

CHINA- Provinces of Fukien & Taiwan -
Re-assessment of the Work of the Foochow
Mint on the Silver Coinage. 1896 - 1906.

by R. Wright.

General acceptance of the theory that the Taiwanese silver coinage of "c 1890-2" was produced at the Foochow Arsenal is puzzling, considering that the Fukienese silver coinage was not apparently produced by the same mint until 1898. After following up a set of Fukien 20, 10 and 5 cent pieces donated to the Royal Mint Collection in 1898, it is equally perplexing to find these coins to be of the type normally dated "c 1902". (K.128, 129, 131).

Close inspection of the works of the authorities Kann, Kalgan Shih, Tsiang, Wayte-Raymond and Su (1) reveals the maximum contradiction on the subject and the perpetuation of two errors. Firstly, the occasional dating of the Taiwanese silver coinage to as far back as 1886 is clearly due to a misinterpretation of a statement by Tsiang, when he writes: "As Formosa was a province of China in the 12th Year of Kuang Hsu, silver coins were issued in that territory". Secondly, the Imperial Maritime Customs Decennial Reports, which are usually quoted as source material for Chinese numismatics, were actually a precis of the annual reports; a false trail was laid when the report for Foochow for 1892-1901 baldly, albeit correctly, stated that a new mint for coinage of 20, 10 and 5 cents was opened in 1900 - but omitted any reference to past activities. The result has been a certain legitimate confusion ever since. However, by making use of the material contained in the IMC annual reports, the China Coast newspapers, the Commercial Reports produced annually by Her Britannic Majesty's Consuls (and here we were fortunate in having a Consul at Foochow and one interested enough to arrange a visit to the mint) and finally the accession dates of the coins contained in the Royal Mint and British Museum collections, a rather more coherent picture can be obtained; although inevitably some questions are left unanswered.

Looking briefly at the early silver coinage of Fukien and Taiwan - all of which are undated - they can be grouped as follows (some type letters have been added for easier reference in this paper):-

Fukien

"c 1898" Y.102-5 5c. 10c, 20c and dollar .

These may actually be subdivided into what appears to be a set of 5, 10, 20 cents and pattern dollar identified by 4 point rosettes in the obverse and reverse (20 cent reverse only)

(scarce or rare)----- Type A K.127,126,
125,124

Fukien (Continued)

and 10 and 20 cents (illustrated in Yeoman, p 93) identified by large dots on both sides in place of the rosettes (common)----- Type B K.126a, 125c

All these coins are named in Chinese: "Made in the Official Fukien Mint".

"c.1902" Y.102-4 5c, 10c and 20c with different dragon

These subdivide into a standard set of

5c, 10c and 20c (all common)----- Type C K.131, 129, 128

and 10c and 20c with larger dragons

and many minor variations ----- Type D K.130, 128k-t;also
Kalgan Shih C11-6
C11-8

Taiwan

"c.1890-2" Y.246-8 5c, 10c 20c

These divide into two sets:-

5c (rare), 10c, 20c (rare)----- Type E K.135, 134, 133

10c, 20c (rare)----- Type F K.137, 136

The only difference between the two sets is the second character from the right at the top which reads as "province" in Type F. Both types of 10 cent appear to be from the same workshop and show many minor die differences.

With the exception of Type C/D - which was of a unique design never again to be repeated - the coins bear a strong likeness to the coinage of Kwangtung, particularly the dragon reverses. Apart from the more obvious conclusion that they were all copied from the Cantonese coins, there are possibilities that some of the dies were produced by the Canton Mint - only a highly trained die maker could reproduce the intricate dragon designs accurately, and the English legends provided their own problems - or even that some of the coins were actually struck at Canton.

