

Asiatic Echoes:

The Identification of Ancient Chinese Pictograms in pre-Columbian North American Rock Writing

Supplemental Report #3

ANCIENT AMERICAN CHINESE ROCK WRITING DEFINES THE LUNAR MONTH

by

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In this study a unique set of ancient Chinese petroglyphs located in the Mojave Desert of southern California is analyzed and deciphered. Collectively these images preserve the account of an ancient astronomical message defining the monthly lunar cycle as the sum of three 10-day periods. Epigraphic and statistical analysis of these images informs us that literate Chinese were indeed present in North America approximately 2500 years ago, and that some of the 3-ringed concentric circle rock art patterns found in the American Southwest, and also around the world, may represent the set of three 10-day weeks employed in ancient times to describe a lunar month. Curiously, long ago both the Chinese and Native Americans embraced such a calendric system. Collectively, this set of archaic petroglyphs preserves a demonstrable record of an early Chinese trans-Pacific exchange of intellectual property.

Evidence of Early Trans-Pacific Contact

For over 250 years the possibility of an early trans-Pacific interaction between Asian and North American populations has been debated. As early as the middle of the 18th century the theory was set forth by the renowned scholar Joseph deGuignes as he reflected upon the mounting secondary evidence in support of such an event. A century later the writings of Charles Leland, Edward Vining, and Alexander von Humboldt all gave voice to the likelihood of early trans-Pacific crossings based upon both historical and nautical data. More recently, genetic analyses of both animal and plant species have provided conclusive scientific evidence for the early movement of both people and biologicals across the Pacific (Sorenson and Johannessen: 2004).

Recently, examples of long extinct styles of ancient Chinese writing have been found pecked upon the rocks and boulders of North America, confirming early trans-Pacific interactions as historical events. (Ruskamp, 2018). Importantly, these ancient writings have conclusively been shown to be real artifacts and are not modern specious fabrications. And, as knowledge of the most ancient forms of Chinese script appearing in these recordings was lost to mankind following the fall of the Shang Dynasty in 1046 BC, and recovered only recently beginning in AD 1899 near Anyang, China, these recordings remained forgotten, overlooked, unstudied, and pristine for millennia. Significantly, the levels of repatination evident upon these marks, located at multiple incongruent sites over 700 miles apart, confirm that these scripts are considerably older than a mere 120 years.

One particularly evocative argument that has been set forth as suggestive of an early trans-Pacific intellectual exchange is the fact that both ancient Native American and Asiatic people utilized three weekly 10-day periods to mark the moon's monthly rotation around the earth (Zeilik 1986). Additionally, 10-day weeks were also employed in ancient Egypt, and briefly during the French Revolution. However, the dearth of demonstrable physical evidence to support the theory of a calendrical paradigm being transmitted from one population to another, and that it was not independently developed on both sides of the ocean, has left the idea as little more than a curious historical sidebar.

Defining the Lunar Month

In late 2015 a research study being conducted in the Mojave Desert of southern California came upon a previously overlooked large boulder embellished with two ancient Chinese script petroglyphs in a small canyon otherwise embroidered with a plethora of archaic Chinese scripts (Figure 1).



Figure 1.

The ancient Chinese rock writing defining a lunar month

Ancient Chinese writings typically read from top to bottom and from right to left. Employing this paradigm to understand the symbols on this boulder reveals that the first two of these images are well-understood ancient Chinese scripts. However, deciphering the implied meaning of the third image upon this boulder, a set of three concentric circles, is problematic as this is a common rock art pattern found at sites around the world. When viewed as stand-alone items concentric circles are typically very difficult to interpret with certainty. Fortunately, in this instance the tri-partite circular symbol was

intentionally placed below two clearly readable Chinese scripts, revealing its meaning and the lunar aspects of the symbol.

At the top of this boulder the ancient author began recording his message by pecking into the surface an illustration (pictogram) of the figure “D,” the antique symbol employed by the early Chinese for their word Yuè, meaning “moon” and also signifying “month” (Houston 2004). Although similar figures of the moon are still in everyday use, viewed in the context of this singular rock writing, and with a readable ancient Chinese character inscribed below it, this D-like symbol is understood as the first word of a larger informative statement.

Beneath the symbol for the moon this ancient author placed another identifiable Chinese script, the archaic symbol of Shí, meaning “a period of time” (Figure 2). Importantly, the multifaceted elements of this character are helpful for its decipherment as Shí is a compound symbol composed of three sub-elements.

The script begins at the top with the symbol of a plant (Ma 2019) underscored by a single horizontal line representing the “ground.” At the side of these two depictions the ancient author drew a divided rectangle which is understood as the Chinese script for the Sun, Rì (Song 2019). Viewed collectively these three pictograms form the unique archaic Chinese ideogram Shí, meaning “a period of time” (Chen 2019).



