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## The Question of Asiatic Objects on the North Pacific Coast of America: Historic or Prehistoric?

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**Abstract:** Claims have been made that Native Indian cultures of the North Pacific coast of North America have been influenced by prehistoric contact with advanced cultures of China. Purported evidence has focused on the finding of ancient Chinese coins as well as literary references to early voyages and shipwrecks. These claims are dealt with in the context of examining the nature of the diffusion of Asiatic objects around the North Pacific Rim. Historic, protohistoric, and prehistoric events relevant to the interpretation of the evidence are discussed.

**KEY INDEX WORDS:** *Alaska, archaeology, Asiatic, British Columbia, Chinese, coins, copper, diffusion, Fou sang, Huishen, iron, Japanese, North Pacific Rim, prehistoric, protohistoric, trade.*

### Introduction

There is a great deal of interest in claims that various Asiatic peoples made early visits to the Pacific coast of Canada long before the arrival of European traders. These claims have been based on interpretations of old documents and the finding of supposed ancient Chinese and Japanese coins, ships and other objects. Inherent in the claims is the suggestion that cultural development of local Native Indian societies was altered by contact with these foreign visitors.

This article examines the existing evidence for the prehistoric diffusion of Asiatic goods to the North Pacific coast and elaborates on some of the historic, protohistoric (the period when non-native trade goods were coming into the area before foreign visitors) and prehistoric events that may be relevant to the interpretation of both present and future claims of evidence.

Do we have evidence that demonstrates the presence of Asiatic derived artifacts on the Pacific coast of North America before the first documented visits by Europeans? If so, what is the probable mechanism by which these objects could have diffused from Asia? If evidence exists for diffusion, whether of direct cultural contact by peoples, or material diffusion of objects only, its most conclusive form will be objects of undisputable Asiatic origin. One such class of artifacts, a major focus of this article, is Asiatic coins.

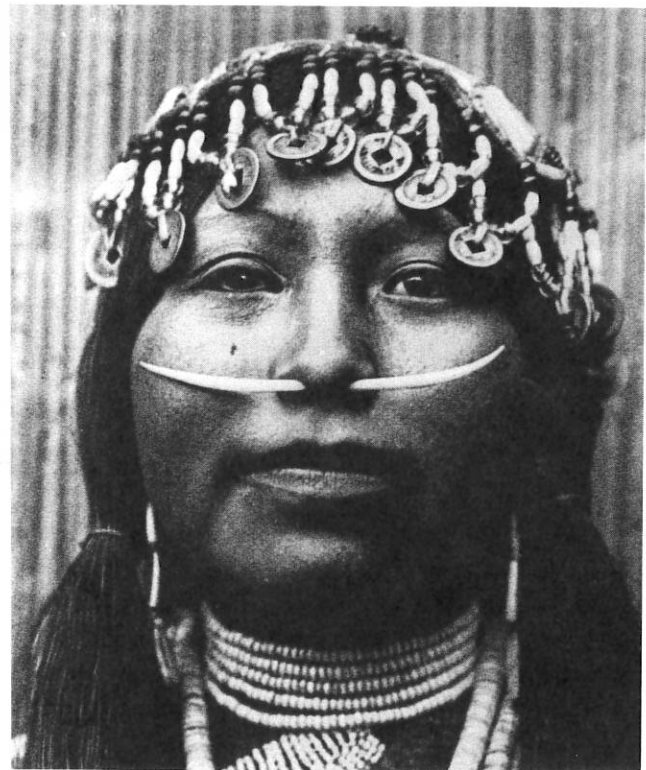


FIGURE 1

*Chinese coins attached to a Wishham bridal headdress from the Columbia River area. Modeled for photographer Edward Curtis in 1910. (Photo from original print in author's collection.)*

On the Pacific coast the debate surrounding the concept of trans-Pacific contact has focused on direct communications between the more developed cultures of the Old and New Worlds, the contacts between the Shang Dynasty of China and the Olmec or Maya cultures of Central America, or the Jomon culture of Japan and the Valdivia culture of Ecuador (*see* Leland 1875, Kiang Kang-Hu 1933, Ekholm 1953, 1964, Mertz 1972, Meggers 1975, Schneider 1977, McEwan and Dickson 1978, Zhongpu 1980, Carlson 1980, Jett 1983, Shao 1978, 1983, Needham and Gwei-Djen 1985, Tolstoy 1986). There also have been claims that evidence exists of Asiatic contacts with Native Indian cultures on the North Pacific coast (McKelvie 1933, 1941, 1944, 1955; Covarrubias 1954; Shao 1983; *see* Fitzhugh 1988). In considering these claims we need to be open to the idea that a gradual and indirect process of long-distance cultural diffusion of material objects may have occurred between Asiatic cultures and the less technologically advanced cultures of the New World.

How can we judge what constitutes evidence for this? Or, how might it be possible to distinguish between evidence for direct cultural contact between peoples of the New and Old World as opposed to the indirect diffusion of material objects? If objects of undisputable Asiatic manufacture are found in a datable prehistoric context in the New World, this will not in itself constitute evidence of significant primary intrusion into New World cultures or even minor contact with foreign people. We have to consider long-distance, indirect, diffusion around the North Pacific Rim as one explanation of the occurrence of such objects as well as, or in combination with, other forms of secondary intrusion such as ocean drift of vessels and flotsam (*see* Fig. 2).

A crucial requirement in assessing the evidence for possible prehistoric diffusion between cultures of Asia and cultures of the Pacific coast of North America is a better definition of what constitutes the historic period and especially the protohistoric period on the North Pacific Rim.

Objects of known European and Asiatic manufacture were already present on the northwest coast of America according to the earliest accounts of Russian, Spanish and British explorers. An established trade link between northeastern Siberia and northwestern America was in existence when the Russians first occupied Alaska (Michael 1967:100-101; Ray 1975:97-98; Vanstone 1979:63-64, 88-89; Hickey 1979:420-421; Pierce 1980:30-31). Hickey suggests that this trade system began to crystallize by the 15th century A.D. (1979:411).

The evidence for prehistoric trade, however, goes back much further in time. Prehistoric trade in iron is first evident by A.D. 200-500 in the Old Bering Sea culture (Collins 1937; Rainey 1941; Chard 1960; Levin and Sergeev 1964; Dikov 1965:19), and by A.D. 350 in the Alaskan Ipiutak culture (Larsen and Rainey 1948; Bandi 1969:76; Rainey 1971). McCartney (1988:57) believes that the use of metal "was so common that Alaskan Neo-eskimos developed an epi-metallurgical technology about 1,500-2,000 years prior to direct Russian contact." In light of this, there is a need to examine closely the temporal and spatial context of late prehistoric and protohistoric Pacific Rim trade and its potential involvement in the exchange of goods of Asiatic and European manufacture. On the North Pacific coast the use of the terms pre-contact and protohistoric vary over time and space.

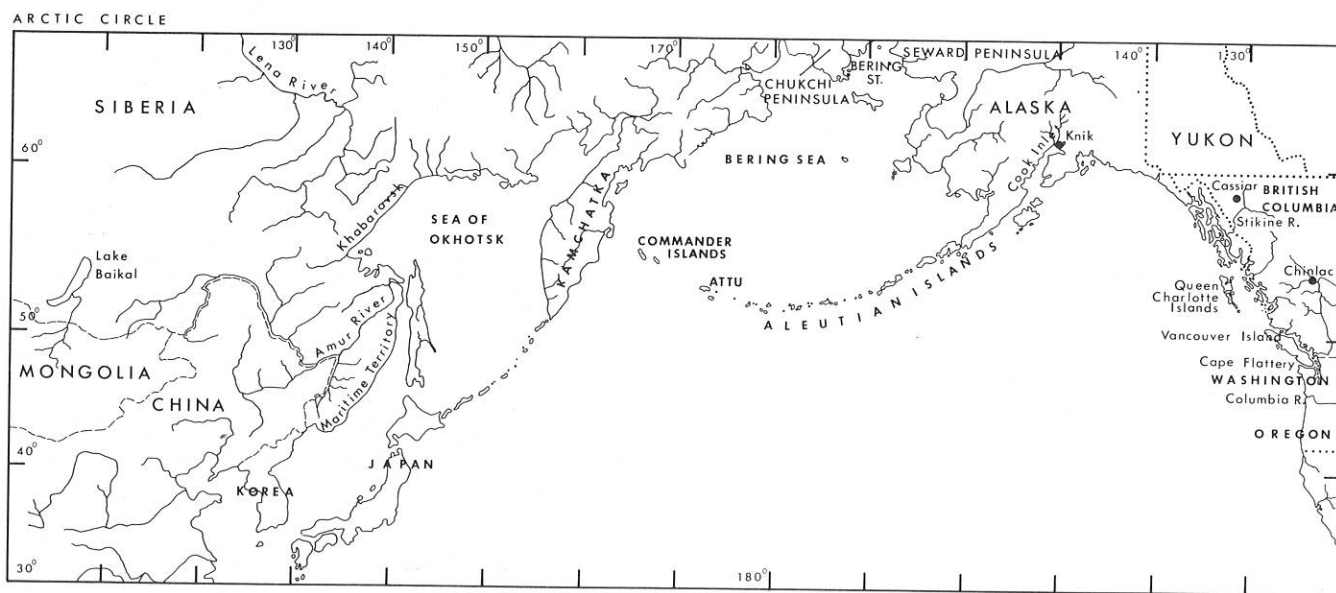


FIGURE 2

*The North Pacific coast showing some of the localities mentioned in the text.*

Contact-period dates most commonly used are associated with visits by specific individuals and range from 1595 A.D. on the northern coast of California, 1774 A.D. on the coast of British Columbia, and 1741 A.D. for southwestern Alaska. When viewed from a local regional perspective we have concrete evidence for the prehistoric use of iron.

For example, there are iron tools from the Ozette site on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State dated by dendrochronology to 1613 A.D. (Gleeson 1981:3; *see* Kirk and Daugherty 1974:136, 1978:96). If this iron proves by metallurgical analysis to have come from Russian sources through Siberia, or Spanish sources to the south, do we designate the context of this material as being protohistoric? If the iron proves to have come from an Asiatic source such as Japan do we use a different terminology? The main difference between the three source areas given would be the distance of the diffusion. In future we will need to examine the types and quantity of outside goods reaching a specific area before we classify the area as being inside or outside the realm of the protohistoric in the broader areal context. We need to look at how these goods have affected various cultural changes such as aspects of social organization, settlement and technological or artistic traditions.

With respect to the northern Canadian fur trade, Bishop and Ray (1976:124-125) suggest that the prehistoric period terminates when trade goods or other Euro-American influences reach a specific area. The beginning of the protohistoric period is marked by the influx of trade goods or influences such as disease. It is the time when native Indians began to travel outside their traditional territories to obtain these Euro-American goods. If we use the above definition of

the protohistoric period on the North Pacific Rim we may find that it covers a much longer time than previously believed.

MacDonald (1984:74) has examined protohistoric trade networks in the Skeena River area of British Columbia. He concludes from his study that, "It now appears that metal and trade goods were converging on the Northwest Coast from three or four directions from the very beginning of the eighteenth century, three-quarters of a century before the first Europeans established direct contact. The length of the protohistoric period on this part of the coast may eventually be stretched to a full century."

MacDonald (1984) has questioned Borden's (1952) post-contact dating of the Chinlac village site in the northern interior of British Columbia. I agree with MacDonald that, based on the native informant's statement given to Morice (1971: 14-19), the date of about 1735 A.D. for the abandonment of the village is probably more accurate. The site would then predate the contact period. The Chinlac site contains many iron artifacts as well as a Chinese coin from the Song Dynasty given a preliminary date by Borden (1952) of 1125 A.D. I have since examined this coin and it clearly dates to the Chih Ho period, 1054-1056 A.D., of the Song Dynasty (Fig. 3).

