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April 15, 2013

Book Review: Chinese Petroglyphs in America? by John Ruskamp, Jr.

Chinese Petroglyphs in America? - A Book Review

Asiatic Echoes: The Identification of Chinese Pictograms in North American Rock Writing; Ruskamp, Jr., John A.; Amazon Press, Charleston, SC; 2012. (\$29.50)

Asiatic Echoes: The Identification of Chinese Pictograms in North American Rock Writing - Addendum 2012; Ruskamp, Jr., John A.; Amazon Press, Charleston, SC; 2012. (\$9.25)

In his best-selling book, *1421: The Year China Discovered America*, the author Gavin Menzies claims that it was not Christopher Columbus, but the Chinese that were the first to land in the Americas (excluding the native inhabitants, of course, who have been purported to be living there since the last glacial period). Dr. John A. Ruskamp, Jr., an ESCONL member, builds upon the premises popularized by Menzies and theorizes that in the rock art of North America there is evidence of early Chinese trans-Pacific contact at scattered sites, particularly, in the southwestern U.S. The rock art (petroglyphs), it is proposed, take the form of ancient Chinese pictographic characters.

The Introduction presents information on the locations where writing first originated and the glyphs being examined. According to the research, writing developed independently in five regions of the world, i.e., China, Egypt, the Indus Valley, Mesoamerica, and Mesopotamia.

The first chapter of the volume highlights the early attempts to interpret rock writing and helps to ground the reader with basic terminology. Chapter 2 gives a brief history of Chinese writing from oracle bone script, originally developed for divination, to modern Chinese script in current use today.

This is followed by a unit on the interpretation of rock writing by use of statistical means. A form of analysis used for comparing images in the legal profession, the

concept of substantial similarity, is introduced. Jaccard's Index of Similarity (J), a statistical technique that is the essence of the monograph, is explained in detail. Basically, this rubric compares the likeness of two similar pieces of art (in this case, North American petroglyphs to historic Chinese pictograms using line strokes of the writing for the analysis.) J -values can range from zero to 1.000, with higher values indicating a greater degree of similarity.

Chapters 4 - 7 portray a variety of pictograms under investigation in the research. Examples of pictograms of boats, water, ponds, trees, forests and fields are displayed. Boat (Zhou) pictograms are analyzed in some detail.

The eighth chapter relates combinations of Chinese pictograms in North American rock writing. Here a few petroglyph sites that have two or more Chinese-looking characters presented side-by-side on the same rock face suggest that their ancient authors were well versed in ancient Chinese writing.

The chapters titled "*Conclusions*" and "*Identifying the Authors*" contain a summary of the study analysis that; "Collectively, the substantial similarity of the pictograms and the glyphs evaluated in this study establish with statistical certainty their shared Asiatic history." The possibility of parallel creation of the symbols is ruled out. However, the likelihood that Native Americans appropriated Asiatic written symbols for use in their rock writing is emphasized. Therefore, this chapter leads the readers to the conclusion that the study's North American petroglyphs are of Chinese origin and that the Chinese visited America, perhaps many times, prior to its "rediscovery" by Columbus. "In [this] first-of-a-kind report, the Asiatic ancestry of twenty-four examples of North American rock art is demonstrated with supporting statistical evidence."

Appendices provide supplementary material vital to the interpretation of the book. Appendix A, in both books, provides comparison charts of Chinese pictograms and North American petroglyphs. For each of the glyphs/pictogram contrasts, comparison of line strokes; comparisons of line stroke touch relations; and the calculation of Jaccard's Index is presented. Appendix B focuses on age estimates for the study's pictogram-glyphs and Appendix C is a table of significant values for the Jaccard Index of Similarity.

The Addendum to the original work provides readers with ten additional examples of Chinese pictogram petroglyphs. These glyphs are representative of dogs, flowers, elephants, and more and evoke additional support for the theory of pre-Columbian North American visitation. However, in addition to the use of Jaccard's Index to test similarity, probability measures are presented to that discredit the idea of parallel evolution of the glyphs. It is reported in the Addendum that, "The probability of chance creation upon Newspaper Rock of the four Chinese script images of Xiang, Si, Zhou, and Shui, separate from a working knowledge of Chinese calligraphy, is less than one out of 20 billion."

Overall, the books are well thought out and lend additional credibility to support the original hypothesis. However, as always, additional research needs to be conducted in this area. The next logical step is to develop and/or discover methods of dating the rock art itself and to provide still more examples possibly from other countries such as Mexico and from Central and South America.

The author encourages discourse on the topic and, if people wish to contact him directly, you can obtain either of both of the books at a discounted price. He also is working on a webpage for the book currently which will be operational, in a basic form, in early March 2013. In the interim, Mr. Ruskamp can be reached at info@asiaticechoes.org.

By now, Dr. Ruskamp has given an oral presentation to the ESCONI archaeology group on the subject. It is hoped that his presentation and this review encourage more thought and research on this very interesting and thought-provoking topic.

-Joseph D. Kubal

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