

Consequence of Laughter: Reflecting on the ways to Create and React to Comedy

Yi, Su Heng

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### Abstract

Self-deprecation is a useful tool, capable of creating laughter and drawing attention to oneself, especially as a response to mockery as it can control who the perceived comedian is in the eyes of witnesses. However, its consequences and necessity are always not certain due to the situational nature of unscripted comedy in a conversational setting. This autoethnography seeks answers by using the comparisons of my own experiences and those of comedians who have recorded their experiences in similar situation such as Ryan Higa and Joe Wong as a base. What jokes and laughter fundamentally are is first analysed to discover if jokes have ideas within them beyond entertainment and how the presence or absence of laughter can be seen as an act of affirmation or refutation by the audience and how the existence of only two choices leads to the formation of two factions. The divisive element is used to analyse the way self-deprecation as a response to mockery can perpetuate harmful ideas in the mockery it is supposed to be counteracting and how trying to resist the ideas and stop laughter is possible but could lead to consequences harming the one attempting it, even if it is successful.

Keywords: self-deprecation, laughter, humour, choice and consequence, autoethnography

I was born in Tianjin, China, a city famous in equal parts for its breakfast food and its contributions to the traditional stand-up comedy form called 相声 (xiàngsheng), sometimes known in English as “crosstalk.” The Tianjin dialect is one of the only Chinese dialects to have a single character for the word “funny” (哏), which has no English translation and almost no usage in other dialects, which generally express the idea of “funny” with phrases such as 有趣 (has interesting elements) or 可笑 (worth laughing at). In a character-based language such as Chinese, only the most basic and important concept such as 日(sun), 月(moon), 天(heaven) and 地(earth) can be expressed with only one character, so the word “funny” sharing similar status in Tianjin illustrates its foundational nature in the local culture. Xiàngsheng is a form of comedy which can only really be done with at least two people, as it is a form of banter where the participants layer their own jokes over each other’s. Growing up watching and sometimes performing it, this method of comedy made up how I learnt to express myself and communicate with others. In fact, in grade 8, when we were doing career sheets, I wrote down “comedian” as my plan for the future, not necessarily because I wanted to be one professionally, but because it was the only career I really understood. While Xiàngsheng is no longer very popular amongst my generation, its popularity only died down after I came to Canada when I was six, so I missed the memo telling me to not like it anymore. Though my affinity towards humour did not change after I learnt English, it began to rely more heavily on self-deprecation, which I had only used previously as a set up to or part of a joke instead of making myself the entire joke. In the year 2020, when anti-Asian sentiment in my community reached new heights and myself and those around me experienced real hate crimes for the first time, I began to wonder about the role my actions, my tendency towards self-deprecative jokes in particular, play and have played in the greater scheme of things. I had found self-deprecation to be a useful tool growing up, but never

considered the consequences of using it and, maybe, I had not fully understood the consequences of if I had avoided using it either.

In comedy, the laughter of the audience signals approval, and I had interpreted laughter as a sign of how much one is found agreeable or acceptable. This is how self-deprecation came to be a defensive strategy for me, as I believed making fun of myself before others did and having people laugh would mean I would appear a more likeable person than whoever had been making fun of me. I failed to account for laughter as indicating agreement with the idea behind the joke, which I had never really thought about. Since I would be made fun of either way, I figured accepting whatever joke was being told or would be told and responding with self-deprecating humour to be the only two options, so I might as well choose the latter as it could make me an actor as opposed to a receiver. However, through witnessing the people who have influenced me and the role models I have taken, I now see people who once thought similarly yet found a way to prevent laughter directed at themselves from continuing altogether. Michael Billig has used the term “unlaughter” to represent the opposite of laughter, as a way to show disapproval in the context of laughter signalling approval.<sup>1</sup> But in Billig’s formulation, unlaughter is the action of an individual, and my concern is whether unlaughter can also be a communal phenomenon, so, in simple terms, in a situation where the majority of the people present are laughing at a joke, the minority can change the minds of others, turning the situation into one where the majority are not laughing at the joke. Within the context of comedy, not laughing when others are is a form of resistance.<sup>2</sup> The resistance is intentional but also comes with its consequences be it harm to the person’s social standing in the moment or harm to their

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<sup>1</sup> Billig, Michael. *Laughter and Ridicule towards a Social Critique of Humour*. London: Sage, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.,

professional standing in the long term. Though the consequences may be severe, it is not impossible for the results to be worth it.

