Book review

Xiaodong, Yue (2018). *Humour in Asian Culture: A Psychological Perspective***.**
Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Yue's book brings together the theoretical propositions, empirical studies, and cultural analyses of humour in Chinese societies, and touches upon the differences of western and Chinese perceptions of humour. As Yue mentions in Chapter one, although Chinese culture has a long tradition of humour and being acknowledged for its diverse forms and creative usage, Chinese humour differs substantially from the western humour in that it is more subtle, delicate and conservative (p. 11). Chinese humour has been profoundly influenced by Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, in which inappropriate levity and laughter might be frowned upon (Chey 2011). However, Yue (2011) highlights that the Chinese do value humour, although they may not be fully aware of it, or openly admit it. Judge Wu (quoted in Kao 1974: 18) described that "Whereas Westerners are seriously humorous, Chinese people are humorously serious."

Decoding the intricate and ambivalent views of humour held by Chinese people drove Yue to complete this book. The other reason, as explained in the preface (p. i), is a relevant one, especially for people who study humour and cross-cultural communication between Chinese and English. The current literature of Chinese humour resides largely on the theories and empirical findings of western humour. Although scholars do observe remarkable differences between western and Chinese people in the way they produce and respond to humour, scholars seldom delve into how humour is related to various demographic, dispositional variables as well as into how humour is related to creativity, emotional expressions and mental health in Chinese society. The exploration of the mechanics of Chinese humour and its underlying psychological connotations are much needed, not only for the scholars, but also for the institutions and industries involved in cross-cultural communication. Therefore, the book, while being mostly descriptive in scope, lends itself to prescriptive purposes quite well (especially in Chapters 6, 7 and 8).

The book discusses the origins of humour in Chinese culture, literature and philosophy (Chapter 1), the different perceptions of western humour and Chinese humour (Chapter 2), and the culture-specificities of humour in various aspects of Chinese society (Chapters 3-8). The theoretical propositions in Chapters 1 and 2 are necessary to provide a more focused analysis for the remaining six chapters; however, all chapters can be appreciated and studied in isolation.

Chapter 1 "Humour, philosophy and Chinese culture" introduces the core question right from the start by tracing the origin of humour in Chinese philosophy. Worthy of mention (and of great praise) is the discussion of major forms of humour in Chinese history, where Yue expounds the concept of *huaji* in Chinese history and its difference with western conceptions of humour, and delineates major humour techniques used in ancient, modern and contemporary China based on previous literature. In the following sections, Yue discusses how humour is viewed in Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, and how Confucianist, Buddhist and Taoist ethos shape Chinese perceptions of humour, and impacts the use of humour by the Chinese. Yue's discussion of the essence of Chinese humour denoting both *denial humour* (critical of reality) and *complimentary humour* (complimentary of reality), which is different from the *pure*

humour expressed by western humour (just making people laugh), lay down the foundation for the further inquiry.

Chapter 2 "Chinese and western views of humour" on theoretical premises and empirical analysis first discusses Chinese and western different perceptions of humour. The theoretical proposition unveils how culture influences the perceptions of humour in Chinese and western society, with special attention to the impacts of collectivism and individualism. Under the impacts of Confucius culture, Chinese favours positive humour, such as affiliative humour, rather than aggressive humour. Yue supports his views by reviewing several cross-cultural studies of humour in the Chinese society, and by presenting the comparative analyses of the perceptions of humour, the nominations of humourists, and the benefits of humour between Canadian and Chinese students. In this chapter, Yue also discusses the neuropsychological studies of Chinese humour. These studies unveil the brain activities during the incongruity-resolution process of humour, and present the mind-reading hypothesis of humour and the inner eye theory of laughter, which both claim that readers' mentalising about characters in jokes is essential for perceiving humour.

Chapter 3 "Chinese ambivalence about humour" is where the book takes its main research question to the central stage. Yue first explains Chinese people's paradoxical attitudes about humour, such as valuing humour but devaluing self-humour. Then, he presents a series of comparative studies of this ambivalent attitude about humour by decoding its underlying cultural factors. Yue explains that the Chinese paradoxical attitude about humour is related to the Confucian puritanic bias against humour throughout Chinese history as well the Communists' lofty prejudice for humour in modern times. In the final part of Chapter 3, Yue presents a few empirical analyses of the Chinese ambivalence about humour, and verifies that, although Chinese people value humour greatly, they will not consider being humorous to be a favourable personality trait for a typical Chinese and are highly cautious in using humour in interpersonal interactions.

Chapter 4 titled "Humour and Chinese personality" continues the discussion of humour in relation to the Chinese personality, including happiness, shyness, optimism, romance, and so on. Yue delves into the question raised in Chapter 1, that is, why Chinese people favour affiliative humour rather than aggressive humour. The Confucian ethic of acting benevolently and the Confucian ethic of avoiding shame are used to explain the cultural justifications behind such preferences.

