

UNIT 5

Table Manners

- ▶▶ 食不语，寝不言。……席不正，不坐。乡人饮酒，杖者出，斯出矣。

—— 孔子

Be silent when having food and retiring in bed. Do not sit if the mat is not straight. When the villagers are drinking together, do not leave until the elders have departed.

— Confucius

(551–479 B. C., ancient Chinese philosopher, thinker and educator)

- ▶▶ *The dinner table is the center for the teaching and practicing not just of table manners but of conversation, consideration, tolerance, family feeling, and just about all the other accomplishments of polite society except the minuet.*

— Judith Martin

(1938–, better known by the pen name Miss Manners, an American columnist, author, and etiquette authority)



Exploring the Topic



Video

Do you still remember the dos and don'ts that your parents or grandparents have told you? Words like “Do not talk with a full mouth” or “Do not go for the dish beyond your reach” may still occur to you and the manners may have already become second nature to you.

Table manners are rules of etiquette you should observe while eating. In the whole process of dining, people are expected to follow the rules which include behavior norms, seating arrangements, serving orders, tableware placement, etc. Table manners vary greatly in different cultures. As a Chinese, you must be familiar with certain Chinese table manners. But if you are invited to a formal dinner in a Western restaurant, how much do you know the dining rules, such as the use of the utensils?

Text A in this unit introduces some yum cha rules in the Chinese context and Text B gives some tips for using utensils at a formal Western dinner. By reading the two texts you will better understand table manners in China and the West.

After learning this unit, you are expected to be able to answer the following questions:

- What rules do people follow during yum cha at traditional tea houses?
- How are utensils used at a formal dinner in the U.S.?
- How are table manners like in different countries of the world?
- What are the dos and don'ts for Chinese seating arrangement at a dinner table?

Understanding the Text



Key Words

Text A

The Yum Cha Rules You Need to Know

- ① As a born and bred Hong-Konger, going to yum cha with my family every Sunday is an important tradition that has lasted many generations. Here, stories old and new are recounted over a table full of bamboo baskets that hold a variety of dim sum — small bites that encompass everything from delicately translucent prawn dumplings and silky rice rolls to molten lava custard buns and sweet roasted pork buns.
- ② Literally meaning “drink tea” in Cantonese, yum cha is as common a meal in Hong Kong as coffee and toast in Western culture, where Chinese tea is enjoyed with dim sum at traditional tea houses. Dating back to ancient China, teahouses have long been a place of rest and conversations for the common people.
- ③ Yum cha is a group activity that involves everyone around the table. As it’s centred on sharing, there are certain things to bear in mind when you’re being served or serving others. My grandmother, the eldest in our weekly yum cha gathering, has always been quick to straighten out everyone’s table manners. A few rules that she frequently mentions include finishing the last grain of rice in the bowl so a future spouse’s skin will resemble the smoothness of the clean bowl; and to never stick chopsticks straight down into a bowl of rice because it resembles incense for the dead and will bring bad luck. She also reminds us to never bang our chopsticks on the bowl for fun because that was what beggars used to do for attention and is thus believed to bring poverty to the family.
- ④ To the uninitiated, these rules may seem random. But they are etiquettes that have been passed down from one generation to another through anecdotes that trace all the way back to ancient China.
- ⑤ One of my favourite examples relates to flying elephants. In Chinese chess, or *Xiangqi*, the two opposing sides are divided by a river, and the goal of the game is to move across the board and capture your opponent’s king piece. As a rule, the pieces labelled elephant or *xiang* play a defensive role and are not allowed to cross the river into the opponent’s side.