The Canton Mint, after various trials and tribulations over the design and weight of its coins, started mass production of the Kwangtung silver coinage in the middle of 1890. Of the five coins of the set (Y.199-203) the dollar had to fight its own battle against the firmly established foreign dollars such as the Carolus, Mexican and Yen; the 50 cent piece met no particular need, but the 20, 10 and occasionally the 5 cent pieces filled a vacuum for small change caused by the cash shortage, and which had been only partially compensated for by the use of Hong Fong subsidiary silver coin on the mainland. Canton quickly became an exporter of "small coin" up and down the coast; in October, 1890 the newspapers reported interest shown by neighbouring Fukien province:

"The Minche Viceroy requested the Liang-Kuang Viceroy (2) to coin one hundred dollars worth of 20, 10 and 5 cent pieces for circulation in the province under his jurisdiction...." (3)

A month later the papers report:

"The Governor General of Minche has received the sanction of the throne to establish new mints to coin dollars and cents similar to the Canton Mint. The enterprising Governor has already begun the building of the mint". (4)

The mint did not seem to materialise, and Fukien remained an importer of silver coin, certainly for the next couple of years. In his report for 1892 (dated 18.3.1893), H.B.M. Consul at Foochow quotes figures obtained from the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, which show that in 1890 the bank imported into Foochow \$15,000 worth of Hong Kong subsidiary coin for the local authorities; the following year this was increased to \$150,000 worth; and "in 1892 the local authorities imported 350,000 dollars worth of Canton small coins, and this being insufficient a new mint is being established at Pagoda Anchorage (5)". The Consul goes on to say: "I am informed that the mint for small coin, alluded to above, is already set up at Pagoda Anchorage, and that the Viceroy's decision as to whether operations are to commence at once is expected in a few days". (6)

A newspaper has references in both February and June 1893 (7) to the shortage of change, and rumours of an "Arsenal" mint being established. The Cantonese coinage had obviously become popular elsewhere by this stage, and the Canton mint unable to meet the demand; mintage figures for 1893 onwards show that it was operating to its full capacity of 100,000 silver pieces per day.

Newspaper interest in 1894/5 was unfortunately diverted away from the currency to the more exciting events leading up to, and then followed by the Sino-Japanese War, but H.B.M. Consul's report for 1893 (written early in 1894) has this correction:

"There are no silver coins made at Foochow, nor is there any machinery for making such at the port. The local mint makes only the common "cash"... " (8). So it looks as if the Foochow Arsenal Machine Mint of the 1890's was a myth.

The Imperial Maritime Customs maintained a Commissioner at Foochow. His annual reports contain no information about mints until 1896, when he states:

"The scarcity of small change led to the opening of a mint in November, where pieces worth 10 and 20 (dollar) cents are struck. The coins are somewhat roughly finished." (9)

Visits to Chinese mints by Europeans were rare occurrences but in his report for 1896 (written early in 1897) H.B.M. Consul obligingly records:

"Mr. Hughes of this consulate lately paid a visit to the Foochow Mint, established last year in the premises formerly the godown and offices of Messrs. Sassoon, Sons & Co (10) for the coinage of subsidiary silver money, that is of coins representing a fractional part of a dollar. He reports that there are 4 presses worked by hand. Over 100 workmen are employed daily. Up to the present only 10 cent and 20 cent pieces are coined, but when the steam machinery expected from Japan arrives, 5 cent and 50 cent pieces, and possibly dollars too will be coined. The silver used

is 820 to 825 standard, and from 40,000 to 50,000 taels weight are being turned out every month. There have been several cases of coining spurious small coins. I have in my safe some of the dies, that were seized on foreign premises." (11)

The story is then followed up by the I.M.C. annual reports until 1907. It is worth quoting them verbatim:

1897. "The scarcity of currency was severely felt during the earlier part of the year. The unsuitable machinery, hastily erected, and the natural inexperience of the employees of the mint, resulted in the issue of badly made coins, which for a time would not circulate. Later with new machinery, coins of better appearance and more uniform weight were turned out, and no more trouble followed. During the year the mint issued 1,198,851 pieces of 20 cents, 1,246,211 pieces of 10 cents and 28,007 pieces of 5 cents. No dollar pieces were coined." (12)

1898 "The out-turn of the local mint for the 12 months was 1,382,500 20 cent pieces, 968,000 10 cent pieces and 256,222 5 cent pieces, and the use of this small coinage is largely superseding the "chop" dollar - so much so, indeed, that emulative enterprise has led to the forgery of subsidiary coinage. . . ." (13)(14)