In Chapter 5 "Humour and Chinese emotions", Yue highlights that Ancient Confucian doctrines and the Chinese classic medicine have caused the Chinese to have a unique cultural attitude toward excessive emotional expressions. Confucianism advocates moderate humour and laughter, in which the Chinese should conceal their joy or sadness in front of others ("喜怒不形于色") (Sun 2013) so as to maintain interpersonal harmony. On the other hand, traditional Chinese medicine observes seven kinds of emotions (i.e. joy, anger, worry, happiness, sadness, fear, and terror) as normal human expressions and advocates them to be complementary rather than contradictory to each other. Therefore, the Chinese has long pursued to keep a calm mind so as to obtain a peaceful disposition ("心平气和") in one's emotional regulation. In the second part of this chapter, Yue provides empirical evidence to the importance of performing affiliative talks and avoiding conflicts while joking. Maintaining a moderate mood and elegant laughter have been central to Confucian ethics for social formality and proper personal conduct (Bond 2010; Sun 2013).

In Chapter 6 on "Humour and Chinese mental well-being", and before introducing his own data analysis, the author reviews the important concepts of humour styles and mental health, as well as the interrelation of using different humour styles in indicating individual's mental well-being. Then, Yue presents an empirical analysis of humour and mental health among Hong Kong

adults, and among mainland students studying in Hong Kong. The results reveal that the Chinese are more likely to embrace adaptive humour for its greatest influence on mental health, while maladaptive humour styles are less influential. Although studies of Chinese undergraduates indicate that they tend to appreciate and use humour less than their western counterparts do (Yue et al. 2014), humour still is an integral part in Chinese mental health. As in western cultures, humour and laughter bring cheerfulness and energy, while reducing depression, anxiety, and tension (Martin 2007, p.269). Thus, humour boosts positive moods and counteracts negative emotions for everyone, and all cultures should enjoy humour equally without mystification or stigmatisation.

In Chapter 7 titled "Humour and Chinese creativity", the author begins with a discussion of the western and Chinese different conceptions of creativity. While the western perception of creativity is typically associated with liberal individualism, freedom of expression, self-actualisation, and equality (Lubart 1999), Chinese associate creativity with the promotion of collectivism, social harmony, social conformity, and reinterpretation of traditions (Rudowicz 2003). In contrast to the western concept of creativity, the Chinese concept of creativity emphasises ethical judgments regarding the value and outcomes of creativity (Yu 2008). Yue presents several empirical analyses of critical thinking, humour styles and traits among Hong Kong students. The results show that the Chinese associate humour styles with creative personality traits, possibly because they believe that creative personality traits are innately related to the capability of humour. However, China's social learning environment has caused individuals to disconnect humour from creative thinking, since the Chinese have been used to judging creativity by its utilitarian values and expressing humour in restrained ways.

In Chapter 8 "Workplace humour in Chinese society", the author first reviews two theories of workplace humour, namely relational process model of humour (Cooper 2008) and wheel model of humour (Robert & Willbanks 2012). These two theories address how humour stimulates positive impact on interpersonal interaction within a group. Then, Yue reviews the studies of humour styles, conflict styles, leader's effectiveness, and teaching effectiveness in Hong Kong universities. It is found that a supervisor's affiliative humour might cause subordinates to be more loyal and work more effectively, but a supervisor's aggressive humour could cause subordinates to show stress, strain, and addictive behaviour. The use of humour in Chinese workplace discourse is highly related to *guanxi* 关系 (having personal trust and a strong relationship with someone, and can involve moral obligations and exchanging favours) and the need for facework 面子功夫 (Liu et al. 2010). The Chinese may enjoy social interactions that include intelligent and proper humour, but they will be deeply insulted if humour causes someone to lose face, especially in workplace discourse.

To conclude, this study looks at humour in Chinese from a psychological-linguistic perspective. Yue's quantitative research design does explain the mechanisms of using and interpreting humour in the Chinese context. It certainly contributes to the field of humour perception in psychology and linguistics. His in-depth review of how Confucianism and traditional ethos impact Chinese ambivalent attitudes about humour can shed light on further studies in similar areas. Also, research results provide a good explanation of how humour is related to various psychological aspects of the Chinese, such as personality, emotion, mental well-beings, and creativity; and of what are the functions of humour in Chinese workplace discourse. Some limitations and further study directions in this research can also be raised. For example, the empirical analysis is largely based in Hong Kong society, where culture and traditions has been evidently impacted by western culture. In this sense, further research need to delve into humour used by the mainland Chinese, especially those with less exposure to western culture, so as to depict a more elaborate view of humour in the Chinese context.

It is hoped that this book will encourage a response among humour scholars, particularly among people interested in humour in the Chinese context, and the culture-specificities of humour in Chinese discourse.

Ying Cao
Wuhan Polytechnic University, PRC
yingcao1217@gmail.com

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