

glyph *notes*

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Shared Traits Among the Chinese and Mesoamerican Cultures

By Sherrie Kline Smith

Note: The material below comes from another writing I used in preparing a slide lecture “Shared Traits Among the Chinese and Mesoamerican Cultures.”

Presented here for you to ponder is a sample of similar traits between China and the Olmec and Maya, referenced together as Mesoamerica.

JADE

Both the Chinese and the Mesoamericans revered jade. They believed it was more precious than gold or silver. Thousands of examples from both cultures have been discovered. It held great intrinsic value in every Mesoamerican culture and was valued as an heirloom from Olmec times onward. Present-day Chinese still value jade highly. They have a saying, “huang jing you jia; yu wu jia.” Gold has a price; jade is priceless.

Because both cultures believed jade had the ability to give immortality and preserve the body from decay, royal and elite burials on both sides of the Pacific contained large amounts of it. Some are ritualistic objects like the Chinese bi discs and others are of ornamental function like necklaces, pectorals, and earplugs. Masks of jade, Olmec and Maya, have been discovered in Mesoamerican burials while more than ten jade burial suits made from thousands of small pieces of jade sewn together with gold thread or scarlet silk ribbon have been found in northern and central China.

CHINA

Present-day Chinese still value jade highly. They have a saying, “huang jing you jia; yu wu jia.” Gold has a price; jade is priceless. Jade comes in many colors, but pure jadeite is white.

MESOAMERICA

Not only is this one of the oldest pieces of jade found in Mesoamerica, it's also one of the largest. It was discovered at San Jose Mogote.

Cont. on Page 2



Shared traits suggest connections between China and Mesoamerica perhaps explained by the passage of the Jaredites through China.

Sherrie Kline Smith

Don Beebe

Shared Traits (Cont. from Page 1)

JADE

CHINA



Lyle L. Smith



Lyle L. Smith

The Chinese work the many colors of jade into the most beautiful pieces of art. The above examples are not ancient jade but modern jade.

Some jades are ritualistic objects like the Chinese bi disc at right. The bi disc had special significance.

It represented heaven and was believed to have “powers of Heaven”—therefore the Emperor, being the Son of Heaven, was able to commune and consult with Heaven through the medium of this jade disk.



Sherrie Kline Smith

MESOAMERICA



Don Beebe

Don Beebe

Don Beebe

Jade was also ornamental and worn like necklaces, pectorals, and earplugs. The original Olmec belief that jade represented the heart of the earth, heart of the mountains, and heart of the people carried through to other Mesoamerican cultures clear up to the conquest. The Aztec word for jade, Chalchihuitl, literally means Heart of the Earth. When you buy jade from Guatemala, you’re buying much more than just jewelry or an artifact replica. You’ve acquired the heart of the Mesoamerican people.



Don Beebe

Called Offering No. 4 from the Olmec site of La Venta, this group of 16 figures of jade and serpentine flanked behind by six celts have finely incised figures or “writing” on them. These figures also had been coated in cinnabar, another common trait shared by these cultures discussed on the following page.

CINNABAR AND HEMATITE/THE COLOR RED

Red had special meaning to both the Chinese and Mesoamericans. Cinnabar (also called vermilion) and hematite are red mineral ores with transmutable properties. Red-colored cinnabar changes to mercury and hematite can be polished into a mirror or ground into a blood red powder. They were used symbolically by both cultures, applied to ritual objects and found in burials.

According to an article in *Connoisseur* (Spring 1996), the magazine of the Shanghai Museum, painting the surface of jade with cinnabar was a special practice for jade used in burials. Recent excavations beginning April 1995 in Suzhou unearthed hundreds of pieces of jade, many coated with cinnabar. Other Chinese examples include forty three jade sword fittings stained with cinnabar

from the tomb of the King of Nanyue in Guangzhou and a pair of openwork ornaments of translucent green jade with traces of cinnabar on the surface from a collection in Hong Kong. Pieces of jade with cinnabar can be seen at the Shanghai Museum.

Maya and Olmec tombs have yielded bodies liberally coated with cinnabar after death. A Tikal tomb contained bones carved with figures and filled with cinnabar. Displayed at the Palenque museum is a stone box filled with cinnabar. Some Olmec objects coated with cinnabar are the jade “Seated Ruler in a Ritual Pose” displayed at the Dallas Museum of Art and the sculpture group of sixteen jade figures referred to as Offering No. 4 from a La Venta burial as shown on page 2.

