

Combining The *Daily Manners* to Discuss The Importance of Table Manners

Word Count:1,505

Introduction

There are twelve chapters in the *Daily Manners* 常禮舉要, the chapter of At Meals is the most than other chapters. Besides, there are also a lot of etiquette norms about dining in *The Book of Rites*, which shows the importance of table manners. Dining, though, is something everyone does every day, but how to eat a meal will is worth learning. The process of dining can reflect a person's moral cultivation. Eating well is beneficial to others and ourselves, and vice versa. So not only the East has a variety of table manners, the West is also very attention.

The Relationship Between Table Manners and Self-cultivation

When he was young, Chen Ping 陳平, a famous prime minister of the Western Han Dynasty, divided the meat offered to the people in his village evenly. He was praised by his fellow villagers. Chen Ping said that if he have a chance to govern a country, he would deal with the affairs of a country as fairly as he would with meat.¹ Liu Rong in the Qing Dynasty wrote an essay, which is called *Xiguanshuo* 習慣說, in which it was mentioned that once his father entered his room and saw a low-lying place that had not been repaired. His father sighed that if one room cannot be treated, how do you govern a country?² Dividing meats and repair a room are small matters. Although there is big or small on a matter, there is no difference from the heart. A person's mind cultivation need to improve through daily matters; when we do the trifles in our daily life with a respectful heart, naturally we will not be careless about other things. Three meals a day is almost everyone's daily requirement, and it is also a good opportunity for cultivation of mind.

How do we develop a sense of respect and consideration at the table? The *Daily Manners*

¹ Translated by Xiaoxue Gong, [Han] Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記, (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju 中華書局, 1959), p. 2052.

² Translated by X. Gong, [Qing] Liurong 劉蓉, *Xiguanshuo* 習慣說, <https://www.kekeshici.com/xueshenggushiwen/daxue/96956.html>, 13 November 2020.

said that after sitting, do not lean your elbows on the table, and do not stick out your feet. Because in many cases, space is limited, if the hands and feet spread out, it will hinder the people around you. In addition, when you chew food and swallow, you also should be careful not to make a sound; Do not pick your teeth in front of people.³ These are not only prohibited by people in the East, but also very taboo at western dinner tables. Because these behaviors are very offensive and make other people feel disrespected.

Nowadays, it is common to see some people putting a lot of delicious food into their bowl, regardless of whether everyone else at the table can taste it or stand up and scramble distant dishes and toss around a dish to pick out something they like. This series of actions not only leave the impression that you are greedy and impolite to others, but also indulge your own bad habits. Hence, the *Daily Manners* said that we should never eat twice as much as anyone else. Only take dishes that are close to you, and do not stand up to pick up dishes from other plates.⁴ *A Butler's Guide to Table Manners* also teaches us, at a buffet, it is best to take a little less food at a time, but you can do it multiple times. Not overloading your plate. This is undignified and unpopular, and others will label you as an 'open pig.' Overloading food will not only make you feel the plate is difficult to carry, but also make these food more likely drop it.⁵

The *Daily Manners* emphasizes that do not leave any grains in your bowl after eating.⁶ This is to cherish everything, to cultivate a grateful heart and the virtue of thrift. Zeng Guofan once said that a family thrives when they know thrift. The family education of Zhang Shouzhong, the founder of Shanqing Tang in Fuzhou, taught him that no grains of rice should be left in the bowl after meals, but everyone should give helping hand generously to those in need, at last his family and business prospered. I consider this story confirms what Zeng Guofan said. According to Xunjian Shikang 訓儉示康, thrift can make people less desire. If a man of noble character reduce desire, he or she will not be hindered by things and follow the path of Dao; average person reduce desire, he or she can be prudent and economical and

³ Translated by X. Gong, Xu Xingmin 徐醒民, *Changli Juyao Jiangji* 常禮舉要講記 [An explanation on Basic] Manners and Conducts] (Beijing: Tuanjie Press 團結出版社, 2013), p.88.

⁴ Translated by X. Gong, Xu Xingmin 徐醒民, *Changli Juyao Jiangji* 常禮舉要講記 [An explanation on Basic Manners and Conducts] , p.82.

⁵ Nicholas Clayton, *A Butler's Guide to Table Manners*, (London: National Trust Books, 2007), p.29.

