
Zhou Xicheng's "Guizhou Auto Dollar": Commemorating the Building of Roads for Famine Relief



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"It is difficult for one in Peking, Shanghai, or New York to realize just what that means – an automobile in the heart of Kweichow!"¹

Abstract

In 1926 Zhou Xicheng, Governor of Guizhou, China, obtained a new car from an American Motor Company, the first car ever to find its way to this remote Chinese province. Road construction in Guizhou was well underway when the American engineer O. J. Todd, a member of the China International Famine Relief Committee, was invited that year to assist in its continued development. Governor Zhou had his own methods for the speedy and effective building of roads and recruited local people, the army, and even large teams of school children to assist in construction. It is likely that his work methods had taken their inspiration from Sun Yat-sen's plans as outlined in his book *The International Development of China* of 1920; plans that Sun Yat-sen further promoted in the writing of a letter to Henry Ford in which he requested the industrialist's assistance in the improvement of the motor industry in China. In 1928, in an effort to commemorate his own role in China's road construction projects, Zhou Xicheng had a coin struck. Instead of showing an image of his own head or that of another luminary such as Sun Yat-sen or Yuan Shikai – as had been common with coins of the first decades of the twentieth-century – this one yuan silver coin shows an image of his beloved motor car.

Keywords: Silver coin; warlord; motor car; Guizhou province; Henry Ford; Zhou Xicheng; O. J. Todd; road building.

Introduction

The subject of this paper is nominally a Chinese silver one dollar (*yuan* 圓) coin, minted in 1928 and issued in Guizhou province, southwest China. This was the first coin in the world to feature a motor car in its design, and the only car-themed coin until the 1980s.² As well as introducing the coin itself, along the way this paper will touch upon a number of other

¹Todd, *Two Decades in China*, p. 236, originally published in the *Journal of the Association of Chinese and American Engineers* (January 1928).

²See for example the 1983 Isle of Man 50p coin commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Model T Ford.

topics, including: road construction in China, the car industry, and the building of the country's future through "reconstruction" as proposed by Sun Yat-sen (Sun Yixian) 孫逸仙 (1866–1925). The four central characters in the story that results from this are an eclectic assortment of people: Sun Yat-sen—"Father of Modern China"; Henry Ford (1863–1947)—industrialist and car manufacturer; Zhou Xicheng 周西成 (1893–1929)—Governor of Guizhou Province in the late 1920s; and Oliver Julian Todd (1899–1973)—engineer and collector of Chinese ancient bronze mirrors.

In the decades since the "Guizhou Auto Dollar" was minted, relatively little has been written about its history and background. This is despite the fact that the coin is well-known among numismatists and coin collectors and has enjoyed widespread popularity in these circles. By 1933, just five years after it first appeared, the coin had already become scarce and was being sought after by collectors worldwide. Despite its popularity the scant information found in the Hong Kong published *A History of Chinese Currency* is typical of most textual sources:

"The coin was minted to celebrate the completion of the Guizhou provincial highway in the 17th year of the Republic (1928) when warlord Zhou Xicheng was governor".³

What is most distinctive about this coin is that in place of the face of a leading dignitary—as found on most coins of the period—a depiction of a car of 1920s manufacture can be seen; hence the names given to it in Chinese: *Qiche qian* 汽車錢 (Automobile Coin), or *Guizhou qiche bi* 貴州汽車幣 (Guizhou Car Coin),⁴ and in English: the "Motor Dollar", or "Auto Dollar" (plus a host of variants in both languages).⁵

In the available modern sources, apart from physical descriptions of the coin itself, additional information as to its background is more often than not conjectural. A notable exception to this is a 1992 article by Qian Cunhao 钱存浩, which will be introduced later in this paper.

Background

This is not the place to recount the entire history of silver coinage in China, but, nevertheless, some historical background will be necessary in order to put the coin into context. According to a 1933 English-language magazine article, Zhou Xicheng, Governor of Guizhou from 1926–1928, had originally considered having a depiction of his own head struck on the coin in the same way as Sun Yat-sen and Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859–1916) had done before him, but, as we shall see in due course, he thought better of it.⁶

Late nineteenth-century examples of the Guizhou silver dollar, in common with those from other provinces, had shown coiled dragons, or similar symbolic designs;⁷ it was only

³*A History of Chinese Currency (16th century BC – 20th century AD)* (Xinhua (New China) Publishing House, CNC Ltd, M.A.O. Management Group Ltd. (Hong Kong, 1983).

⁴Ding Daoqian 丁道謙, "Lun Zhou Xicheng 論周西成 (On Zhou Xicheng)", in *Guizhou minyi* 貴州民意 ("The Peoples [sic] Opinion of Kweichow Monthly") (Guiyang, 1948), Vol. IV no. 3, pp. 16–17.

⁵The British Museum has two examples of the coin in its collection: BM 1936, 0710.1 and 1996, 0217.2205.

⁶"Motor-Car" Dollar which Brought Bad Luck to Kweichow General', in *The China Weekly Review* (11 November 1933), p. 450.

