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asienne

Christina Hsu
& THE POLITICS OF HER COMEDY

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM DU

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**If you're interested,
you do what's
convenient.**

**If you're committed
you'll do whatever
it takes.**

A graduate of UCLA with a major in Political Science and a minor in Global Studies, Christina Hsu is not your average actress and comedian: she uses political science terminology to describe the kind of impact she wants to make with her acting and comedy.

In this interview, she talks all things creative, women inspirations, and describes what it's like to be a comedian – specifically an *Asian woman* comedian – in the era of "PC" culture. This is the politics of comedy with Christina Hsu.

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Name: Christina Hsu

Field: Acting, Comedy, Writer, Producer, and Entrepreneur

Known for: Freckles, smile, and flowy hair. Indie shorts such as: *Mind Games 108*, *Snap*, and *Routines.exe*, as well as *The Second City* sketch comedy ensemble *Winnebago* and *No Shoes Allowed*

Star Sign: Pisces

Life Philosophy: "If you're interested, you do what's convenient. If you're committed you'll do whatever it takes."

And that's what attracted me to IR (International Relations). When I was taking undergrad courses in political science, they would talk about *hard power* and *soft power*.

Soft power is McDonald's for example. It's a cultural thing, right?

Almost every globalized nation that's in the United Nations that get along have a McDonald's [in their country].

It's a way of influencing people through culture in a soft, light-handed way.

ON THE QUESTION OF 'WHY COMEDY?'

So through comedy, I feel like I can share my experiences in a lighthearted fashion; wherein someone's watching it in a theater and they get to laugh and enjoy it and then they get to take away the message in a way that's easy to absorb.

They can leave the show feeling happy while having that Asian experience shown to them. I just feel like it's a good way to reach a mutual understanding without turning someone off or away.

ON LIFE PERSPECTIVES

As a kid, I would go to Asia to visit family sometimes. Even at an early age, I always saw the world from a different point of view.

When you go to the other side of the world, you really get to see how your life and your world perspective can be so different depending on where you grew up.

ON TALKING ABOUT THE ASIAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN HER COMEDY

Growing up as an Asian American is a very interesting and unique experience. I've had a lot of racist things said to me.

And I think as a minority, sometimes, when you're trying to get your point across, it can be weird and you don't want to sound preachy. You don't want to sound like you're shoving your agenda down someone's throat.

ON HER FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH COMEDY

My favorite movie of all time is *Napoleon Dynamite*. I love that movie! I can watch it again and again. I can quote it and it just makes me laugh no matter how much time has passed! It's still relevant to me and I realized that that was my humor: stupid, quirky, comedy that is just nonsensical, that is just so funny.

I like lighthearted humor that can appeal to all ages. That's my personal style and preference.

That's when I **knew** I wanted to do comedy.

Then, the first time I realized I **could** do comedy was when I was taking classes at Second City where they teach you improv.

ON COMEDIC INSPIRATIONS

My role model is Mindy Kaling. She's an Indian-American woman who is just so smart and funny. She writes, produces and directs her own stuff.

And obviously, Tina Fey. She's also a Second City alum. She has comedic timing! I really respect her.

ON OTHER INSPIRATIONAL WOMEN CREATIVES

Patty Jenkins and her *Wonder Woman*. I teared up during that movie! It was so insane seeing – and not to knock on male superheroes – but something about seeing the focus being on a female superhero instead of them being a sidekick or oversexualized – it was great just seeing *Wonder Woman* be strong and powerful!

I found my voice in comedy.

That's when I realized that I wanted to direct my own film [too] because if a male director directed *Wonder Woman*, I just don't think it would have been the same.

I think the emotional aspect really comes from a woman directing that film.



PHOTOGRAPHY: RYAN VITHAL



PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM DU

ON BEING "PC" IN HER COMEDY

I think with my background, it's really hard for me to **not** be politically correct. I always have this thing in the back of mind telling me to **be** PC.

It's an interesting question. As I grow in my career, I think I would be able to, maybe, have more of a say in things when I become more comfortable. Right now, it's probably something I should work on.

I *do* talk about politics. In comedy, there's **punching up** or **punching down**.

*"PC": POLITICALLY CORRECT

When you're "punching down," you're making fun of something in a mean way often at the expense of an already marginalized group.

When you're "punching up," you can make fun of something in a lighthearted way by going after those in positions of privilege and power instead. You can call things out, but it's not really funny or beneficial when it becomes victim shaming.

ON HER SENSE OF HUMOR

For me, I think you can make fun of yourself all day everyday and it's fine. Self-deprecating humor is my kind of humor.

If you're Asian you can make fun of being Asian. It's kind of how it is right? It's weird. But you can.

But I wouldn't make fun of other cultures because I don't fully understand another culture. I haven't lived that life. So, what right do I have to make fun of it?

When I don't fully understand it? You know? I understand my personal journey so I can definitely make fun of that. I can try to empathize, but I can't claim to fully understand what someone else's journey is. So, I wouldn't feel comfortable making fun of that person.

Silly little stuff you can make fun of.

ON HER MAIN MESSAGE IN COMEDY

I just like doing lighthearted comedy that appeals to all audiences, but at the same time, if I can make the world better understand the Asian American minority experience, that would be amazing!

I don't need everything to be about that but some things, yes. I'm in two comedy sketch teams right now. In one, I don't really write any sketches about being Asian. Obviously, with the other one, I already have so much material that I'm writing I don't need all my humor to center around it.

**ON BEING AN ASIAN
WOMAN CREATIVE**

I am someone who...people have told me that I have too *much* creative integrity (*laughs*) because I like to retain my authentic self.

It's fascinating, I think, and really fun to be an actor because you can bring someone else's script, or vision to life. I think as long as I agree with the message, there's something really fun and powerful about playing different characters.

At the same time, it's also a tool for me to share my authentic self with people: my thoughts and feelings. That's why I am writing and producing and directing my own projects because it's a way to showcase who I am: how I feel and how I think as a person, and as an Asian woman.