

ANCIENT CHINESE ROCK WRITINGS CONFIRM EARLY TRANS-PACIFIC INTERACTION

by

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ANCIENT CHINESE ROCK WRITINGS CONFIRM EARLY TRANS-PACIFIC INTERACTION

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This paper documents and translates two sets of ancient, readable, and highly complex Chinese writings that were pecked into the rocks of Arizona and New Mexico approximately 2500 years ago. Here is the long sought and conclusive epigraphic evidence that Chinese explorers not only reached the Americas in pre-Columbian times, but that they interacted positively with Native populations, sharing both intellectual and cultural information.

Este trabajo documenta y traduce dos conjuntos de escritos chinos antiguos, legibles, y altamente complejos que fueron picoteados sobre rocas en Arizona y Nuevo México hace aproximadamente 2500 años. Aquí está la evidencia epigráfica largamente buscada y concluyente que exploradores chinos no solo llegaron a las Américas en la época precolombina, pero que interactuaron positivamente con las poblaciones nativas, intercambiando información cultural e intelectual.

The Written Record of an Ancient Chinese Offering

"John... You might perhaps, see the term *Dà Jiǎ*, A Shang ancestor!"
David N. Keightley, Ph.D.

In a remote region of Albuquerque's Petroglyph National Monument, high above a sandy trail frequented daily by joggers and dog walkers alike, is a very old and readable set of ancient Chinese script petroglyphs (Figures 1 and 2). Here, in public view, yet remaining unrecognized and miscategorized, are the ancient written Chinese symbols of: *Xiàn* (to offer in worship to the deceased ancestors); *Quǎn* (dog); *Dà* (great); *Jié* (to kneel down in reverence); *Dà Jiǎ* (the name of the third king of the Shang dynasty); and *Gēng* (the seventh Chinese Heavenly Stem).



Figure 1. Ancient Chinese script petroglyphs in the Petroglyph National Monument



Figure 2. The boulder shown in Figure 1 with matching ancient Chinese pictograms inserted over their corresponding petroglyphs

Images from: Chalfant, Fazzioli, and Sears

Independently, David N. Keightley, Ph.D., considered by many to be "the foremost analyst of oracle texts in the West" (Eno 2010:2), has confirmed that these petroglyphs have the form of Chinese scripts. In fact, Keightley was the first to recognize the name of the Shang king, Dà Jiǎ, upon this boulder, and communicated his insight with the following message: "John... You might perhaps, see the term Dà Jiǎ, A Shang ancestor!" (personal communication, May 11, 2013).

Additionally, Michael F. Medrano, Ph.D., Chief, Division of Resource Management for Petroglyph National Monument, personally evaluated the petroglyphs upon this boulder on November 13, 2013. With more than 25 years of experience working at the Monument with local Native cultures, upon viewing these figures, Medrano commented, "These images do not readily appear to be associated with local tribal entities," and "based on repatination appear to have antiquity to them."

The Recorded Message of the Pictogram-glyphs

Centrally located on this boulder, in the middle of a collection of discernable Chinese characters, is the serpentine Bronze era script figure Jié, meaning to kneel down in reverence toward a greater authority. The illustrated message of this symbol (Figure 3), an individual bowing towards a superior while holding aloft his half of an imperial seal (Wieger 1965:147 [1927]), may be understood as follows:



Drawing by Jennifer Mucha

Figure 3. A man kneeling before his superior holding his seal in his hand

The short vertical section atop this curvilinear drawing represents half of an imperial seal given to the man previously, as he displays it to his superior. From the bottom of this section, the line abruptly bends to the right, depicting the arm of this respectful individual. It then reverses direction and curves to the left forming the outline of the man's body,

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Insightfully, Keightley informs us in *Sources of Shang History* that an emerging Shang practice towards the end of the dynasty was to add the preface Dà (meaning "great") to the names of their kings, examples being Dà Jiǎ, Dà Gēng, and Dà Wù (Keightley 1978:207). Following the era of the Shang, a different form of appellation gradually supplanted this custom. Therefore, the intentional placement upon this boulder of the title Dà as a simplistic stickman alongside of the name of Jiǎ, suggests that these logographic petroglyphs were inscribed near the end of the Shang dynasty in 1046 B.C.