A positive relationship between comics and their audiences is necessary for an act of comedy to be successful, and the factor of positivity depends on shared values between the two parties. While the performers do act as the host of the show and decide what will be presented, the audience is equally important to a functional performance. This is due to comedy being an exclusively social phenomenon: “[the] audience [does] not make the joke seem more or less funny; they make the joke more or less funny”.<sup>3</sup> From the performer’s side, within the frame of one show, the “social role [of the comedian] is to provide laughter,” but because the laughter is coming from the audience members, the comedians’ role is more akin to providing a reason to laugh.<sup>4</sup> From a rhetorical and political standpoint, jokes performed in front of an audience divide the audience and create a conflict.<sup>5</sup> When the performer tells a joke, the audience’s role is to laugh, increasing the quality of the show, whereas not laughing will reduce it. If someone does not laugh while the majority does, they would be making the show less enjoyable for others, leading to them being considered “someone with no sense of humour who is ostracised from the group.”<sup>6</sup> Since laughing at a joke would be the intended response of the one telling the joke, laughing would equate to agreement.<sup>7</sup> The social role of the audience therefore, in order to

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<sup>3</sup> Limon, John. *Stand-up Comedy in Theory, Or, Abjection in America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000: 12

<sup>4</sup> Smith, Daniel R. *Comedy and Critique. Stand-up Comedy and the Professional Ethos of Laughter*. Bristol: University of Bristol Press, 2018: 13

<sup>5</sup> Pérez, Raúl, and Viveca S. Greene. "Debating Rape Jokes vs. Rape Culture: Framing and Counter-framing Misogynistic Comedy." *Social Semiotics* 26, no. 3 (May 06, 2016): 265-82. doi:10.1080/10350330.2015.1134823.

<sup>6</sup> Bemiller, Michelle L., and Rachel Zimmer Schneider. "Its Not Just A Joke." *Sociological Spectrum* 30, no. 4 (May 27, 2010): 459-79. doi:10.1080/02732171003641040.

<sup>7</sup> Pérez, Raúl, and Viveca S. Greene. "Debating Rape Jokes vs. Rape Culture: Framing and Counter-framing Misogynistic Comedy."

improve the quality of the show, also includes agreeing with the performer's opinion as expressed through their jokes. However, in the case where the majority does not laugh, the ones who do along with the comedian, will be seen as being inappropriate, creating a dynamic of victory and defeat.

Which ideas are accepted and which are rejected would then be turned into a game of numbers based on how many in the audience laugh at each joke. As long as some laugh and some do not laugh, two factions will be formed and only one can win. Power would then lie in the audience's collective response to the jokes as opposed to the performer's jokes themselves. In 2012, when then-prominent comedian Daniel Tosh was speaking about rape jokes during a stand-up routine, an audience member shouted, "rape jokes aren't funny," to which Tosh responded, "[w]ouldn't it be funny if that girl got raped by, like, five guys? Like right now," provoking laughter from the audience.<sup>8</sup> In this situation, the person who openly disagreed with the performer ended up ostracised by the rest of the audience, which was only possible because the majority agreed with the comedian. If the ratio of laughter and unlaughter were switched and the majority of the audience disagreed with the comedian, their "unified conscious withholding of laughter [could have acted] as a form of resistance."<sup>9</sup> Due to the directness of the conflict between the two parties, the minority will always be harmed.

The concept of people agreeing with the idea behind jokes—and there being ideas within jokes at all—made me question whether the usage of self-deprecation is actually helpful. However, self-deprecation as a strategy is not always used while actively considering whatever implications jokes may have, especially when it is used as a spontaneous response in the

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<sup>8</sup> Pérez, Raúl, and Viveca S. Greene. "Debating Rape Jokes vs. Rape Culture: Framing and Counter-framing Misogynistic Comedy."

