

From Entertainment to Empowerment: How Chinese Female Stand-Up Comedians Expand the Safe Zone for Gender Discourse through Humor

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Abstract

The fast development of the internet in the 21st century has given rise to Chinese fourth-wave feminism, which challenges deeply rooted Confucian values and gender norms in daily lives. This study examines how Chinese female stand-up comedians use humor to expand the safe zone of gender discourse under the current gender order and role structure. Using a qualitative content analysis, this study draws on gender order and gender role theory to examine three female stand-up comedians' scripts and 59 audience comments collected from Chinese online platforms. The findings reveal that female comedians use humor not only for entertainment but also as a tool to resonate with female audiences and create a safe space for discussing gender issues, thereby peacefully expanding the scope of public discourse on gender. This study contributes to Chinese feminist studies by highlighting the role of stand-up comedy as an effective tool for the feminist movement. It also offers strategies of strategic humor for other feminist movements in non-Western contexts.

Keywords: feminist studies; feminist humor; gender order; self-censorship; subversive repetition