

*Alexander Alexiev*

*WORDPLAY IN CHINA: A LANGUAGE AND CULTURE PHENOMENON*

*Wordplay in China is a widespread cultural phenomenon. Its important place in the country's tradition is preconditioned by the grammatical and phonological characteristics of the Chinese language: economical phonetic inventory, extensive homonymy, polysemy and multifunctionality of language elements. These specific linguistic conditions that so easily trigger differences between form and content of words are a natural prerequisite for the common use of puns in various styles of communication. Chinese puns are not only limited to the individual expression of a certain author. They are key elements in long-established genres of folklore, traditional superstitions and taboos, and major life rituals and celebrations, like weddings and the Chinese New Year.*