<sup>9</sup> Billig, Michael. *Laughter and Ridicule towards a Social Critique of Humour*

moment. For example, in his memoir *How to Write Good*, Ryan Higa, a prominent American entertainer from Hawai'i, describes how he used self-deprecation as a defensive tool against bullies when he was in high school. His bullies would do the classic actions we are all familiar with, such as tripping him in hallways or calling him "ugly chink boy." When he realised "[they] did it to make people laugh[,] it was comedy," the solution he discovered was, at first, to make fun of himself in response.<sup>10</sup> Later on, he learnt to do it pre-emptively before other people had a chance to make fun of him at all: "I'd beat my bullies to their insults by making fun of myself first, stealing their laughs from them altogether."<sup>11</sup>

Higa's clear description of the thought process through which he developed this strategy reminded me of all the moments in my life when I resorted to doing the same thing, though I had never taken the time to think of why or how I did it. A clear memory of such an experience comes from primary school, a time when I always went straight to several tutoring academies after school ended and until late at night. The tutor at one academy was a Christian fundamentalist who sought out students from new immigrant families, through immigrant discussion forums for example, which was where my parents learnt of it. Classes were taught using different versions of the Christian Bible, but he also took a good portion of class time to preach his more fringe opinions, such as how the Holocaust was God punishing the Jews for killing Jesus or how transgender people were demons destroying God's creations. He voiced most of those opinions in the form of jokes, inciting laughs from the students. Due to the frequency of the jokes and his clear intention to be funny, the class environment became one where we felt as though we were an audience and he was the comedian, so students laughed

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<sup>10</sup> Higa, Ryan. *Ryan Higas How to Write Good*. Illustrated by John Nugroho. Boston, NY: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2017: 100-125

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 130

almost before any jokes were told. We expected him to expect us to laugh, so we laugh though, in hindsight, many things we thought were supposed to be funny had no comedic elements. For example, he really hated Lady Gaga for reason never made explicit and always took time to talk about her being disgusting and her having a penis. When he put up a photo of Lady Gaga on the whiteboard and encouraged students to vandalise it during breaks, we all just interpreted it as one of this man's strange yet funny character quirks. Thinking back on it now, this series of events does not seem like one which a normal human mind is capable of interpreting at all. When this event is isolated from all other on-goings and contemplated on its own, there was no reason to consider it funny and I still do not know if anyone got better at English as a result.

Usually, I would usually ignore all the jokes, but it became difficult in situations where I was their target. On one occasion, after I mentioned the remnants of French churches in my hometown during a long discussion on the differences between French and English Christianity, he made a joke about how, because China and its people were never fully Christianised by a European power, everyone there will still go to hell, and I was going to go with them because I couldn't even become Christian in Canada. In response, I pulled back my eyes and said: "what did the Chinese do to you?" in the kind of Chinese accent one might hear on TV but does not exist in reality. Everyone laughed. I knew they were laughing at me and, as I was being stupid on purpose, they had every reason to. But all of my options, or at least the ones ten-year-old me was aware of, would result in people laughing at me. The difference here was they were also laughing because of my activity instead of my passivity, so at least the laughter felt like it was under my control. I did not actually "win," since my joke targeted myself and perpetuated the same ideas as the teacher's joke, but because the teacher was not the one who created the reason for laughter, he did not "win" either. We all lost.



