

# Laughing in Chinese

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## TALKING OF SMILE AND LAUGHTER

PAOLO SANTANGELO

Sometimes we laugh at others; sometimes we are laughed at by others. Those who laugh at others are in turn the object of laughter by others.<sup>1</sup>

Smiles and laughter are phenomena that have been mainly studied by psychologists and experts of human communication, but in fact pose some key questions to the philosopher, on the way to express what cannot be explained by words, and are also of interest to anthropological and ethnological researches, since they provide a valuable source of information about the emotional attitudes and social interactions within a given society, and thus about the culture in which they are produced or represented. Literary texts, artistic works and mass-media productions frequently offer us some hints about the cultural dimension of human smiling and laughing. By comparing the philological studies of some scholars dealing with East Asian cultures – mainly Chinese civilization - with the experimental results by psychologists, we aim to help elucidate some aspects of human behaviour through an interdisciplinary and intercultural approach, taking advantage of the various different specializations of the contributors.

Emotions and states of mind cover one aspect of smile-laughter phenomena, the subjective aspect: they may be the expression of the positive emotional sphere, as we are accustomed to considering. Sometimes however it is difficult to single out a clear feeling behind laughing and smiling, which might be a way of reassuring the interlocutors, a communication of a comical insinuation and its acceptance, or the shared derision for somebody, an infantile reaction - as in the interplay between sighs and smiles - or simply an act of politeness. From the psychological perspective, R. Caterina, P.L. Garotti and P.E. Ricci-Bitti, in *“Smiling and positive emotions”* offer an introductory survey on recent researches and some experiments done in Bologna University concerning the relationship between smile and positive emotions. They emphasize the interaction of emotional and social aspects in smiling, as many emotional smiles have their own specific social components: especially joy and elation can be properly expressed only if they elicit other people's interest. Moreover, as Stefania Stame has shown in her article, the so called formal or polite smile plays an important role in smoothing contrasts and making easy interpersonal interactions. Such manifestations also reflect social interactive contexts:

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<sup>1</sup> Feng Menglong, Preface to “Treasury of Laughs”, *Xiaofu xu* 笑府序, Ōki Yasushi 大木康 2008, p. 213.

courtesy or seduction may be well expressed by smiling. Thus other aspects are also important, such as the communication function, the humour factor, and especially the social and interpersonal functions. Furthermore smiling is one of the commonest ways to mask the facial expression of negative emotions (according to the model of “display rules” by Ekman and Friesen). Finally we can notice how in western tradition, linguistic and behaviour differences clearly distinguish smiling from laughing. This distinction is not so clear in other cultures.

The analysis of such elements offers information on values, symbols, mental representations, imagery, and conceptual and methodological tools providing insights into behavioural patterns of any society. In many civilizations these phenomena may be associated with joy and amusement, or with the reaction of perceiving something as funny out of a sense of superiority, embarrassment, self-irony or arrogance. Not only are they expressions of states of mind, but also an answer, a means of communication and a way of negotiating identity in interpersonal relationships. They help to deal with difficult situations or strengthen relationships and they may be feigned or insuppressible. Thus, not only do smiling and laughing **manifest a state of mind**, they are also **social acts** at the same time. And as social acts performed in systematic and socially organized patterns, they play an extremely important role in human interrelations, communication and interactions. What makes such phenomena meaningful, therefore, is an awareness of the context in which they are expressed as well as an understanding of the state of mind of the subjects who are interacting.

However, laughter and smiles are phenomena that have only recently received recognition as a research topic. They have often been given negative connotations, as in the Latin maxim which states that “*risus abundat in ore stultorum*” (laughter is plentiful in the mouth of fools). Usually laughter was considered a distraction from serious matters and thus trivial, childish. At the same time, this triviality and this childishness are actually considered so important in society that “inopportune laughter” is often warned against (in Latin wisdom: “*risus ineptus*”). And in fact nothing better expresses the fundamental lightness of life than laughter, which can be so powerful sometimes as to defuse a difficult situation. And in Chinese culture too, humorous writings have been marginalized for their dirty jokes and vulgar expressions or double meanings, and yet reveal an official severe attitude towards them.<sup>2</sup>

Laugh and smile can be sign of foolishness, but also the human reaction to the bewilderment for the absurd of reality, or for what is considered absurd. Thus, laughter is not only an expression of an emotional state, but it may also be a sign of non-conformist behaviour, or of a deeper wisdom, both in the West and

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<sup>2</sup> It is no mere chance that no jestbook was included in the corpus of the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 compiled between 1772 and 1782. Anyway the “Analects” report that a master “never laughs unless he is happy” 樂然後笑 (Lunyu, 14:13).

in China, and they may be studied as the “language of wisdom”. Any human being is aware that on reflecting beyond the everyday petty worries and calculations he/she cannot avoid laughing tragically or else crying warmly. A classical example of sapiential laughter can be seen in Democritus, who laughed so much that people thought him a fool, when in fact he was laughing simply because he could not see anything serious about the matters people took so seriously.<sup>3</sup> Along analogous lines in the dialectics “laughter-crying”, as the dichotomy between “laughing Democritus” and “crying Heraclitus”, Lü Kun 呂坤 (1536-1618), a Chinese thinker, states that:

He who forgets about the world's affairs laughs if he is talking to a person who worries about the world's affairs. He who worries about the world's affairs is sad if he is talking to a person who forgets about the world's affairs. 憂世者與忘世者談，忘世者笑。忘世者與憂世者談，憂世者悲。 (LK 22, Hikita 1977b, p. 79)

And the tenth century eccentric Budai (Cloth-Sack) Monk 布袋和尚 is praised by Feng Menglong as his master, because “laughable is talking about something we doubt, and even more laughable is talking about something we believe: the Classics, the Philosophers and the Histories, are just nonsense, and yet people compete to transmit them. Poems and compositions are just idle chat, and yet people compete to produce them. Praise and ridicule, promotion and dismissal are just confusing tales, and yet people contend in following and avoiding them.” 話之而疑之，可笑也。話之而信之，尤可笑也。經書子史鬼話也，而爭傳焉。詩賦文章淡話也，而爭工焉。褒譏伸仰亂話也，而爭趨避焉。<sup>4</sup> The so called “bisociation” is a device by which one expresses his/her embarrassment and communicates his/her dissatisfaction, as the logical language is not enough to explain the feeling or reaction: the humourous discourse becomes “a better medium than the serious discourse to depict the fluid complexities of the real world, which is full of ambiguities, contradictions, and surprises”.<sup>5</sup> The function of laughing here is similar to the laughter of some Daoist personages, deconstructing the distinctions between madness and sanity,

<sup>3</sup> Another classical example is the « Laughing Philosopher »: “[Democritus] adeo nihil videbatur serious eorum quae serio gerebantur”, Seneca, *De Ira*, II, 10, cit. in Jean Lebeau 1971, p. 246 (241-269). On the “cruel laugh” of Democritus and the “compassionate crying” of Heraclitus, see Jean Jehasse 1980, pp. 41-64.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Feng Menglong, *Xiaofu*, Preface. Ōki Yasushi 大木康 2008, p. 213. The sentence by the eccentric Budai Monk quoted by Feng Menglong was not so weird to the Buddhists who were quite accustomed to such an attitude. A similar sentence can be found, for instance, in a poem written by a young Buddhist laywoman, Tao Shang 陶善 (1756-1780), on the superfluousness of speaking of Dao and talking of Chan (論道談禪事也餘). Cf. Grant Beata, “Who is This I? Who is That Other? The Poetry of an Eighteenth-Century Buddhist Laywoman.” *Late Imperial China*, 1994, 15, pp. 47-86.