Future research may show the need to define a series of protohistoric periods for the northwest coast of North America because of the many potential sources of European and Asiatic goods available to Indian cultures. We know, for example, that between 1565 and 1815 Spanish galleons annually crossed the Pacific between the Philippines and Acapulco, Mexico. These ships passed close to the American

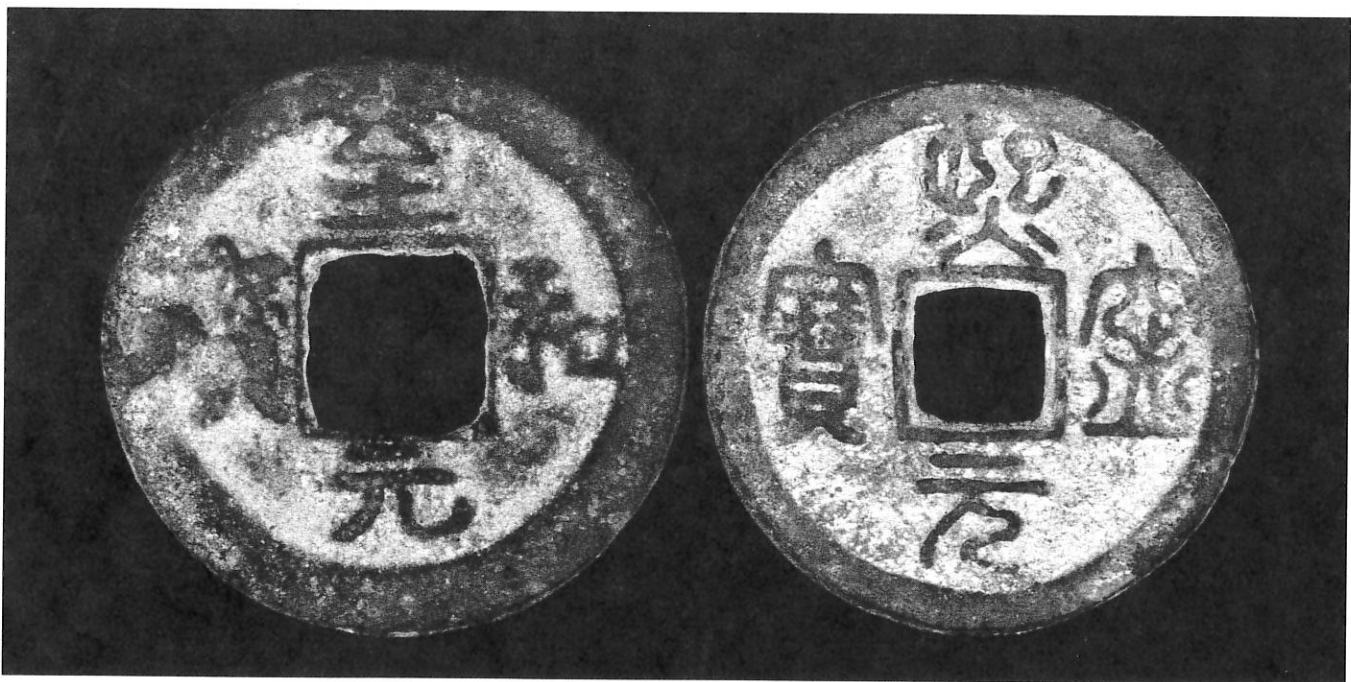


FIGURE 3

*Chinese coins from the Song Dynasty of the same types as those found in British Columbia. Left — Chih Ho period (1154-1056 A.D.) from the Chinlac site. Right — Hsi Ning period (1068-1078 A.D.) from 1880s garbage dump in Victoria's Chinatown. (Author's collection)*

shore and several laden with goods from Asia were known to have been lost at sea. English, Dutch and French privateers were known to have been active between 1575 and 1742 along the west coast of America (Schurz 1959; Cook 1973). Many of these vessels may have had unreported trade contacts with Indians of the North Pacific coast. In some areas, native traditions tell of visits by white men before those of the established trade periods. The father of a Clatsop Indian, Mrs. Solomon Smith, (born about 1810) was a witness to a shipwreck with survivors at Point Adams, Oregon, about 1750. From this ship came "pieces of money, having a square hole through the center" (Gibbs 1877: 236-237). This is probably the same incident reported to Boas (1894:275-278, also see Beals 1980:61).

### Asiatic Influence in the New World?

#### *The Literary Evidence*

Scholars have been discussing the similarities between ancient Chinese and New World cultures for over 400 years. In 1642, Hugo Grotius began the first controversial discussions suggesting links between China and the advanced cultures of the New World. His ideas were stimulated by reading earlier accounts of Spaniards who claimed to have observed "Asiatic" shipwrecks on the Pacific coast of Mexico (Grotius 1884:18). When Portuguese sailor Antonio Galvao visited China in 1555 he is reputed to have heard from Chinese sources about early Chinese voyages to the New World (Huddleston 1967:27). Galvao did note that, "the people of China were sometimes Lords of the most parts of Scythia, and sailed ordinarily the coast, which seemeth to reach unto 70 degrees toward the north", but his claims that Chinese ruled over locations in Central and South America seem to be his own additions based on observations of similarities in the physical appearance between Chinese and New World populations (see Hakluyt 1812:2). This statement is interesting, however, in suggesting that the Chinese of the 16th century were trading as far as the northern Bering Sea.

Many comparisons between aspects of culture in China and cultures of the Pacific coast of North America and claims of finding ancient Chinese artifacts have been made more recently (Watson 1935; see Wallace and Hurley 1968; see Riley et al. 1971; Meggers 1975; Zhongpu 1980; see Keddie 1980a and 1980b; Frost 1982; Shao 1983).

Some of these comparisons have been stimulated by secondary interpretations of several early Chinese documents. Most influential have been the writings on the *History of the Liang Dynasty* or the *Liang Shu* written by a team of official Chinese historiographers and completed about 629 AD during the Tang Dynasty. The most prominent writer of this group was Yao Silian (557-637 A.D.).

The *Liang Shu* refers to a monk named Huishen who, between 458 A.D. and 499 A.D., travelled across the "great eastern sea" and visited, among other places, the land of Fusang. European, American and, more recently, Chinese scholars have debated whether or not Fusang and other lands visited by Huishen are along the Pacific coast of North America at various locations from the Aleutian Islands to Mexico (Keddie 1982 with references).

Secondary references to the period during which Huishen lived vary considerably. The confusion results in part because Huishen is reported to have left on his voyage at a time when China was politically divided. He seems to have departed from southern China during the Sung (of the Liu family) Dynasty whose capital was in Nanking from 420-479 A.D. and he returned near the end of the Ch'i Dynasty (479-502 A.D.) that replaced it.

The original story of Huishen was recorded in the official court records of the Ch'i Dynasty. These records were lost, but not before the information was included as part of the records of the Liang Dynasty (502-557 A.D.). The Liang records were also lost but extracts were published in the *Liang Shu* as mentioned above, during the Tang Dynasty.

To add to the confusion, the Huishen story was extracted from the *Liang Shu* and published in 1317 A.D. in the historical encyclopedia *Wen-hsien t'ung-K'ao* by Ma Tuan-lin. It is this reference which was translated by De Guignes (1761 A.D.) and other Europeans, who in turn have been quoted or misquoted by many American writers from the 19th century (e.g., Leland 1875 and Vining 1885) to popular writers of recent years (e.g., Mertz 1972). We will never know how much the original story has changed through its many interpretations.

Some 19th-century scholars believed that the land of Fusang referred to the province of "Fu-sang" in Korea (Dall 1886) or areas north of Japan (Schlegel 1892). The voyage across "the great eastern sea" and the peoples described in the Huishen stories probably refer to the South China Sea and the practices of the many different cultural groups ranging from Japan to the Kamchatka Peninsula. A modern and critical translation of the original documents is needed before there can be an attempt to resolve the dispute as to the locations referred to in the stories.

Eighteenth-century explorers on the northwest coast of America were aware of a place called Fusang because it was clearly marked on a number of early maps. Thomas Jefferys published a map in 1768 which shows Fou Sang as an island north of the entrance to Juan de Fuca Strait at 50° north latitude (see Fig. 4). This location could be interpreted as Vancouver Island — although, on Jeffreys' map, Fusang is oriented east and west rather than northwest to southeast as is the case for Vancouver Island. The Spanish map of Antonio Zatta published in 1776 also shows "Fou Sang Colonia de Chinese" at 50° north latitude which would place it at the centre of the west coast of Vancouver Island (see Armstrong 1982). The features of both of these maps are inaccurate and probably compiled from incomplete Spanish and Russian maps. One could interpret the location marked as Fou Sang as representing several different regions between southern Alaska and the mouth of the Columbia River.

#### *The Chinese-coin Evidence*

It has been suggested that the finding of ancient Chinese coins from Oregon to Alaska gives credence to the Huishen story and confirms that part of this area is the land of Fou Sang he discovered. What is the truth of these statements? At present there is considerable evidence to show that Asiatic coins, manufactured in Asia before the period of known

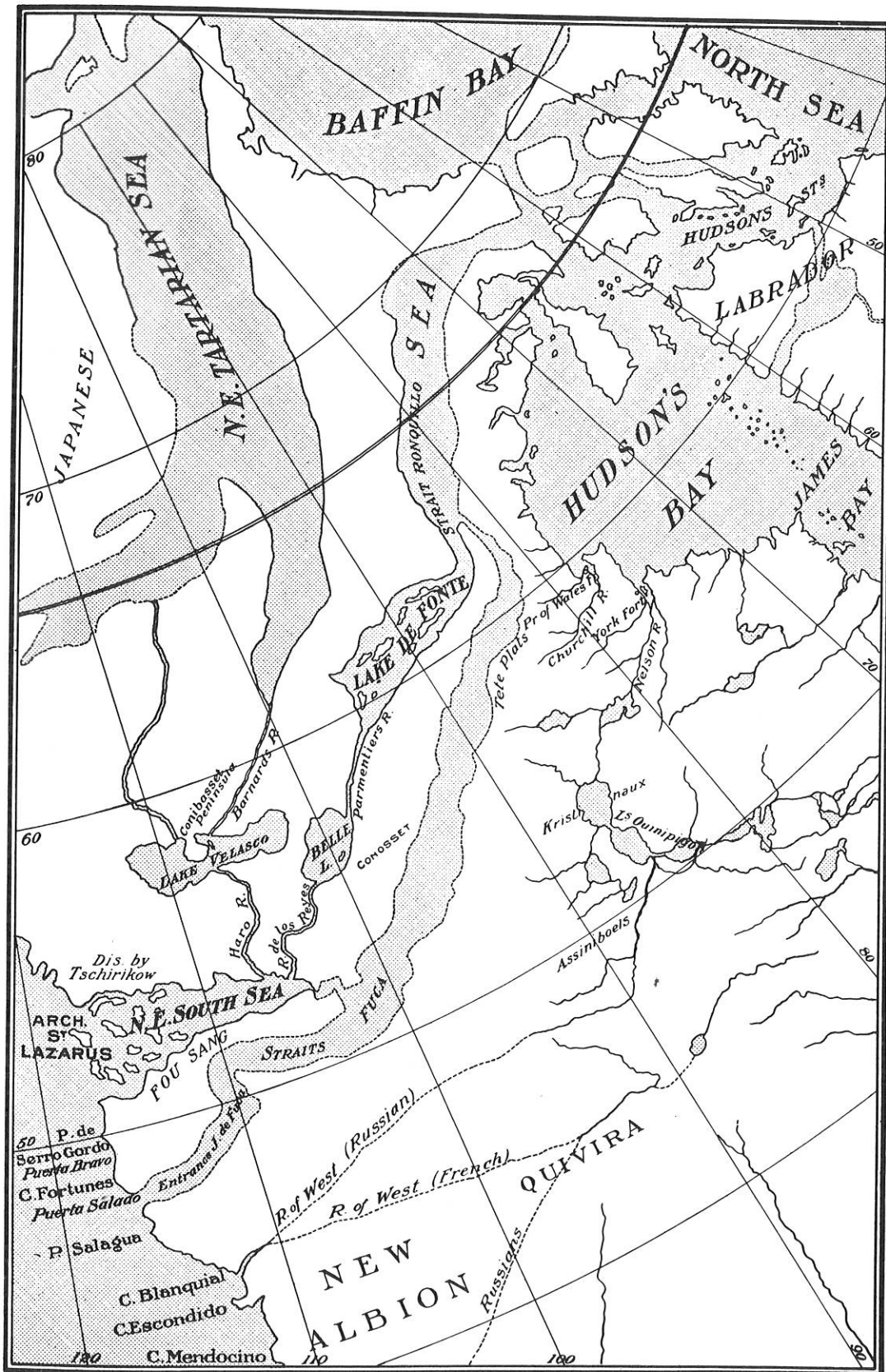


FIGURE 4

Thomas Jefferys's map of 1768 showing Fou Sang as an island north of the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. (After Newcombe, 1914 Plate 1)

European-Native contact on the northern coast of North America, were brought there in the late 18th century by non-Chinese trading vessels and later in the 19th century by Chinese immigrants. There is some evidence to suggest the occurrence of a pre-European contact diffusion of Asiatic coins around the North Pacific by indirect trade and directly by accidental Japanese marine voyages. Supposed evidence of much earlier prehistoric coins is at present dubious both in the dating of the coins and their ascribed context.

