Maya Glyphs and Chinese Characters
A Comparative Reading

By
Charles William Johnson

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A Comparison of Five Maya Glyphs and Five Chinese Characters

Part I

By
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Earth/matrix Editions
Introduction

For the comparisons between the Maya glyphs and the Chinese characters, I have selected words that do not share a natural common design. For example, the pictogram for a “bird” might essentially reflect a similar design based upon the natural characteristics of the bird’s form. However, by choosing words for comparison that do not suggest an essential pictorial design, the comparisons may be more meaningful in terms of linguistic correspondence. For example, one might not expect any similarity in design with words such as the formless color ‘red’, or that of ‘writing’.

In the selected cases presented here, it becomes obvious that one may consider adding a cartouche around the Chinese characters or, subtracting the cartouche from around the Maya glyphs. In either case, the similarities between specific words are impressive and suggest a shared or common origin at some point in their respective histories.
The nature and direction of reading the Maya glyphs is frequently shown in the following manner as illustrated:

![Maya Glyphs Illustration](source: www.wikipedia.com)

In my view, the most significant aspect of this geometric analysis and presentation of the Maya glyphs is that it also suggests the nature of the Chinese characters upon initial observation.

Both the Maya and Chinese writing systems are generally accepted as representing two totally distinct and unrelated systems. Yet, it becomes obvious that both share similar features in the structural and spatial presentation of the elements within a specific glyph or character. The comparisons made herein demonstrate this point.
“red” in Chinese

红

“red” in Maya

紅

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“sky” in Chinese

Note the two Chinese characters are nearly inverted designs of one another.

Add a cartouche

“sky” in Maya

Subtract the cartouche
“writing” in Maya

Add a cartouche
“yellow” in Chinese

What are the chances that geographically opposite cultures on Earth would select a similar basic design for an abstracted color as in the pictograms for “yellow”? The same question obtains for the other four pictograms selected in this brief study.
Flint rocks may have infinite forms, but the idea of flint striking something is common knowledge.

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Observation

In this comparison, I have selected five Maya glyphs and Chinese characters [graphemes/morphemes], whose meanings do not suggest a definite pictorial form. And, yet, the similarities in the glyphs|characters are obvious and stunning.

Imagine that similar pictorial designs are shared in innumerable Maya glyphs and Chinese characters, too many to compare for now. Their comparison shall require a more extension analysis.

In these comparisons, I have referred to the pictorial similarities, without alluding to or discussing their corresponding phonemes. A complete study must necessarily include the three aspects of each glyph/character: graphemes, morphemes and phonemes.

For now, I have merely offered the suggestion of carrying out similar comparative studies.
A Comparison of Maya Glyphs and Chinese Characters

Part II

By Charles William Johnson

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Introduction to Part II

In this comparison, I have selected a few Maya day-sign glyphs together with other glyphs relating to general concepts. These are compared to the apparently corresponding Chinese characters as graphemes and as morphemes, relating to pictorial form and meaning respectively. Any correspondence in phonemes regarding the sounds of the compared graphemes and morphemes constitutes yet a third level of linguistic correspondence.

At this late date in linguistics studies, one might not expect to encounter any linguistic correspondence between the Maya glyphs and the Chinese characters, given the fact that so many scholars have studied these two languages for such a long time. And, yet nothing significant has been discovered regarding a comparison between the two distinct writing systems.

A possible reason why comparisons such as those effected here have not been carried out earlier lies in the prevailing concept
of theoretical linguistics. For linguistic correspondence to be recognized by many scholars the languages compared must share similarities as phonemes, morphemes and graphemes.

There is a fourth level of correspondence among written languages that has generally been overlooked. This particular level will be treated in subsequent studies. It concerns the artistic creative nature of a written language in serving as a system of codification of information regarding hidden images in artwork. This particular aspect has never been covered in the linguistic sciences literature, as far as I know. I shall be presenting studies along these lines shortly.

For now, I wish to present a few additional comparisons between the Maya glyphs and the Chinese characters in order to illustrate a possible linguistic correspondence between these two ancient writing systems.

As I mentioned in Part I, my impression from the correspondences
is that the Maya glyphs are older than the Chinese characters. In the sense, that it would appear that the Chinese characters derived from the more rudimentary designs in the Maya glyphs.

Such comparisons are relatively obvious when one considers drawing a circular figure around the Chinese characters or subtracting the circular form around the Maya glyphs. By effecting such comparisons, the similarities as graphemes and morphemes becomes apparent. However, often the coincidence at the level of phonemes is generally lacking. There are a few Maya glyphs and Chinese characters that appear to share similarities on all three levels, but they seem to be in the minority.