<sup>5</sup> See the article by Hsu Pi-ching.

nonsense and sensibility, illusion and substance, marginality and centrality, subversion and establishment.

A word which is so often used when we talk of laughter is ‘humour’. What we intend with such term? Many philosophical and psychological theories attempted to explain it, and most of them converge into a “relief”, “superiority” and/or “incongruity” perspectives. We can describe it – borrowing Stame’s words – as a relevant conversational strategy to satisfy interactional functions in social encounters, such as releasing tension and facilitating communication. If intuitively laughter and humour are linked together, their relationship is not so clearly defined: laughter is obviously a relevant clue, but only one among the many contextual, linguistic, paralinguistic or prosodic marks which identify instances of humour. Salvatore Attardo, in his “*Smiling, Laughter, and Humour*” summarizes some of the issues and points toward a solution to the methodological problems raised for the field of humour research. Considered the distinction between irony and sarcasm and comic and ridicule, Attardo starts from analyzing smiles and laughter as *ambiguous* markers of humour: he points out that they are indicators only in some cases and certain circumstances, while conversely laughter is one of the many possible reactions to humour. Then, in order to establish a correct methodology for the identification of humour, the idea of ‘humour competence’ and ‘performance’ are introduced. Intra- and inter-personal functions of humour in conversations are explored by Stefania Stame in “*On some functions of humour in everyday interactions*”. Resorting to a qualitative analysis, she focuses on “situated humour”, i.e. the different social contexts such as informal as well as formal encounters - dinners, workplaces - where people use to express instances of humour in conversation. Humour is strictly context bound, as already underlined. She stresses the fundamental condition that participants share the same experiences, and that humour is identified or enjoyed according to the context shifting.

Concerning Chinese literary production, Feng Menglong is without doubt the writer who mostly dedicated his works to humour and laughter in traditional China. In 1620 he published “Jokes Old and New”, *Gujin xiao* 古今笑, also known as “Survey of Talk Old and New”, *Gujin tan'gai* 古今談概, “History of Jokes Old and New”, *Gujin xiao shi* 古今笑史, which might be defined as an encyclopaedia of humour and wit.<sup>67</sup> The work in fact collects comic anecdotes on human folly and vice rather than jokes, in the tradition of compilations of

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<sup>6</sup> Hsu Pi-ching 2006, p. 148.

<sup>7</sup> As Huang Ching-sheng (1998) notices, the definition of jokes is quite different from that in the West, although they fundamentally play the same roles of amusement and social criticism: “Chinese considered all witty and funny anecdotes as jokes, though sometimes those narratives do not sound humorous at all. A large quantity of them was the anecdotes of some interesting, famous, historical figures recorded in the form of notes [...] jokes were a tool to amuse people and to reduce their social and living pressures. Beyond that jokes also served some intellectuals’ needs as vehicles to their criticism on a variety of problems in their society.” (p. 10).



paradoxical essays.<sup>8</sup> It presents several examples where to be “crazy” and “foolish” is sign of distinction. A whole chapter (the third) is dedicated to “infatuation-insanity” 癡, another (the fourth) to the state of being “naïve-foolish-dull” (愚, 蠢, 呆, 糊塗), and another (the ninth) on “obsessions” (癖). These character traits are not only presented for entertainment and to amuse the reader. They seem to be considered crucial in differentiating the personalities of those who bear these specific characteristics from ‘ordinary people’. So much so, in fact, that Feng Menglong criticises the contemporary trend of pretending to be like that, and distinguishes the ‘true foolishness’ from the affected and insincere state of folly: 惟不自謂癡乃真癡 [...].<sup>9</sup>

In many episodes described in the above and in the following works, quickness of perception or discernment, astuteness and acumen, are particularly appreciated, especially when this ability to find a solution to concrete problems is also capability to express oneself in an amusing way. This is the case in another work edited by Feng Menglong, and published in 1626, the “Sack of Wisdom”, *Zhinang* 智囊, where in fact what is praised is wit. No less sarcastic than the *Gujin tan'gai*, the object of the satire and laugh is always the pedant and inflexible Confucian, although the tone here seems more solemn as most of the episodes are framed in a historical context. The author offers a multifarious exhibition of examples of *zhi* 智, and “wisdom” is used not only in a moral sense, that is *xian* 賢 “wise and virtuous”.<sup>10</sup> Often *zhi* is rather the practical and quick ability based on the freedom of individual judgment to overcome difficulties, “applied intelligence”,<sup>11</sup> including scheme, strategy and cunningness: social conventions can be forgotten in order to face particular situations and to preserve the general well-being. Instead of praise for the old sage philosophers, or for the enlightened or immortals (聖人, 真人), we mainly find admiration for the practical ability of men and women of various social origin in solving every kind of problem, in everyday life or in military strategy, in political and administrative questions, in judicial cases, which somewhat recalls the legacy of the “strategy school” on the one hand, and some ideas from the Wang Yangming schools, on the other.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Cf Hanan 1981, p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> *Gujin tan'gai*, *Mi dian shi*, p. 107. in his essay of 1998 M. Huang comments that “self-expression had become a matter of style”, and that “eremitism had been a part of the convention of self-fashioning for so long that it had become institutionalised, a mere dramatic gesture orchestrated to catch public attention.” (pp. 100-101). On true and fake “mountain men”, see also Hsu Pi-ching 2006, pp. 126-128.

<sup>10</sup> Among the cases of moral wisdom, see the wife of a common man (*Le Yangzi qi* 樂羊子妻, 25:1526-28) and the wife of a general (*Li Kan fu* 李侃婦, 25:1590-91); moral integrity is behind two refusals to carry out the Emperor's orders due to the officials' great prudence in *Ci lianshu* and *Ci mijie* (辭連署, 辭密揭, 2:104-06).

<sup>11</sup> See Hanan 1981, p. 83.

<sup>12</sup> In some stories wisdom is good discernment and prudent decision, in other stories it is far-

The most notable comic texts written by Feng Menglong are surely the collections of jokes and situations under the title of “Treasury of Laughs”, *Xiaofu* 笑府, and two anthologies of popular songs, “Hanging Twigs”, *Guazhi'er* 掛枝兒, and “Popular or Mountain Songs”, *Shan'ge* 山歌.<sup>13</sup> These “Three Rounds of Child’s Folly” *Tongchi sannong* 《童癡三弄》 are non-fictional works on humour and wit, a sort of compilation of underground literature. They collect folksongs and jokes, oral tradition documents considered trivial by scholars, and belonging to popular entertainment expressions in the quarters of pleasure: they are typically set in the context of informal conversations, singing, joking, and drinking contests, and preserve a vast array of tabooed materials that were marginalized by the mainstream culture as crossing the borders of ‘decency’. They share a facetious attitude, non-canonical contents, and non-orthodox perspectives, where hedonism paradoxically has a dialectical relation with didacticism. These texts can be read in different ways, either as dangerous social criticism, or entertainment writings re-elaborated by a non-conformist young scholar, or even as a literary experiment and aesthetic manifesto, but they nevertheless share a fundamental and common humour. And

