



## THE JAPANESE PHOENIX COLLECTION

**A mysterious hoard of Japanese World War II banknotes and specimens has re-emerged after more than seventy years, challenging collectors, dealers and researchers worldwide.**

**T**he mystery began in Japan soon after World War II. For the first time in history, Japan had been occupied by foreign powers. The country was in a state of ruin, people were starving and the country was facing severe inflation.

General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) oversaw the demilitarisation and restoration of Japan's economy. SCAP was the title held by MacArthur, but in Japan, SCAP also referred to the offices of the occupation forces. MacArthur was not initially tasked for monetary reform in Japan. His directive stated "You will not assume any responsibility for the economic rehabilitation of Japan or the strengthening of the Japanese economy." As the occupation was prolonged and Japan was facing higher inflation – they were literally printing money for trade – SCAP was obliged to assist.

MacArthur had already formed a close relationship with Japan and was revered by Emperor Hirohito and the Japanese people. SCAP staff were appointed to oversee monetary reform in the finance division working with staff from the Bank of Japan. Lt. Colonel David H. Jennings was part of this team, holding the title of Deputy Chief, Finance Division, Economic and Scientific Section, General Headquarters, Supreme

Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), Tokyo (1945–1948). Col. Jennings formed a close relationship with Japanese staff including Japan's Minister for Finance, Tokutaro Kitamura.

In a letter to Col. Jennings on completion of his service, the minister wrote:

*"... It is indeed a great loss for us to be left without the assistance and advice of one who was so well acquainted with and friendly to our country ... I hope you have well enjoyed your sojourn in Japan and will come back some time to renew our most genial relations with you ..."*

It is humbling to read such a sincere letter from a Japanese minister to an American Colonel in occupied Japan soon after World War II and shows the close bond that was formed.

In 1945, Mr Yamamoto of Bank of Japan, gave two American gentlemen concerned with monetary reform at the time, sets of specimen notes that had been used for exhibition or discretionary use of the Bank of Japan.

One set was accounted for and possibly formed part of *The Japanese Destiny Collection* which was auctioned by Lyn Knight Auctions in 2013. Due to privacy considerations, the vendor's details are not available.



*Letters from The Phoenix Collection.*

The second set remained a mystery until recently. It is believed that Col. Jennings was a recipient of the second set, the collection that is now referred to as *The Japanese Phoenix Collection*.

### **“Christmas Greetings from The Land of the Setting Sun”**

On 25 December 1946, Col. Jennings sent a bundle of banknotes and specimens from Tokyo back home to his parents in San Francisco.

His accompanying letter opens with “*Christmas Greetings from The Land of the Setting Sun*”, a play on words to describe Japan’s decline and the end of an era, soon after the war. Restrictions were placed on flying the ‘Rising Sun’ flag in occupied Japan, effectively making Japan ‘The Land of the Setting Sun’.

He wrote: “... *The Nips, being optimists, had ready sufficient currency of foreign design to finance their occupation efforts in the Philippines, Dutch Indies, Australia, all of China ... we thought you may like to see some of their handiwork ...*”

According to his letter, he was going to send more notes at a later date.

### **Phoenix Collection**

For more than seventy years, the hoard of notes was hidden and had become somewhat of a legend between dealers and researchers.

Dr Norman Jacobs, leading researcher of Japanese numismatics and author of *Japanese*

*Coinage*, 1972, was stationed in Japan as part of SCAP, although not in the finance division. Dr Jacobs had heard rumours of the mysterious hoard and spent years trying to trace the whereabouts. He contacted Mr Yamamoto of Bank of Japan and he did not remember the actual names of the recipients and had no record of the sets. Dr Jacobs then tracked down an ex-SCAP staff member, who was at that stage working at the Bank of Washington. He gave Dr Jacobs the lead he needed, suggesting that Col. Jennings could have been the recipient of one of the elusive sets. Dr Jacobs located Jennings’ home address and wrote a few letters but it would appear his letters were left unanswered. At that stage Col. Jennings had already passed away. It is unknown whether Dr Jacobs realised that he was on the right track as his further requests to Jennings’ wife, specifically regarding the set of notes, appear to have been left unanswered. Dr Jacobs passed away in 2004.