Though I hesitate to compare myself to Ryan Higa due to his accomplishments in comedy as an adult, I feel our positions as children were similar enough, and I do feel a sort of comradery as one who dropped out of biochemistry in university to another who dropped out of nuclear medicine. These stories had us both in situations where jokes were made at our expense. If Higa didn't make fun of himself, others would have continued to, but once he stole their laughs, "there wouldn't be any reason to pick on [him.]"<sup>12</sup> In my situation, I knew the teacher would continue to make jokes at my expense no matter what, but if I told a joke about myself first, I could choose when people laughed by being the one who caused them to laugh. As Higa notes, "If I [had] the perfect comeback, I [wouldn't] feel so powerless all the time."<sup>13</sup> Higa accurately conveys the sense of power and agency I gained in a situation where I actually had none, and it did prevent other people from making fun of us. However, in my current position, I do not see the problem as whether or not we were being made fun of specifically by other people. If we were still the target of the jokes being told and of the laughter of the audience, it is difficult for me to consider any practical problem as solved, even if it did make us feel better about ourselves. The shortcoming of the model where the power of the comedian depends on the number of people who laugh at their jokes is its failure to account for the kind of jokes which work against the comedian. In Higa's and my situations, we took away the power to make other people laugh from the bullies and the teacher, but we did not gain the power to not be laughed at. At the time, we both saw it as the best we could do and the most power we could claim.

It was not until I saw comedian Joe Wong's recollection of an experience at a comedy club where jokes targeting him were being told when I realised it was possible not only to steal

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<sup>12</sup> Higa, Ryan. Ryan Higas How to Write Good.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.,

the laugh but destroy the laugh. In February 2020, Dr. Joe Wong, a stand-up comedian and game show host, was leaving the venue after finishing a show when he heard the comedian who followed his act say the word ‘chink’ on stage, followed with the audience laughing. After the organiser informed him the comedian was making fun of something he said during his show, he decided to leave to avoid causing a scene, but then he changed his mind and decided he needed to do something. He went back on stage and yelled, “stop saying ‘chink,’ this is not cool, this is fucked up” and the audience laughed harder. However, when he then yelled “why can you call me ‘chink’ but you don’t have the guts to say the n-word,” the audience turned silent.<sup>14</sup>

Wong’s initial choice between ignoring or reacting was the same decision I had to make during the English class and the same decision Higa had to make while being bullied at school. When Wong’s initial action caused the audience to laugh harder, it had the same result of causing the audience to laugh at him, though unlike self-deprecation, it was not his intent. His second action, however, stopped the audience from laughing, a result I did not consider to be a possibility. Higa described his discovery of making fun of himself as “how I thought I had only one way out of this cruel world [but] found a better way,” but Wong’s approach seemed to me like the next step as it responds to hostile comedy in a more absolute way.<sup>15</sup> Since the laughter of the audience signals agreement with the joke, if the joke is damaging, getting people to laugh at it, even if I was the one to tell the joke would still be in agreement with a same concept. When people in the environment one is in laugh at a discriminatory joke, both laughing and not laughing will have negative effects, as they will be either “complicit in their own humiliation” or

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<sup>14</sup> Wong, Joe. “birthday wish: stop the racial slurs!” YouTube video, 6:14. 17 Feb 2020. <https://youtu.be/1GNzia15b8g>

<sup>15</sup> Higa, Ryan. Ryan Higas How to Write Good.

spoiling the fun for others.<sup>16</sup> Avoid both outcomes, Joe Wong gave a response to the joke which stopped the laughter, ending agreement with the joke along with it. Though his first attempt to stop laughter failed and may have caused himself to be considered a ‘spoilsport’ momentarily, the success of his second attempt meant the original joke was no longer considered by the audience to be something worth laughing at. A divisive joke created a conflict between people who laughed and people who did not. While the side who laughed was winning at first, Joe Wong, through his words and actions, tipped the scales and caused the those who laughed at the initial joke to stop laughing at it, making those who chose unlaughter the majority.

One argument used against people who resist certain jokes or disagree with self-deprecation is that jokes are “only jokes” and disagreeing with them infringes on the comedian’s right to their sense of humour.<sup>17</sup> For example, Perez and Green conducted a study in which they interviewed people about their response to the previously mentioned Tosh’s stand-up, asking whether they found it offensive. Many of those who did not find it offensive suggested comedy is not reflective of what happens in the real world.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in defence of self-deprecatory comics, Joanne Gilbert suggests self-deprecation is merely the comic “using what works,” and the success it may bring to a comic from a marginalised group is itself “[calling] cultural values into question” and empowering the comic’s social group.<sup>19</sup> From my point of view, the first issue with the perspectives is distinguishing what is “just a joke” from what is more than a joke, and the separation of these categories, cannot benefit marginalised groups because the distinction is

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<sup>16</sup> Billig, Michael. *Laughter and Ridicule towards a Social Critique of Humour*.