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sightedness (識之遠), or it is the ability to control negative emotions, such as anger or fright, and in some other stories it is even the cunning skill to cheat people. For instance, see the role of common people in *Suzhou di* (蘇州堤, 8a:541-42) or in *Yushitai laoli* (禦史台老隸, 3:220-21), of a monk in *Huai Bing* (懷丙, 17:1083), of an actor in *Zhongmou ling* (中牟令, 20:1193-94). For feminine protagonists, see the previously mentioned wife of Le Yangzi (*Le Yangzi* 樂羊子, 25:1526-28), the wife of a general (*Li Kan fu*, 25:1590-91), and a prostitute who cunningly helps the Chinese army to vanquish Japanese pirates (*Wang Cuiqiao* 王翠翹, 26:1594-97). Many stories deal with the strategic ability to take advantage of the enemies’ weakness to defeat them, as in *Zhou Fang* (周訪, 22:1287-88), *Li Jing* (李靖, 22:1298-1300), *Cao Wei* (曹瑋, 22:1317-19), *Zhao She* (趙奢, 22:1279-81), *Tang Taizong* (唐太宗, 22:1293-96), *Liu Qi* (劉錡, 22:1310-15), *Wu Chengqi* (吳成器, 22:1337-39). For examples of ability in managing financial problems thanks to one’s experience, see *Liu Yan* (劉晏, 2:146-47) or *Zong Weimin* (宗威愨, 11:773-79), *Xiang Minzhong* (向敏中, 10:701-3), *Gao Ziye* (高子業, 9:632-34), *Yang Pingshi* (楊評事, 9:639-40), *Yang Maoqing* (楊茂清, 9:640-43), *Cangjin* (藏金, 9:646-48), *Linhai ling* (臨海令, 10:734-35) are examples of wise solutions to judicial cases. On the wisdom of fathers in their decisions concerning their children, see the stories *Pei Kuan*, *Li You* (裴寬, 李祐, 2:150-52), and *Fan Li* (範蠡, 6:372-76). Scheming officials who are able to avoid troubles thanks to their cunning solutions are described in *Li Hang* (2:99-101) and *Ye Nanyan* (葉南岩, 3:227-29). *Pei Jin Gong* (裴晉公, 3:220-21), *You Weng* (尤翁, 5:325-28), *Li Guang* and *Wang Yue* (李廣, 王越, 23:1378-80) show the ability to control anger or fright, while *Yongjia chuanzi* (永嘉船子, 27:1666-68) or *Yishu* (易術, 28:1733-34) present the skill to cheat people. Most of these stories are written with irony and humour. All quotations refer to the *Zhinangbu*.

<sup>13</sup> It can also be rendered as «Clandestine Loves», since the main topic is related to illicit relations. In fact, the humorous tone was shared by popular songs and jokes, which were often classed together (cf Kathryn Lowry 2005, p. 14). On the so called trilogy, see Hsu Pi-ching 2006, and 1998, pp. 1042-67.

whatever our interpretation, they all display a deep humour towards the realm of human affairs and behaviour, the limits of humans beings seen through laughing at their contradictions.<sup>14</sup>

They also share an attitude to wisdom which has been mentioned in other works: rather than talent in learning and wisdom, in Feng Menglong's collections mental qualities mainly concern the cunning ability to reach one's tasks, and to use tricks and stratagems (機謀) to obtain them, at the same time making sure to avoid trouble with others. This also appears frequently in the songs, where the constant aim is the meeting with the lover – considered a good in itself – and the stratagems necessary to achieve the purpose, something that would often appear to be praising deceptive,<sup>15</sup> false, and flexible traits. Thus, the author refrains from censuring what would normally be considered immoral, and describes, without condemnation, women actively pursuing extramarital relations: humour often consists of the subversive description of reality.<sup>16</sup>

In this volume, Hsu Pi-ching's "*Feng Menglong's Treasury of Laughs: A Humorous Reflection on Self and Society in Ming China*" deals with the "Treasury of Laughs" *Xiaofu* 笑府 that she has already extensively analysed in previous essays. The "Treasury of Laughs" collects 700-odd jokes, which induce laughter at the expense of a broad cross section of society in late Ming China. Buffoons include people from all walks of life, from beggars and street vendors to officers and officials; even the emperor and the sage Confucius are indirectly mocked. And they include all ages, from young children who cannot play along in their parents' worldly games, to elderly people who would not give up those games of folly even when death has caught up with them. The jokes reveal strains in all sorts of human relations: parent-child, husband-wife, master-servant, teacher-pupil, doctor-patient, clergy-patron, between siblings, among social peers, and so on. The jokes also expose tensions in various aspects of

<sup>14</sup> On humour in Chinese culture, besides the classical essays by Herbert Giles 1901, pp. 430-36, Kao George 1971, and Hsia C.T. 1978, pp. 30-36, see the item "Ku-chi" 滑稽 (*huáji*), in Nienhauser 1986, pp. 482-84, and Hsu Pi-ching 2006, pp. 21-28.

<sup>15</sup> There are countless songs dealing with stratagems and cunning ways to hide social transgressions. Just to give an example, in 1:3A, we can read: "Young man, you don't know shame. / Why did you look back at me after you passed by the gate of our house? / The spinning eyes of my husband are not blind. / If you wish to meet me, why don't you go to a back gate?" 小年紀後生弗識羞, / 那了走過子我裏門前啖轉頭, / 我裏老公谷碌碌介雙眼睛弗是清昏箇, / 你要看奴奴那弗到後門頭。

<sup>16</sup> Just to give an example, in *Shan'ge*, 6:177A, the woman is said to hide her adulterous affair (symbolized by the image of "heaven without the sun") from her husband (who in Confucian iconography is compared to heaven), and she encourages her lover not to be afraid of the illicit relation: "cheating Heaven, the weather is fine inside of me (晴 is a pun for 情, and thus means "I have a secret affair with another man"). / She says to her lover: 'although this is an affair like heaven without the sun, you need not fear about it' [...]." 瞞子天天我裏私下晴, / 姐道郎呀, 箇樣有天無日頭箇事你也弗要怕 [...].

Ming society—within the political, educational, and judicial systems, within intellectual circles, between the sexes, and among different classes. By illustrating how negative emotions such as greed, jealousy, pride, shame, stinginess, and affectation work against spontaneity, honesty, honour, generosity and piety, the “Treasury of Laughs” lays bare the human follies that rupture the fabric of society in the final decades of the Ming. Therefore this collection is important not only for its evidence of the sense of humour in the period, and the relation between playful and serious utterances, but also of the social and intellectual reality. This article introduces such multiple aspects, and discovers the tensions covered by the humorous tone of the jokes; after a general survey of the collection, it presents a detailed analysis on the objects of Feng Menglong’s satire against the social, political, and cultural history of Ming China, as well as in the context of Feng Menglong’s “teaching of *qing* 情 (human emotional responses to particular circumstances).” Despite Feng Menglong’s invocation of the above mentioned Budai monk, Hsu’s study demonstrates that an otherworldly Buddhist enlightenment is far from the purpose of the laughter. Rather, the aim of the humour is this-worldly and may be best described as neo-Confucian, in Wang Yangming 王陽明 style. When the laughter dies down, the reader should go away with an awareness of the discrepancy between what is and what should be, and a resolve to do what should be, in the hope of transforming society for the better. Thus, Hsu’s essay – by presenting a few dozen entries that are particularly meaningful for Ming studies, and analyzing them against the social, political, and cultural history of Ming – helps to uncover new values behind the humorous tone of the jokes, and the characters of the ideal gentleman according to the Ming intellectual circles around Feng Menglong.

Hsu Pi-ching shows how the jokes in the “Treasury of Laughs” are funny because they are hyperbolic, with ingenious punch lines. They poke fun at a wide range of sectors of society, so that every reader could find quite a few “victims” to laugh at. The jokes are mild and do not give names, so that even those who find themselves mocked are not terribly embarrassed or offended. And, being a realistic reflection on the ills of Ming society, the jokes strike a cord in the minds of many a conscientious reader.