Mutually, the Seal era Quǎn pictogram written upon this boulder and the adjoining Bronze era script form of the Xiàn character located beside it support the above estimate for the age of these pictogram-glyphs. Informatively, the commingling of these multiple styles of Chinese script indicates that these writings were produced during a transitional period in Chinese calligraphy, likely after 1046 B.C. and not much later than 475 B.C., for, we are reminded that "...the different scripts did not follow one after the other in orderly fashion, each growing from the previous one in a linear progression. They evolved over several centuries and often overlapped" (Wilkinson 2000:409).

The Story of an Ancient trans-Pacific Journey



Figure 4. Arizona's Ancient Chinese script cartouches

In east-central Arizona, approximately 250 miles southwest of Albuquerque, New Mexico, reside three ancient and uniquely subdivided petroglyph cartouches, each filled with readable combinations of ancient Chinese scripts (Figure 4).

Instructively, these cartouches were numbered by their ancient author, for written beneath one of them is the Chinese character Yī, meaning "one," and similarly inscribed below the adjoining cartouche is the symbol of Yī, meaning "second." Together, the equivalent positioning of these numeric designations, one beneath each cartouche, provides a visual clue for the intended alignment and reading order of these writings.

Of note, these cartouches are all relatively small, measuring from 15 to 20 cm in length and width. Consequently, when they are viewed from even a short distance, they are inconspicuous upon this embellished rock outcropping. Evidently, the message preserved by these pictogram-glyphs was not intended to be a public announcement. Rather, as Keightley notes in his article concerning oracle-bone inscriptions published in *Archaeology of Asia*, "the incising mattered more than the writing," as they were "inscribed to leave a record rather than a document;" for "the importance of the inscriptions was that they were there, that they existed, not that they were read" (Keightley 2006:189-191).

Curiously, the scripts within the numbered cartouches were rotated by the author 90 degrees to the left of vertical, while the symbols within the third unnumbered cartouche were orientated in the opposite direction, 90 degrees to the right of vertical. The deliberate rotation of these writings, both to the left and right of vertical by an equal number of degrees, endorses their authenticity, for the rotation of individual scripts by Chinese calligraphers is well-documented (Wilkinson 2000; Keightley 1978).

Cartouche 1 "Together for Ten Years"

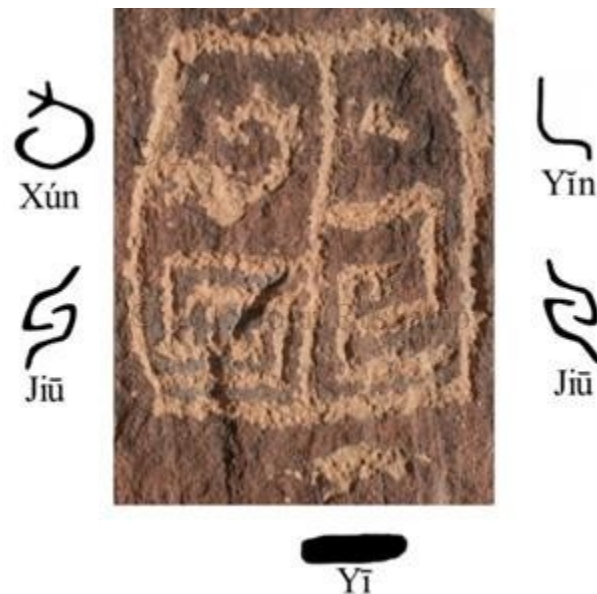


Figure 5. Cartouche 1 with corresponding Chinese pictograms alongside

(Note: Photograph rotated 90 degrees to the right)

Images: Xún - Sears; Jiū - Sears; Yīn - Chalfant; Yī - Karlgren

The ancient author of this the first cluster of ancient scripts at this site intentionally labeled it as *Cartouche 1* by placing beneath it a single horizontal dash, the Chinese script Yī, meaning "one" (Figure 5). Notably, the manner in which this numerical designation is inscribed alongside these enclosed scripts informs observers to: a) rotate the characters 90 degrees to the right for reading, and b) "Start here."

Significantly, Cartouche 1 is subdivided into two equal and parallel sections, each of which is filled by a pair of vertically orientated ancient Chinese scripts. Of considerable importance for understanding these two sets of aligned scripts is the fact that they have uniquely opposite mirror-like orientations, reminiscent of a reflective script oracle-bone pattern (Keightley 1978), and suggestive of folio pagination. The intentional separation of these two pairs of vertically aligned scripts informs the reader that each duo is to be interpreted independently.¹

Within the top right segment of Cartouche 1 is the ancient Chinese script symbol of Yǐn, meaning "secluded" (Chalfant 1906:Plate XXXI), or alternatively "secretly" and "hidden" (Morrison 1819:1029). Below it, the author wrote the Chinese character Jiū, thereby adding to the meaning of Yǐn the concept of "togetherness." Collectively, these two scripts inform us about an implicit group of individuals ascetically "set apart, together."