<sup>17</sup> Pérez, Raúl, and Viveca S. Greene. "Debating Rape Jokes vs. Rape Culture: Framing and Counter-framing Misogynistic Comedy."

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>19</sup> Gilbert, Joanne R. "Performing Marginality: Comedy, Identity, and Cultural Critique." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (1997): 317-30. doi:10.1080/10462939709366196: 319-320

decided by those representing the dominant narrative. Through a study interviewing people based on their opinions on whether jokes can be considered “just jokes” without impact on greater society, it was discovered “exposure to sexist humour increases tolerance of sex discrimination.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, jokes are capable of impacting reality and harming group of people, meaning those who determine which jokes are acceptable and which are not would also be simultaneously determining who suffers harm. How and whether humour is defended is unequal when it comes to the targeted group and “whether they support or oppress its target.”<sup>21</sup>

Comedians who disagree with regulating humour have stated “it’s either all okay or none of it’s okay,” a point of view which, in Perez and Greene’s analysis, implies only when discourse is completely unregulated, can it remain free speech.<sup>22</sup> But I feel the only way this argument can be applicable to reality is if unregulated discourse is what exists in reality, which is a perspective I find difficult to imagine. I would, instead, opt to say discourse is and has always been regulated; the problem being instead the way it is regulated is either unclear or unfair. In Joe Wong’s experience, he was able to shut down laughter by showing the comedian thinks some racial slurs are acceptable while others are not. If everything was fair game, the comedian would have considered all slurs acceptable. Leading back to my anecdote about after-school tutoring: the teacher could have argued his joke targets only the people who will go to hell, by his standards, making it acceptable. I could then have argued his joke targets all non-Christian

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<sup>20</sup> Ford, Thomas E. "Effects of Sexist Humor on Tolerance of Sexist Events." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 26, no. 9 (2000): 1094-107. doi:10.1177/01461672002611006.

<sup>21</sup> Billig, Michael. *Laughter and Ridicule towards a Social Critique of Humour*, as quoted by Pérez, Raúl, and Viveca S. Greene. "Debating Rape Jokes vs. Rape Culture: Framing and Counter-framing Misogynistic Comedy."

<sup>22</sup> Pérez, Raúl, and Viveca S. Greene. "Debating Rape Jokes vs. Rape Culture: Framing and Counter-framing Misogynistic Comedy."

people, making it unacceptable. The argument over who the joke targeted and what was acceptable could have gone on forever, as there is no standard as to what is and is not 'okay'.

However, both examples were personal to a degree and the idea of regulation applied only to whether the people present would find the joke to be in good taste. Thus, it is still possible to argue the idea 'it's all okay or all not okay' is applicable to censorship in terms of law. But real-life situations have shown the law is not unwilling to decide on the appropriateness of humour. For example, the print comic *Charlie Hebdo* attracted controversy due to its caricatures and jokes about Islam and the prophet Muhammad, causing a lawsuit to be filed for the comics to be removed, which ended when French courts decided the comic made fun of extremists and not Muslims as a whole.<sup>23</sup> In a similar situation, when the painter and digital effects artist Wuhe Qilin created a multimedia painting satirising the Australian media response to the revelation of war crimes in Afghan war, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison called it "terrible slur on [Australian] defence forces" specifically while requesting Twitter take down the image.<sup>24</sup> If national courts and leaders of countries are willing to involve themselves in arguments over what joke targets which people, and whether a joke is allowed to be told, the idea only two possibilities exist in which either all jokes are allowed or none are allowed has no bearing on reality. There exist powers which are capable of deciding the answers to questions such as does a joke cause harm and who does a joke harm.