⁷See the *Guangxu yuanbao* 光緒元寶 of the 22nd year of the reign of the Guangxu Emperor (1893) and the *Qianbao* 黔寶 of the 14th year of his reign (1885). Liao Yangming, *Zhongguo yinyuan tuji* (An Illustrated Catalogue of Chinese Silver Yuan) (Tianjin, 2008), p. 134.

after the founding of the Republic of China in 1912 that the heads of Sun Yat-sen, Yuan Shikai and others began to appear regularly on Chinese coins nationwide.⁸

Sun Yat-sen's profile first appeared on a coin in 1912 to commemorate the founding of the Republic of China that year, and was minted in Nanjing in both silver and copper. Thereafter, coins were produced to mark important events in the lives of provincial governors throughout the early Republican Period and the corresponding Warlord Period (1916–1927), variously in copper, silver, and gold, and often as commemorative souvenirs rather than for circulation. A coin with the head of Li Yuanhong 黎元洪 (1864–1928), was minted at the Wuchang mint in the first year of the Republic, following his (initially somewhat reluctant) part in the October uprising that resulted in the *Xinhai* revolution – the event that finally brought to an end centuries of imperial rule. In 1915, a silver coin from the then remote province of Yunnan, was minted by Tang Jiyao 唐繼堯 (1883–1927) and gold and copper coins followed.⁹ Also in the early years of the Republic, Lu Rongting 陸榮廷 (1859–1928), Guangxi Military Governor and a member of the Old Guangxi Clique, had a gold coin minted when he assumed office in 1916. In the 1920s many more figures in competing military and political cliques chose to raise their personal profiles in this way. In 1924 Duan Qirui 段祺瑞 (1865–1936), founder of the Anhui Clique, had a commemorative coin struck in Tianjin to commemorate his appointment as “Chief Executive” of the nation, and in the previous year, also in Tianjin, a fierce rival in the Zhili Clique Cao Kun 曹錕 (1862–1938) had silver and gold commemorative coins struck to mark his assumption of the presidency.

1928, the year in which the Auto Dollar was issued, was the year that the Nationalist Government finally established itself in its new capital of Nanjing, following the Northern Expedition, a military campaign that was specifically designed to bring regional warlords, such as those listed above, under the control of a centralised government. A 1926 coin from the Tianjin mint, which demonstrates the continued practice of displaying the image of warlords on coins right up to the time of the Northern Expedition, shows the head of Zhang Zuolin 張作霖 (1875–1928)—leader of the Fengtian Clique and major political figure of the time. Bearing in mind the sticky end to which many of these warlords came, it might be reasonable to suppose that when it came to Zhou Xicheng's turn, he would shy away from having his own head appear on a coin.

According to one source, Zhou had initially deferred this honour to his “nominal chieftain” Yuan Zuming 袁組銘 (1889–1927) who declined for reasons unknown.¹⁰ Shortly afterwards, Yuan was killed by the Nationalists “for alleged treachery” to their cause,¹¹ so it

⁸ *A History of Chinese Currency (16th century BC – 20th century AD)*, p. 41. Wolfgang Bertsch, “Fantasies and Forgeries of Quarter and Half Sichuan Rupees, Struck in Gold”, in *Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society*, no. 224 (summer, 2015), pp. 38–40. See an example in the collection of the British Museum: BM OR.9080. The very first coin in China to include the head of a person on it was from Sichuan, a province that borders Guizhou. This was the Sichuan rupee; commonly thought to depict the Guangxu Emperor (r.1875–1908). This coin is said to have been minted in an effort to compete with the Indian Rupee, which depicts the head of Queen Victoria in her role as Empress of India.

⁹ Before this Tang had also briefly acted as Military Governor of Guizhou province. Howard L. Boorman and Richard C. Howard (eds.) *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China* (New York and London, 1970), p. 224.

¹⁰ “Motor-Car’ Dollar which Brought Bad Luck to Kweichow General”, in *The China Weekly Review* (11 November 1933), p. 450.

¹¹ O. J. Todd, *Two Decades in China: comprising technical papers, magazine articles, newspaper stories and official reports connected with work under his own observation* (Taipei, 1971), p. 246.

can be seen that the most likely explanation for Zhou's reticence to have his head appear on the coin was indeed to disassociate himself from other warlords, and from Yuan Zuming—his former mentor and commander—so as to plant himself firmly within the ranks of those who supported the new Nanjing government. On the death of Yuan Zuming, who had effectively been “military governor” of Guizhou, Zhou Xicheng—then the province's “civil governor” (perhaps incongruously, with his thousands strong army)—raised the Nationalist flag and, according to Todd, changed the title of his post to “Chairman of the Governing Committee” of the province.¹² In fact, by June 1927, the year of Yuan's death, Zhou had officially become “Chairman of the Guizhou Provincial Government and Commander of the Twenty-fifth Army of the Republican Revolutionary Army”,¹³ but by 1929—just months after the Nationalist government was installed in Nanjing and the Northern Expedition had finally come to an end—he had indeed adopted the less militaristic title of “Committee Member and Chairman of the Guizhou Provincial Government”.¹⁴

A letter from Sun Yat-sen to Henry Ford

Sun Yat-sen, who had held the position of Provisional President of the Chinese Republic after the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, and was to continue as a leading political figure before his untimely death in 1925, plays a central role in this story, as it was his interest in road building and the car industry—as part of his plans for China's development—that is likely to have been a central motivation for the minting of this provincial coin.