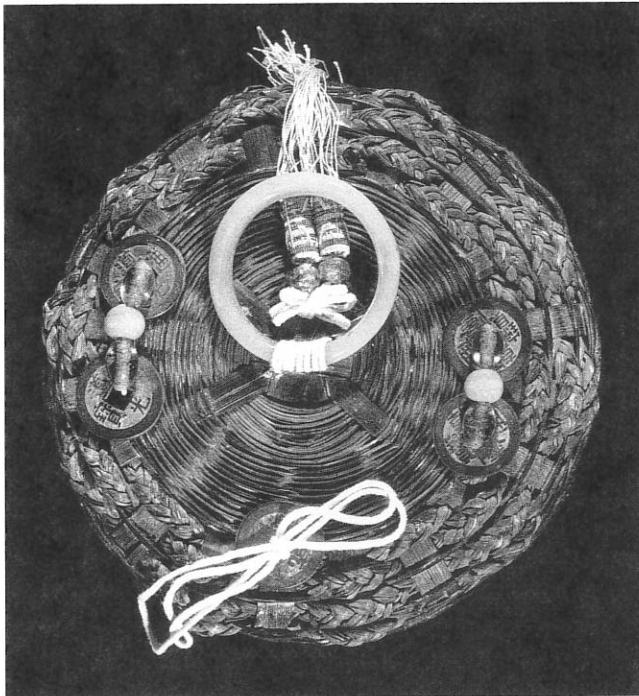


FIGURE 5

*Chinese coins attached to an imported sewing basket. Common in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these baskets are known to have been used by both native and non-native peoples. (Author's collection)*

In the article: *Pre-Columbian Old World Coins in America: An Examination of the Evidence* Epstein (1980), presents two unresolved cases of potentially ancient pre-contact Chinese coins, one found in Alaska and one in British Columbia. I have since investigated both of these instances.

I shall focus on the details of these cases because they have most often been used by proponents of early Chinese visits to the Pacific coast as providing at least partial substantiation, if not conclusive evidence, for the voyages of Huishen and others. In both cases the coins have been reputed to be between 1500 and 2000 years old. I shall deal here in depth with the history of the purportedly ancient, temple coin from Alaska. As accounts of the British Columbia find have been published (Keddie 1981, 1982), only a short summary of this and subsequent research will be presented. First, however, it is necessary to place these coins in a broader perspective, for there are in fact tens of thousands of Chinese and other Asiatic copper coins that have been found either buried or attached as ornaments to native Indian and Chinese

material objects from the Northwest Coast (*see* Figs. 1, 5, 6, 7, 10).

#### *Coins of the Post-1850 Period*

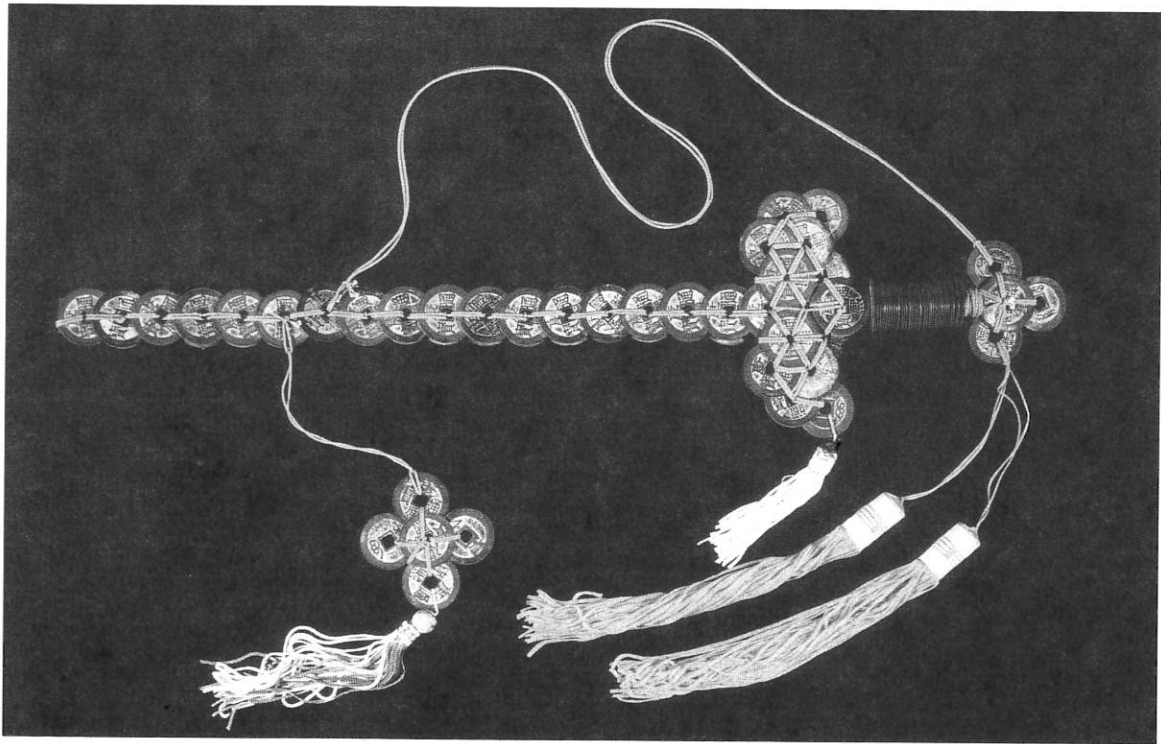
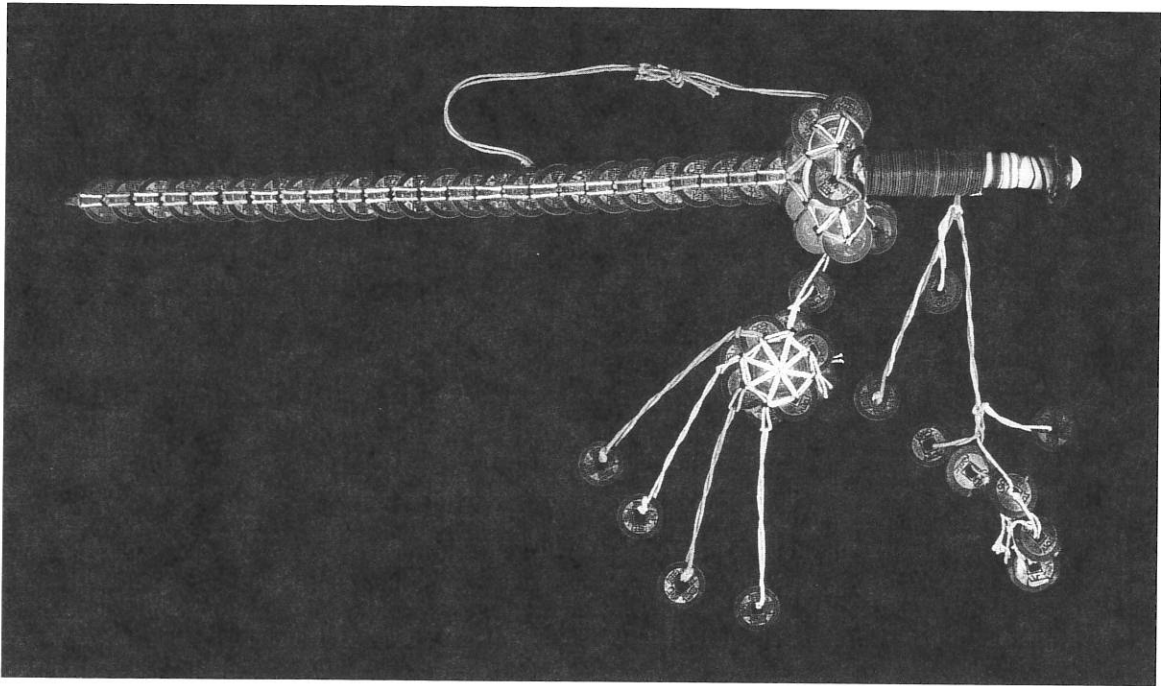
The deposition of these copper coins may be from a number of sources. In the last 30 years, Chinese copper coins have been imported, mainly from Taiwan and Hong Kong, to be sold to players of the I Ching fortune-telling game, to makers of jewelry, and to coin collectors. To this day, some elderly Canadians of Chinese origin still carry a good-luck coin tied inside their clothing. Earlier in the 20th century, in Canadian Chinese communities, it was still not uncommon for newborn babies and newlywed couples to receive coins for good fortune as gifts — the older the coins, the better the fortune. Old coins were often passed down through many generations. In the late 19th century, Chinese coins came into North America attached to common sewing baskets as well as on a number of ceremonial objects (*see* Figs. 5, 6, 7). For example, coin swords that were hung on the cribs of babies to scare away ghosts were made of 130 to 140 old coins tied together. I have examined the coins on eight of these swords and they range in date from 1662 to 1908 (*see* Fig. 6). Coin circles were also hung in windows to keep out evil spirits (Fig. 7).

During the gold-rush periods after the 1840s, and later coal-mining and railway-building activities, when thousands of Chinese entered the northern Pacific coast area, many Chinese coins were brought to this region.

Bottle diggers looting the old Chinese camps and towns have found thousands of coins, some in small clusters and others in large individual caches of hundreds of coins. These coins were used as currency among Chinese immigrants and were often hoarded with the intention of taking them back to China. I have seen several thousand coins dug from the ground. Almost all dated to the Chien Lung period (*see* Fig. 8). The most common of these coins date to the Chien Lung period between 1736 and 1795 A.D.

Next in frequency are coins of the K'ang Hsi period, 1662 to 1722 A.D. Coins from the Chien Lung period were being imported to be used in the Fan Tan gambling establishments. I obtained an unopened package of imported coins which was known to have been purchased by a Chinese Fan Tan player in Victoria, British Columbia, in 1911. When opened, 277 of the 280 coins dated to the Chien Lung period and three to the Chia Ching period (1796–1821 A.D.) (Fig. 9).