One might understand these comparisons against the backdrop of the similarities of Japanese and Chinese language systems. Where Japanese shares the Chinese characters, but not as phonemes. A similar pattern appears between the Maya glyphs and the Chinese characters. Although it may be the Chinese language that has borrowed the Maya writing system, and not the other way around.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequence Number</th>
<th>Day Name</th>
<th>16th C. Yucatec</th>
<th>Reconstructed Classic Maya</th>
<th>Associated natural phenomena or meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Imix'</td>
<td>Imix</td>
<td>Imix (?) / Ha' (?)</td>
<td>waterlily, crocodile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Ik'</td>
<td>Ik</td>
<td>Ik'</td>
<td>wind, breath, life force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Ak'b'al</td>
<td>Akbal</td>
<td>Ak'b'al (?)</td>
<td>darkness, night, early dawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>K'an</td>
<td>Kan</td>
<td>K'an (?)</td>
<td>sacrifice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Chikchan</td>
<td>Chicchan</td>
<td>(unknown)</td>
<td>cosmological snake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Kimi</td>
<td>Cimi</td>
<td>Cham (?)</td>
<td>death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Manik'</td>
<td>Manik</td>
<td>Manich' (?)</td>
<td>deer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Lamat</td>
<td>Lamat</td>
<td>Ek' (?)</td>
<td>Venus, star, ripe(ness), maize seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Muluk</td>
<td>Muluc</td>
<td>(unknown)</td>
<td>jade, water, offering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ok</td>
<td>Oc</td>
<td>(unknown)</td>
<td>dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Chuwen</td>
<td>Chuen</td>
<td>(unknown)</td>
<td>howler monkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Eb'</td>
<td>Eb</td>
<td>(unknown)</td>
<td>rain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>B'en</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>(unknown)</td>
<td>green/young maize, seed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ix</td>
<td>Ix</td>
<td>Hix (?)</td>
<td>jaguar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>(unknown)</td>
<td>eagle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Kib'</td>
<td>Cib</td>
<td>(unknown)</td>
<td>wax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Kab'an</td>
<td>Caban</td>
<td>Chab' (?)</td>
<td>earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Etz' nab'</td>
<td>Etznab</td>
<td>(unknown)</td>
<td>flint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Kawak</td>
<td>Cauac</td>
<td>(unknown)</td>
<td>rain storm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Ajaw</td>
<td>Ahau</td>
<td>Ajaw</td>
<td>lord, ruler, sun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.wikipedia.com Public domain.
“wind, breath, life force” in Maya

"wind" in Chinese

Shēngmìng de lìlìng
"life force" in Chinese

Inverted Maya Ik
Ak’b’al

“darkness, night, early dawn” in Maya

“night” in Chinese

黑

黑暗

Hēi’àn
"darkness" in Chinese

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K’an

“corn; sacrifice” in Maya

Yùmī
"corn" in Chinese
Chicchan

“snake deity who makes rain” in Maya glyphs

She Shen

Shé shén
"snake deity" in Chinese

“snake” in Chinese

Shé shén shuí shí yǔ
"snake deity who makes rain
Cimi, Kimi

“death” in Maya glyphs

Siwang

死亡

death in Chinese

Siwáng

Phonemic
Cimi, Kimi

“death” in Maya glyphs

Paul Arnold’s treatment of the comparison between the ancient language systems of Maya and Chinese is a must read study.
Manik’

Manik’

“god of hunting; deer” in Maya glyphs

Shòuliè zhī shén
"god of hunting" in Chinese

Flipped horizontally

Lù - "deer"

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Lamat

金星
Jīnxīng
"venus" in Chinese
Literally: “gold star”

Venus, star,
ripe(ness), maize seeds
Muluk

“jade, water, offering” in Maya glyphs

Consider

玉
"jade" in Chinese

供
“offering” in Chinese

The Chinese character contains both elements of the Maya glyph.
Ok, Oc

“dog” in Maya glyphs

Gǒu
"dog" in Chinese
Chuwen, Chuen

“howler monkey” in Maya glyphs

Phonemic

ku / kū (English translation: "to cry")

Hóuzi

"monkey" in Chinese

Hǒu hóu

"howler monkey” in Chinese

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B’en

玉 米
yùmǐ
"corn, maize" in Chinese

米
mi / mǐ ("rice")

