The Influence of Chinese Table Manners on Individual Behavior And Society

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Abstract. In modern society, people often encounter various dining situations, especially during the Chinese New Year feast, which is a significant communal meal for the Chinese people. Dining etiquette and interpersonal communication at these gatherings have a long-standing history and are considered a crucial reflection of human civilization and progress. Dining culture influences individuals and society, both positively and negatively. Therefore, examining the impact of dining culture on individuals and society is meaningful. This paper reviews literature related to the significance, etiquette, and impact of dining culture and analyzes these impacts on individuals and society using the SWOT analysis method.

Keywords: Chinese table culture; Table manners, Individual behavior, Society, SWOT analysis

1   Introduction

In China, whether for holidays or business discussions, the common choice is to dine together, exchanging ideas and conversations over the meal. The culture surrounding the dining table is not a development of a day or two but a historical sedimentation. This is not unique to China; such scenarios also occur in other countries around the world. The so-called dining culture is actually a set of practical norms designed to ensure meals proceed smoothly and without disruption [1]. At the dining table, people often exhibit a greater desire to communicate, and relationships become closer. Those who observe dining etiquette are likely to gain favor, as they display good breeding and depth of character. Nowadays, proper etiquette at the dining table is increasingly important. Against various cultural backgrounds, China and Western countries may have different table manners, such as the placement of chopsticks or the choice of seats. Speaking of culture, dining culture is especially prominent in China, such as during the Chinese New Year, when people typically gather for the New Year's Eve dinner, a national activity on a large scale. Such extensive activities seem to have an impact on the local or national economy. Therefore, it is worth considering how this strong desire for communication arises and affects people, what the history of dining etiquette and culture is, and what impact dining culture has on the national economy.

Given the broad scope and long history of dining culture, this paper aims to explore its influence on individual behavior and the national economy, resolve these questions, and summarize relevant literature on the history of dining culture and its impact on individual behavior and the national economy. The SWOT analysis method will be used to analyze the influence of dining culture on individuals and society.

2   Literature Review

2.1   Spring Festival Dinner

The culture of the dining table in China is vividly represented during the Spring Festival, particularly through the New Year's Eve dinner—a celebration that would be incomplete without it. This custom is a historical sedimentation within Chinese culture. In researching the literature on the New Year's Eve dinner, Li Dongjun's work 'The Dining Table Over New Year' organizes the history of the Chinese lunar new year and the history of the New Year's Eve dinner. For example, in ancient China, life was primarily agrarian, and thus, Chinese dining customs were heavily influenced by agricultural practices. The original meaning of Chinese lunar new year associated with agriculture, could be linked to the taste of the rice and crops. Celebrating the New Year signifies not only aging another year but also moving forward. Consequently, a Chinese dining table during this celebration is not just a place for open and abundant food, flavorful and full of aroma, but also one that is filled with benevolence; dining is done with human dignity [2]. Hence, the New Year's Eve dinner is not merely about people coming together to eat but is more about harboring hopes for a better future.

2.2   Carbon Neutrality in China

At the dining table, different countries observe different etiquettes, rooted in the people's respect and manners. Understanding the diverse table manners not only helps prevent faux pas, but it also lends grace to one's conduct at the table. Therefore, this paper has researched the dining etiquettes across different nations. Su Wenjun, in the analysis of the differences between Chinese and Western dining cultures, looks into the dining cultures, food philosophies, seating arrangements, and table language of the East and West. For instance, in China, chopsticks are the primary utensils for eating. There are many dos and don'ts associated with chopsticks: they should not be fiddled with, used to knock on other items, pointed with, gestured with, sucked on, or stuck upright into a bowl of rice. In the West, cutlery, namely knives and forks, is predominantly used. The knife is held in the right hand and the fork in the left, with the blade of the knife never facing outwards. Placing the knife and fork parallel on the plate signifies the completion of the meal and that the dish or plate can be cleared away. Regarding seating, in China, people commonly sit around a round table, with the guests guided to their seats after all have arrived. In ancient China, the seat to the left was considered the most honorable, followed by the one opposite, with the host's right-hand side seat being the third most important, and so on. In the West, the seat

farthest from the door and facing it is usually the hostess's, with the opposite seat being the hosts. The seat to the right of the hostess is reserved for the guest of honor, typically a gentleman, while the seat to the right of the host is for his spouse. The third and fourth seats of honor are to the left of the hostess and host, respectively [3]. Thus, it is evident that dining etiquette is intricate and varies greatly between countries, yet it is this complexity that brings order to dining life.

2.3   The Influence of Table Manners on People and Society

To explore the impact of dining culture on individuals and society, this paper has conducted a literature search. Xu Cuicui, in the study 'Exploration of Chinese Dining Table Social Phenomena,' discusses the influence of dining culture on personal and social aspects, primarily reflected in social interactions, societal relations, concepts of hierarchy, and food waste. For instance, dining etiquette plays a role in interpersonal communication. Successful social interaction at the dining table is the result and assurance of good dining manners. From the perspective of societal relations, people often seek to gain new benefits and maintain existing ones through social gatherings at the dining table, as well as to lay a foundation for future career development. Consequently, emotional and interest-based relationships are maintained and enhanced through dining interactions [4]. It can be seen that dining culture has various impacts on both individuals and society, manifesting mainly in social interactions and certain societal issues.

