

A Chinese Coin to Raise Canadian Dollars

By Curator of Archaeology Grant Keddie, Royal BC Museum

I have collected coins for many years, first because of my interest in the history of China, and later due to the fact that copper coins were items the fur traders brought from China to trade with First Nations and, after 1858, were also used by Chinese immigrants as gambling tokens. We find these copper coins in historic period archaeological sites.

My curiosity was piqued one day when I saw a 1938 photograph in our archives collection of a Chinese woman with a basket in downtown Victoria on the corner of Douglas and View Streets. The archives information clearly identified the activities as part of the “Chinese Women’s Committee Tag Day for War Victims in China”. This, I realized, was in reference to the second Sino-Japanese war that lasted from July 7, 1937 to September 2, 1945. The Chinese were suffering significantly from the invasion of the Japanese army.

The photograph shows what appears to be a woman going into her purse to give a donation and in turn receive something from the basket. Later, in a second hand store, I was delighted to find what was obviously an example of the item in the woman’s basket. It was a paper tag on which was written, in both Chinese and English: “For War Sufferers in China. Chinese Women’s Committee”. Attached to the tag with coloured string was a modern copy of an old Chinese copper one cash coin. It was from the reign of Chien Lung 1736-1793, which was considered a period of good luck in China. Years later I came across a second example of this tag with two coins attached, one a similar copy to the other, the second one a real coin from the same time period. These are the only two coin tags that I know of. They provide a unique addition to the photographic image of this social action taken by a Chinese community in British Columbia. I thought it appropriate to donate them to our history collection.



Above: Chinese Women’s Committee tag day for war victims in China, Victoria BC, 1938. BCA A-05763

Left: Chinese coins from a ‘tag day’ collected by Grant Keddie.