Secondly, while self-deprecation could bring some form of success to the comic themselves, it can reinforce negative stereotypes towards the group the comic belongs to, harming

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<sup>23</sup> Janssen, Esther. "Limits to Expression on Religion in France." *Agama & Religiusitas Di Eropa, Journal of European Studies* 5, no. 1 (2009): 22-45. doi:<https://ssrn.com/abstract=2018277>: 11-12

<sup>24</sup> Khalil, Shaimaa. "Australia Demands China Apologise for Posting 'repugnant' Fake Image." *BBC News*. November 30, 2020. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-55126569>.

the performer by association. For example, Anna May Wong was a successful Asian-American actress in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but all her roles “were rooted in stereotypes as a villainous, seductive ‘dragon lady’ or the forlorn love interest cast aside when the leading man found a happy ending with a white woman” and further perpetuated the anti-Asian sentiment of the Chinese Exclusion Act, and, later on, the anti-Asian sentiment during WWII and the following Red Scare.<sup>25</sup> While her films were not always comedies, they were self-deprecatory forms of entertainment which only brought her monetary success at the price of reinforcing discriminatory ideas.<sup>26</sup> Wong defended herself by saying “she had little choice if she wanted to find roles,” as no non-discriminatory roles were available.<sup>27</sup> While choosing to avoid self-deprecation was possible for her, she had knowledge of the implications of each option and decided not being an actress was the worse one.

This reminded me of watching Jackie Chan’s and Jimmy O Yang’s responses to similar questions interviews. On Netflix’s *Chelsea*, Jackie Chan was asked “is there romance in China,” to which Chan responded, “of course there is romance in China, how is that a question?”<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, in an interview with Stephen Colbert, Jimmy O Yang said “there wasn’t any stand-up growing up in China” in response to Colbert asking whether there was comedy in China.<sup>29</sup> I know there is stand-up in China because I am from a place famous for it, and I know there is

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<sup>25</sup> Paner, Isabel. "The Marginalization and Stereotyping of Asians in American Film." Honour's thesis, Dominican University of California, 2018.

<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2018.HONORS.ST.08>, 10-12

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 12

<sup>28</sup> Chelsea “Jackie Chan (Full Interview) | Chelsea | Netflix.” YouTube video, interview by Chelsea Handler and Jackie Chan. 8:31. 8 Oct 2017. [https://youtu.be/O9UDJh\\_bgak](https://youtu.be/O9UDJh_bgak)

<sup>29</sup> The Late Show with Stephen Colbert. “Jimmy O. Yang Says There's No Stand-up Comedy In China” YouTube video, hosted by Jimmy O Yang and Stephen Colbert. 7:42. 14 Mar 2018. [https://youtu.be/H9\\_pg-gTOR8](https://youtu.be/H9_pg-gTOR8)

romance everywhere because I have common sense. I feel these questions are phrased identically enough for the same person to answer both questions the same way as it is difficult to imagine a place where humans exist but romance or comedy do not. So, I must wonder whether these actors' difference in response to uncannily similar questions also is related to the differences in how they approach acting. while Yang at times plays Asian caricatures in his comedy, Chan generally refuses to inhabit such personas.<sup>30</sup> As Chan stated in an interview with George Stroumboulopoulos, he had to stop taking movie roles in Hollywood because he was only being offered type-casted roles.<sup>31</sup> Jackie Chan's reasoning was very similar to Anna May Wong's, with lack of monetary and professional success being a deterrent from pushing against stereotype and self-deprecation in entertainment, but he solved the problem by simply doing more movies in other places, finding a third choice in a situation in which, to some, seemed as though only two existed.<sup>32</sup>

There is always a price to pay for resistance since the people who have the authority and ability to create consequences are not always the same people who support the act of resistance. Even with the new ideas I learnt about the possible negative impact of self-deprecation in comedy, I cannot say choosing to confront and trying to shut down laughter, at the after-school class for example, would always be the best idea. The teacher could have easily kicked me out of class, leading to me being beaten for days at home. Then when the next week came, I would again show up at class with the teacher making the same jokes, except he would now like me even less. I do not think, for my ten-year-old self, it would have been worth it just to try to stop

