

## **The Question of Gold and Coin in the Legal System of the Qin Dynasty – A Study on the Yuelu Qin Slips and Liye Qin Slips**

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### **Abstract**

In the laws of the Qin dynasty, we can see a system of rewards and punishments related to property like “Redemption Punishment” 贖刑, “Imposition Punishment” 貲刑, “Gold Reward” 購金 and “Coin Reward” 購錢. Of these, “Redemption Punishment”, “Imposition Punishment” and “Gold Reward” use gold as the accounting unit. This gives the impression that the Qin dynasty took gold as a primary currency, because there are several deficiencies within copper coins. Aside from being used as the accounting unit in the legal texts concerning punishment and reward, however, gold is nowhere to be found; it does not appear within the texts concerning financial and accounting regulations. Instead, copper coin appears in all the places where we would expect gold to be. That some of these copper coins resulted from exchanging gold at a certain rate is undeniable, but given these conditions, it would be hard to say that the Qin government used gold as a preferred medium of exchange. The amount of a “Coin Reward” could be based on two sources: the first is an exchange with gold, and the second is directly specified by the law text. The amounts imposed by these two sources are quite different for the same legal offense; this might indicate the Qin government was trying to intensify enforcement of its laws after unification. Moreover, the amounts

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involved in reward and punishment did not change in the early Han dynasty even after dramatic changes in the currency system. This might be the result of the Han government nominally continuing its support of copper coins (*ban liang Qian*). Such phenomena primarily demonstrate the important status of copper coins in actual legal practice; gold had a more nominal existence in law. However, this article does not dispute the circulation of gold in the Qin and Han period, but it appears that the quantity of gold and the frequency of its circulation were not nearly so high as has been imagined. This might give us an entry point to explain the important issue of excess gold in the Han dynasty.

Keywords: Gold Rewards, Coin Rewards, imposition of coin, Imposition Punishment, Redemption Punishment