Similarly, the left half of Cartouche 1 also contains a pair of vertically aligned ancient Chinese scripts. Within this outline, there are backward oracle-bone figures of Xún, meaning "10 years," inscribed above a mirror image of the character Jiū as it appears within the right half of Cartouche 1. In spite of the author's reversal of these two script symbols, together they convey the idea of having been "10 years, together."

Collectively, the two sets of paired scripts identified within Cartouche 1 describe a team of individuals who have been together for a period of 10 years.

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In the same manner as Cartouche 1 is numbered by the symbol Yī, so also is Cartouche 2 identified as the second set of scripts at this location by the purposeful placement of the Chinese script Yī, meaning "second," beneath it (Figure 6). Instructively, Cartouche 2 was pecked immediately to the left of Cartouche 1, thus confirming the intended reading sequence of these scripts (i.e., from right to left as a conventional Chinese document).

Consistent with the orientation of the scripts in Cartouche 1, those contained by Cartouche 2 exhibit the same intentional rotation, 90 degrees to the left of vertical. However, unlike the author's bilateral division of the interior space of Cartouche 1, Cartouche 2 was subdivided into four unequal areas, each filled by a solitary script figure. From top to bottom and right to left, the individual characters of Cartouche 2 appear in the following order: Chǐ (speech), Huí (to return), Huí (completed journey), and the compound symbol of Rì (Sun) placed within Wéi (a wall).² Read in this manner, these four ancient Chinese pictogram-glyphs preserve the core message documented by the three cartouches (i.e., "declaring, to return, the journey completed, to the house of the Sun").

Curiously, in the ancient Chinese text of the *Shan Hai Jing*, known since at least the fourth century B.C. (Bagrow and Skelton 2009:204), there is the somewhat fanciful account of an ancient expedition that journeyed to a land far beyond the East Sea (Pacific Ocean). Among other things, this early document asserts that this distant region is where the Sun and Moon rise, and that it contains an abyss called the "Big Chasm" (Birrell 1999:159).

Cartouche 3 "Returning Together"



Figure 7. Cartouche 3 with corresponding Chinese pictograms alongside

(Note: Photograph rotated 90 degrees to the left)

Images: Huí - Wieger; Jiū - Sears

In the same manner as Cartouche 1, the interior space of Cartouche 3 is also bilaterally divided (Figure 7). However, Cartouche 3 was not numbered, and the scripts within it are orientated 90 degrees to the right of vertical, diametrically opposite the positioning of the scripts within Cartouches 1 and 2.

Written within the left section of Cartouche 3 are the ancient Chinese script figures of Huí (completed journey) and Jiū (together). Read from top to bottom, these scripts reiterate the messages of Cartouche 1, stressing the unity of this accomplishment, and that it was "a journey completed, together."

However, unlike the identifiable scripts within the left side of Cartouche 3, in the adjoining right portion of this figure, there is what, to date, remains an unidentified symbol. With a form unlike any known Chinese script, it resembles drawings placed upon early Chinese manufactured items, which, as emblems, are understood to be identifiers of ownership, or trademarks. Consequently, if this unique depiction is a representative figure, it may be the author's testimonial mark (signature). Nevertheless, for now the meaning of the symbol remains unresolved.

The Message of the Arizona Cartouches

The author of the three Arizona cartouches described above employed a unique methodology for documenting his story. By enclosing sets of related scripts within numbered and subdivided outlines, he grouped his thoughts into sections, as if they were paragraphs written upon successive pages, thereby indicating the reading order to be followed for comprehending his message. And, as William Boltz reminds us: "The interpretation of what any Chinese character depicts is always subjective and never the same thing as understanding what word the character writes, but if the interpretation is arrived at thoughtfully, and without recourse to unwarranted a priori assumptions, it can sometimes be legitimately suggestive all the same of specific aspects of material culture" (Boltz 2009:107).

Consequently, by deciphering these ancient scripts in the prescribed sequence, from right to left and top to bottom, as Chinese is read, it is possible to understand the entirety of the message recorded at this location as follows:

Cartouche 1: "Set apart (for) 10 years, together;"

Cartouche 2: "Declaring, (to) return, (the) journey completed, (to the) house of the Sun;"

Cartouche 3: "(The) journey completed, together, (affixed emblematic signature)."

