



Coins in early Hong Kong: Chinese silver ingots and copper cash coins

Chinese silver ingots and copper cash coins were among the many currencies circulating in nineteenth-century Hong Kong. Different regions of China produced silver ingots in various shapes, including boats, shoes, bowls, saddles and square troughs. A silver ingot's value was calculated according to its weight, which ranged from one tael (37.43 grams) to 50 taels.

Inscriptions or stamps on silver ingots often gave information about their origin, date, weight and use. Because of their high value, they were used mainly for tax payments or large transactions and purchases. The one shown above (right), weighing 10 taels, was used for the payment of customs duties in Guangdong in 1852.

For day-to-day purchases, people in nineteenth-century Hong Kong used copper cash coins, which were declared legal tender in Hong Kong in 1842. The "exchange rate" between silver ingots and copper cash coins was one tael to 1200-1300 cash.



Chinese copper cash coins

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