This pattern of dating on imported coins of the historic period is not unexpected since the 60-year Chien Lung period and the 61-year K'ang Hsi period produced far more coins than later periods. The copper Chien Lung "cash" coin was also valued higher than others because of the luck inherent in the longevity of this emperor's reign and because of a traditional belief that the coins contained minute traces of gold. In the 1860s they were often considered to be worth one-quarter of an American cent instead of the usual one-sixth of a cent for coins of the other periods or the Japanese or Korean "cash" sometimes mixed with the Chinese coins. Zinc Annamese coins were also used in gambling in British Columbia and were worth one-tenth of a cent. The Chinese



FIGURES 6a & 6b

*Ceremonial coin swords used by Chinese Canadians in British Columbia. Top — made of Chinese coins all dating to the Ch'ien Lung period (1736–1796 A.D.). Bottom — made of Chinese coins all dating to the K'ang Hsi period (1662–1723 A.D.). (Author's collection)*

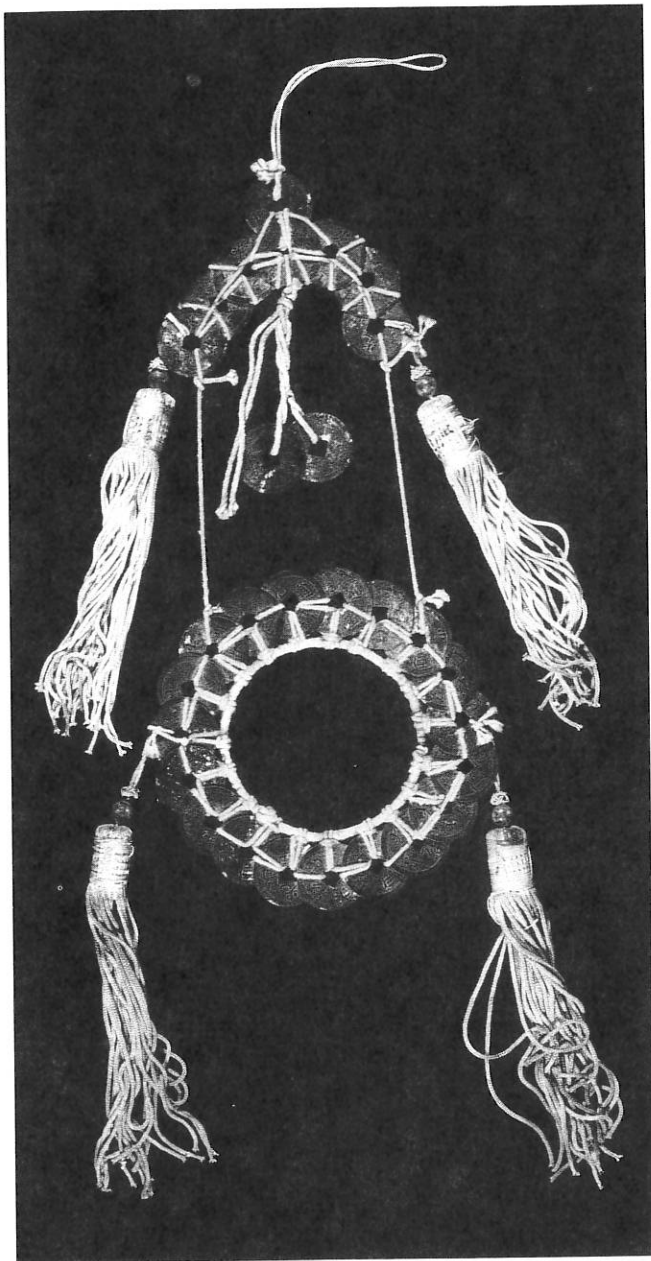


FIGURE 7

*Chinese-coin window hanging used traditionally to keep out evil spirits. (Author's collection)*

were very conscious of assessing the value of coins not only for their mineral worth but also for their luck value. This value carried over to the coin-like tokens purchased at the Taoist temples in China and worn by Taoist followers who came to the Northwest coast in the 19th century (Figs. 11, 12, 13). The temple tokens, like the smaller coins, have been found by bottle hunters.

#### *Coin Use by Native Indians*

Before the period of major Chinese immigration to North America, Chinese coins were purchased in China by

European and American traders engaged in the fur trade on the Pacific coast. They are recorded as trade cargo on European vessels (Meares 1790). By 1790, Chinese coins were observed in the possession of Indians from Alaska to Washington State. One account, in 1972, describes a high-ranking Haida as sounding like a mule in harness due to the rattling of so many Chinese coins on his clothing (Wagner and Newcombe 1938:219).

Chinese coins found in archaeological contexts, away from Chinese immigrant settlements, are mostly associated with historic period Indian burials. The clusters of coins found in both archaeological and ethnological contexts from Alaska to Oregon tend to date mostly to the early Ching Dynasty (A.D. 1644–1796). A Nisga'a medicine man's cape at the Royal British Columbia Museum, last used in a curing ceremony in 1928, had 26 coins attached (Fig. 10). All were manufactured between A.D. 1662 and 1796 with the K'ang Hsi period (A.D. 1662–1723) represented by 19 of the coins (Keddie 1978).

American museums hold several examples (collected in the mid-19th century) of Tlingit hide-armor jackets covered with Chinese and Japanese coins that have a similar dating sequence to the coins on the Nisga'a cape (*see* Phebus 1974; Burch 1988:231). Emmons noticed that the coins were found only on the "more modern type of hide armor" (n.d., chap. 9, p. 33). A Tanaina necklace from Cook Inlet, collected in 1883, has 19 Chinese coins attached that date mostly to the Kang Hsi period (*see* Osgood 1966: 228; Pl.7).

Occasionally, pre-Ching Dynasty coins are associated with historic period Chinese clothing or Indian burials. Beals (1980:58) describes five coins found together at the Clackamas River, Oregon. Of the three identifiable specimens, two are K'ang Hsi period (1662–1723 A.D.) specimens and one is from the northern Song Dynasty, Yuan Feng period, A.D. 1078–1085. I have observed two examples of Song Dynasty coins mixed with late 19th-century coin assemblages. One of these (Hsi Ning period 1068–1078 A.D.) was associated with 1870s historic refuse in the city of Victoria.

Many of the early Ching Dynasty coins were being used by Indians until the early 20th century. In the late 19th century, among the Wishram of the Columbia River, girls wore headdresses made of shell beads and Chinese coins on special occasions, such as after puberty and during marriage ceremonies (Curtis 1972:166; 1975:xv,87) (Fig.1). The same practice was found among the neighbouring Yakima (Conn 1979:354). "Strings of Chinese cash" were also tied to the body of a deceased by mourners among the Wishram (Spier and Sapir 1930:270).

#### *Japanese Shipwrecks*

At least some of the Asiatic coins found among Indian cultures were from shipwrecks. The frequency of these wrecks is uncertain. Of the many cases of Japanese and other possible Asiatic wrecks enumerated by Davis (1872a and 1872b) and Brooks (1876) as occurring between 1617 and 1876, only 12 are reported as having come ashore between California and the Aleutian Islands. Of the others only four were found at sea within 1000 miles of the American coast line.







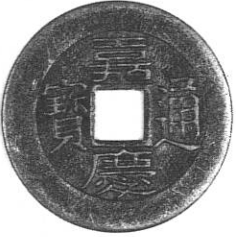





Shun-chi	Kang-hsi	Yung-cheng	Chien-lung	Chia-ching
1644–1661	1662–1722	1723–1735	1736–1796	1796–1820
				
Tao-kwong	Shen-fung	Tung-chi	Kwong-shui	Shuen-tung
1820–1850	1850–1861	1862–1874	1875–1908	1909–1911
				

FIGURE 8  
*Coins from each of the reign periods of the Ching Dynasty.*

The quality of documentation for most of these events is poor. Only one wreck, in 1813, can be substantiated for the coast of British Columbia (Keddie 1989). A wreck, in 1784, on "Amisochka" (Amchitka ?) Island in the Aleutians is the best documented of the early accounts in the New World (Dmytryshyn *et. al.* 1988:401). An earlier account, in 1731, describes a Japanese wreck on the Kamchatka Peninsula (Dmytryshyn *et. al.* 1988:116). The frequency of losses may be a product of a Japanese law, in 1639, that banned deep-sea rudders on coastal vessels and forced the making of junks with open sterns and large square rudders (Davis 1872:359; Brooks 1876:7). However it must be admitted that it is possible, if not probable, that the occasional vessel did reach the coast intact in prehistoric times. These could have provided peoples of the west coast of America with Asiatic coins and other metal goods.

One of the best documented Japanese shipwrecks is that of the *Hyojun Maru* which washed ashore south of Cape Flattery, Washington, in 1834. This ship was blown to sea when carrying a cargo of rice and porcelain. The case has been documented by Kohl (1982) and Drury (1945) and referred to by many previous authors. One of the early accounts of this incident was a personal observation in 1834

by Alexander Caulfield Anderson. Anderson intercepted a group of Indians at Cape Disappointment at the mouth of the Columbia River after they had acquired goods from the *Hyojun Maru*. Anderson notes that, "Indians boarded our vessel and produced a map with some writing in Japanese characters; a string of the perforated copper coins of that country; and other convincing proofs of a shipwreck . . . It was south of Cape Flattery (at Queen-ha-ilth I believe)" (Anderson 1863).

Queen-ha-ilth was the name used in the early 1800s to refer to the region occupied by the Quileute Indians. It is interesting that Japanese coins have been found in small clusters just to the north of Quileute territory at the Ozette site in house 1 (believed to date to the early 19th century) and also associated with a child burial on a small island close to this site (Ruth Kirk, pers. com. 1982). Pieces of Asiatic bamboo were also found in house 1 at Ozette. These specimens may be from the 1834 wreck or an earlier one. At least some of the coins date to the early 18th century.

Japanese-made, glass, fishing-net floats have been found by the thousands along beaches from the Aleutian Islands to California. This profusion of finds has often been used to give credibility to the suggestion that there were many

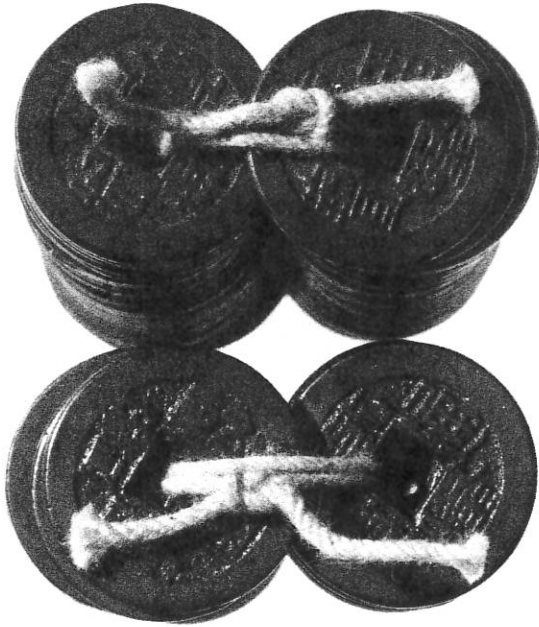


FIGURE 9

*Bundles of 18th and 19th century Chinese coins used for gambling in the early 20th century. (Author's collection)*

prehistoric shipwrecks along the Northwest coast. However, since World War II, Japanese glass floats have also been used by North American and European fishermen; therefore, those found along the Northwest Coast did not necessarily drift over from Japan. The glass floats were first produced in Japan in 1910 and are therefore not found in prehistoric archaeological sites (Haskin 1955). Prior to 1911 items other than glass floats were observed. Emmons mentions that "Drifts of coconut, bamboo, and other Oriental woods are not infrequently found on the seaward shores of the Queen Charlotte Islands." (1911:73-74).

#### The "Ancient" Chinese Coin from British Columbia

A great deal of misinformation has been presented about supposedly ancient coins found in northwestern British Columbia. The original published story pertaining to this find appeared in *The Victoria Daily Colonist* newspaper on October 21, 1882. It was titled "The Oldest Inhabitants — Were the Chinese Here 3000 Years Ago." Most of it is quoted here as follows:

A few weeks ago a party of miners who were running a drift in a bank on one of the creeks in the mining district of Cassiar made a remarkable find. At a depth of several feet the shovel of one of the party raised about 30 of the brass coins which have passed current in China for many centuries. They were strung on what appeared to be an iron wire. This wire went to dust a few minutes after being exposed; but the coins appeared as bright and new as when they first left the Celestial mint. They have been brought

to Victoria and submitted to the inspection of intelligent Chinamen, who unite in pronouncing them to be upwards of 3000 years old. They bear a date about 1200 years anterior to the birth of Christ. And now the question arises, how the coins got to the place where they were found. The miners say there was no evidence of the ground having been disturbed by man before their picks and shovels penetrated it; and the fact that the coins are little worn goes to show that they were not long in circulation before being hidden or lost at Cassiar. Whether they were the property of Chinese mariners who were wrecked on the north coast about 3000 years ago and remained to people the continent; or whether the Chinese miners who went to Cassiar seven or eight years ago deposited the collection where it was found for the purpose of establishing for their nation a prior claim to the land, may never be known.

The dating ascribed to these coins is clearly wrong. I have concluded that the "ancient coins" were good-luck, temple tokens made in the late 19th century and probably either brought to British Columbia by Chinese miners who lost or buried them at the Cassiar District mining operation on Defot Creek between 1878 and 1882 or were deposited in a Native Indian burial unearthed by Chinese miners. The tokens were located in an area heavily populated by Chinese immigrants in 1882 and, after unfounded claims of having great age, they gained a popular notoriety. The temple coins were shown to many people and different versions of stories pertaining to their discovery and age spread around the province to be put into print and changed frequently by many authors in the last 100 years (Keddie 1981, 1982).

