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## EARLY CHINESE EXPLORATION ON THE PACIFIC COAST?

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Introduction

The topic of early Chinese exploration on the Pacific coast is one that commands a wide interest among the general public. In the United States amateur magazines that deal with such topics are rapidly gathering the zeal common in religious cults. Thousands of publications have been produced in recent years on the topic of early pre-Columbian voyages to the New World. Most of these are newspaper articles that are simply reworked versions of earlier articles. Only rarely do they provide a critical analysis of the topic under consideration. Articles written by the scientific community are considerably fewer in number and generally published in journals not as accessible to the general public as the morning newspaper.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief history on the question of early Chinese exploration on the Pacific coast, with a bibliography for those who wish to pursue the topic.

The Literary History

The topic of early Chinese exploration on the Pacific coast was first brought to the attention of the European academic community by Hugo Grotius in 1542 (see English translation by Goldsmid 1884). In his dissertation on the origins of the people of the New World, Grotius gave a number of subjective reasons why the Peruvians in particular were descended from the Chinese. To back up his statements he noted, "This is confirmed by the remains of the Chinese ships, which, according to the reports of the Spaniards, have been discovered on the shore of the Pacific Sea" (Goldsmid 1884:18).

Although the topic of Chinese influence on the Pacific coast was occasionally mentioned within the next 200 years, it appears to have been brought to a point of prominence in 1761 by Joseph De Guignes in a publication in the *Memoirs of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles Lettres* in Paris. De Guignes (1761:1) announced that he had found Chinese historical records which revealed that Buddhist priests had discovered a country called Fu Sang which was the Pacific coast of America. Stories of these adventures were recorded by the imperial historiographer in the year 499 A.D. as told by the priest or sham Hui Shin (or Hwui Shan or Hoei-chin) who began his supposed journey to the New World in 458 A.D.



*The Land of Fou - Sang*

Interest in the topic was intermittent over the next 70 years until 1831 when Klaproth attacked De Guignes' theory. Klaproth (1831) used the distances outlined by De Guignes from the Hui Shin stories to claim that Fu Sang was really Japan, not North America. From 1836-39 Alexander de Humboldt produced five volumes which examined the history of the New World and its similarities with Asian cultures. In the 1840s to 1870s numerous publications were being produced, especially in France and Germany. In this period of controversy, early Chinese documents referring to the voyages of Hui-Shin were translated in Europe. The most notable is a rewritten version (1321 A.D.) of Hui-Shin's adventures which was published in Geneva (Lin, 1876). One of the more thorough critiques of this and other translations was in 1892 by Gustave Schlegel, a professor of Chinese language and literature at the University of Leide.

The enthusiasm of the European scene began to show up in the United States publications in the 1870s. In 1872 Horace Davis wrote two publications on Japanese wrecks on the Pacific coast, followed by Brooks in 1875. Another popular publication in 1875 by Charles Leland called Fu Sang had a strong influence on the academic and especially the non-academic community. This publication encouraged the production of numerous articles, and in 1885 of the popular book by Edward Vining titled An Inglorius Columbus.

The first American academic to deal extensively with the question of trans-oceanic contact between the Old and New Worlds was Hubert Bancroft who in 1875 dedicated an entire volume to the subject (Vol. 5 of his series on "The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America"). Bancroft reflects the mood of the times in his statement as to why he is undertaking a review of theories and opinions concerning the origins of New World Indians:

...not that intrinsically they are of much value, except as showing the different fancies of different men and times. Fancies, I say, for modern scholars, with the aid of all new revelations of science, do not appear in their investigations to arrive, one whit nearer an indubitable conclusion. (Bancroft 1875:1:20.)

As archaeological work progressed in the New World around the turn of the century more articles started appearing in academic journals, such as Walter Hough's "Oriental influences in Mexico" in a 1900 edition of *American Anthropology* (Hough 1900). A moderate stream of articles appeared through the first half of the 20th century in the U.S. culminating with a revival beginning in the early 1950s.

In 1950 Gordon Ekholm published "Is American Indian Culture Asiatic?" In 1953 the Society for American Archaeology published a series of articles in "Asia and North America: Transpacific Contact" (Smith 1953). At the same time a popular amateur publication Pale Ink entered the market. Pale Ink still remains popular in its 1972 revised edition. This publication is one of the more comprehensive of those from the non-scientific community although it shows a definite lack of familiarization with the archaeological record and contains a lot of speculation.

In 1961 Charles Boland captured the mood of the public with his "They All Discovered America." In the 1960s and early 1970s the academic world began producing more volumes dedicated to the subject, such as "Archaeological Frontiers and External Connections" (Ekholm and Willey 1966) and "Man across the Sea: Problems of PreColumbian Contacts" (Riley 1971).

Controversy within the academic community was highlighted with the 1965 publication of Meggers, Evans and Estrada concerning contact between Jomon period Japanese fishermen and cultures of Peru, and again in 1975 with Meggers' "The Transpacific Origin of Meso-american Civilization." In the latter publication Meggers put forward her claims for a pre-historic connection between Olmec civilization in Middle America and the Shang Dynasty in China around 3200 B.P. Both of these publications have produced interesting responses such as those of Coe (1967), Pearson (1968), Schneider (1977) and McEwan and Dickson (1978).

#### Issues of Interest in British Columbia

Numerous newspaper and magazine articles have been written about early Chinese contact in British Columbia. Typical of these is a January 19, 1926 Victoria Daily Colonist article entitled "Orientals First to Find America" which brought about an instant reply from Alma Russel, then head of the Provincial Library, who had been misquoted on virtually everything she had said to an enquiring reporter.



*Man milking a deer in the land of Fou - Sang is believed to be an Ainu (from Schlegel, 1892, p. 127)*

On January 21, 1934 a feature article in the Daily Colonist was printed with the giant title "Mongols Found America." This and many other uncritical articles were often encouraged by respected historians. B. A. McKelvie, a well-known newspaperman and historian, whom many of us know from his publications, "Fort Langley" and "Maquinna and the Magnificent," not only wrote articles about the Chinese discovering the coast of B. C. (Province, January 15, 1955) but was also convinced of early Jewish settlements on the coast (Colonist, August 14, 1935).

A number of publications has been encouraged as a result of finding what are claimed to be very old Chinese coins or other items of Asiatic culture. I have demonstrated in a previous publication (Keddie 1978) that Chinese coins of considerable age can be expected to be found in British Columbia in connection with the fur trade and the later influx of Chinese populations to the gold fields. There are, however, specific references in the literature to coins and other items found in B. C. which are claimed to be of great antiquity.

The Comox District Free Press in 1951 (April 19, p. 1) had an article titled "1000 year old Chinese Coin found at Comox." In the Vancouver Daily Province in 1941 (Sept. 20, p.3) B.A. McKelvie wrote an article entitled "Ancient Chinese Charm Relic of Early Migration to Coast", and in the Victoria Times in 1968 (Feb. 2, p.17) Humphrey Davy produced an article titled "Tiny Piece of Pottery Raises Questions: Orientals First to Reach Coast."

These latter items have remained unresolved. Some of these unresolved cases have appeared time and again in unreferenced publications, causing endless frustration for those who want to examine the original references or the original objects. In future issues of The Midden I hope to deal specifically with some of these unresolved cases.

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