

Humour as Politics: Parody, Irony, and Satire in Southeast Asia

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Panel format: double session.

This panel brings together scholars of humour studies, political studies, cultural studies, comparative literature, and translation.

As pointed out by many scholars (Davies 1998, Hodgart 2009, Kessel and Merziger 2011, Tsakona and Popa 2015, Sørensen 2016, Davis 2017, Holm 2017, Le Breton 2018, Wedderburn 2021), laughter does not only have psychological, philosophical, or religious implications, but also includes social and political ones. Humour, in its various forms, including comedy, irony, satire, caricature, parody, etc., can help highlight social situations, dominant thoughts and opinions in a certain group and at a certain time.

In Southeast Asia the use of political humour both as an art form and a mode of persuasive discourse dates back for centuries, and politicians and elites have been well aware of its powerful influence on public opinion, leading to the use of humor against foreign occupation, colonialism and imperialism in the past, or against limitations of civil and political rights in modern times.

Though humour is rather common both in traditional and contemporary Southeast Asian arts and cultures, the field of humour in Southeast Asia is still relatively unexplored. The comparative lack of knowledge in the West of Southeast Asian arts and literature, and the scarcity of studies dedicated to them makes it difficult to draw an overall picture of the humorous production in the area. This may contribute to the Eurocentric stereotype according to which humour in the Eastern world is often obscure, incomprehensible, paradoxical, and even perhaps non-existent (Davis 2006). This in addition to the fact that humour is not always found in the same contexts and at the same conditions it occurs in European cultures. In fact, in Southeast Asia, humour is a powerful force just as in the rest of the world, and it is closely connected to both the language and the socio-cultural context in which it is produced.

The papers in this panel address the role and politics of humour in Southeast Asia by exploring different humorous styles, including comedy, irony, satire, parody and the grotesque, as well as its various manifestations, including Southeast Asian folklore, literature and theatre, ritual performances, dance performances, the politics of performance, stand-up comedy, meme, media and journalism, etc., in different Southeast Asian contexts. By reflecting on various approaches to the study of political humour's content, audience, and impact, this panel offers scholars multiple ways to consider the effects of political humour on individuals and society, and how humour helps understand better the socio-political complexities in this part of the world.

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- Kessel, M. and Merziger, P. (editors), (2011) *The Politics of Humour*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Sørensen, M. J. (2016) *Humour in Political Activism*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
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- Wedderburn, A. (2021) *Humour, Subjectivity and World Politics: Everyday Articulations of Identity at The Limits of Order*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.