Although Feng Menglong needed to elevate his language in order to be taken seriously in the *élite* circles, as he fundamentally felt to be member of the “gentry society”, he did not completely share their values, especially in his early publishing career.<sup>17</sup> It may be useful at this point to add some thoughts about his “Songs” (*Shan’ge*), as their spirit and humour are emblematic. If we take into consideration the situations that appear behind the parallels and innuendos of the Songs, we notice that the hilarity coming from the *double entendre* and the metaphors is very tolerant toward transgressions in sexual morality, and at the

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<sup>17</sup> On late-Ming commercial publishing and the concept of ‘elegant’ and ‘common’, see Lowry 2005, especially chapter 3.

same time sarcastic towards institutions and orthodoxy: both *Shan'ge* and "Hanging Twigs" (*Guazhi'er*) show the irreverent position of the author towards society. Some reports have suggested that after publishing *Shan'ge* and *Guazhier* he became so notorious that he had to leave Suzhou and live in some sort of exile. When he later republished the two collections he added the Preface of *Shan'ge* to try to trace his work back to the dignity of the *Shijing* tradition.

Humour factors are based on the double meanings and the hints at eroticism but also on iconoclasm. Laughter is not just the reaction to superficial or vulgar jokes. In fact, as van Gulik noticed and recently Harbsmeier pointed out, humour and ironic interpretations did not spare even the sacred texts of Confucian Classics,<sup>18</sup> and thus a certain trend was not alien to Chinese culture. And yet the taste for the absurd and satire as well as the use of erotic materials are applied also in the frame of Feng's clear commitment to *qing*.<sup>19</sup> The context of the Songs is popular, and the attention of the Songs is focused on clandestine love, its personal implications, and the multifaceted attitudes to carnal love. But the spirit behind the songs transcends sensual jests. In other words, what we see in the two song collections of *Shan'ge* and *Guazhi'er* is eroticism with a spiritual dimension: humour is thus used to convey that spiritual dimension. This way of writing also had the indirect advantage that using humour to tone down the eroticism of his love stories made them more acceptable to the elite circles.

Just to have an idea of the type of humour, we can read the song 4:99A from *Shan'ge*. Here, besides the joke on the number of loves, the main point is the sacralization of carnal love, the appeal to arhat and Bodhisattva, and the comparison of this woman with Malangfu 馬郎婦, an incarnation of Guanyin, who was supposed to have taken on a human form as a charming girl who attracted men and had sexual relations with them, but finally she made all these men lose all their lustful desires, after intercourse with her.<sup>20</sup>

人人罵我毳千人，<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> For a broad survey on the topic, see Huang Ching-sheng 1998. Cf also Christoph Harbsmeier 1990, p. 152.

<sup>19</sup> See the useful volume by Hsu Pi-ching 2006. After Hanan's classical studies on Feng's production, the volume – which is actually an essay on humour in Feng Menglong – is a comprehensive study of the three above-mentioned works. It is an attempt to re-examine Chinese humour in relation to historical conditions, and thus the essay throws new light on some aspects of mentality which can be detected only through a combined historical and literary enquiry. Hsu correctly excludes that the use of erotic materials is done in the form of "disenchantment through enchantment", as is the case with other writers, due to Feng's clear commitment to *qing*.

<sup>20</sup> Mǎlángfū 馬郎婦, an incarnation of Guanyin, who is supposed to have taken on a human form in the Shaanxi. According to the legend, she was a charming girl who attracted men and had sexual relations with them. The miracle consisted of the fact that all these men, after intercourse with her, lost all their lustful desires. Finally she married a young man, a certain Ma, but she died on the evening of the wedding, and became a Bodhisattva.

<sup>21</sup> Zè: vulgar term meaning "sexual intercourse". It is not usually found even in monolingual

仔細算來只毳得五百箇人，  
爾不見東家一箇因兒毳子一千人了得佛做，  
小阿奴奴一尊羅漢穩丟丁。<sup>22</sup>  
南無黃金瑣子骨菩薩。<sup>23</sup>

Everyone insults me, saying that I have slept with a thousand lovers. / But if you calculate precisely, the number of lovers with whom I have slept is no more than five hundred. / Look! The daughter of your easterly neighbour became a Buddha after sleeping with one thousand men. / So, compared with her, I should at least become an arhat.

[Comment] Hail to the majestic Golden-Chain Bodhisattva!<sup>24</sup>

Or we can enjoy Feng Menglong's comment to another song (5:112), a masterpiece of irony, where the wife is appreciated above any other woman. It is

dictionaries, with the exception of the Kangxi zidian 康熙字典 (repr. Beijing Zhonghua shuju, 1973, p. 520), and in the Hanyu dazidian 漢語大字典, Wuhan, Hubei cishu chubanshe, 1988, 3: 1996 (see also Liu 415, 1) but with a different meaning. It is not even present in dictionaries of Wu dialect (吳方言詞典, 明清吳語詞典). According to Zhang 張惠英1994, it is a homophone of chuō 戳, and is used as a vulgar term in Suzhou slang (音同“戳”, 吳語用作褻語).

<sup>22</sup> The sentence should be read as a rhetorical question: “Who will ever take away Lohan's position from me?”.

<sup>23</sup> The same Bodhisattva is mentioned in a story collected by Feng Menglong, in the *Gujin xiaoshuo* 29. Anthony Yu (1987) has emphasised the compatibility of religious attitude with biting satire and exuberant humour in the *Xiyouji*, in line with the iconoclastic tradition of “jeering the Patriarchs and abusing the Buddhas” 呵佛罵祖 (Repr. “Religion and Literature in China: The “Obscure Way” of *The Journey to the West*” in Yu Anthony, *Comparative Journeys. Essays on Literature and Religion East and West*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, pp. 179-181)..

<sup>24</sup> See the legend of the “Chain-Bones Bodhisattva” (鎖骨菩薩) in Li Fuyan's 李復言 “Xu xuangailu” 《續玄怪錄》, quoted in *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, 101, “Yanjou furen” 延州婦人 (Oki 538). This is the same legend that mentions the generous girl who never refuses to sleep with those who ask her: people consider her a lascivious woman, but in fact she is a great saint, as she is so benevolent as to submit to any desires in the world 世俗之欲, 無不徇焉. Thus she becomes a Bodhisattva whose bones are joined like the links in a chain. This story recalls the analogous Guanyin reincarnation of Malangfu, in the following song, as well as the devas of pleasure (*huānxīfó* 歡喜佛) in the Lamaist representation of male and female deities embracing each other in love, and also the concept of “enlightenment through love”, based on the paradox that “without detachment one cannot be attached; without attachment one cannot be detached”, 不離則不即, 不即則不離. On the use of the *Surangama sutra* (*lèngyánjīng* 楞嚴經) to extinguish the fire of lust, and courtesans, see Susan Mann, 1997, pp. 188-189, 272. this song belongs to a volume under press, edited by Oki and Santangelo, for the series of the Encyclopaedia of States of Mind.

one of the rare notes on the human condition, hovering between a longing for freedom and fear of solitude: the abandonment of free and libertine life is determined by a health contingency, rather than by a moral conversion or a deep love for a wife:

○親老婆	My dear wife
天上星多月弗多， <sup>25</sup>	There are many stars in the sky, but there is only one moon
雪白樣雄雞當弗得箇鵝，	A cock can't be a goose even if it is as white as snow.
煮粥煮飯還是自家田裏箇米，	If you cook congee or rice, in the end, it is best to use rice from your own rice field.
有病還須親老婆。	If you fall ill, in the end, the only person you need is your dear wife.
忽然道學，還是無病的日子多。 <sup>26</sup>	[Comment:] Suddenly he has started to speak like an orthodox moralist, but his 'healthy' days still outnumber the others!