CHINA

This excavation at Suzhou, China, in April 1995 unearthed hundreds of pieces of jade, many coated with cinnabar. Other Chinese examples include 43 jade sword fittings stained with cinnabar from the tomb of the King



Sherrie Kline Smith



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of Nanyue in Guangzhou and a pair of openwork ornaments of translucent green jade with traces of cinnabar on the surface from a collection in Hong Kong. Pieces of jade with cinnabar can be seen at the Shanghai Museum.

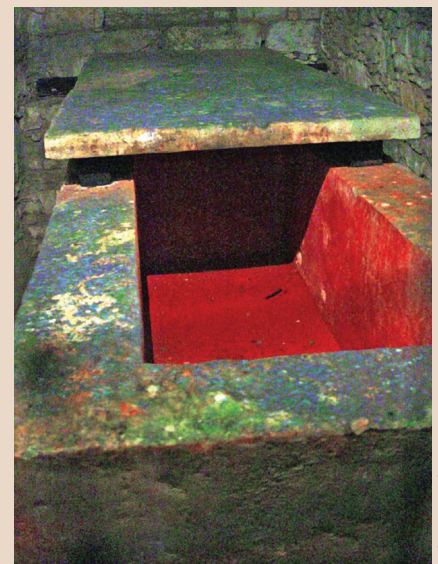
MESOAMERICA



Don Beebe

This Maya mummy from Kalukmul is covered in jade of which some is painted with red cinnabar.

A recently discovered tomb in Palenque is called the red queen's tomb because it was covered in cinnabar.



Lyle L. Smith

Cont. on Page 4

Shared Traits (Cont. from Page 3)

DRAGON/FEATHERED SERPENT

Another trait shared by the ancient Chinese and early Mesoamericans is the common characteristics of China’s dragon and Mesoamerica’s feathered serpent. Both share numerous similarities, so much so that probably the likenesses are not coincidental.

In a study of China’s dragon compared with that of Mesoamerica’s feathered serpent, over 21 shared

characteristics came to light. In both cultures the respective entity was the best-known and most important art motif as well as the symbol for immortality and rebirth, healing, giver of all that’s good in life, and benevolence towards mankind. A great deal more could be written on this subject.

CHINA

MESOAMERICA



Unknown

Unknown

The dragon proves to be one of the most ancient art motifs. Archaeology in China has confirmed the presence of the dragon design in earliest times. As the sacred symbol of the East, it was believed that the dragon brought new life. According to Outlines of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motifs, “It is common opinion that the dragon, being a divine animal, dies of its own accord. (C.A.S. Williams, 3rd. rev. ed. 1976:133,1344”).

Quetzalcoatl is a Nahuatl word composed of two words – quetzal is the emerald plumed quetzal bird native to the Maya highlands and coatl means serpent. Nahuatl was the language spoken by the Aztecs at the time of the Spanish conquest. The Mayas called the feathered serpent Kukulcan – kuk is their word for the quetzal bird and kan means both serpent and sky. The drawing above is of the Temple of the Feathered Serpent found at Xochicalco.

Traits of Dragon

- Healing, curative powers of crushed dragon bones
- Immortality/ Rebirth
- Divine, dies on own accord
- Gave gift of writing
- Essence of strength and beauty
- Represents forces of nature



Sherrie Kline Smith

Traits of Quetzalcoatl

- Healer, performer of miracles
- Rebirth/saves man from death
- Divine/Redeemer —gives own life and blood
- Inventor of arts, science, calendar, and writing
- Strength and wisdom; all that is good
- Lord of creative forces/Breath of Life



Don Beebe

Most students of The Book of Mormon believe the feathered serpent of Mesoamerica, commonly

called Quetzalcoatl, symbolizes Jesus Christ. Could the dragon also represent Jesus Christ?

PUNNING

The Chinese and Maya both practiced “punning” or using words that had the same sound but different meanings. The Mayan word *chak* means both “red” as well as “great.” The Maya coated stelae and temples with cinnabar as a colorful pun. To paint a monument red is to paint it “great” (Jeffrey Chouinard, *Mouths of Stone*, 1995).

Astonishingly, the Chinese also have a word that means both “red” and “great”—*hong* (same sound and tone, but different characters)—which they employed as a pun. Berthold Laufer, in *Jade: A Study in Chinese Archaeology and Religion* (1912, Dover ed. 1974:pp. 287-289), describes a pale-green jade girdle from the Tang dynasty carved with bats

stained red. “The jade of the bats is red like cinnabar (whether natural or artificial is not mentioned), ‘which is very curious, for this red (*hong*) means the word *hong*. . . “great,” and as the bat *fu* means *fu* “happiness,” this design has the significance of *hong fu* or “great happiness’...”