1899 "The coins made by the Fuhkien Mint during the year have been 4,147,500 20 cent pieces, 2,904,000 10 cent, and 768,666 5 cent pieces. Dies have been cut for 1 dollar and $\frac{1}{2}$ dollar coins and when the mint reopens after the holidays, dollars and $\frac{1}{2}$ dollars will also be coined. Moreover, improved machinery is to be introduced for the manufacture of 5 cent pieces. At present these coins are turned out by hand, and the supply is now inadequate to meet the demand which constantly exists for small money. With new machinery possessing automatic feeders, we may hope to see a good supply of 5 cent pieces put on the market. The manager informs me that a large number of coins from the Fuhkien Mint find their way to Manchuria. This seems strange, considering that there are mints both at Moukden and at Kirin; but it argues much for the quality of the money coined in Foochow as compared with the quality of that minted in Manchuria, (15) though locally it is thought much inferior to that issued by the Hong Kong and Canton Mints." (16)

1900 (After references to a major flood). "The mint, which was alluded to in my last report, stopped work during the first week in July, owing to the impossibility at that moment of effecting insurance on sycee from Shanghai. In October the authorities purchased the plant of the mint, and in November started working on Government account. In addition to issuing 10 cent and 20 cent pieces, it was decided to turn out 10 Cash pieces (17); but at the end of the year, these last mentioned coins had not been put upon the market." (18)

There was no information on the mint in the report for 1901, but the report for Amoy for that year stated:

"Subsidiary copper coins..... produced at the Fuhkien Mint, made their first appearance here during the year and were at once put into circulation." (19)

1902 "For the last two years the Foochow Mint has coined copper coins without the traditional hole in the centre. Three denominations are minted, nominally equivalent to 5 Cash, 10 Cash and 20 Cash respectively. The 10 Cash coin, almost equivalent in value to a dollar cent..... changes for 13 cash. These cents, to the value of HK Tls 67,000 were exported to Shanghai during the year." (20)

These copper coins can be identified with certainty as Y.99-101; it should be noted that they too bear the Chinese Legend: "Made in the Official Fukien Mint".

The 1904 report contained a useful table of mintage figures:

	<u>1902</u>	<u>1903</u>	<u>1904</u>
20 Cents	5,462,740	1,558,487	7,401,497
10 Cents	2,008,467	620,478	1,630,870
5 Cents	1,456,000		
20 Cash	18,650		
10 Cash	15,624,893	45,927,486	106,257,790
5 Cash	123,927	467,985	

(21)

1905 "Hitherto this province has had a single mint, known as the City or Viceroy's Mint, situated in the suburb outside the South Gate, its chimneys being conspicuous on the river bank near the north end of the Stone Bridge. This Mint is adequate to the coinage requirements of the province, and even to supply coins (at a profit) to other parts of China. But early in 1905 the establishment of-not merely one, but - even two (sic) more Mints was resolved upon by the local government, apparently hoping for profit from the export and sale of copper 10 cash coins. The machinery duly arrived and was set up (in the summer) in one Mint at the Arsenal, near Pagoda Anchorage, and in another, known as the West Mint, at the small arms factory near the Upper Bridge. Then began a rather feverish output of coins, made chiefly from imported copper discs or blanks - an output, which with the machinery working well, might have exceeded 2,000,000 pieces per diem. The market value of the coins sunk gradually below par (at first the 10 Cash pieces fetched 13 cash); and, what was more serious, the privilege of unlimited minting was gradually reduced by orders from Peking to 300,000 coins a day, while the export to other provinces was forbidden. (22) The two new Mints at present stand idle." (23)

H.B.M. Consul's report for 1905 amplifies this information slightly by stating: "The new Mint erected during the year by the Tartar General was supplied by a German firm" (24); Commencini (25) identifies the Fookien Customs House 10 cash coins (Y.97) as one issued by the Tartar General and Superintendent of Customs at the Mamoi Arsenal. (It is not immediately obvious what type of 10 cash was struck at the "West" mint). The U.S. Mint Report for 1906 fortuitously shows some Chinese mintage figures for 1905 including 7,599,271 20 cents and 97,929 10 cents for Foochow (26).

