



Chinese Segregation: No Caucasian Mummies Need Apply

The Chinese exhibition “Secrets of the Silk Road” ran without incident in California and Texas. But now Chinese authorities have decided that parts of it really must be kept secret and have ordered that some artifacts and, most notably, a certain mummy not be displayed. The news came as a blow to the Penn Museum in Philadelphia, which was poised to show the exhibition in toto starting February 5 and was informed of the change just the evening prior.



At issue is a 4000-year-old mummy called the “Beauty of Xiaohe.” Remarkably well preserved, she has long eyelashes, half-open eyes and flowing hair. But then there is the distinction that may make her a political liability.

She’s Caucasian.

The mummy and other artifacts present the Chinese government with a problem because the remote part of western China in which they were found — the Tarim Basin in Xinjiang province — also has a distinction: It’s oil-rich and home to a separatist movement. And evidence that Europeans were the first to settle the region would weaken the Chinese’s historical claim to it. *The Independent* elaborates:

[T]he Chinese authorities...face an intermittent separatist movement of nationalist Uighurs, a Turkic-speaking Muslim people who number nine million in Xinjiang.

The government-approved story of China’s first contact with the West dates back to 200BC when China’s emperor Wu Di wanted to establish an alliance with the West against the marauding Huns, then based in Mongolia. However, the discovery of the mummies suggests that Caucasians were settled in a part of China thousands of years before Wu Di: the notion that they arrived in Xinjiang before the first East Asians is truly explosive.

So the Beauty of Xiaohe has been taken into custody. Will she now become the mummy in the iron mask, a threat so great to the powers that be that her face must be hidden from the world?

And it seems that an iron muzzle is in place, too. A commenter under the *Independent* piece who attended the exhibition when it showed at California’s Bowers Museum reports the following:

A person asked the docent whether these people were Celtic, since everything looked it. The bright colours and plaids, blonde and red hair — everything shouted northern Europe. He stiffened a bit a [sic] recited the party line: All I can tell you is that genetically they are the same as the people on the far northwest coast of Europe, but I am not allowed to use any other designation for them.

Unfortunately, it isn’t unusual for history and science to be placed in the service of political agendas. The Japanese would at one time censor unflattering facts from their history textbooks. The Nazis did in



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fact, à la *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, launch expeditions to the Far East in an effort to prove that they were descended from a race of Aryan god-men. Then, of course, we have contemporary revisionist historians who would have us believe that the Founding Fathers were all ACLU-minded atheists and that, whatever their stripe, we'd be best off forgetting about them anyway because they're nothing but dead Caucasian males.

Hmm, come to think of it, the Chinese's hang-up isn't so unusual after all.



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