



No Laughing Matter

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Without freedom of speech,
the jester's art can be perilous.

Chinese comedian Li Haoshi, who performs under the name House, recently did stand-up comedy at a Beijing club, after which, [reports Reuters](#), “an audience member posted online a description of a joke he had made . . . describing it as demeaning to China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA).”

That went viral on Chinese social media.

“In the joke,” [Reuters explains](#), “Li recounted seeing two stray dogs he had adopted chase a squirrel and said it had reminded him of the phrase ‘have a good work style, be able to fight and win battles,’ a slogan Chinese President Xi Jinping used in 2013 to praise the PLA’s work ethic.”

Not exactly a ripsnorter, it is hardly biting satire, either — after all, Li steered clear of any [mention](#) of

[Winnie the Pooh](#).

But no matter. Next thing the funny man’s employer knew, “China’s Ministry of Culture and Tourism Bureau said it would fine Shanghai Xiaoguo Culture Media Co 13.35 million yuan and confiscate 1.35 million yuan in ‘illegal gains’ from the firm.”

That’s a cool \$2 million U.S. for the ever-so specific crime of “harming society.”

“In response to the fine, Xiaoguo Culture . . . said it had terminated Li’s contract,” and, for good measure if you are a totalitarian, [Reuters](#) adds that “Weibo appears to have banned him from posting to his account there.”

“We will never allow any company or individual [to use the Chinese capital as a stage to wantonly slander the glorious image of the PLA,” declared China’s cultural ministry.

Suffice it to say, China isn’t currently known for its comedy.

And won’t be until more people perform their own stand-up act.

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.