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Group of Chinese bronze coins; comprised of five strings of ten Yongzheng Tongbao coins. Sold for \$300 USD via 888 Auctions (January 2017).

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Rare coinage has long interested collectors worldwide — bits of metal that were once mundane are now tokens of the world's history. Qing Dynasty coins are just one example of a currency that's remained valuable due to its historical connections. Ostensibly, these are rare Chinese coins with square holes and silver and copper varieties. But their greatest value stems from their being a relic of the last imperial dynasty of China. We've prepared a guide to these rare Chinese coins and their value below.



[Qing Dynasty \(1644-1912\) Emperor Wen Zong \(1851-61\) 100 Cash Xian Feng yuan bao Kaifeng Mint, Henan Province.](#) Sold for AUD 350 via [Status International](#) (June 2023).

The history of Qing Dynasty coins

The Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) officially began under Manchu Chieftain Hong Taiji (Emperor Taizong) after he consolidated territories and military forces that his father, Nurhaci, cultivated. With their gathered strength, the fledgling dynasty went about conquering territory that China's previous rulers, the Ming Dynasty, then held.

In 1616, Nurhaci issued the first coinage of what would go on to be the Qing Dynasty. These were generally bigger than other coins created at the time, with older Manchu script inscribed on their surfaces. Once the Qing Dynasty took over Beijing, one of its first financial decisions was to value Ming Dynasty coinage half as much as Qing coins. As a result, Ming Dynasty coins were melted down to mint new Qing cash coins.

In 1644, the Qing Dynasty created the Ministry of Revenue and the Ministry of Works to oversee the cash coin manufacturing process. This made the coins more official and has contributed to their value among collectors today.

The evolution of coins in the Qing Dynasty

The Qing Dynasty lasted well over 200 years, and its currency underwent several design changes in this time. Under the Shunzi Emperor (1644-1662), Qing cash coins were modeled after Tang Dynasty

Qing Dynasty coins during the reign of Kangxi Emperor



[Qing Dynasty Kangxi Tongbao Boo Yuwan Brass Coin \(1661-1722\)](#). Sold for \$125 USD via [888 Auctions](#) (August 2018).

The Shunzi Emperor issued five types of coins during his reign, but his successor, the Kangxi Emperor (1662-1722), only retained two. One featured Manchu characters on the left side of the back face, with Chinese characters on the left. The other included text indicating the mint where in Manchu the coin was created on the right, with the character “𐩣𐩢𐩨” (“Boo”) on the left. This indicated a cash coin made at the Ministry of Revenue and Ministry of Public Works.

The bimetallic monetary system was also established during the Kangxi Emperor’s reign. A bimetallic standard sets currency’s worth as equivalent to the quantities of certain metals. The Qing cash coin’s value matched the amounts of silver and copper available within the empire.

Qing Dynasty coins during the reign of Qianlong Emperor

In 1735, the Qianlong Emperor’s reign began, lasting through 1796 and bringing several notable shifts to Qing Dynasty coins. At the time, China was experiencing a shortage of copper and, as a result, coins. However, an increase in ore from the Yunnan Copper mines led to a swift increase in the money supply. The coins in this period were similar in size and quality to those produced during the Kangxi Emperor’s reign. However, their designs differed slightly, with the mint marks and the issuing mint entirely written in Manchu on the coin’s reverse.

While the Qing Dynasty enjoyed a surplus of materials for a time, expensive military campaigns started to lead the government to financial troubles. As a result, certain materials needed for coin production became scarce, necessitating the addition of tin to reduce manufacturing costs.

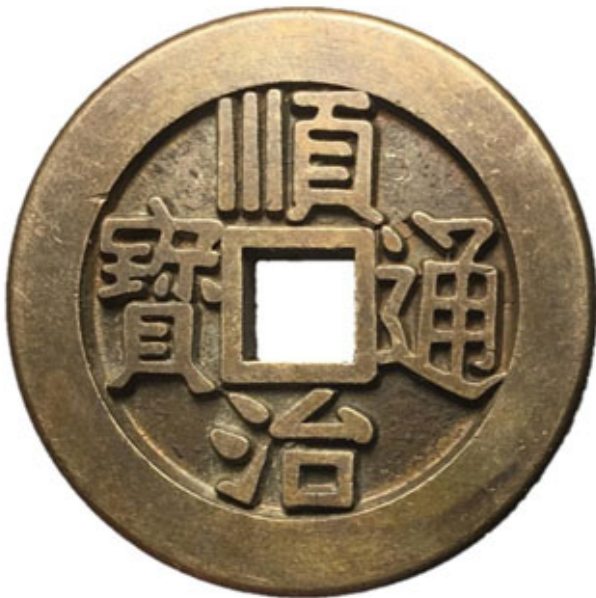
Types of Qing Dynasty coins

Early coins

The earliest coins in the Qianlong Dynasty were those that Nurhaci and Emperor Taizong issued. Nurhaci's coins included the "abkai fulingga han jiha" and the "Tiān Mìng Tōng Bǎo," both modeled after Ming Dynasty coinage but weighing less. The inscriptions on the latter were written in an older Manchu language, while the latter's was written in Chinese. Both coins were with one wén (a unit of currency at the time).