The T.M.C. report for 1907 rounds off the tale with references to allegations of embezzlement - investigations - disgrace; and a statement that all three mints were now under the sole control of the Central Government at Peking (27).

From this data it is worth bringing out the following key points:-

1. There is a considered statement by H.B.M. Consul in early 1894 to the effect that there was no machinery for making silver coins in Foochow.
2. The definite establishment of the Foochow City Mint late 1896, producing, initially, badly made 10 and 20 cents on hand presses, and then better made 5, 10 and 20 cents (on steam machinery, and possibly from master dies, supplied by Japan) from 1897.
3. The arrival of one of these sets of coins, probably obtained by H.B.M. Consul, in the Royal Mint, London, by 1898; and which is of Type 'C'.
4. The statement that the "authorities" took over the running of the Mint on "Government account" in 1900 - implying that the earlier concern had been a semi-private or commercial affair.
5. The issue of copper coin in 1901 bearing the legend "Made at the Official Fukien Mint".
6. The fact that the silver series type A/B bear this same legend.
7. No record of any 5 cent pieces being minted after 1902.

Checking through the accession dates of the Fukienese silver coins in the collections of the British Museum, it is interesting to note that neither of the silver coins type A/B were acquired before 1935; on the other hand 10 and 20 cents type C, and one 10 cent Type D were acquired in 1899 (as well as a contemporary forgery of a 20 cent type C/D in 1901).

This seems to prove the following pattern of events as being the more likely:

- | | |
|--------|--|
| 1896-7 | The Foochow Mint produces 10 & 20 cents type D (Kan 130, 128-t; Kalgan Shih C11-6, C11-8). |
| 1897-9 | The mint produces 5, 10 and 20 cents type C (K.131, 129 and 128) possibly from master dies obtained in Japan. |
| 1900 | In view of the remarks, and the fact that the 5 cent is not scarce, it is probable that a large issue of these coins (K.131) was made in the first half of this year. |
| 1901 | The Foochow Mint, under the title "Official Mint", issues copper 5, 10 and 20 Cash (Y.99-101) and silver 5, 10 and 20 cents type A (K.127, 126, 125), possibly in view of the high quality and close resemblance to the Kwantung coinage, using reverse dies supplied by the Canton Mint; also strikes a pattern dollar (K.124). |
| 1903-4 | New dies for the 20 cent and 10 cent are introduced (type B) possibly locally made. |
| 1905-6 | Last year of silver minting. |

All of which seems to indicate that there may be pattern dollars and half dollars of 1899 (type C) still to be uncovered: and as there are no coins left unaccounted for it must be assumed that the specific order for coins placed with the Canton Mint in 1890 was for Kwangung coinage.

Now, having eliminated the Foochow Arsenal Mint until 1905, and no silver mint having been recorded for Taiwan up to the time of its secession to Japan in 1895, the question outstanding is - where did the Taiwanese silver coinage come from? Curiously, the answer is fairly straightforward.

A newspaper reported in 1893:

"The new mint at Formosa turned out for the first time a large quantity of ten and twenty cent pieces on 20th inst., the Canton Mint being unable to supply the amount yearly required by the Formosa Government. In design the new Formosa money is like its Canton prototype, with the exception that the name of HM the Emperor Kuang Hsu is omitted (28)." (29)

H.B.M. Consul at Tamsui (N. Formosa) in his report for 1893 is more specific:

"During the year the Government has turned out a considerable amount of subsidiary silver coinage. This, however, has been done without any minting machinery properly so called, but the coins have been struck by cartridge making machines, slightly altered, which answers well (30), though only 5 cent and 10 cent pieces can be issued, as the press is not strong enough to coins the heavier 20 cent pieces. The intrinsic value of these coins is, I believe, not so great as those minted in Canton..". (31)

The contradictory references to 10 and 20 cent coins, and then 5 cent and 10 cent coins, is probably due to the six months interval between the respective reports. The British Museum acquired two specimens of 10 cents type E and two of type F in 1893. From examination of these and other coins it is evident that neither type is of sufficiently good workmanship to have been produced from Canton dies. It therefore seems likely that both sets of coins (K.133-5, 136-7) were produced in Taiwan in 1893, probably at the Taipeh arsenal, on dies copies from the Canton coinage. From the relative scarcity of 10 cent type F (K.137), and the lack of any 5 cent in the set, type F was probably the prototype set, being superseded by Type E (K.133, 134, 135) later in the year. Only 10 cent coins were, in fact, struck in any quantity.