Laufer continues, “The most interesting point in regard to this rebus is the double symbolism associated with the red color; for the color red is an emblem of luck itself, but besides this, the color is supposed in this case to be readable with its name *hong* “red” which is punned upon with another word *hong* “great.”

CHINA



Lyle L. Smith

At the Chinese New Year’s the red umbrellas decorated Fuxing Park – only a couple blocks from where we lived. The Chinese word for “red” – *hong* also means “great” – it’s the same sound and tone but is written with different characters. Remember the Red Guards of the Communists and Mao’s little red book—chosen because of its symbolism—*red* means “great.”

MESOAMERICA



Lyle L. Smith

Rosalila Temple at Copan: The amazingly well-preserved Maya temple was found in an excellent state of preservation from the base up to the roof, including its highly elaborated painted stucco decoration. Unlike other buildings archaeologists have found, the ancient Mayans did not destroy Rosalila. Instead, it was carefully and ceremoniously buried, so its original red paint was preserved. Strangely enough, the Maya have a word – *chak* – that also means *red* and *great*! How can this be? The Maya coated stelae and temples with cinnabar as a colorful pun. To paint a monument *red* is to paint it “Great.”

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Shared Traits (Cont. from Page 5)

DUALISM OR OPPOSITION IN ALL THINGS/COMPLETENESS

The Chinese express their belief in the principle of dualism—negative and positive principles of universal life—as yin and yang. Yang signifies heaven, sun, light, male. Yin represents earth, moon, darkness, female. Maintaining a proper balance in opposites ensures health, prosperity, and long life.

One of the basic structural principles of Mesoamerican religious thought is the use of paired opposites. These include pairings like life and death, sky and earth, day and night, sun and moon, fire and water. This concept can be traced to the earliest peoples in Mesoamerica.

CHINA

MESOAMERICA



Lyle L. Smith

This is the Taijitu (太極圖), with black representing yin and white representing yang. It is a symbol that reflects the inescapably intertwined duality of all things in nature, a common theme in Taoism. No quality is independent of its opposite, nor so pure that it does not contain its opposite in a diminished form: these concepts are depicted by the vague division between black and white, the flowing boundary between the two, and the smaller circles within the large regions.



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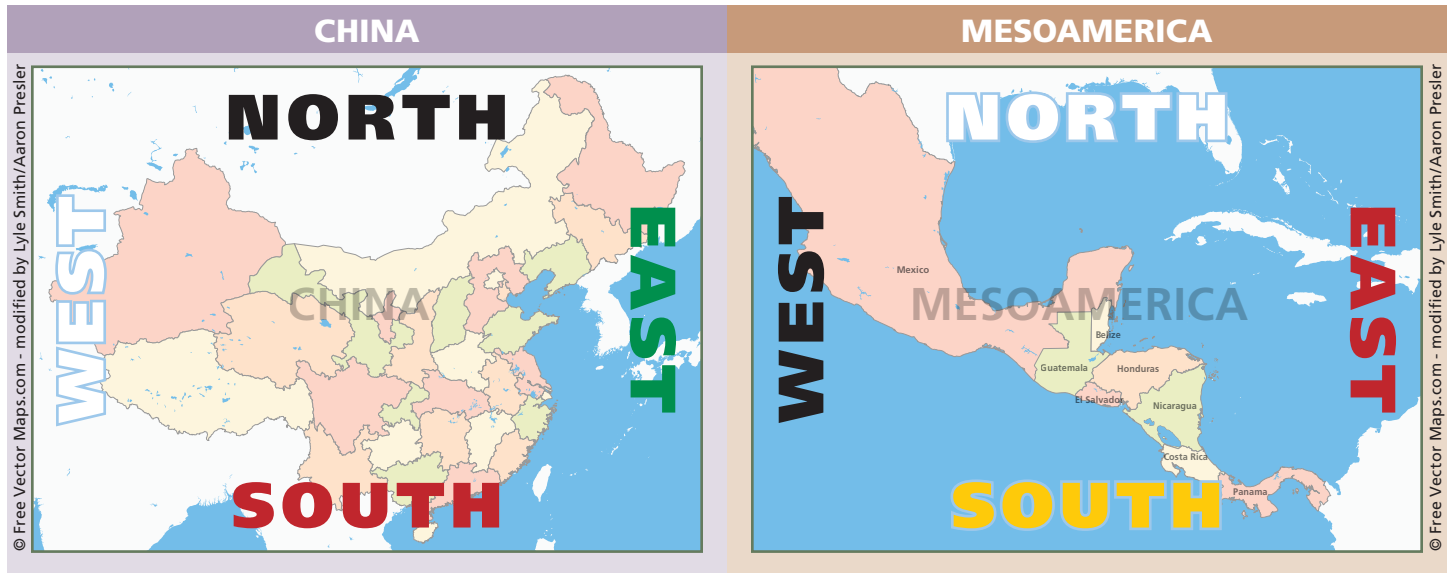
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The photo is from the ruin of Copan in Honduras, Temple 11, East Door, South Panel. The upper left glyph (inset photo also), which combines a pair of complementary words, is called a Distance Number Introductory Glyph. This means it introduces the following glyph which tells the amount of days, months, etc. elapsed since the prior date mentioned in the inscription. The panel shown here is one of eight panels written in mirror image.

