Call for papers for a special issue of Global Storytelling: Journal of Digital and Moving Images, 3.2 (December 2023)
Asian Satirical Activism and Youth Culture in the COVID-19 Pandemic

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There is a long history of human, comedy, and satire in serving as a force for social change. Creative resistance has been a key feature of popular culture. The internet, social media, data and digital technologies have brought creative resistance from the cultural to the digital domain. Across Asia, with its widely varying norms and regimes of public speech, the digital domain is the primary site of articulation for popular discontent and resistance through satire and political humour in a multitude of genres and forms by a wide range of actors. People used jokes, comedy shows, graffiti, street art, cartoons, memes, mashups, and user-generated video clips to criticise political figures and the political systems, to shed light on the absurdity of their socio-political realities. The COVID-19 Pandemic, with its absolute disruption of daily life, unprecedented state interventions and the reliance on digital platforms for most forms of social contact, has encouraged a wide range of satirical and pointed humour across the region.

This special issue calls for papers that focus on digital interventions in the public sphere enacted through light-hearted, creative, and resistant communications in multi-media forms (from text and meme to short-video and livestreaming) across platforms and networks. It highlights the light-hearted and humorous nature of such digital practices in everyday life and the vernacular and mundane agencies of Asia's digital generation. It will include studies of everyday users, influencers, bloggers, journalists, activists, and professional comedians serving the expanded satirical domain in hyper-connected and trying times. Case studies from all parts of Asia will illustrate regional dynamics and politics of the relationship between humour and satire, youth, popular culture, and citizen activism in the era of COVID-19. These practices can be witty and winked in their entertaining and affective value, or motivating and stirring in that instrumental value, as a safe entry into and exit from taboo topics or censorship.

COVID jokes are abundant in all cultures and countries. From Facebook to TikTok, people create and share digital humour—from jokes, memes, GIFs to short videos—to relieve stress from COVID restrictions. Pandemic control strategies from lockdowns and mask mandate to contact tracing, mass vaccination, and restrictions in mobility and economic activities have caused grievance, complaint, resistance, and backlash. Even ill-spirited misinformation has adopted the discourse and format of satire and 'funny' memes.[1] In Asia, there are abundant and telling examples across its diversified cultures and societies. As successive waves unfold, everyday users

across Asia are using short online satire and networked practices (via liking, sharing, or commenting) to kill time and bridge social capital during lockdowns.[2]In China, digital humour provides a critical coping mechanism for people to live with the country's strict COVID-zero policies, and such humour often has subversive functions as veiled criticism of their socio-political realities. In India, stand-up comedy has flourished in the country's online video culture, engaging critically with the right wing and authoritarian turn in the political domain, and WhatsApp as the carrier of the vernacular public sphere has become a vast network of sarcasm, wit and politics of all stripes. In Israel, people use humorous memes to mock, alleviate stress and build solidarity in face of common enemies.[3]

The witty and humorous digital activism has taken on new genres, from memes, online satires, webtoon, digital art, to deepfakes. It has also taken on more complicated features. In some instances, these new forms of dissent and citizen activism have weaponised social media platforms through satire, irony, and parody, as was the case in the so-called Arab Spring, when "Facebook, mobile phones, and Twitter became the primary means of circulating the jokes; jokes thus became one of the revolution's most crucial weapons".[4] What are *powerful tools for artists, satirists and activists in nonviolent resistance can be used by the ruling elites to create, propagate and manipulate messages of their own, as in the case of China, where digital parody art 'The Last G7'—created by an independent computer graphic illustrator—went viral in Chinese social media and made international headlines in 2021 as the Chinese official visual propaganda,[5] thus blurring the boundary between grassroots political activism, censorship, and propaganda.*

This special issue aims to bring 'satirical activism' to the centre of enquiries on the politics of youth culture and digital publics in Asia. It asks: What are *the effective forms and means for Asian artists, satirists and activists for nonviolent, resistant, and or subversive expressions and/or actions in and beyond the region? What is the relationship between such satirical activism and youth culture in digital Asia? We welcome contributors from interdisciplinary scholars in arts, humanities, and social science to address these broad questions through empirical studies.*

Possible topics include, but not limited to:
· Memes
· Satires and parodies
· Political humour
· Data activism
· Deepfakes
· Algorithmic activism

- Digital art
- Video art

Important dates:

- Abstract submission date: by 30 October 2022; see below for details.
- Acceptances / rejections (and comments): by 15 November 2022
- Full paper submission: by 1 April, 2022
- Peer Reviews completed/resubmissions: by 1 August 2023
- Manuscripts finalized and delivered for production: by 1 September 2023
- Special issue published: 1 December 2023

Abstract Guidelines:

Please submit an abstract of 500 words (including references) that states the paper's main argument, method, and contribution. The abstract should clearly explain how the paper will contribute to the theme of this special issue. Abstracts should be accompanied by a short biography for each author (approx. 200 words).

Submissions (abstracts and full papers) should follow Chicago Manual of Style guidelines. For more information, please see our Submission Guidelines.

Please send abstracts and enquiries to: Professor Haiqing Yu (haiqing.yu@rmit.edu.au) and Professor Adrian Athique (a.athique@uq.edu.au)

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[1] Jack Goodman and Flora Carmichael, "Covid-19: What's the harm of 'funny' anti-vaccine memes?" BBC, 29 Nov. 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/55101238

[2] Ji Pan, et al, "Duanzi as Networked Practice: How Online Satire Shapes Psychological Well-Being, Social Support, and Issue Knowledge for Chinese with Different Social Capital during COVID-19 Outbreaks," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 18 (2021): 9783. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18189783

[3] Tsafi Sebba-Elran, "A pandemic of jokes? The Israeli COVID-19 meme and the construction of a collective response to risk," *HUMOR* 34, no. 2 (2021): 229-257. https://doi.org/10.1515/humor-2021-0012

[4] Sabine Damir-Geilsdorf, and Stephan Milich, eds., *Creative Resistance: Political Humor in the Arab Uprisings* (Columbia University Press, 2020): 11.

[5] Koetse, Manya. 2021. Digital Art or Visual Propaganda? China's New Wave of Online Political Satire. *What's on Weibo*, June 19. https://www.whatsonweibo.com/digital-art-or-visual-propaganda-chinas-new-wave-of-online-political-satire/

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