In other cases the comic effect comes from the contrast between the cleverness of the girl and the clumsiness of her boyfriend (3:80), or the subversion of the usual hierarchy of genders, such as the case of the widow with seven husbands (5:133), or the couple at the temple where the wife prays to gods for her secret lover (1:40).

Some personages resemble those marginal characters presented by fiction, from the bandits of the Water-Margin tradition to the servants and merchants of urban society. In sexual matters the *carpe diem* principle seems more accepted at the individual level than any Puritan or Confucian strict gender separation, which nevertheless prevails in society with the veneration of women's chastity and the warning against desires.<sup>27</sup> Common topics are the wisdom and

<sup>25</sup> This allegory appears at the beginning of many songs and here alludes to the rarity of faithful wives.

<sup>26</sup> This is Feng's ironic joke: the subject of the song usually ignores morals and commits adultery, except for a few days when he is sick. “忽然”(suddenly) may also be interpreted as expressing the contrast between the earlier mountain songs, which tolerate adultery, and this “moral” song.

<sup>27</sup> See the song 1:7: “Passed twenty years, I am twenty one years old. / I would be foolish if I do not get a lover, at this age. / After passing thirty years, the flower will soon wither. / and

determination of women, the daughter who is smarter than her parents in meeting her lover against their will, the cunning lady who can cheat her husband and has her dates with the illicit lover. A justification for the transgression is easy to be found.<sup>28</sup> The only warning seems to be that all transgressive behaviours must be done in the most hidden way: “in the front (in public) they are separate, but at the back (in secret) they are tied” 當面分開背後聯 (*Shan'ge*, 6:163); “to have secret dates as furtive thieves in the darkness with no lamp oil” 竊盜無油暗裏偷 (*Shan'ge*, 2:68B).<sup>29</sup> The hostility against sexual pleasures is evident in the capillary social control, embodied in the parents' severity with their daughters, as well as in the omnipresence of the neighbours's ears and eyes, or the “troublesome men” who do nothing but refer to the husband about his wife's secret affairs (有閒人搬來我裏箇聽)<sup>30</sup>, and in the fear for the social sanction of becoming the object of rumors and gossip (惡風聲):<sup>31</sup> “but outside they say that they will discover our illicit love, / speaking unpleasant words with their mouth askew like the crooked lips of oil pots,” 外頭唸話捉姦情, / 歪嘴油瓶喫子箇口弗好 (1:29), or “weak people offer presents to their neighbours, / while strong people curse them. / both are behaviours of women who are involved in secret affairs” 弱者奉鄉鄰, / 強者罵鄉鄰, / 皆私情姐之為也, (*Shan'ge*, 1:29A). Here the comic situations come from the ways women try to cope with social hostility and control.

The most dreaded danger is the proof that might uncover any illicit affair.<sup>32</sup> In this context, what is appreciated is cleverness, as the ability to realize one's desires and aims without damaging social harmony. Thus, in the first line of the

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then it will be useless to invite a man even with both hands.” 二十去子廿一來, / 弗做得人情也是駸, / 三十過頭花易謝, / 雙手招郎郎弗來。

<sup>28</sup> For instance, in song 1:29D, the girl says to her lover: “You must get hold of stolen things to catch a thief. / you must capture both of two to catch their adultery. / ‘Darling, you and I are like one person who shares one gall and one heart. / Why should we fear that other people can catch the two?’” 捉賊從來捉箇賊品, / 捉姦從從來捉箇雙, / 姐道郎呀, 我聽你並膽同心一箇人能介好, 囉怕閒人捉耍雙. And furthermore, “Ancients' words are not worth obeying! / Why is one pretty girl allowed to marry only one man? / If Tang Empress Wu could change the law of great Ming, / who in the world would dare to arrest the adulterers?” 古人說話弗中聽, 那了一箇嬌娘只許嫁一箇人, 若得武則天娘娘改子箇本大明律, 世間囉敢捉姦情 (*Shan'ge*, 1:29E).

<sup>29</sup> See also *Shan'ge*, 6:141.

<sup>30</sup> See for instance *Shan'ge*, 7:208: “When our affair was just at the beginning and nothing had happened yet, already a troublesome man came and told my husband about it [...]” 私情起意未曾曾, 唸有閒人搬來我裏箇聽 [...].

<sup>31</sup> See for instance *Shan'ge*, 6:155. For a pun, see also *Shan'ge*, 4:111.

<sup>32</sup> “[...] who is to blame for the baby growing in my belly now? [...] like a ship which goes up on the rising tide, it is hard to hide it.” [...] 我喫腹中有孕要人當 [...] 水漲船高難隱藏。 *Shan'ge*, 1:32C.



song 1:27, entitled “Deceiving” 瞞人 we read: “When you have an illicit affair, just make the most of your cunning and ingenuity” 結識私情要放乖, and in the 2:38: “If you have a secret affair, you must be smart” 結識私情只要自即伶. The most admired are those who are quick in escaping and avoiding troubles for their illicit partners: “he is out of the door just after he has noticed a sound / and no one remains with you within the bed curtains to cause you any trouble.” 一聲響覺人在房門外, 羅帳內無人好聽渠爭.<sup>33</sup> What is most feared and blamed are those traits of character that denote lack of cautiousness: the impulsive youngster who always speaks without worrying about the reactions of others and who likes to deliver secrets concerning his girl friend, is to be avoided: “If you have a secret affair, you had better not find a raw youngster [...] 結識私情沒要結識暴後生<sup>34</sup> (*Shan’ge*, 4:111). Rumors are feared, as they irreparably damage the image of the individual and the family, make him/her and others lose face, and might provoke contrasts, envy, jealousy.<sup>35</sup> The ability to hide the illicit affair becomes an object for laughter too.

In the Songs human weak points, like female or male inconstancy and infidelity, are simply presented with a smile, without moralistic judgments: “The young woman’s heart belongs to her favourite lover. / But while she is waiting for him, a second man comes along: /If dumplings are not available, simple noodles will do. / I take you for now, and we enjoy love and sexual pleasures, creating a scene with “wind and clouds”. [Comment] Where is her favourite lover, while she ‘takes comfort’ with the other?” 姐兒心上自有第一箇人, / 等得來時是次身, / 無子餛飩麵也好, 捉渠權時點景且風雲。 / 點景時第一箇人何在。 (*Shan’ge*, 1:14).

Although the genre and context are different, the humour of “Songs” and “Hanging Twigs” is basically the same as that of the “Treasury of Laughs”: the same satirical spirit, appealing to the audience’s tastes of the time, remains in all the works of the “Child’s Folly”, which laughs at social hierarchy, the educational system, mocking everything and everyone. This trend is testified by some contemporary circumstantial reports, such as Shen Defu’s 沈德符 (1578 – 1642) *Private Gleaning from the Wanli Reign* (*Wanli yehuobian* 萬曆野獲編,) and Zhang Dai’s 張岱 (1597 - 1689), *Remembrances of Tao'an's Dream* (*Tao'an mengyi* 陶庵夢憶). The section of the *Private Gleaning from the Wanli Reign* dedicated to humour *xiéxuè* 諧謔 describes several examples of oral and written jests and jokes (*xuèyǔ* 謔語 and *xuèshī* 謔詩) that reflect the

<sup>33</sup> *Shan’ge*, 4: 110A. 聽渠 in Wu dialect is for 同他; thus the passage 聽渠爭 literally should be rendered with 同他爭理, “to fight with him”.