Shared North American and Asiatic Symbolism

Multiple times, the ancient author of the cartouches described above recorded his message with graphic images that were, and still are, understood in the same manner by both Native American and Asiatic populations.

The first of these mutually symbolic figures portrays the interlocking fingers of two hands. Persisting into modern times, the Hopi people of North America refer to this figure as "Nakwách," and understand it as their symbol for "brotherhood" and "friendship" (Figure 8). Chinese calligraphers, both ancient and modern, use an identical figure, Jiū (Figure 9), which for them represents the twisting of multiple items into one (Wieger 1965:145 [1927]). For the Chinese, the figure of Jiū conveys the idea of "togetherness," in much the same manner as the Nakwách symbol is now, and has been in the past, understood by the Hopi.



Figure 8. Hopi Nakwách symbol
Image: Frank Waters



Figure 9. Chinese script Jiū
Image: Matsumaru & Takashima

A second prominent example of the parallel symbolism employed by North American and Asiatic authors, evident in the study cartouches, is their joint use of a rectilinear spiral to convey the concept of a "round-trip journey" (Figure 10). This symbol, pronounced as Huí by the Chinese, appears frequently in North American rock art, both as a singular object and in repetitive patterns. Historically, the Hopi have used this symbol to portray the four complete migrations that their legendary god Massau instructed them to make, once to each of the four cardinal directions (Figure 11). Curiously, "...among all Pueblo Indians the cardinal directions, the zenith, and the nadir are associated with specific colors, and color and directional symbolism are important" (Cordell 1997:17). The fact that these same color patterns are associated with the Chinese, and are equally important for them, has also been noted (Davis 2001:xxx; Zeilik 1986:S8).



Figure 10. The Chinese pictogram Huí
Image : L. Wieger



Figure 11. Linked Native American rectilinear spirals

A Brief History of Chinese Writing

The history of writing is a multifarious topic. From humankind's earliest use of signs and symbols, through proto-writing, to the development of formal script systems, there is considerable debate about just what constitutes true writing. Still, most scholars agree that "Writing arose, as far as we know, *ex nihilo* only three times in old-world antiquity: in Egypt, in Mesopotamia, and in China, and once in the new world, viz., the Mayan script of Mesoamerica" (Boltz 2003:10 [1994]).

Throughout the evolution of Chinese script, it has remained a highly pictographic form of writing, relying upon imagery (graphemes) to convey meanings rather than employing symbols for the individual speech sounds (phonemes) of the language.

The earliest known, fully developed, example of Chinese writing, oracle-bone script, appears in the historical record around 1700 B.C. From this early date, and for approximately the next 600 years, oracle-bone script was primarily carved into animal bones.

Of singular importance for dating the pictogram-glyphs of this study, knowledge of oracle-bone script was totally lost to humanity for over two millennia following the collapse of the Shang dynasty in 1046 B.C. Once lost, it remained unknown until A.D. 1899 when ancient bones inscribed with oracle-bone script were recovered from an archaeological site near Ānyáng, China. However, although more than 100 years have passed since its rediscovery, the task of fully deciphering oracle-bone script is not complete. To date, the meaning for approximately 50 percent of the 5,000 known figures remains a mystery (Wilkinson 2000:397).

Following the demise of the Shang, newer styles of writing appeared which eventually supplanted oracle-bone calligraphy (Figure 12). However, prior to the standardization of writing in China around 200 B.C., scribes were free to independently modify, personalize, and embellish their scripts as they desired. Accordingly, there evolved an overwhelming plethora of new symbols, which, unfortunately, were seldom widely understood. This unregulated profusion of script characters became such a problem for the average Chinese reader that, in approximately 500 B.C., even the learned Confucius complained "of scribes who were dishonest and instead of leaving blanks when they forgot characters, made new ones" (Wilder and Ingram 1922:iv).

With time, the invention and widespread adoption of new and improved writing technologies, such as the brush and ink, required that stylistic changes be made in Chinese characters, rewarding their conformity. Subsequently, each major style of Chinese writing is now associated with a particular historical period. Therefore, although Chinese writing was generally unregulated early on, its major calligraphic styles are very datable and are especially useful for determining the approximate age of written records.