At the time of the revolution of 1911 Sun was famously raising funds in the USA to help in the overthrow of the Manchu ruling dynasty, and it was while he was in Denver that he heard of its demise. At this early date—before the aftermath of the revolution could have been foreseen—plans for road building as part of China's “reconstruction” had not yet even been considered. On his fundraising tour Sun Yat-sen had also been due to visit Detroit, already a centre of the US car industry, and the town where Henry Ford had established his factories, but Sun would not have been in a position to approach Ford on this, or any other matter, as news of the Chinese Revolution—for which he acted as figurehead—cut his fundraising tour short, well before he was able to complete his planned itinerary.¹⁵

A letter from Sun Yat-sen to Henry Ford—sent from the seat of Sun's short-lived Canton Government in 1924—shows both Sun's admiration for the American as a businessman, and the importance he attached to both road building and the motor industry in his plans for the

¹²*Ibid.*,

¹³*Guizhou sheng zhengfu zhuxi jian Minguo geming jun di ershiwu jun junzhang* 貴州省政府主席兼民國革命軍第二十五軍軍長 (Chairman of the Guizhou Provincial Government and Commander of the Twenty-fifth Army of the Republican Revolutionary Army). See *Guomin zhengfu gongbao* 國民政府公報 (Bulletin of the National Government) no. 6 (21 June 1927), p. 29.

¹⁴*Guizhou sheng zhengfu weiyuan jian zhuxi* 貴州省政府委員兼主席 (Committee Member and Chairman of the Guizhou Provincial Government). *Xingzhengyuan gongbao* 行政院公報 (Bulletin of the Executive Yuan of the Republic of China) no. 56 (15 June 1929), p. 4. The Northern Expedition formally ended on National Day - 10 October 1928; the date the Nationalist Government was officially established in Nanjing. See Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1997), pp. 24–25.

¹⁵Him Mark Lai, “A Memorable Day 70 Years Ago”, in *Bulletin (Chinese Historical Society of America)* (October–November, 1981), part 2, pp. 9–10.

development of the Republic of China. Sun's letter to Ford was written in 1924—thirteen years after the *Xinhai* Revolution and just one year before his death through illness:

"...I know and I have read your remarkable work in America. And I think that you can do similar work in China on a much vaster and more significant scale. In a sense it may be said that your work in America has been more individual and personal, whereas here in China you would have an opportunity to express and embody your mind and ideals in the enduring form of a new industrial system".

I am of the view that China may be the cause of the next World War if she remains economically undeveloped and thus become an object of exploitation and international strife on the part of the Great Powers. For this reason I began, as soon as the Armistice was signed in Europe, to think out a plan for the international development of China with a view to its consideration by the Powers at the Peace Conference in 1919. This plan has since been worked out in my book, "*The International Development of China*", which was published in Shanghai in 1921 [preface dated July 20th 1920] and in New York in 1922 by Messrs. Putman's Sons.

I now realise that it is more or less hopeless to expect much from the present Governments of the Powers. There is much more hope, in my opinion, from a dynamic worker like yourself; and this is why I invite you to visit us in South China in order to study, at first hand, what is undoubtedly one of the greatest problems of the Twentieth Century".¹⁶

The book mentioned here by Sun Yat-sen, *The International Development of China*, includes a short but telling entry on road building that is also worth quoting:

"...If we wish to move quickly and do more work, we must adopt the motor car as a vehicle. But before we can use the motor car, we have to build our roads. In the preliminary part of this international Development Scheme, I proposed to construct one million miles of roads".¹⁷

What follows is significant with regard to the actions of Zhou Xicheng, Governor of Guizhou, just a few years later:

"These [roads] should be apportioned to the ratio of population in each district for construction. In the eighteen provinces of China proper, there are nearly 2,000 *hsiens* [*xian* or "counties"]. If all parts of China are to adopt the *hsien* administration, there will be nearly 4,000 *hsiens* in all. Thus the construction of roads for each *hsien* will be on an average of 250 miles. But some of the *hsiens* have more people and some have less. If we divide the million miles of roads by the four hundred million people, we shall have one mile to every hundred. For one hundred people to build one mile of road is not a very difficult task to accomplish. If my scheme of making road-building as a condition for granting local autonomy is adopted by the nation, we shall see one million miles of road built in a very short time as if by a magic wand".¹⁸

Sun goes on to talk about the importance of the manufacture of cars and the supply of cheap fuel, which would become readily available to all who desired them:

"...cars, if turned out on a large scale, can be made much cheaper than at present, so that everybody who wishes it, may have one".¹⁹

¹⁶Letter from Sun Yat-sen to Henry Ford 1924: Henry Ford Office Papers. Object ID 64.167.285.5.

¹⁷Sun Yat-sen, *The International Development of China* (Shanghai, 1920), p. 151.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 151–152.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 152.

Such widespread availability was of course Henry Ford's aim with his production of cars for the US market, but would certainly not have been a possibility in China's still far from egalitarian society. Although there appear to be no records to show whether or not Ford ever responded to Sun Yat-sen's letter, earlier in the same year Ford had hosted a visit by Chang Chien 張謙 (Zhang Qian (1888-?), China's then Trade Commissioner, who gave a speech to a group of Chinese trainees at the Ford, Highland Park plant in Michigan that was duly reported in the Ford company magazine *Ford News* of March 1924—three months before Sun's letter to Ford was written. In his speech Zhang gave an equally exaggerated account of the prospects of China's future car market, pre-echoing the ideas that Sun Yat-sen would later express in his letter, by suggesting that over one hundred million cars would eventually be required to supply China's four hundred million people.²⁰

Zhou Xicheng and O. J. Todd: road building in Guizhou

Having looked briefly at the road building dreams of Sun Yat-sen we turn once again to Zhou Xicheng, Governor of Guizhou, and his part in the building of roads in that province—a project which had begun in June 1926 with his establishment of the “Guizhou Provincial Government Bureau for Roads”.²¹ In a 1985 study of the history of road building in China, Lin Xin suggests that there were three main reasons why, in the late 1920s, the Governor of Guizhou should have wanted to build roads in his province.