<sup>34</sup> 暴後生 according to C. Töpelmann 1973, p. 258, *bào* 暴 must be read as *pù* 曝/暴, “expose, reveal” (see also Ōki Yasushi 2003, p. 556). *Shan’ge*, 4:111.

<sup>35</sup> Jealousy is considered one of the enemies of relations: “Growing our jealousy, we started to quarrel” 一場喫醋走進子是門 (*Shan’ge*, 3:76).

sophisticated fashion of joking among the literati of the time.<sup>36</sup> Zhang Dai, describing the elite society in the South-East China of the same period, among various different associations, mentions a club where people gathered periodically just to amuse themselves by jokes: “My second uncle was a humourous person, and he found the "Laughter Society" in the capital with the likes of Lou Zhongrong, Shen Huchen and Han Qiuzhong. There, when they uttered some words, people would laugh uncontrollably, with their hat ribbons broken and splitting the sides with laughter. 仲叔善诙谐，在京师与漏仲容、沈虎臣、韩求仲辈结“噓社”，喋喋数言，必绝纓喷饭。(TAMY 6:36-37 噓社).

Li Zhi (1527-1602) influenced Feng Menglong, in his aesthetic and philosophical thought, but also in his works featuring comic anecdotes and satirical comments: Hanan mentions the influence of Li Zhi's *Chutan ji* 初譚集, (repr. Beijing 1974) on Feng's already mentioned *Gujin tan'gai*.<sup>37</sup> Li Zhi is the author of [*Li Zhuowu xiansheng pingdian*] *Sishuxiao* [李卓吾先生評點]四書笑 ([*Li Zhi's Punctuated and Annotated*] *Jestbook on the Four Books*) that develops a model of a special humour based on the Confucian Classics.<sup>38</sup> It is well known how the *Four Books* were not only the basis for moral behaviour and respectable social image, but also the key for the preparation of an official career, and thus they implied pedagogical methods, criteria of selecting scholars, socialization and internalization channels. This parodic work is an example of a ‘subversive literature’ attempting to create comic effects by ridiculing orthodox rules and canons. Among the works produced in order to provoke laughter, another collection of comical jests and passages is worthy of study: it is an important but neglected work attributed to Li Zhi, *Kaijuan Yixiao*, an anthology of ridiculed jests, songs, articles, poems and biographies, anecdotes of hearty laughs from the Song, Yuan and Ming periods. Lee Cheuk Yin, in “*Anecdotes of Laugh and Tears: Li Zhi 李贄 and his Kaijuan Yixiao 開卷一笑 (Reading with Laugh)*” offers an original analysis on the work. Compiled as they are for the function of fun and laugh, the articles are examples of popular mockery, based on some physical defects such as a bald head, big nose, and short legs, and are thus significant examples for reconstructing the tradition of satirical literature in late Ming and its relations to the popular trend of figure-appraisal in late historical writings. The book may be considered as a popular and unorthodox version of “praise and blame” in Chinese historical writing. In fact, Li Zhi in his *Cangshu* 藏書 (1599) presents an appraisal of historical figures different from the Confucian standard, to illustrate how “Human judgments are not fixed quantities” and “in passing judgments men do not hold settled views.” 人之是非

<sup>36</sup> *Wanli yehuobian* 萬曆野獲編, 26:664-72.

<sup>37</sup> See Hanan 1981, p. 83.

<sup>38</sup> See the study by Huang Ching-sheng 1998

初無定質。人之是非也亦無定論。<sup>39</sup> This paper notes the interesting mixture of sense of humour with the sympathy which the authors sometimes express towards the tragedy of life. Moreover it is interesting on account of its inquiry into the categorization of the period, based on the analysis of the criteria for the selection of different types of jests and episodes.

Some other specialists have examined different kinds of materials, mainly literary, historical, philosophical sources, focusing on traditional China and Japan, and have offered their reflection starting from different perspectives.

This multifunctional and ambiguous character of smile and laughter is clearly reflected in the various different sources. From the studies that are collected here it appears that even if these phenomena are a kind of manifestation of states of mind, the correspondent emotions are often difficult to determine.

As Erhard Rosner points out in his article, also in the Chinese tradition the facial expression of laughter itself has been regarded as something enigmatic, being much more difficult to interpret than the expression for other emotions, such as anger. And in fact Rosner quotes the eunuch Yu Chaoen's (-770) statement that "anger is a common [understandable] emotion (*changqing* 常情), while a person who laughs is difficult to estimate (*bukece* 不可測)".

Further evidence of this ambiguity is the apparently foolish but actually wise attitude of *Yingning* 嬰寧, the personage whom Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640-1715) named one of his stories after in his well known collection *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異.<sup>40</sup> Yingning is the controversial character of a young fox-woman who was considered by everyone to be foolish, because her behaviour was not in accordance with human customs, and she laughed so readily and without apparent reason; in the end however she demonstrated that she possessed great wisdom, virtue and goodness. In this story Pu Songling explains that this laughing was in fact a kind of pose, behind which a more complex personality was concealed. She was wisely determined to adopt an elaborate strategy in order to reach her objective to be assimilated into human society and ingratiate herself with the family of her lover.<sup>41</sup> Laughter is thus not only a spontaneous reaction or an expression of a foolish attitude, but it might be a cultivated pose, like the miraculous plant 'Laugharia', that, when smelled, makes men laugh without stopping. In his own comment, Pu Songling notes at the end of the story:

The Historian of the Strange comments: "Judging from her excessive childish simper, she seemed lacking in sensibility and awareness; but from the trick she made beneath the wall, who else can be more cunning? And her sorrowful

<sup>39</sup> Li Zhi, *Cangshu* 藏書, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959, p.1, quoted in Lee Cheuk Yin's article.

<sup>40</sup> *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 by Pu Songling [preface 1679], [Zhang Youhe critical edition 張友鶴輯校] 1978, 2:147-159.

<sup>41</sup> See Barr 1989, pp. 501-506.

affection for her ghost mother that changed her laughter to tears [suggests that] my Yingning was actually concealing herself in laughter! I have heard of a mountain herb called Laugharia, which, when smelled, makes men laugh without stopping. If some of these were planted in a room, then flowers like the Forget-Your-Sorrow (silktree albizzia) or Joy of Union (lily) would all look pale. As for this beauty – the so-called flower-that-understands-speech – people will feel sick of her pose and mannerism.” 異史氏曰：“觀其孜孜憨笑，似全無心肝者；而牆下惡作劇，其點孰甚焉。至悽戀鬼母，反笑爲哭，我嬰甯殆隱於笑者矣。竊聞山中有草，名‘笑矣乎’。嗅之，則笑不可止。房中植此一種，則合歡、忘憂，並無顏色矣；若解語花，正嫌其作態耳。” (LZZY, 2:159, Ying Ning 嬰寧)

In my article, “*Functions of laugh and smile in their Chinese pre-modern representation: a preliminary survey*” I attempt to monitor and map the main different meanings that such a phenomenon presents in various sources from late imperial China. It is a general survey on the way *xiao* 笑 and similar terms have been used in Ming and Qing sources. *Xiào* is really a generic term, which includes both noisy laugh or silent smile, and may manifest various states of mind: joy 高興, laughing at 嘲笑, intimacy 親密, mocking oneself 自嘲, admiration 贊嘆, surprise and amazement 驚訝, realization and understanding 明白, agreement and consent *tóngyì* 同意, ingratiating aim *tǎohǎo* 討好, or helpless *wú nài* 無奈. The groups that I have formulated take into consideration both the Chinese terms and the categories and the states of mind they manifest. In the tables I have marked the general meanings of the compound, and the specific meanings it assumes in the examples, with special attention to the states of mind which are manifested, and I have supplied significant examples for each case. Besides the expression of amusement, disdain and sarcasm, obsequious and ingratiating attitude, this phenomenon is described together with the body’s posture and gestures, and its interrelation with words and sounds. By resorting to expressions related to smile and laughter, writers have the possibility to pass through new dimensions both in the description of interpersonal relations and of personalities. Thus this representation opens a window on the inner self and its presentation to others, the bargaining of one’s position in front of people who are present, the individual’s reaction in expressing agreement or disagreement, pleasure or distance, disdain or admiration, a sense of inferiority or superiority.