Col. Jennings’ collection has recently re-emerged in the U.S. – the notes that are now referred to as *The Japanese Phoenix Collection*. The Phoenix being reborn and arising up from the ashes is the connotation that is associated with this significant collection.

It provides an important record of paper money produced by Japan in World War II including Japanese occupation and Axis-aligned money. The sets having been sent out of Japan, may have been the only reason they have survived.

On first inspection, the hoard doesn't appear to be entirely of Japanese origin but on closer investigation, all of the notes were printed in Japan for use in World War II including *occupation, invasion, security* and Axis-aligned banknotes.

The *Phoenix* collection includes some high quality notes, some rare and later edition printing and prefixed notes as well as specimen varieties that don't appear to have been fully documented until now.

When the *Phoenix* collection re-emerged in 2017, it comprised:

- Approximately 160 various notes and specimens (multiple copies of some, approximately 30 different specimen types) plus a total of 26 specimen notes taken from the four bundles below.
- Approximately 160 x Japanese 10 yen China Hei (3rd) series - specimens.
- Approximately 160 x Japanese 100 yen China Hei (3rd) series - specimens.
- Approximately 160 x Japanese 100 yen French Indochina 'Ro' series - specimens.
- Approximately 160 x Japanese 100 yen 'Bo' type, China (possibly south China) - specimens.

The main collection which includes notes from each of the four bundles remained as a set in 2017 and the four bundles were sold to different buyers.

### The *Phoenix* difference

A number of the notes in the collection are very rare and in some cases undocumented to the best of the author's knowledge.



#### Burma - State Bank

100 kyat - Block (1) - 1944  
Specimen. Mihon left and right on face.  
*Extremely rare specimen variety.*

The *Phoenix* collection includes banknotes and specimens for occupied and Axis-aligned territories in World War II including: Burma, China, French Indochina, Malaya, Netherlands East Indies, Oceania, Philippines and Thailand.



#### Netherlands East Indies

1 cent - Block S/GR - 1942. *Extremely rare block.*



#### Philippines - Japanese Government

10 pesos - Block (54) Serial 0436085 - 1943  
Specimen. Mihon left and right on face.  
*Unique, undocumented specimen variety.*



#### Malaya 1000 dollars Block MA (Straight-sided 'M')

Mihon left and right on face.  
*Unique undocumented specimen variety.*



#### Thailand

50 satang - Block 40R - Series five - 1942  
Specimen. Mihon left and right on face.



### China - Central Reserve Bank of China

100000 yüan  
 Serial <sup>C</sup>/<sub>B</sub> 645402 <sup>H</sup>/<sub>V</sub> 1945  
 Specimen. Mihon left and right on face.  
*Undocumented specimen variety.*



### China - Hei (3) Series

100 yen - Revised Hei (3) - 1945  
 Specimen. Mihon left and right on face and back.  
 Gunpyou (military note).



### China (possibly southern China) - Bo (5) Series

10 yen - Block (0) Serial 000000 - 1940  
 Specimen. Mihon left and right on face.



### French Indochina - Banque De L'Indochine

5 Piastres - Block (W) - 1944  
 Specimen. Mihon left and right on face with 'Specimen' in English script on face and back.  
*Extremely rare specimen variety.*

Since the recent discovery, debate has raged between experts in the U.S., Australia, France and Japan. Even the most experienced numismatic researchers that have viewed some of the notes had never seen some specimen varieties.

The main point of difference with the notes is with the specimens carrying two *mihons* on the face. Several of the notes have never been seen in this format before. They may have been prepared as specimens for use in the field, such as banks and exchanges in World War II or possibly for a different purpose. It is the author's belief that they were prepared as a record of the various banknotes Japan was printing in World War II and were gifted to Col. Jennings whilst stationed in Japan between 1945–48. He may have also added other notes from his time in Japan as some appear to be printer's rejects and higher quality examples may not have been available at the time.

It's wonderful to discover that after seventy years there are still new notes being uncovered. A full catalogue of *The Japanese Phoenix Collection*, featuring all note varieties is being assembled and will be available in the near future.

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