1. To keep up with neighbouring provinces that had already built roads some years before.
2. For the purposes of strengthening his political and military power.
3. To increase his personal prestige and leave his mark for generations to come.²²

To these reasons might be added Zhou's real need to establish his position, and that of Guizhou, in the new order, following the clamp down on regional warlords and the founding of the government in Nanjing.

A rather different take on this can be found in the writings of the American Engineer Oliver Julian Todd. Todd is central to the story of road building in Guizhou and in many other parts of China during the 1920s. We are fortunate that his colleagues seem to have thought highly of his work, as, in 1938, his writings were collected together in a book entitled *Two Decades in China* and published by the Association of Chinese and American Engineers in Beijing.²³ The essays had originally appeared in various engineering magazines as well as in popular publications such as the American magazine *Asia* and the Shanghai published

²⁰Thomas J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon: China's Urban Revolution and What it Means for the World* (New York, 2008), p. 224 quoting *Ford News* 3, no. 16 (22 March 1924).

²¹*The Guizhou sheng zhengfu lu zhengju* 貴州省政府路政局 (Guizhou Provincial Government Bureau for Roads) was based on the pre-existing *Guiyang shizheng gongsuo* 貴陽市政公所 (Guiyang Ministry of Public Works). See Lin Xin 林辛, *Guizhou jindai jiaotong shilue* 貴州近代交通史略 (Historical Outline of Modern Transportation in Guizhou) (Guiyang, 1985), p. 99.

²²Lin Xin, *Guizhou jindai jiaotong shilue* (Historical Outline of Modern Transportation in Guizhou) (Guiyang, 1985), p. 99.

²³O. J. Todd, *Two Decades in China: comprising technical papers, magazine articles, newspaper stories and official reports connected with work under his own observation* (Beijing: Association of Chinese and American Engineers, 1938). For more on Todd see Jonathan Spence, *To Change China: Western Advisers in China 1620–1960* (London, 1980), pp. 204–216. Spence makes extensive use of material from Todd's *Two Decades in China*.

English-language journal *The China Weekly Review*. The collection was reprinted in Taiwan in 1971.²⁴

During his time in China Todd supervised the construction of three thousand miles of roads in fourteen different provinces, and was responsible for several largescale projects aimed at taming China's rivers to halt the perennial flooding that was a major contributing factor to frequent famine in China.²⁵ Todd worked for the China International Famine Relief Commission²⁶ and had been invited to Guizhou by Zhou Xicheng who at the time held the post of Honorary Chairman of the Guizhou committee for that organisation.²⁷

By this time Todd had been involved in road building in China for many years, and as far back as 1920 had been closely associated with the charitable organisation, the National Good Roads Association of China—more popularly known as the "Good Roads Movement".²⁸ Thomas J. Campanella has suggested that it is likely that Todd had American commercial interests in mind with the construction of the roads, on top of any humanitarian aims that would benefit the local populous.²⁹ This may indeed be the case, but it should be understood that on a number of occasions in his writings Todd expresses his thoughts on the matter of famine relief, which do not immediately appear to support such profit-led motives. He claimed that "...the food problem of China has made the question of transportation a most vital one"³⁰ and with this in mind considered the question of roads in China to be "...one of the most vital ones for the present generation of engineers".³¹ Todd may have seen these projects as something that would be of mutual benefit to both China and America³² but as further stated by him, "...it is from a humanitarian aspect that the Famine Commission is interested in this work and it is making famine prevention its main program here as in other provinces in China. The opening up of more motor roads seems to be the soundest use of funds, for the present".³³

²⁴O. J. Todd, *Two Decades in China: comprising technical papers, magazine articles, newspaper stories and official reports connected with work under his own observation* (Taipei, 1971). This is the version consulted for this paper.

²⁵Thomas J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, pp. 225–226.

²⁶*Zhongguo huayang yizhen jiu'ai zonghui* 中國華洋義賑救災總會 (China International Famine Relief Commission).

²⁷O. J. Todd, 'The Good Roads Movement in Kweichow', in *The China Weekly Review* (24 December 1927), p. 95. Todd wrote that it was after a meeting of the Association of Chinese and American Engineers in Tianjin in October of 1920 that a group of individuals from the organisation decided to "urge the adoption of a program of construction of public utilities to be carried on coincident with the issuing of food for the destitute". Todd, *Two Decades in China* (Taipei), p. 203, reprinted from *Journal of the Association of Chinese and American Engineers* (November 1921).

²⁸The Good Roads Movement had published the *Good Roads Monthly* in Chinese since 1922 and, according to A. Viola Smith, this had a circulation of 8,000. The National Good Roads Movement of Shanghai was established in May 1921. See A. Viola Smith, "China Makes Way for the Motor", in *The China Weekly Review* (11 May 1929), p. 455. It is interesting to note that the systematic urban destruction in China, which is often seen as a more recent phenomenon, was well and truly underway in the 1920s and amongst what might be considered the association's more dubious policies was the demolition of city walls in order to facilitate the construction of ring roads. Thomas J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, pp. 226–227.

²⁹Thomas J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, p. 226.

³⁰Todd, *Two Decades in China*, p. 251, originally published in the *Journal of the Association of Chinese and American Engineers* (October 1929).

³¹Todd, *Two Decades in China*, p. 218, originally published in the *Journal of the Association of Chinese and American Engineers* (September 1926).

³²Jonathan Spence, *To Change China*, p. 215.

³³Todd, *Two Decades in China*, p. 231, originally published in *The China Weekly Review* (24 December 1927).