- ⑥ Just like the elephants in Chinese chess, I was taught from a young age that at the yum cha table you are not supposed to “cross the river” and go beyond your reach for dishes that are placed further away or in front of someone sitting opposite you. It is considered rude and undesirable behavior at the table. Instead you should wait until the dish is placed in front of you or ask someone to pass it. That is also why, whenever I did occasionally forget the rule, my grandmother would tell me not to “飞象过河”, the neat four-character word that describes an elephant flying across the river and a reminder to stay within my reach.
- ⑦ While my family and I enjoy a few rounds of dim sum and catch up on stories from the past week, Chinese tea makes for the perfect drink to sip on and help cut through the oiliness of the food. To begin every meal, the task falls on me, the younger generation, to order and serve the Pu'er tea my family likes, then make sure everybody's cups are filled throughout the meal. My grandmother, who has spent many years working at a local teahouse, will knock on the table as a way of signalling thanks to the person who poured her drink. And the story behind this is one that many locals, including myself, will have heard many times before.
- ⑧ According to legend, Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty once visited a town in China dressed as a civilian, accompanied by several staff as security. The group decided to go to a teahouse for tea, and the emperor took a teapot and poured his staff some tea. The staff were terrified, but could not kneel to thank the emperor for fear of breaking his cover. Instead, they had a lightbulb moment, and knocked on the table three times with three fingers curled to signify kneeling three times as gratitude.
- ⑨ Since then, the ritual has been well noted in modern literature as a way to thank someone during drinking tea without interrupting the conversation or talking with a full mouth. The gesture means both saying yes to more tea, as well as gratitude.
- ⑩ There are different ways to knock, depending on your relationship with the person pouring the tea. To elders, you should knock with a closed fist, to symbolise prostration and admiration. Between people of the same generation, knock with your index and middle fingers, much like cupping one fist as a sign of respect. Towards younger people, as my grandmother would do to me, just a single finger rap is needed as a nod of thanks.

- ⑪ We drink so much tea that we usually need to refill the single teapot on the table every half hour or so. Whenever we need the wait staff to top up the pots with hot water, we know to leave the lid of the teapot open and the lid balanced on the handle as a cue. This move is done for the wait staff's sake, so they don't have to check on the pots or be waved down — but what started this is said to be far more than just convenience.



- ⑫ The origin legend has been long passed down through Chinese families as a fun anecdote. Back in the late Qing Dynasty, there was a bad man who went to a teahouse after a big loss at the bird-fighting ring, and decided to set up a scam to get his money back. He took an empty tea pot and placed his bird into it. The waiter came to fill up the pot, but once he opened the lid, the bird escaped and flew away. The man then began to throw a fit, demanding compensation. Luckily, a martial arts master intervened and dissolved the situation, but ever since that day, the teahouse owner made a rule that customers must open the teapot lid to show that it needs filling up.
- ⑬ Nowadays, hot water in insulated pots is usually available on each table so that diners can top up the tea pots themselves. But even now during our weekly yum cha sessions, my family will still leave the lid balanced on the handle of an empty tea pot, even as we refill the tea pot ourselves, and continue to teach younger family members the stories behind the table manners and rules.
- ⑭ So next time you're heading to yum cha in Hong Kong, be sure to knock on wood as a sign of thanks to the tea-pourer, think of the flying elephant before reaching for food, and ask a local about the many fun tales of Chinese table manners.

A Global Understanding

Fill in the blanks with information from Text A to understand the yum cha rules and the stories behind them.

Etiquettes are passed down from one generation to another through anecdotes.

Rule 1: Don't go for dishes 1 _____

- In Chinese chess elephants cannot cross the river.
- My grandma told me not to go beyond my reach for dishes like 2 _____.

Rule 2: 3 _____ when showing your thanks.

- My grandma will knock on the table as a way of signaling thanks to the person 4 _____.
- This etiquette can be traced back to the legend of Qianlong and recorded in 5 _____.
- There are 6 _____ to knock depending on your relationship with the person pouring the tea.

Rule 3: Leave the lid of the teapot open with the lid balanced on the hand when you need the wait staff to 7 _____.

- The origin of the rule can be 8 _____ late Qing Dynasty.
- My family continues to 9 _____ the rule nowadays.

B Language Focus

Translate the English expressions from Text A into Chinese.