种 子
Zhǒngzǐ
"seed" in Chinese

“green/young maize, seed” in Maya glyphs

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Ix

“jaguar” in Maya glyphs

美洲虎
Měizhōu hǔ
"jaguar" in Chinese

虎

“jaguar” in Maya glyphs
Men

Lǎoyīng
"eagle" in Chinese

Gǔ
"falcon" in Chinese

“eagle” in Maya glyphs

Flipped horizontally
Kab’an, Caban

居
Jū
"abode" in Chinese

大 地 女 神 年 轻
Dàdì nǚshén niánqīng
"young goddess of earth" in Chinese

“earth; abundance” in Maya glyphs

土
Tǔ
"earth" in Chinese

富
Fēngfù
"abundance" in Chinese

丰 富
Fēngfù
"abundance" in Chinese
Etz’nab’

Suìshí
"flint" in Chinese

Rén de xīshēng
"human sacrifice" in Chinese

“flint; human sacrifice”
in Maya glyphs

Dào ànniǔ: "to knapp"
in Chinese
Cauac, Kawak

“rain; dragon who sends rain” in Maya glyphs

Lā gòng shuí sòng yǔ
"dragon who sends rain" in Chinese
Ajaw, ahau

“lord, ruler, sun” in Maya glyphs

太 阳

Tàiyáng
"sun" in Chinese

太阳神

Tàiyáng shén
"sun god" in Chinese

統 治 者

Tǒngzhì zhě
"ruler" in Chinese
A page from Paul Arnold’s book, El libro maya de los muertos.

Ajaw, ahau

Paul Arnold’s treatment of the comparison between the ancient language systems of Maya and Chinese is a must read study.
Pakal

屏

屏蔽

Píngbì

"shield" in Chinese

屏

“shield” in Maya glyphs
Zotz, sotz

蝠
“fu”
bat in Chinese

“bat” in Maya glyphs
Numbers
“the number five” in Maya glyphs

“the number five” in Chinese

“15”

“15”

3 squares

2 squares plus 1 square [?!]
“the number five” in Maya glyphs

“fifteen”
“3 squares”

“the number nine” in Maya glyphs

“the number five” in Chinese

Fāng
"a square"

“the number nine”

“nineteen”

“nineteen”
Consider the idea of a cross in a square = 2 + 4 lines

Cross: “the number six” in Maya glyphs

六: “the number six” in Chinese

交叉: Jiāochā "cross" in Chinese
“Ring Numbers” in Maya glyphs

Diǎn
"point, dot" in Chinese

Paul Arnold’s treatment of the Maya and Chinese language systems represents an analytic venue that must extended.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Número 1 — <em>Alto</em></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>El signo chino “alto” (a la derecha) coloca una raya o un punto por encima del nivel (de la tierra o de la palma de la mano, interpretaciones actualmente propuestas, aunque ambas discutibles).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Número 2 — <em>Bajo</em></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>El signo chino “bajo” (a la derecha) coloca la raya o el punto por debajo del nivel adoptado.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Número 3 — <em>El Limbo</em></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Combinación de los signos “alto” (número 1) y “bajo” (número 2) en un solo glifo. El signo chino, frecuente en los documentos más antiguos (sobre carey), ha desaparecido de la escritura más reciente. De forma parecida, combina los signos “alto” y “bajo”. Provisionalmente se lee “Alto-Bajo” con implicaciones metafísicas. La comparación permite conferir al signo maya un sentido análogo a Potencia-Lugar supraterrestre. (Ver comentario de la página 33). Propongo que provisionalmente se transcriba “en el Limbo”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Xul

The month of “Xul” in Maya glyphs
“a dog”

邪
“evil, heretical” in Chinese

狗
Gǒu
"dog" in Chinese

邪
狗

邪
狗

邪
邪
狗

It was at this point in my comparative analysis of the Maya glyphs and the Chinese characters, on the 4th of May, 2014, that Jorge Luna Martínez told me about Paul Arnold’s book, *El libro maya de los muertos* [1983]. He sent me a few pages from Arnold’s book yesterday and today [5-6 May]. Arnold makes a phonetic comparison between these two languages. Plus, he presents some comparisons between the phonemes, graphemes and morphemes of both Maya and Chinese.

His comparisons differ somewhat from the ones that I have been effecting, presented in this study. As I mentioned, my comparisons are concerned more with the aspect of graphemes and morphemes and, for now, less with the phonemes.

It is incredible that I have not come across Arnold’s book after surfing thousands of pages concerning these linguistic subjects. His book is in Spanish (and German and French), but even so, one would have expected to stumble upon it. In my view, this confirms the manner in which institutional scholarship shuns certain studies and approaches. Most mayistas are concerned with translating the graphemes into phonemes, which is a limited analytic perspective. Arnold makes this point effectively.
Citations and References


www.wikipedia.com

www.google.com/translate