The one Cassiar temple token or talisman of which a photograph remains is of a modern character style. Similarly designed talismans first appear in the Ming and early Ching dynasties. However, these are larger, have square holes, are of a more bronze-like than brass-like material, and more crudely cast. The Cassiar specimen is almost identical to several 19th-century talismans in the author's collection (see Fig. 11). The Cassiar talisman is the same size, has a round hole of the same diameter, distinct post-casting, circular grinding and polishing patterns, which can be seen in the photos, and an identical style of characters. Therefore, the Cassiar finds can clearly be ruled out as evidence of early Chinese voyages to British Columbia.

#### The "Ancient" Alaskan Coin

Epstein (1980:21:1) quotes MacMillan-Brown as reporting that:

... a Russian farmer dug up when ploughing virgin soil in 1913 a large stone lamp with a Buddha-like figure rising from the bottom. It is in the Juneau Museum, and in the same case with it are large Chinese coins also found beneath the soil, and these, from their interpretation, belong to the reign of an Emperor in the eighth century (1927:67).

A single Chinese "large bronze talisman" is described in the Alaska State Museum's catalogue (No. III-0-14) as 2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (7 cm) in diameter (Fig. 12). It has a "square center hole with Chinese characters on one side with figures on (the

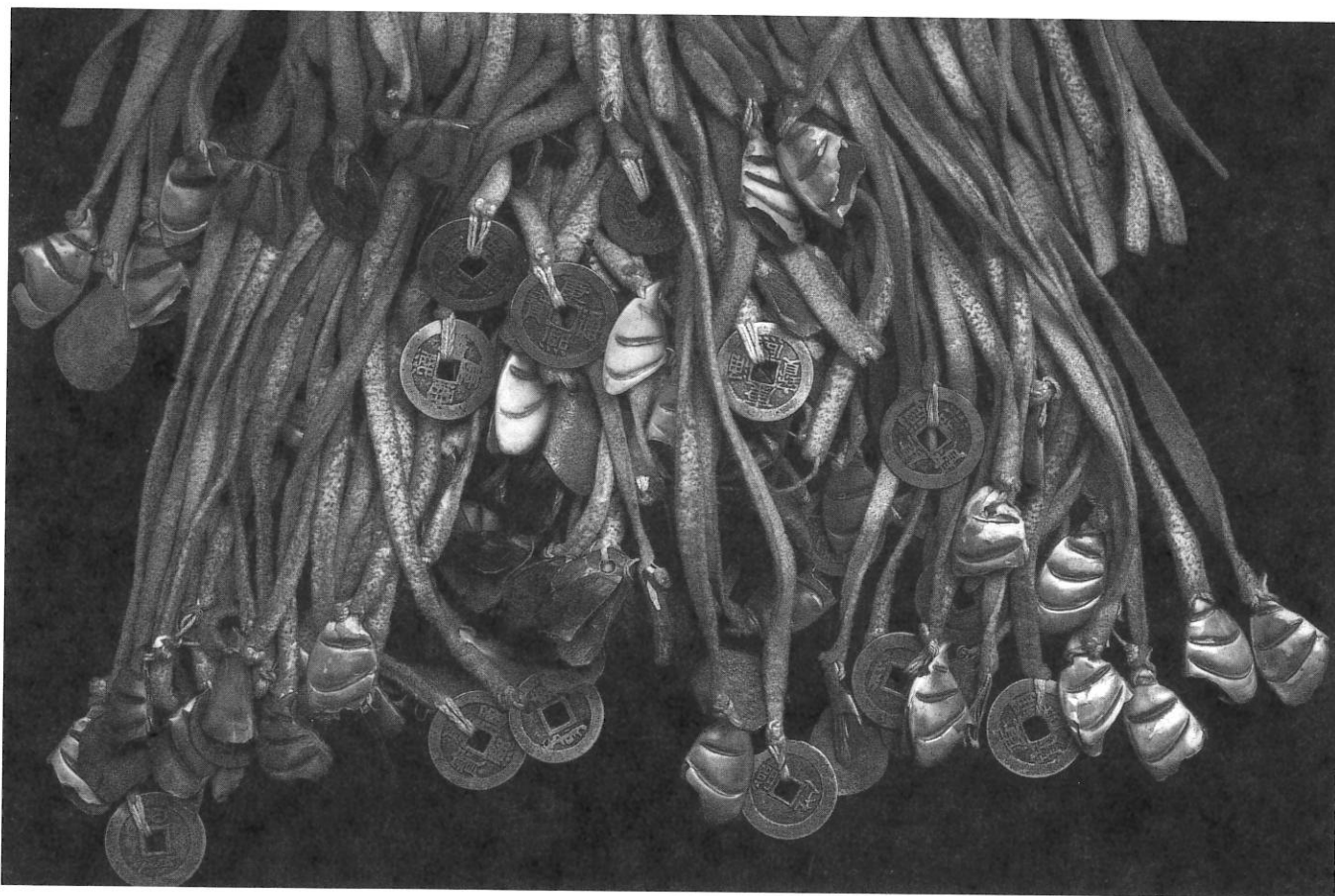


FIGURE 10

*Chinese coins and puffin bills attached to fringe of a Nisga'a medicine man's cape. (Royal B.C. Museum, Anthropology Collection, Cat. No. 14293)*

other." The item was found June 15, 1913, by Charles Ulanky on his farm at Fish Creek, near Knik on Cook Inlet. The 1957 entry was taken from the 1923-24 accessions record. The accessions catalogue for this period reads "Crocker, U.G. Anchorage, Alaska, one very old and rare Chinese temple coin." The 1957 record states "date corrected from museum booklet." "Booklet" here could refer to any of three booklets.

The *Descriptive Booklet on the Alaska Historical Museum* issued by the Alaska Historical Association was published in 1922 and edited by the first curator, Reverend A.P. Kashevaroff. An article in this booklet entitled *An Oriental Stone Lamp* was described as "a connecting link between the Orient and Alaska." In 1928 Kashevaroff published a revised edition that added illustrations and text on a Chinese talisman.

A crucial question regarding the dating of the talisman is its possible association with the stone lamp referred to by MacMillan-Brown. Kashevaroff describes what he believed to be an "Oriental Stone Lamp" with its inside "Buddha-like figure" as being:

... turned up in plowing by Mr. Charles Ulanky on June 15, 1913, while breaking virgin soil on his homestead, on Fish Creek, about four miles from Knik, Cook Inlet,

Alaska. It was found at a depth of about one foot. At the same time and place Mr. Ulanky uncovered a Chinese temple coin . . . several skeletons and small trinkets," which led him to believe the place to be the site of an old Indian village or burying place (1928:28).

Kashevaroff stressed that the Chinese talisman was "uncovered by Mr. Ulanky at the same time and place as the lamp." (Ibid: 28). Kashevaroff submitted the talisman to "Chinese scholars" and concluded that:

... the period at which this amulet might have been made ranges, according to the interpretation of the various Chinese scholars, between 265 and 700 A.D. The inscription as deciphered by authoritative scholars, reads: Fu Kuei shou k'o . . . meaning riches, honors and long life.

Kashevaroff saw from the interpretations presented that the "Taoist surroundings of this talisman seem to be sufficiently clear." It is this believed association of the talisman with the early period of classic Taoism that biases his decision in favour of an early date for the item.

In 1950, another booklet included an article by Curator Edward L. Keithahn entitled *A Mysterious Lamp*. Keithahn comments on the stone lamp:

... so unique was the specimen when found that it was at first believed to be a hoax. Since then several more, so



FIGURE 11a & 11b

*Two sides of a 19th century Chinese temple token of the type found in the Cassiar district of British Columbia and claimed to be 3000 years old. Specimens with the same motifs are still made today. Top — obverse side showing the eight trigrams which are the basis of the I Ching oracle. Bottom — A statement of the coin's spell to destroy evil spirits. (Author's collection)*

similar that they might have come from the hands of the same artisan, have been discovered (1950:52).

Keithahn seemed to be unaware that Alden Mason (1928) had already published an extensive commentary on the Knik bowl and others in the area. These lamps are shown and discussed by de Laguna as products of Pacific Eskimo culture (1975:177-180; Plates 28, 69, 70-1, 70-2, 71).

Stone lamps have over a 4,000-year history in the Pacific eskimo area. The large, stone lamps with human and animal figures date to the late Kachemak III period between about 100 B.C. and 1000 A.D. The Knik bowl style would fit the earlier part of this period (*see* Clark 1984:142).

In commenting on the talisman, Keithahn (1950) gives a broader range as to its date of manufacture and expresses an uncertainty as to its association with the stone lamp:

... Unfortunately it is not a coin but a talisman of Taoistic connections which varied little from century to century. Scholars have dated it variously as of 265-420 A.D. (Chin Dynasty) to 1368-1644 A.D. (Ming Dynasty) to not over fifty years old in 1928. It was once believed to have had a connection with the lamp with which it was found, leading some to believe that the lamp, too, was Chinese. It is now more generally believed to have been merely a chance association (Keithahn 1950:54).

He continues giving his opinion on the origin of the talisman:

... it is conceivable that it was carried there by Russians from Siberia where they had business contacts with the Chinese and traded to the native among whose bones it was discovered (Ibid 1950:54).

Who were the Chinese scholars referred to by Kashevaroff? On March 27, 1923, Kashevaroff received a letter from W. de C. Ravenal, administrative assistant to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, in response to his letter with photographs of March 14, 1923. Enclosed was a statement (made upon examination of the photographs) by Walter Hough, Head Curator of Anthropology. Hough pointed out that, "These temple coins are not uncommon in southeastern Alaska and British Columbia," and he identified the stone lamp as, "Alaska Peninsula on account of its characteristic form." Hough referred briefly to the Cassiar find "a jar containing a number of coins intended as charms against lightning was found 200 miles up the Stikine River in British Columbia."

Another letter received by Kashevaroff dated April 25, 1924, sent by Thomas Riggs of New York enclosed a letter from Ziang-ling-Chang, the Consul-General of China, in New York. Chang claims that he has:

... at last identified the coin as of the Tang Period, 700 A.D. The coin was a sort of charm for keeping away evil and it was made either by or for Sun Sze-miao.

In a letter of March 24, 1926, R. H. Geoghegan describes the characters on the reverse side of the coin as Taoist "occult glyphs." Geoghegan refers to a statement from the San Francisco consulate that referred to the "Tien Shaw period of Chou dynasty, 1234 years ago" as the period to which the talisman dates and points out that it is basically the same as the A.D. 700 date given by the New York consulate. Geoghegan indicates that "Sun Ssu-miao" was:

... revered as a patron spirit of medicine. It is said that about A.D. 630 he was induced to leave his mountain

hermitage for the court of the T'ang emperor, T'ai Tsung, where he performed many miracles . . . There are no names or dates on your coin whereby it might be assigned to any particular epoch, but the common consent with which the gentleman of the two Consulates you mention refer it to the T'ang period is undoubtedly based on some knowledge of these matters that appears sufficient in their judgement, as cultured scholars, to warrant such a conclusion.

Geoghegan points out that "the Chinese are very prone to make copies of antiques, and copy the same model generation after generation," but he then concurs "that A.D. 700 is not at all beyond the bounds of possibility as the true date of this interesting relic."

Another letter of August 29, 1927 addressed to a Mr. Bishop is from Benjamin March of New York who also passes on comments by Professor Arthur W. Hummel. March indicates that he:

... submitted a tracing of the characters to a Chinese student of calligraphy, who gave as his opinion that, read top, bottom, right, left (the usual way), the inscription was fu kuei shou k'ao, a common inscription on coins of the talismanic or charm type, of which this is one, meaning riches, honors and long life.

The picture suggests Taoist connections. The figure at the left seems to be a sage or Taoist teacher, and may be identified with Shou Lao, the old figure of longevity. The bird, the red-headed Manchurian crane, beyond a doubt, is a common long life symbol, and the lotus flower and star are familiar elements in Taoist decoration.