	Modern after AD 220	Seal era 221 BC - AD 220	Bronze era 1050 - 221 BC	Oracle-bone 1700 - 1050 BC
Xiàn	獻	𣎵	𣎵	𣎵
Quǎn	犬	𤝵	𤝵	𤝵
Dà	大	大	大	大
Jiǎ	甲	甲	十	十
Gēng	庚	庚	𠂇	𠂇
Jiè	卩	卩	卩	Unknown

Figure 12. Evolution of Selected Chinese Pictograms
Images from: Fazzioli; Sears; and Wiegner

Discussion

Bruce Trigger reminds us... the ultimate goal for the field of archaeology "must be to recover knowledge of what has been forgotten" (Trigger 2006:531). Demonstrably, and with manifold robust proofs, this study fulfills that quest; it has recovered previously overlooked intellectual information preserved by ancient Chinese scripts embedded within the North American rock art record.

The authorship of North American rock writing is a highly controversial and politically charged topic. While ancient stone glyphs evoke curiosity in many observers, by their very nature they are extraordinarily difficult to date by any established scientific methodology (Donald Graczyk: Chemist; Inorganic Analysis Technical Lead at Argonne National Laboratory, personal communication, May 17, 2013; Patterson 1992:4). Although a few knowledgeable rock art researchers have put forth plausible explanations for particular rock art symbols, most prudent investigators avoid assigning meaning or authorship to these figures. This inclination is largely due to the characteristic uncertainty of rock art imagery (Patterson 1992), and the sometimes-wild speculations which have been and, unfortunately, still are found in some rock art research reports (Ruskamp 2013).

Similar to the controversy involving rock writing, the theory of pre-Columbian trans-Pacific voyages to the Americas has also been a hotly debated topic for over 250 years.

Although the facts referenced by various reputable scholars support early trans-Pacific interaction, most professional archaeologists have dogmatically rejected the idea. This reluctance is largely because there has been a dearth of primary supporting evidence, such as the discovery of an undisturbed early period Asiatic relic or village in the Americas. However, as Henriette Mertz suggests in *Pale Ink*, "It would be a relatively simple matter if the Chinese Buddhists had been as thoughtful as 'Kilroy' and had taken time out to have carved their names in Chinese characters on solid rock, together with a date." "If they did, perhaps we have not yet recognized it" (Mertz 1953:16-17).

Concerning the elucidation of rock art, the noted researcher Col. Garrick Mallery cautions that "no attempt should be made at symbolic interpretation unless the symbolic nature of the particular characters under examination is known or can be logically inferred from independent facts" (Mallery 1893:767). Quantifiably, the line strokes and inter-stroke touch relationships comprising each of this study's Chinese pictogram-glyphs have been statistically correlated, each at or above the 95 percent probability level, with a known ancient Chinese script symbol by application of the Jaccard Similarity Coefficient formula (Table 1). Collectively, these analyses confirm that the Chinese script petroglyphs evaluated in this study were not created, each for a second time, apart from Chinese influence.

Pictogram-Petroglyph Comparison Data				
Chinese Pictogram	Location of Petroglyph	<i>J</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>N</i>
Bronze era Xiàn	Petroglyph National Monument	1.000	0.001	7
Seal era Quǎn	Petroglyph National Monument	0.667	0.01	15
Bronze era Jiè	Petroglyph National Monument	0.692	0.01	13
Oracle-bone Dà Jiǎ	Petroglyph National Monument	1.000	0.01	5
Oracle-bone Gēng	Petroglyph National Monument	0.667	0.01	15
Oracle-bone Chǐ	Arizona Ranch	0.864	< 0.001	22
Oracle-bone Xún	Arizona Ranch	1.000	0.01	5
Oracle-bone Yǐ	Arizona Ranch	1.000	0.01	5
Oracle-bone Rì	Arizona Ranch	0.846	< 0.001	13
Oracle-bone Wéi	Arizona Ranch	1.000	0.001	8
Seal era Húi	Arizona Ranch	1.000	< 0.001	17
Seal era Húi	Arizona Ranch	1.000	< 0.001	16
Oracle-bone Jiū	Arizona Ranch	0.615	0.05	13

Key

J = Calculated value of the Jaccard Similarity Coefficient

P = Probability for the calculated value of *J* occurring by chance

N = Total number of line stroke and inter-stroke touch relation attributes

Note: Three of the petroglyphs evaluated in this report are not included in the above data set. Both the Yīn and Yī symbols lack the minimum number of attributes necessary for making a comparative statistical analysis with the formula of the Jaccard Similarity Coefficient. In addition, while readable, the large Rinconada Canyon stickman petroglyph is an embellished drawing, not a pictographic symbol.