Petroglyphs forming the symbol Shí



Image: Wilder & Ingram

Figure 2.

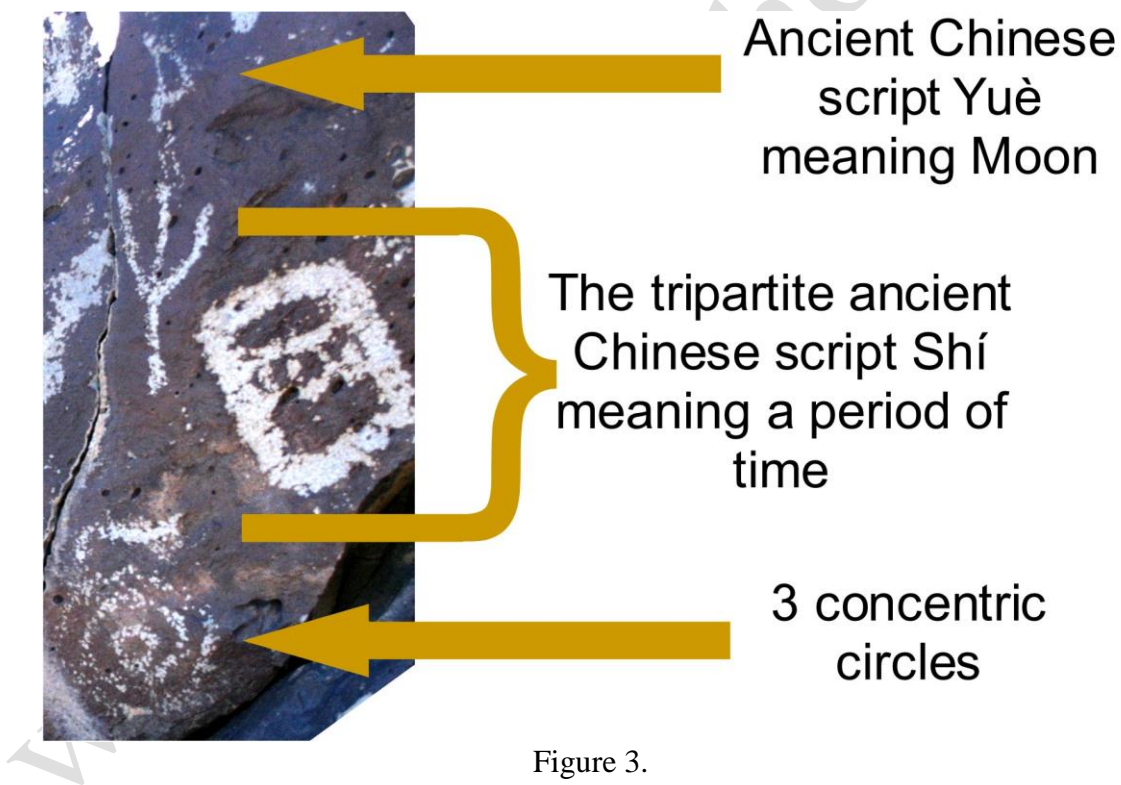
As noted above, images of the moon and patterns of three concentric circles such as are portrayed on this boulder are common rock art designs. However, here the ancient author’s intentional placement of the readable multi-element Chinese script symbol of Shí between these two symbols provides a literary context for translating this set of images. Importantly, the ancient Chinese script symbol Shí has a complex form that is unknown to have been employed outside of China, so both the age and source of this character are understood by its unique design.

Worldwide rock art enthusiasts have encountered great difficulty in explaining the exact meaning of patterns of concentric circles. For instance, in *Rock Art Symbols of the Greater Southwest* concentric

circles are unfortunately defined as “concentric circles” (Patterson 1992). Other authors in the field of rock writing have set forth equally uncertain definitions for these circular patterns. They have been described as: “ ... visual stimuli associated with altered states of consciousness” (Hedges 1981); footprints of the Hopi god Maasaw (Stephen 1940); or reflecting the ability of a shaman to travel between the upper and middle worlds (Edberg 1985). Unfortunately, such interpretations as these fail to provide insight into the meaning of any given concentric circle pattern, although it is a frequent rock art depiction.

Informatively, in this desert setting the readability of the two ancient Chinese scripts located above the three circles pecked into this boulder provide a contextual setting for deciphering the pattern, at least in this instance. Subsequently, learning the meaning of the 3-ring concentric circles at this site may prove useful for understanding similar images at other locations, especially in the American Southwest. With the moon above and the symbol Shí positioned between the moon and the lower depiction of three concentric circles the meaning of the entire message can be logically deciphered.