Specifically with Guizhou in mind Todd realised that without roads or railways the province would be bound to self-sufficiency and as a consequence would “have practically no trade with the outside world”. When Todd went to view the road building work in Guizhou, which had been carried out under the auspices of the Famine Relief Commission, he found that over a thousand soldiers and famine refugees were working on it. Zhou Xicheng had even organised school children over the age of fourteen, of both sexes, to assist on the building of roads; the boys and girls taking it turns to do a week’s work at a time. Todd’s description on his arrival tells of a thousand school girls who had been “marched there for the short exercises that were to precede their initiation into activities such as schoolgirls the world over, perhaps, had ever dreamed of”.³⁴

Todd described his 1926 journey to Guizhou and the greeting he received on the Yunnan side of the border by one of Zhou’s representatives and the “happy surprise” he felt when, still several miles from the capital Guiyang, he had been met by Zhou Xicheng in his newly acquired “seven-seater American automobile”.³⁵ Zhou’s car, the very first car in the province, when mentioned in English-language sources, is always described rather generally as, an “American automobile”. Although several photographs of the car do exist it has not been possible to identify the manufacture of the car by looking at them—it would be nice to think that it was a product of the Ford factory, but it could equally well have been any one of a number of American cars. A representative of Ford Motors, “a titled British gentleman”, did in fact visit Guiyang in an effort to promote the company’s cars but this appears to have been well after Zhou had acquired his own beloved vehicle. This visit, for which the sales representative was compelled to travel “through bandit-infested Yunnan”, prompted an anonymous newspaper reporter to suggest that “the ubiquitous Ford will soon appear in Kueichow”³⁶ and in fact, even by the time of the writing of that article in 1928, sixteen other cars had been reported to be on order for the province.³⁷ Whether or not these were products of Henry Ford’s factories is unknown, but they are most likely to have been American. During the late 1920s it was American cars that dominated the Chinese market, providing 95% of those exported to North China, and 75% of those to Shanghai.³⁸

To Todd, being met by a car in such a remote province, was clearly a thrill:

“It is difficult for one in Peking, Shanghai, or New York to realize just what that means—an automobile in the heart of Kweichow [Guizhou]!”³⁹

We learn from a number of sources that this car had arrived in the mountain-locked province—described by Todd as “probably the most isolated province in the country”⁴⁰—not, of course, by road or rail, but in parts, on bamboo carrying litters, having travelled the fifty-day

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 239. This article, originally published in the popular American magazine *Asia* in January 1929, states that the girls came from all backgrounds.

³⁵O. J. Todd, “The Good Roads Movement in Kweichow”, in *The China Weekly Review* (24 December 1927), p. 95.

³⁶“The Strong Man of Kueichow”, in *The North-China Herald* (26 May 1928), p. 328.

³⁷*China Weekly Review* (24 December 1927).

³⁸Campanella, p. 224.

³⁹Todd, *Two Decades in China*, p. 236, originally published in the *Journal of the Association of Chinese and American Engineers* (January 1928).

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 239.

journey from Guangzhou over the mountains when the option of travelling by river had ended.⁴¹ Todd's arrival in Guizhou, in the company of his wife, on 9 September 1926, is described by him in some detail:

"[Todd was greeted by] the governor and his full staff just outside the city in the first automobile that had ever been brought into the province. The governor appeared in white uniform with gold-ornamented sword. His whole local army of 10,000 men stood at attention. Officers saluted. No visiting potentates could have been more highly honoured. The gold braid on the uniforms of the brass band alone shone, and the strains of 'The Red, White and Blue' and 'Swanee River' filled the air".⁴²

At this time, an American-style military band would have been as unusual as a car in this remote province, and Todd tells us that the "bandmaster had been sent to America for his training at the governor's personal expense". At the ceremony in his honour, no doubt still to the accompaniment of Sousa and Gershwin, Todd was given a large gold medal specially struck for the occasion in recognition of his help in connection with the project. On seeing the work carried out by the soldiers, refugees and school children, Todd gushed:

"I was convinced that the people of this province, led by their governor, meant business and a new day was dawning in this part of China. They really had the 'good roads bug'".⁴³

Todd's mirrors

O. J. Todd is known in archaeological and museological circles as a collector of Chinese bronze mirrors. Although Todd does not mention it himself in his writings, one of the bi-products of both road and rail construction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the uncovering of new archaeological sites.⁴⁴ This situation met the interest of foreign collectors in their thirst for the acquisition of grave goods—objects that had been buried with persons of noble rank to accompany them in the afterlife—an area of collecting in which Chinese collectors were not widely involved at this time.⁴⁵ In the 1935

⁴¹"Modern roads have replaced ancient city walls at Canton, Shanghai Nantungchow, Hangchow, Changsha..." A. Viola Smith, "China Makes Way for the Motor", in *The China Weekly Review* (11 May 1929), p. 455.

⁴²Todd, *Two Decades in China*, p. 241, originally published in *Asia* (January 1929).

⁴³Todd, *Two Decades in China*, p. 236, originally published in the *Journal of the Association of Chinese and American Engineers* (January 1928).

⁴⁴See W. Perceval Yetts on George Eumorfopolous and his early years as a collector: "Railway making in China soon offered him the chance to exercise his flair independently of fashion. It occasioned the opening of ancient tombs on a large scale, bringing to light vast quantities of *ming ch'i* or things made on purpose to accompany the dead, and also a lesser number of cherished possessions buried with them". W. Perceval Yetts, "George Eumorfopolous", in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 2 (April 1940), p. 255. Archaeological discoveries as the result of railway building is something that continues to this day. See for example "Pictures: Lifelike 'Wet Mummy' Found During Roadbuilding", in *National Geographic* (12 March 2011). <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2011/03/pictures/110310-wet-mummy-china-ming-science-mummies-tomb-chinese-road/> Accessed 09.03.2016.

