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CHINA - The Republican 20 cent pieces of the Manchurian Provinces,
and some notes on the Mukden Mint.

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Superficially, one would be justified in assuming that the only coin minted in the Manchurian Provinces during the years of the Republic, from 1912 until the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, was the 1 Fen of 1929 (Y.434). In fact, the Mukden mint was very much alive for a good part of that period and, amongst a variety of other coins, struck a large number of 'dragon' 20 cents in the style of the Imperial coinage.

In order properly to appreciate why this was so, it is useful to have an outline history of the mint and the background against which it was operating. Mukden, in Fengtien province, was one of the '2nd Phase' mints authorised in 1896, and began operating in July 1897, with machinery for striking silver and 'cash' (1). Being fairly close to Peking, and directly connected to the capital by one of the early railroads, it was rather less independent of Central Government than any other provincial mint, apart from its contemporary at the Peiyang arsenal in Tientsin. The Mukden mint was duly closed down in 1899 (2), reopening again in 1903 with new machinery, probably adapted for the dual purpose minting of silver and copper coins. In 1907 the 'Three Eastern' or Manchurian Provinces of Fengtien, Kirin and Heilungkiang were formally incorporated into the Chinese Empire as a Viceroyalty, and Mukden had the task of striking a new silver coinage (Y.209-212). This was not actually much more than a token issue but larger numbers of the popular 20 cent were produced in 1908, presumably of the type with stars replacing the dots used to separate the legends (K.257a-d). 20 cent coins were again struck in 1909, dated 1st of First Year of Hsuan Tung (Y.213) and the Imperial Maritime Customs Trade Reports for that year show that some 45 million were produced (3). Unpublished Foreign Office correspondence indicates that the mint was closed mid 1910 - in common with most other provincial mints - but was allowed to open again at the end of the year to alleviate some shortages. 31½ million 20 cent coins were struck in 1910, but these were probably similar to the previous year's issue, i.e. dated First or 1st Year of Hsuan Tung.

Some provincial mints, including Mukden, were named as branches of the Tientsin Central mint to assist with the production of the new coinage, but in the event only Wuchang and Nanking seem to have been involved. During this period the main mint at Kirin - also closed - was destroyed by fire (4), thus eliminating the only other silver mint in the Manchurian Provinces.

Mass production of the national coinage started at Tientsin, Nanking and Wuchang in July 1911, with the outbreak of the revolution in Central China in October leading to its premature issue. In March 1912, shortly after the formation of an unstable republic sharply divided between north and south, the Central Mint at Tientsin was destroyed in a riot, thus leaving the north with two minor mints - Mukden, and the Peiyang branch mint at Tientsin. This delayed any immediate attempt at introducing a national republican coinage and the provinces were quick to take matters into their own hands. In the south, provinces such as Kwangtung and Szechuen struck their own republican coinages; in Central China the Nanking and Wuchang mints produced some commemorative coins, but otherwise re-struck the dragon coinage; in the north it seems probable that the Peiyang mint met demand by re-striking the last of its dollar issues (Y.73. dated 34th Year) until the Tientsin Central mint was rebuilt in 1914, and could thus proceed with the new republican coinage. Dies for this national silver coinage, featuring the bust of the President,

Yuan Shih-kai, were distributed late in 1914 to the Mukden, Wuchang, Nanking and Canton mints (and possibly to others); and the dollar of the series was placed in circulation at the very end of the year (Y.329). The introduction of the minor silver coins (Y.326-8) was delayed, in order to give the prime unit a chance to become established, and it was not until September 1916 (5) that the 50, 20 and 10 cents (still dated 1914) were issued from Tientsin. By this stage Yuan Shih-kai had made an attempt to become Emperor, gone into a decline and died; leaving the country, in the absence of any effective successor, at the mercy of a succession of Warlords. Tientsin eventually released the national copper coinage (Y.323-4) in 1917 (6), but by then the tenuous control over the provincial mints had been lost; they had started on the profitable business of minting lightweight 10 and 20 cash coins from melted down 'cash', usually struck in the form of copies of the Imperial coinage, an operation which was to continue until the Canton based Kuomintang gained control of the country in 1927-8.

Thus the Mukden mint probably came back into operation early in 1912 and in 1913 was reported by the 'Manchurian Daily News' to be receiving bullion from Peking for coining into 'Silver Yen' (7) and 'small silver coin'. One report quoted the fact that small silver coin was being sent back to Peking (8). Information in 1914 from the same source became more specific: 'The Fengtien Provincial Mint is reported to be putting out small silver coins bearing the obsolete marks of those minted under the defunct Manchu Government. Some cynics say that these marks are used on purpose as a blind to cover up the adulteration of the coins with metal baser than silver' (9). Later on it was stated that the new coins were only 0.700 fine, the reduction from 0.82 fine having been ordered by Peking; and that some 2½ million (of this particular issue) had been placed in circulation. The coins were withdrawn after an investigation and a statement was made that all coins in future were to have a statutory percentage of 80% silver. 'Furthermore, in order to distinguish the new good coins to be minted from the debased kind to be withdrawn from circulation, the figure of a plum blossom is to be shown in the intervening space between the Chinese characters indicating the Chinese era of Hsuan Tung....'. Also revealed was the fact that no less than three different types of small silver coin had been put out by the mint during and after the civil war, with decreasing silver contents (10).

The Mukden mint received the dies for the national coinage in November 1914 (11), and therefore was in a position to strike Yuan Shih-kai dollars in 1915. This it probably did, in modest quantity, together with the plum blossom type 20 cent; but by April 1916 the mint was reported as being 'as good as closed' (12), although one, probably final, issue of 'brand new' small silver coin was made in September 1916 (13). From the coincidence of the timing these were almost certainly Yuan Shih-kai 20 cent pieces (Y.327).