Table 1. Chinese pictogram - petroglyph correlation values generated by application of the Jaccard Similarity Coefficient

Furthermore, the independent evaluation of the study's pictogram-glyphs by multiple recognized authorities confirms their readability as Chinese writings. Significantly, the sequence in which the primary ancient Chinese scripts of Gēng, Jié, Dà, Quǎn, and Xiàn were pecked into the patina of the Rinconada Canyon boulder conform with the syntax employed for chronicling some traditional oracle-bone era sacrificial writings. For recording such sacrificial rites, characteristically the ancient Chinese would begin by documenting the date of the divination followed in order by the sequential pattern of symbols for the subject of the testing, the King, the object of veneration, and the sacrificial action taken (Liú Yuán 2009).

Demonstrably, the literary attributes of the study's pictogram-glyphs provide compelling and conclusive evidence that, before oracle-bone characters were fully supplanted by newer forms of Chinese script... "literate Chinese were present in the Americas" (Ruskamp 2013:89). However, there are no known eyewitness accounts detailing the authorship of these ancient rock writings. Moreover, to date, the physical dating of petroglyphs remains inherently unreliable and technically elusive. Still, we are reminded that: "In the absence of sufficiently precise absolute dates, arrived at by carbon-14 dating or some other method, and in the absence of sufficiently precise relative dates, arrived at by analogical or stratigraphic criteria, the inscriptions themselves provide our most reliable evidence for relative dating" (Keightley 1978:94).

Importantly, both the complexity and quantity of the readable combinations of Chinese scripts found at the study's primary sites in Arizona and New Mexico reveal that the author(s) of these pictogram-glyphs had an extensive Chinese vocabulary (Ruskamp 2013). Notably, as part of their historical calligraphic development, the Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese peoples each supplanted their earliest form of writing with Chinese script. However, these appropriations occurred following the domination of Vietnam by China's Han dynasty (221 B.C. - A.D. 206); subsequent to the introduction of Buddhism in Korea around 500 B.C.; and in the case of Japan, during more recent times (ca. A.D. 700) when knowledge of oracle-bone script was well extinguished from human memory. Consequently, the ancient oracle-bone style pictogram-glyphs identified by this research endeavor cannot be credited to an Asiatic population outside of China.

Frequently, Native Americans attribute the production of ancient rock art to their ancestors. However, thus far, little if any conclusive proof for the authorship of North American rock art has been offered (Cole 1990:4). Generally, the greater the age of a rock depiction, the less is known about it. Consequently, the best answer for the authorship of these enigmatic illustrations is that they are "messages from the ancestors, which, though no longer decipherable, remain signs from the past" (Young 1985:3).

In spite of this vagueness, the extensive Chinese vocabulary evidenced at each location advocates against the authorship of the figures evaluated in this study being credited to Native Americans. None of the more complex Chinese figures identified in this report are known to have any Native tribal affiliation (Medrano 2013); and if these writings were Native accomplishments, there should be additional examples nearby. To date, after the review of more than 100 regional rock art locations, containing hundreds of thousands of

individual figures, no further examples of these uniquely complex patterns of Chinese pictogram-glyphs have been identified.

Conclusion

Accordingly, what *is* certain is that *the origin* of the significantly repatinated and uniquely styled Asiatic script symbols identified in this report must be consigned to China, for "The Chinese script is obviously an original system of signs created to record an ancestral form of the Chinese language" (Houston 2008:258); and never in the history of humanity has such a uniquely complex and readable set of characters been invented more than once.

Therefore, in conclusion, and in contrast to any previous historical uncertainty, the comparative evidence presented in this report, which is supported by both analytical evaluation and expert opinion, documenting the presence of readable sequences of old Chinese scripts located upon the rocks of North America, establishes that prior to the extinction of oracle-bone script from human memory, approximately 2,500 years ago, trans-Pacific exchanges of epigraphic intellectual property took place between Chinese and North American populations.

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Notes

1. Unlike the vertical orientation of the two sets of script parings located within Cartouche 1, when two Chinese characters are written horizontally as side-by-side "phono-semantic compounds" they have a single meaning apart from that of their component scripts. In such cases, one symbol is a symbolic figure communicating an overall meaning, and the other character functions as a phonetic item providing the reader with a clue for the proper pronunciation of the word.
2. Although two of these symbols are pronounced as Huí, they are written with very different line stroke patterns and have very different meanings.