⁴⁵See for example a quotation from the introduction to a 1910 exhibition catalogue written by C. H. Read (1857–1929): "...[an] influx of hitherto little-known specimens is mainly due to the making of railways in China..." in Stacey Pierson, *Collectors, Collections and Museums: The Field of Chinese Ceramics in Britain 1560–1960* (Oxford, 2007), p. 90. "Today in certain progressive districts one sees the actual removal of graves to make way for roadbuilding", in A. Viola Smith, "China Makes Way for the Motor", in *The China Weekly Review* (11 May 1929), p. 455.

catalogue of his collection of Chinese Bronze Mirrors—examples of such grave goods—Todd himself mentions that he usually purchased them in areas far from the metropolises of Beijing and Shanghai, as he understandably thought that examples acquired outside these commercialised areas would be less likely to have been forged or faked.⁴⁶ Contrary to standard archaeological practice, possibly because they were bought from third-party dealers, no indication is given in the catalogue as to where each mirror was unearthed, although, in the introduction to the book it is noted that most were purchased in the provinces of Shanxi, Shaanxi and Henan. Historically, Han-dynasty-style mirrors are known to have been unearthed in Guizhou,⁴⁷ albeit in fewer numbers than in more northerly provinces, but it seems from his catalogue that none were purchased by Todd during the time he was there. Todd's collection of bronze mirrors can be seen in the "Oliver Todd Memorial Collection" at the University of Michigan Museum of Art.

Zhou Xicheng's plans for Guiyang City

For many years there has been some controversy as to where the Guizhou Auto Dollar was minted, some suggesting that it was most likely produced in neighbouring Sichuan province where there was already an established mint.⁴⁸ This has been refuted by Qian Cunhao who through his research was able to identify the actual location of the mint in Guizhou.⁴⁹ The original Guizhou mint, which preceded the later institution by two hundred years, was established in 1730, and produced coins until the time of the Guangxu Emperor (r.1874/5–1908). The scant information available in the secondary sources as to the subsequent history of the mint, has led to much uncertainty—largely because it was commonly thought that there was no mint in Guizhou at the time the Auto Dollar was produced.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, even from the writings of O. J. Todd in the 1920s, it can be seen that Governor Zhou Xicheng certainly had plans for the construction of a local mint as part of his grand scheme for the modernisation of Guiyang, capital of Guizhou.⁵¹ Decades later Qian Cunhao was able to convincingly show that the planned mint did come into being, and was indeed the very same factory that produced the Auto Dollar. In his article, relying heavily on documentary sources, but principally on eye-witness accounts, Qian sets out to challenge the assumptions of many previous authors, showing that Zhou Xicheng's plans for a mint did indeed come to fruition (albeit not as a full-scale facility), and persuasively demonstrating that the Auto Dollar was minted using the machinery and facilities of Zhou's recently established arsenal under the supervision of specialist technicians brought in from Sichuan.⁵²

⁴⁶Rupert T. Milan and O. J. Todd, *Chinese Bronze Mirrors: A Study Based on the Todd Collection of 1,000 Bronze Mirrors Found in the Five Northern Provinces of Suiyuan, Shensi, Shansi, Honan and Hopei, China* (Peiping, 1935), pp. i–ii.

⁴⁷Xu Pingfang, "The Formation of the Empire by the Qin and Han Dynasties and the Unification of China", in Chang, Kwang-chih et al., *The Formation of Chinese Civilization: An Archaeological Perspective* (New Haven, 2005).

⁴⁸See also Eduard Kann, *Illustrated Catalog of Chinese Coins (Gold, Silver, Nickel and Aluminium)* (Los Angeles, 1954), pp. 261–263.

⁴⁹Qian Cunhao, "Guizhou qiche yinbi zhudi kao ("The Minting of the Motor Dollar of Guizhou")", in *Zhongguo qianbi lun wenji (di er ji)* (Beijing: Zhongguo jinrong chubanshe, 1992), pp. 401–404.

⁵⁰George S. Cuhaj (ed.), *Standard Catalogue of World Coins – 1801–1900* (Iola, Wisconsin, 2012).

⁵¹O. J. Todd, *Two Decades in China: comprising technical papers, magazine articles, newspaper stories and official reports connected with work under his own observation* (Taipei, 1971), p. 246, originally published in *Asia* (January 1929).

⁵²Qian Cunhao, "Guizhou qiche yinbi zhudi kao ("The Minting of the Motor Dollar of Guizhou")", in *Zhongguo qianbi lun wenji (di er ji)* (Beijing, 1992), pp. 401–404.

Zhou Xicheng had great plans for the improvement of the city of Guiyang and despite the charge that he was building roads for personal gain, as suggested by Lin Xin, it was not only with road construction and the minting of a coin that Zhou sought to raise the profile of Guiyang. In the January 1929 issue of *Asia* it is reported that during the previous year Zhou had made improvements to the town—which would indeed have been of benefit to him, but would also no doubt have contributed greatly to the development of the province in general. These included: carrying out street improvements, providing a water supply system, and the building of a cement plant.⁵³ Zhou was also responsible for the supply of electricity to the Guiyang *yamen*, which was part of a larger street lighting and electricity project, and this was to be recognised as one of his major achievements.⁵⁴ Other projects, perhaps less humanitarian in their aim, include the establishment of the Guizhou arsenal, and the commissioning of a type of rifle that took his name—the *Xicheng shi buqiang* 西成式步槍 (Xicheng-type rifle). It was the very existence of this arsenal, and the machinery that was already available there, that made the minting of the Auto Dollar possible.

