

# **Preserving Stereotypes Forever: Cross-cultural Representations of Chinese Identity in the Body Worlds Exhibits (人體奧妙展覽等類) and Beyond**

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## **Abstract**

The incredible worldwide success of the various kinds of plastinated human body exhibits over the last ten years, which often use bodies “sourced” and “processed” in Mainland China, has coincided with rapid growth in media technologies and communications worldwide. Consequently, the plastinated bodies have taken on a disturbingly ambassadorial role in introducing (and reinforcing) stereotypes about Chinese culture to a hungry global mediasphere. This talk will treat the global phenomenon of plastinated body exhibits as an example of contemporary transnational Chinese cultural production, and the divergent Chinese- and Western-language media treatments of the exhibits as an occasion for comparative discourse analysis. In North America, Europe, and Australia, for instance, suspicions about unethically-acquired Chinese “donations” of bodies or bodies “sourced” from Chinese prisons has led to a near-total saturation of Western-language media discourse with highly over-determined (and often sensationalist) human rights critiques. Media from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, meanwhile, generally characterize the exhibits more mildly, emphasizing their educational merits or their potential to inspire nationalist sentiment over their shock or entertainment value. This talk will not attempt to address the truth or falsehood of claims about the use of Chinese prisoners as “sources” for the plastinated human body exhibits. Instead, it will suggest that a critical reassessment of Western-language human rights discourse in light of Chinese-language treatments of the same exhibits can expose the constructed nature of “Chineseness” and “Chinese identity” in contemporary Western-language media and culture.