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Wa Grottesque: Headhunting Theme Parks and the Chinese Nostalgia for Primitive Contemporaries

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their culture, including ways the staged representations are taken up in Wa attempts to revive aspects of their cultural past.

KEYWORDS: Primitivism grotesque kitsch cultural theme parks Wa China Asia

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Notes

1. This is (a grotto) of a long-b... come to evokes t 'grotesq

2. Nij T Chin early Ch non-Bud [2013](#)).

3. I mys

4. The p

ethnographic photography database at the Academia Sinica in Taipei, organized on the

and Latin the walls of grotesque has here it ginal

ws the shows how prefix for kesjö [2006](#);

HP



internet by Wang Ming-ke and his colleagues from the undeveloped films left from the 1930s! There are at least 538 Wa-related photos in the Institute for History and Philology web-based database (中國西南少數民族聯合資料庫), http://140.109.18.243/race_public/index.htm (see under 'Photos of Ethnographic Expeditions' 田野照片). On these photos, see Fiskesjö (2000) and Wang Ming-ke (2008).

5. Friedman (1979), in his *System, Structure and Contradiction* (one of the most spectacularly unread classics of anthropology, Southeast Asian, and Chinese studies) attempted to show how these circumstances are both generated and produced in a transformative dialectic (of agricultural production and tribute-making, in opium trade and war, etc.), something which Edmund Leach and others (Leach 1954; 1960; Lévi-Strauss 1969) had failed to achieve (Fiskesjö 2010b). It is worthwhile to re-engage with this work, including the 1998 edition where the author confesses to the total absence in his own Marxist 'modelling' of the historical agency of the people involved, of people as agents of their own history. The extreme example in the original 1979 work is the aetiology of Wa headhunting 'explained' as a population-depressing measure, in the externally produced circumstances of hopeless circumscription and pressure on the increasingly densely populated Wa lands. This picture of the Wa as laboratory rats in a cage that has become too small is inadequate (Fiskesjö 2010a).

6. For ex... (1986).

7. This d... rious Wa
jokes ab... ing
bloodlet... he Wa' (prex
a vi, son... o like the
tiger do... their hands
(or pa...)

8. Con... iterature on
the 'erot... e men (e.g.
Cable 20...

9. This a... e official
level: so... officially
replaced... al

chauvinism. All this is also taking place within the larger context of globalization. There



is even still a minority within the Chinese power elites insisting on the continuing importance of state-held key assets and a commitment to socialism, and at most would concede that China is only 'hiding its ideology while building strength', as one popular slogan goes (see Nonini [2008](#)).

10. See below, and see Stasch ([2014](#)) and Merlan ([2014](#)) for extended discussions of how this ambivalence reflects the complex 'intersystem' character of primitivist tourism wherein those involved are potentially able to adopt and identify with others' perspective on themselves but at the same time also to manipulate these perspectives, as well as their difference from dominant others, belying any simplistic assumptions of 'absolute, extreme or ontologically based difference between parties in encounter' (Merlan [2014](#)).

11. This newly created festival, in which participants and tourist guests smear themselves with mud, implicitly yet unmistakably plays on the notion that the Wa are dirty; it contrasts uncomfortably with the widespread Tai (Dai) water-splashing festival, also massively exploited for tourist-entrepreneurial purposes today.

12. It is being prevented from switching from the traditional wood-and-bamboo construction with houses on stilts, to the brick or concrete structures that the Chinese government is aggressively promoting everywhere else (despite the earthquake dangers)

13. The [redacted] in 2012 and 201 [redacted] s, and the same co [redacted] for Chinese tourists. [redacted] a; though for the lack [redacted] d by Khmer dancers. [redacted] n Indonesia see F [redacted] theme park in Ind

14. Most [redacted] ma border region. ([redacted] k in his mountai

15. For f [redacted] e 'Splendid China' p [redacted] ([1997](#), Ch.



7), Pun ([2003](#)), Ren ([2005](#); [2007](#)), Stanley et al. ([1995](#)), also Yang ([2011](#)) on migrant worker's perspectives; and Gordon's ([2005](#)) film *Global Villages: The Globalization of Ethnic Display*.

16. See Note 10, and compare Hammons ([2014](#)). Curiously, the 'Rousseauan' propensity of Westerners to find something among the primitives that is 'lost' among themselves has long been absent in Chinese 'civilization' (Fiskesjö [1999](#)) – but may be emerging now as China merges with the Global North (Fiskesjö [2011b](#)).

17. Fiskesjö and Hsing ([2011](#)). Incidentally recent genetics research affirms, to a certain extent, the Wa view of themselves as an ancient people.

18. So that the tension between Chinese settlers and aboriginal peoples on the former imperial peripheries can be suppressed (see Sturgeon [2007](#)).

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