The Chin Shih So, a standard Chinese work on bronzes and stones, originally published in 1822 by the brothers Feng Yun-p'eng and Feng Yun-yuan of Kiangsu, contains, in the fourth volume of the six devoted to bronzes, a picture of this coin, front and back. This wood cut is slightly smaller than the photograph, but in every detail of decoration is so exactly the same as to indicate that the coin of the photograph is either one of the original issue there described or an exact copy of it. I think we may assume that we have an original. That coin is classed there as an amulet or talismanic coin. The statement is made that the coin was made by a certain Sun Ssu-mo of the Chin Dynasty, 265-420 A.D.

Hummel, however, believes that the coin is very recent. He is quoted as saying that it:

... is the duplicate in every detail, size, composition, and all, of at least a score of amulets I picked up in Shansi, . . .

In 1966 the Fish Creek site was recorded as a result of an archaeological survey along Knik Arm (Dumond and Mace 1968). The site is "located approximately one mile directly southwest of the village of Knik (NE 1/4 of NE 1/4, S34, T16N, R2W of Seward Meridian), and is undoubtedly that visited by de Laguna (1934:141) in 1930 . . . The discovery of the lamp, at least, was apparently confirmed by de Laguna (1934:141) through correspondence, in which Ulanky wrote that the vessel had been found in the marsh near the low terrace on which presumably both de Laguna and the 1966 Oregon party excavated." (Dumond and Mace 1968:7-8).

Dumond and Mace (1968: 13-19) conclude that there are two occupation levels at the Fish Creek site, an earlier Pacific eskimo occupation beginning before A.D. 1000



FIGURE 12a & 12b

*Two sides of temple coin from Cook Inlet, Alaska, claimed to be over 1000 years old. (Photo courtesy of Alaska State Museum, Juneau, Cat. No. 111-0-14.)*

based on the style of the stone lamp and lasting until after A.D. 1000 based on evidence from pottery styles. The latter period may have extended as late as A.D. 1700. The last occupation was a result of a historic movement of Tanaina Indians into the area. The occurrence of both a prehistoric and historic occupation level allows for the probability that the stone bowl and Chinese temple coin date to different periods.

In summary, the bowl is a product of local cultural development sometime after 100 B.C. and before A.D. 1100. The association of the temple coin and the stone bowl is uncertain. It is likely that the bowl and temple coin were found in the same general area and not necessarily associated. There is uncertainty as to the personage represented on the talisman and the age to which it is associated. My more recent inquiries have so far produced no additional pertinent data. If the personage is Sun Ssu-Miao, he is more properly referred to as the patron saint or god of druggists (Werner 1932:468). The Tang Emperor T'ai Tsung (c. A.D. 627–649), during whose reign Sun Ssu-miao lived, was himself recognized as the patron saint or god of the soil during the Ming Dynasty reign of Jen Tsung, A.D. 1425–26 (Werner 1932:484). It is more probable that Sun Ssu-Miao was deified during the Ming Dynasty resurgence of interest in the Tang Period.

The information presented by various authors is, of course, not evidence of the dating of the coin but simply an identification of the person depicted in the scene on one side of the talisman. To say the talisman must date to the Tang Dynasty because it has an engraving of a personage of that period is tantamount to saying that all statues of Buddha must date to the period of his life over 2400 years ago.

Stylistically, the characters on the obverse side of the talisman are similar to those first appearing on coins of the Chin Dynasty (A.D. 1115–1250), specifically of the Tai Ho reign (A.D. 1201–1208). The specimens from this period, however, had much larger central holes in relation to the size of the talisman than later periods (*see* Coole 1965:41 and 114). Copies of some of these early examples continued to be made into the 20th century. The copies often have noticeable differences.

Other temple coins found in southern Alaska include those on the famous Chilkat Tlingit mask that appeared on a 15-cent U.S.A. postage stamp (Fig. 13). The latter temple coins have round holes while the Knik specimen has a square hole. The Chilkat mask (*see* Feder 1982:132) was collected between 1883 and 1885. The collector indicated, "The grave in which this mask was found was pointed out to me as being old, and that of a medicine man, who had flourished more than two hundred years ago, six successors having filled this office; each one living to a good old age." (Bolles 1893:221). The design elements on the mask specimens are very similar to privately made amulets of the Shun Chih (A.D. 1644) and Kang Hsi (A.D. 1662–1722) reigns of the Ching Dynasty (*see* Burger 1976:57, 64). The latter specimens, however, have square holes like the Knik specimen (Fig. 12), not round holes like the temple coins of the mask. The round-hole specimens are later copies whose mode of manufacture closely resembles specimens made in the 19th century. The presence of the specific size of square hole in the Knik specimen would place its date of manufacture before the 19th century. The evidence suggests that the manufacture of the Knik coin does not predate the 12th century A.D. and is most likely to date after the 15th century and before 1800



FIGURE 13

*Chinese temple coins used as eyes on Chilkat Tlingit mask. (Smithsonian Institution Photo No. 80-16868)*

A.D. The specific dating of this temple coin must await further numismatic research or trace-element studies. Keithan's suggestion that the temple coin is associated with the Russian fur trade is the best explanation of origin, based on present evidence.

### The Diffusion of Asiatic Objects

Are some of the older coins and temple tokens the product of interactions that occurred between peoples of the Old and New Worlds before the known historic trade period? If this is the case, we need to look at the potential for long-distance, indirect trade in a prehistoric context as well as the potential for direct trading or exploring voyages by Asiatic peoples.

We know that artifacts of Chinese manufacture, and stylistic imitations of Chinese objects in native materials, spread great distances beyond the borders of China. This diffusion by trade was undertaken not only by those people who were in a political sense Chinese but also by many other neighbouring peoples and trading peoples such as Indo-Iranians, Arab and various Malayo-Polynesian peoples. As an example of the far-flung dispersal of Chinese material goods we may note that the oldest Chinese coins found on the coast of East Africa date to A.D. 620 (Gernet 1985:703). Yet the earliest documented Chinese voyages to Africa were not until A.D. 1413 (Gernet 1985:401). Present evidence suggests that these early Chinese coins came to rest in Africa as a result of indirect trading activities with Arab or Indo-Iranian traders, the same peoples who were responsible for the depositing of Roman coins (struck in A.D. 152) in the Mekong Delta on China's southern border (*see* Gernet 1985:127).

In China, during the 3rd to 6th centuries A.D., there were many trading visitors from southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean (Gernet 1985:201). The mostly Buddhist missionary pilgrimages, and increasing Chinese commercial activity continued through to the 9th century. This activity was mainly in the the south seas but at least some strategic interests existed in northeastern seas (Gernet 1985:196). Trade relations and the diffusion of Chinese manufactured artifacts to the east beyond Korea and southern Japan has generally received little attention. What do we know about these trade patterns from archaeological evidence?

The movement of envoys between China and Japan began in the 1st century B.C. (Tsunoda 1951:1). The oldest Chinese coins found in southern Japan (Kyushu) are from the period of the Han Dynasty usurper Wang Mang 9–23 A.D. (Gernet 1985:198). Japanese coins from the 10th century have been found on the Kurile Islands and in at least one site on the southern Kamchatka Peninsula but the dating of their associated context is unclear.

Present evidence does not allow us to examine specific trade patterns and movements of goods toward the Bering Strait from China but we can look at general patterns in the dispersal of metal artifacts (*see* Fig. 14). On the Siberian steppe iron finally replaced bronze as the standard metal during the 4th through the 2nd centuries B.C. (Chard 1974:74).

It was in the Glazkovo phase of the Lake Baikal sequence (c. 1850–1350 B.C.), that the first metal artifacts appear in substantial numbers: copper knives and small strips of copper used as ornaments and later bronze objects such as tanged knives, fishhooks and needles. All these metal artifacts:

... imitate the forms of earlier stone and bone objects, thereby providing evidence of local manufacture and the beginnings of local metallurgy . . . The appearance of the first copper objects is accompanied by changes in a number of typologically important artifacts (Okladnikov 1962:279–280).

Also associated with the Glazkovo phase are shells from the sea of Japan and the Moluccas indicating long-distance trade.

Okladnikov has shown direct evidence of Chinese influence on the developed bronze-age cultures of southern Siberia:

... The distinctive taiga celts, . . . bearing decoration in the form of eyes and pendant triangles obviously derive from Shang celts of the second half of the second millennium B.C. The effects of contact with ancient Chinese civilization were even more profound among the neighbours and relatives of the Baikal tribes living east of the Baikal. Here this contact radically changed the culture pattern and affected the composition of the population itself (Okladnikov 1962: 281).

The age of metal, at least on a limited basis, had spread to the lower Lena River in northwestern Siberia by 1000 B.C. and spread to much of the maritime regions of Siberia by 400 B.C. (Okladnikov 1964:53, 92). Dikov (1964) places the use of bronze tools on the Chukchi Peninsula as early as 500 B.C. Okladnikov (1963) shows iron tools to be well established in northeastern Siberia during the Birnirk-Thule transition of c. 900–1000 A.D.

In well-preserved sites in western Siberia dating to the 4th century B.C., long-distance trade items are well in evidence. They include fabrics from Persia, cowrie shells from the Indian Ocean, as well as silk and a bronze mirror from China (Okladnikov 1964:60–61). Bronze mirrors which were similar in appearance to temple tokens were a common export item in the 1st century A.D. and have been found from Vietnam to Siberia (Gernet 1985:140). By the first millennium B.C., the shell-mound cultures of the Soviet maritime provinces show evidence of the replacement of flaked stone tools by ground slate daggers and spear heads modelled after metal ones of the Shang Dynasty and other early iron-age, southern-Siberian cultures (Okladnikov 1962:284).

As early as 300 B.C., the Chinese were aware of the Tungus tribes of the Amur River region whom early chronicles refer to as the "Sushen" and by the 1st century B.C. as the I-lou (Ivanov *et al.* 1964:692). In the *History of the Three Kingdoms* c. A.D. 220–265 the I-lou were referred to as agricultural peoples and "intrepid sailors" (Okladnikov 1964:85).

The Mo-ho tribes of the Amur region were agricultural and pastoral peoples who had cultural and political ties with the Chinese as early as A.D. 471. By the 6th century A.D., Mo-ho embassies regularly visited the Chinese court (Okladnikov 1964:93).

The extent to which these Amur region groups were trading toward the Bering Strait is unknown, but certainly an