FOUR DIRECTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH COLOR

Both Chinese and Mesoamericans associated colors with the four cardinal directions, although not the same. For east, China had green, the Mayas, red. China connected white with the west, the Maya

used black. North was black for China, white for Maya, and Chinese south had red while the Mayas employed yellow. 



glyph quotes

By Kevin Anderson*

Simple and inspiring is the story of the Brother of Jared as he led his family and friends and crossed the sea in barges. The great antagonist of this journey is captured in the waves of the sea that encompassed the barges and buried them in the deep, from time to time, as well as the “great and terrible tempests” caused by the fierceness of the wind. The testimony of this story, however, is the strength of faith and trust exhibited by these families as they sought to follow God’s direction.


Many times and in different ways we face the waves and tempests. These come in many forms but always with the same purpose—to try us and to test our patience and endurance. What we learn from the Jaredite story, however, is that the faith and trust of these families were “tight like unto a dish” just as the very vessels they had boarded. The Brother of Jared and his family had been directed by the Lord in all of their travels, culminating in His Word which directed them to build barges as they had hitherto done and to board them for their journey across the sea. Their obedience required a tight, solid faith and foundation

tight like unto a dish....

~ Ether 3:8 [LDS Ether 6:7]

that should inspire us today.

Blind faith such as this is a mountainous wave that God’s people face continually. We, however, sometimes have the luxury of jumping ship when the swells become too fierce. This was a luxury the Jaredites simply did not have. There was nowhere for the families to turn—except to God. This is the purpose of every trial: to try us, as the Apostle Peter tells us in 1 Peter 4:12, and hopefully to push us in His direction. The question is how well is our ship built to begin with? Is our ship built upon the foundation of the Word of God? Do we know, because of our prior faithfulness, that our ship is “tight like unto a dish” and capable of weathering the storm?

Man is continually faced with the temptation of turning and running from his trials. At some point it becomes necessary to pick ourselves up and get aboard the barge, as the Jaredites were commanded to do. If our faith is sufficient and our preparation sound, we can be assured that the foundation we have built through His Word is solid, even to the salvation of our lives and our souls. Are our faith and our foundation “tight like unto a dish?” 

*Although Kevin wrote this several years ago, we reprint it here because it seems very appropriate today.

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Thank You, Loyal Readers

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Thank You, Loyal Readers


By Patricia J. Beebe
Dear Friends,

I trust this letter finds you healthy and hopeful. The past several months have been a struggle for many, and the need for outreach to others through prayer and personal touch is paramount. As a representative of Pre-Columbian Studies Institute (PSI), I am thankful for your steadfastness in partnering with us. Your financial support has allowed us to reach out to thousands with the Good News of the Gospel through its newsletter, *glyph notes*. As it is said, "Many hands make work light" (Sir Bevis of Hampton). Our contributor base continues to grow in donations; the small together with the great.

The years have gone by quickly since PSI accepted the stewardship of imparting new insights into the message from The Book of Mormon. The organization is strong financially because of you even

in a time when the economy has been weakened by a pandemic. We acknowledge that there has been much loss and sorrow in the world. Our prayers go out to those who are suffering and petition for comfort and peace. It is truly good, however, to see faith and hope at work in the lives of so many.

We look forward to continuing to be in your homes and offices in the coming months. May the Lord continue to bless you and your family. It is always a pleasure to hear from you. Please keep the ministry of PSI in your prayers. A self-addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience in communicating with us.

Thank you! 



In keeping with the spirit of this issue, we say "Thank You" in Chinese with a Chinese brush.

We apologize for not being able to publish the Oct/Nov/Dec 2020 issue of *glyph notes*.