My thanks are due to Mr. J. Cribb and Mr. G.P. Dyer for giving me the opportunity to inspect the British Museum and Royal Mint Collections respectively.

Appendix: A Summary of Fukien Silver Mintage Figures:

	<u>20 Cent</u>	<u>10 Cent</u>	<u>5 Cent</u>
1897	1,198,851	1,246,211	28,007
1898	1,382,500	968,000	256,222 (32)
1899	4,147,500	2,904,000	768,666
1900			5 million? Closed for 6 months.
1901	?	?	?
1902	5,462,740	2,008,467	1,456,000
1903	1,558,487	620,478	
1904	7,401,497	1,630,870	
1905	7,599,271	97,929	
1906			

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1. Kann. E., Illustrated Catalog of Chinese Coins, Reprinted U.S. 1966.
Kalgan Shih, Modern Coins of China, Shanghai 1949
Tsiang, C.C., Illustrations of Chinese... Coins, Shanghai 1939
Wayte-Ramond, Coins of the World, 19th Century, U.S. 1953
20th Century, U.S. 1951
Su, T.K., Illustrated Catalog of Chinese Coins, Taiwan 1974
2. The Viceroyalties of Fukien-Chekiang and Kwangtung-Kwangsi respectively.
3. The Chinese Times, 25 Oct. 1890, P.684.
4. The Chinese Times, 29 Nov. 1890, P.763.
5. The Pagoda Anchorage is about 10 miles down river from Foochow City. The Foochow Naval Dockyard and the main (Mamoi or Makiang) arsenal were adjacent.
6. British Consular Commercial Report (BCCR) No. 1216, P.7.
7. North China Daily News, 28 Feb. 1893 and 6 June 1893 (both reports extracted from the Foochow Daily Echo): the article in the Celestial Empire, 10 Nov. 1893 contains the information from the HK and Shanghai Bank quoted earlier.
8. BCCR No. 1392 P.6.
9. Imperial Maritime Customs Trade Report (IMCTR) for 1896 P.362
10. Note that this is in Foochow City and not the arsenal.
- 11 BCCR No. 1907, P.14.
- 12 IMCTR for 1897, P.372
- 13 The British Museum Collection contains a contemporary forgery of a Fukien 20c acquired in 1901.

- 14 IMCTR for 1898, P. 380
- 15 A sentiment notechoed by the Commissioner for Newchang
(Manchuria); see IMCTR for 1898, P.8
- 16 IMCTR for 1899, P.435
- 17 This was following the example of the Canton Mint which
introduced the 1 cent or 10 Cash coin in 1900
- 18 IMCTR for 1900, P.427
- 19 IMCTR for 1901, P.474
- 20 IMCTR for 1902, P.530
- 21 IMCTR for 1904, P.622
- 22 This restriction was imposed on all provinces. A higher
daily allocation was given to the larger mints.
- 23 IMCTR for 1905, P.358
- 24 BCCR No. 3710, P.7
- 25 Comencini, Coins of the Modern World 1870-1936 U.K. 1937
- 26 Report of the Director of the U.S. Mint 1906, P.184
- 27 IMCTR for 1907, P.423
- 28 Probably an oblique reference to the omission of the usual
Manchu translation.
- 29 North China Daily News, 30 June 1893, P.591
- 30 The Royal Mint Report for 1899 contains the information
that the Moukden Mint, when not being used for coining, was
employed for other purposes, such as making screws.
- 31 BCCR No. 1395, P.9
- 32 The Royal Mint Report for 1899 contains Chinese mintage
figures for 1898.

Those shown for Foochow differ: 20 cents 3,567,500
10 cents 3,019,005
5 cents 88,000

It is not clear from what source these were obtained.