Thereafter, Emperor Taizong issued the "Sure han ni jiha" coin. This coin was similar to the "abkai fulingga han jiha" coin, with the Manchu script on the reverse. However, it held more value than past coins given its 10-wen worth.

Shunzi era coins



Early coins in the Shunzi era comprised 60% copper and 40% either lead or zinc, or both. This three-to-two ratio would change over time. The initial coins, though, were modeled after the Kai Yuan Tong Bao coins from the Tang Dynasty, as well as the first Ming Dynasty coins.

On the reverse face of Shunzi era coins, you'll see Chinese mint marks denoting the coins' origin. Some coins were also created with blank reverse sides rather than script.

Kangxi era coins

Kangxi cash typically feature a wider outer rim and smaller center hole than their predecessors. Additionally, only two other currencies were retained from previous eras. You can see Manchu characters on

the left reverse side on one of these coins, with Chinese mint marks on the right. The aforementioned "☸" ("Boo") coins also emerged during this era.

[Qing Dynasty Shunzhi Tongbao Bronze Coin](#)
[\(1644-1661\)](#). Sold for \$70 USD via [888](#)
[Auctions](#) (Feb 2019).

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this era. Once they entered circulation, people came to believe they held special powers.

Yongzheng era coins

Under the Yongzheng Emperor, the copper content of the cash coin was reduced from 60% to 50% in 1727. At the same time, these coins weighed slightly more. The reverse face of these coins showcased only Manchu mint marks.



[Kangxi Period 17-18 Century Bronze Coin](#). Sold for \$1,200 USD via [Empire Auction House](#) (June 2019).



Qianlong era coins

Cash produced during this era was similar in size and quantity to coins produced in the Kangxi era, getting smaller as China experienced economic difficulties. Financial setbacks led to changes in metal composition that also notably changed the final coin's color. Yellow cash coins were standard, made with 50% copper, 41.5% zinc, 6.5% lead, and 2% tin. Additional red cash coins were made almost entirely from copper. "Green cash coins" made from metal utensils sold to the government also emerged.

[Qianlong Bronze Coin](#). Sold for \$1,900 USD via [Empire Auction House](#) (Oct 2019).

Jiaqing era coins

In 1796, the Qing Dynasty entered a period of instability that affected the composition of this era's coins. Rather than the standard composition of 60% copper and 40% zinc, the mints of this point in history used 54% copper, 43% zinc, and 3% lead.

Daoguang era coins

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about one-third more expensive than the face value of the coin itself. As a result, by 1845, Daoguang coins were significantly smaller than all previous eras of coins.

Tongzhi era coins

The Tongzhi emperor was initially called Qixiang, and while coins were inscribed with that name, they weren't put into circulation. His name was changed to Tongzhi in 1862 during a continued copper shortage that changed the composition of the coins produced with his name. These issues resulted in cash coins that were inferior in quality to those of previous eras.

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Jiaqing Period 18-19 Century, Bronze Coin.
Sold for \$500 USD via Empire Auction House
(June 2019).



Chinese Tong Zhi Coin. Auction passed (Est: \$496,000 USD – \$600,000 USD) via Antique Reader
(Sept 2017).

Guangxu era coins

The Guangxu emperor enacted policies to modernize the currency system, introducing machine-made copper coins without the square hole in 1899. However, traditional coins were still minted thanks to the discovery of new copper sources. Guangxu coins were inscribed with the words



[Guangxu Period 19-20 Century Silver Coin.](#)

Sold for \$80,000 USD via [Empire Auction House](#) (July 2019).

The significance of Qing Dynasty coins today

Qing Dynasty cash coins remain valuable to collectors due to their historical significance. Since the dynasty lasted for centuries, collecting coins from every era shows the evolution of currency in China. From cruder initial designs to modernized coins without the square hole, each version represents a different emperor's reign. Additionally, Chinese coins are significant in feng shui as charms that invite wealth and good futures.

Tips for starting a collection of

Qing Dynasty coins

If collecting Qing Dynasty coins interests you, there are several steps you can take to get started.

- **Discover where to buy authentic Qing Dynasty coins.** Qing Dynasty coins can be bought on online marketplaces or auction houses. Verifying a coin's authenticity is important before purchasing, as buying inauthentic coins can devalue your collection.
- **Learn how to clean your cash coins.** If you've bought an authentic Qing Dynasty cash coin, it might be difficult to determine the era they come from due to corrosion. If you're more interested in identification than preservation, soak the coin in vinegar before scraping off the corrosion around identifying characteristics.
- **Study how to identify Qing Dynasty cash coins.** Learning identifying marks of coins from different Qing Dynasty eras gives your collection historical context. Knowing these signs can help you locate any coins that your collection might be missing.



[A collection of 40 cash coins from China, Qing dynasty and earlier.](#) Sold for €600 EUR via [Nagel Auction](#) (June 2023).

The enduring legacy of Qing Dynasty coins

The Qing Dynasty was a significant period in Chinese history, and changes in its coins over time showcase how the dynasty evolved. During each era of the dynasty, certain aspects of the currency emerged or disappeared, creating fairly straightforward identifiers of a coin's origin in time. With that knowledge in hand, you can start or continue your collection of Qing Dynasty coins with as much historical accuracy as possible.

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Isaiah Atkins is a writer based in Atlanta. He has written about Ernie Barnes, the most valuable Star Wars toys, and more for Invaluable.



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