Beginning with the symbol of the moon, and then reading down, the first two ancient Chinese scripts in this message form the phrase Yuè Shí which may be translated as “Moon, period of time... .”



Continuing to read below this defining phrase, as Chinese is read from top to bottom, the three concentric circles located below Yuè and Shí remind us of the three 10-day weekly cycles employed for keeping time in ancient China, and importantly in pre-Columbian America. Therefore, the complete message preserved by these rock writings inform us that “(the) Moon’s period of time (is) three cycles.” To state this more clearly, “the lunar month is composed of three 10-day periods.”

DISCUSSION

To correctly decipher and interpret ancient Chinese writing it is important to note that prior to the era of the Qin dynasty (221-206 BC) the forms of the scripts used for writing were unregulated (Norman 1988). Lacking standardization authors often wrote in their own styles much as today our personal signatures reflect our uniquely individual preferences. The world renown sinologist David N. Keightley notes that “One of the major difficulties in deciphering early inscriptions derives precisely from this ‘looseness’...” (Sennner 1989). Hence, variation in symbols was a common element of early Chinese writing (Galambos 2006).

Generating written symbols on a rock surface and in a desert-wilderness is a substantially different experience than what was involved in creating the early Chinese written record. Pecking patterns of scripts into hard rock, often basalt, involved applying different tools, techniques, and expenditures of energy than those required for placing a pen to paper, inscribing a symbol upon a bone, or for casting an image into an ancient bronze vessel. While the representative scripts preserved in ancient Chinese lexicons were assembled from the styles of writing employed by the scholars of a bygone era, the rock writings analyzed in this study were created by individuals of unknown levels of literacy and upon a different medium. Consequently, variations between the styles of the ancient Chinese scripts created in these different settings are to be anticipated.

Importantly, following the fall of China's Shang Dynasty in 1046 BC the forms and meanings of oracle bone scripts such as the Shí figure described above fell into disuse and obscurity. Ultimately these forms were eliminated from human memory, that is, until examples of these symbols were rediscovered near Anyang, China in AD 1899 and subsequently deciphered.

The shared elements of such a uniquely extinct system of writing by two widely disparate populations informs us that at an early date, prior to or shortly following the demise of the Shang, a significant trans-Pacific intellectual exchange of the particulars of this style of writing occurred, for no system of writing has been independently invented more than once (Houston 2004). Significantly, the use of such a uniquely datable style of writing in the American rock art record provides a platform for assessing the age of unrelated petroglyphs independent of the rock's surface characteristics, including many of Native authorship.

As noted above, it is significant that both the ancient Chinese and Native Americans employed three sets of a 10-day weekly paradigm as a lunar metric (Zeilik 1986), and that each of these peoples wrote upon the rocks of North America utilizing some of the same ancient Chinese script symbols (Ruskamp 2014). So why would a literate ancient Chinese explorer in North America invest the time and energy to mark down on the rocks at a remote location a record of what was a widely understood and accepted method of time measurement... unless it was to preserve the most important details of an intellectual exchange?

However, if the literate Asiatic individual who recorded upon rock the description of the Chinese 10-day calendrical system described above had introduced this measurement to the Native people he was with, then providing a written record of it for future reference would be most beneficial. Manifestly, this unique set of readable ancient Chinese glyphs informs us that ancient Chinese were operating in North America at an early date, as it preserves a “rock solid” record of an important trans-Pacific intellectual exchange at a time when the ancient style of scripts that comprise this message were still in use in the Orient, at least 2200 YBP.

CONCLUSIONS

All of the Chinese script petroglyphs contained in this study's database have been independently confirmed as an identifiable form of an ancient Chinese symbol by multiple world renown Chinese historians and epigraphers. Additionally, the statistical probability for the independent creation of each of the glyphs included in this study, apart from prior knowledge of ancient Chinese writing, has been calculated to be less than 5% in each instance, and for most of the scripts this value is less than 0.1%. Cumulatively, the chance of independently engraving rocks at scattered sites with these readable ancient Chinese scripts, and in some cases as clusters exhibiting the appropriate syntax from a bygone era, is essentially zero. Augmenting these statistical values, the level of surface repatination observed upon the study's Chinese script petroglyphs has been assessed as having substantial age (Medrano 2013; Jett 2018).

This monograph details the decipherment of an ancient Chinese rock writing describing the period of a lunar month, and along with the larger study's discovery of an ancient Bronze era Chinese poem inscribed upon a cliff along the Little Colorado River and the unique scripts and syntax employed to record an equally ancient traditional Chinese sacrificial message in the Petroglyph National Monument, it demonstrates that the trans-Pacific theories previously set forth in the literature by such scholars as Nancy Yaw Davis, Alexander von Humboldt, Carl Johannessen, Joseph Needham, and others are demonstrably confirmed and upheld.

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