscription” of the parts starting from No 107 which has the inscriptions *Tian xia tai ping* 天下太平, “Great Peace in the empire”, and with the reverse *da ji* 大吉, “Great luck”, or No 108 with *Tian xia tai ping* on the obverse and Taiwan on the reverse, etc. One also finds objects which are not amulets like passes of palace (Nos 224 and 225), or No 140 which is a gambling metal token of the Han dynasty and it is a tiger which appears there, not a dragon.

These points of detail hardly have any importance taking into consideration the work which is offered to us: the Author knew to gather an exceptional material, to provide an iconography of high-quality, to give precise references to religious or esoteric texts often ignored, to work out an intelligent analysis and to develop a setting in original prospect. One will also greet the effort made by the Author and the editors to give a considerable part of the text in English translation, which makes it available to a larger audience. Thanks to the party for the systematic enlargement of the images in colour, nobody will be able to say any more, beyond their cultural and social aspect, that the Chinese amulets are objects without aesthetic interest. The work of Alex Fang is essential to any library concerned with the Far East, that of an institution, that of a researcher or that of an amateur.



Cover of Fang, Alex Chengyu 方稱宇. 2008. *Zhong guo hua qian yu chuan tong wen hua* 中國花錢與傳統文化 *Chinese Charms: Art, Religion and Folk Belief* (Bilingual Edition). Beijing: The Commercial Press

## A List of Historical Texts

《安祿山事迹》  
《楚辭·招魂》  
《楚辭注》  
《打馬》  
《打馬格》  
《打馬錄》  
《打馬圖經》  
《打馬圖示》  
《打馬圖序》  
《大錢圖錄》  
《道教授神契》  
《冬月洛城北謁玄元皇帝廟》  
《風俗通義·正失》  
《佛說七千佛神符經》  
《宮詞》  
《古博經》  
《古今圖書集成》  
《古泉匯》  
《古事記》  
《韓非子·外儲說左上》  
《韓非子》  
《漢書·武帝記》  
《漢書·遊俠傳》  
《和漢古今泉貨鑒》  
《後漢書·許升妻傳》  
《黃帝金匱》  
《黃神越章》  
《江南曲》  
《金鑾密記》  
《經國集》  
《舊唐書·玄宗本紀》  
《舊唐書·職官志·三平准令條》  
《開元別記》

- 《開元天寶遺事·卷二·戲擲金錢》  
 《開元天寶遺事·卷三》  
 《雷霆咒》  
 《類編長安志》  
 《歷代錢譜》  
 《歷代泉譜》  
 《歷代神仙通鑑》  
 《聊齋志異》  
 《遼史·兵衛志》  
 《六甲祕祝》  
 《六甲通靈符》  
 《六甲陰陽符》  
 《論語·陽貨》  
 《曲江對雨》  
 《全唐詩·卷八七五·司馬承禎含象鑿文》  
 《泉志·卷十五·厭勝品》  
 《勸學詩》  
 《群書類叢》  
 《日本書紀》  
 《三教論衡》  
 《尚書》  
 《尚書考靈曜》  
 《神清咒》  
 《詩經》  
 《十二真君傳》  
 《史記·宋微子世家·第八》  
 《史記·吳王濞列傳》  
 《事物紺珠》  
 《漱玉集》  
 《說苑·正諫篇》  
 《司馬承禎含象鑿文》  
 《私教類聚》  
 《宋史·卷一百五十一·志第一百四·輿服三·天子之服 皇太子附 后妃之服 命婦附》  
 《宋史·卷一百五十二·志第一百五·輿服四·諸臣服上》  
 《搜神記》  
 《太平洞極經》  
 《太平廣記》  
 《太平御覽》  
 《太上感應篇》  
 《太上咒》  
 《唐會要·卷八十三·嫁娶·建中元年十一月十六日條》  
 《唐兩京城坊考·卷三》  
 《唐六典·卷二十·左藏令務》  
 《天曹地府祭》

- 《天罡咒》  
《通志》  
《圖畫見聞志》  
《退宮人》  
《萬葉集》  
《倭名類聚抄》  
《五代會要·卷二十九》  
《五行大義》  
《西京雜記·卷下·陸博術》  
《仙人篇》  
《新唐書·食貨志》  
《新撰陰陽書》  
《續錢譜》  
《續日本記》  
《續資治通鑑》  
《延喜式》  
《顏氏家訓·雜藝》  
《鹽鐵論·授時》  
《易經·泰》  
《弈旨》  
《玉芝堂談薈》  
《元史·卷七十八·志第二十八·輿服一 儀衛附》  
《雲笈七籤·卷七·符圖部》  
《雲笈七籤·卷七·三洞經教部》  
《韻府羣玉》  
《戰國策·齊策》  
《直齋書錄解題》  
《周易》  
《莊子·天地》  
《資治通鑒·卷二百一十六·唐紀三十二·玄宗八載》  
《資治通鑒·卷二一六·唐天寶十載》



# A Chronology of Chinese Dynasties and Periods

- ca. 2100–1600 BC Xia Dynasty 夏朝
- ca. 1600–1050 BC Shang Dynasty 商朝
- ca. 1046–256 BC Zhou Dynasty 周朝
  - Western Zhou 西周 (ca. 1046–771 BC)
  - Eastern Zhou 東周 (ca. 771–256 BC)
    - Spring and Autumn Period 春秋 (770–ca. 475 BC)
    - Warring States Period 戰國 (ca. 475–221 BC)
- 221–206 BC Qin Dynasty 秦朝
- 206 BC–AD 220 Han Dynasty 漢朝
  - Western/Former Han 東漢／前漢 (206 BC–AD 9)
  - Eastern/Later Han 西漢／後漢 (25–220)
- 220–589 Six Dynasties Period 六朝
  - Three Kingdoms 三國 (220–265)
  - Jin Dynasty 晉朝 (265–420)
  - Northern and Southern Dynasties 南北朝 (386–589)
- 581–618 Sui Dynasty 隋朝
- 618–906 Tang Dynasty 唐朝
- 907–960 Five Dynasties Period 五代
- 960–1279 Song (Sung) Dynasty 宋朝
  - Northern Song 北宋 (960–1127)
  - Southern Song 南宋 (1127–1279)
- 1279–1368 Yuan Dynasty 元朝
- 1368–1644 Ming Dynasty 明朝
- 1644–1912 Qing Dynasty 清朝
- 1912–1949 Republic Period 民國
- 1949–present People’s Republic of China 中華人民共和國

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