# Chronology of Events B.C. 1700 - 100 A.D.

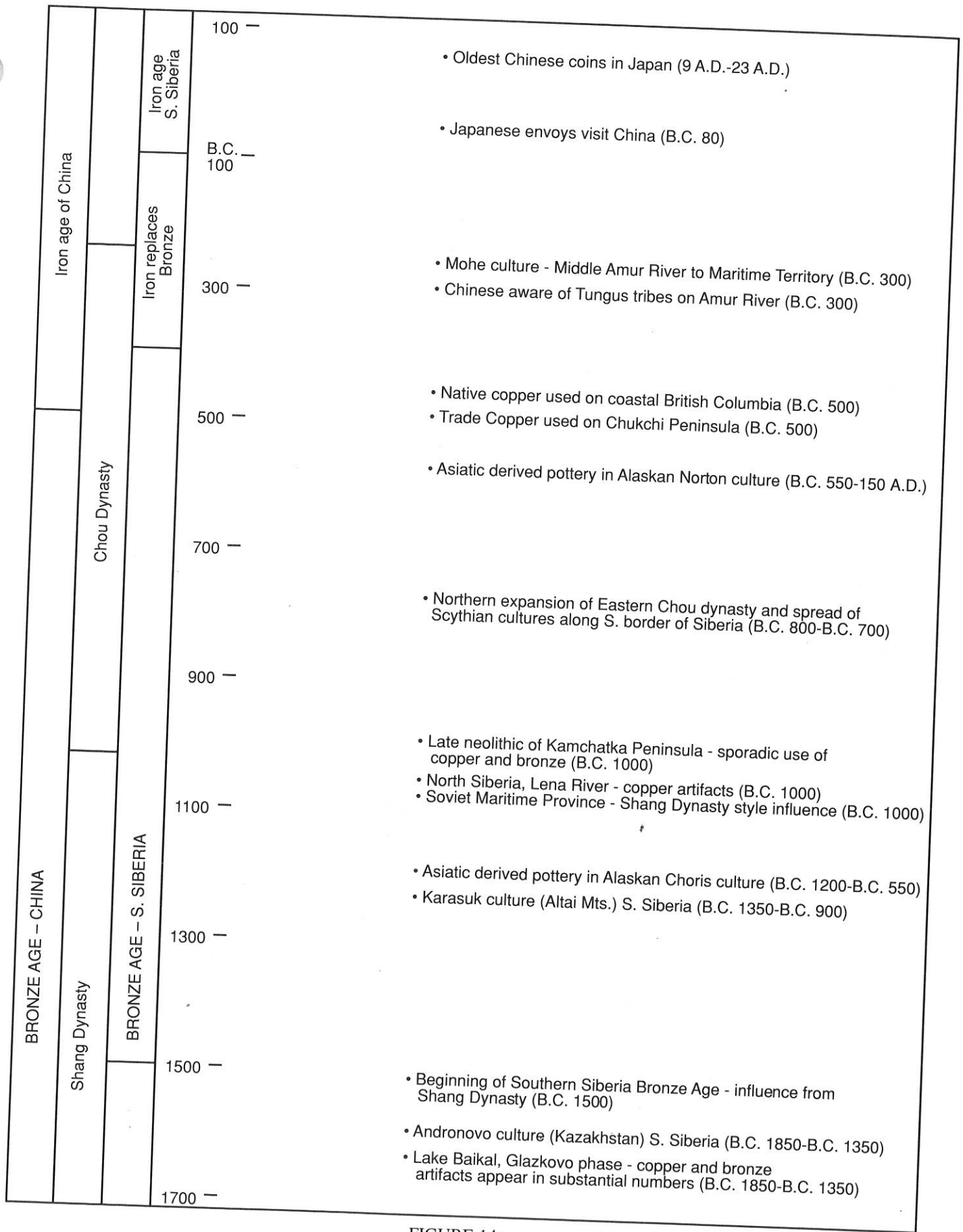


FIGURE 14a

increasing quantity of goods moving into the Amur region was being passed on to the tribes beyond to the northeast. The creation of the Po-hai state (719–925 A.D.) in what became Manchuria and northern Korea, and the establishment by the Tungus tribes themselves of the Chin empire of 1115–1234 A.D., must have greatly increased trade with tribal groups to the northeast (Ivanov *et al.* 1964: 692; Gernet 1985:463).

A 1641 Russian report indicates that the Chinese were coming 2800 km up the Amur River to trade in the area of the Shilka River (Dmytryshyn *et al.* 1985:185-186). This trade pattern probably began much earlier. Derevyanko suggests the introduction of Buddhism among the Jurchens of the Amur Valley between the 7th–11th centuries A.D. based on the finding of a bronze figure of Buddha and other Buddhist related grave goods at the Korsakov burial ground (1986:127).

A Russian report of 1711 states that the people on the northern Kurile Islands obtained metal and coloured textiles from further south on the Kuriles (Dmytryshyn *et al.* 1988:45). These may have come indirectly from either Chinese or Japanese traders. A story told by Jochelson (1933: 15) may pertain to Chinese traders in the Aleutian Islands. He reports an early account given in 1747 by an Aleut boy from Attu that speaks of “men dressed in long many colored silk and cotton clothing came to the island Attu in small ships with one sail, their heads were shaved to the crown and the hair on the back was plaited into tresses. Evidently these were Chinamen (if the report is correct)”. The same boy told them that “in former years a ship used to come to Attu, the men giving them iron, needles, and leaf-tobacco (which they did not want) in exchange for sea-otter’s skins.” Possibly these were traders from the Amur River region as Ivanov (Ivanov *et al.* 1964: 707) indicates that the Nanays of that region practiced the Manchu head-shaving and hair-braiding from the mid-17th century. The presents of tobacco would suggest a post-1600 A.D. date for this voyage.

It is highly probable that trading peoples of southeast Siberia had a continuous supply of Chinese coins since at least the 12th century A.D. Copper coins issued during the Song age spread over every country in Asia and were so plentiful in Japan that they were used as local currencies (Gernet 1985:322). The often exclusive official use of paper currencies of the later Yuan and Ming dynasties further increased the export of coins to neighbouring areas of China where they were first used as raw metal and then as currency. In 1432 A.D., when copper coins were much devalued, they were intentionally exported to Japan (Gernet 1985:421). Copper took a role of varying significance in China with the influx of silver from America after the establishment of Spaniards in the Philippines in A.D. 1564-65 and the founding of Manila in 1571 A.D. The fiscal reforms of 1570–80 sanctioned the general use of imported Spanish silver coins in the Chinese economy (Gernet 1985:416). During the early recorded period of European exploration of the northwestern coast of North America, Chinese coins would be inexpensive for traders to obtain in China as a liang (c. 36 grams) of silver was worth about 1000 copper coins before 1820. Copper coins continued to devalue during the trading period. By 1845 a liang of silver could purchase 2200, or more, copper coins.

If earlier Spanish ships were bringing Chinese coins back to Acapulco, Mexico, as trade items, and these were subsequently traded among Native Indian groups, this process may account for the deposition of some Ming Dynasty or earlier coins at Native Indian village sites.

## Iron and Copper

Returning to the question of the earliest iron goods in the New World, it has been suggested that iron tools must have been used to carve some of the specimens of bone and ivory carvings found in cultures earlier than the Ipiutak, the first known iron-using culture in Alaska (Collins, 1937). The question has been asked as to whether the small number of iron specimens found archaeologically is merely a remnant of a once much larger assemblage of iron specimens. The Alaskan Ipiutak iron blades are parts of tools similar to those used at the same time and much earlier in many parts of Siberia.

Philip Hobler (1986) has “suggested” that adzed wood from the central coast of British Columbia preserved in late prehistoric waterlogged deposits may have been worked with metal cutting tools. My own experiments in working bone, antler and stone, and observing the work marks on collections from the southern coast of British Columbia, have led to similar conclusions.

One explanation for the existence of fine carving with sharp cuts indicative of metal use may be the existence of prehistoric copper carving tools but, besides being too soft, these seem to be absent in prehistoric deposits. British Columbia has a well-established prehistoric (non-tool) copper complex that has remained largely unrecognized in the literature. These assemblages are composed of ornamental objects and parts of armoured clothing. Native copper artifacts date from 500 B.C. in the Prince Rupert area of northern coastal British Columbia (MacDonald and Inglis 1980), as well as from the same time period in the Marpole culture of the southern coast (Identification by Kay Allan, pers. comm. 1976).

I have observed private and museum collections of objects that have been found with burials from the southern interior of British Columbia. These often contain elaborate assemblages of copper ornaments and the occasional iron object. These burials have usually been assumed to date to the post-contact period even in the absence of obvious 18th or 19th-century trade goods. I had one of these specimens tested. Although to the naked eye it looked like European manufactured sheet copper it proved to be made of native copper (Identification by Kay Allan, pers. comm. 1976). This late prehistoric complex remains largely unstudied. Copper associated with a burial has been dated to the 8th century A.D. in the interior of the province (Mark Skinner, pers. comm., 1986).

It is tempting to suggest a possible stimulus diffusion relationship between the “Coppers” of the Northwest coast — large, shaped, sheets of copper with important symbolic value — (*see* Duff 1981 and de Widerspach-Thor 1981) and some of the earliest Chinese coins issued by the Zhou rulers in the 6th century B.C. (which were inscribed imitations of garden hoes) and later varieties such as those of the Liang Dynasty or the silver tax ingots of the 12th-century Song

# Chronology of Events 100 A.D. - 1000 A.D.

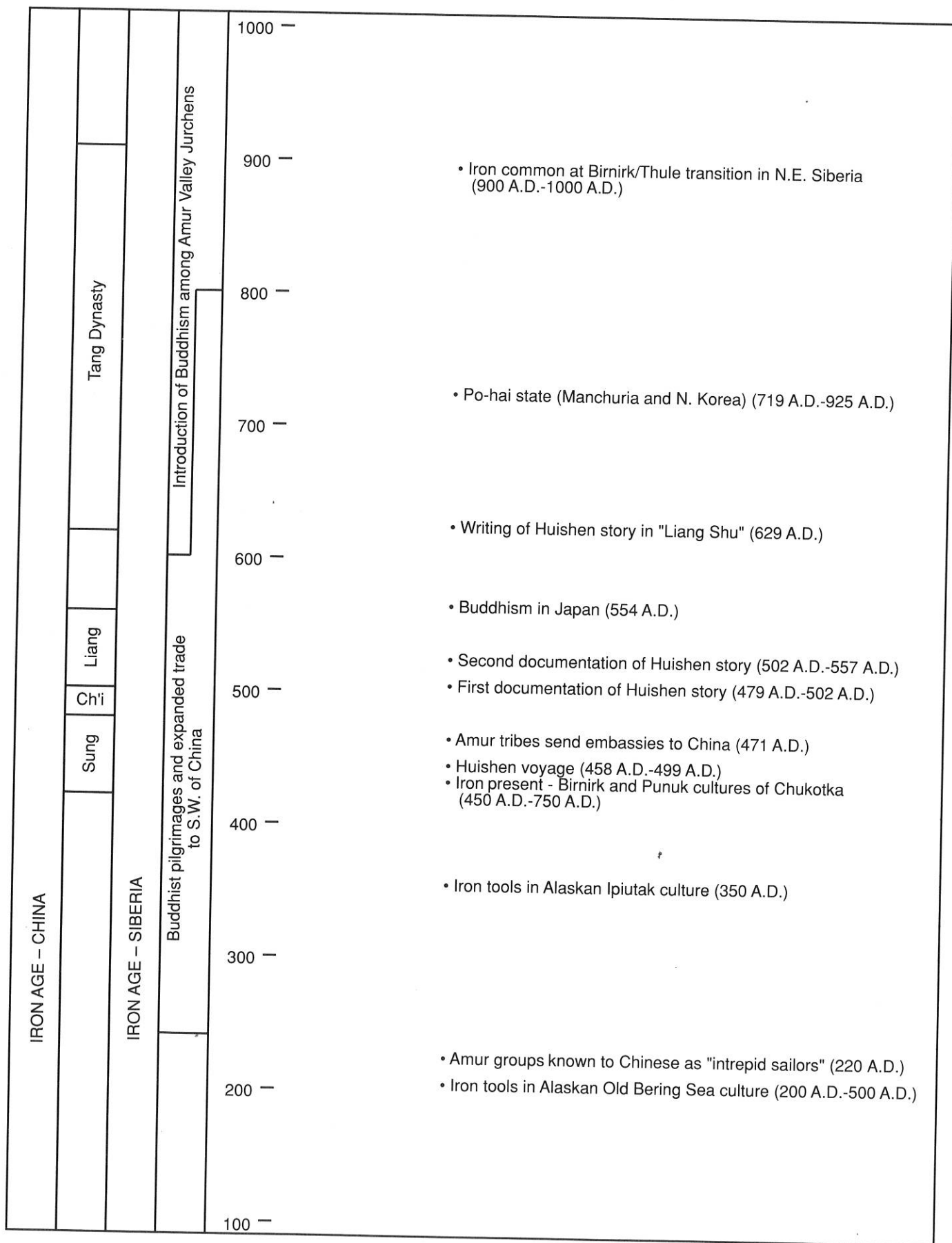


FIGURE 14b

Dynasty (see Cribb 1980). None of the Northwest coast "Coppers" that have been analyzed are made of native copper and have therefore been assumed to date to the post contact period. None have been recovered in a prehistoric context.

Prehistoric copper objects in British Columbia do come in several standard shapes. This could imply that they had a set monetary trade value, but their numbers and level of standardization do not come close to paralleling the development of, for example, the copper-axe money that evolved in south coastal Ecuador, northern Peru and Oaxaca Mexico after about 800 A.D. Prehistoric copper in British Columbia has a long history but present evidence suggests that copper was used for ornamentation and objects of prestige value, not as money and probably only rarely as tools. The only copper tool I am aware of from British Columbia is a copper arrow flaker I found at site EkRo 17 near the mouth of the Chilcotin River.

