

### Chinese 'hell banknote'

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The Collection's numismatic collections contain many examples of rare and important coins and tokens from Britain and across the world, from the Iron Age to the modern day. The collections are more than simply examples of legal tender, however, and aim to demonstrate the ways in which the concept of money has been used by different cultures right up to the modern day.

This Chinese banknote is not legal tender and was made only very recently. It is, however, indicative of Chinese beliefs surrounding the afterlife and a central element of important annual festivals.

The banknote was collected in Chengdu, in China's south-western Sichuan province, and is made of joss paper. Notes such as this are burned by families at their ancestors' gravesides throughout the year, but particularly at the festivals of 'Ching Ming' ('Festival of Pure Brightness') and 'Gui Jie' ('Festival of Hungry Ghosts'). The Chinese belief is that the spirits of the dead go to a form of limbo, but where money is still required to purchase goods. In order to ensure that the ancestors are being provided for the banknotes are burned, often in large quantities, while saying the names of items that could be purchased with them.

This banknote is based on a Hong Kong note, and displays noticeably western imagery. The figure on the right is the 'Jade Emperor', the supreme deity with responsibility for the afterlife. The concept of 'hell' does not translate directly into Chinese belief, but the word became associated with the afterlife after Christian missionaries arrived in China in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