Arrangements made by the Japanese with the provincial government in 1916 for the redemption of small silver coin banknotes in specie caused a heavy drain of silver, and small silver coin and dollars had to be imported from Tientsin during 1916 and 1917, the one to meet the redemption of the notes, the other because a 'large dollar' standard had been imposed on the banks. But the Japanese had their own ideas about the economy of Manchuria, the net result being that it rapidly became paper based and flooded with depreciated banknotes (14): in consequence it seems unlikely that any more silver coin was struck at Mukden for the time being.

The mint appears to have continued sporadically in service, possibly utilising some of the mounds of old copper 'cash', reported in 1916 to be 'lying in heaps' on its premises (15), for conversion into lightweight variations of the general issue Tai-Ching coins of 1909 (16), and certainly an Imperial Maritime Customs Report for 1919 stated that the mint issued a large quantity of 1 cent

coins that year. However, it evidently ceased operations and lost its plant early in the 1920's, as in May 1926 there was a report that the authorities were planning to use the leftover copper (17) and the mint was re-established with a single machine in the Mukden arsenal in June 1926 (18). This mint was actually employed striking dollars; these were to have carried the bust of the Manchurian Warlord, Chang Tso-lin; but the proposal was somewhat courageously overruled by the Director of the Provincial Bank, on the reasonable grounds that the circulation of such coins would be limited. In the event 1914 dated Yuan Shih-kai dollars were restruck (19), possibly from the original dies, and the total output of dollars for the period 1926-1929 was recorded as 18,700,000 (20). It is for consideration that the mint may also have been responsible for the Fantasy Half Dollars of Chang Tso-lin (KB65, YS-S63) which are crude copies of the Commemorative dollars struck for him at the Tientsin mint. (21).

In 1928 Marshall Chang, who had ruled the north-east for so long in co-operation with the Japanese, outlived his usefulness and was assassinated. However, his son and successor, the Young Marshall, unexpectedly threw in his lot with the Kuomintang, thus reuniting north and south for the first time since the revolution. This event resulted, numismatically, with the striking of the 1929 dated Manchurian Provinces 1 Fen copper coins, bearing the Kuomintang 'Sun' emblem, and the quoted output of 18 million 'auxilliary' coins in 1930/31 (22) presumably refers to these.

Whether or not the ultra large 1909 issue of 20 cents was made in connivance with the Central Mint, the coins undoubtedly found a ready market in North China generally, clearly because no similar type of coin had been produced in any quantity by the Tientsin mints, and this explains why the Manchurian coins were used as models for the Shansi coins (suitably denuded of Manchu inscriptions) struck at the Taiyuan arsenal in the early years of the Republic (Y.217).

The later Manchurian Provinces 20 cent pieces are fairly easy to date, given a positive identification in 1914 and the reasonable assumption that those without Manchu inscriptions were minted post empire, as there are only three basic obverses, muled in sequence with two basic reverses; and all are undated :

1. A 1909 obverse, muled with a new reverse, with error PROVIENCES (K.259). (See illustration in Yeoman, p.98). Probably early 1912.
2. The PROVIENCES reverse, muled with a new obverse without manchu (K.265a-266). Probably 1913.
3. The new obverse without manchu, muled with a new reverse with the correct spelling PROVINCES (K.265). Probably the issue withdrawn mid 1914.
4. The new reverse PROVINCES, muled with the obverse with the five petal plum blossom in the centre (K.263-4). Mid 1914-1915.

These coins are not uncommon, despite the heavy drain of silver from the Manchurian Provinces from 1916 onwards. The reason is shown by a figure of 249 million 20 cent pieces reputedly minted at Mukden between 1905 and 1917 (23). This total, although apparently excessive, is partially supported by the figure of 45 million quoted for 1909 and is, in fact, far less than the total output of the Canton mint over a comparable period.

RNJW
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References:

- (Y) Numbers from R.S. Yeoman, Catalog of Modern World Coins, 1850-1950 11th Edn.
- (K) Numbers from E. Kann, Illustrated Catalog of Chinese Coins.
- (YS) Numbers from A.B. Coole, Coins in China's History.
1. Imperial Maritime Customs Trade Report (IMCTR) 1898, p.7 & 8
 2. ONS Occasional Paper No. 7, p.4.
 3. IMCTR 1909, p.190.
 4. Kann, p.116.
 5. North China Herald, 2 September 1916.
 6. Manchurian Daily News (MDN), 8 March 1917.
 7. MDN 18 July 1913. If the implication that dollars were being minted is correct, it is possible that Mukden was also involved in restriking the Peiyang dollar dated 34th Year.
 8. MDN 18 August 1913.
 9. MDN 9 March 1914.
 10. MDN 22 April - 2 May 1914.
 11. MDN 24 November 1914.
 12. MDN 10 April 1916.
 13. MDN 20 September 1916.
 14. North China Herald 13 December 1919.
 15. MDN 15 November 1916.
 16. See Woodward, The Minted Ten Cash Coins of China, p.46.
 17. Woodward, p.40.
 18. MDN 11 August 1926.
 19. MDN 11 August 1926.
 20. Manchukuo Year Book, Tokyo 1934.
 21. See Also YS-S52.
 22. Manchukuo Year Book, Tokyo 1934
 23. Report on Progress in Manchuria, by the South Manchuria Railway Co., Dairen 1929, p.144.