Zhou carries out the wishes of Sun Yat-sen

Zhou was widely recognised as a strong military leader and it was his ruthless nature as a former “bandit chief” that apparently allowed for the transition of the province, in just two years, from “a state of disruption into comparative order and calm”.⁵⁵

Remembering the dreams of Sun Yat-sen, and his apparently hair-brained scheme to build roads collectively “as if by a magic wand”,⁵⁶ it can be seen that Zhou appeared to be successfully putting into practice some of Sun’s ideas with regard to the use of manpower in road construction. As recognised by Todd:

“...the Governor Chow [Zhou] proved to the great farming community, the shopkeepers and the ‘carry coolies’ through the province that a renaissance was taking place. With everybody else working, why should they object to doing their share? When the plans were perfected, the governor issued an order to all magistrates along the line of the new road. Each must build a stretch of road before rice planting, the work to be divided fairly among all men in the country. Fifty thousand men were to be put to work in the early part of 1927. None refused. It was a tax that must be paid...”⁵⁷

Such methods are no doubt rightly described in one source as “those of an eastern despot”⁵⁸ but, with the responsibility to build a share of the road falling to individual magistrates (or to individual families according to another source),⁵⁹ there is a certain resonance, not only with

⁵³Todd, *Two Decades in China*, p. 246, originally published in *Asia* (January 1929).

⁵⁴Ding Daoqian, “Lun Zhou Xicheng”, in *Guizhou minyi* (“The Peoples [sic] Opinion of Kwichow [sic] Monthly”) vol. IV no. 3 (Guiyang, 1948), pp. 16–17.

⁵⁵*The North-China Herald* (26 May 1928), p. 328. A bronze statue was erected in his honour following his death in 1929, but was removed in 1952, not long after the founding of the People’s Republic of China; by this time such reminders of the “old society” and the warlord era of the 1920s were something that the new government thought best forgotten. Two photographs of this statue can be seen in “Phases of the Generalissimo’s Tour of Western China”, in *The North-China Herald* (5 June 1935), p. 371.

⁵⁶Sun Yat-sen, *The International Development of China* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1920), pp. 151–152.

⁵⁷Todd, *Two Decades in China*, p. 247, originally published in *Asia* (January 1929).

⁵⁸*The North-China Herald* (26 May 1928), p. 328.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*,

more general collective systems such as the *Baojia* system, and ancient methods of work distribution and corvée labour used throughout Chinese history, but clearly also with those methods advocated by Sun Yat-sen himself in his 1920 call for the reconstruction of China:

“...If we divide the million miles of roads by the four hundred million people, we shall have one mile to every hundred. For one hundred people to build one mile of road is not a very difficult task to accomplish”.⁶⁰

Zhou Xicheng's demise

Returning to the coin itself, in his 1954 study, Eduard Kann, numismatist, collector and author of many influential studies, goes into some detail concerning its physical appearance. He identifies some subtle variations in design when pointing to the existence of several different types: the *shaocao* 少草 (scant vegetation) type and the *maocao* 茂草 (dense vegetation) type; those with “dots” on the bonnet of the car and those without.⁶¹ These variations are discussed by him in some detail:

“In classifying the deviations of the Kwei-Chow [Guizhou] motor car dollar, one finds a group where the ventilator is depicted by lines curved at the top. Beneath the horizontal line on which the car rests, in the southeastern corner, one sees 2 parallel blades of grass. This is the ordinary type. The other group, which is not met with so often, shows the ventilator depicted with straight lines, each ending with a dot on the top of the line. There are other deviations to be discovered, as minor differences in style of the Chinese ideograms and a number of varieties in the size of the wheel, the windows, the caps, the spare tire [*sic*] and the fenders...”⁶²

Such design details, so important to coin collectors and numismatists, were also crucial to the way the coin was seen by the people of Guizhou and, according to local beliefs, may even have had direct consequences for Zhou's future.

One problem with which the builders of railways in the nineteenth century and the builders of roads in the 1920s had to cope with, was the reconciliation of local beliefs with the destruction of the countryside brought about by such large construction projects, and this was an issue with which Zhou also had to contend. In common with remote, and not so remote provinces, Guizhou had its fair share of local customs that may have had an impact on the planning of large-scale building projects. According to one suggestion, local beliefs—apparently considered “superstitious” by Zhou Xicheng—posed as an obstacle for his road building plans. Todd suggests that Zhou believed in “abolishing superstition” and had punished one “influential man”, in Guiyang for “trying to invoke *feng-shui* (the ‘wind-water’ powers) to interfere in road making”.⁶³ This is all very well, but other reports suggest that Zhou was, on the contrary, “a great believer in portents and such arts as physiognomy” and even practiced geomancy himself.⁶⁴ Two examples of his close engagement with geomancy mentioned in *The North-China Herald*, are worthy of note. First, he is said to have

⁶⁰Sun Yat-sen, *The International Development of China* (Shanghai, 1920), pp. 151–152.

⁶¹Liao Yangming 廖扬名, *Zhongguo yinyuan tuji* 中国银元图集 (An Illustrated Catalogue of Chinese Silver Yuan) (Tianjin, 2008), p. 135. Both examples in the British Museum collection are of the “scant grass” variety.

