Symposium on *Chinese Political Humor: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*
Hong Kong, 10-11 December 2013

**Questions and resources**

**Issues of definition and genealogies**
1. How is “humor” defined and carried out at different times and by different people within the context of modern China? Are there relatively stable forms it takes? If so, are they distinctive to China? How so? (One hypothesis: clear connection of much humor to the literary canon that developed in the context of the examination system.) If not, what factors cause new forms of humor to appear and become popular – influence of foreign examples? New technologies?
2. Is it possible to map modern Chinese political humor categorically and temporally?
3. What has been the role of humor in different political contexts, including war, revolution, and social upheaval?
4. How does political humor draw from existing "ideological orders" to find sources of critique or ridicule? how does it push toward the crafting of new ideological orders? In other words, how does understanding humor give us a more subtle understanding of ideological "hegemony" in an authoritarian (and, for the contemporary period, consumerist) society?

**Issues of politics and identities**
5. How has Chinese humor fit into wider discourses of Chinese identity and modernity in a globalizing world?
6. Under what circumstances has humor served to undermine authority?
7. Under what circumstances has it been used to marginalize sectors of the population?
8. Does the proliferation of irony and humor in political discourse lead at times to lower levels of engagement in political action?
9. In what ways has political humor been gendered in various times and places in modern China? Are clear patterns discernable in the gendering of humor? What factors shape these patterns?
10. How can particular instances of humor be understood in their effects or purpose? As "safety valve," cynicism, genuine forms of agency?
11. Link and Xiao (2013, cited below) examine how discourse on the internet (including satire) changes "modes of thinking." What are some of the ways that forms of political humor in China accomplish this?
Draft bibliography of resources for the symposium on *Chinese Political Humor: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (English materials only)

Works on Chinese Humor


*Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Fall 2008): Special Issue on Comic Visions of Modern China (guest edited by Christopher Rea and Nicolai Volland).

*Philosophy East & West*, vol. 39, no. 3 (July 1989): Special issue on Philosophy and Humor.


### Works on Political Discourse in China


Humor Theory and Comparative Perspectives: A few recent publications


Summarizes recent anthropological approaches to humor around the world and analyzes on-line Eritrean humorous discourse.


A sociologist offers an explanation of patterns in popular humor. Includes a chapter on Soviet humor.


Argues that writing about humor in the American context has been tied closely with the construction of national identity and racial hierarchies, but that it can serve other purposes.


Reviewed by Christie Davies in issue 1 of the *Israeli Journal of Humor Research*; Studies of humor in European politics.


A history of key figures in the development of Jewish humor, with much discussion of the concept of Jewish humor itself. Aimed at a broad audience.

*The European Journal of Humor Research*

Refereed, open-access, interdisciplinary journal launched in 2013.

http://www.europeanjournalofhumour.org/index.php/ejhr/index
Humor: International Journal of Humor Research
Interdisciplinary journal published since 1988.

Israeli Journal of Humor Research
Refereed, open-access, interdisciplinary journal launched in 2012.
http://www.israeli-humor-studies.org/122789/About-the-Journal