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1 to straighten out one's table manners | _____ |
| 2 to interrupt the conversation | _____ |
| 3 to talk with a full mouth | _____ |
| 4 to dress as a civilian | _____ |
| 5 a fun anecdote | _____ |

- 6 a sign of respect _____
- 7 a way of signaling thanks _____
- 8 a lightbulb moment _____
- 9 a nod of thanks _____
- 10 to top up the tea pots _____
- 11 to set up a scam _____
- 12 to throw a fit _____

Text B



Key Words

**How to Use Utensils at a Formal Dinner:
Tips for Surviving a Formal Dinner Party**

- ① Have you ever cringed with fear after getting an invitation to a formal dinner party out of anxiety over not knowing which fork to use? If so, you're not alone. Most people don't have enough opportunities to learn or practice formal table manners to be confident that they're using the silverware correctly.
- ② Before you turn down the invitation, take some time to learn these skills. It's not difficult and may even become second nature with practice. Knowing which fork to use for each course will begin to feel natural, and eventually, you won't have to think about what to do next. You might find that formal dining is fun, once you develop confidence by actually doing it.
- ③ Knowing which utensils to use at a formal dinner is essential if you want to make a good impression. Whether you're at an elegant dinner party or eating at a 5-star restaurant, you can show your knowledge of proper etiquette without being intimidated.

Follow Your Host's Lead

- ④ Remember that if you are ever in doubt about which fork to use, follow the lead of the host. Even if he or she uses the wrong fork, you'll show your respect by doing the same thing as long as you don't call attention to yourself or embarrass the host.

Start on the Outside and Work Your Way In

- ⑤ Generally, you can follow utensil placement in order from the one farthest from the plate and work your way inward. Forks go on the left, with the salad fork first, and then the dinner fork beside the plate. On the right side of the plate, you will find the knife, appetizer or salad knife, spoon, soup spoon, and oyster fork. The knife blades should be positioned with the cutting sides closest to the plate. The fork and knife closest to the plate are for eating your main course.
- ⑥ The dessert fork or spoon in most cases will be placed parallel or diagonal to the edge of the table near the top of your plate. In some cases, it may be set on the empty dessert plate. Not all formal place settings will have all the flatware mentioned; you will only find it if you will need it for one of the courses.

Be Aware of Proper Eating Techniques

- ⑦ If you want to appear savvy, knowing how to eat with the utensils is important during a formal dinner. Place the fork in the hand you normally eat or write with. The American way to cut meat is to place the fork in the other hand to secure the meat in place and place the knife in your coordinated hand to cut the meat. Then put down the knife and switch the fork to your regular hand to lift the bite-sized pieces to your mouth.
- ⑧ The British way to cut and eat meat is to not switch the fork, but to lift the meat to your mouth with the fork in the hand you don't normally use. This saves the step of switching hands each time you need to cut the meat.
- ⑨ When eating soup you should use the bowl-shaped or larger oval spoon. Keep the soup bowl firmly on the table; never lift or tilt it. Scoop the soup away from you starting at the center of the bowl. Bring the spoon to your mouth and tilt it while sipping soup from the edge. You should never make a slurping noise when eating soup. Resist the urge to lift the bowl to drink the last few drops that can't be scooped with the spoon.
- ⑩ Bread is finger food, so don't use your fork to eat it. Instead of cutting it, tear off bite-sized pieces and butter them one or two bites at a time. Slathering an entire slice of bread is awkward and will give away your lack of understanding of proper table manners. It can also be very messy.

Additional Tips

- ⑪ When you are eating at a formal dinner, remember that the utensils are the tools.

Each one has a purpose, and if you learn what that is, you shouldn't have any problems.

- 12 At some informal gatherings, it is OK to eat chicken or lamb chops with your hands. However, that isn't the case at formal dinners. You should always use your fork. Don't use your utensils to point or gesture during conversation.
- 13 When you drink water, tea, coffee, wine, or any other beverage, put down your utensils before picking up the glass or cup. After you use each utensil, rest it on the edge of your plate; don't put it back in the lineup.
- 14 Remember that if you make a mistake, most people probably won't know as long as you don't call it to their attention. In fact, if you look around the table and watch others, you may find that you know as much or more about formal dinner etiquette than most.
- 15 Avoid calling others out on improper etiquette because that shows worse manners than using the wrong fork. It's more gracious to focus on your own etiquette and not worry about others.



A Global Understanding

Fill in the blanks with information from Text B to learn how to use utensils at a formal dinner.

Tip 1: Follow your host's lead.

Whether the host uses the right or wrong fork, you

1 _____ by following him/her.

Tip 2: Start on the outside and 2 _____.