⁶²Eduard Kann, *Illustrated Catalog of Chinese Coins (Gold, Silver, Nickel and Aluminium)*, pp. 261–262.

⁶³Todd, *Two Decades in China*, p. 246, originally published in *Asia* (January 1929).

⁶⁴*The North-China Herald* (26 May 1928), p. 328.

chosen the site of his mother's grave according to "his own ideas of 'feng-shui'", and secondly, that on the discovery of two large snakes in a temple wall (after it was demolished to make way for a road) Zhou apparently "gave orders for the serpents to be worshipped" and for a temple to be built in their honour.⁶⁵ It is not clear who should be believed on the question of his beliefs; perhaps such contradictory evidence might even be the result of the practitioners of two or more contending geomantic schools disagreeing amongst themselves. The possibilities for contending schools in Guizhou are many; in addition to the geomancers and Daoist priests in the Guiyang area, there were also shaman from various indigenous groups, including the Dong, Hmong and Yao.⁶⁶ Owing to the vast number of possibilities that present themselves here it is difficult to decide just who the local *fengshui* priests advising Zhou might have been. It is certainly no surprise, though, that in newspaper reports such identification is not seen as a priority; contemporary journalists preferring instead to refer to such figures as "native priests" or "soothsayers". It was apparently not the case that Zhou Xicheng was inherently against geomancy and local customs, but that he simply chose to ignore the warnings of "soothsayers" with whom he did not agree, or whose advice did not accord with "his own ideas" of *fengshui*.⁶⁷ The 1933 report, "'Motor-Car' Dollar which brought Bad Luck to Kweichow General" suggests that such anonymous "soothsayers" had predicted Zhou's death as a result of the production of the coin. They prophesied that it was Zhou's ill-judged decision to include an image of the car on the coin, together with his name inscribed in Chinese characters below that was to be the very reason for his demise.⁶⁸ If one examines the coin carefully, it is indeed the case that stylised forms of the Chinese characters for his name, *xi* 西 and *cheng* 成, can be seen concealed amongst the vegetation depicted on the coin.⁶⁹

"General Chow [Zhou] failed to reckon with the sooth-sayers or native priests, who immediately whispered it about among the superstitious that the placing of the characters for Gen. Chow's name under the picture of the automobile could have no other significance than the violent demise of Gen. Chow in an automobile accident".⁷⁰

According to this report, it was specifically because Zhou asked for his name to appear on the coin, and that it appeared there lying in the undergrowth, that the "soothsayers" believed he would lose his life.

Zhou's apparent efforts to distance himself from the warlord regime, to avert political misfortune, and perhaps even to show a degree of humility, by not including his own image on the coin—choosing instead to depict a detailed image of his car—apparently backfired and led directly to his demise. Zhou lost his life in battle on 22 May 1929, fighting against a

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁶ There are said to be more than 12 indigenous ethnic minority groups in Guizhou Province. See 孟筑敏 Meng Zhumin *et al.* (eds.) *Guizhou sheng dili* 贵州省地理 (The Geography of Guizhou Province) (Guizhou, 1990), pp. 136–137.

⁶⁷ *The North-China Herald* (26 May 1928), p. 328.

⁶⁸ "'Motor-Car' Dollar which Brought Bad Luck to Kweichow General", in *The China Weekly Review* (November 11, 1933), p. 450.

⁶⁹ *The China Weekly Review* (11 November 1933), p. 450. The characters can be seen in both the "scant vegetation" and "dense vegetation" versions of the coin. See Liao Yangming, *Zhongguo yinyuan tuji*, p. 135.

⁷⁰ "'Motor-Car' Dollar which Brought Bad Luck to Kweichow General", in *The China Weekly Review* (November 11, 1933), p. 450.

representative of the Nationalist Government who had been ordered to bring Guizhou into line following Zhou's support for the New Guangxi Clique that opposed Chiang Kai-shek's authority.⁷¹ Concerning the last moments of Zhou's life, the 1933 article in *The China Weekly Review* presents the tragi-comic vision of Zhou in his car—now serving as a military vehicle—charging into battle. We can imagine him speeding along, brandishing the sabre he wore as part of his formal dress, and leaning out through the window in a manner reminiscent of the keystone cops.

Evidently it really was his beloved car that was to be his undoing. This car, the symbol of his part in the Good Road Movement and in famine relief, was so important to him that he had it depicted on a commemorative coin “as a means of popularising the doctrine of good roads”.⁷² The car performed its role as a military vehicle a little too well, as, on charging the enemy, his infantrymen were left far behind.⁷³ The not so comic vision of Zhou surrounded by his enemy, failing to make an escape, overpowered and left to drown in the reedy marshland in front of his car, had been inadvertently recorded on the coin by order of Zhou himself, and had become nothing less than a premonition of his own death.⁷⁴ <pb24@soas.ac.uk>

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⁷¹For more information on this see Meng Zhumin 孟筑敏 *et al.* (ed.), *Guizhou junfa shi* 贵州军阀史 (A History of Warlordism in Guizhou) (Guiyang, 1987), pp. 232–267. It is interesting, and perhaps important, to note that in this account there is no mention whatsoever of Zhou Xicheng's car or of the Guizhou Auto Dollar.

⁷²“Motor-Car’ Dollar which Brought Bad Luck to Kweichow General”, in *The China Weekly Review* (11 November 1933), p. 450.

⁷³*Ibid.*

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

- Meng Zhumin 孟筑敏 *et al.* (eds.), *Guizhou junfa shi* 贵州军阀史 (A History of Warlordism in Guizhou) (Guiyang, Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1987).
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