

Literary history, as established in 20th century China, mostly believed that Confucian conservatism had always oppressed and marginalized practices of “humour” in China.¹ This view, formulated in early 20th century when anti-traditionalism prevailed among Chinese intellectuals, regarded entertaining practices as suppressed and suffocated by Confucian moralizing and at that time even the notion of “humour” itself was introduced to China using an English word (humour-youmo).² As a result, in sinology until recently the topic of “humour”³ in literature was – with only few exceptions –⁴ perceived as marginal to the understanding of ancient Chinese society and culture (as very few works have been published on the topic of Chinese humour, which, though, do not bring valued insights to the topic).⁵ However, in early sources there are evidences of entertaining practices linked to humour, which can be traced back to Warring States period. The first step toward a reconsideration of the tradition could be due to the findings, particularly from the last decade (referring in particular to Guodian excavation in late 1993), of new textual materials which obliged the scholars to confront with a different reality of texts and thoughts (expressed by the texts) from that they have previously reconstructed. This led to a rethinking of the terminology previously used,⁶ and to a discussion of the notions about Chinese history (and the fields linked to it, such as society, literature, philosophy, etc.), which before were rarely being questioned.