- On the 3 _____ of the plate are salad fork and dinner fork.
- On the right side of the plate are the knife, salad knife, spoon, soup spoon and oyster fork.
- Parallel or 4 _____ to the edge of the table near the top of the plate are dessert fork and dessert spoon.

Tip 3: Be aware of 5 _____.

- American way to cut meat is to cut, put down the knife in the regular hand and switch to the fork to eat.
- British way to cut meat and eat with fork in another hand.
- It is important not to lift or tilt the bowl when 6 _____.
- Don't use fork to eat bread.

**Additional
Tips:**

- Remember that 7 _____ are tools.
- Always use fork to eat at formal dinners.
- Always drink after 8 _____.
- Do not call to others' attention when 9 _____.
- Do not worry about 10 _____.

B Language Focus

1. Find the English expressions for the Chinese expressions about formal dinners in Text B.

Chinese Expressions	English Expressions
正式就餐礼仪	1 _____
第二天性 / 习惯	2 _____
留下良好印象	3 _____
效仿主人	4 _____
按照餐具摆放顺序	5 _____
主菜	6 _____
用勺舀汤	7 _____
喝汤时出声	8 _____
撕成大小适合入口的小块	9 _____
高雅宴会	10 _____

2. Fill in the blanks with phrasal verbs in the box. Change the form when necessary.

call ... out
put ... back

give away
put down

look around
tear off

pick up
turn down

- 1 Every cowboy in the place would _____ his drink, take off his hat and join in.
- 2 When the girl in red was interrogated by the police, her face _____ none of her thoughts.
- 3 It is okay to _____ invitations to dinner parties if you want a night at home.
- 4 Jeff was so powerful in the company that no one would dare to _____ him _____.
- 5 We then essentially took the piece apart and _____ it _____ together again.
- 6 The old lady saw the little boy toddle to the bread basket and _____ a little piece of bread.
- 7 I _____ the restaurant to see if there were other people I knew.
- 8 I asked Taro to _____ meat and eggs, so that we could make them a Western breakfast.

Improving Reading Ability

Avoiding Inner Speech

Have you ever heard of such an expression in English — “The reader’s eye tells the mind’s ear?” This expression refers to the habit of using inner speech while reading. Do you have such habit of reading silently individual words one after another in your mind? If yes, do you notice that you read much more slowly than others who do not do so? Take the sentence “Now read the following sentence” as an example. Do you “see” the words in the sentence (Now, read, the, following, sentence) or “hear” the words in your mind’s ear? If you hear the words, you are having an inner speech.

A person who depends on inner speech may never actually pronounce any words. He just imagines the pronunciation or “whispers” words in his mind. His speech organs are at rest, but his inner voice is still actively repeating the words along the line of print. When one has formed such a

habit, he can hardly expect to grasp the meaning of a page at even average speed.

Meta guiding has been claimed to reduce subvocalization (inner speech) in that it is the visual guiding of the eye using a finger or pointer, such as a pen, in order for the eye to move faster along the length of a passage of text. It involves drawing invisible shapes on a page of text in order to broaden the visual span for speed reading. If you have the habit of inner speech, you may find you could read faster than usual with the help of this technique. Such technique can help to break the habit of automatically subvocalizing, thus improving reading speed.

Now read the following paragraph taken from Text A in your own manner of reading and record the time. Then read it again, using your index finger as a pointer and moving it faster than you can read words inside your head.

Yum cha is a group activity that involves everyone around the table. As it's centred on sharing, there are certain things to bear in mind when you're being served or serving others. My grandmother, the eldest in our weekly yum cha gathering, has always been quick to straighten out everyone's table manners. A few rules that she frequently mentions include finishing the last grain of rice in the bowl so a future spouse's skin will resemble the smoothness of the clean bowl; and to never stick chopsticks straight down into a bowl of rice because it resembles incense for the dead and will bring bad luck. She also reminds us to never bang our chopsticks on the bowl for fun because that was what beggars used to do for attention and is thus believed to bring poverty to the family.

Enhancing Cultural Awareness

Different cultures observe different rules for table manners, many of which go back to centuries ago. As part of ancient Chinese diet culture, Chinese table manners are mostly the traditional styles. It is believed by some that the idea of table manners began during the time of Confucius. There are also some historical records showing that table manners began with the duke of the Zhou Dynasty, who wrote a ceremonial book which became the etiquette guide during the reign of the Han Dynasty.