### Discussion

Native copper is established as being a desirable commodity by the Indians of the North Pacific coast of America by at least 2000 years ago. The openness to acquiring and shaping other metal goods was undoubtedly established by this time. The answer to how early and how often copper coins and iron were being traded and used on the North Pacific coast may have important implications for interpreting the prehistory of the region. Although our knowledge of this area of research is sparse, new information suggests that the factor of "circum-Pacific cultural drift" espoused by de Laguna (1947:270) and others may have been enhanced by trade in metal goods long before recognized European contact.

In Siberia, the late Bronze and Iron Ages encompassed the period between the second millennium B.C. and about A.D. 500. Early in this period, the vast steppe belt zone of Eurasia served as a route of cultural movement and diffusion between the high cultural centres in the East and West. There was a gradual replacement of farmers by herders in the northern frontiers of China. More mobile and militant cultures developed in the steppe zone. Rapid and expansive cultural flow was greatly facilitated by the steppe environment and the mobile way of life. "By the end of the eighth century B.C., the Scythians and related complexes had replaced the late Timber culture in southern Russia, the late Andronovo culture in Kazakhstan, and the Karsuk culture in the Altai Mountains and the Minusinsk basin." (Chang 1977:397). The appearance of these steppe nomads was coincident with the wide expansion of the Eastern Zhou civilization toward the north.

According to Mochanov and Fedoseeva (1984: 688) the "Analysis of the archaeological data leads to the idea that replacement of one culture by another in North-East Asia did not mainly take place as a result of local factors . . . but due to continuous migrations from the south and southwest. That these were migrations and not simply cultural exchanges is proved by the complete changes in the complexes, as is well manifest in the ceramics." Chard (1974: 65) sees a more

gradual development out of preceding technological patterns although "Major traditions can be seen spreading over large areas."

Regardless of which of these views proves to be correct the evidence suggests the potential for a long and relatively continuous movement of goods from Central Asia toward the Bering Sea region. We know that pottery of the Choris phase of the Norton tradition of Alaska is clearly of Asian origin and has resulted from stimulus diffusion or trade (Ackerman 1982:33) or a possible influx of Asian people into Alaska (Dumond 1982:47).

Other exchanges occurred at least sporadically across the Bering Sea during the last 4000 years. Metal trade goods appear earlier in southern coastal than in inland locations of northeastern Siberia. By 3000 years ago we find the sporadic use of copper and bronze in the late Neolithic cultures of the Kamchatka Peninsula. Recent excavations are providing a picture of an early and more widespread occurrence of iron tools in Northeastern Siberia. The possibility of even direct trade between peoples of the latter region and cultures to the south is becoming more apparent. During the 11th century A.D., China was passing through a period of unprecedented growth (see Curtin 1984:109). It seems likely that the Jurchen peoples of the Amur River region traded with peoples along the Pacific coast to the north. Future research of the "voluminous written records" (Derevyanko 1986:125) for this area should help shed some light on early trade patterns in this region. An investigation of Japanese records of early northern trade will also help in understanding the extent of northward trade expansion.

Embassies from Indian kingdoms and Ceylon frequented Nanking between the end of the 4th and middle of the 6th century A.D. (Gernet 1986:196). Possibly these trading peoples were extending further north than our present records indicate. There is a report of an East-Indian survivor of a shipwreck that occurred about 1697 off the Kamchatka Peninsula (Dmytryshyn *et al.* 1988:11-12). Caravans of trade goods from East India and China were coming regularly to Siberia according to a Russian report of 1714 (Dmytryshyn *et al.* 1988:63). On the second of the Kurile Islands south of Kamchatka it was recorded in 1711 that the people of the island "obtain iron and other goods and textiles of all colors" from traders to the south (Dmytryshyn *et al.* 1988:45). Boas (1901:52) attributed a bronze handle with the figure of the East Indian deity Garuda, found near Prince Rupert, British Columbia, to the early protohistoric period.

When North American archaeologists find porcelain, copper or iron artifacts they all too often assume that they date to the known post contact period without a careful attempt at verification. Heizer and Meighan have set a good example by documenting the remains of 16th-century Chinese porcelain and pottery as attributable to the northern California visits by Cabrillo, Drake and Cermeno (Heizer 1941, Meighan and Heizer 1952, and Von der Porten 1968). However, caution has to be used when making assumptions about the dating of some types of ceramic ware. Beals and Steele (1981) have identified porcelain ware from coastal sites in Oregon, the earliest of which has the mark of the Ch'eng Hua period (1465-1487 A.D.) of the Ming Dynasty. This period mark is

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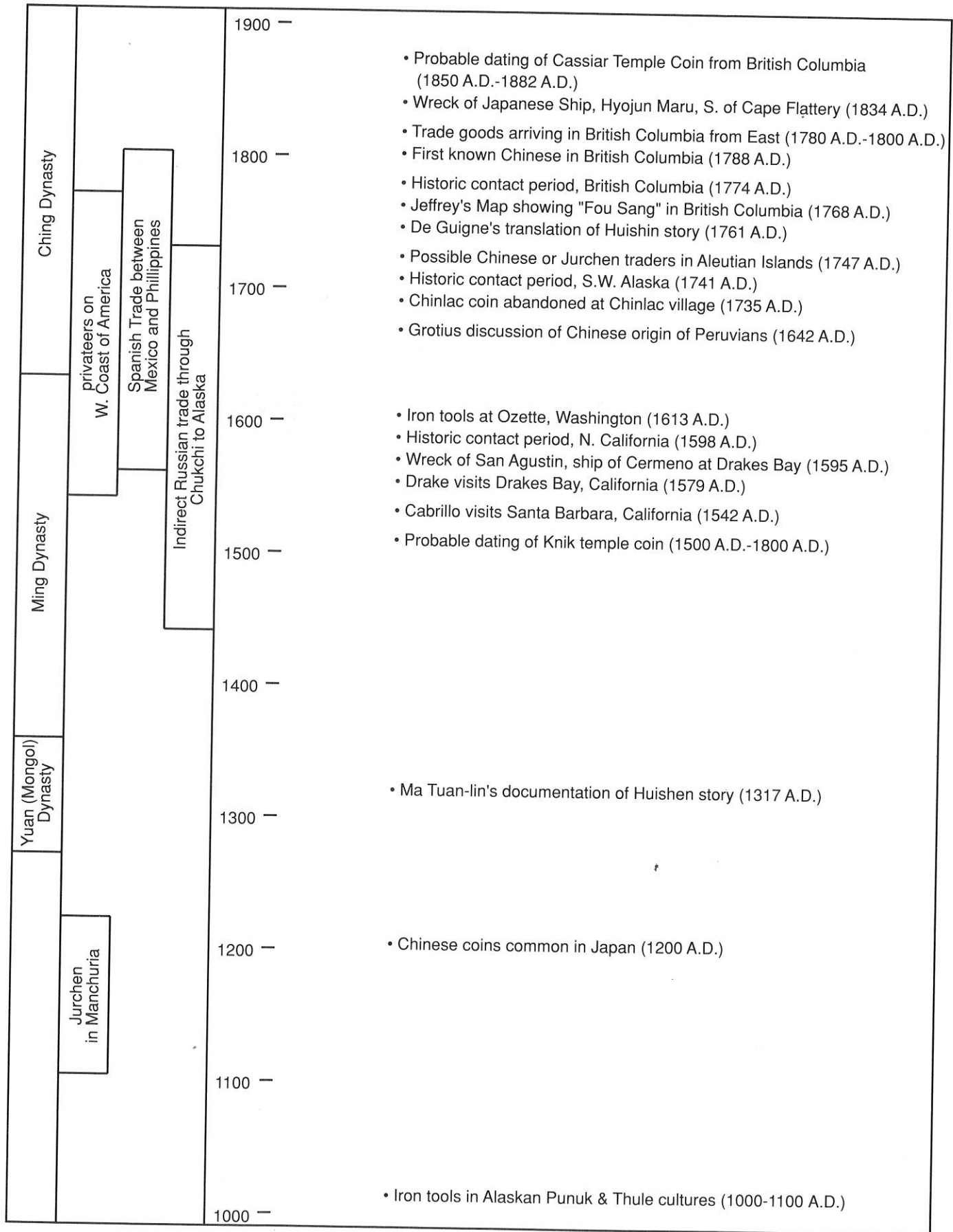


FIGURE 14c

*Charts — captions on.*

frequently used on later manufactured porcelain (*see* Honey 1927:Pl. 1, Pl. 5b) and therefore the dating of the artifacts to this time period is very tenuous.

In future, archaeologists working on the North Pacific coast will need to make a concerted effort to look for and separate out goods that result from different periods of European activities in the North Pacific and artifact material that may be from other earlier sources. Hobler's (1986) studies on native acculturation contribute directly to an understanding of this problem by focusing upon variations in the patterns of material remains at contact period sites on the central coast of British Columbia.

### Conclusions

In Alaska, iron appears sporadically by 350 A.D. and is fairly common by 1000 A.D. The evidence in North America of items manufactured in advanced Asiatic cultures during the latter period is presently non-existent or unproven. The numismatic evidence from both British Columbia and Alaska does not support an "ancient Chinese" connection with the eastern Pacific coast. The native use of large numbers of Chinese coins on the Northwest coast as a result of the fur trade is well documented in the journals of early explorers and traders. Their continued use by some Indian groups into the 20th century is documented by anthropologists and museum collections. The motivation for the diffusion and cultural integration of Asiatic coins and tokens on the Northwest Coast is easy to explain. Copper was traditionally an item of high status and greatly sought by indigenous cultures. Copper coins could be purchased cheaply in Asia in large quantities by European traders. The holes in the coins rendered them immediately available to wear as decorative signs of wealth.

The manufacturing dates of Chinese coins traded to North American Indians and introduced later by Chinese immigrants were most often of a pre-contact date. It can be expected that these Ching Dynasty trade coins were occasionally mixed with earlier Ming and Song Dynasty coins. The one example of a Song Dynasty coin from the Chinlac site may represent an object whose origin predates the known trade contact period on the coast of British Columbia.

The presence of metal artifacts at the Ozette village site and the work marks on late prehistoric wood, bone and antler suggest that metal tools were being used on the northwest coast several hundred years before the known contact period. From what direction these items were coming and how early in time has yet to be discovered.

It is clear that the temporal and spatial context of late prehistoric trade between the Old and New Worlds is in need of further study. The answer to the question of whether or not there was direct cultural diffusion from Asia to North America would, of course, have major repercussions on our interpretations of the history of cultural developments among Native Indians on the North Pacific coast. But we should also consider that even indirect diffusion of metals and other items of Asiatic manufacture may have influenced technological, artistic or social traditions.

The validity of pre-historic, trans-oceanic, cultural diffusion is often given greater credence with the increasing size of the trait list that is purported to constitute evidence of

contact. When the context of each of these traits is dealt with individually we usually find that each has its own complex history.

We need to examine the context of individual traits in both the giving and receiving cultures to be able to explain the process by which the traits diffused. The level of social integration of a particular trait will determine to a large extent the rate at which the trait is likely to move or, equally important, not to move, from one culture to another.

The process of movement of goods that are highly integrated, that is, for example, objects such as lip plugs which are intricately tied to social and cosmological networks, only transfer from one culture to another slowly through a particular process such as marriage between trading partners.

The movement of Chinese coins and iron for tools seemed to lack social barriers and therefore these items could move rapidly from one trading partner to another. Although Chinese coins were used as wealth/status items they appear to have complemented rather than to have replaced previous status items. The lack of social barriers to the acceptance of iron and Asiatic coins in combination with information highly suggestive of the probability of early trade patterns should alert us to the possibility of finding these items in earlier prehistoric contexts.

Diffusion trait lists need to be upheld or refuted individually as well as collectively if we are to judge whether specific objects or forms of social behaviour are a product of diffusion or parallel evolution. We need to separate out each trait and see if it has validity in itself. If the diffusion of a complex of individual traits is then supported after a critical analysis of the context and process involved in their movement, greater validity will be given to strengthen either the suggestion or the proof of cultural contact.

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Postscript – Grant Keddie, 2014

Since writing this article in 1989, I no longer agree with the statement I made about Japanese shipwrecks: “Only one wreck, in 1813, can be substantiated for the coast of British Columbia”. See my article “Japanese ship wrecks on the Northwest Coast” on this web site for updated information.

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