Particularly useful is the short analysis of the emotion-related lexicon in Ming and Qing *xiaopin*, which is offered in Paolo De Troia’s article “*Smile and Laughter in Imperial China: the xiaopin genre*”. The essay examines the function and meanings of this facial expression in the stereotyped description of courtesans in some *xiaopin* texts, the use of smile as social language, and contributes to the understanding of certain aspects of private history in the advanced areas of Jiangnan, through a lexicographic analysis of some key terms.

If we consider laughter in its social implications, and interaction of roles, we cannot ignore the ladder of social structure, its organization, and hierarchy at

different levels. The smiling expression on the face of emperors is described, in relation to their status, as mainly didactic: What is the meaning behind the Chinese record reporting on the “laughter” (*xiào*) of the emperor and a “smiling emperor”? In “*The Smiling Emperor: Facial gestures in Chinese historiography*”, Erhard Rosner deals with the linguistic representation of facial expressions in the Chinese, through the analysis of incidents related to the emperor’s “smiling” and “laughter” in the Official Histories. The author considers both aspects of his research considering the nature of the sources, the biographical patterns with respect to the Chinese serene rulers, as well as his self-representation as a paragon of self-control, but also, owing to the rhetorics of the panegyric style of such documents, the codes of the description of gestures in Chinese literature. Rather than re-negotiating interpersonal relations, the smiling emperor is mainly a modal and political act, reported for its exemplary functions: either amused or sympathetic, either tolerating remonstrances or symbolic of impartiality, the emperor’s face is the face of the undisputed superiority of power. As in any culture, in Chinese culture too laughter has a pedagogical function, influences others’ attitudes, and acts as a social comparison.<sup>42</sup> In so doing, Rosner’s article contributes to the development of the image of power and political history.

In the frame of laughter as sapiential expression, it is presented in many works as the manifestation of one’s different level of wisdom, from foolishness to enlightenment. The classical case of sapiential laughter associated with paradox is the type cultivated among Daoists and Chan Buddhists. These works constitute the first source of the historical development of the Chinese art of humour. In fact, in *Zhuangzi* 莊子 we can find examples of polysemous laughter, whose meaning depends on the circumstances and on the enlightened progress of the subject: not only the laughter of the enlightened, but also the ignorant who laughs at the wise, the knowing at the ignorant, and the sages laughing together, are all presented in the work. This topic has been studied by Wolfgang Schwabe, in his “*Is life but a joke? Who is laughing in the Zhuangzi 莊子?*”. The essay examines the different functions laughter has in the *Zhuangzi*, where laughter is often being employed as a substitute for verbal communication, and brings us to the “laughing Democritus” even if the spirit of laugh is different. This paper singles out three different levels on which laughter occurs: The ignorant laughing at the wise, the knowing at the ignorant, and the knowing laughing together. The relation between laughter and the “true man’s” (*zhenren* 真人) is also examined, between its spontaneity and the cultivated heart that is like “dead

<sup>42</sup> Among recent psychological studies on laughter and smiling see S. Duncan, L.J. Brunner and D.W. Fiske 1979, pp. 301-313; P. Ekman, R.J. Davidson, W.V. Friesen 1990, pp. 342-353; P. Ekman, W.V. Friesen 1982, pp. 238-252; M.G. Frank, P. Ekman, W.V. Friesen 1993, pp. 83-93; A.J. Fridlund 1991, pp. 229-240. In Garotti, Caterina, Brighetti, Giberti, Ricci Bitti 1993, pp. 29-53, six studies describe different types of smiles (amusement, elation, sensory pleasure, formal smiles, etc.). For a recent general analysis of weeping and crying, see Pio Ricci Bitti, Roberto Caterina and Pier Luigi Garotti, 1997, pp. 43-48.

ashes”: “Laughing at what change and chance bring us is one step towards the right attitude in life. Only those who are able to laugh at the world seem to be able to distance (*pai* 排) themselves from those changes in the world and escape (*qu* 去) change”. This is the same wisdom, the complete reception and flexibility to changes (道也者，回復變通), that is mentioned in the last of the “eight investigations” (*baguan* 八觀) in the well known “Treatise about Human Character” (*Renwuzhi* 人物志), dealing with cleverness 聰明, that starts with the statement: “We say ‘inquiring into cleverness’ in order to know one’s possible achievements” 八曰觀其聰明，以知所達。<sup>43</sup>

We have seen that laughter seems to be the only appropriate reaction to the absurd of the universe, in which human beings acknowledge their ephemeral role in the everlasting change. It can be evaluated as a disorder, and thus a negative reaction for our health. “*Attitudes Towards Laughter and Euphoria in Medieval Chinese Daoist Texts*” by Rudolf Pfister offers a guide to the perception of laughter in the Daoist medical circles of Medieval China. It focuses on a normative perception, on precepts, medicalising ideas, and descriptions of meditative states which codify social attitudes towards laughter and pleasure. This paper notes the cautious attitude towards such manifestation: in particular, too much laughing and too much pleasure provoke damage to the self, like any excess. Other phenomena, such as laughing to yourself, heavy laughter, or deriding others are considered as disorders or behaviour leaning towards madness. On the contrary, a fine smiling, euphoria, and a lightness of being are seen as accompanying traits of certain advanced meditative states.

In some way related to Rudolf Pfister’s and Wolfgang Schwabe’s papers, is “*When the Tibetans laughed and smiled*” by Elena De Rossi Filibeck. This paper deals with the meaning of laughing and smiling as a cultural heritage. In fact it presents the image that was attributed to the Tibetan traditional civilization on the basis of two different kinds of sources, the native literature and, above all, the narratives of the western travellers of the past. Laughing and smiling are presented as part of a “sapiential language”, a manifestation of an ideal inner joy, and the sign of “illumination”.

Maria Gioia Vienna in “*Laughter and the Smile in Japanese Literature: From the senses needed to perceive them, to the meaning of their appearance*” offers a few hints about possible interpretations and the literary functions of these two gestures, as they appear in Japanese literature throughout the centuries. Thus the article presents a diachronical survey of the evolution of the use of laughter and the smile in Japanese literature, both as regards their literary description as physical gestures and emotional expressions, as well as their functional role as narrative devices. This paper also gives information on the widely varying meanings and emotions expressed by laughing and smiling within Japanese culture. Special attention is given to laughter and the smile of

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<sup>43</sup> See Liu Shao’s 劉邵 *Renwuzhi* 人物志, “Treatise about Human Character.”

women, these being characterized by a certain number of culturally absorbed rules, which vary in many aspects according to different epochs.

