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# Time to abolish Hong Kong's irritating, useless small coins

**H**ong Kong still has its own currency, and that position is legally mandated to continue for fully 50 years after the handover in 1997. But some of our coins are of such low value as to be practically useless, and an irritation to boot. I am thinking here of our 10-cent, 20c and 50c coins. I wonder if anybody these days really bothers to count out their change in such absurdly small denominations.

Hong Kong's taxi drivers, often a law unto themselves, seem to have adopted a general policy of avoidance so far as this coinage is concerned. Many a local taxi driver will not proffer the 50c change if you pass him, say, HK\$33 for a metered fare of HK\$32.50. But if you offer him only HK\$32, he is sure to insist on receiving the rest owing! A penny for your thoughts on what these taxi drivers actually do with all these tiny coins, because they invariably claim to have no change if small coins are due in repayment to a passenger.

Since many local passengers are willing enough to add a little tip to the fare, especially when handing such truly trifling amounts, few would bother with change below HK\$1 anyway. But it would surely be better, and easier, for all concerned were the taxi meter to be re-adjusted to click up in round dollar figures, each time.

I was amused to be travelling with a foreign lady recently, who with a flourish told the taxi driver that he was most welcome to keep the mere 50 cents in change. The response I expected from him, a sarcastic thank you, instead turned out to be a foul language encouragement for this generous Lady Bountiful to be on her way!

Then there are the public transport fares, ending in minimal amounts of odd cents. While it is all very well, and very easy, for passengers to pay by the use of Hong Kong's super-efficient Octopus pre-paid card system, those remaining folk who still cough up the fare in cash must be mightily irritated by having to scrape through a pocket or purse for that irritating extra 10c or so. Why not round the fare into dollars only? Doubtless they are more likely to be rounded up than rounded down, but such moves would certainly reduce the need for these coins of exceedingly low value to be used — or even to exist.

I suspect that the costs of producing these cute, well designed and tiny little coins of values under a Hong Kong dollar are rather higher than their face value. If so, all the more reason to discontinue their use, as our government is wasting money by continuing to produce them.

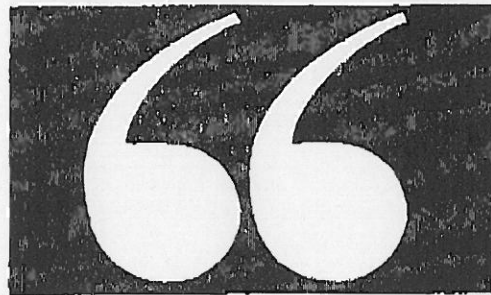
Clever shopkeepers the world over are keen to offer a supposed bargain at \$99 or the like, which to most of us looks to be much cheaper than a rounded-up figure of \$100. Some of the meaner merchants even have the check to grasp a few more cents from us gullible consumers, by quoting their "bargain" at something like \$99.8. It seems that many of us may be "penny wise, pound foolish!"

These coins worth less than a dollar that are still in



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circulation in Hong Kong can be a nuisance to get rid of. They are often discarded, in quantity, as tips in restaurants or in church collection boxes. I know several people who carry around what they call "tip bags" of such otherwise useless little coins, plus others of slightly higher value, specifically to be able to offload them as gratuities whenever the chance comes. What else could you possibly do with piles of such almost valueless small coins, unwillingly collected in your change as you shop?

I am always delighted to be invited by friends to visit a family home where piggy banks are kept by the children. They make a great place to pass along handfuls of these little coins, along with the odd banknote or two. In fact, young children seem to be the only ones who really welcome receiving these mini coins. Most adults pointedly eschew them. So why have them in circulation in this wealthy city of Hong Kong at all?

It is high time for Hong Kong's lowest-value coin to become HK\$1, and for all prices here to be quoted only in round dollar figures. In reality, rounding up is what often occurs anyway, given the chance. So why not make it official, and say goodbye to these little coins? They should be withdrawn and consigned to history forthwith — saving us many pointless hassles.

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