⁶ Translated by X. Gong, Xu Xingmin 徐醒民, *Changli Juyao Jiangji* 常禮舉要講記 [An explanation on Basic Manners and Conducts] , p.87.

stay away from crime, make their home thrive.⁷ Therefore, it is important to cultivate the habit of frugality at every meal of the day, which is also the cultivation of the heart's sincere respect for food and even for all things in the universe.

The dining etiquette in the *Daily Manners* is very detailed small matters, but if we have dinner with a respectful heart and empathy, considering others' feelings in every detail——Avoiding behaviors that make people feel uncomfortable, taking care of your heart: do not neglect others in order to eat well for yourself and appreciating all the food you have and so on. As time goes by, when this kind of sincere and respectful attitude becomes a natural reaction, people will respond with sincere and respectful heart without thinking when they meet other circumstances. Therefore, the dining-table can not only reflect the self-cultivation, but also to improve the cultivation of people's mind.

The Influence of Table Manners on Social Communication

Good interpersonal relationship is very significant for people living in groups and dining is also a part of social intercourse. How do we perform well socially? In addition to the appropriate words and behavior, but also pay attention to avoid misunderstanding. The *Daily Manners* said that after the banquet or dining, the host will tell modestly the guest that he or she have not been well treated (In fact, the host takes great care to entertain guests, but he is modest when he says). At the same time, guests should thank the host. Mr. Xu Xingmin said that in a foreign country, the host can't say as that as above to the guest. Instead, he should ask how the guest is eating and show these food are very good. If the host still says that the reception is not good, the guests will be in a bad mood.⁸ If such etiquette is not clearly understood in advance, it is possible to make mistakes and lead to unnecessary misunderstandings. Regional differences, cultural customs are also different, hence, being sure to understand its culture and etiquette in advance.

When social contact between people is expanded, it becomes diplomacy between countries. Table manners also play an important role in the history of diplomacy. At the table, the essence of politics can be saw said by a French gastronome Breyer Chavaroun. State banquet

⁷ Translated by X. Gong, [Song]Simaguang 司馬光, *Xunjian Shikang* 訓儉示康, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E8%AE%AD%E4%BF%AD%E7%A4%BA%E5%BA%B7>, 16 November 2020.

⁸ Translated by X. Gong, Xu Xingmin 徐醒民, *Changli Juyao Jiangji* 常禮舉要講記 [An explanation on Basic Manners and Conducts], p.89.

is an momentous diplomatic occasion, but also an important place to show the national image and culture. State banquet etiquette and other factors can express its attention or contempt attitude, the performance at dining table is the key that decide many of the success or failure of diplomacy.

In 2014, President Xi Jinping met with Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe. As the President was very old so that he had a meal slowly, President Xi specifically told the protocol officer beside him not to rush him and let him eat slowly, we all waited for him. During the meal, President Xi accompanied President Mu patiently. So the event was extended from two and a half hours to more than five hours. But since then, relations between China and Africa have become friendlier. When China came under pressure in the South China Sea, unprecedentedly 39 African governments did not hesitate to stand up in solidarity with us.⁹ Therefore, from personal socializing to international diplomacy, what you do at the dinner table plays a decisive role.

Conclusion

All the items in the chapter of At Meals the *Daily Manners* are details and trifles, but it is the so-called ‘from the first small beginnings one can see how things will develop.’ The details of eating a meal can reflect a person's culture and level of education. Westerners also believe that we need to be clear about how we behave in the public, especially at the dinner table. The way we eat reveals a lot about ourselves: this very public display is impossible to hide and it reveals more about us than our entire resume.¹⁰

If we can follow the table manners from the *Daily Manners* when we have dinner, through eating to improve our self-cultivation, respect to others, do not hinder everyone, not only to help mental health, will be more respected.

The dining-table is not only a place for spiritual cultivation, but also an significant place for social contact and diplomacy. Table manners are vital and crucial for a person who is popular or not, a thing that is successful or not and a country that establish and develop friendly and

⁹ Translated by X.Gong, Beijing People's Daily 'State banquet witnessed Chinese diplomatic history' <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2013/0608/c1001-21790900.html>, 14 November 2020.

¹⁰ Translated by X.Gong, Daguo Waijiao 大国外交, Episode 06, <http://news.cctv.com/2017/09/03/ARTIfhfprSq1y6OI9bVK1gji170903.shtml>, 13 November 2020.

lasting diplomatic relations.

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