

# “China Needs a Sense of Humor”?: The Grand Theater Incident and its Translated Geopolitics

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The Grand Theater Incident (1930) provoked by famous dramatist Hong Shen's protest against the Chinese-humiliating film marks a rare occasion that successfully pressured the Chinese government to exert influence on Hollywood studios, to the extent that the renowned comedian Harold Lloyd, who starred in Paramount's comedy film *Welcome Danger*, felt compelled to issue a "letter of apology" to the Chinese public. This incident also played a pivotal role in establishing and enforcing film censorship as an institutional practice. Despite its historical importance, the Grand Theater Incident has primarily been treated as a cinematic event, limited on its significance in Chinese film history. This paper seeks to address this gap by analyzing the original "letter of apology" both in English newspapers and in its Chinese translation. In doing so, the paper aims to engage with translation theory (Lawrence Venuti, Itamar Even-Zohar, Naoki Sakai, etc.) that examines geopolitical disparities and global power dynamics. By closely scrutinizing this case, the paper seeks to address the following questions: Firstly, I examine how, despite the neutral nature of Lloyd's letter, the Chinese media strategically positioned him within the rhetorical hierarchy of social status by adopting traditional Chinese textual conventions. Secondly, the paper investigates the nuanced differences between the original letter and its translations. These disparities contributed to a cognitive gap between Chinese readers and Lloyd, potentially extending to English-speaking readers of English-language newspapers in Shanghai. Finally, I explore how comedic portrayals of "the Other" perpetuated, appropriated, and exacerbated structural inequalities faced by the marginalized races or nations. I further investigate how such seemingly innocuous humor undermines the legitimacy of protests that react to sarcastic representations in earnest. Ultimately, through an exploration of humor and its underlying implications, the paper delves into the international political and racial dynamics that often remain concealed beneath seemingly innocuous forms of entertainment.