

The members of the SIEF Ritual Year working group discussed further cooperation, joint publications and the distribution of subject matters. Among a number of research directions, great interest has been shown in the structuring of folk calendar in post-socialist countries – an international interdisciplinary project will be devised for researching these processes.

Conference programme and abstracts are available at <http://www.folklore.ee/ri/fo/konve/ritualyear6/abstracts.pdf>.

Irina Sedakova

## **22ND INTERNATIONAL HUMOR CONFERENCE IN HONG KONG**

At the time when Estonian people celebrated Midsummer night, more than 200 researchers from all over the world convened for the 22nd annual conference of the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS) in Hong Kong, China, from June 24 to 27. The conference was organised by the Department of Applied Social Studies of the City University of Hong Kong. The four-day event provided an opportunity to listen to presentations in five concurrent sessions, in addition to several symposia with a more narrow insight into the subject matter.

Inter-disciplinary approach and new developments in humour studies were the key words of the conference, with the main focus on 1) the role of humour in psychological well-being, stress management, self-development and social interaction; 2) the role of humour in culture, education, creativity and management training; 3) the use of humour in business, media communication and advertising, and 4) humour in psychotherapy and psychological counselling. Proceeding from these foci, the subject matters of the concurrent sessions were specified as follows: culture, psychology, stand up comedy, society, linguistics, Chinese humour, with an emphasis also on the psychological, linguistic and socio-cultural aspects of humour.

The keynote address was delivered by Elliot Oring, the current President of the ISHS, his theoretical and extremely elegant speech was titled *Shaken, Not Stirred: Blending and Humor*. This title, inspired by the favourite drink of the secret agent James Bond, the character created by the British writer Ian Fleming, was ideally appropriate for the presentation focusing on the implementation of the contemporary metaphor theories in current humour research studies in the broader sense. Bearing in mind the fact that the conference took place in China, the peculiarities of Oriental humour were presented on a number of occasions during the four days of plenary and concurrent sessions. The keynote speaker of the second day, Xiaodong Yue, professor at the organising university and also the governor of the conference, gave a good overview about the past, present and future of Chinese humour therapy, elaborating on the four basic forms of this: joke therapy, clown performance therapy, ridiculing therapy and happy event therapy. The third day of the conference started with the plenary speech of Jocelyn Chey, professor at Sydney University, on *youmo*, the Chinese counterpart of the concept of *humour*, introduced by Lin Yutang in 1933.

During recent years, the Graduate Student Award has been granted to young outstanding humour researchers at the annual conference. The award winners in 2010, Clare Watters and Till Weingärtner presented their work during the last plenary session. C. Watters, who is involved in Italian studies at the Birmingham University, delivered a presentation titled *To the Streets: Italian Comedians and Social Protest*, and T. Weingärtner, a young japanologist at the Freie Universität Berlin, *Towards a Theory of Fictionality in Humor*.

Both these presentations were extremely fascinating and caused a lively discussion among the audience. Clare Watters observed as to how political comedy has obtained a central role in the cultural opposition of the government in Italy, since Silvio Berlusconi's gaining of power. This is not at all surprising as the social protest movement is deeply rooted in Italy where intellectuals and cultural figures have performed their relevant role with their activities and speeches. The presentation dealt with the two political comedians, Sabina Guzzanti and Beppe Grillo, in their critical performances against Berlusconi, and their great potential to use social protest to diffuse the borderline between comedy and politics.

Japanologist Till Weingärtner dissected the relationships of humour and reality, contemplating on the proportion of fiction in humour, and presented a question whether and how to measure the fictionality of jokes. The speaker observed both facticity and fictionality in Japanese humour and comedy and described fiction as variation from that reality. The presentation was also an initial deliverance about the theory of fictionality in humour.

Being a folklorist myself, I mainly participated in the sessions on culture and society (in my presentation I observed Estonian abbreviation jokes from a socio-cultural aspect), dwelling on humour in an extremely diverse manner. As the conference venue was Asia, the focus was frequently on the differences in the sense of humour, affected by the dissimilarities in Oriental and Occidental culture.



Participants of the 22nd International Humor Conference in Hong Kong, opening session.

Japanese researcher's Kimie Oshima's speech – *Why Japanese are not funny?* was a substantial overview of distinctive features caused by societal differences, taking a closer look at Japanese and Oriental culture as a high context culture, and opposing this to the culture of low context, this being primarily intrinsic of the social organisation in the West, where the messages are direct and clear, irrespective of the relationships between the sender and the receiver of the message. The words convey the main part of communication. In high context cultures the focus is on the context of the message: the sender, or the receiver of the message, is of greater relevance than the message, thus also affecting the reciprocal relationships, and the hidden meaning proves more important than the words. Likewise, the focus in jokes is also different – in Western societies it is mainly anecdotes that are being told, but in Japan, it is the personal level that is in the forefront, funny stories, told with an aim to enhance relationships or get to learn about the partner in conversation.

Dorota Brzozowska from Poland took a closer look at Polish jokes about Chinese and Japanese cultures, and presented somewhat all-European cultural stereotypes which can also be noticed in Estonian jokelore. The prevailing semantic fields therein are based on 1) external differences and peculiarities (specific racial features, large population figures, high-level technology); 2) specific eating culture, different nourishment (eating rice, using sticks, etc.); 3) linguistic puns accentuating fundamental differences in comparison with Polish and other European languages.

Globalisation of humour and intercultural similarities/differences were touched upon on a number of occasions, during a special session with presentations all well linked to each other. An inspiring presentation was delivered by Giseline Kuipers, researcher from the Netherlands, who observed how humour travels and the relevant implications on transnational culture. The Australian social scientist Jessica Milner Davis talked about cross-cultural challenges in studying humour, contemporary social attitudes and conventions about the use of humour in Australia, Japan and China. English humour researcher Christie Davies who has recently made in-depth studies of the transformation of jokes, looked at how jokes spread and how they change as they travel. The joint presentation by Limor Shifman and Mike Thelwall observed the impacts of globalisation on the media and world-wide diffusion of Internet jokes.

The presentations and standpoints were indeed from wall-to-wall, the ones worth mentioning comprised Kawakib Al-Momani's review of the comic strips and cartoons spreading in the media during the parliamentary elections in Jordan; Chaya Ostrower's two presentations on the forms and functions of humour among the Jews surviving the Holocaust; Władysław Chłopicki's cognitive-linguistic discussions on conceptual space in humorous interaction; Rolf Heimann's speech on the history of cartooning in Australia; the paper by Joseph Wu and Raymond Chan on the use of humour in coping with stress, among the secondary school teachers of Hong Kong, etc. The programme and the abstracts of the conference are available at the home page: <http://ssteach4.ss.cityu.edu.hk/~ishs2010/Home.htm>.

In 2011, the humour researchers of the world will convene in Boston, and as Władysław Chłopicki, Associate Professor at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, a long standing member of the ISHS, has already applied for the right to organise the conference in 2012, the 24th meeting will take place Kraków, the Pearl of Poland.

Piret Voolaid