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<sup>30</sup> Paner, Isabel. "The Marginalization and Stereotyping of Asians in American Film." 24-25

<sup>31</sup> Strombo. "Jackie Chan on George Stroumboulopoulos Tonight: Extended Interview" YouTube video, interview by George Stroumboulopoulos and Jackie Chan, 24:41. 21 Sept 2012. <https://youtu.be/2qbi4wNefo0>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.,

people from laughing at a joke, especially since, even now, I do not know whether attempting non-compliance in the situation would actually have changed anything.

I am not a brave person, and I am honestly not sure whether it is advantageous to be one. The risk of losing out on professional development by trying to fight against self-deprecatative humour and the discriminatory humour of others might not be a risk I am willing to take. When I was growing up, my mother always told me the only way to gain anything, be it as grand as fame and fortune or as simple as day-to-day security, is to trade your pride for it. I feel there must be good reason behind her words, and perhaps it might be necessary to give up on some pride here and there to ignore the issues of comedy I have been addressing to avoid the consequences for if I confront them. However, since Jackie Chan managed to continue growing his success as an actor and director without violating his own principles by finding and going to places where success did not require sacrificing self-worth, I see there exist ways in which it is possible to gain without losing pride. I am seeing escape as one such way but also wondering what others may exist. When faced with discriminatory humour, other than escaping, the three options are to ignore it, self-deprecate to steal laughs, or resist it to try to prevent laughs. The first option leads to complicity in the discrimination and the second does the same, though with potential gains for the person. The last is the only one which truly antagonises the discriminatory concepts but leads to professional consequences. However, if professional consequences in the present can lead to greater change over what is and what is not considered acceptable, then the first two choices would bring short-term rewards with long-term consequences while the other brings short-term consequences with potential long-term rewards. I don't know if it is a risk I, myself, will take. After all, my mother also always said the only freedom a person needs is the freedom to escape. I do not see a reason to ignore or surrender the freedom. On the other hand, when I mentioned hate



crimes in the introduction, I did not mention the difference in how they were committed. When my mom is alone on her walks, people have spit at or yelled at her. But when I'm out with a group of friends, people have only said things in public areas with many people watching. Furthermore, while I was editing this essay in May of 2021, the news reported an event in my home city of Richmond where a man who had "vented to another group of Asian individuals in Downtown Vancouver last year [in 2020]" appeared again at a Stop Asian Hate rally and "near the end of the event," started "hurling racial slurs" at remaining volunteers and attendees (Shen).<sup>33</sup> The most interesting thing about this situation was how the man did not choose to engage until the main event had ended, when almost all the attendees and organisers had already left. Though unrelated to performance comedy, the numbers game once again came into play through how the perpetrator only began to publicly show hate towards Asians and start a conflict when the people obviously against it had appeared to become a minority. Notably, once bystanders disagreeing with him joined the discourse, it became apparent the people holding his opinion was now the minority and he left immediately. Joe Wong's reflection of events made me realise victory through resistance is possible but this story made me wonder, if the people willing to attack are not brave either, what is truly the difficulty of obtaining such a victory.

Personally, the first profession I ever wanted to have was to be a comedian, possibly because I was not yet aware other professions existed. While my desire to do comedy professionally died alongside all my other hopes and dreams, I cannot imagine a future where comedy does not make up an important part of my character. I only wonder how differently it will manifest itself. I still do not know of a standard for what is acceptable to make fun of, and

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<sup>33</sup> Shen, Nono. "Video: Man Yelled Racial Slurs at Stop Asian Hate Rally in Richmond." Richmond News. May 25, 2021. <http://www.richmond-news.com/local-news/video-man-yelled-racial-slurs-at-stop-asian-hate-rally-in-richmond-3809980>.

no matter how much I argue for the goodness of resisting disagreeable humour, I am also aware there are situations in which it is not viable. But since I now know it exists as an option, I know I will choose it in the future, at least once.

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