Since then, the rules have been deep-rooted to the Chinese people. To date, the rules remain a great treasure.

Seating and serving customs play important roles in Chinese dining etiquette. For example, the diners should not sit down or begin to eat before the host (or guest of honor) has done so. When everyone is seated, the host offers to pour tea, beginning with the cup of the eldest person. The youngest person is served last as a gesture of respect for the elders.

The earliest Western dining traditions were documented by the Ancient Greeks. Table-setting scenes are said to have been found in the writings of Homer. European table manners and other examples of chivalry date back as far as the 11th century. Today, many of the behaviors that take place at the dinner table are still exerting a strong influence on people today. In North America, for example, the proper dining etiquette includes: People try to eat neatly and quietly and sit up as straight as they can without being uncomfortable; if something on the table is out of their reach, they politely ask someone to pass it to them; food should be lifted up to the mouth; it is considered to be poor manners to talk with one's mouth full, to name just a few.

Whether you are having dinner with your friends, dining at a restaurant, or eating at home with your family, good table manners are an essential part of every meal you have. With good etiquette, it is very likely that you will become a pleasant companion for both informal and formal gatherings. Also, you will feel comfortable dining in public or at anyone else's house.

You have learned some table manners in different cultures from Text A and Text B. Complete the following table with relevant information about table manners in China and Western countries in the given aspects.

Aspects	China	Western Countries
Origion		
Serving		
Tableware		
Seating arrangement		
Dining behavior		
Dining taboos		
.....		

Taking a Global Perspective

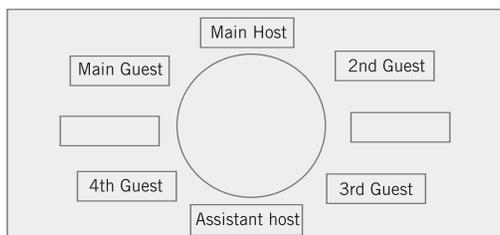
Much like how tipping etiquette differs around the globe, proper table manners and what's considered rude or polite when dining differ, too. For example, making noise while you chew or eat in the presence of others is considered rude in the U.S., but in Japan, it shows appreciation for your meal. In Ireland, you might want to be prepared to offer up a round of drinks when you're out with a group, while in Kazakhstan, it's a good sign if your server brings you only half a cup of tea.

Now select three countries you want to visit most and do some research on their respective dining etiquettes. Write an essay of about 250 words to introduce what you have found from your research.

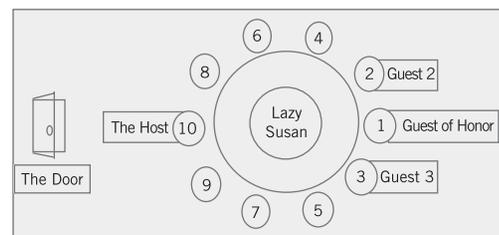
Telling Chinese Stories

As part of Chinese culinary culture, Chinese table manners are still observed today. As illustrated in the following figures, there are some rules for Chinese seating etiquette at a dinner table. In general, it follows the rules of "guest of honor" and "social ranking."

Now make a 3-minute presentation to introduce the seating etiquettes in the north and in the south.



Seating Etiquette in the North



Seating Etiquette in the South



Assessing Your Learning

After learning this unit, what have you accomplished and what do you still need to improve? Go over each aspect and rate your learning on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means “Poor,” 3 means “Average,” and 5 means “Excellent.”

Aspects	Your Achievements	Rating				
		1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge	I have got to know the rules during yum cha at traditional Chinese tea houses and those of using utensils at a formal Western dinner party.					
	I have learned that using inner speech while reading is not a good habit and should be avoided.					
Language	I have mastered the key expressions about table manners in China and in the West.					
	I can tell the distinctive features of Chinese and Western table manners in appropriate English.					
Skills	I can adopt the technique to avoid inner speech while reading.					
	I am able to explain the dos and don'ts for Chinese seating arrangement at a dinner table.					
Values	I have a deeper understanding of the cultural differences in table manners.					
	I have strengthened my confidence in the unique Chinese culinary culture.					