3   Methodology

3.1   Research Design

A thorough literature search reveals that the manifestation of dining culture is quite extensive, not just during festivals but also in table manners, business settings, and interpersonal relations. The widespread application of dining culture has both positive and negative effects on individuals and society. To further explore the specific impacts of dining culture, this article will employ the SWOT analysis method. This approach divides the effects of dining culture into impacts on individual behavior and society. The SWOT analysis method helps clarify these influences by distinguishing between strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, thus aiding in a comprehensive study of the advantages, disadvantages, opportunities, and challenges presented by dining culture.

3.2   SWOT Analysis of Table Culture

3.2.1 Strengths

For individuals, the advantages of dining culture primarily lie in mental relaxation and the enhancement of relationships. In China, the Spring Festival is an annual celebration where people working far from home return to have the New Year's Eve din-

ner with their families. Sharing a meal in the familiar surroundings of one's hometown with loved ones provides a sense of belonging and happiness, offering significant relaxation and comfort. The profound reason for the developed dining culture is not merely to satisfy cravings or to revisit childhood nostalgia but to seek and preserve the warmth of friendship. Food serves not only as a medium for social interaction but also as a tool to foster emotional exchange. For society, the benefits of dining culture are mainly the promotion of the surrounding restaurant business and the development of the food industry. Dining out during festivals can boost the turnover of local eateries. The movement of people during the holidays stimulates economic growth as they are likely to spend on various items. Generally, restaurants have beverage suppliers, and when people gather for festive meals or large events at these restaurants, they tend to consume drinks in addition to food, thereby driving the development of the food and beverage industries.

3.2.2 Weaknesses

For individuals, the drawbacks of dining culture pertain to table manners and interpersonal communication, which can pose challenges. For instance, failing to remember or incorrectly following dining etiquette during meals with leaders can lead to embarrassment or offense, potentially causing displeasure among superiors. Moreover, the need to carefully observe words and manners, and to communicate appropriately in such important dining scenarios, can be exhausting and diminish a sense of well-being [5]. From a societal perspective, the negatives of dining culture include food waste and the subtle implications of social hierarchy that accompany dining interactions. Food waste at dining tables is a common issue, with unfinished meals contributing to the problem. In a world where many go hungry, such extravagance, coupled with an increasing demand for food, may lead to a shortage of supplies and, consequently, food scarcity.

3.2.3 Opportunities

The opportunities presented by dining culture for individuals can translate into employment prospects. Observing table manners during meals with leaders may convey respect, potentially enhancing an individual's rapport with their superiors and leading to opportunities for promotions or new job offers [6]. Valuing and mastering the dynamics of dining engagements can open doors in one's career by capitalizing on such opportunities [7].

Furthermore, knowledge of diverse table manners such as seating arrangements, use of cutlery, dining ambiance, and conversation during meals is designed to help people understand and adhere to social courtesies across different cultures [8-9]. This respect for varying traditions and customs can mitigate cultural shocks, facilitating better cross-cultural communication. In terms of societal benefits, the opportunities lie in the development of the food industry. Most people need to eat daily, and especially before significant festivals like the Spring Festival, food suppliers have the opportunity to capitalize on the festive demand for their products. This demand encompasses raw material providers and manufacturers, culminating in the end product. Such de-

mand not only drives the development of this industry chain but also propels the growth of the dining establishments involved, thereby enhancing the overall progress of the food and beverage industry. To address food waste, individuals can adopt practices like taking leftovers home to prevent unnecessary waste.

3.2.4 Threats

The challenges of dining culture for individuals mainly revolve around interpersonal communication and remembering proper table manners. For instance, in social interactions, nuances such as managing the ambiance, engaging guests emotionally, ensuring effective communication between host and guest, and making sure everyone leaves satisfied can significantly influence the success of social dining. Even small details like the placement of utensils can impact the dining experience. These complex protocols are generally managed by the host of the event [4].

From a societal perspective, the issues include the potential food shortages caused by food waste and the implicit social hierarchies present in dining interactions. An unhealthy dining culture can lead to significant waste of food. Table manners are meant to reflect respect for others, not as a tool for employees to ingratiate themselves with superiors [10]. Traditional concepts of hierarchy rest on two points: one is the belief that 'people are born unequal,' and the other is that each person should act according to their status, fulfilling their roles, rights, and duties.

In modern society, while the explicit arrangement of seating according to rank is not prevalent, it still exists, and seating often reflects an individual's status. An overly clear division of rank may be perceived as discriminatory, potentially leading to discontent among people. If such grievances are suppressed to a breaking point, it might lead to a minority of individuals posing threats of retaliation against society.

4   Conclusion

In summary, to investigate the history, etiquette, and impact of dining culture on individuals and society, this article has collected literature on three main aspects: the Spring Festival dinner, table manners in different countries, and the influence of table culture on people and society. The aspect of the Spring Festival dinner encapsulates the deeper meaning behind the New Year's Eve dinner, concluding that it represents not only a gathering for a meal but also embodies people's hopes for the future. In terms of table manners in different countries, the summary focuses on various dining etiquettes, such as the placement of chopsticks and the use of cutlery. The section on the influence of table culture on people and society illustrates societal phenomena such as social relationships, hierarchical concepts, and food waste.

To delve deeper into the specific impacts of dining culture, the article utilizes the SWOT analysis method. The strengths of dining culture for individuals include mental relaxation and fostering interpersonal connections, while for society, it primarily promotes the development of local restaurants and the food industry. The weaknesses for individuals are challenges in table manners and interpersonal communication, and for society, it includes food waste and the implicit hierarchy in dining interactions.

The opportunities dining culture presents are employment prospects for individuals and growth potential for the food industry for society. The challenges for individuals involve navigating social interactions and remembering table etiquette, and for society, they encompass the potential issues of food shortage due to waste and the hidden problems of social ranking at the dining table.

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