Smile is also important as a means to transmit messages on values and moral behaviour: the descriptions of the smiling emperors made by Erhard Rosner is an example concerning political authority. Alessandra Aresu, in her article "*Normative and educational functions of the smile: an analysis of iconographic materials in Chinese sex education texts*" provides us with a case related to youth and sex education in contemporary China. What is discussed here is not the way in which Chinese youth express their emotions and feelings through laughter and smile. The purpose is instead to discuss the use of smile within school sex education manuals as an educational tool. In this study the smile is analysed as a means to convey values and ethical rules that young people are encouraged to observe in order to become healthy, moral and happy adults able to contribute to China's development and modernisation. Smile and the different facial expressions that are included in the images are analysed here as means through which educators propose or impose specific meanings on Chinese adolescents. Different pictorial representations of boys and girls' facial expressions contained in the texts are associated with specific behaviours, values and principles of sexual morality. Images of wide smiles with happiness and joy, for example, represent conducts that the manuals are designed to encourage (for example sexual abstinence) and principles that young people are supposed to share (for example heterosexual love or the importance of the conjugal family). Smiles of disgust or pain are associated with behaviours defined by the manuals as immoral or unnatural (for example premarital sex and homosexual relations). In this essay, therefore, the various forms of smile are not considered as spontaneous expressions of emotions but are analysed in Foucaultian terms, in their normative and educational functions.

Other aspects of laughter and smile have been presented by some psychological studies done in Italy. Besides the already mentioned survey by R. Caterina, P.L. Garotti and P.E. Ricci-Bitti, Paola Bonifacci and Silvana Contento, in "*Looking for Happiness: an Investigation through Eye Movements*", examine some processes involved in the decoding of emotions through facial expression. Focusing on perceptual analysis of the visual stimuli and cortical elaboration of the meaning conveyed by a specific pattern of traits, they have conducted experiments on the different neural pathways which are involved for positive and negative emotions recognition. On the basis of the results the Authors conclude that happiness and its more distinctive mark, smile, are easier to process in explicit modality, but attract a more intensive visual exploration in implicit judgments. We can speculate that smile, which might convey multiple meanings, delays implicit recognition. Conversely, the processing of negative emotions (e.g. fear, anger, sadness) involves a faster subcortical processing but a slower semantic access.

On the same psychological side, Iolanda Incasa, in "*Smiling in Unexpected Situations: The Case of Surprise*", examines smile as a particular orienting

reflex, according to the hypothesis that smile is a sort of “soft” laughter, in response to a threat followed by a harmless situation. Incasa starts from the case of laughter as reaction to tickling, process which has been associated with the brain needs tension and surprise. As it has been demonstrated, laughter caused by tickling is more the product of a psychological reaction, not physiological, because persons particularly sensitive to tickling frequently start laughing even before being really touched, as a defence against possible contacts with other persons. Moreover, when one tickles oneself it does not work, as there is no tension or surprise. The second part of the article presents and comments the results of an experiment of inducing surprise on children affected by a pathological condition like autism. The results show a significant difference between the autistic and normal group, in all tests concerning the comprehension and expression of surprise. The presence of surprise was significantly lower in the autistic group than in the control group, and the manifestation of the smile response was expressed together with surprise. Thus Incasa concludes that her experiment results show a significant relation of co-occurrence between surprise and smile in the control group, while there was no significant relation in the autistic group.

Many representations of smile and laughter are so rooted in their social background that they are much more than manifestations of individual emotions or interpersonal action: beyond the universal needs they express, they are part of the culture to which they belong, and their understanding is proportional to the knowledge of that specific civilization where they are constructed. The contributions collected in this volume aim at offering a multifarious answer to some questions raised at the beginning of this introduction.<sup>44</sup> The present survey, through the examination of various sources - literary, historical, philosophical sources in various traditions and ambits - confirms the universal patterns of smiling and laughter, both in their social functions and in their psychological mechanisms, and provides a contribution towards understanding these different issues as specifically represented in the written cultures which are located in the area of East-Asia, by offering a sample of comparison and reflection. Most of the articles confirm that although smiling and laughing are emotional manifestations that are often expressed during a ‘sunny’ moment of joy, pleasure and gratitude, and provide a positive image associated with love, seduction and beauty, goodwill and sympathetic disposition, they are in fact often expressions revealing an uneasy or negative feeling, the dark and evil side of human beings, both as the sarcastic manifestation before the miseries of life, or in the enjoyment of others’ misfortunes and disgraces. Moreover, the bi-dimensional expression of laughter and smile is evident: as a manifestation of emotions it transmits polysemous affective codes (sympathy, disappointment, joy, etc.)

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<sup>44</sup> Most of the contributions are based on papers presented at the Conference “Emotions behind Smiles and Laughter: From Facial Expression to Literary Descriptions” held in Bologna in 2008.



while it re-negotiates or reaffirms social positions in social interactions. In fact, both dimensions are present in any manifestation of emotion. In the smile-laughter phenomenon, however, this double function is more evident: as a consequence, the frequent ambiguity of its message makes it an emblematic image of enigmatic expression, or lets it be interpreted as just a polite expression, especially when a conversation is formal, or the role of social relation is predominant. Erhard Rosner has given convincing examples on the use of smile by emperors as expressions of their authority and power (威) rather than as “common” emotions. Smile and laughter are thus expressions of various attitudes, sharing leisure and amusement, transmitting the seeds of wisdom, expressing social and personal criticism, and they can be considered as a manifestation of interpersonal and status relations, but also as the expression of wisdom or foolishness, dangerous or helpful to our health. The same laughter may express the perception of the incongruities of reality, systems, and speeches: however laughter in *Zhuangzi* is not the same as in the iconoclasm by Li Zhi and Feng Menglong, and it is completely different from the analogous manifestation in the orthodox warnings against self-deception by Lü Kun. Such various perspectives are in some ways universal, as they can be found in several traditions, but they differ in the way humour is understood, as well as in the way such multifarious functions are perceived in each culture and within the same culture. Thus, in the same Chinese ambit, for instance, the adverbial/attributive *xiao*, placed at the beginning of a statement – that generally denotes the positive mood of the speaker – takes on different connotations according to the circumstances. Its meanings and messages are different if the subject is a man – one may remember the case of Baoyu in the “Dream of the Red Chamber” – , a woman – emblematic may be Golden Lotus (Jinlian) in the *Jin Ping Mei* – or an emperor as represented in the official sources – the mild side of authority’s virtue.

In our enquiry, we deal roughly with two types of documents: a first group of sources is mainly descriptive, and they present a fairly rich documentation on the various ways smile and laughter are used, the circumstances and motivations, including the messages which are conveyed; a second group of documents are not only descriptive, but have been written to provoke laughter, i.e. comic or humorous literature. While the former texts have been analysed in order to understand the social and personal meaning of this manifestation, the latter enquire into the kind of humour, and its aims. Aims may be different and concurrent, such as entertainment, didacticism, provoking awareness and awakening, social criticism. In fact, there is no clear distinction between the two kinds of documents, as a descriptive text often has a sarcastic and ironic tone, and it aims to make the reader laugh. Thus, the reflections presented in this book often consider both aspects.

This volume – which is inspired by the discussions we had in the conference held in Bologna University, Department of Psychology, May 19 and 20, 2008<sup>45</sup> – is divided into four parts. The first part includes contributions on the functions of laughter and smile in Chinese and Japanese literary works, while the articles of the second part examine some examples of comic literature. Laughter and smile in fact can be used to express a sense of wisdom, or they convey a message of morality or a modal behaviour (third part). The last part contains essays by psychologists.

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<sup>45</sup> See [http://w3.uniroma1.it/santangelo/emotions\\_file/workshops/2008\\_Bologna.htm](http://w3.uniroma1.it/santangelo/emotions_file/workshops/2008_Bologna.htm). I am grateful for the cooperation of the Department of Psychology of Bologna University. I am indebted also to Dr Paola Culeddu who has taken the burden of the editing work of this volume.

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